

# The Memory of Clothes

Robyn Gibson (Ed.)



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## **The Memory of Clothes**



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*Edited by*

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For my mother, Mabs



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<sup>1</sup> Before embarking on reading this book, I strongly suggest that you read the biographies of the contributors. In many instances, these give you unexpected insights into the writer, their world and their sense of style.



## INTRODUCTION

Why are these clothes so etched upon my imagination, as if history can be pierced together by a patchwork of this stuff? ... maybe history is not a jumble, but a kind of loom, shuttling through the warp and the weft, weaving together a whole. (Picardie, 2005, p. 15)

As a young child, I fell in love with clothes. To me, there was an artistry in taking a bolt of two-dimensional fabric and through a process of cutting, draping and stitching create a three-dimensional garment that enhanced the female form. In deciding on doctoral studies many years later, this fascination with fashion<sup>1</sup> seemed the most logical course of action. Others within the academy did not share my passion.

It seems that dress is trivial, ephemeral and unworthy of scholarly investigation. As Lehmann (1996) has argued:

To write about fashion, to discuss its impact and importance, always means to transform the fleeting and transitory into the statuary and permanent. Fashion as a topic (as research) remains embroiled and disputed because of its alleged lack of substance. (p. 12)

While male fashion, at least in terms of mainstream trends, has become rigidly uniform, female dress has undergone chronic fluctuations in style. This penchant for change has been interpreted as either evidence of women's inherent frivolity and flightiness; or, of their subjection and oppression (Wilson, 1990). Without losing its obsession with the new and the different, with change and exclusivity, I would argue that dress has become a form of popular aesthetics. Almost every fashion writer, whether journalist or art historian, insists anew on the importance of fashion. However typical responses from outside the discipline border on cynicism, ambivalence or irony (Gibson, 2001).

The true significance of clothes as vessels of social history was probably most aptly articulated more than a century ago by Anatole France, a librarian, a novelist and Noble Prize winner when he recorded the following:

If I were able to choose one book from among the many that will be published during the 100 years after my death, do you know which one I would choose? No, I would not select a novel from this library of the future, nor a history book ... No, my friend, I would select a fashion magazine to see how women will dress a century after my demise. And those bits of fabric will tell me more about the future of humanity than all the philosophers, novelists, commentators, scientists, and scholars. (Anatole France, 1844-1924)

Here France is affirming that clothes are social barometers. Like cultural statements, they interpret and reflect the milieu of their times. But they also serve as windows into family histories. In *My mother's wedding dress*, fashion journalist Justine Picardie (2005) details how the narrative of our clothes is inextricably

## INTRODUCTION

linked to the story of our lives. Her witty vignettes are pierced together to form a family tapestry in which ideas and memories are told through the medium of clothes from her mother's black mohair wedding dress to the treasured black Gap jacket belonging to her dead sister.

Counter to the argument that dress is lacking in substance, the crowds that are drawn to large scale fashion exhibitions staged with increasing frequency in galleries and museums around the world offer glimpses into the meaning that we attach to these items of clothing. Often dress is collected and exhibited by an art gallery in order to give the general public an appreciation of the designer's creative talent and inspire ways for the viewer to understand the garment's fabrication, innovation and visual appeal (Healy, 1996). We are, in fact, drawn to them as "things of beauty we want to gaze at or touch, as objects we covet or desire, something we want to have, to own, to feel" (Weber, 2012, p. 242). While art may appear much more cloistered, more removed from people's lives, fashion is clearly "in the midst of things" (Calefto, 1997); very much a part of our everyday lives.

Once hanging static in a wardrobe or folded away in a trunk, in recent times clothes have found themselves thrown into the spotlight. How can we forget Miranda Priestly's (Meryl Streep) biting explanation of cerulean to a fashionably naïve Andrea Sachs (Anne Hathaway) in the *Devil wears Prada* (2006)? Or the artistic integrity of *Vogue's* creative director, Grace Coddington in the *September issue* (2009)?

Clothes have, in fact, become an autobiographical tool with which to explore important themes and issues in an author's life. Ilene Beckerman in *Love, loss and what I wore* (2005), the book behind the Off-Broadway show tells the story of Beckerman's life through the clothes she wore and in doing so reveals that our memories are often stitched into the seams of our favourite dresses. Likewise Erin McKean in *The secret lives of dresses* (2011) interweaves a tale of vintage dresses that have their own 'secret lives' written a piece of paper and stashed into their pockets. While in *Dreaming of Dior* (2009), Charlotte Smith shares her godmother, Doris Darnelle's vintage clothing collection and a lifetime of memories. "Tiny snapshots of our joys and disappointments, our entrances and exits, triumphant and tragic." Recently Lorelei Vashti in *Dress, Memory* (2014) wrote about a decade of dresses she has owned, worn and loved. In musing on her collection, she writes "memory, like a lighthouse, shines the most vivid moments back to us, over and over, and these stories become the myths we stitch together" (p. 11). Weber and Mitchell (2004) have labelled these sorts of narratives 'dress stories.'

... whether or not they are 'true' in their details, whether or not they really happened (or happened the way they are remembered), bear traces of our past experience and provide insights into how we perceive and make sense of our lives. Dress stories reveal much more than we may realise about who and how we are in the world and what sort of culture we are living in. (p. 4)

Apart from their aesthetic value, clothes have the ability to evoke issues of identity, of the relation of self to body and self to the world (Gibson, 2001). We are able to find ourselves through the experience of delving into our wardrobes and

## INTRODUCTION

remembering. Clothes are thus layered with meaning since they have the power to act as memory prompts. Woven into their fabric are traces of past experiences. Stitched into their seams are links to people we have loved and lost. How appropriate that in the technical language of sewing, wrinkles are termed ‘memory’? (Stallybrass, 1999).

There is however the unreliability of memories as in order to draw on them we return to the past which is often an amalgam of both fact and fiction. According to Barone (2001):

... memory, that easily maligned process, nevertheless plays a vital role in binding together a selfhood. Memory, however fragile and untrustworthy turns out to be ‘self-serving’ in more than its tendency to skew reality according to a particular set of interests. It also serves the self in its construction. Memory is the glue that holds meaning together, that allows a life story to be fashioned and related. (p. 165)

Wieder (1998) warns us against trusting in our memories suggesting that we ask ourselves three fundamental questions: How do people select their memories? What cultural processes do they follow? What happens to experience on the way to becoming memory? While it is not within the scope of this introduction to delve into the psychology of memories, I do believe that there is an apparent link between clothing and memory. I have witnessed it firsthand as have the others who have contributed their ‘memories of dress’ to this book.

Clothes have the capacity to conjure up intimate memories. We may not remember the specific details of our first day at school, first date or first wedding but we are very likely to remember the clothes we wore. Garments become autobiographical narratives “rooted in sensory and emotional associations” (Weber & Mitchell, 2004, p. 257) and because of this, we save these threads of the past in order to keep our memories alive.

## NOTE

- <sup>i</sup> Fashion, dress and clothes are used interchangeably within this chapter. Although I am acutely aware that costume historians favour ‘dress’ since the term ‘fashion’ often includes clothes, accessories, trends and the fashion industry itself.

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## THIS BOOK ...

A wide range of genres is represented in this collection making it quite distinct from other texts about memory and dress. As we each have different memories of clothing, we also have diverse methods of telling and sharing these stories. I have however attempted to group these narratives under descriptive titles and placed the authors in alphabetical order for convenience.

In *A Mother's Love*, Victoria Campbell offers a poetic tale of her mother's untimely passing as seen through the weave of a red pashmina; through her poems, Deborah Fraser muses on the ways that her mother and grandmother have shaped her own aesthetic. I, (Robyn Gibson) share the reasoning behind this book as I enter my Mother's wardrobe and extract its many memories while Laurene Vaughan details the possibility of making which has become a tradition in her family.

*The Generation Gap* offers insights into family histories intertwined with articles of dress and adornment. In her photographic and poetic piece, Alexandra Cutcher reveals the role of clothes, style and grooming to four generations of women in her family while Tony Fleming documents his Grandfather's boots which still remain in Antarctica. Marianne Hulsbosch creates a textile artwork titled 'Dad' and Lea Mai presents her Italian grandfather's aviator cap as part of her 'Museum of Us.'

In *Creatures, Great and Small*, Josephine Fleming provides a tongue-in-cheek research report about clothing moths eating her items of beauty. Linda Hodson, on the other hand, documents a trek through the Himalayas and the making of horse blankets along the route.

Like pieces of apparel cherished over time, songs often conjure up memories of people, places and past events. *Songlines* includes Robyn Ewing's memory of two identical, blue velvet dresses made by her mother for her middle sister and herself. I could not resist combing through popular songs, looking for clothing references and weaving these together to create a 'fashionable' poem.

Quite unintentionally, *Men in Suits and Dresses* contains entries predominantly from men. Paul Dufficy shares four snapshots about growing into his own skin through clothes. I include an interlude about the history of men's suits woven around five vignettes. As a comedian, Marty Murphy finds 'suitable material' in wearing his uncle's three-piece suit on stage. David Smith provides us with a gendered fashion story about kaftans.

In *Dressing Up*, I delve into my PhD thesis to retrieve 'false memories' of Salvador Dali's obsession with fashion. It also includes a reader's theatre about Mardi Gras costumes told by three longtime friends, John Hughes, Murray Picknett and Warrick Hart. Llian Merritt recalls her elder sister's dance dresses and the envy they created.

In *Brothers and Sisters; Sons and Daughters*, we find Nicole Bruncker's poem about moving on and ridding her household of her only son's baby clothes. This is

IN THIS BOOK ...

in contrast to Val Horridge's humorous tale of the misadventures that befall family members and their clothing at her sister's wedding.

As our clothes are *Loved, Lost or Stolen*, the next collection is a *bricolage* of memories. Joshua Barnes tracks down the original owner of his beloved white safari suit. As a disability advocate, Christine Bruno shares an excerpt from the play 'Screw You, Jimmy Choo!' and offers a candid explanation as to what it's all about. Jacqueline Molloy writes about the creation of a quilt made from stolen pieces of fabric. A truth is told by Robbie Monkhouse – sometimes we do steal for love! As Elizabeth Wilson<sup>i</sup> (2003) stated: “garments, once they have been worn, take on a residue; they become associated with ... the person who wore them.” Ian Were explores this theme of scent and sweat in his narrative about events taking place in Adelaide, South Australia.

The final collection of memories revolve around change. Just as fashion has a penchant for change so our lives are like *Changing Rooms*. As a world renown sociologist, Raewyn Connell knows a lot about people. In her revealing story, she talks about re-learning clothes as a transsexual woman. Nell Greenwood on the other hand takes us on a 20 year journey that began with a purple jumpsuit. It is somewhat fitting that this book ends with Brooke Roberts' story of changing CT and MRI brain scans into objects of beauty given that this is the site where our memories are born.

So, these are our memory of clothes and it has been my privilege to gather them together in this collection.

#### NOTE

<sup>i</sup> Elizabeth Wilson, Keynote address at *Fashion: Making an Appearance*. University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia, July 2003.

## **A MOTHER'S LOVE**

VICTORIA CAMPBELL

## THE RED PASHMINA

On my mother's final evening on earth she had curled up in bed with a book – *Meditations: By Marcus Aurelius* (Forstater, 2000). I know this because the book lay open on her bedside table the morning we found her dead. During the night my mother's heart, which had charged every room she entered with warmth, had stopped. It was not a heart attack; rather her heart simply paused, never to beat again. After 65 years of rhythmically, dutifully pumping blood through her arteries, her quota of beats was now at an end. A blue silk ribbon marked the last words her eyes rested upon. *God sees the inner spirit stripped of flesh, skin and all debris ... you are not the body that encloses you ...* (p. 151). Eerily prophetic, these words quietly haunt me to this day.

It's not surprising that my mother's last earthly images were a collection of words in a book. She was a voracious reader. A love I also developed because of her. Our shared reading began when I was a child. Her gentle voice nightly breathed life into the words held within volumes of fairy tales. The last book I gave my mother was *Sepia* by Isabelle Allende (2001). The first book my mother gave me, as a teenager, was *The Grass is Singing* by Doris Lessing (1973). Lessing's book was a new development in our shared reading, and set my literary compass toward women writers from that moment onwards. At that time my mother, a newly minted single parent, had found her 'feminist voice.' It was the late 70s and in the West patriarchal ways were being fiercely challenged. Books by other female novelists from that era started appearing on our shelves – Margaret Attwood, Erica Jong and Fay Weldon. In retrospect we were a house of quiet feminists. My youngest sibling, the only male in the family, felt lucky to have been brought up by what he called 'three raving harridans' – my mother, my sister and me. He says this affectionately, I hope.

Apart from *Aurelius*, lying next to my mother's lifeless body that morning was her amber necklace procured on a trip to Morocco; and her *red pashmina*, given to her by a girlfriend returning from Tibet.

When she was alive I attributed nothing significant to my mother's *red pashmina*. She wore it often – it was simply just another piece of her clothing. There were other items that held more sentimental value such as a bold, multi-coloured hand knitted cardigan that she used to teach primary colours to her grandchildren. Or the fur coat, which became a source of embarrassment during the animal slaughter campaigns in the eighties. But in the days after her death that *red pashmina* became significant in ways I could not image when she was alive.

## THE RED PASHIMA

I loved my mother deeply. I am not sure what happens after death, but I do know that those left behind are punctured with grief. Hers was not a slow death, but a sudden unexpected one. In relative terms she was young-ish. Grief combined with the shock of loss, left us so unprepared – it felled us. During this time her *red pashmina* saved me from what I was sure would kill me – death caused by inexplicable grief.

It wasn't merely the comfort of the silky softness of the wool next to my skin as I swaddled myself in it daily, nor was it the fact that it had belonged to her. It was the *smell*. Secreted away in the microscopic pockets of the warp and weft were traces of her perfume, her cooking, her garden, her books – smells from her life. But above all what lingered was *her* unique scent, a familiar milky sweet fragrance. All loved ones have a certain aroma. It presents itself every time you hug; the all-senses-engaged-embrace; the one that lets you know you're *home*. Allende (1998) describes one of her characters who in an attempt to never forget his mother would; ... *run to her side, hug her, cling to her clothing in a desperate attempt to retain her presence, her warmth, the smell of her apron, the sound of her voice* (p. 28). It is 10 years since my mother's heart pumped blood through her generous body. The grief is well and truly gone. As I look at the *red pashmina* now slung casually over the back of a chair I realise in a peculiar sort of way that it helped me wean myself from my mother for a second time. I also wonder what it would say about that period of time if it could magically speak? What story would it tell if it could write? What perceptions would it share with us if it had senses ...

## THE READER AND THE DAUGHTER

*Written by the Red Pashmina*

Three sets of women's hands have owned me. My *Yak-Butter Mother*, *The Reader*, and *The Daughter*. I have spent most of my life with *The Reader*. But her body no longer exists, therefore I serve no purpose to her anymore. I was born to serve – to adorn and to protect. But sadly I am not able to protect those I love from death. Death is curious to observe. I was there, beside her, on the night *The Reader* took her last breath. A peculiar peace settled in the room, an exquisite hush reminiscent of my early years in the Himalayan foothills. But that silence, evoking early memories, was not to last. Phone calls, ambulances, men in strange uniforms, and the children. Old and young children. *The Reader's* children, and her grandchildren. Hugging her lifeless body. Some sobbing, some not. All in shock. That was the day I went to live with *The Daughter*.

Perhaps my *Yak-Butter Mother* is dead too. I remember her, the one who gave me life – her dark bamboo like hands massaging my thready inner being into life on the clickity clack loom. Yak butter singe in the air, children laughing, somebody singing. Vague memories now. As for *The Daughter*, I am certain to outlive her. I am made of strong stuff.

The day I went to live with *The Daughter*, it was 36 degrees outside, hot and humid. Regardless of the heat *The Daughter* wrapped herself in me. Desperate

VICTORIA CAMPBELL

sobbing. Fierce enfolding and unfolding. Saturation from tears and sweat. I was repulsed. *Stop!* I wanted yell. I, who had always been worn with stylish grace by *The Reader*, had now succumbed to the wrenching and drenching of *The Daughter*.

I grieved for *The Reader* too! I had loved her for fourteen years. Her presence pulsated inside me. I had sucked at her life, hiding bits of her essence throughout my weave. Layered her laughter into my warp, secreted her scent snug-tight in my weft. I became greedy to be worn by *The Reader*; I couldn't get enough of her. I wanted to be stuffed full with *The Reader's* essence, to be her ambassador in the world. But now the horror of living with *The Daughter* engulfed me. I wished for legs to sprout, so I could run away.

I don't know what came over me, but after a few hours of more tugging and wailing from *The Daughter*, I remembered what I had been born to do – to adorn and protect. The strain of resisting *The Daughter* was tiring, so I relaxed. I loosened my weave a little, ever so slightly to reveal a scent. *The Daughter* calmed and became still. I opened my memory-laden pores a little more. A smile teetered at the corner of *The Daughter's* mouth. I relaxed further allowing more of *The Reader's* essence to float in the air. A ray crept across *The Daughter's* face, no teeth to speak of, but a smile none the less. Then, holding me close to her cheek, she whispered the word *Mum*.

I know now that I adopted the role of surrogate mother in those first few months after *The Reader's* death. *The Daughter* wore me often, mostly at home by herself. Every time I enshrouded her, I released more of my greedily stored away memories of her mother. They were random – roast potatoes, beach, gardenias, etc. you get the picture. Gradually there were fewer tears and the smiles more frequent. There were several occasions when I was worn out of the home. Once I was used as a tablecloth. At another time I wiped the tears of one of *The Daughter's* friends, who also blew her nose on me. One day I was used as a picnic rug on sodden dirt. *The Daughter* refused to wash me. Even though by now *The Reader's* essence had mostly dissipated. My deep crimson blush was turning grey, my silky texture becoming crisp. I started to reek like a sewer. I was embarrassed to be seen out of the house. Then about six months after *The Reader's* death, *The Daughter* made a sound I had never heard her make before. A velvety rush of air flew out of her mouth and filled the room. *The Daughter* laughed, a laugh just like her mother's. Shortly afterwards I was washed.

There are still a few traces of *The Reader* secreted in my folds, released for my private pleasure only. But now, intertwined deep in my weave are the ripples from *The Daughter's* life. Folded and tucked away until needed. I am the keeper of quiet moments in a life of those I adorn and protect. For those who have worn me, and those who are yet to wear me, I am a silky labyrinth of familial essence. But to you, if you see me on the street – adorning and protecting – I will simply be a *red pashmina*.

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DEBORAH FRASER

## THE LIONESSE, THE WITCH, AND THE WARDROBE

### INTRODUCTION

The aesthetic as a way of knowing is not always valued yet it shapes us (Eisner, 2004, 2002; Gendler, 1988; Lovecky, 1990; McCrary-Sullivan, 2000, 2005; Osna Heller, 2010; Parkyn, 1995). This article is in some ways an exercise in ‘poetry’ therapy as I reflect on the inextricable ways the women of my family and their aesthetic have shaped me. This is far deeper than a mere interest in fashion; the ways in which my mother and grandmothers dressed and the ways they related to clothes permeated my consciousness. Clothes are literally the threads that bind us, as women, as mothers, as daughters, and as lovers of clothes.

In addition to clothes, the visceral memories of my female lineage include scent, hair, jewellery, make-up and accessories which were vivid sensory impressions with magical qualities. It is through my mother’s and grandmothers’ wardrobes that I inhaled the accoutrements of femininity; the alchemy of colour contrasts; the textural nuance of fabric; and the wondrous transformation of dressing up and dressing down.

I hope that readers of these poems see some glimmer of these women brought to life on the page. McCrary-Sullivan (2005) argued that “the poems we read can take us across boundaries, give us vicarious experience, render the abstract concrete, take us under the skin of the other, generate empathy” (p. 29). These poems convey the influences learnt at the hemline of my mother and grandmothers. Like values and attitudes, the gift of style is caught, not taught; caught in the cuff of a velvet dress, or the gleam of a brooch, or the startling sparkle of purple sandals. In essence, these poems explore the multiple selves that a wardrobe offers, from lioness to witch.

