RE-ENCHANTING FASHION: AN ECOCENTRIC APPROACH

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS (TEXTILES)

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Declaration

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

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1/10/2015
ABSTRACT

The contemporary disconnect between people and their garments, is symbolic of a greater malaise; the loss of connection between humans and the environment. The loss of connection leaves us vulnerable to the seduction of endless fashion possibilities with limited meaning and maximum environmental impact. As we are framed within the Anthropocene age, where our activities influence the earth system, we are bound to comprehend the nature of our relationship to the natural systems.

Our creative working lives influence the earth’s ecosystems and the environment requires attention, consideration and refection for natural world to be embedded within practice. Rather than positioning ‘Nature’ as something external to our everyday work, it is part of the environment that we live and participate in (Mathews, 2005). We are embodied and perceiving subjects and for Merleau-Ponty, ‘the body is part of the fabric of the world.’ Our design practices are embodied and we are intertwined with human and non-human ecosystems and the cosmological cycles.

This research investigates the notion of taking an ‘ecocentric’ (Merchant 1992) approach in our design work; as one that is based in the ‘cosmos.’ It will include the project-based Spiritus Loci project, which combined elements of ritual, place-specific narrative and neo-crafting structures.

When we experience the intrinsic value of the whole environment (Merchant, 1992) we include the space for ‘self-enhancement’ together with the potential of cloth (Schneider, 2006) in a manner of crafting meaningful objects (Walker 2011). In looking to nature for creative nourishment rather than the industrial essence of the modernist spirit, then we deny fashion’s ‘immanent death’ (Lehmann, 2000) and make it a life-affirming process.
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INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century is framed by the recognition that we are living in the Anthropocene age, which is to say that ‘we are the first generation with the knowledge of how our activities influence the Earth System, and thus, the first generation with the power and the responsibility to change our relationship with the planet’ (Steffen et al, 2011, p. 749). This knowledge informs this project and research. It is unlikely, however, that one person can have any real effect on a large-scale problem such as climate change. This project does not set out to solve changing climate either, it is a small-scale project that is personal, local and industry-specific.

The research that will be outlined in this exegesis is about our relationship with our earth through the re-evaluation of the creative process of making garments or textile artefacts. In comprehending that we have en masse an influence upon changing climate and conditions, we also need to understand that the fashion industry causing the destruction of environments and ecosystems through deforestation, habitat loss, loss of diversity, toxification and pollution (Greenpeace, 2011, 2012, 2013). This practice-based research project, based on a participatory creative process will examine how we might encourage dialogue between the environment, the industry of fashion, and ourselves. It is about forging connections between human and non-human networks, and explores place-connectivity.

While a Modernist perspective on fashion is that its’ ‘immanent death renders it infinitely transient and constantly moving’ (Lehmann, 2000, p. 273), this in itself is an outdated view, and yet we often cling to it as if it were still relevant today. But there are philosophical positions and practices that deny the Modernist stance. Like other proponents of the fashion industry, we understand that we have to propose other systems that might encourage a shift in the industry (von Busch, 2007), either from within or externally.
Through the practice-based research project Spiritus Loci and drawing on my experience within the fashion industry as fashion educator, writer and curator, my intention is to critically examine the current fashion system and look for clues for alternative approaches. The project’s narrative is part of a larger dialogue around fashion and sustainability. It is a speculation as to whether fashion design, crafting networks, and immersion in place might go beyond ‘sustainable design methodologies [that] lack philosophical depth’ (Chapman, 2005, p. 25).

This speculation has directed me to look outside the fashion system at alternative practices and theories. The Spiritus Loci project takes its cues from various elements of the art world where spiritual, political, ecological and environmental concerns are the subject of expression, unfettered by the drive for commercial viability, which is normally associated with an industry like fashion. These lenses became my foundation for Spiritus Loci, where I creatively explored an alternative. This process of working and reflecting without the dictates of fashion has allowed me to re-examine the system with a different lens.

However, within a post-modern, post-industrial fashion context, elements of protest are very quickly rendered ‘unfashionable’, and what is unfashionable is deemed unimportant. Indeed, the very notion of ‘sustainability in fashion’ can become ‘so last season’, just like the garments that were, just a few months ago, considered de rigueur. With these ideas in mind, the project is about maintaining a dialogue between fashion and the spiritual, the political and the environmental. This body of work was not only about the project Spiritus Loci; it was also about my own work outside of amateur crafting, and my own means of creative expression, which is primarily writing, creative production and education.

This research project aims to better understand how we might overcome our division from the natural world through crafting a garment; a ‘meaningful object’ (Walker, 2011). This process would be a way of interacting with place by ecological thinking and ritual (Grimes, 2003), and of considering whether, by constructing different narratives around objects or garments, we may be able to bring about a more dynamic connection with our clothes, with the environment, and with our relationship to fashion.

The current system of fashion production and consumption is arguably as meaningless as it is destructive to the environment. Like others with a ‘vested’ interest in fashion, I also feel these meaninglessness and destructive capabilities on a personal, individual level. So my project plays with the ingredients that may be necessary for rearticulating fashion ‘enchantment’ (Gablik, 1998; Bennett, 2001), in response to the earth’s resource depletion and degradation. This is further examined in Chapter 2: Looking Within the System.
To address the notion of ‘reenchanting’ the fashion industry, we need to understand what the enchantment of fashion might be in the first place. Enchantment is defined as ‘the act of enchanting or state of being enchanted; a magic spell or act of witchcraft; great charm or fascination.’ (Collins English Dictionary) Being enchanted is a personal experience, although many may be simultaneously enchanted by a phenomenon. In relationship to garments it may refer to the fabric, style, silhouette and colour that powerfully appeal to an individual.

Enchantment may be about a sentimental attachment; the unseen narrative of the garment or it may about its future potential. It is about how it makes the wearer feels, but equally it can be about appreciating the skill and design that went into its creation. All of these elements come to play in what Otto von Busch (2008) refers to as the ‘magic’ of fashion. Suzi Gablik refers to art with ‘visionary energy’ (1991), the same may be said of fashion. It is this magic that is lost with the bulk of fast fashion in that most considerations of material, design, ethical concerns, and narrative are beholden to keeping the costs low, and the desire for new collections alive. The meaning that may be attributed to individual garments is lost quickly as are the life-affirming qualities.

Understanding what we are destroying, both human and non-human, requires attention, consideration and reflection, and I believe that revaluing and working with human and non-human networks to facilitate this provides the potential for a more holistic approach to sustainable fashion.

The fashion system, according to Alison Gill, is ‘the industry and its supporting infrastructure… that bring regular changes to men’s and women’s clothes and bodies’ (cited in Evans, 2003). Fashion is, indeed, part of the larger corporate narrative that structures and polices contemporary life. It is this rigidity of infrastructure and purpose that made me glance longingly to the art of Joseph Beuys, where textiles were free from industry constraints and materiality expressed more than a three-dimensionality. In the case of Beuys, his art practice was driven by many of the anthropological philosophies of Rudolf Steiner (Moffat, 1998).

This enabled me to question whether there could be a spiritual dimension, not only in the art world but also within a fashion context. Schneider (2006, p. 205) writes

> the spiritual and the material are inseparable in the minds of humans everywhere, including those who inhabit industrial capitalist societies. Textiles … elicit intense affect, a feeling of connection… add substance. … cloth and clothing shore up the person in magical ways...
This was altogether different to the fast fashion industry that has unfolded over the past two decades. What I was seeing in the fashion world was the ‘deathly pallor’ (Evans, 2003, p. 149) of modernity’s dream.

There is nothing life-affirming about an industry that is ‘fast’. At the same time, the notion of a ‘simple’ life or ‘Simplicity’ (after Voluntary Simplicity; Elgin, 1993) in relation to fashion and clothing means, among other things, ‘freedom from artificial ornament… [or]. freedom from subtlety’ (Andrews and Urbanska, 2009, p. 4). However, fashion is both a ‘cultural practice as well as a symbolic product’ (Kawamura, 2005, p. 32), and as such, it is a narratorial device. Simplicity is layered with subtleties. But we need to attune ourselves to those subtleties, to the unobvious. In the case of fashion, it may even be attuning ourselves to the ‘un’ fashionable.

Alternative narratives of sustainability are ‘performed’ (Szerszynski, Heim, Waterton, 2003) in place, time and ritual and this research proposes one such performance of alternative fashion narrative. There are philosophies that are not part of the ‘naturalistic materialism’, (Walker, 2014, p. 8) which are supported by ‘scientific investigation’ and ‘grounded in instrumental reason’ (Walker, 2014, p. 9). As Walker suggests, ‘traditional sources of meaning and value may have been abandoned, but nothing has replaced them.’ (Walker, 2014, p. 9).

This research, looked to what elements were needed to replace meaning and value in fashion, and was largely carried out through the creative project Spiritus Loci that involved a group of eight participants, including myself, all of whom work and research within the fashion and textiles domain. They include an industry fashion designer, a recent fashion design graduate, a weaver artist, a musician/dancer, a 2D graphic designer, a festival costume designer and two amateur crafters (one of them myself - the crafter/curator). (See Appendix, Part ii) I explore the specific time dimensions given to the project (between the Spring Equinox (September 22, 2012) and Summer Solstice (December, 21, 2012), and places that participants chose to be their ‘muse’. I also look at the role of ritual as a way of heightening awareness during this project, and communicating the narrative of each individual.

The broad framework of the project is based on reflexive, practice-led research (Smith and Dean, 2009) and the notion of ‘research through practice’ (Downton, 2003). It is a single study over a three-month period of time with a fixed group of participants each producing an artefact, planning and orchestrating a ritual gathering for the group and exhibiting their outcomes in an exhibition. The process of being ‘embedded’ within my practice as creative facilitator, curator of Spiritus Loci and as a participant within the group, enabled
me to reflect upon the qualitative data and question my own practice and outcomes.

Practice-led research allows the ‘researcher’s own self-reflexive mapping of the emergent work as enquiry’ (Barrett, 2012, p5). It is based upon the ‘situated knowledge’ (Barrett, 2012) of process and outcome. This enquiry was specifically structured so that each participant could develop and share their own experience of process and narrative. Because it is often based upon ‘personal interest and experience’ (Barrett, 2012, p.5) practice-led research is likely to be ‘holistic and integrated’ (Leavy, 2015, p. 23) with a ‘synergy between the form and content, as they shape each other and, in turn, expand how we think about our role in shaping knowledge.’ (Leavy, 2015, p 23) My enquiry required a framework that was holistic and flexible, one that enabled theory to inform practice. The process was the crucial point of the enquiry.

I broadly define my theoretical approach as ‘ecocentric’ (Merchant, 1992), denoting that which is based in the cosmos. According to this model, ‘the whole environment, including inanimate elements, rocks, and minerals along with animate plants and animals, is assigned intrinsic value’ (Merchant, 1992, pp. 74-75). In respect to Spiritus Loci, I maintained a focus inspired by human and non-human networks, not the exclusively anthropocentric. This approach follows a similar philosophical vein to Arne Naess’ notion of Deep Ecology. While Naess’ philosophy has been criticized for taking an essentialist view of nature (Littler, 2009, p. 100), it has, nonetheless, been widely influential.

Throughout this exegesis, I use the term ‘nature’ to refer to local ecosystems in the non-human realm. Within this framework, ‘nature’ is not merely positioned as something ‘out there’ or an abstract wilderness; it is the environment in which humans live and which they inhabit (Mathews, 2005). It is also an unfolding interaction between the built environment and the life forces that grow and exist without human intervention. Within Spiritus Loci, ‘nature’ occupied the boundaries of the urban environment: it utilised the green spaces that are peppered throughout the city of Melbourne.

Nature was very much related to the concept of place and site-specificity. Much of the research conducted into Spiritus Loci was driven by theory relating to place-sensitivity (Plumwood, 2002), to locale and our connection to that place, notably the work of philosopher Freya Mathews (2005) and eco-philosopher David Abram (1997, 2010, 2012). The rituals created and associated with each participant’s place, from my perspective as creative facilitator, were influenced by elements of site-specific and land art of the 1960s and 1970s where ‘…“site” in and of itself [wa]l part of the experience of the work of art’ (Soderburg, 2000, p 4). In Spiritus Loci, place-sensitivity may articulate a drive towards fast fashion’s alter ego, that which might be about active non-consumption and creative practice.
Place incorporates all the concepts of locale, identity, time, performance and that which is unseen. In Gaston Bachelard’s seminal work The Poetics of Space, we understand open space as a ‘call for action’ (1994, p. 12) with interior spaces providing the human soul with room for reverie and imagination. By working with and being in a ‘nature’ place, it too becomes part of our inner world, our consciousness. This inner world is where we go to as we daydream, where our creative selves are active. This inner structure provides the potential for how we imagine the world. To hold an inner sense of nature as place may therefore be essential for new ways of thinking about design and material cycles. A creative space where boundaries are open and fluid, alive with networks of that which is unseen but yet perceived. The industrial model of creativity is bound in structure. We have been confined by industry, so we go back to the nature.

The methodological approach to the project is based upon the principles of neo-crafting groups, whereby social networks and political activity are often commonplace. There, is according to Mary Jane Jacob, (1999 in Geigel Mikulay 2009, p. 195) an atmosphere of ‘critical craftsmanship’, within crafting groups whereby ‘slow space’ is created in contrast to ‘hyperproduction.’ (Bratich and Brush, 2011). Jane Schneider (2006) refers to the ‘self- enhancement’ potential of cloth in ‘productivist’ relation to capitalism and consumption, she notes this self-enhancement as ‘energizing a small group, through life affirming practices and rituals’ (p. 206). The ‘slow space’ accorded with the intentions of the Slow Movement (Parkins and Craig, 2006) and as an extension to that the notion of Slow Fashion (Fletcher, 2007) that has informed my approach to design, making and consumption.

Indeed, this project sits somewhere between the design and the psychology of consumption in relation to sustainable design (Fletcher, 2007) and it could be argued that the crafting group functions as a ‘bridge’ between the two. In architectural terms, crafting provides the link between Tim Ingold’s notion of ‘building perspective’ and the ‘dwelling perspective’ (Thomas, 2006, pp. 53-54). The importance given in phenomenological theory of immersion and experience (Moran, 2000) to the construction of artefacts (Ingold in Thomas, 2006), and indeed, phenomenological theory (via Merleau-Ponty) has framed much of the ecocentric and cosmological philosophy that ultimately guides this work.

This exegesis is structured into five chapters, each of which represent critical phases of the practical research project. In Chapter One, I look inside the fashion system, at what I consider to be the disconnect between people and their garments, as symbolic of a greater malaise of the loss between humans and the environment. I argue that this loss of connection leaves us increasingly vulnerable to suggestion to the faster-paced interventions between consumers and businesses. I outline my connection with the
fashion industry against the backdrop of inspiring alternative narratives with a holistic approach to the human and non-human.

In Chapter Two, the fashion world is left behind as I turn my gaze to look outside the system in search of alternatives, as research theories and practices that provoke and inspire are identified and contextualised within the larger framework for the project. Attention is given to the notion of the human and non-human, and to our need to connect and reflect between the two for personal and practice-based meaning.

With a theoretical framework set up, Chapter Three shifts focus to discussing the project Spiritus Loci as a way to reconnect. It articulates the workings of the project, showing how its methodology brought together various elements place, ritual and material to form a cohesive project. It explores the nature of the crafting group, and in particular the eight female participants of the project, all of whom work and research within the fashion and textiles domain.

