

Wearing Clothes

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Abstract

Wearing Clothes

In the event of wearing clothes more than appearances are altered; a re-grounding takes place. In this thesis, that re-grounding is considered in terms of shifts in substance and the making and unmaking of identity. As such, wearing becomes a central concept in the meditation to follow, and as both practice and concept, it allows the knitting together of the concerns of representation and reality, immateriality and materiality, clothes and bodies; this theoretical work is necessary when the central premise of signification renders it necessary to surmount a barrier of reference to a material world through acts that mediate its brute substance.

In chapter one, the thesis begins by identifying the incitements and imperatives, residing in both the rhetoric of consumerism and the research discipline of dress studies, to think of wearing clothes as the shaping of identity statements. The predominant tendencies of semiotics and cultural constructionism to portray this practice as a performance of culturally produced masks and faces pinned to the body, consequently leaves unaccounted the matter of substance.

The efforts of theorists within dress studies to raise the question of body-matter within the appearances of fashioning, have found it difficult to accommodate matter within a representational frame-work. A question unfolds in chapter 2 which becomes central to the dissertation – how do changes in appearance entail shifts in substance? This question is pursued along particular threads of post-structuralist feminist inquiry – particularly the writing of American feminist Judith Butler, and Australian feminists Vicky Kirby, Sue Best and Adrian McKenzie and its roots in Derridean philosophy – until it intersects with a phenomenological tradition. This thesis resolves to accommodate dual perspectives on the clothes-wearing body, that it is at once a discursive body and a phenomenological field of material, being and activity.

The consequent rendering of a three-dimensional living body is of significance when juxtaposed next to those accounts in dress studies that seek to interpret the significance of clothes as they re-dress nature, essence or given body, with a resulting effect of an impressed flat surface upon which identities are pinned.

The thesis does not set out to be the final or complete word on wearing clothes, or all of its related fields of research. For it is such an immense topic and one of the central points of this dissertation is that wearing is such a fundamental human practice, that many fields could lay legitimate claims to investigate it. Instead, by charting predominant tendencies to represent this practice within “dress studies” (the central discourse which claims dress, clothes and fashion as its object of inquiry) it intends, by pursuing a series of dormant questions to new ends, to establish future research directions.

The thesis concludes that there is an understanding of bodily being that is implicit in wearing clothes, but one that is persistently disavowed by an imperative to state one's identity. This imperative enacts the persistence of a will to represent which can overshadow the lessons of an embodied Being in clothes.

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Chapter 1

An Introduction

The following is a meditation on the topic of wearing clothes and how this practice is understood, and in doing so it will engage with a post-semiotic Anglo-American discourse on dress as it seeks to understand wearing clothes.¹ This thesis will argue that wearing can illuminate two vital points about sentient and living human existence – that “Being” is to *have* and *be* a body, and that this body is dressed for a life spent predominantly in clothes of some description, in which we both *are* and *have* our clothes. Guided by our systems of visual and linguistic representation, and oriented by our everyday deportment in the world, wearing is a practice which brings clothes and bodies together to inform each other. Wearing, like the word dress, can be thought to refer both to a forming and a sedimentation and re-arrangement of stuff, where this stuff can mean both the manifestation of an ephemeral ideal and physical matter. By this it is meant that wearing, brings together bodily acts and the practices of making and unmaking identity as both figural and physical self, due to its fundamental base in bodily doings such as inhabiting, gesture and movement.

To address the multi-dimensions of this subject, this thesis will bring a discourse on dress into dialogue and relation with a feminist scholarship of the body. Whilst both fields of scholarship have given overdue recognition to the ideological figurations of bodies, they remain largely disparate discourses in spite of sharing an apparent object – a body that is in large part clothed. In dress studies, attention is largely focused on the outside surfaces of bodies, while in feminist scholarship bodies are starkly disrobed and the corporeal dimensions beneath the absent outer layers explored. As such, bringing these discussions together enables us to identify something of a gap, or oversight, when seeking to speak of a *clothed body*. More particularly, to speak rather formally of a “clothed body” may awkwardly conjoin what “goes without saying” as

¹ If clothing can be defined generally as that category of objects that are attached to a human body, then a post-semiotic discourse is that which seeks to interpret this category of objects with reference to theories of language as signifying objects and visual representations clothing the body. The post-semiotic discourse is that which unfolds the legacy of structuralist semiotics as well as attempts to actively reconfigure this legacy, under the name of “post-structuralist” revision.

dress and what regularly confounds those distinctions between animate organism and inanimate fabric, biological entity and cultural artefact, material body and discursive body that language gives us. It is precisely when trying to find words to explain this embodiment of common-day alchemy that one experiences the gaps and limitations of language. Embodied human existence not only takes place inside clothes, it is fundamentally informed by the meanings that are forged in these surfaces and relative to the world beyond the individual. It follows, then, that ontologically speaking, being a clothed-body is to directly experience the differential and relational production that is human existence; it is both to be *inside* clothes and *as* clothes, and to be both a body inside clothes and a body clothed. In our worldly dwelling, as we wear clothes and maintain our bodies, we are engaged in relational exercises that enact the many identifications, practices and meanings of doing clothed existence.

Dress theorist and historian, Elizabeth Wilson indicates the complex physical and social relationships which are encompassed as the elements of clothes, bodies and world shift around in dress:

Clothing marks an unclear boundary ambiguously, and unclear boundaries disturb us. Symbolic systems and rituals have been created in many different cultures to strengthen and reinforce boundaries, since these safeguard purity. It is at the margins between one thing and another that pollution may leak out. Many social rituals are attempts at containment and separation, devised to prevent the defilement that occurs when matter spills from one place – or category – to another.

If the body with its open orifices is itself dangerously ambiguous, then dress, which is an extension of the body, yet not quite part of it, not only links that body to the social world, but also more clearly separates the two. Dress is the frontier between the self and the non-self.²

In these words from the opening pages of Adorned in Dreams, Wilson speculates if the desire to dress the body is a socially instituted ritual to reinforce somatic boundaries and to shore-up anxiety about bodies which constantly threaten to extend beyond their own limits as polluting, decaying and permeable.³ While it would take

² Elizabeth Wilson, Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985) 2-3.

³ Her argument follows that of Mary Douglas in Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966).

some time to sufficiently explore the motivations and reasons for dress, it is most important to observe here that as clothes work to mark a surface they do so in such a way that a body is an integral part of that construction. On the one hand, clothes can be said to provide a physical frame for the body, an envelope for preventing the body from dissolving into the anonymity of either nudity or the social world. On the other hand, clothes weave the singular body amongst a social collective thus connecting it with other bodies in acts of communication, interaction, and routine daily practices. If, as bodies extend outwards, dress simultaneously attempts to both contain and connect that body with not only other dress but also a world in which the clothed body is a part, then where does the body end and clothes begin?

In short, the answer, is somewhere in the midst of the forming of a third substance, a substance which is both animate and inanimate, but not simply their sum. The forming of this third substance is an event that confounds our analytic heritage because we cannot simply divide this substance up into two parts – body and clothes – so that they correspond with the analytic categories of nature and culture, or animate and inanimate material. Such categories come into binary opposition when clothing is considered to make a “natural” body decent or acceptable, to convert its given nature, as it were, into a recognisable or meaningful cultural form. Instead, this third substance is the inter-mixed stuff of physical materials and immaterial meanings, in an inter-mixing which makes it difficult to isolate a prior substance where nature might have been intact. For one, the body (both dressed and undressed) is as much cultural artefact and discursive construct, as it is organism which animates clothes in wearing them. Secondly, purportedly inanimate clothes are imbued in wearing with an organicism which moves across the line away from the category of inanimate cultural artefact. In evidence of the alchemical fusion of wearing, one only has to think of the contrasting sight of unworn clothes, a pile of discarded clothes on the floor, that are unsettling in their lifeless form. Moreover, the two terms “clothes” and “bodies” cannot in themselves represent all that is included in acts of wearing. Cosmetics, jewellery, shoes, lingerie, miscellaneous accessories, and an assortment of minor garments (socks, scarves, hats etc.) can also be worn in productive combinations and therefore should be incorporated as inter-mediary elements in these preliminary formulations of what it is possible to make from the relationships of clothes and

bodies.⁴ Consequently, the clothed-body is not made up of two discrete entities or even elements joined or connected together like the hyphen that joins the two words "clothed-body." For this is where language fails us in identifying the relation; instead the hyphen is to be read as the mark of contamination that points to the intermixing and differential production of wearing clothes. Significantly, in short here (for more will be said about this term in time), the term "dress" cannot capture as well this vital alchemic intermixing that the clothed-body points to. The hyphen is also a signal of grasping for what lies beyond the binaries; in wearing clothes certain distinctions and boundaries are questioned and the relations elude language, or at least description using familiar old tools used to weave the analytical fabric.⁵

The English language offers words such as dress and appearance to name the practice or productive event of being a "clothed-body" or more precisely, where clothes, bodies and intermediary elements are worn in such a way as to make anew. Whilst this is a re-making which promises to unravel different ways of thinking the relationships of clothes to body and body to clothes, the majority of attention in post-semiotic literature on dress has been focused on the productive event of dress as the making of a visible envelope of the self. For example, Leslie Rabine describes the act of "putting on" clothes as an embodied subject's productive emergence when she writes that:

the process of enacting fantasies of fashion magazines upon the body, the daily

⁴ In addition, the elements of head and body hair, nails, eyelashes and the various modes of styling, removing, supplementing and accentuating them, require special consideration as bodily extensions, perhaps as prosthetics which straddle the distinction between body and clothing, by blurring the difference between body part and attachment. As well, there are the attributes of body gesture, movement and posture, to include in the relations.

⁵ The binary oppositions that organise the clothes/body relationship are necessary for Western thought and conceptualised as productive of the fundamental differences of language and even more complex social structures, which enable differentiation. While there are experiences which reveal both the analytic heritage and current vocabularies to be inadequate for their representation, one cannot simply dispense with this inheritance. See Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1978), when he writes: "We have no language – no syntax and no lexicon – which is foreign to this history; we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest...The quality and fecundity of a discourse are perhaps measured by the critical rigour with which this relation to the history of metaphysics and to inherited concepts is thought" (280-82). See also Jacques Derrida in *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981), where he speaks of the impossibility of "decisive ruptures" with a metaphysical thought and language. He writes: "Breaks are always, and fatally, reinscribed in an old cloth that must continually, interminably be undone" (24).

act of donning clothing and cosmetics...entails a ritualized reenactment of a "mythical moment"...the symbolic replay of this profoundly productive moment when subjectivity emerges.⁶

It is the outer surfaces of these envelopes as sites of communication and self-expression that have continuously caught the theoretical gaze. As it is used in the literature on dress, the term "dress" refers to articles of clothing (either a singular garment or an ensemble) used in a communicative and expressive practice, and implicitly to a subject who dresses to communicate using the aesthetic and meaningful tools of clothing, history and image. As such, then, it is primarily the visible surfaces of dress as sites of communication and expression that have preoccupied the scholar in studying the productive event of dress. This thesis aspires to reassert the body's importance to dress by exploring the practices and forces that are vital to the constitution of such communicative surfaces through the concept of wearing. Clearly an integral part of the practice of dress, wearing is mobilised as both philosophical concept and practice, to explore the conceptual underpinnings of dress as productive event, and as a practice which is vital to any dress production. As such, this thesis seeks to understand how wearing clothes is understood. How it is studied, thought about and conceptualised as dress and fashion.

I ask that the reader consider the following simple question "what is it to be someone who wears clothes?" Being clothes scholars – you the reader and I the writer of this text – we will have our own strong ideas about wearing clothes. Yet, I ask the reader to continually ask this question as they engage with this text, as I have asked myself this question continually while writing it. To ask this question is to call forth a thinking about what awareness – if any at all – we have of dressing and being clothed and to reflect on them as practice and mode of being, to call on an understanding. As "clothes-wearing" people we are always already placed within clothes rather than outside them. As such, we are set up from the outset, as subjects of the object we seek to study, inside the text, as it were. And as subjects we have vested interests – by virtue of being invested, literally, by our vestments – in any thinking we may construct about this practice of wearing.

⁶ Leslie W. Rabine, "A Woman's Two Bodies: Fashion Magazines, Consumerism, and Feminism," *On Fashion*, ed. Shari Benstock and Suzanne Ferriss (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1994) 64.

Establishing Dialogues within Dress Studies

A post-semiotic discourse on dress is the consequence of a condition of academic inter-disciplinarity in the 1980s where theoretical frameworks from feminist theory, art history (and its off-shoot "visual culture" studies), social history, film theory, cultural studies, sociology, material culture, and design and costume history have intersected to give both visibility and form to a hybrid, trans-disciplinary entity called "Dress Studies."⁷ "Dress Studies" has engaged the tools of sign, image, material culture, and history to analyse both the historical variations of clothing forms and the ideological dynamics of a ubiquitous and pulsating stream of images, styles and events accompanying these variations. Experiencing rapid growth as a publishing field, dress studies has responded to the spectacular and varied faces of contemporary fashion and enabled it to command a place in matters of cultural significance, its eye-catching faces capturing the gaze of growing numbers of scholars. Yet, "dress studies" is a somewhat artificial name for what is now a sizeable body of differing literature and it would be wrong to present this as a unified discipline of writing cemented by a singular methodology or theoretical approach to the subjects of dress and fashion. Rather constituted piecemeal from writings issuing forth from multifarious academic departments/faculties, dress studies has revealed itself as a loosely connected plural field of theoretical approaches.⁸ Building upon and stretching

⁷ Recently published material on dress (where it is apparent that a variety of theoretical frameworks are at work) are the articles in Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture 1-6 and in Form/Work: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Design and the Built Environment: The Fashion Issue 4 (2000).

⁸ Publications and essay collections that have been important to establishing this field are Elizabeth Wilson, Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity; Arthur Kroker and Marielouise Kroker, eds., Body Invaders: Panic Sex in America (New York: St Martin's Press, 1987); Caroline Evans and Minna Thornton, Women and Fashion: A New Look (London: Quartet Books, 1989); Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog, eds., Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body (New York and London: Routledge, 1990); Gail Faurschou, "Obsolescence and Desire: Fashion and the Commodity Form," Postmodernism: Philosophy and the Arts, ed. Hugh J. Silverman (New York: Routledge, 1990); Juliet Ash and Elizabeth Wilson, eds., Chic Thrills: A Fashion Reader (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992); Jennifer Craik, The Face of Fashion: Cultural Studies in Fashion (London and New York: Routledge, 1994); Shari Benstock and Suzanne Ferriss, eds., On Fashion (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1994); Christopher Breward, The Culture of Fashion (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995). Although a little earlier Anne Hollander's Seeing Through Clothes (New York: Viking, 1975) was very influential. While not an exhaustive list, these works have assisted to evidence the significance of dress and consequently fashion, as a vital cultural entity, an academic pursuit and as a vehicle for debates within the aforementioned disciplines. With various frameworks from these disciplinary or theoretical fields at work in the above texts, one needs an inter-

the methodological parameters of traditional costume history the emergence of academic subjects and programs on dress and fashion (rather than simply technical, these are historical and cultural in focus) as well as an international journal of Fashion Theory has given the image of coherence to this literature and research activity.⁹

Connecting various contributions to dress studies, forming a set of primary threads, are the vital interests of feminist scholars in dress as a significant dimension of women's experience and in fashion as an instrumental force in shaping the private and public faces of femininity. As such, much attention has been focused on the feminist subject of woman in clothing as representational object of art, literature, film, advertising, fashion, and social spaces, an object of ideological investment. Additionally, the hermeneutic frame of Barthesian semiotics has operated as one of the central theoretical frameworks for decoding the discursive and mythic narrative investments in the cultural representations of women. To this end, Roland Barthes' The Fashion System serves in name as a convenient summation of the notion that has taken root of dress as a semiotic system (organised by the structuring principle of fashion), retrospectively positioning this work as a canonical text.¹⁰ What is meant, here, is that Barthes' text and its notion of dress as a semiotic system has been honoured more than studied, in the period when semiotics was adopted in dress studies and related areas. Yet, it would not be appropriate to over-determine the influence of this one text for its substantial position amidst the corpus of Barthes' writings and its indirect impact on dress studies is frequently passed over, Barthesian semiotics being introduced to dress studies more loosely through semiotic analyses of the photographic and filmic image. Consequently, it is in the study of the photographic and filmic representation and mediation of clothed women – where the clothed woman and her representation come together as image – that semiotic and feminist frameworks have been deployed to read the investments in the sign of woman.

disciplinary disposition and taste for the hybrid to work in dress studies.

⁹ See Alexander Palmer, "New Directions: Fashion History Studies and Research in North America and England," Fashion Theory 1.3 (1997): 297-312, for an outline of various subjects and programs in North America and Britain.

¹⁰ Roland Barthes, The Fashion System, trans. Matthew Ward and Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983).

In the following pages, seminal texts from this field of dress studies will be considered via a parallel discourse of feminist post-structuralist philosophy of the body. This will allow us to examine the approaches which underpin concepts of representation and identity operating in this field, and to trace certain threads from these to particular problematics in feminist scholarship. Little artifice is required in aligning these inquiries from feminist philosophy so that they bear upon the field of dress studies, or aligning two discussions in parallel, for a dialogue between various feminisms and dress scholarship has always been integral to dress studies. This present study pursues the already established dialogue into several unexplored corners of dress scholarship. These parallel discourses share the legacy of structural linguistics which has provided a ground for productive exchange of theoretical insights; the figure of dress or its correlate fashion provides in various arenas of feminist scholarship a metaphor for “constructions” (by discourse, society, culture and representation) of subjectivity or embodied identity (for example, to fashion, to dress a subject in/of language), and in exchange dress studies has engaged an interpretive frame of a symbolic system derived from linguistics to interpret the work that dress performs in making meaning. Such exchanges flow from a climate of academic inter-disciplinarity which permits and enables such connections as both of these conversant fields and the study of their respective subjects – woman and dressed woman – unfold against a shared background in semiotics, and socio-cultural and political theory. As such, this points to a shared knowledge and research practices for interpreting the body of woman as an effect of social structures and systems of representation. This is not to suggest that research practices are the same in all locations, but rather it is to suggest that often a particular assemblage of discourses – products of different times and locations – enable particular objects to emerge. Being the product of an assemblage of discourses, articles of “dress” were conceived in dress studies as a socio-cultural construction of identity and an image of woman.

An influential text by American feminist and queer theorist Judith Butler titled Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex” examines the manner in which recourse to the figure of “women’s experience” has operated to ground political solidarity in some feminist writing by reliance on ontological givens such as nature,

essence, and sex.¹¹ In attempting to counter these essentialist tendencies, by insisting that woman and her experiences are figured by discourse, the alternative “constructionist” approach can make the mistake of rendering woman so that she has no facticity outside discourse. As Butler discusses the complexities involved in positioning a critical feminist writing, she raises various problematics that will be shown to have important bearing on the field of dress studies. Primarily, her formulations will assist me to ask how the representational surfaces of clothing articulate themselves as embodiment and co-exist with – inhabit – a living, perspiring, corporeality. Contemporary post-structuralist feminist writing such as Butler’s, notably informed by Jacques Derrida’s theory of general writing, asks how representation is embodied (eg. in the collective experience of being a woman) and pursues this question to the limits of discursive construction where discourse becomes or inhabits the very matter of – in Butler’s case – sexual embodiment.¹² While I may have over-simplified her thought, my purpose in this introduction is to flag Butler’s intention so as to give weight to the notion that bodies are “cultural constructions,” and also to signal that the vital and necessary pursuit of thinking gender and sex representations unfolds the unthought, perhaps unthinkable, intersections of discourse and material (i.e. living) bodies. From this, two related avenues of inquiry can be elaborated and imported into the scholarship of dress. Firstly, any investigation of the limits of discursive constructions gives thought to the logic, operability, and autonomy of systems (of which these constructions are a part), to a thinking of *systematicity*, whether of language, culture, representations, economy or fashion. Secondly, to continue to pursue such thought inevitably leads us to the base “units” of a system such as the word, the image, the object, the sign and how these units interact with a user/viewer/reader to situate that user in relation to complex social structures. Significantly, a contemporary fashion system engages all such units in weaving its web. Particularly, the second line of inquiry pursues an investigation of the co-materialisations of artificial, representational or technological bodies (i.e. non-human bodies) and living bodies, of technical objects and their relational existence with human bodies. Such matters are integral to a discussion of the interrelations of people

¹¹ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

¹² Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976).

with clothes and the units of the fashion system, as their interrelations entail limits and thresholds, and the crossing over of limits and thresholds. In these relational exercises of dress, both body and clothing are inscribed with the values of sign, material, utility and fashion commodity.

In that we have already made reference to the terms clothing, dress, fashion and wearing at this early stage of the discussion, it is necessary to outline and survey the semantic field of terminology about clothing more closely. It is important to observe any points of distinction in the common and particular theoretical usages of terms, when the English language has so many words for aspects of both the object(s) and the practice of dress; clothes, fashion, costume, dress, apparel and wearing. An analysis of the language used to name and describe dress can assist to differentiate these various aspects, as they enable and articulate an understanding.¹³ It will be shown to be important to this meditation on wearing that all of the words *fashion*, *clothing*, and *dress* have two grammatical forms as both nouns and verbs, around which have formed clusters of meaning.¹⁴ As both noun and verb, these words can retain the dual senses of entity, thing, or object and action, process or practice. For instance, the word *fashion* is derived from the Latin *facere* (to make or do) and the word retains this sense of an action or process in that the verb "to fashion" means to make, build, or shape material forms, appearances or visible attributes, and also immaterial effects of meaning.¹⁵ It also retains this sense when "fashion" describes a manner or method of doing or action explicit to the English word *mode* or less explicit in the more specialised sense of technical *modality*.¹⁶ The noun "fashion" is more common as it is used to refer to the material and immaterial character of things,

¹³ Language is our means of making an entity present and *as* what they are named. For Martin Heidegger, naming is a gathering of presence, a holding together and a granting which can be thought of as a granting of understanding which affords an attunement to how things and language exist relationally: language names an understanding. See Martin Heidegger, "The Way to Language," On the Way to Language, trans. Peter D. Hertz (San Francisco: Harper, 1971). One of the implications of Heidegger's path toward understanding language is to acknowledge that language is not capable of capturing a thing in its totality.

¹⁴ With regard to the meaning and etymology of these words The Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd ed., 12 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) and The Barnhardt Dictionary of Etymology (New York: H.W. Wilson Company, 1988) have been consulted.

¹⁵ On "fashion" see The Oxford English Dictionary 5: 743-45; The Barnhardt Dictionary 370.

¹⁶ On "mode" see The Oxford English Dictionary 9: 939-40; The Barnhardt Dictionary 670.

entities or objects, or a transforming “spectrum of appearances”¹⁷ that have been brought about by a system of stylistic change with its origins in the dress variations of 13th and 14th century European court societies.¹⁸ The system, archetypically taking form in dress, articulates a temporal cycle of change and renewal wherein particular styles, shapes, or attributes of appearance, the materialisations of a mode or manner – i.e. a fashion, a doing – of dress, pass in and out of accepted or conventional usage within a section of society. In comparison to fashion, the words *clothes* and *clothing* apply to general forms which have the connotations of endurance and functionality, and like fashion have a related use as verbs – to clothe, clothed, clothing, – to refer to the general use of things made of cloth to cover the human body.¹⁹ It is in vernacular usage that one finds the most frequent invocation of “clothes” as articles of personal but widespread ownership, vivid materiality and utility as coverings of the body. Additionally, their mass availability correlates with a technical usage in referring to clothes and apparel as “units” of an institutionalised system of industrial mass production. *Costume* can refer to the clothes worn in performance, theatre, carnival or festivities, and being related to the word “custom” is also used to refer to clothes of a particular region, period of history or circumstance.²⁰ *Dress* carries particular connotations of assembling, arranging, and embellishing derived from the verb “to dress” when used to refer to a process of preparing or dressing-up for an event (or say, children’s dress-ups), but in much usage is interchanged with costume and clothes to refer to the article(s) or garment(s) a person wears.²¹ While used today in a non-gender specific manner to refer to the daily act of putting clothes on, it has also come to mean a feminine garment with skirt and bodice, after originally referring to a suit or outfit of clothing. One could sort out these terms according to the degree of

¹⁷ Mary McLeod, “Undressing Architecture: Fashion, Gender, and Modernity,” *Architecture: In Fashion*, ed. Deborah Fausch et al. (New York: Princeton, 1994) 40.

¹⁸ It is more or less unanimous amongst fashion historians and sociologists that the origins of an institutionalised ritual or practice of fashion change can be traced to the fourteenth century variations in appearance in Western Europe and frequently located in the aristocratic dress practices of the Burgundian court of Phillip the Fair 1285 to 1314. See Christopher Breward, *The Culture of Fashion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995) 7-9; Fred Davis, *Fashion, Culture and Identity* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992) 28-29; Gilles Lipovetsky, *The Empire of Fashion: Dressing Modern Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) 18-54. While there is agreement about these origins, it does not rest upon a consensus as to what fashion is today.

¹⁹ The word “clothes” is used as a collective plural, which no longer has a singular form. One would use the phrase “article of clothing” or the word “garment” when speaking of the singular. On “clothes” and “clothing” see *The Oxford English Dictionary* 3: 352-56; *The Barnhardt Dictionary* 181.

²⁰ On “costume” see *The Oxford English Dictionary* 3:992; *The Barnhardt Dictionary* 224.

²¹ On “dress” see *The Oxford English Dictionary* 4:1042; *The Barnhardt Dictionary* 301.

“intermixing” with a body, with garment at the most discrete end of the scale as independent thing or entity, and “dress” suggesting a surface construction. Within dress studies, the term “dress” is conceptualised or theorised not only as a cut of material object but also to point to the meanings communicated by a garment and the embellishment of a body with surface material which add values or meanings, in an understanding derived from semiotics. This usage draws upon both senses of dress as a process or practice of assembling *and* a suit, outfit, construction, to establish that dress is a cultural practice of constructing meaning for user and object. One of the important determinants used to distinguish fashion from clothes, costume and dress, is the pace or temporality of change in clothing forms. This means that clothing (& its correlates) is associated with a comparatively static and widespread presence, becoming the *general* form with a very gradual mode of change relative to fashion’s faster cycles and *particular* variations. These distinctions between the general and the particular, and between the verb and noun forms (which respectively point to practices and objects), articulate the two semantic axes within which the use of the words fashion, clothing and dress shift around to create differentiation. From these axes of meaning flow various connotations and distinctions as terms are used to distinguish the static from the mutable, ubiquity from variability, continuity from ephemerality, utility from decoration/adornment, necessity from superfluity, fashionability from unfashionability, the habitual from the exceptional and so on.

The distinction between the meanings of fashion and clothing holds a significance, Michael Carey proposes, in a context where contemporary cultural theory has located in fashion a general principle which has been disengaged from clothing, and its theorization, and has “migrated” to “innumerable social and cultural spheres – even to the spheres of society and culture themselves.”²² Notably, fashion achieves acknowledgment today, theoretically if not also popularly, as a matter of cultural significance and an integral discourse among a broader constellation, which shape culture and society, partly because of its expanding media and entertainment profile in performing cycles which renew the spectra of cross-media appearances. This acknowledgment has given rise to numerous figurations of the meaning of fashion

²² Michael Carey, “Ontology and Meaning Ascription: Some Notes on Walter Benjamin and the uses of Fashion,” *Form/Work* 4 (2000): 42.

within dress studies and the general area of cultural theory, and it would imply that the original relationship of fashion and clothes has been refigured. One of the prevalent figurations of fashion is as postmodern cultural sensibility *par excellence*, a sensibility of fragmentation, as "its obsession with surface, novelty and style for style's sake" accentuates culturally relative experiences and multiple contexts of interaction with artefacts and images, experiences that cannot be governed by universal or meta-discursive structures.²³ Frederic Jameson has suggested that what marks the postmodern is an "...intensification of the autoreferentiality of all modern culture, which tends to turn upon itself and designate its own cultural production as its content."²⁴ While these points will need to be explored more slowly, in short the operations of fashion have been figured in two ways that connects fashion with the postmodern; as both an indicator, if not a cause, of an order of economic, social and cultural consumer *transition* and *intensification* (called postmodernity), and as a *fragmenting* and *multi-dimensional* phenomena which can be seen from many different contemporary perspectives – as sociological, economic, gendered, communication and aesthetic-cultural thing.

To point more explicitly to the principles which characterise the relationships between fashion and clothes, and give fashion its modern and postmodern character, the modern industrialisation of the clothing form established an identity for fashion as an economic principle of stimulating growth by enforcing obsolescence upon the value of clothing forms. In modernity, as such, fashion's industry face is defined as an *economic principle* of production within the framework of industrial development and the expansion of women's ready-to-wear clothing, which mimicked the cyclical pattern of women's haute couture as well as responding to the modern sensibility embodied by the mobility of new industry itself.²⁵ The rationale for industrial development was that it responded to the needs of modernising societies, all the while instituting fashion as a practice of consuming clothes in regular cycles. Relevant,

²³ Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams* 11.

²⁴ Frederic Jameson, "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *Rethinking Architecture*, ed. Neil Leach (London: Routledge, 1997) 244.

²⁵ See Elizabeth Ewen and Stuart Ewen, "Fashion and Democracy," *Channels of Desire: Mass Images and the Shaping of American Consciousness* (London: Minneapolis Press, 1992) on the relationship between women's haute couture and the emergence of off-the-rack markets in America by the 1880s, the arrival of standardised sizes approximating fit and the conceptualisation of women's ready-to-wear as an industrial model for other products (75-188).

then, are the responses of individuals to fashion's industrial face. While there is a risk that such a theory implies that a universal impulse or social structure drives people to distinguish themselves, it is widely held following sociologist Georg Simmel that fashion was established in modernity as a social practice of individual and collective identification via which the tensions between individual distinction and social compliance are played-out. Such a theory grounds fashion change in practices which oscillate between the tensions of social conformity and distinction in appearances, and can partly explain the constant mobility of fashion change above and beyond an enforced economic principle of industry. From these practices scholars have interpreted fashion to have a distinctly *social face*, as an agent of socialisation, a *structuring principle* capable of generating social interaction and reproducing social order.

As Carey argues, it would be tempting to render the relationship of clothes to fashion in terms of the "genetic and the static," figuring clothes as a sphere of genesis and fashion as the logical structure which arises from the movements to prefigure the meanings of clothing.²⁶ An example of the prefiguration of the various meanings of clothing by a structure of fashion which migrates and multiplies can be found in Hollander when she writes about the contemporary moment of dress: "Fashion...is now the general condition of all Western clothing...it now appears in multiple manifestations, so that many different fashions, small and large, are flourishing at the same time."²⁷ In exploring the economic and social principles of fashion change, we have seen this condition manifest itself as fashion's ascription of clothes with the meanings of social dynamics and economic values.

It is fashion's identity as a signifying system of meaning production and as a prevalent mode of consumption that has defined its general, expandable and therefore postmodern character. Informing the notion that fashion represents a "migratory logical structure"²⁸ is the important insight of French post-structuralist philosopher and sociologist Jean Baudrillard that fashion seems to be expanding, spiralling, and penetrating into ever more domains of social experience. Baudrillard characterises

²⁶ Carey 42.

²⁷ Anne Hollander, *Sex and Suits: The Evolution of Modern Dress* (New York: Kodansha, 1994) 11.

²⁸ Carey 42.

this generalisable and expandable cultural logic of meaning production in the following quote:

Fashion is one of the more inexplicable phenomena...its compulsion to innovate signs, its apparently arbitrary and perpetual production of meaning – a kind of meaning drive – and the logical mystery of its cycle are all in fact of the essence of what is sociological. The logical processes of fashion might be extrapolated to the dimension of “culture” in general – to all social production of signs, values, and relations.²⁹

Baudrillard points here to the penetration of all domains of the social by what he calls in later work on fashion, “the order of the code” – code referring variously to signs, the binary code of computer technology, DNA code of biology, and the data-code of media information.³⁰ For Baudrillard, fashion is an exemplary model of a spectacle of the code, the arbitrary and self-referential generation of meaning, which is the essence of the cultural order where the circulation of information, commodities, and signs tends to turn culture in upon itself. Fashion is that realm which takes its own cultural production as its content, making a spectacle from the capacity to make, in Roland Barthes’ words, the “insignificant signify.”³¹ Significantly, observing fashion transforms Baudrillard’s understanding of production from an industrial process to one where everything becomes “commutable, reversible and exchangeable according to the same indeterminate specularly as we find in politics, fashion or the media.”³² For example, fashion is conceived of as a mode or technology of reproduction connected to a wider network of media and commodity reproduction, and in an order where everything is reversible and commutable, fashion’s clothing-signs are conceived as image and commodity, and images and commodities as fashion.

Gail Faurschou’s essay represents a Baudrillardian characterisation of fashion and the importation of the principle of fashion as code into dress and cultural studies.

²⁹ Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of The Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. Charles Levin (St Louis, MO: Telos Press, 1981) 78-79.

³⁰ Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, trans. Jain Hamilton (London: Sage Publications, 1993). Baudrillard spends little time defining the nature and variations in the notion of the code, but in his earlier work it is used when referring to the system of signs. While this term may have been used there as a synonym for system or language, in *Symbolic Exchange and Death* it takes on a great importance in pointing to an order of cultural reproduction and refers to the aforementioned forms of code which become the basis for information, genetic and media reproductions.

³¹ Roland Barthes qtd. in Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death* 93.

³² Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death* 16.

Faurschou writes:

...if postmodernity is here understood as a new phase of the intensification and re-organisation in the mode of production of late capitalism such that production, having surpassed its earlier rationale of satisfying the needs of a modernizing society, is now compelled to drive consumption to new extremes of insatiability, then *fashion* is what has become the propelling momentum, the dominant MODE of consumption itself, the infinite and indefinite extension of its modalities. As both the *organisational thematic and fluctuating dynamic of consumption*, fashion is rapidly instituting itself as the universal code under which all other previous cultural codes are subsumed, contained but not transcended, reiterated, re-dressed, seemingly forever "reconsumed" in a perpetual, circular semiosis of stylistic variation.³³

Carey's insightful analysis of Faurschou's characterisation of fashion is worth quoting in full:

The induction is familiar; fashion is at once the prevalent mode of consumption (consumption here representing a seemingly regulative principle of our epoch through which the figure of insatiability overcomes the figure of the satisfaction of needs causing economy to become, in the jargon, libidinal) and, in a movement which reduces all of culture to an economic moment of this principle, the universal code "under which all other codes are subsumed." The indistinct nature and contradictory results of this induction are also familiar...[for example] Universality, therefore, refers to the totality of a system which is at once entirely closed yet all-encompassing, while semiosis refers to a referentiality which is closed to all but its own significations yet is the "dominant model" of not only economic but all cultural signification.³⁴

As *the organising thematic*, namely as the dominant mode of consumption, fashion appears to have two faces or prevalent forms. For one, as a "dominant mode of consumption" fashion's identity as a consumption practice would seem to involve here, as Carey observes, a regulative principle of consumer control where the nurturing of insatiability overflows to dominate consumption, irreparably weaving desire and expectation amongst appearances and subsuming the drive to satisfy needs. In this work, fashion advances as a structuring principle unfolding ahead of us, determining that appearances and environments are implicated in economies of desire, which cannot be fulfilled. Secondly, fashion's work is, as Carey notes, "a- or post-historical" in manifesting a distinct systematicity, or as Baudrillard observes above, a

³³ Faurschou, "Obsolescence and Desire: Fashion and the Commodity Form" 235.

³⁴ Carey 43.

perpetual production of arbitrary meaning, a hermetic system of semiotic stasis.³⁵ What is important to observe, here, are the ways of defining fashion, either as a circumscribing system or a mode of consumption which engulfs, encloses and organises clothing forms for re-consumption, albeit configured in the presence of an expanding number of other cultural forms organised by the same principles. In this introduction, I intend to point to the shifts in meaning of the terms clothes and fashion, implied with respect to the claim that fashion represents a general logic of cultural signification, that has arisen out of a relation with the clothing form, but may now be applicable to many other cultural forms.

The “Corporeal Turn” of Dress Studies

Opening a contemporary fashion magazine, it is difficult to miss the serial skin-shows of catwalk dramas and fashion spreads which announce that both the skin surface and body shape reside in a domain organised to the tempo of fashion's beat and vision. Flicking through these pages, a reader will skim past advertisements for cosmetic treatments and surgery, articles on diet modification, and probably move into a section on health and fitness, together indicating that both skin surface and body shape are sites where fashion can materialise as certain effects of skin texture and complexion, body-silhouette and proportions. Moreover, skin surface and body shape are not necessarily discrete sites of attention for configuring fashion as these magazines promote regimes for regularly maintaining health, beauty and diet as a holistic package, putting these sites into a continuum of body regulation. By this it is meant, that various feature articles and promotions envision “body shape” to be a designing and re-organising process encompassing both health and appearance which moves between the inside and the outside of the body. It might be argued that both the magazine presentations on health and the aims of the regime itself would always be structured in terms of the goal of a better looking appearance, yet in a process of managing health by exercise and diet it is not simply the surface of the body that is modified. All these considerations are directed toward making the simple point that perhaps more explicitly than ever before the body itself, rather than simply its surface appendages, can be cast as one of fashion's objects. This is not to suggest that

³⁵ Carey 42.

attention has shifted away from the delectable fabric objects of fashion's couturiers, but rather to make the two points that garments have everywhere and always dressed and been promoted with bodies. Today a body is treated less as a coathanger and more as one of the wearer's most valuable assets, meaning that beauty is much more than skin-deep.

The range of body-services which are addressed within the pages of the fashion magazine – make-up, cell exfoliation, cosmetic surgery, skin peels, piercings – can be considered part of the accelerated transmutation of the natural by human action which has become a condition of building the artificial and post-natural realms that humans dwell in today.³⁶ Ironically, such services can be promoted with the aim of preserving the body and its attributes in their “natural” youth or beauty; defying age etc. Consequently, in that the preservation of skin surfaces is the focus of the bio-chemical frontier of the pharmaceutical and cosmetic industries, the reader can witness in magnified proportions on the advertisement page the chemically treated epidermal layer of the face laid out as cultural artefact. If these body-services are conceived as practices of fashioning, a making of appearance, then “fashion” might be understood to refer to any practice or object which engages with and works upon the body to construct appearances, always remembering that “appearances” are being construed in the following pages as changes of substance. The fashioning of appearance might include the use of garments, accessories, cosmetics, jewellery, piercing, tattooing, hair-design, branding, cutting, scarification, and cosmetic surgery, and the practices of using certain objects or tools either in isolation or in combination to style appearance. Certainly, if one were to examine all human cultures closely one would find such practices being used for culturally and regionally specific rituals and effects yet there is a sense in which all of these practices might be generalised to refer to fashion as a practice of making and working on the body for the purpose of constructing appearances.

³⁶ The notion of the “post-natural” points to the immensity of a world created through human and machine labour, as well as the networks of signs, environments, objects and information that together create a sense of this world as “artificial.” From such a perspective, we can formulate a view of a world of things and people, as well as living amidst this world, as a naturalised existence with the artificial. This doesn't mean that we can clearly delineate a boundary for a human-made world as totality and thus readily separate it from what is unmade. In fact, it is to register the impossible task of separating what is meant by a natural entity and environment, as both the idea and actuality of “nature” appear to be totally imbricated with our made existences.

While this definition might appear on the one hand to be too reductive or on the other to eliminate fashions in objects which don't work on the body directly, in terms of the recent theorisation of fashion, it is the case that fashion is taken to be certain practices that work on the body, particularly as a means of self-fashioning or self-identification. For example, evidence of a quite explicit corporeally-based definition of "fashion" can be found in the charter of the journal of Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture which has been a focus for publishing recent writings on dress. It states:

The importance of studying the body as a site for the deployment of discourses is well-established in a number of disciplines. By contrast, the study of fashion, has until recently, suffered from a lack of critical analysis. Increasingly, however, scholars have recognised the cultural significance of self-fashioning, including not only clothing but also such body alterations as tattooing and piercing. *Fashion Theory* takes as its starting point a definition of "fashion" as the cultural construction of the embodied identity. It aims to provide an interdisciplinary forum for the rigorous analysis of cultural phenomena ranging from footbinding to fashion advertising.³⁷

In this statement the body is foregrounded as the site of activity and focus of a set of practices dedicated to the "cultural construction of embodied identity." The said body-altering practices and phenomena – clothing, tattooing, piercing, footbinding and fashion advertising – are defined as a starting point for interpreting "fashion" in a theoretical context where "scholars have recognised the cultural significance of self-fashioning." Importantly, the "starting point" for this definition is that these modes of practice are for the purpose of *self-identification*. We might understand from the journal's subtitle that three conceptual categories relevant to the theorisation of self-fashioning are "dress," "body" and "culture"; the construction of embodied identity potentially occurs, as it were, across these categories. The starting point for a definition is also cross-cultural in its intentions of formulating a publishing forum where articles on, say, traditional Japanese footbinding and contemporary American piercing could be brought side by side, and it also seeks to avoid an exclusively modern Western framework by defining fashion as a system of the industrialised West. This would appear to be an invitation to immediately move into the detail of

³⁷ *Fashion Theory* 1.1 (1997).

studying specific cultural practices, however, worth careful consideration is the essential point that it is the significance of these practices as *bodily* practices which seems to unite this definition.

Furthermore, if we examine the opening words of this statement and note their reference to academic disciplines where "the body as a site for the deployment of discourses" is "well-established" we are meant to hear, for one, the influence of Michel Foucault and post-Foucauldian scholarship which has studied social systems, structures and institutions that govern and regulate bodies. The historical analyses of Michel Foucault's studies of punishment and sexuality have been influential in developing genealogical methods for studying the human subject as the imagined object of discourses and institutions.³⁸ Foucault's studies have focused primarily on three inter-related concepts of knowledge, power, and the body, these concepts used to analyse particular structures and regimes of domination. Influentially, his work has introduced a theoretical framework for approaching the body as permeable, regulatable, and governable, where the body figures as the site of the inculcation of social discourses and institutions. By studying the development of bodily techniques of micro-regulation one can understand how/why institutions and knowledge/power have developed in particular ways and how they in turn seek to influence and work upon bodies, finally producing a certain type of regulated subject. In addition, the journal's statement makes reference to the influential and Foucauldian-inspired treatment of the term "self-fashioning" by Stephen Greenblatt, which points to the use of the term fashion from the sixteenth century to refer to "a way of designating the forming of a self" and a process of manufacturing identity through artful manipulation of appearances.³⁹

By suggesting that the "lessons" from such approaches might translate in formulating critical studies in fashion, the journal "projects" that the analysis of fashion might be able to make a valuable contribution to understanding the processes of forming

³⁸ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Allen Lane, 1977) and *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction* (London: Penguin, 1978). Genealogy refers to the method of historical analysis devised in these studies which can be called a history of the present, one that will point to and continue to challenge the hegemony of various disciplines and assumptions.

³⁹ Stephen J. Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) 2.

human identity; that is, the analysis of fashion as discourse, image, and as practice. Consequently, from this very brief statement various identities for fashion can flow, as either regulative institution or discourse, or as micro-regulative bodily technique after Foucault (i.e. the word "deployment" rings with the voice of controlling force). Or further, as a symbolic system of magazine or advertising images with which people identify, or as an embodied practice. Foucault's notion of discourse enables an analysis of fashion as a discursive domain that influences, if not regulates, the body and its presentation. Fashion has been defined as a system of power in the West operating to distinguish people by class and gender,⁴⁰ and after Foucault, fashion could be defined as a system of power governing the changing spectrum of appearances and dress practices, its governing power established and continually buttressed through the constant and often competing circulation of discourses of the image and written text which shape appearances.⁴¹ Alternatively, there has been a wealth of attention focused on analysing fashion as a symbolic and aesthetic practice of self-expression, where the autonomy of the individual can take precedence over external social forces or regulating structures. As a result, the material and changing body responds to these forces, where it is over-looked and sacrificed to a voluntaristic practice of self-fashioning.⁴² The analysis of fashion requires a balanced outlook. Integral to the analysis of human identity construction are those embodied practices where the interconnections can be made explicit between the impact of external controlling mechanisms and social structures, and the development of personal practices where private desires, emotions and communications are articulated. So, then, the practices of clothing, tattooing, piercing, tight-lacing, foot-binding, scarification, and cutting, amongst others, can be positioned alongside each other as a

⁴⁰ See Davis 110-15. In this book, Davis describes Thorstein Veblen's so-called "Trickle-down theory." Named by Veblen's followers after his characterisation of fashion, this "theory" is a description of fashion change as the consequence of a hierarchical class structure, where a powerful elite distinguish themselves and set the scene for the aspirations of the classes beneath. For more on the Trickle-down theory see also Lloyd A. Fallers, "Fashion: A Note on the Trickle Effect" Class, Status, and Power: Social Stratification in Comparative Perspective, 2nd ed. (New York: Free Press, 1966) 402-5. For a contemporary characterisation of fashion as oppressive power, see Sandra Lee Bartky's "Foucault, femininity and the modernization of patriarchal power," Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance, ed. Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988).

⁴¹ Elizabeth Wilson, "Fashion and the Postmodern Body," Chic Thrills: A Fashion Reader, ed. Juliet Ash and Elizabeth Wilson (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992) analyses fashion from a Foucauldian perspective as a system of power.

⁴² Exemplary of too much emphasis given to the voluntaristic practice of self-fashioning are Ted Polhemus's several publications: Streetstyle: From Sidewalk to Catwalk (London: Thames & Hudson, 1996); Style Surfing: What to Wear in the 3rd Millennium (London: Thames & Hudson, 1996); The Customised Body (London: Serpent's Tail, 2000).

group of embodied and body-altering practices to be studied in their relation to fashion. Such embodied practices are important for both their work on, and defiance of, the surface or skin membrane which has always taken on a charged presence as the outer container of the self in Western conceptions of personhood which are historically located "inside" but not "of" the body (in the sense of soul, mind or spirit). Carving a place for fashion in such work, the journal points to the contributions that dress studies (here "Fashion Theory") might make to the burgeoning "corpus" of literature on the body.⁴³ Here, it can study various forms of body modification where the self is fashioned via the externalisation of internal desires and the internalisation of unwritten laws in the form of social conventions and figurations modelled on intimate dreams and public spectacle. Indeed, such practices as clothing, tattooing, and piercing are able to reveal the paradox which underpins the location and characterisation of Western conceptions of the self. For despite the etherealisation of the self and the denigration of mere corporeality that has historically characterised Western conceptions of personhood, it can only be through the body and embodied action that one can construct and make visible, for ourselves and for others, what we are. The journal's statement is able to expose the bitter irony that the study of fashion might receive a deferred legitimation from the academy via an indirect route – by way of discourses and theories of the body – as if dress studies has followed the lead of an interdisciplinary thematic of the body in recognising the critical import of the cultural fashioning of corporeality. It is ironic that an interest in fashion may be on the rise because of an interdisciplinary thematic of the body, which takes the study of bodies through the long route of cultural studies, visual arts and sociology of the body, where the dressed and groomed body is reinterpreted as sign in paintings, photographs, and subcultures, before reaching the intimate touch of clothes and the

⁴³ The journal *Body & Society* is an important site for collecting a wealth of sociological scholarship on corporeality. Philosophy and feminist philosophy of the body is also conveniently collected in Donn Welton, ed., *The Body* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999). I am not entirely convinced that the body-question is a recent one, or more particularly by arguments such as that of Dani Cavallaro and Alexandra Warwick, *Fashioning the Frame: Boundaries, Dress and the Body* (New York: Berg, 1998) that claim "the body has only relatively recently become a subject of serious theoretical investigation" (1) mainly because of the significant value to be found in analyses from the history of 20th century thought, both phenomenological and metaphysical, which ask body-questions. Some highlights of such analyses have been conveniently compiled in Welton's *The Body*. Equally, I cannot deny the sheer amount of activity generated recently, nor that there is a long tradition of privileging the experience of mind at the expense of alternative modalities of embodiment, if these are the reasons for the authors' insistence on recent serious investigations.

body.⁴⁴ In fact, its irony is revealed by dwelling on the more significant point that indeed the study of dress has a lot to contribute to critical inquiry into the emplacements of corporeality in representational and social systems, and the world, because of the long-standing intimacy its subject has shared with the body, for bodies are everywhere dressed.

So, there is some truth to the point that it is only more recently that the study of dress has been acknowledged in dress and cultural studies as a way to mark the cultural mediation of the embodied subject. In contrast, for all the talk of "fashioning" as a useful metaphorical device for speaking of the fabrications of history and discourse in sociology and philosophy of the body there has been little explicit acknowledgment of a body that exists in fabric. In dress studies, although there may be an increasing awareness of the public spectacles of fashion that disseminate through the culturescape, variations on the theme of the body (images and forms), situating bodies historically and ideologically, there is little explicit analysis of dress as mundane and habitual practice which shapes the daily appearance and experiences of being a clothed body. In dress studies, fashion has been predominantly theorised as a symbolic system of artefacts, and attention has been focused on interpreting the outside surfaces of dress and fashion for their messages about the wearer. An understanding of dress as an embodied practice has not been explored in dress studies, and if dress studies have recently taken a corporeal turn, then the *living* body is yet to arrive. The argument forwarded by Fashion Theory and others that various body-practices such as piercing, tattooing, cutting, and scarification could now be encompassed as part of the "fashion system"⁴⁵ assist to illuminate the point that dress too, is a form of body-modification. Consequently, it also opens discussion onto the complexity of differences between these practices and the varying ways in which they

⁴⁴ The study of dress has always held a marginal place in the academy and therefore these recent convergences, which would appear to indicate a more resolute place for dress studies, represent a "deferred legitimation" re-routed through a larger – albeit inspiring – set of concerns in body studies. On the disdain and scorn fashion has received as a philosophical subject see Karen Hanson, "Dressing Down Dressing Up – The Philosophic Fear of Fashion" Hypatia 5.2 (1990): 107-21. Elizabeth Wilson discusses the need for fashion scholars to constantly justify their choice of object in Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity (47).

⁴⁵ Discussions of this argument can be heard in Susan Benson, "Inscriptions of the Self: Reflections on Tattooing and Piercing in Contemporary Euro-America," Written on the Body: The Tattoo in European and American History, ed. Jane Caplan (London: Reaktion Books, 2000) 236; Paul Sweetman, "Anchoring the (Postmodern) Self? Body Modification, Fashion and Identity," Body & Society 5.2-3 (1999): 51-76.

impact on an understanding of fashion – i.e. they involve distinct degrees of modification of the body's flesh and surface so that, in turn, they involve varying rates of permeability and change over time. For example, the fashionable status of the tattoo seems to throw into relief clothing fashion's reliance on its regular, changing and permeable identity. That is, this permeable identity is relative to the permanence of the tattoo's ink which seems to be reliant first and foremost on the receptivity of the body's flesh and skin surface rather than (like clothing fashion) on the context of its appearance to decide its rate of change.

Can we make a place in dress studies for an analysis of wearing clothes as a living bodily act, leaving space for the mundane and repetitive (in the sense of habitual act), as well as the spectacular and innovative, as well as the informing effects of fashion's cyclic changes and discourses of the image and text? It is precisely a body as a phenomenological field of activity and experience that is required to analyse wearing and relations in, and with, clothing.

It might seem incongruous to insist that wearing clothes is an embodied practice when pitched against a backdrop of the skin-shows in contemporary fashion magazines and burgeoning theoretical work on bodies. However, the implications of defining fashion as the "cultural construction of embodied identity" and seeing this construction as the outcome of cultural relationships between clothes and bodies, is yet to be fully explored.

Notes on My Use of Terms in this Thesis

In a cultural context where the changing "spectrum of appearances" can affect clothing with a transitoriness and insubstantiality, it might seem anachronistic to speak of "clothes" as if they were concrete entities or singular and stable in meaning. This thesis maintains the use of the term *clothes* to take us directly into the domain of everyday use and the user; to emphasise a certain functionality, materiality and relation to the body essential to wearing, alongside the undeniable effects of signification as clothes are always and everywhere relative to a fashion system.

In doing so, it will try to retain a sense of "clothes" as those covers in which a body is continuously invested and of "dress" to refer to an embodied practice of arranging material and meanings on, and for, the body, which can both be derived from a thinking of wearing. This is, in very simple terms, a carrying and inhabiting of those clothes put-on by a body. We will see that the concept of "dressing" can open up a discussion about different modalities of covering, equipping, arranging, assembling and/or embellishing a body with meanings, values and physical presence in and for wearing. In these explorations, these modalities of "dressing" will need to be distinguished from the alternative use of the word "dress" meaning the articles themselves. If dressing is the "putting on" of clothes, then wearing is both a carrying/bearing of these additions *and* their easing into the self, together with certain social forces embodied in them. Ultimately, I want to be able to show that wearing clothes is able to question boundaries and frames that might serve to divide agency and theoretical attention unevenly to favour either clothes or bodies, and the abstract or the physical, for wearing must oscillate between these variables as a practice situated at an unstable boundary.

As already noted, Fashion can register as discourse, system, image, and practice of consumption. The sense of Fashion as a mode of consumption has become quite abstract, as it is frequently separated from the different manner by which various fashionable objects are consumed and used. In view of the widespread use of the term fashion to refer to all manner of objects, in this thesis the term "dress studies" will be used to differentiate the study of clothing and clothing-fashion, when clearly fashion studies could also be used, but *might* create confusion. Encompassed within "dress studies," then, is the study of dress, clothes and fashion.

To reach its subject this thesis will travel a long and necessary route that re-traces the theoretical labours of decoding fashion's significations and the symbolic economies of commodity-signs. Through a certain sensitivity to the theorisation, the logic and the phenomenal conditions of fashion's systemic organisation, this thesis will isolate the embodied wearing of clothes as an irreducible dimension of fashion's labour of signification. Consequently, fashion will be treated less as a self-evident logic of postmodernity, and more as a cultural practice of consumption and the use of

garments and accessories to form clothing ensembles. This thesis will permit a slippage around the term fashion for it is important to observe its sliding operations as a general metaphor for the figurations of cultural construction (i.e. *fashioning*) to very specific references to the dressing of femininity or masculinity. In a consumer context where all manner of objects and leisure pursuits, spiralling outwards from the clothes of the wearer to incorporate shoes, sports equipment, cars, houses/flats and their contents, hobbies, entertainment spaces, lifestyles, are acquired or frequented to display aspects of identity, it is clear that fashion can encompass far more than clothing and its decorative accompaniments of cosmetics, make-up, shoes and jewellery. We have already remarked upon, via Baudrillard, the complexities in deciphering it from culture generally.

Finally, writing about wearing as an embodied practice, making it into an "object" of inquiry, will necessitate a certain objectification of body as thing, a mode of incarnation as "the" wearing body, even while my point is to illuminate a body's non-objectifying way of wearing clothes. Other writers have encountered this issue of objectifying the body before me, and have significant comments to make. To assist with this, the term embodiment is adopted – as in the usage above "embodied wearing" – to convey a dual sense of both an "act of embodying" and a "condition of being embodied."⁴⁶ Embodiment, too, does not fully avoid difficulties as to put too much emphasis on the "em" as in *embodying* can suggest a containment of self, either in the sense of a metaphysical tradition where consciousness, or thinking mind, might be said to be lodged in an external material frame, or in clothing terms, the installment of self inside a container of covers in such a way that maintains an external relation with them. This thesis will seek to *dis*-cover alternative relations with clothes.

⁴⁶Elin Diamond, "The Shudder of Catharsis in Twentieth Century Performance," *Performativity and Performance*, ed. Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (New York: Routledge, 1995) 155. Diamond discusses that embodiment involves a playful oscillation between elements both material and discursive, in the sense of including the act of doing and the thing done. She remarks that the notion of performance has a similar make-up.

The Form of the Thesis

Chapter 2 introduces the reader to several dominant approaches to the study of dress via the figure of the performer, or more precisely, references to a practice of dress which is likened to a performance. The attention that the performer attracts is focused on the communications of his/her surfaces, where messages are read about "character" or identity. The purpose of the chapter is to re-trace and outline several approaches formulated by the theoretical gaze that has been oriented toward these surfaces. As such, the concept or trope of performance is a critical tool to speak about identity as a cultural construction, a culturally relative construction of meanings and identifications. This chapter will consider its use as an effort to displace a traditional conception of dress as the expression of a given self or subject who is independent of their productions, purportedly lodged somewhere inside of their physical frame. It will also introduce Judith Butler's concept of performativity as a theory of subject formation which has been very influential in gender, sexuality and cultural studies. In doing so, it will set in place an important foundation for this thesis about wearing – a performative body.

In chapter 3, Butler's concept of the performative body will be further explored in light of pressing issues raised within feminist philosophy about the materiality of bodies and their reception of culture, issues which have followed from Butler's unprecedented questioning of a constructionist theoretical inquiry. This chapter will seek to identify what is most helpful for writing about dress from a now immense theoretical corpus of body studies for exploring the bodily incorporations of dress and insisting a material and embodied dimension be integrated into the stuff of daily life in clothes. It will erect a theoretical framework that will assist in addressing some of the complexities which arose in regards to the performer's body in chapter 1. A core part of this framework is Jacques Derrida's theory of general writing – a theory which reconceives the commonsense conception of inscription –and therefore assists to reformulate culture's writing on the body as a relational writing together with/of traces which can include the performativity of a body's gesture, movement and even routine inhabitations of clothing. Important to this theoretical framework are the fruitful intersections between Derrida's poststructuralism and a phenomenological

approach to a situated embodiment.

It is at this point that it will be useful to take pause, and offer the reader an intermission to reflect on the issues discussed in chapter 3, as they might pertain to dress studies literature. This section will undertake a review of selected examples as being representative of the positioning of the body within theoretical accounts of dress. Significantly, these accounts employ the tools of the sign, text, language, image, discourse and representation, to analyse dress. Starting from a traditional interpretation of the relationship of dress to body as an opposition of completion/lack, many accounts seek to “re-dress” this relation by recovering a more positive identity for a body. By this I mean to refer to the “corporeal turn” of dress studies, or the efforts to “bring the body into language” by pointing to the re-play of the clothed body as sign, or various dressed interpretations on a theme of embodiment, inscribed within representational systems. Attention will be drawn to the metaphors of “writing” and “mapping” the body as they are used as mechanisms to point to the sense of significance that dress brings to the body.

Chapter 4 re-traces the legacy of Barthesian semiotics and the concept of inscription which has informed the field of dress studies, through to their conclusions, or rather the limits of their theoretical frames, re-examining the conditions which underpin applications of the notion of inscriptional writing in dress scholarship. “Writing on the body” has been an influential theoretical motif that leaves an impression of etched or inscribed surfaces. This chapter mobilises different interpretations of the term wearing – discursive marking and material making involving wear/tear – to put into operation a concept of wearing as a performative oscillation between discourse and materiality, demonstrating that if wearing is both a discursive and practical phenomenon, then the surfaces where various meanings are etched, partake of fleshy elements and abrasive conditions to the point where the co-ordinates required for conventional inscription begin to wear away.

Chapter 5 will explore in greater depth what it is to be a clothes-wearing-person. It subsequently engages, in doing this, the tools of phenomenology to consider the way in which wearing clothes weaves us into the practices and discourses through which

people both conform to, confront and interact with a world beyond the individual. This is what it means to dwell as a relational exercise. Wearing fits a clothed body into structures or situates a body and its dress in time and space, as well as in relation to the systems of fashion, economy and language, but only as this body accommodates those structures in an interplay which is primordial.

In that the following pages makes a journey from several of the predominant themes in post-semiotic dress studies, as these indicate "departures" worthy of meditation and inquiry, the "literature review" that might be found at the beginning of a more classically organised thesis is built-in to various parts of the following five chapters. The thesis is not so much a clear-cut critique of this literature. It aspires to be perceived as an appendage which has the identity of what Derrida has called a "supplement" an optional addition *and* also a necessary element.⁴⁷ By this it is meant, that it seeks to make apparent something that is very important yet this something is an addition only in so far as it seeks to remember dimensions of wearing that are either forgotten or assumed and therefore silent in the theoretical repertoire.

