WhiteFroth
Palpitating Body, Sounding Dress

A project submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Winnie Ha
B.Des., B.Arts

School of Architecture and Design
College of Design and Social Context
RMIT University
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Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Winnie Ha

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For the ‘almost graspable,‘
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And to my family – my heart.
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Prelude.

You are like an undulating billow warmed by the sun, and all this fluff of muslin about you is the froth.

Thomas Hardy: Tess of the D’Urbervilles, 1891

The project Palpitating Body, Sounding Dress contemplates the phenomenon of dress and bodily experience. Set within the context of live performance, it explores the potential of sound and movement in evoking an affective experience of body-dress relation. The intent is to convey an alternative way of understanding dress, by augmenting the significance of the subjective body in contemporary studies of fashion and dress.

On this basis, my research asks:

*How can body-dress relation be experienced through sound and movement?*

*How does the research suggest another way of understanding body-dress relation?*

Emphasising the charged, contiguous relation between body and dress, my research builds upon the premise that the body instigates, mediates, and communicates dress experience, inasmuch as the physicality of dress elicits

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an awareness of bodily experience. It predicates on dress as embodied experience, and sound and movement as having the capacity to express the intents, desires, and responses of the sensing body. My research explores the significance of the body within the realms of contemporary fashion practice and dress studies. As a means for a more expansive understanding of the body in fashion, it draws upon certain fundamental elements from sound and performance studies, as well as artistic practices involving the live body. It is also inspired by the subtle poetics and phenomenology of everyday occurrence, in relation to concepts of sensory perception, experience, and subjectivity.

------ The body in fashion is not inert.

My research queries the predominantly visual systems of fashion expression, production, and consumption in the conventions of Western contemporary fashion, where the body tends to be objectified. The body is commonly regarded as a standardised model and template onto which other objects may be applied. Paul Sweetman writes that the body in fashion is treated as ‘an inert and unfeeling frame to be decorated and adorned…[The body] is simply a mannequin or a shop-window dummy – it is the clothing, rather than the wearing of it, that is regarded as significant.’

The emphasis on the body as ‘object’ is at the expense of its corporeal depth and capacity for lived experience and subjectivity. In response to the lack of critical attention paid to bodily experience – specifically in relation to dress, my research suggests that the modality of attentive listening has the potential to augment the awareness of the body as a moving, sensing entity, and ‘dress’ as embodied experience. Constance Classen describes the world

as existing for the listener ‘not as a stable scene, but as a dynamic sequence of sounds. It is too changeable, too transient, to be dominated – as one dominates a landscape through sight – it can only be attended to and engaged with.’ My research locates the experience of body-dress relation – first and foremost – within the sensory world of sound. It is perhaps apt to stress that I am not substituting the dominance of sight with that of sound, but rather, to shift the weight of sensory experience to the latter, with the understanding that the senses are always intermingling and do not operate in isolation. By shifting the emphasis from the visual to the auditory, I intend to suggest another way of experiencing dress – where the body is immediately and always implicated. Whilst my research acknowledges the significance of sociological and cultural practices of dress in relation to the body, it is not framed within this area of study. Rather, my curiosity lies with the experience of body-dress relation, contextualised within the aesthetics of live performance.

‘Palpitating body’ refers to a lively body, perpetually moving and breathing, acting and being acted upon. It hints at the priority of the lived, subjective experience of the body that moves with, against, and through, dress. It is a body that tremors, pulsates, and quivers. The term ‘dress’ is used in my research to refer to any material thing worn by the body, and ‘sounding dress’ literally, as that which emits sound and movement – more palpably so when it is upon the body. The physicality of dress is enacted and lived through the lively body, whilst the sensitive body responds to the condition(ing) of dress.

I am intrigued by the possibility of a palpable experience of body-dress relation – particularly its quality of being at once tangible and intangible – suggesting the contiguity between physical (body-dress) experience and the psychical, subjective self. My research explores the possibility of an experience of body-dress relation that is charged with palpation – augmented through the moment-to-moment convergence between the body, dress, sound and movement. It considers the palpitating body to be actively moving and listening; and the sounding dress acting with, and upon, the body – rustling, trailing, bursting, weighing down, restricting, swishing about, and adhering to it.

----- Sensing.

The physical interaction between the body and dress involves the expression of sound, as each movement evokes sound or the imagination of sound. We can hear the rustling of silk, just as it is possible to ‘hear’ the tautness of silk being stretched. If we pay attention, it is possible to imagine a sense of movement embodied within the sound.

My research explores sensation as a sensory experience that is subjectively lived. The experience of sensation is a conundrum. It is both concrete and imaginary; it is immediate and acutely felt, and yet seemingly just beyond our full grasp. There is a mystique to sensory experience that resists definition and articulation. It varies from one person to another. If we imagine the phenomenon of rustling silk, we can begin to tease out the richness of its sensory spectrum: Is it being rubbed between the fingers or is it sliding between the thighs? Is it a hard rustle, or a soft rustle – and what is

4. “palpable, adj.” *Oxford English Dictionary* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50109936, accessed 10 June 2010. I refer to the notion of ‘palpable’ to imbue the quality such as that ‘of darkness, mist, heat, etc.: so extreme or intense as to seem almost tangible,’ and ‘in later use: of a feeling, or an emotional atmosphere.’
the difference? Who is wearing the rustle? What thoughts, memories and emotions does it evoke? The quality of the sound of rustling silk varies depending on the way in which the body encounters the sound event; a rustling piece of silk right next to the ear is a different experience compared to the body immersed in a spatial projection of the sound through loudspeakers. There is no absolute sound of rustling silk, but a spectrum of possible sounds. Sensory perception and experience always and immediately involves all of our senses. One sense ignites another, resonating waves of synaesthetic sensations and impressions that are bound only by the limits of one’s thoughts, emotions, memories, and imaginations.

Like attempting to catch water flowing through my fingers, sensation is acutely felt, but it resists containment. The water falls through my fingers. I can hear it. It stirs my emotions, thoughts, and imagination; and yet it is always just beyond my full grasp. I cannot explain it. It is always just ‘almost graspable’ – and therein lies its rich magic.

Winnie Ha: Notebook entry, 27 November 2007

----- Project: White Froth.

My research is based on a project entitled White Froth. A collaboration with a sound designer and two dancers, the project was developed through weekly workshops over a nine-month period culminating in a public performance on 06 March 2008. White Froth was presented as part of the LMFF Cultural Program. The performance is best described as a live

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5. Hardy, *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, 143. The project title is drawn from Thomas Hardy’s novel and references a particularly sensual moment between Tess and Angel Clare, the love of her life in which the author refers to the protagonist’s white dress as a ‘fluff of muslin.’

spatial sound experience, sculpted and sustained by moving bodies in
various ensembles of dress incorporating paper, metal chains, muslin,
nylon, and silk. The workshop season was a vital aspect of the project as it
provided the scope for collaborative experimentation, play, and reflection,
which, in turn, informed the overall trajectory of my research.

------ One: *Doing.*

This chapter unravels the process of collaborative working and
experimentation. It suggests the significance of the acts of listening, making,
imagining, capturing and recording sounds; ‘handling’ dress, dressing
bodies, grappling with technology, moving/dancing, and discussing/arguing.
These ‘acts of doing’ reflect processes of improvisation, trial and error,
reflection, and communication, imbuing the vitality of research through
practice.

------ Two: *Expressing (The Final Night)*

The second chapter focuses on the one-off, live performance of *White Froth*
in March 2008. It is my personal account of the events of the night – both as
an audience member and as the primary instigator of the project. The
chapter conveys a textual experience of *White Froth,* supported by
background details of the technology involved, and the elements that
inspired the structure and form of the performance. As such, the ‘text’ of
the performance augments the audio-visual experience of its video
recording. The tone of this section is more suggestive than that of the other
chapters. By virtue of its subjective nature, lived experience escapes
objective perception. The intent of this chapter is not to substitute the live
performance with a descriptive account. Rather, the aim is to convey a
written impression of the performance, as a live convergence of spatial
installations, exhibitions and events. It is part of the LMFF Fashion Week held in March
every year in Melbourne, Victoria.
sound projection, movement, bodies and dress. It also introduces some of the words that I used to communicate with the performers to generate movements, sounds, and imaginary sensations: swirling smoke, dense breath, gushing sea, ectoplasm,\(^7\) crushing glass. The use of words to evoke and communicate poetic impressions is inspired by the manner in which Thomas Hardy – in his late Nineteenth Century novel *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*\(^8\) – conveys impressions of Tess through the way she moves, and what she wears throughout the novel, in correlation with her immediate landscape and the cycle of seasons. These total impressions act as metaphorical extensions of her interior states of being, which, in turn, provide grounding for the spectrum of sensations conveyed through the *White Froth* performance.

------ Three: Opening.

Entitled ‘Opening,’ the last chapter implies the act of reflecting upon the *White Froth* project, in the sense of ‘opening it up’ for further contemplation. It discusses the significant themes that have emerged from the project and reframed the overall scope of my research. The chapter draws out the intricacies of the project by unraveling the minutiae of some precious moments, exploring their capacity to open up new ways of engaging with the experience of body-dress relation. The ‘precious moments’ refer to specific anchors during the project that have shifted my thinking and practice. This section further discusses the *White Froth* performance as an event of ‘liveness’ – an emanation of sensory experience from the live convergence of sound, movement, body and dress. The intent

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8. Hardy, op cit.
is to grasp an experience of body-dress relation as a ‘palpation of sensation’. ‘Imagining’ references Gaston Bachelard’s notion of the poetic imagination as a means to access the wonder of the ‘miniature’, that is, how small moments of experience are gateways to the grandness of phenomena via the poetic imagination.⁹ To ‘open up’ these moments is to be attentive to the minutiae of lived experience, and how they have the capacity to stir our emotions, thoughts, memories, and imaginations.

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MARKING THE TERRITORY.

My research is informed by discourses and artistic practices across fashion, dress, performance, sound and phenomenology. At its heart, it is located within the margins of dress studies that engage with the experience of dress and the dressed body. In terms of situating it within practice, it aligns itself with contemporary fashion-based projects that engage with digital media and time-based experiences, and with interdisciplinary practices spanning fashion, dance, performance, installation, and moving image. As a project-based research, I use sound and live performance as devices to explore the possibility of engaging with body-dress relation via sensory experience. Whilst my research is not formally grounded in phenomenology, my approach is, to a certain degree, inspired by the subtle, poetic manner with which Gaston Bachelard applies the practice of phenomenology towards the experience of the everyday. The live, moving body is a dynamic interface where all of these elements converge, and where subjective experience is mediated. As an experiential and aesthetic contemplation on the (palpitating) body and (sounding) dress, my research attempts to engage with a spectrum of relevant design and arts-based practices with the intention of expanding contemporary studies on dress, and the experience of the subjective body in fashion.
BODY, DRESS.

My research addresses the experience of body-dress relation through sound and movement, from the perspective of the phenomenological subject. Within the realm of fashion and dress studies, there is a rich array of recent discourses on the relationship between the body and dress, locating them within semiological, cultural, psychological, social-anthropological, and historical concerns. However, the connection between dress and the subjective, bodily experience itself is rarely drawn. In these contexts, the body is often tied to discussions on ‘dress as human behaviour’ – the body and dress framed as symbiotic expressions of identity, gender, and sexuality – rather than ‘dress as human experience.’ These studies view the body and dress as objects to be analysed in terms of their roles in the

10. Mary Lynn Damhorst, Kimberly A. Miller-Spillman and Susan O. Michelman, eds., in The Meanings of Dress (New York, USA: Fairchild Publications, 1999) explore socio-cultural and psychological issues pertaining to dress through a collection of essays spanning a spectrum of ethnographic groups. The premise is to understand the meanings of dress, relative to individuals and societies. Whilst there is some mention of the body and selfhood, the discussions stem from objective standpoints that preclude the experiencing body and construction of subjectivity. Ruth Barnes and Joanne B. Eicher, eds., in Dress and Gender: Making and Meaning (Oxford, UK and New York, USA: Berg, 1992) focus specifically on the significance of dress in the social construction of gender. Susanne Küchler and Daniel Miller, eds., in Clothing as Material Culture (Oxford, UK and New York, USA: Berg, 2005) consider the sociological life of various dress cultures by examining their ‘materiality.’ Fred Davis in Fashion, Culture, and Identity (Chicago, USA: University of Chicago Press, 1994) and Eugenia Paulicelli and Hazel Clark, eds., in The Fabric of Cultures: Fashion, Identity, and Globalization (Abingdon, UK and New York, USA: Routledge, 2009) examine the construction and communication of social identity through dress codes in relation to the mechanics of the fashion system as well as the globalisation of fashion.

Margarita Gleba, Cherine Munkholt and Marie-Louise Nosch, eds., in Dressing the Past (Oxford, UK: Oxbow Books, 2008) presents a survey of different approaches (museological, curatorial, designer, maker, etc.) in the archaeological and historical analyses of dress.


construction of individuality and societies, and seemingly detached from an engagement with corporeal experience.

My understanding of ‘lived bodily experience’ is influenced by contemporary performance studies and practices across dance, theatre, body art and performance art – where the body performs as subject, object and/or mediator of live experience.\(^\text{12}\) In the worlds of live stage performance and dance, costume is a vital component of the overall production. Stage costume is implicated in the characterisation of the performer as well as imbibing the atmosphere of the narrative (in the manner of stage props, lighting and sound). It is also cautiously crafted to accommodate and sustain specific bodily movements and gestures, suggesting a vital connection between dress and bodily experience. I am intrigued by the concept of dress as a device that underscores the expressions of the body, inasmuch as the body responds to the affect of dress. A more sensitive awareness of how bodies perform in dress – and, correlative, how dress enables the performing body – may lead us to another understanding of the relation between the body and dress.

