[A]DRESSING DEATH:
Fashioning Garments for the Grave

A project submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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THE ADR DOCUMENT
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COLLAGES:  Tegan Carter for Garments for the Grave
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 part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the exegesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; and, any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged.

PIA INTERLANDI
December 2012
IN MEMORIAM:

Grandpa: Arthur James Farnworth (30.09.1923-10.12.06)
Nonno: Gaetano Interlandi (30.11.1919 – 04.04.2009)
Grandma: Enid Hinda Farnworth (10.12.1924 – 03.04.2010)
Miles Coleman (01.07.1989 – 01.01.2011)
Paul Simpson (02.05.1966- 03.3.2011)
Dori Bicchierai (5.4.1964 – 24.8.2011)
Justin Whittaker (14.09.1950- 02.09.2011)

To my pink pig friends:
Anastasios, Aronfsky, Ball, Burton, Cant, Eagleman, Ennis, Evans, Fuller, Gilbert, Harris, Janaway, Jensen McBay, Larkins, May, Mims, Pendle, Roach, Shields, Utrainen, Wakely.
(July 2009 – October 29, 2009)

And to my beautiful Nonna, Nicolaa Interlandi, who died on the 3rd of October 2013, only a few short days before the final examined submission of this exegesis.
The following document contains images of deceased people and animals

Discretion is advised
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
Death affects each of us differently and often our relationship with it is deeply personal, so to the people who shared their stories and listened to my own, thank you. While I’m the first to admit that there are more people than I can possibly list, I’m going to attempt to name a few who without none of this research would have been possible.

To my supervisors Pia Ednie-Brown and Robyn Healy, thank you for your guidance over the last few years – it’s been quite a journey.

My endless gratitude to the friends who have mentored and supported me, talked life and death (even modelled it in some cases), answered calls in the middle of the night, calmed me down during some of the more intense moments and encouraged me to keep going. To Diana Klein; Emma Bosely, Karl Korju, Devika Bilimoria, Tegan Carter, my sister Sonia Interlandi, Tarryn Handcock, Jasmine Norrie, Katie Molloy, Priscilla Lim, Sue Thomas, Joanna Henning, Ruth Nguyen, Bernhard Kohli, Martin Leskowski, David Neustein, Larin Sullivan, Lani Steinberg, and Leanne Butler – I can’t possibly ever thank you enough.

To all of the staff, students and post-graduate community in the School of Architecture and Design at RMIT – thank you for your support and interest, and for keeping my plants alive when I wasn’t in the office – for letting me share my findings and experiences - even those that involved partially decomposed pigs. A special thank you to Peter Allen, Jiyu Hong, Duo Xu, Kara Liu, Remie Cibis, Jason Ho, Julia Wang, Rhys Williams, Khalilah Zakariya, Ricarda Bigolin, Reza Afla, Pete Macfarlane, Liliana Pomazan, Tania Sliwa-Neyman, Adele Varcoe, Winnie Ha, Karen Webster, George Chan, Liam Revel, Georgia McCorkil, Mittul Shah-Vahanvati, Denise Sproynskyj, Denise Solley, Peter Boyd, Kristin Green, Mick Peel, Janette Gavin, Jo Cramer, Liz Starrett, Claudia Cotrone, Greg Allan and Gwen Scott.

To the SymbioticA community who brought new meaning to the phrase- *friends help you move – real friends help you move bodies*, by helping me to then dig them up every 50 days over the next year - Lisa Carrie Goldberg, Oron Catts, Ionat Zurr, Jane Coakley, Ian Dadour, David Cook, Amanda Alderson, Guy Ben-Ary, Joel Ong,
Lynette Tan, Benjamin Forster, Daisy Ginsberg, Tarsh Bates, Perdita Phillips, Paola Magni and the amazing Kathy High and Cynthia White.

Thank you to the ‘Deathies’ who are making not only death, but life, more fulfilling - Simon Ferrar and Aileen Sirra at Clandon Wood, Kristie West, Barbara Charmers, Fran Hall, Dorothy-Jane King, Sally Cant, Kerrie Noonan, Shirley White, Molly Carlile, Victoria Spence, Sally Raudon, Ken West, Charles Cowling, Lindsey Fitzharris, and Caitlin Doughty.

And to the grandparents I’ve lost along the way... Grandpa, Arthur Farnworth who died in 2006 and was my first experience with death. My Nonno, Gaetano Interlandi who died in 2009 and was the first person I had the privilege of dressing for death. My Grandma, Enid Farnworth who died in 2010 and reconfirmed that dressing the dead was something that could be made beautiful. And to my Nonna Nicolaa Interlandi, who died only one week ago and was the first family member I’ve made garment for, and whose dressing gave me the opportunity to share the life affirming gift that is dressing the dead. I love you.

And finally to my parents for bringing me into the world, giving me this life and facilitating my dreams.
This research explores the ways fashion design can directly approach the realities of the dead body, specifically, the moments between death and disintegration, and in doing so, seeks to contribute to the ways in which fashion design can play an important role in the way we approach the dead body and the rituals surrounding death.

Fashion designers largely cater to living bodies. While there has been an increasing use of death related imagery within the fashion field, most notably in the area of advertising and digital media, this is vastly different from approaching the actuality of ‘the dead.’ While the dead body may be absent of life, it becomes part of a series of cultural, material, emotional, and ethical processes that have been largely neglected by fashion design. Generally, the dead body is approached by dressing and wrapping to cover and shield it (and the living) from its vulnerable, transient state. A key aim of the research has been to seek alternative ways to dress the dead body – both through the design of actual purpose-built garments, and in the way the act of dressing the body with these garments can affect our approach to death and the dead body.

The research has been undertaken through a series of creative projects involving fashioned processes and garments. Projects have been produced and have evolved in response to the moments between death and disintegration in three primary ways. Firstly, through the design of garments that literally, dissolve as a way to explore the disintegration of the garment as an aesthetic process. Secondly, it is examined through exploring processes of growth and formation in the earth, where plant roots are grown in body moulds. The third body of work explores the realities of decomposition, engaging directly with the visceral nature of ‘disgust,’ through the dressing, burial and exhumation of pig bodies, done in the context of a scientific experiment.

Ultimately, this research becomes the beginning of a new type of fashion practice, catering to the care and dressing of the dead. It makes contributions to ways in which we might deal with dead bodies, and to thinking about the potential role of fashion design as the fashioning of processes, rather than simply the design of garments.
Exhibitions/Publications/Lectures

2012-2013  Residency at Clandon Wood Natural Burial Ground to be conducted between December 2012 and April 2013, at the invitation of its owner Simon Ferrar. This residency will include a freelance role working between funeral homes that clients of Clandon Wood will be employing, and will primarily focus on instigating family participation in the dressing of the dead. http://www.clandonwood.com/


Invited guest speaker for College of Fine Arts (COFA), University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia “Current Issues in Art” series. COFA Talk entitled Skin and Death conducted with UK fashion consultant and academic Prof. Paul Rider, COFA, Paddington, NSW, Tuesday, October 9, 2012.

“Melodies in the Air.” Collaborative exhibition of art by fashion designers, and works by artists who are inspired by fashion. No Vacancy Gallery, Melbourne, September 19 – 30, 2012.

“Death Down Under” (DDU) 2012 Conference. Fashioning Death: Garments for the Grave The annual DDU is a multidisciplinary conference showcasing the research being undertaken in the areas of death, dying and bereavement throughout Australia and New Zealand. Hutton Theater, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand, June 28-29, 2012.


2011  “Social Studio: Quick Unpick” Guest Talk. The Social Studio ‘Quick Unpick’ are a series of public fashion talks where local designers talk about their experiences and the ideas that underpin their work. The Social Studio is a fashion school, fashion label and a community space created from the style and skills of the young refugee community. The Social Studio, Collingwood, Victoria, Australia. July 13, 2011 (Melbourne)

Small capsule exhibition at the Asia Funeral Expo (AFE) held in Hong Kong, China. The Asia Funeral Expo is the largest funeral conferences and expos in Asia. I presented a number of photographs, posters and flyers of my funeral garment work. I was invited to be a guest speaker at their 2012 conference and to launch my collection, however dates clashed with PhD events. Asia Funeral Expo, Hong Kong Convention & Exhibition Centre, Wanchai, China, May 19 – 20, 2011

2010 - 2011  
Shroud exhibited at “Trash Fashion: Designing Out Waste.” One of my burial garments from The Piq Project was displayed in the exhibition, which explored garments and textiles that reduce waste and the impact on our environment. The exhibition ran from June – December, but was then extended for another 4 months. It featured a number of innovative fashion designers such as Sandra Black, Suzanne Lee, and Kate Goldsworthy. Antenna Gallery, London Science Museum, South Kensington, London, UK, June 26 – April 2011.

2009 - 2010  
Intermittent residency at SymbioticA Centre for Biological Arts: University of Western Australia.  
http://www.symbiotica.uwa.edu.au/residents/interlandi  
This was where some of my PhD research was undertaken with Prof. Ian Dadour. SymbioticA is a cutting-edge artistic laboratory dedicated to the research, learning, critique and hands-on engagement with the life sciences. It enables artists and researchers to engage in wet biology practices in a biological science department. It has an international reputation for ground breaking and pioneering research and practice in the field of art and the life sciences. The residency resulted in a documentary and a future publication.

School of Anatomy and Human Biology, The University of Western Australia, Crawley, Perth, WA, Australia.

2009  
A fashion parade held with five other local designers. It included a small capsule collection of garments from my PhD research.
Together we promoted and organised the entire event within the Festival. March 18 – March 22, 2009. ARM: Level 11, 522 Flinders Lane Melbourne 3000 Australia.

**2008**  
“Missing Persons, ”Inter-disciplinary conference: Garments for the Grave, paper presented at the University Of Western Sydney, Bankstown Campus, Milperra, NSW, Australia, July 10 – 11, 2008

**2007**  
Mercedes-Benz Fashion Festival Brisbane: Coffee Club Australia Graduate of the Year Fashion Parade. 
To compete in the parade, two students were picked from each fashion institution in Australia. I was one of the two selected students from RMIT and was flown to Brisbane where I presented my honours year collection of garments to a panel before participating in the event fashion parade. Hilton Hotel, Brisbane, QLD, Australia, August 30, 2007
PRESS + INTERVIEWS
Where articles are available on the internet, a hyperlink is provided.

2013  ⚽️ ABC Anatomy Arts Documentary: SOUL. Directed by Larin
Sullivan and produced by Matchbox Productions. Final installment
of the 12-part Anatomy series on ABC Australia.
A half hour documentary about my practice as a fashion designer
and funeral celebrant that will be televised across Australia in
March, 2013, and then screened at various film festivals both in
Australia and internationally.
http://www.abc.net.au/arts/tv_radio/artscape/about.htm

2012  ⚽️ "Boroondara Review, Local (Boroondara): “Dressing the Dead”
profile by Linley Wilkie, Wednesday, October 17, 2012, p. 17

VICE UK online article by Monica Helsey, “OBSESSING OVER
DEATH ISN’T JUST FOR OLD PEOPLE ANYMORE.” October
16, 2012 http://www.vice.com/en_uk/read/obsessing-over-your-
own-mortality-isnt-just-for-old-people-anymore

Office interview on Sunday Night Safran with John Safran and Father

The Lifted Brow magazine: ““How is the Work Done?” as told to
Christine Priestly http://www.theliftedbrow.com/sample-page/
The lifted brow is an Australian independent literary magazine. The
article is a 5000 word ‘as told to’ style interview. Issue no. 7,

Article in numerous Japanese Newspapers written by Shinji Ito
(Oceania Correspondent) about my doctoral work and funeral
practice. A team from the Sydney Bureau was flown to Melbourne
to interview and photograph me for their paper in Japan. (Kyoto
Shimbun 29 Aug 2012 p6, Gifu Shimbun 5 Sep 2012 p5, Chiba
Nippo 9 Aug 2012 p12, Nihon Nippo 28 Jul 2012 p4, Yamagata
Shimbun 20 Aug 2012 p21, Kōhoku Shimpō 28 Jul 2012 p4,
Hokkoku Shimbun 24 Jul 2012 p3, Chubu keizai Shimbun 21 Jul
Jul 2012 p7, Nihonkai Shimbun 11 Jul 2012 p9, Chugoku Shimbun
12 Jul 2012 p8)

Peppermint Magazine: ‘Garments for the Grave,’ blog by
Lee Yong Soo, Monday, June 4, 2012.
http://peppermintmag.com/garments-for-the-grave/
Peppermint is an award winning Australian based magazine
promoting green fashion and ethical lifestyles.
ABC interview with Red Symons: *Breakfast with Red Symons.* May 31, 2012 on Radio 774 ABC Melbourne. This was my second interview with Red Symons about my doctoral research.


2011

YOROKOBU Magazine (Madrid): “El Ultimo Traje” by Gema Lozano, SPANISH. Issue no. 23, November, 2011, p. 30. Yorokobu. “Take a Walk on the Slow Side” is a monthly magazine produced in in Spain covering a variety of design media. It is marketed at professionals in communications, marketing, advertising, creativity, design, media, social media etc.

Financial Times Magazine (London): “First Person,” As told to Katie Engelhart. September 30, 2011. The ‘First Person’ is a regular profile in the FT Magazine which features an interview told in the first person about a person who is the ‘first’ to do something. I was contacted and invited to be interviewed.

http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/2/7a78a1f6-e976-11e0-a74b-00144feab48a.html#axzz2DsrVKJp1

BBC Mundo: “Ropa para usar en el ataúd,”


http://www.rnw.nl/english/radioshow/death

http://www.metro.co.uk/lifestyle/872028-designer-pia-interlandi-creates-range-of-shrouds-for-the-dead


Real Radio Sydney 2SER 107.3FM: “Garments for the Grave,” Saturday, July 2, 2011 8 Interviewer’s name?


In Memorandum 2: Blog article by Philippa Wagner posted June 8, 2010 http://www.philippawagner.co.uk/blog/view/in-memorandum-2/
Phyllipa Wagner is an established future caster and trend forecaster consulting with a number of subscription only forecasting websites including: WGSN, stylesight, LS:N Global and Stylus.


Syn FM interview with Lydia Chia (90.7fm) “Natural Earth Burial” Tuesday, June 2, 2009

Syn FM interview with Lidia Chia (90.7fm) “Eco Fashion,” Tuesday, May 5, 2009

World Global Style Network (WGSN): “Lingerie S/S 11: Inspiration – Timelines” WGSN is “The leading online fashion trend-analysis and research service providing creative and business intelligence for the apparel, style, design and retail industries.” In addition to industry, many fashion educational courses offer their students subscriptions (including RMIT).

PREFACE
Prior to commencing this research, my interests within the fashion design discipline largely revolved around the notion of transformation through processes such as decay, dissection or dissolution. When I commenced this PhD and began to critically analyse my previous work, I realised that much of the metaphor and allusion in the garments I had created was aimed at exploring death within the context of the living. Like many other designers, artists, authors and philosophers who employ this same notion of death as transformation, I, too, was intrigued by the inherent taboos: the sense of inevitability, and its future implications on my own mortality, in addition to the contextual interpretation of death around me. I have been ‘fashioned’ by the culture surrounding me, and therefore had been exposed to countless depictions of death, the dead and the dying via print, visual and audio media, to the point of saturation, without ever having experienced the death of someone known to me. Nevertheless, I was intrigued by the human body and its unavoidable deterioration, both through the ageing process and through what I perceived decomposition to entail. In a range of experimental fashion designs, I studied the art of autopsy and dissection and then applied its principles to garments, inserting y-incisions through which
the inner organs and skeleton could be revealed as garments peeled back on the catwalk. [P.03-P.09].
I created jewelry in the form of a biological heart [P.10], its weight around the chest a reminder or our own internal mechanism. I denatured synthetic fibres with heat, leaving them with the appearance of biological decay, and explored the fragility and transience of dissolvable fabrics that disintegrate not simply with water, but from the sweat of my hands.
A catalyst occurred shortly after the decision to undertake this doctoral research. This was when, after his death, I dressed my Nonno, my paternal grandfather, in preparation for his viewing and funeral. This experience led me to more deeply question the role of fashion and clothing in relation to death. Coming at the end of existence, this was, in fact, one of the most sacred moments in life, and indeed, the only ‘certainty’ in the context of living.

Momentous occasions of ritual and ceremony usually call for particular dressings; for example, the wedding dress is a garment that has months of deliberation sewn into its seams. But the garment chosen for my grandfather, the last garment that he would ever wear, was done with haste and without much thought invested in its selection, as more consideration was given to the surrounding rituals of readings, photos, coffin choice and other funeral arrangements, as well as the process of grieving itself. My Nonna, my grandmother and his wife of sixty years, simply did what she had seen others do, which was to dress him in his best suit. But as a designer, I understand the power of fashion, of its role in identity, its proximity to the skin, its communication as an exterior layer with which we present ourselves to the world, and with an expertise in textile science, I also understood the role that fibres play in the fabrication of clothing.
While the garment he was dressed in might not have been as deeply considered as I would have liked, the experience of dressing him proved profound in both its simplicity and its symbolism. I was privileged to take up the task of dressing the man who had known me longer than I’d known myself, who had lived for eighty-nine years, fathered my father and was the source of life for half of my family. He was strong, stubborn and traditional, but had died in a hospital gown, weak and fragile and stripped of many of the qualities I had known him to possess during his life. By clothing him, I was able to restore some of those qualities through the symbolism of his garments, reinstating these traits through the simple act of dressing, a process he was no longer able to do for himself, and thus required assistance from the living to perform.

This was not my first encounter with death, as two years earlier my maternal grandfather [P.15-P.18] died; this was when I was an undergraduate. In that instance, our family went to see him in hospital only hours after he had died. Informed by media exposure in having watched every season of Six Feet Under,\(^1\) I felt as though I was prepared for the experience. A critically acclaimed television show created and produced by Alan Ball and screened between

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2001-2005, the program documented the fictional life of a family living and working in a funeral home. Each episode featured a dead person, their body often an object around which many of the dramas of that particular episode unfolded. I was both correct and mistaken in presuming I knew what to expect. As a work of fiction, none of the bodies featured in the show were ever actually dead humans.

I knew my grandfather would ‘look dead,’ which was to say, no longer alive; jaundiced from where the blood had drained from his face, and cold, but I had no idea what ‘dead’ actually looked like. Whatever force was in him that gave him ‘life,’ be it a soul, a spirit, chi, or energy passing between atoms, was gone. His body was akin to a shell, a physical and graspable object, but void, inert and only hinting at once containing a life. Having had his own clothing replaced by a neutral hospital gown added to the lack of his formerly living identity. Nevertheless, his body was not simply an empty vessel eliciting impassive response. It did, however, call for a new set of negotiations.

We did not see my grandfather’s body again. At his funeral, it was housed inside a no-nonsense, plain, pine coffin, befitting his customary attitude in life. This was then housed inside a decorative coffin we had hired for the occasion. At the time, I only fleetingly wondered as to what he was wearing; peeling back the babushka doll-type arrangement in my mind. Each layer took us further away from the reality of his death, and as a result, I felt somewhat disconnected from him at his funeral. So, when the opportunity came to dress my Nonno, my paternal grandfather, I accepted [P.19-P.22].
Nonno was presented to my Aunt and myself with a white sheet draped over his body. He had been embalmed, something we had not requested the mortuary staff to do, and their presumptions were bothersome to me. Then again, I was grateful for the fact that they had already replaced his underwear. I had been slightly nervous about encountering the full nakedness of his body, knowing full well that he would have been horrified about me doing so. I noticed that the staff member helping us wore latex gloves and I asked if we needed to put them on also. She replied that as family we didn’t need to, a comment that puzzled me. How was it that we were immune to his deathliness, whilst she, the professional, was not? In some ways, I felt a rejection, but we moved forwards with the dressing ritual. All of his selected clothes were too large given that he had lost a large amount of weight in the last years of his life, but I tried to work with the idea that with a few well-placed darts, I could ‘fit’ the suit to his frame, regardless of the seeming insignificance of tailoring to the function in this situation. However, when it came to manoeuvring his leather shoes onto his feet, the totality of the operation crystallised in my mind. It was not that I had an aversion to the clothes we dressed him in; it was rather, a subconscious awareness that the clothes and the shoes were designed for life, and not for death. That is to say, that the intended form and function of the chosen garments was no longer relevant to the body that they now clothed.
It was this realisation that leads into the research projects developed throughout my candidature. I saw that a contribution could be made to this, one of the most sacred of moments; the final corporeal minutes of a life completed.

There was room for new rituals to be developed that engaged the dead in a meaningful way, and that through my skills as a fashion practitioner I could facilitate the fashioning of garments and the process of dressing the dead.

Through fashion, we could not only simultaneously dress, undress and redress the dead, but encounter our own mortality.
INTRODUCTION
INTRODUCTION
In 1824, Italian poet and philosopher Giacomo Leopardi commented on the relationship between fashion and death in his satirical operette *Morali: Dialogue between Fashion and Death*. Fashion and Death are linked as sisters who complement each other’s strengths and compensate for their respective weaknesses, but their tasks are collective - renovating, ending, renewing. This short piece of writing made an amusing yet poignant observation about the nature of fashion and death and became a critical piece of literature in my research. Leopardi describes an imaginary conversation between estranged sisters, the daughters of Caducity.

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2 This conversation is played out in Michele Maxby’s series *Paper Lilies* (2010) [0.01-0.02] as well as an untitled series of illustrations by Fumie Sasabuchi (2007) [0.03-0.05] who cheekily draws Death into published fashion magazine pages.
3 In contrast, George Pendle’s 2008 biographical account of the life of Death in *Death: A Life*, he speculates that Death was born in Hell, ‘the only son of Satan and Sin. He was educated in the ‘Palace of Pandemonium and the Garden of Eden’
FASHION. Don't you recognise me?... I'm Fashion, your sister.

DEATH: My sister?

FASHION. Yes. Don't you remember that we are both Caducity's daughters?

DEATH. What can I remember, I who am memory's greatest enemy?

FASHION. But I remember well; and I know that you and I together keep undoing and changing things down here on earth although you go about it one way I another...I'm saying that it is our nature and our custom to keep renovating the world.

...

DEATH. Then I believe that indeed you are my sister and, if you want me to, I'll hold it more certain than death itself...but if I keep this still, I'll faint. So if you feel like running next to me, be sure you don't croak, for I go fast...

FASHION. If we were to run the Palio together, I don't know which one of us would win the race, for whereas you can run, I can go faster than a gallop; and whereas you faint by standing still in one place, I waste away.

...

DEATH. ...Since you were born from my mother's womb, it would be good if you would help me in some way with my chores.

FASHION. I have done that in the past more often than you think. First of all, though I continuously cancel and distort all the other customs, I've never in any place allowed the practice of dying to stop... Obviously you don't know the power of fashion.

...

FASHION. ...I think it is desirable that from now on we should always stay together.

DEATH. You are quite right. Let's do as you say.
From this perspective (one which has been drawn upon by philosophers and sociologists such as Georg Simmel⁴ and Walter Benjamin⁵), Fashion and Death, whilst separate entities, share common traits. Both are similar in the way they are constantly changing. They do not "exist without the notion of change;" if either were to stop “running” they would “waste away.”⁶

In Leopardi’s essay, their mother is known alternately as Caducity, Transience, Decay, Fragility and Transitoriness, depending upon translations, and can also be known as ‘Process’ (referring to a series of transforming actions). Indeed, Process is my preferred interpretation in representing these acts of transformation across time and space, with a beginning and an end. Fashion can represent the beginning or birth of a cycle, endless change and growth, whereas Death represents finality – endless change and decay. As

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such, they are inseparable, each a different side of the same coin. However, these ends and beginnings can’t be precisely located, having blurry and permeable boundaries. In continuing with an analysis of Leopardi’s characters, perhaps Fashion is the younger, more eccentric of the pair, changing the ‘colour of the season’ seemingly at random. She shares a link with birth and Eros, fertility and life; she is unattainable and ‘ageless’, traversing the line between alive and dead. Conversely, Death, the older sister, is infinitely more feared. She is at the other end of a spectrum, the reverse of the coin, the Grim Reaper, often represented by a grimacing skeleton, or even a putrefying corpse. Death is perhaps the “ultimate reminder that we do not control the conditions of our existence” but it is from “her kinship with Fashion, we know that these conditions include relentless, unpredictable change.” But they both share a streak of unpredictability; Death, too, can strike out at the least expected moments.

1 In many ways, Fashion is personified by the young, firm, beautiful woman; a model. This hanger of fashion is at the peak of fertility, or rather teeters in the ‘moment’ of a girl becoming a woman, (not necessarily ‘heath’ if one observes the model archetypes of the ‘heroin chic’ phase of the 90’s), but more often than not she is intrinsically connected to sexuality. The Fashion model has a long association with mannequins and dolls, and as fashion author and academic Caroline Evans (Fashion at the Edge, 2003) suggests, they can even be seen as corpses. They negotiate the line between real and false, dead and alive. But in fashion, ever-fleeting, models too come in and out of favour.
3 Fashion leaves behind more than clothes, but it is the clothing aspect of ‘fashion’ in which I situate my practice.
4 Other reflections about Fashion and Death have led to Death’s association with beauty and fashion’s with ugliness. It was Death, and not Fashion, who was named ‘Mother of Beauty’ by American poet Wallace Stevens in Sunday Morning (1915). I venture to say that Beauty spent much of her time with - and was highly influenced by - Aunt Fashion when Death was on an undertaking, as we know that Beauty is malleable, and often depends on the fashion of a given moment. Jean Baudrillard (For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign, 1981, 79) went so far as accuse Fashion of being and giving rise to Ugliness, the antithesis of Beauty when he stated that: “Fashion continually fabricates the ‘beautiful’ on the basis of a radical denial of beauty, by reducing beauty to the logical equivalent of ugliness.”
Fashion and Death represent a different ‘moment’ in the life of Process, yet in their own way, they take on many of their mother’s genetic traits, most notably the ‘arrow of time’ that is their pulse. Each leaves a physical remainder on society as they move forward in time, a snail trail of sorts: Fashion leaves behind clothing; Death, in its wake, leaves corpses. Destruction is par for the course. Like all biological processes, death represents the undoing of one entity to feed another; the same can be said for fashion. Academic in comparative literature Eugenia Paulicelli summarises the arguments put forward by fashion sociologist George Simmel and social critic Walter Benjamin noting that the, “History of fashion shows clearly that new fashions are related to, and grow out of, their immediate predecessors.”  

The end is the beginning is the end: “in occupying the dividing line between past and future, [fashion] feeds on the ungraspable present.”

Yet, how a particular event unfolds from past-present to future, where exactly the beginning and the end of a process are defined, is indistinct and ill-defined. In terms of the human life, it may seem easy to say that it begins at birth and ends with death, but the processes of birthing, and of ‘death-ing’ are complex. The ‘point of death’ has been negotiated as technology has improved in efficiency, from final breath, through to final heartbeat, and now, to brain death. Yet the heart can still beat in the brain-dead body, and in cardiac surgery, the heart can be bypassed altogether for hours at a time, with no consequence to the functioning of the brain. People are rarely connected to an ECG at death, and the final electrical spark is not witnessed. Instead, we have only the clinical signs presented by the body upon which to make an assessment of finality.

My research is not an investigation into the point of death, nor is it an analysis of the beginnings of fashion. Rather, it acknowledges both as transient processes and instead examines the traits and patterns of growth that can emerge from both and the margin at which they intersect.

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10 Paulicelli, “Fashion: Narration and Nation.” P 284
11 Ibid.
Our cultural relationship with death has fluctuated over the centuries. There have been moments throughout history when death and dying have filled much of the collective consciousness, such as during the devastation of The Black Death (1348 – 1350); the strict mourning protocols of Queen Victoria’s reign over England (1837 - 1901), and the Second World War (1939 - 1945). However, at the beginning of the Twenty-first Century, it is widely accepted that our current cultural attitudes bifurcate between denial and horror. Either understood through Denial of Death, outlined by sequestration into the clinical environment of the hospital, or The Pornography of Death, argued by Geoffrey Gorer, where we experience death through the bombardment of images in the media depicting violence.

Within the context of this research I am primarily referring to Westernised culture. The Black Death decimated an estimated third to two-thirds of the population of Europe in the 14th century and resulted in the development of a rich vein of art and literature embracing the Danse Macabre and Ars Moriendi. These texts evidence the importance placed on preparing for one’s individual death as the populace were faced by the plague’s devastating scale, and are addressed as significant to the development of cultural attitudes toward the act of dying. Philip Ziegler, The Black Death (Edinburgh: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997).

The 19th century heralded a move that saw a shift from concern over one’s own death to concern over the death of one’s significant other. Death became romanticised, seen as separation of loved ones, and there was an increased striving toward material immortality. Memorials became ornate and decadent, effigies of the dead painstakingly carved into marble and publically erected. When photography became available to the middle class there was also a dramatic increase in post-mortem or memorial photography. Stanley B Burns and Elizabeth A Burns, Sleeping Beauty II: Grief, Bereavement and the Family in Memorial Photography (New York: Burns Archive Press, 2002).


Even though written in 1973 and 1955 respectively, The Denial of Death and The Pornography of Death are still considered key texts within contemporary death studies and have informed the field of death studies amongst many others.