To render a sense of wearing clothes as a meaningful, socially structured and embodied practice will require drawing from a theoretical tool-kit which is diverse and consequently will operate in a way that may be perceived, by some, to bring to this thesis a mix of theoretical traditions which are incommensurate. This thesis does draw quite fluidly on differing theoretical traditions to develop the theoretical approaches employed here. These approaches operate as mechanisms for understanding different aspects of or perspectives on the same subject. This is not an advocacy of a liberal approach to research. On the contrary, theoretical approaches should be carefully tailored to the subject of inquiry. Moreover, the incorporation of differing theoretical perspectives cannot be achieved altogether unproblematically. While the researcher certainly has an obligation to explain both how various perspectives can be brought together to yield a coherent set of ideas or understanding and how the underlying concepts and philosophies that inform each approach can be reconciled in a manner that leaves the work free of any major contradictions, research that is informed by different theoretical positions can be all the more rich. It is not

⁴⁷ Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 141-164.

always necessary to make clear choices between theoretical approaches and to do so can be an act of philosophical essentialism. To perceive a clear-cut choice between a poststructuralist theoretical approach to the study of the body (a body of discourse) and a phenomenological approach (a material and active body field), thought by some to be at odds, would be to remain blind to these approaches as different and complementing perspectives on the same subject.⁴⁸ These perspectives do not compete because they each analyse something different, albeit a different aspect or perspective of the same phenomena. The subject that concerns this thesis calls for a multi-faceted approach to deal with its complexities. Indeed, to limit one's approach in order to maintain disciplinary procedures, or in the name of philosophical essentialism would explain only part of the complex issue at hand.

⁴⁸ Nick Crossley, "Body/Subject, Body/Power: Agency, Inscription and Control in Foucault and Merleau-Ponty," *Body and Society* 2.2 (1996): 99-116. In this article he discusses the fact that some scholars would see these perspectives as incommensurable.

Chapter 2

The Fashioning Performer: False Fronts and Making Characters

Adornment...which gather[s] the personality's value and significance of radiation as if in a focal point, allow[s] the mere *having* of the person to become a visible quality of its *being*.¹

A post-modern person, now one of either sex, has further learned that not only may disparate wardrobes cohabit in one person's closet, as if on backstage costume racks, but they may now be combined. Beyond the classic cinema, in the new world of music video and free-wheeling, overlapping, uprooted camera imagery, old denim and fresh spangles or pale chiffon and black combat boots are worn not just in quick succession but together. The new freedom of fashion in the last quarter-century has been taken up as a chance not to create new forms, but to play more or less outrageously with all the tough and solid old ones, to unleash a swift stream of imagery bearing a pulsating tide of mixed references.²

This chapter will explore a now familiar trope for the contemporary person of fashion in post-semiotic dress studies – the performer. The performer is a popular thematic through which the discourse of dress studies imagines a living person experiencing life – i.e. performing themselves in the fashioned drama of their own life. More than this, the performer is that person who embraces clothes with an aspiration to transform or re-invent appearances, and thus make oneself anew.

The quote by Hollander above allows us to establish a set of concerns in regards to the performer – performance as a symptom of a postmodern personhood or subjectivity, a performance that foregrounds the process of identity formation using the liberating materials of dress.

Before going any further, we must meet the performer again “in person.” In an essay published in an important feminist collection bringing the subjects of film, film theory,

¹ Georg Simmel, “Adornment,” *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings*, ed. David Frisby and Mike Featherstone (London: Sage Publications, 1997) 207.

² Hollander, *Sex and Suits* 166.

fashion, costume and the body together called Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body, Wilson, writes:

We live in an urban society in which fashion, or fashions, are one essential ingredient in the rituals of the cityscape. New definitions of the individual's social place and group affiliation are announced by means of clothes which become part of a performance. One's personality, beliefs, and even desires have to be stated. Clothes are the poster for one's act.³

Together with the earlier quote from Hollander these words establish a broader profile for the individual subject of dress studies – someone who uses dress – and a way of thinking about what it means to dress, as a performance that acknowledges both an imperative to state and a freedom to play with identity. From the stream of music video, a disparate wardrobe, or any other ingredients of urban rituals, the performer takes up the opportunity to act oneself, to become a character, a figure and/or a role in a fantasy, or drama, that is real-life. Or, in the terms which Simmel presented above, these characters would be able to prove that “having” a person is an achievement that must be acquired, but in such a way that both gathers the display to a focal point, and disperses its influences across potentially diverse cultural sites and references. This chapter will explore the way in which dress studies renders a subject of dress as a performer and their performance as one of fashioning the self.

In an essay published two years after the first, titled “Fashion and the Postmodern Body,” Wilson writes again of the performer:

...in a fragmenting world others feel that they can in some way *choose* the identity they were born with, or redefine and rework it. Yet ultimately, we do not choose our bodies, so postmodern playfulness can never entirely win the day... Dress could play a part, for example, either to glue the false identity together on the surface, or to lend a theatrical and play-acting aspect to the hallucinatory experience of the contemporary world; we become actors, inventing our costumes for each successive appearance, disguising the recalcitrant body we never entirely transform. Perhaps style becomes a substitute for identity, perhaps its fluidity (in

³ Elizabeth Wilson, “All the Rage,” Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body, ed. Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog (New York: Routledge, 1990) 33.

theory it can be changed at will) offers an alternative to the stagnant fixity of old-fashioned ideas of personality and core identity, perhaps on the contrary it is used to fix identity more firmly. Either way, we may understand dress as one tool in the creation of identities.⁴

Wilson's words give some insight into the chaos or flux which the concept of performance can bring to the notion of identity. Harnessing the props of dress, the performer can claim, refuse or confuse various codes and in doing so destabilise, if not dissolve into fluidity, a core Romantic notion that clothes assert or express the aspirations of inherent personality, identity or character. A subjective freedom is made possible by constructing the falsity of a mask or by playing with surface appearance for the purpose of re-invention. As such, we can witness a traditional approach to identity as innate or interior being superseded, or more precisely displaced, by a superficial notion of identity as artificial mask, as playful acts of disguise, and open to a fluidity of subjective positioning through the image of style. While Wilson is unresolved in regards to the final consequence of the performer's act in either entirely dissolving the notion of true identity in styling or confirming that identity cannot be chosen, she is unequivocal in identifying a critical theoretical understanding of the function of dress, now also familiar in consumerist rhetoric, that says it is possible to re-design identity: it is "one tool in the creation of identities."

Thus it is important to note that these various descriptions of the performer are as much attempts to describe dress's implication in constructing postmodern subjectivity as they are to describe any one particular ensemble of clothes. Thus, via Wilson, we can recognise performing as a critical device to describe a constitution of identity as a consequence of acts of dressing which is to say that dress is a way of acting-out the complexities of self and meaning. More precisely, identity is performed in such a way that it is no longer rooted in a prior self but rather in a modality of display that directs attention to the latest manifestation. Exactly what is meant by an act of display, and what parts of the self can be invested in such action? It is at this point that any study making claims to being a comprehensive analysis of possible performances would compile a list

⁴ Wilson, "Fashion and the Postmodern Body" 8-9.

of potential communications about the self via dress: occupation, gender, sexual preference, sex, geographical location, social grouping or subculture, national identity, lifestyle, political persuasion, income status, emotion and so on. In making an inventory, the point would be to evidence that it is a big enough part of the person to challenge any sense of self not open to the realm of display; to question what actually exists, if anything, behind the mask. For our insight into dress studies, the significance of the performer is that it prefigures an understanding of what it is to *be* someone who wears clothes in a contemporary world and presents performance as a significant modality of being-in-clothes, particularly foregrounding visible self-identification. This is enough to indicate that we need to get to know the performer's way of being.

Where the Action Is?

The activity of the performer would take place in an order where the message becomes paramount, and there is sensitivity to decoding masquerade as a display of self-identification. This would indicate a realm where the social lives of people would be continuously focused on the operations of the code, the playful maneuverings of which comprise a reality of appearances. By appearances it is meant that which is in part rendered by way of what Hollander has called the "representational force" of fashion to envision an abstract, emblematic and allusive order where life is experienced.⁵

It is in relation to such an order, against such a background as it were, that the identity of the performer can be deciphered as a "semiotic object in process."⁶ Indeed, the performer's vitality, more precisely life, is measured with respect to how much subjective

⁵ Hollander *Sex and Suits*. She writes, "[Fashion's]...power to satisfy lay deeper than that, in the representational force of fashion, which allowed a retreat from the actuality of breasts into the abstract, emblematic figure dress could make them a part of. It was with the development of such devices in fashion that dress became a modern art. It began to operate symbolically and allusively through fashionable shape and ornament, using its own suggestive applied forms in a dynamic counterpoint to the shapes of real bodies. Fashion has done this ever since, just as art has done, making its own agreement with natural forms to create a vital sequence in its own medium. But in fashion, of course, part of the medium is always the live person experiencing its life" (32).

⁶ Patrizia Calefato, "Fashion and Worldliness: Language and Imagery of the Clothed Body," *Fashion Theory* 1.1 (1997): 83.

freedom is extracted from the "play-acting aspect" of exchanging and re-working signs within an order of the code. The performer has a potential to be liberated by a game of adopting and discarding identities; a potential to be claimed or refused by you or I. To this state of play, Wilson gives a distinctly urban flavour to an "enveloping condition," a characteristic of postmodernism and its aestheticisation of a dystopic tendency toward excessive consumerism, as well as its fragmentation of identity, knowledge and world political order.⁷ It would appear that this game is open to anybody touched by the "new world" of music video and free-wheeling, overlapping, uprooted camera imagery, for Hollander's world seems to be one and the same experience of hallucination which envelops Wilson. Whether *all* social life has been penetrated by the same intensity and build-up of signs experienced at the urban centre would be a moot point, yet the flows of global media have unfolded enough, say in Australia so that at the rural outreaches, the man in the Akubra could be said to be the mask of an "outback" performer doing his real self. Everywhere, the *precession* of the semiosphere has fully mediated what is taken to be real, mediation occurring prior to the emergence of any distinction between urban and rural appearances. It is in regards to what dress might actually display of personal and collective identities in a society of appearances that sociology becomes quite transfixed with fashion and clothing as modes of constructing affiliations and/or distinctions between the personal and collective. To fully understand the site or order of the performer's operations, it is necessary to explore the theoretical frameworks that inform dress studies and the definition of its object, and appear to have brought it closer to cultural studies and sociology who are attracted to fashion and clothing as a modality of social interaction and regulation.

Dress Studies and its Object(s): Constructionism

The performer emerges as a distinct theme of a semiotic theorisation of dress and a response to writings about the condition of the postmodern, or if not explicitly

⁷ Carol Tulloch, "Out of Many, One People: The Relativity of Dress, Race and Ethnicity to Jamaica, 1880-1907," *Fashion Theory* 2.4 (1998): 376. Tulloch characterises Wilson's description of the arrival of the contemporary world of postmodernism as an "enveloping condition."

postmodern, then about contemporary manipulations of identity.⁸ More precisely, the performer presents a loose set of attributes or characteristics which are enough to indicate that he/she shares in a culture of transition that many different theoretical disciplines or approaches to cultural analysis endeavour to respond to, without necessarily identifying the performer by name. The characteristics of performance unfold amidst the research context of an attendant focus upon the cultural systems that prefigure contemporary existence and make it impossible to cut the performer away from its contextual and interpretive frame.

Christopher Breward in an article titled "Cultures, Identities, Histories: Fashioning a Cultural Approach to Dress" has proposed that "dress studies" is a better name than "dress history" to represent the writings on dress which are the product of convergences with the theoretical frameworks of semiotics and textual analysis operating in cultural studies more widely.⁹ Dress studies is largely focused upon contemporary concerns and, at least in part, addresses late 20th century representational systems of image or film. In his article, Breward addresses the discipline or academic areas which have been responsible for shaping the current topography of dress studies including art history, design history (more potential than actual), cultural/media studies, semiotics, film theory, subcultural studies, discourse analysis and feminist politics. More importantly, for its confirmation of the central place held by fashion and clothing as vehicles for debating issues which "lie at the heart of visual and material culture studies," he identifies four of these issues which have influenced approaches to dress over the "past decades."¹⁰ These are characterised as textual analysis, the consideration of audience and consumption, the role of ideology, and the political question of identities. My extrapolation of these

⁸ While the characteristics of the performer will continue to be examined closely, a list of additional sites and references – apart from those already mentioned – to either a performer or performance in dress studies would include; Evans and Thornton, Women and Fashion; Jane Gaines, "Introduction: Fabricating the Female Body," Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body, ed. Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog (New York and London: Routledge, 1990) 26; Marjorie Garber, Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety (London and New York: Penguin, 1992); Barbara Vinken, "Transvesty-Travesty: Fashion and Gender," Fashion Theory 3.1 (1999): 33-50; Calefato 69-90.

⁹ Christopher Breward, "Cultures, Identities, Histories: Fashioning a Cultural Approach to Dress," Fashion Theory 2.4 (1998): 309.

¹⁰ Breward, "Cultures, Identities, Histories" 305.

categories are as follows:

1. Textual analysis refers to the method generated by the semiotic approach to reading objects or "texts"—clothes, magazine images, films – as part of a cultural system of signs.
2. The consideration of audience and consumption has been concerned with clothing and fashion as agent of social, economic and historical relations (Breward simply lists "ethnography, history, and sociology" as the disciplines interested in audience and consumption).
3. The role of ideology (summarised by Breward as "hegemony, subcultures and pleasures") points to a sensitivity to the dynamics of power in shaping the responses (often pleasurable resistances) of subcultures to dominant or normative ideologies, and to the emergence of Post-Foucauldian approaches to discourse analysis to interpret the regulation of lived experience.
4. The political question of identities (race, gender, sexuality) signals the sensitivity to the use of clothes and imaging of bodies as sites for the representation and/or subversion of dominant racial, gender or sexual identities. In the context where such politics are approached as a matter of appearances, this has been coined a "politics of style" and, for example in Dick Hebdige's and others work on British post-60s subcultures, connects quite explicitly with the roles of racial and class ideologies (therefore overlapping with point 3 above).¹¹

Proving Breward's caveat that these categories are not mutually exclusive, we can find that the performer wears inflections of all of these concerns as a social figure enmeshed in contingencies of ideology, representational systems, politics and economics. The performer is most clearly drawn in accounts which have been formulated in a theoretical context of applying methods of textual analysis to the study of dress, images and

¹¹ Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, eds., Resistance Through Rituals (London: Hutchinson, 1976); Ted Polhemus and L. Proctor, Fashion and Anti-Fashion: An Anthology of Clothing and Adornment (London: Cox and Wyman, 1978); Dick Hebdige, Subcultures: The Meaning of Style (London: Methuen, 1979); Angela McCrobbie, Zoot Suits and Second-Hand Dresses: An Anthology of Fashion and Music (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989) have all been influential in terms of studying the self-display and rituals of youth groups as a politics of expression, style and representation. It was Hebdige's book that cemented the notion of a "politics of style."

discourses, which implies a subject of dress – a user – who operates in a consumerist and media environment. Again, the way in which the performer emerges is in reference to a practice of dress as display, so we have arrived at the subject of dress via an indirect route. For us, Breward's analysis of contributions to the study of dress is helpful for confirming the influence of semiotics in shaping dress studies which sought to conceptualise its object – clothes and fashion – more explicitly in relation to a culture of communication (including popular or less traditional mass produced or represented objects, images, advertisements, films) and for highlighting the connections these studies appear to have with visual and material culture studies, history and sociology in so far as they acknowledge the historically and socially variable effects of media, consumption and the constructions of appearance. These convergences called for the interpretation of both broad theoretical frameworks in which to conceive of dress in a relation with various media "platforms" and a detailed attention to the specificities of dress.

Pointing to the connections around the sign between cultural studies and dress studies Breward writes:

Recent dress history, predicated on a cultural studies understanding of the power of the sign, together with film theory, revels in the ambiguity of fashion and its shifting signifiers, which moves the discipline away from earlier reductive or moralistic approaches.¹²

Note the reference, here, to the *ambiguity* of fashion, which is predicated on the shifting play of the new unit of analysis, the "sign." Here, Breward refers to the fascination that fashion holds for various scholars as a system of signification which brings change to clothing objects or signs, not simply via a linear route of regular industrially determined cycles but also by the circuitous route of an arbitrary play of meaning. To spend some time exploring the theoretical framework of semiology can partially assist us to understand what the disciplinary formation of dress studies is about and how it defines its object (at least what it claims to be studying and its approach to this object). Following from structuralist linguistics, particularly the writings of French linguist Ferdinand De

¹² Breward, "Cultures, Identities, Histories" 308.

Saussure, the view that language might operate as a model to interpret other cultural systems is the foundational tenet of the science of semiotics, in the form pioneered by Saussure and continued by Roland Barthes.¹³ Implicit in the maxim "language speaks us" is the notion that analysis of the structures of language (either written or spoken) can reveal the operations by which individuals understand the world and existence in it. In the wake of Barthes' analyses of clothing, food, cars and furniture in The Elements of Semiology, and the evocative readings of popular or everyday culture in Mythologies, the theory of semiotics has been applied to all manner of cultural forms in order to unravel their significance and meaning for social relations and knowledge (films, television, photographs, advertisements, dance, music video and so on). As Breward writes: "Central to this method is the idea of the sign, an anchoring unit of communication within a language system, which might be a word, an image, a sound, an item of clothing, that placed in juxtaposition with other items produces a particular meaning."¹⁴ The analysis of the sign as a unit of communication in a system of representation allows the scholar to both decode the elements specific to any one system of representation and to begin to consider the cross-referencing of cultural forms and practices (ie. intersecting systems of signification): the basic principle of the process of signification is that a sign's meaning is produced in relation to its place in a system of signs, and therefore meaning is acquired and culturally relative rather than given. What is important about this brief digression into the principles of semiotics is that their incorporation into dress studies marked a distinct shift away from positivist or empirical studies of clothing, toward a new object of analysis – the *text* – which is no longer simply a product of "authorship" (to reflect the literary roots of the killing-off of the author or, in other words, genius-producer) and instead an active or constitutive part of a cultural system (environment or context) and a process of interpretation.¹⁵ Dress studies has followed a similar trajectory to cultural

¹³ Ferdinand D. Saussure, Course in General Linguistics, ed. C. Bally and A. Séchehaye with A. Reidlinger, trans. W. Baskin (Suffolk: Fontana Collins, 1974); Roland Barthes, The Elements of Semiology, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977); Roland Barthes, Mythologies, trans. Annette Lavers (London: Jonathan Cape, 1974).

¹⁴ Breward, "Cultures, Identities, Histories" 306.

¹⁵ See Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," Image, Music, Text, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977). The importance of Barthes' notion of the "Death of the Author" for dress studies is to re-balance the weight of emphasis away from the designer or couturier as the genesis of a garment's significance and meaning, towards a thinking of the garment as part of a cultural system. Alexander Palmer

studies in defining its objects of analysis as “texts,” meaning that there is a commitment to articulating their active part in constructing cultural or symbolic systems. More particularly, while often not explicitly using the term “text” there is undoubtedly an understanding that images and clothes are *cultural constructions*.¹⁶ We will see that the “text” whether conceived as dress, illustration, or photographic or filmic image can never be separated from, or made to be independent of its interpretive frame and context. This will have important consequences for an understanding of the performer who interacts with a cultural object which has multiple dimensions as symbolic object, functional object, and commodity.

To explore the implications of semiotic approaches to dress studies, we must embark on a much longer route which will continue at various points throughout this thesis, but the skeleton of an understanding must be erected here in order to appreciate the “turn to the text.” We must begin by examining the proposition that clothes are a social language. Frequent reference to a “language of clothes” can be found in popular language in the commonplace that “clothes can say something about people,” even make statements. This notion was popularised by Alison Lurie in The Language of Clothes who claimed that clothing was virtually a visual language, a “non-verbal system of communication” with its own vocabulary and grammar.¹⁷ She argued that such a proposition can only be considered in the plural, that is, “as with human speech, there is not a single language of dress, but many.”¹⁸ She remarks that such a notion is not new to Western meditations, and observes that such an idea is gaining influence with the semiotic proposition that fashion

also remarks that this tendency to celebrate the designer is particularly strong in studies of the modern period of dress (299). In a later section of this thesis, the implications of the concept of the Death of the Author will be discussed in more detail.

¹⁶ The embrace and standardised usage of the term *text* in Cultural studies to refer to “books” and “works,” and less traditional cultural productions like images, advertisements, films, television and popular practices means that this disciplinary formation has claimed a certain ownership of the term. In anthropology it is also applied to cultural beliefs and behaviours. See James Clifford, The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature and Art (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1988) 38.

¹⁷ Alison Lurie, The Language of Clothes (London: Bloomsbury, 1981) 3.

¹⁸ Lurie 4. For Lurie, what binds clothing together as a system is their classification as “non-verbal” signs. Defining clothing in the negative, as it were, means that *all* that doesn’t fit into the category of verbal signs, is grouped under its opposite to legitimate a systemic organisation. This inhibits a thinking of the interaction of verbal and non-verbal systems of signs.

is a language of signs.¹⁹

The putting of weight behind the insight that fashion might be organised into a system of codes, a verbal and non-verbal language of signs, can be attributed to French sociologist and linguist Roland Barthes who undertook an ambitious structuralist analysis of fashion in The Fashion System published in English in 1983. The germ of such a project can be witnessed in The Elements of Semiology where he commenced his engagement with the clothing system. For Barthes, this project meant giving a certain technical content to the postulation that clothes are a language by identifying clothing syntax, differentiating it from a loose or metaphorical coining of the notion of a "language of apparel."²⁰ Lurie's attempt to decode the language of fashion and document its vocabulary and grammar is far less nuanced than Barthes' and does little to convince that clothes are in fact a language. Unaware of the complexities introduced to the task of fitting clothing into an axiomatic structure analogous to Saussure's linguistic model, Lurie persists in reading the symbolism of clothes confident that her exercise of decoding will articulate a master system to which all signs can be returned.

In dress studies, it is quite common practice to discuss the proposition that clothes are a language with a derisory reference to Lurie's project which undertakes the inventory of clothing codes with such conviction, that she convinces her readers only of her own faith that a clothing system exists. Others are clearly more reserved about the matter of a "language of clothing" introducing for us the important observation that there appears to be a significant reservation about the operability or function of clothing as a message, which is enough for us to challenge the notion that its primary operability is to speak or be read as statements. For instance, as Elizabeth Wilson citing Lurie's study, writes quite elusively: "...fashion is more than a message, and the vulgarised view of it as a language or system is only half, or less, of the story."²¹ Joanne Finkelstein is similarly unconvinced

¹⁹ Lurie remarks that Balzac in Daughter of Eve (1839) observed that for a woman dress is "a continual manifestation of intimate thoughts, a language, a symbol" (3).

²⁰ Roland Barthes, "On The Fashion System and the Structural Analysis of Narratives," The Grain of the Voice: Interviews 1962-1980, trans. Linda Coverdale (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) 43.

²¹ Wilson, "All the Rage" 33.

and concludes in her judgement about the capacity of clothes to enunciate:

The metaphor that fashion is a language has persisted despite the obvious failure of clothing to produce the fundamental requirements of a language, namely, an explicit vocabulary, parts of speech, syntax and dialogue. Clothes do not speak to us or to one another; they do not sustain a system of meaningful exchange. Social encounters constituted by language are unscripted, flexible and unpredictable. Even if, by a generous reckoning, we allow that clothes can "make a statement," they are not capable of nuanced exchange.²²

Sociologist Fred Davis, acknowledging the import of semiotics to a theory of the clothing code and the seasonal force of fashion (which "influences" clothing changes), argues that clothing's code is best characterised as an "incipient or quasi-code," because of its low semanticity.²³ He writes: "It is a code radically dissimilar from those used in cryptography; neither can it be more generally equated with the language rules that govern speech and writing."²⁴ For Davis, the low semanticity stems from dress' allusive, ambiguous and inchoate mode of drawing on the conventional symbols of tactility and visuality in a culture through, to paraphrase him, deployments of the key elements of its "code" – i.e. texture, volume, colour, pattern, cut, weight, fabric, silhouette and occasion. This points to a *process* of communication that is less definitive, more open to ambiguity, and shifts in meaning and distinguishes Davis from functionalist approaches to the idea that clothes communicate identity as if in precise, non-ambiguous statements somehow contained in the object. Summarising his position that dress is a practice that expresses identity ambivalences, Davis writes: "...dress, then, comes easily to serve as a kind of visual metaphor for identity and, as pertains in particular to the open societies of the West, for registering the culturally anchored ambivalences that resonate within and among identities."²⁵ Davis spells out the mystery clothing communication holds for the sociologist when he explains: "In the case of sociological interest in clothing and fashion, we know that through clothing people communicate some things about their persons, and at the collective level this results typically in locating them symbolically in some

²² Joanne Finkelstein, After a Fashion (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1996) 24.

²³ Davis 5.

²⁴ Davis 5.

²⁵ Davis 25.

structured universe of status claims and life-style attachments.”²⁶ Again, he concludes that what clothes are able to “speak” is only of the order of suggestion rather than precision, but in this work of creating meaning, clothing operates as an agent of socialisation.²⁷

A more recent case that compares clothing with language communication is that of Patrizia Calefato when she writes:

Clothes, coverings, the objects with which we adorn ourselves, the signs that engrave and decorate us are the forms through which our bodies relate to the world and to other bodies. Just as language is the device for shaping the world that is typical of the human race, so in every society and culture dress is a form of projection, or simulation, of the world, valid both for society and for the individual, expressing itself in signs and objects through which the human body is placed, temporally and spatially, in its surroundings.²⁸

Calefato’s notion of clothing “language” is likened to a “socio-cultural syntax” which projects, constructs and places the individual. Calefato makes her way through the semantic distinctions of terms by distinguishing fashion – from costume – as the modern and “esthetic” modality of dress: “Dress is articulated by a sort of sociocultural syntax which could be called ‘costume’ in the context of traditional societies and ritual functions, ‘fashion’ in the context of modernity and esthetic functions.”²⁹ It would seem that fashion has, for her, a more explicit aesthetic function than a communicational or ritualistic one perhaps more evident in costume.

The importance of the question of whether clothes are a language is connected to a need to understand the theoretical attitude which underpins, and the cultural frame which surrounds, the performer. How so? To state, in very simple terms, an interest in

²⁶ Davis 4.

²⁷ Davis’ conclusion about the differences between the language code and the clothing code are as follows: “The essential distinction, however – what distinguishes clothing as a mode of communication from speech – is that meaningful differences among clothing signifiers are not nearly as sharply drawn and standardised as are the spoken sounds employed in a speech community” (13).

²⁸ Calefato 69-70.

²⁹ Calefato 70.

understanding the logic of the clothing code and cracking its systemic organisation is to decipher the role of clothing in structuring that "universe" (ref. Davis) of sociality or order of the cultural where clothes' doings "fit" people into place. For Davis, the phenomenon of clothing is able to articulate *cultural* meanings, where cultural refers to an order of "common understanding."³⁰ Wilson would seem to be in agreement with Davis about clothes as agents of socialisation when she writes: "Clothes socialise our bodies, transforming them from King Lear's 'poor forked thing' into the cultural being... Dress is the cultural metaphor for the body, it is the material with which we 'write' or 'draw' a representation of the body into our cultural context."³¹ Like Calefato, the aim for Wilson is to demonstrate that clothing confirms a body's place in a cultural context as a representational object. It is also to begin to decode the manner in which clothing operates in a context, network or field of culture where meanings and experience are generated; to unravel the meaning and significance of clothing as cultural production is to try to ascertain how it assists to make sense and order. Put simply, the germ of the idea that clothing or fashion manifests a systemic organisation like a language, is the belief that clothing's *structure* will assist to unravel the meaning and significance it holds as a cultural production, and moreover its *structuring* tendencies might unfold an understanding of the mechanisms by which people experience the world. It is generally agreed that clothing cannot be organised into the structure of a language, yet it is deemed (almost by default of an alternative formulation of "how" clothing communicates and organises itself) capable of *cultural* meaning, and therefore communication, by its capacity to draw upon, allude to, or cross-reference the symbols of the culture in which it is a constitutive part. Significantly, there is little sense of exactly what is meant by the order of the cultural.³² One response to this would be to point out that it is often said the operability or function of clothing is of an order of signification, rightly making it impossible to separate utilitarian function from symbolic function. Here, we are left with

³⁰ Davis 13.

³¹ Wilson, "Fashion and the Postmodern Body" 6.

³² It is worth noting at this point that "Fashion" is often referred to as a "discourse" in spite of the lack of consensus that clothes constitute a language. Clearly, the meanings of clothes and fashion are partly constituted via written and spoken language, however the usage of the notion of fashion as a discourse appears to extend beyond linguistic deployments to refer to a "fashion system." Calefato refers to the perception of a fashion system as a "metadiscursive province" in the eyes of its users (83).

an impression of "culture" as the system of meaning in relation to which the use of clothing signs is interpreted. The words of Aileen Ribeiro definitively state the case for clothing-as-sign as she explains the interpretive exercise of *reading* clothes: "Clearly, in any sophisticated discourse on dress, there is a place for the interpretive element, for clothing is nothing if not about signs and meanings."³³ We have been concerned with locating a general approach to the object of dress studies as constructions in/of a culture of signification (i.e. "cultural constructions" whether the text is either "real" clothes or images of worn clothes), and identify the theoretical attitude called *constructionism*. Dress studies, like cultural studies and certain strands of sociology, approach dress from language-oriented theories as symbolic formations or constructions. It has been observed by Alexander Palmer that the consequences of the direction of scholarship away from the artefact itself to textual analysis has been a new emphasis on social meaning and this thesis will make more apparent the ramifications of this shift.³⁴ Under these circumstances, one can find ambivalence for what is both unpalatable and enticing for theorists in the question of the degree to which meaning may be iterated as an economy of symbols, signs or systems.³⁵

It becomes apparent that in a range of social forums and disciplines there is an investment in the notion of "reading" clothing for information about the place or position of the individual in relation to the collective or an indication of a role or persona. Whether referring to gender, subcultural grouping, or sexual preference, clothes are read as indications of, or messages about, the person. A comment from Wilson, cited earlier, seems to state a commonplace: "Dress is one tool in the creation of identities."³⁶ To recapture the potential for fluidity implied in the description of the performative acts of creation (from which this phrase was drawn), it is widely held that transformative acts (i.e. re-creations) of identity can be achieved with sartorial changes. In that many

³³ Aileen Ribeiro "Re-fashioning Art: Some Approaches to the Study of the History of Dress," *Fashion Theory* 2.4 (1998): 320. In this passage Ribeiro is arguing a case that interpretation is always subjective and involved in an overlapping relation with the object, in response to a call from Susan Sontag for a more objective description of art objects.

³⁴ Palmer 297-312. Also, see Breward who cites Palmer in "Culture, Histories, Identities" (302).

³⁵ Carey 49.

³⁶ Wilson, "Fashion and the Postmodern Body" 9.

disciplines would appear to have claims on analysing a structured universe of the social where identity statements and transformations are registered, we thus have insight into the potential for disciplines as diverse as sociology, anthropology, history, art history, literature and so forth, to share an interest in such a widespread occurrence as clothing communication. This can mean that it is difficult to maintain a boundary for a disciplinary formation called dress studies and it partly accounts for its changing topography as frameworks and lines of inquiry are shared. Also, the difficulties in mapping this terrain and its conceptual movements for the scholar are exacerbated by the fact that dress studies writers frequently go without clear labels identifying their theoretical tool-kit. Relevant to this issue of disciplinary slippage is Breward's diagnosis that new art historical approaches have brought to dress studies an increasing concentration on problems of social identity, appearance, the body, gender and representation, which have come to be central to an understanding of fashion itself.³⁷ We will consider these problems more closely when it comes to characterising the performer, and so, for now, Breward's diagnosis serves to support the postulation that the performer and its theorisation is primarily concerned with displaying some kind of statement about social identity. With the problem of social identity through sartorial display increasingly preoccupying scholarship and the analysis of visual texts (paintings, photographs, illustrations), certain convergences were enabled with related cultural studies approaches to studying urban youth, particularly the semiotic analysis of visual texts and sartorial style as displays of identity. For instance, the work of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies founded in 1964 has been very influential in establishing semiotic and sociological frameworks for interpreting subcultural behaviour and symbolic practices which engage cultural artefacts – dress, music, graphics – to articulate group belonging and display collective and individual preferences.³⁸ Subcultural identity displays have been interpreted as either anti-fashion resistances to dominant fashion or as popular fashion phenomenon. It is at this level that various theoretical accounts must

³⁷ Breward, "Culture, Histories, Identities" 302.

³⁸ Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, eds., Resistance Through Rituals; Polhemus and Proctor, Fashion and Anti-Fashion; Hebdige, Subcultures: The Meaning of Style; McCrobbie, Zoot Suits and Second-Hand Dresses have already been cited briefly for their original scholarship on the self-display and rituals of youth groups as a politics of expression, style and representation.

account for the phenomenon of culture and the placement of fashion within this phenomenon. Add to this a risk, the "internal threat" that a theoretical position may be made redundant by the flotation of its currency, via mutual investments in its object, say by cultural theory in fashion or in reverse, the dependence of clothing analysis on a cultural or systematic organisation. However, as Carey argues, theoretical analysis – by dress studies or cultural studies – "may then take precisely this flotation as its object."³⁹ It is in this sense that the code of fashion – as a "metadiscursive province" that evades systematisation and precise disciplinary location – becomes attractive for cultural theory.

What is meant, here, is that important to the constructionist approach to dress analysis is the view that an understanding of fashion and clothing "texts" are potentially constructed across various *discourses* simultaneously. It is possible for multiple discourses to in-form or impart an understanding of any particular object or artefact with certain attributes, and so the object is potentially always conceived relative to a rich weave of cultural and historical references. Kim Sawchuk attempts to elaborate this understanding that fashion is always part discourse and therefore its objects must always be conceived as an integral part of a cultural context rich with many dimensions, when she writes:

At any specific historical juncture, fashion is located in a discourse of health (corsets, suntanning, fitness), beauty (ideal shapes of breasts, buttocks or lips), morality and sexuality (dress as sign of one's moral fibre), the nation and the economy (the question of the veil in Algeria), and location (climate, geography, seasonal variations), to name only a few possibilities.⁴⁰

This approach to the fashion object as polygenous sought to re-invest it with an activity that was lacking in empirical history approaches to an object. In the latter the object operated as a reflective mirror for social events or movements in relation to which it was thought to be passive and separate. Contrary to this passivity, it becomes possible for the object to feed back upon social events and discourses, effecting changes in these areas.

³⁹ Carey 49.

⁴⁰ Kim Sawchuk, "Tales of Inscription/Fashion Statements," *Body Invaders: Panic Sex in America*, ed. Arthur Kroker and Marilouise Kroker (New York: St Martin's Press, 1987) 65.

The understanding that potentially multiple discourses bear on the object has undoubtedly been nurtured by the interdisciplinary orientation of incorporating different theoretical frameworks to analyse objects, discourses and visual images. It should be made clear that semiotics is not the only framework in operation in dress studies for communication, feminist, psychoanalytic and media studies analyses have also helped to shift the emphasis of dress history away from empirically based histories of garments, their users and stylistic or formalist methods derived from art historical analyses of painting, towards a more complex explication of an object which is impossible to separate from its socio-cultural context. It is often the case that these frameworks intersect, say in the form of feminist semiotic readings, in the style of the feminist dress scholarship of Caroline Evans and Minna Thornton in Women and Fashion who “decode” the images and forms of fashion as a representational apparatus central to the identity of women. In their own words: “Seen as a discourse about femininity in its cultural construction, fashion may be read as a text not simply of a finished femininity but of the formation of that femininity.”⁴¹ The semiotic text is here conceived as a *process* of feminine construction and a critical engagement which can reveal that various signs of femininity have a conventional rather than natural connection to their wearer. This study is indicative of a shift away from a vexed relation with fashion that plagued second-wave feminist debates; fashion was frequently perceived as a commodity to be resisted because of its work in reinforcing a notion that women have a *natural* affinity with adornment and decoration. Fashion’s work in reinforcing the apprehension of women as objects of beauty and decoration earned it a reputation as a form of patriarchal oppression. Instead Evans and Thornton sought to demonstrate, that the virtues of embracing, inhabiting and re-conceiving fashion could be both pleasurable and present a viable critical position for a feminist identification with images of women.

At the beginning of this chapter, several accounts were highlighted which characterise dress as a performance of acting-out meaning, and the direction of scholarship in dress studies has been to pursue the ascriptions of meaning. So in summary, in this section we

⁴¹ Evans and Thornton 13.

have outlined a theoretical position which studies dress as a sign production or semiosis, as a critical intervention into empirical or positivist accounts.⁴² The task for us, then, is to re-trace the theoretical underpinnings which inform the critical approach to the performer as a sign production, as they unfold an understanding of a culture of semiosis and the subjects of this culture.

Consequently, three distinct thematics or implications emerge from dress studies literature:

1. The predominant object of dress studies inquiry is the clothing object as sign.
2. Semiosis infers an understanding of a cultural realm with all the attendant implications of limits and boundaries, myths of origin, and a notion of a system logic. In this cultural arena where fashion operates to produce and circulate signs and codes of appearance, the concepts of culture and fashion are close associates, if not often used interchangeably.
3. The imagining of a particular subject as a product of symbolic formation and theatrical acts of dress.

The Performer: A Better Look

To this point, we have been operating within a very abstract notion of the performer largely because the quotations from Hollander and Wilson introduced at the beginning of this chapter refer to a modality of performance rather than any *particular* performer. It has become necessary to try and shake-off this anonymity by taking a closer look at some "concrete" examples from discussions in dress studies. For, it is now more certain that the performer would be the subject, consumer or user of the fashion "text."

To re-examine Wilson's description of the play-acting aspect of dress, to which we will return several times throughout this chapter, as an example of the imagining of the

⁴² In Hugh J. Silverman's words semiosis takes us to a thinking of the "signing rather than the signs themselves, the indicating rather than the indications, the inscribing rather than the inscriptions." See Hugh J. Silverman, *Cultural Semiosis: Tracing the Signifier* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998) 1.

activity of dress as a theatrical activity of identity production, she writes:

...in a fragmenting world others feel that they can in some way *choose* the identity they were born with, or redefine and rework it. Yet ultimately, we do not choose our bodies, so postmodern playfulness can never entirely win the day.

Despite the different and inconsistent ways in which "fragmentation" and "identity" are used in discussions of postmodernism, as concepts they are of interest in relation to dress. Dress could play a part, for example, either to glue the false identity together on the surface, or to lend a theatrical and play-acting aspect to the hallucinatory experience of the contemporary world; we become actors, inventing our costumes for each successive appearance, disguising the recalcitrant body we never entirely transform. Perhaps style becomes a substitute for identity, perhaps its fluidity (in theory it can be changed at will) offers an alternative to the stagnant fixity of old-fashioned ideas of personality and core identity, perhaps on the contrary it is used to fix identity more firmly. Either way, we may understand dress as one tool in the creation of identities.⁴³

In commencing an identification of several issues the quote addresses, it seems fair to say, firstly, that Wilson depicts the performer who creates and invents meaning through changes of costume; to change costume is to change identity. Secondly, the quote begs a question of the relation between the performer's single acts and successive acts – it refers us to the problems of the difference, continuity and consistency between one act and another. Importantly, to perceive "fluidity" and change, various changes and inconsistencies in appearance would have to be registered in a temporal sequence. Thirdly, the quote highlights a confusion around whether the notion of play-acting in dress displaces the sense of a centred subject, and the agency of a *wilful* subject along with it. Fourthly, the quote introduces a series of distinctions between a changing surface and a recalcitrant substratum, between the created and the given, between the formed and resistant matter. Consequently, this quote illuminates for us some issues which we will come back to in turn, but for now gives us insight into dress studies' imagining of a subject whose theatricality brings a state of chaos to conceptions of identity. Performance is used as a trope for outlining various modalities by which dress might intervene in conceptions of identity, that is to illuminate "identity" as construct and in doing so to put some weight behind the postmodern principle that the subject is displaced from its place

⁴³ Wilson, "Fashion and the Postmodern Body" 8-9.

as the source of cultural production. We know this when she writes, "Either way, we may understand dress as one tool in the creation of identities" and understand this as an attempt to displace the certainty of a subject whose identity is innate (i.e. "core") or decided from "birth," by implicating identity in the culturally relative productions of "textuality." If the identity of the self is disseminated in the culturally relative meanings of clothing, the meanings of which are beyond the users control, then the conception of an autonomous subject is displaced. As Wilson explores the implications of what she calls the "fragmentation" of identity, it is implied that the "text" is at work in three different ways in tooling creations which rupture the singularity of identity – as style *substituted* for identity, as fluid or variegated styles (replacing one subject position with many), or as a fixing agent constructed on the surface. These variations highlight the important question, often too quickly resolved as a decided matter of the culturally constructed subject, of the nature or modality of construction and whether by "creating identity" it is meant that dressing is an act of self-creation, self-representation or a pure invention.

When Anne Hollander writes, in a second example, of the performer who may not only have a multitude of outfits to choose from off "backstage costume racks" but who combines these, the costume helps to provide a sartorial freedom to express a subject who is always more than one. She emphasises a plurality of roles for a "person" who seems empowered by choice and the fluidity provided by a sartorial freedom. This presents as an opportunity to examine the "postmodern person," and for us to consider why the name *person* might be used here, for the terms person, identity and subject are not interchangeable across each account with the same effect, and are used with different emphases. In Hollander, a "person" of fashion is significant for they might be of either sex, and this expanding demographic of feminine *and* masculine involvement breaks, for Hollander, the tradition of women's long association as privileged subject of fashion. And ultimately, when combined with a new found sartorial freedom to reinvent, represents for her, a postmodern symptom. We will see that Hollander's metaphor of performance, far more tangential in that any performer is a product of metonymic slippage (from a reference to the racks where his/her costumes are hung), is used with

less critical intention, than we found in Wilson for instance, to prefigure the purported postmodern principle that identity is not given. For Hollander, a lot less is at stake, as to dress-up is to act someone other than what you are, rather than someone you might become.

Evans and Thornton in Women and Fashion would be in agreement with Wilson in charting a subject's movements within postmodern culture as a negotiation of depthlessness and superficiality, when they write:

As the critical and creative practices of postmodern culture are marked by deliberate negotiation of depthlessness and superficiality, in fashion "the feminine," as a text, a code, divorced from nature and history, becomes the site for postmodern fashion's "acting-out" of meaning.⁴⁴

Fashion – as an arena of shifting signifiers – becomes the perfect residing place for their feminine subject who is interested in exploring resistances to a conventional submission to fashion. In that Evans and Thornton invoke the term postmodern both in reference to an adoption of critical cultural practices *and* something evident in fashion itself, it invites the question of Hollander and Wilson whether performance as a modality of existence is the consequence of the imposition of a new cultural order, conveniently summarised under the name postmodernism? Or whether the performance itself is a determining sign or symptom of the emergence of this order, perhaps as a self-conscious or deliberate adoption of a critical acting-out of culturally relative meaning? We will return to these questions later.

Jennifer Craik's argument that "clothing creates a face which positively constructs an identity rather than disguising a "natural" body or "real" identity"⁴⁵ is related to Wilson's performer as a critical position intended to debunk the myths of true identity and essentialism, by rupturing that identity in the mediations of clothing. Following comparison with Craik, Wilson's account appears to be more of an *exploration* of a

⁴⁴ Evans and Thornton 80.

⁴⁵ Craik 5.

critical position rather than a firm theoretical commitment to a thoroughly constituted subject because she doubts that the matter of the body – essence, nature and truth – can ever be changed by play-acting in dress – as such the mutations of “identity” are separated from a body. In *The Face of Fashion: Cultural Studies in Fashion* Craik goes a step further as she conceptualises dress as a “technology of the self” which is part of a socio-cultural apparatus called fashion that incites individuals (men and women) to take responsibility for their own appearance and to regulate their self-presentation in accordance with socially sanctioned codes of conduct. An individual develops through dress “an active process or technical means for constructing and presenting a bodily self.”⁴⁶ The technical arrangement of clothes and the manner in which bodies are worn through movement and gesture, demonstrate a “fashioning of the body” as a process of acculturation which will be specific to different cultures. As such, the fashioning of the body comes to mean the assignment of a meaningful identity and place in a social environment through acquired techniques. She writes: “bodies are ‘made-up’ in both senses of the term – constructed through the acquisition of body techniques, and known through the ways in which they are made presentable in habituses or living environments.”⁴⁷ Although not defined in this way by the author, Craik’s conceptualisation of fashion as a regulative mechanism can be affiliated with a post-Foucauldian view of fashion where Foucault’s analytical approach to the institutions and discourses of modern social control suggest being taken beyond the spheres of law, medicine, and religion considered by him, to explore fashion as a disciplinary mechanism which controls the way in which women and men dress and present themselves.⁴⁸

The next example explores the subject positioning of women in relation to dress as a practice of display and various images of woman/dress. In the introduction to her groundbreaking study of the female body and film, Jane Gaines extrapolates the relevance of

⁴⁶ Craik 1.

⁴⁷ Craik 5.

⁴⁸ Such an approach has been mobilised by feminist writers to critique fashion as a form of patriarchal social control evident in Sandra Lee Bartky’s “Foucault, femininity and the modernization of patriarchal power.” Elizabeth Wilson’s “Fashion and the Postmodern Body” also points to a Foucauldian framework as potentially useful for analysing fashion as a regulative, if not disciplining practice, of the social body (3-16).

various themes of spectatorship, masquerade, and voyeurism central to feminist film theory for dress studies and an understanding of woman as a "construction" and image of femininity. She writes influentially: "One can draw a useful analogy between the photographic representation of woman and the everyday adornment of her body."⁴⁹ And more definitively: "There is a significant link between the notion of woman displayed by dress and woman displayed by other representational systems."⁵⁰ As such, "woman" is the *feminine construction*, or *fictitious self*, which is assumed like a garment and circulates in various representational systems to establish socially acceptable images of femininity. Gaines outlines persuasively what it is to live amidst the ceaseless reproduction of images of women, pointing to the fact that our relations with clothes and our approach to the display of identity is always inflected through images, when she writes, following the above quote:

In addition, one might say that contemporary feminists have understood woman's inscription in the codes of contemporary representation because they themselves know too well what it is to be fitted up for representation. We are trained into clothes, and early become practiced in presentational postures, learning, in the age of mechanical reproduction, to carry the mirror's eye within the mind, as though one might at any moment be photographed. And this is a sense a woman in Western culture has learned, not only from feeling the constant surveillance of her public self, but also from studying the publicity images of other women – on screen certainly, but also in the pages of fashion magazines – *Elle*, *Seventeen*, *Vogue*, *Jackie*, and *Mademoiselle*.⁵¹

Quite simply, it is in Gaines' account that the identity of dress as a practice of representation is made quite explicit for dress studies and, because of its function as an introduction to essays about the filmic treatment of costume, this book has encouraged a *prominence for debates concerned with the cinematic body of fashioned woman, spectatorship and theories of identification with filmic and photographic imagery*.⁵² So for us, an impression of the performer or wearer as somebody who is "fitted up for

⁴⁹ Gaines, "Introduction: Fabricating the Female Body" 1.

⁵⁰ Gaines, "Introduction: Fabricating the Female Body" 3.

⁵¹ Gaines, "Introduction: Fabricating the Female Body" 3-4.

⁵² While not wanting to over-determine the influence of one publication on another, the collection of essays in Benstock and Ferris, eds., *On Fashion* continue to explore the representation of fashioned women in photography and film, as well as theories of spectatorship.

representation” and for viewing through the theories of the gaze is set in place by this publication. But we are jumping a little head to appreciate this rendering of the performer, for it is necessary to outline several of the ideas central to the post-1970s theorisation of female spectatorship addressed by Gaines and the collection she introduces. Feminist psychoanalytic film theory, which emphasises the centrality of sight in the positioning of a cinematic spectator – the viewing subject, has been extremely influential in feminist discussions of cinematic spectatorship. In brief, a seminal theory was set in place by Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” that situated the female star of narrative cinema as the erotic object of a male spectator who viewed her either voyeuristically or fetishistically.⁵³ The implications of this argument for the female viewer were elaborated by Mulvey and Mary Anne Doane when they outlined the limited possibilities for the female spectator, condemned to assume the masquerade, as it were, of the male viewer, and therefore identify masochistically with the passive female.⁵⁴ Rather than rehearse the arguments and counter-arguments that have questioned the validity of the male gaze paradigm, it is sufficient here to establish that there has been a concerted effort by feminist writers to expand the options for female spectators by exploring other forms of imaginative identification.⁵⁵ Central to these ideas is the notion of “spectatorial cross-dressing” which sees a connection between the switching of gendered subject positions in cross-dressing and a spectatorial flexibility where it is possible for the female viewer to assume both active and more varied positionings than, for one, a masochistic identification.

It is via this long circuitous route through the theorisations of the female spectator that one can reach a characterisation of the performer or wearer of clothes, via an analogy between the spectating body and dressing-up on the screen. If the analogy between the subjective flexibility of costumed performances of filmic stars and spectatorial flexibility

⁵³ Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* 16.3 (1975): 6-18.

⁵⁴ Laura Mulvey, “Afterthoughts on ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ inspired by *Duel in the Sun*,” *Framework* 6.15-7 (1981): 12-15; Mary Ann Doane, “Film and the Masquerade-Theorising the Female Spectator,” *Screen* 23 (1982): 74-87.

⁵⁵ A summary of feminist film scholarship on spectatorship that engages with the limitations of the male gaze paradigm is Linda Williams, ed., *Viewing Positions* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1995).

is pursued to its limits, then the sartorial pleasures of women off the screen can ignite in the spectating body various imaginings which are tactile and visual. It could be argued that the relation between image and spectator can incorporate the "tactile imagination" which Iris Marion Young has posited is integral to a freeing and pleasurable relation of women to clothes and thus immerse the spectator in the visual and material "puttings on" of dress which forge connections with performances both on and off the screen.⁵⁶ This points to the spectator's wearing as an important dimension which could potentially expand an understanding of spectatorial identifications with the image. One can also take the relation between the spectator and the wearer in another direction, to establish the contingency of images and a viewer's identifications with imagery as an important reference point for ways in which women (and men could be included here) inhabit clothing. Young explores the thesis that there is a relation of the experience of clothing to images of clothing, a thesis established by Anne Hollander when she argued that the meaning of clothes is conditioned by pictorial images.⁵⁷ When Young writes, "Contemporary images of women's clothes capture a single movement in a narrative whose beginning and end lie outside the frame" she seeks to establish the connections between dressed women on and off the screen – women seeing themselves in terms of the circulating images in advertising, fashion photography, film and illustrations.⁵⁸

Fashion: A Carnival of Signs

From the accounts of the performer, an implicit part of dress activity is a theatrical play with signs which *foreground* a process of constructing a role, an image or figuration by fashioning an ensemble of clothes and acting-out meaning (often in reference to a domain called fashion). This is dress as performance. After exploring the arena of play where self is equated with clothing we will come to a better understanding of the expansion of fashion and we will be able to render a more complex picture of the conceptual underpinnings of the cultural context so important to constructionism.

⁵⁶ Iris Marion Young, "Women Recovering Our Clothes," *On Fashion*, ed. Shari Benstock and Suzanne Ferriss (New Brunswick, New Jersey; Rutgers University Press, 1994) 205.

⁵⁷ Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes*.

⁵⁸ Young 199.

The identification of clothing with self or with identity can only make sense in a circumstance where surface appearances are thought to hold a conception of truth, when appearances are no longer contrasted with a more truthful order of depth or reality – the true self, the real, the authentic. These circumstances are a key characteristic of what has been called “the carnival of the postmodern” most famously unfolded in the logic of reversibility and the playful inversions of social conventions in the writing of French sociologist and semiotician Jean Baudrillard.⁵⁹ For Baudrillard, the postmodern carnival ushers in a new cultural order of representation called simulation which marks a shift from modernity to a carnivalesque hypermodernity to be called, in his writing from 1980 onwards, the postmodern. Here, the heightened and spectacular presence of fashion provided an important constituent in the intensification which brought about this shift.⁶⁰ In his analyses of media and consumption, Baudrillard points to the increasing penetration of ever more spheres of social life – art, politics, sport, religion, shopping – by a proliferation of sign production. Late twentieth century social life is significantly focused on the media and practices of consumption, in that the commodity and information are used as signs to communicate social meanings (for instance about lifestyle) which can differentiate and draw parallels between people. Lifestyle, beliefs, ideas and value are decipherable relative to exchanges (i.e. communications) using commodity-signs. For Baudrillard this represented an important *cultural* formation as all spheres of life are effected by the “structural law of value,” of symbolic exchange, which draws together signification, desire, value and meaning as important to the dynamics and growth of Capitalism. In opposition to Marx, Baudrillard does not see art, culture, politics as epiphenomena of economic change but rather crucial domains to the shifts of capitalism.

⁵⁹ Douglas Kellner Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989) 117-18. “Postmodern carnival” is Kellner’s expression rather than Baudrillard’s.

⁶⁰ Kellner points out that the term postmodernism was not used by Baudrillard until 1980, until that time referring to modernity or “our modern society” (117-18). Some of the key works by Baudrillard which lay foundations for his theory of simulation and characterisation of contemporary social life are, The System of Objects (London: Verso, 1996); For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign; Symbolic Exchange and Death; Simulations, trans. Paul Foss et al. (New York: Semiotexte, 1983); In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities: or the End of the Social and Other Essays (New York: Semiotexte, 1983).

The increasing arrival, speed, density, build-up and play of media, advertising, and commodities have assisted to usher in what Baudrillard refers to as the order of simulacra or the third successive stage in the history of Western representation where the distinction breaks-down between signs and what they refer to.⁶¹ In the regime of simulation which comprises contemporary culture, there is an incessant production of images that do not appear to be grounded in reality. In fact all of contemporary life appears to have been reproduced as a facsimile where the simulation of objects, environments and experiences in theme parks, television and films to be more real than the real, has produced a sense that an order of simulation *precedes* the real. When people on the street appear to have made themselves over as look-alikes from TV-Shows like Friends (simulacra of "real" people) a self-reproducing universe of simulacra appears to have brought about the replacement of the real by the semiosphere. Here, semiosphere refers to an order of cultural semiosis which precedes or comes before the real to mediate it. Here, what is indicated is Baudrillard's notion of *reversibility* as these "Friends" or TV-characters (Chandler, Joey, Rachel, Ross etc.) perform reality (being twenty-something "friends") as they are being performed, as it were, by the real (the look-alikes). This is an indication of reversibility as it points to the connectedness of the orders of reality and appearances/representation, a certain collapse of distinctions in the face of an overlap which makes it possible for each performance to be registered in either sphere.

Importantly, Baudrillard's formulations follow the instability of the sign (i.e. the arbitrary generation of meaning) to its limits and point to a relentless structural interplay between reality and representation, bringing about an *implosion* of the distinctions between reality and representation, depth and surface, truth and deception. In the face of the proliferation of simulations of identity, the reproduction of truthful performances, there is no secure ground from which to judge the separation of the true from the false. By order of the same crisis of judgement, it becomes difficult to distinguish the made, the artificial, the performed and the fictional. It is, here, as a certain "exceptional desolation" or despair sets in, that fashion makes a spectacular appearance by way of re-focusing life on the

⁶¹ Baudrillard, Simulations 11.

order of the code. In a fascinating yet bewildering essay on fashion, Baudrillard attempts to account for the enchantment of the "spectacle of the code": "The acceleration of the simple play of signifiers in fashion becomes striking, to the point of enchanting us – the enchantment and vertigo of the loss of every system of reference.... There is no longer any determinacy internal to the signs of fashion, hence they become free to commute and permutate without limit."⁶² We have already heard in an earlier essay that what he calls here the "parades of the signifier" are motivated by a compulsion, a kind of "meaning drive," which now "no longer lead anywhere."⁶³ Fashion introduces a fundamental theatricality to social life, as he writes: "Spectacle is our fashion, an intensified and reduplicated sociality enjoying itself aesthetically, the drama of change in place of change."⁶⁴ In fact fashion "haunts" out-moded disciplines with its "play-acting" which convinces that "specularity" is the only mode of production that counts for anything – it becomes a reason in itself for production.⁶⁵ In its perpetual cycles of renewal, fashion brings about a certain weightlessness by positing an imaginary order where "reason crumbles under the blow of pure and simple alternation of signs."⁶⁶

Gail Faurschou captures something of the essence of Baudrillard's "meaning drive" when she writes that fashion's formal character as a system "discloses a pervasive and enveloping logic, a logic that circulates at the center, or rather, endlessly dissimulates the absent center of postmodernity and postmodern subjectivity."⁶⁷ The logic is one of obsolescence, a repetitive "circular semiosis of stylistic variation" which achieves an unprecedented level of abstract systematisation, and accelerates the "logic of the obsolescence of value itself." This logic – cause for despair and focus of enchantment – would conceal the absence of a "centre" or, what Baudrillard has pointed to as, the "loss of reason" central to fashion's cyclical or vertiginous assembling of signs. The concern with fashion for both Baudrillard and Faurschou is to diagnose the conditions of

⁶² Baudrillard, "Fashion, or the Enchanting Spectacle of the Code," *Symbolic Exchange and Death* 87.

⁶³ Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* 78-79; Baudrillard, "Fashion, or the Enchanting Spectacle of the Code" 87.

⁶⁴ Baudrillard, "Fashion, or the Enchanting Spectacle of the Code" 87.

⁶⁵ Baudrillard, "Fashion, or the Enchanting Spectacle of the Code" 91-92.

⁶⁶ Baudrillard, "Fashion, or the Enchanting Spectacle of the Code" 88.

⁶⁷ Faurschou, "Obsolescence and Desire: Fashion and the Commodity Form" 234.

consumption which appear to strike at the heart of the condition of the postmodern: fashion penetrates the "deep structure" of social life which undergoes a profoundly "cultural" moment. Fashion can no longer be marginalised as the stylistic support for objective social systems, for instance its endless incorporation of historical references restages history as a recycling rather than an advancement of the social toward development and progress. The enveloping logic of Faurschou's fashion is the moment of fashion's "rise" to become the "universal code under which all other previous cultural codes are subsumed."⁶⁸ For Faurschou, fashion is said to subsume all other cultural meanings, installing a model of consumption as signification not only in the order of economic exchange but all cultural practices. "Culture" assumes the formal character of a system of signification. For Baudrillard, fashion appears to be the overarching code into the sphere of which all other cultural systems collapse. The sense of vertigo, and at once enchantment found in fashion, which for Baudrillard, flows from the loss of every system of reference, indicates a culture without centre, a defining symptom, in Faurschou's Baudrillardian schema, of postmodern, or late capitalist consumer society. It is difficult not to read Baudrillard's diagnosis/critique of fashion as the stripping away of reason without invoking François Lyotard's characterisation of a condition of postmodernity as the erosion of the centring "grand narratives" of Western scientific rationality, a crisis of legitimacy for Western knowledge.⁶⁹

It is here, in the order of the code, that we meet the two faces of the theoretical treatment of fashion which are presented –but the workings of which are not necessarily made

⁶⁸ This appears to be an interpretation of Baudrillard's observation that "Under the sign of the commodity, culture is bought and sold – under the sign of fashion, all cultures play like simulacra in total promiscuity" ("Fashion, or the Enchanting Spectacle of the Code" 88).