As an extension to Chapter Three, Chapter Four draws attention to the project Spiritus Loci from within, to reflect on my personal approach of the project. It includes a reflective account of my own experience of crafting an artefact from hemp (the common fabric given to each participant) as a symbol of potentiality and the reflection of some of the participants.

This research project aims to incorporate the discussion around place-sensitivity (Plumwood, 2002), the potential of group design activity (Fuad-Luke, 2009) and action in relation to crafting circles and spiritual development (Walker, 2011) through ritual. Both the material and non-material outcomes of this research, and the project Spiritus Loci, embodied the principles of the original intention, and show the potential for further development, using, for example, different groups, different places, different timescales. But what it also implies is that the crafter, craftsperson or designer is part of place, not a separate ‘objective’ being, and if we humbly situate ourselves within an eco-system on a local level there may be articulations at the global level.
CHAPTER 1: INSIDE THE SYSTEM

‘Nihilism and violence’ (Evans, 2003, p. 298) were characteristic of much of the fashion aesthetic in the late nineties and early first decade of this century. Evans suggests that this phenomenon reflects ‘ghosts of modernity’ (Rabate, 1996, cited in Evans, 2003, p. 299): the ‘unresolved tension(s)’ that come back to play before us, as ‘optimistic modernist ideas and ideals about progress and revolution [which] carried with them an implicit denial of the mess and chaos of history’ (Evans, 2003, p. 299).

Indeed, there are ‘ghosts of modernity’ (Evans, 2003, p. 299) that burden the positive attributes of our wardrobes today. They are the skeletons in our closets that bear witness to our complicity in a system established in the initial waves of modernity where ‘mess and chaos’ (Evans, 2003, p. 299) describes the environmental degradation caused by the fashion industry (Greenpeace, 2012; 2013). The industry is based upon the premise that ‘if an article becomes fashionable it is already deceased’ whereby ‘what one perceives to be the latest cut, the most recent fad, is nothing but a dying echo of the actual innovation’, and, in consequence, ‘[t]here is no finality to this process’ (Lehmann, 2000, p. 273).

As Kawamura writes, ‘the definite essence of fashion is change’ (2005, p. 5); however, the ‘essence’ of ‘change’ in fashion is not straightforward. While fashion today is ‘fast, if not the fastest, moving consumer good,’ (Edwards, 2011, p. 121), it ‘is always retro, but always on the basis of the abolition of the past: the spectral death and resurrection of forms. Its proper ‘relevance’ is not a reference to the present, but an immediate and total recycling.’ (Baudrillard, 1993, p. 88). It is a ‘myth of change’ (Baudrillard, 1993, p. 90); a regurgitation of styles.

If, as Baudrillard argues, fashion only exists within the ‘framework of modernity … a schema of rupture, progress and innovation’ (1993, p. 89), then what if we play with that schema and substitute it with another framework? This research will examine philosophies and practice that serve to deny this ‘death drive’.
‘Fashion’s immanent death’ (Lehmann, 2000, p. 273) is based in a particular timeframe roughly pertinent to the notion of modernity as manifest in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The rise of fashion came with the rise of the city, and the rise of industry over many centuries. As Wilson has argued, ‘[w]ith the coming of the industrial revolution and a world dominated by the first time by machines, capitalism was lifted to a new level. Industrial capitalism created vast and turbulent new city centres with new characteristics’ (Wilson, 1985, p. 26).

Fashion, then, is overwhelmingly a ‘city phenomenon’ (Wilson, 1985, p. 26). It stands to reason that most fashion is also created in cities, where there is an exchange of ideas and inspiration for designers. Yet this, of course, is not the rule and there are many examples of rural or non-urban design and production hubs. Today, for example, the lifestyle denim brand Hiut is based in Carmarthenshire, Wales, while the history of Fletcher Jones is located in Warrnambool, Victoria. Nonetheless, for the most part, our experience of fashion production today is mainly through the interface of global supply chains and outsourced labour.

The pace of fast fashion challenges our connection to seasonal changes, as clothes are purchased and disregarded as ‘fashion’ dictates. Fashion’s connection to seasonal change (Greundl, 2007) and our need for different items of clothing depending upon the particular season and local weather patterns - namely, the ‘seasonal shift’ (Edwards, 2001, p. 121) between winter, autumn, spring and summer – is no longer relevant to the regurgitation of styles. As the fashion industry output gained pace in the late 1990s and early 2000s with labels like H&M and Zara establishing themselves on the global market, it meant that consumers were changing their wardrobe items with a regularity previously unseen, because clothing items were getting cheaper and more ‘throwaway’. And, while we are so busy looking for ‘fashion’s immanent death’ we are seemingly blind or untouched to the actual ‘death and destruction’ to the environment that we inhabit.

The fashion cycle, which characterises current Western attitudes to fashion, perpetuates our desires to consume, yet denies genuine attachment to our garments. In the same way that we throw away our garments, this ‘matter is thought to appoint no ends or purposes for us’ and ‘that same matter becomes increasingly irrelevant to the way we experience our lives: it is perceived as merely as the inert backdrop to our meaning-making.’ (Mathews, 2005, p. 12).

But this project seeks to engage with this ‘matter,’ our clothes and our meaning-making with them. It is not only our narrative that makes up our world. Just as there is a ‘commonwealth of air’ (Abram, 2012, pp. 335-341) that passes within and between all
beings on earth, we have privileged the Anthropocentric world view to the detriment of All Beings (Seed et al, 1988). I propose that fashion and fashion objects can be life-affirming; can refer to other cycles of change; to different philosophies underpinning meaning and self-expression.

There are many different possibilities for affirming the life cycle, such as the Wabi-Sabi approach in the next chapter, which acknowledges the ageing and imperfection in objects rather than the innovative qualities or newness. There is also the biodynamic approach as established by Rudolf Steiner, (1924) which is a cosmological method of farming, known today as a form of premium organic production techniques. Spiritus Loci played with these different ways of approaching our view of fashion and change.

As Edwards argues, ‘[f]ashion… is sold according to illusion or the notion that dresses, jackets or shoes are somehow invested with the transformative magic to make us more than what we are, that clothes may somehow make up for what we lack.’ (2011, p. 120). It is important that we do not lose sight of the ‘self-enhancement’ potential of cloth in ‘productivist’ relation to capitalism and consumption, and how this may ‘energiz[e] a small group, through life affirming practices and rituals’ (Schneider, 2006, p. 206). There are potential implications in the larger scheme of the industry, but firstly, there needs to be an emotional connection with the natural ecosystems that are being destroyed.

The Spiritus Loci project was an action to find those elements that are lacking in the current system of designing and consuming. It was prompted by models of crafting, both traditional and ‘neo’, where social networks and shared community space and time are possible. It was also about non-traditional approaches to time, that are in keeping with notions of Slow and the mindfulness of the seasons, rather than an imposed sense of speed and consumption modelling. It was about a dialogue with locale, learning from place. This research explores alternative narratives of metamorphosis – narratives that reflect change in the natural ecosystems, and potentially in the creator-wearer. It posits that the fashion myth of change (Baudrillard, 1993) may find other expressions of transformation.

I would argue that, for many fashion businesses and designers, a lack of connection with the environment in their practice is problematic. It may contribute to, or increase, a divide between what fashion industry employers in post-industry nations feel about the environment, and how that feeds back into practice.
Just as we experience fashion through a series a opaque rather than transparent interfaces, ‘meaning-making’ (Mathews, 2005, p. 12) needs to be directly experienced. This project is very much a personal exploration of my connection to the fashion world and my world-view. In particular, it was borne out of the gap between the two, or, to use McCracken’s terms, the ‘displaced meaning’ (1988, p. 105).

As McCracken notes:

> The gap between the ‘real’ and the ‘ideal’ in social life is one of the most pressing problems a culture must deal with. There is no simple solution. Those who retreat into naïve optimism must eventually accept that the gap is a permanent feature of social life. Those who move, instead, to open cynicism and a formal acceptance of the gap must contend with the unmanageable prospect of a life without larger goals and hope (1988, p. 105).

Taking these ideas as a starting-point, this project experiments not with replacing meaning, but with place(ing) meaning. By experiencing an ecosystem and connecting with place and practice, it explores possibilities for shifting the meaning of our objects, and our role both in creating sustainable solutions and denying industrial mess and chaos. Without becoming personally involved in exploring our human and spiritual connections to the natural world, then our approach to ‘sustainability’ is lacking emotional depth. Without emotional depth, we remain unmoved. And in remaining unmoved, there is little motivation to change behaviour. We must, therefore, be able to use a medium to which we are connected.

In her most recent book This Changes Everything, Naomi Klein (2014) writes about her very personal interpretation of the meanings and implications of climate change and pollution as she struggled to achieve a full-term pregnancy. It is interesting that for Klein, it was a very private experience that prompted her new exploration of environmental issues. In this way, Klein’s ‘conversion’ became the result of her own emotionally and bodily experiences, and her understandings became embodied as well as intellectual.

This phenomenological approach became a framework to practice my own personal immersion within this project. My particular approach to the fashion industry has also been formed by my own experience. Fashion did not always look so bad to me. I, too, was under its spell (von Busch, 2008) for some time, till the gap between ‘the ideal and the real’ (McCracken, 1988, p. 105) became obvious. I started writing for the Australian fashion press including Elle, Harper’s Bazaar, Oyster Magazine and The Australian during the late 1990s when I was then living in Paris. Attending the fashion shows, showrooms,
talking to designers, buyers and other industry professionals was exciting at this moment in time. But with a new baby daughter, we moved to the Netherlands.

I started teaching at the Amsterdam Fashion Institute in 2002 and this coincided with my first daughter attending a Waldorf early childhood day care centre (De Kleine Rijk) in Rotterdam. For me, the centre connected the larger picture between the organic, alternative lifestyle and therapies with which I had always engaged, with a system that worked with an alternative philosophy; where the holistic approach to educating children which was totally engaged with the workings of the individual’s cycles of growth (Lievegood, 1985), together with the weekly and annual cycle, the seasons, and the rhythm of the day.

These various cycles were highlighted through specific colour usage (Wildgruber, 2009) throughout the rooms, particular organically-grown grains to be eaten on particular days of the week, while the materials and foodstuffs in the daycare centre which were as close to handmade and ‘unprocessed’ as possible. There was ‘no finality to this process’ (Lehmann, 2000, p. 273) and yet each daily, weekly, seasonal and annual reiteration functioned as a renewing of the creative urge through ritual.

At the same time, I shifted my teaching focus to sustainability in fashion, when I worked at incorporating industry into the conversation around sustainability in the supply chain. My intention was to ensure that students were informed of best – and also illegal – practice within the industry. I worked together with the Textiles & Footwear Industry Association (TFIA) to organise industry best practice and knowledge exchange talks at RMIT, and initiated the Commune Festival which aimed to connect industry, education and the broader community into discussing, doing and learning about sustainability. However, I never felt that the industry would desire to be distanced from the current system that it operates under. It is the means by which it generates income.

‘Fashion production is exploitation’ writes Tim Edwards (2011, p. 120). During the course of this research project, the Rana Plaza factory building in Bangladesh collapsed (24 April 2013), and with it came with a huge loss of human lives. Here the ‘death’ element of fashion became a very real event. It has received much press and even an annual memorial day whereby people are asked to wear their garments inside out for a day to remind themselves and others of where their clothes were produced.

There was, however, a less-publicised discovery by the online retailer ASOS that a batch of designer leather belts made on the Indian subcontinent were radioactive and needed to be recalled for fear of contamination in its customers. Yet the fear was not for the
women who had made these belts but rather for the Western consumers. Although Silverman, writing for the Telegraph (29 May 2013) claimed that ‘[n]o-one ha[d] been harmed by the belts’, it was also reported that they were handmade by workers in India.

These two examples of the ‘mess and chaos’ (Evans, 2003, p. 299) of the fashion industry suggests little sign of stopping, even with a ‘convergence’ of Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) (Black, 2008, p. 19) working to address the industrial production of clothing. Most of them working with industry to bring about positive results, they include ‘Clean Clothes Campaign, Labour Behind the Label and the Fair Trade movement’ (Black, 2008, p. 19). They work independently, yet ostensibly together, with a ‘proliferation’ of eco-labelling schemes working at the level of textiles production (Black, 2008, p. 19). However, this ‘soft’ approach has, in reality, done little to change the modus operandi of the industry.

It often takes ‘outsiders’ like Greenpeace International to bring to the public eye the real damage from the fashion industry. Greenpeace has been working on a series of ‘exposures’ highlighting the ways in which the fashion industry is responsible for the pollution of riverways from the dyeing and manufacturing processes of yarn, textiles and clothing making. These riverways have traditionally provided food and water, functioning as a place for cleansing and nurturing, but by are now charged with toxins from the nearby fashion-related factories (Greenpeace International 2012; 2013; 2014). These examples draw immediate attention to the loopholes in the system, despite the convergence and proliferation of NGOs in the sector.

While compliance systems such as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policies are considered essential to keep companies ‘in line’, they also function as ‘damage limitation or risk avoiding strateg(ies)’ (Littler, 2009, p. 61). Many CSR policies are considered greenwashing tactics (Littler, 2009). Littler also suggests that they are ‘viewed as a necessary break on corporate power and one of the only realistic routes to a more equitable mode of consumption’ (2009, p. 51). This position certainly has merit in a pragmatic sense. This ‘realistic route’ (Littler, 2009) is for an industry the accumulated size of the international fashion industry a necessary path to take for incremental change.

However, deeper concern for the environment, both human and non-human, demands a perspective that does not originate from within the fashion industry or the corporate world. When profit, or social justice is the starting point, then there is little hope for any real change. Changing the fashion system to one of life-affirming potential needs to be approached holistically.
Merchant (1992) describes three ethical approaches to the environment. They include the previously-outlined ecocentric approach, alongside the egocentric and anthropocentric approaches. Conflicts with the environment quickly emerge between ‘egocentric’ and ‘anthropocentric’ approaches to environmental policy and practice. An egocentric ethic approach ‘permits individuals (or corporations) to extract and use natural resources to enhance their own lives and those of other member of society, limited only by the effects on their neighbors (sic)’ (Merchant, 1992, p. 63). In contrast, ‘(a) homocentric (anthropocentric) ethic is grounded in society’, while ‘(a) anthropocentric) ethic underlies the social interest model of politics and the approach of environmental regulatory agencies that protect human health’ (Merchant, 1992, p. 70).

Both egocentric and anthropocentric ethic approaches have been inadequate in ensuring environmental and human health because they do not work holistically. They are the approaches responsible for models like Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) which currently monitor the fashion industry.

In their current guise, CSR and ‘Triple Bottom Line’ strategies are about tweaking supply chains, rather than changing the status quo. Indeed, if they were about bringing about real change, in all probability, the Rana Plaza incident in Bangladesh would not have happened so recently. Evidently, then, there needs to be consideration of other elements. Walker, for example, considers a ‘Oualdruple Bottom Line’, which proposes that there should be an element of personal or spiritual growth for the maker inherent in the process of design. For, as he writes, ‘the designer’s role is one that inescapably includes ethical, and even spiritual, considerations’ (2014, p. 31).