Hans Holbein the Younger
Selected works from The Dance of Death:
The Child
The Old Man
1538
and the deaths of people we do not know. As a result, when ‘real’ death inevitably comes to visit, we are often poorly prepared.

Perhaps, Fashion tends to increasingly align itself with the ‘pornography of death;’ in that it is more often associated with the death of others, rather than the death of those to whom we are close. The models who wear ‘corpse chic’ are not people we know or necessarily care about, their twisted bodies made up with fake blood and grey toned skin seem rather to beckon death. The resultant ‘trends’ over the last few decades have increasingly moved towards a flirtation, or a romanticising, eroticising, or even mockery of death. Not only has the method of advertising the objects of fashion demonstrated this, but so too the increased saturation of death reportage in news media, television series, fictional and non-fictional literature. I refer to these tendencies as death in fashion, or ‘through the eyes of Fashion’, whereby our relationship with death is still a step removed from reality. The reality of death is composed of complex issues we do not necessarily wish or want to consider.

This research aims to address these realities through the processes of fashion, within the context of Death.

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MOTIVE
In searching for exclusive links between fashion and death, it became clear that while there has been recent cultural analysis as to our relationship with clothing and fashion, and similarly, our societal relationship with death, dying and the dead, there is no thorough contemporary research being undertaken that joins the two fields and specifically investigates our relationship to the clothing we wear for our interment. The gap between these two lines of investigation became the space in which I began to carve out my line of enquiry.

It became apparent when dressing my late Grandfather (“Nonno”), for his funeral that there was a space to be explored between clothing and the dead. The main predicament facing burial garment practice is that within the fashion field, designers largely cater to living bodies; bodies with lived experience, dynamic movement, and sensory perception. This, of course, differs significantly from the realities of the dead body. However, while the dead body may be absent of life, it is still recognised as being embedded within a series of cultural, material, emotional, and ethical processes, and these are what designed burial garments must strive to cater for.

In almost every human culture, when an individual is readied for burial or cremation, their body is prepared in some way [0.08]. Generally, the dead body is approached through the processes of washing, clothing and wrapping, which act to cover and shield it (and the living) from its vulnerable, transient state. Clothes, garments, and wrappings used in rituals for the dead will literally and symbolically become part of the body as it decomposes during interment.

20 Fashion has long been neglected as its own branch of theoretical discourse. It has only been within the last twenty years that fashion has been taken more seriously as an academic study. Bergs’ Fashion Theory Journal was launched in 1997 which brought together the writing of several key theorists within the field. Also see: Kathryn McKevelly and Janine Munslow, Fashion Design: Process, Innovation and Practice (Chichester/GB: John Wiley and Sons Ltd, 2012); Yuniya Kawamura, Doing Research in Fashion and Dress: An Introduction to Qualitative Methods (London: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, Berg Publishers, 2011); Ingrid Loschek, When Clothes Become Fashion: Design and Innovation Systems, trans. L Rennison (New York: Berg, 2009); Lars Svendsen, Fashion: A Philosophy, trans. John Irons (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2006); Yuniya Kawamura, Fashion-Ology: An Introduction to Fashion Studies, ed. Joanne Eicher, Dress, Body, Culture (New York: Berg, 2005).
Yet it is this final dressing and the chosen garment that have been largely unaddressed within the realm of fashion design and funeral practice, most specifically within Western cultures. One explanation for this absence is that the responsibility for caring for a dead body has been handed over to the funeral profession, and no longer lies with the family.

The death-care landscape altered dramatically in the late Twentieth Century, with funeral directors becoming the primary caretakers for the dead, taking over from the position usually filled by family members to whom the responsibility of washing and dressing the body once fell.\(^{21}\) This resulted in an alteration and shift in the manner in which death is handled. Instead of dying at home, the dying are now either likely to be found in hospitals or nursing homes. From here, they are transported to the funeral home where they remain until they are interred or cremated. This has contributed to what is referred to as Death Denial,\(^{22}\) which in essence, is a denial of human mortality evidenced in the encouragement by funeral directors to embalm the dead body in order to ‘preserve it’, implying that to simply let it rot away is a fate too terrible to consider.\(^{23}\)

However, we seem to be at a turning point. A ‘new wave,’\(^{24}\) or ‘revival’ of death practice is emerging whereby families are reclaiming their dead and bringing them back into their care. In many ways, this is a cultural movement influenced by societal fashions. Formerly ‘buzz’ words - ‘sustainability’ and ‘eco-footprint’ are concepts that are becoming familiar, everyday ideals for many people, and are

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\(^{22}\) Becker, *The Denial of Death*.

\(^{23}\) Interestingly author of *Rest in Peace*, Gary Laderman, noted that “Without this procedure, funeral directors would have had a difficult time claiming that they were part of a professional guild, and therefore justified as the primary mediators between the living and the dead from the moment of death to the final disposition.” Gary Laderman, *Rest in Peace: A Cultural History of Death and the Funeral Home in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press Inc, 2005). P 8.

\(^{24}\) At the most recent Death Down Under conference held in New Zealand in June 2012, there was intense discussion about what this ‘new wave’ is to be called. Words like ‘wholesome’, ‘reclaimed’, ‘wellbeing’, ‘engaged’ were placed next to ‘death,’ but there was no definitive decision made.
driving this interest in what could be termed ‘green’, ‘organic’ or ‘natural’ funerals.

In particular, the contemporary interment practice of ‘natural earth burial’ or ‘green burial’ (discussed further in Chapter 2), became a method through which the research could be located. Instead of the more traditional use of chemical embalming, lavish coffins and grandiose tomb stones, which have come to be the norm for funerals occurring in the last fifty years, the aim of natural burial is to allow the body to decompose into the earth as organically as possible. The same notions about transformation through the literal disintegration and decomposition of materials and body, as well as the more ephemeral concepts of the transmigration of energy, drive the design processes that are engaged with through the research projects.

I periodically use the term ‘moment’ as a way to address sections of time within an ongoing process. Selecting a place to nominate as the ‘beginning’ or the ‘end’ is problematic when describing processes like Death or even Fashion. As processes, they are inherently transforming and evolving – and as such, are difficult to pin down. Thus ‘moments’ become a more easily negotiated way to describe certain milestones or events in the project work.

It is a key aim of the research to directly address and dress these moments, to seek alternative ways to dress the dead body both through the design of actual garments, and to examine how the act of dressing the body with these garments can affect our fundamental approach to the dead body.

By analysing fashion from this angle we can better understand some of the relationships we have to clothing in life and in death, and furthermore, our role both within our clothes and in the environment that surrounds our clothed bodies. This research also reveals the ‘power of fashion.’ Even though Fashion is often depicted stereotypically as ‘frivolous’, it is a powerful tool affecting many “diverse areas of human group life...It is easily observable in the realm of the pure and applied arts...There is plenty of evidence to

25 Leopardi, Dialogue between Fashion and Death.
show its play in the field of medicine.”

The stereotype that has caused “frustration amongst fashion theorists [not to mention practitioners and designers] as to the notion of fashion being mistaken for frivolity,” underestimates the potential for fashion to be a positive tool in the seriousness of death. The uneasy intersection between the contexts of fashion and death is something this research aims to navigate. It seeks to demonstrate ways in which fashion can instead be perceived and used as a beneficial tool, allowing us to engage directly with death and mortality.

The research has also been interested in moving beyond the process and rituals of burial, to the physical processes of decomposition, dissolution and disintegration, where a body’s relationships with the world are fundamentally altered. As such, the physical composition of textiles and the ways in which they disintegrate became an important issue within the research.

[Diagram demonstrating areas and crossovers of primary and secondary field, key theoretical discourse and trends, and location of area of interest and projects.]

[0.09]
Pia Interlandi
2012


Many of the definitions, boundaries and restrictions of the research became apparent as the projects unfolded. But at this point, building on the exploration of fashion and death, it is appropriate to outline several parameters that specify the research and build on the earlier definition of fashion as process enacting actions of transformation.

**Fashion and the social world: A way of life and death**

As sociologist Herbert Blumer once stated: "[Fashion] is sensitive to the movement of current developments as they take place in its own field, adjacent fields, and in the larger social world." And so for the purposes of this exegesis, I have adopted Blumer’s understanding of fashion as a broadly constructed human phenomenon. This understanding is one that has itself undergone a process of transformation and evolution, witnessed through the writing put forward by literary theorist Roland Barthes, fashion professor Elizabeth Wilson and sociologists Joanne Entwistle and Yuniya Kawamura. Each of these writers has demonstrated an understanding that fashion, while stereotypically relegated, or intrinsically connected to the realm of clothing, is by action rather than definition, far larger than that, and can come to encompass many other fields of study or human endeavor. As Blumer insightfully noted, fashion "even touches such a relative sacred area as that of mortuary practice... the domain in which fashion operates is very extensive, indeed. To limit it to, or to centre it in, the field of costume

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and adornment is to have a very inadequate idea of the scope of its occurrence. \(^{33}\)

It is particular to this research that fashion has come to be deeply entrenched in the 'death-care' industry, where changing attitudes towards death are indeed 'fashions' or *modes de vie*: they are new ways of approaching death. Fashion is the pushing forward of new ideas, the instigator of paradigms to be accepted or not in the broader landscape, and in this way is involved in the shaping of a new generation of death practitioners.

Fashion itself is "invisible"\(^{34}\) and an ungraspable driving force, yet it can be witnessed by the appearance of 'trends', which are not necessarily 'clothes', but emergent 'tangible' repetitions of aesthetics, behaviours and attitudes. However, Fashion is the momentum toward paradigm, from modalities to tropes. As sociologist Yuniya Kawamura states in her exploration, *Fashionology*, \(^{35}\) "it seems agreed that fashion is never stationary, never fixed and ever-changing,"\(^{36}\) which is a continuum of the satirical musings expressed by Leopardi.\(^{37}\) Kawamura further asserts that fashion "is the result of the acceptance of certain cultural values, all of which are open to relatively rapid influences of change."\(^{38}\)

On one level, as a fashion designer, I am involved, or participate in, directly contributing to these “cultural values” or “repetitions,” or rather, in creating new configurations that will be diffused and absorbed to be then copied, shifted, transformed and repeated, thus creating new fashions. I respond to the world around me, and channel this response into ‘Fashionings’.

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35 Ibid.
36 Ibid. P 4.
37 Leopardi, *Dialogue between Fashion and Death*.
The notion of fashion is heavily nuanced, as John Potvin states: “Fashion is not simply a product of labour, but a practice of being-in-the-world, a sensual activity.” 39 Fashion can be used in two ways, one as the noun, an all-encompassing system, the second as a verb, a doing process, and this is where I use the term ‘fashioning’ contextually. It is the ‘doing’ that takes precedence. I do not use the term ‘fashioning’ dismissively. Rather, it is central to the practice of fashion design. It is seen as an active process whereby fashion is developed.

The doctoral work is therefore interested in the notion of the ‘practice of Fashioning’ as a verb, rather than ‘practicing Fashion’ as a noun. Thus, the interest lies in the processes leading to a fashion outcome, rather than the outcomes of fashion themselves.

Identifying spaces and places in which the doctoral projects are situated

The spaces and places in which fashion is explored need to be addressed here in recognising the way in which this research is situated within Fashion as a broad discipline. John Potvin’s book, The Places and Spaces of Fashion,” 40 discusses the ways in which:

“Sites can be marked out as places and spaces which define and are transformed through by, and because of the subjects and objects of fashion. As potential site of and for spectacle, performance, and even transformation, people often seek out locations of fashion either as participants, voyeurs, consumers, spectators, or would-be models. Fashion tailors the perception of spaces or places and the identities which occupy or traverse them.” 41

The fashion research, the tangible aspects, undertaken here could be seen to occupy the ‘margins’ of conventional fashion design practice, which is to say an association with the design and production of everyday clothing. By this, I mean that they do not sit within the commercial arena of clothing production: they are not for

40 Ibid.
41 Ibid. P 9
everyday wear. Instead they sit outside the traditional patterns of fashion consumption. The work inhabits a ‘niche market’ as such, and my fashionings are not intended for mainstream consumption. However, the work does occupy some of the more characteristic physical and conceptual spaces of fashion for consumption and promotion: photography, catwalk, and exhibition with which the work is engaged.

I do design garments, but more than that, I design process and rituals that involve garments. Clothes are indeed part of the language with which I work, and are used to construct fashion, which is seen as a “wild card, descending on some times and not others in an arbitrary and fortuitous way.”\(^42\) Clothing as it pertains to the exegesis is further examined in Chapter 1. But at this introductory stage, it should be understood that fashion can - and does - exist outside of clothing, yet clothing is embedded within fashion.

Clothing is a result of materials being ‘fashioned’ into a form, but is distinct from ‘fashion’ as a field and process. Often realised as a tangible, wearable reflection of the self, clothes are created predominantly through the use of soft and flexible textiles and are produced with the purpose of being borne and worn upon the human body. In the context of this research, the trope of clothing is inclusive of other forms of body-based adornment such as jewellery, wearable artefacts, temporal and permanent decorative markings upon the body, or the application of scents and oils.

\(^{42}\) John Harvey, Clothes, ed. Mark Vernon, The Art of Living (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008). pg 11
Within the research process, isolated acts of ‘fashioning’ and being ‘fashioned’ are often discussed as being embedded within the moment. These moments are brought about by exercising an influence through intervention, manipulation or facilitation of natural and inevitable processes of transformation. Many of these processes are commonly associated with cycles of death: material decay, disintegration and dissolving, though implicit in this is also the eventual regeneration of new life as a result of the transformation of the old.

I define ‘fashioning’ as the practice of facilitation, or remoulding and scaffolding of processes that lead towards particular goals or outcomes beyond fashion itself. The process in direct question is the negotiation and navigation of the processes associated with death; decay, decomposition, dissolution, disintegration and ultimately, regeneration. In essence, I am fashioning the way that we, in Western dominated cultures, can approach death. I do this by focusing directly on the aspects that within this culture are often avoided or imbued with fear and disgust.

Initially, I do this by using the tools of fashion as it pertains to clothing, but eventually move away from these tools altogether, and perform fashioning in league with the conversations that have arisen from the previous projects. Garment design is part of that process, but as a designer specifically engaged with ‘fashion’, I further extend my role into the dressing and ritual aspects of clothing. “Dress, and the experience and practice of being dressed, is a fundamental aspect of human experience and, as such and as always, of social experience. Dress is a constitutive element in experiencing one’s own and the other people’s bodily existence.”

EXCLUSIONS

There are a large number of theoretical discourses which debate the inclusion of art within the fashion field or of fashion within art, or, the appearance of hybrid practices. I am aware that some of the work referred to in this document, and some of the work I have produced references art practices. However, the classification of my work in this context is not of specific concern here. Earlier in the introduction, I discussed the forms of communication I have addressed in my projects including photography, exhibition and catwalk modes, which traverse the fields of fashion and art. However, it is not the intention of this research to focus upon exploring the nature of art and fashion practices but to examine the interrelationship between the realms of fashion and death. Artworks are also addressed in the capacity of acting as cultural products engaged with Fashion as broadly defined above; constructed out of a timely milieu and reflecting social and personal concerns that are of central interest to the research.

Likewise, eroticism and the sexualising of the dead body, a trend outlined by Jacque Lynn Foltyn in her article Dead Famous and Dead Sexy: Popular Culture, Forensics, and the Rise of the Corpse, is excluded from the scope of this research. Sex is entwined within readings of fashion and death, just as it is in birth and beauty. Whilst I acknowledge that on occasions where the naked body is exposed and therefore potentially evocative, this reference is concerned more with reflecting upon the sentiment of creating vulnerability as it pertains to mortality, rather than vulnerability as it pertains to sexual innuendo.

Academic and sociologist, Jacque Lynn Foltyn has also written about the pairing of fashion and death and their fetishisation. In Dead Famous and Dead Sexy: Popular Culture, Forensics, and the Rise of the Corpse, she coined the term ‘corpse porn’ which describes, 

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45 Foltyn, "Dead Famous and Dead Sexy: Popular Culture, Forensics, and the Rise of the Corpse."
46 Ibid.
“[design] to highlight the body’s sexuality as well as its decomposition.” Corpse chic—a trend within fashion of the 1990’s, “styles death with the flesh of the living” and is a symptom of what Caroline Evans described as ‘deathliness’ in her influential text Fashion at the Edge. However, much has changed within the decade since Evans’ “extremely well-documented” writing and Foltyn provides an analysis engaged in the present, proposing that while deathliness in fashion in the Nineties may have been about “mutability” reflecting societal tropes about the insecurities brought about by “change, instability, and uncertainty,” death is today, considered less analogous in terms of fashion aesthetic and more “about death itself.”

Whilst Gorer’s use of the phrase ‘pornography of death’ had little to do with sex at the time of its composition, ‘corpse porn’ does. Foltyn comments that “socially appropriate emotion is absent from both corpse porn and sex porn; which is to say, “love [is removed] from sex porn, “grief, reflection, and discussion of the preciousness of life [is removed] from corpse porn.” Another vein of enquiry that becomes apparent when analysing Foltyn’s “corpse porn” is the role of women: “The corpse porn star just as the sex porn star is most often female, not only because of the long discussed patriarchal oppression of woman and the control of mass media by men but because of woman’s closer association with birth, sex, death, depravity, and dirt.” The work of authors such as Simone De

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47 Ibid.  
48 Foltyn, “To Die For: Skull Style and Corpse Chic in Fashion Design, Imagery and Branding.”  
50 Foltyn, “To Die For: Skull Style and Corpse Chic in Fashion Design, Imagery and Branding.”  
51 Evans, Fashion at the Edge. P10-11  
52 Ibid. p 10-11  
53 Foltyn, “To Die For: Skull Style and Corpse Chic in Fashion Design, Imagery and Branding.”  
54 Gorer, “The Pornography of Death.”  
56 Ibid.  
57 Ibid.  
58 Ibid. P 16.
Beauvoir\textsuperscript{59} and Mary Douglas,\textsuperscript{60} have also addressed the association of women with these issues. Women have a closer association with both death and fashion and there are tensions between feminism and the study of fashion which underpin prevailing attitudes and reception and representation of fashion\textsuperscript{61}. However, it is not the intent of the research to pursue the symbiosis of fashion and death as a purely feminist polemic.

The understanding of death that I employ within this study is seen as a natural progression of a life lived. Therefore, I do not explore particular types of death – even though they can be included within a broad discussion of death. In particular, violent death is not something that I focus on, even though it is the type of death that ‘corpse porn’ and the ‘pornography of death’ most often include. In the same regard, I do not discuss the death of children, nor do my final garments include a size suitable for small bodies. It is not that I do not wish to acknowledge these types of death, but rather that to engage with these deaths would sway the direction of the research, and would require individual focus.

\textsuperscript{61} Foltyn, “Dead Famous and Dead Sexy: Popular Culture, Forensics, and the Rise of the Corpse.”

Research Structure

This research was largely carried out through the production of a series of creative projects that involved fashioned processes and garments. Initially, these were situated within a metaphorical fashion context whereby garment-making and dissolving were employed. This then moved into a broader discussion of fashion that involved the use of sculpture, and grown fabrications that had their own life and death. From this point, it became apparent that there needed to be an experimental section wherein there was a literal application and engagement with the dead body. This describes the three phases of the research in general terms.

This document, which will accompany the PhD exhibition and presentation, is organised in chapters that present the project work more-or-less chronologically. However, there were often moments in the practice where the projects overlapped and occurred simultaneously. The images embedded throughout the chapters allow the reader to access and visually experience specific moments of the project process and their impact.

Chapters 1-3 address the ways that the projects have been produced and evolved in response to the moments between death and disintegration. This is examined in three primary ways:

*In the first chapter, the body is examined as a physical entity through a series of projects that explored the use of dissolvable fabrics reflecting the process of decomposition. Through this process of dissolving, notions regarding nakedness and vulnerability both in the living and the dead were explored.*

The role of clothing in fashion and the body is discussed, specifically the ways that Fashion is influenced by processes closely linked to death and decomposition. This was conducted through an aesthetic exploration of materials and garments that literally dissolve to reveal the naked body underneath. Through the use of dissolvable fabrications, my project iterations present a series of investigations into the process of fashioning garments, both as a technical exercise in the use and employment of transformative textiles, and as an analogy for the fragility inherent in death and decomposition. I
discuss what it means for a body to have permeable boundaries, arguing that clothing can be understood as a second skin. By dissolving the outermost layer of skin, I bring to the fore issues of nakedness as linked with vulnerability, fragility and ultimately, mortality.

I begin to break down the body-garment and observe its dissolution and dissipation while not yet entering the realm of horror and disgust usually associated with the dead and decomposing body. Conversely, working this way with dissolvable garments can be seen as ephemeral and beautiful, while still representing processes often imbued with fear and revulsion.

In the second chapter, the body is situated as a disintegrated entity that can be reabsorbed and reformed into the environment and landscape.

Moving out of the traditional notions of fashion design, and into more sculptural work, this second chapter explores processes of growth and formation in the earth, where plant roots are grown in body moulds. This project consists of a number of iterations or cycles, whereby several material tests were conducted and a number of different types of mould shapes were experimented with, each engaging with slightly different dialogues. The themes and analogies brought about by the body moulds connect largely with the ‘natural earth’ burial movement, and the notion of the body as a ‘gift’ returned to the earth. Through the creation of these body moulds, I was able to draw out information embedded within them to create textile prints and embroidery patterns.

Following the exploration of both of the projects undertaken in the first and second chapters, it became apparent that there was a need to test these ideas within the realm of the dead body and away from analogy.

In Chapter Three, the dead body is positioned as a sacred entity requiring care, and conversely, as an entity that is repellant and warranting aversion.

The third chapter begins with a rationale of expanding my role as a designer by becoming a funeral celebrant. This was to bring about
dealing with the realities of death, and sets the scene for the third major body of exegesis project work, *The Pig Project*. In this iteration, my work explores the realities of dressing the dead body, and also its unavoidable decomposition within the context of a natural burial. Conducted through a residency at SymbioticA, at the University of Western Australia, it engages directly with the visceral nature of disgust through the washing, dressing, burial and exhumation of pig bodies. Performed in the context of a scientific (forensics) experiment, issues regarding ethics of animals use and distancing oneself from the implications of using animals in research became prevalent. It was by confronting these issues and the natural bodily processes, with the inclusion of newfound ritual-making experiences through funeral celebrancy, that I was able to confidently negotiate a way that they can be addressed within the creation of garments specifically for the grave.

In Chapter Four, *all the previous bodies of work come together in a new form of fashion practice, one by which I dress the dead and design Garments for the Grave*.

My role, which began as designer, transformed into maker, sculptor, scientist, celebrant, dresser and death-wear facilitator. *Garments for the Grave* is a practice that has emerged from previous project work, and uses skills from the fashion realm whilst incorporating elements of funeral celebrancy. It is a practice that functions as ritual engaged through the creation or fashioning of a burial garment. It neither denies nor flirts with death, but presents it in a way that invites observers to view it as natural, undeniable, inevitable and at times, beautiful. The garments are designed for easy inclusion of dressing rituals performed by the family. There has been significant attention from the press regarding this work, which is an indication that it is a ‘fashionable’ topic, and a realisation that there is a need and demand for this type of engagement.

This research explores the ways in which fashion design can directly approach the realities of the dead body; specifically, the moments between death and disintegration, and in doing so, make significant contributions to the manner in which we both deal with death, and consider the role of fashion design. Ultimately, this research sows seeds for the beginning of a new type of fashion practice, catering to
the care and dressing of the dead. It makes contributions to methods in which we might deal with dead bodies and to thinking about the potential role of fashion design as the fashioning of enduring processes, rather than simply the designing of garments.
CHAPTER 1: DISSOLVING BODIES: DISSOLVABLE GARMENTS
CHAPTER 1
Dissolving Bodies
Dissolvable Garments
"Though we appear to be solid, we are in fact, liquid bodies, similar in a way to gelatin, which also seems to be solid but is in fact largely water, ‘gelled’ by the presence of an organic material."

- Daniel Hillel: Out of the Earth

It is through the body that fashion and death intersect, each occurring on, in and to bodies. In this first chapter, I begin to explore the body as a transforming entity and as form that dissolves as it decomposes. This is the platform for the series of works to follow.

I investigate the way death is used as a tool to create garments, whereby surrendering to process and relinquishing control becomes integral to the practice of design. To emphasise the mortality of my garments, and in turn, the fragility of the human body, I created a series of fashionings using dissolvable textiles, the process of doing so informing and changing my approach to design. Before introducing this project work, the scene is set through discussions about the human body, clothed and naked, vulnerable and mortal. The texts and authors drawn upon are varied and diverse in background, and whilst a broad reading was undertaken, I have chosen to include references to the writing that particularly resonated. I have made a concerted effort to select texts that combine death, clothing and nakedness, discussing these issues in tandem, as intersecting areas of interest.

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THE ALLEGORY OF ADAM AND EVE

The story of Adam and Eve is a bridge that links an awareness of the fragility of life and its inherent decay, and the need to clothe and protect the body. Even with a warning that eating fruit from the Tree of Knowledge will result in *moth hamath* (“die a death”), Adam and Eve consume the forbidden fruit and their eyes are opened. Stripped of innocence they become ‘self-conscious’, at once aware of their own naked bodies. They quickly move to cover themselves, resulting in the first attempt at clothing, the infamous fig leaf. Upon seeing their scantily covered bodies, God knows that his perfect creation is soiled, and the repercussions are fierce. Where nakedness was once imbued with innocence, it now comes to represent shame.² Before expelling them from the

²Margaret Gibson states that: “The nakedness before the Fall is innocent because there is no exterior point of view and thus no feeling or experience of self-consciousness or exposure to the perspective or gaze of another. Once there is clothing, the moral necessity for covering the body, there is the

[1.01] Masaccio
Adam and Eve Expelled from Paradise.
Brancacci Chapel,
Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence,
1424-25

[1.02] Holbein the Younger
Adam and Eve Driven from Paradise
1538

[1.03] Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld
The Expulsion from Eden
1860
Garden of Eden and exiling them into more ominous and threatening surrounds, God sacrifices an animal and fashions clothing from its skin (Genesis 3:21). Banished from Paradise and cut off from the Tree of Life, they will eventually succumb to death, their immortality the price paid for their betrayal. Thus, life is tainted with the knowledge of death, and clothing becomes entangled with mortality.

Over the centuries, many artists have depicted the expulsion from Paradise, showing Adam and Eve deeply shamed and embarrassed by their bodies [1.01]. Masaccio depicts Adam holding his head in his hands, and Eve struggling to cover her naked body. In Holbein’s version [1.02] (1538), they are chased out by an enraged God; the figure of Death just ahead of them. Carolsfeld’s interpretation [1.03] (1860) features them wearing their coats of skin, heading into darker and more menacing environs.

I am not the first researcher to revisit the seminal Judeo-Christian story of Adam and Eve as a starting point in a discussion of death, or clothing for that matter. Its inclusion is not a conscious attempt to view the scholarship through the eyes of Christianity, but rather a realisation that it frames much of the research into and around the area. Ernst Becker’s *The Denial of Death* describes ‘The Fall’ as “the foundation stone for Kierkegaard’s view of man” and a number of fashion/cultural theorists have written about it as “Christian culture’s primary myth about the birth of the first human being.” But regardless of literal belief in

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Holbein is the same artist who was responsible for a largely circulated series of carvings depicting the Dance of Death. Holbein, *Holbein’s Dance of Death and Bible Woodcuts* (New York: The Sylvan Press, 1947).


the Bible, this allegory “has had a tremendous influence on our attitudes to our bodies and on our feelings about nakedness” and can still shed light on much of “the basic insight of psychology for all time: that man is a union of opposites, of self-consciousness and of physical body.”

The punishment handed to Adam and Eve, “Thou shalt surely die” (Genesis 2:17) had repercussions that were revealed slowly and continued for every subsequent generation. For humans, the knowledge and conscious awareness of our impending deaths, an insight given to no other animal and ours alone to bear [so we believe], has led to what cultural anthropologist Ernst Becker dubs “death denial.” Becker explains, “the final terror of self-consciousness is the knowledge of one’s own death, which is the peculiar sentence on man alone in the animal kingdom. This is one meaning of the Garden of Eden myth and the rediscovery of modern psychology: that death is man’s peculiar and greatest anxiety.”

CLOTHING AS SECOND SKIN

John Carl Flügel, an English academic, psychoanalyst and author of The Psychology of Clothes proposed that the primary function of clothing is protection, both against the physical and the psychological. While this view of clothing as it pertains to fashion is limited, it is by no means inconsequential within the margins of this research it is significant. Human beings are notoriously vulnerable.

Birth is one momentous situation during our lifetimes where we experience complete public nakedness. Our bodies are particularly fragile and vulnerable and we are totally dependent on others for our survival. It is only a quick succession of moments

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2 Becker, The Denial of Death, p 68.
3 ibid p 70.
that move us from womb to cloth/clothing. Often, it is before we even reach the arms of our mothers that we are wrapped in cloth and thereby "wrapped into culture." \[12\]

Interestingly, Flügel also proposed - in abstract terms - that clothing, in general, is a replacement for the womb. He theorised that apart from the physically protective device that clothing becomes, it is also linked with the psychological need to protect us from the "general unfriendliness of the world as a whole," \[13\] the ultimate protective device being that of the "interior landscape" \[14\] of our mother's womb. At the other end of the spectrum, when a final swaddling and wrapping is enacted upon the dead body, it returns to the internal landscape of the earth, a process embraced within the context of natural burial (discussed in Chapter 2). The mirror image of birth to death will be further examined.