⁶⁹ François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). Following Lyotard's proposition that the "grand narratives" (37) of rationality are experiencing a crisis in legitimacy, it has frequently been argued that the modern rational subject has been "de-centred" from a position of authority and agency. It would be wrong to present such a crisis or even a de-centring of the subject as an "event" which occurred at some point in history, rather than being symptomatic of a rupture within the very structures of knowledge. Also, the reference above to Baudrillard's "diagnosis/critique," is to register an unresolved disposition toward fashion on the part of Baudrillard for his attitude is not all positive, analogous to his relationship with postmodernism more broadly. Yet it is not our concern here to resolve the question of disposition but rather to illuminate his characterisation of fashion as an arena of sign production penetrating social and cultural life.

explicit – in cultural theory and dress studies. Either it is implicit as a closed, circular semiotic system and a model for cultural signification as a self-organising or self-referential system, *or* it is a powerful force of subsumption seemingly inevitable and evolutionary, colonising spheres which are intrinsic to it such as art, politics and even, more broadly culture. Either way the central reason for examining Baudrillard and Faurschou's arguments, which generalise fashion to a cultural and societal level, is to make apparent an extreme view of clothing use that effectively places figures on a stage where fashion as spectacle unfolds supplying a structure – albeit vertiginous – to organise behaviour, desires, and everyday deportment in clothes. Here, the radical proposition is that there is no longer a distinction between reality and the representational systems (image, discourse and clothing-sign) which prefigure the “shape” and look of clothes. As Gaines proposes: “if the image now precedes the real, engulfs and renders it obsolete as a point of comparison” it “obliterates the problems endemic to comparisons between images and society.”⁷⁰ In other words, a performer would be operating as if it were already within a frame, already operating as if it were an image and a cultural or aesthetic practice. Fashion as discourse, as visual image, is present immediately, not as a separate, and separated realm of representation. For an audience, this stage presents a performance which is real and one of many truths.

It is in the sense of a powerful subsuming force that French sociologist Gilles Lipovetsky gives the name “consummate fashion” to its expansive power which works less through coercion and more through seduction. He writes:

Where does fashion begin and where does it end, in the era of exploding needs and proliferating media, mass advertising and mass leisure, stars and “hits”? What is left that fashion does not rule, at least in part, when the ephemeral governs the world of objects, culture, and meaningful discourse, and when the principle of seduction has profoundly reorganised the everyday environment, news and information, and the political scene?⁷¹

⁷⁰ Gaines, “Introduction” 5.

⁷¹ Gilles Lipovetsky, *The Empire of Fashion: Dressing Modern Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) 131.

A note of caution is needed here, for there is a problem that strikes any theorist who has followed the enveloping logic of fashion. If one attempts to elevate fashion's ontological status by equating it with culture, there is some risk in the theoretical flotation of fashion, that it will produce an equivalence of meaning and ontology.⁷²

It is from this figure of general or consummate fashion that we can best understand clothing fashion to have various dimensions as symbolic system, as discourse, as image apparatus and purveyor of fantasy images, as an industry of haute couture, ready-to-wear and mass production and as a force of social organisation. It is important to acknowledge that fashion is figured today as both a force of homogenisation and something that neutralises mass conformity (i.e. a universal code of dress) by enmeshing people in frequently specific and local variations. It would be a long exercise to provide thorough examples of the varying effects of fashion conformity, distinction and subversion through the long lens of contingencies which bring about what can be called these fashion figurations. It is important to point, here, to the fact that fashion has a *double face* as a "technology" (thinking here of a force, like Foucault's sense of a disciplinary method or conditioning technique) which can be either viewed from a perspective of social control and from that of social participation. However, these should not be seen as completely independent perspectives for an individual's behaviour is "governed" by an incitement to consume and manage appearance through practices in which they are at least in part complicitous as pleasuring participants and desiring subjects. This is not to say that pleasure is the only emotion or mode of participation experienced, for consumption can engage a subject in conflicts and ambivalences, and take them through a range of emotions. The point to be made is that reciprocal relations between consumers and mechanisms of contingency accompany any perception of fashion power.

What gives weight to the notion of fashion, as a subsuming force of social control and homogenization, is the perception of the centre of fashion – archetypically Paris –

⁷² Cf. Michael Carey who writes, "Cultural theory levels ontology, and, in the figurations of theory, all becomes fashion, producing an equivalence of ontological status and equivalence of meanings" (49).

releasing an endless cycle of visions of novelty in ensembles and departments. In spite of popular declarations about sartorial freedom due to the diminishment of the dictatorial presence of Paris fashion in this pluralist moment, as well as theoretical efforts to formulate a polycentric model of fashion which can recognise the many influential cultural centres and accommodate the multiple journeys to fruition of novelty, innovation and influence (i.e. from the "street" and various capitals), the classic centre-to-periphery model of fashion change is still commonplace.⁷³ Central to this perception is the power certain centres – Paris, Milan, New York, Tokyo – still hold to name what is fashionable, a naming which both liberates styles of dress into a re-newed appreciation and also excludes others, both opening up and de-limiting the field of choices. From this naming flows the predictability of a cut, style, colour or silhouette, which occupies the shops for several months. Moreover, those objects that are named are connected to a predictable cycle of obsolescence, which means they will disappear in the following season. The centre-to-periphery model holds at its core the myth of particular centres as exclusive seats of innovation, ideas and freedom that are central to fashion's power. Add to this power the promotional function of fashion photography and advertising and one has an important source of what is compelling and, purportedly, controlling in the innumerable imaginings of a perfected life in clothes provided by images. If indeed fashion is a world "where reality and fantasy mingle and become confused, a world in which we go adorned in our dreams"⁷⁴ then the image – a space where fantasies are tried-on – has helped to nurture a sense of clothing as "wish-fulfilment and fantasy."⁷⁵ It is toward the image that the finger is usually directed for introducing a standardisation or an oppressive idealisation of a way of being, however for these forms to be directly prescriptive it

⁷³ Fred Davis in *Fashion, Culture and Identity* acknowledges the need to formulate a polycentric model to understand, for one, the bi-directional movement of fashion influences from traditional fashion centres outwards and from street fashion inwards toward these centres (103-20). Yet he refuses to abandon the classic centre-to-periphery model entirely. Lipovetsky in *Empire of Fashion* argues that a new stage in the history of fashion has come into view. But this is no simple matter because the expansion of the large-scale organization of the modern fashion industry continues, "matched by an equally large-scale reconfiguration of the system. New centres of creation have emerged, and new criteria have been imposed. The earlier hierarchical and unitary configuration has exploded" (88). Both writers speak to a period of transition and the reconfiguration of what is understood as the fashion system as the centre-to-periphery model.

⁷⁴ Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams* 228.

⁷⁵ Aileen Ribeiro, "Utopian Dress," *Chic Thrills: A Fashion Reader*, ed. Juliet Ash and Elizabeth Wilson (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992) 234.

would mean that the image simply engages the viewer in imitation rather than identification/performance.⁷⁶

An Act That's Been Going On a Long Time?

It should have become evident by now that the various descriptions of the performer are attempts to describe a form of display, an acting-out of meaning and ultimately an act of self-identification. In this, at least Wilson hoped to point to the importance of clothing for both creating personal identity and as a basis for a critical conception of identity as fluid and changeable.⁷⁷ Here, dress as performance enables the changing of identity (the adoption and discarding of different identities) via the signs that "decorate and engrave" bodies.⁷⁸

Not all is new about these conditions. The association of sartorial freedom with subjective freedom has a long tradition in carnivalesque masquerade of costume and disguise founded in the European folk culture of antiquity and the Middle Ages.⁷⁹ The notion of a freedom sought in masquerade makes its appearance so frequently in the history of Western culture, philosophy and literature it is impossible to give anything but a brief overview of this widespread thematic. Masquerade and the carnivalesque switching of "clothing, positions and destinies in life" to challenge social conventions of "estate, rank, age, property and status" has been influentially theorised by Bakhtin, and is a rich and varying thematic of literature and drama over many centuries particularly flourishing in nineteenth century images of cross-dressing.⁸⁰ As well, recent historical

⁷⁶ See Rabine 59-75. In a discussion about the fashion magazine and theories of female identification with images, Rabine argues for a more active and critical notion of a female reader, who is being interpellated in the changes of magazines between 1960-80. She calls on the analogy of performance to describe this shift: "Aside from increasing the narcissistic seduction of the magazines, it [the changes] represents a shift from assuming a reader who uncritically imitates an established social role to assuming a reader who produces a self through the proliferation of theatrical roles created through a judicious use of costume and masquerade" (64).

⁷⁷ Wilson in "Fashion and the Postmodern Body" writes "...we become actors, inventing our costumes for each successive appearance" (9).

⁷⁸ Calefato 69.

⁷⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968) 39.

⁸⁰ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (West Germany: Ardis, 1973) 101. Bakhtin writes in

research into the elaborate masquerades of artificiality, sometimes particularly “effeminate” artifice, of eighteenth century English males associated with the names of either molly and macaroni, are linking dress changes to alterations within the sexual systems of their day.⁸¹ In addition the foregrounding of appearances of gender transitivity in masquerade, drag performances, cross-dressing and/or transvestism has been a foundational principle for arguing that gender is fluid and free from anatomical destiny in feminist, gay/lesbian and queer theory – that is, gender is masquerade.⁸² Prior to the flourishing of gender studies and queer theory, the concept of performance, of an actor investing “his” person in the craft of performing everyday presentations was explicitly developed in sociology through Erving Goffman’s thesis that there is a matrix of techniques which are necessary for building a role or personal front for convincing conduct of daily life. As Goffman notes: “insignia of office or rank; clothing; sex, age and racial characteristics; size and looks; posture; speech patterns; facial expressions; bodily gestures; and the like” become necessary props for constructing identity.⁸³ After Goffman, sociologist Richard Sennett, in his book The Fall of Public Man, discusses the analogies between theatre and 18th century urban street life and the use of clothing to accompany the performing of a role; the 18th century performer lived life as if it were happening on a stage.⁸⁴ Like Sennett, recent examples would seem to wish to dissolve the boundaries separating reality and the stage and to posit that a mixed bag of relations with

Rabelais and his World that “The mask...rejects conformity to oneself [and] is related to metamorphoses, the violation of natural boundaries [and] to mockery...[S]uch manifestations as parodies, caricatures [and] eccentric postures...derived from the mask. It reveals the essence of the grotesque” (40). In the twentieth century, a memorable literary representation of gender fluidity via clothing is evident in Virginia Woolf’s Orlando in which for Orlando to change selves – to change from man to woman – is to change clothes. See Virginia Woolf, Orlando: A Biography (London: Hogarth Press, 1990).

⁸¹ Christopher Breward, The Culture of Fashion: A New History of Fashionable Dress (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995) and Peter McNeil, ““That Doubtful Gender”: Macaroni Dress and Male Sexualities” Fashion Theory 3.4 (December 1999): 411-47.

⁸² Marjorie Garber, Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety (London: Penguin, 1993); Mary-Anne Doane, “Film and the Masquerade”; Valerie Steele, Fashion and Eroticism: Ideals of Feminine Beauty from the Victorian Era to the Jazz Age (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). In Queer studies, two notable studies applying the concept of masquerade are Mark Simpson, Male Impersonators: Men Performing Masculinity (London: Routledge, 1994) and Marcia Ian, “How Do You Wear Your Body: Body-Building and the Sublimity of Drag,” Negotiating Lesbian and Gay Subjects, ed. Monica Dorenkamp and Richard Henke (London: Routledge, 1995). The importance of dress and costume and attendant notions like putting-on and wearing to this work attests to the close dialogue between researchers investigating drag and dress studies in many different academic and research contexts.

⁸³ Erving Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, 2nd Edition (UK: Penguin, 1959).

⁸⁴ Richard Sennett, The Fall of Public Man (New York: Knopf, 1977).

clothes may in fact include a conception of them as costumes, for occasions that are not necessarily what one might call fancy dress.

The practice of costuming, while opening up the difficulties of differentiating, for the interpreter, the tenor of costume – i.e. the parodic performance from the direct imitation – it allows for a subjective freedom of making oneself in the image of a certain character.⁸⁵ As such, it appears to interweave fantasies and interior ideas with exterior manifestations so thoroughly that one can no longer speak of a separable costume – the self *is* the costume. It is in this spirit of play that the recent “costume dramas” attempt to play havoc with the long-standing romantic notion that clothes assert an idea of what is unique to the individual. Prevalent in the nineteenth century, dress is used as a “self-docketing and self-announcement...the vehicle for the display of the unique individual personality,”⁸⁶ most familiarly known as self-expression, or the attempt to make a subjective proposition of an idea of the person. That dress is an indicator of inherent character or person (an expressive act) is a product of modern enlightenment thought. Now, this costuming variation of dress attempts to push the actor of modern thought out from centre stage and into the wings, namely toward the debate about identity in postmodern discourses.

Does this mean that the kind of self-expressive performance with its correlative notion of prior identity characteristic of modern identity is finally being supplanted by a new, postmodern performance, or is this newness merely an old performance that has been intensified and exaggeratedly written large? Either way, the issue of what constitutes the human subject and indeed how it fits with conceptions of the cultural order cannot be evaded in a consideration of dress performance, particularly with regards to being an indicator of a substantial transformation of social life debated under the term postmodernity.

⁸⁵ In this insight to freedom, the danger is to overemphasise the element of conscious will in the ensuing practice – i.e. that the practice is a product of a wilful making. This danger and the tendency of wilful and deliberate making, as it is rooted in a notion of core-identity, we will encounter again in this chapter.

⁸⁶ Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams* 155. Additionally, the identification of social rank was also present in this display.

It is quite difficult to displace such a notion of clothing as self-expression.⁸⁷ That “ideas” inform and structure our acts sits more comfortably with a notion of people as thinking and purposeful beings, who operate within meaningful structures. Accordingly, the self becomes the root or source of the ideas that inform intentional clothing acts. Perhaps this impulse towards meaning, as a theoretical unconscious underlying the discourse of dress studies, is what motivates it to define clothes as part of a symbolic system and to pursue the ascriptions of meaning engraved by the sign. Such an argument has been important academically, in terms of constituting a place for the study of clothing as both popular and thoughtful expression and for throwing off the mantle which has plagued the image of fashion and clothing, as a trivial practice over-preoccupied with surface and superficialities.

Fluid and De-Centred Subjectivity (In Pursuit of the Excesses of the Sign)

We have seen the characterisations of the performer appear to be defined in relation to the carnivalesque play of meaning through the cross-referencing of styles assembled as disguises or “costumes.” Here, it seems that the performer is a precipitate of a culture of semiosis where if we follow the parade and play of the signifier to its limits “the image has swallowed reality whole.”⁸⁸ I say “seem” because as we examine certain efforts to displace the actor-subject some arguments are at pains to materialise the conditions necessary for this displacement. To make this point more slowly, in the examples considered, dress is being articulated in respect of a notion of fluid and constructed subjectivity which is associated with discussions about postmodernity, implying that dress can make explicit that we are in fact constructed and fluid subjectivities. In general, it could be assumed that the notion of a unified or interior actor-subject as the source of cultural production might diminish as a more complex understanding of the cultural arena in which a subject is constituted replaces it. To conceptualise the subject as a constitutive part of a cultural inter-text is consistent with the semiotic lineage and Barthes’ notion of

⁸⁷ Cf. Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams* 13. “Fashionable dressing...is also one of the ways in which women have been able to achieve self expression.”

⁸⁸ Gaines, *Fabrications* 5.

the "Death of the Author" which questioned the autonomy of the author in determining the meaning of his/her text and instead, conceived of the text as a "tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture."⁸⁹ With respect to the equivocations, it has already been noted that Wilson formulates a question of whether the fluidity afforded by dress thoroughly displaces a conception of "core identity" and, we will see, as further examination of these accounts follow, that Hollander is reluctant to let go of the notion of the "person" who manipulates the multiplicitous artifice of dress.

The sense that the human subject can no longer only be understood in stable or abiding terms is emphasised in contemporary theorisations of gender as performance. A concerted effort to displace the autonomous subject in poststructuralist philosophy of gender and now associated, but not necessarily coterminous with, a debated "postmodern periodisation" is Judith Butler's argument presented in Gender Trouble. This study has been enormously influential in cultural and gender studies and can be shown to have profound ramifications for the theorisation of dress. These will be explored in the following two chapters. In Gender Trouble Butler argues that all gender is performed and can be understood first and foremost as a practice structured by repetitive acts which draw upon – or act out – socially sanctioned signs of gender inculcated from birth. Butler initially states her deconstructive theory of gender as a practice, which at once points to the constitutive acts of gender (constructive) and at the same time to the (deconstructive) effects of these acts as they undo a substantialist model of gender identity:

Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.⁹⁰

A substantialist model of gender identity posits that there is an essential core to identity, as the quote suggests, from which acts stem and which exists prior to the acquisition of

⁸⁹ Barthes, "Death of the Author" 10.

⁹⁰ Butler, Gender Trouble 140.

feminine or masculine characteristics. Another way of expressing Butler's theory of gender identity would be to argue that it is the performance itself which is substantial, rather than this substance being contingent on a centre or core to subjectivity. Butler is thinking of this core variously as given nature, essence or consciousness, variations in a history of metaphysical conceptions of the subject. Relative to this core, a categorical model presumes that it is possible to demarcate one gender from another by sorting the descriptive attributes which are thought to exist independently from (and said to correspond or be relevant to) one's core being. We should note that her emphasis shifts in arguing that gender is not an expression of these features relevant to one's core being, but rather something that one *does*, to a temporal comprehension of gender action over time. Repetitive acts of gender both repudiate the performance as an expression of inherent identity and reveal these descriptive attributes as effects of performance itself. Moya Lloyd argues that Butler's understanding that performance resides in a symbolic social space in which subjects enact the gender codes of regulatory discourses is important in turning thought away from a conceptualisation of gender in an abstract space of categorisation— i.e. forming the "continents of subjectivity habitable only by authentic substantive identities."⁹¹

At this point it is important to explore Butler's concept of "re-signification" as an important conceptual underpinning of "performativity" and therefore to consider the philosophical lineage her writing draws upon. Simply, the concept of re-signification is Butler's name for the enforced performance of norms and in developing this concept of production (essential to a culture of semiosis) she configures the influences of Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, Louis Althusser, Jacques Derrida and J.L. Austin. Expanding her theory of gender in her third book Bodies that Matter, Butler's intent is to expose the culturally enforced performances of gender, sex and sexuality as enactments of regulatory discourses. For instance she writes that one's "normal" gender is "not the product of a choice, but the forcible citation of a norm, whose complex historicity is indissociable from relations of discipline, regulation and punishment."⁹² Here, Butler begins from the

⁹¹ Moya Lloyd, "Performativity, Parody, Politics," Theory, Culture & Society 16.2 (April 1999): 196.

⁹² Butler, Bodies That Matter 232.

Foucauldian premise that power works in part through discourse and in this work it produces and destabilises subjects.⁹³ She argues, to simplify, that the very regulated reiteration of the norms of gender, the embodied enactment of these norms, points to the sedimentation of these norms into hegemonic ideals which one is compelled to approximate. As such, Butler's theory of gender foregrounds a *process* of identity formation as a consequence of reiterative acts which admit a degree of instability in the repeating of impelled norms. To construct this argument she locates, in speech-act theory, a trope for a productive action called the performative utterance – an utterance that brings into being that which it names. It is particularly Derrida's exposition in "Signature, Event, and Context" of the performative utterance as an instance of "citation" – an iterable or repeated speech act – which informs Butler's proposition that a subject may in fact be the product of a performative utterance's naming, or more precisely, citation of a subject position. This *performative* production would happen through a kind of repetition and recitation. Here, re-citation, like re-signification, refers to performative acts of citation which repeat other citations, as if repeating themselves in one another, but each time differently. In "Performative Acts and gender Constitution" Butler explains one of the implications of performativity in terms of the possibility of subversion:

If the ground of gender identity is a stylized repetition of acts through time, and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style.⁹⁴

The quote is suggestive of clothing's implication in the styling of the "seamed" constructions of identity. In Bodies that Matter Butler is careful to warn that any transgressions of gender norms, those acts which do not correspond to the heterosexual matrix/symbolic which configures sex-gender relations of male and female subjects, do

⁹³ Lois McNay argues that Butler's work represents the sustained attempt to arrive at an understanding of Foucault's notion of "subjectivation," to elaborate the specific mechanisms of subjective formation whereby a subject is formed in submission to discourse, but not reducible to it (177).

⁹⁴ Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre, ed. Sue-Ellen Case (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1990) 271.

not pass without recrimination.⁹⁵ Yet certain constitutive instabilities are opened up in these constructions by virtue of their reiterative make-up – ie. the possibility of doing sex and gender differently. It is in this conditional sense that Butler's theory unfolds an understanding of potential gender fluidity in acts which "escape or exceed the norm."⁹⁶

It is evident that Butler's writing is itself very indebted to a concept of *dressed* performance as re-signification when she refers to the "stylization of the body" and writes: "In other words, acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body...."⁹⁷ The fact that dress is not addressed explicitly in *Gender Trouble*, but inferred, is now being amended by various studies which are examining the ramifications of dress and images of dress as performative signs integral to performances of gender and the relation of these performances to the constitution of sexual identities.⁹⁸ It is in *Bodies That Matter*, in her analysis of Jennie Livingston's 1991 film *Paris is Burning*, where the connections between the formation of sex and gender subject positions, by approximating or performing normative and fashionable social categories, and an explicit styling of the body are more clearly drawn. This film documents an African-American and Latino drag ball community in Harlem, New York during the ball-circuit of 1987. The film's subjects are African-American and Latino men – some transvestite and others transsexual – who

⁹⁵ This is most apparent in her analysis (Chapter 4 of *Bodies that Matter* from 121-40) of the film *Paris is Burning* and the plight of a central transsexual character called Venus Extravaganza who is found strangled, purportedly for doing tricks as a female prostitute and thus failing to comply with the masculine gender designated by anatomy.

⁹⁶ Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 10.

⁹⁷ Butler, *Gender Trouble* 136.

⁹⁸ Paul Jobling, *Fashion Spreads: Word and Image in Fashion Photography since 1980* (Oxford: Berg, 1999); Peter McNeil, "That Doubtful Gender." For instance, Peter McNeil's analysis of the English macaroni's exaggerated performance of "effeminate" dress between 1765 and 1780, points to a gendering performance which repudiates "dress as the simple assertion of some inherent character" and links dress as sign to homosexual self-identifications. Historiographical research such as this assist to materialise Butler's theory of gender performance as a signifying practice of dress and her work serves to ratify studies in dress which preceded her theory (work that sought to establish that dress is a performance where identities are both sedimented and potentially reconfigured). Importantly, however, any connections between Butler's contribution to theorising styled gender identity and the dress studies accounts of the performer that have been considered up to this point cannot be established as direct ties of scholarship. Instead, in their characterisation of a performance of subjectivity that writes the subject into a contextual manipulation of masks, signs and identities the discourse of dress studies is more indebted to Roland Barthes' theory of the text and its importance for thinking about productive acts as a product of an intertext.

are bound together ritually and domestically by participation in the balls and the organisation of alternative families (or "houses") which compete against each other for the honours of "legendary performances." Trophies are awarded for the performance of "realness" or the perfected enactment of various categories which require the approximation of idealised norms and resistances encompassing race, class, gender and sex differentiations such as the white "straightness" and privilege of the "high fashion Parisian woman," the "male executive," or the "Ivy League College Boy" and the black resistance of the "Banji Boy." Butler reads the performances in drag as the radical attempt to transfigure some of the strikes against these bodies – sexually transgressive, poor, homeless amongst others – by re-making them. In doing so, these re-made bodies resist a social positioning that works to define them as "bodies that don't matter."⁹⁹ The contestants hope to win points against a symbolic that prevents their easy social passage by performing the look and movements of, in the contestant Octavia's words, "being somebody, instead of nobody." The morphological fantasy of "being somebody" is constituted in reference to the bodies on fashion catwalks, in ad campaigns, TV soaps, film appearances, fashion labels, and street characters with "attitude," upon which the categories draw and the enactments cite. The poses, movements and clothing in the "images" sampled from media culture are metonyms for identities, lifestyles, wealth, privilege and social elevation enacted on mass, the "children" of the balls wearing these signs in a hyperbolic submission. The great risk that the performances of re-signification take, which both the film and theorisation of the film are in danger of perpetuating, is that they re-idealise and reinforce the very norms which have refused these bodies social standing and reinforce their own status as excluded, transgressive, and outside the norm. As such, there is a risk that the drag ball community is perceived as a fantasy space that works to a fundamentally different rhythm from the "real" world, rather than, in a more radical Butlerian proposition, as a micro representation of the regulative performance of identities in a symbolic social space that is realness/fantasy. These risks are made evident

⁹⁹ Butler describes the regulative work of the social symbolic wherein, "The rules that regulate and legitimate realness (shall we call them symbolic?) constitute the mechanism by which certain sanctioned fantasies, sanctioned imaginaries, are insidiously elevated as the parameters of realness," and she would argue that these performances demonstrate a requirement for an "opening up of the possibilities for the resignification of sex" within the parameters of the symbolic (*Bodies that Matter* 130-31).

in the film by the tragic death of Venus Extravaganza.

Butler's profoundly serious view of a symbolic social space where the inculcation of norms is enacted and harsh recriminations are brought about for those that exceed or deviate from these norms, is seemingly rendered in stark contrast to a popular utopian view of a postmodern space of play, freedom and liberation to re-invent the self.¹⁰⁰ Wilson calls this, somewhat sceptically, a "postmodern playfulness"¹⁰¹ invoking that utopian perspective on a fragmenting world where all subject positions become possible and there for the taking. Pop star and diva Madonna is frequently referenced (both theoretically and popularly) as a woman who has made a career of experimentation with female identities, amongst other practices, and is celebrated as an icon of feminine re-invention and therefore an example of the fluid possibilities of performativity. She lives what Butler has called a popular desire for a "radical theatrical re-making of the body" which seems to be "out there in the public sphere."¹⁰² Her successive video and stage personas or make-overs demonstrate the adoption and discarding of various feminine types – the cross-dresser, the virgin, the whore, the "new age" techno-hippie and more recently as wife and mother, and the "respectable" Lady of the British manor. In these acts of changing masks she performs a game of accessing multiple subjectivities that are there for the taking and in so doing juxtaposing feelings, experiences and behaviours not traditionally available to women. This game is reinforced by her refusal to deliver up to spectators what Richard Dyer has called her "authentic self."¹⁰³ As such, the distinctions between actor and character, before and after, clothing and stage-costume become blurred. In another example, Madonna's "voguing" is a dance based on the re-citation,

¹⁰⁰ The notion of gender performance as it unfolds a theory of identity fluidity has been associated with a condition of the postmodern – the dissolution or death of the subject – although there is no explicit address of this matter in these terms or as a problem of postmodern cultural order or historical period in Butler's *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*. Evidencing an association between her writing and the notion of a coreless self, Roy Boyne has argued that Butler's work on performance is compatible with a view of late modern identity as coreless and citational. Roy Boyne, "Citation and Subjectivity: Towards a Return of the Embodied Will," *Body & Society* 5.2-3 (1999): 212.

¹⁰¹ Wilson, "Fashion and the Postmodern Body" 9

¹⁰² Peter Osborne and Lynne Segal, "Gender as Performance: An Interview with Judith Butler," *Radical Philosophy* 67 (1994): 33.

¹⁰³ Richard Dyer, "A Star is Born and the Construction of Authenticity," *Stardom*, ed. C. Gledhill (London: Routledge, 1991).

the adoption, of postures and gestures of catwalk fashion models and film-stars.

In that both Wilson and Hollander's accounts of dress performance set an identity manufactured, in turn, through the switches of disguise and the mixed clothing references disseminated via media, against a back-drop of postmodern playfulness, they point to the experiences of performance, fluidity, fragmentation, and multiplicity of identity as either a response to or a symptom of postmodernity. There is something in Wilson of an idea that postmodernism is an order which has descended or even imposed itself on us, ushering-in an *imperative to play* with identity and to *state*, as we have heard in an earlier essay, different aspects of identity – i.e. “one's personality, beliefs and even desires.”¹⁰⁴ But before exploring Wilson's account, in Hollander, postmodern culture – an uprooting flow of media's tidal wash of mixed references ¹⁰⁵ – has provided an opportunity for a mere expansion or addition of self-displaying ensembles without displacement in time or of character, an addition to an otherwise intact identity. The (Postmodern) person's multiplicity and freedom does little to displace the notion that there is a prior (modern) subject who responds to and negotiates these changes and orchestrates the practice of dress. Indeed, prior to this comment, she discusses the modern person's act, and so she confirms our suspicions that the postmodern has simply *added* an irreverent attitude to mixing past styles, to a similar game of transformation – “with no loss of personal identity or consistency” – practiced by the modern person.¹⁰⁶ Here, by identity she refers to a prior sense of subjectivity. In Hollander's performer there is little of the liminality which confuses actor and character, the subject's before and after, invoked by other theorists. Hollander thus remains committed to the category of “person,” for little has changed to the identity of the subject in the course of this game of self-representation, a game of adding sophistication to one's make-up. While Hollander suggestively refers to a “new world,” there is also little in her description of the performance which can assist us in answering whether it is a merely a response, a symptom of, an indicative sign of, a new

¹⁰⁴ Wilson, “All the Rage” 33.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Hollander who refers to a “new world of music video and free-wheeling, overlapping, uprooted, camera imagery” (*Sex and Suits* 166).

¹⁰⁶ Hollander, *Sex and Suits* 165. There is little room for any other conclusion when in this passage Hollander neither seeks to explain the term postmodernism nor to cross-reference discourses where the postmodern is debated.

cultural order, or whether it is more actively conceived in bringing about this “new world.”

In contrast, Wilson attempts a more comprehensive analysis of the state of “[p]ostmodern ‘fragmentation,’” particularly as it pertains to an experience of fragmenting identity rendered in a practice of dress which allows us to observe the confusions and complexities which arise in a notion of postmodern play. For her, first and foremost the term postmodernism is useful as a “portmanteau concept”¹⁰⁷ that can embody contradictory conditions; it can encapsulate living in a world that has been turned upside down with the disintegration of the Eastern European bloc, threats of ecological disaster, and general global instability; a world denuded of feeling; a utopian impulse to twist the excess of consumerism into a pleasure and more – an overwhelming world of upheaval which fragments experience. Wilson is sceptical of theoretical attempts to define the term postmodernism too closely for the term operates primarily as a “gesture” toward a set of changes at the cultural level and is useful for naming the “aestheticisation of dystopia” and the confusion of a social order which throws up many incompatibilities.¹⁰⁸ One of these is a paradox of identity as she grapples with the implications of theatrical dress practices for a thinking, which equates style and appearance with identity. Again she writes: “Perhaps style becomes a substitute for identity, perhaps its fluidity (in theory it can be changed at will) offers an alternative to the stagnant fixity of old-fashioned ideas of personality and core identity, perhaps on the contrary it is used to fix identity more firmly.”¹⁰⁹ The practice of styling highlights for Wilson a conundrum about whether the possibility of re-invention (referred to as fluidity) in fact challenges the notion of a core self, or instead re-instates it, and the agency of a wilful subject who decides and chooses one disguise from another along with it. If fluidity “substitutes” dress for core identity (“creating” identity with its fabrication(s) and replacing the one with the many), and if dress offers an alternative to the stagnant fixity of “old-fashioned ideas of personality and core identity” then, the subject who wills particular changes would not pass without

¹⁰⁷ Wilson, “Fashion and the Postmodern Body” 4.

¹⁰⁸ Wilson, “Fashion and the Postmodern Body” 4.

¹⁰⁹ Wilson, “Fashion and the Postmodern Body” 9.

question. Butler's solution to this problem would be to argue that, if dress is instead "used to fix identity more firmly" then this wilful agency is in fact an effect of repeated and centre-ing inscriptions enacted performatively in accordance with received norms, perhaps enacted in an attempt to affirm a certainty and fixity to identity. For Wilson, popular conceptualisations of identity as fluid appear to be a consequence of an enveloping condition that arrives with a sense of the fragmenting world of the postmodern and an imperative to play with the materials of dress as an opportunity to re-make and re-state identity. It is implied that the performers, those actors who work with style to re-invent identity, are in one sense "victims" of fashion which she describes earlier in the article as "a kind of compulsory pluralism of styles"¹¹⁰ and in another sense they operate actively as cultural practitioners. It should be made clear that while Wilson lays out for consideration some of the implications of what she calls dress's representational "writing," a creative and cultural production of identities, we should not be blinded, by the performer's dazzling display of identity options, from seeing that Wilson does not provide the answer to what finally happens to conceptualisations of identity. More precisely, she provides an answer that dress is a tool for creating and acquiring culturally relative meanings about identity, but this is not an answer to the issue of whether this practice will finally displace traditional notions of core identity. Ultimately, Wilson quite rightly does not commit to a position that holds subjectivity to *originate* in these cultural practices of making meaningful style. She maintains some distance from this notion and yet, if we remember her reasons for why "postmodern playfulness can never win the day," she introduces certain conceptual difficulties for her argument by arguing that there is a part of identity that cannot be changed. This point might seem at one level reasonable, however, when it is argued that it is the body that "we do not choose," does she intend us to calculate where the creative production begins and ends? It is as if Wilson wants to cut the transformations and mutations in identity enabled by playful acts of the wearer – say a clothed-body – down the middle, separating on one side the changing disguises/identities of clothing from, their other side, an unchanging body. It follows also that subjectivity, as "false" identity (in her words), is

¹¹⁰ Wilson, "Fashion and the Postmodern Body" 6.

separated from a *true* part of identity rooted in the body. In the absence of a careful argument that the cultural writing that positions the body in its cultural context is one that collapses the distinctions between truth and falsity, then there is a risk that this dichotomy remains in place. If Wilson's subject is split in this way, then that part of the self which resides in the body can easily be misconstrued as a true source of cultural productions – the site of some truth from which various acts emanate as representations. In fact, this takes Wilson very close to a traditional conception of self-expression which is argued by her elsewhere¹¹¹ and which is at odds with her attempt to establish an always already culturally relative position for the subject. And, here again, we can remember her earlier comment that, as the subject responds to an incitement to make a deliberative project of identity, clothes ritually *state* aspects of individual identity in relation to the collective and social place.

In seeking to link popular conceptualisations of identity, and observing an imperative to re-invent the self by mobilising the materials of dress, with quite distinct social changes in a vertiginous world debated under the term postmodernism, Wilson appears to echo the ideas of her contemporaries in sociological theory which argue that the loss of most traditional systems of meaning and social order in late modernity have made a deliberative project of re-ordering identity to compensate for an “ontological insecurity.”¹¹² Elsewhere Wilson writes that dress may “assuage that fear by stabilizing our individual identity,” referring to a condition of modernity which fears the loss of self-autonomy.¹¹³ Contemporary “postmodern” dress might be more of the same as individuals attempt to “glue the false identity together on the surface” and render identity less uncertain.¹¹⁴ A deliberative project of re-ordering identity appears to be consistent with what Wilson calls attempts to fix identity more firmly and what illuminated for her a

¹¹¹ Wilson in *Adorned in Dreams*, writes, “Fashion...[is] the most widespread medium for women's self-expression” (66).

¹¹² See Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (London: Polity Press, 1991). Giddens characterises humanity's condition in the approach to the 21st century, a “post-traditional” social order of late or high modernity, as a widespread scepticism to reason (i.e. all reasoning seems open to revision) “coupled with a recognition that science and technology are double-edged, creating new parameters of risk and danger as well as offering beneficent possibilities for humankind” (27-28).

¹¹³ Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams* 12.

¹¹⁴ Wilson, “Fashion and the Postmodern Body” 8-9.

conundrum about "postmodern playfulness." For us, what is significant in her formulation of the problem of identity, is that it allows us to see how perilously close the conception of identity as a performative production is brought to a notion of self-fashioning as an intentional and entrepreneurial activity of invention and re-invention, requiring will, hard-work, application and ingenuity, a conception which is further encouraged by a consumer rhetoric which orients the consumer to a buoyed-up sense of free choice. This latter conceptionalisation would appear to be at odds with the sense that the self is acquired and perfected through acts of styling and, exacerbated by a practical tendency to read external appearances as the manifestations of an idea or proposition of who the self *is*, is an indication of a capacity to manage self-display. By Giddens, it is argued that insecurity attempts resolution in an unprecedented emphasis on a project of individualisation. Paradoxically, one can see that this "project" might become susceptible to those entrepreneurial tendencies of the well-applied and disciplined individual. Contemporary "individualisation" refers to the pursuit of *difference* or distinction, through a self-fashioning and related life-stylisation (eg. the aestheticisation of all aspects of life to make a value statement – domestic tastes, leisure practices, possessions, as well as personal appearances)¹¹⁵ which firmly connects the pursuit of identity to the value-systems of consumerism, particularly the acquisition and replacement of goods based upon a liberal rhetoric of choice to select things which embody one's tastes. This rhetoric promotes a sense that there is no aspect of the self which cannot be acquired, altered or "overcome" if the subject chooses. We could illustrate this point with reference to the film Paris is Burning where it might be argued that the subjects documented in drag ball mode articulate the project of middle-America or American men and women "in general" to realise desires for security, economic success, celebrity-style, attractive body-image and even fame by applying the methods of dedication, entrepreneurship and self-possession celebrated in magazine celebrity profiles, sports advertising (Just Do It!) and

¹¹⁵ By turning lifestyle into a noun here, I hope to signify that it has become a definitive phenomenon, a thing and a practice that encompasses not only an absorption in personal appearance as a lifestyle statement (self-fashioning), but also a similar approach to choosing and decorating homes, buying cars, eating, cooking, hobbies, leisure, fitness and so on. The approach is defined by the aesthetic and symbolic organisation of a front to display beauty, taste and/or value. Aestheticisation is designed to convey the refinement of a look or appearance to encapsulate "personal style" (beauty, taste and/or value). See Celia Lurie, Consumer Culture (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996) 10-52, on the significance of life-style in consumer culture.

films such as Rocky 1 through to V.¹¹⁶ The re-invention of the self is taken up as a project, where one lives out the myth of self-transformation as a means to individuality.¹¹⁷

It is also argued, following Baudrillard, that the contemporary stage for this theatre of identity is a culture of the code, or in Butler's language a culture of citationality, where identity is verified through a citation of sources, instead of through some form of depth model of the self.¹¹⁸ Thus it is against such a backdrop that an impression of the de-centred performer has been formed as either a pleasuring or indifferent consumer who is constantly on the look-out for sources and images to "add value" to restless emptied souls on a relentless quest for difference in the construction of shifting, multiple and often fragmented identities.¹¹⁹ Sitting alongside a consumerist incitement towards individuality

¹¹⁶ Cf. Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993) 106.

¹¹⁷ In sociological terms, the pursuit of individualisation does not have to be at the expense of collective identifications which, following Georg Simmel's 1904 argument about fashion's manifestation of a tension between a desire for conformity *and* individual distinction, can today result in unresolved gestures toward both the poles of collective identification and individual difference say in contemporary dress. Georg Simmel, "Fashion," *On Individuality and Social Forms: Selected Writings* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1971). This tension can be thought today as the pursuit of a distinctive edge to an ensemble that might work to mark an individual from the group, while at the same maintaining affiliations. Here, the vestimentary and financial investments in the sports-shoe by urban youth (or *homies*) come to mind, evident in many of the world's cities, as they operate as labels of group affiliation but individual models are used to signify small differences in loyalty, technological advancement, even cash-flow. This has an effect of producing a conformity of (small) differences.

¹¹⁸ Boyne 211-12. Boyne elaborates on the culture of citationality – the intense cross referencing of citations – and its implications in the following words and example from Easton Ellis: "Late modernity has encouraged us to simulate and stimulate our selves and shop for our identities in cults, through films and at chain stores. As identities constructed statement by statement, performance by performance, we are made and confronted by cut and paste, with citations impeccable and publicly correct, and with discursive reaffirmations of sources providing guarantees of presence. The paradigm case is Brett Easton Ellis, *American Psycho*. This is a typical passage:

I take a hot shower and afterwards use a new facial scrub by Caswell-Massey and a body wash by Greune, then a body moisturiser by Lubriderm and a Neutrogena facial cream. I debate between two outfits. One is a wool-crepe suit by Bill Robinson I bought at Saks with this cotton jacquard shirt from Charivari and an Armani tie. Or a wool and cashmere sport coat with blue plaid, a cotton shirt and pleated wool trousers by Alexander Julian, with a polka-dot silk tie by Bill Blass. The Julian might be a little too warm for May but if Patricia's wearing this outfit by Karl Lagerfeld that I think she's going to, then maybe I will go with the Julian, because it would go well with her suit. The shoes are crocodile loafers by A. Testoni.

Identity in consumer society is secured by footnotes, but there is no core text to which they refer. Beyond the citation of sources, there is, to use Brett Easton Ellis's phrase 'Less than Zero.'

¹¹⁹ William Keenan, "From Friars to Fornicators: The Eroticization of Sacred Dress," *Fashion Theory* 3.4 (1999): 404. While addressing the "eroticisation" of sacral garments, in this essay Keenan describes the contemporary "face of fashion" as the consumer roaming a sign economy searching for sources to construct identity, somewhat indifferent to the traditional contexts of symbolism, but in no sense engaged in a meaningless enterprise.

and self-expressive acts of distinction, there is taking place an increasing codification of the individual or what Gilles Deleuze calls "dividuals" as the masses, samples, data, markets or banks of a society entranced and structured by information or data collection and exchange.¹²⁰ A way of thinking about fashioning identities is particularly prone to this bar-code consciousness, a data sampling, labelling or recognition of the "dividual" – as if one were deliberately wearing a label. Theoretically, the concept of "re-signification" can assist us to see that these labels are less than static and also to interpret the produced effect of "fluidity" or shifting identity, as identity is riven with the traces of meaning of various signs, commodities and images which are reproduced through each other as one sign becomes referred through another. Performativity, as re-signification, is a practice that not only takes place in time, but is also a temporal process wherein signs are reiterated in such a way that alters continuity. This is a little different from Wilson's rendering of fluidity as a changing of different discreet disguises and a series of successive appearances, which unfold *in*, rather than, *as* time. Fluidity, as re-signification, can point to both the transformations and form shifting of identity, and the non-continuity of identity formations. Also, we can now clarify what is meant by the effect of "fragmentation," a word that is frequently absent of meaning in the postmodern vocabulary when both the "what" and "how" of fragmentation are not examined. Fragmentation can refer to the effects of an identity riven with polysemous meanings, or even to the mixing of potentially disparate signifiers in the one body, with the result that multiplicity and contradiction penetrates a singularity of existence and even meaningful coherence.

Familiar inductions of "fluid subjectivity," which commonly takes it to mean being caught up in a kind of endless slide of referral of one signifier through another signifier, from one meaning to another meaning cross-referenced through another, seemingly opening onto a "vertiginous spiral"¹²¹ of overlaps and implications which can never come to an end, may appear gripped themselves by a "postmodern playfulness" which becomes

¹²⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

¹²¹ Vicky Kirby, Telling Flesh: The Substance of the Corporeal (London: Routledge, 1997) 60.

open to criticisms of exaggeration and scepticism. There is some intention to an "exaggeration" which seeks to point to the displacement and becomings of identity in moments of *excess*. But it also invites the challenge that life is not spent in a state of constant fluidity, groundlessness nor "ontological insecurity," and that one can usually mount a case that one knows exactly where one is and why particular choices are made. The moderate critic might concede that some portion of the self experiences a fluidity or de-centring while some other portion works to stabilise and/or re-correct, only to then find him or herself under obligation to not only draw a line between these two parts, but also to explain how it might be that the self comes in parts whose differentiation is not a matter of a signifying practice. But, as one begins to draw that line, the unconstructed or stable part itself is bounded by a signifying practice and that very boundary which was intended to demarcate that part of the self as clearly separate from re-signification is now defined by an act of construction. This takes us, then, close to an extreme constructionist position, which might purport that there is nothing outside signification, discourse, and culture. However, this would be a mistake for it is not to say that there is no "outside" to signifying practices, for it is rather to admit that there is an "outside" – here invoked as a stable or grounded part of the self – but that this outside is never absolute, and will always be thought in relation to signification, "at and as its most tenuous borders."¹²²

Embodied Doings and Re-presentations

Certainly, it becomes possible to understand theatricality – a theatre of identity – in different ways, i.e. as an intentional self-fashioning, a self-display, or performative constitution – and even to explore the resonances between them as we have been doing above, but it would be wrong to collapse these conceptions of identity entirely for Butler's theory of performance presents us with a more disturbing view of subjective formation.

In that it is also an attempt to displace the autonomous subject, we might make a contrast

¹²² Butler, Bodies That Matter 8.

with Gaines' conceptualisation of a dressed female subject who knows well what it is to be "fitted up for representation," although we must take heed that the distinction is one of degrees rather than polarities. For Gaines, being dressed as woman is to know what it is to be inscribed in "the codes of contemporary representation." The correlation between "woman as image" and "woman in/of dress" is grounded in the constitutive conventions or inscriptions of received ideas about femininity which undo the ties to naturalism or essence. While without a doubt Gaines conceives dress practice in a cultural order where representation spills off the 2-D page and mediates reality in the sense of mediating a woman's perception of herself, this conception holds an understanding of dress and identity very close to display and a practice of *depicting* the self. If dress is a mode of constructing the self, self-production becomes an exercise in depicting or representation; the dressed and moving subject is a walking representation. It would be analogous to saying that performance results in a *product*, like an image, which is a representation or symbol of the subject who performs in a productive act which has something to show of its content. Self-production through theatricality – the fabrication, fashioning, constitution of the subject – would be perceived as display, perhaps even intentional self-display of content. Here, self-production is conceived in primarily visual and, ultimately, spatial terms.

Butler's view of performance more actively seeks a distance from a representational framework. In Bodies that Matter, she clarifies her position in Gender Trouble that performance, and consequently the subjective positioning which is its effect, is certainly not a bounded act. She writes:

...performance as bounded "act" is distinguished from performativity insofar as the latter consists in a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer's "will," or "choice"; further, what is "performed" works to conceal, if not to disavow, what remains opaque, unconscious, unperformable.¹²³

Performance does not have to be conceived as a bounded act that the performer is in

¹²³ Butler, Bodies that Matter 234.

charge of or manages. In fact, the subject is not a cultural product of anything like a single act, but part of a temporal process of materialisation whereby matter (i.e. real bodies) is re-conceived as a sedimentation over time, rather than as simply a site or surface where identity is displayed. An "act" or moment would be an emergence within a fluid formation, which has no claim to discreteness or exteriority. An important point would be, for Butler, that one can not produce a *representation* of the *content* of an act, as if to procure a discrete entity which is the identity of a subject. And in this sense, the subject is not produced in accordance with a pre-determined representational content. Thus while it might seem certain that a subject *has* its own identity, an identity which is resolutely materialised in the body, this is only because reiteration "conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition."¹²⁴ Butler's formulation directs us to a thinking of the embodied enactments or *re-presentations* where theatricality is conceived as a *doing* over time. While display is certainly one of the outcomes of the activity of performance and the predominant mode of *knowing* identity, the performance is more accurately the whole being, and the visual is not the only way in which the representation of this knowledge is performed and understood. At this point, it is suffice to say that Butler's formulation becomes a reminder that spatial and temporal processes of materialisation, visible and invisible elements, are inseparable from one another.

Retreat from Nature

Of all those who have written about fashion, René König has come as close as any to capturing its tantalising and slippery essence. He sees fashion's perpetual mutability, its death wish, as a manic defence against the human reality of the changing body, against ageing and death. Fashion, Barthes' "healing goddess" substitutes for the real body an abstract, ideal body; this is the body as an idea rather than as an organism. The very way in which fashion constantly changes actually serves to fix the idea of the body as unchanging and eternal. And fashion not only protects us from reminders of decay; it is also a mirror held up to fix the shaky boundaries of the psychological self. It glazes the shifty identity, freezing it into the certainty of image.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Butler, *Bodies that Matter* 111.

¹²⁵ Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams* 58.

When first speaking of the performer, Wilson's talk of *costumes* and *disguises* is enough to alert us to a problem or risk which might jeopardise her attempt to displace the subject, the explanation of which can justify the lengthy quote above that encapsulates in elegant terms a quite commonplace understanding of fashion and its relationship to the body. A mobilisation of *disguise* refers us to a thinking of "putting-on" costumes – costumes that are premised upon a detachment from the physical body and that conceal more than they reveal – for the costume conceals so that the subject can be released into an arena of artifice or anti-nature. Above, Wilson confirms her thinking of fashion's transformative powers as an attempt to convert the body into an abstract idea premised on a retreat from the organism. Yet, we have already heard her remark that the "recalcitrant body" represents a block or resistance to full, as it were, re-invention and total absorption into the mask – it is the difference that the body introduces to the play-act which, for her, foils attempts to choose identity.¹²⁶

The risk in a discourse on construction is that the performative body is conceived as a kind of manipulable artifice separate from the physical body. This is what we find above in Wilson and produces, for her, an instance of the conundrum of identity conceived as superficial mask. In her description of freezing and fixing a detachable mask for the body, there is little of the liminality which confounded the separateness of a body, the performance and its constitutive effects which is spelt out in Butler's account of gender performance as a process of embodied formation. Such accounts of masks are unable to achieve the proposition that is central to the constructionist argument – i.e. that the embodied subject is constructed or constituted in its cultural context. Wilson indicates such an argument when she writes that clothes "'write' or 'draw' a representation of the body into our cultural context."¹²⁷ While a mask becomes a useful device for mediating access to the "essence" of the wearer – indeed as a metaphor for construction it is designed to block our access to any essence – can it actually identify how this essence is *constituted*? Before we go on, it should be noted that constructionist arguments have given overdue recognition to the importance of accumulated culturally relative effects

¹²⁶ Wilson, "Fashion and the Postmodern Body" 8-9.

¹²⁷ Wilson, "Fashion and the Postmodern Body" 6.

and acquired codes/languages to the creation of individual and collective differences. However, is the mobilisation of masks able to take the argument as far as it would like, to arrive at the radical project of demonstrating how identity is constructed, created, and constituted? Are they able to tell us about the emerging reality or nature of the performative body who inhabits his/her mask, a mask which is completely in-formed by the acting of bodily shape, size, gesture, movement and pose, enacting cultural ideas, signs and forms? What is meant here, is that we cannot finally remove the question of the performer's material reality and its relation to representation and cultural production. For if a culture of representation is said to constitute an object, then material reality and a physical body would be constantly rewritten and transformed. It takes such an acknowledgment for representation to *matter*. If there is indeed no outside of the sphere of cultural production, then the differential of cultural production would have to be apparent or enacted in the performative body's clothes, movement, breath, pose and surroundings.

There are a couple of implications which flow from the metaphor of masks. For one, the mask formulation presupposes a subject who is concealed behind it and therefore introduces a problem of a voluntarist subject who manipulates the mask, a subject that is on many occasion being questioned by a constructionist discourse. That is, voluntarism arises from a sense that the mask can be manipulated and re-ordered, as a symbolic content, released from concern for its material support. This sense could rehabilitate a notion of core identity that was particularly the focus for re-conceptualisation in Butler's account of performance. Secondly, the mask too easily maintains a distinct identity as an attachable object, a manipulable artifice. This presents certain difficulties for the scholar in that the mask appears to harbour certain bodily secrets underneath and it becomes difficult to assess the degree to which the disguise extends. On the one hand, perhaps the notion of construction can't be thought in terms of degrees, yet, on the other hand, surely the construction of the subject is a differential operation which produces elements with distinctions in material form, affect and meaning.

Significantly, it is the notion that the performance and the performative body is a

subjective *proposition* (an idea) and an objective representation (i.e a mask), that is put into question by the brief view or glimpse of Butler's performer who is caught up in an unbounded fabric of interactions and enveloping and vertiginous folds of referential meaning without end. As a notion of a unified and interior actor-subject diminishes it is replaced by an impression of a "subject" who is part of a network of interrelating and fluid subject positionings. It is the nature of subjectivity itself which determines the complexities of putting its play into language and can account for certain contradictions which arise in various attempts to displace the certainty of the subject. The nature of the subject is a theatre of performing language games which is to say that no stage, no theatre will contain it and, certainly, no attempts to perfect a mask can capture its full meaning.¹²⁸ Consequently, the revelation is not that performance is an expression of a social identity which can be revelatory about a character, but rather that the performer realises the play of subjectivity itself in the becomings of performances.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the figure of the performer has been of assistance to act-out several tasks simultaneously, some of which were descriptive and introductory – clearly pieces of a bigger puzzle that needed to be set into place for both the analysis that followed and later discussions – whilst others were more analytical in intent.

By analysing some of the language and ideas that have helped to shape the performer, we have also been reviewing the theoretical underpinnings of a post-semiotic discourse on dress. To do this it was necessary to outline descriptively the theoretical framework of constructionism that has informed dress studies and to take note of the reservations about, and the outright rejections of, the proposition that clothes are a language. In spite of this, there remains an adherence within sections of the field in regards to the status of clothing as something like statements or articulations of identity. It is in this context that certain references to performance appear, being less to do with an analysis of particular

¹²⁸ Phillippe Lacoue-Labarthe, "The Response of Ulysses," *Who Comes After the Subject?*, ed. Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, Jean-Luc Nancy (New York and London: Routledge, 1991) 198.

ensembles of clothes, and more to consider the playful articulation of subjectivity itself. More precisely, the notion of subjectivity as a construction, as a consequence of acquired codes crafted into a front or mask. Performance becomes, then, a way to describe a way of dressing, fashioning, a process of changing clothes to change identities. According to the representational framework which governs this conceptualisation of dress, performance is understood as a process of productive acts of dressing where certain culturally conceived norms are re-enacted as a re-signifying practice to fashion the self. It is in rendering performance as signifying practice that we find evidence of a residual thinking that identity might be an objectifiable thing, a representational *content* which can be captured in and stated via the masks that are crafted from clothes and worn in acts of self-display.

While doing this we have encountered the minefield of terms – costume, dress, fashion and clothing – used in reference to contemporary relations with the clothing artifact. The language of costume has appeared in conjunction with the performer, to imply that something like masquerade is part of contemporary relations with clothing.

This chapter has also set in place, via Butler's exposition of gender performance, a very preliminary thinking of a performative body whose "doings" allow us to see that there might be vital and organic dimensions of wearing clothes (which supplement representation). The following chapters will slowly unfold a more comprehensive understanding of the doings of the wearer – a performative body – as relational exercises sustained through complex incorporations.

With respect of the references to a performer and a performance which articulates identity in the discourse of dress studies it might seem incongruous, or more precisely unnecessary, to insist that it is a clothed-body which is performing. Add to this the explosion of cultural studies material on performativity and embodiment, and this necessity only seems to dissolve, as the material points to dress as a fundamental arena for the analysis of embodied performance and articulation of identity. The implications of the theoretical paradigm of performativity are yet to be fully explored in dress studies and

the applications of this paradigm to dress are only currently emerging in dress and cultural studies. While it is difficult to miss the simple point that clothes are embodied, there is enough to indicate that attention has been very focused in dress studies on the clothing surfaces and their communications, to the point that the clothes appear to be speaking without their fleshy, performing and mobile substrate. The modes of incorporating dress, in addition to imagery and discursive productions, remain largely unexplored as relational exercises of dress and bodies.

Chapter 3

Corporeal Complexity – The Scenography of Construction

In the introduction to a seminal anthology on dress and fashion, the editors Shari Benstock and Suzanne Ferriss offer an opening for the collection of essays that follow: “A central concern is not only the clothes that cover our bodies but the bodies we recover under our clothes. How does fashion shape the body to its changing ideals?”¹ If this is a statement of intent, the word *recover* is quite compelling; what is meant by it? What understanding of *bodies* do they seek to recover? In using the plural, do they in fact seek to retrieve different ways of knowing bodies? How does one differentiate a body, “the bodies” so to speak, from the familiar hermeneutic identity of fashion as that which produces variations on a theme of embodiment? By this I mean, in the covering and re-covering of bodies, there is a popular conception as discussed in chapter 2, that the life of a body is replayed as countless deaths and reincarnations as different interpretive themes of identity in a performance that is likened to wearing masks or fronts. “Life” and “vitality” become attributes signified by the mask or re-coverings, and properties of the code. Significantly, it is frequently argued that from within the rich intertext of cultural reference that one cannot access an unmade, ungroomed or natural body that is not in someway marked or “clothed” by cultural meaning.

The authors’ reconnaissance mission can be linked to an active area of academic scholarship which seeks to reconceptualise Western conceptions of self-hood that have traditionally denigrated the body in preference for the ethereal or mind-based self. Also, it will be argued that by privileging self as immaterial these conceptions, by extension, have denigrated general materiality as well. Not apart from the obvious counter-point that the mind is lodged in the bodily frame, both the stuff of the material body and the practice of being a body is a “limiting horizon of some sort, perhaps *the* limiting horizon

¹ Shari Benstock and Suzanne Ferriss, introduction, *On Fashion*, ed. Benstock and Ferriss (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1994) 3.

of what is possible and impossible in the human condition.”² It is not incidental that clothes are together with the stuff of the body at this horizon, in some form or other. Is it that the authors’ want to investigate what it is possible to recover of this limit? What might be recovered under the name of “bodies”? What might be retrieved or recovered from underneath or amidst clothes? For one, to speak of recovering bodies is to seek a more explicit exposition of the relationships of clothes and bodies, fashion and bodies, which according to Elizabeth Wilson has had little academic attention.³ Without the company of clothes, the body undressed has traditionally been conceived as incomplete and in need of the completion and cultural intelligibility of clothes. So, the clothed body has been seen as complete, clothes effectively shielding and blocking access to the limiting horizon, and consequently having complicity in defining the limit as *limit*. For this reason, the body underneath the clothes has been frequently perceived as a coat-hanger or clothes horse for the garments which re-cover and animate it, clothes transforming body rather than the other way around – i.e. the body animating clothes. In philosophical terms, a series of metaphysical oppositions flow from this traditional apprehension of a relationship which positions clothes and bodies with respect to the coordinates of intelligibility or raw material, activity or passivity, presence or absence, change or stasis, and those categories which separate the cultural from the natural, self (clothes) from non-self (body). In contrast, both fashion and clothing have been cast as a frivolous, or unnecessary addition, an appendage of artifice to the body, giving rise to another pervasive opposition that sets the body as nature against excessive culture. In contrast to these traditional castings, what alternative ways exist to recover the relationships of a body with clothes and their entailments, as they connect to the question of the possibility of the human condition? Therefore, this chapter takes up the authors’ opening, as an opportunity to ask related questions and follow particular lines of inquiry to address these.

Like Benstock and Ferriss, Wilson, in her essay “Fashion and the Postmodern Body,”

² Kirby102.

³ Wilson, “Fashion and the Postmodern Body” 9. Apart from making the point that relatively little has been written about the relationship of fashion to the body, she also writes, “the study of fashion has an important role to play in bringing forward a consideration of the body in cultural studies” (15).

aspires to explore the relationship of fashion and bodies, marking a route through the formulations of Foucault on disciplinary and self-regulative body practices, to pursue a revision of a Feminist preoccupation with fashion as a power which largely oppresses women, subordinating a woman's agency and resistance to the persuasion of ultra-thin body styles. She describes fashion's shaping of the body as a negotiation with the limitations of corporeal possibility, as she writes:

As anyone who has tried to diet knows, it is actually rather difficult radically to alter the shape of one's body. Yet dress and adornment in virtually all cultures have been used to do precisely this: from tattooing and neck rings to the dyeing and curling of hair and the use of high heels, both women and men have worked hard to produce a "different" body.⁴

Traditionally, the labour of transformation would be invested in converting the coat-hanger (nothing) into *something* of shape and value ("a different body"), but instead it might illuminate the possibility of constructing and disseminating a *range* of different bodies, as well as the difficulty of pointing to 'the body' as a contained and bounded entity at all. In addition, amidst the desire for transformation, Wilson recovers an identity for the body that resists the rhetoric of complete fluidity and multiplicity – remembering her comments about the body's "recalcitrance." As such, she observes a limit to fashion's productive force as power, a limit where corporeal transformation is contested. She observes a body that resists being appropriated under the terms of transformation – i.e. the constraint of fashion's disciplinary measures.