My research is situated within this gap of critical engagement with the lived, subjective experience of body-dress relation. Joanne Entwistle and Elizabeth Wilson allude to this in *The Dressed Body*,\(^\text{13}\) noting a curious absence of the body in historical, anthropological and cultural studies of fashion and dress, and an absence of fashion and dress in the recent


proliferation of research on the body, stressing that ‘... between these two growing areas of interdisciplinary work ... there has been relatively little fertilization.’ Postulating dress as a ‘fleshy practice involving the body,’ and fashion as ‘embodied practice,’ they suggest a necessity to engage with phenomenology as the basis for accessing this experiential dimension of body and dress. To accompany this strand of thinking is Umberto Eco’s germane story Lumbar Thought, in which he introduces the notion of ‘epidermic self-awareness’ through his self-reflection on donning tight jeans. He illuminates how the feeling of ‘being dressed’ encroaches upon the operation of one’s thought, demeanour, and behaviour. The jeans instigated in him a hyper-awareness of his external body; they ‘made their presence felt,’ and ‘obliged him to live towards the exterior world,’ thus suppressing the interior self. Eco’s sensitive account delightfully captures the embodied experience of dress and dressing in relation to the corporeal body. Extending from Eco’s proposition that ‘thought abhors tights,’ my research proposes for a sense of hyper self-awareness of one’s body in, and through, dress. This awareness prompts an embodied navigation of the flux and flow of the external world, continuous with subjectivity and the interior self. The body is not the boundary, nor is it a passive receptor, but rather the mediator, a means for navigation, and a site of experience.

14. Sally O’Reilly, The Body in Contemporary Art (London, UK: Thames and Hudson, 2009), 8. O’Reilly notes that ‘the visceral and vulnerable body is now a potent signifier of lived experience as well as a medium of formal and aesthetic inquiry.’
15. Entwistle and Wilson, op cit., 1-5.
16. ibid.
18. ibid., 194.
19. ibid., 192.
20. ibid., 193.
21. ibid., 194.
------ A brief note on dress and dressing.

I use the term ‘dress’ to encompass any material that is put upon the body, hence it can include anything from clothes, accessories, and fabrics, to ‘non-clothes’ such as wearable technologies (lapel microphones, microchips), shackles, prosthetics, etc., as long as the material engages in an aesthetic or functional exchange with the body.\textsuperscript{22} As an abstract, conceptual notion, my usage of ‘dress’ emphasises the materiality of things for and upon the body that engages the body in an experience; it is without the historical and socio-cultural connotations that are attached to other usages of the term.\textsuperscript{23} I use the correlative, active term; ‘dressing’ to express a sense of performativity embodied within the act itself, with a subjective awareness of one’s actions. Acts of dressing include putting on, attaching, pulling up, drawing in, lacing, tightening, covering up, layering, etc. More significantly, ‘dressing’ implies the presence of a body – an inherent corporeality in the midst of its engagement with dress.

My use of the term ‘dress,’ by emphasising an abstract materiality – and thus, not really defining what it is exactly that is put upon the body – conveys the significance I place on the experience of the body in its encounter with materiality (any materiality), over the specificity of what constitutes that materiality. I find it more interesting to explore the experience of the body when it encounters ‘the silkiness of a thing,’ rather than the silk scarf. Encountering this silkiness, the attention shifts to that of affect, process, and a plenitude of possibilities … because it has stirred the imagination. In this manner, we may then imagine the sensory experience of ‘dress’ and

\textsuperscript{22} Damhorst, Miller-Spillman and Michelman, eds., “Introduction,” in \textit{The Meanings of Dress}, 2. I refer to their definition of ‘dress’ and ‘dressing’ as inclusive terms for all materials and objects put upon the body. However, my framing of the term ‘dress’ emphasises the significance of corporeal exchange, rather than bodily ‘appearance.’

\textsuperscript{23} Roland Barthes, \textit{The Language of Fashion} (Oxford, U.K and New York, USA: Berg, 2006), 8-10. My usage of the term is different from the way Barthes uses it to denote an institutionalised manner of dressing, a social inscription independent of the individual.
‘dressing’, more expansively, as affective phenomena – beyond the physicality of bodily sensation and connecting with the psychical interior.

------- A brief note on the body.

My body is the fabric into which all objects are woven … and it is, at least in relation to the perceived world, the general instrument of my comprehension.24

Maurice Merleau-Ponty:

Phenomenology of Perception, 1945

I refer to the ‘body’ as a corporeal being that is as much the object of lived experience as it is the subject and mediator of that experience. It is not a passive receptor, but rather, an active participant in the sensory world through its integration of external, physical experience with the psychical interior. The body is the corporeal enactment of the subject/interior self,25 rather than a container of selfhood.26 I imagine it to be overflowing the viscera.27 My understanding of the phenomenological body is related to my conception of the Butoh body, which has been informed through my

27. “viscera, n. pl.,” Oxford English Dictionary (UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50278167 accessed 9 June 2010. In anatomy, viscera is defined as the inner parts or interiors of the body, ‘the soft contents of the principal cavities of the body; esp. the internal organs of the trunk; the entrails or bowels together with the heart, liver, lungs, etc.’
“visceral, a.,” Oxford English Dictionary (UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50278168 accessed 9 June 2010. Visceral refers to the condition of ‘affecting the viscera or bowels regarded as the seat of emotion; [and] pertaining to, or touching deeply, inward feelings.” The term visceral captures the mutual, intrinsic connection between the physical and the psyche – lived and experienced through the body.
collaboration with two performers trained in Butoh. Whilst a more substantial grounding of Butoh will follow in a later section, at this point, it is worth mentioning the way the performers engage with their ‘performing bodies.’ Perhaps the best way to do so is to refer to Yoko Ashikawa’s reflection upon Tatsumi Hijikata’s choreography. Hijikata emerged in 1959 as the Butoh pioneer, and Ashikawa was one of his early disciples.

There was a conscious effort in his training to reconstruct a child’s wisdom, a kind of innocence, which children possess, which we have forgotten, especially in regard to their bodies. He used the metaphor of a meal for dancers served on a plate, on which were placed the dancer’s liver, lungs, and heart. This is something that children do unconsciously; they play with parts of their bodies in order to recognize them.28

_Hijikata’s hyper-internalised practice of wondrously engaging with one’s body poignantly captures a connection between the corporeal body, viscera, and subjectivity. My research explores the minutia of internal experience, and how the ‘minuscule’ has the potential to ‘open up an entire world.’29_ Hijikata would also ask his disciples to dance like a puppet or a baby. The intention, however, was not for them to imitate, but to ‘really experience … their bodies like a baby, through touching, feeling, exploring.’30 It is this internalised way of exploring the corporeal body and its raw experiences that has influenced the way I conceptualise the body in my research.

Blindness works like dope, a fact we have to reckon with. I don’t believe there is a blind man alive who has not felt the danger of intoxication. Like drugs, blindness heightens certain sensations, giving sudden and often disturbing sharpness to the senses of hearing and touch. But, most of all, like a drug, it develops inner as against outer experience, and sometimes to excess …

Jacques Lusseyran: And There Was Light, 1963

Sound is a chosen medium of research exploration – a device – with which I explore the experiential potential of body-dress relation. The emphasis on sound and listening is not to disregard the significance of other sensory modalities, as one sense cannot be considered in isolation from another. The intention is, rather, to shift the weight of sensory perception from a visual paradigm that characterises the world of (contemporary Western) fashion and dress, to an auditive paradigm framed within lived subjectivities, poetics and phenomenology.

Although it is not located within the field of sound studies, my research is driven by an interest in the sounds of dress. My collaboration with a sound designer has contributed to my understanding of sound recording, projection and performance, and the notion of listening as an active

32. Constance Classen, Worlds of Sense: Exploring the Senses in History and Across Cultures (London, UK and New York, USA: Routledge, 1993), 1-11. Classen notes that within the experience of sound, there is always an existing implication of sight, taste, smell, kinaesthesia, touch, and other mysteries comprising a multi-dimensional sensory world that defy sensory classification and ranking.
participation in an experience. I also engage with sound primarily through the filter of artistic practices in sound and performance supported by some fundamental aspects of sound studies introduced by R. Murray Schafer in *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* as well as Barry Truax’s *Acoustic Communication.* In narrowing down the scope of sound studies in line with my research interests, I focused on the phenomena of sound and the culture of specifically listening within electro-acoustic practices from the Twentieth Century onwards, spurred by Luigi Russolo’s 1913 *The Art of Noises: Futurist Manifesto*. Russolo declared that ‘we must break out of this limited circle of [classical musical] sounds and conquer the infinite variety of noise-sounds, including rustling, crackling, and rubbing.’

A spectrum of sound artists and composers, philosophers, and cultural theorists introduced me to some essential concepts that are relevant to my research: the aesthetics of electro-acoustic sounds and the mechanics of their transformation, through processes of composition, recording, storage, signal processing, transmission and reproduction; and the phenomenon of silence which intrinsically (and poetically) implicates the phenomenon of perception itself. Drawing from these concepts, I eventually found that it is not the source or cause of the sound that interests me as much as the affect of the sound and the experience of listening, thus augmenting the act of

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perception itself. This places significance on an embodied experience of sound and listening and is intrinsically tied to a willingness to listen.

**SENSING DRESS.**

This research is a continuation of a previous project developed in 2005, which was undertaken during my Honours year in the Bachelor of Design (Fashion) program. I used paper silk, rice paper, and bells to develop a ‘noisy’ collection of garments and accessories – empire line dresses puffed up with an under-layer of paper silk, tight sleeves joined together in loop-form; a heavy, floor-length woollen skirt lined with nylon, a paper silk jacket with bell buttons, a puffy paper silk dress with embedded bells, and hefty necklaces constructed from up to a hundred bells of different shapes and sizes. I was curious about the volume and weight of Nineteenth Century Western dress: the restrictions they imposed upon the moving body, and the sounds of the rustling, or ‘frou-frou,’ from the layering of petticoats, underskirts and overskirts. Whilst it was not possible to experience the full implication of such dress, it was possible to daydream and imagine it. These

37. Pierre Schaeffer, “Acousmatics,” in *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, eds. Cox and Warner, 76-87. Schaeffer’s concept of ‘acousmatic listening’ draws from phenomenology whereby the emphasis is not on the source or origin of the sonic event, but on the experience of the event itself.

38. Paul Carter, “ambiguous Traces, Mishearing, and Auditory Space,” in *Hearing Cultures: Essays on Sound, Listening and Modernity*, ed. Veit Erlmann, 43 (Oxford, UK and New York, USA: Berg, 2004). Pierre Schaeffer’s notions of *acousmatic* and *objets sonores* (sonorous objects) are relevant to this point. *Acousmatic* is said [of] a noise that one hears without seeing what causes it – an adaptation of the Latin term *akousmatikos*, which refers to ‘a professed hearer, or a class of scholars under Pythagoras, who listened to his teaching, without inquiring into its inner truths or bases;’ and adopted from the Greek as, literally, ‘one who is willing to hear.’ *Objets sonores* refer to ‘objects of acousmatic listening ... independent of any causal reference, and contained entirely only in our perceptive consciousness.’ Schaeffer, “Acousmatics,” 76-87.

early explorations introduced me to the aesthetics of the sounds of dress, and how the moving body is inherently implicated in the sounds. The pieces I designed were exaggerated in volume, length, and weight adding to their sheer physical mass upon the body. This was a way to impart an augmented awareness of dress upon the wearer’s body – such as a corset that is too tight, a skirt that is too heavy, or a collar that is too stiff – and the capacity of such physicality to elicit bodily responses through sound and movement. They put me in touch with a sense of profundity in the way our bodies engage with dress, suggesting the potential for further exploration into the experience of body-dress relation.

Whilst the aesthetics of the sound of dress are not widely and rigorously documented in academic discourse, there are numerous sources from film, novels, live performances and research projects that have helped contextualise my project. Each project in the following section conveys an affective, sensory experience of dress – through sound, movement, and synaesthetic sensations and impressions.