There has, however, not been a lack of groups, people and approaches trying to address these problems. These have included NGOs, eco-labelling, academics such as Otto Von Busch researching the possibilities of ‘Hacktivism’ (2008), which is a specific version of activism and hacking into the fashion system from within, and industry insiders such as Stephen Meisel. Meisel’s ‘Oil and Water’ fashion shoot for Italian Vogue (2010) struck me deeply with its direct visual code, which conveyed his shock, dismay and anger at the human-based environmental catastrophe of the Gulf of Mexico oil spill some months earlier. Yet overall, the impact after a decade or so of work is miniscule, and the retail giants like H&M and Primark continue to grow (Gustafsson, 2014; Savenier, 2014).

The demand by consumers on the fashion industry is often seen as ample justification for production methods. Indeed, a quick scan of the high street shoppers, with their bags of cheap fashion, would suggest that the consumer is led by price and is therefore
responsible for the vast quantities of post-consumer waste going to landfill (Fletcher, 2007, p. 9). This ‘drive’ by consumers to ‘buy into’ the myth of change, despite the environmental damage, bears witness to the illusionary power behind the myth. Indeed, Edwards writes that ‘shoppers know that what they are purchasing is the result of sweatshops and other forms of exploitation’ (2011, p. 132). And, as part of the consumer world, I too needed to connect the spiritual, environmentalist and fashion together again, writing in 2008:

> We have stuffed our wardrobes to the brim and still there are only a few pieces in our closets that really speak to us; that convey that almost spiritual ‘fashion moment’ quality of clothing, craftsmanship, enchantment, memory, I-did-it-myself kind of pleasure. What if every item could do that? (Brien, 2008)

Designers actively contribute to the system as they sell their skills and knowledge on the open market. Spiritus Loci worked with designers and makers to reflect upon their practice, and upon how working locally, and in a connected manner, might inform other areas of their work. Walker writes about the importance of inner development in relation to design and one’s working self, arguing that ‘[w]hile many still find refuge and succor in natural places, the sentiments that may arise from such times do not transfer easily into our work lives’ (2014, p. 11).

By connecting my own experience of ‘refuge and succour in natural places’, Spiritus Loci started to take form. My project sought to capture the artistic ‘description of experience’, working from the perspective that, by crafting an artefact or garment as a response with the environment, then we potentially take that time and place with us. But ultimately it is ‘a negotiation with locale’ (Walker, 2011, p. 63). If we connect to our locale on an everyday basis, then our environment becomes something in which we live and participate; something internal (Mathews, 2005).

This research fitted into trend writing and ideas generation forums for industry. Speaking on my article ‘Considering the Irrational’ to an industry-based trend forecasting session, in partnership with ItFits! and SecondSight Trend Bureaus in Amsterdam (November 19, 2013) enabled me to join the two areas. This article presentation was based around my research into networks in the unseen in nature. It was heavily informed by David Abram’s (1997; 2010) work on animals and shapeshifting shamans with connection to Biomimicry principles (Benyus, 2002) and I presented the Spiritus Loci project as an alternative systems approach.
So while this project takes its cues from various elements of the art world where spiritual, political, ecological, and environmental concerns are expressed more freely, it does not mean that the problem has a clear solution. Much of the research that has gone into this work has been about broaching an uneasy dialogue between two seemingly disparate worlds. The dialogue is ongoing.
A survey of alternative approaches

Fletcher writes that we need new fashion narratives to ‘reconnect us with nature and each other’ (Fletcher, 2008, p. 125). Indeed, much design innovation matches scientific enquiry with elements of the natural world. In 2013, a trade exhibition in Paris, entitled En Vie / Alive, exhibited various innovative projects and included a general underlying theme around ‘programmable nature’ and a ‘future hybrid world’ (Alive, 2013).

While much of this ‘programmable nature’ design has elements of sustainable future development in mind, there is little ‘nature’ in it. It is again, a story of the science of ‘naturalistic materialism’ (Walker, 2014, p. 8) or ‘anthropocentric approaches’, (Merchant, 1992), which ‘seeks to mould the natural environment and human society to suit human purposes’ (Walker, 2014, p. 9). There is no two-way conversation. However, prominent eco-psychologists such as Roszak (2001; 1995) reflect upon the need for humans to reconnect with the natural world for mental, social and environmental health.

Eco-philosopher Abram in his seminal work, the Spell of the Sensuous (1997) and furthermore in Becoming Animal (2010), speaks of humans’ need to connect with the ‘more than human world’ (2010). This includes approaching the subject area of animism and spirituality in a holistic interpretation. Indeed, to take responsibility for our role in this holistic network of all living beings we need to be aware of the external and internal world.

The importance of connecting with nature in a deeper sense, particularly in the light of Naess’s work on Deep Ecology, is, I believe, crucial if we intend to avoid ‘Western-style medicine approaches to saving the planet. Freya Mathews (2005) suggests that if we avoid framing ‘nature’ within dualistic paradigms - the Cartesian nature / culture divide – we begin to connect to it as part of our everyday lives, not
something ‘out there’, perfect and distant, but rather an environment in which we live and participate; something internal as well as external.

Wilson suggests that ‘contemporary fashion refuses the dichotomy nature/culture’ (1994, p. 187). And while she makes this observation within a discussion of the position of women in society (Kawamura, 2005, p. 12), it could be argued that fashion indeed constructs a divide between ‘nature’ or the environment, and ‘culture’, the human. It constructs this divide because it damages ecosystems on a global level (Greenpeace 2011; 2012; 2013), and it manages to distance itself from this damage through off-shore manufacture in developing nations like Mexico, Indonesia and China (Greenpeace 2011; 2012; 2013,) where consumers in the West do not see or directly experience the damage.

But we can also directly experience the local. If we are to be a part of the local ‘ecosystem’ then we must invest ourselves in what we have. Indeed, Mathews believes that this realisation is the beginning of the process of building community; of honouring what we have; of ‘becoming Native’ (2005, p.49). It could be argued that without connecting to the environment (in an urban context too), the real interest in the outcome of any kind of local transformation is at best notional. One of the guiding principles of Spiritus Loci has been working with place and experiencing it as a site of inspiration, creativity and connectedness. But it is also about extension to larger ecosystems, and appreciating the connections between the local ecosystem and the larger environment.

Much of my understanding of the need for a holistic approach has come through the anthroposophic framework of Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925). As he set about ‘manifesting the spiritual in each domain (Moffitt, 1998, p. 16), his work extended into the realm of agriculture which was also shifting into an industrial-style system in the early part of the twentieth century. His work informed the ‘Biodynamic’ agricultural system (now certified under the Demeter labeling system), whereby the health of the soil is the key to a bountiful and productive yield. This was particularly pertinent to Spiritus Loci as it encompasses the spiritual, psychological and physical wellbeing of the earth and its occupants.

But I did not see any connection between Steiner and fashion, until I saw the Felt Suit by the artist Joseph Beuys and I began to see the links between materiality and earth-centred philosophies and spiritualities. His Felt Suits were not created to be worn as such but they offer a concept of material that is healing, creative, spiritually symbolic and politically active. Beuys’ use of material was key in exploring cosmological dimensions of human life and his political commitment to the environment. He focused on materials
like beeswax, fat, felt and metals for their transformational potential (Tisdall, 1979). Beuys has been deeply influential on post-war art, and these strains of influence also merge into fashion today. The design duo AF Vandevorst has been influenced by the mythologies of Beuys’ work, if not his environmental activism. AF Vandevorst have consistently linked materials and imagery from the natural world such as beeswax, felt, and traditionally crafted leathers as part of equine themes. Their logo, the outline of the Red Cross, also refers back to Beuys’ Red Cross references and his interest in healing, in developing human warmth. They are alluding to elements of mythological interest (See Appendix, Brien, 2013). Dutch designer Alexander van Slobbe on the other hand was educated in a Waldorf school in Rotterdam and this influence is most evident in his atelier method and handcrafting (see Appendix i, Brien, 2013).

In the same way, Spiritus Loci was based around the central themes of place, ritual and material. All three have a specific relation to place in the exploration of cosmological dimension of human life. Within this project, ritual offers the fashion and textile context with a means to contribute to social connectivity and ecological awareness. Ritual in this case may facilitate the positioning of our garments, or objects, our creative practice and ourselves within the ‘ecological’ system. The positioning within the ecological system came from the connection to a particular place; in turn, this place became the point of connection to the ecosystem, and from there other ecosystems on a larger scale and the material component became the means for us to work place and ritual into a meaningful object (Walker, 2011).

Another philosophical position significant to this project is the Slow Movement (Petrini, 2003; Parkins and Craig, 2006). The Slow Movement itself, based upon the principles of Slow Food, is described as:

> a global, grassroots organization, founded in 1989 to prevent disappearance of local food cultures and traditions, counteract the rise of fast life and combat people’s dwindling interest in the food they eat, where it comes from and how [...] food choices affect the world (Slow Food, 2014).

While it has been criticised by some for being too privileged and elitist (Donati, 2005, p. 227), I suggest, nonetheless, that it contains revolutionary potential. The Slow Movement, which can be translated very easily to many creative industries including fashion, looks at the manner in which food is produced and how that affects and connects people and place. In the case of the fashion industry, it is important to look at organic production in term of fabric and materials, such as the hemp used in Spiritus Loci.
The Slow Movement is anti-corporate, and ‘substantivist’ (Emmison 1983, cited in Parkins and Craig 2006, p. 125) where ‘economic forces are not ‘abstracted’ from the social activity from which they derive’. So the system is situated ‘locally’ and is network rather than corporate-based. Terroir, or the combined ecosystems of a particular region provide an element of ‘authenticity’ (Parkins and Craig, 2006, p. 102) and tradition. The connectivity and human pleasure derived from sharing meals together and taking the time to interact socially with family and friends is a key part of the Slow Food Movement (Petrini, 2003).

Similarly, in the area of Slow Fashion, Kate Fletcher’s Craft of Use project, looks at people’s connections to and ‘use’ of garments over time and the potential for disrupting fast fashion. While Timo Rissanen’s Endurance Design, which he considers to be ‘design for sustainability, as opposed to sustainable design’ (Rissanen 2011, p 135) is an homage to tradition and elements that can be re-articulated in today’s context.

The translation of Slow in Spiritus Loci, was constructed into a design and crafting model using the basis of ritual as a way to heighten awareness both of the moment, and of human and non-human networks. It was about privileging the time taken to be with people and to share an experience, which in our case involved stories, theories and practice. The ‘host’ of each ritual was encouraged to open a dialogue around their ‘place’ and the inspiration derived from there. It was a way to enable engagement and participation in the project.

The Slow Movement is also contingent with the ‘Voluntary Simplicity’ (Elgin, 1993) philosophy. This lifestyle option is concerned with making a ‘voluntary reduction in income’ (Kasser and Brown, 2009, p. 38) alongside denying consumer excess, and is based around the notion of choice of ‘down shifting’ expectations of financial reward, and with it, the related stress of overwork. It became a lifestyle attitude that has continued to be embraced. It is based around mindful attention given to ‘thoughts, emotions and behavior (sic)’ (Kasser and Brown, 2009, p. 38), and the related sense of wellbeing associated with this. In the words of Kasser and Brown, ‘[m]indfulness refers to a receptive state of mind in which attention is brought to bear on what is occurring in the present’ (2009, p. 38).

They argue that ‘materialistic values are widely encouraged in contemporary consumer society … intrinsic values are focused on self-acceptance and personal growth, close relationships… and contribution to the larger world and are theorized to offer more direct satisfaction and fulfillment (Kasser and Brown, 2009, pp. 38-39). According to Kasser and Brown, research shows that ‘materialistic values promote ecologically destructive attitudes
and behaviors, whereas intrinsic values promote more sustainable ecological attitudes and behaviors (sic)' (2009, p. 39).

The intrinsic value and notion of mindfulness were important components in the conceptualisation of Spiritus Loci. The speed of fashion today means that the value of ‘matter’ and materials are diminished, while the destructive effects are increased. While we focus on consuming more, we are less mindful of what we have, and how we can work creatively to add intrinsic value to objects and garments.

An influential design-related cultural attitude is Wabi-Sabi. This addresses alternative ways of seeing material value as separate to materialistic values and the fashionability of objects. This ancient Japanese philosophy has enjoyed a demure spotlight in sustainability dialogue due to its privileging of ‘finding beauty in the imperfect, austerity, nature and the everyday’ (Griggs Lawrence, 2009, p. 158). It is also described as ‘a logical reaction to a society disgusted with its own excess’ (Griggs Lawrence, 2009, p. 161). What is most interesting in the Wabi-Sabi philosophy, however, is the emphasis not on the new, but on the aged and weathered, where the sign of time is seen as a virtue rather than an impediment to value. It is the responsibility of the viewer to cherish time within an object or the natural world. This contrasts with Western models of privileging the new, and novelty in general, which is essentially what today’s fashion industry depends upon.

As the curator of Spiritus Loci, I asked participants to turn to the natural cycle of the season of spring to find inspiration as it evolved in time and in place. It was about sensitising oneself to place and ‘goings on’, both on a personal and an external level. For my own contribution, I was inspired and impressed by the yellow colour of the Melbourne spring, which I integrated within my project using turmeric to dye the cape that I initially wanted to make. While we were producing new garments and objects, one significant underpinning was how to avoid ‘throwaway’ culture, and accordingly, how to imbue our objects with longevity.

My fellow participants were inspired by and produced different artefacts to my work. The garment made by Emma Lynas, a 2D designer, for example, was embroidered with the memories of her childhood in rural Victoria using fabric dyed with plants sourced from her family farm. Ria Soemardje, a dancer, musician and textile crafter found that memories of her two grandmothers were the catalyst for making two aprons during the project to be used in her future dance performances. And for Kate Kennedy a fashion industry designer, the sadness associated with a dying Eucalyptus tree, outside her home studio under which her son had played as a small boy, became the inspiration for a dress-shroud.
While the Slow Movement, Voluntary Simplicity and Wabi-Sabi philosophies have guided my approach to the structure of the project, it was the central importance of the body and experiencing of clothes and place that led me to a phenomenological approach. The framework became a reworking of traditional and neo-crafting circles, which Jacob refers to as ‘loc(i) of reflection and critical thought’ (Jacob 1999, p. 82, cited in Geigel Mikulay 2009, p. 195) and which often become sites of political activism because of this. We choose our clothes to express our individuality today, but by positioning our clothes within the ‘fashion for fashion’s sake’ paradigm we have essentially erased meaning, commentary and our connection to clothing from the equation. In Gablik’s terms, ‘[o]ur perspective has been shunted into the ‘hegemony of a technological and materialist world view, which has eliminated from its map of reality any means through which to keep visionary energy alive’ (Gablik, 1991, p. 46).

Fashion is a visual medium. We see fabrics, silhouettes, and style in a 2D or 3D manner. But it is also an embodied practice (Entwistle, 2000). There are many unseen elements: the effect of light on material, the inner structures, fastenings, texture, and the reverse side of fabric, to name but a few. There are also the unseen machinists; the place of provenance; the resources that go into the fabric; the factories; the transportation. It is in the most part an unseen process and outcome.

There might also be unseen personal transformations that connect us to the cosmological. Fashion is ‘performative,’ (Evans, 2003, p. 6); we experience life through and with and within our clothes (Woodward, 2007). As Entwistle notes, ‘[t]he experience of dress is a subjective act of attending to one’s body and making the body an object of consciousness and is also an act of attention with the body’ (Entwistle, 2000, p. 30).