Earlier in the same essay remember that Wilson describes dress as a textual and pictorial process by which culture attempts possession of bodies: "Dress is a cultural metaphor for the body, it is the material with which we 'write' or 'draw' a representation of the body into our cultural context." Here, she imagines a translating production and rhetorical displacement of bodies, similar to the traditional apprehension of incomplete body

⁴ Wilson, "Fashion and the Postmodern Body" 10. Note the Foucauldian perspective remains only an echo in the article, as she suggests that fashioning could be thought as a self-disciplinary practice. Her discussion about women's uniforms in British prisons and their relinquishment, establishes only a "virtual" link rather than an example that historically coincides with Foucault's study of the prison.

outlined above, from “King Lear’s ‘poor forked thing’”⁵ into articulate, visible, meaningful, and culturally groomed beings. She also conceives the process of transformation into intelligibility to be like a *writing* or *drawing* by which a body acquires meaning and attributes by the inscription of marks or etching lines – by order of dress’ inscriptive marks a body acquires a viable enunciative position as a cultural subject. As writing, dress illuminates the layers of mediation inserted by representational structures into the cultural context, between a wearer and their dress, between a representation and its “reader” or observer, between a wearer and their “reader-observer.” As a mediating and inscriptive apparatus, dress invites further consideration of the discourses and images of fashion which structure dress codes, the systems which order these codes and determine the shape of bodily presentation. If “writing” refers to the production of bodies as different dressed representations of socialised being, then what room is there for thinking about a body that *resists* writing? Is the resistance to be appropriated and quashed by the constitutive force of writing? The bodies to be written appear to be in need of the mark of the social to signify: “Clothes socialise our bodies, transforming them from King Lear’s ‘poor forked thing’ into the cultural being.” In addition in regards to bodily material, if clothes are said to shape the body to the changing ideals of fashion, then what is the material to be shaped? If it is by way of inscriptive productions that the material body is said to appear in fashion’s latest shape, then in what way do these representations *refer* to materiality? What is at stake in these two lines of questioning is a real fleshy body – resistant and/or material – caught up in the folds of cultural being. As a metaphor for the mediation of dress, if the writing or drawing that attempts to capture an insufficiency or bodily absence, is delimited to the realm of metaphor – a body translated through meaning – can this purported absence, lack or resistance be either recovered or transformed? Or is it always destined to fail?

To address these questions, this chapter explores provocative poststructuralist discussions about language and the body, broaching the pressing concern of bodily materiality and facticity via the long and necessary routes of textualism. It is necessary to take this path

⁵ Wilson, “Fashion and the Postmodern Body” 6.

in order to firstly, do justice to the complexity of thinking encapsulated in these discussions and secondly, to better understand the tensions that arise in dress studies interpretation that has followed a route charted by methods of the sign and text to “map” the body inscribed by clothes and fashion. With respect to a definitive contribution to a virtual library of “body thought,” it is generally held that a poststructuralist would emphasise that there is no body in itself. In broad terms, textualism, now quite frequently used derisively, refers to an understanding of the constitution of a representational sphere as language “burst(s) the boundaries of its conventional articulation”⁶ to intermix inscriptive productions – signs, the pictographic, the graphic, the ideographic – with the real and the physical. With respect to bodies, the notion that there is a body in itself is rejected in favour of a discursive body, a body that is embedded in the “orders” of language, power and signification, and to some extent desire, a desire that is linguistically pre-figured by language, power and signification. Related to this is a fundamental acknowledgment of difference, where culture and all that it entails – discourse, concepts, representation – rather than biology *marks* bodies, constituting the specific conditions in which they live and reproduce themselves. While the lessons of the text have swept the humanities and cultural studies and become standard fare within the identifying terms of poststructuralist and postmodern critique, critics have identified textualism as a delimiting linguisticism or discursive determinism. One of the consequences of this linguisticism, it is argued, is the category of matter has been dissolved in “an acid bath of rhetoric” by the efforts to dissolve the centred subject via the work of external determinants such as language.⁷ In *Bodies that Matter*, Judith Butler has considered this critique, along with her own commitment to the insights of what she calls a constructionist position, and expresses reservations about the position widely held in feminist theory that argues “the body is a cultural construction” in such a way that identifies it as so-called constructionism, brings admonishments about real flesh and blood body, and defences of an eating, shitting entity. This chapter will discuss Butler’s rigorous questioning of the constructionist argument as she has directed it toward feminist and critical theory, and also consider Vicky Kirby, Sue Best and Adrian

⁶ Kirby 52.

⁷ Kirby 102. Kirby characterises the view of these critics, rather than advocating this point of view.

McKenzie's responses to Butler.⁸ In sum, the discussions address issues of language, complex systems of representation, contingencies, power and bodies, and argue that the critics would have it that matter is absolutely *outside* language, coupling matter with the insistence and immediacy of experience. Part of their task is to explain why this position remains problematic. In an essay from 1989, there is some insight into the framing of a Butlerian "take" on the constructionist position that she correctly writes is connected with Foucault. She posits:

To claim that "the body is culturally constructed" is, on the one hand, to assert that whatever meanings or attributes the body acquires are in fact culturally constituted and variable. But note that the very construction of the sentence confounds the meaning of "construction" itself. Is "the body" ontologically distinct from the process of construction it undergoes?⁹

Butler illuminates, here, the paradox of the grammatical formulation which appears to contest its own premise by suggesting there is a body which is outside of the operations of culture, language and representation. The paradox illuminates the contradictions that circulate in the discourse of construction with regard to the concession to a bodily facticity, and to the drawing of a limit to culture or language's knowledge of a flesh and material body. As she explores the notion of bodily inscription, a point to note is Butler's assertion that she does not seek to write a theory of construction per se, yet her contribution has been extremely ground-breaking, opening up a space for responses to her unprecedented questioning of "the discourse of construction that has for the most part circulated in feminist theory."¹⁰ What distinguishes Butler's contribution is her refusal, as Kirby insightfully characterises, to "simply endorse the clichés of much postmodern writing while at the same time embracing many of its insights."¹¹ In Bodies that Matter, Butler's inquiry about bodily inscription is staged around what she calls the "scenography and topography of construction" as a scene which matters to critical theory, to theories of

⁸ Kirby; Sue Best, Flesh of the World, diss., University of Sydney, 1996; Adrian McKenzie, "Technical Materialisations and the Politics of Radical Contingency," Australian Feminist Studies 14.29 (1999): 105-18.

⁹ Judith Butler, "Foucault and the Paradox of Bodily Inscriptions," The Body, ed. Donn Welton (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1999) 307.

¹⁰ Butler, Bodies That Matter xi.

¹¹ Kirby 101.

representation and to feminist theory.¹² Her contribution is that the poststructuralist scene of textual production, the matter of the text, is shown to bear upon sexual politics where certain irreducibles like sex, as a variant of materiality, essence or biology, have operated to ground critical feminist practice – both essentialist and anti-essentialist positions. The logic, here, is that an anti-essentialist position is also by definition essentialist. She argues that the constitution of materiality and sex is so vitally important to the social symbolic in general, where the legitimation of certain bodies mean that heterosexual versions of the sexed body matter much more than those others which do not fit the prescribed norm. For these political reasons she convinces that the scenography of construction bears closer scrutiny, as she seeks to disarm the safety of rigidly secured theoretical positions or the clichéd.

The scrutiny brought upon constructionism is relevant to dress studies in that it invites and inspires the formulation of questions with which this chapter commenced such as whether the body is figured as part of the constructions of identity and the site of clothing's inscribing effects, bearing constructions in such a way that its materiality is not accounted for? In contrast, is it dissolving under the trace of clothes? Is it possible to recover this site and draw it out from within the cultural context whose marks it receives? After Benstock and Ferriss's (poststructuralist) gesture to recover the body, I began the task of enquiring after the motivations and theoretical methods of recovery in the wider field of dress studies. But this work cannot seriously commence until this chapter's end, following an outline of the debate about poststructuralism. The important point to make at this stage is that dress can illuminate the significance of this debate between poststructuralist theory and its critics, for what *is* dress but one part a screen upon which various projections are cast, and another part corporeal presence. It is necessary to remember that to study "the clothes that cover our bodies"¹³ is usually to study *bodies*

¹² Note that the title of this thesis chapter borrows from Butler's phrase to revisit the theoretical discussions about this scene.

¹³ Benstock and Ferriss, "Introduction" 3.

clothed (whether as person, image, or painting), and it may not be necessary to recover a body, for a body is already *there* in the clothes. It will be useful, then, to review at the end of this chapter the way in which clothed embodiment and the differences between bodies and clothes have been framed theoretically. The main point will be that the materiality of a body in dress is like dress studies' unexplored ground, that which is surprisingly inaccessible to analytical inquiry as that taken-for-granted foundation. This is not a materiality "outside" clothes but very much inside its confines, integral to the representations and physical practices of dress. Undoubtedly because of the direction of poststructuralist scholarship towards the body in/as/of the text, a difference is perceived to exist – if not a distance – between the now commonplace understanding of clothes as representational projections of a body (to make different bodies), and an understanding of the physical body that is transformed.¹⁴ A body has been captured and posited into the rich fabric of symbolism and inter-textuality, and textual signs bear upon a body inscribing it with effects, but little understanding of how these signs come to inhabit and be inhabited by the body arrives along with these inscriptions. It can be argued that the status of the body as a disembodied representation of dress has become disarticulated and distanced from that view of the body as a corporeal dimension. It is precisely such a gap that holds open the oppositions between a material body and an intelligible body, a natural body and a cultural body, matter and appearance. Yet, such a distance would need to be bridged if representations actually entail changes to material bodies. Quite simply, by reviewing a discussion that outlines the complexities of the relationship of language and the body, this chapter will be locating appropriate theoretical tools to address the body of the clothed text and the theoretical formulations in dress studies. My intention in this chapter is to consider several theoretical endeavours to open what Judith Butler and Joan Scott have called "empirically restrictive 'examples' of language"¹⁵ to the scenography of construction, and as they seek to establish a definition of discourse and

¹⁴ The alliances of clothes and bodies foster a complexity for the scholar, as the relationships encompass both representational and material corporeal dimensions. As Cavallaro and Warwick confer in their recent exposition of the clothes and body relationship: "it is arduous to determine to what extent dress contributes to, or indeed confirms, the body's status as a disembodied representation, and to what extent dress, as a material phenomenon in its own right, reinforces a view of the body as an irreducibly corporeal dimension" (4).

¹⁵ Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, eds., *Feminists Theorize the Political* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992) xv.

textuality which is open to corporeality. As such, by re-tracing the movements of a meta-theoretical discussion that involves considerable complexity, it aspires to lay a foundation to conceive of the constructions of dress to be inclusive of an active corporeality. In a similar gesture, this thesis seeks an opening to a corporeality which is an active part of the productivity of construction where corporealities as both constraints and possibilities are negotiated, interpreted and contested. It will do this by developing the tools to understand a performative body who enacts and sustains self-identifications through complex incorporations, such as the clothing object and all of its entailments.

Setting-Up the Scene

Significantly, a close scrutiny of the “scenography of construction” bears upon a consideration of the macro perspective of an embodied subject’s placement with respect of a complex system like fashion. In chapter 2, it was mentioned that fashion has been conceptualised as a force of power – a subsuming force – and a representational force as a system of signification. It was also mentioned that there was a flirtation with the conceptualisation of fashion’s force in terms of the productivity or outcome of discursive power, which can be associated with Foucault. In this sense, fashion can be thought as inscribing the cultural with prescriptive ideals of appearance, establishing a network of constraint and potential homogenisation, as people are impelled to reproduce these ideals.¹⁶ Butler’s notion of discursive performativity can enable the analysis of fashion as a network of articulations – both conceived as the constitutive force of signified value or the force of discursive power – which materialise as *enactments*, and set parameters around the styles of flesh to shape the materialisations of the fashion person. In Butler’s

¹⁶ As it was implied in Chapter 2 (footnote 48), the connection with Foucault is a potential, yet to be fully realised in theoretical terms, as a way to explore further the observation that fashion is a force to which certain people fall victim, a sense that operates in dress theory and popular discourse (see Rabine 59-60). There are varying opinions in dress theory about the applications of a Foucauldian approach to fashion. Benstock and Ferriss argue that analysts of fashion have “repeatedly turned to Foucault” but, in that little evidence of detailed expositions (expositions that take the connection beyond the suggestive) actually exist, fashion as a textual site of inscription is yet to be fully explored and evaluated (“Introduction” 8). Two exceptions that advance Foucault’s concept of inscription a little further are Kim Sawchuk’s “Tales of Inscription” and Joanne Entwistle, “Fashion and the Fleishy Body: Dress as Embodied Practice,” *Fashion Theory* 4.3 (2000): 323-48.

hands, the performative speech act is able to refer to the structuring of a discursive field or network as a space of lived and embodied practice; more precisely, it refers to the appearance of "discursive performativity ...to produce that which it names, to enact its own referent, to name and to do, to name and to make."¹⁷ As such, performativity becomes a means to flesh out her theory in Gender Trouble about the enactments of received gender norms which, as introduced in chapter 2, "surface as so many styles of the flesh." A performative body's enactments would be a form of cultural iterability or the rearticulation of norms that circulate in discourse; in fact, discourse is reliant for its materialisation, its productive capacity, on the bodies which speak and enact its "force." Mobilising performativity, fashion can be thought with respect of a network of writings, images and performances which establish sometimes non-consensual and conflicting discourses on fashionability, that are all the same seductive and powerful forms which people are impelled to approximate, materialising subject positions.

Again, this chapter will examine the writings of four feminist writers which engage with the premises of much recent poststructuralist theoretical work on the body, through the considered formulation of questions about the theoretical representation of culturally groomed corporeal life. In the simplest of terms for now, a simplicity which belies the complexities involved, Butler carefully negotiates the question "in what sense can language be said to refer to materiality?" or in Butler's words, "is language also the very condition under which materiality may be said to appear?"¹⁸ In that these feminist inquiries would be situated academically as philosophy of the body, these engagements will be able to assist me to pursue a consideration of the relationships of clothes and bodies, into a meta-theoretical debate about corporeal life and complex systems, pursuing particular threads to the forefront of debate in philosophy of the body.

In that the following writers dare to broach the question of living matter from within an academic paradigm of constructionism that has been more concerned with the changing pictures of our world and their imponderable inter-textuality than with an intersection of

¹⁷ Butler, Bodies that Matter 107.

¹⁸ Butler, Bodies That Matter 31.

these interpretive acts with material realities, then it is possible to set their questions against a broader context of speculations about post-evolutionary life. As such, these writings take critical theory a step closer towards the cutting edge of cultural studies where fascinating intersections with the sciences of bio-technology, bio-medical practices of genetic engineering in the fields of biology and medicine, and virtual or artificial life have forced a re-negotiation with the "biological" as a transforming, resistant and complicated presence.¹⁹ This cutting edge of cultural studies distinguishes itself from, what Kirby refers to as the "stance that permeates much contemporary discourse in cultural studies" which is the once widespread tendency to "prohibit any mention of biology as inappropriate to critical theory."²⁰ The complexity of reasons for cultural studies to express an indifference to biology, at the very least, are not to be dismissed and will be addressed in the following discussion through the problematic of essentialism. For Kirby to pitch such an indifference in the violent language of "prohibition" is a sure signal of the kind of courageous turn that was required to speak biology in feminist circles, a turn away from the blind-fold, "a frightened reflex that only reinvests in the prescriptive determinisms that we now have the means to contest."²¹ All of the writings to be considered are informed by a gesture like Kirby's "turn" to point to a new direction, a gesture which is well versed in the complexities and risks of the slightest of such turns, in that they indicate an opening in which living matter appears to be inhabiting the performativity of language. This activity of living matter, it is convincingly argued by Kirby and Best, is an integral part of the Derridean grammatical textile or the texture and movement of the world where the performativity of language is enacted as a "scene of writing" that includes matter. In what Kirby calls "a shifting scene of inscription that both writes and is written"²² a body is a product of an interweaving, of the marked and marking movement, which transforms a conventional understanding of writing as the

¹⁹ For example see the anthology George Robertson et al., *FutureNatural: nature, science, culture* (London: Routledge, 1996); Anne Balsamo, *Technologies of the Gendered Body* (Durham: Duke University, 1996); See *Australian Feminist Studies* 14.29 (1999) for an issue on "Feminist Science Studies" which includes Annemarie Jonson's essay, "Still Platonic After all these Years: Artificial Life and Form/Matter Dualism," (47-58) and Catherine Waldby's essay, "Iatro Genesis: The Visible Human Project and the Reproduction of Life" (77-89).

²⁰ Kirby 98.

²¹ Kirby 98.

²² Kirby 61.

inscription of a pen on a blank page. This challenging re-conceptualisation of writing will take time to explain as it is unfolded over this chapter.

Such a discussion is "vital" in a contemporary theoretical context which anticipates that the terms "dress" and "fashion" are used to refer to practices of body-modification such as tattooing and piercing, and where the longstanding historical union of dress and body is illuminated as a pertinent example of a mediating construction or technological apparatus, a technology of bodily re-design. As Cavallaro and Warwick write,

Dress, in some respects, is a more traditional, yet no less timely, co-operating factor in a deluge of contemporary mechanisms of mediation that rely heavily on the artificial, the simulated, the hyperreal, virtual spaces, cyberspaces and the electronic realm, and that serve to problematize with perhaps an unprecedented intensity the relationship between the biological and technological bodies and concomitantly, the body's relation to both space and time.²³

To those who imagine dress as a mediating construction, from what direction does mediation arrive? Is it conceived that the biological body has a role to play in such a problematisation of a body-subject's relation to space and time? If the activity of dress as technology of re-design is conceptualised against this backdrop of speculation into body matter in a range of social and scientific spheres, then the conceptual ambiguities of the body and dress "alliance" can be considered as "one of the most inveterate incarnations of the fusion of the natural and the constructed."²⁴ In chapter 5, it will be shown that the techno-biological constructions of dress are able to highlight this issue of a body's place in relation to space and time.

In this current chapter it will be illuminated that the concept of a performative body (which is to be brought to the study of wearing) is indebted to two theoretical traditions of constructionism and phenomenology. As well as being able to illuminate the essential premise of a constructionist argument that there are potentially infinite meanings that a body can acquire in its movements as cultural entity, the performative body demands a thinking with respect of a phenomenological field, where a body is situated in time and

²³ Cavallaro and Warwick 4-5.

²⁴ Cavallaro and Warwick 5.

space, while acknowledging this body's situation at the borders of a culture which constantly challenges its finitude and re-writes existence in the flesh. It can be shown that to appreciate the living body in its complexities, or more precisely to point to complexities which cannot simply be grasped as an undifferentiated presence, as a pure "entity" or absence to be imported into dress studies analysis, one needs to be able to look across these two theoretical traditions. In doing so, this chapter aspires to begin to flesh-out another dimension of the embodied experience of wearing to "add" to the exposition of performance offered in chapter 2 of a culturally processed performer shaped by the discourses of fashion and identity. However, it is also the purpose of this chapter to underline why, in seeking to address the performative body as a living system of wearing, as a fusion of the natural and the constructed, that the issue is more complicated than addressing dress studies with a corrective gesture which seeks to either add or re-insert a living body into clothes, or to unveil a (animate? biological? material?) body that sits underneath the garments. For one, as a long-established bodily practice, we should not have to insist that dress is forged of the habitual alliance between a fleshy body and clothes. Following this chapter, we will review the relationships of bodies and clothes when the theoretical approaches within dress studies will be more fully explored. As such, we will start to make a separate fold for the experiences and matter of a body, in amidst the intricate folds of a rich fabric of the world. It will be argued in this chapter and those to follow, that to interpret the complex incorporations that constitute performative bodies as *different* bodies requires the resources of sign, gesture, matter, habit, representation, image and technics (relations with objects).

Mattering; Poststructuralist Critical Theory and Feminism

The following will discuss selected American and Australian poststructuralist critical writings that have been focused on the conceptual limits of representation and sexually differentiated material embodiment, which emerge out of feminist politics. The three feminist perspectives presented have been selected because they present a range of responses to the provocative questioning of materiality formulated in Butler's Bodies that Matter. Firstly, Butler's work and then three responses to it, can assist in the diagnosis of

a crisis of/in a discourse of representation in that it questions the split between reality and representation, particularly as this split operates in discussions of constructionism as a division between the representations of the body and the matter of the body. In short, Butler warns that unless the question of the constitution of body-matter is raised rigorously, repeatedly and urgently, then the theoretical impulse will continue to posit body matter as a substance inaccessible to the investigation of the cultural meanings that bodies acquire within specific cultural fields. Yet, in the terms of Butler's political motivations of exposing the exclusion of queer bodies from a heterosexual social order, this very substance is decisive in the calculation of legitimate or viable citizenship (hence the title "Bodies that Matter"), or in very simple terms, it is an integral part of the constitution of either normative or queer realities as meaningful. If matter is simply that which cannot be accessed, a conceptual position which re-installs an oppositional distinction between the categories of discourse and matter, culture and nature, it can also inadvertently reaffirm the sex-gender distinction so that it corresponds to these polarised terms – i.e. sex (given matter or nature) and gender (discursive or cultural construction). If "sex" cannot be realised by the effects of signification then it would present as a part of a woman's reality that cannot be reformed; or inversely and more constructively, it might be asked what part of sex might it be possible to change? Quite simply if these discussions fail to address sex at the level of a material body, then "matter," conceptualised as raw or unmediated nature, operates as the subordinated or expelled term, purportedly indifferent to or outside of semiosis.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to further explain how such a crisis has ensued. The labours of second-wave feminist inquiry have given overdue recognition to the importance of accumulated history, representations and acquired languages, on the construction of gender differences. That is, these differences are said to be constituted and not given, moreover doubly constituted in relation to differences of ethnicity, race, sexuality and place. Relating this directly to the body, the gendered body is understood as an epistemological issue by virtue of the fact that it is embedded in social and discursive systems that represent it, mark it and speak it. That is, a knowledge of the gendered body becomes a matter of the manner in which it is written and represented. This approach has

been important for the study of the female body in presenting the female as a figure of discourse, belonging to culture rather than nature, and as Anne Balsamo has argued, one that was invoked to "correct the overreliance on an essentialist definition of the female body as a biological or 'natural' entity" that, due to its role as "organic foundation" and glue for collective formation, equally delimited feminist debate.²⁵ Yet such a correction risks tipping the scales too far towards a linguisticism, for Balsamo, like Butler, has warned of the dangers in suggesting that knowledge of a body is only discursive, of the implicit risks, in a project seeking to demonstrate the constructed fabric of the body, of reducing that body simply to a discursive effect. Add to this the complexity that there are certain risks for feminists in dis-anchoring themselves from the "reality" of women, frequently defined with reference to a shared experience that is underpinned organically. If it was a feminist project to indicate the import of gender representations on the lives of real women, then it was necessary for such work to be established around the critical premise that confounds the distinctions of the "real" and the "represented," a distinction which problematically underpins the sex-gender distinction. Butler writes:

The discourse of "construction" that has for the most part circulated in feminist theory is perhaps not quite adequate to the task at hand. It is not enough to argue that there is no prediscursive "sex" that acts as the stable point of reference on which, or in relation to which, the cultural construction of gender proceeds. To claim that sex is already gendered, already constructed, is not yet to explain in which way the materiality of sex is forcibly produced. What are the constraints by which bodies are materialized as "sexed," and how are we to understand the "matter" of sex, and of bodies more generally, as the repeated and violent circumscription of cultural intelligibility?²⁶

At one level then, Butler's analysis is philosophical, a critical deconstructive engagement with the sex-gender distinction as a residual metaphysical distinction between discourse and the material – she writes "this scenography is orchestrated by and as a matrix of

²⁵ Balsamo, *Technologies of the Gendered Body* 31. See also Elizabeth Grosz, "A Note on Essentialism and Difference," *Feminist Knowledge: Critique and Construct*, ed. S. Gunew (London: Routledge, 1990). Grosz outlines the feminist view of biology as an essentialism and goes on to point to the anti-essentialist rationale for rejecting biology as a constraint for women. She writes: "Biologism is a particular form of essentialism in which women's essence is defined in terms of their biological capacities...In so far as biology is assumed to constitute an unalterable bedrock of identity, the attribution of biologicistic characteristics amounts to a permanent form of social containment for women" (334).

²⁶ Butler, *Bodies That Matter* xi.

power that remains disarticulated if we presume constructedness and materiality as necessarily oppositional notions.”²⁷ As well, she points to the corollary terms whose foundationalist principles are sustained by similar distinctions, that operate as irreducibles to define women such as the “given,” “nature” or “essence.”²⁸ She seeks to destabilise these ossified conceptual forms. At another level, her aim in scrutinising the scenography of construction is profoundly political in that she seeks to expose or articulate a matrix of power, which leaves certain types of social bodies oppressed. Butler exposes the operations of a symbolic regime of heterosexualising norms whereby difference from prescribed or valued norms is made synonymous with deficiency and as this mark attaches to certain bodies, a domain is produced of abject bodies. These bodies which deviate from the norm are considered “beyond cultural intelligibility, beyond representation, and therefore outside the concerns of the democratic process.”²⁹ What is more, the processes by which these bodies are marked deficient through classification, moralisation and pathologisation – on which Butler is very quiet – become invisible. Refused entry into the social symbolic, “into the domain of the fully human, these outcasts are then aligned with the unruly dangers of the natural, the brutish, and the animal – with the threat that is perceived to emanate from matter itself.”³⁰ As such, the symbolic process of subject formation permits entry to certain types of bodies – bodies that matter – whilst foreclosing others. Butler’s goal is not to provide a historically accurate account of this symbolic matrix of heterosexualising norms, but rather to disrupt the conceptual structure of its logic.

Butler’s Meta-Theoretical Argument with Constructionism

To consider Butler’s argument in some detail, Butler engages with feminist debate at the level of the body, in particular engaging the debate at the level of the purportedly irrefutable claim of the body’s facticity. Her starting point is a claim by philosopher

²⁷ Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 28.

²⁸ Following the discussion in chapter 2 of Butler’s critique of a substantialist or core notion of identity, the project of *Bodies that Matter* can be seen to continue questioning substantialist or essential categories of self/body/identity.

²⁹ Kirby 106.

³⁰ Kirby 106.

Gianni Vattimo that "poststructuralism, understood as textual play, marks the dissolution of matter as a contemporary category."³¹ She observes the difficulty in identifying both the "poststructuralist" agenda insinuated here (who or what?) and exactly what is to be retrieved under the sign of "the body."³² The antagonism marking the union of feminist and poststructuralist agendas concerning the problematic of the body is summarised in the "warnings": "If everything is discourse, what happens to the body? If everything is a text, what about violence and bodily injury?" She asks what is so compelling about the "commonsense force"³³ which asserts the facts of bodily human existence – living, dying, eating, pain and pleasure. Kirby insightfully observes: "The difficulty in Butler's project is considerable, for she has to juggle a critique of the discourse of construction while still defending its most basic tenets. Wanting to secure a hearing from those whose patience with constructionist arguments is close to exhaustion, she begins by offering some basic reassurances about her own approach."³⁴ In defense to an accusation that the discourse of construction is a form of linguisticism, she acknowledges the reality of bodies. She concedes the "alleged facts of birth, aging, illness and death."³⁵ For Butler this is more complicated, however, in that "to concede the existence of certain bodily facts" as Kirby writes, "is also to concede a certain interpretation of those facts."³⁶ Butler's manner of expressing this complication is to ask "Is the discourse in and through which that concession occurs...not itself formative of the very phenomenon that it concedes?"³⁷

This question forms the basis of the poststructuralist insight that there is no reality that is not mediated by language, an insight which forms the target of Butler's analysis of the constructionist argument within feminism that stresses the "constitutive force of signifying practices."³⁸ In particular, she marks the phrase "everything is discursively

³¹ Vattimo qtd. in Butler, Bodies that Matter 27.

³² Butler, Bodies that Matter 28.

³³ Kirby 101.

³⁴ Kirby 105.

³⁵ Butler, Bodies That Matter 10.

³⁶ Kirby 105.

³⁷ Butler, Bodies That Matter 10.

³⁸ Kirby 105.

constructed," for questioning and notes two variations of this point as problematic.³⁹ Firstly, she observes a generative and determinist version which reduces constructivism to a "linguistic monism" with "god-like agency" to produce everything, thus "making a mockery of human agency," effectively evacuating it.⁴⁰ A second variation of this same argument she remarks succumbs to the problems of grammar in proposing "Discourse constructs the subject."⁴¹ She appropriately identifies the grammatical formulation which retains the subject-position and its attributes of agency and primacy as it places discourse in the position formerly occupied by the human subject. An argument found in structuralist accounts which describe the constitutive force of Culture, Discourse or Power, Butler argues that this position remains caught within the metaphysics of the subject, even as it reverses the place of discourse and subject.⁴² She writes:

As a result construction is still understood as a unilateral process initiated by a prior subject, fortifying that presumption of the metaphysics of the subject that where there is activity, there lurks behind it an initiating and wilful subject. On such a view, discourse or language or the social becomes personified, and in the personification the metaphysics of the subject is reconsolidated.⁴³

Here, Butler characterises what she calls a "foreclosure to matter" whereby discourse/language/culture are presumed to have a productivity and agency. Importantly, Kirby observes that Butler is in obvious sympathy with a position that would stress the constitutive force of signifying practices, but summarises two implicit risks carried by this position which her argument seeks to highlight: firstly, reinstalling a metaphysical opposition by articulating a passive body subjected to a productive/forceful agency of; secondly, a doing away with the question of matter's difference from immaterial signification.⁴⁴ In Butler's introduction, she points to a tendency within constructionist

³⁹ Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 8.

⁴⁰ Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 6-7.

⁴¹ Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 8.

⁴² Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 9. Butler characterises the mechanics of a determinist force in structuralist accounts using capitals as she writes, "They often claim that there are structures that construct the subject, impersonal forces, such as Culture, Discourse or Power, where these terms occupy the grammatical site of the subject after the 'human' has been dislodged from its place."

⁴³ Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 9.

⁴⁴ Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 9. Kirby acknowledges that a divided goal for Butler can account for her argument's considerable difficulty. To reiterate, "The difficulty in Butler's project is considerable, for she

accounts to produce the premise that refutes and confirms their very enterprise. Here, it is important to quote at length to grasp Butler's dual rendering of the limitations of this enterprise in terms of the category of sex:

If such a theory cannot take account of sex as the site or surface on which it acts, then it ends up presuming sex as the unconstructed, and so concedes the limits of linguistic constructivism, inadvertently circumscribing that which remains unaccountable within the terms of construction. If, on the other hand, sex is a contrived premise, a fiction, then gender does not presume a sex which it acts upon, but rather, gender produces the misnomer of a prediscursive "sex," and the meaning of construction becomes that of linguistic monism, whereby everything is only and always language.⁴⁵

She intervenes in the terms of this debate by questioning the conditions under which discourse and materiality are distinguished:

I want to ask how and why materiality has become a sign of irreducibility, that is, how is it that the materiality of sex is understood as that which only bears cultural constructions and, therefore, cannot be a construction? What is the status of this exclusion? Is materiality a site or surface that is excluded from the process of construction, as that through which and on which construction works?⁴⁶

Butler thus suggests an alternative approach:

What I would propose in place of these conceptions of construction is a return to the notion of matter, not as a site or surface, but *as a process of materialisation that stabilises over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter.*⁴⁷

As Kirby argues about Butler's exposition of materialisation, the success of her enterprise depends on her particular understanding of signification in that for Butler to return to matter means to "return to matter as a sign."⁴⁸

has to juggle a critique of the discourse of construction while still defending its most basic tenets" (105).

⁴⁵ Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 6.

⁴⁶ Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 9.

⁴⁷ Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 9.

⁴⁸ Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 49.

She addresses her understanding of signification and the relationship between language and materiality, in a section of *Bodies that Matter* titled "Are bodies purely discursive?" Butler begins her argument with the point that a referent like the body is unstable and any given signified can never contain or fix it decisively. She posits:

Indeed, that referent persists only as a kind of absence or loss, that which language does not capture, but, instead, that which impels language repeatedly to attempt that capture, that circumscription – and to fail. This loss takes its place in language as an insistent call or demand, that while *in* language, is never fully *of* language.⁴⁹

The failure or loss, as language attempts capture, is explained in semiotic terms, by the difference between signifier and signified, as well as the difference between the signified and referent. In Butler's words: "This radical difference between *referent* and *signified* is the site where the materiality of language and that of the world which it seeks to signify are perpetually negotiated."⁵⁰ As Kirby writes, the shortfall, inadequacy or frisson "witnesses the frustrated nature of the transaction between concept and 'thing.'"⁵¹

In short, the peculiar connection which underpins the transaction of language–world, signifier–signified and signified–referent, is explained as a difference that is incommensurate. Butler calls on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notion of the "flesh of the world" to conceptualise this difference which is not a conventional understanding of difference as a space separating two discrete entities.⁵² Instead, it is more like, as Kirby appropriately describes, a "spacing through which the very notion of a delimitable entity is both generated and threatened."⁵³ The transaction that moves between these undecidables, of separation and contamination, is explained by the figure of Merleau-

⁴⁹ Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 67.

⁵⁰ Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 69.

⁵¹ Kirby 102.

⁵² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968). Merleau-Ponty identifies the *flesh of the world* in what is often called the reflex of perception, as the "overlapping" or "transgression" of body and world. "That means my body is made of the same flesh as the world (it is perceived), and moreover that this flesh of my body is shared by the world, the world reflects it, encroaches upon it and it encroaches upon the world...they are in a relation of transgression or overlapping" (248).

⁵³ Kirby 69.

Ponty's chiasm.⁵⁴ Butler writes:

Although the reference cannot be said to exist apart from the signified it nevertheless, cannot be reduced to it... Language and materiality are fully embedded in each other, chiasmic in their interdependency, but never fully collapsed into one another, i.e. reduced to one another, and yet neither ever fully exceeds the other. Always already implicated in each other, always already exceeding one another, language and materiality are never fully identical nor fully different.⁵⁵

As Kirby explains, Butler's position is clearly poststructuralist in her understanding of the relevance of language and discourse to corporeal politics, as it seeks to clearly illuminate that the "integrity of a pure referent," world, or signifier is undermined by the contamination of each category "with/in" its related other (i.e. the signified or language).⁵⁶ Ultimately, "she argues that there can be no access to a pure materiality outside or before signification and, by extension, no access to a pure materiality of bodily life that is separate from language."⁵⁷

Kirby has explained Butler's characterisation of the relationship between language and the body in terms of the enfolding overlap of a Venn diagram, "wherein two recognisably different spheres are nevertheless involved in a mutual and constitutive relationship that compromises their integrity."⁵⁸ If conceived like two overlapping spheres, Butler is able to argue that the body "bears on language all the time."⁵⁹

The point to grasp, here, is that Butler understands there to be an irreducible difference between language and the body, a difference that does not fit the conventional understanding of difference between a second-order of language and concepts hoping to capture a sense of the given things of the world. This difference is both extremely nebulous and most vital. Significantly, it is the radical nature of this difference which

⁵⁴ Kirby 103.

⁵⁵ Kirby 69.

⁵⁶ Kirby 103.

⁵⁷ Kirby 103.

⁵⁸ Kirby 103.

⁵⁹ Butler, Bodies That Matter 68.

propels Butler's project of exploring "materiality" or that "compelling materialization;"⁶⁰ she writes, "what then do we make of the kind of materiality that is associated with the body, its physicality as well as its location, including its social and political locatedness, and that materiality that characterises language?"⁶¹ Butler takes issue with an agenda that posits the matter of bodies to be outside the reach of interpretation and its mutually constitutive relation with language and therefore with a nature that is beyond question. Here to reiterate the risk, the matter of unquestioned sex and sexuality can be appropriated as undisputable *nature* in corporeal politics. Consequently, Butler's contribution is to envisage (rather than necessarily finally resolve) an image of materiality that it is so "infused with a constitutive energy and efficacy that will disrupt the inevitability of this logic."⁶² In an effort to deconstruct the logic of the form/matter, language/body split which involves considerable difficulty as it engages the legacies of semiotics and Foucauldian discourse analysis, Butler's project is to articulate a "matrix of power" where matter is "rescued from its location as prior and passive with regard to the notion of production."⁶³ Conceptualised as the performativity of language, the matrix of power seeks to account for the enaction and materialisation of various subject positions. While her aim is not necessarily to articulate a theory of construction, her work does construct an abstract model of the structural conditions which give rise to an efficacious and energetic contouring of a body. This will have consequence for the conventional understandings of corporeality and matter, as passive or unchanging material.

Butler's Post-Foucauldian Formulations

One of the more influential theoretical models for conceptualising power in the human sciences is that offered by Michel Foucault in his study of the disciplinary apparatuses of modern government in Discipline and Punish. His articulation of the operations of disciplinary power through the discourses, institutions and archives which accumulate knowledge about the modern social subject have been able to resonate in, if not providing

⁶⁰ Butler, Bodies That Matter 1.

⁶¹ Butler, Bodies That Matter 69.

⁶² Kirby 103.

⁶³ Kirby 103.

an explicit methodology for, poststructuralist analyses of language and discourse as expressions of power. In dress studies, to analyse fashion's modern force as a discourse of power would appear to invite an obvious application of a Foucauldian perspective, if not a distinct Foucauldian methodology of studying the genealogy of the fashion apparatus. Shari Benstock and Suzanne Ferriss would agree on the import of Foucault's approach when they write that "analysts of fashion have repeatedly turned to Michel Foucault's study, Discipline and Punish, for assistance in charting" the terrain of fashion as it "stakes out the body as its territory."⁶⁴ Here the authors refer to one of Foucault's major contributions to the theorisation of the body, one which has particular resonance for dress theorists, for he refers to the "micro-physics of power,"⁶⁵ the capillary forms of power that ingrain themselves in the learning processes and regulated actions of everyday bodily life. His argument was that the emergence of modern government added to existing forms of sovereign power, by defining new modes of administrative governance and power designed to manage populations through techniques and discourses of classification, archiving, identification and organisation of peoples. The apparatuses and institutions established from the eighteenth century onwards form part of a fabric of techniques, tactics and administrations of social control which were refined in prisons, asylums, schools, hospitals, factories and police stations. For Foucault, the history of various disciplining techniques and procedures, points to the conceptualisation of a modern disciplinary subject whose effective constitution is accomplished through techniques in which subjects are not only disciplined, but take an active role in their own disciplining. Most famously explained through the apparatus of the Panoptic prison, Foucault argued that the disciplinary procedure of imprisonment was designed to *produce* a subject through effective spatial isolation, regulated control of daily activity and constant self-surveillance.⁶⁶ In the daily patterns of structured and constrained activity of

⁶⁴ Benstock and Ferriss, "Introduction" 8.

⁶⁵ Foucault, Discipline and Punish 26.

⁶⁶ In short, the plan of the panopticon was a semi-circular building with an inspection tower at its centre and cells around its exterior wall. Prisoners, who would be in individual cells, were open constantly to the gaze of the guard in the central tower, an inspector, but it was impossible for the prisoner's to see the guard. By a carefully contrived system of lighting and the use of wooden blinds, inspectors would be invisible to the inmates. The disciplining of the prisoners was to occur in part via the constant sense that prisoners were watched by unseen eyes. There was nowhere for them to hide, nowhere to be private. In that a prisoner was never sure whether or not they were being watched, but obliged to assume that they were, the prisoner was

imprisonment, the technologies of power directly regulate and inscribe the bodies of subjects.⁶⁷ To return to Benstock and Ferriss, they quote an earlier publication on fashion and dress, where the connections between fashion and the site of the body as the scene of power's deployment are spelt out by Kim Sawchuk when she writes "When we are interested in fashion, we are concerned with relations of power and their articulation at the level of the body."⁶⁸ For Benstock and Ferriss, this comment is interpreted as an indication that a Foucauldian approach would be useful for studying fashion as an institution of power. However, it can be argued that the Foucauldian framework is more like a potential unrealised, the purported "repeated turns" to Foucault's work by fashion analysts being infrequent and only preliminary gestures. For one, Sawchuk does not turn to Foucault in any detail for assistance in articulating relations of power. Here, it is not my intention to complete a Foucauldian inspired project but to follow the threads of a theoretical model of power indebted to Foucault which finds occasional mention in dress studies. This is presented in conjunction with criticisms of his work including Butler's points of dissatisfaction with a mentor. The purpose here is to briefly outline Foucault's contribution to body theory in order to characterise his influence on methods of analysing a disciplined and discursively constructed body.

Set against the backdrop of Foucault's "structuralist" influence on the human sciences as a model for thinking about the impact of the constraints of social structures – language, discourse, systems of representation, social systems – on subjective formation and operability, Butler's project can be defined as an attempt to re-think "discourse" as a constitutive constraint. Particularly, she seeks to ensure that a concept of discourse is informed by a temporality, a sense that structures derive their structurality through a certain reiteration, defining her work as poststructuralist in that she redeploys discourse

effectively managing their own surveillance.

⁶⁷ Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish*, defines disciplinary power as a "policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviour" (138). The policy of coercions is what Foucault would call "strategy,...tactics, techniques, functionings" (26), which amounted to a machinery of power that "explores it [the human body], breaks it down, and rearranges it" (138). Speaking more generally about the body as a political field, he wrote "power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs" (25).

⁶⁸ Sawchuk 62.

and textuality in such a way that their prescribed norms are always open to indeterminacies. Such as the indeterminacies of being open to "what is most material and vital,"⁶⁹ the matterings of the material substrata which she invokes, as if they assist to materialise, as it were, these norms. In short, Butler's objective, like the commitment of Kirby and Best to a very similar theoretical project, is to question whether constructionist arguments, albeit informed by a poststructuralist agenda to demonstrate the construction of realities by the textures of language, have been sufficiently equipped to "effectively challenge... the classical constraints of the sign/language and its conceptual legacy."⁷⁰ Again, Butler's particular philosophical interests are in the political and theoretical investments that arise from an apparent foreclosure to matter, a foreclosure which presupposes and produces a more powerful agency on the part of discourse, language or the sign. Significantly, Foucault is not excluded from her scrutiny of the logical presuppositions and theoretical formulations that inform the field of feminism. While jumping slightly ahead of this present discussion of Foucault, Kirby's description of the parasitic mode of her argument prove doubly useful by anticipating her contention with Butler as well as being insightful about Butler's own approach:

Yet if we are persuaded by Butler that the foreclosure of matter must be contested, then evidence of this same gesture in her own work deserves attention. In order to explore those parts of Butler's analysis where she retreats from her own insights, much of my argument will need to resemble hers and even to endorse the same theoretical commitments. This sense of mimicry that discovers my own argument inside Butler's is reminiscent of the way that Butler, in her turn, engages the discourse of construction. She is also committed to the very terms whose meaning she disputes. There is a reason why *this mode of argumentation is parasitic*, a reanimation of the host argument. If we concede that oppositional logic persists in the very act of its rejection (crudely put "I am opposed to oppositional logic"), then its terms are more effectively destabilized and reinscribed if we do not pretend to abandon them.⁷¹

It can be argued that Butler's engagement with Foucault in Bodies that Matter formulates

⁶⁹ Foucault, The History of Sexuality 152.

⁷⁰ Kirby 84. More precisely, this quote describes Kirby's project while Butler seeks to challenge the inheritance of metaphysical oppositions that have determined corporeality. Like Kirby, Best hopes to examine the semiotic legacy which has foreclosed matter from discussions of the text.

⁷¹ Kirby 106.

a similar "non-oppositional" reading, as she develops an argument within the terms of his own concerns with power and bodily inscription, an argument which forms the basis for destabilising constructionist approaches that continue to "presume constructedness and materiality as oppositional notions."⁷² As the paradigm of constructionism is often directly associated with Foucault, (she notes in an earlier essay that the notion that the "body is a cultural construction" is frequently traced back to Foucault⁷³), she might argue that feminism may not have heeded Foucault's efforts to question this opposition, but also in later comments and writings she seeks to register the shortcomings and limitations of Foucault's concepts and to ensure the expansion of these concepts can accommodate her specific concerns.⁷⁴

Butler's theoretical project continuing from Gender Trouble to Bodies that Matter and onwards through later writing can be understood as a sustained effort to elaborate Foucault's notion of power as productive of regulated subjects, an attempt to arrive at an understanding of the specific mechanisms of subject formation whereby subjection to "discourse" (as disciplinary apparatus) occurs and yet the subject is not reducible to it.⁷⁵ Importantly, the Foucauldian exposition of disciplinary power should spell the decentring of discipline, of the hierarchical opposition between the subjected and the force of subjection, between the disciplined and the disciplining. For one of the central tenets of Foucault's conceptual framework is that the self becomes the subject of one's own discipline – the subject is not fully determined by disciplining forces but is rather *self-controlling* as they interact with, are integrated into, indeed actively shape, the structures

⁷² Butler, Bodies That Matter 28.

⁷³ Judith Butler, "Foucault and the Paradox of Bodily Inscriptions" 307.

⁷⁴ See Judith Butler "On Speech, Race and Melancholia: An Interview with Judith Butler," interview with Vicki Bell, Theory, Culture and Society 16.2 (1999): 164; Also Judith Butler, The Psychic Life of Power (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997) 2.

⁷⁵ See Lois McNay, "Subject, Psyche and Agency: The Work of Judith Butler" Theory, Culture and Society 16.2 (1999): 177. Also in interview Butler has said that her 1997 publication Excitable Speech continues to explore the Foucauldian heritage which informed many of the guiding questions driving Bodies that Matter. She spells out these questions when she states "What does it mean to be constituted as the subject only by discourse? What is the mechanism of that constitution? What do we mean when we say constitution? So I think Bodies that Matter sought to understand constitution through the notion of materialisation. But then I was in a bit of a bind because I felt the predominant Foucauldian frame that I had been using didn't give me a precise enough account of what it meant for a subject to be constituted in discourse given that a subject is only partially constituted, or is sometimes constituted in ways that can't quite be anticipated..." (Butler, "On Speech, Race and Melancholia" 164).

of coercion. Thus, from this tenet emerges the impression of Foucault's notion of power as productive, in that a subject both emerges from this process and has a potential to operate differently under this power. The complexity of Foucault's legacy of subject formation is apparent in his dialectical conceptualisation of the submission and potentialities for resistance to power as he wrote "the subject is constituted through practices of subjection, or, in a more autonomous way, through practices of liberation, of liberty."⁷⁶

Sociologist, Lois McNay posits a critique of Foucault as she writes: "Indeed, ...despite the dialectical idea of subjectivation, Foucault does not succeed in integrating systematically the two moments of submission and autonomy and this is illustrated in the oscillation of his thought between the determinism of the work on discipline and the voluntarism of the final work on ethics of the self."⁷⁷ Butler is less far reaching in her criticism limiting her critique to the lack of detail in Foucault with regards to the mechanism by which the subject is constituted by discourse. As it has been noted already, this problem of constitution is addressed through the notion of *materialisation* as Butler writes, "At times it appears that for Foucault the body has a materiality that is ontologically distinct from the power relations that take that body as a site of investments."⁷⁸ McNay observes that Butler, along with others, notes in The Psychic Life of Power that Foucault "does not elaborate sufficiently on the specific mechanisms whereby the subject may be formed in submission but is not reducible to it."⁷⁹ In another site, Butler writes, "In Discipline and Punish, perhaps one of the places where the theory of subject constitution is too unilateral, its clearly too unnuanced. It's as if the prisoner is simply made, it's as if somehow the prisoner is constituted almost mechanistically."⁸⁰ Yet, in Bodies that Matter Butler reads Discipline and Punish as a successful elaboration by Foucault of discourse and materiality working through one another to articulate a process of materialisation of the subject which is coextensive with the investiture of power and

⁷⁶ McNay, "Subject, Psyche and Agency" 177.

⁷⁷ McNay, "Subject, Psyche and Agency" 177.

⁷⁸ Butler, Bodies That Matter 33.

⁷⁹ McNay 177.

⁸⁰ Butler, "On Speech, Race and Melancholia" 164.

discourse. In short, what Foucault describes in Discipline and Punish as the materialisation of the prisoner's body through a decentring nexus of power/discipline leaves little room for presupposing an ontologically distinct, prior and subordinated body. Butler argues that in this work "the soul is taken as an instrument of power through which the body is cultivated and formed."⁸¹ As the soul operates as an instrument of power, a "power-laden schema" it is that through which a body is "formed," "maintained," "sustained," and "regulated."⁸² Therefore for Butler this indicates that "strictly speaking, power is not a subject who acts on bodies as its distinct objects. The grammar that compels us to speak that way enforces a metaphysics of external relations, whereby power acts on bodies but is not understood to form them. This is a view of power as an external relation that Foucault himself calls into question."⁸³ Where Butler finds reason to offer a limited criticism of Foucault, is where the productive capacity of power and resistances to it might need to be re-thought in relation to various modalities or degrees of power. Or in her terms, for the process of power to operate coherently, to materialise, would anything need to be excluded as incomprehensible? Here, Butler seems to be thinking of the actual failure of subject constitution, or else certain degrees of unpredictable materialisation.

While Butler is at one level convinced that Foucault has suitably addressed the problematic of power as external or unilateral force, others have been more explicit in their critique of Foucault's characterisation of power as external and determining of the subject. For example, in a judgement that reminds one of Jameson's infamous phrase of the "prison-house of language," the sociologist and criminologist David Garland has argued that Foucault presents an overtly deterministic conceptualisation of "power" in Discipline and Punish.⁸⁴ Garland argues that in Discipline and Punish power is used by Foucault as a *thing*, the word becomes a noun and thus the concept becomes separated from "value."⁸⁵ Garland rejects this interpretation of power arguing instead that power is

⁸¹ Butler, Bodies That Matter 33.

⁸² Butler, Bodies That Matter 33-34.

⁸³ Butler, Bodies That Matter 34.

⁸⁴ David Garland, Punishment and Modern Society (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

⁸⁵ Garland 169.

always relational and is the name we give to a capacity to realise particular goals.⁸⁶ Ultimately, Garland argues that for Foucault power is externally constraining and binding of the body:

...in the end, power is a kind of total confinement which envelopes the individual, molding[sic] the body and soul into patterns of conformity. Power is at once socialisation and social control. It constructs the individual as a subject, but it is always an individual who is "subjected" or subjugated in the same process.⁸⁷

In an essay which represents the most detailed analysis of Foucault's relevance and contribution for dress studies, Joanne Entwistle argues that dress is an embodied practice and assesses the value and potential of Foucault's concepts of power and discourse for further analysis of bodies and dress.⁸⁸ This analysis voices criticisms of Foucault's notion of body and power, which echo Garland's concerns. She writes:

In particular, his notion of discourse is a good starting-point for analysing relations between discourses on dress and gender as they are constituted in fashion texts and organisational strategies of management and are suggestive of particular forms of discipline of the body. However, there are problems stemming from his conceptualisation of the body and of power, in particular his failure to acknowledge embodiment and agency.⁸⁹

Entwistle argues that Foucault's particular form of post-structuralism "is not sensitive to practice," and therefore "...presumes effects, at the level of individual practice," as the product of discourse alone.⁹⁰ She argues that "he thus "reads" texts *as if* they were practice rather than a possible structuring influence on practice that might or might not be implemented."⁹¹ She posits that this becomes particularly apparent in his concept of the body, that on the one hand, wants a body that is concrete and material and on the other hand, this body is a product of discourse that has no materiality, she argues, outside of its representation in discourse. She concludes:

⁸⁶ Garland 169.

⁸⁷ Garland 171.

⁸⁸ Entwistle.

⁸⁹ Entwistle 330.

⁹⁰ Entwistle 331.

⁹¹ Entwistle 331.

If, as it seems, Foucault errs on the side of the body as a discursive construct this would appear to undermine his aim to produce a "history of bodies" and the investments and operations of power on them. What is most material and most vital about a body if not its flesh and bones? What is power doing if not operating on, controlling or dominating the material body?⁹²

I would counter-argue that, for Foucault, both discipline and discourse are *practices* of knowledge – discourse and discipline must depend on, to be both produced and received, a certain bodily practicing – and also that Foucault *is* explicit in Discipline and Punish in emphasising that a material body is the site of capacities and forces of power. Recalling the example of the Panoptic prison, Foucault's emphasis is frequently on institutional practices and how discourses and knowledges inform various disciplinary practices and constitute the social world, as it is understood. What interests Foucault most of all, is how certain discourses and knowledges understand the subject and the manner in which this understanding is realised by those subjects of discursive regimes. Here he makes a leap to the position that this knowledge is practiced, without necessarily expanding on a subject's experience of this practice. So I would agree with Entwistle, that Foucault's analyses or readings do not aspire to understand the "fleshy body and its experiential dimensions,"⁹³ and in her inferred point that discursive practices cannot tell us about the full gamut of embodied experiences which arise in the practices of dress, for writing, reading, comprehension, identification and regulated practices are only several of a body's practices. Much of Foucault's writing is focused on reading the history of discourse and state institutions. It would follow, then, that a strictly Foucauldian analysis of fashion as the operation of power would emphasise fashion and clothing as disciplinary and regulative practices of a disciplinary and discursive regime. She formulates the implications of her point as such, by asking:

if the body has its own physical reality outside or beyond discourse, how can we theorise this experience? How can one begin to understand the experience of choosing and wearing clothes that forms so significant a part of our experience of

⁹² Entwistle 332.

⁹³ Entwistle 335.

In these questions Entwistle formulates some key issues. I would agree that the body's physical reality is not in doubt, however what poststructuralist formulations have undoubtedly helped to illuminate is whether the body's facticity can be thought independently of the discursive constructions which form dress reality. The development of practices structured by the influences of images, discourses and language comprises a significant part of the experience of wearing clothes. Undoubtedly, the analysis of these discourses as they are said to inform practice assumes a large section of theoretical activity. Can one locate a knowledge of the body's "own physical reality," in quite such distinct and separated terms, as Entwistle would suggest? In theoretical terms, what is possible to know of the body that is, as suggested earlier, already *there* in clothes, as people wear clothes daily in and as representation *and* as their real? For semiotic and discourse analysis, it has been possible to recover an understanding of the multiple styles in which clothing, images and words can signify, represent and articulate a body. This is a body that is not necessarily located anywhere in particular as symbol, but significantly it is a symbolic representation that can directly inform the experience of being in clothes. An important site for the theorisation of dress is the ongoing development of models for interpreting the modalities by which various figurations of bodies are identified, embodied or acted out. If, as it seems, theoretical efforts have weighted activity a little more to the side of interpreting the body as a symbolic and representational object of discourses, this does not mean that it is impossible to differentiate embodied acts – i.e. actual bodily practices – from various representations of bodies in discourse, without necessarily calling for a domain of practice that is outside or beyond the reach of discourse. It would be unlikely that the physical reality that the body *has* would be entirely its own. The aim would seem to be to investigate reality – i.e. to theorise experience – as it is experienced in a relation with discourse.

In the above section, I have been concerned with presenting Butler's engagement with Foucault in conjunction with outlining his theoretical model of power because echoes of

⁹⁴ Entwistle 332.

this notion of power operate in dress studies, in the duplicitous figure of fashion as both constraining and subordinating *and* a productive discourse. Also, the brief outline of the Foucauldian concepts that influenced Butler have been set against further criticisms of his work which are not presented to discredit Foucault's framework. This would be inappropriate, for the criticisms nor the presentation of his work here, do not pertain to be comprehensive in their analysis of Foucault's entire *oeuvre*. Instead, the criticisms operate by way of identifying avenues of inquiry for characterising the relation of fashion and the body, clothing, language/signs and the body, particularly observing a deterministic role for fashion in producing a subject of dress.

Following on from Foucault, Butler's Bodies that Matter explores the materialisation of sexed and gendered subject positions within a matrix of symbolic power that regulates these subject positions in accordance with heterosexualising norms. Butler's concept of the *performative* is an attempt to develop an understanding of gender and sexed identities that is not a unilateral process of imposition or determination, without on the other hand lapsing into a voluntarist account of the subject. As already discussed in chapter 2, "performativity" does not refer to a voluntarist subject who performs his/her identity, as much as a "forced reiteration of norms" in the sense of a compulsory and constraining heterosexuality that impels and sustains gender and sexed identities.⁹⁵ From Foucault, she draws an understanding of discourse, power and temporality to articulate a discursive and symbolic "structure" which unfolds temporally through the repetition of "regulatory ideals," or after Foucault, discursive categories, of sex and gender. That is, the structure is comprised historically by the performance of socio-symbolic norms, rather than being a rigid or quasi-permanent set of categories. As Lois McNay argues, Butler has been able to unpack Foucault's position that power breeds its own resistance. "Although constraint is the condition of possibility of sexuality, this does not mean that the cultural imperative of heterosexual norms is inexorable. Change arises from the constitutive instability of the symbolic and discursive structures which invest the body with meaning."⁹⁶ From Louis Althusser, Butler has drawn on the concept of "interpellation" whereby a subject is hailed

⁹⁵ Butler, Bodies that Matter 94.

⁹⁶ McNay 175-77.

by the voice of authority, a call which brings the subject into being.⁹⁷ The challenge for Butler is for this call to become more than an act of constitution *by* discourse. Consequently, from speech-act theory, she draws upon the notion of a performative speech-act by which a subject *enacts* a phrase, a name, a convention and thus re-cites the discursive conditions of their own emergence. By enacts, it is meant that the speech acts of this subject are conceived as a performance, a process of inculcation that, in the language of inscription, re-inscribes gender identities upon the body. In the language of citation, each act re-cites or reiterates another earlier act, thus delineating a process of materialisation in “which the constraints of social structures are reproduced and partially transcended in the practices of agents.”⁹⁸ In summary, the above articulates the configuration of theoretical affiliations that Butler draws upon to construct her understanding of subject formation in a symbolic matrix of power/discourse. With respect to her relation to Foucault, we can propose that Butler’s formulations attempt to replace Foucault’s mechanistically constituted subject (an individual that is simply made/produced by discourse), with a more animated approach to the subject who *performs*, albeit an *enacting* solicited from a performance of speech.

It is argued in this thesis that it is necessary to engage with the concerted efforts to expand the notion of textuality, engaging with its slow re-working, in order to recall the most radical implications of post-structuralism. To suggest that analysis should move away from an overt focus on discourse and textuality, as it represents an epistemological domain closed to the facts of the real world, to instead analyse this world, is to miss one of its primary lessons and premises – i.e. that it is impossible to finally break from a relation with language.

The next three sections will outline several responses to Butler’s work and introduce further points of criticism, as they seek to take the theorisation of bodily materiality toward three different and seemingly abstract horizons of *technology*, *biology* and *nature*. In the following outline, the reader will observe several points of connection as Kirby,

⁹⁷ Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 121.

⁹⁸ McNay 177.

McKenzie and Best explore these horizons, confirming for us that the horizons may not be quite so independent. In the later chapters these ideas will further lose their abstraction as they are shown to have relevance to the wearing body.

McKenzie in "Technical Materialisations and the Politics of Radical Contingency"⁹⁹

McKenzie's contribution is to question whether Butler's insights about materialisation – stemming from her exposition of the ritualised productions of heterosexuality and sexually differentiated embodiment – needs to be restricted to living bodies. He argues that technological bodies might, too, evidence a performative materialisation vital to the problem of conditional or contingent existences.¹⁰⁰ He posits: "there is no reason arbitrarily to limit these repetitions to living bodies as Butler does. They must also be involved in the co-materialisation of technological bodies and human bodies, as we will soon see."¹⁰¹ By technological bodies, he means non-living materialisations and their inter-ramifications with the living; he writes: "an in-depth embodiment of technics has long accompanied human becomings."¹⁰² Within the category of the non-living or technics he would include the categories of the artefact, the technological, the machinic, as well as the symbolic interactions of discourse and speech with these terms.