SHOWStudio – The Sound of Clothes: Anechoic

This is a SHOWstudio project that is based on the concept of an ‘audio collections show,’ using sound ‘to interpret the essence of key garments in the Autumn/Winter 2006-07 season by leading fashion brands.’ The garments incorporated dress materials such as feathers, sequins, glass crystals and beads, nylon, taffeta, leather, velvet, jacquard, zips and metallic chains. To capture the ‘actual sound a garment makes,’ SHOWstudio used

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40. SHOWstudio is an ongoing, digital platform that aims to reveal, through collaborative projects, the various innovative processes behind the construction of fashion, of an image, a show, a collection, and of the designer’s hand.
42. ibid.
43. ibid.

a semi-anechoic chamber,\textsuperscript{44} with the model Zora Star slowly dressing herself, moving, and caressing the garments.\textsuperscript{45}

Viktor and Rolf: Bells
The use of ‘noisy’ dress materials was echoed in Viktor and Rolf’s Autumn/Winter 2000 - 01 haute couture collection. Entitled Bells, the coats, dresses, belts and blazers in the collection had brass bells embroidered onto the entirety of their surfaces, which resonated with bodily movement. Of particular interest to me in the Bells collection is the way it was shown in the context of a multi-sensorial experience. The dominance of the visual at the fashion show was diminished to heighten the experience of sound:

\begin{quote}
The show was carefully choreographed to ensure that the eagerly waiting audience heard the garments before they emerged from shrouds of fog, visible for a brief moment before passing again into the mist. For Viktor and Rolf, the show was about creating an aura, grasping the intangible.\textsuperscript{46}
\end{quote}

Kirsty Beilharz – Fabrication II: The Cry of Silk
Kirsty Beilharz’s project\textsuperscript{47} also seeks to express the ungraspable qualities of material sensuality through sound, although her focus is specifically on the evoking an experience of drapery. The Cry of Silk was a sound piece composed for the exhibition of Amanda Robin’s paintings and drawings of the drapery of fabrics and interiors of garments. Entitled What Lies Beneath,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{44} A semi-anechoic chamber is typically a recording studio where the wall surfaces are lined by sound-absorbing material, resulting in an environment that is almost void of echoes as well as environmental sounds. This type of space allows the recording of high-quality acoustics.
\item \textsuperscript{46} Viktor and Rolf. http://viktoretrolf.typepad.com/about.html (accessed 14 February 2010).
\end{itemize}
Robin’s realistic representation of drapery was a metaphor for the embodiment and appreciation of different textures and folds. Beilharz used the tactile and visual metaphors of layering, superimposition, veiling and concealing embedded in drapery as compositional processes implanted within her digital sound piece. Referring to the mythology of \textit{The Cry of Silk} – in which it was believed that the sound of the finest silk being torn resembled a little cry – Beilharz used digital sound processing and amplification to reveal the minutiae of the micro sensations of fabric that would ordinarily escape our perception. This project resonates with my work in terms of the potential of sound to \textit{imbue} a sense of the texture of drape and interiors of garments, rather than to reproduce ‘real’ or actual sounds. Her project was driven by a synaesthetic experience of drape in its expression through visual imagery and spatial sound.

\textbf{SIAT (Simon Fraser University) – Whisper[s]}

The \textit{Whisper[s]} project\textsuperscript{50} at the School of Interactive Arts and Technology in British Columbia, Canada has developed intimate, sensual, and responsive wearable devices that can map physiological data and express affective states between a connected network of live bodies. The wearable devices were presented in the context of a live performance with people sharing physiological data by moving in a state of emphatic and interactive play within a responsive sonic environment. Whilst my research is not located within the realm of interaction design, \textit{Whisper[s]}’ proposition of finding ‘a means of capturing and expressing lived bodily experience via movement’\textsuperscript{51}.

\textsuperscript{48} ibid.
\textsuperscript{49} ibid.
\textsuperscript{50} Whisper[s] Research Group, Simon Fraser University, http://whisper.iat.sfu.ca (accessed 03 March 2010). As a collaborative project involving artists (in dance, sculpture, music), designers (of visuals, objects, textiles), computer scientists and hardware/software engineers, \textit{Whisper[s]} explored a broad scope of sensory experience beyond sound (incorporating haptics, visuals and light).
\textsuperscript{51} ibid.
– and which is driven by phenomenological practice – is conceptually relevant to my project.

The ethereal, spatial experience of Viktor and Rolf’s fashion show suggests an attempt to convey the fleetingness of fashion through the transient quality of sound. Whilst Anechoic was more focused on capturing the actual sounds of garments, its underlying intent was to use sound to convey the ‘essence’ of each garment. The title of Beilharz’s work, The Cry of Silk, hints at the liveliness embedded within material such as silk – that being the biological matter of little silk worms. Through Beilharz’s use of sound as a means for an immersive, synaesthetic experience, the work imbues a poetic of the texture of fabric. It engages with the interiority of dress through an experience of tactility. All three projects, in their own ways, suggest that the sound of dress has the capacity to instill palpable sensations in the wearer and the observer. They also convey the potency of sound in igniting, as well as being ignited by, other sensory and physical impacts (sight, touch, and spatiality). They further allude to the capacity of sound to express certain qualities of dress and fashion that could not be fully articulated, could not be grasped in their entirety; it is this mysterious capacity of sound that inspired White Froth – that is, sound as an aesthetic, multi-sensorial experience – at once shared and yet subjective, acutely felt and yet perpetually elusive.

52. Elizabeth Grosz, Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism | Bloomington, USA: Indiana University Press, 1994, 98-99. Following Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception, Grosz notes that the senses are inherently integrated for in lived experience, the senses interact, form a union and yield access to a singular world.
**THE PERFORMATIVE BODY.**

During the workshop phase of *White Froth*, the experience of the body’s movements in dress gained prominence in correlation with the notion of the performative body. It suggests the ‘[enactment of] the body or subject in a performative fashion,’ highlighting an inter-subjective engagement between the body, self, and other – whereby the meaning is always negotiated, perpetually in flux, never fixed or absolute. Following this strand of thinking, a performative act is a direct utterance – and in its manner of directness, does not describe or represent the subject, but rather *expresses* it. In other words, the performative body is the medium whereby subjectivity is enacted.

The concept of the performative body suggests that it is not a search for the truth-value or absolute meaning in the act itself; rather, it is to be attentive to the subjective experience of the body and the affective potential of the act. This is in line with my interest in the resonance of sound (and the propagation of affect), rather than the origin and meaning of the sound event. During the workshops, we abandoned the search for any objective meanings in sound and movement, and focused instead on open-ended explorations based on freeform, improvisational experimentation. It was necessary then, to focus on the *process* and *present-ness* of experience in the midst of utterance, or performativity, in order to *engage with* the nature of phenomenological experience. In a way, we had to forget the limits of our own physicalities in order to open up to a more expansive, psychical self.

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[The dancers, sound designer, and I] worked in close physical proximity, immersed within the intimacy of the padded and dark, semi-anechoic ‘pod’. We would be in there for hours. We listened to one another (they tuned into my words, and I to the sounds of their movements), we spoke about the nuances of experience … sometimes we would get lost in translation, other times lost in another world altogether. [I was] moved by the minutiae of their movements in the garments, and the sounds that filled the space.

Winnie Ha: Notebook entry, 03 September 2007

My interest in live body and performance arts practices is specifically driven by the allure of ‘the everyday’ as the raw material for wondrous and poetic experiences, grounded by the concepts of noise-making as performance and a parsimony of concept and gesture. In the positioning of quotidian activities as performance, just as John Cage found music in the everyday sounds of the environment, so too the choreographer Merce Cunningham

54. Housed within the SIAL (Spatial Information Architecture Laboratory) Sound Studio at RMIT University, the ‘Pod’ is an eight-channel, near-anechoic, insulated space that serves as the sound studio’s main listening space. It is used for spatial sound production, composition, recording, and small group presentations. Loudspeakers can be relocated around and above the central mixing location in project specific configurations. SIAL Sound Studio, RMIT University, http://sound.sial.rmit.edu.au/About.php (accessed 05 April 2010).

55. Marinetti’s ‘onomatopoetic artillery’ performances, such as Zang Tumb Tumb in 1914, and his collaborator Luigi Russolo’s use of machine sounds as outlined in his manifesto The Art of Noise, op cit. Russolo’s The Art of Noises aimed to capture the noise of machinery, the city life, and modern warfare. He built a family of ‘noise instruments,’ each of which played a different noise; the instruments were ‘played’ in his noise orchestra.

56. Another performance of interest is the Futurist Synthesis which deliberately consisted of brief, ‘one idea’ performances, and in the manifesto of Futurist Synthetic Theatre of 1915, the notion of Futurist Synthesis was explained as: ‘Synthetic. That is, very brief. To compress into a few minutes, into a few words and gestures, innumerable situations, sensibilities, idea, sensations, facts and symbols.’ Marinetti’s manifesto on performance, Dynamic and Synoptic Declamation, instructed performers on how to perform, outlining rules for body actions based on the staccato movements of machines. ‘Gesticulate geometrically,’ the manifesto had advised, ‘in a draughtsman-like topological manner, synthetically creating in mid-air, cubes, cones, spirals, and ellipses.’ Roselee Goldberg, Performance: Live Art 1909 to the Present (London, U.K: Thames and Hudson, 1979), 16-19.
proposed that walking, standing, leaping, and the full range of natural movements could be considered as dance. Conveying that the mundane is never far from the poetic, Yvonne Rainer’s early films – such as *Hand Movie*57 (1966) and *Trio Film*58 (1968) – are short cinematic exercises exploring everyday movement and the relationship between bodies and objects. Ann Halprin and the Dancers’ Workshop Company, San Francisco, similarly incorporated everyday actions and objects as performance material. Her choreography involved an open-ended score using graphic notation, with an emphasis on free association and improvisation to discover the range and limits of the moving body. *Parades and Changes*, first performed in 1964, revolved around the everyday ritual of dressing/undressing, and attaching/detaching objects and garments on/off the body. Each performer developed a vocabulary of movements of the body in space that expressed their own sensory responses to light, material and space, culminating in a rhythmic piece of idiosyncratic movements.

**BUTOH INFLUENCE.**

Something is hiding in our subconscious, collected in our unconscious body, which will appear in each detail of our expression... We can find Butoh in the same way we can touch our hidden reality.59

Tatsumi Hijikata

From the initial influence of sound and performance-based works outlined above, I eventually shifted my attention specifically to Butoh. The dancers I

57. Yvonne Rainer, *Hand Movie*, 5.00, b&w, silent, 8mm to video (New York, USA, 1966).
58. Yvonne Rainer, *Trio Film*, 13.00, b&w, silent, 8mm to video (New York, USA, 1968).
collaborated with come from a background in Butoh, psycho-physical research, and Asian shamanistic trance dance.\textsuperscript{60} Their expression is embodied within the physicality of the body, in relation to a profoundness of gesture and movement. They possess a hyper-sensitive awareness towards a synaesthesia of images, sounds, smells, textures, tastes, words. We would draw from Hardy’s words during the workshops as a way to instigate movement and sound via sensory inspiration – such as imagining the ‘rustle of the straw’\textsuperscript{61} as having the ‘weight of bodily touches.’\textsuperscript{62} Their capacity for subjective and responsive engagement (as opposed to a trained and prescribed method for following directions and choreography) is a vital aspect of developing the project in an organic manner.

To me, Butoh is first and foremost, not a style of dance but an intensely psycho-physical expression incorporating dance, performance art, and visual theatre. Akaji Maro writes, ‘Butoh is a form that almost precedes dance, just as a child moves and plays before he dances.’\textsuperscript{63} The Butoh expression is raw, immediate, intimate – an expansion of interior thoughts and transformative states of being through sheer, raw physicality. Rather than an expression of a set of definitive techniques (in terms of the way it is classically understood in terms of conventional dance styles), the Butoh technique is based on ways of accessing the unconscious through the body.

\textsuperscript{60} Both performers train with the Tony Yap Company based in Melbourne, Australia. TYC, Tony Yap Company, http://www.tonyyapcompany.com (accessed 13 June 2010).
\textsuperscript{61} Hardy, *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, 332.
\textsuperscript{62} ibid., 293.
\textsuperscript{63} Hoffman and Holborn, eds., *Butoh: Dance of the Dark Soul*, 76.
Yet listen well. Not to my words,
but to the tumult that rages in
your body when you listen to yourself.64

Gaston Bachelard: The Poetics of Space, 1958

Although it is inspired by its intensity of physical expression as an
immediate response to the psychical interior, White Froth is not a Butoh
project. Evocative devices such as verbal expressions and poetic images are
commonly used to elicit responses through the body. Ashikawa writes,
‘When we danced, the images were all derived from his verbal expression.
Without the words we could not dance, so it was like following a poem.’65 In
terms of my research, the Butoh aspect is relevant because it underlies the
way the dancers intuitively respond to the affect of exterior sensations –
dress, sound, words, and images – through improvised movements, rather
than following a choreography. Thus, the Butoh approach enables my
project to open up to a more expansive exploration of movement and
sounds as lived, bodily responses to exterior, sensory experiences.

**POETICS, PHENOMENOLOGY.**

The grip that poetry acquires on our very being bears a
phenomenological mark that is unmistakable. The exuberance
and depth of a poem are always phenomena of the resonance-
reverberation doublet. It is as though the poem, through its
exuberance, awakened new depths in us. In order to ascertain the
psychological action of a poem, we should therefore have to

64. Bachelard, The Poetics of Space, 181-182.
follow the two perspectives of phenomenological analysis, towards the outpourings of the mind and towards the profundities of the soul.

Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 1958

Bachelard’s *Poetics of Space* served as my introduction to phenomenological thinking. His manner of phenomenological expression embodies a poignancy that has influenced the way I perceive and communicate my work, particularly in his use of language and imagery to convey the poetics latent in our encounter with everyday objects and spaces, as well as the potency of the ‘miniature’ in revealing the world. In *Closer: Performance, Technologies, Phenomenology*, Susan Kozel positions the necessity of listening to one’s own body to sense the world. Reflecting upon her experience as a dancer and phenomenologist working with responsive technology, Kozel emphasises the value of lived experience in understanding one’s relation to the world. This understanding is not meant to be absolute but richly contingent on one’s subjectivity. She writes, ‘Through a phenomenology that does not attempt to posit truths, but instead act as a chiasmic, embodied, first-person methodology, with the objectives of understanding, expressing, and extending lived experience.’

My research is not on, or framed by, phenomenology and thus should not be evaluated as such. Instead, it draws upon some fundamental aspects, as expressed primarily through the filters of Bachelard and Kozel’s writings.

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68. ibid., 148-182.
Within the context of my research, phenomenological practice expresses a way of engaging with the lived experience of body-dress relation through the vitality of subjective experience as a mode of enquiry.