#### *Frock Habits*

My mother’s mother  
Had a strange habit  
Of wearing black to weddings  
And she’s not Italian

And a habit  
Of not  
Wearing a bra

And a love of frocks

*R. Gibson (Ed.), The Memory of Clothes, 7–15.  
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THE LIONESS, THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE

A shock of frocks  
Frocks for all occasions

The house frock  
The garden frock  
The take-the-smoko to the shearers  
Frock

Bent double  
Between the endless rows  
Of vegetables  
She gleaned her harvest  
In the garden frock

While  
Her garden pansies  
Dahlias  
And violets  
Grew in glee  
Around the house

And her tireless house frock  
Dealt with jam-making  
Scone-baking  
Clothes-mending  
Fruit-bottling  
House-scrubbing

Shelling peas  
With wicked chortle,  
The bowl nested in her lap  
Narrow ankles crossed.

*Blind Faith*

Her husband  
Her second husband  
Built their home  
With his farmer's  
Capable hands

Including a magical wardrobe  
With its entry in their bedroom  
And its exit in the spare room

DEBORAH FRASER

A veritable jungle  
A Raiders of the Lost Ark  
Tunnel of garments

Sleeves that grasped and groped  
Unpredictable shoe hazards  
And still darkness  
At the centre.

Airless, musty  
That mixture of perfume and dust and death  
The bodies hung limp  
The end relying on  
blind faith.

*A Reason to Dress Up*

My father's mother  
Wore tortoiseshell combs  
Gleaming brooches  
Warm stoles  
Embroidered blouses  
And matching cloche hats.

Photos of her  
In some windswept  
Arid field  
Show her smiling with her sister  
Dressed for high tea  
On the low tussock.

Reasons to dress up  
Were scant  
In those remote  
Rural soils,  
Yet there is proof  
That fashion  
Thrust from the ground.

*No Money but Plenty of Style*

Not many could wear  
An all-in-one  
Purple pantsuit  
Those large

THE LIONESS, THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE

Purple quadrangles  
A walking geometry  
Of cloth

At little over five foot  
You'd think she'd avoid  
Such bold statements  
Such a barrage  
Of shape and colour,  
colour and shape

But with her hair swept up  
And that sparkle  
Of purple sandals  
She sailed  
Like a tall ship  
Proudly flying –

No money  
But plenty of style.

*At the Machine*

There was plenty  
Of muttering  
At the machine  
As mum cut  
And sewed  
And grumbled

Turning out  
Pantsuits  
And floral dresses  
In blues and greens and browns  
Pinning garments  
Inside-out  
While I yelped and winced  
Learning about  
Pain  
And fashion  
And their strange  
Relationship

Watching her make magic  
Out of cloth and thread

DEBORAH FRASER

Making two dimensions  
Three.

Creating me over and over again  
As she did  
In the beginning,  
From the inside-out  
And the outside-in.

*Caught in the Cuff*

Green velvet at night  
Daughter's delight  
Purple at cuff  
And V-neck ruff  
Such is the style  
Capped with a smile  
Sporting a wig  
And sherry to swig  
Fabric so soft  
Dreams held aloft  
Mother so fine  
Captured in time.

*Cigarettes*

When cigarettes were fashionable  
My mother and her mother  
Both  
Sported cigarettes  
Like a fashion accessory

Roll your owns  
And trails of ash  
Encircled my grandmother

While my mother  
Tried telescope holders  
At one stage  
Holding the nicotine  
Like a spear

Armed with a cigarette  
They both seemed bolder  
And stronger

THE LIONESSE, THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE

And ready to take on  
Those crouching  
In corners.

*I See You*

I see you  
Those elegant bright nails  
Counting money, lugging wood  
Hoping you can make the mortgage this week  
And that the bank will understand

I see you  
Letting that man  
Hold your hand  
For a discount on the kerosene  
Paying with pride, your head down

I see you  
Putting on that lipstick  
While other women  
Clutched their husbands close  
And warned their daughters not to visit

I see you with  
That Cleopatra flick  
Those wigs and gold filling  
Beaming at the world  
As you bounced past in that turquoise mini

I see you  
Lost in a book  
Safely wrapped in a chair  
Living a life unlimited  
Denied beyond a small town house

I see you  
Bringing clothes to life  
Effortlessly  
In ways that others  
Could only admire and darkly glare

I see you  
Cast as the tragic heroine  
In plays and in life

DEBORAH FRASER

A warrior princess  
A femme fatale (doomed of course)

I see you  
Lying in the garden  
And the black sand beach  
Sunglasses and bikini  
On the edges of it all, letting the sea stroke your toes

And later – I see you  
In intensive care  
Hallucinating  
And dealing with white on white  
Groping for that tissue lost on the bed

I see you  
Shrunk into yourself  
Your head too large  
Your feet too small  
Staggering from bed to chair and back

I see you  
Sorting your clothes  
Taking out the mediums and large  
Stocking up with  
Skinny jeans, tiny tops and extra-smalls

I see you  
Bright-eyed still  
Lost in a book again  
And the world it offers  
Beyond the past and future both.

*Everlasting Love*

Before I loved men,  
I loved  
clothes.

When I finish loving men  
I'll still love  
clothes.

They are the weather  
An inescapable part

THE LIONESSE, THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE

Of my life

The focal feature  
Of every  
Single  
Style-infected day.

When down  
I don tangerine  
Shot through with aubergine

When playful  
Lemon vies with lime  
From neck to toe

When aiming  
For profound  
Turquoise takes a twirl with taupe

And all is  
As it  
Should be.

CONCLUSION

Poetry, like science, helps us to observe or recall things intensely. It helps us to make the ordinary, extraordinary. Poems are more expressive than analytic, yet like the shearing of cloth, they cut to the heart of the matter, with depth of feeling. Moreover, they promote empathetic understanding as they enable us to get under the skin of another. Inevitably, the highly personal nature of the poetry above is therapeutic; an excavation of the female family ties that informed and shaped me in ways both subtle and blunt. Writing such poems offers insight and healing, a process which has been acknowledged for centuries. For instance, Soranus, a Roman physician in the first century A.D. believed in the healing power of the aesthetic, prescribing tragedy for his manic patients and comedy for his depressed ones. Interestingly, Apollo the God of medicine is also the God of poetry, underlining the ancient connection between the aesthetic and health (A brief overview of poetry therapy, n.d.).

These poems offer a chance to honour the women, the clothes and the memories that bind, that enfold, that wrap, and cover me. They stitch us together across the generations from seam to seam. Some garments are left unfinished. The wardrobe drawn from here, like memory, is selective. But these are the clothing stories that insisted on being told.



DEBORAH FRASER

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ROBYN GIBSON

## INTO MY MOTHER'S WARDROBE

My Mother died quite unexpectedly. She had a fall doing something that someone her age shouldn't have been doing. But that was my Mum – never one for doing the expected. That said, I should have been thankful? She didn't suffer a long, debilitating illness. She wasn't extracted from her home like some rotting vegetable to be deposited in a nursing home full of strangers. I should have been thankful but I wasn't! The day that my Mother passed away I felt that happiness had found a tiny hole in my heart and simply slipped through. A shroud of sadness descended on me and I found it impossible to imagine ever smiling again.

I left the train and wandered outside to stand and wait. I blinked into the bright Queensland sun that on any other day would have signalled a trip home to see Mum. I don't know how long I remained on the footpath, heat rising through the asphalt up into the soles of my feet before I saw my father's car reach the top of the hill and begin its descent towards the train station below. He pulled up to the curb probably a little too far away and waited for me to throw my bag into the back and join him in the front seat. Tentatively I asked "How's Mum?" "She's gone," he murmured. I fought back tears and stared out the window, counting the pelicans sitting atop the streetlights that fanned the Sandgate Bridge. I looked further at the ugly mangroves that signalled the mouth of the estuary where Dad sometimes fished when he first retired here. The smell of salt air filled my nostrils but I wasn't coming home this time.

When we pulled into the driveway for a moment I thought I caught a glimpse of Mum standing on the front porch tea-towel in hand but it wasn't my Mother, it was my Auntie Jean. She approached me with arms outstretched and as they folded around me I broke into uncontrollable sobs. Even now, I find it hard to describe the ache that presses on your heart when you realise that someone precious is no longer there. Between the heaving sobs, I croaked into my aunt's bosom "I want my Mum. I want Mum."

In my father's typical stoic manner, he didn't show any grief, outwardly anyway. Perhaps it was his generation or the fact that he had spent his entire adult life in the military, I don't know. I'm not saying that he didn't care but he didn't know how to show his feelings. I held my Dad's hand once and that was at my Mother's funeral. That was just how he was.

Mothers and daughters? It's a bond that binds forever and no more so than when you become a mother yourself and realise the hell that you put your own mother through. As an only child, my relationship with my Mother had ridden a roller-coaster of emotion especially during my rebellious teenage years when I had said

and done things that I now deeply regret. But she had forgiven me and over the years, we had grown closer; more accepting of each other's annoying habits and keen time to spend time together rather than apart.

They say there is a universal pattern of grieving (Kubler-Ross, 1997) when we lose someone we love. I suppose my denial stage was one of disbelief. How many mornings did I wake and within those first few minutes of consciousness think "Oh my God. What a horrible dream. I dreamt that Mum was dead" only to realise that it wasn't fantasy, it was reality. So, I would force myself back to sleep believing that I would wake to a different ending. Like many, my grief gave way to anger. She had been taken too early. Yes, she was 82 but she had an insatiable zest for life, for people and conversation. I had often joked that my Mother would 'talk to a dead frog on a log.' She was not the person you wanted to be seated next to on a long flight IF you anticipated catching up on some much-needed sleep and watching a movie or two.

You see she still managed to attend exercise classes twice a week, help with the hospital auxiliary delivering cups of tea and biscuits to patients and until quite recently, riding her bicycle to visit her many friends. Dad on the other hand was not a social person. He enjoyed (not sure if that is the right word) his own company and a few beers in the evening much to my Mother's annoyance. Mum said that he was a deep thinker but what he actually thought about I never knew. When my Mother died, my father closed down even further and so it was left to me to make 'the arrangements.' Organising a funeral is never an easy task but I was working from ground-zero. I had been to one funeral previously and that had been a joyous occasion. Darcy had been 96 and had lived a long, happy life. The guests at his funeral were keen to share their many stories over cucumber sandwiches and cups of tea.

It was unspoken but a clear expectation was that I would organise things. And it seemed that closure for my Father meant getting rid of my Mother's clothes. But I was emotionally and physically exhausted from attending to the minutiae of death so I excused myself explaining that I would do so on my next visit home. Living more than 10 hours away, I would phone my father weekly and visit every few months. With each visit north, the strained conversation would inevitably end with "when are you going to do something about your Mother's clothes?"

Now, Mum had been a seamstress at *New Age Creations* making foundation garments before getting married in the fifties. Throughout my childhood and teenage years, to save money, she had made my clothes. I can vividly recall a one-piece pantsuit in a swirling pattern of orange, brown and white with cut-out sides and a gold buckle adorning my stomach. I was the trendiest girl at that party or so I thought! Being a lover of clothes but without much money, early on my Mother had discovered the joys of rummaging through second-hand clothing stores exiting with a stylish summer frock or flattering blouse. Such items filled her wardrobe to overflowing but the thought of discarding these 'treasures' filled me with dread. It seemed somewhat sacrilegious, in some way devaluing something that had brought her such pleasure. Yet it seemed to be an act that my father needed to happen so

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late one afternoon (probably after a glass or two of red wine) I resigned myself to the inevitable. I would open my Mother's wardrobe!

I had from the onset believed that this would be confronting. How could I possibly discard my Mother's favourite clothes? But as I began the process, this unravelling of threads, something quite cathartic happened. As my hand tentatively travelled along the line of clothes, it would settle on one. Was I attracted to the colour, the texture of the fabric or was there something or someone wishing me to select that one? I don't know but as I pulled out a mushroom pink dress in silk chiffon, I was overcome with emotion. This was the very dress that Mum had worn to my wedding many, many years ago. I remembered how elegant she had looked with her string of pearls and matching shoes. Had she worn it since? I don't know but she had kept it perhaps as a keepsake of a happier time in my life.

Not every item in my Mother's wardrobe was beautiful by any means. Many were functional pieces of clothing that served a specific purpose in her life. I looked at a straight blue shift with a zipper down the front and a large pocket on each hip. This was her hospital auxiliary uniform but as I examined the badges on its collar, I recalled how she had worn it. To 'dress up' a non-descript frock, she would add a bright red, hand-knitted cardigan and matching red shoes. I'm sure the other ladies envied her sense of style. I looked at the row of trousers and realised that they had steadily increased in size over the years. Why had she kept them? Perhaps the thought that her exercise classes would eventually whittle those extra kilos off her growing bottom?

So the process continued. And as I pulled out pieces of clothing, I also extracted cherished memories of my Mother. A silk blouse with a riotous floral pattern in purples and greens caught my eye. I had bought it as a birthday gift but its label was still intact. Clearly it had not been to her liking but still she kept it rather than give it away. I wondered why given the lack of space in her closet.

Then something struck me. Amongst all the garments that hung in my Mother's wardrobe I could not, for the life of me find anything black. For all her stylist ways, my Mother had never embraced black as chic. Like Arum lilies, she associated it with funerals, death and periods of mourning. Akin to Scarlet O'Hara, she would rather make an outfit from the drapes hanging in the lounge-room than adhere to black as a fashionable colour. And so I spent the afternoon playing in my Mother's closet – laughing at her choices, conversing with her dresses, folding and unfolding each individual garment but most of all remembering a lovely lady who loved clothes.

Like Vanessa Williams (1992) I tend to 'save the best for last.' So I sat on her bed in the late afternoon in order to fully appreciate that last item hanging in my Mother's wardrobe. I had glimpsed at it over the years. Perhaps as I teenager, I had tried it on. I can't recall. She had kept it despite all the moves we made – from Sale to Townsville and back again but her wedding dress always came with us. It wasn't white and it wasn't long nor was it lacy or frilly. My Mother had married at the age of thirty-five and felt no need to dress as a fairytale princess instead she had selected an ice blue cocktail length gown 'created' by Helena Kaye, a very



*Figure 1. Mabel's wedding day, April 1957.*

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exclusive label in Brisbane during the 1950s. It was worn with a little hat and matching veil – long since lost and a pair of white high-heeled shoes with a peep toe and *guipure* trim.<sup>i</sup> According to my Auntie Jean:

Granny and I helped her choose it ... I remember that she tried on a pink tulle number that Gran thought was lovely but really not for Mabs so we side-stepped that one. Her choice was very elegant and not at all fussy.

The bodice is tiny and I realised how slender my Mother had been on her wedding day. Like small child's tears, cream coloured pearls adorn its collar although now a few are missing. Its skirt is full and gathered and nipped into the narrowest of waists. The silk *faille*<sup>ii</sup> is surprisingly heavy. How many metres of silk fabric were purchased? I have no idea but I'm sure that she felt light and beautiful when she wore it. So I took it. It would become part of my wardrobe and hang beside my own wedding dress.

And so, I loaded my Mother's clothes into the back seat of my Father's car and drove to her favourite second-hand clothing store. The woman working that day seemed delighted that I was making such a sizable donation. As I was about to leave, she whispered "Don't worry love. They'll find a good home." Did I ever return? No, my Mother had loved those clothes and I felt my heart would break if I saw them waiting/hoping for someone else to love them.

### *Epilogue*

Sometimes late at night as I am drifting off to sleep, I hear soft murmurings emanating from my wardrobe. If, I listen very carefully I can hear two special dresses sharing secrets, their tales of love and loss and perhaps waiting ever so patiently for the next generation of women in my family to cherish them as I have done. You see clothes are so much more than material objects to cover our bodies. Woven into their very fabric are histories and associations that enrich our lives. And if we carefully unravel the threads, you discover memories that were otherwise lost.

### NOTES

<sup>i</sup> *Guipure* is also known as Venise lace.

<sup>ii</sup> Silk *faille* is a slightly glossy silk with strong defined, soft, wide ribs. Although heavy in weight, it maintains a shallow, graceful drape.

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LAURENE VAUGHAN

## A WARDROBE OF MAKING

As a child my mother's wardrobe was a site of familiarity and comfort – full of dresses and shirts on hangers often laid over with jackets and cardigans. Skirts and trousers were squeezed for space pinched between the clips of their hangers. All those colours, textures, smells and sensations pushed to one end of the robe as my father's clothes hung quietly, somberly at the other end.

A mother's wardrobe – a place to play, to hide, to dress-up; it is a site of wonder and mystery where cloth and skin meet. As both a collection of apparel items and a physical thing, the wardrobe is a domestic place of that holds, protects and conceals the space between the public and private self.

It was in my mother's wardrobe that my future fate lay, there with its mix of homemade and store bought clothes, that I learnt the power and possibility of making.

My mother was a tailor. She refined her craft during the war years, amidst the excitement of Melbourne's Flinders Lane. In the 1940s, the street was the centre of Melbourne's thriving Ragtrade – fabric stores, haberdasheries, millinery supplies, tailors and retailers were all there. But it was long before then she had learnt to sew, falling in love with the manipulation of cloth. From her earliest days she made her own clothes. As a teenage girl bedridden with rheumatic fever, her father modified her sewing machine enabling her to sit and turn the wheel that would push needle and thread through cloth passing time in a productive way from the confines of her bed. Her physical weakness was to be no encumbrance to her desire to make.

My mother was a maker through and through. Whether it was sewing, knitting, baking or makeshift costumes for some event or another, the site of her creativity was home. It was there with all of its domestic demands she made her home and the wardrobes of her children and herself. Making for her was a gendered activity – girls learnt to sew and cook, and boys to weld, dig and build. The boys were under the tutorage of my father, whereas my sister and I were her charges. And so it was that my fate to make was secured. Cloth or yarn, sewing, knitting, crochet – these were the materials that she saw as our intelligence. Long before I encountered any academic literature on the idea of multiple or diverse intelligence, I knew it from my mother.

My father's sister was a non-maker. For 40 years or more I heard my mother rebuke my aunt to her face or in absentia – *she's stupid! She can't make a thing!* A statement I heard so often, and it never eased, not even with old age or approaching dementia. If anything it got worse. As my mother's own hold on her sanity was

LAURENE VAUGHAN

getting as shaky as her hands, and her own ability to make had long passed, she held on to this, her ability to make was her identity and for a relatively humble woman a source of pride. Until her deathbed she was a maker, a tailor, a conjurer of cloth and thread.

At the age of two I had an accident. It was a foolhardy attempt at escape from the safety of the house to the wilds of a country backyard. I ran towards my father and brother who were busily pumping water from one tank to another. I didn't see the tubes that lay across the ground, I tripped and with that my right hand skimmed a belt driven pump and my thumb was severed and my hand has born the mark of my foolhardiness ever since. Following the period of shock and healing, mum's greatest fear was that I was now destined to be incapable to make.

*If you can't make things, people will think you're stupid.*

I remember her clearly making this statement over and over. She was worried that my destiny was to be classified as stupid, to be like my aunt – one who is unable to make which, ultimately was evidence of my intelligence; unconsciously she was equating intelligence with capability.

And so it was, that from my earliest days I was given a fine needle and thread to play with, threading buttons as I sat at the kitchen table whilst she cooked. Learning to manipulate a fine piece of steel on the end of my stump. Finding my own way to overcome the limitation of having no opposable thumb. I adapted processes, misused tools, persevered until I could do what I wanted to do. And it worked for I have been sewing ever since.

The making of clothes is a family tradition for my mother, my sister and me; a tradition of financial necessity and creativity in one. As a young child and through my teens I would head off on shopping trips with the two of them. We would go into stores try on clothes, and mum would look closely at shape and fabric, issues of fit and make. With it all stored in her head, we would then head to the fabric store and haberdashery to purchase the materials we needed before making our way home with mum in the lead, and items from the fitting room would manifest on the kitchen table. Almost the same as we saw in the store, but with a touch of difference, a mark that would make it our own.

My mother's wardrobe was all over our house. It extended from the built-in robe of my parent's bedroom to the kitchen table, and then back across the home to the wardrobe my sister and I shared. Ours was smaller than my parents, and appropriately was nestled right behind theirs in the room next door.



## **THE GENERATION GAP**

ALEXANDRA CUTCHER

## **MY FAVOURITE DRESS: FASHION AS HISTORICAL DOCUMENT, FAMILY LEGACY AND IMPRIMATUR**

Clothes, adornment, fashion and grooming are themes that have resonated through four generations of women in my family. Dresses have always been a big deal for us. Hailing from Europe, my grandmother and mother brought with them a sensibility and sense of style quite foreign to the Australian vernacular in the 1940s. My sister and I have continued the tradition; we have always liked to ‘dress,’ modelling this behaviour to my daughters.

At the age of 16, my grandmother was asked, ever so kindly, if she would please leave the family home. Her dramatic temperament was too much for her eight siblings. It was the 1920s and she found work in a fashion house in Budapest, learning the trade. Her instinctive talent, flair and intuitive creativity meant that she was a natural. She could cut, and her construction was impeccable. Later, in Germany after the war, she made bespoke gowns for the American officers’ wives.