Our bodies are fleshy constructs made of bone and sinew, organs, muscles and tendons. Our largest organ, the skin, is the visible barrier at the border between our visceral interiors and outside environments. Porous and permeable, it is our interface between self and world, yet, for the most part, large swathes of it remain concealed. Those around us rarely see us naked. \[15\] Outside of the intimate acts of birth, washing and sex, we wear clothes — "human bodies are dressed bodies. The social world is a world of dressed bodies." \[16\]

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\[12\] Terhi Utiainen, "Naked and Dressed" op cit. p 135
\[13\] Flügel, "Protection." p 130.
\[15\] Nakedness doesn’t imply without clothes, rather it means without ‘dressing’.
In *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory* (2000), fashion academic and lecturer in sociology, Joanne Entwistle, states that:

*Dress is a basic fact of social life and this, according to anthropologists, is true of all known cultures: all people ‘dress’ the body in some way, be it through clothing, tattooing, cosmetics or other forms of body painting. To put it another way, no culture leaves the body unadorned but adds to, embellishes, enhances or decorates the body.*

Entwistle’s comment can also come to include the dead; social etiquette requires us to dress and add to the body; to cover nakedness and mask vulnerability. In this societal sense, clothing or garments as physical objects are embedded with symbolism beyond their role in protecting the body from physical and mental danger. As Malcolm Barnard writes: “While clothes are not alive they powerfully suggest the presence of live bodies, and, because they are such a part of our living selves, when we see them still and not moving they hint at the absence of our living selves.” 19 Jones and Stallybrass agree noting that, “clothing is a ghost that, even when discarded, still has the power to haunt.” 20

Within the public realm, bodies undergo cultural production. As such, I adopt British academic John Harvey’s acknowledgement that “there is a long-standing and deep dividedness in us about uncovering the human body: we want to expose it and we want

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to shield it. Clothes are our soft utensil for managing this division.”

21 The word ‘utensil’ is particularly pertinent in this instance. That
clothing is a tool, an ‘instrument’, ‘implement’, or ‘container’, 22 a
‘vessel’ 23 designed to serve a purpose is the key in the use of
‘clothing’ in my research. Harvey goes on to say that, “clothes are
like a lens: they bring us, or part of us, into focus, and push the
less wanted selves back towards the shadows.”

Clothes, as a conjuring of fashion, are a system of
communication. We speak with our clothes; 24 they are part of our
voice, part of our selves. The words they speak, or rather the

21 John Harvey, Clothes, ed. Mark Vernon, “The Art of Living” (Stocksfield, UK:
Acumen, 2008), p 54.
22 Collins German Dictionary, s.v. "Utensil," accessed May 19, 2012,
nsil/1
23 "Utensil," in The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary, ed. Bruce Moore,
24 Among other things, dress has been seen as a mode and system of
communication comparable to language; as a screen for society and religion to
project their image onto the individual; as experience and expression of the
ethnic or gendered body; as an important object of desire; as a boundary and
continuously receding and unstable rim of the self or personal identity (see, e.g.,
Entwistle & Wilson, 2001; Guy et al., 2001) (Utriainen 2004)
language they speak, is created by Fashion. When our clothes are removed, it can be “experienced as a (at least a partial) lack of self.” When we “dress” ourselves, we construct sentences that we wish to express, both consciously and unconsciously. In On Human Finery, English art historian and author Quentin Bell suggests that “our clothes are too much a part of us for most of us to be entirely indifferent to their condition: it is as though the fabric were indeed a natural extension of the body, or even of the soul.” In her book Dressing for Heaven, Cordelia Warr noted that “[s]imilar conclusions have been drawn by historians such as Jean-Claude Schmitt who, writing in Ghosts in the Middle Ages, has commented that clothing “became one with the person who wore it… like a second skin.”

Our corporeal body is covered in our own skin, but also layered with other skins. Clothing can act as a second skin: the skin with which we present ourselves to the world and an expressive container of the self. Clothing as a second skin is an extension of our selves, constructing elements of both our physical body and our psychological consciousness [1.04–1.05].

Within the context of this research, nakedness is synonymous with mortality. To be naked is to be vulnerable and to be vulnerable is to be susceptible to death.

Death is a similar process to birth that plays out in reverse, and it too calls for the clothing and dressing of the body. Through the processes involved in dying, and which continue into death, we are denuded of “personal belongings or qualities as the ability to walk, to eat, to weep or to laugh, [the dead] can be

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25 Utriainen, op cit.
29 It was this idea that formed the plot for David Fincher’s 2008 film The Curious Case of Benjamin Button, in which the protagonist is born elderly but ages in reverse, his death coinciding with his birth. [See figure 1.24]
denuded even of their gender. "Moreover, they can even be seen to have become stripped of the whole personality in the form of memories. This process of denuding can be observed as something that happens "layer by layer"; that is, gradually, and sometimes this is expressed by the very familiar image of a tree losing its leaves. When denuded of life in the manner described by Utiraiinen, death could then be seen as the ultimate exposure.

While "dead people, who are (left) undressed, are often regarded as an ultimate token of abandonment and denial of human value," in most cases, the dead experience a series of dressings and undressing. The first is the familiar act of pulling a sheet over one's face after they have died in hospital. From here, the body is most commonly taken to the morgue or directly to the funeral.

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31 Ibid.
32 P 135.
establishment where the staff will undress and wash the body. It is then redressed in a garment that can carry a semblance of living personality before being interred.

When the dead body is interred, it is undressed by nature as the environment reclaims it and its nutrients are returned to the earth. However, this final ‘undressing’ is not considered as a stripping to reveal the naked body; rather, it can be considered as part of process of becoming the landscape (to be discussed in Chapter 2). In embarking upon the research projects discussed in this chapter, my main aim was to use dissolving garments as a metaphorical way to understand and approach the processes of mortality, most notably, the dissolution of the dead body. With the intention of clothes being understood as a second skin, by dissolving these skins we would in turn be dissolving the outermost layers of humanity, revealing our innermost anxiety. Garments aren’t mortal, but both we and they are impermanent. Furthermore, this process of dissolving was to be viewed outside the realm of the abject, meaning that it didn’t have the visceral reaction of repulsion that most processes of decomposition incite.

THE DISSOLVING SKIN

The premise for my first group of projects – the Dissolving Garment Series – was formulated a number of years before my PhD candidature. It was whilst completing my undergraduate degree that I began to play with notions of transformation through the use of dissolvable textiles. The anabigies I drew from the use of these textiles catalysed simply as an investigation into changes of physical state (from solid to liquid to gas, for example), but as I fashioned these textiles into garments, they started to take on a different meaning. They began to hold increasing sentiment as each garment adopted the more traditional reading of clothing as an extension of the body and self. Each garment became a

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33 Mark Harris, Grave Matters - a Journey through the Modern Funeral Industry to a Natural Way of Burial (New York: Scribner, 2007).
34 This will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 3: The Body becomes the Earth.
second skin, more vulnerable and fragile than the skin that it covered.

At this early point in the candidature, I was still firmly fixed within the more acceptable understanding of fashion, clothing for the living body; I was not yet involved in the visceral nature of the dead body. The aim of this body of work was not to imitate the dead body or its putrefaction, but instead to explore the poetics of the processes of disintegration without the physical realities of death.

This chapter discusses five of seven iterations of the dissolving garment series: Shroud, Spindle, Body Suit, Tailored Jacket, and The Wayward Fold. I have focused on those iterations that most explicitly contributed to the research trajectory, and two other iterations, Eulogy for the Living and Melodies in the Air, are not included in this discussion for the sake of brevity. The works discussed in this chapter are situated within the following spaces of fashion: photography, catwalk performance and exhibition. The first four iterations are explored through a series of photographed images, while the fifth was expressed though a catwalk at the Melbourne Fashion Festival in 2009.

The research undertaken here involved designing garments, but more than that, designing process and rituals that involve garments. I refer to my role as a ‘designer,’ one specifically engaged with fashion, as a role whereby I create ‘fashionings.’ My designs are thus a series of fashionings. Garment design is part of that process, but as a designer, I extend my role into the dressing and ritual aspects of clothing.

Processes associated with transformation, specifically, the process of dissolution, have been used by a variety of contemporary fashion designers and artists. I position the exploratory work done here within the field of fashion through the discussion of fashioned works such as Lucy and Bart’s Grow on You (2008), Kate Just’s In My Skin (2011), The Helen Storey Foundation’s Wonderland (2008), Martha MacDonald’s The Weeping Dress (2011) and Maison Martin Margiela’s Spring/Summer 2006 collection.
In 2005, I was given Mary Roach’s *Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers.* At that point, I had very little knowledge about death and decomposition, but this book, which has since become an international bestseller, presented death as something natural; undeniably sad, but not frightening. A single paragraph revealed that:

“Dead people, unembalmed ones anyway, basically dissolve; they collapse and sink in upon themselves and eventually seep out onto the ground. Do you recall the Margaret Hamilton death scene in *The Wizard of Oz?* (‘I’m melting!’) *Putrefaction is more or less a slowed-down version of this.*”

It was this revelation that first caused me to consider the notions of dissolving and melting within the context of the decaying body. *Stiff* was one of the first in a new wave of Twenty-First Century death exposé literature, a genre initially begun in the 1960’s when Jessica Mitford pulled the curtain back on the death industry with her book, *The American Way of Death.* But it was *Stiff* that changed my own trajectory.

Up until that point, my design work, whilst including elements of what Caroline Evan’s coined as ‘deathliness’, dissection and medical instruments had only ever used death as a starting point for an analogy of transformation. I had never considered designing anything that actually contained its own ‘death’.

Shortly after reading *Stiff*, I began to look at my work through a different lens; from the perspective that my garments, like everything in nature, would also suffer or experience a ‘death’, or at least move through a kind of life cycle. I wanted to highlight this, and to do so I started using dissolvable fabrics.

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36 Roach, p 44.
My first encounter with dissolvable fabrication came when I was granted a residency in Tokyo with designer Yoshiki Hishinuma in 2006. Hishinuma’s fashions are all heavily based on textile manipulation and series of decorative techniques embedded within the garment. I was given garments to place over three-dimensional wooden blocks and then boiled so the fabric would melt over the scaffold and take on the underlying shape. The placement of the fabric over the blocks involved precise measurement, but to simplify this procedure, guidelines made of thread had been sewn into the fabric.

During the boiling process, the guidelines were dissolved rendering the end result even more ‘magical’ (there one minute and gone the next), or even ‘sublime’ as there was no evident hint of how they came into being. When I returned from Japan, I tried to source some of the dissolvables so that I could use them thematically and conceptually rather than just as a technical process.

The yarn I first encountered in Japan was a spun form made of Poly Vinyl Alcohol (PVA). When it came to sourcing the fibre back in Australia, my options were limited. The dissolvable textiles I was able to access were available in only two forms commercially. One was a multi-filament sewing yarn used periodically in the knitting of sock tubing, so that when washed, the socks separate. This had to be imported in bulk from China. The second was a non-woven fabrication used to create machine-made lace work, the design being sewn-in and then separated when washed. This latter product was available locally in Melbourne.
Other options included rice paper, cellophane, and plastc (a regenerated corn starch – although at the time, this was only available in a sheet form). Choosing and experimenting with the correct materials was essential. Creating garments that looked like ‘regular’ garments was also important. An appearance of stability and durability was integral to the design work, as was the surprise that resulted when the garment began to dissolve. We often forget how fragile our bodies can be, and the intention behind these garments was to be analogous to this.

I first began this investigation when I was in the honours year of my undergraduate degree. Initially, I created conjoined garments that linked body to body and then dissolved in water (or rather, when water was sprayed onto the garment) to separate the pair, which I considered to be a death, but in the process of doing so revealed a new beauty from within [1.07-1.09] The couple modelling in the photo shoot was expecting their first child: the woman was eight months pregnant. This was the first moment in which I released the power and realised the potential of using dissolvables as they pertained to death and birth. I continued this work into my doctoral studies, expanding upon the use of the dissolvable as a medium to provide analogy. The poetics tied into using the ‘dissolve’ to represent decay and decomposition without having a realistic and confrontational horror of putrefying flesh. I wanted to represent death as something beautiful, just another process intrinsically entwined with life. In considering how to go about capturing a process that is intentionally transient I found that for the purposes of controlling the staged context and the aesthetic outcome, still photography was the optimum medium for its ability to preserve the minuiae of the process variables.

The historical use of photography was also significant in my decision. When the first wave of photography was made available to the working and middle classes in the mid 1800s, it was largely employed in capturing images of the dead for memorialisation.
Owing to the high mortality rate of children in the Victorian era, they were often the image subjects; their first and last photograph was frequently post mortem.\footnote{[1.10]}

\footnote{[1.10] The dead made for excellent portrait sitters. Stillness was a key to the outcome of a successful photograph, and often when the living and dead were photographed together, there was a blurred aspect to the living image due to the slight movement of exhalation and inhalation. The dead, by contrast, were clearly represented [see figure 1.01]. And while shutter speed has dramatically increased in efficiency, and universally crisp edges of the image being taken are largely achievable, I am acutely aware of the origins and implications of its use within an image.}

In this image, the dead newborn twins are surrounded by their family, who, in contrast to the crispness of the twin’s image, are blurred owning to the physical functions of their ‘living’ state.

Sleeping Beauty II: 18: Dead twins wrapped in crib quilt, surrounded by family. Daguerreotype ¼ plate, circa 1849
SHROUD AND SPINDLE

PREMISE:
The first iteration of project work in this chapter was a photo shoot\(^5\) and experimental ‘dressing’ that occurred at photographer Devika Bilimoria’s studio.\(^6\)

The concept and aim was relatively simple: to employ a single sheet of dissolvable fabric to enshroud the face, and then to use a single yarn to enshroud the body.

When experimenting with the dissolvable materials, I had consistently been placing small scraps of the fabric on the back of my hand before trialling different water temperatures and modes of water application. These small segments were intriguing; slowly transforming into transparent ‘goo’ on my skin, leaving the texture different from my most ordinary experience of it. However, at the edges where the fabric bordered on dissolving, and in its more stable form, there was now a seamless blending into my own bodily landscape. I wanted to experiment on a larger scale and within a captured photographic context (as opposed to standing over the sink at home).

I sought to emphasise the face and hands in these shoots as these parts of the body are particularly important in communication and body language,\(^4\) being considered especially expressive of the personality. Aside from the obvious use of fingerprints in identifying dead bodies for forensics, the face and hands are still key markers of identity. As evaluated by academic

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\(^5\) Photographic representation of my work was important in not only documenting the research, but in capturing transience itself. Creating professionally captured images meant that they could be used for future communications, circulation and consumption of my fashionings.

\(^6\) Melbourne based photographer Devika Bilimoria and I had been conducting photo shoots for years prior to this research project. We have worked on numerous artistic and fashion related shoots, and established an excellent working relationship. Her ability to ‘see’, interpret and transform my garments into the still, two dimensional medium meant that when it came to photograph my Post-graduate work, I chose to work with her once again.

Jane Mowll, who finished a PhD regarding regret in viewing the dead, noted that “where the [facial] injuries were considered too great” families were still recommended to see the dead but instead “were advised just to see the hands of the deceased.” Conversely when anatomy students undertake gross anatomy classes, the faces and hands of their cadavers are wrapped in gauze until “their dissection comes up on the syllabus. ‘So it’s not so intense,’ one student would later tell me. ‘Because that’s what you see of a person.’”

The majority of our photographs are shot against a plain black background. The focus is then directed to the garment and the body within it. The decision to use black, instead of any other colour was to emphasise the white garments through contrast and due to the association of black with death within Western cultures. The blackness surrounding a model in my photo shoots has, for me, always symbolised a saturation of death present as a backdrop in life. Treating the body as a permeable boundary, the surrounding environment allows ‘death’ to permeate the skin.

42 Jane Mowll, “Transition to a New Reality: The Experience of Viewing or Not Viewing the Body of a Relative in the Context of Grief after a Sudden and Unexpected Death” (PhD, University of New South Wales, 2011). P 56
SHROUD

Belgian surrealist artist René Magritte’s 1928 painting entitled The Lovers [1.11] was a starting visual reference for my work with shrouds. While shrouds are defined as “a sheet-like garment for wrapping a corpse for burial,” and they are also synonymous with ‘concealing’, covering ‘so as to protect’ and ‘mystery’. Magritte’s painting emphasised a number of these elements.

44 “Shroud,” in The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary, op cit, p 1319
46 Interpretations of the mysterious piece are varied: Magritte himself was quoted as saying that ‘mystery means nothing either, it is unknowable,’ but it was the widely circulated reading that “the shrouded heads in Magritte’s paintings has been suggested in the memory of his mother’s apparent suicide. In 1912, when Magritte was only thirteen years of age, his mother was found drowned in the River Sambre; when her body was recovered from the river, her nightdress was supposedly wrapped around her head.” Michael Lloyd and Michael Desmond, eds., European and American Paintings and Sculptures 1870-1970 in the Australian National Gallery; National Gallery of Australia (Canberra: Australian National Gallery, 1992), p 173
While I have not included two people together in the photographs within my doctoral projects, this was done as recognition of death as a deeply personal and individual bodily experience integral to the images. Death, romance and mystery were notions I aimed to embed within my own exploration of the shroud as it pertained to dissolvable fabrications.

The body was wrapped in a single piece of non-woven dissolvable fabric [1.12]. In my first fashioning, the application of the fabric was simply to drape it over the head, masking the person underneath. In the Shroud process, water application was performed with a spray bottle. As learned from my experimentation, water would then slowly seep into the fibres, allowing a number of photographs to be captured before the garment entirely dissipated. Even with the use of the spray bottle, the dispersion of the water vapours was only partially controlled; meaning that only limited control over the dissolving was possible, and element of surrender ensued. In this way, it is impossible to dictate the exact outcome of the process, which in and of itself was synonymous with the processes of bodily decomposition, also largely out of our control.

As I gradually sprayed water over the model’s face, the dissipation of the fibres resembled a melting of frost, or if viewed in reverse, a covering with a white mould. With her face revealed, so too were her identifying features [1.13-1.15]. The dissolution of the shroud not only referenced the uncovering of features but the dissolving of the ‘veil of secrecy’ regarding death through processes associated with death.

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47 Although it was something explored in my undergraduate work.
48 This was by no means meant to assert that a number of other people are not involved in the process of dying, or in the after care of the dead, but rather a recognition that becoming dead is something that is experienced in isolation.
In part, this project was informed by that of contemporary ‘Body Architects’\(^\text{46}\) Lucy McRae and Bart Hess. Collaborating on a number of temporal projects exploring the boundaries of the body, their stated aim is to create ideas regarding “future human shapes and new body forms.”\(^\text{45}\) Most often, their early collaborative endeavours were in the form of photographs, their creations lasting only a few moments.


Identifying commonalities between their work and my own, it was one of their first experiments, *Grow on You* [1.16-1.17] that reiterated many ideas about my own *Shroud* series. Theirs was a simple photo shoot in which they dressed each other in coloured foam (their ‘low tech’ approach is part of their design philosophy). McRae enthused about these soft, fragile, transient silhouettes in her 2012 TED presentation stating that she: “became obsessed with this idea of blurring the perimeter of the body so you couldn’t see where the skin ended and the near environment started.” 51 This notion of blurring into the environment was precisely one of the aims I set out to investigate through my own project work, albeit with a different emphasis and set of interests than McRae’s work.

**SPINDLE**

A number of references became immediately apparent in considering the presumptive aesthetic of the dressing. I was reminded of the wrapping of an Egyptian mummy; and of medical bandaging, of winding and binding of the cloth to the body. But instead of strips of bandages, I used one continuous filament yarn to demonstrate the continuous and unbroken stream of time [1.18-1.20].


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These fine filaments were vulnerable to moisture, but held surprising tenacity when elongated. I should have predicted the outcome, as this wrapping and spinning process is the exact action executed by many caterpillars when preparing for transformation into butterflies/moths. At first, the intention was to create a mummy. Instead, the result was a cocoon. One body was being wrapped to undergo its transformation and reconfiguration. This process was stopped or revealed when the wrapping was dissolved.

The spinning of the cocoon simultaneously implied a dressing for death, but also birth: wrapping for transformation. The body revealed through the dissolving was not quite the same as the one that previously existed, transformed through the fashioning, a new body was born; covered in a residue from its journey.

A detectable rhythm of spin emerged. Both hands involved, moving in circular repetitions. Even the physical act was a reference, or more poetically, an ode to the cyclical nature of life. The dressing was also laborious. My arms ached from the spinning. It became a ritual, an action embedded with meaning and symbolic value. Each cycle around her body was another small piece of herself that became covered, or faded from view.

At one point, it became a group effort with Devika acting as another cog in the machine of application, another set of hands touching and working the filament that coursed through our fingers. For some time, we stood in concentrated silence, spinning and wrapping. Initially performed by a single person, the process instead involved a community of helpers.
Her hands were wrapped with her face and head, bound against her heart. Key bodily identifications of individuality were covered yarn by yarn until she was hidden and covered in the cloth web. Indeed, I would have liked to continue spinning her until she was completely enclosed, but time constraints prevented me from doing so.

Unlike the *Shroud*, the act of dissolving the spindled body was performed with precision. Using a brush injected with water, it was yielded as a scalpel, picking one yarn or another to impregnate with water and start the reaction. As yarns shrunk and then snapped, they revealed more of the model’s visage, slowly exposing the facial features, breaking away from the anonymously shrouded body. Yet even with the intention of precise water application, this dissolving was a somewhat unpredictable process.

I couldn’t tear myself away from the acute awareness that this simple process of wrapping a yarn around a model’s head, dressing them and then dissolving this dressing, was inextricably tied in with process of dressing death, but as their faces were revealed, I was struck by the idea of a birthing. Whichever reading of the image, birth or death, I was also reminded that death and birth are in fact, messy. Fluids are spilled. I wasn’t certain if the coagulated guge was more reminiscent of an amniotic discharge, or the fatty grave wax associated with the uncovered dead.

In the beginning, the models were being dressed. But at the completion, I wasn’t sure if they were being born or being ‘death-ed’; the ambiguity was arresting. There is symmetry between birth and death that exists and emerges on a number of levels both aesthetically and philosophically.
The techniques and aesthetic results from the \textit{Shroud} and \textit{Spindle} experiments proved highly informative when it came to the next investigations. Through their application to the body, they started to raise issues about the intertwine-ments of death and birth, dressing and the dissolving of bodily boundaries. They were critical for the technical development in using dissolvable fabrications, but I felt that there was room for further exploration into the conceptual and poetic aspects that were beginning to emerge.

On reflection, perhaps the lack of structured garments, which could engage more familiar conceptions of garments proper, created a space that invited the next pair of dissolvable iterations. As such, before moving forward with any further photo shoot, it was essential to resolve the dissolvable fabrications beyond simple unsewn non-woven and un-woven yarn compositions.

Helen Storey is another designer within the fashion field who works with dissolvable fabrications. Her atelier, The Helen Storey Foundation revealed \textit{Wonderland} in 2008,\textsuperscript{60} an exhibition of

\textsuperscript{60}Helen Storey Foundation, \textit{Wonderland}, 2008.
garments that were slowly lowered into a bowl of water. Unlike my work, which is explicit in its relationship to death, Wonderland focuses on creating a dialogue about disposability and global responsibility that is then carried through the medium of fashion. In an interview, Helen Storey commented that, “we picked on something that grabs attention in order that we can talk about a bigger debate. So we have used and abused fashion, if you like, for a message which we think is more important than it.” She further remarked on the fact that the larger dialogue of sustainability is something that can “terrify people”, an emotional response that “everybody wants to get rid of...as quickly as possible.” This had a deep resonance with the response put forward by thoughts of death, and Storey similarly embraced what I had been attempting to do in my own work with dissolvable, which was the notion that “if you can attract [people] towards something through awe and beauty... then it is much easier for them to feel open to what it is that they are learning or picking up,” but because what they are doing has got “a provocative visual at its heart which is the idea of destroying something beautiful in front of you, which normally goes against the grain of how people think art should be valued or viewed. So it was quite important for me to do something that would capture people’s curiosity, if only to have the bigger discussion.”

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64 Ciarán Humphries, “Wonderland Belfast,” (United Kingdom2008). 00:00:43 – 00:02:31, Retrieval date?
65 ibid
115
A common element felt amongst Storey’s atelier, one that appeared in a number of interviews, arose when they were asked the question about destroying the beautiful dresses they had created. Patricia Belford, a textile designer involved in Wonderland, commented on dissolving the dress she and her team had spent “weeks” making, saying that “we were really quite staggered at how distraught we felt,” but she conceded that the “metaphor was working.” This attachment to garments designed to be destroyed to release their conceptual potential was something that I too would feel throughout this series of projects.

To further evolve this series of work, several types of dissolvable textiles were necessarily created. The properties of dissolvable fibres aren’t desirable within conventional clothing, and as such, dissolvable fabrications were not easily obtained. In order to create the knits and weaves necessary for the next iteration, assistance was ultimately sought from the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO). To this point, I had only used non-woven fabric and low-twist yarn within the process. In order to create as many options as possible employing dissolvable fabric product, I had to investigate alternative fabric constructions. Initially, I sourced some yarn from China with which I could create more ‘conventional’ fashion.

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66 Ibid
textiles in that I wanted to use weft knits and plain weaves common to mass production. I then contacted the CSIRO who was willing to experiment with the dissolvable yarn.

With machinery available on site that could twist, interlace and interloop the fibres, I discussed at length the possibilities of what could be created. Chemical processes such as pre-shrinking were deemed immediately unsuitable, as they would trigger the dissolution, so we were limited to purely mechanical processes. However, as the fibre had low tenacity and elongation, it was proposed that several yarns be twisted together before any further construction could be attempted.

Having taught the basics of Textile Technology to first year fashion undergraduate students for a number of years, I wanted to ensure I covered these basic tenets of fabric construction myself. There are three types of fabric construction: weaves, knits and non-wovens. For my purposes, the priority was to trial weaves and knits.

The interlacing of yarns that occurs in woven fabrics results in fabrications that are stable and the basis of construction for rudimentary garments such as jackets and trousers. The interlooping structure of knitted textiles lends itself to form-fitting garments, and with the use of a fully-fashioned knitting machine, a garment could be created that entirely enveloped the body.

The weave was unsuccessful as the construction process itself was too forceful and snapped the fibres, which proved too fine and delicate to withstand the rigorous weaving process [1.35-1.36]. However, the knitting of the dissolvable yarn yielded fruit.

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BODYSUIT

I commissioned a dissolvable bodysuit to be created on the CSIRO’s fully-fashioned Japanese Shima Seiki Whole garment knitting machine. With minimal human intervention, the digital pattern used to create the bodysuit resulted in a garment that almost entirely enveloped the body, including fingers [1.26] and individual toes [1.27]. The garment was a second skin made of a series of purl and knit stitches and as such, represented a machine-fashioned body.

With a body inside, it was alive, but when that body was removed it became a sloughed skin, an empty casing. This was something that American-born, Melbourne-based artist and lecturer in painting at the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA), Kate Just explored in her knitted sculptural pieces, and most poignantly, in one of her most recent works, In My Skin.59 In this piece, she too employed the use of a fully-fashioned body suit as a skin, but she evolved the pattern further by hand-knitting in more distinctive features such as facial structures, nipples, navel, and pubic hair. In doing so, she effectively transformed the generic suit into a portrait. The bodysuit was exhibited laid out empty and flat on a

black platform. In an interview for the *Textile Fibre Forum*, she commented that: “I always turn to knitting as one of the tools I have to deal with the body. It mimics skin, and comes together almost like pores, tissue, and texture. It’s an emulation of the membrane ... cloth is connected to our bodies all the time. In a sense it’s this material in our skin always.”

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61 Ibid.
In My Skin [1.40-1.41] evoked a connection with hyperrealist artist Ron Mueck’s Dead Dad [1.42], another sculptural piece in which a dead body was laid out on a platform for exhibition, stark and isolated. In some ways, Dead Dad was one of the first dead bodies I encountered when it was exhibited at a retrospective of his work at the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) in 2010. Mueck’s work looks incredibly realistic, and if it were not for the small size of this object, one could quite easily be convinced of it being the real thing.

Somewhat ironically, (in that I was unaware of this when I first encountered her work), it was the unexpected death of her younger brother that instigated Kate Just’s mother to teach Just to knit in her mid-Twenties. I began to question the role of real death within the process of artistic creation. It seemed that when this influence became apparent, it added a layer of sacredness to the work.

I noticed that I became reluctant to actually dissolve garments.

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62 Ron Mueck, Dead Dad, 1996-97. 20.0 x 38.0 x 102.0 cm. Stefan T. Edlis Collection.
DISSOLVING THE BODY SUIT

I held onto the bodysuit for some time before dissolving it. As a skin, it became precious and although it was only a ghost of a body, it was something that I had brought into being and it was one of many forthcoming instances in the research where I was positioned to intentionally ‘kill’ something, which is to say that it’s ‘life’ was prematurely ended, thereby contributing to the instigation of the cycle of death. I found that I was beginning to see my work as being ‘alive,’ and something with which I was becoming sentimentally engaged.