------ Resonance, reverberation.

Sounds had the same individuality as light. They were neither inside nor outside, but were passing through me. They gave me my bearings in space and put me in touch with things. It was not like signals that they functioned but like replies …

But most surprising of all was the discovery that sounds never came from one point in space and never retreated into themselves. There was the sound, its echo, and another sound into which the first sound melted and to which it had given birth, altogether an endless procession of sound.71

Jacques Lusseyran: And There Was Light, 1963

I refer to the notions of *reverberation*72 and *resonance*73 as captured by Bachelard, and in reference to Minkowski’s *retentir*74 – auditory metaphors

72. “reverberation, n.” *Oxford English Dictionary* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50205332 (accessed 03 June 2010). As an auditory term, *reverberation* is a ‘repeated echoing or occurrence of a sound; a temporary persistence of sound without perceptible distinct echoes, resulting from repeated reflection from nearby surfaces or produced artificially.’
73. “resonance, n.” *Oxford English Dictionary* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50204166 (accessed 03 June 2010). As an auditory term, *resonance* is ‘the reinforcement or prolongation of sound by reflection or by the synchronous vibration of a surrounding space or a neighbouring object. Resonance is corresponding or sympathetic response; an instance of this. Resonance refers to the power or quality of evoking or suggesting images, memories, and emotions; an allusion, connotation, or overtone.’
for the measure of the poetic image at the onset of its experience. Rather
than adopting them as a metaphor in my research, the notions of resonance
and reverberation can quite literally embody the essence of the poetics of
spatial sound and performance. Minkowski’s analogy of a ‘well-spring’ in a
‘sealed vase,’ with its echoes filling up space with ‘their sonority,’ captures
the essence of reverberation as an inherently spatio-temporal experience
that palpitates and resounds across psyches and physicalities. Resonance
suggests a sense of a propagation of a phenomenon – across space, time,
 videogame, subjectivities – following its initial reverberation. In a discussion on
 a performance based on telematics, Kozel refers to the concept of
 ‘resonance’ as the propagation of an interior experience, outward, so as to
be emphatically shared with others. Quoting Bachelard:

‘...in the resonance we hear the poem, in the reverberations we

 speak it, it is our own... The multiplicity of resonances then

 issues from the reverberations’ unity of being... [Resonance]

takes root in us. It has been given us by another, but we begin to

 have the impression that we could have created it, that we should

 have created it.’

Poetics and phenomenology cater to an experience that is concrete and yet
phenomenal, palpitating outwards (resonating) whilst at the same time
arising from inwards (reverberating). Like a breath, poetics imbues a
phenomenon that is not entirely obtainable, and yet it ‘possesses us

Poetics of Space*, xvi introduction.
75. Ibid.
78. Ibid., xxiii introduction.
entirely.\textsuperscript{79} The palpitating body and sounding dress are sonorous beings; neither fully concrete nor fully phenomenal, I aim to posit that experience of body-dress relation, through a phenomenology of sound, embodied within the realm of poetics.

\textit{Hands burrow deep into the creases of silk organza, fingers grip and then let loose. A crackling, then careless ripples – surprising reverberations take hold of us. The sounds resonate through our souls, touch the depths before they stir the surface.}\textsuperscript{80}

Winnie Ha: \textit{Notebook entry}, 06 February 2008

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{79} ibid., xxii introduction. Bachelard referring to the power of the initial reverberation of the poetic image/poem/imagination and the subsequent resonances through the psyche, and how poetic experience transforms us, bringing ‘a change of being.’

\textsuperscript{80} ibid., xxiii introduction.
\end{footnotesize}
I. DOING.

‘Doing’ is a reflection on the process of developing the White Froth project. It discusses the project as a lively and ever-shifting experience that was gradually formulated through a reflexive process of ‘doing-thinking.’ The chapter conveys my practice of using clothing, sounds and bodies, integrated with the theoretical aspects of sound, phenomenology, subjectivity, and performance practice that I draw upon. Using my collaboration with a sound designer (Jeffrey Hannam) and dancers (Janette Hoe and Mariela Laratro) as the framework for discussion, I reveal the intricacies of some events and activities that took place, particularly in weekly workshops over a nine-month period from July 2007 to March 2008. This chapter reveals some of the minutiae and idiosyncrasies that emerged from the midst of ‘doing’ the project: (ad)ressing the body, ‘handling’ materials (garments, dress accessories, microphones), as well as grappling with language and technology. It conveys how my research questions were explored in practice. It also suggests how the practice – or the ‘doing’ of the project – challenged, shaped and inspired significant ideas that subsequently steered and shaped the overall trajectory of my research.
**COLLABORATING.**

*White Froth* was a project that emerged out of a collaborative process between a cluster of strangers. Despite our differences in approach, background and experience, we have a shared interest in the affective experience of sound and live performance that sustains a meaningful collaboration. My background is in fashion design, with an interest in the experiential aspect of body and dress. Jeffrey is a postgraduate researcher based at the SIAL, Sound Studio, as well as a composer and sound designer with experience in multi-channel spatial sound performance and presentation. He brought to the project an expertise in digital sound recording, processing and projection. Janette and Mariela are independent, Melbourne-based performers whose experience in Butoh intrigued me. I was drawn to them through their engagement with the performative body. The performative body expresses psychical states of being. Its physicality is not a mere representation of intention, but a tangible means by which the inner state – the mind and the viscera – can be accessed, addressed, and expressed in the midst of movement. We were fascinated by the potential of live performance as a means for embodied experience – in the sense that we reflect upon ourselves, and our relations to others, through the action and experience of the body, and improvisation as a means for its realisation.

Jeffrey, Mariela, Janette and I share a similar sensibility in the poetics of sound, movement and materiality, particularly in the subtleties of affective experience – that which is elusive yet concrete, absent yet viscerally felt. In the nine-month period during which we met almost every week, we experienced periods of intense connection, but we also fell into lapses of

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81. SIAL, RMIT University, [http://www.sial.rmit.edu.au/About/Overview.php](http://www.sial.rmit.edu.au/About/Overview.php) (accessed 5 March 2010). SIAL (Spatial Information Architecture Laboratory) is a research facility at RMIT University in Melbourne, Australia, specialising in trans-disciplinary design research and education.
disconnection – perhaps indicative of the nature of human-to-human, and body-to-body, relational dynamics. In terms of shared experience, over time we established an understanding between us that was unspoken – perhaps it was beyond the necessity of language. And whilst this inner communication was critical in sustaining us through the project, the moments of disagreement and breakdown in communication proved essential in highlighting not only how (wonderfully) different we were, but also how difficult it was to express – even to one another – our grasp of sensation and lived experience with their infinite, subjective possibilities. We shared analogies, anecdotes, gestures, sounds, and words that were idiosyncratic to the project. They imbued a sense of what we were trying to express, evoking an awareness of an intimate social connection. These expressive devices approximate sensations, reminding us that each sensation is subjectively experienced and, by virtue of its elusive nature, escapes objective definition.

I started with only a vague impression of what the White Froth project might be, and used the collaborative workshops as a platform to question and refine my role in my own practice, and to negotiate the essence of what we were pursuing. This freeform approach allowed a degree of liberalness that, whilst frustrating at times, embraced a self-reflexive process of collective working, making, creating, thinking, communicating, doing and redoing – acts that are vital to the phenomenological nature of my enquiry.

------ White Froth workshops – body-dress-sound-movement.

The workshops are a vital part of my research, evolving dramatically from the initial to end. From the beginning, the only thing we were certain of was that the outcome would be a public performance involving spatial sound projection, live bodies, and noisy dress – all other details were open for negotiation. The early phases of the collaborative workshops focused on
ways of generating and capturing the sound of dress at their points of origin. How would we record the sound of a piece of silk being rubbed? How would we capture the sound of a heavy woollen skirt being dragged across the floor? From the onset, it was clear that there were a set of interlocking variables that would dramatically affect the quality of sound we could capture: the garments and accessories (form, shape, and materials), the microphones (type, quality, quantity, and placement), and how the body moves or interacts with them. As our familiarity engaging with the materiality of the garments, technology, and sounds grew, and we became more at ease with one another, we started building a narrative in terms of how the sounds, garment and material choice, and movements could be coherently integrated. The narrative was loosely based on a personal reading of Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* – an abstract distillation of sensations through his use of language and imagery. New garments were also developed from the initial exercises. The later period of workshops, focused on the curation of an affective experience for the public performance, which is unraveled in Chapter Two.

**LISTENING, MOVING.**

To begin with, we used a range of garments, fabrics, and accessories sourced from my Undergraduate project – paper silk dresses, waxed cotton skirts and pants, as well as bell necklaces. We also gathered some cellophane paper, glassine paper, metal link chains, as well as muslin, tissue chiffon, and nylon fabrics. We gave our attention to the sounds of these materials, through ultra-deliberate processes of dressing and undressing. Some materials were obviously ‘noisy,’ whilst the near silence of others prompted imagined sounds. As a simple listening exercise, without any
form of digital manipulation, the aim was to allow the materials to activate our auditory and spatial awareness, and to free us from any preconceived ideas about how the work should be composed.

Whilst the sounds were affective and visceral, it would be impossible to describe them without employing the use of analogies that are admittedly arbitrary; ‘taffeta sounds like crunchy rain,’ or more like ‘rustling branches’ perhaps, and I would argue their relevance. Sound eludes language, and every listener will have a different cultural and personal perception of the same acoustic event. A mere description of a sound is, at best an approximation. However, by being receptive to its potential to evoke sensation, I propose that the aesthetics of the sound of dress can form the basis of a phenomenological engagement with the body. Sound cannot be pinned down in words, but it can be imbued through poetry. At this juncture, it is apt to once more stress that I am neither seeking to objectively determine the meaning of these sounds, nor to reproduce the ‘real’ sounds of dress. Rather, my curiosity lies with their aesthetics in terms of emotional and affective qualities,\(^{82}\) and more significantly, the potential for the visceral experience to inspire an expanded, embodied, and subjective understanding of body-dress relation.

\(--\text{ A Brief Note on the ‘Pod.’}--\)

These initial workshops were held in the ‘pod’ – an eight-channel, near-anechoic, insulated space designed primarily as an immersive listening space. From the outside, the ‘pod’ could perhaps be described as a futuristic

\[^{82}\] Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, 131-150. Through the *World Soundscape Project*, Schafer developed a classification system that analysed sound according to: their physical characteristics (acoustics), or the way in which they are perceived (psychoacoustics); according to their function and meaning (semiotics and semantics); or according to their emotional or affective qualities (aesthetics).
igloo that is housed within the SIAL Sound Studio: it is a space within a space. The ‘pod’ could just fit three to four of us comfortably.

_A claustrophobic, intimate, close, almost eerie space with that slightly muffled ringing in your ear… what is that? Silence?_

_Winnie Ha: Notebook entry, 27 July 2007_

We kept the space dark, and often spoke in whispers. One could easily shift into a state of hyper-awareness. The tightness of the space meant that the performers could only move in a limited range, and thus their movements were often controlled, slow, and deliberate. Their gestures were at times, very subtle … very minute – a slight twist of the back shoulder, a bend of the neck, a tremor of the body. Since the padded walls absorbed most sound reflections, the sounds from the performers moving in dress were naturally augmented. In combination with the darkness and seclusion (one would have to shut two heavy doors after entry), the experience of moving and listening to dress was intensely intimate, and the presence of our own bodies in relation to others was palpable.

In the initial workshops, I left the garments and materials in a heap on the floor, and asked the performers – Janette and Mariela – to interact with them without any predetermined, or choreographed, movements. More so than the sounds themselves what eventually became more interesting was their physical engagement with the materials: crunching, rustling, smoothing, rubbing, pulling, and twisting with their hands, burrowing their faces and bodies into fabric, rolling in and over garments. They responded intuitively to the nuances of each texture, form, density … some were crispy and stiff, or metallic and hollow, whilst others were unwieldy and limp.
A lot of the movements were based on everyday gestures that we forget to notice – how you run your palms across your hips (how slow, how gentle, what the fabric feels and sounds like as it travels across your palms, falls between your fingers…). The minutia of body-dress experience is augmented when you put your whole body into your palms – is it possible to hear the sounds if you are merely hovering your fingers over the dress, not actually touching it?

Winnie Ha: Notebook entry, 05 February 2008

The dancers moved very slowly and deliberately. At times, I was not certain whether they were completely present, or whether they were caught in another state of mind/being altogether. The physicality of the materials, and the affect of the sounds within the intimacy of ‘the pod,’ heightened our spatial and sensorial awareness of our bodies in relation to others; the movement of the garments themselves, temporality and duration, sound and silence, gesture and stillness. In some instances, the dancers wore blindfolds and/or tight medical corsets to experiment with restricting certain parts of the body in order to ‘liberate’ movement for other body parts. The garments and materials functioned as instruments enlivened by the body, whilst at the same time implicating on bodily movement and posture.

Unlike conventional dance/performance costumes that typically represent or signify content, the garments in White Froth took on a vital role as the object and mediator of lived experience. In their exaggeration of a particular material quality, the materiality and form of the garments elicited idiosyncratic responses from the performers. In the workshops, the garment was not considered as an end in and of itself. The garment frames,
articulates, structures, shapes, relates, facilitates, prohibits, and gives significance to posture, gesture and movement.

10:03am: Tearing, sounds of tearing – biscuits? Finding some space underneath the petticoats. Now her whole waist is covered. Trace the sounds. The weight. The openings.