It’s not surprising really, Hungarians are well known for their textiles: embroidery and embellishment are part of the cultural landscape. Fabrics, threads, colour and detail were the pride of every young Hungarian lady’s glory-box.

My mother learnt all of these skills too, almost by osmosis. After coming to Australia, my grandmother and my mother opened a dress shop, and together, continued to create elegant evening and daywear for the cocktail crowd. Later, after we were born, she (and our grandmother) thriftily made all of our clothes; we were the most glamorous children in Sunday School. Gorgeous, but somehow not quite right for the Australian milieu.

So at our mother’s knee, my sister and I learnt about cut and proportion and silhouette. We learnt about what was chic and what was not. We learnt about a striking neckline, a gorgeous back, exquisite movement. We learnt about cutting on the bias, draping, weighted fabrics and how they behaved on the body. We learned to look and we learned to choose; style was something you had, not something you could buy.

My daughters, unsurprisingly, have a love of fashion and its documentation. Inevitable really, given their genetics; it is a point of reference for us all. They will remember their great-grandmother, who was always impeccably turned out, even in her last years. What have left us are the clothes; gone but not forgotten, the memories remain.

The following piece is a poetic and visual response to the memory of four generations of women and their clothes, for whom they have meant so much.

ALEXANDRA CUTCHER

*Sölt, Hungary c.1933*

It's between the wars in rural Hungary, and my Nonya, Juliánna, is visiting her family in the village on a rare weekend home from Budapest. Her stylish presence, so evident as she stands there between her mother, Mária, and three of her nieces. And a cow. I see the haystack in the background and the edge of the thatched roof of the family home. I see my great grandmother, the only image of Mária I will ever see. She is a shadowy figure, a foil to Nonya's glow. Her apron worn high, scarf disguising her face, her hands red and swollen from too much toil. She raised nine children in that house, that three roomed house. I see how different Nonya is: pearls, high heels, a décolletage on show, hair coiffed. Different to Mária, different to it all. She couldn't wait to escape it, she couldn't wait to leave; she couldn't quite belong.



MY FAVOURITE DRESS

*Budapest, Hungary c. 1929-1939*



Budapest between the wars was a stylish city. Art, music, opera, ballet; and fashion. Juliánna learnt about fashion. She learnt how to cut, and how she could cut! No pattern needed, no voile. She drew onto the fabric with chalk and she cut. She had an intuitive understanding of form, silhouette and proportion. She learnt about draping and structure. She learnt about colour and texture. And she could work; she was a worker; she was never afraid of work.

And into this life, came my mother, an only child, in 1936. Things were heating up in Europe, and the war began. Things in Budapest were dire, bombings were frequent and the black market rife. It wasn't long before the small family that was Gábor, Juliánna and little Zita fled to Germany, to Bayreuth. It was here that Juliánna's shrewdness thrived and after the war when my grandfather worked for the Americans, Juliánna made couture gowns for the officers' wives. And then the bottom fell out of Europe and once more they fled.



ALEXANDRA CUTCHER



*Newcastle, Australia c. 1950-1958*

Into a parochial Australia they came, vibrant  
European flowers in  
a sea of drab. My mother said  
everything was grey, beige, dowdy. My mother said  
continental style had not yet made it  
to Australian shores; it took immigrants like them to  
colonise the colony, to  
make it their own. Coffee, Art,  
music, opera, ballet. And fashion. They brought with them,  
European fashion.

After settling in Newcastle, Nonya and my mother  
opened a small shop, making  
designer dresses for the cocktail crowd. Nonya was  
a survivor; she said she always knew  
what to do. Expressing her creativity in  
beautiful bespoke gowns and  
her fighting spirit in hard work, she  
and my mother  
carved a successful business from  
nothing. Garments, textiles, fabric, thread.  
These were the materials of their beginnings,  
their belongings, their memories, their  
becomings.



## MY FAVOURITE DRESS



My mother was the best dressed girl in town. Zita was beguiling, she stood out from the crowd. Her dresses were neatly fitted, her mink carelessly arranged over her shoulders, her hair courageously short; she was different to the others, a cosmopolitan beauty. She didn't quite belong in a place that wasn't ready. She learnt at her mother's knee about cut, and she could cut; she could look at a photograph and without a pattern she could cut. She learnt about form, silhouette and proportion. She learnt about draping and structure. She learnt about colour and texture. And she could work; she was a worker; she was never afraid of work.

ALEXANDRA CUTCHER

Her favourite dress, her wedding dress, was created in two pieces, of heavy silver silk satin, fully lined and beautifully constructed. The veil was three metres of silk tulle, artfully gathered together and arranged at the last minute, a minute before she left the house. Her shoes were glass slippers; her memories of a demanding yet beautiful day still wrapped in this dress, this beautiful dress, her favourite dress, her wedding dress.



*Newcastle, Australia c. 1959-1987*

And into this life came my sister, myself.  
Second-generation Australians, we were raised in a house where philosophy and culture were normal. And fashion. Always fashion.



It wasn't until I was older, my sister reminded me that it was not like this for everyone. Our house was a sanctuary of Art, music, literature. And of fashion. I took for granted that our dolls had opera capes made from my mother's evening dresses and that classical music was always playing in our house. I took for granted that my mother always made our clothes and that we were the best dressed children in Sunday School. It was awkward; we were too dressed, too European, too glamorous. I took it for granted.

MY FAVOURITE DRESS



We didn't quite  
belong in a place that wasn't ready. We  
we were impeccably  
dressed, gorgeous. But  
not quite right.  
It was at my mother's knee that  
I learnt about fashion; not about cut or construction.  
I couldn't sew. But  
I learnt about form, silhouette and proportion.  
I learnt about draping, cutting on the bias and  
how to weight a full circle skirt.  
I learnt about colour and texture. I learnt these things,  
I learnt about these things. My love  
of fashion was nurtured by the  
two strongest women in  
my life, Zita and Juliánna, and developed alongside  
my love of Art, music, opera, ballet. They taught me that,  
like them, I am an artist.  
And they taught me that  
I could work; I was  
a worker; I was  
never afraid of work.

My favourite dress, my  
wedding dress, made by my  
mother, was created in  
two pieces; of  
silk Chantilly lace and  
made into a fully boned and  
beautifully constructed bodice. The  
skirt was a hundred metres of silk  
tulle, artfully  
assembled into a skirt  
that floated, that  
flounced. My shoes were  
cream slippers; my memories of  
a demanding yet beautiful day still  
wrapped in this dress, this beautiful  
dress, my favourite  
dress, my wedding dress.





ALEXANDRA CUTCHER

My own work as  
an artist wrapped around itself  
this opera cape  
of beauty, of style, of  
a particular aesthetic, a  
deeply continental sensibility. I always  
felt odd, yet strangely  
enchanted, different  
to everyone else, different  
to it all.

*Kurrajong – Kingscliff, Australia 1991-2013*

And into this life, came  
our daughters, two girls with a love  
of fashion, of Art, of music, of dance.  
They,  
like me,  
like their grandmother,  
like their great grandmother,  
are artists. We  
taught them about  
fashion; not about  
cut or construction. They  
cannot sew. They  
learnt about form, silhouette and  
proportion. They  
learnt about colour and texture. They  
learnt these things, they  
learnt about these things. Their love  
of fashion was nurtured by the  
three strongest women in their lives,  
Lexi and Zita and Juliánna.  
We taught them that, like us,  
they are artists.  
We taught them that  
they could work; they are  
workers; they are  
never afraid of work.



MY FAVOURITE DRESS



Their favourite dresses, their wedding dresses, are yet to be created; metres of silk or satin or chiffon, yet to be fashioned. Their shoes yet to be chosen; their memories of demanding yet beautiful days yet to be wrapped in those dresses, those beautiful dresses, their favourite dress, their wedding dress.

TONY FLEMING

**“I’LL GO ANYWHERE TO GET OUT OF THIS  
DAMNED PLACE!”**

And so he went to the interview. He was, the story goes, asked two questions:

Can you identify gold?

No.

Do you play a musical instrument?

No.

With that he was selected at twenty years old to be the geologist on an expedition to Antarctica with Ernest Shackleton. This was a break that would change the course of Raymond Priestley’s life. He walked out of Bristol University, left his studies behind and set sail on The Nimrod in 1907.



*Granddad’s boots have remained upright on the wall of Shackleton’s Hut at Cape Royd, Antarctica since 1907. Photographed by Tony Fleming in 2013.*

The following photographs are of the clothing Raymond wore and the bed where he slept in Shackleton’s Hut 1907. Photographs: Tony Fleming (2013).

*R. Gibson (Ed.), The Memory of Clothes, 37–40.  
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TONY FLEMING



I'LL GO ANYWHERE TO GET OUT OF THIS DAMNED PLACE!



TONY FLEMING



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MARIANNE HULSBOSCH

## MNĒMONIKOS PATERAS<sup>1</sup>



*It is the boots I remember most: the smell, the size and the texture. They evoke the earliest and most vivid memory of my Dad. In fact these memories are two-fold: my Dad, the father, nurturer and my playmate who would throw me in to the air and catch me regardless of how high I would fly, and my Dad the superhero in his big brown leather boots and puttees that complimented his army fatigues. Two very distinct personas who somehow are also one.*

Memory cannot convey time and is mediated by distortion of recall when we attempt to visualize the past. However visualizing memory gives voice to the images in my head and allows me to speak with a different voice, the voice of construction with an unknown aesthetic. One without speech but one which speaks louder than words; one that can be understood without language, one with an inner voice. My narrative is constructed and is present; it can be understood in one's own cultural context. Such is the power of visuality. And this authority is stronger than any words spoken because a visual narrative cuts across all boundaries and allows for personal mediation. Memory is subjective and acts as a mediator between the narrative multi-vocal voice

and the viewer to assume the point where ownership of recollection is transferred (Appadurai, 1996; Bal, 2001).

*R. Gibson (Ed.), The Memory of Clothes, 41–45.  
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MARIANNE HULSBOSCH

*Strong, robust with a commanding presence. A man of military standing whose fabric is most revealing. Bold shapes and subdued colours blend gracefully with the fluid detailed patterns so characteristic of the Asian cultures he so admired. My superhero who saved the world and effortlessly embodied difference. He, who provided a safe haven for the most traumatic experience in my life. He, who guarded my spiritual, emotional and physical well-being with zeal. Tough, resilient, protective and safe. Private, determined, generous and dedicated. All the qualities of a tough, don't mess-with-me guy.*



When analysing the fabric of my life, its rough and smooth patches, those vivid and subdued colours, its designs and textures, I teased out the intricate weave that was my Dad. By examining the textures, smelling the dye, fingering the beads, counting the stitches and turning the cloth over and over, I unraveled his character and frayed the unique aspects of his personality only to discover the depth of my inner self.

*Dad. Duality. Dichotomy. Interchangeability. Mystery. How can one person be two? Superhero one day; nurturer, protector, the next.*

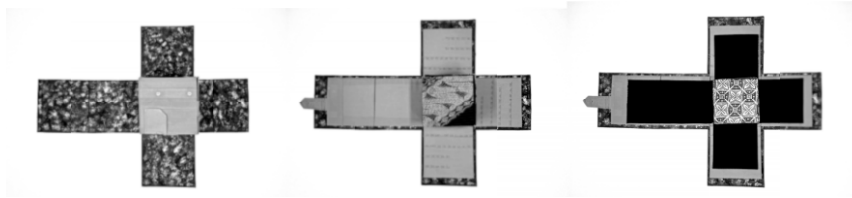


The haptic and dimensional properties embedded in a textile reveal memories that facilitate exploration of ancestral patterns of life. Actualization through the alchemy of textile construction, manipulation and decoration transcends fabric from its origin into an object that repurposes memory. Following Bal (2003) who suggests that the act of looking is profoundly 'impure,' I propose that

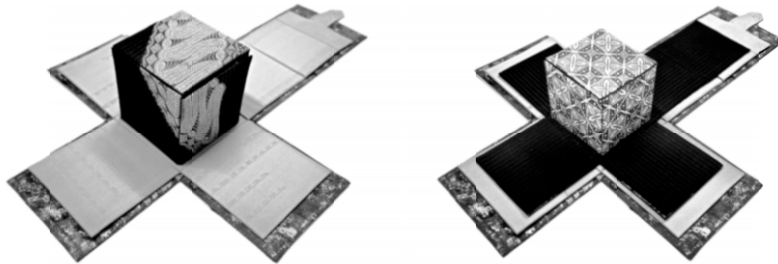
memory is also impure in the sense that it is inherently framed in a context that is forever changing. Engaging a dialogue of reminiscence with materials and artistic processes produces an object that reveals the perspectives of all those involved in its genesis and transformation: myself, my family, my upbringing.



The production of ‘Dad’ profoundly challenged my perceptions of being. Producing an object establishes that item’s domain. In other words through the design and making process, the object was taking on the very qualities of my father. Through careful selection, I created a specific image based on intimate knowing. However, designing, fabricating and then viewing ‘Dad’ is forever open-ended and contingent on fashioning and re-fashioning what was/is visible. Because when experiencing the object now, I overlay it with another cloth. This fabric of time is constructed of dense and transparent patches. I can move it at will to expose certain aspects and obscure others. Foucault (1975) suggests that knowing one’s subject directs and mediates the gaze and makes certain aspects of an object visible, that otherwise would remain obscure. Thus each act of engagement with the object, either through fabrication or through experiencing, tangibly represents the elusiveness of memory.



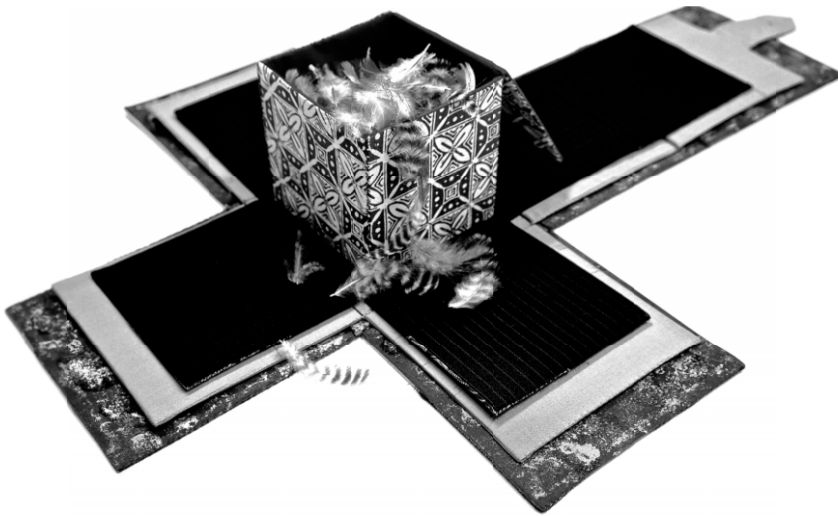
*A proud member of an elite force, Dad was simultaneously a warrior, gentleman, father, husband and Indonesia consumer. Seeking challenges, his external fabric changed like a chameleon. Like glass beads that shimmer and change in different light, he could adapt his suit of armour to business attire and Asian dress in a flash. Never casual, always professional, forever noble.*



I have repurposed memory through inscribing meaning onto patches of my Dad’s scrap basket. I selected those pieces that represented episodes of his life. The fabrics consist of good strong natural fibers. They are sturdier, absorb colour better and allow for a little texture in the weave. The basic cloth set the tone for further embellishment. The tools I used were handed down through the family and had that familiar feel of loved wear and tear. I cut, sewed, gathered, pulled, frayed, dyed,

MARIANNE HULSBOSCH

batiked, beaded, embroidered, stretched and ironed. I linked my stitches and matched it to that of my Mother and both brothers, grandparents, my own husband and our children. I joined disparate elements into a coherent narrative. A fabric that holds the family together, that provides warmth and comfort physically, emotionally and spiritually.



*Dad's exterior encases the soft smooth fabrics inside. Although dense, some areas are so transparent that the delicate quality of the soft inner layers is visible. Two cultures are woven together and are imbued with texture and integrity, surprise and softness. Reposition memory, pull the inside out, count the stitches, feel the textures, admire the beading, smell the dyes and unravel the fabrics. Play with the overlapping structure and step backward in time; strip away the outer layers, reverse appliqué. Create the future by reshaping the structure: feature the lining. Shape memory by (re)constructing this textile. My 'Dad' is an organic textile object, positioned between the past, present and future.*

#### NOTE

- <sup>i</sup> This work is part of a large body of textile objects titled 'Family' exhibited in Australia, the Netherlands and the US in 1995.

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MNĒMONIKOS PATERAS

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LEA MAI

## THE MUSEUM OF US: A BEGINNING

In my mother's house, tucked away in a drawer, lying between layers of white tissue paper, there is an aviator's cap. It is made of fawn coloured cloth, and its chin straps hang loose by its side. It is a little fragile now. The first time my grandfather wore it, he was 17. And it was 1933. In a small town in Northern Italy, Mario Messina had fulfilled a dream. He became the youngest airplane pilot in Italy. Ahead of this young man lay a long life lived across two continents, a world war, a family and countless hours of flying. But in the photograph that sits on my mantelpiece that is all yet to come. All I see is a proud aviator, standing tall beside to his aircraft, those chin straps hanging loosely around his jaw line.

What is the difference between any other aviator cap produced at the same time and Mario's aviator cap? What makes one cap qualitatively different from the others?

If I offered Mario's cap to a museum today they may accession it but they may also reject it. They might reject it because it lacks significance on a public scale and therefore it is not considered a museum-piece. After all, many of those caps were made and many are probably still in existence. No one famous wore the cap and it was not found in a critical theatre of war. Nothing distinctively unusual happened to the cap or its wearer. The life of the cap was prosaic and private.

And yet it is no ordinary aviator's cap. It is unlike the caps we wear every day to keep the harsh Australian sun out of our eyes. Caps that are fashionable but meaningless. Caps that are easily bought, easily lost and easily replaced. So I ask: what occupies that interstitial place between a museum piece and an everyday functional object? What objects reside in that space? And how?

The idea that I want to share with you is that there are accessories and apparel that live in that interstitial place in the everyday, unremarked lives of many families. And that many families house an invisible, private museum populated with items such as my grandfather's aviator cap, which are not worthy of inclusion in public museums and yet are distinctly different from the other objects which fill people's houses. They are neither insignificant stuff nor public patrimony. They are not catalogued or curated yet they are taken care of and their history is passed down through the generations – often orally. They are not housed in museums yet they are preserved and protected. They may not carry (inter)national historical significance but nor are they devoid of meaning.

It is not a new idea that humans inscribe meaning onto objects. And that objects become more or less valuable by the meanings and importance that humans afford each of them. Sometimes that meaning is given a financial value as well.

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Sometimes those objects are housed in museums open to the public so that with each visitor a little more meaning is written into the object. The birth of the museum was not, however, a public affair. The first museums were private. They were housed behind high walls in the castles and palaces of the European nobility and aristocracy as symbols of wealth and power. While in private hands, the objects within these museums had an acknowledged public value. The publically accessible art was found in churches and it served to inculcate the wealth and power of religion. The birth of the public museum came with the Louvre after the French Revolution. The museum as public institution then went about declaring which objects were valuable and which were not. The private sphere continued to co-exist with the public sphere of precious objects. Private museums were sometimes transitioned to the public sphere, such as the Wallace Collection in London.

But in between the to-and-fro of publically acknowledged artefacts, there exists a third type of museum that invisibly stands alongside these public institutions and private collections. It is also private but it is not filled with objects which are publically deemed precious. Rather it is filled with objects that the family deems precious because of an affective association between an item of clothing and a particular member of that family. These objects are inscribed with affective wealth and power. They do not just include apparel, but clothing that has been worn is especially intimate and therefore more powerful. They have the power to create connections between family members and between generations. They have the power of creating a feeling of belonging, as they allow family members to know their family history through more detailed and tangible narratives. I always knew my grandfather was a pilot; he took me flying with him when I was three. And yet, holding his cap, the cap that sat on the head of the grandfather I loved, creates something more than just the memory or the knowledge of Mario, the pilot. I touch it, I try it on. I am in the cockpit with him. The love that I feel for my grandfather coalesces in the fibres and stitches of the aviator cap. It makes me rich in connectedness. It makes me feel powerful from the security that positive family links can bring. It brings me closer not only to my grandfather but also to his daughter, my mother, as we talk about the cap and its owner. I am going to call this third type of museum – the Museum of Us.