I wanted to trial multiple methods of dissolving the bodysuit as different techniques would result in water saturating the fibres at different rates and produce differing dissolved aesthetics. Previously, I had only practiced small swatches of the knit against my own skin, and was not certain, therefore, of my ability to predict the outcome of dissolving the bodysuit. Once again, I had to accept the dissolving as a process over which I had only minor control, acknowledging that in the process of death, there is only a small level of intervention that can be conducted. Overall, the processes will occur organically in their own way and control must be surrendered accordingly.

[1.43]
Pia Interlandi
Dissolvable Body Suit
2012
Photo by: Devika
Blimoria
The dissolving began with the application of the water-sprayer over the face of the model. Metaphorically, it was also an acknowledgement of my own mourning of the impending loss of the garment, the ‘body’ casing: the water pooling around her fringe and eyes and then dripping down the centre front of the garment was, in part, reminiscent of shedding tears. The water formed a rivulet on the model’s chin that then dripped down into the stitching directly below. The water was captured in the wale of the knit and the loops slowly unzipped.

I moved onto the shoulders, a major anchoring of the garment, and sprayed blasts of water. The moisture created holes in the garment and the unpeeling ensued - where the most saturated fibres had dissolved, they rolled under the more intact knit, so rather than becoming translucent against the skin, they simply created holes that exposed the ‘intact’ skin. This was not the aesthetic that I considered best communicated the merging of skin and body, so I changed tactic. Instead of creating isolated, dissolved holes, I sought to create a more consistent dissolving, and a more uniform melt. I had considered submerging the model into a bath to entirely and simultaneously saturate the fibres, but felt that the garment may have dissipated before I was able to effectively capture images of the process in situ [1.43].
Instead, parts of the body were simply isolated and then immersed into a bucket of warm water. Once again, the focus shifted to the hands. After hastily dipping a hand into the water, Devika quickly snapped away at the hand as the fibres became transparent, shrunk in, and then peeled away from the skin. This method proved much more effective as the saturated fibres became transparent skin to be seen, whilst the texture of the knit was still apparent. In this way, the skin fused with the fabric, becoming one body, before the fibres surrendered and melted.
[147]
Pia Interlandi
Dissolvable Body Suit: Hand Detail
2012
Photo by: Devika Billimoria
The saturation technique produced more of the aesthetic results for which I was hoping, so to finish the dissolving process, I poured a large amount of warm water over the shoulder of the model [1.48-1.50]. Completed in approximately five minutes, it was only in reflecting upon the photographs that I could appreciate the process more deliberately and intently.
In this slower motion version, I was reminded of a sculptural candle that was exhibited by Belgian fashion label A. F. Vandevorst for the Arnhem Mode Biennale in 2002. This human candle, staged lying on her side in a foetal position, gradually melted as a series of candles slowly wasted away her fashioned skin.

[1.51-1.52]
A. F. Vandervorst
A Woman Made of Candles
2011

Pia Interlandi
Dissolvable Body Suit
2012
Photo by: Devika Bilimoria
Following the disappointment at the inability to machine weave a dissolvable fabric – in itself yet another reminder of its inherent fragility in the manufacturing process – I began to consider this limitation as an element to be worked into the design process.

In direct contrast to the fully-fashioned knitting of the bodysuit, which involved minimal human interaction, I wanted to execute the opposite for the next iteration of the dissolvable garment series. Seeking to make something that required much involvement with my own hands, I considered traditional garment archetypes and reflected upon my own experiences of undergraduate fashion studies. Realising that the most challenging component of the course had been when we spent a semester designing, patternmaking and constructing a tailored jacket, I decided to confront my anxiety regarding this garment, and engage with it.

[1.54]
Nick Veasey
Jacket/Shirt/Tie
2005

[1.55]
Peter Allan
The Organza Suit
2006
TAILORED JACKET

The tailored jacket has come to be synonymous with the representation of an external fashioned body. The jacket, unlike the bodysuit, which requires a body to be present within to give it structure and silhouette, is a garment that is possessed of its own body. The many components within it essentially give the garment a skeleton, organs and skin; stitching, shoulder pads, fabric.

Photographer Nick Veasey has explored this notion of the layers in items of fashion in his x-ray photographic work whereby he allows viewers to see both inside and outside an object simultaneously, creating an ephemeral, ghostly garment portrait. [1.54]

I approached Dr. Peter Allan, a colleague and former undergraduate teacher, to assist me in the pattern-making and construction of the garment, as his own doctoral research [1.55] and fashion practice revolved around tailoring methodology as it pertains to the body. He reminded me that the act of “tailoring is both process and craft, physical and psychological” and he referenced Giannino Malossie who argued that “… suits, which once lasted a lifetime, corresponded to an idea of the body that remained unchanged.” This reminded me of the importance of the jacket as a fundamental garment in the wardrobe. However, it was this notion that the body remain eternal that I found challenging: I was not creating a garment that would last a lifetime, but rather a garment that would be susceptible to death far more easily than it would ordinarily.

[56] His research focused primarily on the male body, but even though my research wasn’t specific to gender, his expertise in the area was still immensely valuable.
[57] Peter Allan “The Fabricated Man,” p 199.
[58] Ibid.
Without a woven dissolvable fabric, I returned to using the dissolvable non-woven variety. I quickly learnt the limitations to its use and the metaphoric implications of the profoundly physical/corporeal interactions between the fragile cloth and myself even before the planned process of decomposition had commenced:

1. Sweaty hands would begin to trigger the disintegration process. While this was observable as a slight waviness appearing in the fabric, it was more noticeable on my hands as they became sticky, which implied that I was rubbing off on the garment as much as it was rubbing off on me.

2. Ironing dissolvable fabric is difficult when there is a steamer attached to the iron. If the iron drizzled or emitted even a little steam, holes would appear in the garment, which meant that regular finishing processes had to be avoided as even the smallest interaction with water, a vital commodity for the preservation of life, would impact negatively on the garment.

3. Sneezing around the garment was a dangerous if involuntary action, as any moisture hitting the garment would result in tiny holes. Therefore, I had to be acutely conscious of my own bodily reactions, the impact they would have on my surroundings and ultimately, the integrity of the cloth.

Thus, in producing a garment for ‘death,’ living processes imperiled its realisation. This jacket was a fragile entity that required additional care: it would easily blend with my skin, my skin being a catalyst for its disintegration. I felt that my body was endangering the garment, ergo my body was dangerous.
The noticeability of this during the construction meant that the way I interacted with the fabric and the garment differed from the manner I would normally treat a garment that was in mid-production. Every time I placed the garment on a surface, from working table to mannequin, I had to pre-screen every element of the contact surfaces with my hands to ensure that there were no wet patches that would threaten the integrity of my jacket. The garment had its own life that I was protecting; the fact that I was ultimately going to encourage it to ‘die’ was not relevant until that time. But just as I was fashioning the garment, so to it was fashioning me.

**DISSOLVING THE JACKET**

The layering of the dissolvable jacket proved to be the most interesting part of this dissolving process. Stitching provided a scaffold on which different pieces could hang. Unlike the bodysuit, which peeled back and lost most of its original
configuration, the stitching jacket held together, reiterating its function as the skeleton of the garment. However, unattached stitching, such as that in the buttonholes, meant that buttons simply slid off the garment, their role as fastening melted away.

I chose to dissolve only one side of the jacket so that I could compare the appearance of the disintegrated section with the intact side. It also meant that I was creating a designed remainder, the first time I had the ability to do so. There were many readings of the garment in this form: as a ghost, as a corpse, as a comment on fashion in general.

Dissolving a tailored jacket, a garment that is associated with durability and longevity, was an act of speeding up the process of decomposition. If this garment was so easily susceptible to time and decay, it acted as a forewarning to the body worn underneath. If we alter the time lapse at which we look at a life cycle, so too would the body shrink, pucker and wrinkle before slowly melting away, revealing our bones. The jacket was a mirrored skin, reflecting our own mortality.
Pia Interlandi
Dissolvable Tailored Jacket
2012
Photography by: Devika Bilimoria
Pia Interlandi
Dissolvable Tailored
Jacket- Sleeve Detail
2012
Photography by: Devika
Billimoria
[1.64]  
Pia Interlandi  
Dissolvable Tailored Jacket - Remainder  
2012  
Photography by: Devika Bilimoria
By working more heavily with dissolvable textiles, I began to realise that it was not only their power as analogy that deserved engagement. The act, the process, of cutting and sewing these fabrications meant that one had to reassess one’s own influence over the cloth. As described previously, I became aware of all the ways in which my own body was a threat to these garments, and in that way, hyper-conscious of my own bodily secretions. I myself was a permeable boundary.

In their collaborative book *What We Leave Behind*, environmental activists Derrick Jensen and Aric McBay noted that, “we are not impermeable. Our boundaries are blurry, shifting, porous, and ultimately indefinable.” This translated into the theories already outlined regarding clothing as a second skin. Fashion academic Diana Klein’s research into the *Intimate Habitat* analyses the effect our clothing has on our physiology, recognizing that “fibres are at the interface between the body and fashion” and what we wear can literally, in a chemical sense, seep into our skin.

In January of 2009, in the midst of my tailoring engagement, I was invited to participate in a group show as part of the Cultural Program of the L’Oréal Melbourne Fashion Festival. Entitled *The Wayward Fold*, the work of seven designers was presented in a show that aimed to investigate “new types of interaction between

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72 Ibid, p 85.
73 Interestingly, this mirrors the photographic analogy between the dead and the living in image capture, wherein in the living are blurred through processes of respiration - of being alive - whilst the dead remain inert.
75 Ibid, p10.
76 Naomi Raggatt (RAGGATT), Liam Revell + Stephen Gallagher (Mechanisms of Alteration), Pia Interlandi + Priscilla Lim (“Hhhh...”), Polly Van Der Glas (VAN DER GLAS), Sarah Martinus (P.H.A.T.)
clothes, jewellery and the body. Human hair and teeth are made into jewellery, garments are tailored and pleated to fit obese bodies, fleshy bits are folded and clothes for the dead are made to dissolve and disintegrate. This is a show that will challenge your relationship to beauty, body, mortality and dress.77

Each designer was asked to produce a capsule collection. I viewed this as an opportunity to take my work outside the realm of photography, and embed it within the ritual of the fashion catwalk.

The catwalk is one of the most established ‘spaces’ in which fashion is communicated, specifically as spaces pertain to clothing. It would be an opportunity to demonstrate my garments and their concepts to a live audience, and would necessitate that I had to negotiate a new way to present my dissolvable garments. I decided that I would show the collection under the name of my collaborative label with partner Priscilla Lim. “Hhhh...” is a label under which Priscilla and I show experimental fashions that we established shortly after completing our undergraduate degrees.

Evolving from my work involving the Y-incision garment pattern-cutting and heat manipulation of fibres, I decided that pairing the garments with dissolvable fabrication would be an effective method of communicating ideas of transformation through death. As the garments became saturated with water, elements of the garments would dissolve and reveal concealed panels within the garments. This method would attempt to portray the process of death, and also of decomposition, as something from which beautiful and unexpected things can arise.

I was also interested in the ‘trick’ used within funeral homes when dressing the dead, which involved the cutting of garments up the center back seam in order to fit clothing around a dead body that may have either gained or lost weight since the garment was last worn. The garments that were designed were done so with this seam intentionally left open [1.65].

Another technique I was keen to add to the dissolvable garments was transfer printing. As a method of print application with which I had experimented in the past, I was eager to ascertain the ways I could apply my established techniques to the dissolvable fabrications. Imparting colour would be another layer upon the garments, as would the inclusion of other textiles and garment shapes.

Transfer printing, within the context I had used it previously, involved either digitally printing in a transfer specific dye or directly painting the pigment onto paper. The print is then transferred onto a fabric with the application of heat and pressure. The effect that this process might have upon the dissolvable fabrication was something that involved numerous tests.

The first aspect of the process revealed that heat shrinks the fibres. It was as though the garment was a skin that contracted when exposed to the high temperatures (200 degrees Celsius) of the heat press machine.
At first, I had considered printing the fabric before cutting and constructing the garment, but the effect created by the simultaneous printing and shrinking resulted in a surprising effect [1.66-1.67]. The solid print became wavy and unpredictable, and as this notion of unpredictability and a limit in control over the processes of decay was something that I had already discovered in the process of dissolving the garments previously, I sought to incorporate it into the Wayward Fold collection.

However, we could not print the finished garments without considering the dramatic change in the size of the garments. Designing for a size twelve, garments would be reduced by process to a size six [1.68]. In response, all of the dissolvable garments that were to be printed required up-scaling before construction. This also proved to be another instance in which I considered the garment as it pertained to a human body, and thought about the shrinkage and distortion of the body that can occur as we age.
Pia Interlandi
Dissolvable Tailored Jacket – before
and after transfer printing
2009
A byproduct of the printing process is the paper on which the dye was originally painted. Once printed, a trace of the garment was left on the paper, the dye removed from the transfer process [1.71-1.73]. By pressing onto a finished garment, the unevenness of the levels meant that dye did not transfer evenly. What remained were footprints of the garment, a ghost of where it once was. In and of themselves, these post-transfer papers became fragments of the process and were somewhat beautiful. These fragments became the basis for the next iteration, to be discussed shortly.

We were not able to have a dress rehearsal of the garments, as that would have required sewing double of the collection, which time did not allow. Thus, each garment had a one and only life.

[1.71-1.73]
Pia Interlandi
Transfer printing paper
remainder
2009
The show was set within the foyer of a contemporary architecture studio [1.74-1.76]. It was a large space with polished concrete floors, and issues regarding the safety of our models and of anyone walking over the catwalk were taken into consideration to ensure that the ground did not become too slippery. We needed to ensure that the water used to dissolve the garments was contained, which then limited the methods of application we could use to trigger the dissolution.

Due to the unpredictability of the process, it was decided that Priscilla and I needed to be on hand to apply the water. In an attempt to communicate the theme of growth through death, the use of watering cans seemed appropriate.

As the models walked down the catwalk, they stopped to pose as they reached Priscilla and I midway on the runway. From here, we watered them before they continued walking to the end. By the time they reached the end of the catwalk, the garments had already begun to dissolve. In ensuring the comfort of our models by using warm water, we had also dramatically increased the speed of the dissolution.

Being witness to the audience reaction was an interesting part of the process of performing the dissolving ritual. As the majority of the audience had no idea that the garment would dissolve, there were audible gasps as the first garment slipped down the body of the model.
1.78
Pia Interlandi + Priscilla Lim (*Hhhhh...*)
Wayward Fold
2009
Photography by: James Morgan
Pia Interlandi + Priscilla Lim ("Hhhh...")
Wayward Fold
2009
Photography by: James Morgan
A curious aspect was the embellishment on the body and cloth created by the dissolving process in conjunction with the transfer printing. Contextualised within a fashion domain, I was reminded of a collection presented by Maison Martin Margiela in 2005 as part of the House’s Spring Ready-To-Wear season [1.82-1.84]. The collection “had begun in Margiela’s head as an idea about ‘dissolving’ the structure of clothing” as reported by Sarah Mower in her review of the collection. It featured models wearing garments that were in transition from fabric (still on the roll) to garment construction, and were adorned with jewellery made of dyed ice cubes. As the ice cubes melted, they imparted bright blue and violet dye onto the clothing. This was one method used to stain, print and, to an extent, ‘finish’ the garments.


161
A fashioned work by Martha McDonald, uses a similar process played out in reverse within her *Weeping Dress* unveiled at Craft Victoria in 2011 [1.85-1.87]. Produced using a black crepe paper, McDonald created a Victorian mourning dress, and in a performance for the opening of the exhibition, McDonald sung “a mother’s lament for three dead children.” Instead of tears, water ‘wept’ from the ceiling, and relinquished the dye in the dress. Rather than be coloured by the process, the garment was un-coloured: the garment wicked from black through to an almost grey-turquoise through to pale blue. The remaining garment was bleached of colour, like a corpse drained of blood.

The remainders from my own show were peeled off the models backstage. These remainders were a source of contemplation, a symptom of using a combination of fibre compositions, and they became remnants and reminders of origin, and thereby mementos of a life past.

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Most garments contain a combination of fibres or textile constructions. These are unlikely to deteriorate at the same rate, and as a result, there will be garment remainders at a given time, just as a body will decompose in several stages, the last of which is usually the skeleton. Skeletal remainders were a key aspect to the dissolvable collection, and were evidence of a ‘lived’ and ‘post mortem’ garment. [1.88-1.91].

As to whether to continue with intentional remainders within future designs was something taken into consideration. Paralleling these garment remainders with cultural death practices, I reflected that without burial remainders, we would not have discovered how early humans existed as there would not be any supporting archaeological evidence. Jensen and McBay, who write primarily about ‘waste’ in their collaborative book *What We Leave Behind* as things that outlast their intended use, also noted that “societies that produce little or no non-degradable waste are consequently less interesting to many archaeologists and historians… in fact, there’s a good chance that a society that ‘failed’ to produce any lasting waste may not even exist in the orthodox historical record.”

The importance of creating something that lasts in a garment to become an intentional skeletal remain was something that I would consider within my garment design in Chapter 3.

[1.88-1.91]
Pia Interlandi + Priscilla Lim (“Hhhh…”)
Wayward Fold: Remainders (Shoulder Pad)
2009

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62 Jensen and McBay, *What We Leave Behind*.
63 ibid, p 17.
In summary, this chapter began with a discussion of the body and it’s covering skins as fashioned entities that have boundaries that can blur and be dissolved to reveal our inherent vulnerability and fragility: our nakedness and our mortality. By understanding the body and its permeable skin as, in the words of John Potvin, “the flesh that encounters the world of objects; fashion not only rubs up against our fleshy bodies, but it itself a second skin, another layered and significant sensory device of being-in-space,” the skin becomes a location that can be manipulated. Through the story of Adam and Eve, the realisation that an encounter with clothing was also analogous with an encounter with one’s own mortality set the scene for the projects that followed.

The series of fashionings discussed in this chapter each transformed and evolved into one another, each asking a different series of questions. By engaging the use of dissolvable fabrications, I was able to explore a range of analogies of death and disintegration within design. The dissolvable garments sought to explore something of what happens to the garment and body when buried.

The first series, Shroud and Spindle was the first time dissolvable fabrications were utilised, specifically in the form of a multifilament yarn and non-woven fabrication, and showed that by entwining and covering the body, analogies of death and of birth could be explored. The residue of the fabrications, whilst potentially messy, could also be seen as beautiful, but what was left at the end of this exploration was a need to create more structured garments, so as to best explore the theme of clothing as skin, and then skin as a dissolving entity revealing messages about mortality, nakedness and fragility.

The second series employed the use of a fully-fashioned Body Suit, a garment knitted with the same dissolvable multifilament used in the Spindle experimentation. While this garment involved a denser construction than that of the previous fashionings, the method of construction was separate from my own bodily interactions, as it was created by machine, and not by hand. Aside from this fact, this was the first instance in which I had been able to...

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64 Potvin, The Places and Spaces of Fashion, 1800-2007, p 8
slight reservations about dissolving the garment. I had begun to see the garment as being entwined with life, and by dissolving it; I was a catalyst for its death. Aesthetically, this fashioning bore the most resemblance to a skin being dissolved as the garment was stretched over the folds and crevices of the body and included spaces for fingers and toes knitted into its structure.

In order to further explore this connection between the garment and myself, I created a dissolvable Tailored Jacket, a process that involved much interaction between my own body and the fabrication. From the tailoring experience, I was able to observe myself as an entity that was permeable. Just as my own sweat was triggering the dissolution of the fabric, so too was it imprinting on me; at the end of a sewing session, my hands would be sticky from transference with the fabrication. The realisation that there was simultaneous transference between the garment and myself impacted the notion of the garment being a part of the body. On the body, it drew awareness towards the mortality of the garment, which in turn made the wearer aware of their own humanness, mortality and fragility.

Once dissolved, the tailored jacket revealed an interesting remainder that had not appeared in the other iterations; for in this instance, there were manifold components to the structure. Whereas the bodysuit had sloughed off, the fabrication around the body being consistent, the tailored jacket held multiple layers. The jacket had its own body, skin (dissolvable fabric), organs (buttons and shoulder pads) and skeleton (stitching from seams). A seed was sown in my thinking that I could create intentional remainders, and thus the question of where and if a garment was ever finished could be explored.

An important moment within the research praxis, The Wayward Fold production took the dissolvable fashionings into another stage. Exploring different techniques of garment construction and embellishment with transfer printing allowed for added dimension to the dissolvable practice established in previous iterations.

Having taken the dissolvables to a fashion catwalk, one main interest emerged as a result of displaying the dissolving process in a live audience context. Moving from the still images captured
in previous photography work, I felt that I was left with nothing but garment remainders at the end of the day. Although photographers at the show captured images and film, I had little or no control over what was considered of importance through the eye of their respective lenses and for their individual purposes. For example, I found the movement captured in the background to be distracting and not germane to showcasing the specificity of the work, and as such, for my purposes, I felt that carefully controlled photographic conditions would prove the best way forward with future project work in the series.

While I had imagined this exploration of dissolvables as an enactment of the process of putrefaction, these garment-skins were not decomposing and putrefying in front of my eyes. Rather, the shedding of the old skin revealed a fresh new one, and in that way, this process of decomposition was revivifying. The pouring of water over the garment resembled a cleansing ritual whereby the body was being reborn. The fashionings effectively moved some of the more feared and repellent aspects of death into something profoundly beautiful. While this eluded the actuality of death, its finitude and degenerative physical associations, and could be interpreted as another expression of ‘death denial,’ it nevertheless made the idea of disintegration more approachable and something I could go on to explore with fascination rather than fear.

However, in reflecting upon this initial body of work, one of the more important issues that arose was the revealing of remainders: what is ‘left’ and how a garment might be designed to deliberately leave remainders, even as it mostly dissolved away. In moving into the following series of fashionings, it was the intention to take the next step and regenerate these newly available remainders.
CHAPTER 2:
BODY BECOMES LANDSCAPE:
BODY MOULDS
CHAPTER 2
BODY BECOMES
LANDSCAPE
BODY MOLDS
“... Listen. Listen. He said that if they dug his father’s body up, it would be gone. They had planted a seed over his grave. The seed became a tree. Moses said his father became a part of that tree. He grew into the wood, into the bloom. And when a sparrow ate the tree’s fruit, his father flew with the birds. He said ... death was his father’s road to awe. That’s what he called it...” - ‘The Road to Awe.’ Izzi: Exchange with Tom Creo in *The Fountain*.

In 2006, American film director Darren Aronofsky released *The Fountain* [2.01], a film that took seven years to reach the big screen. The director’s labour of love, it is an opus with a plot that spans over one thousand years and blends Buddhism, Mayan, and Biblical philosophies; weaving in astronomy and even the Spanish Inquisition. With three braided story lines, the overarching themes are of death and immortality through the acceptance of death as eternal life. In each scenario, the central character embarks on a quest to save his love from her impending death. While she eventually learns to accept her fate, her partner tries everything to prevent it, even going so far as to declare that “Death is a disease, it’s like any other. And there’s a cure. A cure - and I will find it.”

Described as “A Love Poem to Death,” the entire film moves “from darkness into light, from black to white.”

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5. Darren Aronofsky as quoted in ibid.
This film’s main relevance to the research is poignantly revealed as the main character searches for the Tree of Life \([2.02-2.05]\), and upon finding it, rubs some of its sap into a wound on his stomach \([2.06-2.10]\). Experiencing the tree’s drastic healing properties, he greedily drinks from it, and then watches in horror, as flowers and grass begin erupting from his wound \([2.11-2.12]\). It is at this point, that he realises that eternal life is eternal death. His death is his rebirth, into the form of plants \([2.13]\).\(^6\)

\(^6\) Aronofsky, "The Fountain." @01:20:30
The Fountain presents the viewer with the idea of life continuing after death, or more specifically, an eternal life given by the Tree of Life, into which the body is planted and becomes part of the landscape. Similarly, when a seed is planted in the soil in which the protagonist’s wife is buried, she becomes transmigrated into tree.

A deeply moving and influential piece of cinema, watching this film activated my own considerations and the viewing of death as a transformation into new life; that the body is literally reabsorbed and feeds plants, which in turn feed other life. Thus the next series of iterations explored the merging of body and textile treated as a root system through the process of decay and dissolution. Where the dissolving fabric investigations discussed in Chapter 1 were perceived as a ‘second skin,’ the ‘body moulds’ evolved to represent a state that examined the borders between life and death, body and textile and a condition positioned between decomposition and regeneration.

I began my research into this area of discourse with a walk through Melbourne General Cemetery [2.14-2.17]. It was my intention to find ‘life’ emerging from the graves, and it proved rather sporadic. On occasion, weeds would emerge from between cracks in the old graves. In one grave, there was a large rosemary bush, a plant symbolising remembrance; it had established itself between the concrete. I wondered if its planting had been intentional. The idea of planting memorial trees is something that has existed in Australia for quite some time, but planting trees directly above the grave has not.

‘Natural Burial’ was an emerging practice that I encountered when reading Robert Larkins’ Funeral Rights: What the Australian ‘Death-Care’ Industry Doesn’t Want You to Know.7 Natural Burial carried the aim and notion of the body extending and embedding into the environment. This chapter focuses on regeneration and incorporation of the body into the environment as the main process of interest.

In 1993, when Carlisle Cemetery in the United Kingdom was opened, “much controversy arose ... especially with funeral directors.”8 Although it was first called a ‘woodland’ burial site, it has since been recognised as the first ‘Natural,’ ‘Eco’ or ‘Green’ burial site. In 2000, it was touted as “the single greatest environmental initiative in the UK.”9 Its pioneer, Bereavement Services Manager Ken West recognises that it is not a new concept; being planted into the ground in a shallow grave without coffin or tombstone is something that was considered the norm for most of the 19th Century and is still a practice within most Jewish and Islamic communities. However, within most Western cultures, where embalming is expected and elaborate coffins and grave markers selected, it is new. For some, “green burials may re-establish an ancient, powerful connection to [the] landscape10 – a more “spiritual connection than an ecological or religious one.”11 West goes on to say that “is not about harking back to some dreamy arcadia but about taking the best from the past, adding present day knowledge, and creating a new sustainable way forward.”12

Since then, and more specifically in the last few years, a number of books have been exclusively dedicated to the topic,13 and even

9 As cited in ibid. p xvii
12 West, A Guide to Natural Burial p xvii
more has been written about it in sections of contemporary burial ‘how-to’ guides. These have been based largely overseas, and academic Robert Nicol has noted that there is a deficiency in literature covering the Australian perspective.  

Natural Burial in Australia is a relatively new concept; we are at least a decade behind developments being made in the UK and the United States. As of 2010, “there were only seven green burial sites in operation,” the first of which was opened as part of the existing Lismore Cemetery in New South Wales in July of 2008.

ABC’s Radio National has hosted a number of experts in the field to talk about Natural Burial since 2006, but by the time Network Ten’s popular news program The Project played a segment about Natural Burial on the 29th of November 2011, interviewing the Natural Death Centre’s Zenith Virago and Robert Larkins author of Australian Funeral Rights, it is fair to say that the idea had impacted the mainstream. That isn’t to say that it has become the popular choice for internment in Australia, but rather it is a concept that is beginning to grow in interest.

There are many definitions of what exactly constitutes green burial. The Australasian Cemeteries and Crematoria Association (ACCA) defines a green burial “as the interment of a body that conforms to the usual or ordinary course of nature and adds to the biodiversity of the area.” However, as stated by Nancy Marshall, in her 2011

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Innovation (London: Continuum, 2012); Larkins, Funeral Rights: What the Australian ‘Death-Care’ Industry Doesn’t Want You to Know.


15 The Natural Death Centre was officially opened in 1991 by Nicholas Albery and his wife Josefine Speyer.


17 Ibid.


conference paper Green Burials in Australia and their Planning Challenges, “regardless of which of the many working definitions of green burials is used, there must be an appreciation of two distinct components: the burial environment and the burial process itself.”

Within my own work the main focus is the “burial process.” As to why this burial practice has become a “trend” or come into “favour”, Marshall states that:

*From a sociocultural perspective and in light of the relatively [new] environmental movement, it is undeniable that individuals have become increasingly aware of the impact they have on the environment. This awareness has driven many to adopt sustainable daily practice with the intention of reducing their ecological footprint.*

Green burial is creating is the opportunity for individuals to, as Mark Harris states, “allow the body to re-join the elements, to use what remains of a life to regenerate new life.”

This sentiment of “giving something back” was primarily what British academic and natural burial expert Hannah Rumble was investigating in her doctoral thesis. At the 2012 Death Down Under conference held in Dunedin, New Zealand, she presented a paper entitled Natural Burial and the Gift, in which she noted that there has been a shift allowed by natural burial by which people are able to “[talk] about their own bodies, not as being disposed, but as being full of potential.”