Adam and Galinsky (2012) found that wearing clothes causes people to ‘embody’ the clothing and its symbolic meaning. They conducted research exploring the relationship between certain clothing types and behavioural change, asking participants to wear laboratory coats and perform a series of tasks. They found that simply looking at the laboratory coats was not enough to cause behavioural change. Rather, the symbolic garments had to be physically experienced through wearing them, which caused the phenomenon of ‘enclothed cognition’ (Adam and Galinsky, 2012) and increased behaviour consistent with the symbolic meaning of the item.

Our clothes are not only ‘performative’ props, but also ‘symbolic objects,’ and as such, it is unsurprising in today’s fashion landscape of uncontrollable excess that there is a ‘crisis of purpose’ (Gablik, 1991, p. 124). We have resigned ourselves to an uninspired ‘social’ performance of fashion, and the notion of investing deeper meaning has been relegated
to social ‘rules’ (Entwistle, 2000, p. 36) and ‘taste’ as relating to our habitus (Bourdieu, 1994, cited in Entwistle, 2000, p. 36).

As Jones and Stallybrass (2000) point out, Marx criticised the commodification of objects, rather than the objects themselves. Yet objects and material have the potential to ‘be’ more than commodities and to become themselves imbued with meaning. As Kawamura writes, clothes are ‘symbolic objects’ of a particular culture and ‘culture is the means through which people create meaningful worlds in which to live’ (2005, p. 32).

The question with which Spiritus Loci engaged was whether we can imbue our clothes with ‘deeper meaning’, and, if so, how we can do this if the meaning comes from the existence of an unseen world that is hidden from our senses (after Steiner), and from the thinking which is tied to those senses. It is the Unseen or the life force of the human and non-human to which we attempt to connect via material processes.

Animated by the work of phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty, and contemporary eco-philosopher David Abrams, Spiritus Loci refers to the position that it is the invisible, which gives the visible its truth. It is the virtually unseen, ‘light, lighting, shadows, reflections, and colour’ (Taminiaux, 1993, p. 290) which renders ‘visible’ (after Merleau-Ponty, in Barbaras, 2004, p. 162) the world around us. Entwistle notes too that ‘our engagement with the world is tempered entirely through our being a part of it and perceiving it through our bodies’ (2000, p. 30).

In her work Quelque part a l’interieur, artist Emilie Faif printed secret landscapes into clothing items from French fashion designer Isabel Marant. It was an incongruous positioning of nature landscape scenery within the garments, invisible on the outside, only the wearer knowing of its place next to her skin. In this way it formed a secret landscape within: a landscape that touches us just as our bodies touch it back. Kawamura (2005) writes that ‘fashion is not visual clothing but is the invisible elements included in clothing’, going on to note that is the ‘cultural values… [that] are open to relatively rapid influences of change’ (p. 4).

So, too, the process of describing the internal frameworks of the natural world – which themselves need to be articulated through mindfulness of place – serves to heighten our awareness of the invisible expressions of the natural world. By fixing them inside our garments, our ‘second skin’, we are then able to ‘wear’ a specific moment; a specific place. For the most part, however, we are unaware of the internal frameworks of the natural world. Abrams (2012) suggests that the air around us and in us, and which becomes a part of all beings, is something we forget about, neglect, pollute and destroy. We reflect about this invisible force when it is seen as ‘turning against us’, as in cyclones or dust-storms, for example. And yet it is always there, life being impossible without it: a
source of common wealth; a source of life.

By taking a largely phenomenological approach, the primacy of experience and the description of that experience was essential. In the same way, each personal response to environmentalism or an ecosystem is crucial in making behavioural changes, which may filter through to our working, civic and social lives. Our engagement with the world is tempered entirely through our being a part of it and perceiving it through our bodies. To Merleau-Ponty, the flesh becomes the site of exchange; he argues that ‘the body is part of the fabric of the world’ (Primacy, p. 163, cited in Moran, 2000, p. 429); it touches but it is also touched, and there is both an inside and an outside that intertwine. In the case of Spiritus Loci, the length of hemp given to participants becomes the surface, or the interface or point of confrontation or assimilation between culture and nature, and in this respect it holds meaning. Spiritus Loci sought to extend the emotional connectivity that we might feel when we have a garment with sentimental value – for example that of a loved one – to a narrative of physical, emotional, and spiritual connectivity to a non-human ecosystem.

In his writings on basket-making, Ingold identifies both a ‘building perspective’ and a ‘dwelling perspective’ (Thomas, 2006, pp. 53-54). This, in Moran’s phenomenological reading of the construction of artefacts emphasises the importance of immersion and experience. Ingold argues that, rather than there being the concept (building perspective), that is then directly translated into the object, the basket is constructed by both the concept and the experience (dwelling perspective) working in tandem through the maker during the making process. The interior and exterior are not clearly defined at the outset, but they come into being in a process. In this way, the making of the artefact becomes a play between our thinking selves and our feeling selves.

Gaston Bachelard wrote, in essence, that when we see a tree it becomes invested in our inner space (Allen and Rumbold, 2004). Within Spiritus Loci, we experimented with this notion, ‘investing’ inner space by heightening our awareness of a specific nature place through the performance of group ritual. One of the key proponents of this research has been looking at overcoming our division from the natural world through crafting a meaningful object (Walker, 2011) or garment, and bringing our working lives into an ecosystem and taking ‘succour’ from our experience of the environment into the domain of work and creative process.

The ‘internal framework’ of our environment requires attention, consideration and
reflection. So in embedding a crafted meaningful fashion or textile object imbued with place into the internal (or external) framework of our clothing, then we are potentially reminded to look, hear, feel ourselves as connected to the environment. Indeed, to take responsibility for our role in this holistic network of all living beings we need to be aware of the world without and within us. We inhere in a world as embodied, perceiving subjects, while our art raises this experience to a more universal level (Matthews, 2012). When we only feel ourselves as separate from the ecosystem then we more likely to damage, over consume and destroy it.
CHAPTER 3 – RECONNECTING

Place, Ritual and Material

METHODOLOGY

I took my structural cue from the traditional crafting circle. ‘Crafting’ creates, according to Bratich and Brush (2011, p. 254), ‘slow space’, in contrast to ‘hyperproduction’. It highlights relations between old and new technology, reconfigures spaces of production and gender relations, and implicates itself in ‘a reconfiguration of political activism’ as seen in craft collectives and circles (Bratich and Brush, p. 254). Crafting collectives have been used as tools in raising environmental awareness, for example the Hyperbolic Crochet Coral Reef project, which highlights the destruction of the various marine ecosystems like the Great Barrier Reef, through group participation in crocheting the ‘endangered reefs’.

Through participating in such a craft circle, a heightened response to the environment is set through ritual and then crafted individually into an artefact, which could be shared amongst group members. It therefore becomes possible that the symbolic object reminds the individual participant of that particular nature place and time. In his discussion of a textile punctum, von Busch elaborates on an embroidered stain, which becomes an aide-memoire of significance articulating an event and period of significance. This textile punctum may ‘add the contours of memory’ to a garment which then become ‘a wearable anchor in a very specific situation’ (von Busch, 2012, p. 16) From this we might question whether this textile punctum might be applicable in other scenarios.

Regular gatherings and ritual performance within this participatory craft group gave focus and attention to environmental concerns with both an activity-focus and social context. There are frameworks long established in social and/or environmental engagement groups that are centred around crafting, such as activist knitting or crochet circles, whereby political agendas are focused and strengthened through the art of collectively or individually ‘making’. Taking the cue from this kind of (temporary) structure facilitates the forming of an atmosphere of ‘critical craftsmanship’, a term attributed to Jacob, who considers that ‘[c]ontemporary crafts can
be positioned as a ‘locus of refection and critical thought’ (Jacob, 1999, p. 82, cited in Geigel Mikulay, 2009, p. 195). One significant difference between Spiritus Loci and the traditional crafting circle, however, was that we all worked independently rather than together, and shared our experiences with the group at our meetings.

The project was formed from a group of eight women who work and research within the fashion and textiles domain. As mentioned earlier, they include an industry fashion designer, a recent fashion design graduate, a weaver artist, a musician/dancer, a 2D graphic designer, a festival costume designer and two amateur crafters (one of them myself - the crafter/curator). All shared a common concern for environmental issues, and for the impact that the fashion and textiles industry and its consumption patterns, have upon ecological and human systems.

The group of women was a mixture of professional artists, academic peers and friends and alumni with two final year students documenting the project. It was composed of my own network with only two of practitioners not known to me at the beginning of the project. That it was an all-female group perhaps says more about the gender division in the fashion and textiles area because the intention was not necessarily about creating a women’s circle but this, I believe, gave the group a safe and supported space to work in. As the creative facilitator of Spiritus Loci, I formed the group in a manner that I felt was appropriate for the project. I asked people directly from within my networks, starting with my academic colleagues at RMIT’s textile department for interested participants who in turn suggested other potential collaborators. Some people I asked were unable to join due to time constraints. One participant was a former student of mine and was particularly interested in the area of sustainable fashion.

There were differences amongst the women in terms of their relationship to fashion and textiles, that is, some came from a fashion background and others from the textiles area. This ‘division’ gave the group a diversity of experiences and intention. There was also a degree of difference amongst the participants in terms of their interest in ‘earth-centred ritual’. This generated different individual outcomes at the ritual gatherings. For some participants the notion of ‘ritual’ was a little daunting, a bit awkward, while for others, this was a key factor in connecting to human and non-human networks.

As the facilitator I often felt a sense of conflict in trying to keep these expectations somewhere in the middle so that everyone felt comfortable. What was apparent however, was that everyone was open and professional in the way that they participated, so that we were able to achieve the ritual gatherings and the work that was required for the project. There was always a strong level of respect for each individual and this may have been
because it was always framed within the parameters of academic research even though at times the practice was rather esoteric.

Between the Spring Equinox and Summer Solstice of 2012, the participants chose a particular nature place as their ‘muse’. Over a three-month period, the participants engaged with this chosen place as a source of inspiration for the project. We all developed a ritual or a performative manner of heightening awareness, ranging from an afternoon garden tea party to in-situ open-air meditation. These ‘rituals’ sought to evoke the perceived essence of place and was translated to the group, and captured on film. This contemplation of the natural cycle, ecosystem and human response was then embodied within an artefact over time. The common fabric for all participants was a length of raw, unbleached and dye-free hemp. Our task was to work, quite literally, with a type of ‘sack cloth’ material and make a garment or artefact, and in doing so, exploring place and time, the natural cycles and ourselves.

By working with time, place and materials within a neo-crafting structure, there was space for my own ‘reflexive process’ (Haseman & Mafe, 2009) within the project. Haseman and Mafe (in Smith & Dean, 2009) write that ‘the reflexive defines a position where the researcher can refer to and reflect upon themselves and so be able to give an account of their own position of enunciation’ (p 219).

As the creative facilitator and participant I needed to maintain the group dynamics and project direction in an objective manner while still experiencing the project from within as an amateur crafter. Patricia Leavy suggests that when we use reflexivity to examine our own position, which may be in a systematic manner like keeping a journal or another method of documenting the process, then when we go back to interrogate our choices, our feelings and our interpretations we come to a greater understanding of practice and outcome (2015, p. 282-283). Keeping a journal through the season was part of my reflective practice and it gave me greater insight into the integration of theory and practice.

By enabling the group rituals to be a supportive space yet fully trusting and being guided and surprised by each individual participant’s ritual allowed me to experience the rituals from within and with a certain degree of objectivity as a practice-led researcher. As such my position as creative facilitator and crafter seemed to concur with Tim Ingold’s notion of ‘building perspective’ and the ‘dwelling perspective’ (Thomas, 2006, pp. 53-54) in the facilitation of the project itself. With each participant’s ritual, I gained more experience in the facilitation process. The crafting circle format also fostered a deeper knowledge of the participants’ specialisations and their relationship to the subject area from the experience of each gathering. This reflexive process informed and gave momentum to my own
practice until the finalisation of the project.

PLACE

The concept of place in Spiritus Loci refers foremost to place-sensitivity (Mathews, 2005) as we consider our local environment. In this practice-led research, place was composed of the three elements: location, locale and sense of place as identified by Agnew and Duncan (1989, cited in Anderson, 2010, p. 39). Location, therefore, refers to place as an ‘objective’ point in space, such as a point on a map. In this case, all places fell within a 15km radius of Melbourne. Secondly Agnew and Duncan refer to locale, and see this as the ‘built, natural, and social environment generated by cultural relations’ (Anderson, 2010, p. 41) They describe it in terms of a ‘composite of traces’ (Agnew and Duncan, 1989, p. 39) that could be said to comprise its ‘character’.

Thirdly, ‘sense of place’, in Agnew and Duncan’s terms, refers to the ‘emotional, experiential and affective’ elements that tie people to specific environments (1989; 2010, p.39). Over the course of this project, the stories and rituals evoked emotional and everyday connection to place. The work was undertaken off-campus and out of people’s studios, in various alternative civic spaces: places that Thorpe refers to as ‘third place(s)’ (2012, p. 90). These third places create neutral ground; a meeting place between home and work, or a place that might be within a city, but looks to nature for nourishment rather than the edgy-industrial essence of the Modernist spirit.

Within Spiritus Loci, we experienced the shared commons of the green spaces as a space of creative potential and a site of interconnection between participants and place. City parklands and untended public nature zones facilitate a particular kind of ‘nature.’ It is not the untouched ‘wilderness’ about which we might romanticise, but rather it is the damaged, built-over, replanted, bursting-from-cracks-in-the-sidewalk version that we see in our urban landscapes, only perhaps on a larger scale. This ‘tainted’ nature we can connect with; this too is ourselves, our home, work and community.

Many of Melbourne’s ‘green spaces’ are decidedly un-manicured. Native flora species regeneration projects have been undertaken by both government bodies and voluntary groups and in many cases look sauvage. The Melbourne parklands are commons shared by the inhabitants and are generally non-commercialised spaces. At the time of undertaking the project, there was a strong sense of both human traces and the natural world that was distinctive to each place. There were inner city nature growths, backyards with dying eucalyptus trees, several river spots along the Yarra, former council tips in the process of regeneration, as well as grassy domes and manicured parks.
In The Process of Making Art (1979), the sculptor and painter Lee Ufan wrote ‘[i]f one starts by planning, one will, in reality, gradually move away from the plan. If one starts out from place, a plan will gradually emerge’ (2010, p. 551). In the case of Spiritus Loci, starting from ‘place’ with a length of hemp was initial intention of the project.

Each participant worked differently with place. Kate Kennedy has worked in the fashion industry for many years and has recently moved on to academia in her career. Her practice is informed by the industry. Kate found her ‘muse’ in her own backyard. A large eucalyptus tree, which had been part of the school playground next to her home, was dying. Kate’s studio was in the backyard and her son had gone to the school when he was younger, so there was both an emotional and work-based connection. Her completed garment was a Zero Waste dress and shroud for the tree. It remained undyed.

Claire Beale’s project, called Desire Lines, followed the daily path along her inner-city Melbourne streets as she took her dog on its walk. Claire’s work became part of her own PhD research into handwork and its intersections with technology. The embroidery that she worked on in Spiritus Loci traced her everyday ritual through her local streets, which were filled with makeshift guerilla gardens. She mapped moments of restful motion and neighbourhood engagement. Her material was sun-dyed black using shibori methods.