Central to his contribution to this discussion about technical materialisations is an understanding of the technological today (1999) as a dual force of, on the one hand, "homogenisation, dislocating and abstracting proper singularities (eg. Cultural differences)," and on the other, as "something that neutralises universals and ideals by

⁹⁹ McKenzie 105-18.

¹⁰⁰ McKenzie's use of the term *contingency* comes from Butler and Foucault and it is the question of contingency, for him, which is the critical question of recent feminist theory from which his discussion of technics becomes an extension. He cites Foucault "in what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints?" and Butler's re-formulation of this problem "Can there be a theory of 'contingency' that is not compelled to refuse or cover over that which it seeks to explain?" For him *contingency* is both a temporal event and a contacting, contaminating presence which informs identities; in thinking it in two ways he refers us to the construction of an entity over time *and* a breaching of boundaries (105).

¹⁰¹ McKenzie 111.

¹⁰² McKenzie 117.

enmeshing them in highly contingent arrangements.”¹⁰³ Implicit to such an understanding is that this tension which is integral to technology, unfolds in directly material – i.e. corporeal – forms, therefore forging a direct connection with a feminist discussion on the relations between matter and contingency. In fact, McKenzie’s argument convinces that a thinking of technology as reiterative force, as non-objectivist artefact and embodied practice, has not been included in the discussion of discursively produced contingencies to date. Therefore, he outlines what is at stake with matter and by his extension, matter as technical process. It could be inferred from such an approach that McKenzie wishes to supplement Butler’s exposition of the symbolic processes of materialisation, with a thinking of technology as a contemporary force, an event and a necessary dimension of all corporealizations (i.e. a contaminating touch with/in materialisation).¹⁰⁴

To re-count his argument in more detail, McKenzie acknowledges, following Butler, a feminist position that attempts to articulate and locate subjective formation without grounding them in universals of nature, essence reason or culture, but by “ungrounding them in differences.”¹⁰⁵ He reminds us, then, of a premise of these feminist discussions as they represent speculations about contingency and constitutive mattering against a moving “ground” of determinations; he recalls that it is the “absence of necessary ground” that establishes the very question of radical contingency – what is necessary, what is contingent? As a determining force in contemporary life, technological processes are thought by McKenzie to bring matter and technics together in contingent materializations. Technology is being thought as the contaminating touch of living and non-living bodies in and through the repetitions that materialise corporealizations. Technology is inhabiting and inhabited, a process of encountering and negotiating boundaries, that materialise our lived differences: “The very threshold between what counts as technological, and what does not, relies on stabilised materialities whose

¹⁰³ McKenzie 105.

¹⁰⁴ Given this, it is significant that McKenzie fails to examine the differences between the terms “Discourse” and “Technology,” in terms of whether an alternative exposition of discourse might accommodate his concerns [I am thinking here of Foucault’s descriptions of social apparatus as technologies]: it becomes evident in his argument that Butler’s surface characterisations can not accommodate his concerns with the dimensions of depth and temporality of the techno-corporeal.

¹⁰⁵ McKenzie 108.

textures, mobilities, aggregate and chance effects constitute the innumerable and asynchronous orderings of sense, movement and change that we inhabit."¹⁰⁶ As such the apprehension of stable materialisation, is in fact something like the product of repetitions where difference is encountered. In arguing that technology participates in the materialisation and de-materialisation of the limits, surfaces and borders of matter, he means to insert a politic of technology into the debate about differentiated embodiment.

While respectful of the objectives and parameters of Butler's project, he effectively opens up its concerns and inferences to two important dimensions – namely the depths and temporality of technicity – as well as a view of its limitations. Again, he effectively marries the notion of technological repetition with Butler's theorisation of materialisation by ensuring that it includes a negotiation with the technological and the human when he writes: "all repetition couples living and non-living materialisations."¹⁰⁷ The political implications for further analysis involve how the technological as regulative social structure separate and enfold with the domains of symbolic interaction and the political, as dimensions of (Butler's) social. While Butler's theorisation of improper citations always stem from human sources – therefore opening her study to the criticism of anthropocentric bias – her framework allows McKenzie to open up the question of technical involvement between the living and the non-living in such a way that it also involves the question of what is necessary to the human. He proposes this has far more troubling implications for what we define the human to be than most cyborg accounts acknowledge, as they frequently imply a time when the human was clearly defined before the arrival or acceleration of technological change.

McKenzie carefully acknowledges the shared background of the feminist inquiry into sexed embodiment in social, semiotic and political theory, where the possibilities of political subversion or resignification are explored as "productive breakdowns in the structure of the sign."¹⁰⁸ He suggests that an emphasis on signification is both suggestive

¹⁰⁶ McKenzie 113.

¹⁰⁷ McKenzie 112.

¹⁰⁸ McKenzie 109. McKenzie primarily and explicitly analyzes Judith Butler's writing in Bodies that

and limiting in relation to technics. It has been constructive, in its theorisation of indeterminate systems of signs, capable of generating dynamic effects, in re-defining traditional conceptions of agency as either subjectivist or structurally based. In his analysis of technics, however, he seeks to supplement the emphasis on signification with a thinking of the forgotten material and temporal substrate of these marks, which contributes to a sense of depth and the living; he proposes that "to bring contemporary technology into focus, ...the 'linguistic idealism' of much work in the humanities needs to be displaced towards both matter and time."¹⁰⁹

On material depth he argues that: "Butler's account of the paths by which matter comes to stabilise tends to stress "naturally" external, palpable or visible surfaces of the body."¹¹⁰ The implications for exploring technical-corporeal materialisations which have always gone "well beyond relations which count as external in an objectivist sense"¹¹¹ are that our inquiries may remain suspended on a surface, a surface which stabilises itself only in "relation to the exclusion...of a depth...that must involve prior mediations."¹¹²

On temporality he writes, "As it stands the theory of materialisation through citation and performance might hint at what ways the technological constitutes an indispensable multiplication of times."¹¹³ Given that Butler describes materialisation as a process stabilising over time and one that is conceived within a "horizon of lived experience," McKenzie posits that the passage of lived time could be thought as the product of ("iterative") interactions, between different rhythms and rates of technological contingency. For McKenzie, Butler's formulations of performative materialisation represent the short-circuiting of a view of technological contingency that threatens the collapse of the passage of time and horizons of time. Again, like the extent to which matter is a product of a concealed iteration, the stabilisations of temporal materiality

Matter, while actually referring to "feminist work" in more plural tones. He also mentions a review by Pheng Cheah "Matterings" on Butler and Elizabeth Grosz to assist in characterising this work. Therefore he may intend to include Grosz and Cheah in this category of feminist work.

¹⁰⁹ McKenzie 109.

¹¹⁰ McKenzie 114.

¹¹¹ McKenzie 114.

¹¹² McKenzie 115.

¹¹³ McKenzie 116.

would be the product of divergent and asynchronous rhythms and rates that are concealed by the very same repetitions which, not incidentally, open the passage of lived time to becoming. What he means, here, is that the synchronous passage of lived time would be the product of the tracing of asynchronous times that are both concealed and yet make the possibility of new becomings. This point can be thought in relation to the intersection of the different times by which fashion becomes material, all of which take place on different technological fronts; for instance, the intersection of fashion's seasonal time and repeated industrial cycles of production, with the inter-mediary, coincidental and discontinuous times of a continuous stream of media images, together with the daily accommodation of tools such as clothing by the living organism, as well as the technical interventions of gym and dietary design which mix technical re-materialisations with the "natural" growth and the inheritance of a body. These practices bring into convergence many different temporal rhythms.

As such, his ideas about the possibility of the multiplication of different times appears to be a revision of Butler's idea that materialisation is a "process stabilising over time as if the passage of time itself stood apart from the very process in which different stabilisations occur."¹¹⁴

What is important, from McKenzie's account, is that the materialising processes of social formations are thought to incorporate the technological or the artefactual; the enmeshing of material life and technics. The point of contact between McKenzie's and my concerns for relations with/in clothing, is that social relations remain irreducibly material, implicating not only "bodies and discourses producing one another," but also technologies and/or artefacts, or "non-living technical organisations of matter." If it is possible for matter to harbour the sedimented differentiations of sex, then it may also be possible for it to harbour or incorporate differentiations which are a consequence of contaminations by the technological; in formulating such a thinking McKenzie moves from a thinking of technics as intransitive event to technics involving bordering, touching

¹¹⁴ McKenzie 115.

and contamination which has direct implications for this thesis as it will involve re-thinking how dress has been consistently discussed in reference to the meanings of clothing, rather than the materiality of artefact. A lot more could be said about dress as a technical-corporeal or technical-biological materialisation, which allows for a speaking of dress as the product of relational existences of technological and corporeal forces, effects and materialisations.¹¹⁵

The Body as the Scene of Writing: Kirby's Engagement with Essentialism and Butler

Kirby's critique of Butler sits within a larger project which engages with the problematic of essentialism and its anti-essentialist critics, in feminism and other corners of poststructuralist corporeal politics. Invoking the influential phrase by Jane Gallop, Kirby postulates that "rethinking essentialism is a thinking through the body, and this is a thinking through of closure," a closure which represents a pre-emptive critical impulse to close the being of a body to further analysis, under the identity of anti-essentialism.¹¹⁶ This can be compared with what Butler, among others, has called a foreclosure to matter symptomatic of constructionism.¹¹⁷ Thus, as Kirby has already been quoted as such, her own theoretical commitments evidence sympathy with the critical impulse in Butler's work to reconfigure materiality, or what has been foreclosed under the name of the essential, with a generative capacity.¹¹⁸ Kirby asks, in the second chapter of *Telling Flesh*,

¹¹⁵See Cavallaro and Warwick 121. "The compound of body and dress could be read as possibly the most enduring and widespread manifestation of an artificial ensemble, potentially capable of challenging the cult of subjectivity as a sacrosanct whole."

¹¹⁶ Kirby 77.

¹¹⁷ See also Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1989) 39. In 1989, Fuss observed that feminist debate was propelled by the repeated appearance of essentialist presuppositions, which worked to challenge any claims to a safe theoretical position within a constructionist paradigm. Fuss considered this to be a healthy state of debate and called for continued scrutiny of the identifying borders circumscribing various theoretical positions.

¹¹⁸ Kirby's words are appropriate, here, for she explains the sentiment and conceptual tools which question oppositional terms, necessary for re-thinking essence:

"Rethinking essentialism then is not a dispute about its meaning, at least not within the order of its commonplace understanding. The weight of that understanding as the burden of its lived reality is not in contention here. If anything, what is being questioned is how we can pretend to bear this burden so lightly. It is not so much the meaning of essentialism that requires further consideration, but "the how" of that meaning. How is essence entailed, made proper, installed "as such" and

“But how do we think this ‘corporeal place,’ this envelope of immanence that our disembodied speculations would render ‘separable’ and ‘other’?” Her efforts to think this “corporeal place,” re-thinking the ground of essentialism, begins at a body that pinches itself within the reflex of a Möbius loop. The möbius loop or strip is an inverted three-dimensional figure eight which when tracing along its strip “enacts a circuit of contradiction”¹¹⁹ as one side becomes the other, inflecting all sides or dimensions into the one continuum. More particularly, it is a model that allows Kirby to conceive of the contradiction of anatomy which is neither essential nor anti-essential, but embraces both.¹²⁰ A significant keystone for Kirby in re-thinking essentialism is the volatility and generativity, in short the articulacy, of “biology.” Jonson has characterised Kirby’s Derridean reading of corporeal substance as “life solitic[ing] a chiasmatic motif, an intricate textile which transforms and interweaves as it suspends the polarisation of habitually opposed terms”¹²¹ such as language and materiality, ground and groundlessness, biology and culture.

To put this in simple terms, Biology is not the brute substance or unquestioned truth, which underpins the *fact* of the referent. To locate her thinking of biology with respect to the semiotic terminology of “reference” she employs and questions, Kirby counters the claim that language is anti-referential, by insisting that the referent cannot be conceived as some hidden identity, inaccessible behind the “skin of cultural interpretation.”¹²² Instead, reference is a tissue that interweaves an “intricate and infinite fabric-ation” from

naturalized within our thought and our being? How does it congeal into a corporeal reality? We may assume that when we locate essentialism we identify it and corral its dangers, thereby securing the virtue of our own practice. But we have merely embraced another of essentialism’s many mutations and one that finds us right inside the belly of the beast....The stuff of essentialism is not an entity that can be identified and dissolved by merely saying yes or no to it....Yet if we grant that essentialism is unarguably wrong – morally, politically, and even logically – we still haven’t addressed the ways in which its errors work; that is, how essentialism’s scriptures “come to matter,” how they come to write/right themselves” (72).

¹¹⁹ Kirby 78.

¹²⁰ The möbius strip enables a thinking of a body or subject that is not two distinct substances, or indeed two attributes of a single substance, but both of these possibilities together. This model has been used in other areas of feminist theory, notably by Elizabeth Grosz in *Volatile Bodies*, to discuss the relation between body and mind (mind inflecting into body, and body into mind) and between inside and outside of the subject – eg. corporeal exterior and psychical interior.

¹²¹ Jonson 54.

¹²² Kirby 80.

the substantive and the formal, materiality and signification, biology and language.¹²³ Kirby's ideas about the sign, language and corporeality are directly informed by Jacques Derrida's general theory of writing, to be discussed shortly. She seeks to re-think the productivity of the sign, so that what the sign makes/represents is "informed by a context that is more than linguistic, an "intertext" in which the very concept of linguistics is placed under erasure."¹²⁴ Kirby has been inspired by Derrida's suggestion that "the most elementary processes within the living cell" might be conceived as a "writing" whose system is never closed, to re-conceive "essence," as it has been used to establish "foundation" or "ground," as rather a mutable tissue of corporeal substance.¹²⁵ Only in so far as the parameters of what is understood to be writing as a literary and linguistic production and materiality as a foundation are being re-defined, the body is conceived by Kirby as a "shifting scene of inscription that both writes and is written," rather than the scene of writing in the sense of a passive body.¹²⁶

The nature of Kirby's critique of Butler has been anticipated already in earlier parts of this chapter. She argues that evidence of the same critical impulse – to foreclose the analysis of matter – deserves attention in Butler's work and that various commitments and exclusions in Butler's argument no less than jeopardise her endeavour, albeit an endeavour which Kirby finds among the most provocative to discuss the limits of representation. Kirby offers an extremely close and considered reading of Butler's project in *Bodies that Matter*, its aims and objectives, its contributions and achievements and it is respectful of the contribution Butler makes to Kirby's own position. While Kirby concedes the connections of Butler's writing with that of Derrida, she ultimately finds a Derridean position on the problematic of materiality more convincing. For Kirby, this stems around several points about Butler's understanding of language and where it differs from Derrida's, namely Butler's commitment to the sign and its legacy that struggles with the undecidable relation to the existence of matter.

¹²³ Kirby 8.

¹²⁴ Kirby 53.

¹²⁵ Derrida qtd. in Kirby 61.

¹²⁶ Kirby 61.

Importantly, for Kirby, Butler's discussion of the discourse of construction acknowledges that grammatical formulations will inevitably produce an "outside," or "beneath," a "before" or "beyond" language and discourse.¹²⁷ However, in spite of Butler's insistence that interpretation should not be conceived across a distance separating concept and thing which is made objectifiable by language and her insistence on the contiguity of language and matter, it is the case for Butler, Kirby argues, that the temporal and spatial separations which constitute that nebulous and vital difference between the ideal (language and discourse) and matter, indeed between language and the referent, are produced *within* language. For a disappointed Kirby, this points to a need to revise the analogy of a Venn diagram and its overlapping image of a mutually informing relation between language and matter, where instead the spheres can be shown to no longer overlap. Instead, one sphere would have to be placed inside the other sphere, which has expanded to include the first as its subset. Kirby has outlined both Butler's aim and its ensuing tendency to foreclose to the physical presence of a body (an outside to language), as others have before her. She writes:

Butler's aim is to remind us that the perception and representation of this outside, despite its convincing transparency, is always/already a language effect – a cultural production. Indeed, this point is underlined by Butler's reliance on the overarching term "culture" as an explanatory category that both locates and frames this shifting production.¹²⁸

Within Butler's provocative reading, Kirby locates a certain privileging of language. So, Kirby argues, Butler is not successful at opening *both* terms up to their mutual implications, therefore introducing a separating line of clarification between them. In some difficult words, she writes "Her critique of separability within language is founded upon this essential separation."¹²⁹ Inadvertently, Kirby argues, Butler re-installs a series of hierarchically organised oppositions – ideality and matter, culture and nature, mind and body – which jeopardise her attempt to seriously rethink the separation of ideality from materiality. Kirby observes that while Butler's analysis of the terms by which

¹²⁷ Kirby 106.

¹²⁸ Kirby 107.

¹²⁹ Kirby 107.

corporeality is conventionally understood is effective, her object of analysis is clearly not the body as a substantive something. Indeed "its absence is required for her thesis to have some purchase."¹³⁰ This would be a consequence of approaching her object through textual analyses, of her close readings of various textual approaches to the subject of corporeality, in spite of grounding her discussion in contemporary political concerns for corporeality and the matter of sex. In concluding her critique, Kirby's generosity is being tested as she writes: "Our sense of the materiality of matter, its palpability and its physical insistence, is rendered unspeakable and unthinkable in Butler's account for the only thing that can be known about it is that it exceeds representation."¹³¹

Ultimately for Kirby, Butler's understanding of language ultimately makes her more susceptible to a legitimate criticism of linguisticism, more so than Derrida's exposition of textuality, which Kirby finds more convincing. This point hinges around Butler's interpretation and application of the Saussurean "sign."¹³² Kirby argues that Derrida, following Saussure, is able to explore Saussure's ambition in semiology to open the sign and the notion of a semiotic system, to a broader field of operation than might be confined by linguistics. Surreptitiously akin to what is generally held to be a failed ambition of Saussure's, the concept of grammatology, for Derrida, represents an enlarged scene of operation for the sign and its meaning, in a *science* of writing.¹³³ Grammatology is writing, a writing of signs, where the identity of the sign is always preceded by a differential process of altering, and an inseparable part of a much larger and more intricate textile. Directly informing Kirby's reading of corporeal substance as an active presence that has already inscribed itself in the forms which represent it, this notion of a Derridean writing informs her reading of Butler. The implications are that the "morphology" of the Derridean grammatological textile cannot be contained within language or culture or signification, the terms which Butler relies on for interpreting the

¹³⁰ Kirby 108.

¹³¹ Kirby 108.

¹³² Kirby bases much of her critique in Butler's failure to acknowledge Saussure's ambivalence and unease with the components of the sign. Saussurean semiotics is carefully analysed by Kirby in Chapter 1 of her book.

¹³³ "From now on we must admit the possibility of reversing Saussure's proposition some day: linguistics is not a part, even if privileged, of the general science of signs, it is semiology that is a part of linguistics" (Roland Barthes qtd. in Kirby 53).

intelligibility of matter. Instead, Butler is reluctant according to Kirby, to explore the implication that the identity of language and culture, become a question of the sign's re-representation as a "material expression through and through."¹³⁴

This argument is expanded through an examination of Butler's definition of language.

For Butler, what defines language *as* language is the play of substitution, enabled by a founding absence that the sign attempts to fill. In other words, a sign is a "sign of" or "substitute for" something other than itself...Butler understands this absence or loss as the originary difference that language is unable to repair.¹³⁵

In the play of substitution, the identity of the language/sign preserves the oppositional relation between word and thing (not-word); that is, the purported irreducible difference is in fact reducible to the opposition of absence and presence. Kirby must be careful, at this point, to justify her judgment because, to be entirely fair to Butler, it must be acknowledged that in the deconstructive tradition of Derrida, Butler is endeavouring to render difference in such a way that neither materiality nor language can be configured as absolutes. Kirby argues that there are two important differences between Butler and Derrida. Firstly, to outline a point to which we will return shortly, the "difference (*différance*) that Derrida evokes doesn't so much exceed culture or defy intelligibility as it troubles our sense of what identifies or encloses these terms."¹³⁶ Secondly, related to this, language and discourse for Derrida are not mechanisms which bind the human condition, nor does this binding mediate the "unrepresentable substance of the world."¹³⁷ Kirby argues that, as an argument about the limits of representation, Butler's discussion locates itself within the "hermeneutic maze of language and representation that is regarded as separable from 'something' that preexists humanness, 'something' that lacks language."¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Kirby 115.

¹³⁵ Kirby 109.

¹³⁶ Kirby 109.

¹³⁷ Kirby 109.

¹³⁸ Kirby 110.

Kirby goes to great lengths to avoid endorsing the point that the existence of a materiality can be equated with the unrepresentable, as if the production of this materiality as something before or without language was not itself susceptible to the altering, the *spacing*, from which representation arises. Kirby does grant that Butler's characterisation of that which is unrepresentable is being destabilised and is being put under erasure. Yet she argues that because Butler conceptualises language as a mediating barrier, one which tries to bridge a gap and fill an absence, it prevents her from including "within the strange folds of textual interiority" what her Derridean reading is able to include.¹³⁹ More precisely, the inclusion of corporeal substance is made possible by Kirby's Derridean reading, which will be discussed in more depth shortly.

Due to Butler's understanding that language is placed within the functional borders of the sign, as a supplement which allows "what *appears* to signify," Kirby is able to argue that for Butler the originary status of matter, of what appears phenomenally, is never in doubt. Language is perceived as a second order construct or substitute for something which goes absent. Therefore, Butler assumes that matter was in fact a discrete entity which preceded its representation in language/discourse. Even though Butler, as we have been told, proceeds by, as Kirby writes, "placing matter in a relationship of contiguity with language – albeit as active adjunct or as demanding support – the originary status of matter is never in doubt."¹⁴⁰ As the constitutive demand *for* language, matter is the non-linguistic. To allow Kirby to speak at length, for this is the key to her critique:

Matter for Butler may not be a blank or passive surface, but it is still a surface, and one that demands to be interpreted or written upon, by something other than itself. It seems that matter is unintelligible to itself, and this lack of intelligibility can only be remedied by thought/language. Although matter possesses the capacity to call upon thought, it is apparently incapable of calling upon itself to interpret itself: matter can only expend itself in thoughtless activity.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Kirby 110.

¹⁴⁰ Kirby 114.

¹⁴¹ Kirby 115.

Instead, Kirby seeks a more considerable transformation of the identity of both matter and language. To ensure matter is imbued with a constitutive animation, it acquires in Kirby's hands some of the intelligibility and generativity of what Kirby has called earlier in her book "biology." If matter is differentiating, or capable of construing itself through "involved re-presentation," rather than being an absence to fill, "then perhaps matter is considerably more articulate than Butler has imagined."¹⁴² Why would language/thought be alien to this process? Of language, it is possible to apprehend that "language is not first and foremost a system of signification: meaning is not the defining purpose of its expression, and the difference in its reasoning is not simply captured by linguistics."¹⁴³ Consequently, language begins to be attuned to its own materiality (where materiality doesn't only resonate as significance/signification but also substantive materialisation as speaking is gesture and writing is marks on a page) and matter begins to be attuned to its biological generativity, its intelligibility and significance.

Kirby's final point is that Butler is not able to demonstrate the constitution of anything like a weighty body, for the *surface* is the site of engagement with discourse/language. By this Kirby does not simply mean the weight and insistence of a fleshy body, but also the equation of substance with interiority. The performativity of language makes its effect by altering the body's *outline* and inscribing it.¹⁴⁴ From chapter 2 it will be remembered that Butler argues a subject's interiority is something like an effect of marks on a body's surface. Kirby argues that the form/matter distinction underpins Butler's enterprise when she writes:

[Butler's]...intervention is limited to the surface of the surface because she assumes that the differentiation of contour-ing is given by/in signification. As signification is the play of form, substance is excluded from this activity.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Kirby 114.

¹⁴³ Kirby 115.

¹⁴⁴ Butler, *Bodies that Matter* 17. Butler writes: "That the body which one 'is' is to some degree a body which gains its sexed contours in part under specular and exteriorizing conditions suggests that identificatory processes are crucial to the forming of sexed materiality." And, more indicative of the discursive regime of heterosexuality with which she is concerned, she writes, "heterosexual normativity is a regime that contours the body setting the limits to bodily intelligibility" (*Bodies that Matter* 17).

¹⁴⁵ Kirby 128.

In terms of thinking through the body's *materialisation*, then, Butler doesn't get too far beyond the surface. While a body's surface is peculiar in its coupling of interiority and exteriority, Butler's reading does not penetrate the effects of substance as an interiority. Thinking the morphogenesis of language, *through* and *as* the body, is not to reckon across a bounded terrain played out upon the body's surfaces, but "through the surfaces within surfaces that couple exteriority within interiority."¹⁴⁶

While it may seem as if the conceptual aims of Butler and Kirby are very close, with a similar objective to wrest a mutable substance away from its conception as passive and imbue it with activity, Kirby's can be distinguished by a certain insistence that her formulations are more thoroughly entangling of the ideality and materiality distinction, and by extension, construction and matter. Given that Butler concedes that her argument will inevitably produce an "outside" or "before" the work of language's constructions, then it seems fair that one would be expected to read between the lines of her text, being constantly aware that language may not be up to the task of describing the perversity she hopes to invoke in those pages. However, Kirby's reading, in the mode of close scholarship, is able to illuminate some key shortcomings or "traps" – for want of a better word – in Butler's deconstructive style of writing matter. Firstly, Kirby is able to illuminate that a certain complexity is not granted to terms such as language and the cultural, which remain relatively undisturbed by the transformations which breach identifying borders.¹⁴⁷ Secondly, Butler's understanding of difference is defined in relation to the absence of one term. Thirdly, Kirby is persuasive that the extent to which Butler mobilises a sense of subject formation as the internalisation of exteriority, does not extend beyond a body's surface. In agreement with McKenzie, Kirby suggests that Butler's reading of the body is a body that *bears* – and bares for that matter – the contouring effects of signification upon a skin surface and therefore lacks a sense of depth and mass.

Kirby's critique of Butler, when positioned in context with her extended argument in

¹⁴⁶ Kirby 126.

¹⁴⁷ Kirby 125.

Telling Flesh, maintains an insistence on a bodily presence that is biological. This account is influential because it insists on thinking the biological in non-reductionist terms and resists the writing-out of biology evident in some poststructuralism. She seeks to articulate that a biological presence or foundation for the body does not necessarily imply reductionism if the biological is thought as something other than limit or constraint. For Kirby, this means a body that entirely splits itself into a *network* of intelligible and sensible membranes, as her description suggests the internal membranous workings of a physiological organism which is intimate with forms of self-intelligibility and cultural interpretation.¹⁴⁸ Further, the biological can be thought in the sense of capacities to re-generate and grow, as well as an intricate and complex entity of limbs, tissue, bone, flesh, fluid etc., as they constitute a “skeleton” and capacity for language and tool use. Under these terms, Kirby’s “bio-logy” wards against both an internal solipsism *and* a fixed, constraining or unresponsive substance (bedrock) by pointing to the writing together of biology and logos (language, interpretation, logic), in a writing which inflects internal and external bodily realms through each other into a corporeal flow. The shifting scene of inscription internalises “exteriority” and exteriorises “interiority.” While Kirby’s argument can only be conceived as a very provisional discussion of biology, it is persuasive in arguing that articulate or intelligent matter be seen as an integral element of contemporary concerns about corporeality and as an attempt to counter a tendency to write-out biology from constructionist formulations.

In that the discussion may appear to have travelled along way from the themes established at the opening of this chapter about the relationships between bodies and clothes, it may be useful at this point to pause and foreground the importance of these analyses to further discussions about the body’s ways of being in clothes and the theoretical modes of recovering this being. It was proposed in chapter 2 that one of the

¹⁴⁸ Kirby writes “If we think of the complexity of essentialism’s textile as morphology, we begin to appreciate why morphology cannot be reduced to the external outline of an anatomy...Morphology is a splitting through of every membrane that would protect (itself against) an interiority. Morphology is also a bio-logy where the “infinite allusion” of one membrane within another real-izes a corporeography whose substance is never not generative” (79). In rendering her Derridean reading of corporeal substance, she observes Derrida’s description of Freud’s mystic writing pad as, amongst other characteristics, an infinite allusion, as he writes its “depth is simultaneously a depth without bottom, an infinite allusion, and a perfectly superficial exteriority” (78).

prevalent ways of framing the clothes-body relationship was to define it as a way of articulating or shaping a self as a communicating being. In this proposition there is a presupposition about the function of clothing and dress. This function is expressed clearly in the words of Caroline Evans and Minna Thornton: "The function of dress [is] to define the body and to bring it into language."¹⁴⁹ What is suggested here is that clothes and dress not only have a significant role to play in articulating the embodied self, as part of a sphere of meaningful cultural exchange, but they operate like a threshold between the linguistic and its other. From a position granted to them by clothes, individuals come into visibility and "speak" to others, even if the messages are sometimes ambiguous. It becomes important, then, to investigate theoretical discussions in regards to the sorts of investments that are made in defining a position for the embodied self within culture, representation and language. By this it is meant, the way in which specific theoretical paradigms and their concepts have prefigured an embodied way of being – leaving an indelible impression of the relations of self with body, language and representation. Particularly, the impression of the body's surface as the site of engagement between body and language/discourse is central to the concept of the "body as a cultural construction," as language/discourse "write the body." As a consequence, the sense of the body as a changing text, or discursive effect (as the product of this writing), indelibly delineates an impression of a surface body. The concepts of writing or mapping the surface are both very suggestive with regards to thinking about the work of dress, yet various figurations of this concept within dress studies are not without their complications, as we will see in later chapters. While Butler's theoretical efforts have been to invest this surface with activity, so that the body it represents is not perceived as a passive entity, the degree to which she has been successful has been the subject of several critiques. And so, we move on to Best's analysis of Butler.

¹⁴⁹ Evans and Thornton 68.

The Matter of the "Text": Best's Critique of Butler

Best's engagement with Butler must be situated in her extended PhD project about the corporeal and sexual difference, the aims of which were in part to evidence the fundamental importance of sexual difference to conceptions of space, language and being-in-the-world. Like Butler, Kirby and McKenzie, Best seeks to contest restricted notions of language and contingency which claim to constitute the knowledge of bodies, "the body" as exclusively linguistic or discursive object.

Her argument is with the cultural constructionist position that has tended to "convert everything into an interpretable text... When the world becomes "text" it is our relativistic creation; the positivity of matter or real events is assumed to be lost, or, at least, thoroughly mediated by language and interpretation."¹⁵⁰ In the style of Butler's argument, Best works with a certain complexity as she wants to affirm the argument that standard cultural studies usage of the "text" has spread a "very thin, homogenised notion of textuality across the humanities,"¹⁵¹ while also defending a radical potential of the text to challenge both the linguistic and hermeneutic frames from which it arises. Her aim is to ensure that textuality (or cultural interpretation) directly interfaces or intersects with matter, as the text is opened up to the world, rather than the world reduced to text.¹⁵² The implication of homogenisation is explained as the extension of the methods of textual analysis to a merely increasing pool of literary analysis, or heterogeneous objects – say from mass or popular culture – being treated as extensions of either linguistic or literary problems. Consequently, the potential for the text to enable a creative friction along the border between high and everyday culture and to question disciplinary borders due to an alignment with mass culture has diminished in cultural studies. In contrast to Butler, McKenzie and Kirby, Best's discussion is far more grounded in a direct criticism of cultural studies. As a result of her critique, one receives the impression of cultural studies as the poor cousins to a more sophisticated philosophical discourse. Several of the points

¹⁵⁰ Best 132.

¹⁵¹ Best 135.

¹⁵² Best 134.

of Best's argument can be illuminated with reference to a maxim in the humanities and cultural studies that the *body is a text*. Designed to counter the notion that the body is given, this claim is taken to mean that a body is part of an extended domain – a context – of signification and therefore an object for interpretation. Best quotes an example from Off Centre: Feminism and Cultural Studies by Sarah Franklin, Celia Lury and Jackie Stacey which raises this claim while identifying the implications of textualisation in feminist cultural studies. To cite their description of the effects of semiotics on cultural studies:

From this perspective, meaning is understood to be produced through the play of difference and is relational (produced in relation to other signs) rather than referential (produced by reference to objects existing in the world). The development of these interpretative techniques, in which the analogy of language as a system is extended to culture as a whole, marked a substantial break with the positivist and empirical traditions which had limited much previous cultural theory.¹⁵³

The authors then outline why the analysis of cultural processes as texts, under the influence of deconstruction (identified as literary analysis) becomes problematic for feminism:

Central issues for feminists, such as the control of women through their bodies, present problems for this textual analogy; some feminists would suggest that the female body cannot be considered simply as a text. Furthermore, such a method may contribute to the problem of objectification, whereby the female body becomes an object of scrutiny and investigation, devoid of subjectivity and personhood. Analysing gender within the model of "culture as a language," then, presents specific problems for feminists who have highlighted the objectifying practices (or, the construction of woman as object) within language itself.¹⁵⁴

While this example points to and takes issue with the type of reduction that Best argues is evident across the humanities, it also an example, for her, of the reductions that are made in rejecting the text, in rendering it limited, or ineffective, for cultural analysis. Here, the

¹⁵³ Sarah Franklin, Celia Lury and Jackie Stacey, "Introduction 1 Feminism and Cultural Studies: Past, Present, Futures," Off Centre: Feminism and Cultural Studies, ed. Sarah Franklin, Celia Lury and Jackie Stacey (London: Harper Collins Academic, 1991) 9.

¹⁵⁴ Franklin, Lury and Stacey 10.

shortcomings are simply alluded to by the assertion "the female body cannot be considered simply as a text." To advocate such, would conclude that the body as physical entity does not exist. When put so bluntly, both the assertion and its implication would be difficult to support. Particularly, for Best, it is an example of a deconstructive reading of text being cited as instrumental in formulating this reduction, a claim that is based on a mis-reading of Derrida.

For one, the provocative phrase from Derrida "There is nothing outside the text" has done a lot to further the notion that Deconstruction, here conflated with a widespread textualism, stresses an anti-referentiality: "a reduction of reality to the self-referential realm of language."¹⁵⁵ Best correctly diagnoses that this phrase has become a synecdoche for the textualisation of the humanities.¹⁵⁶ Her argument with the above example is that the synecdoche is received as the actuality of textual practice. That is, there is nothing but the text. Moreover, "Franklin, Lury and Stacey believe that the deconstructive version of the text continues and contributes to the problem of objectification and reduction. Presumably, their belief is based on the idea that the deconstructive text brackets out material reality..."¹⁵⁷

Best concedes that Butler's discussion in Bodies that Matter "splays out the question of materiality in an unprecedented manner" making matter very strange indeed.¹⁵⁸ In view of the ground broken by Butler, both Best and Kirby's criticisms can appear to be quite finicky, yet in that they acknowledge Butler's labour in preparing the soil and first crop, their picking over the harvest should be heard, as its detail is equivalent to a second sowing of seed. Best argues that Butler's formulations "unfortunately packs away the bounty set out in the first section."¹⁵⁹ Like Kirby, Best puts this down to Butler's reliance

¹⁵⁵ Best 152.

¹⁵⁶ Best argues that this phrase from Derrida is "a bomb wrapped up in a ribbon. It is designed to explode in the face of the recipient who takes at face value this gift-to-the-critics. Without any of the keys to disarm this phrase, such as a detailed knowledge of Derrida's scattered remarks on the text, or an understanding of how text is to be reconfigured by his concept of general writing, this phrase implies, or baldly states (depending on how one looks at it), exactly the opposite of Derrida's general project" (152).

¹⁵⁷ Best 155.

¹⁵⁸ Best 159-60.

¹⁵⁹ Best 159.

on a conservative interpretation of textuality/discourse stemming from semiotics. Significantly for Best, Butler is able to “unsettle the usual assumption that signification only produces ideas about the body, which are distinct from the body.”¹⁶⁰ When Butler writes that the “signifying act delimits and contours the body that it then claims to find prior to any and all signification”¹⁶¹ Butler clearly begins to challenge that signification can be separated from the body. However, in a sentence which follows, language is characterised, Best argues, as something which names or posits matter, thus allowing language to effectively re-possess and constitute matter. Best writes:

The following passage demonstrates the strain between the linguistic model and its reduction of the language-matter relation to mediation, and the vestigial traces of her earlier suggestions of their complication and cross-contamination:

To have the concept of matter is to lose the exteriority that the concept is supposed to secure. Can language simply refer to materiality, or is language the very condition under which materiality may be said to appear? If matter ceases to be matter once it becomes a concept, and if a concept of matter’s exteriority to language is always something less than absolute, what is the status of this “outside”?

Butler’s provocative opening ultimately closes right down. Language and matter become two distinct realms.¹⁶²

Not satisfied with the method perceived to simply advance an understanding of the complexity of the text as it *mediates* perception of reality, it has become important for Best to question the safety of this mediating relation by demonstrating a more perverse interimplication.

In what is ultimately a defense of the poststructuralist text, Best’s insightful foray into the *history* of the semiotic text in the human sciences, mobilises Derrida’s theory of general writing to, like Kirby, explore the implications of a textuality that breaks through a strictly literary or loosely linguistic definition. Derrida’s theory of general writing advocates that all signs partake of the principles of writing, which practices in a much

¹⁶⁰ Best 160.

¹⁶¹ Butler, *Bodies that Matter* 30.

¹⁶² Best 161.

larger continuum of involvement as an inscription of the *world*. She expands Derrida's suggestion that matter itself can be conceived as writing, a proposition closed off by Butler, albeit suggested by her. Ultimately, like Kirby, Best characterises Butler's engagement with corporeal substance as set within a too tightly constructed linguistic framework which reduces writing to a human production of discourse.¹⁶³

From Butler to Derrida's Intricate Textile

The idea of embodiment has been central to feminist thought because it cross-circuits the dualism of Cartesianism – and the implications of voluntarism or determinism that flow from this – by positing a mutual inherence of mind and body, subject and world, material substance and immaterial concepts. However, one of the complexities that poststructuralist writings open for feminist scholarship is an embodiment that must be conceived within the legacy of a semiotic heritage, that makes embodiment into a condition of language, without necessarily resolving the issue of how language refers to, but also entails changes in, materiality. In Butler's efforts to de-stabilise conventional understandings captured under the name of "the body," both Kirby and Best have caught sight of a potential to explore the generative capacity of matter, that is integral to embodiment. When Kirby speaks of "biology" and Best of "nature," and McKenzie of establishing the "depth" of the "techno-corporeal," all seek to include something of bodily substance that, in spite of Butler's provocative characterisation of it as "insistent demand," she is reluctant or unable to include. The analyses presented document the immense difficulty in establishing a notion of language, by extension representation, so that it can entail matter. This is due to the conceptual legacy of signification that separates and divides terms that can be shown to be involved in more intimate relation. To come to a thorough understanding of this issue a long path was taken to establish the complexity of this ground, from the premise of constructionist accounts – ie. body as cultural construct – through discussions of a body's implication in relations of power, to analyses of "body" as techno-corporealisation, biology and nature, as they are caught up

¹⁶³ Best 181.

in relations with language. As well, it was necessary to establish some sense of the terms/agencies that are potentially encompassed in the domain of the "cultural" (language, discourse, representation, technology). Both Kirby and Best locate in Derrida's theory of general writing a way to conceptualise the being of matter which "writes" to a different rhythm from that afforded to it by the central premise of signification which has to surmount the barrier of reference to a material world by acting to mediate its brute substance. While few in cultural theory will be unfamiliar with Derrida's notion of writing or textuality as a process of "altering" presence and meaning, it is necessary to dust off its conceptual legacy to explore its most challenging implications and why it might offer a formulation more challenging than Butler can deliver. Both Kirby and Best would argue that Derridean textuality offers an appreciation of the identity of language as it articulates the complexity of inseparability as difference: whereby the identity of language or materiality emerges through mutual relational implication.

It has already been suggested, in a footnote, that Derrida's phrase "There is Nothing Outside the Text" can mean the exact opposite to the critic's claim that he wants to reduce reality to the self-referential realm of language. What if instead Derrida seeks to question, as does Butler, the absolute difference between outside and inside textuality? Kirby writes "As Butler conceptualises language as a mediating barrier, it is quite understandable that in her discussion of matter she might choose to avoid the word substance altogether: it too powerfully evokes the brute and unmediated reality that we imagine as absolute exteriority."¹⁶⁴ Yet, substance becomes, then, that part of reality which is inaccessible to representation. What if Derridean textuality actually questions the differences between substance and text, language and biology, culture and nature, subject and object, questioning the identity of these categories as autonomous entities, "include[ing] within the strange folds of this textual interiority what Butler would exempt from it"?¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Kirby 110.

¹⁶⁵ Kirby 110.

It is in Of Grammatology that Derrida offers one of his more lengthy expositions on textuality, more precisely what he calls writing. Writing for Derrida is not writing in the narrow sense of graphic notation on tangible material, rather it is part of a general order of inscriptions called grammatology. Importantly, Derrida moves the identifying borders of both text and writing to challenge their strictly literary, linguistic, or interpretive definition – eg. the book of words, the transcription of thought or speech. For this re-defined writing, the choice of the word writing might seem strange in that Of Grammatology continues Derrida's critique of the repression of writing in metaphysical philosophy due to the privileging of speech. Therefore, in choosing writing it could be interpreted as a defense of writing against the phonocentrism of metaphysics and structuralism. Yet, it is only writing in so far as writing in a conventional sense is transformed. "Writing is transformed from a secondary activity which transcribes thought or speech – that is, writing as notation – to a form of writing without a simple origin in speech: general writing, the textile, or *text*, the interwoven fabric of traces."¹⁶⁶ Taking the principle that writing is traditionally conceived as "the durable institution of the sign" Derrida slowly reworks the unit of the sign so that it is encompassed within grammatology.¹⁶⁷ He argues that the unit of the linguistic sign and the principle of arbitrariness cannot be thought before the possibility of writing and, therefore, the science of semiotics can be encompassed by a general writing. The sign is opened onto a field of traces, where the sign and writing are informed by a context that is more than linguistic. The principles of general writing and the general text are defined as "the absence of the 'author' and of the 'subject-matter,' interpretability, the deployment of a space and a time that is not 'its own.'"¹⁶⁸ Indeed, Derrida defines writing:

And thus we say "writing" for all that gives rise to an inscription in general, whether it is literal or not and even if what it distributes in space is alien to the order of the voice: cinematography, choreography, of course, but also pictorial, musical, sculptural "writing."...All this to describe not only the system of notation secondarily connected with these activities but the essence and the content of these

¹⁶⁶ Best 163.

¹⁶⁷ Derrida, Of Grammatology 44.

¹⁶⁸ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, trans., "Translator's Preface," Of Grammatology, by Jacques Derrida, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976) lxix.

activities themselves. It is also in this sense that the contemporary biologist speaks of writing and program in relation to the most elementary processes of information within the living cell. And finally, whether it has essential limits or not, the entire field covered by the cybernetic program will be the field of writing. If the theory of cybernetics is by itself to oust all metaphysical concepts – including the concepts of soul, of life, of value, of choice, of memory – which until recently served to separate the machine from man, it must conserve the notion of writing, trace, gramme [written mark], or grapheme, until its own historico-metaphysical character is also exposed. Even before being determined as human (with all the distinctive characteristics that have always been attributed to man and the entire system of significations that they imply) or nonhuman, the *gramme* – or the *grapheme* – would thus name the element.¹⁶⁹

Here, Derrida gives us only a suggestion of the scope of an enlarged scene of writing, where distributed across celluloid or stage are respectively light or bodies. What Derrida here calls the *element*, the *gramme* and at other times the *trace* can be conceived as the unit of grammatology, meaning the enlarged system of traces, where no one element is ever fully present to itself. As Best writes: “The general text is thus like a series of “reflecting pools,” a system of infinite referral; each trace, *gramme* or element is reflected, informed and in contact with all the other elements.”¹⁷⁰ In Positions Derrida discusses the generation of text as the fabrication of a textile of interweaving elements:

...no element can function...without referring to another element which itself is not simply present. This interweaving results in each element...being constituted on the basis of the trace within it of other elements in the chain or system. This interweaving, this textile, is the text produced only in the transformation of another text. Nothing, neither among the elements nor within the system, is ever simply present or absent. There are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces.¹⁷¹

Assisted by the work of the trace, Derrida's engagement with language and the linguistic sign inevitably entails the deconstruction of metaphysics's controlling split between intelligibility and sensibility, form and matter.

¹⁶⁹ Derrida, Of Grammatology 9.

¹⁷⁰ Best 163. Significantly, Best spells out the implications for the conception of the relation between each element or trace and the larger whole, utilising a metaphor offered by Kirby of a hologram, whereby each of the pieces of a hologram contain an image of the whole. Thus, no one trace can be properly isolated from the whole fabric. As Best writes, “Without this notion of a minimal new unit, however problematic, one cannot perceive...” (163), Derrida's deconstruction of the metaphysical privileging of discrete and pure presence which he describes, in Positions, as the undoing and re-weaving of an “old cloth” (24).

¹⁷¹ Derrida, Positions 26.

Crucially for this discussion, *différance*, general writing and Derrida's expanded notion of text, would embrace matter and "the most elementary processes of information within the living cell."¹⁷² For Best and Kirby, Derridean writing, or *différance*, becomes a way to think the part of matter in embodied subject formation, or more broadly a bodily intelligibility, in a general field of emergent bindings that couples interiority with exteriority, intelligibility and sensibility, form and matter. It is proposed that if substance can be thought as internal to writing, then morphology, nature, the sensible, biology can be rethought as the shifting text of legibility itself. For example, for Kirby: "It is a writing and a reading whose many expressions include the workings of bio-logy in a conversation that reconfigures what and where intelligibility is."¹⁷³ In summary, general writing can comprehend the *notation*, the *essence* and *content* of this and other activities, linguistic or otherwise.¹⁷⁴ Significantly, general writing accommodates a co-authored production which can articulate the shifting scene of inscription as a body both writes and is written. Consequently, the hackneyed maxim "the body is text" becomes a little more nuanced as both subject and object, inclusive of biology and language, making it easier to differentiate some of the possible variables at work in the frequently conflated and poorly distinguished phrase(s) "the body is/in/as/of the text." In this sense, the phrase should invoke a reciprocity whereby there is no dynamism of matter that is not a function of its articulation and conversely no articulation that is not a function of the animation of matter. Moreover, as Best observes to open the text to matter and nature is to provocatively suggest that textual play must include the play of the world. As Derrida states it is "*the game of the world* that must be first thought: before attempting to understand all the forms of play in the world."¹⁷⁵ For Derrida then the "intricate and interminable play [of *différance*] occasions all textuality, all systematicity, as it undermines presence and origin," and the impulse for closure.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷² Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 9.

¹⁷³ Kirby 127.

¹⁷⁴ Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 9.

¹⁷⁵ Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 50.

¹⁷⁶ Jonson 56.

While it is not much of a stretch from text to textile (the root of text being *texere*, meaning to weave), why would Derrida nominate *writing* to suggest that which now clearly stretches beyond the mark of the pen? For one, as Kirby also makes clear, Derrida's project is to transform *writing* into something *other than* its traditional designation as an inscriptive practice, as a practice of marking a surface. So why then is Derrida concerned with transforming – rethinking – this concept of writing? Surely it would be to simply take writing away from being the sole arbitrator of meaning, from monopolising meaning. In doing so writing is dis-located from its traditional role as an quantifiable, objective translator of meaning – as something that leaves forever indelible/legible marks to be sourced and resourced ad infinitum. By implication, it is meaning, as the act by which things are designated, which floats free, "...no longer tied to writing in the traditional sense any more that it is to speech or any other type of mark."¹⁷⁷

So, if writing is thus unhinged, does it in fact re-locate itself? Derrida seems to suggest that dis-locating the relation between *designating* and *writing* is precisely the point because it allows us to "...put this concept [writing/designating] into question and to transform it."¹⁷⁸ In fact, Spivak takes this point a step further when she writes, "the choice of 'writing' as an operative term is itself suspect, and a candidature for legible erasure."¹⁷⁹

Derrida himself writes:

This common root, which is not a root but the concealment of origin and which is not common because it does not come to the same thing except with the unmonotonous insistence of difference, the unnamable movement of *difference-itself* which I have strategically nicknamed *trace*, *reserve*, or *difference*, can be called writing only within the *historical* enclosure, that is to say within the boundaries of metaphysics.¹⁸⁰

Therefore, across Derrida's works, with the shifts in his conceptual masterwords – such as trace, gramme, *différance* – he seeks to name this "difference-itself." Again,

¹⁷⁷ Jacques Derrida, "Limited Inc...abc," trans. S. Weber *Glyph* 11 (1977): 191.

¹⁷⁸ Derrida, "Limited Inc...abc" 191.

¹⁷⁹ Spivak lxx.

¹⁸⁰ Derrida, *On Grammatology* 93.

difference-itself, or the writing together of traces, comes *before* (what Derrida tells us in the title to the first part of this book) the presence of the letter, as the condition of possibility of full presence. Significantly, that unnamable movement, what is called the "play" of difference, or *différance*, must precede the alternative of either presence or absence, as their origin.¹⁸¹ It is this "common root" of originary difference in the principle of writing which Derrida seeks to expose in the extension of writing and the text. Rather than emphasising "generality" and universal application, the principle of general writing and language for Derrida is repetition, a repetition which flouts universals, by deriving its transgressive and theatrical identity from an inseparability to the category of difference and its destabilising movement. It becomes a way to elucidate styles of action which couple repetition and difference, in such a way that each instance is a different writing.

Remaining with the question of whether the extension of writing might entail a degree of homogenisation, Best draws attention, amongst others, to the problem of a lack of clear differentiation in Derrida's notion of general writing. The point is that neither difference nor *différance* can be thought unless referring to a history of thought, of metaphysical writing, which works with "discrete terms, pure essences and entities."¹⁸² Without identity and presence, the questioning of a presumed separateness, the illumination of connections, contamination and porosity would not need to be raised. Best points to Derrida's awareness of the problem of homogenisation by stating that his intentions were never to "extend the reassuring book-like closure of the text to the world as library,"¹⁸³ and makes it clear that Derrida is trying to establish a practice of writing that solicits an awareness of the logic and foundations which determine and inform how borders and systems are delineated. Derrida's purpose is also to stress the importance of rethinking borders and distinctions, rather than to ignore limits altogether.¹⁸⁴ The text is an inscription of the world and can include, therefore, all the things in the world in its

¹⁸¹ *Différance*, the motivating force of writing if you will, represents both the *differing* of a trace from another and the *deferring* of the presence of one trace through the other. The word *différance* is a difference that one sees in writing, but one cannot hear in speech.

¹⁸² Best 164.

¹⁸³ Best 164.

¹⁸⁴ Derrida admits that rather than "...doing away with all boundaries, all frameworks, all sharp edges...we sought rather to work out the theoretical and practical system of these margins, these borders, once more from the ground up" (qtd. in Best 164).

entirety; in this spirit he seeks to nurture a sense of writing that doesn't actively foreclose to certain elements that it cannot withstand. Working from the "ground-up," he locates a border, a border for concern in the understanding of the world as a product of human making. The world is too frequently delimited to an entity containing those things made by humans – eg. Language or Culture. That is, the world is a product of those things that have been named by language – i.e. a world known through language. The very border between what counts as language and what does not, relies on an assumption about the human role in making language. Of relevance here, Derrida seeks to contrast the determined text where the constraints are determined in advance – i.e. all those things belonging to the category of language – with the general text that opens itself up to the possibilities that sit outside this category, but may well reside in the world.

Concluding With an Opening

In this chapter, I have outlined several unconventional methods of re-reading constructionism's approach to the body, readings which generate the activity of a bodily materiality, desire and agency internal to the scene of construction. As such, we have been exposed to a preliminary sense that the body ("the body as text") is not overdetermined by linguisticism and is instead a generative and intelligible part of the body of the world of which the text is always already a part. That is, for this thesis, Derrida's textile of traces that inscribes world, together with its suggestions that writing is no longer just a writing on surfaces but the activity of bodies, sound, or light, is able to capture a preliminary sense of a living body as a transitional and shifting entity, a point of overlap between the physical, the practical, the symbolic, the discursive and the social dimensions which together make up the world. The body is a threshold at which a subject's lived experience is incorporated and realised, but never completely realised as either subject or object. It can never be pure object because it is the place through which the world is engaged. Nor can it be pure subject because subjectivity involves a process or negotiation never finished, as elements of world are incorporated and realised, material residues and incoherencies are encountered. From this emerges, an appropriate orientation for exploring the material and discursive conditions that determine the

clothing form and our relations with it. So, then, the dressed body might be thought as a construction produced *at* and *as* what has been called the “limits” where a material and experiential body meets language and world.

Over the course of this chapter, another dimension has been added, particularly a fleshy and living dimension, to our understanding of the performative body and the theoretical tools required to read the performance, while sustaining a sensitivity to the framing of the performer’s stage. As suggested by Derrida, the stage of the world may in fact exceed the framework of the “cultural context,” or the work of “culture” that has until now contextualised the potential meanings of dress.

The Expediency of this Debate for Dress Studies

While this chapter has ventured into abstract territory about “a body,” “the body,” “embodiment,” its writer all the while imagined a clothed-body as the point of reference. Particularly, my own clothed-body before the key-board while writing, or the memory of a recent venture beyond the desk in clothes, as it exists as both representation of/for me and material being. From familiarising myself with the literature on dress, this body has been steeped in an understanding of itself as part of a practice of representation, a practice that continues even at times when it was not at all intended; this body would always be communicating something about the identity of its wearer. As it was outlined at the beginning of this chapter, there have been several calls within dress studies to explore clothes/body relationships with a new thoroughness, as part of studies generally influenced by widely adopted poststructuralist approaches of discourse analysis and textual inquiry. From the early 1990s, the mentions of “the bodies we recover under our clothes,” “King Lear’s poor forked thing,” and a body’s recalcitrance amidst otherwise absorbing cultural transformation, were thrown into relief by my wider reading in the field of corporeal philosophy. Their ambiguity was significantly illuminated by the unfolding range of descriptions for bodily modalities and concerns in literature of the body, meaning it became increasingly unclear whether the object(s) of inquiry – dress, clothes and bodies – were to be related to their part-flesh/part-fabric living incarnations

or those representational forms deciphered through the text. Inconsistencies began to appear between methodological approach and stated concern and object. The ambiguity was further heightened by general discussion of clothing as representational forms, which raised the question of the status of that body it enveloped. It is this literature in dress studies and issues such as these that will be reviewed in the following section.

An Intermission

Surfaces, Outlines, Envelopes, Encasings, Frames, Masks: Re-Covering Clothes-Body Relationships in Dress Studies

...the modern body is both a marginalized entity, resulting from the purging of its supposedly unwieldy impulses as 'dead flesh, a mere residue' and a systematized, 'structured, organised object of investigation' whose drives are methodically and clinically harnessed to societal norms. Where dress is concerned, this ambivalence manifests itself in the twofold role played by clothing, as a system simultaneously able to operate as a sanitizing agency that may turn the physical body into an incorporeal persona, by effecting an elision of concreteness in the service of the sign, and as a problematizing vehicle, intent on asserting the inescapability of physicality by foregrounding its own stubborn and unyielding materiality.¹

Fashion – a recognition that nature has endowed us with one skin too few, and that a fully sentient being should wear its nervous system externally.²

In the preceding chapter I noted the difficulty I've had with apprehending the status of the body and its living and/or physical dimensions in dress studies literature. It would seem that theories of dress and fashion frequently leave out any explicit mentions of the experience of embodiment, even while they seem to be motivated to explore dress as a practice. Moreover turning to view another exclusion, if we look back over the lengthy discussions about bodies we have just moved through there is virtually no reference to a body dressed in clothes, even while one may have served for the reader as a point of illumination. For all the talk of bodies, they were all strangely naked.

In Chapter 3, we discussed the immense complexities involved in bringing the living and experiential body into the light of day in such a way that avoids forgetting the lessons of poststructuralism, that this body lives in relation to language and discourse. At this point in the thesis it will be useful to pause and take an opportunity to review the accounts of clothes and body relationships in dress studies. Particularly, it will take up the

¹ Cavallaro and Warwick 14.

² J.G. Ballard, "Project for a Glossary of the Twentieth Century," *Incorporations*, ed. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter (New York: Zone, 1992) 275.

opportunity suggested by Benstock and Ferriss to explore the theoretical methods for recovering and describing this relationship in recent dress studies literature. We will be following a particular trajectory of theoretical work in dress studies, informed by poststructuralist Feminist scholarship of the body, that wished to grant "the body" a positivity as subject of dress and object of theoretical inquiry. It was foreseen that clothes, dress and fashion might play some part in illustrating a body's presence in conceptions of self, thus indirectly "correcting" those traditional conceptions of self that have emphasised the ethereal or cognitive dimensions. This is one small thread of dress studies scholarship but an important one to look at more systematically, particularly because it is only in hindsight that this thread takes a clearer shape and line and appears to have the shape of a motivation to "do" something with an understanding of the relationships of clothes and bodies. Many of the writings to be discussed will reveal the use of the concepts such as sign, text, discourse, language, image and representation that identify the poststructuralist tool-kit. In chapter 3, we experienced first-hand how *deconstructive methods of cross-examination* were applied to the presuppositions of delimiting constructionist arguments which in fact relied on a fixed understanding of matter, essence and nature, all the while hoping to demonstrate how these entities were fundamentally mediated by representations of them. As a consequence, the nature of matter was shown to be far more generative, responsive and changing than had been assumed.

By taking an intermission, the aim is to give visibility to the theoretical and intellectual energy that has been invested in recovering what is known of the relationships of bodies and clothes. The objective is to solicit some reflection. It is not necessary to come to any particular conclusions in these pages but rather to observe and identify particular approaches and methods to the task of writing about dress.

Bringing the Body Into Language

To establish the ground, Caroline Evans and Minna Thornton's book announced that late 1980s contemporary fashion was playing an important role in illuminating the body as a

“critical site of the struggle *for* (and *against*) meaning in contemporary culture.”³ This comment was made in a chapter titled “Women, Fashion and Postmodernism” and the authors’ are emphasising the body as central to contemporary women’s relations with fashion, as fashion served as a site to investigate broader concerns of women’s sexuality, increasing social or vocational freedom and responses to shifting entertainment, leisure and consumer trends. A key point to this comment is revealed in the following phrase: “The function of dress to define the body and bring it into language is foregrounded in contemporary fashion.”⁴ In this comment the authors reveal their approach – for us, their intention to suggest – that it is fashion/dress’s operations within/as language that produces and by extension illuminates the contemporary body as a site of meaning. Again, what is important is the cultural significance of dress as an apparatus for shaping the self, for both announcing it by granting a means to “speak” and by forming it in visible marks of definition relative to cultural issues. From this position within language, the body can participate in the acting-out of meaning. The capacity of fashion to give some insight into the struggle for meaning – the meaningful exchanges of body with things, issues and others, if you like – is illustrated with reference to the products of British fashion label Body-Map. In their unconventional designs for the catwalk, Body-map foregrounded the role clothes play in “mapping” an understanding of the body. Instead of the seamless and familiar cuts of garments, the designers would relocate a garment’s openings or “holes” to unexpected places, working to disarm the viewer/wearer and “to shift the emphasis from one part of the body to another.”⁵ Designers David Holah and Stevie Stewart wanted to explore new parts of the body and to try to, in their words, “amalgamate bits of flesh with bits of clothing and [to] try to make the two merge.”⁶ From these words, it seems the designers were seeking to illustrate the clothed body as an assemblage of material forms and to express some aspect of the clothed body’s hybrid material nature. Their outcomes stemmed from a method of working to cut patterns where the designer’s felt they were montaging parts of the human form in two-dimensions. “A less familiar inquiry into the body and its relation to

³ Evans and Thornton 68. My italics for emphasis.

⁴ Evans and Thornton 68.

⁵ Evans and Thornton 68.