Between The Fountain and the potentiality of the body as conceptualised by Natural Burial, I began to see the dead body as

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21 Marshall and Rounds, p 5.
22 Ibid, p 2.
23 Mark Harris, Grave Matters - a Journey through the Modern Funeral Industry to a Natural Way of Burial, (New York: Scribner, 2007) p.1
26 Ibid.
full of budding life, a body that will disintegrate and be reabsorbed into the environment and landscape.

Further reinforcing the notion of organic breakdown and return to the environment was a documentary featured on BBC 4 entitled *After Life: The Strange Science of Decay* that supported an eight week exhibition staged at Edinburgh Zoo where the accumulated by products of an average family’s daily life from kitchen to garden, together with the debris from a typical barbeque was enclosed in a glass box. The exhibit “followed the events as maggots, moulds, bacteria, flies and mushrooms transformed the contents beyond all recognition.” Amongst the decay of house hold degradables, the notion of rebirth was strongly emphasised, with presenter George C. McGavin, an entomologist, author and academic, reiterating throughout the experiment that “whatever happens it will be a fascinating journey into the fate that awaits all living things; to be broken down; to be recycled; to be reborn.”

It was the language used throughout the documentary that was of most interest to the research. To find a scientific broadcast intended for mainstream viewing, regarding something as potentially disgusting and repellent as decay, and that employed a terminology I too had been adopting when talking about death, was galvanising. ‘Nutrients’, ‘new life’ and ‘reborn’, weren’t just poetics, but instead were part of the “surprising” reality that a “life relies on death. Living things, us included, can only be made from the remains of dead things.”

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29 Ibid.
30 Hepburn, "After Life: The Strange Science of Decay." 00:02:51
31 Ibid. 00:03:24
Preliminary Investigation

The issues of rebirth through death, natural burial, and regeneration into the landscape were integral to a second project series undertaken as part of this doctoral research: the Body Moulds. These began as a simple proposal to create ‘bodies’ that merged with the landscape within a fashion context, to then become a large series of iterations or ‘cycles.’ These moulds then moved from the fashion realm into the sculpture domain, where several material tests were conducted and a number of different types of mould shapes were experimented with, each engaging with slightly different dialogues.

The very first material investigation took the form of a series of beige woollen gloves that were filled with a mix of soil and seeds [2.18] and left to hang from a clothes line [2.19-2.22]. The gloves were a reference back to the hands of the Body Suit utilised in Chapter 1, but instead of dissolvable yarn, the yarn used in this instance was wool, as the intention was for the gloves to provide a scaffold for the soil and this required a fibre with a higher degree of permanency.

The limp hands were symbolic of the inanimate body, but a part of the body that is usually embedded with much personality. ‘Holding hands’ on its own can be an intimate gesture, a physical joining

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32 Wool being a protein fibre, I thought it held the closest approximation to the human body’s own protein structure.
from one body to another. It was an attempt to create a body (or rather a body part) that would erupt with grass, and evolve to become more plant than body.

After one week, very few of the seeds in the Hanging hands had germinated, and when little more had emerged from between the knitted loops in the week following, the iterative idea was abandoned. One of the main problems was that the vertical hang of the gloves meant that water would simply drip through the fingertips and leave the majority of the soil dehydrated. There was also a problem created by the density of the woollen yarns in that they had too much cover and were not allowing enough sunlight to permeate into the earth and catalyse the growth of the seeds.

From Hanging Hands to Body Moulds

In seeking to review the issues that emerged from the initial Hanging Hands investigations, the Body Mould series, and would continue to evolve in following iterations, I examined the work of several other artists/designers who use biological processes to reflect the merging of living body and ‘dead’ textile in juxtaposing life and death, decay and growth, and disintegration and regeneration.

33 When my late paternal grandfather (Nonno) was comatose in hospital at the end of his life and was unable to communicate, there would always be family members holding his hands, if not for his sake, for their own. Feeling warmth from his hands was an indication that he was still alive. Even after his death, there was lingering warmth in his hands that his wife clung to.
On discovering the work of contemporary French artist Mathilde Roussel, I realised that she had executed what I had envisaged the Hanging hands to eventually become in her series The Lives of Grass [2.23]. According to the artist, the pair of suspended figures “show the effects of transformation of the material as a metaphor for the transformation of the body. Time sculpts the forms, makes them change and then decay.”[30] Over the course of her seven week solo exhibition, Anatomia Botanica[35] at the Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art in Nashville, Tennessee, The Lives of Grass transformed from vivid, lush brilliant green bodies into dry brown and matted straw [2.24-2.29], the life literally having been sucked out of each blade of grass. Encouraging the viewer to make return visits, the exhibition was described as “almost like a

[2.23-2.29]  
Mathilde Roussel  
The Lives of Grass  
2010

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35 ibid.  
As discussed in Chapter 1, body architects, Lucy and Bart have similarly created a body that extends into plant life and brings issues of transformation to the fore. Germination, presented as a pair of photographs representing Day 0 [2.30] and Day 8 [2.31] of the growth process, the transition demonstrates the changing texture of the body: grass erupting from the newly fashioned stocking/soil skin.

Working with related ideas to those in The Lives of Grass and Germination, the next iteration of the body moulds consisted of planting soil and seeds directly into the inside of a half mannequin.

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38 Lucy McRae and Bart Hess, Germination, 2008.
Whilst the *Hanging hands* proved a precursory attempt, it offered valuable data as to the logistic adaptabilities involved in working with seeds. Thus the first iteration proper of *Body Moulds* employed the scaffolding provided by a mould and consisted of planting soil and seeds directly into the inside of a half mannequin. Within the context of clothing, “dirt has long been viewed as an enemy. It threatens appearances and the status of respectability. It causes work and effort through the duty of care.” However, in this context, it was the ‘dirt’ that was the foundation for growth. I was beginning with a soil or ‘dirt’ that, in my opinion, had no distinguishable form. It was what Mary Douglas described as “[formless] … therefore an apt symbol of beginning and of growth as it is of decay” that after “a long process of pulverising, dissolving and rotting … all identity is gone.” It was ‘undifferentiated’ and in its ‘final stage of total disintegration’ representing both the beginning and the end of a cycle. I was seeing the dirt as *being* the disintegrated body, ready for re-absorption and reconfiguration.

The mannequin was positioned in recline to best effect water retention [2.33-2.35]. I viewed the physical role of tending to the mannequin as a role similar to the tending of the dead, both in referencing the dead human body, and also tending to the living plants emerging from it [2.32], for without my watering, they would

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32 ibid
also incur their own death. But it was not this particular element of the process in which I was most interested, for it was my intention to impart this death once the grass had grown for some months.

The significant element of interest emerged as I flipped the mannequin over to reveal the hidden growth occurring inside [2.36-2.38]. As if caught by surprise, the root structure within the mould followed and contoured the body. The water pooled in the lowest regions of the mould, just as the blood does in a dead body, and as a result the roots had grown more rapidly and densely in those regions. The roots had formed a dense network over and through the body, working in the same way as a network of veins and arteries in the human body would deliver blood and other cellular nutrition. The roots became the binding agent – the connective tissue in a body. The soil and seeds had become another body, another life, a reiteration, or ghost, of a life past.
I consciously choose to use the word ‘mould’ to describe the final pieces. The connotations and ambiguity of it being both a container and as a fungal growth arising from the decay of something appeased my own reading of the objects.

The first Body Mould was something that bifurcated from the moulds to follow as it was something that I wanted to reapply to the body, and in doing so create a more conscious engagement with a fashion - or even a garment - context [2.39-2.40]. I wanted
to reapply the now dead and dying mould and work it to the body.\footnote{42}

It was the intention to review the body mould as something that worn against the skin so as to dress the body, in essence, in a garment or textile. However, once removed and left outside of its container, the dirt began to dry and crumble, the roots snapping and breaking apart. Plant fibres form a large number of the fibres

\footnote{42 I considered whether the fluids released from the body’s own dissolution would be sufficient to rehydrate the soil and germinate new seeds. This was an idea I took with me to SymbioticA and will be discussed in the next chapter.}

[2.39-2.40]

Pia Interlandi

*Body Mould Series 1 - Reapplied*

2008
that we strengthen through a series of mechanised actions and
turn into roving, then spun yarns before they are woven or knitted
into cloth. These fibres, removed from the soil are in fact ‘dead’,
but are given a recycled life in the form of textiles. However, without
this processing, the individual fibres are fragile and easily broken
into smaller fragments, which, in turn, is what happened to the
roots in the body mould. In applying this dead and dying garment
to the living body, I considered the analogy of the body being
buried beneath the soil and whether the water and nutrients
released during its decomposition could merge with the mould and
revive the seeds in the soil and the create another cycle of life; as is
the main aim within natural burial.

Treating the body mould as a garment served to review the
iteration in the realm of fashion design, similar in principle to other
designers who also incorporate these organic processes of growth
and decay as simultaneous occurrences. However, in most cases
these designers use these processes of decay as a means to
create clothes for the living rather than for the dead, an essential
point of difference between their intent and the research.

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43 Cotton, Linen/Flax, Hemp, Jute, Ramie, Sisal and Coir amongst the most
popular cellulosic fibres. Sara J. Kadolphi, Textiles, 10th Edition ed. (New Jersey:
Person, 2007); Billie Collier, Phyllis Tortora, and Martin Bide, Understanding
During the 1990’s, designers Hussein Chalayan and Maison Martin Margiela explored alternative ways of fashioning garments. Jacque Lynn Foltyn identified these designers as “infus[ing] their designs with macabre imagery in response to social, economic, ecological, technological, and political changes that have created alienation, the distressed body, war, terror, violence, forced migration and a fear of instability, change, and death. Through their process design, the collections also express issues that reflect the intersection of death and decay of growth, rebirth and transformation against the palette of the living body and ‘dead’ textile.

45 Ibid.
In 1993, Chalayan's Central Saint Martins' graduate collection *The Tangent Flows*,\(^{46}\) based on the "duality of spirit and matter"\(^{47}\) featured garments that had been buried with iron filings that rusted the cloth. When excavated, the white garments revealed new layers of dense oxidation on the fabric [2.41-2.43].

Chalayan has since continued this technique in subsequent generations of his collections, including *Cartesia* (1994),\(^{48}\) and in describing his collection *Medea* (2002)\(^{49}\), Chalayan noted that "the garment is a ghost of all the multiple lives it may have had…nothing is shiny and new; everything has a history."\(^{50}\) This simultaneous reflection of the past in the present, a reincarnation of sorts, was something that I was primarily interested in within my own work.

Similar in theme, Belgian atelier Maison Martin Margiela showed his first solo exhibition 9/4/1615 in 1997 [2.44-2.46].\(^{51}\) Collaborating with Dutch microbiologist Dr A.W.S.M. van Egeraat, Professor at the Warenningen Agricultural University, Margiela encouraged


\(^{50}\) Hussein Chalayan as quoted in Clark et al., *Hussein Chalayan*. P 76

different coloured yeasts, moulds and bacterial fauna to grow on eighteen dressed mannequins.

Initially, the garments were white, the silhouettes echoing garments from previous collections. Presented within the setting of an art gallery, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam, the mannequins were displayed on the exterior of the building, which for the duration of the exhibition bloomed with colour imparted by the mould.

The new growth was living and also dying in the process of finishing the garments. In a 1997 interview, Margiela commented that, “we have always been interested in a switching of the perspective on the role of a material. An object worn as a garment – materials or garments given a second life…”

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52 Martin Margiela in an Interview by Simon Grant for magazine SIKSI (June/Aug 1997), as cited in: Maison Martin Margiela et al., *Maison Martin Margiela* (New York: Rizzoli, 2009). P 155
A new generation of designers has emerged in recent years from the blueprint laid down by designers like Chalayan and Margiela in the 1990’s. These designers embrace processes of growth, and simultaneously decay, as a method of creating fashion. Australian Donna Franklin and London-based Suzanne Lee have respectively created new methods of producing textiles that move out of conventional construction techniques and the nature of garment conception and design.

From a residency at SymbioticA53 in Perth, Donna Franklin first started to combine scientific principles within fashion in her widely presented Fibre Reactive Dress2[2.47-2.48]. This dress is host to Pycnoporus coccineus (orange bracket fungi)55 and was reviewed by academic Simon Blond, who observed it as:

... A white dress 'colonised' by a fungal growth. This encrustation was in reds, oranges, pinks and dull greens, transforming the white purity of the cotton fibre into a living fabric of dazzling beauty... The invasion of something so closely connected with self by a beautiful but alien life form was wonderful but alarming – like the earth reclaiming the body after death.56

53 Donna Franklin has had a number of residencies at SymbioticA between 2003-2006.
Franklin’s next project investigated the ability to grow a seamless garment from red wine. Collaborating with scientist Gary Cass, they created *Micro’be’ Fermented Fashion* [2.49-2.51], garments grown from the fermentation of wine. The fabrication was developed from wasted wine, which had ‘gone-off’. Fermentation is a process of decomposition, the death of one thing for the formation of another, as Franklin comments, “A fermented garment will not only rupture the meaning of traditional interactions with the body and clothing; but all raise questions around the contentious nature of the living materials themselves.”*57* While the garments created from these materials are yet to be converted back into recognisable garment forms, another designer has set about aiming to achieve this, essentially aiming to use similar fermented materials as a legitimate alternative to the fabrics we more often associate with clothing for the living.

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Suzanne Lee, the designer behind the *BioCouture* project (2007-2011) has a similar methodology to Franklin whereby she grows textiles that have emerged from decomposition and what she claims is an exploitation of the fermentation process. She has also designed in the end use of her garments, the materiality lending itself to another round of decomposition; the garments can “head to the compost heap when they are no longer wanted.” Her garments are somewhat more wearable than Franklin’s, and have taken steps further into the realm of commercial and wearable fashion. Instead of artistic interpretations of fashion, like those of my body moulds and dissolvable garments, for exhibition and use in photography, her fashionings are intended for wearing against the body. In a 2011 TED talk, she wore one of the pieces, but stated that perspiration was causing the garment to decompose on her: “this one is actually biodegrading in front of your eyes, it’s absorbing my sweat and feeding on it.” To which the emcee responded: “Well we’ll let

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you go and save and rescue it.” But rather than this chemical reaction being a desirable entwining of body and garment, she acknowledged that this was something she was trying to amend, essentially halting the process that within my work I was trying to embrace and encourage. Another comment made by Lee, mirrored in my own dissolvable garments as discussed in Chapter 1, was that: “If you were caught out in the rain wearing the BioCouture jacket, it would probably turn to jelly because it absorbs water so easily.” The chemical and physical interaction between textile and body - and the fragility of the relationship - is further highlighted by the introduction of the natural elements as a catalyst for the dissolution of the relationship.

British writer and academic, Jessica Hemmings commented that, “BioCouture returns to the concept that fashion is essentially a disposable margin between the self and the world. When that margin is no longer needed the material used to create the boundary can be broken down by composting, rather than contribute to our already overuse system of landfill.” And while I too observe the ‘margin’ connecting garment to body, within my work, I discern that the two actually merge during the context of burial and decomposition. It is by this viewing that garment and the body are inseparable that my fashionings are viewed as an exploration of the situation in which the margin between the body, garment and the soil, collapse and collide, merging physically and chemically. That fashion, as this ‘disposable margin’ can have an incredibly powerful role in enacting the dissolving of self and the world into one another, a processes further completed in the comingling of garment with body in the grave.

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52 Ibid. 00:06:22  
54 Hemmings, “Grown Fashion: Animal, Vegetable or Plastic?,” P269
In the second iteration, I began using fabric at the base of the mould as a means by which to create a scaffold that would support the root network - a foundation to which the roots could adhere once the dirt was removed, enabling me to capture the root system establishment. [2.55-2.56].

[2.55-2.56]
Pia Interlandi
Body Mould Series 2
Soil, seeds, cotton muslin
2008
I began with cotton muslin, a fabric made of cellulose derived from plants and used historically, as shrouds in the dressing of the dead. This fibre decomposed into the soil, the fibre serving as a food for the plants. As a stabiliser, it proved limited in securing the roots, but experimentally, it was of interest for further projects. After a six week period, it dissolved into the soil. The fabric tore like wet tissue. In this way, it was similar to the dissolvable materials investigated in the first chapter, and should it be the intention to combine techniques in the future, it could provide an alternative to these original fabrics.

Several smaller moulds were created which featured polyester lace [2.58] that, while mildly successful in creating a scaffold, became redundant as soon as the roots dried up as they flaked off from the scaffold. It was impossible to separate the roots from the earth: they were entwined. The soil was the flesh, the roots veins a vehicle for providing nutrients to the muscles.

While there were initial intentions to create garments from the body moulds, upon reflection, they became more effective as pieces of sculpture or objects of fashioning, partly due to the difficulty of securing the roots independently, but also in that their simplicity in process surrender was sufficiently effective as analogy. Rather than realising a garment that could be placed ‘upon’ a body, these investigations served to reinforce the poetic motif of body and textile intertwined - inseparable as life and death. In the outcome, photographs of the body moulds became the basis for images to be digitally printed onto cloth, which could then be used as fabrications within later projects.

An aesthetic reference point that I had subconsciously tried to attain was that of the German anatomist Gunther Von Hagens [2.57]. Von Hagens developed a process called ‘plastination’ in 1977, whereby “removing water and fats from the tissue and replacing these with polymers” made “it possible to preserve

[2.57]
Gunther Von Hagens
Arteries of the lower arm and hand
Institute for Plastination, Heidelberg, Germany, www.bodyworlds.com

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individual tissues and organs that have been removed from the body of the deceased as well as the entire body itself.\textsuperscript{66} Plastination was utilised for the teaching of anatomy, and then made its debut in an exhibition entitled ‘Body Worlds’ in Japan in 1995. \textsuperscript{67}

Although influenced by his aesthetic, unlike the work of Von Hagens, who achieves the persistence of the network formations through a process that fixes them in place, my aim was not to stop the processes of decay, which would remove mutability - the fragile co-existence of life and death, simply leaving behind a static remainder – albeit beautiful. And, although I continued to attempt to stabilise the roots developing in the fabric, and to remove the soil from around them in several other iterations, I eventually surrendered this notion as it became apparent that the only way to achieve a result would be to set the roots in a resin, essentially halting the processes I was intent on exploring.


\textsuperscript{67} Körperwelten in German
MAKING LACE (TRACE)

At this point in the research, I wanted to return to an idea that had occurred during the Tailored Jacket and Wayward Fold iterations detailed in Chapter 1. I was interested in evolving the notion of creating designed remainders that could be revealed through the dissolving or disintegration process. After conducting several iterations of the body moulds, and having only mild success at being able to directly use the moulds as fabrications to be worn against the body, I decided instead to move into embroidering these branching motifs.

I was, therefore, interested in the work of Marie Ilse Bourlanges who executed a series of textile works entitled Decay,[2.59-2.68] including eight knitted sweaters that “anticipate the broad semantic of decay... the pattern of intricate collections of lines that ebb across the textile... bear an ambiguous forensic feeling; even though they are newly made, the traces they carry express a past enigma that can’t absolutely be solved.” That these ‘new’ garments had evoked a past and also a perceived death in the form of patterns reminiscent of decay was intriguing as was Bourlanges’ methodology. She set about creating these patterns through the employment of a suit made out of carbon paper. As the garment was worn, the places affecting most contact and wear with the garments was transferred onto the paper, to then be revealed and translated into the patterns emergent in the Decay series. That some of these patterns closely

[2.59-2.68]
Marie Ilse Bourlanges
Decay
2008
Photographs: Virginie Rebetez

[^65]: Marie Ilse Bourlanges, Decay, 2008.
resembled the branching pattern that had occurred during the fashioning of the body moulds was further evidence that this bifurcating pattern was highly transmutable.

In the first instance of attempting to create a more durable branching pattern, I transfer-printed one of the images captured of the first iteration of the body mould directly onto fabric. From here, I traced the roots with the sewing machine, moving backwards and forwards to secure the stitching line [2.69]. While I was pleased with the resulting aesthetic, it proved time intensive in that it took over an hour to create a definitive pattern, and as I wanted to replicate the embroidery a number of times, or enough to cover a larger section of the body, it was decided to employ the use of a digital embroiderer. This meant that a branching pattern had to be defined and translated into a format friendly to the machine. To enact this, I traced over the body mould image and scanned the branching created [2.70-2.71]. In this first attempt, the pattern proved far too intricate, and had to be simplified [2.72-2.74].

Once this embroidery pattern had been approved by the commercial embroiderer, it was transferred to a piece of dissolvable nonwoven fabric and from this point; I could begin the next Body Mould cycle by combining them with the dissolvables. By entwining both elements I could explore notions of not only decomposition that the dissolvable fabrics enticed, but also the regenerative properties that the root structure afforded when revealed from the dissolved base.
The first time I combined the dissolvables with the body moulds, the results were photographed [2.75-2.78] on a model I had used several times previously including the dissolvable body suit and tailored jacket iterations. As she was in her thirties I decided to change tactics in the next photoshoot and juxtapose her with a model in her sixties. It was the intention, that by viewing the photographs as a series, there would be an implied time line created which flowed from one age into another, reflecting the ephemerality of life.
[2.75-2.76]
Pia Interlandi
Dissolvable Lace
2010 & 2012
Photography by Devika
Bilimoria
To further this notion of transience, I performed a quick experiment, whereby I photographed the lace remainder from the dissolved piece, and applied it to the last remnant of the human body, the skeleton [2.79]. This reminded me of the illustrative work of Laurie Lipton who frequently draws clothed skeletons [2.80].

I began to wonder just how long a designed remainder could last, whether it could outlast the decomposition of the body, and rest finally, adored on the skeleton. It is with that line of questioning that I approached The Pig Project: Fashioning Death in Chapter 3, a project that saw a dramatic transition from the art and artifice of analogy, and the ‘beautiful’ world of fashion, and into the fashioning of the gritty reality of death.

Following the exploration of both of the projects undertaken in the first and second chapters, it became apparent that there was a need to test these ideas away from analogy and into working with actual biological organisms within the realm of the dead body.
CHAPTER 3

FASHIONING DEATH

THE PIG PROJECT
Unlike the previous chapters, which consisted of project iterations, this third chapter consists of ‘moments’ within a large-scale research enquiry.

During the processes and fashionings discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, it became clear that I was predominantly dealing with analogies of death and transformation, and while those processes did include engagements with the actual processes associated with death such as dissolving and disintegration, growth and transformation, it was my intention to take these processes and what they had taught me into a realm where I was dealing with ‘real’ death. I wanted to engage with bodies that had lived and died, that were moving from composition into decomposition: bodies that, by virtue of the processes of nature, were disintegrating and organically returning to the landscape. But in considering the repercussions and implications of such a transition, I realised that my own skill set required development. In order to navigate the complex issues of bereavement, I would need to move beyond the role of the designer and into another field, that of the funeral practitioner. While I believed I had the natural empathy and compassion to be able to approach these situations, I had not undergone any formal training in the skills required to manage these situations. Accordingly, I undertook an elective study in the School of Social Science & Planning at RMIT University, entitled “Grief Loss and Trauma.” This proved an invaluable experience, however, I felt that I was still under-qualified to officially engage with the rituals surrounding the death of a person. As such, I decided to train to become a funeral celebrant. The sole intention was not to become the person that officiates at a funeral service, but rather, that I would be qualified to facilitate a number of conversations and engagements related to the preparation and participation of a funeral rite.

**FUNERAL CELEBRANCY**

Throughout the Twentieth Century, funerals in Western cultures were largely directed by clerics and other senior officials of religious institutions regardless of affiliation. These ceremonies were conducted within the scripted traditions of organised religion and the respective protocols associated with death and dying. But as there has been a perceptible shift away from the formalised structures of
church and temple into laic societies, a recognised need for secular ceremony and celebration emerged.

In her book *The Heart and Soul of Celebrancy*, Sally Cant describes the emergence of celebrancy through the eyes of Mary Hancock, a foundation member of the Celebrants Association of New Zealand who saw that “people [were] often asking for something with a spiritual basis, and wishing to do so without using words that come from any formal religion.” Celebrants were not active until the early 1970’s, so family and friends conducted funerals until the churches took hold in the 1960’s. By this time, the clergy had a near monopoly on funerals. However, as the Australian public began to demand a more personalised service over the intervening years, even the churches, who, are now increasingly forced to compete with the civil celebrants, have begun to allow families to design their own funeral ceremonies.

In 2009, I partook in a course in Funeral Celebrancy with the Celebrants Training College, a course led by Sally Cant. Over the weekend intensive program, we were taught about the health regulations regarding burial and cremations; each participant wrote and designed a fictional funeral ceremony (inclusive of eulogy, music and poetry selection), talked about how to engage with the bereaved, met with funeral personnel who outlined the role between celebrant and funeral director, and discussed stress and emotional management skills for those becoming celebrants. These ‘stress and emotional management’ skills were embedded within the program so that students could be taught about the importance of creating appropriate distance from intensely emotional situations but still allow for investment in the human interactions, and this proved immensely helpful when conducting future dressings of the dead.

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2 Ibid. p 17
WHEN DRESSING THE HUMAN BODY

I ask him if it’s difficult to dress a dead man, and how he does it. Ruhan describes the process, then stops. ‘Have you ever been to a nursing home? It’s like that.’

I have conducted three human dressings, each remarkable with respect to their respective particularities. My first dressing was that of my late grandfather (“Nonno”) as introduced in the Preface. We were walked into the chapel of the funeral home where his body was draped with a white cloth [3.01] and were left alone with his body to acclimatise to the situation before the dressing commenced. I was grateful for this time, that I was allowed to quietly converse with my Aunt about the minutiae of the context: how cold he was, how they

had missed a spot when they shaved him, how jaundice and dead he looked. When I started peeling off the white sheet, I could see that they had already dressed him in singlet, diaper and socks. It was a loss of circulation in his leg that eventually killed him as it became gangrenous, so covering his feet was a courtesy the funeral home staff took to spare us. I was grateful for the fact they had put the diaper on, as I was resistant to seeing my grandfather completely naked. It had never happened during his life, and he would have been relieved also that it was not going to occur in death. However, one initiative on their part that dis pleased me was that he had been embalmed. I located the stitched incision at his neck and was slightly taken aback. But that decision had not been mine to make: rather, it was that of my Nonna, his wife, for whom embalming for a viewing was guised as simply ‘preparation.’

The second dressing, for my grandfather’s elder sister (my Great Aunt) came a few months later, and proved the converse in terms of extended courtesy in the pre-preparation. Her sisters had been tentative in performing the dressing on their own and invited me to help them through the process. But unlike her brother’s carefully considered pre-dressing, no courtesy had been extended to my Great Aunt in the slightest. This experience was overwhelmingly visceral by comparison. She was presented to us in a mortuary ‘prep’ room within the funeral home. She too, was covered with a sheet. When we peeled back the sheet, I realised that she wore the clothes she had died in at the nursing home. Her mouth was agape; her eyes open. This was a moment in which I had to disguise my own profound discomfort for the benefit of the family. Accordingly, I assured them that this was all perfectly normal. People die with their eyes open, and when their bodies relax in death, their mouths too, fall open. All of that was true, I just was not aware that we would be witness to the undisguised processes. Without any assistance proffered, we cut away her death clothes and disposed of them in the bin. We then looked to the funeral director and asked for something with which to wash her. This experience was also new to me and I half expected us to be led to a hose or bath, none of which were forthcoming. We ended up using baby wipes provided by one of her granddaughters. As we washed her, one of her daughters took a sharp intake of breath and I immediately went to see what she had seen. It was livor mortis, or pooling of the blood.
effecting a purplish discolouration of the skin that occurs once the heart stops pumping and gravity forces the blood towards the lower regions. This is a natural post mortem consequence although one that people are not warned about. We struggled through the process of pulling on her nylon tights, but the exertion caused one of her daughters to giggle, which completely broke the ice, the strangeness of dressing a dead person had landed. But this was their mother and grandmother, my great-aunt, and we loved this person. While the encounter was unlike anything they had experience before they were determined to dress her body in something dignified. The dressing continued, but now the stories of their mother came spilling out from their mouths, not with only sadness, but with pride. As we left the funeral home there were tears in our eyes, but also smiles on our faces.

The third dressing was that of my maternal grandmother, and occurred in 2010 [3.02-3.04], by which stage I had qualified as a funeral celebrant. I was going to perform this alone, as the dressing was not something that any of my family was psychologically or emotionally prepared to undertake. In the case of my grandmother, we had all witnessed the gradual decline of her body over a number

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5 Rob Janaway had actually written about a case study of the burial remains of a woman which they recovered and found that “no other clothing had been present or survived, but her nylon pantyhose were intact and holding the lower part of her body together.” R. C Janaway, “The Decomposition of Materials Associated with Buried Cadavers,” in Soil Analysis in Forensic Taphonomy: Chemical and Biological Effects of Buried Human Remains, ed. M Tibbett and D. O Carter (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2008). P 174
of years. It happened much slower than the degeneration of her brain, as she had suffered the symptoms of dementia for well over a decade prior to her passing. She was un-embalmed, as was the family’s request (something that I had to fight the funeral staff to achieve). She was not going to be viewed en masse by the family; I was the only person to dress her, and as I had training in the funeral industry by this time, I was allowed into a situation that would usually be unadvised to members of the public. Reluctantly, they allowed me to dress her un-embalmed.