Emma Lynas, a 2-D graphic designer and academic in the textiles department at RMIT, worked on a project centred around memories. Her PhD research focuses on Slow Design and Sustainability. The grassy dome of Prince’s Park in Melbourne was a constant reminder of her rural childhood, and a visit back to the old family farm provided all the plant dyestuffs needed to colour her project. The dyed thread held the plant essences of her childhood and was embroidered into a simple summer top that she made. The practice for Spiritus Loci evolved into a daily ritual of ‘winding down’ with the embroidery project.
A dialogue between the seen and unseen

The possibilities outlined by Steiner and Beuys in regards to materials can be attributed to other materials. Since the Neolithic period people have used hemp fibre (Barber, 1991). It has not been part of our fashion ‘finery’, but rather, part of the human quest to move, contain, protect, connect and work with as used in sail cloth, ropes, string, etc. According to Laura Sevier, as one of the bast fibres, it has nitrogen-trapping qualities, does not require as much water as cotton to grow and does not require large amounts of pesticides or fertilisers (2009). By working with this ‘alternative fibre’, space was provided for material diversity. But hemp also has a ‘sackcloth’ image with connotations of shame, punishment and repentance, alongside a long history of altering states of consciousness, both shamanic and the quotidian. So it is an outsider to the fashion inner circle, and thus can be considered an agent of change.

The material aspect in this project attempts to be the conduit for life-affirming properties in ‘natural’ materials. While hemp may not have the tactile or even aesthetic qualities of silk or wool, it is a practical material with different qualities as mentioned above. Indeed Beuys sought ‘[m]aterials that are challenging enough to provoke states of excitation in the sleeping creative centres of the recipients.’ (Zumdinck, 2013, p. 131).

Apart from hemp, many Spiritus Loci participants used materials including organic matter found at their nature place for colouration and dyeing purposes. In my case, for example, I stitched twigs, acacia pods and acorns directly onto my piece. The acorn functioned as a reference to the politically charged environmental project 7000 Oaks (7000 Eichen) of Joseph Beuys, by which Beuys understood ‘planting these Oaks is necessary not only in biospheric terms… but in that it will raise ecological consciousness’ (Antliff, 2014, p. 136). Beuys’ project was an important environmental reference in Spiritus Loci not only for its ecological and mythological message but also because of its contested position in Australia’s ecosystems as an introduced species.
Nonetheless, a single fibre like hemp is not the solution to all the fashion and textiles sustainability issues across ethics, production and cultivation. While studies show on different levels that it does have a lower environmental impact than the current global cotton industry (Sevier, 2009), still it has the negative ‘baggage’ of associations attached to it. Hemp, rather, is used in this project as a symbolic gesture of the diversity of materials needed to dilute the over consumption of cotton and polyester (Fletcher, 2008) within the fashion and textiles industry. The hemp used during this event is chosen to symbolize biodynamic systems (Steiner, 1924; Smith, 2003) and a holistic approach to the earth and production.

My final project was entitled the Vertical Moment, after Merleau Ponty, who described this concept as ‘a moment of magnetism in the world’ (Johnson and Smith, 1993). Within Spiritus Loci, I used cloth and sourced materials to embroider and dye the narratives of my experience of being in time and in place. While my initial concept was to make a cape, I eventually decided against this, feeling the need to express my experiences in a much more immediate manner. I had to ‘dip in and out’ of the stories as I went along each of the strips from which my garment was made, each with a story relating to my experience.

In this way, I told many stories: there were oak trees and colonial histories, as well as Beuys’ environmental legacy in the 7000 Oak project (Antliff, 2014); there were glittering yet barely visible slug trails that I came upon in my meanderings by the river, which were embroidered onto the hemp; and there were the spirits of the indigenous peoples referred to as the White Gum Dwellers who had lived for many generations in the area before settlement. As I worked each strip, the needle and component parts took on a type of stream of consciousness with the narrative finding its own manner of representation.
Ilka White is a weaver and artist who works in the area of place and practice and sustainability. White’s project, entitled ‘Billabong’, was a systematic approach to infusing the colours of the billabong – a regenerated parkland near her house – into the thread she used to weave a scarf.

Ria Soemardje is a musician and dancer with a background in textile art. She has been involved in the area of cultural ties, tradition and place. ‘Two Aprons’ is a tale of her two grandmothers, one Indonesian, one Australian and the differences and similarities of experience between the two. One apron was dyed using a traditional pigment from Japan, the other left undyed and both were coated in beeswax. Both had the same pattern and were going to be utilised in a dance piece on which she was working.
While we all worked in a contemplative way with our nature places, we needed ‘glue’ to bind us as a group and to share our stories with each other. Indeed, as part of a discussion of architecture, Silverstein (1993, p. 91) argues that user-participation in the design and building process has an effect on the human psyche, in the sense that the experience of designing, fabricating and then dwelling in a construction, is fundamentally human. So using this user-participant method, I created what could be regarded as a traditional crafting circle. The process of ‘crafting’ creates the phenomenon of ‘slow space’ a contrast to ‘hyperproduction’ (Bratich and Brush, 2011), as mentioned earlier, which defines the current fashion industry. The difference with Spiritus Loci to the traditional crafting circle was that we didn’t work together, we all worked independently and shared our experiences with the group when we met.

Within Spiritus Loci, the element of ritual was introduced to animate and heighten awareness in the moment, which can then be transformative. Each participant choreographed their own ‘ritual performance’, in part as a narratorial device to be shared amongst the participants. We could learn from each other, understand where each participant was ‘coming from’, thus enriching our experience of the project.

As artist Ruth Jones writes:

> [r]itual’ often conjures images of traditional religion or social occasions that reconfirm traditional authority, and while ritual can be conservative, ritual acts can also be creative and dynamic, having the capacity to introduce innovative understandings of identity, on both a personal and a social level, and to re-present places, often familiar ones, in new and invigorating ways (2010, p. i).

Tasmin Pascal has been actively involved in the alternative Festival scene for several years, in which makeshift costumes become a tool of transformation. Her own practice includes costume design and community tree planting. Pascal’s ritual required us to participate in a meditative tree-planting exercise near her house. This was at once a community act and a practical measure; the oak trees will become the habitat for a Kite, which became Pascal’s ‘totem animal’ in the project and the inspiration for her costume.
Gabriella Ferrante made lavender and honey biscuits for us, and by the banks of the River Yarra we wrote onto the cloth our own ‘sustainable fashion’ Commandments, which were then used as the surface design for her honeycomb-structure-inspired garment. She received her first bee sting on the project; and the hexagonal form of the honeycomb became an important element of her design inspiration. The final garment was a reconfiguration of the hexagon structure of the honeycomb cells.

Ritual, according to the anthropologist Magliocco, is used to ‘heal the rift between humans, nature and the divine’ (1998, p. 8). Ritual heightens awareness within a moment of time and place. For the purpose of my project, ritual performance is defined as an outdoor group ritual based upon earth-centred spirituality practice (Starhawk, 1979; Plaskow and Christ, 1989); an eco-ritual. The ritual actions were used to heighten awareness to a particular place and time. Practitioners of earth-centred spirituality use ritual as a way of channeling energy towards a heightened sensory experience of place and time.

Grimes writes that ‘in ritualizing, human beings discover, then embody and cultivate their world views, attitudes, and ethics’ (2003, pp. 33-34). In his terms, ritual is about

> discovering way[s] of inhabiting a place ... ritual helps people figure out, divine, even construct a cosmos. A cosmos is not merely an empty everywhere. It is everywhere as perceived from somewhere, a universe as constructed from a locale (Grimes, 2003, p. 44).

It is used in Spiritus Loci to recover a sense of the secular sacrum and downplay the Cartesian nature/culture divide (Mathews, 2005).

Ritual seems perfectly ‘at home’ within a fashion context, where according to Baudrillard, ritual and fashion merge whereby nothing is more crucial to the ‘appearance of fashion […] than its resemblance to ritual - fashion as spectacle, as festival, as squandering’ (1993, p. 90). Gruendl (2007) considers the seasonal fashion sale as a rite of passage ritual that occurs biannually, suggesting that ‘[p]rimitive agrarian societies anxiously awaited the return of vegetation in spring’, while ‘[c]onsumer societies, in contrast, worry about the periodical advent of the new trend’ (Gruendl, 2007, p. 45.) But for my project, however, I wanted participants to include ecological and place awareness in their ritual and this is where it differs to the fashion ‘circus’.
In our case, ritual was used as a tool for shifting fashion impulse away from the redundancy of the Modernist dream. So while Baudrillard (1993) considers ritual and fashion merging as a sort of circus performance, I wanted to give space to other ritual formations that tell a different story. To ‘heal the rift between humans, nature and the divine’, (1998, p. 8) as anthropologist Magliocco phrases it.

This project seeks to articulate ritual as a tool for shifting fashion impulse away from the front-view 2D fashion catwalk, de rigueur fashion ‘weeks’ and stimulation and novelty of the new. This is an initial step in exploring ritual practice and ecological awareness within a fashion and textiles context. As Turner suggests: ‘[a] ritual which has never been performed before may seem to those present not so much a ritual as a charade’ (Turner, 1973, p. 32). But the challenge is to establish alternative dialogues to the fashion ‘circus’.

Ritual enabled each participant to shape their telling of place. There were inner city nature places, backyards, there were many river places and there were grassy domes and parks. Every participant’s story unique and muse-worthy, and each ritual centred around inner reflective practice heightened by group participatory modes and ritual. By meeting at regular interviews, and by each participant sharing and ritualising their own experiences alongside their emotional and intellectual connection to place, then participants became privy to other people’s narratives and bonding that may continue after the project’s completion if they so chose. The ritual gatherings were filmed and photographed by two BA Textile Design final year students, and were made into the Spiritus Loci film loop.

The framework of the crafting circle enabled the three main facets of the project – place, ritual and material – to be manifested in a particular time-frame into an artefact. The artefacts were based upon the relationship between the participant and a particular ecosystem, which was narrated to the other group members during regular gatherings where ritual was used to heighten awareness to place. The material was a shared textile - hemp - which symbolised the potential of natural bast fibres and a history of human endeavour.
CHAPTER 4 - THE PROJECT FROM WITHIN

The invisible cape

There is a narrative in the process of designing and making. ‘The process of designing enables what the designer knows, what has become available by research for design and the design knowing brought to the task and enriched through its doing, to be made manifest in the external physical world... This is a transformational process. It involves migration as well as transformation, for the knowledge crosses system boundaries from that of the designer to that of the designed.’ (Downton, 2003, p. 107)

My work began as a cape. It would be a turmeric-coloured, embroidered short cape, which would be a pragmatic addition to my wardrobe, and my contribution to the outcome of Spiritus Loci.

My colleague Julie Wood, a highly-experienced haute seamstress and teacher at RMIT, drew up a simple cape design, and I proceeded to cut out the pattern and coloured it with turmeric. Drawing upon my location for inspiration, I embroidered the surface bubbles of the River Yarra as they meandered away from me, floating on the surface like stars. I enjoyed the process of making the French knots and of feeling that the needle knew where to go, and how to find the boundaries of representation without me being fully conscious of where each knot should be positioned. Parker (1984; after Schreiner) writes that historically at least, embroidery is ‘the bearer of women’s soul’ (2010, p. 499).

I found that, having learned the craft to a rudimentary level at primary school, it could be ‘picked up’ and improved upon.
by attending embroidery groups at the local embroidery supplies store in Roseanna. In my project journal, I wrote: ‘[a]s the project continues the importance of social networks grows’ (18 October, 2012). On the 15th October, I wrote ‘the invisible structures that hold everything together. I thought it might be named the ‘Render Visible Cape.’ There were also other elements to the cape that became highly significant to its construction and embroidering.

I intended to embroider text onto the interior of the cape. In my notes I wrote ‘Lines of narrative render the invisible visible’, alluding to the way in which the reversed text would play with ideas about narrative and transparency. In particular, I was interested in the notion that hemp could function as a pathway to the ‘mirror world’ (Barber, 1991). Within this project, hemp became a symbol of spiritual regeneration because of its narrative potency, its historical associations with shamanistic qualities and the ‘otherworld’ and its material qualities of strength and resilience.

The French artist Emilie Faif became a visual reference point for my research into Merleau-Ponty’s notion of ‘reversibility’. In 2006, Faif, worked on a series of garments for French designer, Isabel Marant in 2006, which were printed with painted historic northern European landscapes on the interior side, which then appeared in a window display for the label (Emilie Faif, 2006). Because of the interior positioning of these images, only the wearer would know that they wrapped around their body. This also gave a sense of the ‘otherworldly’ qualities of hemp, which, in this case, not only took on a
delicate appearance, but made a literal representation of another time and place within a garment.

Within the project time scale, I took part in a Deep Ecology workshop led by John Seed together with two of the participants, Tasmin Pascal and Ilka White. We meditated with trees, performed rituals, and spoke as one of the Council of All Beings. As part of this process, I took on the character or persona of a black snake, which is an emblem of great personal fear. This weekend was an important turning point as it enabled me to integrate the Deep Ecology element, which I felt was missing up until this point. This highlighted the ecocentric (Merchant, 1992) element of the project. Indeed, the completion of the project's outward timescale was the moment when I could reflect upon what I had been doing and how that could be brought through in my work.

With this came the realisation that the cape was not ‘meant to be’ in the Spiritus Loci project. I felt too amateur alongside my fellow designers and its visibility was still beyond my grasp. My Graduate Research Conference (GRC) presentation functioned as a ‘wake-up call’ that while I self-identified as an ‘amateur crafter’, I did not fully understand what that meant in my practice, and how that compared to my fellow participants who were not amateurs, but rather, artists and designers. Attempting to work alongside them on the same level was becoming increasingly awkward, to myself at least. On 4 November, upon reflecting upon Merleau-Ponty’s Vertical Moment (Johnson and Smith, 1993, p. 51), which he describes as ‘simply being there in the world, in the magnetism of the world’, I shifted my position to verticality, to a project that focused around a 2D work rather than a 3D garment.

This shift to the vertical moment gave me freedom to narrate a story in a medium that was my own style. In my role as creative facilitator, it became apparent that the doing was more important than the crafted outcome. As noted by Scrivener (2000) ‘[i]n a research setting, the knowledge associated with the artefact is more significant than the artefact itself’ (Scrivener, 2000, in Rust, Mottram & Till, 2007, p. 12)

My experience of crafting enabled me to experience the project from within, without having to be concerned about my amateur skillset. There were many facets within the Spiritus Loci project and the outcomes were a symbolic part of the whole. Adamson approaches craft as ‘an attitude’ and later, that its ‘inferiority might be the most productive thing about it’ (2007, p. 4). Upon shifting to the ‘vertical moment’ my plan had emerged, and the theme and topic for each strip became apparent.
My practice was free of design prejudice and rules; I embraced my new role as amateur crafter. The needle was to guide me. The embroidery practice became a ‘bearer of [my] soul’ (Parker, 1984; 2010, p. 499). Ideas and topics flowed through me and were channeled by a needle and thread. By engaging with my chosen nature place, I was enabled with a sense of connection to the non-human world, to a cosmos of narratives and this became my work, part of my contribution to the project as a whole. Reflecting upon this, on February 12 I wrote:

Embroidering patterns that reflect the life force of nature. Stemming from a cluster of Acorns (the seed) the piece becomes a swirling eddy of shadings of green. The European sign of spring set against the subtler colours of the Melbourne spring.

From here, I reconsidered my work in relation to previous spiritual and religious experience. On 12 February I realised that that I had started to ‘reflect more upon the Catholic connections in my work’. I wrote:

It has taken on elements of the priest’s vestments. Perhaps the whole piece takes on something of the making of symbolic garments for the spirit of spring. The Catholic church being integrated back into the ‘old ways’? And how does the indigenous history sit within that?’ (12 February).