Woman, body, her constricting second skin, her itchy second skin. It makes audible her inner drives. Holding her dress like peeled skin. Total darkness underneath.

Winnie Ha: Notebook entry, 05 February, 2008

CAPTURING SOUND.

(Microphone underneath the petticoat. Mariela elevated on podium)

Heavy feeling. Hugging my protection. Rip, rip, rip.

Turning the skirt.

How are her hips moving?

Winnie Ha: Notebook entry, 27 July 2007

The interactions between the body and materials were recorded using lapel, spot, and shotgun microphones, through a process of trial and error. Rather than mapping out a specific range of bodily movements, gestures, and sounds for testing, we started with the dress materials, allowing the body to engage with them in a responsive manner, whether through texture (touch), sound, and/or the fit/wearability against the body. The sounds were streamed into the central sound diffusion and projection system controlled
by Jeffrey (sound designer), who responded by transforming the sounds live. The sounds, or source signals, were transformed through processing modules commonly used in electronic music composition – delay, granulation, pitch-shifting and amplitude modulation – to further augment the auditory experience. The source signals were processed depending on the sonic characteristics of the sound, as well as the nature of the body’s engagement with dress. The processed sounds were then spatially projected, producing a continual, feedback loop between the initial movement, digital processing of sound, and its subsequent diffusion back into the space, and onto the performers.

Our initial intention was to compose a matrix of bodily gestures, sound, and dress. We had expected to capture the nuances of the sounds and their contingency on the movement/gesture of moment-to-moment bodily interactions. However, from listening to the live sounds and recordings, we were unable to discern a substantial range of differences – for example, the rustling of silk was not dissimilar to the rustling of nylon. ‘Hard rustling’ was not detectably different from ‘soft rustling.’ The quality of sounds was mediocre at best. However, rather than seeking more advanced options for the microphone technology, we realised that it was neither the quality of sounds nor the recordings that really intrigued us; it was the lived experience of the body in relation to the sounds, garments, and materials that became more significant. At that point, there was a shift in the research – from a focus on what the sounds were, to how they imbued sensation in the wearer and listener. Sound had become a vital device in communicating and mediating this relationship, rather than the object of analysis.
WEARING MICROPHONES.

The process of ‘dressing’ the dancers with lapel microphones coaxes an awareness of bodily experience, recalling Eco’s aforementioned account of feeling himself in tight blue jeans. In White Froth, the microphones are placed on the dancers’ bodies in order to capture the sounds of their movements and gestures. The sounds are then transformed through various processes of digital manipulation before being spatially diffused, creating a sensuous environmental experience. As such, the technologically mediated, and ‘augmented,’ body assumes a capacity to transform the sounds as they occur, indirectly sculpting the spatial experience.

The microphone set was a ‘clumsy’ attachment to the body as the wires had to be taped along the bend of the arms, with the transmitters secured on the waist. The microphone head itself had to be cushioned with a ball of cotton wool and then wrapped with a piece of silk satin – a process of ‘dressing’ the microphone. This process of ‘dressing’ the microphones was to prevent direct contact with fabric and other materials, as the fibrous surface of most materials resulted in an undifferentiated and abrasive sound quality. The ‘clumsiness’ of the microphones augments an awareness of the self/body – like a cumbersome extension that the body has to adjust to. Like a push-pull relationship – and in a manner similar to that of the garments and materials – the material presence of contact microphones implicates the posture, demeanour, and behaviour of the body, inasmuch as the placement of the microphones had to be carefully adjusted on the body in order to capture specific qualities of sound. With their accompanying radio transmitters and
wires, the microphones functioned as a prosthetic extension to the body, in the sense that they augment the operation and experience of the body.83

We experimented with the placement of the microphones on different parts of the body through a process of trial and error. The length of the wires needed to be fully secured to the body to avoid the microphone heads swinging freely and be overwhelmed by the effect of wind. Another complexity was that the generic lapel microphones would only pick up sounds either at contact point or within very close vicinity, hence the placement of the microphones on the body delimited the range of gestures possible, which, in turn, influenced decisions on what sounds we could capture and trigger. Thus, depending on where the microphones were placed on their bodies, the dancers would respond differently in order to control the sounds being captured, and subsequently processed and projected/fed back through speakers. We finally decided to run the wires along both arms, secured with surgical tape at the elbows and wrists, with the microphone head secured between two fingers. The palms then became instrumental in ‘playing the sounds of dress.’ This decision came about as the best scenario for ease of movement – hence freedom of performance – and control over sound quality.

The placement of microphones on the body both triggered and delimited the range of gestures inasmuch as the gesture determines the generation of sound in the performance. At times, however, the process was reversed in that the desire to generate specific sounds necessitated particular gestures; thus it was necessary to test a range of gestures to arrive at a particular

sound quality. The process of negotiating the constant flux between these variables was central in exploring the interconnectedness between the elements of body, dress, sound and movement.

------ Proximity, contact.

The project revealed the affective potential of the sensation of proximity at the moment when the body encounters dress. Suggesting a sense of nearness, contact, encounter, convergence, and disjunction, the notion of proximity and contact emerged from working with generic lapel microphones. In the developmental workshops, we experimented with various ways of attaching them to the performers in order to capture the sounds of movement, fabric, and dress materials. We made a conscious decision not to use professional lapel microphones because we were not as interested in capturing the ‘real’ sounds of dress as we were in exploring the affective, physical contact between the microphones and the body. The sense of proximity and contact between the body and microphones added an unexpected dimension to the notions of embodiment and lived experience, with the implementation of the microphones enwrapped in the minutia of raw gestural expression. Though not as immediately apparent, the microphones also captured a sense of the immediate, interstitial space between the body and dress – the proximity between them became sensible, thus tangible, as spatial hum. There was a high degree of unpredictability and selectivity in the sounds picked up by the generic microphones, augmenting a sense of fluidity, anticipation and sound distortion. The sounds were manipulated through spatiotemporal processing techniques before being dispersed via a multi-channel loudspeaker system. As the sounds folded back from the loudspeakers, back onto the performer, there emerged a charged tension between the performer’s reaction to the processed sounds, and the initial movements
that generated the pre-processed sounds – hence instigating another level of ‘contact’ between the body, sound, dress, movement, and space.

The use of microphones and loudspeakers amplified the intimacies of body-dress relation, and the awareness of self in relation to other bodies and the immediate environment. In this manner, there was a ‘felt’ poignancy in terms of physical intimacy with the performers. Listening to the garments in movement, there was an intimate relationship with the bodies in the midst of dressing. The nuances of the gestures, movements, and sounds – at times barely audible, like whispers – drew us into close connection with them. The physical closeness was palpable.

84. Linda Welters, “Sight, Sound, and Sentiment in Greek Village Dress,” in Dress Sense: The Emotional and Sensory Experience of Clothes, eds. Donald Clay Johnson and Helen Bradley Foster, 7-15 (New York, USA: Berg, 2007). Welters’ ethnographic essay highlights the significance of the sounds of dress in communicating a sense of cultural identity of history. The sounds of dress in villages imbue a sense of community and place, as well as between people, through the sharing of sounds. Welters’ observation corresponds to what R. Murray Schafer refers to as a ‘soundmark,’ a term derived from landmark. He further states that ‘hearing is a way of touching at a distance.’ He further quotes an ethnomusicologist (unnamed), who states that, ‘all of the ethnic groups I know well have in common a physical closeness and an incredible sense of rhythm.’ Schafer, The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World, 10.
II. EXPRESSING (THE FINAL NIGHT)

White Froth performance
06 March 2008, 8pm
Mariana Hardwick salon, Brunswick, Victoria
Thirty minutes

This chapter expresses White Froth as an experience, based solely on the night of its performance. It was only performed to an audience, once. It was also only rehearsed in its entirety a few times immediately before the performance. Thus, the ‘final night’ presents a different experience of the project, in the sense that the ‘liveness’ of performance conveys a potency of expression that is instigated by sharing the experience, for the first time, with a discerning audience.

The main portion of this chapter recounts the White Froth performance in the form of an expanded narrative. It conveys the experience on the night from my personal perspective as an audience member as well as the primary instigator of the project. The intent of this section is to provide a textual experience of the performance, which is another dimension to the project alongside the actual performance and its video recording. As such, it is not merely descriptive, but conveys a subjective experience of the project that is vital to my process of reflection. It draws out the idiosyncrasies of what
happened on the night and re-contextualises them within the broader scope of my research. To that end, it is set out in a more suggestive tone than the other two chapters.

As an expanded narrative, this chapter weaves in ‘background’ information that is not necessarily apparent to the audience, such as the nuances of the performers’ engagement with specific materials, the structural framework of the performance, and the mechanics of the diffusion of spatial sound. It also expresses the way I have attempted to use specific words to imbue sensations – *white froth, crumbling glass, gushing sea*. Through the workshops, we explored the capacity of words, in correlation with sounds, images, gestures, and movements, to paint synaesthetic impressions that touch the imagination.

**WHITE FROTH, THOMAS HARDY.**

The *White Froth* performance is structured into four phases: *Froth, Burden, Bursting* and *Restraint/Relief*. Each phase moves through a spectrum of sensations manifested through the integration of physical movements, garments, and sounds. The expressive content of the four phases is based on a personal response to the protagonist in Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*.\(^5\) Hardy *arouses* multi-sensorial impressions of Tess and her transformation from maiden to fallen woman. He does this through poetic descriptions of what she wears, and how she moves in accordance with the rhythm of the seasons, and across the spectrum of her immediate environment and landscape. Hardy’s writing has been a significant influence on the way I imbue sensory experience through text, in terms of

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85. Hardy, op. cit.
using words as a device to trigger imaginative responses through improvisational movement and sounds. His descriptions are intense in detail; however, rather than narrowing or pinning them down to specific objective meanings, he opens them up to the vastness of individual imaginings. In a similar way, *White Froth* seeks to *imbue and diffuse* sensations that are at once complex, mysterious, vague, and ambiguous. It does not seek to represent or portray definite articulations of what the sensations are, and how they are to be received. Rather, it suggests that multi-sensorial sensations are intrinsically embodied within subjective experiences.

In Hardy’s world, Tess is a sensate being, a minute detail (albeit essential) within the larger composition of the natural world. In the novel, as much as in *White Froth*, she is a rich fiction and a vital figment of our (multiple) imaginations. *White Froth* is not a portrayal or representation of the character Tess. Rather, it uses the medium of performance to respond to, and express, abstractions and imaginations of Tess. She is the abstraction of immaterial sensations which are as corporeal as they are phenomenal: restraint and labour (being exerted upon whilst exerting upon another); weight (in terms of gravity/effervescence); height (being elevated/earth-bound), stiffness (mechanical, hard, contained); and looseness (soft, frothy, uncontainable). In *White Froth*, the multi-dimensional sensations are explored through the interplay between live bodies, dress and movement, augmented through spatio-temporal sound performance.
**CURATING AN EXPERIENCE.**

*White Froth* was curated as an affective and poetic experience within a multi-sensorial environment. The lighting was quite dim, apart from spotlights illuminating the performers. The intention was to heighten an awareness of the sensorial presence of sound, movement, and dress. The sounds from the performers’ movements were captured (via contact microphones), then processed (via a software platform controlled by the sound designer), and finally, projected spatially. The sounds would spatially ripple, propagate, burst, and transform into other sounds. I wanted the experience to be subtle and poetic, at times barely audible but then, punctuated by episodes of loudness – a ‘loudness’ that is the ‘filling up’ of space with sound reverberations and resonances, like filling up a balloon with air, and immersing the listener(s). I wanted to diffuse a sense of rawness of psycho-physical expression within a shared environment of sensory experience and imagination. I am alluding to the kind of rawness that is visceral, such as being immersed in the womb, swept up in dense breath, buried under wet mud, or crushed by piercing rain. It is the visceral quality of such phenomena that inspires my imagination of the micro-phenomena of the everyday, such as the rustling of fabrics, the breath-taking cinch of a corset, the sensuousness of feathers upon the back of one’s neck, and the slow, deliberate tearing of cloth. These are the poetic notions that underlie the curation of *Froth, Burden, Bursting and Restraint/Relief* in *White Froth*.

Throughout the developmental workshops, we had composed a library of movements, gestures, sounds, and sensations. This library contains a set of words that evoke poetic images and sensations inspired by both Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* and Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space*. In *Burden* and *Restraint/Relief*, the movements and sounds have eventuated based on the
way the performers respond to notions of physical weight and restraint implicated by the ready-made garments. In other words, the garments elicit idiosyncratic responses in the performers’ demeanours, postures, and therefore, their movements and sounds. For example, the heaviness of the chained skirt urges her to bend her body close to the ground, as if pulled by the gravity of the skirt. The restraint of the corset and skirt ensemble coaxes her to assume a rigid demeanour and move in a ‘disembodied,’ mechanical manner. In the case of *Froth*, we had in mind a specific *sensation* that we wanted to convey, and which became the starting point for the choice of garment, and thus the movement and sounds. Starting with the imagination of ‘froth’ and ‘ghost’, we constructed the voluminous, light and milky dress by draping, cutting and securing a large piece of fabric on her body. The dress was gradually formed and adjusted on the body depending on her movements and the sounds that could be captured. In this manner, the garment is a device that facilitates her response to specific sensations – real and imagined. In the case of *Bursting*, it was the materiality and sound of the cellophane and glassine papers that inspired the performer’s hyper-deliberate and cautious manner in engaging with them; it was as if she was touching a glistening bed of icy glass shards.