She was presented in a small, but cozy room lit with candles and gentle soothing music playing the background. Once again, a white sheet covered her. However, for the first time in my dressing experience, I saw that she was completely naked, and her body glistened with some sort of moisturising body balm the funeral staff had already applied. I sprayed my grandmother with perfume that my mother had bought her: a final sensory reminder of the person that she had been. My grandmother always had a finely-tuned aesthetic to what she wore in life and this largely comprised a colour palette of burnt oranges, browns and yellows. She was an autumn lady, like my mother. But she died in a pink nightgown emblazoned with a graphic of an obnoxious girl muttering something about being a princess printed on the front, a paradox that sparked giggles of dark humour from her family gathered around her during her last hours (describing something that she ‘wouldn’t be caught dead wearing’). It was my responsibility to ensure she didn’t go to her grave dressed in this. Most of her clothes had been discarded when her home was cleaned out, only the most practical and comfortable of garments survived to constitute her nursing home wardrobe. There were only two garments suitable for dressing her. One was a polyester blend, so I insisted on dressing her in a viscose twin set. It struck me as strange that when I dressed my Nonno, the item of clothing that shocked me most were his leather shoes, yet seeing my grandmother’s bare feet at the end of the dressing, seeming so utterly cold moved me to fetch the slippers I’d left in the car to place on her [3.02]. In my own vulnerable state, I abandoned my ideals for natural burial, and instead opted for the standard approach to covering and dressing the dead.
Common to each dressing was that a white sheet covered the body. It was as though the sheet that had been pulled over their faces in death still remained, even though in Nonno’s and Grandma’s cases the body had already been washed and prepared. This white sheet that only veiled the body was deeply conforming. Had we gone into a room to see the body stark before us may have been an initial shock to the system. But the gentle act of peeling back the sheet to reveal the dead was a process important in its own regard.

A film which outlines the process of dressing the dead was that of Departures, an fictional, yet based on non-fiction, Japanese film that follows the undertaking of a man who unknowingly found himself working as an ‘encoffiner’. The process of dressing the dead was a ritualistic performance conducted with an audience of families and friends of the deceased and consisted of a strictly choreographed series of movements vastly different from those performed by the living in dressing themselves. The hands were

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5 It was after I had dressed my Nonno that I discovered the work of Rob Janaway who is one of the only forensic researchers encountered who has done in depth studies of clothing in burial conditions. In one of these instances he had recovered the boot of a WWI soldier and noted that “footwear represents one of the most durable clothing elements liable to be recovered on a body” and commented in the instance of this recovered boot that, “The leather is in good condition, and the waterlogged conditions have also preserved the woollen sock. The ferrous hobnails on the sole have extensively corroded, and the bones of the foot remain inside the sock.” ibid. P 172.

6 Yojiro Takita, *Departures,* (Japan: Regent Releasing 2008).
bound together and pulled away from the body in a circular action [3.06]; the washing of intimate parts of the body was performed behind a sheet so as not to expose the dead to the family. So, while the dressing was smooth and beautiful, it was unlike the dressings I had myself conducted. Without a ‘professional’—which is to say, a funeral director, my dressing by comparison, had been much more freeform; a self-constructed ritual, or situational fashioning: underwear and bra, tights or socks, pants and shirt, or skirt and blouse, followed by jacket. The fact that there wasn’t a special method of dressing didn’t subtract from the sacredness of the ritual, a ritual that could be performed by family or friends with minimal professional intervention.

Each dressing taught me was that the dead body is not something to be feared; any initial hesitations I may have had were nullified within minutes of the actual encounter. Even my Great Aunt’s open mouth and eyes, which had elicited immediate discomfort, soon faded as we began the process of dressing her. In each instance, there were tentative steps towards the body, but once the white sheet had been pulled back, death revealed, the overriding feeling was a determination to dress this person; to redress them in a garment that brought back some of their ‘living’ personality; their final top layer of ‘skin’. However, the garments chosen in these dressings were not garments that were designed for death and there were awkward moments when the body had to be shifted from side to side, arms lifted so that tops could be threaded over the body; Legs and pelvises manoeuvred through pants, skirts and even pantyhose. While there were encounters with the more obvious signs of deterioration, such as my grandfather’s leg, and livor mortis in my Great Aunt, once this was explained, any uneasiness caused by their presence passed.

I wanted to become as aware of these deteriorations to the body as possible; the power in being able to explain them to a family, and to myself, was transformative from shock to relative ease. Should I be encountering the bereaved in the future, the combination of the skills learnt in funeral celebrancy training, with the experience of confronting a dead body, would mean that I would be able to facilitate a dressing with an outcome that bore catharsis, relief and pride to the people dressing their dead.
Unfortunately, or fortunately, I hadn’t yet been exposed to some of the gritty realities of death, as the bodies I had engaged with were thoroughly cleaned and had been refrigerated or embalmed so as to halt the natural process of decomposition. This preservation was counterintuitive to the work I had previously done with dissolvable fabrications and the regenerated body moulds, so it was with the intention to be fully exposed to these realities that I took my practice to SymbioticA.

I first visited SymbioticA – a biological art laboratory in Perth, Western Australia at the start of 2009, and one year into my candidature. Moving away from sculptural work discussed in Chapter 2, and dissolving, of Chapter 1, as analogies for the decomposing body, I sought to work with real tissue, real skin from a dead organism, as a first step towards creating viable burial garments that would address, dress, merge and carry a dead body through its decomposition. Utilising fabric and seeds to create a regenerated body within Chapter 2, proved a worthy initial simulation, and the investigations within Chapters 1 regarding dissolving garments proved invaluable in shaping the research as an analogous framework. However, I reasoned that to work with biological materials associated with an animal that once lived would add a vital dimension to the research project and evolve the design proposition to explore the symbiosis at the margin of textile and body between death and decomposition in a natural burial context.

I knew that to work in this manner required consultation outside of the fashion field and a formal foray into the realm of science. This represented another phase in my expanding notions of what constitutes a designer, and the malleability and transformability of this role.

SymbioticA, is “an artistic laboratory dedicated to the research, learning, critique and hands-on engagement with the life sciences and facilitates pairings of artists and science academics in the

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creation of multidisciplinary projects, and as such, has hosted a large number of practitioners with whom I contextualise my work.9

I travelled there, perhaps somewhat naïvely; with the intention of simply taking my body mould sculptures a step further by turning the body into a viable food source for plants. Initially, I tried germinating seeds directly into pig skin purchased from the butcher, but none of the seeds germinated due to the sterile laboratory conditions. I then spoke to a plant scientist whereupon I proposed that pockets or seams full of seeds could be features within the garment itself. I reasoned that families could choose a species of plant, and as the body would eventually seep into the plants’ growth, it would effectively ‘become’ the plant. Unfortunately, I was soon apprised that even with the relatively shallow depth of one metre that natural burial usually entails, the plot would be too distanced from the sun and oxygen necessary for the seeds to germinate.

After these unsuccessful proposals, I spoke to SymbioticA director Oron Catts who suggested that I speak to forensic entomologist Professor Ian Dadour. Upon reflection, I had little notion of the outcome that would occur some months later.

**THE PIG PROJECT – Planning**

Professor Ian Dadour,10 of the University of Western Australia’s Forensic Entomology Group, was suggested as a possible collaborator. Catts introduced him as “the Director of the Centre for Forensics, who is also the world leader in forensic entomology. He is happy for you to come over, or using his words – ‘we bury stuff all the time....’”11

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9 Donna Franklin, whose *Fibre Reactive Dress* mentioned in Chapter 2 was a former SymbioticA resident.
10 Professor Dadour is highly respected in his field and one of three registered forensic entomologists in Australia, regularly flying to the US where he delivers lectures at the original Body Farm in Tennessee. After meeting with him and discussing the research aims, it was Ian who suggested the possibility of testing the realities of decomposition outside of a sterile laboratory.
11 Oron Catts, email, 27.06.08 2008.
ian informed me that The Australian Anatomy Act\textsuperscript{12} meant that human cadavers could only be used within teaching, and not experimentation. The restrictions on using human cadavers led us to using pigs as our subject bodies within the research project. Pigs are a reasonable alternative to human bodies: they have similar skin depths, fat deposits, and organ arrangement, or as forensic researcher Schoenly [et al] describes, the similarity is “due to its similar internal anatomy, fat distribution, chest cavity, omnivorous diet, and lack of heavy fur.”\textsuperscript{13} I discussed with Ian my previous research projects, mainly apropos the dissolvable garments, and broached the work of Forensic Archaeologist Rob Janaway, who has written about clothing in specific forensic investigations,\textsuperscript{14} and is the only researcher\textsuperscript{15} who was then looking at specific fibre compositions in relation to effect on decomposition.\textsuperscript{16} Primarily, forensic investigations involving clothing have only examined the presence or absence of clothing, but have not broached different fibre types. I


\textsuperscript{15} Since then, Ian’s team at the Centre for Forensic Science at UWA have also published an article that looks at carcass decomposition in the presence or absence of clothing. However, this article focuses on clothing as a general variable, and doesn’t delve into fibre specific research.

\textsuperscript{16} A common death scenario is the decomposition of clothed human remains, yet the influence of clothing on decomposition has received limited attention and is mainly focused on soil burial as opposed to surface decomposition. Sasha C. Voss, David F. Cook, and Ian R. Dadour, "Decomposition and Insect Succession of Clothed and Unclothed Carcasses in Western Australia," Forensic Science International 211 (2011). P. 68.
discerned that this type of analysis was important to my project work as the time it took for various fibres to decompose could inform the way in which I approached designing garments for burial.

In initial discussions, we looked at the possibility of dressing up to three pigs, burying them and recovering the remains periodically to see how the garments were disintegrating. Experimentally, this was problematic. Firstly, periodically digging up and reinterring a single sample was not a viable option, as the soil disturbance would change the soil variables. Ian recommended fifty-day intervals, which would involve seven pigs over the course of a year—far more than I had anticipated. He then began talking about statistical significance. For statistically viable results to occur (in that the results are not brought about by chance, and the agreed criteria for Ian’s collaboration in the project) required at least three animal subjects so that an average of the results could be calculated to take into account any differences between the three results.

1 year / 50 days = approximately 7 pigs.

7 pigs x 3 pigs = 21 pigs.

As a minimum.

To be involved in the implication of twenty-one lives, or, more specifically, causing the end of twenty-one lives posed a daunting moral and ethical dilemma.

I further investigated the use of pigs in research, and in particular, the method of slaughter that would occur. Had I access to human cadavers donated for the purpose of research perhaps I would not have resisted using the bodies the same way that I did my pigs, as those bodies are willingly and consciously offered. However, as previously mentioned, in Australia, human cadavers are not used outside the medical teaching anatomy room. The ethics process for obtaining the pigs proved surprisingly easy: a one page carcass tissue form, providing the pigs were dead upon receipt.

Ian Dadour suggested that I bear witness to each step so that I would be completely conscious of and invested in the process of their deaths. I was extremely ambivalent towards this
recommendation. Pigs are intelligent creatures: very perceptive and sensitive to their environments. The idea of relocating the pigs, loading them squealing into a van, travelling over half an hour to our forensics site with them bouncing about confused, and then having to stand and watch them watching each other be systematically slaughtered was too traumatising for me to even consider. Benevolent treatment emerged as an overriding concern.

In the process of reconciling these issues and researching the treatment of pigs, it was suggested that pigs be slaughtered on the site where they were born to limit undue stress. The guidelines as outlined by the Farm Animal Welfare Council (2003, p1.) include:

“freedom from hunger and thirst, by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour;
freedom from discomfort, by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area;
freedom from pain, injury and disease, by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment;
freedom to express normal behaviour, by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal’s own kind;
freedom from fear and distress, by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering.”

I came to understand that the pigs were going to be slaughtered regardless of whether it was I (or rather, Ian) who signed the order form. The pigs came from the human consumption chain, and like all living organisms they incur a death at some point. However, I could avoid and save the pigs from unnecessary travel and ‘mental suffering’ by insisting that the piggery owners perform the euthanasia. They could thereby ensure the pigs experienced a normal, and thereby non-stressful, evening before they would be moved into another enclosure where they would be head-bolted away from their peers. Captive bolting is a method of slaughter,

which is "effective, versatile, portable and safe to use compared to a free bullet."[18]

At this time, I attended an animal ethics course suggested as a protocol for all SymbioticA residents intending to use animal tissue within their projects. The PAWES course (Program in Animals Welfare, Ethics and Science,) organised through the University of Western Australia is a two day course in which participants learn about Anaesthesia & Analgesia, Ethics, Regulations, Animal House & its operations, Safety & Health, Office of the Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR), Ethics & Law, and Experimental Design[19] involving the use of animals. On the second day, participants are able to handle the animals most commonly used for experiments within the university: mice, rats, and rabbits. Many of the participants had questions about what happened to the animals once handled by course participants, and were horrified to learn the animals had been bred specifically for the PAWES course, and that their usefulness once handled had been met: they were subsequently ‘sacrificed.’[20]

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[18] Ibid.
[19] From the PAWES course timetable. Punitha C. Mohan, Email, 09.03.2009 2009.
[20] The term ‘sacrificed’ is used instead of killed. “there are various euphemisms, but the most obvious is the word “sacrifice” rather than “kill” in scientific reports, drawing parallels with ritual sacrifice. This gives the killing a symbolic importance, as though the animals were sacrificed for some greater good.” Lynda I. A. Birke, Arnold
PIG MEASURING

As a designer more familiar with dressing human bodies, I needed to first understand the shape and size of the pigs I would dress [3.10]. This set the scene for my first encounter with a dead pig outside of a butcher shop. Ian organised for me to measure up a frozen pig from the research facility at Shenton Park in Perth, Western Australia. Dr David Cook, a fellow UWA forensic entomologist, took me into a refrigerated shipping container where several tubs of frozen pigs both whole and in parts were presented to choose from. I asked for a whole pig and it was laid out in the sun for me [3.08-3.09]. Unlike the dead bodies of humans I had pervious seen, this body was frozen into a fixed position and was completely rigid. Seeing the freezer full of discarded pigs, many with medical tubes entering into their bodies from previous experiments, made me want to ensure that any pig used for my research would be treated with respect and care. This led me to be particularly attentive to the care of the bodies even after they were killed.

Arluke, and Mike Michael, The Sacrifice: How Scientific Experiments Transform Animals and People (USA: Purdue University, 2007). P 60
From this point, I contacted Ian and agreed to his research design, but I requested that upon ordering the pigs from the piggery, a preference be made for the pigs that were to be rejected, deemed less suitable for human consumption; the sickly, the underweight, those with hernias and other maladies.

This notion of using the ‘unwanted’ pigs was related to the work by a British fashion designer, Rachel Freire. Freire focuses on using the ‘less desirable’ parts of animals, and in her debut Spring/Summer 2012 collection entitled ‘Nippleocalypse’, included a garment made from 3,000 cow and yak nipples cut from hide and discarded at tanneries [3.11-3.12]. Labelled as “sickening and repulsive” by British Labour MP Kerry McCarthy, the concerns of Campaign Director Justin Kerswell from ‘Vegetarians International Voice for Animals’ (Viva!), an animal rights organisation further echoed the commentary when he posed the question: “Isn’t the way we treat farmed animals bad enough without turning their dead bodies into a
runway freakshow”? The artist suggests that her garment “makes you aware of the animal itself.”

While my research never intentionally set out to discuss the use of animals in research, it was something that arose during its undertaking. Our attitude towards animal products in apparel use has always been contradictory. We want the properties of the animal’s skin or fur, its texture, handle, lustre and tenacity, but we do not want to be reminded of its past ‘life’ and that it subsequently died for our use. Rather, we prefer to deny its (and our own) death. This feeds into many of our psychological issues about death and its denial; that humans are unique amongst their relatives in the animal kingdom in terms of the search for psychological balance in the face of awareness of inevitable death. The pigs were being used as surrogates through which I could navigate the terrain between the

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22 Ibid.
living and the dead, specifically because of their similarities to humans [3.13-3.15]. Their dead bodies would be conduits for human decomposition, and in the fashioning of the experiment, the fact that they were pigs was an added layer of reasoning to the exploration. I was drawing attention to the dead human body, through its similarity to the decomposition of the pig body, and thus awareness of the animal became built into the process. In each of the human dressings I was not the one ‘in charge’, in fact that was the role of the funeral director, but in this instance I had authority and in essence was the funeral director. I was directing what should be done to the pigs and I was responsible for ensuring that the process of taking the body from mortem to final resting place was fashioned with concern for integrity of care.

GARMENT DESIGN - FIBRE/FABRIC

Choosing the best fibre composition for a design or end use involves looking at the morphological features such as longitudinal view and cross sections, and molecular characteristics such as polymer structure, amorphous or crystalline areas of a fibre. Each fibre has several properties that affect its aesthetics, comfort, durability and appearance retention. The expectations of the fibres I would be using for burial would differ from those chosen to be worn against the living body. The aesthetics; lustre, texture, drapability, cover and hand would still play a vital role, but the mechanical performance and appearance retention properties such as flexibility, abrasion resistance, resiliency, elongation, dimensional stability and the effect of acids and alkali (such as those used in the washing process) would not play as vital a role as the garment would have to stand up against the rigor of a moving body. The comfort properties; mainly, absorbency and thermal retention would take on a different role. Where absorbency would be utilised for wicking vapour away from the body as it sweats, it may now be utilised for and required to hold moisture from the processes of putrefaction. Thermal retention, which helps to hold heat released from the body close to it, thereby keeping the wearer warm, would not be required for a body that no longer releases or requires heat, but a fibre that holds heat may be useful for assisting the rate of bacterial decomposition.
The most important set of fibre properties I was interested in investigating were the properties associated with the disintegration of a fibre. Chemical and environmental properties such as effect of UV light, resistance to biological organisms, effects of alkalis and acids were at the forefront of my thinking when choosing fibres to use in the experimental design.

Within most garments lies a combination of fibres or textile constructions. These are unlikely to deteriorate at the same rate, and as a result, there will be garment remainders at a given time, just as a body will decompose in several stages, the last of which is usually the skeleton. During the final iteration of Chapter 2 I briefly contemplated the notion of a designed remainder, a branching lace, that could endure decomposition of the body and come to rest on the skeleton. Whether to continue with intentional remainders within my garments remains a contentious issue. From an historical perspective, we would not have discovered how early humans existed as there would not be any archaeological evidence in the absence of burial remainders, or as Derrick Jensen and Aric McBay note in their book What We Leave Behind, "Societies that produce little or no non-degradable [reminders] are consequently less interesting to many archaeologists and historians. Stories told by [reminder] are “hard fact”, but oral histories passed down by indigenous peoples are often relegated to the status of allegory or myth." Burial rituals were one of the first signs associated with an evolved human species.

However, within the context of Natural Earth Burial, all elements within that enter the grave should ideally be biodegradable, including the garment. But then what of the remainders of identity of an individual? And, is this important? Although it is not the intention of Natural Earth burial to ever dig up the remains, at some point in the distant future, any remains could be recovered and analysed for their cultural significance.

24 Ibid. P 17.
So, the question arises: Should the garment act as a time capsule of sorts?

As discussed with Ian, there are three groups of fibres: cellulosic, protein and synthetic. I chose to use one fibre from each group within the pig garment to see how they withstood the burial scenario. I had preconceptions about what would happen to each fibre after an extended burial period, and I used these assumptions to create an order in which I expected the fibres to disintegrate. I sought to create a design that experienced a series of transformational stages before being reduced to its ‘skeletal’ state, just as the body would be. Therefore, the use of fabric from each chemical group was not to be equal in percentage. The aim was for the majority of the garment to be ‘undressed’ by the environment.

Cellulose, being a naturally occurring polymer, from a plant source would be most susceptible to disintegration in the burial scenario and the first to be consumed organically. Protein, another naturally occurring polymer, derived from animal sources, would be the next to disintegrate, as protein would be desirable by some of the biological agents consuming the body. The final fibre to deteriorate would be the synthetic, a fibre produced through a series of chemical and mechanical processes, as I was curious to see if it deteriorated at all.

From the cellulosic group, which primarily includes fibres from plant sources and is comprised of cotton, linen, jute, and manufactured fibres such as viscose and acetate, I chose to use hemp. Hemp is a bast fibre (meaning that it comes from the stem of a plant) and shows characteristics very similar to those of linen. It has high absorbency, which increases fibre strength by creating more crystalline areas in the molecular structure when saturated, but then its susceptibility to organic bacteria meant that it would break down rapidly in the earth due to the moisture held in the fibre. This would be perfect for absorbing fluids leached by the body and maintaining them in the fibre to attract more bacterial activity. Another reason for choosing hemp over any of the other cellulosic fibres was due to its production and environmental impact, being a fibre that grows rapidly and is easily renewed. It doesn’t require any of the pesticides during its growth that have made cotton latterly undesirable nor does
It require the same amount of processing as reconstituted cellulosics such as viscose and acetate. Aesthetically, it can look similar to linen in that it has ‘slubbiness’ created by nodes or joins between the fibres that lock together when the fibre is spun for yarns, but it can also be refined through additional combing processes and result in a product with a similar aesthetic to cotton. I was looking for a fibre that had minimal interference, so I chose a hemp that was unbleached or dyed and had minimal processing.25

From the protein group, which includes fibres from animal sources such as fur, hair and reconstituted matter from insects, I chose to use silk. Silk has a long historical association with decadence due to its naturally occurring lustre. During the Victorian era, this lustre was scattered in the use of crepe, which through the boiling of silk, created a pebbly surface that subdued the natural sheen. Lustre is caused by light reflecting off the triangular cross section of the fibre and its smooth filament longitudinal view. I wanted an element of lustre, or highlight, that would break up the design and highlight elements of it. Silk, by contrast to hemp, reduces in tenacity when wet. Its protein composition is also susceptible to damage by alkalis, which would be released by the body. Unlike wool, which has a much thicker fibre diameter and therefore requires more interference to break it down, silk is fine and more fragile. I had confidence that it would break down in the grave.

The first synthetic fibre was Nylon (polyamide) developed in 1939, just in time for World War II. Silk was scarce during that period and a mechanically synthesised alternative was required for items such as parachutes, flak vests and for the lining of many vehicle tires. Polyester was developed in 1953 and quickly flooded the clothing and apparel industry. This was a fibre that was easily manufactured from coal and oil, producing a fibre that was durable and malleable with heat, meaning that it could be permanently configured into desired shapes (for example, pleats). Synthetics are all considered non-absorbent, meaning that they do not take moisture into the

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25 In the future, if I could have my own cloth constructed, it would ideally involve even less processing, but this was not possible at this stage of the research.
fibre, and instead, moisture collects on the fibre surface with the effect that wearers quickly feel damp and clammy.

I chose to use polyester within my garment, as it is a fibre that is often used in sewing threads. In this way, I would execute all of my garment construction using polyester so that, theoretically, the skeleton of the garment would remain after the hemp and silk had been disintegrated.

Another artist whose interest lies with the making of garments for the dead and that are designed for a specific interaction with decay is Jae Rhim Lee. Lee’s *Infinity Burial Project*\(^{26}\) consists of several components, the main piece of which is a black body suit embroidered with yams embedded with mushroom spores \([3.16-3.17]\) or what Lee refers to as “decomposition activators.”\(^{27}\) These specially designed mushrooms are a “unique strain... that


decomposes and remediates toxins in human tissue.\footnote{Ibid.} Many of the aims of the Infinity Burial Project are similar to that of my own research, specifically the facilitation of “individual engagement with the process of decomposition,”\footnote{Ibid.} but the differences are most evident in my concern for dressing the body, whereas Lee’s is in the detoxification of the body.

**SHAPE**

Rigor mortis, when the body stiffens in death, can make it difficult to manoeuvre rigid limbs through small neck and armpits holes in a garment and I was interested in dealing with this issue in the experimental context. Rigor sets in two to three hours after death and eventually subsides after approximately two days,\footnote{Robin Peress, “What Causes Rigor Mortis,” *How Stuff Works*(2008), http://health.howstuffworks.com/diseases-conditions/death-dying/rigor-mortis-cause.htm. Retrieved 19 August, 2012} although it can remain for longer when bodies have been refrigerated. I was conscious of this naturally occurring process when designing the pig burial garments, as this can be important when dressing the dead human body. In rigour mortis, arms are not able to reach above the head and a garment must be rolled up the arms when they are positioned lying down along the torso. The head then needs to be bent through the hole before the garment is shuffled down the body. Similarly, jackets cannot be donned by bending the arms backwards and scooping them through the sleeves. Instead, the garment is bundled up and both hands are placed in the armpits holes before the jacket is slipped over the head and down the back. Rolling the body from one side to another usually requires at least two people to perform, and so the ‘over-the-head’ method is most often utilised. For these reasons, I decided that the pig garment should have minimal sections that were fitted to the body such as the sleeves, neck holes, legs that are usually seen in human clothing [3.18-3.20].
This also took into consideration the variation of pig body size, providing a ‘one-size-fits-all’ garment [3.21].
It is important in viewings that the face and hands of a body are accessible, as these are the body parts that most signify identity. Once the viewing is completed, the body must be completely encapsulated. To address both of these requirements, a garment that had multiple stages or layering of dressing was developed. The idea of layering in death was also explored by conceptual designer Roos Kupiers who created an open coffin after the funeral of her
boyfriend in 2009. Entitled ‘Mark the Last Veil,’ it was
produced in response to the harsh abruptness of closing the coffin
and the need to exhibit ‘a higher degree of care.’ Instead, this act is
softened by using layers of fabric which are ‘turned over like pages
of a book’, and draws ‘care and consciousness’ to the gradual
moment and ritual of ‘parting’, and as such, there were several parts
to the garment that each wrapped in succession, gradually covering
the body.

FASTENING

The designed garment required cords and knotting as a method of
fastening. I decided upon this method as it could be seen as a ritual
of its own, that the physical ‘tying up’ could be a consciously
performed action. There was a readjustment required, whereby
instead of bows being tied, a double knot would be used. These
cords were made of lustrous polyester, and I foresaw that they
would be of the most enduring fibres in the garment, providing a
skeleton around the pig’s skeleton.

I also chose to include two unattached buttons in the experiment, as
I was interested in what could be used in future garments. These
buttons, one a carved nutshell (representative of another cellulose
based fibre), the other a casein (made of milk protein), were to be
placed inside a garment pocket in guise of trinkets that could be left
with sentimentality in the case of a human burial.

EMBROIDERY

Alongside the cording, it was decided that the embroidered
branching pattern would be sewn out of a polyester yarn, in hopes
that it may endure the decomposition of the pig and remain with the
pig’s skeleton. This was an aesthetic I trialled within Chapter 3.

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31 Rose Etherington, "Mark the Last Veil by Roos Kuipers," De Zeen Magazine (2009),
19 September, 2010
32 Ibid.
which combined elements of both the dissolvable garments and body moulds.

THE MAKING

Twenty-one pigs represented a great deal of life. Thirty shrouds (21 + 7 control + 2 for good measure) required an immense amount of fabric. The ninety metres of hemp alone was more than could be carried between four people. Fifteen metres of silk/hemp casing per garment seemed manageable on its own, but multiplied by thirty meant that we were dealing with four hundred and fifty metres of fabric. Each piece of casing was 5 cm in width that then needed 1 cm on each side pressed into the middle which meant we spent three full days ironing it into pre-placement for sewing. Each edge of the fabric needed to be prepared for sewing, so that once again, we had to carefully fold and iron each side.

The front piece of the garment lay most flush against the skin. This section involved decoration, digitally printed and then embroidered with the branching, twisting veins/roots [3.29]. The print was an image I had taken from one of the Body Moulds and the embroidery was digitised from a trace I had done over roots in the same image.

Collecting the embroidered segments from the commercial embroiderer was one of the most rewarding aspects of construction process. When attached to the rest of the shroud, the flecks of lustre and blocks of print finally drew the design together. They were simply beautiful. Observers of the process were drawn to the embroidered smoothness, tracing their fingers over the path of the work.

Based on the quality of the work, I received comments that the garments were ‘too good’ to be buried, that it was ‘a waste,’ and this led me to then question, if they were not to be thus arrayed, what should the dead be dressed in? There was not often an answer; and consistent with my research, the question was not one that had ever been considered.
Posting the garments ahead of my flight to Perth, I was met at the SymbioticA office by Kathy High, Cynthia White and the box of ‘pig shrouds’. Kathy High, a film maker from New York, was another SymbioticA resident, and Oron Catts suggested that she might be interested in documenting the research I was doing. She and her friend Cynthia White, who assisted us, became my support team throughout the pig project, and their documentary became one of the key ways that the research project could be communicated in the future.

**MEETING THE PIGS [ALIVE]**

I contacted the manager at the piggery from where the pigs were to be sourced to arrange to meet them while there were still alive. The next day Kathy, Cynthia and I drove a car through the antibacterial liquid trough, used to protect the pigs from outside disease and bacterium, and into the farm. The first element of note was the smell. It was a rich fertilizer aroma: a mixture of shit and dirt and blood.