My project diary became a psychological journal. The snake came back to me, as I became aware of my fear of it in the Australian bush, alongside the fact that it was the year of the snake within the Chinese calendar, and that this represented transformation. But this made me question the nature of what I myself was transforming. As I worked upon the snake, I wrote, in my final piece:

I’ve cut out the snake itself to be present but only unseen. It represents my unseen, unspoken fears and if we maintain this archetypal image of the snake then it is the fear of transformation of creation; of the creation process perhaps. Fear of my creative potential, fear of the old self dying (March 6).
The snake was the final piece that I embroidered.

‘By the banks of the Yarra at the Flatland where I live nearby, these strips of hemp narrate different plots of Spring 2012. From inner narratives to happenings en site. This is a documentation on surface, a self-framing collection of a time and place. This crafting practice developed in a 2-dimensionality – a narrative across hemp canvas in 10 parts. Each part a project to explore a particular facet of the inner and outer signs of spring that I experienced.’ (February 6)

Black and Burisch have argued that ‘[c]raftivism and contemporary curatorial practices both critique the mainstream economies that govern their respective disciplines’ (2010, p. 615). As the curator and crafter, my role became truly participatory. I embraced Beuys’ claim that ‘everyone is an artist’, in terms of its simplicity of statement, and of the freedom that it creates outside of the parameters of the art world and cultural industries. Vertical Moments became a creative ‘non-place’ between fashion design, textile design and art. And, by inhabiting this non-place, I questioned my own position within the fashion system itself. In this way, my craftivist work, and the role that I assumed, functioned as a way of reconnecting more meaningfully with nature, and of shifting fashion paradigms away from urbancentrism.

New ways of approaching systems are possible if we are prepared to step away from it and reevaluate our position. As participant and curator of the Spiritus Loci project, I sought to create, in Armstrong’s terms, a ‘supportive, respectful place to work that finds common ground between the [group members]’ (2009, p. 4). It was highly important that everyone felt their role was of equal importance, and their input of equal significance. At the exhibition, one of the audience members noted that it was clear that everyone
worked together because no one artist was vying for the ‘top’ spot. The atmosphere was
democratic and uncompetitive, which was precisely the ‘mood’ that I wanted to create.

As I reflect upon the exhibition, which was installed and disassembled in one evening, I
feel that it conveyed aspects of Beuys’ and Steiner’s philosophies, which were the essence
of my initial starting point: I was concerned with both human and spiritual warmth. In my
notes I wrote: ‘[t]he night was gezelling / chalereuse. Everyone enjoyed themselves. It was
empathetic and feminine which is what I wanted to evoke. It was not competitive’ (May,
2013).

Spiritus Loci was exhibited as an event in a yoga meditation studio and was filled with
the ancient sounds of a single live harp. This was outside of the normal parameters of
an exhibition space. Yoga and meditation spaces are intended specifically for spiritual
contemplation and ‘alternative’ spiritual practice. Indeed, Black and Burisch write
that ‘craftivist practice is often deliberately situated outside of traditional approaches
and models of presentation’ (2010, p. 615). While fashion today increasingly finds its
presentation within museums, as ‘[fashion designers] … see their work ideally as pieces to
be hung on the wall, and more reluctantly as items of clothing’ (McRobbie, 1998, p. 13).
I wanted to avoid a stark, Modernist cube space, which would’ve been at odds with the
intention of the project.
Spiritus Loci was a dialogue between fashion, textiles and craft, the hemp material being the binding and the participatory crafting circle, the structure. As Black and Burisch (2010) write, ‘the emphasis on dialogue and participation should be a prominent component of any exhibition that includes craftivist or politically engaged craft work’ (p. 615). While the alternative exhibition space echoed the intention of the project, on reflection, it may have been better located outside, to illustrate the importance of green spaces within the project. This choice, however, that would have brought its own issues, such as the relevance of place to each individual participant’s work. Nonetheless, an element of participatory content at the event may have engaged the audience more fully and innovated it.

In participating in this craft circle, a heightened response to the environment was set through ritual, and then crafted individually into a symbolic object, which could be shared amongst group members. It is possible, therefore, that the symbolic object reminds the individual participant of that particular nature-place and time.
DISTILLING THE PROJECT

Reactions from the group

The Spiritus Loci project was a process over three months. I did not manage to obtain completion interviews with all the participants, mainly because I moved away from Melbourne a short time after the exhibition. However, there were significant enough responses to reflect upon the project’s value and this was also reflected in conversations held with the group on the evening of the exhibition. In keeping with my original project brief given to the participants at the onset of the project, I have not disclosed the identity of the person giving the response. I will, therefore, briefly look at reactions to the project structure relating to ritual, material and place.

Throughout the project, the term ‘ritual’ was used to define the choreographed events that participants shared with members of the group, in order to shed meaning on place and practice. Nonetheless, my use of this term does raise questions. Having undertaken the project and reflected upon the process, there were certainly ritualistic elements, but these functioned as what Beuys terms ‘actions’ that aided the human network of participants, and drove the project onwards. These actions, however, are not going to be repeated within our group, and while individuals might continue to use elements of the rituals, such as ‘afternoon tea’ in their backyard, it will be within a different context. Nonetheless, participants acknowledge the lasting impact of our interactions. One of the participants, for example, reflects:

My social habits were challenged by the group-focussed structure of the project. Despite having worked collaboratively before, I am habitually a loner in this area of thinking and making. [...] The project taught me about different styles of relating, different interpretations of ritual, and different ways of making.

In terms of her understanding of ritual, she observed:

Like collaboration, I now realise my definition of ritual may differ from others. I still think it’s important to me that it involves an attentive, mindful presence. That it stops to acknowledge the intention of the gathering when bringing different people together. I was really interested in experiencing other’s places through their rituals, but found myself often wanting to return to the place alone to reconnect with it in the absence of other people. This may be introverted habit.
This participant also reflected upon ritual in other terms. Responding to Grimes notion that

‘ecological thinking requires ritual performance’, this participant commented:

*I think I had to ‘perform’ (act with conscious intention) the making of this work to understand the ecological links in relation to the plants I worked with, and their seasons, and the way they behave in the dye pot, how they preserve etc. I could not have known or understood any of this without participating – interacting with the landscape.*

For another participant,

*During this project we observed the way that rituals can take on different meanings to different people - some were very structured and some were more free-flowing. They are inclusive and exclusive at the same time.*

At the completion of the project, which was the exhibition, there was a sense of having ‘completed the circle’. For many participants, including myself, without a deadline, the artefacts might not have been completed. One participant, for example, notes that ‘[t]he public showing prompted me to finish the work, which may have taken longer were I left to my own devices!’ Indeed, when I consider the project from a different place of abode and some time later together with the reflections of some of the group participants, there are certain elements that gave the project robustness.

One of the elements uniting our practice was the use of the hemp fabric. At times, the participants found it challenging to work with the material, which, as we experienced, was like working with ‘sackcloth’. But this was also something that that linked us, and might inform our future practice. One participant, for example, reflected:

*I am planning to use some of my leftover hemp in some new work for a collaborative show, and it occurred to me that on another level Patricia could be seen as a collaborator in this new work, due to focusing my interest in this path (exploration of place/time), sharing the inspirational writing of fantastically influential thinkers and providing the physical cloth.*

What becomes clear here is that the cloth becomes part of the collaborative essence itself. It both transmits and embodies a sense of our collective intention, and also
functions as the tangible connection to another project. For one of the participants, the fabric symbolised her ritual simultaneously:

*I chose to make my ritual an inclusive part of my finished dress, in that I asked each of the group to come up with a commandment, and then write it on my fabric. Therefore my dress has a little ‘piece’ of each person in it.*

The material is the ‘aide memoire’, very literally, within her work, because it contains the written words of each participant – their words and thoughts written in pencil and then traced in green paint by the participant herself.

*This is a cloth I created. It is itself a material, created in part from another fabric, carefully deconstructed.*

In regards to the importance of place sensitivity (Plumwood, 2002), there was an acknowledgment of the importance of working with place in future projects for several of the participants. One of the group practitioners answered that it is:

*Very important; possibly more so than before... One tree is coming to represent all trees, and one connection symbolic of the interconnectedness of all things.*

For another participant, place will ‘perhaps change the direction of my work, and that is not a bad or scary idea, but an exciting and natural one.’

At the close of the project, and with time to think about what it achieved, it must be said that the group of participants were ideally suited to this project. They were already favourably disposed to, and often committed to, issues within the context of sustainability and fashion. Most were past or present teaching staff from RMIT or connected to the educational model, so they were professional to work with. Other groups within industry or otherwise would not necessarily be so attuned to the workings of the project. Each iteration would need to be carefully adjusted and modified to encourage participation and continued effort.
CONCLUSIONS

It is now that we must lay to rest the ‘ghosts of modernity’ by stopping the ‘drama of change in place of change’ (Baudrillard, 1993, p. 90). This practice-led research project proposes that by investing garments with ‘place’ and working with the natural ‘alternative’ materials and seasonal cycles, we can play with a narrative of what ‘fashion’ might be. This project explored the parameters of fashion ritual and worked to reconfigure them to encourage paths of ‘ecological thinking’ about our connections to our clothes and consumption patterns and our environment. Indeed by this material practice, and by making use of biodynamic systems thinking, we may find potential narratives of reincarnation and ultimately spiritual regeneration.

Spiritus Loci attempted to embed the meaning of place within a crafted object. It has implications in discussions about locale, and connects further to the Slow Movement’s incorporation of terroir and bioregional systems. But what it also implies is that the crafter, craftsperson or designer is part of place, rather than a separate, objective being. Merleau-Ponty’s assertion that ‘being is synonymous with being situated’ is key; this recognition needs to take place on a spiritual and material level, in the materials that we use, particularly in terms of their provenance and their environmental impact. In this respect, it is about human and non-human networks.

This project sought to look to nature for creative nourishment rather than the edgy-industrial essence of Modernism. It used the framework of Merchant’s (1992) ‘ecocentric’ approach to avoid hierarchical diminution of the non-human world at the expense of the human. This project is now complete and I am living away from the place in which it was based. Much of the project was concerned with our relationship with place, and for me personally, it became about understanding the place in which I was living: not the city, but rather, the local ecosystems, both within and outside of the centre of Melbourne. Along with this search for meaning through the environment came a desire to find a sense of belonging. Without feeling ‘at home’ in the natural environment, there is little real connection. We dwell in place.
This scenario of my own individual circumstances reflects my search for meaning within the contemporary fashion system. It addresses the division between our consuming fashion selves, and our disconnect from the ‘pull’ on natural resources that this entails. The Cartesian nature/culture divide has effectively detached us from our place within the natural system. Firstly, we need to reposition ourselves as part of the natural world rather than objectifying it as Other.

The project was about our own disconnect from the creative urge in fashion narratives and bringing back the circle, using the crafting circle as a forum for discussing and being with other people with a commonality. Meeting and discussing individual projects and thoughts was a way to create human networks, and to position ourselves within non-human networks. It was a way to acknowledge and understand our place and our work as a part of a larger story.

This project forms part of an open-ended dialogue proposing that through heightening awareness of environmental concerns directly through place-specific process of creation, dynamic group participation and focused response to the natural environment there is scope for a garment to hold ‘place’ within it; to become a meaningful object.

Spiritus Loci was very small-scale and participants were for the most part working within the parameters of concern for ‘sustainability’ within their own work. And while some of the rituals placed participants outside of their ‘comfort zones’, this did not detract from the group bonding that occurred.

The project and research associated with it is not directly applicable to the current industry model, but neither was it meant to be. Spiritus Loci showed that, by spending time in a natural system, it is possible to create a relationship with it. And while this project was limited in time, our intention as participants was to ‘carry’ our feelings of immersion to other places, opening the way to connecting to other ecosystems, but also maintaining awareness of connection to the invisible; to embed our practice in place.

This project is an exercise in describing, and reflecting upon, an experience of place and ritual performance both into and through textile-based artefacts that are potentially worn as garments. If we situate ourselves within an eco-system on a local level, then there may be articulations into the global level and across species. If we consider ourselves as one with all beings and natural systems, then performing sustainability will be of the greatest importance within, without, and withal.
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APPENDIX

Part i.

ANYALYSING ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVES WITHIN CURRENT FASHION

The Spiritus Loci project was performed within a 15km radius of a city (Melbourne), but it was situated outside of an urban context, in a ‘third place’ (Thorpe, 2012, p. 90). As I have discussed, this might be defined as neutral ground; a place that is likely to be within the urban environment, but which looks not to the industrial aesthetic for inspiration, but rather, searches for succor in the natural world.

The project itself was small-scale, with eight participants chosen for their artistic and environmentally-engaged attitude. It had no commercial intention and participants were essentially free to make what they wanted, as long as they used the hemp was, and no new ‘unsustainable materials’ were added. Undoubtedly, it was a project that sat outside the bounds of the regular fashion industry rhythm and machinery in its creative possibilities.

While the ‘mess and chaos’ (Evans, 2003, p. 299) of the fashion industry continues, I wanted to analyse current industry practice with a framework outside of a ‘fashion’ context. My project sought to examine how might we overcome our division from the natural world through crafting a meaningful object (Walker, 2011) or garment. By taking an ecocentric approach, we gave space for the Unseen. This included human and non-human networks to which we are connected, and the ways in which in developing these networks, we position ourselves within an ecosystem; a cosmology.

I return to look at the fashion industry and in particular focus on two design studios: AF Vandevorst and Alexander van Slobbe, both of whom have subtle, yet identifiable cosmological and mythological elements in their work in relation to the philosophies of Rudolf Steiner and Joseph Beuys. Both are small-scale, high-end design companies. While they are exclusive and not representative of the larger and faster fashion industry, the purpose is to study their design principles and methods as an example of working within an alternative fashion framework.

The paper was written to be presented at the IFFTI conference in Taiwan in 2010 at the beginning of my research, and reworked for the Artez publication A Fashion Odyssey, Progress in Fashion and Sustainability, this was consequently published in 2013.
Could an anti-materialistic philosophy assist in dealing with the material culture of fashion? There is a need to garner deeper meaning and greater attachment to our clothes if we hope to avoid trash fashion on a greater scale. By looking at some key elements of Rudolf Steiner's holistic practical measures and his more esoteric theories, we may come to rethink our irrational 'rational' approach to fashion, that is, ‘make it faster regardless of the environmental impacts’, and replace that with emotional attachment that fosters wellbeing for the people that make our clothes, the earth and ourselves.

Is it feasible to consider spiritualism and fashion in the same sentence? The realm of fashion is based upon constant change, or a ‘myth of change’ (Baudrillard, 1993, p.90) where every season we expect something new. At this juncture the amount of collections or ‘top ups’ are increasing in speed too. Fast fashion is embedded in the total fast lifestyle package. To find some time or space for deeper meaning will be challenging but there are already designers working to slow the pace and invest ‘inner’ beauty in their garments.

Jane Schneider (2006, p. 205) writes ‘… the spiritual and the material are inseparable in the minds of humans everywhere, including those who inhabit industrial capitalist societies. Here too textiles received as gifts are kept and stored. Here too the clothes of deceased loved ones elicit intense affect, a feeling of connection, while ceremonial robes add substance to the wearer. Here, too, the idea lives on, despite two centuries of modern scientific discourse, that cloth and clothing shore up the person in magical ways, promoting his or her success as vital, loved and admired’.