------ *The site, the space.*

*White Froth* was held in an unconventional performance space; it was not a theatre or black box, and did not have a stage and audience seating. Rather, the Mariana Hardwick site is a large warehouse that has been converted into a lush bridal salon – which is, however, naturally dramatic in effect. From the large central space, four sets of wall-height, white double doors lead into smaller salons and changing rooms. There are chipped beams, resonant floorboards, and a grand staircase that dominates the back portion

86. The Mariana Hardwick site is a large warehouse converted into a bridal salon, with 520 square metres of space. Address: 439 - 475 Sydney Road, Brunswick, Victoria, Australia.
of the central space. The warehouse exudes an idealised sense of grandness, whiteness and romance.

In curating the overall experience, it was important that a sense of anticipation was threaded through the entire night. Invitations to the event deliberately gave little away as to what *White Froth* actually was. Prior to the start of the performance, audience members were asked to wait in the front foyer. There were no instructions on what was to happen next. A calico curtain separated them from the performance zone. The entire space dimly lit. Stretching over the vast ceiling were enlarged, overhead projections of what appeared to look like ghostly spider webs in varying shades of grey. Faint sounds – of breath, waves, fabrics, bells – weaved through the whispery chatters of those present.

Curating the space for an optimum diffusive sound environment involved thinking about the spatial relationship between the performers, audience, and the eight-channel loudspeaker system. Upon entering, the audience was asked to sit on the floor around the perimeter of the performance area, viewing the central performance zone at an upward angle (as opposed to the traditional stage set-up where performers are at a cool distance or elevation). This ‘sharing of floor space’ allowed the performers to move within close proximity of the audience. It was an attempt to move away from conventional formalities between performer and audience, between performance and everyday experience. A large mirror covered almost the entire wall facing the audience, thus showing the reflection of the audience, and that of the performance space. Dim, diffused floor lighting warmed the space. There was a small mound of fabrics on the floor, translucent, milky fabric hanging off the central pillar, a small, white podium, a white chair. And the performance begins...
Phase 1 – *FROTH*

Performer: Janette  
Duration: 10 minutes  
Reference to *Tess of the D’Urbervilles: The Maiden*  
Garment: *Frothy Dress*

The darkened lights signal the start of the performance. After a period of suspended stillness, a soft, barely perceptible rustle emerges at the top of the grand staircase. She breathes into her palms, brushing past the set of contact microphones secured between her fingers. She gently smoothes her hair with both hands, in a singular, symmetrical movement. She releases a soft hush into the space. We hear her before we see her.

She is gradually illuminated, upwards, from the lights along the bottom portion of the staircase. She is swathed in gentle folds of light, milky fabric spilling over the stairs. She is wearing a voluminous dress. The dress is a five-metre length of nylon fabric that has been draped on the body, then cut, folded, and secured with pins and black ribbons. It is worn like a dress, though remaining very much a very large piece of fabric that is loosely held on – or, almost falling off – the body. She holds up the skirt, revealing bare feet. Very slowly, she makes her way down the stairs, one deliberate step at a time. Her face is expressionless. All of the weight of the performance lies in her feet and legs. The sounds are faint, so we are asked to be attentive.

She continues to descend. We sense the breath filling up spatially, getting closer. When she reaches the bottom of the stairs, she hesitates for a few moments. Hardy, *Phase the First: Chapters 1-11, Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, 7-74.

*We originally wanted to use muslin for a ‘frothy’ effect, but the muslin was too limp, and the surface too soft for the purposes of capturing sounds by brushing contact microphones against it. We decided to use nylon as it is lightweight, has tremendous body, and produces a slight shrill when rubbed and fondled.*
moments. She releases the frothy skirt from her hands, and it falls with a discernible ‘flop’.

She starts to move again – fragiley, deliberately – her hands gathering, smoothing, and burrowing into the folds of the dress. Responding to the puffy layers of the voluminous dress, she pulls the folds of the dress over her head, buries her hands underneath the skirt. She does this in a languid succession of gestures with her arms, her neck and body curving in sympathy. With her hands (and microphones), she sustains a gentle and continuous contact with the dress, akin to brushing the skin of a milky baby. The sounds are whispery and indistinct – a rustling ghost. Her languid movements send slow waves of rustling sound, swishing like dense smoke across the space. She makes her way across the space, towards the audience. The sounds evolve, mutate, transform, grow, and travel around the space, in gentle swerves and curves. She rolls onto a low, white podium, and faces the audience seated on the floor, less than two metres from her. The act of moving close towards the audience is an invitation to intimacy, a gesture towards an open engagement between bodies. From the podium, she continues on, traversing the performance space, before gradually moving out of visibility.

*Froth* draws from Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* at the beginning of the story. This is the point at which we are introduced to Tess – a child-woman, a ‘mere vessel of emotion untinctured by experience.’\(^\text{89}\) Hardy creates an impression of ephemeral innocence and genuine vulnerability, a rustic creature untouched by men … though dangerously coveted. Her best dress is a white muslin frock, described as having an ‘airy fullness,’\(^\text{90}\) under whose

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90. *ibid.*, 49.
bodice ‘the life throb[s] quick and warm.’\textsuperscript{91} There is a suggestion of a ripening sexuality – a dissipation of innocence. She is described as a creature of such purity that it can only become tainted. \textit{Froth} is a response to Tess at the exact peak of her ‘maiden’ phase, right before it is lost.

The sonic atmosphere of the \textit{White Froth} performance is an organic, live composition of real and processed sounds. The contact microphones between her fingers pick up sounds whilst in movement, which are then transformed and diffused back into the space, the audience, and the performing body. The mutual responsiveness between the real and the processed indicate the nature of the relationship between the performers and sound designer – they implicate on each other’s actions and experience, meld into each other, and form a synergistic relationship. The slight delay between the original signal and eventual processed sound is barely discernible, as the sounds meld into one another. The spatialised sounds of her gestures and movements amplify the nuances of her engagement with the dress, as they diffuse into the space – rising and falling, inflating and deflating. They elicit a sensual intimacy, as they open up the typically private experience of dressing towards a shared environment and experience.

\textsuperscript{91} ibid., 18.
Phase 2 – BURDEN

Performer: Mariela
Duration: 6 minutes
Reference to Tess of the D’Urbervilles: The Maiden No More,92 The Woman Pays93
Garment: Chain Skirt, Extended Loop Top

A period of darkness and silence prompts the transition from Froth to Burden. The lightness of froth has dissolved. There is a palpable descent to darkness, stealth, lowliness.

In the darkness, an indiscernible mass of fabric on the floor begins to move very slightly, as if it is crawling. As it becomes illuminated, its movements become jerky and abrupt. A body arises from the floor, covered with fabric. It is crouched over itself,94 with the head hidden. Unable to identify the face, one is asked to acknowledge the body – through movement and sound – as a creature of raw physicality. It quivers – slightly at first, and then starts to shake quite violently. There is the sound of a heavy metal chain, thumping against the wooden floorboards. The sound is a low rumble, gradually building into a rolling thunder, as the faceless body gathers momentum and becomes more agitated. It is wearing a heavy and voluminous floor-length skirt that it drags around like a burden. The skirt is a double-layered woollen skirt; embedded inside the hem is a thick, three-metre length metal link chain. When worn, the skirt weighs down the body like a physical burden. Even though it is not visible, one can hear and feel

92. ibid., Phase the Second: Chapters 12-15, 75-100.
93. ibid., Phase the Fifth: Chapters 35-44, 227-304.
its little waves of vibration from the impact of its weight against the wooden floorboards. It affects the posture and movement of the creature that is the embodiment of unease and struggle. The metal chain in the hem of the skirt thrashes around as it is kicked and dragged across the floor. The skirt is worn with a contrasting light muslin top with a cotton rope around the neck knotted at the back. A long, nylon fabric extension is connected at both ends, to both sides of the torso, forming an unwieldy five-metre loop. The fabric loop is impulsively pulled, wrung, twisted, and wrapped around the body in a self-binding frenzy.

_Burden_ is a response to Hardy’s description of the plight of the women working in the fields, metaphorically suggesting the tragic burden of Tess’ darkest phase. He conveys an impression of psychical and emotional heaviness, through the oppressiveness of their winter work clothes, in cohort with the tyrannical impact of the harsh environment:

[The women] wrapped themselves up in their thickest pinners, tied their woollen cravats round their necks and across their chests, and started for the barn ... They trudged onwards with slanted bodies through the flossy fields, keeping as well as they could in the shelter of hedges, which, however, acted as strainers rather than screens. The air, afflicted to pallor with the hoary multitudes that infested it, twisted and spun them eccentrically, suggesting an achromatic chaos of things.\(^95\)

The lack of light and colour, ‘the tyrannical weight of their clothes,’\(^96\) and the sensation of rain ‘stick[ing] into them like glass splinters,’\(^97\) convey a

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95. ibid., 289.
96. ibid., 286
97. ibid., 286.
tumultuous state of being that is inseparable from the physical world. In another passage, Hardy paints a synaesthetic impression of linking the psyche and physical world; he describes the heavy and sullen sky as ‘the uniform cloak of darkness ... turn[ing] into a disordered medley of grays.’

The palpability of the physical world implicates upon the self (outside in), inasmuch as it is a reflection of self (inside out). It is this palpable sensation of struggle and oppression that sets the tone for *Burden* – a mysterious darkness, an unknown heaviness, an undercurrent of chaos.

With contact microphones attached to the arm and inner thigh, the sounds of the forceful handling of the fabric, and the dragging of the skirt, are transformed and amplified through delay and echo effects, producing heavy rumbles and loud strokes of metallic sounds across space. The body responds to the spatial projection of the processed (transformed) sound through further movement. The feedback circuit – from the body and back to itself – is a self-propagation of movement and sound. In the transmission of the real, to the digital (processed), and back onto the body (transformed), the circuit is thus generative – mediated by the performers and sound designer.

After a period of struggle with the fabric loop and heavy skirt, the body eventually collapses onto the floor. The rumble subsides. A moment of stillness dissolves the frenzy. Moving out of the bleakness of *Burden*, the face of the body comes into dim illumination. She sheds the fabric loop, and then releases the drawstring of the skirt. She pulls down the skirt, revealing its bright orange-red neon lining – a shocking sight of the innards, the viscera. In contrast to the grayness of what has gone before, the neon is almost crude in its electric boldness.

98. ibid., 284.
------ Phase 3 – *Bursting*

Performer: Mariela  
Duration: 6 minutes  
Reference to *Tess of the D’Urbervilles: The Rally*\(^9\)  
Garment: Glassine paper tutu, cellophane overskirt

The ‘taking off’ of the heavy, chained skirt followed by the ‘putting on’ of the glassine paper tutu and the cellophane overskirt is the transition from *Burden* to *Bursting*. The glassine paper is smooth, thin, light but tough, and produces a crunchy, almost ‘glass-like’ sound when handled. The cellophane paper has a similar quality though shinier, lighter, and produces a fluttering, high-pitched sound. The skirts are constructed in layers of paper, then pleated and stitched together at the waist. When worn, even the slightest movement elicits a crackling and popping sensation, like a subtle shower of sticky glass.

*Bursting* is suggestive of an augmented sensuality – an imaginary popping of liquid bubbles and juicy bursts of milk and froth. It draws from Hardy’s description of Tess at the moment right before she meets Angel, the love of her life. Lured by the sound of his harp, she finds herself moving stealthily as a cat towards it, the hem of her skirts trailing through the damp garden with its ‘juicy grass [and] profusion of growth, gathering cuckoo-spittle on her skirts.’\(^{100}\) The impression of growth, staining, and moistness has an undertone of lust and exchange of bodily fluids, particularly when Hardy describes her ‘cracking snails underfoot, staining her hands with thistle-

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\(^9\) ibid., Phase the Third: Chapters 16-24, 101-152.  
\(^{100}\) ibid., 122.
milk and slugslime, and rubbing off upon her naked arms sticky blights. It is this imagination of visceral tinges, all over a hyper-sensitised body, that the performer is responding to during the Bursting phase.

The weight of the skirts hangs from the waist and the hem reaches just under the knees, emphasising the pelvis and hips as the core of bodily movement. The sensitivity of paper in producing dominant sounds elicits her to respond in a delicate and cautious manner. In a stark contrast to the forcefulness and agitation of Burden, in this Bursting phase, her movements are slight, gentle, and hesitant. Minute gestures would prompt the skirt to crunch, pop, and crackle – whether real or imagined. She begins by bringing the glassine paper tutu close to her body, and then drags it along the floor. She pulls the tutu, slowly, over her hips in a sensual, deliberate manner, gradually rotating her pelvis. She takes hold of the cellophane overskirt and wears it over the tutu. She then builds up her motion, rolls onto the low, round podium, before rolling onto the floor. There is a spilling forth of rippling sounds, mutating into a crumbling wall of pebble rain. She finally wraps the cellophane overskirt into a ball by coiling her entire body over it. She continues to roll around the floor with the skirt wrapped between her body, crushing and destroying it at the same time. At this point, the pops and crackles burst into a brittle thunder of crumbling glass, with an undercurrent of a metallic sound – like rolling over a bed of tiny pins. There is an immediate and intense body-dress relation that is ‘lived’ – a visceral sense of the temporal and spatial flow of experience. It is a state of hyper-awareness, through a deliberateness of touch and movement, of the mutually affecting, or ‘sticky,’ engagement between gesture and movement, body, and dress.