[3.30-3.31]
Pia Interlandi
Meeting the Pigs [Alive]
2009
As we walked towards the silo we could already hear grunting and squealing. As soon as our faces appeared over the fence, the pigs trotted towards us. In retrospect, I wished that I had thought to bring some fresh fruit or carrots for them as a final meal, or ‘last supper’. I climbed into the enclosure and was swarmed by pink, muddy creatures that were as curious about me as I was of them. They weren’t fearful about which I was relieved as it suggested they were treated well: had the breeders been harsh or violent towards them, they would have run away from, rather than towards us.\(^{33}\) [3.30-3.31]

**THE NIGHT BEFORE**

I was thoroughly traumatised on the eve of the death of my pigs, and by the idea of them feeling pain or anxiety during the moments of their death. I also felt impotent in that I couldn’t be present for them; that I couldn’t hold each pig as its life was extinguished. I was reminded of Terhi Utriainen writing on ‘presence at death’, that the ‘dying denude us,’\(^{34}\) and that being present is all we can do to help them on their way. “We need not be afraid of whether or not we can [talk to the dying]. Death is a visitor who denudes us of words.”\(^{35}\)

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\(^{33}\) “Interaction with humans has been shown to significantly influence various aspects of behavior and physiology in farm animals. Several studies have shown that all human interaction is not equal. Sows on farms who withdraw from approaching humans produce fewer piglets (Hemsworth et al., 1981), and the way in which pigs are approached - crouching versus standing, forced versus passive interaction, or even gloved versus barehanded - has been found to influence their growth, behavior and physiology (Gonyou, Hemsworth & Barnett, 1986; Hemsworth, Barnett & Hansen, 1986). Thus, the nature of human interaction can influence a number of the indicators used to assess animal wellbeing.” (The Evaluation and Promotion of Well-being in Farm Animals and Laboratory Primates: Common Problems in Contemporary Animal Care; Tina Widowski, PhD) [WELLBEING OF NON-HUMAN PRIMATES IN RESEARCH: From a conference held by the Scientists Center for Animal Welfare in Bethesda, Maryland on June 23, 1989], Edited by Joy A. Mench, D.Phil. and Lee Krulisch Scientists Center for Animal Welfare 4805 St. Elmo Avenue, Bethesda, MD 20814, (301) 654-6390, January 1990. http://www.scaaw.com/assets/files/1/files/nhp.pdf#page=23. Retrieved 30 March, 2012.

\(^{34}\) Terhi Utriainen, “Naked and Dressed: Metaphorical Perspective to the Imaginary and Ethical Background of the Deathbed Scene,” Mortality 9, no. 2 (2004). P 3.

\(^{35}\) Ibid. p 3.
[3.32]
Pia Interlandi
*Picking up the Pigs-Morning of Slaughter*
2009
I spoke little the morning of the slaughter. On the drive out, I had insisted that our pigs be carried to the trailer and carefully placed inside, that under no circumstances did I want anyone to be handling the pigs indelicately, out of respect for their bodies. In my shock, grief and vulnerability, when the gate was opened and the staff offered to help pack the trailer, I accepted and unfortunately the swinging and throwing ensued. Viewing the situation, even from the cab of the truck, was so shocking and numbing, I was rendered powerless and paralysed to act.

We divided the twenty-one bodies into three groups of seven that we would wash, dress, and bury over the next three days. The next step was then to move them from the trailer to the industrial fridge. I had yet to touch the pigs. They were dirty and smelly and many were covered in blood and faeces. They were now definitely dead, devoid of life and I felt could move again: the paralysis from the earlier piggery interval subsiding. Research Associates, Dr David Cook (known as “Cookie”) and PhD candidate in forensic science, Wei-Feng Hung (“Freddie”) opened the trailer. When Cookie grabbed the first pig by the trotters and heaved it out a coagulated mix of brain and blood streamed from its head. I was amazed at how quickly my squeamishness vanished as I shifted toward care and concern.

In writing on the subject of disgust, William Ian Miller (1997) includes a lengthy discussion of the overcoming of disgust, “love more than sex ...[is] tolerance for bodies and a willingness to excuse their foibles as well as to indulge their dangerous and polluting qualities”. He concludes that, “love means a willingness to pardon normal failings of the other’s body ... it also means overcoming disgust in favour of caring and concern.”

Stripes had appeared on several of the pigs’ bellies. These particular pigs had been on the bottom of the pile and their torsos had made contact with the corrugations on the surface bottom of the trailer, blood pooling in the lowest extremities of the body (livor mortis)

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37 Ibid. P 136.
causing the bruised striping. As pressure was put on certain areas of the skin, blood couldn’t enter those cells and simply pooled in the dips in the corrugations.

As soon as death occurs, the blood, without its heart pump, soon surrenders to gravity and migrates to the lowest extremities of the body. If supine in a bed, this is usually to the back of the body. As mentioned in the earlier part of the chapter, I recalled that when I dressed one of my family members post mortem, I had to reassure my family that my Great Aunt had not in fact been beaten. Whilst the contusions appeared as bruises - and essentially, blood filling tissue is a bruise - this was a natural reaction, and to be expected.

I considered the possibility of laying a body over a moulded design and allowing the body to pool blood into the lowest points, thus affecting a design. This was the same process as occurred in my body moulds, water pooling into deepest crevices.
WASHING

Washing the pig was an integral part of the fashioning of their burial. They were filthy, covered in the contaminants of life and death [3.33]. Even in a standard internment process through a funeral home, bodies are washed to remove unwanted residue from their deaths; fluids from purging, or any lingering blood. It was not an action that was required for the forensic aspect of the project, but as I wanted to keep the use of the pigs as close to the process of dressing the human dead, this washing was an important constitutive element of my own process protocol in the Pig Project.

Each pig was scrubbed and rinsed with water; frozen blood and faecal matter was removed from the body before a second washing was performed with a body wash, mixed with a rosemary essential oil [3.34-3.35]. I chose to use the rosemary scent, as historically, rosemary has been associated with remembrance.38

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Not only was this scent symbolically linked to remembrance but the scent also constituted another layer of ‘dressing’, a scent that could be used as a trigger for memory.

When washing some of the last few pigs, traces of internal putrefaction were apparent. As the pigs were bloating and cells were breaking down, there was a discolouration to the skin [3.36] that bore some resemblance to the transfer paper remainders of the printed dissolvable garments [3.37]. The aesthetic similarity was intriguing; the repetition of patterns from one fashioning to another, sanctioning a reminder of one process being reflected in another.

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30 I realised this when I was presenting at the 2010 Graduate Research Conference at RMIT, where I was discussing aspects of the Pig Project, and had chosen to light a candle and burn the oil for the duration of the presentation. I had found it easy to talk about the deaths of the pigs, but it was talking about them at the same time as the scent was present, that I found that I easily choked up emotion.


DRESSING

Once the pigs had been washed, each was transferred [3.38] to a table where they were dried with towels before being dressed. Between each dressing, the pigs were covered, something that was done almost unconsciously as a way to protect their nakedness. The garment (pig shroud) had been laid out on the ground ahead of each pig dressing [3.40]. It was not the ideal situation in which to be performing a dressing: on a plastic sheet, outside in the sun; flies buzzing around. However, it was the best that could be organised out on the burial site.

Before the pigs were wrapped up in the garments, I named each [3.39]. This was something decided upon in the preliminary stages of the project, as I had not wanted to refer to the pigs as “tissue” or “carcasses.” It was also done in opposition to Ian’s recommendation, who did not want me to become attached to the pigs. However, an attachment of sorts was important. In each of the human dressings I

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37 Anastasios, Aronsky, Ball, Burton, Cant, Eagleman, Ennis, Evans, Fuller, Gilbert, Harris, Janaway, Jensen McBay, Larkins, May, Mims, Pendle, Roach, Shields, Utriainen, Wakely.
had conducted I had known the person, so by naming the pigs I was a way to become more connected to them. This notion of becoming connected was a way to prepare for future encounters with the dead. It was also a method by which I could become engaged with the research beyond the (comparatively dispassionate) requirements of the forensic enquiry protocol. I was performing a ritual as a funeral celebrant, and not just as a scientist. It seemed important to remain somewhat vulnerable to grieving the deaths of the pigs; to feel the loss of their lives.

Deciding to name each after influential authors, film makers or people who had otherwise informed the research up to this point, was a way of making each pig individual and connecting their contribution to the research. Their names were engraved onto a stainless steel tag which was then threaded onto one of the cords attached to the garment. This tag became another material variable in the project, but on a pragmatic level, it was a way to identify each body when it was recovered later in the experiment. A letter of gratitude I had written to each pig was included in the pocket of each garment. This notion of writing letters to be taken with the dead into the grave is a ritual suggested during group discussion during the funeral celebrancy training I undertook, as a small, personal rite that could be performed by the bereaved. I found it profoundly valuable in my own dealing with the deaths of the pigs.
The dressing process for the pigs was simple in procedure but demanding of emotional fortitude. By the time I had dressed them, they were clean, named, and as near to the human condition as could be obtained in this scenario. During the washing, I had worn gloves to protect myself from the dirt and faecal matter from their bodies, but for the dressing, I removed these and worked skin to skin with each pig. The lack of artificial barrier meant that I could feel the coolness of their bodies, the hair bristling from their skin on places like their backs, but also the smoothness of the places where hair was sparse, like their bellies and under their chins.

The garment was laid out on the ground and the pig was then placed in the centre panel [3.41]. In most pig cases, the body folded over to one side: their anatomical arrangement, whilst similar to humans, did not account for this position, that is, flat on their backs. This meant that I had to straddle the pig, using my knees to hold them on their backs, whilst applying the apron section, not something I would imagine doing to a human [3.43].

Next I threaded the name-tag onto the cord around the top of the apron [3.42] and placed the buttons and letter into the pocket before laying the second segment of the garment over them [process outlined in 3.48]. This was the section with cord running around the edge that could then be used to encapsulate the body. At this point, the first of the flaws in my original design emerged. For the bigger pigs, this segment wasn’t large enough to cover head and back trotters. I struggled with the first few larger females, but in the end, had to surrender to their physiological imperatives and leave their feet poking out: the rigor mortis in the joints rendering any flexibility null and void. This reminded me of my grandmother’s bare feet, which I felt compelled to cover. It was a design oversight that I filed away in memory for future reference.

Once they were dressed, they were transferred to the ute for transportation to the burial site [3.49-3.50].
[3.49-3.50]
Pia Interlandi
*Dressing The Pigs*
2009
At the burial site, the graves had already been pre-dug [3.51-3.52] to a depth of one metre,\(^{41}\) so it was just a matter of carrying each pig to its grave and gently lowering them in. Each pig was laid with its head towards the East, feet towards the West so as to ensure consistency between each body, and avoiding any unwanted experimental variables. The control garments (without a body) were buried randomly throughout the site. As each grave was backfilled, a wooden stake was placed into the ground, approximately above each head, so that when it came to the recovery digs we would be able to estimate where the body was located.

A small group of helpers gathered at the end of the burial process to celebrate the last of the day of burials, and together we burnt joss paper that Kathy High had brought over to Australia from a recent trip to China, specifically for the occasion. Within Chinese culture joss paper is burnt in honour of the dead, and seen as an offering to the souls so that they may have a peaceful afterlife.\(^{42}\) It was a small token gesture, which wasn’t done with much solemnity, but it was a

\(^{41}\) Graves should have approximately 92cm of soil from the top of the coffin/shroud to the surface within Natural Burial Specifications as outlined by Ken West in his book *A Guide to Natural Burial* (London: Thomas Reuters Limited, 2010). P 119

nice way to finish a process which had involved much emotional and physical energy.

**OBSERVATIONS FROM DIGS/EXHUMATIONS**

A dig was performed at intervals of fifty days throughout the next year, which meant seven exhumations in total. As such, there is much information to be evaluated, so I have chosen to focus on only a few moments that occurred within this long process.
It is suggested that the documentary *Death Down Under*, directed and produced by Kathy High, be viewed as a support to the exegetical trajectory. This film followed and documented the duration of the *Pig Project* and captured the immediacy of many of the exhumations and processes leading to this point in the research.

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If for any reason this DVD doesn’t work, the documentary is also available at:
http://vimeo.com/50529888
And can be accessed using the password “Piggies”
FIFTY DAYS:

At the fifty day mark, it was time to confront any fears I had about viewing the decomposed bodies of the pigs. This occurred at the end of November 2009, which meant that the temperature was approaching 30 degrees centigrade; we were all sweating, our bodies permeating out into the environment. I arrived on site and put on a pair of coveralls and gloves. To my surprise, this was something that neither Ian nor David Cook did. They were prepared to go into the graves armed only with their bare skin, stating that they could simply wash their hands afterwards. While I had noticed the funeral staff who assisted in dressing my Nonno wore gloves, something which at the time I had been puzzled about as there was clearly no physiological basis for their requirement. However when it came to the recovery of the pigs I anticipated that the boundary of the body would be broken more than it was in the days directly after their death, and perhaps even though I could wash my hands afterwards, it was a psychological defence.

As we dug towards the grave, approximately 50cm in, we began to detect the gases released from the bodies, which I had anticipated as being the worst odour I would ever encounter. To my relief, the main scent detected was that of ammonia; clinically speaking, when protein breaks down, the amino acids break and release ammonia. Up until this point, I had associated the smell of ammonia with extreme cleaning products and possibly stale urine.

When we reached the bodies, it immediately became apparent that the main garment fibre, the hemp, was incredibly damp, saturated in the fluids released from the body.

I had erected an impromptu working station, which consisted of a piece of plastic spread upon the ground secured with branches and twigs from the landscape. Ian and David carried over the first body and placed it in front of me. It was much flatter than it had been

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“See Preface" 277
when first buried, gasses and fluids that had led to the bloating of the pigs initially in death, had clearly been released in the grave.

It was time for me to unwrap the pigs [3.56] and recover the garment for sampling. Peeling back the hemp [3.57], I was amazed to see that all of the pigs’ hair was peeling off with the cloth: the follicles having lost their holding ability, the first sign that the body was surrendering its cellular integrity. The pig face was identifiable, albeit, flattened and discoloured [3.59]. The second surprise, came in the form of the nails on the trotters, which were falling from the body. There was absolutely no connective tissue preventing the body from disintegrating.

The first identification tag was located [3.58], as were the nutshell button, letter and pig clasp. None of these showed signs of decay, other than being covered in bodily fluids. It was the casein button that was of most interest, as it had become soft and flexible, and slightly gooey; it had started to dissolve.

The pigs were put back into their graves [3.61] and the garments placed into garbage bags, to be washed and dried before samples would be taken. However, the garments could not be washed thoroughly as the fibres were brittle and if scrubbed, would fall apart. Instead, they were hosed down with water in order to remove as much sand and pig residue as possible then hung on a line inside a shed. I returned the next day to cut small 4 cm disks of fabric out from all of the parts that required sampling. After a fifty day period, this was easily executed as each of the components of the garment were still identifiable.
The printed section of the garment [3.54-3.55], had been bleached by the ammonia released, and only maintained print where the garment had creased or been folded around the body.

The digs had been very physically and mentally taxing, and it took a week long period to feel as though I had recovered from the process.

ONE HUNDRED DAYS:

While I felt more prepared to deal with the second dig at the one hundred day mark, when the pigs were recovered and set before me, peeling the fabric back proved a much more horrific process than the first time. Instead of just hair being peeled off, it was complete layers of skin and tissue. At times I struggled to identify what was actually garment and what was skin, and while in many ways this was the exact result I had attempted to metaphorically communicate in chapter 1 with the dissolvable garments, this process was far from beautiful. The entire pig had transformed from being a solid and contained entity into a gooey, thick sludge. The fabric was dense with fluids: the absorbency of the hemp coming in to play. It was no longer a ‘layer upon the body’, it had transgressed that boundary, and was ‘in’ and a literal part of the body.

Interestingly, the garment was very much intact, and Ian explained to me that the leakage of fatty fluids into the cloth had turned into adipose tissue (commonly referred to as ‘grave wax’), and that this was actually preserving the fibres as though they had been contained in soap.

When I put my hands under one of the pigs to return it to its grave, my hands simply slipped through its entire structure resulting in goo and bones in my gloves. I was amazed that in one hundred days, there was nothing holding the tissue to the bones, and individual organs had just collapsed into each other and become non-descript viscous mulch. It was impossible to transfer the pigs back into the grave in one piece, and instead, their remains were scooped up and put onto a shovel blade before being disposed of in the ground.
Pia Interlandi
100 Days
Buried
2009
At this point, the process I had been trying to convince myself of as being ‘beautiful and natural’ was just disgusting [3,63]. This ‘life soup,’ a term coined by William Ian Miller in his book The Anatomy of Disgust, was not something I wanted to be in proximity to, and found myself taking multiple showers that day, lathering myself with pleasant smelling perfumes in order to mask the mix of ammonia and decay that had gathered in my pores and sinuses. Merely writing this passage of words causes my stomach to churn. Miller has written that core disgust is “centered on oral incorporation and food rejection. Taste is the core sense, the mouth the core location, ingestion and rejection via spitting or vomiting the core actions,” a sentiment furthered over a decade later by Carolyn Korsmeyer in her statement that, “the general property that inspires disgust is rottenness or fullness, for this emotion is vividly focused on the sensory quality of things one might touch or ingest.” As much as I had wished to retain sentimentality toward the pigs, to be myself fashioned by their passing in some way, it was incredibly difficult to do so once they had become unidentifiable as once resembling bodies. I found myself referring to the bodies not as ‘she’ or ‘he,’ but as ‘it.’ This emotion was something I sought to resist though the entire Pig Project; I had wanted to view it in the same light as I had the dissolvable garments, but it was impossible to do so. I was disappointed in myself, saddened that I had succumbed to my own

45 Miller, The Anatomy of Disgust. P 18
46 Interestingly, it is not that my skin still retained residue of the pigs, but that the gas molecules released by the process of decay, mainly cadaverine and putrescine, are sufficiently large in size, to the extent that they become lodged within the sinuses. This meant that long after I had removed myself from the source of contamination, I could still smell it.
47 Miller, The Anatomy of Disgust. p 6
48 Many texts have been written about disgust in the last decade, but I chose to take references from one of the more recent texts, as Korsmeyer also references and summarises many of these works: William A Cohen and Ryan Johnson, Filth: Dirt Disgust, and Modern Life (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); Aurel Kolnai, On Disgust (USA: Open Court, 2004); Winfried Menninghaus, Disgust: Theory and History of a Strong Sensation (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003); Martha Craven Nussbaum, Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004).
human predisposition to view the dead as being something to be avoided.

I was curious as to why, even with the foresight that the dead are not something to be eaten, or feared, that the disgust that they represent is something that is purely reactionary, I still felt repulsed by their remains. Korsmeyer discusses this as "a strongly reactive or reflex character; it can be more immediate than conscious rational assessment ... What is more, disgust is stubborn, often persisting despite knowledge that its object does not merit the response."50 Even though we can logically unpack and justify what has been seen, disgust is still the first and lingering companion reaction.

Disgust was something easy to suspend or overcome during the earliest stages of pre-burial decay. The cleaning of bodily fluids and dressing of the dead while, at times was unpleasant, was not repellent. Yet it was at this later stage of transformation, where the body had lost all integrity and was borderless, wet and gooey, that disgust was at its strongest. It no longer resembled a body that had ‘life’, and was utterly ‘deathly’, or to use a term first put forward by Aurel Kolnai in his book On Disgust, “pregnant with death,”51 This transition away from a recognisable body is, as Korsmeyer analyses, something that:

...Includes us in its embrace, for as it signals death and decay it includes any mortal being- not just its inevitable end but the point at which its life has ended and bodily integrity has begun to disperse. The immanent disintegration of our own borders lies in the shadow of this emotion.52

50 Ibid. p 23.
51 Kolnai, On Disgust. P 74.
ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY DAYS:

The most notable aspect of the recovery process after one hundred and fifty days was that I struggled to separate fabric from pig in the first two pigs we recovered. Tissue seemed to slip easily from the bones, but clung to the garment. At this point, most of the garment was still intact; hemp, silk and polyester still present. Unfortunately, the ring that attached the stainless steel name-tag to the silk binding at the neck of the garment had rusted completely and we began to have difficulty in finding the names. Buttons were also difficult to locate as the tension they caused against the fabric created a weakness in the hemp fibres, which had split, letting the nutshell button slip through the garment and into the grave during recovery. In contrast, the casein button had dissolved into a creamy texture that was located inside the pocket. This texture was similar to that of the pig tissue, which made sense when considering they were both made of protein.

The third pig recovered that day was amazingly intact and recognisable. We hypothesised that because it had been buried under a tree, and therefore, in the shade, less evaporation of water had occurred, preventing rapid decay at this point.

THREE HUNDRED DAYS:

It was at three hundred day mark after the initial burial that I began to notice a change in the way I experienced the recovered bodies. Not only had the garments begun to disintegrate in my hands, but the pigs themselves had dried up and begun to resemble soil. Ammonia had subsided and tissue remainders had become drier and resembled mud. With the wet muckiness of the tissue, so too had my intense disgust disappeared. I began to look at the remainders with far more enquiry and curiosity than I had been able to in earlier digs.
As the water in the grave had been wicked away or evaporated, the adipose tissue that had encapsulated the garment had dried up, and without this waxy layer, which had essentially protected the fibres, they rapidly succumbed to deterioration. This, in turn, meant that the pigs were undressed, and readily accessible by bacteria and other micro-organisms. The hemp was only visible in small pieces and would break into dust if over-handled. The silk too, would shatter if rubbed between two fingers, and was only found occasionally around the cording. The cording, being polyester, was still unbroken [3.72-3.73]. Inspecting a sample under the microscope, none of the fibres were split: the only major difference between the unburied cord and the interred cord being the colouring; the buried cord taking on a dark, dirty brown pallor [3.74-3.75].
Pia Interlandi
350 Days Buried
2010
THREE HUNDRED AND FIFTY DAYS:

Before we reached the bodies during the final dig, we found ourselves pulling away lots of roots within each grave. Over the previous two months of burial, it seemed that plant life had infiltrated each pig and created a network of roots surrounding every one. When we finally reached each body, it was entirely riddled with roots. The water in the bodies had attracted plant life with its moisture. The garments were themselves entwined with roots [3.78], and it was ironic that I couldn’t easily find the polyester embroidery that was meant to mimic this process.

Separation of the bones from the remaining fabric was performed by
shaking the garment remainders, the dirt now dry and flaky.

There was a sense of relief that came from revealing each skeleton, a sign that the more disgusting processes of decay had subsided. This relief was captured in a passage in which Georges Bataille referenced French intellectual Roger Caillois in writing that “it is noteworthy that the disorder that takes place during ‘the critical period of decay and degradation represented by death’ is during ‘the time when it’s active and contagious virulence is in full swing.’ It ‘ends when all the rotting flesh has finally disappeared from their royal corpse, when nothing is left of the remains but a hard, clean, incorruptible skeleton.” Colin McGinn also writes about disgust noticing that:

… Not all manifestations of bodily extinction are deemed disgusting. The skeleton is an interesting case: it may provoke a cold shiver and be generally shunned, but it does not appear intrinsically disgusting… bare bones don’t prompt disgust, unlike the decaying tissue that may recently have covered them. The skeleton strikes us as ‘clean’.

The most exciting part of this final dig was when the twentieth pig was recovered and I found that plant life had emerged through all of the crevices and holes in the bones. This moment resembled closely the aesthetic I had tried to create when I placed the dissolved branching pattern over the skeleton, and was a final reflection of the similarities between all three project investigations. [3.79].

53 These findings were consistent with that Shari Forbes who described “Adipocere, when freshly formed in a burial site, has a soft, wet, paste-like appearance and can demonstrate a strong ammoniacal odour…Older adipocere material becomes dry and brittle with a white or gray soapy appearance. Shari L. Forbes, “Decomposition Chemistry in a Bural Environment,” in *Soil Analysis in Forensic Taphonomy: Chemical and Biological Effects of Buried Human Remains*, ed. Mark Tibbet and David O Carter (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2008), P 210.
FIBRE DECOMPOSITION ANALYSIS

At this point the official chemical analysis of the fibre samples collected from each recovery is still being conducted at UWA by Ian.\textsuperscript{57} However, from my experience I was able to deduce and graph the following [3.80]:

The cellulosic hemp was the fastest to degrade, and had disintegrated by approximately 50% after 200 days of burial. The silk, a protein fibre, was initially slower to decompose, showing only 20% had disintegrate after 200 days, however this increased in speed after 250 days, and at the end of the experiment, 350 days, there was only 15% of the fibre remaining. In contrast, the polyester, a synthetic fibre, showed no signs of deterioration, and was entirely retrievable after 350 days.

\[3.80\]
[3.80]
Pia Interlandi
GRAPH:
Textile decomposition analysis
2012

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{graph.png}
\caption{Graph showing fabric content over days.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{57} An article is proposed to be submitted to forensic journals in 2013.
There was one significant anomaly to the research and this occurred when we dug up the final pig, Wakely. Wakely had been the smallest pig of the group and we noticed during the washing and dressing that she did not seem to bloat as readily as the others. When it came to her recovery we found that very little decomposition had occurred to the garment. This was drastically different from the other two pigs we recovered that day, which were reduced entirely to bone and polyester. Instead, Wakely’s body had mummified. In discussing this anomaly with Ian, we considered the possibility that she had been ill, either suffering from diarrhea or vomiting, before her death. This may have meant that she was dehydrated, and had little food in her stomach which would have reduced the amount of bacteria present in her digestive tract. Therefore, she did not succumb to the same bloatings.58

58 This is discussed further in Death Down Under, which documented the entire Pig Project.
The *Pig Project* began with the idea of investigating the potential for life to emerge from the realities of the dead and decomposing body. This was something that was conducted within the realm of analogy and metaphor within projects discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, whereby I dissolved garments on the body to break down the barrier between body and clothing and then regenerated, through the use of a body mould, a body created from seeds and soil. Elements from these iterations were brought together as a basis for engagement with the *Pig Project*. In preparing to navigate the realities of death, I became a funeral celebrant, which gave me the confidence and skills to engage with the dead and bereaved, but did not instil a sense of calm in the face of a putrefying corpse, that I anticipated encountering in the future. I wanted to ensure that I could explain elements of decay to families, as this was a way to neutralise some of the discomfort around the body during a dressing process. From my own experiences of dressing the dead, I found that the garments designed for the living were difficult to manoeuvre over the dead body, and the fibres within those garments may not allow for the body to decompose in a normal way, acting to preserve it instead. As part of this initial research intention, I was interested in ascertaining the best fibres to use for burial and how their decomposition rates could be used to manipulate proposed remainders. However, as the project progressed, reformed and unfolded, the importance of this project lay more in what was discovered about fashioning the rituals surrounding death.

Twenty-one pigs were used in place of human bodies, and a strong sense of responsibility for their post mortem care emerged. They became more than a model for humans, having ‘been’ animals in their own right. Each pig was cleaned and named before being dressed in a garment I had designed for their specific physiology; a garment that was primarily made of hemp, but with highlights of silk edging, embroidered branching patterns on top of a printed fabrication, and fastened with polyester cording. The fabric choices reflected three different chemical groups of textile fibres; cellulosic, protein and synthetic, which became the variables for the forensics research. However, this forensics research was only a small facilitatory component of the overall *Pig Project*.
After their burial, three pigs were recovered in fifty day intervals over the next year. These pigs were surrendered to the innate decomposition and the transformation that each encountered transformed my own notions of decomposition and disgust. Aiming to confront what is generally considered to be the most horrific and disgusting aspect of life, its decomposition, I very much wanted to consider that each step along the way – in becoming one with the earth again – was beautiful. However, when I was elbow-deep in non-specific pig effluent, I surrendered my ideals to the grotesque reality of decomposition. A most surprising aspect was the relief that came towards the conclusion of the experiment when the pigs that we then recovered from the earth had been reduced to skeletons, a final biological trace that signalled the end of the rapid and gooey process of decomposing the skin, organs and muscles. The skeletons themselves still had the enduring synthetic cord wrapped around them, but they were ‘dressed’ with the roots from the plant life that had honed in and embraced their bodies in the grave, thriving from the water and other nutrients that their decomposing bodies provided. That final part was both conceptually and physically beautiful, and had become a literal sequel to the iterations of Chapters 1 and 2.

I started this chapter as a fashion designer who also became a funeral celebrant interested in the processes of death and decay, facilitated though the dressing of the dead. I fashioned an experiment that – while proposed as having a scientific component that was interested in the rate at which textiles decomposed – became the ‘fashioning of process’ through which the dead body was ritually taken to the grave where it was furthered fashioned by the environment.

I left the Pig Project prepared to take my research into a practice of dressing the human dead in Garments for the Grave.
CHAPTER 4: GARMETS FOR THE GRAVE
In this final chapter, I discuss the emergent practice of Garments for the Grave, a practice that focuses on the fashioning of burial garments, directed by the previous projects conducted. Garments for the Grave as it currently stands, is a practice that promotes the conversation of death and dying through the initial opening questions of “What will you wear?”[4.01] ‘Who will dress you?’[4.02] And, ‘What will you leave behind?’[4.03] Ultimately, it seeks to address these questions through the fashioning of a personalised burial garment that allows an individual or a family to dress their dead.
The initial engagement with the doctoral research came as a result of dressing my “Nonno” for his funeral. Quite apart from negotiating the logistics of dressing his dead body, this encounter was profoundly helpful in dealing with my own bereavement, and further served to plant a seed in my thinking that catalysed the projects explored in this research. Initially, the research examined within Chapters 1 and 2 revolved around the poetics of death that could be explored through the fashioning of materials and processes as analogues to death, primarily concerned with surrendering to processes beyond my control, and these ultimately lead to an engagement with the realities of death and decomposition in Chapter 3.