How did my grandfather's cap survive long enough to be inscribed with enough meaning that it could become priceless to us? Acquisition is a gamble with these objects. Since these items start out as ordinary functional things, it is difficult to identify them as potentially capable of carrying affective wealth and power. So the first issue is one of survival. Did Mario know, at the time of wearing it, that this would be not just another ordinary cap? That it was a precious item that belonged in the Museum of Us? I dare say not. These precious objects start out as ordinary objects. It is only through time, revisitation and conservation that they become meaningful. I think of so many scarves, stockings, caps, dresses, handbags, nightgowns, ties and shirts that never had the opportunity to enter the Museum of Us simply because they were discarded or lost too early to have acquired meaning. Especially in a family that has spanned four continents in four generations.

In order to be accessioned into the Museum of Us, it is incumbent on family members to become guardians and curators of these pieces. In my family at least, there is never a meeting or a conversation about which items belong in the Museum of Us and who is to be their guardian for each generation. There is no acquisitions committee that meets regularly. There is no formal cataloguing of each item. No updates are sent around the family about the location and state of each object. No exhibitions are held. There is only the odd Sunday afternoon conversation about the cap, or a story about Mario's war-time adventures, a flick through an old family album or a silent pause by the mantel piece to notice something new in the photograph of the man and his plane. Weeks and months and years can go by without family members viewing or discussing the piece. The meaning-making and hence the importance of the object grows slowly and organically, through causal revisitations by different members of the family. Time plays a crucial factor. As the object is passed from one generation to the next, there is a moment in which the item acquires meaning. This object has become precious enough to be cared for by people other than Mario. Time also plays a role. As Mario passes away, his objects acquire greater importance. And with every year that the family moves away from being able to see and touch and love and live with Mario, his objects become more important in telling the story of who he was. Belonging and connectedness do not only happen with family members who are living. Through the aviator's cap I can more easily maintain my connectedness to a man who was a wonderful grandfather, even though he passed way in the early 1990s.



*Figure 2. Mario Messina wearing his aviator cap and uniform, Italy, 1934.*

LEA MAI

The aviator's cap is not the only item in our Museum of Us. There is a dress that my mother made and wore for her 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. A white satin, cross-over, mini emblazoned with large colourful semi-precious stones. It was 1968 after all. A fine pair of stockings from my great-grandmother that lies unused in the original packaging. A bespoke, black, woollen A-line dress that my aunt had commissioned in Rome in the 1960s, which somehow came to me, and which I still wear each winter. A scarf of my grandmother's that my sister possesses. And the blue checked dress that my grandmother bought the day I was born in 1972, which I put on my daughter the day she turned one. These objects lie scattered through the wardrobes and chests of my family members. They have no display cabinet; they have had no opening night festivities. But maybe they should. Because these items are unique, not in the same way that there has ever only been one Mona Lisa but in the uniqueness they have acquired from the stories written along each thread and stitch. These are the narratives that help sew families together. Perhaps the next iteration for my family is to come together and purposefully accession, curate, catalogue and display the precious, unique objects in the Museum of Us. And invite the rest of the family to an opening night party.

## **CREATURES, GREAT AND SMALL**



JOSEPHINE FLEMING

## **EATING BEAUTY: SOCIAL SCIENCE, CLOTHING MOTHS AND DISAPPEARING THREADS**

The larvae of *Tinea Pellionella*, sometimes referred to as the webbing clothes moth, perform what CSIRO identifies as *a useful role in eating refuse matter such as feathers, hides, fur, beaks* (CSIRO, 2013) in addition to New Zealand sweaters, school blazers, cashmere coats, alpaca blankets, velvet skirts and so forth (Fleming, 2015). Despite assertions otherwise, *Tinea Pellionella* have clearly been identified as insects (CSIRO, 2013; Choe, 2013) and, furthermore, insects performing a vital role within the ecosystem (CSIRO, 2013). Although the term ‘pest’ has often been applied, it can be argued that there really is no such thing as a pest only “conflict in habitat use” (Susan Campbell quoted in Winston, 1999). There have been some recent attempts to understand the psychology of *Tinea Pellionella* (see for example, Trematerra & Fontana, 1996) but these attempts have often been frustrated by invisibility once the larvae have colonised a dark household space; or have been invalidated owing to researcher interference and bias often resulting in the death of the subjects under investigation. These studies raise serious ethical issues, although research has largely been mute on this point. It is now incontestable that *Tinea Pellionella* are in a growth phase, with most research pointing to increasingly cramped wardrobe conditions, fewer instances of good housekeeping and lower rates of cleanliness. Alderson (2013) has reported in some detail on this: “They eat our favourite woollens ... because they’re more likely to be a bit scuzzy. There’s nothing a moth larva likes more than a bit of sweat, garnished with some crispy skin flakes.”

An area of recent investigation has been the affect *Tinea Pellionella* has on those who come into close contact (Alderson, 2013), however these studies have tended to lack academic rigour and have relied on subjective reflection rather than real time objective data. It is incontrovertible that memory is at best unreliable. The current study redresses this imbalance by using the researcher as active participant, recording reactive and proactive responses on a daily basis throughout the research process. Although the research was initially intended to take place over a short period of time in order to track the process from discovery through to successful removal, circumstances transpired that extended this research into a longitudinal study, paralleling the recurrent lifecycles of larva to moth to larva and their resistance to removal. This altered the very fabric of the research. As a result the research reported here is ongoing but still of course objective. This invariably means that while it is possible to detect significant findings that warrant discussion

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and which are the topic of this paper, themes and patterns may yet emerge from the data, in particular the full effects of the effect of the larvae on the participant researcher, that render previous findings immaterial. As such it seemed timely to make available the initial findings, because the ability to discuss the material rationally may be declining and hence, although still definitely objective it may become increasingly difficult to actually write an academic paper on this topic while maintaining objective composure.

Defining the research questions was relatively straightforward. Rather than a gap, a gaping hole was identified. A few woollen coats too many resembled poorly mowed lawns and recurrent explanations of worn fabric and dropped stitches in shawls and jumpers became implausible. A pattern emerged and it didn't take a literature review to formulate the questions. RQ 1: How the hell do you get rid of clothing moths? RQ2: Why do I care? A narrative approach was taken.

### *The Blind Leading the Blind*

The larvae of webbing moths have no ocelli (eyes), they cannot see, they are blind. Yet they successfully find all manner of nutrients in the weave of fabrics. This researcher has eyes yet sees very little, blind to the meaning of the flutter of wings near the wardrobe and failing to see beneath the surface ... until it's too late. The realisation in a fieldnote:

As my fingers part the dense tufted pile of velvet, a hidden world of specks dislodge and float to the ground. As my eyes grow accustomed to the complexity of this fabric I see the full spread of the damage. It is apparent just how suited velvet is to these tiny 12-13mm long guerrillas. Beneath the surface a dark hidden world of moths and larvae exist, constantly on the move.<sup>i</sup>

### *Treatment #1 – The Big Freeze*

Freezing as a means of removal has gained some acceptance and is more aligned with contemporary ethics protocols than alternative methods such as the oven. A family fridge, however, is not really practical when considering the size of an average wardrobe today. A professional hire was sought. Hiring a freezer, the researcher discovered, was complicated. There was particular sensitivity around the word 'infestation'; in fact it brought out a flat refusal that all manner of logic couldn't shift. The facts and the best choice of words are not always one and the same thing. In the end a larger freezer was purchased, hauled up a flight of fifty-three steps and a makeshift lab was established on the back deck. It takes weeks to process an average twenty-first century wardrobe at 10° Celcius for four days each load. Before it goes in it has to be washed and then afterwards it must be stored in sealed containers. The freezer, the electricity bills, the bags, the time, a new wardrobe is looking cheap. Except memories can't be bought and my subjectivity

was near lost as I rediscovered a little blue blazer that had been with me since my first day of school:

*A blazer hangs too long on arms that hesitate at the gates,  
Turning around head tilted up to catch a smile that must be left behind.  
Water seemingly blue catches the sun and breaks into diamonds,  
Colourless, each wave differently arrives with a constant motion to trick the mind.<sup>ii</sup>*

In retrospect there was a problem with the method. In the weeks following Treatment #1 when the clothes were dragged out for inspection, it was impossible to know – was that hole there before or is it new? Is this garment still being eaten, did the larvae simply hibernate in the big freeze? The variables had not been accounted for in the design. A pattern wasn't emerging, it was disappearing, hole by hole.

#### *Treatment #2 – A Fiery End*

It seems that every time you return to the literature another layer is revealed. Suddenly it was all about heat. The first batch of clothes went in at 120°C, and came out crisper than intended, which was in fact not intended at all, owing to a conversion issue with the research instrument, i.e. the oven, or rather the instrument of the instrument, i.e. the researcher who confused Celsius with Fahrenheit. It is difficult to imagine that any being could withstand that heat, but with no signs anywhere of the culprits how does one tell? In went a cashmere coat that had been so damaged by moths and the first treatment that there was no rational reason for dragging it through another – it was so unlikely to ever be worn again. In fact ditto the shawl bought in Mysore, the cardigan from Peru, the skirt from New Zealand, the velvet jacket from Hanoi, the little blue blazer from Tintern ... the material evidence of a life was unraveling, and the project threatened to never end.

Now all data is resting in a sealed thick plastic bag, but at some point it must re-emerge, either completely ridden with holes, or stable and waiting for the next attack. And I will wait, and I will record and I will intervene and I will hope impermanence can at some future point in time be falsified. But for now the discussion of the findings is best left to Robert Frost:

Nature's first green is gold,  
Her hardest hue to hold.  
Her early leaf's a flower;  
But only so an hour.  
Then leaf subsides to leaf.  
So Eden sank to grief,  
So dawn goes down to day.  
Nothing gold can stay.<sup>iii</sup>

JOSEPHINE FLEMING

#### NOTES

- <sup>i</sup> Fleming, J., Fieldnote 18 December 2013.
- <sup>ii</sup> Fleming, J., Excerpt from *The day it all fell apart*, 7 May 2013.
- <sup>iii</sup> Robert Frost, *Nothing gold can stay*.

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LINDA HODSON

## MAKING HORSE BLANKETS IN THE HIMALAYAS

This is a tale of horses and horsemen, and the sewing of blankets and bonds. In a land of riven stone, scorched and barbed like the spines of dragons, raised in homage to the sun. It is a tale of encounters with monks and shepherds, garbed in dusty cloaks. And dancing the seasons of reaping and sowing with village women in ancestral robes.

In the July of 1993, my travelling companions and myself, along with our horseman and his four horses walked the remote valleys of the Greater Himalayan Range, where the jut of India reaches out towards Tibet; following the Zankar valley, via Alchi to Leh. From Leh, we took the Ghadi route over the high plains of Rupshu to the 'good grass' of Marhi, as Ramesh, our horseman, liked to say.

Marhi is a summer grazing pasture for horses, thick with 'good' grass. It is fertile ground for a story that weaves memories of clothes and, in particular, of making horse blankets for Tiku, Lilu, Kalu and Titu, with encounters with horses and horsemen, monks, monasteries, and white wolves, in a land of mountain gods.

### WELL PAST MIDWAY

It was a rest day, and one well-deserved. We had been walking for ten days, through snow-storms and white-outs, ears wringing with wind. But today the sun was out; the snow melting and the horses were already halfway along the valley nosing up stones, on the lookout for unwary sprigs of grass.

Ramesh emerged from his shelter, a little tousled but smiling at the sight of the sun. He unfurled the swathe of horse blankets from which he had made his bed, slinging them over the saddles that formed the backbone of his canvas tent.

"Good day for resting" he said, taking his seat in the middle and priming the kerosene stove for the first coffee of the day.

"Coffee?" Yarron croaked, emerging from his corner of the shepherd shelter, roused by the waft of kerosene. He was bundled in his bedding; a pair of horse blankets dangling from his shoulders to the seat of his pants. The dank woollen beanie jammed down on his forehead was not quite able to hold the furl of curls that had unwound themselves overnight.

"How was your sleep Yarron?" Conor asked. "No icicles?"

This brought a chortle from Ramesh who was searching for coffee in amongst the crumbs. He pulled out a cucumber missing a sizeable part of its head and wiggled an accusatory finger at Titu, the baby mule, who had her head under a rock

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nearby. Titu had a thing for cucumbers, although she would bite the head off a carrot in a pinch.

“Ha” Yarron said. “I like this shelter, the rocks are very warm. Much warmer than my sleeping bag.” He looked at the decapitated cucumber, and grinned. “Even my mouth is not that big.”

Everyone laughed. It was good to see Yarron waking without frost on his beard. Despite advising Yarron of the need for a good sleeping bag and tent before our departure from Leh, he had opted for an Indian army bag at the bargain price of ten American dollars and had wheedled a place in Ramesh’s tent. Unfortunately, the rain had started the first day out of Hemis, followed by snow-storms that had yet to abate. A bright icy crust took root on the mountains and spread over the valleys, forming a patina of violet white.

Yarron’s faith in his purchase was quickly undermined and he pronounced the Indian army bag as a “little no good,” borrowing a phrase from Ramesh. Beads of ice clung to the side of his nostrils and the beanie that he slept in had frozen solid enough to set to his curls. Our tent wouldn’t hold a third person but he had Conor’s down jacket for sleeping and a stash of horse-blankets that Ramesh didn’t need.

After a breakfast of hand-made chappatis and Ramesh’s best fiery dhal, Yarron headed down river to bathe. His first yelp brought a wry look from Ramesh, who raised his brow at the struggling sun that had barely peaked over the ridge. Ramesh put the pot on for more coffee and set to clearing a patch of stony earth of its more serious rocks. He spread out one of the old horse blankets over the top and deposited another bundle of blankets close to his seat, setting down his horseman’s pouch.

“What’s in the bag?” Conor asked, as Ramesh pulled out a package, carefully spreading the contents on the covered ground. A length of cotton was revealed, tightly woven, yet soft to the hand, embroidered with twisting lines; in bright red and blue, interspersed with spangles and little crescent moons.

“It’s beautiful” I said. “So, what are you making?”

“Horse blankets” he replied, pulling out one of the stitched blankets that softened the load on their backs. “This one old now, a little no good. I buy best material to make blankets for horses.”

Conor and I offered to help with the sewing, and Ramesh seemed pleased. We had come to love his crazy horses and their errant deeds.

Over the months of walking, I had come to know ‘our’ horses as ‘people,’ along with the subtleties of their language, with its shooshes, urrrghes, and clicks. Ramesh was an expert, having become his own horseman at twelve years of age. At our very first meeting, it was his shooshing and uurgghing that coaxed them out of the “good grass” of Marhi into a less inviting enclosure where food sacks, sleeping gear and more packs lay in wait. Ramesh had been apprenticed in horse lore by his father, with whom he had walked these mountains from a young age; learning each step of the routes, along with the best campsites; those places where good grass could always be found. His father had died when Ramesh was twelve and left him his horses. Tiku was boss then, as he was now. Nothing got past Tiku.

“You shopped up big” I said, as Ramesh took a bag out that held needles the size of dessert forks, along with a spool of thick looking thread, wax coated to keep the stitches strong and fresh. He unwrapped another package of ribbed red ribbon for trimming, along with plaits and tassles in assorted hues.

Ramesh grinned, taking out his giant scissors. “This very good season; good money for family and horses. Maybe next year I buy another mule, like Titu.”

“How much does a mule cost?”

“Maybe thirty two thousand rupees for young one,” Ramesh said, using the old horse blanket as a pattern to cut out the padding for the new blankets. He folded the old ones and laid them over each other to form a pad of swaddling for the horses backs and side flanks. “Mule very smart. Maybe even smarter than Tiku.” He added, turning to check that Tiku was out of earshot.

Once the padding for the new blankets was cut, Ramesh spent some time pondering the best way to cut four matching horses blankets from the lovely cotton without spoiling the symmetry. Finding the main run of the pattern, he took out the other horse blankets and laid them out in a loose square.

By this stage, Yarron had come back from his drubbing and let off another squeal of fright. Seeing Ramesh cutting up the old horse blankets had raised his concerns about freezing to death during the night. Ramesh reassured him that there was no need to worry; there were plenty more horse-blankets to warm his bed. At this, Yarron relaxed and wrapped himself in one that Ramesh proffered, declaring the river the same temperature as his sleeping bag; just above freezing to death.

“You spent long enough in there” Conor remarked, and Yarron laughed pointing at his wet locks of hair.

“You try washing this” he said. “I also washed my clothes. They were on my nose. I could hear my mother saying: ‘Yarron you filthy boy, I bring you up better than this.’”

Yarron had a particular talent for impressions of his mother and her reactions to his trek. He had told us that he hadn’t called to tell her he was going on a thirty day journey in the remote Himalayas with two people and a horseman he’d only just met. He called a friend of the family and asked them to tell his mother a few weeks after he had left.

“I do this so I don’t have to face the yelling down the phone” he said. “When I get back to Israel, my mother will make me a special room and put in those books that tell you about everything – what do you call them?”

“Encyclopedias” Conor offered.

“And when I say I want to go on a trip somewhere, she will say, ‘What is point of taking this trip, I buy you encyclopedia. You can read everything, no need to leave Israel.’” Yarron had nestled himself down near the blanket parade that Ramesh was cutting and looked on with interest.

“What are we sewing?” he asked, picking up one of the needles. “Giant’s pyjamas?”

“Horse-blankets” I said, holding up the cloth Ramesh bought in Leh.

“I can help too,” Yarron offered. “Just not with the sewing; I am no good at this. My mother can tell you; useless, she says. You call when you need help. I am off

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to make a clothes horse. There are no places to hang clothes in this valley; so you will see soon my ingeniousness with the sticks.”

Ramesh had finished cutting the blankets and had the material now ready to fold over the top. He took out a little wallet made of cotton where he kept rows of stout long legged pins. Laying the embroidered cloth over the layers of blankets, he folded one side over the top. I pinned, while he held until we had all sides tucked in. When I asked whether we should set out all four horse blankets in the same way, he shook his head. It was almost lunch time and more grey clouds were gathering to the south.

“Maybe more snow coming tonight” he said. “Horses not going BBBBBSSHHH after grass.” He flicked his hand in an imitation of a naughty horse making a run for it.

This was a portent of bad weather coming, as the horses were apt to go BBBBBSSHH whenever the chance was at hand; Tiku and Titu had both perfected it and could get into the nearest field of barley in the blink of an eye. Our very first morning, Ramesh had lined up Tiku, the lead horse, for packing, telling us that he was always first to be packed, because then Lilu and Kalu and, on most occasions, Titu would fall into line. However, this was the first trek of the season and Tiku, no doubt, knew what was coming, the pile of bags at hand was a sure sign.

When Ramesh lowered the bridle and looked him in the eye, Tiku seized that slip of a moment to make his first attempt at flight; pulling his nose back sharply so Ramesh lost his hold. It took Ramesh some time to catch Tiku and coax him back to the fold. Seeing that more mutiny was likely in sight, Ramesh assigned Conor and Stewart to each side of Tiku’s bridle, while he secured the padding. The padding consisted of old horse blankets –folded over so that they covered each horse’s back and hung down the side to protect their flanks from rubbing where the load took hold. Over the top of these went the ‘proper’ horse blankets; those that we were making; with their fine layer of top cloth and thicker padding for settling the little wooden saddle atop.

The saddles were not for riding but securing the ropes around the loads on each horse’s side. Ramesh took his time weighting the sacks and roping them into a kind of double sling – to ensure an even load. This was important for balance and comfort; uneven loads could cause the horse to stumble and fall. This knowledge of weights and balance had worked its way into Ramesh’s hands. He had no scales or machines to learn from or work with, but an intimate knowledge of each horse and its ways of carrying a load.

Still, the horses were easily startled, with Kalu the most likely to resist reassurance and take sudden flight. On the way to Alchi, the trail had not been difficult to find, not having been walked for two seasons. Then the valley narrowed, and the path rose, cutting through a steep wall of rock that fell straight down to the river below. In places, it became thin and unstable, but Ramesh would continue as long as he led with Tiku and we kept up with the other horses following behind.

This worked fine until we rounded on a rock that jutted out level with the horses sacks. Ramesh edged Tiku around it and was on his way back to walk the others



one by one when Kalu took fright. He rushed at the corner, catching his load on the jut, and bouncing, front feet first, over the edge. Ramesh reacted quickly grabbing his rope from behind while Stewart got the end of his tail in time. Together they pulled Kalu up before he spun over the side. There followed intense discussion, unloading and a reversing of tack and it was some ten hours later before we were able to camp for the night, all sore and shaken, but thankful the horses were alright.