The work of Alexander van Slobbe and A.F.Vandevorst have been used as examples throughout not because they are ‘anthroposophic’ or ‘green’ designers, but rather, their Steiner connections appeared serendipitously at the beginning of the research into this subject. Alexander van Slobbe went to a Vrijeschool (Waldorf) High School in the Netherlands, and it is interesting to ascertain if there might be some influences from his educational background on his fashion practice. In the case of the Belgian design duo A.F.Vandevorst, Joseph Beuys’ art is often referenced in their work. Steiner's philosophical influence on Beuys’ art is documented (Moffitt, 1988) and it is intriguing to research any Anthroposophic themes appearing in their oeuvre via Beuys.
Spirituality and Higher Worlds

Steiner made scant commentary on clothes and garments. However he did refer to the garment colouration of early societies and how that reflected a connection to the spirit world in earlier incarnations. People ‘carried down the colours from spiritual worlds in their garments’ (1923). Colour is perhaps a means to enrich our everyday existence and imbue ourselves with a more spiritual connection. We must remember too that in Steiner’s view the spiritual is in everything we simply need to learn how to ‘see’ it.

The experience of colour is key in Steiner education and Rudolf Steiner’s understanding of the ‘interplay between subject and object’ arises very much through Goethe’s colour theories. Although largely discredited scientifically Goethe’s theories are again being explored in phenomenological circles: in the experiencing of colour. The rationalist bias of scientific hegemony has left out the emotional and subjective experience of colour.

Goethe focused on the interaction between dark and light and more specifically of the ‘Deeds of the light’ rather than simple physicality of colour. For Steiner, colour had a fundamental relationship with cosmic energies. It is the ‘soul of nature and the entire cosmos and we share this soul by sharing the experience of colour’ (cited in Kugler, 2007, p. 24). But what has to first take place is a re-embodying of our disembodied eyes (Gablik, 1991). By uniting oneself with the object colour the subject is able to ‘creep into’ the object – in Anthroposophic schools, students are encouraged to feel the interplay between complementary colours because to feel continuum and contrast means that there is an understanding of this dynamic which is a lesson that can be extended into life.

In the fashion season, there are always colour changes but they are generally dictated by trends. Alexander van Slobbe’s colours are often seasonally linked rather than trend linked. His commitment to colours that are closely related nuanced by degrees of shading and variation makes his colours dynamic (van der Berg, 2008). While there is much following of the ‘colour of the season’ trends, perhaps there is room for expanding upon the role of colour and our spiritual wellbeing, our psychological needs that will also shift the rational way we look upon our clothes and rather encourage us to experience the ‘shades of emotion in colour’ (Steiner)

According to Steiner, thoughts and ideas are also living things, which can be experienced as creative energy. The artist Joseph Beuys (1921-1986) evolved this concept into his ‘Social Sculpture’ which was about imagining the society that we want, visualizing it and then sculpting it into existence. Beuys has been credited with being the most significant avant garde artist in post-WWII Europe (Adams, 1998). He was an installation artist, sculptor and activist he also embodied the qualities of the shaman, a healer through
his ‘expanded concept of art’. What is not generally acknowledged is how completely imbued the work of Beuys is by Steiner’s anthroposophy (Adams 1998, Moffitt 1988).

We can be inspired by Steiner’s concept of metamorphosis on two levels: as a narratorial device or as a way of transforming material through craftsmanship. Steiner divided the visible world into mineral, plant, animal and human dimensions which are connected both spatially and temporally but are also in a continual state of metamorphosis (after Goethe’s theory of metamorphosis). There are things that can be learnt from the natural world. In the process of our human evolution we contain the distant memory of the natural kingdom - minerals, plants, animals - within ourselves. So the archetypal properties of animals for example are available to us to gain insight from.

By embracing the organic impulse in design we may too blossom spiritually like a flower does, or in engaging with the crystalline geometric properties of minerals, we experience steadfastness for example. Cosmic Wonder Light Source from Japan articulate the influence of spiritual and cosmological connections in their conceptual work. For example the weaving of light via crystal into their garments, it could be said they offer an alternative take to than the normal fashion narrative.

By using the mythic and symbolic narrative of animals we are connecting ourselves with their archetypal properties. If we look at A.F. Vandevorst’s referencing to the horse there is perhaps a wink, not only to Beuys’ iconic white horse in his Titus/Iphigenia performance at Experimenta 3 (1969) Aktionen but to these archetypal animals, creatures that stand at the threshold between the earth and spirit worlds. One of their more iconic fashion images is that of the leather saddle ‘corset’ from the A/W 1998-99 collection. This also references traditional craftsmanship.

In 1908 Steiner spoke about the horse archetype and human spiritual evolution ‘Man has grown out of a form which once contained within it what is now embodied in the horse; and in the form of the centaur art still represented man as connected with this animal in order to remind him of the stage of development out of which he had grown...’ (Steiner, 1993, pp. 84-85). The horse according to Steiner signifies human’s ability ‘to acquire intelligence.’

Steiner placed much emphasis on turning inert materials into ‘living’ things, in doing so we ourselves come alive to the world. There is much emphasis on handcrafting in the Anthroposophic worldview. This is firmly entrenched in schools but it continues in ‘craft’ circles and is not out of touch with current neo-crafting trends.
Alexander van Slobbe asserts that; ‘The new luxury is that of the small-scale, hand-made, sustainable’ (cited in Vlassenroon and van der Linden, 2009, p. 22). Perhaps his position on ‘turning inert materials into living things’ has much to do with his Anthroposophic education but it was also a reaction to the fashion industry in overdrive. By the late 80s in the Netherlands, production for the most part had already shifted offshore and every part of the creation process was locked into a system. For van Slobbe, ‘the handmade product was for us the only answer to the industry with all its codes and laws and impossibilities. An industrial demand of a minimal production of fifty pieces in one colour or in one size is illustrative enough to realize that we couldn’t follow that direction and thus had to produce ourselves’ (2010, p. 27).

Hand finished detailing is one of Van Slobbe’s insignias with braiding, embroidery, crocheted edges and hand dyeing techniques featuring in his work but it is not only ‘traditional’ handcrafts there is often a mix of industrial with the handmade. For example in his S/S 2006 collection, delicate printing was done by hand as was laser cutting and garments were cut punched and finished by hand. Van Slobbe’s approach is not anti-technology but rather reclaiming technology at the personal level as a means of ‘infusing the garments with emotion’ (cited in van de Berg, 2008, p. 21).

Materials and substances were crucial in Steiner’s theories because they ensure his philosophy were applicable in the real world (Kugler, 2007). Natural materials and substances are preferred because of the connection they have with natural processes: sunlight, mineral exchange, warmth, and protection. They embody the elements that have made them.

While the honeybee has a long cult following all the way back to the ancients, for Steiner bees mirror the earth’s fertility, capacity for love and work oriented social cooperation (Adams, 1998). Beuys ‘warmth sculptures’ express the opposite side to society’s rational intellect cold and materialistic mentality, a harmonious human social life (Adams, 1998). Beuys used beeswax because it could be melted into a liquid by warmth, or as a candle it could become light and warmth – and it could also be cooled and hardened to forms, such as the crystallised geometry of honeycomb. Beeswax was also a material medium because it was produced by bees in an environment of collective warmth (Adams, 1998).

At A.F.Vandevorst’s graduate collection and in the A/W 2002-3 collection, the design pair explored the strikingly colourful dynamics of the honey bee kingdom using black and yellow stripes and zigzag patterns in bulky and fine knits. But not only have they evoked honey bees in their clothing, at the Arnhem Mode Biennale 2011 they installed a female figure, lying on an iron bed cast in wax with candles slowly burning down her side. The
candles threw off light and warmth.

This harmony of the bees might also express Steiner's more political aspirations of a Threefold social order (Steiner, 1920) with freedom and independence in the arts, the economy and the legal sphere. In large scale production there is little opportunity for connection and holistic creation. There is also little incentive for ethics as everyone is a number or a cog in the machine rather than an individual maker.

The atelier model which Van Slobbe prefers as it allows him to keep things ‘small scale’ and collaborative. Van Slobbe reflects: ‘My greatest dream is that I have several large spaces that cover everything, where I’ve got everything under control, from spinning and weaving to dyeing and manufacturing. In my view that’s the only way to stay specific.’ (cited in van den Berg, 2008, p. 275).

Finally, in the spirit of Anthroposophy, which is based upon reincarnation we might find ways of imparting meaning into our clothes: this may be so they are ‘mended, adjusted and passed on until they can’t be anymore’ which is reminiscent of A.F.Vandevorst’s iconic S/S1999 collection where models wore the collection on rows of iron hospital beds because worn garments have more ‘spirit’ or ‘soul’ but it may also refer to the design principle.

Van Slobbe’s twenty archive pieces (van den Berg, 2008) that are tweaked in different fabrics are testament to his minimalist design philosophy. Testament to the design integrity of the fashion designer – there is no need to continually reinvent the wheel. Styles can be reinterpreted when necessary if there is an emphasis on design excellence rather than excessive outpouring of new pieces.

Indeed fashion, according to Baudrillard (1993, p. 88), ‘is always retro, but always on the basis of the abolition of the past: the spectral death and resurrection of forms’. Van Slobbe’s archive pieces articulate that this ‘myth of change’ may find other expressions of transformation. The wearer may too rediscover the pieces after several years and find that it has not dated, but can be worn afresh with her having experienced change, moved on from a ‘past life’ rather than the garment itself which is ‘new’.

This larger cosmic picture extends into life stages where materials have properties, which go beyond our normal understanding they offer psychological support. A.F.Vandevorst in their A/W 1999-2000 collection used ‘pure’ materials like silk and woollen gauze worn at the front of a skirt which was contrasted with the protective qualities of felt at the back to convey ‘moments of uncertainty’ and ‘inner struggles of many women of all ages (Derycke
& van de Veire, 1999, p. 76). This narration of evolution and change reveals Steiner’s insight that ‘life is the perpetual overcoming and simultaneous new creation of opposites’ (cited in Kugler, 2007, p. 24).

It is important that we in put forward anti-materialistic philosophies as we deal in the very literal material culture of fashion. We have looked at Steiner’s work with concepts like Spirituality and Higher Worlds, Metamorphosis, Materials and Biodynamic principles, Warmth and Social Connection, and Reincarnation, as possible avenues for investing meaning and encouraging sustainable practice in the fashion industry. While we may invest meaning in our clothes through the integrity of the process of making them, as we saw in the holistic design work of Alexander van Slobbe we may also imbue them with ‘deeper meanings’ as A.F.Vandevorst do, springing from archetypal symbolism and mythological storytelling that challenges rampant consumption and allows a more holistic life force to show itself.

While fashion is all about fleeting moments of magic, we’ve not yet embraced a spiritual dimension that encompasses our humanity and environment. Without meaning, fashion will continue to charge ahead on its death drive path, until it can no longer. But the art of designing and making clothes has a greater impulse, the creative drive based upon an initial Idea. It is through our Ideas that we can sculpt our clothes into special objects imbued with greater meaning. It is through our Ideas that we will orchestrate positive change in larger systems too. (Fast) Fashion is dead, long live fashion!
References


Tasmin Pascal - Urban Kite

Costumes can be transformative

This piece reflects my current research into costume design and long-term interest in festival culture. Taking historical and ethno-cultural Shamanism, as inspiration, this Urban Kite costume was created to be of assistance in transforming the wearer from human to bird. The Kite became part of this project, a totem animal if you like. I found the corpse of a Kite that I had been watching over several years and I really felt its absence from the skies above my place. Then after the ritual gathering with the group at my sacred ground, another Kite appeared as if by magic. So the cycle goes on.

Instructions for use: It’s up to the wearers’ imagination to allow this transformation (from human to bird) to take place. The wearer will know it is effective if the birds recognises an aspect of themselves in the wearer. Or, if the wearer recognises an aspect of themselves in the birds. Obviously this requires time and experimentation on the part of the wearer.

Materials: hemp, cotton thread, beeswax and ash.

Claire Beale - Desire Lines #1 - sackcloth & ashes

Shibori sun-dyed, pigment printed & hand embroidered hemp wrapping cloth

Desire Lines forms part of my ongoing Analog Portable project (involving a process of exploration and creative play working with existing or found fabrics, ‘failed’ swatches and offcuts and reassembling them into a new surface or piece). Layering and memories, palimpsest, pentimento, retro and nostalgia become potentially bridges between craft & design.

This project has become a deeply personal expression of the practice of making – from the initial stages of exploring the concept of ‘place’ - both the physical & the spiritual, to the final process of transforming the fabric surface. In this case the furnished hemp material at the core of the project initially conjured up the historical reference of ‘sackcloth & ashes’, perhaps a hard and unforgiving fabric, however once handled and worn, the surface takes on a softer, more fluid feel.

By embracing imperfection and being attentive to the faults in the fabric, repeated
workings of the surface reveal and conceal a narrative journey, tracing desire lines found in the material itself. Embroidery, dyeing and printing embodies a gathering in of the surface, which follows the meandering paths unconsciously chosen, followed, rejected, rewritten and redefined in our daily journeys from place to place.

**Kate Kennedy - Shroud**

This hemp dress is constructed by zero waste pattern design principles where off cuts, scraps or waste are less than 1% of the total garment.

My garment is a tribute to a much loved neighbourhood tree that has provided a canopy of shade, foliage, wild life habitat, and backyard energy above my home studio. Sadly this magnificent Eucalypt, a Peppermint Gum that has thrived in the neighbouring primary school’s adventure playground has become a victim to fake grass. The introduction of new play equipment in the schoolyard with smick and slick, wall-to-wall polypropylene grass has provided a blanket over the root system and the tree is dying from lack of water.

The Spiritus Loci project has been an opportunity to reflect, inhabit and create an artefact from hemp in my creative space. This zero waste dress is intended as a shroud dedicated to the demise of the great tree.

Pattern provided for tracing…

**Gabriella Ferrante - The Eight Commandments**

Emma
“Life is too short to rush, set your own pace.”

Patricia
“Don’t buy or consume anything unless you really, truly love it and prioritise needs over wants.”

Claire
“Thou Shalt Enjoy the Materials & Process”

Ilka:
“Pay attention.
Be astonished.
Tell about it.” (Mary Oliver)

Gabriella:
“Nothing lasts forever - cherish humanity and the natural world; possessions are temporary.”
Kate
“Thou shalt not judge oneself according to a garment size label”.
Tasmin
“Thou shalt not succumb to the crippling despair that creates apathy towards making actions that are needed to sustain all life on this precious planet.”
Ria
“Let the beauty we love be what we do.” (Rumi)

Pollen Suite (2012-13)

I was stung by a bee for the first time in my life during the initial Spiritus Loci gathering. Lavender oil soothed the sting. This event influenced my whole experience of the project. My place is along the Yarra in front of the Abbotsford Convent. The elements that I found at my place were simple beauty that was close to home and close to water. Coincidentally, there is an apiary close by and bees love lavender.

Convent = Religion. Religion played a large part of my childhood, and certainly introduced me to many forms of Ritual. My Spring 2012 Ritual involved 8 women, 8 Commandments (written by each participant with different backgrounds and a common interest), 4 metres of hemp, homemade honey mead and lavender shortbread.