⁶ Evans and Thornton 68.

clothes,” Evans and Thornton suggest, is available in this experimentation than the more regular fair in fashion circles of “standardised” and “sexually differentiated” bodies.⁷ The designers seek, in the authors’ view, a more “phenomenological approach to the body”⁸ although there is little indication what this would be.

Returning to the sense implied in the authors’ two quotations cited above, significantly they imply that it is only through a production within language – by extension fashion as it defines the body – that the body can have definition and meaning, however, *that* meaning should not preclude an experiential or phenomenological understanding of the body. The “struggles” of meaning for a body are not always those that are produced within language.

If the body is a site where the acting out of meaning is forged through its relations with clothes, the authors seek to suggest that contemporary fashion can signify these relationships in an illuminating way. Working from the title of the label (BodyMap), Evans and Thornton argue that contemporary fashion *maps* the body with meaning, leaving an indelible impression of the clothes-body relationship as a contouring exercise as clothes chart a body’s surface and respond to its forms in a play of exposure and veiling. The authors’ rightly propose that this surface, telling us of the relationship the body has with its clothes, is able potentially to express a range of tensions important to contemporary culture. Interestingly, “mapping” is the action of the cartographer’s pen, as a landscape is charted across the flat page and it is an impression of fashion’s surface work across the body that the authors’ leave us with.

While it is significant that Evans and Thornton endeavour to shed some light on the relationship of clothes and bodies, in view of a general point of emphasis about the body as a site of tension in contemporary culture, it is not necessary to single out contemporary avant-garde fashion as an exclusive example. The history of western fashion is full of

⁷ Evans and Thornton 68.

⁸ Evans and Thornton 68.

such relationships, which can equally tell us about bodies and their relationships with clothes. Importantly, perhaps giving further weight to their analysis, their example can be seen as a move to represent a specific theoretical point and concept, namely that the work of culture has come to be more acutely understood as the inscription of particular concerns on bodies. That is, culture is understood as a mapping activity that "informs" bodies, acting on and around their surface, inscribing the practices of those bodies with issues of contemporary cultural concern.

Tales of Inscription

In a 1987 essay by Kim Sawchuk, the significance of the concept, tool and theoretical metaphor of surface inscription is further illustrated in reference to fashion. Following upon a re-telling of Franz Kafka's evocative and gruesome tale of the condemned's bodily inscription with the terms of their sentence in "The Penal Colony," Sawchuk imagines fashion as a discursive force or power, which inscribes bodies through dress practices and the behaviours of fashion. She writes:

...when we are interested in fashion, we are concerned with relations of power and their articulation at the level of the body, a body intimately connected to society, but which is neither prior to it, nor totally determined by it.⁹

Seemingly influenced by Foucault's perspective on disciplinary regimes, Sawchuk mobilises the notion of a surface inscription to articulate an understanding of fashion as a powerful and self-disciplining social force. Taking note of her language of coercion/domination, Sawchuk articulates fashion's securing work on bodies in the following words:

Whether naked or clothed, the body bears the scatalogical marks, the historical scars of power. Fashionable behaviour is never simply a question of creativity or self-expression; it is also a mark of colonization, the "anchoring" of our bodies, particularly the bodies of women, into specific positions, and parts of the body in

⁹ Sawchuk 62.

line with the gaze.¹⁰

Sawchuk articulates fashion's power as a set of interweaving and circulating discourses, that at any historical juncture, can implicate many facets of the social and cultural plane – eg. the discourses of health, beauty, morality and sexuality, location, nation and economy all implicate themselves in fashion's web of influence. All of these discourses “involve the body, produce the body as a textured object with multi-dimensional layers, touched by the rich weave of history and culture.”¹¹ However, there is no explicit reference to Foucault's notion of the “micro-physics of power” which refers to the manner in which power acts itself on bodies.¹²

Sawchuk goes to great lengths to argue that the bodies of women are not simply passive entities awaiting the imprinting marks of fashion, like some “tabula rasa upon which a predetermined message is scrawled.”¹³ Thus, she *implicitly* acknowledges the pleasure women take in fashion and its related attractions, an issue that complicates her tale of power's inscriptions and calls for a better understanding of the mechanisms of its reception or digestion. Instead, it is more like, women anticipate the power of fashion, desiring its guidance and authority. As self-disciplining subjects their submission is an effect of their own desires and efforts to translate its influence into their lives.

Her argument must work against a long-standing tradition that makes the source of messages, ideas, forces, considerably more active and powerful, than the mediums that receive and bear those ideas. That “ideas are capable of informing or inscribing bodies sits more easily within our general scheme of thinking”¹⁴ Best explains. This is because it conforms with the binary order, she persuasively argues, which structures our thought – the dualism of the mind/body distinction consolidates an old Platonic distinction between ideas/matter or intelligibility/sensibility, from which flows a matrix of oppositions which underpin Western thought such as active/passive, production/reproduction, change/stasis,

¹⁰ Sawchuk 62-63.

¹¹ Sawchuk 65.

¹² Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 26.

¹³ Sawchuk 70.

¹⁴ Best 182.

culture/nature. Best writes: "Activity and inscriptive power can be lent, or extended, to what is regarded as the creation or emanation of mind – ideas."¹⁵ The matter of bodies is far more mysterious and impenetrable. What is perhaps, not so easily comprehended, nor given much thought, is how ideas, that can be wielded and originate internally and externally, can pass from outside to inside (or vice versa), from cultural idea to mental idea, (or the other way round). This would involve careful thinking of those practices and experiences by which these ideas are materialised.

When the language of inscription is invoked, a set of ancillary co-ordinates arrive to be set into place. An active force is wielded against a passive surface; the pen against the writing surface, the cosmetic brush upon the unmade-up face. It is these co-ordinates that Sawchuk must attempt to re-organise in order to make her point that women are neither two-dimensional beings, nor without agency to respond to fashion. Also, there is the danger of the implication that the women's bodies are considered as pre-social or pre-existing social relations of which fashion is a part. She writes: "we must take care in our own theoretical discourse not to position the body or the social in a relationship of radical alterity to one another."¹⁶ These legacies of inscription will be examined further in chapter 4.

Clothes as Sign/Text: the Re-play of the Body as Sign

In the preceding chapter it was made evident that the body is both a physical entity and yet never simply a physical object of investigation for us, because it is the threshold of lived experience through which we interact with a world beyond the individual. Movement beyond itself characterises the human body, as the arm stretches, the hand grasps and the legs start to run, a body moves and extends into the world. But this extension is not simply a case of "locomotion" since dress also extends, stretches and re-defines the body's boundaries, so as to create different cuts, contours and meanings. Within the terms of a semiotic approach, a dressed body would be a sign because it can

¹⁵ Best 182.

¹⁶ Sawchuk 65.

signify "beyond itself." A sign can take any sensible form at all, but what defines a sign is that it is part of a shared system of conventions via which meaning is determined and deployed. Reiterating now familiar territory, it has been shown that the methods of the sign have been popular in fashion studies. While the direct application of language models to the study of clothing and fashion have been questioned as either an inappropriate extension of literary concerns or linguistic components to clothing forms, there is an adherence to the notion that clothing and fashion are defined as a means of communication and cultural meaning, like a language. However, unreliable and ambivalent the messages are, clothes are seen as the visible form by which people are read and read others. In dress studies, when writers are pressed to define the "sign" of dress analysis, it is not insignificant that the essential *unit* of signification is regarded as the clothing object and the related forms of image and text that represent it, rather than, say, the clothed-body. Remember at this point, that Breward names the clothing sign, images and texts as the units of analysis in a discussion about semiotic methodologies in dress studies.¹⁷ Also, Fred Davis speaks of the elements of the clothing code being fabric, texture, colour, pattern, volume, silhouette and occasion.¹⁸ It is as if these elements weave an expressive surface or contour to the sign that then stands-up and "speaks" of its own accord. The sign becomes pinned to a material support whose nature is unknown. Yet, when looking at the effect of visible form, the support is present in both the object-sign and the self upon which the objects are pinned, as well as in the identities the sign constitutes. Consequently because of the understanding that the effect is a visible form of identity, one is left with the impression that the pattern for cutting the "object" has been tailored a little small from the fabric of overall effect. This object would be an albeit important but integral part of a produced assemblage and wearing practice.

To some extent the isolation of the word "clothes" as operative sign might be the result of the complex semantic field of terms of which the words dress, fashion, clothes and culture are all a part. On the one hand, the isolation of the clothing object may be a mild form of disciplinary policing, not entirely unreasonable, to clarify and differentiate the

¹⁷ Breward, "Culture, Histories, Identities" 302.

¹⁸ Davis 5.

object of dress studies' analytical efforts from a host of other body techniques and cultural "dressings" such as cosmetics, hairstyling, tattooing, piercing and gym design that can be encompassed as part of fashion activity. In some spheres of dress studies the tendency to embrace all, or some, of these related activities as part of its domain, has already been noted earlier in the introduction. On the other hand, to isolate clothes as object of attention can be a good indicator of the analytical force required to arrest the practices of dress from the over-familiar and bring them more clearly into view. As a practice so thoroughly ingrained in daily life, the objects of dress are not necessarily easily discernible to inquiry. This is also in part because of all the modalities of practice upon which wearing dress registers – the material/physical, the functional, the aesthetic, the symbolic/communicative and the economic. A certain degree of artificiality is required to arrest clothes as objects from their lived entanglements.

The Fashioned Body as Image: Free-Floating Surfaces

The presence of a strong thematic of the clothed-body-in-representation is largely a product of the activities of art historians and art theorists and film theorists working in dress studies such as Evans, Thornton, Hollander and Gaines. For these writers, the clothes-body relationships of contemporary society are thought to be extensively mediated by the image, producing a confluence between the clothed body and its representation, a confluence of the styling of the imaged body and the self-styling spectator/subject. The root of this notion can be traced to the thesis of Anne Hollander's Seeing Through Clothes, in which she argues, that parallels can be identified between the painted bodies, naked and clothed, in a history of Western art and the contemporary clothing cuts and trends of their time. She writes of her intention to explore "how clothes in works of art have been connected with clothes in real life."¹⁹ As an attempt to show these connections are bi-lateral and mutually informing, Hollander's study has been important for establishing the persuasive notions that images inform daily life in clothing and that dress is an aesthetic (evenly painterly) practice. However, the study is largely

¹⁹ Hollander, Seeing Through Clothes xi.

weighted toward the analysis of painted images of nudes and dressed women, rather than life off the canvas. The notion of a confluence between relations with clothes in real life and the conditions of pictorial images is reiterated in Gaines' evocative phrase that women "know too well what it is to be fitted up for representation" and also the words of Evans and Thornton who write:

The analysis of women's relation to the fashion image would contribute towards an understanding of the pleasure and pain of wearing fashion, a practice that is also largely about *picturing oneself*.²⁰

Here, the writers refer to the reflex of seeing/being seen that is central to both relations with the fashion image and wearing clothes. Gaines writes, speaking succinctly of this reflexivity, that women are trained into being objects of "to-be-looked-at-ness": "learning, in the age of reproduction, to carry the mirror's eye within the mind, as though one might at any moment be photographed."²¹ Undoubtedly women appear to be well practiced at internalising the eyes of either camera, mirror or other, yet men are not immune to the experience of the intense reproduction and scrutiny of dressed bodies through simultaneous screens – filmic, photographic, televisual and digital – which are cross-compared with the images of the self in mirror. The ad-jingle by Portmans (an Australian women's fashion chain) that goes "Get the look!" refers to a uni-sex incitement to wear one's look as object of display. Additionally, Gaines observes that colloquial speech about dress can lend an understanding about the very conceptualisation of the image that popular speech about the filmic and photographic image doesn't enable.²² Terms of phrase such as "dressing-up," "making-up" and "getting a good fit" can immediately give away the work, the concerted effort of anti-naturalism invested in constructing the illusion of naturalness in picturing oneself. The (fashioning) metaphor of fabrication – i.e. the "fabricated image" – becomes useful for speaking of an image that is *made-up* rather than simply a natural illusion of the real.

²⁰ Evans and Thornton 12. Italics are mine.

²¹ Gaines, *Fabrications* 4.

²² Gaines, *Fabrications* 2.

In chapter 2, the performance and deliberative project of making identity statements, of re-making the body, was discussed as it draws upon signs and images, to constitute an artificial and changeable outer layer. We saw that the attributes of the self as fluid and decentred, fragmented and multiple, were nurtured by a performance within a culture of citation or inter-textuality. While much of what is presented here may seem evident from the earlier critical survey, it is necessary to make apparent in greater detail the legacy of the image and image analysis, and its importance to clothing and body relationships. Contemporary relations with clothing continue to be conceptualised within the framework of the image as the "management of appearances" places bodies at the centre of attention as a *look*, an *image* and a *display*. Furthermore, the fashion object and the clothed-body-as-representation will continue to mutate into image and reproduce into yet more images that yield influence.²³ A series of attributes and organising principles of visibility are made available to the performer – a clothed-body – and heightened within this order of the image such as visibility, definition, fluidity, mutability, artificiality, commodifiability, reproducibility and imagining/fantasy.

A heightened awareness of the construction of dress in painting, filmic and photographic form has helped to identify a thinking of dress as an imaging or picturing technology in itself (rather than simply being the subject of representations). Kaja Silverman invokes this in her description of the work of clothes: "Clothing and other forms of ornamentation make the human body culturally visible. As Eugenie Lemoine-Luccioni suggests clothing *draws* the body so that it can be culturally seen, and articulates it as a meaningful form."²⁴ Along with its related representational forms, dress has long done this work of shaping, articulating and re-organising human corporeality to be seen, thus catering to a Western preoccupation with *seeing* self and knowing self through seeing. While clothing has been used extensively to play with the anticipation of truth, making fantasies and illusions, the sense in which clothes are conceived as delineating an outline for the body seems to cater

²³ Caroline Evans, "Yesterday's Emblems and Tomorrow's Commodities," *Fashion Cultures: Theories, Explorations and Analysis*, ed. Stella Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson (New York: Routledge, 2000) 94. Evans comments that the directions and forms of the mutating image grant insight into the fashion industry over the last ten years.

²⁴ Kaja Silverman, "Fragments of a Fashionable Discourse," *On Fashion*, ed. Shari Benstock and Suzanne Ferris (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1994) 189. *Italics are for my emphasis.*

to a fundamental requirement to create a projective surface and boundary. Silverman cites Marcel Proust's brilliant description of the passing of the female bustle and the corporeal transformation that arrived with a new fashion. In exemplary terms he describes the securing effects of line and contour within this transformation, praising its desirability:

Odette's body seemed now to be cut out in a single silhouette wholly confined within a "line" which, following the contours of the woman, had abandoned the ups and downs, the ins and outs, the reticulations, the elaborate dispersions of the fashions of former days, but also, where it was her anatomy that went wrong by making unnecessary digressions within or without the ideal form traced by it, was able to rectify, by a bold stroke, the errors of nature, to make good, along with a whole section of its course, the lapses of the flesh as well as of the material.²⁵

The envelopes that clothing makes for the body – often described in terms of their visible image for another of an outline, silhouette or contour – perform a fundamental securing function for the wearer. As Silverman and others have proposed, the envelopes that are created by clothes are used to establish a rudimentary sense of ego as surface, a rudimentary distinction between self and other, thus being a zone of negotiation between the modalities of inside and outside corporeality.²⁶ Also, they act as zones of integration where the non-self is eased into the self. The perceptive reflex of seeing oneself through the eyes of the "other" as image, outline and shape helps to establish these distinctions.

Disembodiment: Release From Nature to Artifice

Bodies weigh lightly. Their weight is the rising of their mass to their surface. Endlessly, the mass rises to the surface, and peels off as a surface [s'enleve en surface].²⁷

While it has just been suggested that clothes serve a fundamental role as envelopes for the body, this encasing is also what plays at connecting this body to the social world, weaving it into relations of communication, interaction and routine daily practices of not

²⁵ Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, vol.1 (New York: Random House, 1982) 665.

²⁶ Silverman, "Fragments of a Fashionable Discourse" 191. See also Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams* 2-3.

²⁷ Jean-Luc Nancy, "Corpus," *Thinking Bodies*, ed. Juliet Flower MacCannell and Laura Zakarin (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994) 25.

only dressing but organising apparel (selecting, washing, sorting, organising, shedding etc.). We have already seen how the play of communication and inter-subjectivity was foregrounded with reference to Baudrillard's envisaging of a space of communication to be like an extending surface upon which the semiotics of advanced society plays itself out in operations of the code. It is in the play upon this surface that an image of the body's release into an arena of artifice emerged in accounts of the performer, providing a vision of the body opening itself onto and across a surface of communication. The clothing surface extends upon and transforms as part of a much larger surface, where the "image was always there, promising more than was evident in daily life – not the impossible but the heroically imaginable."²⁸ Imagining is released from the limitations and practicalities of the real, pursuing a life along this surface that wrests, by some accounts, the body from its organic existence. Certainly this imagining reveals a corporeal transformation whereby any sense of a clear boundary between body and clothes, that boundary established to both contain the body and connect it with other forms of dress, liquefies. Arthur and Marilouise Kroker have interpreted Baudrillard's writings on both fashion and the communication media environment and see an intensifying "aestheticisation of the body" by the fashion industry to be spelling the dissolution of the body's materiality into a "semiurgy of floating body parts."²⁹ This spectacle fragments the body to the point of disintegration. The thesis on the "disappearing body" proposes that the proliferation of fascination with the body illuminates, but also to some degree conceals the "...fact that the (natural) body in the postmodern condition has already disappeared, and what we experience as the body is only a fantastic simulacra of body rhetorics."³⁰ And further: "In technological society, the body has achieved a purely rhetorical existence: its reality is that of refuse expelled as surplus-matter no longer necessary for the autonomous functioning of the technoscape."³¹

²⁸ Glenn O'Brien, "Pink Thoughts," The Idealising Vision: The Art of Fashion Photography (New York: Aperture, 1991) 62.

²⁹ Arthur Kroker and Marilouise Kroker, "Theses on the Disappearing Body in the Hyper-modern Condition," Body-Invaders: Panic Sex in America, ed. Arthur Kroker and Marilouise Kroker (New York: St Martin's Press, 1987) 21.

³⁰ Kroker and Kroker, "Theses on the Disappearing Body" 21-22.

³¹ Kroker and Kroker, "Theses on the Disappearing Body" 21.

In her reading of this essay, Anne Balsamo points to Arthur Kroker's story of the fate of the body (oddly she omits the contribution of Marilouise), as an effort to intervene into the continuing "reproduction of a dominant discourse of the body that would define it as an organic, natural entity."³² In the place of an organic entity we have contesting and accelerating body "rhetorics" – economic, political, psychoanalytic, scientific, sport – reproduced through technological apparatus which not only mark a heightened "concern" for the body, but also the complete subordination and disintegration of a (natural) body as it is transformed, "traced by language," "lacerated by ideology" and "invaded by the relational circuitry of the field of postmodern power."³³ Balsamo argues in an earlier version of her argument that Kroker's intention is to highlight that "the natural body has no ontological status separate from the proliferation of rhetorics that now invest the body with simulated meaning."³⁴ As such, what is integral to their argument, she suggests, is the point that the disappearance of the body marks the very dissolution of a binary, that separates the technological/cultural and the biological/natural. Accepting that contemporary body phenomenon attests to the blurring of these domains or intersecting components of existence, Balsamo is not content with what the body becomes for the Krokers – i.e. an "idealist abstraction," a body fully realised in a "singularly discursive condition" which misses a material dimension.³⁵ For Balsamo, the Krokers' misreading of postmodern embodiment is exemplary of a presumption that a uniformly dominant logic of cultural reproduction symptomatic of images is at work in fashioning the body, a reproduction that is premised on bracketing-out its materiality. Here, Balsamo would like to point to the distinction in an argument that wants to assert that a "natural" body (i.e. unmediated, unchanging) is disappearing, to that which would want to argue that the physical body has disappeared altogether. Ultimately, for Balsamo the hybrid body, figured in such concepts as the "cyborg" represents a more coherent model of a transforming contemporary embodiment and the ever more technological methods that

³² Balsamo, *Technologies of the Gendered Body* 28.

³³ Kroker and Kroker, "Theses on the Disappearing Body" 21-22.

³⁴ Anne Balsamo, "Forms of Technological Embodiment: Reading the Body in Consumer Culture," *Cyberspace/Cyberbodies/Cyberpunk: Cultures of Technological Embodiment*, ed. Mike Featherstone et al. (London: Sage Publications, 1995) 218.

³⁵ Balsamo, "Forms of Technological Embodiment" 219, 233.

are finding new ways to "re-write the physical body in the flesh."³⁶ Balsamo observes that a theoretical argument manifesting similar symptoms to the Krokers' can also be found in Frederic Jameson's exposition of the postmodern cultural sphere, a point conferred by Best who argues that Jameson (despite his "diligent scholarship") may be implicated in a mis-reading of textuality as it has been applied to postmodern cultural forms, as he brackets-out a notion of material reality from the practice of textual interpretation.³⁷

Krokers' thesis is being propelled along by an imagining of a weightlessness and plasticity to the human form with a consequent effect of the effacement of materiality altogether. Susan Bordo has characterised this imagining in contemporary body practices such as cosmetic or plastic surgery, gym-sculpting and "fitness" classes where pumping, toning, chiselling and ripping are part of the common vocabulary of body-shaping, defining it as part of a cultural paradigm of plasticity.³⁸ What is ultimately the culmination of a project born of the renaissance and the figure of the master craftsman, these current practices and their related vocabularies and thought-processes, help to nurture a sense of a body as entirely malleable, morphing and re-constructable. Fuelled by incitements to get fit, shape-up and re-define one's body-image, by accessing numerous services and commodities, the plastic imagining indulges the fantasies of limitless improvement and change, freedom from bodily determination and its carnal measures of growth and finitude. In this imagining, a body doesn't grow and evolve, it is moulded and re-arranged. By extension, a relatively low-impact practice like dress can be considered part of a multi-part transformation, involving diet and exercise and re-conceived from merely "putting on clothes" to building and sculpturing forms and appearances. Needless to say, it is a little more complex to alter body-form than this imagining would suggest.

This effacement of a material body foregrounded by the Krokers' thesis, examined and

³⁶ Balsamo, *Technologies of the Gendered Body* 9.

³⁷ Best 152-55. Such a critique is clearly contingent on what Jameson means by verbal texts. See Best for this discussion.

³⁸ Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) 245-48.

challenged by Balsamo, and further characterised as an imagining manifesting itself in popular body-practices by Bordo, can be encountered to some degrees in scholarship of dress. Propelled by an imagining of fashion's changes and transformations, theoretical attention follows these transformations to examine the semiotics shifts imbued in them, that is, to their ends in the illusion of what Cavallaro and Warwick have called, in the words with which we began this review, "incorporeal persona." The activity of the theorist's eye follows "an elision of concreteness in the service of the sign," to the effects and meanings of those signs and in so doing effacing concern for the physical transformation that underpins it.³⁹ Responding to this abstraction, the theorist observes a dematerialisation of materiality as their object of inquiry – fashion's corporeal transformation – is absorbed into a larger network of effects. It is only by a certain analytic force that the object is made de-limitable, at this point when the theorist isolates the garments or the "clothes sign" from this network. Instead, it is clear these signs are first and foremost part of a larger transformation.

However, the effacement of matter's substantiality is central to what clothes do, but rather than characterising this tendency as a *disappearance* of body, we might think of clothing enacting a dual transformation of the wearer's body. Michael Carter describes this transubstantiation evocatively as a "wiping away" – i.e. an effacement – and a re-embodiment in the following words:

Clothes not only keep us warm and cover our sensitive areas, they also transform what nature has given us. The stuff out of which clothes are made and the forms it assumes when we wear them enact a dual transformation of the human body. Initially they disembody us, wiping away our physical form. There follows a re-embodiment in which we are reborn inside of the ideal forms assumed by clothing. I am using the word "idealisation" here not as something that simply connotes notions such as the beautiful, the pure, or the good (although it may do these things). Nor is it intended to refer to anything immaterial. "Idealisation" simply means a transformation of the body towards a number of sui generis embodiments of perfection. It is a material ideal that is in constant need of repair, since the

³⁹ Cavallaro and Warwick 14.

clothes we wear are always threatening to relapse into their entropic shambles from which they originally emerged.⁴⁰

Observe that by speaking of the "ideal forms" which clothes assume in wearing, Carter immediately subtends any notion of an immaterial ideal to a material substratum. For him, these "ideal forms" or "material ideal(s)" represent the incarnation of meaning, the working-up of physical matter into meaningful forms. He also refers to a bi-directional play or erring towards both re-creation/re-generation and disintegration that is a condition of this transformation; a to-ing and fro-ing, perhaps a loss and a gain. Like the sensation of two hands gathering sand together to build a sculpture on the beach, the action persuasively shapes the grains of sand into something new, while at the same time some grains slip away through the fingers to elude this particular making. This gives the distinct impression that as the form takes shape, something also falls away, speaking to a threat of collapse.

If stuff is said to be formed through wearing, this is not to suggest that the material from which the clothed presence assumes form can be found in a prior state *unformed*. Such is the effect in wearing that there seems to be no clear before or after, which allows one to isolate the elemental materials. More accurately, each act of wearing is a transformation where various elements are formed anew, making it impossible to isolate their original contributions and for them to return to a former state. No matter how much we try to separate the "before" from the "after" of an ensemble, the effect of the whole compels us to overlook these former parts. However, as Carter registers, the effect of the whole carries with it a danger of collapse, threatening to disrupt the whole into an undone, discarded and worn state.

⁴⁰ Michael Carter, Putting a Face on Things: Studies in Imaginary Materials (Sydney: Power Publications, 1996) 4.

Chapter 4

Wearing Inscriptions?

Clothes, coverings, the objects with which we adorn ourselves, the signs that *engrave* and *decorate* us are the forms through which our bodies relate to the world and to other bodies.¹

Putting Weight Behind Clothes

We have just finished reviewing the clothing and body relationship in dress studies, identifying methods, thematics and metaphors that in general employ a poststructuralist understanding that language has burst the boundaries of its conventional articulation, its extension assisting to establish further understanding of an extended representational field including the productive forces of image, word and discourse. For the scholars concerned, clothes, dress and fashion assume a productive agency within this field, as sources of cultural significance, meaning and identities. At this point in this thesis, it is possible to see that this one point used to emphasise a meaningful entity and action – i.e. that clothes/fashion/dress are a cultural production – carries a lot of weight, being used to counter ideas of core (unified or unchanging) identity, to illuminate the body as a constructed entity rather than an unchanging bedrock of nature or biology and to ultimately emphasise the significance of clothes, if not the centrality of fashion, to culture. In chapters 1 and 2, it was demonstrated that the methods employed in dress studies can be traced back, not to Barthes' monumental study of fashion, but to "methods of the text" devised from the semiotic sign and text, developed in his work on writing, reading popular culture and photographic and filmic images.

It was observed in the previous section that metaphors of mapping, inscription/writing and picturing were mobilized, to characterise the productivity of clothes and/or fashion and the changing dimensions and complexity of clothed-relations with language, image

¹ Calefato 69-70. My italics.

and discourse. In doing so, theorists were nuancing the repertoire and range of theoretical tools, by finding new applications and concepts for earlier generations of semiotic terminology in contemporary phenomena. While doing this, we encountered certain risks or difficulties for scholarship in the application of such metaphors as inscription or writing. By not taking great care to complicate the concept of inscription or writing, it can assume impersonal structures such as “discourse” or “culture” act as powerful agents in constructing human subjects upon a receptive material (as if subjects are simply made from some malleable substance). It was also observed that in the application of the language of signs there can occur a disarticulation of meaning away from the material support of the object-sign, in both locating the sign itself and also in the over-attention given to the meaning of the object. In chapter 3, the radical implications of Derrida’s notion of writing were discussed, where the very conditions of writing as material inscription of passive matter are re-conceptualised partly because writing is no longer just writing on a surface, but the “writing” together of cells, dancing bodies, music and sound. From this re-conceived writing, the work of the “trace” (as not simply a writing trace, but more broadly an element of his textile) can be useful in thinking through the complications found in inscriptive metaphors because it no longer relies so heavily on the notion of surface. In addition, working with this re-conception, several feminist theorists were able to revitalise matter in a way that permits a re-thinking of that unknown material support of clothes as object and sign. Both of these ideas – the work of the trace and vital matter – will continue to have import in the following pages and chapter discussion.

Composing Wearing Within a Two-Dimensional Space; Further Tales of Inscription

Returning to the words of Calefato in the quote that opens this chapter, this reference to signs as they “engrave,” along with a host of others, creates a lasting impression, for this reader, of etched surfaces. Again, the intention is to create a sense of force and agency, even if it is not necessarily describing an effect of permanence on the wearer, rather a sense of a lasting impression of clothing’s significance and a specific mode of effect. Across a group of references, one can decipher a range of forces responsible for this work of etching or engraving. In Calefato, the work is that of *clothes* and the effect is one of

decorative line-work.

Another point of reference is Gail Faurschou's description of fashion's etching work in "Fashion and the Cultural Logic of Postmodernity:"

If anything can be said about fashion at a general level it is that its history testifies to the fact that the adornment of the body has rarely been a question of strict material or functional necessity. Indeed, as in precapitalist societies, it has constituted a privileged point of departure for inscribing the socius in and through the body and its vestments, the process of recording a memory of alliance, a system of symbolic investment and exchange. Moreover, as with cultural practices that have persisted throughout all social formations, albeit occupying radically different positions, adorning the body as a form of consuming the social surplus means that here is etched out not only an aesthetic and symbolic but a *political* terrain, an economy that marks and inscribes the most intimate surfaces of our skins.²

This quote brings the concept of inscription together with fashion, to illuminate the effects and influences of social formation, economic and symbolic exchange and cultural practices, to describe fashion's force. Here, particular qualities, modes of effect and coordinates can be seen in operation within this metaphor, which will come to intrigue us further as they can be found in additional pages and will be detailed shortly; an etching inscription like lines on a literal skin surface. It is noted that fashion has an inscribing tendency and agency that is linguistic as it "record[s] a memory of alliance" like a collective inventory, or better an inventory of the collectivity, recording belongings, memories, identifications, experiences, creating affiliations. As well, it unearths a system of symbolic investments. Important to the approach she takes to the notion of inscription, are the phenomenologically oriented studies in sociology³ that inform her characterisation of fashion and the socius inscribing "in and through the body and its vestments," where the ambiguity of vestments could refer either to clothes, the product of bodily investments, or a body's investing. Ultimately, however, we are left with another lasting impression of an etched surface of the intimate body skin.

² Gail Faurschou, "Fashion and the Cultural Logic of Postmodernity" Body Invaders: Panic Sex in America, eds. Arthur Kroker and Marilouise Kroker (New York: St Martin's Press, 1987) 78.

³ John O'Neill, Five Bodies: The Human Shape of Modern Society (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

Related as a form of cryptography, is the reference to writing or drawing cited at several points in this thesis, by Wilson who writes: "Dress is the cultural metaphor for the body, it is the material with which we 'write' or 'draw' a representation of the body into our cultural context."⁴ As writing or drawing is the movement of either the pen/pencil delineating lines, or say a figure in a ground, the concern is with creating a composition of the clothed-body and positioning it in a cultural space. Her point is to emphasise a body in a context of some complexity and by extension "write" clothes into this complexity as they mediate bodies. The most pertinent feature of this metaphor is that it is formed from a representational matrix of marks upon a surface, creating an illusion of three dimensions from these marks. It has been suggested already, that the practice of inscription seems bound by a set of co-ordinates, establishing a phenomenal analogue, or physical template, whereby modes of effect, qualities and properties come into operation; there is the tool which writes or draws (which in the engraving arts would derive from the stylus), the surface to be written on and the hand which drives the stylus to mark the surface material, as well as the relative determinates of activity/passivity, change/stasis which flow from these co-ordinates. These are the conditions under which meanings are said to be produced, interpreted in relation with the discursive codes that determine the meaning of any particular form. Even if you have imagined from Wilson's words a writing or drawing in the air rather than on flat paper, the aim is to position the body in a space defined pictorially, or as representation. The question that has formed from this and related examples is about the properties that are brought to dress, clothes and fashion by metaphors of inscription to prefigure their meanings and significance. Furthermore, what properties might be concealed by this orientation toward inscriptional conditions? Note that we need to turn to ask "what are the materials of dress?" to understand the more specific nature of Wilson's writing/drawing.

Further to etching references, I have already noted a tendency to describe a relation with a clothing object in terms of an encounter with an external thing as it *envelopes, covers*

⁴ Wilson, "Fashion and the Postmodern Body" 6.

and/or *veils* a body. This is not unusual as one of the predominant ways in which dress is experienced is as "putting-on" a garment, a garment that one steps into and is enclosed by, in the sense of an encasing. "Enveloping" speaks to an experience of not only being enclosed, but also potentially being absorbed and carried away, in the sense of being "Adorned in Dreams" to use Wilson's famous title. "Cover" and "veil" both evoke connotations of concealment for various reasons such as modesty, comfort or secrecy. As suggested earlier about a description by Proust, this encounter with an object frequently corresponds to a characterisation of the *outline* created by the effect of clothes, by nature of being described by an external viewer. Kaja Silverman provides further example of a description of drawing an outline and consequently an effect of shape, with clothes:

Clothing and other kinds of ornamentation make the human body culturally visible. As Eugenie Lemoine-Luccioni suggests, clothing draws the body so that it can be culturally seen, and articulates it as a meaningful form. Lemoine-Luccioni's point may be supported by examples from both literature and film. The eponymous heroine of Theodore Dreiser's novel *Sister Carrie* is presented as the quintessence of desirability, yet her physical features are never described. Her body is evoked exclusively through her meticulously described wardrobe, which, like the cut-out clothes of a paper doll, imply in advance a certain shape and stance. Similarly, the body of Charlotte (Bette Davis) in Irving Rapper's *Now, Voyager* conforms so closely to the outlines of her clothing that she can be transformed from an unsightly spinster into a beautiful sophisticate simply by substituting a fashionable suit, hairdo, and pair of high-heeled shoes for the horn-rimmed spectacles, shapeless housedress, and oxford shoes she previously wore.⁵

The heroine's cut-out (if not flat) shape, in Dreiser's novel is filled-in with meticulous literary description of her clothing, in such a way that the outline seems to pre-determine a body for Carrie, a body that goes without any further description than her clothes. Silverman's interpretation of drawings, cut-outs and outlines take us to the outside of the envelopes, to the *outlines* and the external view of the author (with a heightened awareness, like Proust's, to clothes) and the film spectator respectively.

⁵ Silverman, "Fragments of a Fashionable Discourse" 189.

In a final stunning reference of note to these related concerns is from H elene Cixous' "Sonia Rykiel in Translation"⁶ which is about the gaze, the image and a condition of being suspended on the outside looking at clothes:

There are shield clothes, mirror-clothes, shimmering, dazzling clothes, clothes which remould the body to a precise measure, to perfect composure, clothes which adorn. I have had some. Few. I never liked them. I donned them to go to war.⁷

Here, the discussion is about certain clothes *capturing* by a dazzle, the viewer upon a surface and the condition of reflection this allows. Cixous contrasts these unsatisfying "mirror clothes," reflecting the "noisy manifestations of the street" with those that are made from the texture of the "skin of the world."⁸ By this she means a garment which is a "fine manifestation of the world," one that "brims over the edges... doesn't stop short, doesn't declare its boundaries, doesn't gather in its frontiers."⁹

What is the point of this contrast? Firstly, it is to precipitate "a bodily insistence" where the "unbordering of fabrics," opens the reader onto a continuity in which fashion's transformations unfold in "the unique curve in which the body flows."¹⁰ Cixous writes: "The gentle unbordering of fabrics, the terrestrial fabric, takes place in gradual, light changes of colour and substance. Skin of the world."¹¹ Secondly, it is to emphasise a certain hollowness of the gaze that has lost the tactile experience (an experience which involves an imagining) which comes from relations with clothing and supplements and subtends the gaze; by this it is meant that the gaze is incapable of "showing" the intimacies of touch which are like a necessary precondition of looking, with an understanding, at these surfaces. This understanding is the key for Cixous to differentiate clothes as either satisfying or not, by order of whether reflection is refused or not. With reference to the co-ordinates and properties discussed thus far, the shields are like an

⁶ H elene Cixous, "Sonia Rykiel in Translation," trans. Deborah Jenson, *On Fashion*, ed. Shari Benstock and Suzanne Ferriss (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1994).

⁷ Cixous 97.

⁸ Cixous 96-97.

⁹ Cixous 96-97.

¹⁰ Cixous 96-97.

¹¹ Cixous 96-97.

image, a mirror surface and they block or deter reflection via endazzlement. The surface doesn't "give," it is a barrier and subsequently suspends the viewer in a condition of non-reflection.

As a set of references and conditions, etching combined with a sense of flatness, the external perspective of outlines and the image- *or* shield- clothes, together compose a set of representational concerns with clothing, dress and/or fashion. While grouping them in this way may misrepresent various details and nuances within each account, together they unfold a set of approaches to the object under consideration or in view. There is a strong emphasis on the property of surface, which is at one "level" reasonable because of the way clothes are "put-on" the body, supplementing the skin to create another surface (a "second skin").¹² The impression of outlines, cut-outs, mirrors and shields, all foreground this external surface and/or refer us to a figure composed on a two-dimensional surface. Finally, the perspective on the object is an external one, as clothes are viewed or read from the outside. This is not unusual as a theoretical perspective and conforms to the primacy of a visual mode of inquiry. In one sense, it confirms the theorist's position as one of a regular and habitual view of clothes from the outside, notwithstanding the importance of this perspective to a relatively comprehensive "picture." However, the way particular relations with clothes have manifested themselves, throughout a long history, seem to have gone well beyond an external encounter, yet here we look predominantly from the outside. For there is an alternative perspective, equally accessible via habit to each of us, that of being *inside* clothes, if not also the range of approaches to reflection enabled by this perspective (from the scientific to the personal and intimate). This is a perspective included by Cixous whose personal account we will consider again later in this chapter.

However, to further consider the implications of the prevalent perspective, this theoretical representation perhaps reinforces a perspective where we are asked to conceive of the

¹² Cf. Marilyn Horn, *The Second Skin: An Interdisciplinary Study of Clothing* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975). Horn can be attributed with consolidating an understanding of, if not also popularising, a familiar term.

action of clothing and its related frames of reference, moving inwards toward the body. Again the active work of the pen is illuminating as its ink flows in one direction towards its (stationary, passive) page. It also perhaps works to reinforce a sense that the containing surfaces of clothes are like *boundaries* or *borders*, even while clothes equally have a potential to unbind and disperse the wearer. Primarily, this outside perspective has become disarticulated from the material conditions of the object viewed, meaning the different ways in which things make sense *and* appear. By this I mean, it is clear that the representational matrix that re-presents a clothed body and the perspective it provides is meant to correspond to or embody a domain of "reality" i.e. what clothes *are*, including their significance, their ways of appearing and their use. However, this perspective tends to lead to an emphasis on the production of different significances and meanings for clothes, without necessarily being able to account for the various ways in which they appear. An example of this can be found in relation to the concept of "use," a notion that has become quite abstract. It is difficult to decipher in what sense use is being applied or understood. There seems to be a prevalent explanation of the use of clothes, implicitly evident in the examples, although this term is rarely adopted perhaps because of its utilitarian connotations. In their analysis of the meaning of signs and writing effects, it seems one might apply the term ("use") to refer to the use of clothes as representations to reveal character or persona, but it is clear that the meanings or sense uncovered about clothes surpass a utilitarianism (a sense of useful purpose). They might be significant as representations of wit, boredom, happiness, or tenacity and yet how does this significance reveal, or make sense of, the different ways in which clothing appears and the material relations involved in using this object. Note here that the observer of this phenomenon is located as a "reader" of identities, identities as effects of meaning, as something like a cognitive activity. It is significant that the confluence of the positions of the reader and user is not something often remarked, as these positions unite in the one wearer. Another way of describing this concern is that for the reader to locate the meaning, is not necessarily the same as finding the various uses and appearances that meaning has.

Interested in his comments on clothing use and fashion, it will be helpful to turn back to Barthes and consider his approach to analysing fashion in The Fashion System and the

different meanings and ways of appearing of the "fashion object." He carefully delineated several orders for analysis to ensure a representation of fashion's complexity: "written fashion" (the "word" pertaining to garments, for example, in fashion magazines), "image fashion" (the appearance of garments in images) and "real clothing" (the use of clothes in everyday life). In keeping with semiotic method, his aim was to study clothing as a system of meaning, accessed through the semantics of "written fashion," and therefore not "real clothing" or clothing use, but in fact he reveals quite a lot about the relation between these orders. Significantly, his organisation was an acknowledgment of the non-homogenous nature of the fashion system and the distinct ontological orders represented within this system and its objects. Therefore the distinction between the semantic object and real clothing, is a first move made to respect "a certain complexity and certain order of the semiological project."¹³ By looking at Barthes, I wish to acknowledge him as an essential part of the ancestry of dress studies and by doing so give, what Michael Carter has called in conversation, a "belated recognition" to the work of The Fashion System. Some attention might be given by the reader to recognising parts of this work that remain central to the more popularly known Barthes *oeuvre* and/or lexicon. But as it was proposed in the introduction, The Fashion System has been widely passed over, as a work on fashion, while it has been more widely referred to as a method of semiotics outside of dress studies. The purpose will be to consider the premise of Barthes analysis and the exclusions made by him to study represented fashion/clothing (cleaving away clothing use), as they pertain to the complexity unearthed in dress studies, the prevalent representational concern and its relation to use and material relations.

Finally, this chapter will, given a particular lineage and perspective on the clothed body have been identified, attempt to allot the term "wearing" into the space or perspective revealed, about which little is written. By this I mean to see if wearing offers an alternative perspective from that of a prevalent externality and to observe what alternative properties and modes of effect are revealed by this substitution. The aim here will be to consider along the way the notion of Barthesian and Derridean writing in order to observe

¹³ Barthes, The Fashion System x.

what properties are opened-up by a writing that actively seeks to complicate its conventional co-ordinates and question its literary belongings. As such, we will be “testing” the writing metaphor in an exploratory mode, soliciting the intentions of the writers above to expand the conditions of traditional writing to include the inscriptions of dress, clothes and fashion. Also, we will seek to destabilise that set of conditions and implications that were observed to establish the primarily representational concerns of those accounts from dress studies.

Barthes Writing Fashion; Meditations on the Properties of Written Fashion

The following outlines various qualities which are at work in Barthes’ analysis of writings on fashion, what he calls the active *variants* of the written garment, the signifying unit or object’s meaning. The variant (also called the *vesteme*) is, according to Barthes, “...the point of the matrix from which signification emerges and, as it were, emanates all along the utterance, i.e. the written garment.”¹⁴ The variant can be likened to phonemes, or the distinguishing units of sound, in language. As such, this analysis will be based upon Barthes’ foreword and introduction about the method of semiotics employed, as well as section two of his text that details the properties of the vestimentary code.¹⁵

From the evidence found within dress studies that representational meanings of clothes are said to correspond to, influence and inform the use of clothes – together with the absence of evidence about the way this relation is realised – we will be observing Barthes’ diligence in establishing the various orders of analysis of the Fashion system (the *represented* – written-clothing and image-clothing and the *real* – real-clothing).¹⁶ In re-visiting Barthes’ taxonomic approach to written fashion, we will be looking for aspects of written fashion which exceed the conditions of language (or in more recent terminology textuality) and in doing so, offer some insight into the transformation they

¹⁴ Barthes, *The Fashion System* 66.

¹⁵ The reading of Barthes’ text is indebted to the insightful analysis offered by Michael Carter, “Barthes and the Fashion System,” Unpublished Paper, 1993.

¹⁶ In keeping with Barthes’ approach I will use a capital letter for “Fashion” when referring to his analysis of the Fashion System.

effect. After acknowledging the importance of his distinctions as a first step to respecting the different ontological dimensions of an object, we will introduce a complexity to the perception that their structural properties remain entirely separable. We will further observe the movement and transformations of "the fashionable garment" between the different orders established by Barthes and in particular observe the oscillation of the "variants" of the text between a linguistically defined textuality and something representing a challenge to this definition. The impetus for such observations stem from asking "To what degree do we inherit a linguistic, or in Barthes' terms, a 'literary' ¹⁷ set of conditions and problems when thinking about, or even in the practice of, wearing?"

In that it is Barthes' premise that a study of written fashion can inform or illuminate real clothing, or at least the study of it, it would not be unreasonable to posit that the order of written fashion may be opened up to the facticity of everyday life, where image-clothing and real-clothing partake of some properties of written-clothing. Before investigating such a notion, Barthes' premise may need some explanation. Quite simply, he argues a case for the primacy of discourse in generating the meaning of the garment (and not simply the semantic dimension because it "affects" real clothes), because of his conviction that "human language is not only the model of meaning but its very foundation" and that "true reason would ...have us proceed from the instituting discourse to the reality which it constitutes."¹⁸ In accounting for his choice in analysing written clothing, he explains his belief that "the structural analysis of written clothing can also effectively pave the way for the inventory of real clothing that sociology will require for its eventual study of the circuits and circulation-rhythms of real Fashion."¹⁹ In light of this potential interpenetration of one realm by another, it is strange that he insists on the alignment and correspondence of disciplinary objectives with his mapping of the various

¹⁷ Barthes, *The Fashion System* 12. Barthes sees the important role of language in structuring the garment as an instance of literature converting "the real into language." He writes, "isn't literature the institution which seems to convert the real into language and place its being in that conversion, just like our written garment. Moreover, isn't written Fashion a literature?" (12).

¹⁸ Barthes, *The Fashion System* 9, ix. Cf. Carter, "Barthes and the Fashion System" who explains the point that discourse (both written clothing and image clothing) precedes the practice of using the garment, this point being upheld by the empirical situation of the fashion system where the user interacts with it in its "transubstantiated form" as the fashionable garment, the garment of meaning (9).

¹⁹ Barthes, *The Fashion System* 9.

orders of the fashion system, effectively driving a wedge between the two disciplines of sociology and semiology.²⁰ While it is constructive to recognise the different interests of these disciplines, his interest in maintaining the separation of disciplinary foci of semiology and sociology in this way seems to be at odds with the work that they share in potentially illuminating clothing meaning and use in respect of Fashion; again, it is the effect of the articulations of represented fashion on the users of fashion garments (the garment as fashionable and meaningful) that motivates Barthes' "demythologisation" of the Fashion System (to call on a term from his corpus), even if this is inferred through a scaffolding exercise of erecting conceptual distinctions regarding the different orders rather than bridge-building as a stated goal. However, Barthes is in danger of erecting an overly rigid boundary between these two disciplines. It would be difficult to maintain such a rigid disciplinary separation today between sociology and semiotically-based or informed studies. Certainly Barthes' characterisation of the focus of each discipline – semiology (meaning) and sociology (practices, action) – requires revision. Even in respect to Barthes' characterisation, each discipline is afforded an even weighting as dimensions of Fashion research and as Carter appropriately argues, given Barthes' point that the codes of the representational order of clothing are ubiquitously dispersed, "we must regard them as constituting 'social facts' of equal density to the domain of used clothing – what he terms the domain of 'actions.'"²¹

So, what is the rationale behind Barthes' intense separation or dividing of the dimensions of the Fashion system? He writes:

In our society, the circulation of Fashion thus relies in large part on an activity of transformation; there is a transition...from the technological structure to the iconic and verbal structures. Yet this transition, as in all structures, can only be discontinuous: the real garment can only be transformed into "representation"...²²

²⁰ Barthes, *The Fashion System* 9-10. Of this alignment he writes, "Semiology does not follow the same path (as sociology) at all; it describes a garment which from beginning to end remains imaginary, or, if one prefers, purely intellectual; it leads us to recognise not practices but images. The sociology of Fashion is entirely directed toward real clothing; the semiology of Fashion is directed toward a set of collective representations" (9-10).

²¹ Carter, "Barthes and the Fashion System" 14.

²² Barthes, *The Fashion System* 6.

Here, the key is the word “discontinuous.” The central point that he deciphers about the meaning of the object is that it is not the same but rather appears as different objects within the domains of the Fashion System. This is what he refers to as the complexity that is so important to preserve: the fashion object has a number of ways of appearing and meaning. The important point will be to observe, going against Barthes’ intended method, how this difference is both preserved and yet also informs the meaning and appearance of another object, as it undergoes transformation moving from one order to another.

To go on to think further about these differences, his study of variants is regarding their manifestation within the structures of written clothing. Again, what determines Barthes’ choice to investigate written clothing is his theory that the meanings of images are always related to verbal text, if not reliant on this text to secure and elaborate their messages.²³ In The Fashion System he expresses the theory very succinctly as: “The image freezes an endless number of possibilities; words determine a single certainty.”²⁴ Yet only a short distance into this task he observes how a particular configuration of variants – form, fit, movement – would be much more active in the order of the image or image-clothing, or at least the qualities would be fundamental to the signification of the image. He thus reveals an interest in pointing to the differences between image-clothing and real clothing and marking the limits or borders of the linguistic.

To briefly summarise the manner in which the orders of image and word are differentiated, Barthes writes:

...they do not have the same structure, because they are not made of the same substances and because, consequently, these substances do not have the same relations with each other: in one the substances are forms, lines, surfaces, colours, and the relation is spatial; in the other, the substance is words, and the relation is, if

²³ Barthes develops this theory in “The Rhetoric of the Image,” Image Music Text, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Flamingo, 1977) and elsewhere as in the introduction to his The Elements of Semiology.

²⁴ Barthes, The Fashion System 13.

not logical, at least syntactic; the first structure is plastic, the second verbal.²⁵

Thus, the garment within each order is differentiated by substance and the relations are determined by elements of substance. In addressing the differences between real clothing and the two orders of represented clothing, he points to the complexity that image-clothing presents for his study:

“Real” clothing is burdened with its practical considerations (protection, modesty, adornment) these finalities disappear from “represented” clothing, which no longer serves to protect, to cover, to adorn, but at most to signify protection, modesty, adornment; but image-clothing retains one set of values which risks complicating its analysis considerably, i.e. its plastic quality; only written clothing has no practical or aesthetic function...²⁶

For him, image-clothing and real-clothing are burdened with a plastic quality and in the case of real clothing an added concern with utility and morality, which distinguishes them from the semantic *purity* of written clothing. He writes “written clothing is unencumbered by any parasitic function” and therefore it can transform the material plasticity of clothing into a system of “intellective,” (*read* inactive, immaterial, abstract) meanings.²⁷ For Barthes, the written fashion’s message is solely motivated by the “pure” content of Fashion, the capturing of a garment’s fashionable state of being.

Here, he acknowledges the qualities and meanings which distinguish image-clothing and real-clothing, the qualities which *exceed* the linguistic category of the fashionable; these qualities would be what marks them as more than simply fashionable. Carter further elaborates on the qualities of the image which supplement its discursive fashionability:

For Barthes, the image always presents the potential user with a set of more labile meanings which set up a resistance between it and its final insertion into the category of the fashionable. It is only by its final appearance within language that the garment is transformed from the ‘immediate and diffuse’ entity that is image

²⁵ Barthes, *The Fashion System* 3.

²⁶ Barthes, *The Fashion System* 8.

²⁷ Barthes, *The Fashion System* 8.

into the specific written garment of Fashion."²⁸

What properties does the written garment manifest in its appearances within language? In Barthes' formulation of an inventory of the contributions of 30 variants (divided into 8 groups) to Fashionability, his point is to demonstrate the manner in which a garment is invested with certain qualities and attributes via its syntactical descriptions, from the language of fashion magazines. His analysis covered magazines from 1958-59 (June to June) primarily *Elle* and *Le Jardin des Modes*, with some references to *Vogue* and *L'Echo de la Mode*.²⁹

Barthes organises variant expressions according to the following categories:

1) Under the category of *identity*, Barthes suggests that the garment has been ascribed the following attributes; a *name*, a *presence* or *existence*, a value as *natural* or *artificial* and a capacity to *mark* or emphasise. Of these, the more interesting point is that he connects "play" in fashion to the self-conscious display of artifice, remarking that the natural appears to be receding in view of the (artificial) richness of the play with personality.

2) The category of *configuration* includes the attributes of *form*, *fit* and *movement*. We have already remarked that while describing these features he is interested in the differences between their linguistic operation from their mode of operation within the image. Being characteristic of Barthes' theory of image-text relations, as already suggested, here he precisely reveals his affiliations with the textual as a purer code when he writes that the *complex* feel (*fit*), forms and movements of garments can be rendered more precisely by the immediacy, synthesis and abstraction offered by the written word.³⁰ In doing so, he points to the complexity of what, in his discussion of *fit*, he calls the co-enesthetic quality of garments, described as a sensory experience where form and matter, body and clothing, constriction and loosening coalesce. He remarks that the function of *fit* is very close to that of volume, however with regards to "volume" the concern turns to

²⁸ Carter, "Barthes and the Fashion System" 11.

²⁹ Barthes, *The Fashion System* 10-11.

³⁰ Barthes, *The Fashion System* 119.

the garment's extension of its external surface into its surrounding space (forming a totality or volume), whereas in the discussion of "fit" the issue is the garment's relation (particularly adherence) to the body of the wearer. In fit, the *plasticity* of the garment's constraining pressure on the body becomes important. Barthes' concerns with evoking the complexity of sensation and feel extend into his discussion of the variants of substance which are also co-enesthetic.

3) The category of *substance* includes the properties of *weight*, *suppleness*, *relief* (surface) and *transparency*. While outlining the function of these variants to "make certain states of the material signify," he remarks that these significations are largely registered through tactility, with the exception of transparency. He also proposes that these variants take clothing towards a "poetics," later described as the "coming together of matter and language,"³¹ and here hopes to characterise the complexity of sensation and an experience of substance which writing can capture and spread to the garment as a whole. He uses "poetics" to suggest that the garment and these particular variants prove to be more than "molecular" facts or simply material entities; by this he means, that the quality of material is extended to the effect of the entire piece if not even further.³² A sense of clothing's reach outwards into the world to operate poetically, is invoked when Barthes writes:

as a substitute for the body, the garment, by virtue of its weight, participates in man's fundamental dreams, of the sky and the cave, of life's sublimity and its entombment, of flight and sleep: it is a garment's weight which makes it a wing or a shroud, seduction or authority...³³

Weight is structured around the polarity of *light* and *heavy* and Barthes observes that Fashion favours an emphasis on lightness; euphoria is connoted from diminished weight. Moving on to the effects of both texture and movement in a garment which suppleness implies, *suppleness* variates between the supple and the less supple, rarely realising itself in stiffness. "Like weight, *suppleness* is a variant of matter," Barthes writes, "but as was

³¹ Barthes, *The Fashion System* 235.

³² Barthes, *The Fashion System* 127.

³³ Barthes, *The Fashion System* 126.

the case with weight, there is a constant carry-over of the variation onto the entire piece.”³⁴ The variant of *relief* refers to the indentations *in* or embossing *out of* a flat surface. Finally, *transparency* describes the degree of a garment’s visibility – its transparency or its discontinuous visibility (eg. Openwork).

4) The category of *measurement* includes the properties of *definition* (a degree of specificity), *length*, *width*, *volume* and *size*. Barthes proposes that each variant of measurement has in fact a double message: the measure of a physical dimension and the degree of precision of this dimension. As well, these variants can be organised according to a hierarchy of function in notation moving from the precise to the imprecise, from the regularly and systematically noted to the more arbitrary reference, in respect of length, width, volume and size. Interestingly, Barthes further distinguishes the operation of volume (i.e. totalities) from fit (the relation between body and clothes), by extrapolating from J.C. Flugel’s study the points that “volume” is concerned with the expression of personality and authority (an ethics of personality and authority), while “fit” is concerned with an ethics of eroticism.³⁵

5) The category of *continuity* includes the properties of *division*, *mobility*, *closure*, *attachment* and *flection*. Here, Barthes points to the complex interplay between seamlessness (continuity) and rupture (discontinuity) of the elements of a garment or by extension the elements of an ensemble. The quality of discontinuity is created by “division” and therefore division is a pre-requisite for whether a garment is open or closed, attached (i.e. mode of attachment) and mobile (i.e. attachable, detachable). The variant of closure is an issue of the degrees and nature of openings, exposure and overlap of the divided elements of a garment (i.e. its edges or sides). The variant of attachment (clasped, buttoned, zippered etc.) is prepared for by the variants of division and mobility and its intensity established by the degree of closure required.³⁶ In our language, it is often difficult to separate the action of attaching, from the object which performs the

³⁴ Barthes, *The Fashion System* 127.

³⁵ J.C. Flugel, *The Psychology of Clothes*, 3rd edition (London: Hogarth Press and Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1950).

³⁶ Barthes, *The Fashion System* 127.

attachment (eg. Knot, button, lace, zipper). The expression of “flection” occurs through the relative movement of pieces according to their origin or function eg. turned upwards or downwards, folding and straight.

In Chapter 10, Barthes discusses the “variants of relation” and thus organises these into the following categories:

- 1) Position – refers to the placement of a particular element or garment in relation to space conceived as the space of the wearer’s body – i.e. horizontal, vertical, transversal and orientation.
- 2) Distribution – variants of addition, multiplication and balance.
- 3) Connection – refers to the operation of two or more clothing elements and their association. These operations would concern emergence, association and regulation.
- 4) Degree – integrity and intensity.

In concluding this inventory of variants, given that they describe the manner in which garments makes sense, can the meaning of a garment be separated from the manner in which this meaning is interpreted and enacted? To address this, it is necessary to further investigate Barthes’ concept of writing, as it was developed in this and his related works.

Barthes on Writing

Traditionally, writing has been defined as something that originates in the writer/author; as something that reports what originally happened in a speech act; as something that represents a distant reality, which all differ from Barthes’ understanding.

For Barthes, the properties outlined above operate in the written text and they emerge from the inventory of exchanges between the phrases in magazines, Fashion, their society and its readers. Writing is a “collective” and shared speech, as Barthes discusses in Writing Degree Zero, it comes of written shared exchanges and is encountered through

reading.³⁷ From this, we can see that the reader is positioned quite centrally as the subject of Fashion in The Fashion System, the one who is presented with an *activity* or an *identity* where fashion itself is performed to be read: an activity is defined broadly as human activity “or by its circumstances of time and place (*If you want to signify what you are doing here, dress like this*)”; and the identity is presented as “*If you want to be this, you must dress like this.*”³⁸ There are two points here; Firstly, Fashion can and does signify *activity* (he argues these are often marginal rather than essential activities – i.e. shopping, gardening etc.) and *identity* (i.e. you – the reader); secondly, it is also the case that its language is performative in that it constitutes the activity, identity and its clothing object as Fashionable via the transitivity of its language. Paul Jobling observes that the statements presented as samples by Barthes, appear to be paraphrases or approximations of what was originally encountered in the magazine rather than based on actual speech.³⁹ Thus, they capture the authoritative, performative tone and the styles of rhetoric which he would have encountered. Even if the word fashion is not stated, it is implied that what is described *is* Fashion or the performance of the Fashionable in such statements as “This year blue is in Fashion”⁴⁰ or “Prints win at the races.”⁴¹ For Barthes, what is important is that the phrases conform to a formula and consistent message which states “this is Fashionable.” This is the manner in which Barthes develops a sense of the activity of (written) Fashion inscribing itself in the reader, significantly laying the ground for later Barthesian concepts such as the “Death of the Author”⁴² and a poststructuralist performative language which produces the subject-reader and other things that it names. And we might propose, although diverting from Barthes, that in the figure of the (clothed) reader, the different productive acts of reading and wearing, the difference of writing and the actual garment, interact as different dimensions of (clothed) experience. It

³⁷ Roland Barthes, Writing Degree Zero, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968).

³⁸ Barthes, The Fashion System 249.

³⁹ Jobling 85-93.

⁴⁰ Barthes, The Fashion System 77.

⁴¹ Barthes, The Fashion System. Barthes writes “the fashionable is almost never enunciated: it remains implicit, exactly like the signified of a word” (22).