Yarron had finished his clothes horse and brought it over for praise. It was an edifice of skeletal twigs, with two sticks wedged in their fork joints at either end. A fifth stick sagged in the middle under the weight of his dripping jeans. He declared it a testimony to his training in the Israeli army and, catching the end of the previous conversation, asked anxiously.

“You think more snow is coming?”

Ramesh nodded, pointing to the horses who had edged further towards camp, and were watching us intently in their nonchalant manner.

“Horses no going BBBBBRRSSH, no good weather coming, maybe.” Ramesh liked to put a maybe at the end of his statements, not just as an out in case things did not come to fruition, but also as a kind of comforter that bad news was not always certain, with the effect that any utterance of maybe was taken as a sure sign.

The possibility of snow spurred on the sewing, with Conor and Ramesh brandishing their needles and Yarron and myself left to supply the coffee and tea. The conversation turned back to the topic of the horses and their BBBBBRRSSHing, of which Yarron had, as yet not had the same opportunity to see.

Ramesh looked up from his stitching. It was small and very neat. He was feeding the needle in through the cloth he had folded over and tucked up a little to make an even hem. He secured the thread through the square of blanket that covered the underside and began sewing in a tight cross stitch. Conor was following instructions and doing okay, not quite as tidy as Ramesh’s fine stitching but it looked better than expected, and Ramesh was pleased.

“If Tiku say ‘BBBBRRSSH,’ all going ‘BBBBRRSSH,’” Ramesh observed. “If Tiku no go, all stay.”

We had learned this the first night of trekking, after walking over the Rhotang Pass, into the barren beauty of Lahual. No more forests of spruce and Kharsa oak, but stones cast in monumental hues. We camped in a patch of rocks, musing up the intense silence with our raggedy breathing, while the horses snorted unhappily. Ramesh had tied them up for the night, securing a rope through their bridles to a large immovable rock.

“Must tying, especially Tiku.” Ramesh had informed us, securing Tiku’s rope first and foremost. “Otherwise horses go BBBRRSSH.”

Going BBBBBRRSSH, though, was not just something the horses did close to home, or when there was particularly good grass to be had in a previous camp, they also went BBBBBRRSSH, when there was a temptation like a barley field at hand. This had happened when Ramesh was at the Likir monastery, undertaking puja as he regularly did.

“They went BBBBBRRSSH at Likir” I said, as Ramesh handed his needle to Yarron for a refill of thread. “Ramesh went to the gomba with Stewart and Shona,

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and Conor and I were left on guard. We were having a quiet wash, with our eyes on the horses, who were munching their way up the bank. We only took our eye off for a split second but the next thing you know they were bolting for the barley, with Titu out in the lead.”

“The best bit was watching Conor” I added, with a grin. “He took off after them barefoot and they ran while he chased, until I lost sight. Then, suddenly I see the horses running in the opposite direction with Conor stumbling and yelling behind, like an old farmer Joe, stubbing all of his toes.”

“That bugger, Tiku, gave me the slip,” Conor said, shaking his head. “I was getting up close when he turned and charged, taking off with the others up the path of stones. My toes got a good kicking. And I know he did it deliberately.”

“How did you catch them?”

“Linda ran for Ramesh and he came running-fast.” Conor replied, rolling his eyes. “Having your horses chomp up a field of barley doesn’t make you a popular guy. Ramesh cornered Tiku from the other side. Anyway, they got their come uppence; they all got tied that night.” Conor gave Tiku a miffed look.

Tiku looked up, hearing his name. He snorted at Conor and went back to chewing his grass.

The afternoon passed quickly, with the retelling of escapades of horses intermixed with those of women and men, while Conor and Ramesh sewed the new fronts onto two horse-blankets. Ramesh rewarded us with chapattis for dinner and dangled the promise of puris at our next rest stop. He hoped to have the blankets all sewn up and sequinned so that he could show off his horses before our trek came to an end.

By late afternoon, the clouds had regrouped and a thin sleet began to fall. Yarron took his clothes horse into the shepherds’ shelter, as his jeans were not yet fully dry and the horses, who had gorged themselves to a standstill, turned into mournful statues, beads of moisture glistening on their manes.

#### SNOW STORMS AND WOLVES

The next day was dark and drizzling and we started out late. No-one, horses included, liked walking in the thickening rain. We all set out in our layers; that we usually shed. Yarron was in jacket and beanie and Ramesh in the layer of blankets with which he began the day; wound over his head and shoulders, to the letter of the horseman’s code. By mid-morning, a slim smiling man would emerge in long pants, shirt and a horseman’s vest; a home-made knit, thin but warming on the chest.

That morning though, the cold was determined; and a grim wind whipped up the valley heading for the pass, so there was no unravelling of layers, just more tucking up as the morning grew dark. The air crackled and stiffened and the sky had a spectral hue; there was no sign of rock on the mountains; from the peaks down to the river, the slopes were vested in white. Yarron was truly delighted and scrambled up a small incline. Declaring himself in a snow desert, he set about some impromptu sledding, using his parka as a ride. This didn’t bode well for later,

when his Parka turned stiff with ice. Ramesh was still coming with the horses, who had to be urged through the snow. The valley floor kept on rising and the whiteness roared up ahead, lashed by purple wellings of sky. In the midst of my steps, I felt eyes upon me, and turned towards the slope on my right; on a near ridge a white wolf waited, its coat merging into snow, still and almost invisible, except for the green flash of eyes. He looked at us for a moment and then he was gone; taking off up the mountains as quietly as he had come.

That night we camped on top of a bluff of earth that rose up from the valley floor. Although it was flanked by a high ridge, a steep ravine separated us from its walls. Ramesh was thinking of his horses, after hearing of our encounter with the wolf. He was taking no chances, he would tie them all and keep them close. Although the horses were much stronger and bigger than any wolf, Ramesh said that wolves were clever and could kill large horses in packs.

“Wolves coming like this, horses running” Ramesh said, demonstrating their mode of attack with his hands. “Wolves chase horses up mountains and run from every side, until horses fall off.”

In the days that followed, the weather eased, returning the sun to the valleys; that, for the first time in a long time, were home to some thickets of spindly trees. We met a wandering shepherd who was herding his goats downstream. He had taken shelter in an abandoned hut, waiting out the rain and snow. He warned us of wolves up the mountains in the valleys beyond. In one of the shepherds’ summer camps some goats had been taken and a dead horse had been found.

Wolf talk gave Ramesh the shivers so we walked further than intended over valleys and bluffs until we reached a place where the vale opened into an eddy of streams. Patches of bristling plants grew on their edges, yellow fronds hanging low, fanning out across the pebbles, at the behest of the wind. A wide blue horizon stretched in every direction and Ramesh called a rest day.

We rose early, knowing there was lots of stitching to do. Ramesh and Conor had to sew the covers on the last two blankets, while I stitched the brocade, which had to be pinned round the edges and sewn tightly on either side. This suited my fingers, as did the size of the needle I would have to wield. The brocade was of shiny red cotton, ribbed on its top size. It looked perfect with the material Ramesh had selected; with its red spangles and crescents of silver blue.

Yarron was in charge of the tassles and sewing them on after I had finished the brocade. Ramesh chose the tassles well; giving Tiku a blue royal enough for a king, and forest green for Lilu to befit her steady temperament. Kalu’s tassles were smaller in greedy shades of gold, while Titu would be resplendent in stormy indigo blue.

We started after breakfast; one of Ramesh’s special treats, fresh puris made from besan flour that puffed up like crispy mits. After kneading the dough, he spun little balls with the palm of his hands, then flattened them with his fingertips before dipping them in boiling oil. I was in charge of the rescue; of pulling them out so that they were crisp but flaky on the inside. There was an accompanying sambal, made from dhal and chilli and mustard seeds, that was so delicious Yarron begged

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for more. But he would be rewarded on the provision that he made a good job of sewing on the tassles by the end of the day.

By mid-morning, we had found our rhythm for sewing; hypnotised by the land. I felt the mountains in my fingertips and the river in my hands. I have never enjoyed sewing as much as I did that day, but then I have never enjoyed eating as I have under rafts of stars, or washing clothes in mountain streams. It feels like a kind of a freedom: I have never felt that way about a washing machine.

#### OF MONKS AND MONASTERIES

Yarron broke my reflections, asking for advice on how to stitch the tassles so you couldn't see the thread. I showed him how to tuck the thread at the join and he said,

"I am so glad I come here. It is something you cannot imagine, not in picture books or TV. No matter what my mother says."

"No."

"But you know, here there are no monasteries. Tell me about the ones you see."

"Phuctal is magic." Conor responded. "Just the way it stands in the cliff like an old King's lair."

"It's like a giant nest made of honeycomb," I said, adding a little flair. "You take a side valley up the Sarap River, about halfway between Darcha and Padum."

"No good path for horses," Ramesh said. "I no go, I take horses to the camp."

"Yes." Conor remarked. "You told us about your cousin's shortcut on the other side of the river, just a bit around the bend. Good path, you said. It was like a wall of moving shale with a couple of footsteps thrown in."

Ramesh looked sheepish and shook his head. "I never go, but other way, long long way to camp."

"But we got to cross the river on a rope bridge" I said, sticking up for Ramesh. "That was a feat of engineering, just like Yarron's clothes horse, shaky as you please."

"Ha!" Yarron retorted, pretending injured pride. "What about Phuctal?"

"It's a labyrinth" I said. "With monks in red robes and floppy hats, popping out of little hidden doors. There are tunnels winding up the mountain, joining libraries and schoolrooms and lots of lama's cells."

"The monks I see have amazing faces" Yarron said. "They look like those magic men. What do you call them?"

"Wizards" I replied, knowing exactly what he meant.

"We had tea with one of the high lamas that Stewart had met along the way" Conor said, remembering bit by bit. Stewart and Shona were Buddhists and they shared that bond with the monks we met.

"He invited us into his cell, and showed us pictures of his family and some other treasures he kept by his bed" I said. "There was a photo of the Dalai lama and some other well-known Rympoches; one of them that Stewart and Shona had met."

"The thing I remember was the hole in his cell" Conor ventured, changing tack. "It was cut in the centre of the floor and went all the way down to the bottom of the cliff."

“It’s a hole for the heating” I said, seeing Yarron’s confused face. “They keep a furnace going at the bottom and every cell has a hole, so the heat rises, along with the smoke.”

“Does it work?” Yarron asked, looking doubtful.

“I asked the lama about that” Conor said. “But he said that he always went home to his family in winter. Ladakh is much too cold.”

“You ever come in winter?” Yarron turned to Ramesh, who was just finishing the final row of stitching on the blankets and was ready to pass it along.

“NO” Ramesh said, looking horrified at the thought. “Too much snow.” He indicated a level just up to his waist. “Horses die, all die. No crossing in the snow.”

“What you do in winter?” Yarron asked, showing off his work. He had just finishing attaching a pair of tassles in red and blue to the corner of Tiku’s blanket and it looked very good.

“I bring family to Kulu” he said. “Horses too. Maybe five days walking, slowly, slowly.”

“Maybe?” Yarron said, smiling at Ramesh. “What do you do in Kulu?”

“Horses working; carrying potatoes and carrots and cabbages” he answered “My mother, sister and wife cooking in teashop.”

“Good business” Yarron replied. “If they cook like you.” Having stitched on another tassel and needing a refill of thread, Yarron was ready for a smoko. “I only have two cigarettes.” He added, quickly.

Yarron had calculated exactly how many cigarettes he’d need for thirty days, but he had failed to account for the occasional bumming from myself, Conor, and Ramesh.

Ramesh passed around his beadies, along with a box of matches to keep the things alight. After sacrificing half a dozen matches, he finally got his beadie to light. He took a puff and said, “And we go gompa party in Skiu, and the monks say to me – you all come gompa party. We have big celebration tonight.”

“Best party, I’ve ever been to,” Conor said, in truth. “We just happened to arrive the day they finished building the new monastery.”

We had gone to the monastery for prayers, before following the villagers down the mountain to the communal house. The elder women had already settled in at the very far wall, all dressed up in their festive best; shoulders adorned with goatskin shawls and heads atop with hats, that curled up in a showy peak at either end. These ends were trimmed in colours to match each waist sash; a riot of pink and vermilion to accompany their chat. They had brought their spools with them and were spinning yarn as they chatted.

“The festivities began with a dance of sowing and reaping, led by three young girls, who dug and twirled and clapped, as the season passed, before the crop with imaginary scythes.” I said, showing Yarron how it was done. “Then each one took a jug of chang and offered a cup to everyone.”

“They fill your glass and you take a sip and then they fill it again and again” Conor added, raising his thumb. “The three sips is a must; that took us a while to understand.”

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“Three is lucky” Ramesh said, explaining why it was that way. “The lamas bless chang three times, make it lucky for everyone.”

“And while the ladies were making Thupka – a soup of thickened barley, up in the caves, I played jacks with the younger children” I said. “As soon as they showed me the goats’ knuckles, I knew the game, so I threw them up and we played jacks until dinner came.”

“Then the lamas arrived, and after dinner, they all began to chant. A single man with a bongo drum provided the evening beat. I’m not sure what prompted it, but we were asked to sing, so we did a travesty of a Beatles song, but everyone seemed pleased.”

“Probably because we finished,” Conor retorted, and it looked like Ramesh agreed.

“After that, there was more dancing and we all danced the reaping dance. Then the beat got faster and the marriage dance began.” I said. “What was the name, Ramesh?”

“Sevelay Sevela,” Ramesh shook his head. “I say Linda, this is marriage dance, but she let ladies come with scarf and take Conor and Stewart away.”

“I knew they’d send him back” I said, and Conor pulled a face. “They just took him and Stewart off to the caves and filled them up with chang.”

“And once the head lama went off to bed, even the ladies at the back put down their spools and danced,” Conor added. “We formed a circle and followed as they led. Then one of them dressed Linda like a local and we all danced until dawn.”

“I have little no good head next day” Ramesh said, holding his head.

“You were very lucky though.” Yarron said. “Just to go to a party like that.”

“Yes” I agreed putting the finishing stitch on the brocade. “We’ve been lucky to meet so many good people. And such handsome horses too.”

“Horses lucky too” Ramesh said. “New blankets nearly finished and I buy bells for Lilu, Titu and Kalu too.”

He rummaged through his bag and took out a smaller sack. Inside were brass bells, hung on thick red thread. Tiku as the lead horse already had a bell. He always wore it walking but Ramesh took it off in the evenings worried that it would bring him harm in an encounter with wolves. The biggest bell was Lilu’s because she was the strongest horse and needed something of stature around her neck. Titu had a jazzy bell, scrawled with intricate lines, and Kalu had a clanger, to keep his nipping tendencies in line.

We didn’t finish the blankets until almost a week later, when we were camped by the road, nearing our journey’s end. Conor and I had walked with Ramesh and his horses for more than ninety days and for thirty of those days, Yarron walked with us too. We had become a family of the mountain kind, looking out for each other and the horses. Dressed up in their bold new blankets, the horses looked a treat and Ramesh was very proud. But in my mind, when I see them, they are still going BBRSSH in the mountains, free of all baggage and adornment, bar the little glint of wildness always in their eyes.

## SONGLINES<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Songlines* was a term popularized by Bruce Chatwin for 'tjuringa line' or 'dreaming-track.'

ROBYN EWING

## TWO LITTLE GIRLS IN BLUE<sup>i</sup>

Two little girls in blue, lad, two little girls in blue ...

In the late fifties and early sixties when we were young children our family lived very modestly. My mother's household budget was ten pounds a week and, even in those days, it didn't stretch far. To help with clothing expenses my mother learned to sew at an evening class at the local high school and subsequently made all our clothes. She would often buy a whole bolt of material to ensure the best price possible. From an early age then, first my middle sister and I, and then with the addition of my baby sister, the three of us would all wear the same homemade outfits. Same style, same material. My mother even had a go at making hats (with less success).



*Figure 3. Some discontent about homemade hats!*

Lots of our jumpers were also hand-knitted until the advent of the knitting machine. Mum also made all our ballet costumes including both short and long tutus.

Looking back I really admire my mother's skill and the investment of time she made sewing well into the night to make sure we were well dressed. One memory



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that particularly stands out for me is my mother making two identical blue velvet dresses for my sister Janelle and I when we were around five and seven.

These dresses must have taken my mother some time. She invested lots of time and energy in covering the buttons in blue velvet to match the dress and there was piping around the waist and a white collar edged with lace. Initially I loved that dress, especially the feel of the velvet against my skin. It felt very special, even luxurious to wear it for very best. To this day velvet is one of my favourite fabrics.

We wore these dresses on special occasions and to Sunday School. Interestingly, whenever people of my parents' generation would see us dressed in them they would start to sing the song: *Two little girls in blue* (see the full version in attachment 1). We didn't know the song and at first I thought the song began: *Two little girls in blue land*. To begin with, it was fine to be a novelty and when I did hear the whole song I was intrigued by the sad story that the lyrics related:

*Two little girls in blue, lad, two little girls in blue  
They were sisters, we were brothers and learned to  
love the two.  
Now one little girl in blue, lad, she stole your father's  
heart,  
Became your mother, I married the other  
But now we have drifted apart.*

That was usually all that they sang. In time we both tired of this reaction. I guess the novelty wore off.

My mother continued to make us matching dresses for some years. As the oldest, I must confess that I soon tired of and later resented wearing the same as my sisters – not only the same material but the same dress design!! Saving on patterns too I guess. One year we went to a televised children's party and were singled out because we had shift dresses with a pink background decorated with poodles in a raised white fabric. While adults would delight at three girls dressed the same, it came to trigger intense embarrassment for me.

By the time I turned twelve, wearing the same clothes as my seven and ten year old siblings made me quite angry.

But when I objected I was told that I should be grateful, that it saved a lot of money and that we looked cute into the bargain. To look cute was not what a twelve year old wanted to hear!

Did it make us closer as sisters – or, as in the song, did it cause us to drift apart? I believe it did contribute to me seeking more distance from my sisters. It wasn't that I didn't love them, but I didn't want to be part of a trio.

In hindsight, while I deeply appreciate my mother's efforts to ensure that we were well dressed despite her tight budget, these memories most certainly contributed to my desire to be as independent as soon as I could. I wanted to earn enough money from an early age so that I could choose and buy my own clothes. I know that I caused my mother some hurt by this reaction. I'm not sure that she ever

really understood. Such memories also influenced the way I thought about clothes for my own daughters as they grew older.

I have many other memories of the fashions through which we defined ourselves. I have vivid memories of ...

Hot pants  
Mini skirts  
Maxi skirts

But my memory of two little girls in blue is the clearest.

Fifty years on I still enjoy choosing clothes. They are an important part of who I am – I think they are probably an indulgence for me because now I am too old to be swayed by current fashion, etc. I love soft fabrics (including velvet) and colour and texture. I love finding something that is a little different and that is a reflection of who I am. Clothes can be an art form, an expression of who we are.

More importantly, I think this memory of two little girls in blue has made me aware of the importance of valuing every child as an individual!

*Two Little Girls in Blue*

An old man gazed on a photograph,  
in the locket he'd worn for years;  
His nephew then asked him the reason why  
that picture had cost him tears.  
"Come listen," he said, "I will tell you, my lad,  
A story that's strange but true;  
Your Father and I, at the school one day, met two little girls in blue."

*Two little girls in blue, lad, two little girls in blue,  
They were sisters, we were brothers,  
and learned to love the two;  
And one little girl in blue, lad,  
who won your Father's heart, became your Mother,  
I married the other, but now we have drifted apart.*

"That picture is one of those girls," he said,  
"And to me she once was a wife,  
I thought her unfaithful, we quarreled, lad,  
And we parted that night for life.  
My fancy of jealousy wronged a heart,  
A heart that was good and true,  
For two better girls never lived than they,  
those two little girls in blue."

*Two little girls in blue, lad, two little girls in blue,  
They were sisters, we were brothers,*

ROBYN EWING

*and learned to love the two;*

*And one little girl in blue, lad,  
who won your Father's heart, became your Mother,  
I married the other, but now we have drifted apart.*



*Figure 4. 'Two little girls in blue' plus one.*

NOTE

- <sup>i</sup> *Two Little Girls in Blue* is a musical theatre work composed by Paul Lannin and Vincent Youmans, with lyrics by Ira Gershwin (under the pseudonym "Arthur Francis") [1] and a libretto by Fred Jackson. The musical premiered at the George M. Cohan's Theatre on Broadway on May 3, 1921. The song itself is attributed to Charles Graham (1893). Accessed from: <http://lyricsplayground.com/alpha/songs/t/twolittlegirlsinsblue.shtml>. A recording is available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yn36MHFnptc>

ROBYN GIBSON

**TO THE DEDICATED FOLLOWER OF FASHION**

H'adore, Vivienne I really want  
Pucci, Fendi, and Cardin, Valentino, Armani too  
Madame love them Jimmy Choo.  
But there's a lipstick stain on my nice dress  
The fabric's scarred and I'm distressed.  
Fashion put it all on me  
Don't you want to see these clothes on me?