101. ibid.
Phase 4 – Restraint/Relief

Performer: Janette
Duration: 7 minutes
Reference to Tess of the D’Urbervilles: The Consequence
Garment: Stiff skirt, medical corset, voluminous top, fitted jacket, pleated collar-piece

In contrast to the previous three phases, Restraint/Relief is characterised by the symmetry of movement, to the point of being unnatural and machine-like. It begins with the performer appearing from behind a door, wearing an uncomfortably stiff, floor-length skirt constructed out of waxed cotton fabric. The skirt is narrow from hip to ankle, pressing the entire length of the legs together. A long, fluffy train was attached to the narrow hem around the ankles, lined with multiple layers of cotton voile that she kicks with her feet as she shuffles. The skirt is worn with a voluminous top that is overlaid with a fitted long-sleeved jacket, over which a medical corset is held in place through a combination of lacing and buckle-fastening. The corset is stiffened with the insertion of vertical rows of metal boning. The breath-taking cinch of the corset makes rigid her posture and gait, as does the high, separate collar-piece that keeps her neck upright. The inelasticity and restraint of the ensemble elicits a visceral awareness of her body/self that Eco refers to as ‘epidermic self-awareness’. Her posture, movements, and gestures are implicated by the affect of the form and materiality of the ensemble upon her body; she assumes a certain demeanor through the

102. ibid., Phase the Fourth: chapters 25-34, 153-226.
donning of a garment, adjusting to the new frame and fleshiness of her being. There is a push-pull interrelation between body and dress that is ‘lived’ – it is present, real, and experienced viscerally.

This phase draws from the point in Tess’ life where she is about to marry Angel, who is of upper-class bearing. She transforms herself from a simple, country girl in muslin and cotton frocks, to a lady in a new silk ‘perfect morning costume’104 and jewels. When she puts on the fineries, she is no longer the rustic girl of the land and the seasons, she has become another. However, this change of dress evokes a sense of unnaturalness and impending doom. A sense of unease is welling up in her. She is finding it increasingly difficult to harbour her sense of guilt about her ‘impure’ past. While she finally tells Angel about her past with another man and the bastard child, Angel calls her an ‘impostor,’105 and that the woman he has loved is not her but another woman in her shape: ‘You were one person; now you are another.’106 It is this sense of uneasiness and unnaturalness – as if the body has been assumed by another and disconnected from the mind – that inspires the choice of garments, movements, and sensations in Restraint/Relief.

As the performer enters the performance space, her face is blank and distant, and the rigidity of her posture somewhat ‘unnatural.’ With legs rubbing against each other, her feet shuffle – quickly, sharply – amongst the mass of excess lining that swishes and twists around her ankles. She approaches the low, white podium, briefly hesitates, and then makes a small jump and lands, with a thump, with feet flat on the podium. Only her arms and hands remain liberated, and with the contact microphones secured

104. Hardy, Tess of the D’Urbervilles, 206.
105. ibid., 299.
106. ibid.
between her fingers on both hands, she smoothes her face and hair in a symmetrical motion. She moves down to her corseted torso, and begins to stroke and rub it with her fingers in a mechanical manner – vertically and horizontally in a disjointed symmetry. She gradually builds to a more aggressive rate, extends down to the skirt, and strokes her thighs and hips, as if she is maniacally trying to get something off her body, albeit with forced resistance. The coarse and, at times, almost screechy sound, from the repeated acts of rubbing against the waxy surface of the skirt, has a tone of abrasive discomfort – perhaps alluding to the unnatural friction between her inner thighs and knees rubbing against each other.

She eventually bends over, holds up the hem of the skirt, and after a brief hesitation, tears it apart in a singular gesture. The sound of the tear is piercing, not only because of the volume and pitch, but more so its clarity – its spatial intervention into the silence that precedes it.

*After*...

The performance ends with the two performers eventually dissolving out of their ‘performance state.’ They gather the garments strewn on the floor, fold them, and put them aside. The space is gradually lit up.
III. OPENING.

From the interior he discovers interior beauty …

Gaston Bachelard: *The Poetics of Space*

An ‘opening’ signals a means of ‘getting into’ something, with the intent to unravel, unearth, uncover. An ‘opening’ is also means for getting out, such as to escape or ‘release through an opening.’ Both imply a sense of hope for some sort of revelation. This chapter will reflect upon the *White Froth* performance as lived, subjective experience, as a process of re-contextualising it within the overall scope of my research. By isolating and critically exploring some of the precious moments that hold particular resonance, I engage in a process of opening up, or unpacking, the project. The process is one of listening in, peering into, and disclosing the idiosyncrasies embedded within the live convergence of sound, movement, and dress. The intent is to draw out the little discoveries from doing the project, and contemplate them in relation to the main premise of this research, thus opening an alternative passage towards understanding the experience of body-dress relation, and inspiring my future practice. It suggests, on one hand, a sense of *opening up* a wardrobe, or getting into a

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garment, in order to experience what lies within. On the other hand – and subsequently – by reflecting upon the experience, it aims to *open out* to a more expansive understanding of the garment or wardrobe.

The chapter begins by emphasising the idea of ‘liveness’ in *White Froth*, as a necessary condition that exudes a rawness of experience and subjectivity. This sense of ‘liveness’ is vital because it imbues the performance with an urgency, coaxing a moment-to-moment engagement with the flow of sensory experience. The chapter also unravels some precious moments – the visceral, the imaginative, in the *White Froth* performance, and their capacity to open up other ways of contemplating the experience of body-dress relation.

**LIVENESS.**

*White Froth* is conceptually driven by a desire to explore the ‘liveness’ of sensory experience with regards to body-dress relation. I use the term ‘liveness’ to suggest a sense of the ‘here and now’ of experience, and how this connects with lived subjectivity. I am intrigued by the capacity of a ‘lively’ event to coax an acute awareness of self, in relation to what one experiences. Correlatively, it suggests a vital awareness of presence (of others, of the event), and being present. It is significant here to note my choice to present the project through the medium of live performance (as opposed to recorded sound and/or video); it is a means to engage with a condition that is as close as possible to something raw and immediate – haunted by a sense of urgency, impulse, and unpredictability. The performance is an experimentation of the condition of ‘liveness’ with regards to body-dress relation. It is not representative of any sort of ‘finality,’ or ‘product,’ of the
White Froth project. Rather, it should be understood as a specific point in the overall trajectory of my research, where a (large) component of my explorations are tested in a live format to a discerning audience, in order to explore the potential of shared experience and instigate further contemplation.

Within the White Froth performance, the sense of ‘liveness’ comes from a constant sense of anticipation, immediate response, and spontaneity. The modulation of duration and pacing, sound and silence, motion and stillness, as well as darkness and illumination, guides the audience through the subtleties of the event, whilst coaxing and sustaining their attention. All of these spatio-temporal relationships converge to sensitise our sensory impulses, ignite our psyches, and awaken our imaginations. The modulation of the experience is a means for sculpting the spectrum of sensations that change, develop, transform, and dissolve. For instance, temporal deliberation instigates a constant sense of anticipation in the transition from one spatio-temporal event to the next, such as a prolonged stillness before an eruption of movement and sound, or a sustained repetition that cries out for change – evoking a sense that it must change, at some point.

The performers’ movements in the White Froth performance are not strictly choreographed, nor are the sounds pre-composed. During the developmental workshops, we established a matrix of sounds, garments, gestures, and movements. The matrix correlates to a spectrum of sensations that underpin the whole performance. Operating like a toolbox, the matrix enables the performers (two dancers and a sound performer) to relate to one another through a shared spectrum of movements and sounds that can be drawn from. The performers are able to improvise within the scope of the matrix, thus maintaining a degree of freedom in terms of expressing their
subjective responses in real time. The dancers respond intuitively via movement, to a complexity of sensory and physical triggers: sound (actual sounds produced by the garments, as well as the processed sounds diffused spatially); dress and lapel microphones (the fit, form, and texture of materiality against their bodies); and sensation (imaginary sounds, images, and words). These triggers form the basis of the dancers’ movement improvisations, which, in turn, inform the sound designer’s spatial sound composition and diffusion. The diffusion of processed sound back onto the space further affects the dancers’ movement. In this manner, there exists a lived awareness with which the performers relate to one another, through a moment-to-moment feedback loop between sound, movement, dress, and sensation.

The mechanics of this relationship is not as linear as that of cause and effect. Whilst one action immediately affects another, there is fluidity to the way they are mutually implicated, one in the other. They come together as a perpetual balancing act – sometimes one component changes or compromises another, and at other times they converge and trigger something unexpected. For instance, the caress of dress could be gentle or harsh, which could project a variety of sensations depending on whether the spatial sound is amplified, echoed or shifted in its pitch. There is an embedded ‘liveness’ to this project, imbued with a degree of unpredictability and instability. The sense that anything can change coaxes the performers to be deeply empathetic and involved in one another’s presence and actions, in order to capture the minutiae of movement and sound. The liveliness of communication and expression also reflects the developmental process, where the richness of experience lies in the process of ‘doing’ – moving, listening, and responding – rather than working towards pre-determined outcomes. It is an indulgence in the process of the experience itself – an embedded ‘liveness’ in doing and expressing.
Diffusing.
The *White Froth* performance is a means for diffusing an evocative experience of body-dress relation that is as physical as it is psychical. I use the active term ‘diffusing’ to suggest a sense of propagating and resonating; it is a gentle mode of transmission, as if to pour or send forth as from a centre of dispersion.\textsuperscript{108} It refers to both the spatial distribution of sound in a technical sense,\textsuperscript{109} and – more poetically – the emanation of subjectively lived, sensory experience, from the minutiae of the real to the indefinite expanse of one’s imagination. The latter subtly references Bachelard’s phenomenological notion of imagining the grandness of the world by grasping the ‘miniature.’ In contemplating *White Froth* as a spectrum of sensations, I imagine ‘diffusing’ as a gradual release of white smoke, into a dark, airtight room through a tiny hole in the wall. Imagine if the room is the body, and the smoke is audible.

*PRECIOUS MOMENTS.*

Within the smoky space, there are tiny bursts of dense froth that emanate and then dissipate. I imagine these bursts of sensation as small moments of visceral experience, resonating through the physical and the psyche, and emanating affective sensations of sound, tactility, sight, and movement. These moments could be minute and barely perceptible, like the gentle flop of a plump skirt onto the floor, or a careless caress of hand against neck.
floor, or dress. They could also be noticeably forceful, like the dragging of invisible metal chains that sends waves of vibration across the floor, or the violent twisting and wringing of fabric that screams. The mystique of it all, is that there pervades, in the viscera, a sense of the almost graspable. Like dense smoke, it permeates one’s emotion, memory, and imagination; it is acutely felt, though never entirely graspable nor fully expressible. Such sensation has the capacity to bypass the filter of intellect.

The *White Froth* performance begins in dark illumination and near silence, gently punctuated by moments of barely perceptible sounds – rustles and whispers of an invisible presence. The diminution of sensory impact paradoxically augments one’s sensory perception, referencing John Cage’s notion of silence – which is not the absence of sound, but an expansion of auditory perception to allow all sounds to come to the fore. The near-stillness of the performance coaxes an investment of concentration – of listening in, of being acutely aware – in order to grasp the minutiae of not only sound, but also gesture.

There are also cacophonous moments that confront the senses, particularly in the two phases of *Burden* and *Bursting*. The violence involved in the twisting and pulling of fabric in *Burden* is augmented and spatially drawn out through sonic amplification, echoing, and pitch manipulation. Since there is only a slight, barely perceptible delay between an actual sound made and the diffusion of that sound in its digitised, transformed state, the performers’ actions take on an augmented quality – such that a twist of the fabric would be experienced as a loud, spatial rupture. These tumultuous moments aim to deliver the impact of the physical contact between body, dress, movement and sound. In terms of movement, there were moments of frenzy and aggression, contrasted with those that were singularly languid.
and continual, whilst still others were slight or invisible/hidden and only discernible through sound. There are also moments that appear to rupture the boundary between performance and reality – between the staged and the real – such as the quiet hesitation before the loud, violent tear in *Restraint/Relief*, where the sound of the rip reaches a visceral peak by virtue of its *real*ness; the potency lies in the simplicity of gesture – a singular stroke of motion – as if slicing into the skin with a knife, as a piercing of sound into space.

------ *The visceral.*

One of the main conceptual impetuses behind *White Froth* is the diffusion of visceral moments, rather than objectively describing, representing, or recreating sensations of the body-dress relation. In order to phenomenally engage with these moments, we are asked to simultaneously invest our entire beings. The viscera are as physical as they are psychical, emanating from within the body and connecting to emotion, thought, memory and imagination. A visceral experience refers to that which is deeply affective and, like sound, resonates through both the psyche and physical being. It also has an emphatic quality; for instance, when we perceive others experiencing a visceral factor, we tend to imagine ourselves experiencing it as well, and vice versa. *White Froth* explores the potential spatial sound diffusion to coax an instinctive response. It operates on the basis of sound having the capacity to heighten and amplify multi-sensory perception, as well as space and temporality. It reverberates and resonates waves of sensation, passing through, as well as connecting bodies in a shared environment.

There are moments that are slightly unsettling: for instance, the first brutal tear of the skirt rupturing a moment of near-silence, and the aggressive
rubbing of the textural surface of the boned corset. At the beginning of *Burden*, the mysterious movement of the indiscernible mass of fabric on the floor in the darkness, and the dragging of an invisible metal chain across the floor, are strangely stirring due to a sense of the unknown. They are invisible to the eye though inescapable from the ear. The revelation of the shocking neon red-orange lining of the heavy, chain skirt is an electric moment – a piercing visual shock echoing the metallic sounds that have just gone before. During the *Froth* phase, when the performer drops the voluminous, frothy dress on the floor, with a quiet sound of a singular flop, the ‘realness’ is acutely visceral, as if one’s heart just dropped.