⁴² Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author.” By the death of the author, it is meant that Barthes dissolved the authority of the author as the largely singular source of a text’s meaning by grounding it instead in the “tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture” (146). An integral part of this new tissue is a reader, or the readers, who respond to and interpret texts.

is precisely this convergence that makes sense of “written fashion” informing real clothes.

From his detailed taxonomy of written fashion, it is apparent that Barthes allowed himself to be seduced by systematicity and the desire to “reconstruct one of those systems [a sign system other than language] step by step, to reconstitute a language both spoken by and unknown to everyone.”⁴³ It is worth re-stating his motivations as he defined them in a 1967 interview, so that we can firstly observe what he describes as the “ground” of his semiological inquiry and secondly, the exclusions which were deemed necessary to achieve his model. Firstly, he writes about his choice of clothing as semiotic object:

Writers like Balzac, Proust, and Michelet had already postulated the existence of a kind of language of apparel, but it remained to give a technical, not just a metaphorical, content to what are too loosely called “languages” (languages of film, photography, painting, etc.). From this point of view, clothing is one of those objects of communication – like food, gestures, behaviour, conversation – which I have always profoundly enjoyed investigating because, on the one hand, they possess a daily existence and represent to me an opportunity for self-knowledge on the most immediate level (since I invest myself in my own life), and because, on the other hand, these objects possess an intellectual existence, offering themselves to systematic analysis by formal means.⁴⁴

Secondly, on the way in which the project and this original motivation needed to be modified as the method emerged, he writes:

I began with a project which was, of course, resolutely semiological but which remained, in my mind, on a sociological ground. Thus, I thought, in the first stage, that I would analyze the language of actual clothing, the kind worn by everyone: I even began my survey. But I quickly realised that one couldn’t successfully complete this sort of sociological investigation without working from a model (in the structural sense) against which to measure the observations furnished by real society. I therefore concentrated, in the second stage, on clothing as it is presented in fashion magazines. And then a new uncertainty regarding my method intervened (I remember a conversation with Levi-Strauss on this subject): I became convinced that one operation could not effectively study combined systems, i.e., an object comprising manufacturing techniques, images (in the form of photographs), and

⁴³ Barthes, *The Fashion System* 43.

⁴⁴ Roland Barthes, “On *The Fashion System* and the Structural Analysis of Narratives” 43.

written words all at the same time. The systems had to be separated for analysis according to their individual substances, their signifying materials.⁴⁵

This personal reflection is very insightful. While it confirms a certain truth that each of these systems demanded a specificity of analysis, it is important to observe, here, his statement that the project *remained on a sociological ground*. It seems that in spite of attempts to cleave away the subject of actual clothing from his current analysis, it may in fact continue to haunt it. It is possible that his original interest in the "daily existence" of clothing was more difficult to separate from the redefined parameters of his study. The refinement of his method takes us from the category of "clothing" toward "Fashionable clothing," or clothing in the Fashionable mode within the pages of the fashion magazine, this being the first main exclusion of his study. However, in that one of his key justifications for undertaking an analysis of fashion magazines was that their "truly enormous circulation" guaranteed them an integral place within mass culture and therefore an important projection of a "collective image-repertoire,"⁴⁶ then it would seem that Barthes' point is not to make fashion a subset of a broader category of clothing, but rather to point to the dissemination of the language of Fashion amidst clothing use.

In reference to this disseminative quality of language, Barthes' further comments on writing seem to inform this study. In a section of a 1974 interview titled "From Speech to Writing" Barthes seeks to make clear his distinction between "writing" and the "written."⁴⁷ In the following quote, we find evidence of Barthes' destabilising the literary framework for writing:

⁴⁵ Barthes, "On *The Fashion System* and the Structural Analysis of Narratives" 44. In another interview in the same collection he seems to offer the reason – of actual clothing's impoverished code – for turning instead to the rich signification of language about clothing. These comments attest to his belief that we should respect the differences between actual clothing and represented clothing, as well as having a regard for the investment of language in clothing: "to consider clothing is already to put language into clothing." From, Roland Barthes, "Conversation on a Scientific Poem," *The Grain of the Voice: Interviews 1962-1980*, trans. Linda Coverdale (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) 65.

⁴⁶ For this justification underpinned by sociological rationales or empirical statistics, see Barthes, *The Fashion System* 9; and Roland Barthes, "The Fashion System," *The Grain of the Voice: Interviews 1962-1980*, trans. Linda Coverdale (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) 57.

⁴⁷ Roland Barthes, "From Speech to Writing," *The Grain of the Voice: Interviews 1962-1980*, trans. Linda Coverdale (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) 3-7.

Writing is not speech, and this separation has received a theoretical consecration these past few years; but neither is writing the written, transcription; to write is not to transcribe. In writing, what is too present in speech (in a hysterical fashion), namely the body, returns, but along a path which is indirect, measured, musical, and, in a word, right, returning through pleasure, and not through the Imaginary (the image). It is, after all, this voyage of the body (of the subject) through language which our three practices (speech, the written, writing), modulate, each in its fashion...the value of a differential experience of languages; speech, the written, and writing engage a separate subject each time, and the reader – the listener – must follow this divided subject, different depending on whether he speaks, transcribes, or formulates.⁴⁸

In these words, Barthes points to an axis for differentiating the experiences of language, a differential which can separate speaking (articulating), from transcription (or copying and re-arranging) and from writing (as making or formulating). These differences are experienced as a “voyage through the body,” delineating different subject positions and ways of acting. As this differential appears to question the conditions of conventional literary production as it winds a musical path through embodied pleasure, what if dress could be described along the lines of this voyage of language through the body? The voyage would allow the differentiation of various subject positions and ways of acting in clothes such as wearing acts (speaking?), interpreting the language of fashion (transcription), or making fashion (“writing”) and to add, also being viewers and consumers, all of which could potentially coalesce in the one wearer (reader).

The complication of writing implicit in the above quote is symptomatic of Barthes’ later writings where he questions the limits and borders of literature. The description is suggestive as an approach to be tested on other modalities of production – like dress – to illustrate its variable subject positions (as different body-subjects) as well as relations with language and image. It is in this spirit that “writing” may have suggested application to earlier writers such as Wilson to characterise “dress’s materials.” However, while Barthes may unsettle our perception of a literary framework for writing, in his corpus he remains faithful to a literary conception of writing and textual production. In large, his generous contribution was to analyse the way in which the differential of language –

⁴⁸ Barthes, “From Speech to Writing” 7.

speech, writing, text – is produced and maintained, by questioning the conditions and borders of literary production. Significantly, in applying writing to dress, one experiences a lack of correspondence between the differentials made possible through language (speaking, transcribing, writing) and those of dress largely because of the host of terms already available to describe aspects of dress (fashion, wearing, worn, garments etc.). For instance, it is difficult to find a neat equivalent in this field for speaking that is not also a way of formulating/making. Ultimately, in Wilson “writing” is used to simply *describe* the work of dress (as a metaphor for making/formulating) and it hasn’t the same powerful force to construct the differential in wearing that Barthes unfolds in language. After borrowing the essential point of comparison, that writing is productive of a differential of experience, it is worth noting that the phenomenal conditions of the “outlining” metaphor do not readily dissolve.

Opening Up the Text

As a result of his detailed description of the structure of a social object/text –namely *written* fashion in the fashion magazine – the various properties appear to exceed Barthes’ containment of them to the order of the linguistic. I wish to demonstrate how these qualities outlined by Barthes cannot be confined to the domain of representation – i.e. the manner in which certain qualities bleed into the other domains.

We can see evidence of these qualities extending beyond the linguistic, stretching into image-clothing and the real, however, in Barthes’ organisation of these orders and the conceptual terms used to differentiate them it is impossible for the attributes which description affords garments to make any journey outside of the linguistic. As such, according to Barthes’ methodology, prone as it is to defining the system of written language by exclusions, the descriptions remain performative instances of fashion language which produce “meaning” and the sense of order which emanates from grammatical organisation.

One can find evidence of slippage between domains of the represented and usage, almost

immediately in his definition of a variant; in the fact that the effects/affects of the variant straddle across the material element of the "support" (which is based in the garment's technical or real existence) and any variant's non-material status, its signifying powers. He states that the variant *modifies* the material element of the support; the support would be the *collar* on a pullover in the example "a pullover (object) with a closed (variant) collar (support)."⁴⁹ In situations like this, the distinctions that emanate from Barthes' rigid separation of sociology and semiology – such as, in accordance with the focus of each discipline, that between the real and its Representation, Action and Meaning, or the actualised and the Imaginary – start to break down.⁵⁰ For example, in this particular instance of referring to the modifying operations of the variant, Barthes muddles the *activity* of usage with the realm of *meaning* in representation, the immaterial at work in the material elements. To explain this further, in Barthes' organisation meaning is a domain of pure value, the immaterial, the abstract, the intellectual, the "conventional," and it "cannot produce clothing or constitute one of its uses."⁵¹ Within his concern for representation, use would be located, for him, in the act of *reading* and interpretation, where relations of equivalence (i.e. value) are established between clothing and either fashion or the world. But this is not the same as clothing use. This is when his distinctions operate as binary oppositions dividing and opposing the terms of meaning and use. So when use is deciphered in the representational sphere, Barthes' binary distinctions go out of operation. For Barthes, if meaning is at work in the material element of the support, this points to a complex problem of Fashion's operations (or the meanings of fashionability) at work in clothing use more broadly (beyond reading) and for us, it hints at the complexity of clothing usages. So, then, we slowly begin to find further evidence of Fashion's appearances at a series of borders with traditional categories such as the aesthetic, the functional, the linguistic, the technological, the actual or "real," the ideological (or social conventions of morality, modesty) and the economic (arriving later in Barthes' study), as well as its opening onto a number of distinct disciplines and/or hybrid fields of inquiry (for Barthes sociology *and* semiology). Today,

⁴⁹ Barthes, *The Fashion System* 60-70.

⁵⁰ Carter, "Barthes and the Fashion System" 16.

⁵¹ Barthes, *The Fashion System* 24.

we can extend the disciplinary borders at which fashion intersects to include consumer theory, theories of the body, feminism, film theory and communication/technology theory, pointing to what Michael Carey has described as a multi-proximal and finally indeterminate theoretical and phenomenal placement for Fashion.⁵²

Such a placement of Fashion, by potentially implicating fashion's appearances in a range of categories and ways of theorising, opens it to much more than the binary between what is fashionable and what is not, yet in Barthes' study this relation is the over-determining motivation for the system's utterances and therefore the defining axis of its structure. Here, in reiterating his main purpose of decoding the Fashionable through the inventory of signifying utterances, Barthes himself writes:

...the function of the description of Fashion is not only to propose a model which is a copy of reality but also and especially to circulate Fashion broadly as a *meaning*.⁵³

And in comparing image-clothing with written-clothing he again comments on written-clothing's adherence to the category of the fashionable and image-clothing's divergence from this category:

this dress, which is represented to me (and not described), may well be something other than fashionable; it may be warm, strange, attractive, modest, protective, etc. *before* being fashionable; on the contrary, this same dress, described, can only be Fashion itself.⁵⁴

For him, the analysis of the utterances of "Fashion itself" unearths the very "reason of Fashion," by which he means that a general structural principle of periodic renewal is shown to be in operation through performatively reiterated utterances that point to seasonal changes.

However, within his method of outlining the syntactic constructions of written clothing,

⁵² Carey 43.

⁵³ Barthes, *The Fashion System* 10.

⁵⁴ Barthes, *The Fashion System* 16-17.

Barthes himself opens a door to an increasing complexity. He writes that his commentary on the variants "will ...[be] making a few brief comments from the point of view of substance, i.e. from justifying each variant beyond its systematic value by using morphological, historical and psychological factors in such a way as to demonstrate the relations between a semiological system and the 'world.'"⁵⁵

It is the function of written fashion to insert a meaning of Fashionability or a set of worldly signifieds, between the reader (potential user) and an object (the garment or clothing), resulting in what Barthes has called elsewhere a "struggle" or tension within the object. In his essay "The Semantics of the Object" he writes:

Now, we know that meaning is a process not of action, but of equivalences; in other words, *meaning does not have a transitive value; meaning is in some sense inert, motionless; hence we can say that there is in the object a sort of struggle between the activity of its function and the inactivity of its signification. Meaning deactivates the object, renders it intransitive, assigns it a frozen place in what we might call a *tableau vivant* of the human image-repertoire.*⁵⁶

In The Fashion System, Barthes locates this tension *between* the orders of the represented and the real, rather than within a domain in which the object variously appears and changes its dimensions. To do so, is to understand that a *distance* separates reality and representation, an interval or gap.

Why does Fashion utter clothing so abundantly? Why does it interpose, between the object and its user, such a luxury of words (not to mention images), such a network of meaning?⁵⁷

It is significant that he uses the word "interposed" to describe the production of meaning, as if it was inserted later and that the user and the object were not integral to the production of meaning. Here, if the user is the reader, isn't this reader essential to the production of meaning, rather than separated from it? If the reader and user are one and

⁵⁵ Barthes, The Fashion System 114.

⁵⁶ Roland Barthes, "The Semantics of the Object," Critical Essays, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1972) 189.

⁵⁷ Barthes, The Fashion System xi.

the same, there would be no need for insertion or interposing. Or is the reader being implicated in a much broader context of clothing use? If this is the case, this user would also be implicated in a domain of meaning production.

Of relevance here, is the slippage in Barthes' different ways of using the term *substance*. In his comments about the relation between the variant and material support above, "substance" has an extra-linguistic quality. Earlier in his text while describing the qualities of the written clothing code, he specifies in contrast that "Substance is used here in a sense very close to Hjelmslev's: an ensemble of aspects of linguistic phonemes which can be described exhaustively without recourse to extra-linguistic premises (cf. L. Hjelmslev, *Essays*)."⁵⁸ To clarify, material difference is implicit in the structure of the Saussurean sign to which Barthes' analysis conforms when he defines the signifier as a discrete, material, numerable and visible garment(s) and the signified as immaterial (the meanings of fashion or worldliness depending on the case).⁵⁹ The relation of the parts of the sign are founded on a difference which stems from the assumption that the real and represented are opposed and separable spheres. But as was implied in my points above about the tension, the value or meaning produced by the clothing sign cannot be located *in between* these two orders separated by distance, because he must, ultimately, be able to show how meaning moves from one to the other as substance transforms into different material and meaning. That is, as the garment moves from one order to another material transformations are affected, as well as different degrees of clarity of meaning from the labile to the pure. In fact, the difference of substance has already inhabited the identities of material it attempts to separate.

Wearing as "Writing": Toward the Category of Clothing Use(s)

Across the corpus of Barthes' writings about semiology, he weaves particular thoughts about fashion,⁶⁰ and when these are considered in relation to his theory of and disposition

⁵⁸ Barthes, *The Fashion System* 70.

⁵⁹ Barthes, *The Fashion System* 25.

⁶⁰ We have already heard from Barthes in two interviews "On *The Fashion System* and the Structural

toward mass culture and the reconfiguration (i.e. the heterogeneity) of the social order ushered in by the semiotic exposition of its various practices, we can postulate that he was possibly less interested in the fashion magazine as a domain of symbolic production, than in articulating something of the "daily existence" of clothing as it unfolds across the various orders which he so carefully delineates. If you remember, it was this daily existence which demanded a structural model for the formal analysis of clothing's intellectuality. However, his method in The Fashion System seeks to remain true to his literary field of inquiry. Yet in spite of the strict controls he asserts to define his study to fashion literature, he points us to or designates a general experience of the garment where "acts, images and words"⁶¹ would interact in various practices, consumptions, knowledges and methodologies symptomatic of the use of material objects within a heterogeneous social order with which he remained captivated throughout his intellectual life.⁶² He points to a generic experience of clothing in which these various levels might coalesce, but it would be wrong not to reiterate Barthes' rejection that such a coalescence brings a singular identity to the garment. In fact, as it is shown that the object can move from one system to another and be transformed into the languages of each system, then the impression one gains of this order is of a domain so filled with the ubiquitous presence of codes, that the object becomes riddled with the properties and differences of the codes of each system. Moreover, as an object's presence and meaning is potentially stretched across a number of ways of appearing it becomes impossible to simply divide its existence up into discrete levels that bear no relation to each other.⁶³

Analysis of Narrative" and "The Fashion System." He also refers to fashion in Barthes, Image, Music Text 155; Barthes, "Literature Today," Critical Essays, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1972) 152-53; Roland Barthes, "Literature and Signification," Critical Essays, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1972) 265. Also, there is a section on the garment system in The Elements of Semiology 25-27.

⁶¹ Barthes, The Fashion System. He writes in full "To study the garment of Fashion would first be to study each of these three structures separately and exhaustively, for a structure cannot be defined apart from the substantial identity of the units which constitute it: we must study either acts, or images, or words, but not all these substances at once, even if the structures which they form combine to constitute a generic object which, for convenience sake, we call the garment of Fashion" (7-8). Note that he refers to a generic object "the garment" where these spheres would combine.

⁶² Barthes, The Fashion System. Exemplary of his interest in the mass cultural sphere and observant of fashion's place within it, he writes in The Fashion System, "even if the garment of Fashion remained purely imaginary (without affecting real clothing), it would constitute an incontestable element of mass culture, like pulp fiction, comics and movies" (9).

⁶³ Carter, "Barthes and the Fashion System" 10.

What, then, might Barthes mean by the category of clothing *use* which would come into operation in the real order of social action?⁶⁴ As Carter argues, Barthes' representation of the order of used clothing becomes quite limited and austere, if one extracts all the qualities of discourse which differ from it.⁶⁵ However, given that it has become impossible to finally contain the discursive properties of the garment to the domain of representation, it is left to us to (re-)insert various properties and codes back into (clothing) use; so then, for us, the category of usage begins to partake of the values of semantic production and aesthetic plasticity available in discourse, as well as the functional activities of protection and the ideological properties of morality already operative in use, in addition to the "morphological, historical, and psychological" activities which prove for Barthes the relation between a semiological system and the world.⁶⁶ As the operations of the semiological system appear to have spilled beyond the boundaries of a conventional linguistic operation, it engenders a reality whose inscriptive production implicates semantics and ideology with/in the physical, the historical, the practical. Thus it begins to evoke for us a more accurate representation of the multiple dimensions of the area of used clothing. It is possible, then, that what Barthes meant by the "daily existence of clothing" could be captured by this composite picture of clothing use or, at least, a slightly less austere rendering of the dimensions of usage where "several systems of expression are at play – material, photography, language."⁶⁷

Couldn't *wearing* be an important dimension of the general experience of the garment where the various orders of analysis and their implications would coalesce? Isn't wearing a fundamental dimension of clothing use and an integral element of the "daily existence of clothing" missing from our discussion of use thus far? Wearing is an activity where "acts, images and words" come into operation, bringing the properties and effects of

⁶⁴ For Barthes the "real" represents the intersection of a technical definition of the garment and social facts, for instance individual actualisations of wearing.

⁶⁵ Carter, "Barthes and the Fashion System" 15.

⁶⁶ Barthes, *The Fashion System* 114.

⁶⁷ Barthes, "The Fashion System" 57. Given Barthes' position on the voice of the author, the term expression in this sentence would appear to refer to the actual media systems and their internal structures, rather than the author's/producer's internal qualities or attributes seeking to be expressed.

discourse (writing and image) into interaction with embodied acts and garments. Certainly, it is not easy to insert wearing into the binary opposition that separates clothing use into the orders of the real and the represented.

Cixous points to a similar sense of the dispersion of the experience of clothing and a rupturing of a garment's singular identity, to that encountered in Barthes', when she likens wearing one's sweater inside out to an act of disseminative *writing* which, for her, savours the elements of its composition as parts of a broader network of the "skin of the world." Like Barthes, by the experience of clothing she means clothing in its fashionable mode, for her account revolves around her bond with a fashionable Sonia Rykiel jacket. For us, what is important is that she compares the expressive capacity of wearing to writing, but only in so far as writing undergoes a revision which makes it consistent with the "death" which Barthes brings to the author. In a familiar Barthesian move she dissolves the voice of the author (designer or wearer) as the locus of the garment's meaning and places it in a much broader framework of properties or elements – a piece of warm night, water, sky, hand, body. She does this in two related ways; firstly, she reintegrates the wearer back into the world of "elements" foregrounding a phenomenological perception that solicits a continuity not unlike the terms of Merleau-Ponty's "flesh of the world."⁶⁸ Secondly, she challenges the boundary which marks the wearer's inside from outside – the fabric's second skin – in and through a comparison with writing. She writes:

In moving outward, in expressing oneself in wool, in jersey, in visible forms, the intimate does not *show* itself, does not exhibit itself. There is no rupture with the body hidden in the body. There is continuity... Writing likes its composition to be savoured. Ever since the Bible, writing is what lets the inside out show: and there is no more inside out.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and Invisible*. To explain, for Merleau-Ponty the *flesh of the world* is neither simply material or spiritual. He writes, "To designate it, we should need the old term 'element' in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire, that is, in the sense of a general thing, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being" (139). Following this definition of the element he writes about what is often called the reflex of perception, as the "overlapping" or "transgression" of body and world (248).

⁶⁹ Cixous, "Sonia Rykiel in Translation" 96.

What is meant here, is that writing has traditionally been conceived as that which lets an interiority *show* itself on the outside, but here Cixous points to a non-subjectivist approach to an expression of “intimacy” where there is no *rupture* between outside and inside. In wearing her garment, the difference between inside and outside becomes entirely fluid:

And the seams? I mean the inside out, I mean the right side out, I mean the right side where it is the inside out that is the right side. ... That the seams should remain apparent is the immodesty of writing.⁷⁰

Why does Cixous’ account go further than a structuralist gesture of invoking a linguistic production – writing – to describe an expressive or productive clothing act? It is because of where she locates the productive action; she points to an experience of *wearing*, which is not simply a consequence of the action of word, clothing, or image, but rather a differentiated, sensual, material and disseminative *writing*. More precisely, Cixous writes herself inside the garment and her garment, self and body are integral parts of a disseminative production or composition that she likens to writing. Her object, that which writes, is literally split across different material manifestations and sensations. Writing is also immodest, as it involves a bodily exposure; to expose the garment’s seams is to expose a body caught up in these seams. To reiterate, in wearing, body and garment are of the same stuff and activity with/of the world and, in this activity and stuff, knowledge and perception, intelligibility and sensibility, intellect and emotion, are completely entangled. In Cixous’ account of the phenomena of wearing, it is in the various textures of the “skin of the world” where the differences of sensory perception – seeing, touch – and material apprehensions and understanding are fleshed out.

To use simple terms, in Cixous’ account *wearing* is likened to an inscriptive production (i.e. an expressive act of writing the world) which can be compared to what Barthes meant when he wrote “to consider clothing is already to put language into clothing” and that worn clothing serves to “exchange information” and is thus a “vestmentary language

⁷⁰ Cixous, “Sonia Rykiel in Translation” 96.

which ought to lend itself to linguistic analysis even though the signifying material is not articulated language."⁷¹ Again for Barthes, actual clothing both communicates (speaks) and is spoken for (in "conversation," in "publicity," in "commentary," in "promotion"). More particularly, it is articulated, spoken *and* written language that surrounds clothing in a relational way; also clothing speaks and is spoken, writes and is written. Also, Cixous is more explicit in her "fleshing-out" of clothing's expression, her bodily insistence, her pleasure in exposing a body together with clothing; her clothes are worn in such a way that starts with her bodily inhabiting of them. This reminds me of Barthes' description of the differential of language "in and through the body" in his thoughts on writing. While we are left to infer that Cixous' inscriptive productions amidst the skin of the world might refer to, for example, *both* acts of writing and being written, a reciprocal give and take, her insistence on continuity with body and world is enough to propose that the traditional co-ordinates of inscription (as an activity that takes place on a flat surface with the force of a single pen and the unidirectional flow of ink) are being challenged. There would be no definitive surface to write upon here. In Cixous, we can see that wearing is an important dimension of an embodied clothed *writing* which for her brings immodesty, heightened sensation, movement and self-presence. She writes: "And here I am, dressed at the closest point to myself."⁷² Following Barthes and Cixous we can posit that wearing would be a site or space of potentially multiple subject positions and dimensions to the object, where various elements and forces come into play to shape the presences of (embodied) clothing. Amidst Cixous' evocative rendering of these elements, Wilson's reference to the "materials of dress" that write or draw a representation of the body, begins to appear a little too quickly drawn.

An Enlarged Scene of Writing

Continuing to mine Barthes' profile of the fashion system and references to clothing use, will involve approaching and extending wearing as a site of multiple inscriptive forces and phenomenal elements, by placing wearing within what Derrida has called an

⁷¹ Barthes, "Conversation on a Scientific Poem" 64-65.

⁷² Cixous, "Sonia Rykiel in Translation" 97.

expanded scene of writing. In summary, for this is not new territory, Derrida's notion of general writing is determined by a redefinition of language to mean anything that leaves a trace or mark; this is writing in the general sense rather than literally writing on a page. Under such terms, writing is no longer simply a literary notion and architecture, cinematography, choreography, painting, music and so on, could all be considered instances of writing. Following Barthes' lead about the richness of clothing use, the centrality of heterogeneity, of relations of difference between orders of signs, we have posited that wearing is a writing only in so far it is co-authored, in a strictly non-linear, multiply contingent way, by the differences in "acts, images and words," opening up for us a complexity of exchange in substance and meaning and, therefore, ensuing immaterial and material transformations.

One can think about the division of the clothing object across various ontological orders, or the differences registering themselves in the object, in terms of the work of Derrida's trace. Text, sign, presence attests to the trace's work, but the trace is particularly useful when it is difficult to extract or start from one cause or origin by which to re-trace a set of effects, elements or units. Like writing, wearing is where presence – i.e. marks of sense – are produced, registered and acknowledged. Being that space where act, image and word unite, wearing is where the trace's work is intertextual from its inception in an ordinary play or movement between different traces. So, to the list of variants of a general system of traces, to which writing, text, inscription, arche-trace, *écriture* belong as grammatological, we might add *wearing*.

So then, in that wearing and writing can be compared at the level of being acknowledgments of meaning and sense, it is relevant that Derrida re-conceives writing so that it operates in a system of generic traces, rather than simply linguistic signs. Derrida has argued:

...I would like to demonstrate that the traits that can be recognized in the classical, narrowly defined concept of writing, are generalizable. They are valid not only for all orders of "signs" and for all languages in general but moreover, beyond semio-linguistic communication, for the entire field of what philosophy would call

experience, even the experience of being: the above-mentioned "presence."⁷³

This quote takes us beyond signs, beyond semio-linguistic communication toward recognising a series of traits which mark the experience of "being" (which importantly for Derrida is not confined to human being).⁷⁴ For Derrida to define the trace as a fundamental structure of phenomena, is in the interests of reconfiguring boundaries and limits which have organised writing in opposition to its "others" ("speech, life, the world, the real, history,... body or mind, conscious or unconscious, politics, economics, and so forth"⁷⁵): to reconceive these boundaries is to acknowledge the admixture which makes writing possible and the different modalities of marking made possible by the transformation of writing itself.⁷⁶ To reiterate his approach to writing, Derrida explains that the term writing is engaged only to the extent that its common traditional conception has been transformed in his employ:

Strategic reasons...have motivated the choice of this word [writing] to designate something which is no longer tied to writing in the traditional sense any more than it is to speech or any other type of mark...[w]hat is at stake is precisely the attempt to put this concept into question and to transform it.⁷⁷

To interpret Derrida's transformations of the mark, we should understand that the sign of semiology is radically informed by a context that is more than linguistic, an inter-text in which the very concept of linguistic text is put under erasure in and through its contamination with other "writings," signs, texts, marks and makings. Of interest to us, is the way Kirby has signalled this inter-textual contamination implicit in marks,

⁷³ Jacques Derrida, "Signature, Event, Context," *Limited Inc*, trans. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1988) 9.

⁷⁴ In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida posits that the trace would precede the distinction between human and non-human when he writes "Even before being determined as human (with all the distinctive characteristics that have always been attributed to man and the entire system of significations that they imply) or nonhuman, the gramme – or grapheme – would thus name the element" (9). We can begin to grasp why Derrida's conception of general writing is more far reaching than the stretching of the linguistic paradigm that one can find in social semiotics which assumes that all signs – literary and non-literary – are human made, largely due to the hermeneutic frame which interprets them.

⁷⁵ Derrida, "Living On" 84.

⁷⁶ This might seem to invite a homogeneity and a problem of non-differentiation to the mark. Derrida would argue that such a reconception is designed to attend to difference rather than produce homogeneity. We will examine this issue shortly.

⁷⁷ Derrida, "Limited Inc....abc" 191.

evocatively but only once as “ma(r)kings.”⁷⁸

A kind of double vision is required to understand Derrida's thought of the different workings of the trace or mark, the play of difference. The trace and writing in Derrida refer simultaneously to the whole and the elements that comprise this whole; similarly we will see that to compare wearing with writing, wearing as a totality can be said to write, just as its various comprising elements are said to write this whole. Just as for Derrida *différance*, the motivating force of writing, represents both the *differing* of a trace from an other and the *deferring* of the presence of one trace in and through the other (so that difference is never an absolute or pure difference), ma(r)king can stand to represent both *marking* and *making* and their interplay in the action and meaning of wearing. Any marking, or in semiotic terminology any sign, is made possible by the deferring presence of *différance* – i.e. ma(r)king.⁷⁹ In that ma(r)king is to signal the transformation of writing in and through contamination, marking would not presuppose something passive to receive its mark, for it is always already engaged in a contaminating relation with that which receives its mark. More will be said about making shortly, but suffice it to say here that the trace is both incisive mark, effect, action and material. That is, it can be both literal and non-literal in the act of leaving incising marks. In ma(r)king, the conjoining brackets are to signify an inhabitation of the one literal term by the other non-literal term, pointing to a certain combinatory play of characters and elements within each other as different systems – considered non-isomorphic – come into contact. Moreover, in that writing, this peculiar ma(r)king, is generated within an intricate textile of entangled inter-textual traces which write together, any one instance of marking is subject not only to the contamination of one trace by another, but also a certain exposure to and rubbing up against other traces, introducing for us, the possibility of both generating new marks (or

⁷⁸ Kirby 63

⁷⁹ Derrida explains the logic of differing-deferring presence as such, a relational logic of elements within a system: “The play of differences supposes...syntheses and referrals which forbid...that a simple element be present in and of itself, referring only to itself...no element can function...without referring to another element which itself is not simply present. This interweaving results in each “element”...being constituted on the basis of the trace within it of other elements in the chain or system. This interweaving, this textile, is the text produced only in the transformation of another text. Nothing, neither among the elements nor within the system, is ever simply present or absent. There are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces” (Derrida, *Positions* 2).

ma(r)kings) and the erasure, destruction and modification of the identity of existing traces. It is to such a set of conditions that wearing is exposed in partaking of this complex and intricate inter-text.

The full import of the comparison of wearing and general writing can be felt in its capacity to re-conceive Barthes' literary schema of the fashion garment in a much broader network. Additionally, it honours Derrida's intentions to locate in the generic mark the capacity to transform the "classical, narrowly defined" conception of writing – eg. as that which is preceded by and records speech, as that which is page-bound, as that which animates the object. In that it was Barthes' intention to make of fashion a system which would be a part of linguistics, he continues to invest in a certain systematicity which is underpinned by a discreteness of sign and system, as if the closure that surrounds the categorisation of the fashion sign was not a process of closing, a process of identifying and delimiting that can never be finished. As Kirby elaborates: "it is this process that precedes, constitutes, and subverts the integrity of sense and meaning, and the identities of sign, system, linguistics, and its "other," that grammatology tries to acknowledge in the words trace, inscription, arche-writing, and text."⁸⁰ In that the sign of fashion in Barthes, as we have already observed, resists containment, any attempt to organise the system within identifying closures, marks an indebtedness to limits that are fundamentally limitless. As such, we are able to question the idea that written-clothing and particularly its mark of, or sense, of a fashionable (or its opposite, non-fashionable) mode, is simply a literary production of semanticity and that writing begins to partake of many properties and values other than what is fashionable or not. Some intriguing questions are opened up: What happens when we point to the impossibility of closure of the fashion system? What happens when Fashion spills over and roams more freely amongst the broader category of clothing use, apart from cooking up a theoretical complexity that brought Barthes to delimit his study so that its integrity could be preserved? It is surely beyond any study to follow and capture a sense of this spillage and claim to examine clothing use in its entirety; it would be ambitious enough to try to

⁸⁰ Kirby 53.

slightly stretch his parameters by following the spillage a little. Barthes has left us to explain the manner in which both system and sign break down and to address the relation between a system of knowledge and everyday use. One of the legacies of his structuralist enterprise is that Fashion is equated with a linguistic agency and is always that which simply prefigures clothing with the sign of fashionableness; fashion is simply that which names clothing as fashionable. In acknowledgment of Barthes we would need to retain an important emphasis on the word, on language, as that which effects and is effected by fashion, while re-conceiving Barthes' methodological field which privileges the literary object and confines writing to a literary enterprise.

So, in that wearing enables us to witness the transformation of Barthes' writing, wearing operates with all the properties of Derrida's transformed inscriptional motif, writing, *différance*. Wearing allows us to propose that the significations of purportedly ontologically distinct systems of expression (important to Barthes) of the act, image and word, are only possible because of an interplay between these orders of the object. In spite of Barthes' concession that it is a combination of the different modalities or orders which provides a certain richness to the fashion garment, the differences are starkly, if not oppositionally, drawn by him; written clothings' dynamic productions of the sign of fashionability, are in dramatic contrast to a certain stability of the "garment" (as actual, functional clothing object) and the aesthetic or plastic functions of the image. If we remember that Derrida's intertext, posits *différance*, as its defining force, the differing and deferring (a productive spacing, the "order of coexistences")⁸¹ of one term of a binary opposition within the other, then we would have to concede that written clothing achieves its dynamism and fashionable image only with the contamination of the qualities attributed to image-clothing and real-clothing; not only would written clothing be susceptible to the plasticity which distinguishes the former, the shared properties would inhabit the object itself. I am reminding the reader, here, of the qualities of plasticity and aesthetic functionality, contaminating the order of discourse, even while Barthes is attempting to assign these properties of the image a subsidiary function to that of

⁸¹ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) 24-25.

language; it is possible for the object and image to effect or animate the word. What is being proposed here in this corruption, contamination or undoing of Barthes' conceptual map is only a provisional rendering of the experience of wearing so that it comprises a differential network of the traces of acts, images and words and their interplay and imbrications as they delineate the potential parameters of the daily existence of clothes – imagining, practicality, habit, aesthetics, boredom, pleasure, renewal, eroticism, mood, innovation and so on (in an endless list of possibilities). Wearing would participate in a broad system of traces, which enables us to think about it as a practice, that produces or writes meaning infinitely and also what is made possible by the elements which write through each other infinitely. Each trace could constitute a distinct way of writing/wearing.

It might be helpful to think about this through the differences of *marking* and *making* with respect to Barthes' tripartite organisation of the garment, which has an appealing simplicity. Yet his references to the methodological "uncertainties" which emerged in his research are enough to suggest his awareness of the questions and complications which arise from such simplicity. Again, to clarify, while Barthes had hoped to demonstrate at some level that clothes signify and are open to linguistic analysis, his actual project aimed to show that language about clothing installs a network of meaning before the user; that is, when he writes "to consider clothing is already to put language into clothing" he declares his intentions to study the language in the clothing – i.e. the *marking* of clothes by language.⁸² The "impoverished code" of real clothes depends, as it were, on the inscriptions of language for signification. To represent Barthes, then, we can take *marking* to be the inscribed effects of the writing of clothes by language: "it's impossible to consider a cultural object outside of the articulated, spoken, and written language which *surrounds* it."⁸³ Moreover, the sentence that follows this last statement not only definitively announces the implications of Barthes' study as a linguistic analysis, but couples linguistics with the production of meaning, unequivocally proposing that language is an (exclusive?) agent of meaning. He writes: "Thus, linguistics no longer

⁸² Barthes, "Conversations" 65.

⁸³ Barthes, "Conversations" 65. Italics are my emphasis.

seems to be a part of the general science of meaning: on the contrary, linguistics is the general science of meaning, which can then be subdivided into particular semiotics according to the objects encountered by human language."⁸⁴ So, for us, *marking* can stand to acknowledge the impacts of the linguistic – the marking of language, the marked effects in clothes – through which *meaning* is actualised, produced or made (i.e. marking and marked). We have already seen that the rhetoric of the fashion magazine, inscribes and even over-determines clothes with the cyclical renewals of Fashion as meaning – i.e. the meaning of the fashionable. In that he has language speaking and animating clothing from a *surrounding* position external to it, post-Barthesian scholarship must address how language's effects move from the surrounds into the clothes themselves and their work of investment, to establish a specific voice for clothing which is perhaps a little less reliant on the word for all its animation and meaning.

To turn to *making*, we need to uncover one of Barthes' "uncertainties" and seek to clarify what he means when speaking of "acts." In an interview following the publication of The Fashion System, Barthes refers us, in another tripartite organisation, to "manufacturing techniques" as the substance, the signifying materials of "acts."⁸⁵ These acts would be acts of *making*. Several lines before this, he referred to actual clothing "worn by everyone" as his initial impetus for undertaking the research,⁸⁶ the wearing actions of which this term "acts" could hold a residue. If we remember his slightly later reference to the three-tiered systems which come into play in fashion (i.e. materials, photography, language), he refers us to the category of the "material" which can potentially connect to both the media and substances of the acts of clothing.⁸⁷ By this reference to the *material*, does he mean the literal material of the garment, or does he mean to refer to the materialisation of acts of wearing? If indeed Barthes is referring to acts of wearing clothing instead of clothes themselves, over which there is some suggestion but also doubt because of his ambiguous references to the garment's "material" and "techniques

⁸⁴ Barthes, "Conversations" 65.

⁸⁵ Barthes, "On *The Fashion System*" 44.

⁸⁶ Barthes, "On *The Fashion System*" 44.

⁸⁷ This would be the case if the two three-tiered organisations which Barthes give us could be said to correlate as a grouping of media (materials, photography, language) and their atomic units of substance (acts, words, images).

of its manufacture," it would have to be argued, for one, that these acts are performed by both living and non-living, organic and artificial, non-machine made and machine made *matter*. As well, it would direct us to techniques of manufacture which exceed the textile and machinic; leaving us somewhere between things and doings – i.e. made things and acts of making. These doings can be thought of as makings – acts of embodied wearing. It is worth remembering Cixous' rendering of the "expressive acts" of dress, which can be thought of as hybrid makings; I would rather call them makings rather than representations or expressions because it is difficult to see what any one *thing* is being expressed. In Barthes, acts anticipate the category of meaning, but they are reliant on language for any real (fashionable) *sense* (hence they are makings rather than meanings). To link embodied acts together with the substance and manufacture of the garment in this way (i.e. to construct a category of makings), would have the effect of extending Barthes' focus from the "object" and its meanings into a much broader scene of determinants, inclusive of a critical approach to living bodies and their relational existences with objects. A preliminary understanding of these relational existences could be extracted from Barthes' isolation of acts that point to the phenomenality of things and doings (i.e. the made and the making).

Now, it is possible to explore the writing together of traces – wearing's "ma(r)king" implied in the composite organisation in Barthes' – with reference to Derrida's thoughts on the trace and difference. Important to Derrida's thought about general writing is the capacity of the trace to question *difference* defined traditionally as a division or interval between things. Difference is normally understood as an interval of space or time between things, as we saw in Barthes to be something like a gap or a distance "in between" where words are differentiated from and prioritised over things (or the object) and a series of oppositions flow from this – meaning and action, the immaterial and material, temporal change-dynamism and stasis, the linguistic and phenomenal – the two sides of which are represented here as marking and making. In contrast, for Derrida, an interval or gap is internal to writing, internal to the identity of any mark. Important to this, is that if presence becomes manifest in the traces of writing, then the trace is what joins the same and the other and therefore the trace is something like the promise of

presence, identity, being, a presence which is declared and differred by the very work of the trace. It is the motivation of difference, a spacing, that attempts to produce a mark by trying to differ from something other than itself, but in the process the mark becomes both connected to this other thing and internally divided by it. Moreover, this spacing (which is not a gap but a connecting interface of text or mark and that which is purported to be outside, "context"), is also a timing. The timing of the interval is a delay or deferral, a detour through otherness. The interval thus allows the passage or translation between different modalities by interweaving them. What is being proposed, in relation to Barthes, is that the linguistic mark of fashion is always deferred by the differing of marks through the makings of objects and doings – ie Meaning, action and presence are always the product of ma(r)kings. One can think of this deferral in terms of the person who speaks or writes the meanings of fashionable clothing, being at once a wearer and writer, as is the reader of these "messages," also a wearer.

Significantly, any marking begins to partake of a whole, in such a way that the mark as the unit of grammatology – otherwise known as trace, gramme or element – cannot be properly isolated from a continual interweaving; any one element is always informed by the other elements and the resulting fabric. As both part and an embodiment of the whole, ma(r)king stands to represent, for Barthes' schema, the interplay which constitutes the writing together of action and meaning, the phenomenal and linguistic, text and context, material and immaterial effects, fashion and clothing, change and stasis, living and non-living matter. This is the enlarged scene of writing which wearing partakes of. For Derrida, this enlargement calls forward a sense of a broadening field of operations that are part of the *world*; from chapter 3, the reader might remember that Derrida proposed that it is important to think the play or "gam[ing] of the world" before we turn to all the forms in this world. It is not necessary to think of "world" as a new totality that encircles and encloses this set of elements and forces within an enlarged system. Instead, his opening up to a "world" of operations invites us to turn to the gaming or play that is vital to the particular appearance and being of various forms and also to defer or resist the impulse to closure. Further, it is necessary to explain that I am not seeking to posit for wearing an *origin* in the playing movement of, in this instance, ma(r)king, for the

centrality and structure of an origin is only brought into being through *différance*. Nor is wearing being posited as an origin or source of all the possible meanings of clothing and fashion. Rather it can be one of the elements integral to clothing and fashion, their meanings and appearances.

Into this differential network, amidst marking and making, we must emphasise the generativity of the corporeal substrate in accordance with the findings of recent feminist scholarship which has assisted me to argue that a body's *mattering* would be an integrally and actively implicated element of any wearing. Wearing becomes a text in a differential network where a body's matter takes its place – a fold – amidst a series of elements, or various folds, vital to an intelligence and articulation that does not strictly rely on the voice of an uncontaminated “linguistic.” As such, by positing wearing in this way, we are able to short-circuit Barthes' preoccupation with the agency of language.

Also, in order to be true to Barthes' full schema, we would have to acknowledge a part played by the image and a wearer's inhabitation of certain imaginings and descriptions of life in clothes, presented by images. For example, Carter proposes, amongst others described in our review in the previous section, that a fashion image can be thought as a condensed reference point for clothing use and by extension acts of wearing. He writes of the imaginative exchanges which occur between picture and use, photographic subject and user:

It [the fashion image] becomes a point at which a particular type of idealisation (completion) may be pictured, a counterweight to that other place where we constantly strive to close the gap between our ability to represent this unattainable ideal of the garment in a visual image and our failure to make the used garment conform to this image.⁸⁸

In wearing, one travels this distance (yet which in our terms is the duration of a “spacing,” but no distance at all) to where reality (often terrifyingly) meets the anticipations and idealisations of the image. From this, we might travel a little further to

⁸⁸ Carter, “Barthes and the Fashion System” 17.

yet another place according to Barthes (but again no distance at all) where the immediacy and plasticity of image-clothing is shaped to the rule of the written garment, confirming its fashionability only by its appearance in language. By this it is meant that Barthes privileges the caption or text above the image and awards them the power to ascribe fashionability to the image. Again, we could propose more of an interaction. Paul Jobling's study of post-1980s fashion photography evidences the effects of various contemporary discourses, ideas and issues in shaping the look and significance of the fashion image, sometimes taking their significance far from the realm of (fashionable) clothing.⁸⁹ Consequently, to re-conceive transformations in wearing to be in an imaginative exchange which is a consequence of a body's movement and posture writing together with the image's envisionings of aesthetic forms, poses, ideas and issues (rather than, say, the rendering of the "real" into a representational language) is an important counter to any proposition that acts of wearing are somehow more *real* than their representation, or any of the efforts to emulate the postures in these representations.

How Can Wearing Complicate the Flatness of Inscription?

We have seen that the poststructuralist conception of language (mobilised by critiques of structuralism) opened up "writing" within an extended extra-linguistic field to various alternative modalities of writing. In the discussions we have looked at within dress studies – Wilson, Sawchuk, Silverman, Faurschou – the phenomenality of a literal writing or inscription emphasises the productivity of clothes and/or fashion as an illusion of effects on a surface. The theoretical motif of writing, unless explicitly complicated, will call upon that impression of a flat writing plane, consequently circumscribing or prefiguring the ma(r)kings of wearing, constraining them to a geometry of a two dimensional representational space. All the fullness and richness of inscriptive possibilities (all the meanings that the clothed body can be said to have) supposedly emerges from a flat surface of etched effects, viewed from the outside. Yet in other arenas, namely the representative feminist philosophies discussed in chapter 3, there is a

⁸⁹ Jobling.

more thorough realization of the dubious economy that informs such a notion of writing. Consequently, it is the combined impressions of an engraving force, the surface effect and the external viewpoint which guides this critique, as the complex of material form, meaning and enaction constituting the wearing body is reduced and hollowed out to a flat schema which allows meaning to assert itself as paramount (as if the matter of form is somehow settled by a certain flattening).

By the passing reference to these conditions as an "economy," it is meant to observe, following Derrida, the dynamic flows or directions of force, that determine value and meaning. Derrida would describe writing in terms of an economy that is inclusive of the dynamics of force and form, resulting in losses and gains.⁹⁰ In Derridean writing and its general economy (contrasted with a restricted economy), force would not necessarily emanate from one source and would be rather understood in a strictly non-linear, potentially multi-contingent way. Again, it is this economy of multi-contingency, that can be brought to wearing. We have already observed Barthes' acknowledgement that a more complete rendering of the daily existence of clothes would unfold across three orders of signification, which gave rise to our thinking of wearing as something like an interplay where the agencies of at least acts, images and words are at work. It is worth considering Cixous' remarks on "dress" here where she refers to an *assemblage* of garments coming together and melting into the flow of the world.

I say: the dress. I call every garment "dress." And I only wear pants and pullovers. Yet I hold myself to this inexactitude: because it is into a "dress" that the two pieces translate themselves, into a single enveloping curve in which the apparently separate pieces of the garment melt together. The water opens up, and recloses. The dress doesn't separate the inside from the outside, it translates, sheltering.⁹¹

Remembering that part of the material of the world, for Cixous, is the body itself, then "dress" is garment, body and world, as well as an act of assembling, much like what occurs in wearing. Within the terms of Barthes' structure of fashion literature, he also asks us to think about time, just as McKenzie in chapter 3 demanded a thinking of

⁹⁰ Derrida, *Writing and Difference* 251-277.

⁹¹ Cixous, "Sonia Rykiel in Translation" 98.

temporality in contemporary techno-corporealizations of living and non-living convergences. Barthes describes dress at one point in The Fashion System as a worn *event* that is suggestive of dressing *in* time, but also dressing *as* time and duration. Here, this point can be suggestively expanded using wearing, as a worn or a wearing event can occur in different temporal modalities such as either the instantaneous and temporary, or the durational and durative, which evoke a sense of the variable compression and expansion of times that can be involved in wearing.

If we continuously remember, wearing as various acts and meanings coming together – such as the meaning and substance of clothing, a body's posture, stance, a garment's weight texture – to embody and actualise imaginings, descriptions and names, both fantastic, aesthetic and practical then we have short-circuited a certain preoccupation with clothing and dress as agents of meaningful representation prevalent in constructionist agendas, opening onto a fascinating dialogue with, for one, the semi-repressed other which these studies disavowed. For instance, no longer is the matter of the body that which is simply enclosed and represented by the enveloping surfaces of etched marks or that which presents as a surface for etching, but rather is that actively informing and enlivening of these now animating surface-clothes creating different ways of appearing. Remembering some of the properties Barthes' finds *in-forming* the written garment directs our attention away from these captivating surfaces, to a concern with volumes, weight, mass and movement taking us from a surface right through to the body's bone. Within this order where the productive difference of *ma(r)kings*, for one, make possible whole and meaningful forms – i.e. totalities rather than simply surface effects, the combined senses of weight, fluidity and movement unfold a frequently forgotten *substrata* integrated into inscriptive productions called wearing. In Cixous we have seen that the multi-contingent assembling that is "dress," likened to wearing, can encompass modalities of action, movement, emotion, self-perception, sensation, thought, reflection, consciousness, experience, affectivity and self-making. This long list of concerns integral to wearing is difficult to distribute across, or position so that they emanate from, a surface and direct us to productions that are more *all-encompassing*. Our clothes may well form a surface of fabric which sits upon our skin, yet their specificity is achieved from a much

thicker set of determinants and properties which both connect and differentiate this surface to and from a potentially articulate totality. To offer a caveat, this is not simply an attempt to oppose depth/volume and mass to surface, but rather to make apparent the *inadvertent* privileging of a dimension of surface. By stressing the sense of inadvertence, it is meant to acknowledge that the privileging of surface was not intentionally opposed to a condition of depth, but rather it was believed that the "surface" is all there is (speaking not simply of clothes but possibly a whole domain of existence). Yet when conceived as signs, these productions have been hollowed of that thicker set of determinants and properties to become a surface, failing to absorb various properties into their singular plane of marked effects. This state of depthlessness fails to be convincing as encompassing dimensions integral to wearing. If *marking* can stand to represent the surfaces of signifying effects made possible by clothes writing and various discourses writing clothing, this surface is stretched in wearing to such a degree that the conditions of inscription – flatness, the external view of meaning, the emphasis on etched marks – begin to wear thin. Here, *ma(r)king* is used to signal the ruination of any residues of the traditional conditions of linguistic production.

Conclusion: Wearing

Here, wearing is offered as only a provisional exploration of the forgotten substrata of inscriptive productions. As such, it comes to embody a *re-writing* of textuality, as it has been represented in dress studies.

For one, we have remarked that wearing can be where the phenomenality of enaction (making and the made) and the inscriptive effects of the linguistic (*marking* and the marked) both unite, co-habit and emerge from an enlarged scene of writing. By doing so, we have been able to position Barthes' tripartite organisations of "acts, images, words" in such a way that they begin to co-habit as *ma(r)kings* in and of wearing. As wearers we appear, now, to be positioned inside not only clothes but also a complex textile where the modalities of identifying with images, words and material forms are ensuring that representation *matters*. Wearing is able to re-write (or re-conceive) textuality to such an

extent that there is much less of wearing which resembles the traditional conditions of writing. From the lessons of poststructuralism, dress studies extracted the important points of comparison between dress and writing/inscription, being that they are both modes of signifying meaning and producing sense of considerable complexity; in this spirit when speaking of the "writing" that remains integral to wearing it is intended that a thinking of the conditions of what makes signification possible, in their totality, can ensue. However, the "general writing" of Derrida, another lesson from a poststructuralist, requires an envisaging of a more radical field of operation for meaning, where concerns for sense production can no longer be simply defined as those of representation. When these conditions are brought to wearing, the over-determined impression of surfaces dissolves considerably. Consequently "wearing," invoking the conditions of Derridean general writing (to become a "re-writing of writing"), stretches the notion of writing to an edge where representation meets its beyond, where we might entertain, at the very least, some thoughts about the appropriateness of the term writing. Why use writing at all in relation to wearing? In short, the engagement of writing to describe this re-conceptualisation rather than an alternative figure of production/reproduction like assemblage, has been a necessary crutch to not only reveal or access wearing, but also signal the great labour involved in lifting the veil of inscription, extracting the lessons of poststructuralism and the impossibility of shifting away entirely from acknowledging its legacy of inscriptive productions.

Importantly, wearing, as a new name for the relations of clothing-use, can only ever be a partial rather than a total picture of this situation. However problematic it is to posit a new entity, a new unit, it becomes necessary to continue to think the involvements of bodies, clothes and fashion through which a communication and a representational culture are thought to unfold. Wearing becomes, then, a name for the reflective thinking of this exchange. It is a corrective to an over-emphasis on the signifying qualities of clothes and their surfaces as etched representations.

Chapter 5

Wearing as Dwelling

...it is clearly unnecessary to enumerate the functions that clothing plays in all our social relations; it is only necessary to recall their general nature, lest their very familiarity should cause them to be overlooked. When we have once realised the social significance of clothes by this very simple process of recalling an everyday occurrence, we should need no further warning as to the importance of clothes in human life and human personality, indeed the very word personality, as we have been reminded by recent writers, implies a "mask," which is itself an article of clothing. Clothes, in fact, though seemingly mere extraneous appendages, have entered into the very core of our existence as social beings.¹

In chapter 4, a preliminary sense was laid down of the elements that contribute to the forming of human physical and meaningful presence that we called wearing. We then enumerated the forces which prefigure and influence this forming, in so far as they embody both discursive effects and shifts in substance, so as to short-circuit, at the very least, the notion that body identities are simply *made* or *constructed* by clothes and/or in fashion. In sum, the previous chapter opened up a characterisation of wearing, through a discussion of the diminutive treatment of the category of "real clothing" in Barthes' Fashion System, to an oscillation between the potential variables that it can include; it represented this oscillation through the trope of ma(r)king, made up of making (things and doings) and marking (linguistic inscription). In this last chapter, we need to continue to characterise wearing (rather than "real clothing" which was a tool to get us to this point) and linger on British psychologist J.C. Flugel's point above. Simply recalling the everyday occurrence of clothing – presumably, he means here, to reflect on those acts of wearing that occur daily – can bring forth an understanding of the significance of clothes and their importance in practical and everyday human life. In this chapter, the sense of the indispensability of clothing to Western human presence is thrown into relief within the context of the intense fitting-out of the individual with the latest high-tech appendages – mobile phones, personal organisers, lap-tops and portable email interfaces

¹ Flugel 16.

– purportedly deemed essential to contemporary social life. It is in this context of multiplying interfaces that the dream of one interface and thoughts about life’s essential tools, reveal clothing to be both one of the/our fundamental tools and a prosthetic technology, rather than extraneous appendage.

What remains to be clearly examined in this thesis is the substance entailed in clothing’s inscriptive faces, the substance that is integral to the productive practice of wearing. This is the stuff of human being and doing, the forms of its transubstantiation and activity, so vital to wearing in its daily occurrence.

To do this involves drawing upon a phenomenological tradition of thought about the nature of being and also knitting, where possible, this tradition together with the lessons of post-structuralist inquiry. This is not an unnatural alliance given the influence key thinkers within the former tradition – particularly Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty – have had on the development of poststructuralist inquiry and the ongoing affiliations of particular corners of post-structuralist thought with these thinkers. This sense of affiliation was experienced directly in chapter 3 when the formulations of several feminist theorists were shown to resonate with key ideas in Merleau-Ponty’s thoughts about embodied being. In keeping with the phenomenological method, it is important to encounter the “stuff of human being and doing” in its everyday appearances as they unfold a foundation for understanding Being-as-wearing. The understanding of being that unfolds in being-as-wearing, is called after Heidegger, *Being-as-wearing*.² As such, this final chapter continues to restore something vital to wearing that began in earnest in chapter 4.

² Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: Basil Blackwell, 1988, originally 1927). It has been assumed by philosophers that the notion of being is the most general predicate and therefore an empty concept because it does not refer to anything. It is not an entity. This indicates for Heidegger that “Being lies in the fact that something is, and in its being as it is” (*Being and Time* 26). But this only tells us about how we might access being, a point that becomes very important to Heidegger. So, for Heidegger, *Being* is that on the basis of which beings are already understood and as they are found. The understanding of being, as Being, is found as inseparable from being-in-the-world (a place of dwelling rather than the totality of the world of knowledge) and being amidst other things.

Philips' Smart Clothing: The DJ-ing Outfit as a Case-Study

The Research and Design wings of Philips electronics have been involved in developing a range of wearable electronics, part of their product development drive to design what is called in-house "ambient, intelligent technologies." With the technologies of conductive textiles, embroidered sensors, fabric wiring and switches and flexible fabric displays, it is possible for your suit to call a colleague, allowing its wearer to speak through its fabric and its built-in mobile phone. Otherwise known as "intelligent clothing," or alternatively "smart clothing," there is the ring of cognitively-enhanced clothing technologies in these names for this new frontier where textile designers, electronic engineers and product designers are coming together to design clothing that connects the wearer to communication networks, sound-players and additional equipment for use in vocation and/or leisure; it is as if this field of research represents the equivalent of artificial intelligence in clothing design. In that artificial intelligence is the attempt to capture attributes of the human thinking brain within the confines of the computer as digital process, by having "intelligence" it may seem as if these clothes can perform things for the user that he/she *thinks* about doing. It is the relevance of this research to identifying an intelligence of wearing – or more simply, an intelligence about clothes and our relations with them – that is the reason for exploring this as a case-study. In particular, the intelligence that the technology entails is not a disembodied cogitation that bypasses the body in going straight from brain to electronic execution, rather it is established upon an understanding of living as an embodied, sentient being who interacts in clothes. It is this understanding that Philips attempt to embody in their placement and wiring of electronics around the body.

Taking a step backwards to explore the premise of this research, these technologies originated from the drive to strip back the number of tools and appendages that one person requires for their contemporary (networked and entertained) existence. Citing this impulse to shed and simplify, rather than acquire more and further complex tools, the Philips message, pitched in terms of their acuity of *the* "path of technological progress," is to not only improve and miniaturise technologies so that humans become omnipotent

and omnipresent, but to ultimately reduce the number of tools by integrating their functions into those objects that “we do not feel clutter us, that are part of our life.”³ As a major producer of electronic tools, it would be too much to expect that, following this insight, Philips would begin to simply reduce the number of tools it produces. By this I mean to refer to a history of technological development that defines progress as the new and the better, as “development” turns to ever-new frontiers with the promise of better technologies. The premise of the wearable electronic frontier is that, after due consideration of what might be eliminated from the clutter of lives, clothes have emerged as objects that do not clutter, to be acknowledged as essential and indispensable to human life: by extension of being tools that one is already *in*, clothes might integrate the functions of those unnecessary appendages which we would like to shed. It is necessary to make a distinction between tool and interface for it is the desire of Philips to find new “interfaces” within fibre technologies to perform the functions of now familiar tools such as portable stereos, mobile phones, electronic address books and cameras. By working on alternative interfaces to the familiar faces of these portable but extraneous tools, Philips can continue to produce in the spirit of diversification and multiplication, as a subset of the “ultimate dream” of simplification and the desire to do-away with tools altogether.

Central to this premise is the idea that clothes are perceived as prosthetic technology, rather than extraneous appendage. The event of their attachment and wearing more than impacts upon the wearer’s body as an augmented tool or appendage, instead becoming a part of it: a prosthetic is both appendage and integral part incorporated into one’s bodily being. A key concern of Philips research has been to anticipate human ways of responding to over-technologisation, citing the objective of cyborg inventions where the human is encouraged to meld with machine to achieve superhuman feats. Philips concern is that this direction of advancement is unilateral as humans are asked to become machines, rather than machines becoming more human. While the objective, here, is not to deconstruct Philips’ rhetoric, instead to examine the premise that underpins it, it is

³ Cited from an abstract for the book “New Nomads: An Exploration of Wearable Electronics” printed at <http://www.design.philips.com/smartconnections/newnomads/index.html> last accessed 31st July 2002.

important to characterise these as efforts, at least in part, to re-humanise technological advancement and alleviate any subsequent anxiety that a perceived absorption by technology might create. Wary of losing customers by sounding too cutting-edge, Philips would be reluctant to persuade people that they must relinquish their humanity and be willing to mutate into machines before they were ready. As such, one of their central questions for inquiry and public promotion of the wearable electronics project has been: "How could person-borne technology help us in ways that did not require humans to adapt to machines?"⁴ What is important, here, without investing in the determinism of an implied re-humanising impulse, is the way that the question of "what is it to be human?" gets wrapped up amidst an inquiry into wearable technologies such as clothes. Particularly, it is the way in which technologies are worn which takes the Philips inquiry back to the body (that person-bearing form) and its accompanying forms of clothing, to decipher what is essentially human and preferable to preserve of human-ness. How does the human body wear? What is necessary to sustain life? What is possible to change, to alter and improve? That is, we arrive back at that point of questioning what has been called earlier, in Kirby's words, a "limiting horizon of what is possible and impossible of the human condition," and there at this limiting horizon we find a body clothed, implicated in such a way that goes beyond needing *something* to carry electronics.