Because I'm a dedicated follower of fashion ...

She's a model and she's looking good  
For every camera she gives the best she can  
I saw her on the cover of a magazine.  
She's a devil with a blue dress on  
Wearin' her perfume, Chanel No. 5.  
She said 'just take off my red shoes  
Put them on and your dream'll come true,'

You see, she's a dedicated follower of fashion ...

So, put on your high-heel sneakers, child  
Put on your red dress, baby  
But you can leave your hat on  
Since all I want is a girl with a short skirt and a lonnnnggggggggg jacket  
... dust off your fuck me pumps.

I want a dedicated follower of fashion ...

In a mansion house and a rabbit fur coat  
It's all this for that rabbit fur coat.  
Please dress sexy at my funeral my good wife ...  
Wear your blouse undone to here  
And your skirt split up to here.  
'Cause I no longer need no skin tights in my wardrobe today.

Oh yes, I feel like a dedicated follower of fashion ...

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There's a power of orange knickers under my pretty coat  
The power of listening to what  
You don't want me to know.  
You see ...  
PVC (it's my fabric plastic)  
PVC ('cause it's nice and shiny)  
PVC (and completely waterproof)  
So, do anything that you want to do, but uh-uh,  
Honey, lay off of my shoes.  
Since I live, to be model thin  
Dress me, I'm your mannequin.

Because I'm a dedicated follower of fashion ...

You haven't lost your brand new sweater  
Pure new wool, and perfect stitches.  
But I no longer love the colour of your sweaters  
I like a girl in uniform (school uniform)  
I like a boy in uniform (school uniform)  
Cos not everything is uniform

For the dedicated follower of fashion.

**MEN IN SUITS AND DRESSES**

PAUL DUFFICY

## MY OWN SKIN

It all began with shoes, I suppose. The rule I knew from early on was ‘no shoes in the house.’ After school and on the weekends was always barefoot. What puzzled me was why I had to wear shoes to school when at least half my Kindergarten classmates came to school barefoot. That’s what I was confused about. I didn’t like shoes, they were never on at home, but I had to wear them to my small Catholic primary school in Kempsey, on the north coast of New South Wales. Before Grade 1 we moved to Sydney. We kept the same shoe rules at home, but everyone at my new school now wore shoes.

Apart from the shoe conundrum, clothes just meant things you put on to go somewhere. School had a uniform, but in my widening world it was a shirt and some shorts to explore parks, local bushland, storm water drains and canals. The weekend rule was to leave at breakfast and return at tea time. No questions asked.

Everything remained pretty much the same for me all through my primary school years. I didn’t think about clothes. Most, I think, were hand-me-downs from my big brother and all wore battle scars in the shape of my mother’s patching and darning. My school uniform (a navy blue suit – thank you, Christian Brothers Lewisham) served as my formal wear. It was what I wore to mass on Sundays and to the wedding of my sister.

I was sent to boarding school at the beginning of high school. That meant a uniform pretty much all the time. School uniform, swimmers, football jersey, or cricket whites. When I went home for holidays, it was back to the few clothes I had left behind. The jeans would have had been ‘let down’ by mum to fit my new body. My brother still supplied the tops. But now I was also seeing what some other boys were wearing away from school. They seemed pretty cool to me because they were wearing the clothes I also saw on Channel 10s *Uptight with Ross D. Wylie*. I was fascinated but had no idea where you would even go to get high-waisted, corduroy pants – the kind the band *Zoot* wore when singing their version of ‘Eleanor Rigby.’

By the time I was 16, I was working at something most holidays to make some money. If I was to be imprisoned until I was eighteen I was determined to have the means to make my way when I was released. Working in factories allowed me to wear what I had. But one weekend I was invited by a new friend to his house in Dee Why for the weekend. His brother had been the guy with the high-waisted pants. For the first time I was worried about what I could wear. I wanted to fit into the north side beach scene. But I’d never even been across the Harbour Bridge.

PAUL DUFFICY

Anyway, on our first trip to the beach I had on one of my brother's T-shirts which I can see now he'd scavenged from the set of *West Side Story*. I was on the beach about 5 minutes when some of the locals took exception to my Richard Beymer look – maybe it would have been easier if I'd had Natalie Wood with me. At the time, I was not scared, or angry, just puzzled. Anyway, a little way behind my friend and I was his cool, big brother who made it clear we were with him.

Two days after I left school I started working as a bus conductor in Sydney which gave me three months full-time income before I was to start University. Once again I was in uniform for most of the week. My life, it seemed, had been spent in uniform. I saw a lot of movies in my first year of University and failed Law. I also met a girl. By this stage, I had absorbed the fashion of what might pass for a left-wing, dope-smoking, failed law student and she seemed okay with that. This was 1972. But then my friend from Dee Why told me about a cracker of a party in Kensington. We turned up and the epiphany took place. Here were some very cool young men wearing what I soon found out were batik shirts. They had just come back from Bali. I was sold – that was me. A month later I was back on the buses and saving for Bali. Whatever I took to Denpasar in 1973 never returned. My return pack was full of clothes (along with just about anything else Balinese). I embraced batik, sarongs, and flour-sack pants. My 'me' appeared.

From that initial trip, I returned many times to the region. I met another girl. We travelled light over the months that turned into years. Our year in Pakistan saw us take on the Pashtun look; in our year in Tokyo, we moved more towards a Harajuku stance. For our wanderings across borders we were, I suppose, early adopters of the Khao San Road look.

By the time the kids came along I was working as an EAL teacher and pretty relaxed in my skin and my clothes. Kind of Graham Parker with a touch of Joe Camilleri and Stephen Cummings.

All the while, in the background was my dad. He was born in 1908 and came to Sydney from the farm up Lennox Head way around 1929 to pursue a career as a surveyor. The Depression put paid to that and he returned to the family farm. He made a few bob running professionally until he eventually got a job as a forester. His style was bush rugged until he got a desk job in Sydney just as I was moving into batik. He had a small lowboy in his and mum's bedroom where he had all his possessions (magic tricks included). Dad was the go-to person for wrestles, cuddles and the obligatory rub of the unshaven face. He saw the funny side of most things and demanded nothing of me beyond doing what I thought was right.

Once he retired from his city job, he remained a dapper dresser and he would arrive at our place dressed more formally than you would think necessary. On occasions he would turn up at one of the kids' birthdays in full regalia including suit jacket with lawn bowls pins.

In April 1991 our third child was born. In July that year dad died.



A HISTORY OF MEN'S SUITS: AN INTERLUDE

I was distraught. I helped mum empty the lowboy. I nicked a few trinkets (the magic tricks). Things went to Vinnies. But I kept two things: an old pair of shoes and a singlet. From then I started to wear both. Wore them out in fact. Not long after I ran into a mate whose dad had just died. We talked and I shared that I was wearing my dad's singlet. Some sort of space opened and he said "I am too."

ROBYN GIBSON WITH PAUL DUFFICY, DAVID SMITH,  
LAURENCE COY AND JOSHUA BARNES

## **A HISTORY OF MEN'S SUITS: AN INTERLUDE**

I recently took my 20 year old son, Beau 'suit-shopping.' We had purchased a non-descript suit for his Year 11 formal in 2009. It had fulfilled a purpose and was never worn again. With his teenage years behind him, he wanted a 'proper suit.' His only requirement being charcoal grey; mine being one that didn't cost the earth.

Entering the men's wear section of our local department store, we were confronted by a sea of black and navy apparel. Moving aimlessly between the rows of jackets and trousers searching for something distinctive; something memorable. What could easily have become an exercise in fruitility, we were rescued by Mrs Chen, a petite Asian woman whose mind seemed crammed with useful morsels concerning men's suits. Having ascertained Beau's size at a glance, we now advanced towards some grey tailored jackets. Donning his correct size, Mrs Chen looked over her spectacles and informed him that it looked "like a school blazer." What about black? he murmured. She was having none of that either. Her considered response? "You can wear a black suit to your Mother's funeral." Our shopping expedition seemed to be going nowhere, fast.

Sensing our disappointment, she relented her attack and suggested "something new and modern; something suitable for a young man."

Gone in a flash, she returned armed with a slate blue suit jacket. She manoeuvred behind Beau and effortlessly slipped the jacket onto his tall, slim frame. Cautiously approaching the floor length mirror, he scrutinised his reflection – turning this way and that. It was then that I witnessed an instant bond between man and suit. Looking at the label, I grimaced when I read 'Pierre Cardin.' I calmed myself by examining the jacket's fine details, the pale blue Damask lining and matching handkerchief square in the breast pocket. Matching trousers were located and Mrs Chen began to croon. "Oh my. Don't you look handsome?" And with every compliment, I saw a young man grow taller and more confident.

So, we exited that department store with a slate blue suit, Beatlesque in style that seemed somewhat fitting for a budding musician? And it was at that point that I started to ponder – what is the relationship between men and suits

and what memories are carefully folded and kept in the right breast jacket pocket?

The modern suit has a complex lineage. It began in England during the 18<sup>th</sup> century through the production of military uniforms. The precision of these uniforms eventually resulted in Saville Row in London. The Saville Row tailors began to introduce various design elements from military garments into civilian clothing. The flat lapel evolved from flattening the traditional stand-up collar on British navy frock coats that were designed to keep out the cold. The buttons on cuffs were designed for 19<sup>th</sup> century surgeons who needed to roll up their sleeves to avoid blood stains (Chertoff, 2012) since taking off one's jacket would have been out of the question. Working in skirt-sleeves was for tradesmen. In fact, the now familiar vents at the back of suit jackets were added for Victorian horse-riding enthusiasts.

Hindsight led me to realise I'd spent a good part of my first 18 years in a uniform of one sort or another. OK, I did finish my HSC and within two days was working as a bus conductor (in a uniform). The elusive voice of foresight told me that, given the choice, and when I was done with bus conducting, a suit was not for me. So I found a job that didn't require a suit and I attended weddings and funerals in whatever I cobbled together. But then when I was 52 the lure of the East once more took hold and I was advised a suit was the uniform of these Recruitment Fairs. So I bought one. Wore it once, got the job, suit left in Australia. My next job interview for a job in Thailand, when I was 57, was by phone – not even Skype – so the suit sulked in the closet. A week before I left for Thailand my mum died. I wore my suit to her funeral. My brother and sisters asked me why, after so many years, and after so many rants about conformity with my parents, I chose to wear a suit. I couldn't answer them. And still wonder why. (Paul Dufficy)

Influential in the evolution of men's fashion was Beau Brummell (1778-1840), a military officer in the 18<sup>th</sup> century who enjoyed the fit of military uniforms. When he left the military, he continued to return to his tailor to create clothing specific to 19<sup>th</sup> century fashion. Brummell is often associated with the emergence of the dandy movement (see Gibson's chapter on "Dali's 'Fashion Memories' of Fashion"), a subculture that focused on perfection in cut, perfection in fit (Long, 2013).

'Wow!' I am overwhelmed just looking at the rows and rows of beautifully made sets of pants and jackets in fabrics that had to be felt to be believed and a range of colours that would make your head spin.

It was February 1961 in Cronulla, a southern beachside suburb of Sydney. I was just 17 years old, having completed my Leaving Certificate only months before and next week I was leaving for Bathurst Teachers' College. Here I was with my Mum and she was buying for me, her eldest son, a suit. Shopping with Mum was pretty special – if a bit embarrassing. It had never happened before. But shopping for a suit was a new experience and there was a strange mix of feelings associated with the occasion. It was the first suit I

had ever owned. Until now the only jacket I had ever worn was a second-hand school blazer: expensive formal end of school functions in even more expensive attire were not yet part of the final years of school culture!

For the last good few years all my clothes I had bought myself with money I earned from a number of part-time jobs. With four hungry mouths to feed and my Dad working four jobs I felt guilty that my working class Mum had to fork out the exorbitant amount of twenty quid to buy me a suit to take to teachers' college. But it was one of the specified pieces of required apparel.

Some of those feelings of reservations did pale as I tried on a number of suits of different styles, fabrics and colours. I can clearly still remember the soft feel of the fabrics against my skin, feelings that were entirely dissimilar to the rough feel of the school uniforms that I had worn for the previous five years.

Although awed by the occasion, I still felt I had to be selective. After all, I considered myself, within my limits, to be a reasonably sharp dresser: a rocker, with an Elvis hair curl who liked tapered legs and pointy toe shoes – still like them, although it is a bit hard now to fit the 70 year old body into them! So finally we settled on a wool single-breasted suit in a dark green with muted darker stripes, three buttons and tapered cuffless legs. I felt very proud and looked forward to wearing it on many future occasions.

I did wear it on many occasions to numerous practice teaching assignments, to graduation from Bathurst Teachers' College and to my first wedding. All of these were positive and uplifting celebratory occasions, at the time. However, the first time I wore that suit was only a few months later, to my mothers' funeral. I will never forget my first suit and the memories and experiences buried in its warp and weft. (David Smith)

Saville Row tailors estimate it was about 150 years ago when elements of the various predecessors of the modern suit wove themselves into a single garment (Kraegen, 2011). From the Industrial Revolution, the businessman was born. He required a suit that conveyed a sense of respectability combined with productivity. As a result, the suit became quite sombre, devoid of any embellishment and almost always black; a man's standard corporate ensemble.

Throughout the 40s and 50s, the trend was to simplify and modernise the suit. *The New York Times Style Magazine* describes one iconic suit of the era the grey flannel suit:

Back in 1955, when denim was the height of rebelliousness, Sloan Wilson's novel *The man in the gray flannel suit* turned a man's classic into a synonym for drab, middle-class conformity ... Flannel had humble beginnings ... It was used for underwear in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the 1880s white flannel was worn for summer sports; by the 1920s the more seasonless gray had become a favourite. When the Prince of Wales wore gray flannel trousers on his 1924 trip to America, they were aped by collegiate on both sides of the Atlantic.

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Cary Grant and Fred Astaire then carried the trend through to the 1940s. (Bryan, 2009, n.p.)

In the late 1960s, the Nehru jacket made its appearance and was worn by many trendy males. In the 1970s, the fitted three-piece suit became popular once again. Most equate this tight suit with discotheque music and culture popularised by the film *Saturday Night Fever*. It featured exaggerated lapels and flared trousers often in white or brightly coloured polyester fabric.

Thirty five years ago I was nineteen. I could run for hours without pain; I could drink beer all night while listening to loud music; and, incredulous to me now, I enjoyed conversation with other nineteen year olds. I can't remember doing any of these things but there is photographic evidence.

What I do remember about those days is being released into the adult world and being hopeless at everything. Starting at the bottom was traumatising when I'd only recently been near the top as a school boy. And progression through the ranks seemed so arduous, slow and random for those who managed it. But one had to work. Going out cost money. Some of my friends even had careers.

So after picking up glasses in pubs, working on a car production line, waiting tables, handing out brochures, labouring, delivering milk, washing cars and caddying on a golf course – you can only imagine my thrill at being offered a Retail Cadetship with a chain of department stores. I had a future!

A year later, aged twenty, I'd worked on the shop floor in various departments in the big city store; I'd done a stint in the distribution warehouse out west; I'd gained experience in a smaller suburban branch and now I was posted to the buying office. And I loved it in the buying office. In the buying office there was no humiliating red vest to identify me as a customer servant, or compulsory safety clothing to make me feel like a potential statistic. In the buying office, we were businessmen. We were the face of the company to its suppliers. People flattered us and bought us lunch to get us to stock their bookcases, rugs and haberdashery. We were out on the road visiting factories and passing judgement on the quality of merchandise. We spent someone else's money. And we wore suits.

The only thing standing between me and complete immersion in the buying office culture was not owning a suit. I managed to avoid the issue for a while but I didn't want to look like a trainee. I wanted to look like the successful person I wanted people to see me as. I wanted to be a grown up.

So with a budget of \$60 I went to David Jones one Thursday night after work and hunted down a suit.

I had a few references in my head from movies I'd seen. At the forefront were 'Saturday Night Fever,' 'The Stud,' and 'American Gigolo.' It was sale time and mass produced synthetic garments were just starting to flood the

market so I was delighted to find my \$60 was going to take me a long way towards looking like the disco pimp I was fantasizing about. After watching me try on three or four white three piece suits my helpful sales assistant pointed out that this style, while elegant, wasn't quite right for the office. So I tried on a couple of navy blue three pieces, a grey polyester flannel, a nylon Prince of Wales check – but they just weren't Richard Gere enough. With only ten minutes to go before the shop closed I made my decision. It was a Trent Nathan four piece suit – beige and chocolate houndstooth jacket and waistcoat with two pairs of plain beige 'slacks.' I teamed it with a cream polyester shirt with brown buttons and a collar that looked like a seagull in full flight. The tie was a very long and wide caramel and dark brown paisley. My budget didn't extend to footwear so my battered black school shoes had to last another couple of years.

My mother for many years made a dessert that consisted of vanilla ice cream with smashed Violet Crumble bars stirred through it. Looking back, my outfit looked a lot like that dish. (Laurence Coy)

The clothes worn on the television series *Miami Vice* had a significant influence on men's fashion during the 80s (Janeshutz, 1986). 'Sonny' Crockett (Don Johnson) and Ricardo Tubbs (Phillip Michael Thomas) popularised the T-shirt worn under an Armani jacket style. Don Johnson's typical attire on the show usually included an Italian sport coat, T-shirt, white linen pants and slip-on sockless loafers. In an typical episode, Crockett and Tubbs wore five to eight outfits appearing in pastel shades of green, blue, peach, fuchsia and pink which reflected Miami's art deco architecture (Trebay, 2006).

I bought my first suit in the dying days of the 90s. My 21st birthday was coming up and while this North Queensland boy had evolved to wearing long pants, a suit was a very big thing.

I can still remember the feeling of wearing my first suit jacket loaned to me by my Mum's boss when I was just 14. It was like being offered a precious object or given the keys to sit in a big Mercedes. A whole other layer of clothing, angular and precise. I felt important; handsome for the first time. My chest puffing up to fill the space in the suit.

Age 20, I set out with money promised to me by my Grandparents. Whisked into the upper reaches of the Wintergarden Centre, off Brisbane's Queen Street Mall, my first ever boyfriend took me to buy my first ever suit. It all happened very quickly. I have a memory of the shop attendant – a tall sharp silvery man who I had seen in the nightclubs of the Valley. A glass encased room filled with rows and rows of suits. I tried to behave with aplomb, hiding my nerves with loud confident tones that attempted to tell the man what my style was.

My first suit was a stony bone ensemble. Rather square with three buttons, wide shoulders and un-pleated pants that I thought were sleek and hot. I wore

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it accompanied by a tight black round necked long sleeve shirt – bucking the expectations that I needed a collar and tie. I wore my suit two nights in a row for the two parties that my parents had put on to mark my coming of age and I don't think it was worn again.

Soon after, I left to travel around the world. (Joshua Barnes)

According to Timothy Long, curator of fashion at the *Museum of London*, London's influence on the development of men's fashion continues. Postwar subculture from the Teddy Boys to the Mods and the Punks “reinterpret, deconstruct and subvert the meanings and codes of the modern suit” (2013, n.p.). For some, the suit represents power; for others a ‘gilded cage.’ “But it has spent a century and a half at the pinnacle of men's fashion, leaving no room for debate – the suit remains the ultimate symbol of style and machismo” (Kraegen, 2011, p. 1).

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MARTY MURPHY

## SUITABLE MATERIAL

That first suit I wore on stage had been made at Richard Hunt Tailors in Pitt Street, Sydney, some time in the 1970s. As a small child with a massive forehead I sat while my father Philip, a solicitor from Queanbeyan, was measured for a suit upstairs, a navy woollen three-piece with a chalky blue stripe. There was a mezzanine with a polished oak balustrade and a tall man on the upper floor who reminded me of Mr. Peacock, the floorwalker from *Are you being served?* That suit lasted my first couple of years working up material in late night cabarets. The top of the thighs frayed first. Usually it's the seat of the pants that bottoms out. They say once the crotch goes, it's all over. My first appearance was at a cabaret on Oxford Street. I was slotted to come on after a sexy girl who danced in a giant clamshell. I had a five-minute spot; I was thirty years old and finally had something funny to say. Breathing and talking at the same time was hard. It was the start of my career as an obscure comedian performing one-man shows in small theatres. *Happy and Clean*, the first of three shows about unfortunate career choices, toured as part of a double bill with veteran comedian, Flacco.<sup>1</sup> I played all the parts and narrated the story as a failed comedian who is hit by a bus, discovers he is dead but makes a deal with Death by casting him in low budget movie. In my parallel career as a film and television director, I had made a low-budget horror film, *Lost Things* that also had a small audience, including people who walked into the theatre by mistake. So, my one-man show was part memoir, part hyperbole, and featured twenty-five characters, one based on my father.