Galvanised by my personal experience of dressing the dead, I was able to ask questions about the potentiality of garments created specifically for burial; about the materials and the function of a garment that will literally and symbolically merge with the body in the ground. However, these questions were without the purview of those
Pia Interlandi
Reapplied Buried Control Shroud
2010
Photo by: Devika Bilimoria

buried, and thus, the solutions have now moved beyond me and my role as a practitioner, and into the domain of those who are dying.

Giving the dying a choice about clothing isn’t merely about the garments they will wear into their grave, it also allows them to access a broader dialogue about what they are choosing to take with them as they move out of and dissipate into the environment they leave behind. As discussed throughout the research, clothing is our second skin, part of ourselves. In thinking about the tangible and material-based covering that we take to the grave, we begin the conversation that addresses, dresses and undresses our lives.

A prototype Garment for the Grave was designed, constructed and photographed for use as a visual prompting of these questions, and also as a means to suggest solutions or at least, possibilities for answers. While the garment is now something that is increasingly
requested for commercial use," its most important role is as a vehicle or tool for engagement with a topic that most people choose to avoid.

At the conclusion of the Pig Project, it became apparent that I was prepared to move forward with the fashioning of burial garments for humans; that there was a need, and space for this practice to operate at a larger scale. The burial garments (or, rather, the control garments unused in the Pig Project, and not wrapped around a pig body) were placed upon the animate body of a human, and subsequently, photographed. The images produced in this photo shoot were used to promote the "idea" of burial garments as being beautiful clothes that are designed to disintegrate with the body; a surrendering to the processes of natural decomposition. Unlike a uniform garment like those used in Jewish and Islamic burials,

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1 Representations of the work in the form of posters and flyers shown at the Asia Funeral Expo (AFE) held in Hong Kong, China in May of 2011 brought about requests for samples and cost specifications. At the time, however, I was not in the position to provide these. Additionally, a request for the garments to be retailed in the United Kingdom has resulted in a residency at Clandon Wood Natural Burial Ground, Surrey Hills, UK, with the intention to produce the garments within the UK. http://clandonwood.com

2 Within Jewish funerary custom, the dead are tended to by the Chevra Kadisha, a group of volunteers who work with the family to perform the dressing of the dead. The dead are wrapped in a white garment known as a ‘Tahrihím’ – a simple white shroud preferably made of linen. While men are also dressed in their ‘Tallit’ – a prayer shawl used in life, each member of the faith is dressed in the same garment. Interestingly this ‘tahrihím’ contains no permanent knots in the construction, including no knots at the end of any sewing yarns. The idea behind this is so that there is nothing binding the dead to this world, allowing for an easier resurrection. "Preparation for Jewish Burial," Jewish Funeral Guide, http://www.jewish-funeral-guide.com/tradition/shrouds.htm. Retrieved 12 December, 2011

3 Within Islamic funerary custom, the dead are subjected to a ritualistic series of three washes before being wrapped in white cotton cloth cut into 3-5 (3 for men, 5 for women) rectangular pieces, the ‘Quamis’, ‘Izar’ and ‘Ullafah’. These pieces come together to form the ‘Kafan’ or shroud, and should have no stitching, and are laid in specific dressing order before the body is placed on top. The ‘Quamis’ – or the ‘shirt’, which is the largest piece of cloth, is cut to provide a whole for the head to go through. There are also a number of cotton strips which are used to tie the body. "What to Do When a Muslim Dies," The Islamic Bulletin. http://www.islamicbulletin.org/free_downloads/other/funeral.pdf. Retrieved 24 December, 2012
these garments could be tailored and personalised, and utilised outside religiously defined rituals. The model was primarily dressed in a prototype garment that had yet to be buried, and was therefore, whole [4.04]. Next, the same model was swathed in a garment that had been recovered from a burial one hundred days after interment.\(^4\) The model was photographed with the garment wrapped around her body in various configurations to demonstrate the adaptability and transformability of the garments [4.05]. The images were lined up next to each other as a series of garments in various stages of decay. This series was a visual method of communicating many of the elements explored in earlier projects, and served to put forward the research into the fashioning of Garments for the Grave.

During my residency at SymbioticA, my research caught the attention of fashion forecaster Philippa Wagner who had previously profiled the work of SymbioticA Director, Oron Catts. Philippa asked if she could feature some of my work on World Global Style Network (WGSN). WGSN is an internationally regarded online forecasting company with “more than 35,000 users in 2,500 subscribing companies, ranging from high street fashion retailers to manufacturers, as well as businesses beyond the fashion industry influenced by fashion trends, such as Apple and BMW.” At the time, Philippa was employed by WGSN as their Materials and Innovation Consultant where her role was to source and research material innovations and was involved in researching “sustainability from a cradle to cradle aspect with unusual materials.”\(^6\) She asked me to

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\(^4\) This garment was not one of the ones that had wrapped a pig, but instead was one of the control garments that was buried without a body, but still deteriorated as a result its interment.

\(^5\) This was after she was included in a mailing list which was sent a blurb about my work attached to an invitation to a casual talk I was to be giving at SymbioticA. During the university semester at UWA, SymbioticA run Friday afternoon talks, a relatively casual affair held in their office where residents or invited guests can discuss their work.

\(^6\) Philippa Wagner, Email, 24th June, 2009.


\(^8\) Wagner.
email her some images of my work, and I sent her my undergraduate dissolvable work, photographs from *The Wayward Fold*, and additionally, an image of my first *Body Mould* iteration. At the time, these were the best images I had, as I was yet to conduct any formal photo shoot with Devika Bilimoria. Ultimately, it was one of the images of my undergraduate work that was used in the WGSN forecasting palette “Think Tank Trend Analysis for Spring Summer 2011” [4.06-4.07].

Sometime later, Philippa contacted me again requesting any new work. It was at this point, that I sent her images from the *Pig Project* and updated the dissolvable work iterations. This proved to be the catalyst for a number of unprecedented, press-related interactions.⁹ The fact that the research elicited such an overwhelming response indicated that there was a need for a dialogue about death and decomposition that could be accessed through the ‘fashioning’ of these processes. In particular, the degree of interest from mainstream culture pointed to a relevance that was unexpected. The work was starting to have a life of its own that extended beyond my own discussion of it; it too was branching out and creating traces outside of my control. Just as in the ‘dissolvable’ iterations, *Body Moulds* and the *Pig Project*, I had to surrender control to the naturally occurring process of unfolding.

⁹ Including international articles in the London Financial Times, BBC Mundo, London Metro, VICE UK magazine. (For full list of articles please see the ‘Exhibition and Press Listing’ at the beginning of the exegesis.)
As the images began to circulate through and around the Internet, Dominique Driver, the Contemporary Science Exhibitions Manager at the London Science Museum contacted me. She enquired as to the possibility of sending one of the burial garments to London for inclusion in an exhibition entitled Trash Fashion: Designing out waste, held at the Museum between June 26, 2010 – August 28, 2011.¹⁰ This exhibition served to plunge the research not only into a public fashion context, but to embed the project as a point of scientific enquiry, contextualised amongst the other science-related exhibits in the Museum [4.08-4.10]. The Exhibition also featured the work of Suzanne Lee whose work BioCouture¹¹ was discussed in Chapter 2. Prior to the close of the Exhibition, I was contacted by a curator for the London Print Studio who was mounting an exhibition entitled Grafik Apparel: Interweaving Art and Fashion,¹² an exhibition bringing together “artists, designers and performers together to explore the messages and meanings encoded in the things we wear. Clothes entwine references, ironies and identities.”¹³ The garment submitted to both displays has not returned to Australia since leaving in 2010, moving, as it has, from gallery to gallery – an indication of its value for exhibition purposes within many contexts.¹⁴

¹⁰ (It was originally meant to run until February, but the exhibition was extended for another six months due to its popularity).
¹⁴ It is currently being held in preparation for Graveland, an exhibition scheduled for the end of January 2013 at the Crypt Gallery in London. The exhibition “looks at
I began to receive attention from Australian-based media after a presentation as part of the Death Down Under conference held in Sydney, June 26-27, 2011, after which I was contacted by a reporter for Fairfax Media who had heard that I was discussing ‘Fashion and Death.’ The article, entitled Life Yet in Creative Send-Offs for Dead and Not-So-Dead [4.12], featured the work of several academics, companies and individuals, who shared an interest in contemporary death practices, or, in the words of the reporter Maris Beck, “Death, it seems, is having a makeover.” She also noted that, “Green Burial is increasingly popular.”

To be aligned with other burial products was to be contextualised as a provider of tangible funerary objects. The emergence of Natural Burial as a viable internment method has opened the door to other innovative funerary objects. These ‘objects’, mainly those in direct cemeteries and tributes from around the world, exploring the idea of memorial. Photography, stories, objects and decorations will show some of the many different ways we commemorate a person worldwide, from the traditional to the more unusual. Carla Conte, “Graveland,” Kickstarter Inc, http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/230706648/graveland-exhibition.

12 Such as Pete McFarlane, a contemporary memorial stonemason, LifeArt cardboard coffins with digitally printed images on the surface.
14 Ibid.
contact with the dead body, such as coffins, have also been susceptible to fashion trends with a push towards environmental sustainability. These objects, some of which started as conceptual art projects, are forming part of the visualisation of death, and contribute to the idea of choice to consumers. Among some of the more interesting projects are the Capsula Mundi,\(^{19}\) [4.13-4.14] a project developed by Raoul Bretzel and Anna Citelli, and the Womb Coffin, [4.15-4.16]\(^{20}\) developed by Diddo as part of the Project Womb. In both cases, round ergonomic shapes have replaced the traditional rectangular coffins or caskets. Similarly, companies including Kinkaraco\(^{21}\) [4.17-4.18] and Bellacouche\(^{22}\) [4.19] create what is referred to by the Good Funeral Guide\(^{23}\) as "soft coffins."\(^{24}\)

These ‘soft coffins’ are reasonably close to engaging some of the issues I proposed to address with my burial garments, and while they take a step closer to addressing the dead body, they do not seek to resolve the issue of what is worn against the skin, nor do they take into account the dressing process.

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22 Yuli Somme, Bellacouche: Leaf Cocoon, 2005-present.
Raoul Bretzel & Anna Citelli  
Capsula Mundi  
2003-2004

[4.15] & [4.16]  
Diddo  
Project Womb: The Womb Coffin  
2010-2011

[4.17] & [4.18]  
Esmeralda Kent  
Kinkaraco: Green Burial Products:  
2005-Present

[4.19]  
Yuli Somme  
Bellacouch: Leaf Cocoon  
2005-Present
[4.20 - 4.23]
Elizabeth Heyerts
The Travelers
2003-2004

[4.24 - 4.25]
Margareta Kern
Clothes for Death
2007

[4.26 - 4.33]
Lien Foundation
Life Before Death: Last Outfit
2010
While there are very few practitioners that actively seek to address clothing for the dead with proposed garment designs, there are a number of projects that have emerged in the last decade that directly engage with the clothing worn by the dead. These include photographic series such as The Travelers, by Elizabeth Heyerts [4.20-4.23]; Clothes for Death, by Margareta Kern [4.24-4.25]; and the work of the Life Before Death project, which has an offshoot enquiry entitled, Final Outfit [4.26-4.29]. From this, it would appear that there is a conversation being had about death and the clothes we wear for it. Within The Travelers, each of the people photographed were visually ‘speaking’ their “eulogies”: Heyerts commenting that the “photographs are visual accounts of what the living want to remember, the stories we all want to tell about the dead.” In a New York Times article about The Travelers entitled “Bringing back the Dead,” Isaiah Owens, the mortician who prepared each of the individuals photographed stated that he considers it “his duty to prepare a body for the after world with the same care a Hollywood stylist might use to prepare an actress for the Oscars,” something that Heyerts found interesting stating, “The thing that intrigued me most about this project was the whole idea of people going out dressed to the nines.” While slightly different in aesthetic, and the fact that those in the portraits are living, is the series Clothes for Death. The photographer, Margareta Kern, visited the homes of several elderly women in Croatia and Bosnia & Herzegovina, photographed them alongside their burial clothes:

25 At this point in the candidature only Jae Rhim Lee’s Infinity Burial Project (discussed in chapter 3) is aligned with this idea.
31 Ibid.
In tattered suitcases... these elderly women have packed their final outfits - a white nightgown, an embroidered bolero, a pillow, a pair of thick woollen socks. There is a moving contrast between their worn clothes and the newness of the unworn - clothes that someone else will dress them in... In each, the ritual garments laid out at their sides suggest a consolation, a chance to preordain one aspect of the unknowable.  

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In both instances, the clothes were acknowledged as being a special garment, something reserved or purchased for the purpose of death, and the migration into the next world. This was also the case for the clothes chosen by participants in the Life Before Death’s investigation into the Final Outfit.

Of particular note was 46 year old Mdm Foo Piao Lin [4.33], the only terminally ill participant, and she asked to wear an “expensive cheongsam” as it was something she had always wanted. In agreeing to be part of the project, she believed that it was about “getting people to talk about death openly,” something that she and her family had seen as embracing “the emotional and spiritual healing power of coming to terms with death.” Her pre-death photograph was taken in a series with her family dressing her [4.30-4.32]; the laughter is clear as her daughters fitted her shoes and wig, in a similar way to the dressing I had facilitated for my Great Aunt in Chapter 3.

Another individual who fashioned her own death was the former editor of Vogue Australia, Sheila Scotter [4.34], who died in April, 2012. In 2009, she gave an interview to The Age newspaper in which she candidly described her burial outfit as her “fashionable quilted dressing gown,” qualifying its choice: “so I’ll be warm.” She went on to say that she was choosing to be buried over cremated so that she could “give something back to the earth.” For someone as dedicated to fashion, and to promoting chosen trends (long before the use of networks such as WGSN), as was Scotter, publically

[4.34]

Lawrence Money
“Ex-Vogue Editor Styles Her Ultimate Farewell,”
The Age
13th October 2009

33 Foundation, "Life before Death: Last Outfit.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
addressing something as personal as her “death style” was an act in itself worthy of trend forecasting.

What all of these projects and public figures have done, and what my own work aims to achieve, is to open up a dialogue regarding death, as a way to prepare for a process that we have very little control over, and to, indeed, perform a fashioning of death.

This chapter finishes with a quick overview of some of the elements included in the prototype garment fashioned for *Garments for the Grave*.

The garment prototype I have fashioned as a utensil for exploring and putting enquiry about death forward is detailed in the following moments:

**FABRICATION:**

The fabrics selected for the prototype garment were a hemp/organic cotton blend weave, a raw silk weave, hemp/silk weave and cotton cording, with viels made of various weights of silk. Each fibre was chosen for its easy biodegradability as witnessed in the *Pig Project*.\(^{40}\)

**SHAPE:**

While the shroud designed for the pigs contained minor flaws, on the whole the large flat shape allowed for dressing the body without having to shift its weight. As such the same protocol was applied to the *Garments for the Grave* prototype [4.35]. The garment is designed to be laid out on whichever surface the body is being dressed. From here, the body is laid on top, and the garment simply folded over [4.41]. There is an adjustable neckline, which allows the head to easily come through without any awkward manoeuvring. The

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\(^{40}\) A term coined by The Natural Death Centre’s director Zenith Virago when she stated that if the dead or dying has “a lifestyle, that they may want to have a death style” [http://www.zenithvirago.com/death-dying/death-dying/p/88, retrieved 28 November, 2012, and repeated at the *Death Down Under* conference in 2010. \(^{42}\) Both hemp and cotton belong to the cellulosic chemical group and have been estimated to decompose within a similar time frame.
sleeves too are attached to the garment, but are open, and then closed by tying the cords. Even if the body is in the stiffest of rigor mortis states, the garment can still be put on.

CHIN TIE

This simple strap is used to close the mouth in death [4.36-4.37]. This is something that is usually performed by funeral directors and involves suturing through the gums and tightening the yarn in order to secure the jaw in a closed position. However the same effect can be achieve by placing the strap around the crown of the head and under the jaw either before rigor mortis begins or after it has subsided. It is something that can be performed by the family.
FOOT BAG

A response born of my experience with my Nonno’s dressing in which the shoes he wore seemed obsolete in the purpose for which they were originally designed; a response to seeing my grandmothers’ bare feet during her dressing, and the desire to cover them; and finally, as a response to the ill fitting garment in which some of the pig’s feet were left exposed. This foot cover or bag ensures that all of the body is covered and contained within the garment [4.38-4.40].

[4.38-4.40]
Pia Interlandi
Chin Tie
2011
Photography: Devika
Billimoria
HAND BAGS

These sheer silk organza hand coverings were designed as a fashioning of the gradual slow veiling of the body [4.42-4.43]. While the torso, legs and feet are quickly covered in opaque hemp, the hands remain visible, and are of the last details of the body to be enshrouded.

TYING UP

As was the method of fastening in the Pig Project, the prototype garment features cords, this repetition of putting a knot in each cord is a way to slow down the dressing, and is a delicate ritual that not only enacts the physical tying up of cords, but so to the tying up of a life [4.44]. Instead of bows, the cording can be double knotted, as a reminder of that these knots will only be undone by the process of disintegration in the grave.
VEILING

The final piece in the prototype outfit is a series of silk veils that aim to gradually cover the body in preparation for burial; each layer leading softly into an evocation of the final layering of the return to the earth [4.45-4.50].

Death will always be met with sadness, but the function of this garment, and indeed the intent inherent in the fashioning of Garments for the Grave, aims to gently guide the bereaved through what is one of the most profound and difficult encounters facing us all. The burial garment is the last skin that will be placed upon us, and will literally and symbolically merge with us in our decomposition and dissipation into the earth.
Conclusion
Through the course of the research trajectory, my position as a designer of clothing was transformed into the role of one who performs ‘fashioning’ of processes, and it was in this role that the research began to take shape. Cycling in and out of using conventional tools of clothing design, I was able to explore the realities of death both through the use of analogy, and then through the literal engagement with dead and decomposing bodies.

Opening with a discussion of clothing as a second skin, the first series of iterations conducted in Chapter 1 involved the use of dissolvable materials and the fashioning of different methods of applying and removing these from the living body. They resulted in a series of photographed moments within the dissolving processes. The iteration entitled *Spindle and Shroud* revealed the power in the ritual of dressing, the physical act of entwining a body in the dissolvable yarn bore affect in its spinning. However, these iterations were not as effective as explorations of dissolving the outer layer as clothing, as they were not fashioned garments in their designed configuration. Without construction such as seams or fastenings, they did not read visually in the manner I had sought to achieve. Thus, the next iterations *Body Suit* and the *Tailored Jacket* sought to address the apparent deficit through the creation of two very different types of garments. The first, the *Body Suit*, effectively communicated the garment as a second skin, as it was a fully-fashioned knit in the precise shape of the human skin, with articulated fingers and toes. As this garment dissolved, it shrunk in and around the body, further accentuating its connectivity to the skin before it disintegrated and peeled back to reveal the underlying corporeal body. In contrast, the *Tailored Jacket* was a garment that involved a much closer working relationship with the maker in the traditional tailoring protocol. In this instance, the process of construction revealed the mutually affective physiological nature of working with the dissolvable, in that just as the fabric was sticking to my skin in the desired process outcome, it was also vulnerable to my sweat. I was imparting on it at the same time as it was imparting on me. The blurred boundary evolved into a comment on the symbiotic relationship between skin and cloth beyond that of a purely philosophical or metaphorical notion. Dissolving the jacket revealed the inner workings, or anatomy of the jacket, shoulder pads and stitching of the organs and skeleton.
The final iteration discussed in this series was that of the Wayward Fold, a catwalk presentation of the dissolvable garments that allowed for a live audience reaction to the transformation from solid garment to liquid – this took the research outside the use of photographs as a means of recording the process. This iteration also allowed a more purposeful utilisation of the garment components as intentional remainders. In turn, this reflected some of the remainders that brought the garment into being, mainly, the paper used to transfer print onto the cloth. The residue and remainder of these garments both in photographed moments and in live performance, whilst messy, wet and gooey (elements included in that of the decomposing body), could also be seen as beautiful and evocative of the body’s inevitable outcome when it encounters mortality, but without the disgust and aversion this engagement generally portrays. This was made possible by presenting death and decay through the use of fashion as an intermediary.

This chapter sought to put forward an aesthetic and analogous engagement with the body and clothing as a connected entity, which are both susceptible to the processes of dissolution.

The next series of project iterations, discussed in Chapter 2 sought to build upon these remainders and move from decomposition into regeneration. In this chapter, death and fashion are combined within the context of ‘Natural Earth’ or ‘green’ burial, which is a trend or emergent method of interring the body in the most ecologically aware and sustainable method possible. Instead of attempting to preserve the body with the formaldehyde based embalming traditionally used in Western funerary practice, the body is surrendered without preservative intervention to the underlying process of cellular breakdown. In this manner, the body is reabsorbed into the environment where it is seamlessly broken down and used as nutrient for the surrounding organisms such that it can be understood to have been recycled and regenerated.

The preliminary investigation for this chapter began by trying to replicate this emergence of plant life from the body in the form of Hanging Hands, in which seeds were sown into soil that filled a pair of gloves. This was an echo back to the dissolvable iteration of the Body Suit, the articulated fingers replicated in a woolen yarn instead of the
dissolvable thread. In and of itself, this experiment was deemed unsuccessful due to the soil drying out as a result of the water draining through the constructed ‘fingers’ with minimal moisture retention. Ultimately, however, it proved to be an informative prelude to the following iterations. In consideration of the drainage imperatives, the next iteration - the first of *Body Moulds*, was set inside a mannequin, in which the water could pool in the deepest crevices of the structural physique. This mannequin was then filled with the same combination of soil and seeds as *Hanging Hands* and left to germinate for a number of months. When this mould was flipped over, a dense network of roots was revealed. This growth had essentially altered the loose and formless soil into the form of a constructed ‘body.’ And as such, I understood this to be a ‘regenerated body’.

I sought to apply this newly fashioned body onto that of a living human body in the form of a ‘garment’ by treating the mould as a textile; a web of roots similar to that of a non-woven fabrication. However, it became apparent that the mould itself was dying; a result of the grass being faced away from the sun, the soil and roots began to dry and flake away from the body, returning, once again, to formlessness.

In an attempt to stabilise and capture this process, I sought to grow the roots through a conventional fabric, in the hopes that the roots would grow through the fabric, and even if the soil were removed, would be retained within its structure. A series of investigations was conducted utilising different fibre compositions and constructions. The first was cotton muslin, which, as a scaffold proved unsuccessful as it deteriorated rapidly in the soil, and by the time the mould was flipped over had disintegrated. I set this information aside for the time being and tried to grow the roots through more durable synthetic fibres. One of the trials was to grow the roots through a piece of lace, and whilst mildly successful at providing a scaffold for the roots, in that it was made out of a polyester fibre, within a week, the roots had dried and flaked away. By revealing them through the action of flipping the body over, the mould incurred a death, and thus entered its own cycle of deterioration.

I realised that seeking a semblance of permanency with the root structure was counterintuitive to my initial aims of embracing transience and transformation; I was attempting to ‘freeze’ death, and
halt its push towards disintegration. Rather than persevere with my attempts at preserving a process that clearly did not lend itself to preservation without the involvement of artificial resins (as is the process involved in work of Gunther Von Hagens), I instead chose to focus on enabling death to live through the fashioning of processes surrounding it. I turned my attention to recreating the aesthetic of the roots across the body mould, which carried a branching pattern, by using a different methodology. Returning to more conventional tools in garment construction, (as opposed to making garment forms from soil and seeds), I employed the use of machine embroidery.

I began this process by transfer printing one of the images of the first Body Mould iteration and using it as a pathway on which to trace the roots. After experimenting with the laborious process of embroidering each root using a basic sewing machine, an extremely time consuming process, I resorted to hiring a commercial embroidery company who could automate the process rapidly and allow for replication of the pattern numerous times, which would ultimately allow me more time to experiment with the finished embroidered pattern.

After a pattern had been traced in pen over the body mould image, it was digitised and embroidered onto fabric. I sought to isolate the roots from the soil, in this case, the embroidered roots from the fabric on which it was embroidered, and thus, the dissolvable fabrications were reintroduced. By utilising their susceptibility to water, I could use this vulnerability to create contrast between the embroidery and the ground it was stitched into. This proved to be an opportunity to combine the enquiry of each project; the dissolvable as decomposition, and the revealing of the branching pattern as regeneration: a cycle in and of itself. However, at this point it became apparent that this type of fashioning was dealing with death in a predominantly metaphorical way, and thus I sought to engage in a research project that took the practice forward and into direct contact with the visceral nature of decomposition. In preparation for this engagement with the grittier realities of death I sought to become a funeral celebrant. The intensive course undertaken at the Celebrants Training College delved into the creation of funeral ceremonies, but more importantly its students were taught how to talk to the bereaved,
and methods by which to manage one’s own consequent stresses and emotions.

Chapter 3 focused on the research conducted at SymbioticA and involved *The Pig Project* in which I collaborated with forensic entomologist Professor Ian Dadour. Together, we devised an experiment that would allow us to test the deterioration of textiles fibres within a natural burial scenario in order to put a timeline towards a rate of decomposition. As a science experiment, this was intended to enable observations as to the manner and rate at which various chemical groups (cellulose, protein and synthetic) of textiles fibres disintegrated. From that point, I would be able to effectively design a burial garment that would itself undergo a predictable series of transformations in the earth. With the *Pig Project*, I aimed to ultimately leave a skeleton alongside that of the body on which it was wrapped, in this way I could facilitate and fashion the manner in which the garment and body were reabsorbed into the earth. However, in constructing this protocol, I was confronted with being implicated in the sacrifice of twenty-one pigs as substitutes for human cadavers. I fashioned a ritual around their delivery from death to the grave, and thus, it became an experiment that not only engaged with a scientific methodology, but also came to encompass my ethical and emotional insurance that the pigs were treated well, something that was well out of the realm of a traditional forensic experiment that involves the use of pigs.

While I had wanted to retain a sense of respect and beauty towards the pigs, when we started to recover them at fifty-day intervals, I found it increasingly difficult to maintain this intention. As the body moved through the first one hundred and fifty days of burial, it purged all of its fluids into the garment and surrounding earth; the cellular integrity annihilated. Skin was mistaken for fabric and vice versa, the body had merged with the garment in a literal sense and it was disgusting, which was different from the photographs in the second chapter, which aimed to soothe and aestheticise decomposition.

It was approximately three hundred days afterwards that the wet, paste-like tissues of the body began to dry, and evaporating alongside the effluent was my sense of revulsion. The pig skeleton was revealed, a stable and more durable remainder of the body. As regards the
garment, at three hundred and fifty days all that remained were the polyester cords, a few small remnants of shattered silk and the embroidered branching motif that was developed and described in Chapter 2. The most exciting aspect of what we found entangled in the body were the roots of the plant life that had located the body underground and embraced it, feeding on the nutrients released from the cellular dissipation. Thus the essence of what Chapter 2’s early iterations were trying to achieve though metaphor and allusion, was created naturally through the burial process.

After navigating my way through the cycle of decomposing described in the third chapter, I once again realised that I too had undergone a fashioning, the research imprinting on me as much as I did on it. I felt empowered through the process of fashioning and felt confident to go forward into the work described in Chapter 4 where I revealed the practice in which I now find myself designing namely, Garments for the Grave.

In Chapter 4, I outlined a prototype garment for burial: one that was fashioned for the specific purpose of dressing and embracing the inevitable processes of decay. The fabrics chosen reflected those that were biodegradable within the Pig Project, and the shape allowed for ease of dressing should a family wish to engage in this ritual. But more than the tangible object itself - the physical outcome of a process of fashioning - was the role that this object can facilitate in the fashioning of death for others.

It wasn’t immediately obvious to me at the outset of the research that I would finish by designing garments for burial; it was a practice that I became prepared to do through the projects discussed in the previous chapters. Entering into the doctoral study, my garments had been designed for the living, but were already fixed as being something inspired by transformative processes. As my research was picked up and discussed by various public media, I came to realise that not only had I found a need to address the dead body after the experience of dressing my Nonno, but that the broader world seemed to be interested in engaging in the conversation about what happens to the dead body with considerable interest. Through the medium of fashion, I was able to discuss a topic that is notoriously avoided, and
therein, lies the ‘power of fashion.’ By using something as familiar as a piece of clothing, and unpacking or reconfiguring its connection to our bodies/selves, the importance of the consideration paid to the outfit that we choose to take to the grave was highlighted. Ultimately, this empowers those who dare to ask the questions: “What will you wear?” “Who will dress you?” And, “What will you leave behind?”

“Who knows what form the forward momentum of life will take in the time ahead or what use it will make of our anguish searching. The most that any one of us can seem to do is to fashion something - an object or ourselves- and drop it into the confusion, make an offering of it, so to speak, to the life force.”

I complete the end of this cycle of work, acutely aware that in the wake of its death is looming the birth of something new. The end is the beginning in the end.


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