For Philips, wearable technology represents the challenge of "...anticipat[ing] and develop[ing] clothing applications and solutions that address people's socio-cultural, emotional and physical needs, enabling them to express all the facets of their personality."⁵ In response, one of the proto-types by Philips is a wearable electronic DJ's outfit with built-in functions enabling the DJ to move out onto the dance-floor and into the crowd, to gauge their response to his/her selections. From the position on the dance-floor his clothed-body functions as a local area network, allowing him to activate, via wireless remote devices incorporated into his jacket and pants, music for his next set and nuances in club-lighting. One of the design's innovations is its socio-cultural and

⁴ Davide Eves et al., New Nomads: An exploration of Wearable Electronics (Rotterdam: 010 Publishing, 2000) 19.

⁵ Eves et al. 17.

emotional response to the relationship between performer and audience, dissolving the separation of DJ from the dance-floor he hopes to animate. Instead, he can "shape the groove" from the floor and feel part of the dynamic, responding to and modifying mood and social interaction. In addition to the audio controls that are part of a flexible fabric interface with play and scanning functions, modules for phone and a personal digital assistant are included that are like jewellery pieces or buttons that can be pinned into the button-holes of the two-piece denim outfit. Personalised speakers of soft fabric are built-into the collar of the jacket, that can be lifted up around the ears to create not only a conducive environment for the DJ to listen for changes, but also a dramatic image of cool self-sufficiency as he walks the floor.

In addition to the correlation between the look of the jacket and the wearer's taste, what will define this as a successful clothing technology is if it provides the functions necessary for him to be intersubjective, a perceiving and responsive DJ from the floor, if they are well positioned in the garment structure and also if the functions are flexible enough to be converted to another garment (i.e. in case the denim jacket gets too steamy for the temperature of the night-club). In a way not unlike the foresight shown by Maxwell Smart's research team in the TV-series Get Smart (1965-70), to see that he might wear his clothes multi-functionally (i.e. belt as gun and camera, as well as neat trouser-belted device), these clothing gadgetries draw upon a knowledge of the structure of clothing, the qualities of its fabric and the way in which it is worn by a moving and sentient body, as well as a visible, performing and discursively positioned being. This attempt to build-in an implicit knowledge of use into a product which then becomes integral to a user-field, or a task, as in dressing in this example, is called "user-centred" design in the product design industry.⁶ The purported "intelligence" of the wearable technology might be evaluated then, in terms of the garment's ability to perform certain

⁶ In that this research involves the collaboration of product designers, electronic engineers and textile designers, it might represent the introduction of user-centred design strategies into the fashion industry. Yet, it would be fair to say that the fashion industry already has its own conception of user-centred design in the practice of making a "good fit" with the custom-made or tailored garment that is made to measure. The practice of making-to-measure would represent the standard of best practice of "user-centred design" in the industry, as ready-to-wear clothing must abide by standardised sizes which mean they can only approximate the fit of the user.

functions and whether it can embody and disclose to the wearer something of what it is, for him, to Be in clothes.

Prosthetics: On Action and Incorporation

This point which refers to clothing as disclosive of *Being* calls for further elaboration in relation to a discussion about prosthetics. As incorporation occurs as part of a field of action, it is necessary to explore the metaphysical tradition that has defined action and action with things, as human activity with *intention*. The work of German phenomenologist Martin Heidegger will be central, here, for it questioned the conception of intentionality – by extension a directed-ness to act – that had prevailed in Western metaphysics through the study of human relations with simple tools. We are going to pursue a path opened by this discussion on tools as it opens a way towards a thinking of prosthetics, particularly clothing as prosthetic. His thought will assist to unfold an understanding of the clothing-tool that is integral to wearing as a practice of not only bearing but also incorporation, as we attend as dressed bodies to everyday activities in such a way that it is difficult to detect, as it was articulated in the early stages of this thesis, where the clothing ends and body begins. To do this will involve calling upon supplementary texts that have been influential in introducing Heidegger's philosophy to English-speakers and also contextualising his thought with respect to later 20th century philosophy of technology and human action. These are Hubert Dreyfus' 1991 commentary titled Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's *Being and Time* and Don Ihde's 1993 text Philosophy of Technology: An Introduction.⁷

In Being and Time Martin Heidegger differentiated his study of *Being* from the tradition of detached inquiry of his teacher Edmund Husserl by studying the phenomenon of practical activities such as working with hammers and door-knobs.⁸ In doing so, he hoped to challenge the tradition of a detached knowledge and the theory of intentionality that

⁷ Hubert Dreyfus, Being-in-the World: A Commentary on Heidegger's *Being and Time* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991); Don Ihde, Philosophy of Technology: An Introduction (New York: Paragon House, 1993).

⁸ Heidegger, Being and Time.

derives from it. These traditions are informed fundamentally by a representational structure, consolidated with René Descartes and Cartesian Metaphysics and founded on a separation between a contemplative mind that must then *relate to* (as contemplation, description, belief, desire etc) its independent world.⁹ The difference between this tradition and Heidegger's own thinking can be understood through the concept of intentionality. Intentionality, for Husserl, refers to *mental* states – perceiving, believing, desiring, fearing and intending – directed at an object under description whether that object exists or not.¹⁰ The mental state is referred to as having intentional or representational content and such a state is said to contain knowledge. This conception is underpinned by a belief in a self-referential subject and is exemplary of a pervasive metaphysical division between a *subject*, for instance, who contemplates and the *object* of its contemplation; it implies that human beings are intentional subjects because of beliefs about objects and states of affairs. That is, by implication, intentional content – mental content – is separated from an objective world “that may or may not be the way the mind takes it to be.”¹¹ Significantly, it would follow that practice or activity (involving objects or not) would be the product of mental states causing bodily movements. Left up to later philosophers such as John Searle to develop a theory of action from Husserl's concept of intentionality, action would thus be understood in this tradition as a bodily movement *caused* by an intention to perform it as if formed in the mind prior to or during the act.¹² As such, knowledge – as it is initiated from the mind – is prioritised over action inclusive of the body that performs it.

In opposition to this, Heidegger makes a place for a notion of *comportment* as essential to directed or intentional activity as it, significantly, reveals a form of knowledge that is

⁹ This structure, which orders the differences between things into the opposition of subject and object, informs many metaphysical divisions that have been shown to be relevant to this inquiry into clothes – those which oppose reality and representation, form and substance, mind and body, the cultural/technological and natural/organic. These oppositions, the structure of which will be explained in operation through the concept of intentionality, shows the extent to which the Cartesian tradition and its conscious and rational subject was given central place in the modern discourses of philosophy, science and mathematics. See René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Related Writing* (London: Penguin, 1999).

¹⁰ Dreyfus 48.

¹¹ Dreyfus 50.

¹² Dreyfus 56.

more fundamental than a mind-based knowing. He argues that “the usual conception of intentionality...misconstrues the structure of self-directedness-toward, the intention”¹³ as being something like mentally-directed. “Comportment,” or *Verhalten* in German, is the name chosen by Heidegger for the directed relation toward objects in intentionality largely because it has no overtones of mental activity, but rather a bodily orientation. He argues that *comportment* is characteristic of human activity in general and for the being of, in the terms of his phenomenology, Dasein.¹⁴ Significantly, for this discussion of tools and prosthetics, the latin root of comportment being *com-portare* (to carry), acknowledges a sense in which Dasein is *amidst* other things in carrying or bearing objects as part of one’s conduct. In the succinct words of Dreyfus: “Heidegger holds that all relations of mental states to their objects presuppose a more basic form of being-with-things...”¹⁵ which is implied in the etymology of comportment. The full import of Dasein’s way of being in itself *with* other beings is expressed by Heidegger when he writes:

Intentionality belongs to the existence of Dasein...To exist then means, among other things, to be as relating to oneself by comporting with beings. It belongs to the nature of Dasein to exist in such a way that it is always already with other beings.¹⁶

An example from Heidegger, relevant to this discussion about how objects breach the boundaries of discrete entities to become part of their being, is his famous analysis of the cobbler’s work of hammering in *Being and Time*.¹⁷ This example, which represented for him an ordinary activity, can clarify the implications about his understanding of being-

¹³ Martin Heidegger, *Basic Problems in Phenomenology*, trans. Alfred Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982) 63-64.

¹⁴ Dasein is the “subject” through which Heidegger formulates the question of Being – it is that Being whose very *being* is an issue for it. However, Dasein is not to be understood as a conscious subject for reasons that will already be partly apparent. That is, such a convention would repeat a recurrent manner of presenting Being in western thought and not allow him to formulate the question of Being differently from the Husserlian tendency to, what Heidegger called, subjectivize, or to self-referentially generate experience of other things within its own subjective sphere. In such an approach, an ego or subject is always already pre-supposed. See Heidegger, *Basic Problems* 63-64.

¹⁵ Dreyfus 52

¹⁶ Heidegger, *Basic Problems* 157.

¹⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time* 98. Heidegger writes “the kind of Being which equipment possesses – in which it manifests itself in its own right – we call ‘readiness-to-hand’ [*Zuhandenheit*].”

with-things outlined above. Heidegger's point is to show that a cobbler yields a hammer within what Don Ihde has called "a relational context of specific uses" in which the hammer *belongs* to a field of action.¹⁸ The hammer implicitly refers to a place in this context and other objects in it – nails, soles of shoes and the making of an artifact. However, in this act, the hammer does not exist as a discrete *object*. Heidegger's point is that it withdraws, to become part of the hammering, the means of the experience itself. As such, the hammering is not simply a means to an end, outcome or goal, but revealing of a *process* of hammering. Moreover, this process embodies a kind of practical knowledge which is, in significant part, a relation to body rather than simply concepts or mind. Furthermore, it is a knowledge that refuses the metaphysical distinctions characteristic of the detached tradition which divides subject (mind) and object (intended focus of attention), individual and tool, in such a way that ultimately separates mind irreparably from body. Again, he would argue that such metaphysical knowledge of an object is derived from or presupposes such embodied praxis. He would also argue that even what we might call a common sense approach to such a task, might miss – or overlook – the understandings of a fundamental comportment (a being-with) which in fact, he argues, commonsense presupposes. Dreyfus details Heidegger's approach as, "Heidegger is trying to make a place for a sort of comportment that has been overlooked both by commonsense and *a fortiori* by the philosophical tradition."¹⁹ One might say, then, in simple terms, that the hammer is *incorporated* into the "subject's" field of action and intentional activity. However, this wording is not adequate, remembering Heidegger's reservations about the baggage that arrives with the term subject and therefore, for him, limits the opportunity to represent the inter-implication and the elision of the subject and object opposition implied here, because it still assumes that there are two discrete entities that are later connected. The example of the hammer is relevant for us because it allows us to juxtapose two distinct ways of thinking about an object in use. Where for Husserl a practice is caused by a conceptual or self-referential belief or desire to perform a task with an object, for Heidegger this tradition presupposes a more originary praxical knowledge, where in a tool as object-in-use becomes transparent and

¹⁸ Ihde 40.

¹⁹ Dreyfus 57.

comes to belong to the work context. This allowed Heidegger to understand that there were primary relations with a world or context of experience which were fundamentally praxical – by extension bodily relations – rather than firstly conceptual.²⁰

Quite simply, such an example provides insight into the manner in which the use of simple tools is revealing of an essential practical knowledge which establishes something like a corporeal task field and circumvents the separateness of body and tool, as certain tools are appended to supplement the body. While Heidegger's writing was never to attend explicitly to an exposition of a phenomenological anatomy,²¹ this example and its accompanying notion of "comportment" opens the way to an understanding of such a living anatomy that is neither absolutely fixed in time nor by space and which exceeds the physical boundaries of the flesh as a living process of potential self-transformation and acquisition of knowledge unfolds in part via incorporations. The concept of *incorporation* (literally to bring into the corpus or body) needs to be rid of any sense that it describes an absorptive process in a uni-lateral direction; rather incorporation describes a reciprocity wherein a tool supplements, expands and transforms the functions of the body just as the body transforms what Heidegger would call the "world" or the immanent context of the tool. The reciprocity which foregrounds the body and its relations of use with tools, establishes a pattern for thinking of the relation of the body to other things, such as clothes. So, then, one can conceive of an extended body, a body beyond a body that is re-designed in its reciprocal exchanges with things, people and world. Additionally, Heidegger's example reveals that neither human subjects nor the material objects with which they are amidst are thinkable in their distinctness or separation from

²⁰ Ihde 40.

²¹ In *Being and Time*, the subject of Dasein's bodily nature is raised on page 143 and deferred or put to one side, to be taken up in later work; following his brief note of the bodily nature of Dasein's spatialisation he writes in brackets, "This bodily nature hides a whole problematic of its own, though we shall not treat it here." To my knowledge, he does not set out to take up this problematic in an explicit way in later writings. However, David Michael Levin, *The Body's Recollection of Being: Phenomenological Psychology and the Deconstruction of Nihilism* (London, Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), convincingly argues that Heidegger does continue to write, in spite of his methodological decisions to defer or leave aside the whole problematic of embodiment, a detailed phenomenological account of human spatiality which relates directly to the body. And his collected works include various insights into the varied perceptual and gestural capacities of the human body. He proposes that this may be due, at least in reference to the discussion in *Being and Time* on spatiality, to its necessity in disclosing the fundamental ontological difference between the spatiality of human beings and the spatiality of all other kinds of being (38).

either the contextual or conceptual frameworks within which they arise and from which knowledge, being, action and environment/context are understood. In fact, Heidegger's task was to allow this sense of reciprocal being-with things to reveal itself within, or at least as a supplement to, the traditional and commonsensical frameworks of deliberate action. That is, to observe and to reveal the manner in which it is concealed by such frameworks. In that he articulates that all inquiry is presuppositionless, Heidegger's approach anticipates recent post-structuralist interpretations, like that of Butler, of the embodied subject as a precipitate of language, representation and history.

Makings/Re-makings

It will be useful to expand on the notion of reciprocity that is uncovered in Heidegger's work-context of hammering, as it relates to other contexts of making. The writing of Elaine Scarry in The Body in Pain can assist us to further elaborate on the manner in which an object comes to belong to a work context of making something and in such a way that partakes of a mutually transforming relation of person and artifact – what is called the person's "projection" and the artifact's "reciprocation."²² In her formal locution that systematically separates out the parts of a fundamental exchange involved in making, Scarry describes what is implicit in acts of creation:

the act of human creating includes both the creating of the object and the object's recreating of human being, and it is only because of the second that the first is undertaken: that "recreating" action is accomplished by the human makers and must be included in any account of the phenomenon of making.²³

Scarry describes acts of making as being, in general, the same; they involve a perception about human sentience being projected through labour into the free-standing artifact and in turn the artifact refers back, effectively extending a person's powers and/or acuity either directly or indirectly. What purpose the human maker projects into the made object may change significantly depending on the artifact. Scarry discusses the making of a coat

²² Elaine Scarry, The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World (Oxford: Oxford Press, 1985).

²³ Scarry 310.

as an exercise in careful sewing, not to simply make the coat per se, but for this coat to make someone warm. That is, its purpose is to, as she writes in explicit bodily terms: "remake human tissue to be free of the problem of being cold."²⁴ What the human maker consistently projects (but not in a traditional mental mode of projecting a belief or will) is the power of creating itself; the object is invested with the power of creating and exists to complete the task of re-creating the maker. In our attempts to understand making, "attention cannot stop at the object (a coat, the poem), for the object is only a fulcrum or lever across which the force of creation moves back onto the human site and remakes the makers."²⁵ She continues to expand on the understanding of objects that can ensue as a consequence of this transfer of agency: "It is precisely because objects routinely act to recreate us that the confusion...arises in which the object is seen as a *freestanding* creator."²⁶ Here, she observes that an effect of autonomy – an effect that appears to have the object make its maker – can only be the product of a routine investment made in it as capable of creation. Several points from Scarry's discussion add to this path of inquiry. Firstly, that there is some basic assumption, perception or understanding about a human sentient body implied in acts of creation and making, where there is an opportunity in making to preserve, to extend, or to enlarge the capacities of the body. Secondly, the object can be characterised as an intermediate object falling between the inseparable actions of the maker and the transformation of making.

In the example of the Philips DJ-outfit, the outcome is a new technological interface for audio control, the garment becoming an intermediary between the clothed-body as it is and what it might become – the garment re-makes the DJ's body as a mobile body for sound engineering that it is no longer confined behind a deck. To be successful – therefore capable of demonstrating an intelligence – this re-making should involve some understanding of what clothing performs for a body within its related context of use. Thirdly, it is worth reiterating Scarry's point that in this event where, say, the garment acts back to recreate the DJ, the created object can be seen as a free-standing creator, an

²⁴ Scarry 307.

²⁵ Scarry 307.

²⁶ Scarry 310.

independent – and intelligent – entity for what it has created. This means it appears to have some kind of power over its wearer.

At this point, what is being inferred, as a consequence of following this path and must now be brought clearly into the open, is that wearing can be thought along the lines of such a making. This builds on the sense of making proposed in chapter 4, yet particularly here involving the incorporation of an object into a corporeal field of activity, of making. This making is known to us, ever more visibly and celebrated, through the approximations of being in clothes, through our representations of the self. In so far as these products present an understanding of wearing's reality, making representations become part of that real while only partly revealing it. A silence in dress studies literature about wearing can suggest that making is located elsewhere – i.e. in dress, in clothes and in Fashioning (often referring us to the clothes themselves and the Fashion industry). Part of the difficulty, here, is one of separating these parts out for analysis, for clothing, dress, fashion, wearer and the wearing become entailed in each other as part of the extended and visible body. In an other sense, owing to a certain ambiguity of prosthetic entity, it is not unreasonable that incorporated clothes – as an other wise spatially discrete entity – are identified as the theoretical "object" of analysis of a certain activity where human form is re-made. But this makes wearing no less interesting, for to *see* wearing is not the same as *doing* wearing. Wearing would be only one stage of a three-staged process of making, where the making of the clothed object is the first part and the practice of wearing the object is the second. A third stage can be noted in the ongoing circulating agency of the object, a part of making to be discussed shortly. By bringing the two accounts by Heidegger and Scarry together, we can appreciate not only the reciprocity or exchange implicit in making something and its re-making of the maker, but also the making of an understanding that is at hand. As a making, this understanding is available in the structure of wearing as an insight into a mutual belonging or in Heidegger's terms *being-amidst* or *with* things. It is important to observe that in an everyday experience such as wearing, with respect of Heidegger's analysis of an ordinary tool like the hammer, the clothing object may differ in not being apprehended as a tool by its human-users. Instead it backgrounds itself as dressing becomes a skill in order that one can go about daily tasks

or perform a particular role. One can experience *to* the meanings and activities both disclosed by clothes and by the tasks enabled by the requirement of the clothed body. Yet, this is precisely what is accomplished in incorporation and the skill acquisition within a field of activity such as dress and wearing – as Drew Leder has said the activity becomes incorporated into the bodily “I can.”²⁷

Perhaps, one point that has been too quickly passed over in re-counting Scarry’s example of the coat-maker, is that the coat-maker makes the coat for the purpose of keeping somebody warm, alleviating the pain of cold, or at least a fear of being cold. In her example, the projection about human sentience is, that without the coat, one’s body will feel cold. This perception of vulnerability may in fact be a starting point for making a comforting winter coat, however, the literature of dress studies has certainly elaborated other motivations for both making and adorning the self with garments. Certainly the abundance of cuts and materials of coat design cannot be accounted for by the exclusive requirement of meeting this need. Particularly the excessive number of coats in the object world along with various explanations of dressing for comfort, modesty, decoration, identity, would suggest that not only is the external world transformed and its inhabitants transformed by making, but also the very notion of making itself can be re-created. On this point Scarry is informing, as she expresses these ideas in sequential terms in the following quotation:

Through objects, human makers recreate themselves, and now this newly recreated self finds that it is no longer expressed in the existing world, and thus goes on to project and objectify its new self in new objects (which will, in turn, recreate the maker, and so again necessitate new forms of objectification). Thus the continual *multiplication* of the realm of objects expresses the continual *excess of self-revision* that is occurring at the original sentient site of all creation.²⁸

There are several implications to be elaborated in this characterisation of making. It is Scarry’s point that made objects assume a certain life of their own, continuing not only to re-make their makers, but also to distribute effects and capacities which call for new

²⁷ Drew Leder, *The Absent Body*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990) 31.

²⁸ Scarry 320.

applications, modifications and adjustments and therefore new objects. Secondly, she points to a certain momentum that is invested by the human in making where a wilful making takes-hold – whether for pleasure or security – and humans make for the “sake of making.” By an “excess of self-revision” she suggests the over-investment in making has the effect of revising the self and off-setting anxieties of vulnerability, fear and failure, a defense that exceeds the original projection of vulnerability. In simple terms, he/she needs to be seen as the all-powerful maker.

A Corporeal Field

It had been a few weeks later in the year then, still spring but one of those piercingly hot days that sometimes precede the summer like burning embers, hard for the still unseasoned body to bear. Gerda's face had looked haggard and thin. She was dressed in white and smelled white, like linen dried on meadow grass. The blinds were down in all the rooms, and the whole apartment was full of rebellious half-lights and arrows of heat whose points were broken off from piercing through the sack-gray barrier. Ulrich felt that Gerda's body was made up entirely of the same freshly washed linen hangings as her dress. He felt this quite without emotion and could have calmly peeled layer after layer off her, without needing the least erotic stimulus to egg him on.²⁹

In this quote from Robert Musil, his central character Ulrich describes the dressed form in a probing image symptomatic of his observation of and orientation to the nature of early twentieth century life. This quote is suggestive of the impact of Gerda's form, her inhabitation of those linen layers and the incorporation of clothing to make not simply a solid form, but rather an impression of a layered corporeal field – albeit freshly washed and hanging.

Ulrich's visual observation of Gerda's form – its impression on Ulrich being couched in terms of its non-erotic affect – is a starting point for further analysing various modes of embodiment integral to a conception of the body as an extended and extending corporeal field. Beginning at the level of surface, one of the primary modes of knowing the body –

²⁹ Robert Musil, *The Man Without Qualities*, trans. Sophie Wilkins and Burton Pike (London: Picado, 1997) 334.

by extension the wearing body – is through perception of oneself and others, and because the sense organs of sight and touch are located on the skin surface, this surface appears to be that from which we attend to the world as perceived. By seeing Gerda and by reaching out to touch the distance separating her body from his, Ulrich can experience a primary mode of self-individuation as the difference between self and non-self is defined through the senses of sight and touch. In his spectating position, he perceives her as layered form and knows himself in relation to her presence, including her seeing him as discrete entity. Here, Jean-Paul Sartre's famous maxim from Being and Nothingness is instructive, as it describes, for him, a primary mode of self-referentiality as well as self-presence: "The way I see myself is the way I see myself through the eyes of the other."³⁰ Drew Leder's phenomenological investigation of body points to the further implications of such perceptive events of inter-subjectivity: "My expressive face can form a medium of communication only because it is available to the Other's gaze. No organ concealed in the hidden depths of the body could actualise intersubjectivity in this way. It is thus necessary that our perceptual, motor, and communicative powers cluster at or near the body surface."³¹

As a person appends and uses objects such as clothing, they encounter and negotiate that boundary between self and non-self firstly through the organs of the surface body. So too does an encounter with a mirror delineate a boundary for the dressed body as object of this person's vision, as well as distinguishing his/her figure from their surrounds or ground. In this mirror experience, we are able to capture an image of that body which is always "tacitly understood" to be the origin of sight and the power of seeing.³² While these eyes maintain a persuasive power, an integral aspect of the seeing experience with objects or another person, one that is fundamental to ontological being, is the paradox that as the perceptual field radiates outwards from the point of vision to encompass the object, the organ which looks is absent from the field. An expression from Husserl, used

³⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology, trans. Hazel E. Barnes, (London: Routledge, 1995, originally 1943).

³¹ Leder 11.

³² Merleau-Ponty qtd. in Leder 13. The wording borrows from his words "one's own body is the third term, always tacitly understood in the figure-background structure, and every figure stands out against the double horizon of external and bodily space."

provisionally by Leder, to name this paradox is “nullpoint,” which observes that one’s body is always something like an absence in the world one inhabits.³³ This phenomenon has been variously described. Leder suggests that the body is an absolute “here” around which all “theres” are arrayed.”³⁴ Husserl’s own term suggests the nullity of the zero point in a Cartesian co-ordinate system where perspective converges; but as Leder points out, this term and its Cartesian connotations retain the paradox of the organ phenomena which is absent to perception yet still all powerful in yielding the power of sight – i.e. not absolutely absent. Both Sartre and Merleau-Ponty have discussed the attempt to circumvent this phenomenon by watching seeing in the mirror and observed the residue incompleteness, as in Sartre’s words “I cannot ‘see the seeing’; that is, I cannot apprehend it in the process of revealing an aspect of the world to me.”³⁵ Instead, one attends to the image and its eye’s characteristics of shape, colour and surrounding facial expressions. Merleau-Ponty details the implications of this exercise for him:

...when I try to fill this void by recourse to the image in the mirror, it refers me back to an original of the body which is not out there among things, but in my province, on this side of all things seen.³⁶

Merleau-Ponty cannot fill up the void, the non-coincidence of the seeing and the seen, and the experience refers him back to, in Leder’s terms, the body’s “hereness.”³⁷ This

³³ Husserl qtd. in Leder 13.

³⁴ Leder 13.

³⁵ Sartre qtd. in Leder 14.

³⁶ Merleau-Ponty qtd in Leder 14. To clarify, grammatical requirements necessitate a writing of “the body” in both my own and Merleau-Ponty’s writings even when the point is to demonstrate how the body presences as non-object to experience. Importantly, Merleau-Ponty’s lived body is not “the body” conceptualised as an object for the metaphysical subject – i.e. the I of the “I think.” In this work he is concerned with articulating the relation between metaphysical knowledge and embodied perception, arguing that metaphysical knowledge cannot be localised in detached objective forms, but begins with an opening “out on to another” which starts at bodily sensation and perception (168). By his final and unfinished *The Visible and the Invisible* his ontological notion of flesh assists him to continue this theme, as it characterises a series of chiasmic relations between subject and object (as metaphysical categories of knowledge), my vision and that of others, perception and language, which traverse the lived body.

³⁷ While it is not desirable to fully circumscribe one philosopher’s work and themes within the independent project of another, it can be argued that Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of embodiment in *Phenomenology of Perception* has been informed by, even makes overt and substantial, the corporeal suggestiveness in Heidegger of the spatial and inhabiting dimensionalities of Being-in-the-world. In the introductory essay to his edited collection Donn Welton *The Body*, 5, proposes Merleau-Ponty’s project uses light cast from Heidegger’s notion of being-in-the-world to dispel Descartes’ shadow, in the

“hereness” is a self-effacing foundation for perceiving Being.

Of relevance to the disclosing of clothed being, there are ways in which the body reflects on perceptive being and the paradox of bodily hereness/thereness in everyday scenarios of wearing. These can reveal bodily capacities indirectly available to experience. I can look down to see my body mass covered with clothing from the shoulders, unable to see the neckline of some shirts, attending to the external surface of the fabric and its colours, but in such a way that decapitates the surface body and the sense of the body as a whole. A part of my body is “there” for me at the end of my vision, while the whole head form and its facial cavities from which the image emanates, goes unperceived – i.e. a headless wearer. Additionally, I can feel the touch of fabric, I touch it back with my own skin and the contours of flesh, but I cannot touch this touching; can I touch my experience of wearing, or only as it is partially disclosed to me? The wholeness of the self-perceiving body eludes us as a thematic object of inquiry.³⁸ Perhaps, it is the combination of this elusive self-perceiving body and the focus on the spectator attitude of looking at others, in inquiries of dressed bodies, which have led to a predominance of detached reflection. This predominance highlights Cixous’s personal experiential account of the perceiving body in dress, discussed in chapter 4, as a notable exception. Instead, of being *here* embodied in dress, our attention is directed over *there* to the scene of another.

The non-coincidence of perception is absorbed into what Leder calls our “tacit means,” and the tacit structure lies at the heart of corporeal ability and being.³⁹ Self-presencing occurs in trying to modify and work with this intransitivity. Importantly, both the non-coincidence of perception and the fact that there is no absolute division between the observing and the observed body are absorbed into our tacit means and abilities.⁴⁰ I come to rely on a mirror to get a sense of how an approach to hair or make-up combines with a

Phenomenology of Perception. He also posits that Merleau-Ponty’s notion of *flesh* in his later writings is the counterpart to Heidegger’s Being. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 1994).

³⁸ Leder expresses this point as “that which operates via self-effacement, the lived body can never be a fully explicit thing” (7).

³⁹ Leder 17.

⁴⁰ Leder 23.

clothing ensemble, effectively re-constituting my headless body. Or I can ask the opinion of someone else about the effect of my assemblage. Leder makes apparent that within the tacit structure of corporeal activity, within our "from" structure, various senses can operate differently to determine the nature of apprehension. While I attend to other events in my day, the view of my surface body may be in the periphery of my vision (apprehended marginally), while the touch of fabric against the skin and even its sounds rubbing on other surfaces can also presence themselves marginally, but by intermittently coming into and out of presence, rather than being constantly in the background.

Importantly, perception is not the only modality by which the body becomes available to experience, to corporeal presencing and self-presencing, as for instance, motility (kinesthesia) and sensation (coenesthesia) are fundamental parts of embodied experience, therefore also fundamental to phenomenological investigations. It is suffice to say, here, that there are other bodily experiences, processes and functions integral to the wearing body and various comments on movement, posture and stance throughout the thesis point to its integral part in constructing the different actional fields of wearing. Self-reflection is comprised and is only possible because as Leder states, "the body is an extended structure containing within it a multiplicity of parts and powers," and as different processes and functions are able to fold back upon another.⁴¹ As we heard before, some perceptive organs do this more readily than others. Leder's analysis brings us to an understanding of the body as a corporeal field, a sense of which can be illuminated or foregrounded by the extensions and additions made to the body. For Leder, the metaphor of a corporeal field is necessary to counter the implications of "nullpoint" which implies that the body is an originary "point," against which Leder argues that the body is neither a point nor an absolute nullity. It served as a provisional concept to assist in articulating perceptive modalities. A field of vital body processes and functions underpin wearing, an assembly of things known almost exclusively by the reliance we hold of them, for making sense of the world and its impacts on us, as we attend to other things.

⁴¹ Leder 23.

Significantly, the concept of a corporeal field may not be entirely adequate and it is important to acknowledge the difficulty in finding a metaphor to represent the range of embodied dimensions and modalities to the living body. The term "field" does not fully achieve the desired effect for what it is I wish to point to. For a field, defined as a range of perception – ie. as in a field of vision – suggests a view of the body taken from outside it, whereas I also aspire to capture an apprehending from "inside" a living body and inside its understanding of incorporation. It is necessary to preserve the concept of field in recognition of that modality of a spectator's external viewing of a body, for any concept that seeks to make sense of a bodily being and its lived phenomenality should include this viewpoint as constitutive of lived experience. Additionally, a survey of alternatives found the notion of corporeal assemblage to be overly machinic in its connotations. In using field, it is important for it to call up the coexisting modes/processes of bodily function, also the simultaneous and multiple directions of perception and action that the body can enact. A field does not have to imply only one plane of directionality. In so far as it can present the additional point, that the use and action of any part can also implicate a bodily whole, it is adequate. For instance, any sense organ of the body relies on the body's functioning as whole, just as the surface dimensions enlist certain depths. It is also important that it represents the body as a potentially shifting entity, rather than a fully static being as the processes and extensions incorporated by bodies make living into a process of change and flux.

I have lingered on the modality of surface perception, as a body opens itself to the object world sensorially. From the physical surface by means of which perception, gesture and expression can appear to emanate, we moved to a sense of an assembly or field of processes/functions. A body not only has recesses which do not make themselves apparent visually, but also extends beyond the skin, appending and inhabiting artificial "organs" to make them part of its field. In dressing this incorporation, appends differentiated textile materials and their tailored cut and shape to alter both the silhouette and the material of external surface, as well as the volume of the whole. From such a practice unfolds the understanding of clothing as a physical second skin, or organ, of human-made "flesh," and an expressive "face" of the surface body. In the physical and

symbolic work that clothing performs, parts, internal workings and sensitive areas are concealed and then a so-called game begins of revelation and veiling, drawing the gaze toward particular foci, such as neck line and skin surface. So, too, can wearing be seen as a potential shape shifter. Wearing can appear to liquefy and re-organise matter, attention being drawn to the achievement or diminishment of the effects of mass, say in the curve of the back moving to a rounded ass, the movement of which has been drawn together by edging seams.

To reiterate, there are many other dimensions to corporeal existence that have not been explored here which are significant to the multi-functions of the body as a corporeal field, such as its visceral or what Leder has called its "recessive dimensions" that constitute a concealed depth that is vital to body function. Consequently, the notion of a surface body was used as a point of access to this sense of the body as a whole or field and to isolate the characteristics of self-effacement that embodiment manifests. In part, this was to trace out the approach that dress studies takes to its object. In dress studies, significant attention has been drawn to the physical surface of clothes, as communicative and expressive site, as outlined from chapter 1: it was argued that clothing articulates a surface which receives the marks of a broad frame of reference implicating it in cultural contexts and matters of social and cultural significance. This could also include the working-up of clothing surfaces as physical and symbolic forms of protection – boundaries – against both the physical elements (as in traditional interpretations of dress) *and* alien, or rogue elements in recent analyses of social anxieties and threats.⁴² However, less attention has been given to various ways of wearing forms of clothing to articulate both a sense of a body as whole and its nature as a layered, corporeal field of parts, differentiated materialities and processes. In addition, the significance of this conception of a body as whole or field with respect to the cultural order it is inserted in. In sum, the diverse modalities of bodily presence and function that exist other than as communicative or communicating – i.e. the perceptive, emotional, visceral, hormonal and so on – might be elaborated in and through clothing relations, in such a way that they are not curtailed

⁴² Gabriele Mentges, "Cold, Coldness, Coolness: Remarks on the Relationship of Dress, Body and Technology," *Fashion Theory* 4.1 (2000): 27-48.

into evidencing merely the body's communicative dimensions of being. Moreover, the experience of being in clothes and wearing is not simply one of manifesting cloth as surface, just as being embodied is not simply an experience of surface body; while the sensory modalities of sight and touch have been privileged as experiential authority, certain experiences in regards to the whole or corporeal field can be insightful about the practice of wearing as embodied.

A late 20th century phenomenon in fashionable circles in the west, arriving in Sydney Australia approximately for the Autumn 1997 season, can serve to illustrate an articulation of the body as layered, corporeal field, an articulation that occurs through establishing a relation with clothing and the manifestation of this relation in wearing. To isolate one example is to demonstrate that there may be many more such relations, but in a way that does not detract from the specificity of this experience. The practice is one of amassing the body with numerous layers of variously transparent, opaque and coloured shifts, tops/tunics, pants and occasionally including skants (as the integration of a pant and a skirt has become known in the vocabulary). I want to call this mode of dress transparency dressing, but that would belie the range of material textures and weights, including synthetics, silks and cottons – of different degrees of transparency – incorporated to make these constructions. Creating the effect of montage, these worn assemblages combine a differential of materials that is not transformed into a single substance. Returning to the skant, it became a way of industriously incorporating both pant and skirt into the one garment, while still achieving the effect of layers. However, being an adaptation for the sake of convenience that combined two layers into the one garment, frequently using the same material, it did not achieve the sense of differentiated material, which seemed significant to the sense of making the whole construction. This whole was not a solid form but a layered, differentiated and multiplicitous entity. This effect seemed to articulate the conception of the body as a corporeal field, made of disparate, dispersed but *integrating* material forms, functions and processes – i.e. working to create a whole. Moreover, these assemblages appeared to apprehend and highlight an embodied experience of a contemporary cultural space of celebrated corporeal transformation (bodies as works-in-progress), wherein the annexing of disparate

technological processes and artificial organs, point to the engineering of biological life in the late 20th century to realise more ideal forms. The implication of a work-in-progress is that it connotes a whole that doesn't quite arrive as seamless ideal, perhaps even a life of flux. Importantly, fabric is not used to create an effect of surface, but instead the illusion of accumulated mass and layers. It may tell us about an experience of wearing as one of living as a corporeal field amidst this differential of flux and diversity. It is important to acknowledge that this is one mode of many in which the body is conceived through wearing, here exemplified as a transforming and differentiated field, mass or whole and alternatively in Gerda's figure the field of linen layers appear to have absorbed the form of the body underneath, liquefying it. For another example, we could point to particular dialogues between approaches to clothing and to firm body-contouring at different periods in history and detailing here, specifically, the look of tight body mass correlating with tight fitting clothes popular in the late 1980s and early 1990s in Western urban gay cultures. The gym-built musculature of the torso was accentuated by tight t-shirts to achieve a look of acquired built body mass, finishing with a smooth surface resolution. So, instead of the effect of layers, the intention seemed to be one of amassing volume to make a solid and resolute physical entity. As communication, this practice of both building mass and resolving surface as secure boundary can be read as a strong statement of defiance to life-styles made vulnerable to the threat of AIDS-related illness.

Praxical Knowledge and Discovering Wearing

It can be enlightening to expand, here, on Heidegger's account of Being as it was encountered by him in practical life, through a phenomenological method of pointing-out and everyday observation of Dasein. By isolating the elements of practical knowledge, Heidegger was hoping to critique the focus of metaphysics on deliberate action and consequently the model of the conceptual intentional subject that it presupposed, itself a product of a detached and objectifying philosophical inquiry. As proposed briefly, we can learn something of the way to observe wearing in his caring treatment of the practical world. "Care" is a key yet complex term in Heidegger's lexicon. Care is the sense in which the various elements of Dasein's being *matter* to it; Being reveals itself as care, as

care names the form of its make-up or action.⁴³ It is not to be understood as an ethical term, instead “roughly, the concept is an instinctive condition of concern, anxiety, worry over what we have to do in order to maximise the distance between life and death.”⁴⁴ Employing Tony Fry’s turn of phrase, to take care in relation to wearing, is not to be wary in “watching one’s step” or being clumsy, “rather care is a matter of living the concern and the danger,” the possibilities and the risks, as the only available means to proceed.⁴⁵ Here, for me, the oscillation between risk and possibility takes form, in regard to risk, in the possibility that I might be misinterpreted as advocating an essential bodily nature or form consistent to all beings and a correlative mode of practice that flows from this. To be represented in these essentialist terms, as such, would foreclose to the possibility of exploring praxical knowledge, and an understanding of the risks and the means to contest these have been amply demonstrated.

In those practical situations, Heidegger’s Dasein is “in-the-world,” where worldliness is a name for a disclosing of Dasein’s understanding of Being. Dasein is already *in* the world, in the sense of being amidst a context of use, involving relations to other entities. What is fundamentally revealed by the practical experience of things ready-to-hand like the hammer was a concernful way of being. In a later part of Being and Time, from that on hammering, Heidegger details that Dasein’s being-in-the-world, an everyday world, is a consequence of being “thrown” into it.⁴⁶ Rather than a concept which expresses a denial of responsibility, Dasein encounters thrownness, as an absorption in the world and as a tension between constraint and possibility, as the limitations of skills and situation, are played-off against the sense of choices and responsibilities.

However, the world is not simply *there* for Dasein, but is in a sense hidden, to be revealed in the everyday practical context. Disclosedness is a mode of revealing which can be comprehended through a sense of familiarity with the relational context, what

⁴³ Tony Fry, “Introduction,” RUATV?: Heidegger and the Televisual, ed. Tony Fry (Sydney: Power Publications, 1993) 21.

⁴⁴ Fry 21.

⁴⁵ Fry 21.

⁴⁶ Heidegger, Being and Time 174.

Dreyfus calls a "background coping."⁴⁷ Dasein is absorbed in the activity and "background coping that discloses the world as familiar in such a way that there is no separation between Dasein's disclosing comportment and the world disclosed."⁴⁸ The sense in which the world is familiar is not the same as recognising one-self in, or seeing one-self reflected by, the context, thing, or activity. Familiarity is a name for the disclosing of Dasein's being in practical life as a knowing how-to-do. There is an understanding of Being revealed in familiarity, for Heidegger, in so far as those modalities such as willing or effort or wishing as intentional actions, presuppose this familiarity. The transparency of both tool and practical know-how are revealed at those times when tools fail to work or when one experiences excessive tiredness and no manner of willing will recover the situation.

How, then, can this practical understanding be revealed or grasped tangibly? To attempt to *grasp* this understanding would be to fall into the trap that has consistently caught traditional metaphysics that believes an object can be grasped as it is, as an object of inquiry.⁴⁹ Instead, the practical understanding can only be disclosed. For Heidegger in Being and Time, disclosedness becomes the ground for the possibility of *discovering* entities.

Bringing Heidegger's method to bear on our thought of wearing, in what manner is wearing disclosed to us? There is only one way of answering this question, this lies in how a Being *is*. In everyday sight, bodies that wear clothing reveal themselves, surround and interact with us. Moreover, a spectacle of fashion unfolds both before and around us, enfolding us into a continuing flow of new commodifiable themes, gestures and styles. As such, magazines, retail displays and fashion shows set out to disclose the world visually and in so doing construct a fashioned object world, frequently before the world as it known through our own practice. As subjects, we are effectively thrown into a

⁴⁷ Dreyfus 105.

⁴⁸ Dreyfus 106.

⁴⁹ Heidegger, Being and Time. He repudiates the nature of understanding as a grasping in the following: "Grasping it in such a manner would take away from what is projected its very character as a possibility, and would reduce it to the given contents which we have in mind; whereas projection, in throwing, throws before itself the possibility as possibility, and lets it *be* as such"(185).

domain as both spectators of an empire of signs that propel and commutate at an ever increasing speed and as disciplined subjects that are incited to interact with these prefiguring modalities of being-in-the-world. The call to operate as individuated fashioned beings is sounded through consumer rhetoric. But we also find that in situations, both more than ordinary and less familiar, we are already in clothing, in such a way that it discloses an understanding of what it is possible for us to do, we “know-how” to dress, but do we know ourselves as wearing Beings? This question’s unfolding is our own unfolding as wearing beings, rather than the answer to individuation’s call. We may be asked to think about the properties of this garment and how it contrasts with an other, to assess an appropriate outfit for one situation over another, but this diminishes next to the “knowing-how.” To be absorbed in knowing-how is what can show-up entities as belonging or significant as praxical knowledge reveals itself as foundation: it is not wearing-Being with the identity of eternal essence or substance that this question seeks. Instead, it is a sense of being asked to return to assess what one knows (as enduring or durable understanding rather than static), to *re-ground* one’s understanding in the practice of doing wearing. Returning to the example of the DJ to further explain this term “know-how,” he has incorporated the tools of his trade into the garment, so that they become part of his understanding of wearing know-how – a familiarity with wearing an outfit in a club. Borrowing another Heideggerian term, which in later Heidegger was used to expand on Dasein’s primary nature of Being-in-the-world, the DJ is wearing his *dwelling*.⁵⁰ He is wearing his world on his shoulders, his context of use and significance and the world, this club-world, is where he dwells; more particularly, he can be said to be wearing his dwelling because he wears this world of wearing and the practical knowledge it involves. When absorbed in this activity, he is able to project into the possibility of enacting an enjoyment of the music that he so wishes to imbue in the dance-floor. Instead of being a performer and voyeur, he can embody this enjoyment in literally being on the floor.

The analytic of Dasein is an ontological hermeneutics to the extent that it provides an account of how understanding in general is possible. In developing a hermeneutic

⁵⁰ Martin Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” *Poetry, Language and Thought*, trans. Alfred Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971) 143-161.

method, Heidegger came to understand a structure of interpretation unfolding, to be like a stepped-process, that began at the context of practical application, and subsequently moves, at the point at which a particular skill or tool can no longer suffice, to a practice of deliberation over its limitations. The process by which things become unavailable – or more simply fail in practical situations – can help us to understand how unreflective practical understanding is transformed into a process of deliberation or questioning that he calls “interpretation.” Interpretation is, then, a derivation from practical scenarios such as hammering, which enriches an understanding by “working-out...possibilities projected in understanding.”⁵¹ An equivalent clothing scenario would be when in a work situation the awareness of one’s waistband rubbing or even constricting ease of movement, becomes exemplary of the backgrounded understanding of clothing as enabling a job to be done, that is to say, in being comfortable, visible but un-inhibiting. The continued ability to manoeuvre in this situation is directly related to the inquiry that one begins; is this skirt too tight? Is it possible that it shrunk in the wash? Or have I put on weight? How did I come to choose *this* skirt this morning? Have I worn it recently? It is through such a process of questioning that a particular path of understanding will show up as sensible. From this understanding, one can move toward specific ways of acting, or further interpretation.

This implies that interpretation stems from a particular circling activity of understanding, known in philosophy as a hermeneutic circle. Dreyfus succinctly and accurately explains the problem that the circle represents for inquiry: “If all interpreting takes place on a background understanding that it presupposes – a background, moreover, that conditions from the start what questions can be formulated and what counts as a satisfactory interpretation, yet that can never be made completely explicit and called into question – all interpreting is necessarily circular.”⁵² Heidegger’s acknowledgment of this problem comes in the form of a warning that the circle should not be avoided; “if we see this circle as a vicious one and look out for ways of avoiding it, even if we just ‘sense’ it as an inevitable imperfection, then understanding has been misunderstood from the ground

⁵¹ Heidegger, Being and Time 189.

⁵² Dreyfus 200.

up.⁵³ For Heidegger this would not be a matter of choosing to undergo the circling process, but it is perhaps, as Dreyfus assists us to visualise, more a matter of one's orientation to this exercise. Heidegger's method becomes exemplary of an approach to inquiry where one is laying out the structure of Dasein – in its circling understanding – from the inside, instead of approaching the matter from outside.⁵⁴ From the outside, one would need to indeed find the most appropriate way to approach the circle, an approach that will always determine in some form what one finds. It would be, as Dreyfus puts it, a *matter of a leap*. Rather, it would be wise to ensure, instead, that the circle that one initiates and pursues with a question contained substance of inquiry.

Both scenarios – either beginning one's inquiry from the outside or from the inside – involve the implication of a background understanding that prefigures the task. For Heidegger, it is precisely the necessity of this background understanding that, in Dreyfus' words:

makes possible an account of interpretation that avoids the traditional opposition between the claim that interpretation is about facts, viz. intentional states..., and the claim that interpretation is based on convention or arbitrary decision....For Heidegger, ...meaning is grounded neither in some mental reality nor in an arbitrary decision, but is based upon a form of life in which we necessarily dwell, and which, therefore, is neither immediately given nor merely a matter of choice.⁵⁵

The philosophical implications of Heidegger's position need to be made apparent for this discussion in hand here. His position allows us to perceive an important point of distinction in the ways of coming to know an entity. To reiterate, the distinction is between two routes toward interpretation as either the deficient cognition of facts or conventions, or the more authentic way of dwelling-in one's background understanding. It indicates that an intention to know clothing, to extract an intelligence from clothing as mental process or reality seems irreparably flawed because it fails to connect with the very life of the being it seeks to understand. This explains my inherent scepticism about

⁵³ Heidegger, *Being and Time* 194.

⁵⁴ Dreyfus 201.

⁵⁵ Dreyfus 201.

the naming of wearable electronics as intelligent clothing, because of the misunderstanding that might ensue of these clothes as an encapsulation of a human thinking (of clothes), in fact enclosed thinking, into smart electro-cognitive circuitry. As well, it has an important bearing on any attempts, theoretical, practical or commonsense, to interpret the meaning of clothing within a particular interpretive framework such as that of the "cultural." This takes us back to a discussion initiated in chapter two that identified the interpretive framework of cultural constructionism as a central organising principle of a set of discourses in dress studies. To recap in simplified terms, this framework seeks to understand clothing activity as cultural constructions of self, identity and character, variously nuanced as expressions, representations, communications or language. What is at stake is the absence of detailed accounts explaining the *order* and *ground* of cultural interpretation (see chapter 1 of this thesis). Without this, there is a space for misunderstanding, to misunderstand from whence meaning emanates, the mistaken implication being that either clothing makes an entity or in fact interpretation produces that entity it seeks to understand. There is also a possibility that the cultural framework encompasses a "common understanding" for interpretive work, which is simply a product of idealism – which is to say that it is immaterial meaning, a purely mental notion or an idealisation. Heidegger's distinction allows us to see that the Being of entities is neither constructed by interpretation, nor by the agents who interpret. It was shown that the work of interpretation delineates a space, which outlines what is to count as reality and meaning in the domain of interpretation, but this is not to say that it determined what that reality in fact is.

Dwelling as Wearing

In chapter 4, an understanding of wearing was elaborated via a discussion of an oscillating movement between various traces, phenomenal and linguistic, material and immaterial, living and non-living, as well as different temporal modalities of change and stasis relating to clothing and fashion, an oscillation which delineated the identity and difference of these terms within an enlarged field of which wearing partakes. Albeit in quite abstract terms, this set of variables was established from which wearing activity in

its various forms was said to arise. This understanding was laid down with assistance from Derrida's general theory of writing as wearing could be one of the practices of inscription which solicit a play of *différance*, articulated in these pages as an attunement to the ma(r)king of wearing beings and their acts. The point, here, was to demonstrate that it was not possible to slot wearing exclusively into one side of either set of elements, as wearing must be located as part of their relationship and its unstable boundary, belonging to both. In this chapter, the integral nature of wearing to dwelling has been foregrounded, as dwelling discloses a praxical knowledge and embodies a reliance on wearing as we attend to our everyday lives. In dwelling, we are found to be wearing and already in many ways invested in our vestments, in various contexts of use. This is not to say that clothes fade into insignificance in a broader "task-field," for their effects can be both startling and profound, nor on the contrary that there is a purposeful place given to clothing in every situation. The key to this praxical knowledge is that it provides further insight into the general character of *making* evident in fields of action, involving a mutual belonging together of clothes and wearer. By this, I do not wish to imply a universal harmony between clothes and their wearers, since clothes can seem, for many, a persistent conundrum. Instead, it is to point to this foundation that resides in the comprehension of our relational being, a foundation that can be accessed as self-knowledge. An intelligence about clothes can be accessed as an understanding about our relations with things, things that are both part of us and independent objects in the world, things that can also embody an agency to operate with an intelligence to re-make their wearers. It is possible to argue, following Heidegger, that the practical understanding that comes from Being-as-wearing, by dwelling on this understanding, makes possible an interpretation of their broader cultural significance, in fact how they make sense to us and are understood. To think about wearing as mode(s) of inhabiting/inhabitation – as both the easing of objects into the self and the insertion of these accommodations into the orders of language, culture, world – is to call forth in care, with an attunement to Being-as-wearing, a circular process of understanding that Heidegger articulates in the following quotation:

Addressing of something as something is possible only insofar as there is

interpreting; interpretation in turn is only insofar as there is understanding, and understanding is only insofar as Dasein has the being make-up of discoveredness, which means that Dasein itself is defined as being-in-the-world.⁵⁶

Significantly, Being-as-wearing enables a discovery of the emotions, sensations and meanings that are disclosed as the dimensions of say, boredom, excitement, anxiety and sophistication, to clothed life. Central to Heidegger's interpretive orientation, is the contrast of his disposition of care with that of mastery, a mastery that is characterized by a far-reaching approach to things as useful to being, as things are turned into a presence – re-presented – as objects of use. A fundamental part of the interpretive process Heidegger has delineated, from understanding to interpretation, is the role that language plays in prefiguring the terms of our understanding of *being-with* or *amidst* things. For example, I have already made reference to a recent characterisation of a way of *being-with* clothes as a “prosthetic” technology. The linguistic term prosthetic brings with it the baggage that a prosthetic *stands in for* or remedies a deficiency within its partnering form. As such, the needs or desires with we reach for clothes are potentially ascribed with the confessions of insufficiency. So, these connotations of “need” can be potentially accommodated in the thinking of the prosthetic relation we have with clothes, as it is supplemented with those additional word-meanings we have such as (second) skin, for what is more of a relation of established dependency and mutual reliance. What I am seeking to do, in these pages, by inserting the concept of “wearing,” is to use it to set our being in relation to clothes, giving this relation an activity and a sense of the depth to its integration. In particular, to highlight the notion that clothes become, through our prosthetic relations with them, an integral part of our being, that non-objective entity to which we are subject. I want to finally consolidate the point that when a thinking of wearing is brought into proximity to the praxical knowledge available to it that a broad set of concerns begins to emerge about our being in clothes.

What becomes significant is how the insights into relational being – i.e. about ourselves as dependent upon things and our insertion into the world as/with these things – that are

⁵⁶ Heidegger qtd. in Dreyfus 211.

available for self-knowledge through our everyday activities, are frequently forgotten by us. I have already referred to the effacement that occurs in wearing that can forget the presence of clothing – by extension its ways of being with us – while one attends to other things. There are many different modalities of forgetting which can come into operation such as loss of awareness, anxiety, disavowal and active avoidance. I wish to propose that a forgetting of relational being can be evident in the wilful making that Scarry established can set-in to a relations with things as products of our making. It was described as something like a momentum or “making for the sake of making” where the emphasis appears to shift from one of insight into our relations with the things we make, to a self-revision and securing of one’s position as maker. An emphasis on a conscious-will to re-make the self can foreclose an understanding of the way in which this self is already implicated in their surrounds as both maker and made. These symptoms often manifest themselves in the consumerist rhetoric that celebrate acts of individual self-transformation and self-revision, particularly those assisted by services and commodities. In doing so, they play back to us the “will to represent” as makers of our own lives and indulge a preoccupation with meaning being solidified in the objects around us, as concrete representations of this capacity to make. Of course, dress-ups in clothing have always been granted a leniency to indulge this preoccupation with working-up an image, to play the role of maker, however, with an explicit understanding of the materials used to construct the intended illusion and their making of the maker.

I will call on two examples in print advertising to represent the significance of these concluding points, in so far as they both represent wearing and, in particular for us, different insights and dispositions into making the self through athletic clothing and accessories. Being both Nike advertisements, the two images will serve, here, as a point of contrast. One is an image of Brazilian footballer Lima Ronaldo in action in the midst of a match with the accompanying words “The Athlete And The Shirt Are Made Of The Same Stuff” from 1997.⁵⁷ The second is one that pictures a core male figure in the Nike mythology of athleticism, that being the lone athlete as runner pounding the empty road,

⁵⁷ Nike, “The Athlete And The Shirt Are Made Of The Same Stuff,” advertisement, *The Face* Aug. 1997: 2-3.

in pursuit of dreams, with the slogan "There Is No Finish Line" from 1977.⁵⁸ This figure of the "runner" reaches back into the days of the company's track-and-field beginnings as an athletics-shoe manufacturer before becoming a global sports brand for sporting goods and related apparel. The first of the two examples pictures Ronaldo in the Brazilian football-strip which is sponsored by Nike, otherwise a relatively non-descript accessory in the context of the sports game, but in the context of this advertisement it carries the Nike logo and the name of "the Shirt." Significantly, for us, the advertisement draws upon the intelligence of the athlete wearer to promote its accessories and in doing so, imbues its apparel products with the added value of what is called at Nike headquarters "implied Performance."⁵⁹ I would suggest it does this by invoking a sense of that "Stuff" that athlete and shirt create together in appearances of athletic greatness. This example is one of a line of Nike advertisements that have established a pattern of promoting their products in conjunction with high-profile and world-class sportspeople – Tiger Woods, Andre Agassi, Michael Jordan and so on – to celebrate excellence in sport. In both sporting and advertising performances, these athletes perform the "Stuff" that becomes valuable for the Nike brand-name. In this advertisement, the sense of what is meant by "Stuff" remains ambiguous, so that it shifts from the literal to the metaphorical and back again, being at once athletic excellence as ideal and the stuff that is worked-up from the collective materials of athletic skill, application, equipment andShirt ! Again, the advertisement draws upon an understanding of what the shirt can do for the athlete in times of sporting challenge, thus working from an intelligence of the athlete's wearing. This stuff of wearing intelligence would be something like the recognition of the inter-implication or being-with of wearer and clothes at these times, as an ideal of athletic being is subtended in a material substratum of practice and materials. Significantly for Nike promotions, in so far as this advertisement functions as a reflection on the indispensability of clothes to athlete-wearers, this reflection is turned into a message about the indispensability of Nike commodities to potential buyers. Related to my comments made earlier about the nature of corporeal transformation in wearing, significantly, the "stuff" referred to in the advertisement invokes an intoxicating

⁵⁸ Nike, "There Is No Finish Line," We Are Nike (collected from San Francisco NikeTown, July 1997).

⁵⁹ Nike, "There Is No Finish Line" 1997.

transformation of athlete and shirt towards an athletic ideal of excellence, which makes it difficult to isolate a sense of what comes before or after this act. Instead, the point is for the advertisement to emphasise that enticing “stuff” of transformation.

In that the first ad explicitly grounds its message in a reflection of the practice and inter-implications of wearing in sport, the second advertisement presents us with a contrast to the first. The slogan – There Is No Finish Line – works with the principles of the race and running. If we consider running as structured and defined by the act of reaching a finish line first, then the narrative here could be one of a man for whom running is clearly far more than this structure could ever permit. By implication, the man defies the meanings this structure may attribute to the act of running, running instead for the experience that running brings, of transcending and re-figuring the limits set out by others. The runner finds both meaning and challenges in the actual act of running itself and that which materialises for him in this act, as either enabling, inhibiting and enhancing his performance. Implicit in this act are the materials upon which he relies – his body that runs, its capacity, the track that he runs on and the equipment that he calls on to perform this act. However, there is an alternative narrative available, and it is one that resonates with the Nike mythology, that frequently encourages an excellence measured by acts of self-transformation and a questionable hyperbole of individualist self-revision.⁶⁰ Of particular note to those people who are not very good at sports, the more recent Nike slogan “Just Do It” has never simply meant just *do* anything, rather “It” is potentially represented in the models chosen to act-out sporting prowess as self-possession. An alternative reading to the said advertisement, one that is suggested by the small copy which refers to developing the “will to run” and athletic dedication, can be described as a narrative about the “will to represent” oneself as a runner. Here, think of the athlete who diverts their attention away from the immediacy of running and directs it, instead, to the task of designing his/her race, as the goal to become a Runner or an Athlete, perhaps in the Nike tradition. In the fine print of the advertisement, this goal is described in the following words: “...when it happens you break through a barrier that separates you from

⁶⁰ Alison Gill, “Belonging with the Swoosh: On Cyborg Clothing and Part-Objects,” *Form-Work* 4 (2000): 93-128.

casual runners.” This runner finds meaning in running because it is a form of self-mastery; indeed he/she conceives of the transformation implicit in running – as one develops techniques and skills, manages equipment and terrain – as an exercise in controlling one’s existence. In the process, the materials such as his/her sports-shoes, clothing and body become tools in a project of self-mastery, tools for the performance of self-possession as both maker and athlete. Consequently, technique, skill-level, competencies, co-ordination and race times become trophies of his/her orchestration into an athlete. Made representable by these things, the runner finds a self- authenticity mirrored in these things of himself/herself as Athlete. As such, he/she manifests a forgetting of the embeddedness of this athleticism in those things and surrounds in which he/she is made.

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