Over time people have given me suits because, I think, they see me as someone who knows how to wear one. The truth is, it's really quite simple. I pull the pants up first, with the zipper side to the front and then sort of back into the jacket, putting my arms through the sleeves one at a time until I get more practiced. I'm an average size so with a few alterations my suits look tailor-made which makes me look more successful than I really am, albeit from an earlier era. I know it's just a costume but I feel good in a suit and I feel very good on stage in one, which is the most dangerous thing I've ever had to do.

Some dressing rooms look like prison cells with mirrors. Others are glorified bathrooms or in fact just toilets where you can get changed. The dressing room at the Sydney Opera House was bigger than my bedsitter. I always travelled with coat hangers and my suit was the first thing I unpacked. I also kept my bits and pieces in old biscuit tins so it was easy to make any dressing room feel colourful, shiny and familiar. With the box office takings from my first season at the Old Fitzroy



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Hotel Theatre, I bought from the now extinct department store, Gowings a red silk dressing gown with golden Chinese dragons. Wearing it backstage made any cramped space feel like a very small genteel club. I also packed a cut crystal glass for drinking Gatorade to replenish my electrolytes. Because my suit was heavy, and I have a talent for perspiration, I kept several white hankies hidden in the many pockets of my costume, making a gag out of my never-ending supply. When on tour, I found ironing my shirt and hankies helped me focus on the hour of dialogue I was about to have with myself on stage. Flacco preferred to pace up and down like a nervous chicken. I was a calm chicken, just doing some ironing. We all have our own process.

I was wearing my uncle Tom's three-piece on stage by now. When he died my Aunt Bernice gave me several beautiful suits preserved in vinyl bags and hung on curved wooden coat hangers with a honey-coloured varnish. One of these was a dark navy three-piece with a double lined red pinstripe. Heavy and wide at the shoulders with a narrow waist, it was hand-built sometime in the 1930s by Ambrosoli Brothers in Sydney. The vest buttoned up high below the tie and the shoulder pads were broad and comforting. The trousers came up to my rib cage so I wore braces under the vest. The jacket did up with two buttons and I sweated for hours under lights but it never lost its shape. Each night when I came off stage I hung it up to air and packed it carefully into my suitcase with layers of plastic when we bumped out of the theatre.

Walking on stage in my fine woven armour created instant atmosphere and promised the audience that something surreal was about to go down. I drilled my lines for weeks so I could switch from character to character with ease, allowing me to fall into the telling. One night in the middle of a dance routine I heard a crackle at the back of my right shoulder. In the foyer afterwards, a costume designer I knew approached me and offered to mend the tear she heard me make on stage. She wouldn't take payment. Death was a neurotic but benevolent character in my shows. When the grim reaper discovers I am a comedian, he confesses to taking some acting classes himself. I exploit his nascent ambition and bargain to stay alive by improvising a pitch about an action thriller set on my imaginary Aunt Mona's turkey farm near Wagga Wagga.<sup>ii</sup> Death thinks my film sounds thrilling and I offer him the role of detective, quite a good part really. I direct the film, casting all the characters I had met up to that point in the story. It goes straight to DVD, and from then on I have to come up with more projects for Death in order to hold off oblivion.

My two-week season at the Opera House was part of a double bill with Flacco. It was the only time my father saw my act and afterwards I showed him to our dressing rooms. As I helped him up the stairs I saw a waver in his step. My father was becoming a glorious old man. He sent me a postcard, saying how much he enjoyed the show and just sitting on my balcony during the day, surrounded by my books (It was a small place). It was the only time he saw where I lived. The following year Flacco and I toured to the Adelaide Cabaret Festival, where we were programmed after a Nat King Cole impersonator. On our final tour in 2011 we hit the regional centres of New South Wales, catching a locust plague in

Griffith and a cheese plate in Nowra. The Sandman, Flacco's long time on-screen life coach and sometime nemesis, had retired earlier that year. Flacco himself wanted to settle down and write military histories and I needed to find regular work.

My father went into care at the Queanbeyan Nursing Home, his legs swollen by diabetes and his brain shrinking with dementia. Then I met Poppy, a primary school teacher, and knew I wanted to marry her. I needed her to meet Phil before he was unable to remember who any of us were. My sister said he teared-up every time we came into the room. He knew I was going to be all right. None of us could believe it.

Last December Poppy and I were married. Richard Hunt was no longer around so I went to Zink Tailors, where Uncle Tom and my grandfather had suits made. I was fitted for a French Blue three-piece in a lightweight wool. It was a perfect Sydney day, threatening to storm but not too hot if you weren't too nervous. Poppy had taken extra duties supervising tennis games on Saturday mornings and running the debating competition so she could pay for her wedding dress. She wore a long thin veil attached to a beaded wedding cap. Ivory silk spilled down from a jeweled belt and people said she looked like the art-deco lady holding a lamp, except it was bouquet of soft pink and white roses. Watching her walk towards me I felt a bit fat, sweaty and blissful.

My mother Patricia said it all at the reception and the crowd loved her, but my father was unable to attend, bedridden and riding waves of pain. Pictures were sent by phone to my Sister's partner who stayed with Phil back in Queanbeyan. He had lost his famous appetite, now preferring to sip cold milk, but on that day he enjoyed some black pudding as pictures of our high tea reception came down the line. This was a man who had once proclaimed to enjoy all food except banana flavouring on its own. When we returned from our honeymoon we showed him our wedding photos and I wondered if it was the last time we would speak. His smile seemed to go back years. Two weeks later he told the doctor he was ready to go and five days after that he died quietly as my mother held his hand and my older sister stayed on the phone, listening from Toowoomba.

Days before the funeral, when the notice in the newspaper omitted the request to donate to Alzheimer's Australia, my mother's house filled with flowers. We imagined my father's ghost, following bereaved friends and relatives down Monaro Street, haranguing them for going into a florist when there was a perfectly good bakery two doors down. This was six weeks ago. I still have Phil's chalky pinstriped vest and look forward to cooler weather. I need to wear it again.

#### NOTES

- <sup>i</sup> Flacco is the fictional alter ego of Paul Livingston, b.1956, Australian Comedian and author.
- <sup>ii</sup> Wagga Wagga is the largest inland city of New South Wales. On my last tour I missed a mouse plague there by one week.

DAVID SMITH

## **ON KAFTANS: AUSTRALIAN MALES' REACTIONS TO MEN WEARING 'DRESSES'!**

*"OK! Now let's see what you wear under that dress!"*

This was uttered just as three inebriated colleagues were in the process of turning me upside down. As they did so my white Y-fronts were revealed for all to see. Now, the Scots have been dealing with such behaviour for thousands of years, but it was the last sight that I wanted my senior colleagues, wives and friends to witness at that 1976 Christmas party!

I have always been intrigued by the curious negative attitude that many Australian males hold towards males wearing apparel that does not have two legs of some sort. It is even more curious given that for large populations of males in other parts of the world, namely India, all middle eastern countries and some parts of Asia and eastern Europe, apparel with no legs is the traditional and preferred form of male costume. This is so for males from all socioeconomic groups, for princes, kings and peasants alike. And they wear such garments for good reason. They are cool and loose allowing whatever breezes are available to swirl around all parts of the body, unlike two legged garments that are highly constrictive and uncomfortable particularly in hot and humid weather.

Always an advocate and wearer of loose and cool clothing, I welcomed the 1970s with its *laissez faire* attitude to manners, music and fashion and with it more freedom, particularly for males in regard to costume. What males, if they have ever worn them, can forget shirts with Elizabethan puffed sleeves, tight pants with bell-bottom flares, brightly coloured raised platform shoes with pink, purple and lurid green socks and to set this costume the heavy metal chains around neck and wrists! Thus when this period of levity and looseness arrived I very quickly adopted the kaftan. I did and still do believe that such a garment is ideally suited to the Australian hot and humid summer – and can also be ideal, with the right additional garments, for keeping one warm in winter – as happens in many other parts of the world.

I had four kaftans. Three were made from light cotton material, brightly coloured and with large swirly patterns. This was to suit my body – tall and broad. Little flower designs just would not have been appropriate – I saved those for my shirts! One kaftan was in white with large bright blue overlapping circles in the central front and back panels bounded by wavy lines in the same colour. One had a large overall brown and black leaf pattern, and the third was just plain white which allowed for very colourful additions of chains, jewellery and footwear. With my

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shoulder length hair and full beard I also appeared quite Christlike—a remark made by several acquaintances.

Ah! I can still sense the cool and loose feel of those kaftans as they drop from shoulders to lower body, and feel the wind as it blows and cools even those most inner of crevices.

In summer, at home alone, nothing underneath was the *de rigueur*. However, when the kaftans went out and visiting, undergarments were added. This was not only to guard against incidents such as those at the 1976 Christmas party. It was also to preserve some modesty. Because cotton garments are reasonably translucent if one stands or walks in a manner that allows the sun to shine through the garment, all is revealed in stark outline. I did not wish to advertise my wares – an action that women who insist still today, knowingly(?), or not, on wearing skirts and dresses that are translucent, even transparent, would do well to heed!

I also had a pure wool winter kaftan. Unlike those of summer, this was in more subdued shades of grey with fine red and black stripes. Undergarments were always worn with this kaftan mainly to prevent the cold winds of winter finding their way into those bits of the body that needed to stay warm. In addition, maybe a skivvy and long socks could be added – it was even known that on occasions, in very cold weather, a pair of women's tights also came in handy under the kaftan folds. The subdued colours still provided an appropriate backdrop for brightly coloured accessories.

So what is behind the apparent negative attitudes of the seeming majority of Australian males regarding men donning apparel that does not have legs? While no definite answer to this question to my knowledge has ever been provided, it is possible to speculate. Is it that somehow this action by other males challenges the masochistic pretence that we males must somehow perpetrate to sure up our feelings of dominant identity? Is it that for males, seeing another male in a 'dress' in some way weakens the public image of the dominance of the alpha species? Or is it that on seeing another male in this apparel the observers once-sure strength of their own maleness is threatened and weakened? Is it that, dresses are associated with females who, of course, as characterised by the males are the very opposite of machismo – and thus by definition must be the weaker members of the pack?

Whatever the constructed reasons for males' negative attitude to men wearing dresses, let me say that on all occasions of wearing kaftans I never once felt that male identity was threatened. In fact I found that my apparel was actually of great attraction to women reinforcing my machismo and maleness! I felt strong and proud, maybe even a little taller wearing my 'dresses' – even when male colleagues wanted to see what I wore 'under my kilt'! Instead I felt sad and sorry for those who obviously had trouble with one of their kind wearing something that confronted them and their identity at some level. Again it is the theme of difference that has been and still is prevalent in so many ways in our societies. Confront, attack, control and eliminate those who appear different to you, those who and whose customs, dress and beliefs you don't know or understand: those who at some level threaten your identity and your place in the world.

Or, were those male colleagues who wanted to see what I was wearing under my kaftan that night simply carrying out a typical male prank and bit of fun? The sort of pranks that often take place, especially after some time of imbibing and inebriation – the sort of pranks that take place in the name of bonding on a ‘bucks’ night’ before a male marries or in many sporting teams – the sort of pranks that are the basis of bullying in all its forms. Of course, within the legal framework of today I could charge all of the participants with assault.

It is interesting how the memory of clothes not only brings back happy and positive memories but also sometimes, when you begin to write about those memories, some forgotten pain as well.

No matter, I will never forget the feel of those ‘dresses’ as they slip over your body and the coolness in wearing them. ‘Bring back the kaftan,’ I say – but if they do, I won’t have my old kaftans to wear – they were disposed of by one of my former wives! Maybe some females also feel threatened by their male partners wearing dresses! Ah! But that’s a different gendered fashion story!

## **DRESSING UP**

ROBYN GIBSON

## DALI'S 'FALSE MEMORIES' OF FASHION

Nothing is in fact more tragic than fashion. (Dali, 1942, p. 339)

Throughout his often scandalous life, Salvador Dali was continually drawn to fashion. "It was a world as equally rooted in fantasy and disdainful of the role of reason as his own art" (Radford, 1997, p. 170). However the artist was a master of concealment especially when he appeared to reveal all. The confessional dimension of Dali's writing is, in fact, based upon a retrospective view i.e. his memories. It was a synthesis of earlier materials with psychoanalytical insights that he gained later on.

Dali's work is like many Chinese boxes, a fact that renders dubious any attempt to psychoanalyse Dali solely through his paintings, as much as it annuls the possibility of approaching the 'real' Dali by trusting his autobiographical writings. (Finkelstein, 1996, p. 6)

According to the biographer, Fleur Cowles it took three years of research in Spain and France investigating Dali's 'terrible tales' to conclude that "some were maniacal, some perverted, some ridiculous – and all were beyond belief" (1959, p. 253).

One of the most interesting critical accounts of Dali is George Orwell's essay *Benefits of clergy* reviewing Dali's autobiography *The secret life of Salvador Dali* (1942). Orwell described the work as "simply a strip-tease act conducted in pink limelight" (1946, p. 170). Orwell argues that although Dali is an exhibitionist and a careerist, he is not a fraud rather he is a phenomenon demanding attention and needing to be explained. According to Orwell, the analytical skills of a psychologist and a sociologist are essential for the art historical analysis of Dali and his art. "What he [Dali] needs is diagnosis" (Orwell, 1946, p. 179).

### THE BOY WHO WOULD BE KING

At the age of six, Dali wanted to be a cook. By seven, he wanted to be a King – not just any monarch but Napoleon. In Dali's own words, "my ambition has been growing steadily ever since" (Dali, 1942, p. 1).

Growing up in the small Catalan town of Figueres in Spain, Dali and his family availed themselves of a rich offering of traditional cultural events including the festival known as the *Feast of the Kings*. In 1911 to celebrate the special day, Dali received a King's costume from his Barcelonian uncles. The costume was complete with a topaz encrusted gold crown and an ermine cape. In his eyes, it

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“represented the highest of authorities” (Dali, 1976, p. 28). Dali who “bore the King within his skin” would retreat into his monarchical attire whenever a suitable opportunity presented itself. Undoubtedly Dali’s unashamed vanity and love for masquerade were in evidence from this early age.

In the aptly titled chapter ‘False Childhood Memories’ in *The secret life of Salvador Dali*, Dali offered some insights into the role clothing would play throughout the sixty-seven years of his creative work. Although a notary, Dali’s father has decided to send his only son to the local communal school. Unlike the other children, Dali wore a sailor suit with gold insignia embroidered on the sleeves and stars on his cap. By Dali’s own accounts, he was the only one who wore well-shined shoes with silver buttons. Apparently each time one of these buttons was torn loose, his schoolmates, who either went barefoot or wore unmatched and ill-fitting espadrilles, would fight for its possession (Dali, 1942, pp. 36-37). “I was like a fashion plate suddenly dropped amongst ragged street urchins” (Dali, 1976, p. 25).

Like many artists of the twentieth century, Dali remained deeply in love with the memories of his youth. Events from Dali’s early years, whether real, embellished or wholly imaginary formed some of the most persistent images of his work (Hodge, 1994, p. 7). So completely did myth and actual experience finally coalesce in Dali’s mind that it became quite impossible for him and anyone else to know exactly where reality began and the imaginary ended.

By the time he was ten, Dali had developed a craving for nudity, a love of disguise, a longing for solitude and, paradoxically, a profound fondness for exhibitionism. “My life is one tragical sequence of exhibitionism” (Dali, 1959, p. 49). At an early age, Dali had learned how extraordinary clothes could act as a form of armour, diverting attention from the timid boy beneath. From this time onwards, he took eccentricity to extremes (Etherington-Smith, 1993, p. 51).

As evidenced in his self-portraits, by 1920-22 Dali presented himself in imitation of his idealised Raphael and not a little unlike Oscar Wilde. Borrowing his mother’s face powder and make-up to produce the required dissolute complexion, he grew his hair as long as a girl’s, supplemented it with arched eyebrows and flamboyant sideburns and adopted the romantic ‘pose’ of an isolated artist. His styled dress became so extravagant that it caused his sister, Anna Maria and his father great embarrassment. However for the young Dali, his appearance created a sensation thereby drawing attention to his ‘talent.’ One thing was for certain, Dali believed that in order to succeed as an artist, he had to develop the persona of the truculent eccentric.

The pronounced dandyism which revealed Dali’s narcissistic streak first appeared in his early teens. Passages of his 1919-20 diary reveal that Dali’s every movement and gesture were carefully orchestrated for maximum public effect, as were the clothes and hairstyle over which he took infinite pains. “I am madly in love with myself” he wrote, revealing his unashamed celebration of egotism (Radford, 1997, p. 20).



A dandy at sixteen, Dali would remain so all his life. The poet and critic Baudelaire called the dandy “the man, finally, who has no profession other than elegance” (Baudelaire, 1981, p. 419). Dandyism offered the possibility of social mobility on one’s own, albeit restricted, terms. It made possible a kind of incognito, an unmistakable yet understood disguise: the possibility of not being what you see (Evans & Thornton, 1989, pp. 123-124). In fact, Baudelaire concludes that “the dandy must live and sleep in front of the mirror.” This pronouncement might have been the motto of Salvador Dali’s entire life (Descharnes & Neret, 1997, p. 44). Dali accepted this imposition in his adolescence and would do so as readily in his later life. “How you dress is vital for success” he wrote in *Dali: Diary of a genius* in 1952. “The uniform is essential in order to conquer. Throughout my life the occasions are rare when I have abased myself to civilian clothes. I am always in the uniform of Dali” (Dali, 1976, p. 97).

As he grew older, his appearance grew more fantastic. At school in Madrid, Dali wore a black wide-brimmed hat, sported an amply flowing necktie and was in the habit of slinging his overcoat around his shoulders like a cape. He recalls in his autobiography *The secret life of Salvador Dali*, “As soon as possible I wanted to make myself ‘look unusual,’ to compose a masterpiece with my head” (Dali, 1942, p. 124).

Bizarre and peculiar, Dali’s childhood demonstrates that his adult eccentric behaviour and dress was not some sudden and deliberate act, but the evolution and continuation of a basic pattern which would ultimately affect his life and all his creative pursuits.

A ten page diary entry for October 1921 contains a section titled ‘Thoughts about myself’ where Dali confesses:

There is no doubt that I’m a completely theatrical type who only lives in order to ‘pose’ ... I’m a ‘poser’ in my manner of dressing, in my manner of talking and even in my manner of painting, in certain cases. (Dali, 1921, pp. 82-83)

#### STUDENT DAYS

At the age of twenty-two at the Royal Academy of San Fernando in Madrid, Dali began to dress with exceptional care and expense. He realised that in order to join the fashionable set of young intellectuals at the *Residencia*, a change of personal style was called for. In short, he went to great pains to look at he felt he should. “I made lengthy preparations for when I went out, so as to always achieve some theatricality” (Dali, 1976, p. 89).

One morning he arrived at school wearing the most expensive suit he could buy in Madrid’s most exclusive store. His hair (after three hours of soaking in a sticky brilliantine solution and set with a special hair net) had been lacquered with real picture varnish. No longer hair, it had become a smooth hard paste fashioned to his head like a wooden helmet. To remove the varnish, Dali had to dip his head in turpentine. This complete transformation was achieved in a single day and created

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a sensation among the student population. Dali immediately realised that far from looking like everyone else (as had been his stated intent) he had succeeded in combining these items in such a portentous way that people still turned as he passed by. Dali, the 'poseur' who would go to any lengths for the desired effect had established his potential as the dandy-artist.

Ever the chameleon, Dali altered his appearance by dressing in women's clothing wearing a silk blouse of his own design with a necklace of fake pearls. He commented "I became a 'bachelor-girl,' androgynous in appearance [although] I was a man through my white pants" (Dali, 1976, p. 89). Thus Dali acknowledged the beginnings of a lifetime obsession with sexual ambiguity. The interaction of hard and soft elements became an aesthetic equivalent to Dali's own sense of troubled sexuality.