I am drawn to the way these ‘small moments’ harbour potent, visceral experiences. These are precious moments. They are real, by virtue of being unchoreographed and, at times, subconscious issuances of the mind-in-the-body (drawn from Butoh practice). They awaken the senses, ignite the imagination, and refer us to a complexity of phenomenological experience. These moments provide access to the richness of phenomena, through the impact of sensory experience that touches the viscera, and ignites the imagination. A phenomenology of these small moments can open up an entire world.\(^{110}\)

To access the minutiae of these moments, it is vital to invest one’s ‘unflagging attention.’\(^{111}\) This is an investment of one’s senses, which intermingle and effect one another. Subtleties become amplified, and – over time – change, mutate, and transform, as they become enmeshed with one’s memory, emotion, and imagination. To be enraptured by the wonder of these moments is to open out, to imagine. Like a narrow gate, the miniature

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111. ibid., 159.
is the means by which we access ‘greatness,’ via the pathway of the poetic imagination. With a ‘miniature of sound … we are invited to go beyond the auditory threshold, to hear with our imagination.’ He asks: ‘And why should the actions of the imagination not be as real as those of perception?’

**IMAGINING.**

Large issues from small … thanks to the liberation from all obligations of dimensions, a liberation that is a special characteristic of the activity of the imagination.

Gaston Bachelard: *The Poetics of Space*

Not least is the charm of the sound of pure nylon, non-lycra, when my wife crosses her legs and the firmness of these nylons to the loving caress.

A satisfied customer of Caroline B, provider of nylon stockings since 1996.

The precious moments in *White Froth* are precious insofar as one is able to invest them with one’s imagination. I imagine these moments not as harbouring absolute meanings waiting to be discovered, but rather,

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112. ibid., 155.
113. ibid., 158.
114. ibid., 154-155.
possessing the potential to ignite the imagination through the expansion of one’s sensory perception, bodily experience and lived subjectivity. To delve into these moments is to open the doors of sensation, and to escape through imagination.

The sociologist Peter Corrigan points to the significance of the sound of dress in orientating not only human behaviour, but also imaginings.¹¹⁶ For instance, we are able to sense the presence, the proximity of other bodies, through sound, before acknowledging them through other senses. We can also engage in a fetishistic play of hiding/revealing the sight and sound of clothing/underwear, or draw attention to the materiality of skin-like materials such as leather, vinyl, and fur, through the erotic imagination. Although unintentional on my part, some audience members at the White Froth performance found the overall experience sexually charged, due to its allusion to the intimacy of dressing and undressing, as well as the sensuality of the performers’ acts of caressing self and dress – augmented through affective experience and imaginative response. Whilst there is an erotic dimension in imagining the sound of dress, my research attempts to venture beyond that, engaging more broadly across liberated, subjective imaginations. Sound works in synergy with the other senses in imbuing a multi-dimensional sensory world. With its capacity to effect one’s emotion, memory, and thought, the sound of dress – together with the other senses – has the potential to ignite the vast, limitless expanse of the poetic and aesthetic imagination.

One of the strands in the White Froth project is to explore the capacity of synaesthetic experience to inspire the imaginative self, as it connects exterior sensory perception with one’s psyche. In terms of the impact of a

¹¹⁶ ibid.
phenomenological impulse on the interior self, Bachelard writes: ‘Dreams, thoughts, and memories weave a single fabric. The soul dreams and thinks, then it imagines.’\textsuperscript{117} Whilst the primary focus of the White Froth project is on sound, the richness of the experience of the performance lies within the sensory integration of sight, sound, tactility and kinaesthesia. The experience is synaesthetic by virtue of the intermingling of sensory perception. Senses do not operate in isolation. Resonating with sound, the effect of movement is palpable. The diffusion of sound augments the visual and tactile experience of texture, form, and colour of the garments (whether real or imagined), bringing to the fore a complexity of sensory experience that is greater than the sum of its parts.

Like hearing, touch has a strong erotic dimension. We may find more direct delights in the sensory characteristics of the materials themselves: fur, velvet, silk, suede, leather, linen, lycra, wool, cotton and so forth, all these have different feels and are capable of evoking ranges of meanings, memories, and emotions.\textsuperscript{118}

Peter Corrigan: \textit{The Dressed Society, Clothing, the Body and Some Meanings of the World}, 2008

From what is spatially seen, heard, and felt through the floor (vibration of sound and movement), one is able to imagine the rustle of fabric, the weight of metal chains, the crispiness of the glassine paper, tutu-like skirt, the frothiness of the voluminous white dress, the rumbling density of the oppressive skirt dragging across the floor, and the stiff woodenness of the corset. What imaginary thoughts might White Froth elicit? Perhaps the

\textsuperscript{117} Bachelard, \textit{The Poetics of Space}, 175.
\textsuperscript{118} Corrigan, \textit{The Dressed Society, Clothing, the Body and Some Meanings of the World}, 3.
murmurs of a bodiless ghost, a shower of black glass mirrors, the shackled ankles of an indecipherable beast, the suffocated moans of a woman in a vault. The body’s connection with dress does not end at the limits of its physicality; rather, the body is the point of beginning for a phenomenal experience via the imagination. To imagine is to be lulled into the limitless expanse of the sensory world, to access the richness of phenomena.

I suppose it is submerged memories that give to dreams their curious air of hyper-reality. But perhaps there is something else as well, something nebulous, gauze-like, through which everything one sees in a dream seems, paradoxically, much clearer. A pond becomes a lake, a breeze becomes a storm, a handful of dust is a desert, a grain of sulphur in the blood is a volcanic inferno. What manner of theatre is it, in which we are at once playwright, actor, stage manager, scene painter and audience.319

W. G. Sebald, The Rings of Saturn

The imaginative potential of the sound of dress has become significant as a means to open up the experience of body-dress relation to the limitless expanse of subjectivities, rather than pinning it down with objective truth-values. Contemplating my research through the filter of phenomenology, sensory experience is vital in grasping the workings of the world – that grasp intrinsically subjective. The project is not a search for a universal articulation of what the sounds mean, but rather, what they do; and in Corrigan’s words, ‘Our sensate bodies … do not operate in the transcendent
realm of truth, but in the immanent kingdom of the real.¹²⁰ White Froth is grounded in the real and the immediate, and driven by impulse. It takes into primary account the phenomenological impact of sensation, and how this surfaces a connection between sensory experience and lived subjectivity. The ‘liveness’ of the performance is also a necessary factor in coaxing a moment-to-moment awareness of subjectivity. The precious moments in White Froth operate by means of diffusion, suggesting the capacity for a myriad of sensations to emanate from a singular gesture and sound, or even the absence of sensory impact (stillness), provided that one is attentive and in tune with one’s imagination.

POSTLUDE.

Whilst drawing to the conclusion of my research process – and, in reference to this body of work, the scope of scholarship, as well as my future practice – I would like to convey a sense of expansion over a narrowing down to a closure. In conceptualising the notion of body-dress relation in terms of lived, sensory experience, I propose a gesture of ‘opening out’ – with outspread arms, towards the limitless expanse of subjective experiences and imaginations. Connecting with a spectrum of other fields of scholarship and practice (performance practice, body studies, phenomenology, and sound studies), my research extends the scope of contemporary fashion and dress scholarship by building upon the extended, inter-disciplinary realm of body and dress studies. Correlatively, this research process has also broadened the potential of my future practice within, and beyond, the field of fashion.

------ Shifts in practice.

My research process and collaborative project provided an opportunity for exposure to a diverse spectrum of creative practices involving the body and dress relationship. It has facilitated a more expansive perspective in terms of my future practice as a researcher-practitioner working collaboratively across live performance and dress design. Since White Froth, I have been involved in another collaborative, performance-based project entitled
Poetics, which explores the poetics of gesture and movement through the imaginative resonance of sound. Working with practitioners in live performance and sound design has enabled me to extend my practice, and reevaluate the way I work with ‘the body in fashion.’ I became fascinated with the body as a locus of experience, as a means to expand the notion of dress as embodied experience – rather than the construction of dress as an outcome, or resolution, of ideas about the body. I have also been interested in the narrative experience of textual practice, and the use of words and text to imbue sensations and impressions. This research process has instilled a more profound awareness of the ‘tools’ and aesthetic notions towards which I am inclined. I am intrigued by the combinative use of live bodies, sound, and text in sculpting subtle and visceral experiences; and I am driven by a desire to coax an acute awareness of bodily ‘presence’ through the resonance of sound, spatiality, and temporality, and the sensation of the almost graspmable.

----- Shifts in research.

Initially driven by an interest in the sound of dress as another way to evoke dress experience, during the research process my focus shifted to the experience of the body and its relation to dress. Through working with the performers, I became aware of the way the sound of dress always and immediately implicates bodily movement and experience. On the other hand, the affective capacity of the physicality of dress, in terms of its fit, form, shape and materiality, encroaches upon bodily experience. Thus, the implication of dress upon bodily experience suggests an immediate and mutually implicated relationship between body and dress.

121. The Poetics project has not been included in this research, as it is not feasible to constrain its trajectory within the limits of the MA research.
From the exploration into physical sounds, movements, and dress, I shifted my attention to sensation. What became interesting – in addition to the sensations of dress, sound, and movement – is the experience of sensation in and of itself. Sensation is innately experienced, and intrinsically embedded within subjectivity. Elizabeth Grosz writes, ‘Sensation impacts the body, not through the brain, or representations, signs, images or fantasies, but directly, on the body’s own internal forces.’ These internal forces are laced with subjective histories, thoughts, emotions, memories, and imaginations. Working with the dancers was a means to explore the relationship between the exterior, physical sensation, and the psychical interior – and how this mutually responsive loop may be physically expressed. Within the context of my project, affective sensation coaxes a response of the psyche that can be expressed through the physical body. Correlatively, the physical body is the medium through which the subject expresses and responds to the sensation of dress and sound. With the phenomenological body, there is a contiguous relationship between physical sensory experiences and the psychical interior. The physical inter-relations between body, dress, sound, and movement are imbued with the weight of the psyche. Through the connection between the physical and psyche, the experience of sensation is intrinsically and immediately charged with lived subjectivity.

----- Towards another understanding of body-dress relation.

Through my research, I have attempted to expand upon the study of body and dress, by drawing from a set of concepts and practices related to live performance, sound studies, poetics and phenomenology, as well as perception and subjectivity. The intent is to extend the study of body and

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dress beyond fashion and dress studies, and to contemplate it through the filter of related fields as a means to arrive at an alternative understanding of body-dress relation. My research has conveyed an experience of body-dress relation that is mediated by sound and movement set within the context of live performance. The medium of live performance is a vital means for expressing the convergence between the body, dress, sound and movement as a shared, affective experience. This points to the significance of ‘liveness’ (of experience) and lived experience (in reference to subjectivity) in my research – not only in the perception of sound and movement, but, more significantly, in relation to the experience of body-dress relation.

The phenomenological body is the medium through which the sensory experience of dress is both performed and subjectively lived. It has led me towards a more profound appreciation of the implication of lived subjectivity in relation to sensory phenomena. To experience body-dress relation via sound and movement predicates on a self that is attentive and aware; it is a conscious investment in the process of experience itself. This phenomenon is lived, embodied, as well as being richly imaginative. I propose a resistance to any absolute and objective rationalisations of what a sensory experience is, in favour of what it can do – thus, alluding to a more expansive understanding of body-dress relation as a poetic phenomenon. Consequently, the acknowledgement and pursuit of the potential of sensory phenomena as another way of experiencing body-dress relation has become more significant.

By emphasising lived experience and subjectivity, my research has focused on a visceral and poetic understanding of body-dress relation that it is intrinsically subjective, elusive, and does not yield easily to reason. It suggests the capacity of dress for embodied experience, inasmuch as the body in fashion is capable of being active and lively. As an intimate pairing,
they are neither inert, nor entirely separable from each other. It is possible now to imagine, more fully, the phenomena of the ‘palpitating body’ and ‘sounding dress.’ They are acutely physical, visceral, and psychical. They coax an awareness of the experience of sensory experience. They are intrinsically connected: when one moves, the other moves in response; when one reverberates, the other resonates; and where one is still, the other imagines, or is imagined. They are lively in our physicalities and psyches. They coax our lived subjectivities, igniting thoughts, emotions, and imaginations. They are rich in sensations, whether concrete or imaginary.

The *White Froth* project is a means to explore another understanding of body-dress relation, via the inter-related medium of sound and movement. The collaboration with the performers and sound designer has evolved my research and practice, enabling me to branch out to alternate methods and approaches in working with the body, materials, and sound, within the context of live performance. The undertone of poetics and the subtle phenomenological method are pivotal for me in terms of reflecting upon, conceptualising, and expressing ideas of lived sensation, subjectivity, and experience. The experience of body-dress relation stretches across the boundless expanse of lived subjectivities; its resonance can be felt within the realms of the suggestive, the phenomenal, the ambiguous, the imaginative. Lived through the subject, the ‘palpitating body’ and ‘sounding dress’ are *replete* with potential experiences. In once again contemplating Hardy’s words – ‘… and all this fluff of muslin about you is the froth’\footnote{Hardy, *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, 145.} – I would like to be coaxed into the depths of imaginative sensations and phenomena, and to be stirred anew.

\footnote{Hardy, *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, 145.}


**SELECTED READINGS**


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White Froth: Palpitating Body, Sounding Dress


**EXHIBITION CATALOGUES**