My piece is inspired by the beehive. It relates a type of connectivity through the archetypal hexagon-shaped structure and is inscribed with the 8 Commandments. Breaking a garment down into small units that fit together is a constant in my approach to design.

Materials: hemp, cotton thread and Permaset Aqua colours

Karan Jones & Amanda Magnano - Spiritus Loci (film)

This collaboration between two graduating students of RMIT BA Textile Design sought to document the rituals of each of the exhibiting artists in the Spiritus Loci project. The filming over the course of the season aimed to capture the essence of each ritual and artist within the context of specific locations. The film attempts to unravel the personal stories surrounding these individual interpretations and explore the notion of connectivity to meaningful places within a textile context. The resulting outcome is part documentation of events and an evocative reflection on place, meaning and ritual.

Emma Lynas - Grasslands (2012-13)
Inspired by grasslands, both agricultural and native. This piece was constructed and embellished using a process of design for dematerialisation.

The grassy dome at Royal Park is a muse of memory, an environmental reminder of grasslands and a vast unobstructed sky. Eucalyptus leaves, wild thyme, cedar berries and Aleppo pine needles were collected from the agricultural grounds of my childhood home in the grasslands of rural Victoria. The bounty was simmered with strips of hemp to produce a range of summer hues; straw, gold and bronze. Individual threads were pulled, passed through the eye of a needle, stitched and embroidered by hand.

This project forms part of my PhD research exploring ways for textile designers to foster deeper connections between people and material possessions. The slow design method of individual enquiry allowed time to explore ideas, processes and alternatives within the project’s duration.

“Slow design provides a lens through which to more intimately understand one’s own identity as a designer, to reflect upon the design processes one employs, to evaluate tangible outcomes, and to imagine new scenarios. This process of careful and continuous (self-) questioning challenges the designer to reach for the core of design and her / his role as a designer”. Fuad-Luke A & Strauss C, 2008

Ria Soemardje - Aprons

An apron for my two grandmothers, Frances and Eyangti. From two different worlds - Ngawen Blora, central Java and Drouin, Gippsland, Victoria.

I like to walk to the nearest park to my house, the All Nations park, and pass through the she oak avenue, close to a small lake and a cemetery. It’s a quiet, sheltered spot, and for some reason, it makes me think of my grandmothers.

I love to create objects and performance that draw people into a reflective state, through textures, sound, movement and smell. I am also interested in using materials like (beeswax, jojoba oil and Kakishibui) that soothe my skin as I have had skin allergies for years. I am particularly fascinated by the Kakishibui dye, as it is non-toxic and does not require heat. It darkens on exposure to sunlight and has been used to waterproof and strengthen hemp and cotton fabrics and protect them from mould.
Materials: Hemp, cotton thread, Kakishibui (Japanese fermented persimmon dye), bicarbonate soda, beeswax and jojoba oil.

Ilka White - Billabong Habits (2012-13)

These pieces are woven and stitched in honour of the Merri Creek billabong and its delicate presence. They grow from a wider sense of our bodies and selves being intimately connected with the rest of the natural world, all the time.

The word habit (clothe), is closely related to inhabit, or habitat, from the Latin habitare, (to dwell in, to frequent, or figuratively to linger).
I frequent the billabong. When properly attended to it is at least as wonderful as any far-flung locale I’ve visited.

Plant material for dyeing was collected from the billabong and Merri Creek surrounds, plus gleanings from my kitchen downstream, during the spring of 2012. Dye trials, mostly with weeds on hemp, amassed a surprisingly beautiful palette.
Dye Plants include:
Black nightshade berries and foliage
Golden wattle foliage
Gorse flowers and prickle
Lightwood (acacia) bark
Oak leaves and acorns
Oxalis (sour grass) flowers
Periwinkle flowers and foliage
Prunus plum foliage
Red gum leaves
Willow bark
Avocado seeds
Brown onion skins
Passionfruit skins
Materials: Hemp, plant dyes, silk and other yarns, grass
The ‘vertical moment’ is simply being in and with the magnetism of the world (Merleau-Ponty). This project is about connecting with the natural world as both subject and object.

By the banks of the Yarra in Heidelberg near where I live I have found a place to immerse myself in from time to time. I find quietness and if I listen closely, there’s a story being told. The narrative moves and shifts with the seasons, it is cyclical and non-linear. The storytelling is barely audible but ongoing and available to all whether there’s a human audience or not.

The self-framing strips of hemp narrate different events and happenings of Spring 2012 as I tuned in and out of the story unfolding by the river. The crafted and embroidered surfaces are documented in 10 parts, each part explores a particular facet of the internal and outer experience of spring.

i. Wattle
ii. Beuys’ Crosses
iii. Mighty Oak
iv. Yarra surface
v. Ode to the White Tree Dwellers
vi. White Pink
vii. Invisible trail
viii. Spiral unseen
ix. An excuse for Pagan Ritual
x. Beware of Snakes (March to Oct.)

Materials: Hemp fabric, cotton, silk and linen threads, metallic threads, acorns, found metal pieces and bells. All parts were dyed in acacia pods and left to soak over the summer months, except Mighty Oak, which was dyed in oak leaves.
Spiritus Loci
Place, Ritual and Material

“In a forest, I have felt many times over that it was not I who looked at the forest. Some days I felt that the trees were looking at me, were speaking to me.”

James Edie (1964)

This group project explores notions of connectivity and response between the human and non-human, seen and unseen, spiritual and material. The networks associated with the natural world included the numerous living beings within ecosystems and the seasonal rhythm. It took place during Spring 2012 (and spilled over into 2013) in various nature places around Melbourne. It seeks to explore a process of embedding the emotional connection to the natural world in the same way that we might feel emotionally connected to garments or objects that have family or friendship sentimentality. During the period between the spring equinox and summer solstice 2012 (23 September-21 December) each group member chose a particular nature place as their ‘muse.’ Over a three-month period, participants engaged with this special place as a source of inspiration for the project. A ritual was developed – ranging from afternoon garden tea party to in situ open-air meditation. The rituals sought to evoke the perceived essence of place and was translated to the group, and captured on film. This contemplation of the natural cycle, ecosystem and human response was then embodied within an artefact over time.

The human network of participants in Spiritus Loci, work and research within the fashion and textiles domain. They include designers, weavers, musicians, 2D graphic designers, costume designers and crafters. All share a common passion for environmental issues and the impact that the fashion and textiles industry and consumption patterns relating to that has on ecological and human systems.

The common fabric for all participants was a length of raw, unbleached and dye-free hemp. Our task was to work quite literally with a type of ‘sack cloth’ material and make a worn object or artefact of creativity and integrity; exploring place and time, the natural cycles and ourselves. The artefacts range from zero waste garments and hand-treated aprons, a shamanic Kite costume, delicately woven objects coloured from locally sourced plant dyes, and several embroidered pieces exploring pattern, texture, colour and storytelling.

How might we internalise or interiorise ‘nature’ and our relationship to nature into discourses around our connectivity to garments as they form part of a larger conversation
about consumption and the destruction of the earth’s resources and ecological networks?

Part iv. Project Brief

Place, Ritual and Practice: A Collaborative Project within a Seasonal Framework

Welcome to Place, Ritual and Practice: A Collaborative Project within a Seasonal Framework and thank you for participating in this project-led research. You have been asked to join this group because of your progressive artistic/design background and commitment to sustainable philosophies and practice in their various articulations.

This project will take place between 22 September till 21 December, 2012.

Prior to the start of the project and at the completion of the project, you will be briefly interviewed (in an informal manner) about the collaborative nature of the project and related topics. This will be audio recorded and will form part of my research into my exegesis. No part of the interview will be used in public exhibitions.

Aims:

You will be given an amount of unbleached hemp (depending upon how much you need, there is five metres available for every participant, and more can be sourced if required) which you will work with over a period of one season – in this case spring (using the spring equinox 23 Sept to the summer solstice 21 Dec 2012 as the framework).

During this three-month period you will create an artefact based upon your own practice. This may be a garment, a sculpture, jewellery, object, or other, which has some connection to the body. The material may be pulled apart, rewoven, dyed, printed upon, embellished, and other found materials or ‘benign’ fabrics may be contributed to the hemp. Please note, the material should not have any nasty chemicals in it, ie, it should be ‘earth friendly.’ If you are uncertain, just ask me.

Place: You will choose a nature place in Melbourne to follow and be guided by during the course of the seasonal timeframe. This will in effect be your ‘muse’ – in a manner that is relevant to you. The artefact that you create does not need to ‘show’ this place for example. But you might want it to be symbolically present.

You will create an artefact that is not only based upon hemp (and other materials) but also upon your experience of ‘place’ during this timeframe and your emotional, physical and...
psychical experience of said place – the object that you make is potentially the physical embodiment of this creative journey and process, or it may be otherwise.

Ritual: During the seasonal timeframe, all participants will visit the nature place of each other (likely to be every two weeks) and during this visit the ‘host’ will create and choreograph a ritual which relates to place, practice, and story. This ritual will be used as an inspiration point and group bonding tool. Everyone’s ritual will be unique. The ritual may be as simple or as complex as you choose.

We may think of ritual as simply a way to heighten awareness of place, of your ‘locale’ and what that means to you as an equal part of the natural ecosystem. A ritual might be a song, a poem, a chant, a dance, a walk, or other which the group may participate in which heightens our experience of your place and its connection to your work, to our work, to the environment.

Documentation:
i. Together with your artefact, each participant is asked to document their creative journey both visually and written. The media is freely chosen and information will be part of an exhibition and the images for use in my research outcomes. You might like to send me postcards, or work with a visual diary or blog your process. This is intended to assist you in being mindful of practice, process and place. It is not intended to be burdensome, so I won’t specify the amount of documentation necessary, this is up to you. I would like to use portions in the exhibition and potentially refer to segments/statements in my research.

ii. All rituals will have a portion filmed to be used as part of an artistic ‘backdrop’ (loop) to the project exhibition. However, how this should be filmed will depend upon you. For example, I would expect to avoid facial recognition during the filming of any gathering, so that it becomes more a narration of atmosphere. In any case, it will be an artistic representation and not documentary-style. The technical

iii. All participants will be interviewed (audio recording only) before and after the project. Information gathered will not become part of the exhibition but will be used as part of my research. Interview answers will be incorporated into my exegesis and any related conference papers or presentations but the information and identity will remain as “one member of the group” pseudonym.
Copyright: All work which you produce is fully your own. The audio/visual material will be stored safely at RMIT for five years after the project’s completion.

Exhibition: The resulting artefacts, film representation and documentation will be exhibited in 2013 as part of my Masters.

Patricia Brien
INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Project Title:
Place, Ritual and Practice: A Collaborative Project with a Seasonal Framework

Investigators:
Patricia Brien (Researcher): Email: patricia.brien@rmit.edu.au Tel: 9925 9116
Prof Lyndal Jones (Senior Supervisor): Email: lyndal.jones@rmit.edu.au Tel: 9925 2880
Dr Jenny Underwood (Second Supervisor): Email: jenny.underwood@rmit.edu.au Tel: 9925 59247

Dear .............,

You are invited to participate in a research project being conducted by RMIT University. Please read this sheet carefully and be confident that you understand its contents before deciding whether to participate. If you have any questions about the project, please ask one of the investigators.

Who is involved in this research project? Why is it being conducted?

Ritual, Place and Practice: A Collaborative Project with a Seasonal Framework which Patricia Brien is conducting and participating in as part of a student research project for a Masters of Arts Degree. The Senior Supervisor is Professor Lyndal Jones and the Second Supervisor is Dr Jenny Underwood. This project has been approved by the RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee and has been peer reviewed by the RMIT Fashion & Textiles Department during the 2011 Graduate Research Conference procedures.

Why have you been approached?

You have been invited to participate in this project because your work is related to the area of textiles and/or fashion and your design or artistic philosophy is influenced by concerns of sustainability.
What is the project about? What are the questions being addressed?

Place, Ritual and Practice: A Collaborative Project with a Seasonal Framework examines whether we can embed meaning and intrinsic values into fashion artefacts through group ritual performance, place-sensitivity in practice and the use of alternative materials like hemp.

It is based upon group participation and individual making processes using ritual and place-sensitivity to heighten awareness of the natural cycle in a specific ecological nature place around a 15km radius of Melbourne City.

If I agree to participate, what will I be required to do?

Participants will be given an amount of hemp which they will work with over a period of one season – in this case spring (from the spring equinox 23 Sept to the summer solstice 21 Dec 2012). They will create an artefact to be displayed in an exhibition. Participants will choose a nature place in Melbourne to follow and be guided by during the course of the season. They will create an object that is not only based upon hemp but also upon their experience of ‘place’ and their emotional experience of said place – the object that they make is potentially the physical embodiment of this creative journey and process, or it may be otherwise.

During the season, all co-creators will visit the nature place of each other (likely to be every two weeks) and during this visit the ‘host’ will create and choreograph a ritual which relates to place, practice, and story. This ritual will be used as an inspiration point and group bonding tool. Everyone’s ritual will be unique.

Documentation:

i. Together with their artefact, each participant is asked to document their creative journey both visually and written. The media is freely chosen and information will be part of an exhibition and the images for use in my research outcomes.

ii. All rituals will be filmed to be used as part of a ‘backdrop’ to the project exhibition.

iii. All participants will be interviewed (audio recording) before and after the project. Information gathered will not become part of the exhibition but will be used as part of my research. Interview answers will be incorporated into my exegesis and any related conference papers or presentations but the information and identity will remain as “one member of the group” pseudonym.
What are the possible risks or disadvantages?

There are no perceived risks outside your normal day-to-day activities if you agree to participate in this project.

What are the benefits associated with participation?

The main benefit of participating in this project will include a group exhibition. Apart from that, participation in this study will add to the literature on place sensitivity, ritual performance and material diversity in relation to sustainable design and artistic practice. Participants will be contacted after the Masters has been accepted and offered a digital copy of the exegesis for their reference, along with a plain language summary.

What will happen to the information I provide?

The documentation of the project relating to the making of the respective individual artefacts will be in the public domain together with the identity of the participant within the context of the collaborative group structure.

The information that is provided by way of interview is intended to inform the research and therefore information garnered from the interviews will be included in the exegesis and disseminated through papers, presentations or conferences, with the specific identities remaining “a group member” (pseudonym) rather than connecting the identity with quotes taken in the two interviews.

The research data will be kept securely at RMIT for 5 years after publication, before being destroyed.

While we assume that by agreeing to participate in the project you are giving consent to the artefacts and documentation and your identity being in the public, there are images and film footage that will be in the public domain too and therefore we will need your consent to that.

What are my rights as a participant?

- The right to withdraw from participation at any time
- The right to request that any recording cease
- The right to have any unprocessed data withdrawn and destroyed, provided it can be reliably identified, and provided that so doing does not increase the risk for the participant.
- The right to have any questions answered at any time.
Whom should I contact if I have any questions?

Contact the researcher Patricia Brien either by email patricia.brien@rmit.edu.au or Senior Supervisor: Lyndal Jones: lyndal.jones@rmit.edu.au

What other issues should I be aware of before deciding whether to participate?

The copyright of the artefacts and the documentation of the artistic process remains your own. However, images and information can be used by researcher Patricia Brien in the course of her academic activities surrounding this project.

Patricia Brien
BA (UNSW), MA (UNSW)

Professor Lyndal Jones

Dr Jenny Underwood
BA (Textile Design) (RMIT), BPD (Hons) (U. Melbourne), PhD (RMIT)