#### PARIS AND THE ARRIVAL OF GALA

Dali's arrival in Paris in 1929, was welcomed by Joan Miro who advised him on the survival tactics necessary to advance his artistic career in the city. Dali was told to purchase a dinner jacket so that he could "go out in society." The following day, Dali went and ordered a jacket at a tailor's shop on the corner of *Rue Vivienne*, which he later learned was the street where Lautremont had lived (Dali, 1942, p. 173). This was but one of a series of 'chance' circumstances that suited Dali's personality and subsequent lifestyle to the letter.

Dali's success in Paris rested on the impression he created with the *Tout-Paris*. Quickly he was welcomed into this circle of high society that included remnants of the French aristocracy, Americans in Paris, Indian Maharajas and fashion-house entrepreneurs including Gabrielle Chanel and Elsa Schiaparelli. They knew that given his extraordinary appearance and his unpredictable attitudes and behaviour, Salvador Dali the artist would perform and entertain.

In the summer of the same year, Dali had his first meeting on the Costa Brava with his subsequent wife and muse, Gala. His appearance was 'noted' by Gala who thought him an unbearable, obnoxious creature with his pomaded hair; his foppishness striking her as "Argentine tango slickness." Dali was undaunted by Gala's initial reaction and in fact, it seemed to elate him.

The day following this first encounter, Dali dressed and re-dressed to meet Gala on the beach. According to Fleur Cowles (1959) what resulted "... must go down as one of the most perverted and nauseating outfits in history" (p. 78). If we are to believe Dali's personal account as detailed in *The unspeakable confessions of Salvador Dali*:

I decided to show them a side of myself exactly the opposite of what I had been the day before, and to transform the decadent youth into a ragged bullherder. I scissored the life out of my best shirt, reducing it a third in size to make it into a sort of bumfreezer, and cut off the collar. Two slashes in the chest showed me hirsute and nipples. Mixing some fishpaste with goat's dung I made a sordid musk that I doused myself with, and completed the

make-up by shaving my armpits, deliberately cutting myself so as to let the blood run down and coagulate. I added to it some laundry bluing that my sweat promptly spread over my torso. I stuck a jasmine behind my ear. (Dali, 1976, p. 89)

All this seemed so eminently desirable to Dali that he fell in love with his new appearance. Shortly thereafter, Gala left her husband Paul Eluard and their young daughter to live with Dali in Paris.

#### THE FASHION MAGAZINES

As his fame grew, Dali was able to attract commissions due to his ability to create a spectacle and generate publicity. The American press erroneously elevated Dali as the leader of Surrealism. Debates over the issue of whether or not his painting was the work of a 'madman' probably would not have reached the level of intensity that they did, and Dali himself might not have gained such a ready entry into the world of high fashion, if he had kept out of the public eye.

In retrospect, no artist ever put his work before so wide an audience in so short a space of time. But it was not until his second voyage to the United States that Dali felt his 'glory' was indisputable. On his arrival in New York, he declared "I am Surrealism." *Time Magazine* made it 'official' with their Dali cover story. Suddenly Dali was famous. His paintings soared in value. It became almost risqué among very rich Americans to have their portraits painted by Dali.

Dali judged publicity by quantity, not quality and had a childlike faith that all publicity was good publicity. To many Americans, it was not the reserved Duchamp or even the forceful Breton who came to represent Surrealism but the 'crazy' Salvador Dali. To Dali, Surrealism was simply Salvador Dali. Sensational journalism prepared the way for Dali's brand of publicity-Surrealism by developing such a taste for sensation. Thus Dali was able to turn the convulsions and the marvellous of Surrealism into a saleable exhibitionism.

While designing for the stage is an appropriate artistic activity with a long and prestigious history, the same cannot be said for designing for advertising. In the mid-1930s Dali extended his interest in creating fashion to the further step of communicating it. Fashion magazines became a legitimate vehicle through which Dali could broadcast his idiosyncratic version of Surrealism and win increasing public support among the rich and the sophisticated. He understood the importance of the proselytising power of publications such as *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar* and later *Flair*. In fact, it was Dali who opened up avenues to these fashion publications – requisite thoroughfares for Dali as a boulevardier (Martin, 1987, p. 196). According to the Director of the *Fundacio Gala-Salvador Dali*, Felix Fanes:

In the game that led him to expand the universe of the unconscious until it invaded each day, Dali went further than anybody. The world of ... trade would become, for this reason, the preferred pilgrimage for the artist. (1998, p. 1)

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Not surprisingly, Dali's career corresponded neatly with the rise in gimmickry in fashion, advertising and marketing during the Thirties and into the Forties (Cunliffe, 1993, n.p.). Surrealism, which embraced the realms of dreams, the marvellous and the unconscious was a gift for display artists and photographers.

Dali was characterised as a publicity seeker *par excellence*. "Even the most sensational newspaper could not have invented Dali" (Agha, 1936, p. 61). Resolving to become "the greatest courtesan of his time," Dali threw himself into the social and commercial maelstrom of American mass culture. In the United States, where art occupied a marginal cultural position in the life of the nation, the press were more than ready to grant the Surrealists the jester's licence to amuse. Dali provided them with a new typology – that of the 'crazy,' unpredictable, rule-breaking artist (Radford, 1997, p. 169) – the 'madman' of Surrealism. Dali's definition of Surrealism was, of course, symptomatic of his egotism, defining everything in terms of himself and stressing his own pathology. His was mainly a theatre of publicity and self-advertisement (Tashjian, 1995, p. 52). Ultimately Dali's career illustrates the desire of the public to be titillated rather than exalted by art.

The active participation of Dali in the fashion world went beyond collaboration to commercial capitulation (Tashjian, 1995, p. 68). Above all the Surrealists, he became a celebrity on the stage of fashion. Dali was eager to exploit all the commercial possibilities of his Surrealist object-making activity in jewellery, décor and haute couture. For him, there was a tendency to be moved by the past but set in the present. Modernity, he argued, was not found in the pretensions of high art, but rather in the domain of popular culture.

A simple explanation of Dali's commercialism, however, was that in the United States there was an irresistible demand for anything Dali produced. America was ripe for Surrealism or more accurately, Dali's brand of Surrealism. Dali for his part, was well aware that such commercial commissions represented a good way to getting to know (and taking advantage of) the unlimited opportunities offered by his country of exile (Descharnes & Neret, 1997, p. 349).

Dali felt very comfortable with work done in conjunction with the couturier, Elsa Schiaparelli during the Thirties and his later work designing magnificently vulgar jewellery. These activities fully legitimised his practice of imitating his former manner, repeating motifs *ad nauseam*, or bringing them together in various permutations. Such a list would no doubt include lobsters, drawers, inkwells, bread, fried eggs, telephones and numerous others. It is true that once Dali got a good pictorial idea, he tended to go for over-kill. Indeed this was a practice taken up by Dali with great enthusiasm. However Dali was always able to differentiate between his assembly-line art and the serious work over which he agonised. Dali often spoke of 'cretinizing' the masses and it would seem that the bourgeoisie would pay him handsomely to make fools of them.

## DALI, THE CELEBRITY

Towards the end of his life, Dali had become an international public figure. He was the exhibitionistic showman and salesman; the quintessential dandy. In fact, Dali's name became a byword for extravagant dandyism. The critic Robert Hughes remarked: "As a bodily trademark, his moustache is the only rival to Van Gogh's ear" (1993, p. 14). However the more Dali gained in public success, the more his serious artistic reputation declined.

On May 9, 1979 at the age of seventy-five, Dali entered the *Academie des Beaux-Arts of the Institut de France* to which he had been elected as an associate member a year earlier. The high Priest of Showmanship had come full circle in a uniform he made specifically for the occasion. Napoleonic in inspiration, it included an enormous Toledo sword of gold whose hilt featured Leda's swan surmounting the head of Gala.

According to Kenneth Wach, when viewed sympathetically Dali's adaption of an aristocratic manner and elegant dress may be seen as similar outward displays hiding a feeble and tormented soul (1996, p. 11). In fact, Dali acknowledges as much: "My elegant manner of dressing conceals my serious side just as my exhibitionism is the visible part of the iceberg" (Dali, 1976, p. 165).

Dali's adolescent diaries show that by the age of sixteen, he already conceived of his life as essentially a masquerade. The 'real' Dali, the private man was always hiding under layers of disguise: "a dermo-skeletal soul" (the bones outside, the finest flesh inside).

Dali 'matters' argues Carter Ratcliff because he forces us to question the premise that there is a clear demarcation line between high and low culture (Ratcliff, 1982, p. 33). Fashion acts as a hinge between these two realms. For Dali, fashion was one among many forms of aesthetic creativity that allowed him to explore the alternatives. Ultimately it became an amusing and lucrative *divertissement* to Dali, whose strong and discipline creative impulse, needed many outlets for its energy. Yet Dali was unique among his generation of Modernist artists in being so readily consumed by the mass media and disseminated to such a wide general audience. Robert Radford has suggested that Dali alone knew how to modernise the idea of the dandy and transform it into the contemporary mode of the 'celebrity.'

Dali was the first celebrity artist, in whose wake Andy Warhol was later to follow. (Radford, 1996, p. 259)

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JOHN HUGHES, MURRAY PICKNETT AND WARRICK HART

## MARDI GRAS FOR THE BOYS

The Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras is an annual event that occurs in March every year and has for the last 30 years. It began in June 1978 when a group of demonstrators marched down the streets of Sydney and were promptly arrested. Arguably that was one of the most significant events in the changing of the law to make homosexuality legal in Australia.

It was then decided to hold an event every year. In 1981 the Parade was moved to Summer, the end of February/beginning of March when the balmy nights suited what had become a major costume parade. It is now one of the biggest annual events in Sydney, Australia. Hundreds of thousands of people from around the world flock to it but in the early days it was a much smaller event.

[A café in Potts Point, Sydney. A collection of black and white photographs are strewn across the coffee table]

Murray: [pointing] That would have been taken at the end of February or the beginning of March 1984.



R. Gibson (Ed.), *The Memory of Clothes*, 105–110.  
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John: Oh. What memories we've got.  
Warwick: [interjecting] In full costume. Ready for the party.  
Murray: [recalling] I think this was the first time that I remember ever getting in costume and let's face it, it was a fairly outrageous costume for the time ... [peering at photo] Mad Max ... it was all about walking down the street, 'out and proud,' wearing next to no clothes. It was a major statement.  
John: I remember Warwick and Murray. They were in these skimpy Mad Max costumes and I didn't have the guts to go with that little clothing so we bought some cheap silver lame and made togas which covered a little bit more. We might have looked a bit Roman but they were so glittery that it was definitely gay.  
Murray: [continuing] Glitter and gay.  
John: I remember it was still illegal to be gay in New South Wales. So this was a very strong political statement; a gutsy statement to even get out on the streets in costume. People were still being arrested back then.  
Warrick: [seriously] It was just as the AIDS epidemic started to be in the news and it was quite confronting in an odd sort of way. When it started, they wanted to stop the Mardi Gras parade fullstop.  
John: At this stage, we were trying to make very strong statements about it was wrong for homosexuality to be illegal. Remember when this appeared in *People* magazine? This was the first time anything overtly gay had been put into a public publication that didn't deal with it in a very negative way. It was quite a positive comment even though the magazine itself was a very low brow ...  
Murray: [smirking] Very low brow.  
John: Tits and feathers.  
Murray: Not feathers, just tits.  
John: After this I remember we all went to the party and partied on into the night then we staggered home the next day.  
Murray: [whispering] No drugs.  
John: Tired but exhilarated from the night before.  
Murray: [Peering at the next photo]  
John: [questioning] Murray, do you remember where the idea for the costumes came from?  
Murray: The first Mad Max movie was 1979.  
John: [joking] What was 'Mad Max Murray'?  
Murray: It was Mel Gibson extravaganza; the Road Warrior thing.  
Warrick: [correcting] 'Road Warrior' was the second movie.  
Murray: Well, it was based on Road Warrior and ...  
John: I don't recall. What was the film about?





- Murray: [exacerbated] It was all about ... I can't remember what it was about now. It was a post-Apocalypse type movie and everyone wore a lot of leather and drove around in hoony cars and on motor bikes. End of story. It was very fashionable and of the moment.
- Warrick: The post Apocalypse was about petrol, there was no petrol. People became feral.
- John: But would it be true to say this was the first time you'd set out to design a costume that had some topical reference?
- Murray: I suppose so. Yeah, but I'd made costumes for when Crocodile Dundee was released ...

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Murray: [looking at Warrick] In our version, it was called ‘Crocodile Dragee’ and Warwick was in drag and I went as the crocodile but we had to change out of the costume because Warwick’s ears were hurting so much and everyone kept stepping on my tail. But that’s another story.

John: [musing] So, I guess our memory is of just having a lot of fun in the Mardi Gras Parades and it being very risqué.

Murray: The crowd that year ...

Murray: There were 50,000 in the crowd.

Murray: They couldn’t have been happier, everybody was ... not just us but the general public who were along for the ride.

[Another photograph is selected]

John: [pointing] This photo of the parade was in 1988 when we were dressed as a flag. Warwick, what do you remember about the 1988 parade?



Warwick: [contemplating] Well, by 1988 Mardi Gras had caught the public imagination. That whole idea of celebrating our gayness was something that the general public had embraced. Notwithstanding we were in still the worst time in the AIDS crisis, the public education health policies had been so remarkable that we, as a community, were strong and embraced quite surprisingly I suppose. The parade by then was so much much bigger in terms of audience. Sydney came out to watch. 1998 was the bicentenary of white settlement in

Australia so there had been enormous celebrations in January to mark Australia Day. This was the Mardi Gras Parade that followed that, only a month or so later.

John: Murray, do you recall how you came up with idea for our costume that year?

Murray: The obvious thing for me was to design a costume around the Australian flag but the problem was trying to work it out, across four people. Once I'd actually drawn it up and worked it out, each of us would have part of the flag. Warwick had the Union Jack on us and then a bit of a star ...

Warwick: [adds] Half a star each!

Murray: [ignoring] Half a star each and John and Kel were the Southern Cross. It worked really well to begin with but as we got a little bit more messy, as the evening went on of course, we just didn't stand in the right order so it was completely arse about. But anyway, there you go and then of course I got a job in the Philippines and I, having designed the costumes and then bought the singlets and the shorts, then had to leave it up to Warwick with the hot glue gun and the glitter to actually do it.

John: [turning to Warrick] Do you remember anything about the making of the costumes, Warwick?

Warwick: [seemingly annoyed] I certainly do. I don't remember the hot glue gun but I do recall the fact that the glitter that made up the stars and the red part of the Union Jack took about two years to get out of our house afterwards and I remember sitting on the floor doing this until two or three in the morning and ...

Murray: Cursing me because I was overseas working.

Warwick: And cursing Murray because he wasn't there. Anyway, it was all good. The good thing was that Murray got home on the day of the Parade so we were all fully united.

John: [butting in] That's a story that should be told because Murray was away, having designed it all and it looked like you wouldn't even get to take part in the Parade.

Murray: But there was a standby who was probably a lot more attractive than I was.

Warwick: I don't know?

Murray: Well, Warwick had him model my costume and then at the last minute Qantas diverted the plane and we were rescued from Manilla and brought back.

Warwick: So Eric got ditched!

Murray: So I literally arrived home on the day of Mardi Gras and just slipped into my costume and that was it.

John: [mocking] Dumped the poor boy who was the understudy.

Murray: Yep, Eric got dumped.

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[Laughter all round]

John: I've got some very strong memories of that costume. It was a wonderful costume that united the four of us. You two [acknowledging Warrick and Murray] and Kel and myself. We were a very strong foursome in Sydney, both socially and in terms of friendship network. It was fantastic to all be at Mardi Gras together. My son, Tim would have been about seventeen at the time. I had left it up to him to decide whether or not he wanted to tell his friends that his Dad was gay and lived in a homosexual relationship with someone. Bearing in mind this was still a time when homosexuality was illegal in New South Wales.

Warwick: Legal by then, '88.

John: [annoyed] Oh bugger. Correct that. It may have been legal by that stage but still not always socially acceptable amongst 17 year olds at an all boys' school. Tim and I debated it and I decided to wear a mask but the wonderful thing I remember about the whole night is that Tim and his friends were watching the Parade from the side and as we went past, it became clear that it was perfectly cool to have a gay Dad and Tim made it obvious, by screaming and yelling, "take the mask off," "take the mask off." I didn't hear him in all the din of the Parade but as it turned out the mask did come off. Some three or four months later, at the end of Tim's schooling, we held a cocktail party at our place and Tim invited his school mates and his teachers. They met up with all of us, [John acknowledges Murray and Warrick] all of those who had helped raise Tim. It was one big happy family. It was a really lovely memory of a remarkable night.

LLIAN MERRITT

## **MY BIG SISTER AND HER DANCE DRESSES: A LIFE TO BE ENVIED!**

As a young girl growing up in a small country town in the early 1960s I was captivated by the idea of romance leading to the inevitable marriage, all through the activities of my oldest sister, Irene. She was 8 years older than me and I thought she was so sophisticated, not that I think I knew the meaning of the word back then, but it sounded grown-up and I thought it suited her. To me, at 10 years of age, she was very grown up. She was working in the local bank, she was wearing make-up (lipsticks were kept in the fridge in the hot, dry South Australian summer), she was wearing pretty dresses and she was going out with boys. My mother used to despair that all Irene's money was being spent on clothes. In this small country town, young girls were meant to be saving for their trousseaus. I often wondered what went into a trousseau and where it was kept. It was quite a few years before I would find out.

My sister, Irene led a busy and active social life, going to the 'pictures' on Friday nights and dances on Saturday night. It was Saturday night that was the best as it was the opportunity for the young girls to wear an array of fashionable dresses, dresses that would flow out as they were twirled and whirled around the dance floor. Of course, there was always the discreet straight net slip underneath the frock to ensure that a girl's modesty was preserved.

For some time my mother accompanied Irene as her chaperone. This meant that my other sister (three years older than me) could also attend. I loved Saturday nights. My imagination, dreams and fantasies ran wild at the local hall as I sat on the seat that surrounded the dance floor. I can still smell the sawdust that was sprinkled on the floor to prevent the dancers from slipping as the three-piece local band played – drums, piano and saxophone. I still believe the saxophone is the sexiest of the musical instruments. I remember I swung my legs as I watched the passing parade of dancers. I especially loved and admired the beautiful dresses of the young girls as they smiled and gazed sweetly at their partners.

One Saturday Mother stopped going to the dances. I was disappointed and it was some time before I found out why. One boy with whom Irene was dancing had said, 'I see your Mother is here again.' He probably was only making polite conversation but Irene was mortified and told Mother not to come to the dances anymore. 'After all,' she said, 'she was old enough to go alone.' So my Saturday night fantasies came to an abrupt end. I had to be content with my imagination in the big, white wardrobe where her dance dresses were stored.

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The winter gave added treats as there were the more formal dances – the balls – to attend on Friday nights. Oh, to be belle of the ball – a noble and mostly unfulfilled desire in one’s life! I lived vicariously in excitement and anticipation of the glitter and glamour awaiting me one day. After all, the main aim of a young girl living in a country town was to find a husband – the culmination of one’s endeavour. Most girls in my country town were engaged by their 20<sup>th</sup> birthday, married after a discreet few months, followed by the birth of a baby within the first year of marriage (sometimes much sooner).

For the winter balls, girls had to have a long frock, imitation white fur stole, long white gloves and an evening bag that glittered as the chain swung from a young girl’s wrist. The dainty evening bag held gloves, lipstick, comb and anything else that might be needed as the girls retired to the ‘ladies’ throughout the evening to re-apply the lipstick, adjust the corset known affectionately as a ‘roll-on,’ mop the perspiration from their brows after the progressive barn dance and to gossip about the eligible local ‘talent.’ A girl had to always look her best in case ‘the one’ was there tonight. But to catch and snare one of the local pimply-faced farmers was not an easy task.

But for me it was the Singer sewing machine and making the frocks to be worn on Saturday night that captured my imagination. The weekdays were a flurry of activity. It meant a visit to the local department store and haberdashers by Irene and her girlfriends to pore over the pattern books – *Butterick*, *Simplicity* and *McCalls* – and then to select a frock pattern. Once the pattern was purchased, it was time to explore the lengths of fabrics in the store – glorious sounding words like shantung, satin, organza, chiffon, velvet, taffeta. Even the polyester linings, smooth and slippery to the touch fuelled my fantasies. Thread, buttons, zips, lace and other ‘notions’ had to be bought. I often wondered why they were called ‘notions.’

My sister spent most evenings during the week doing her dressmaking, preparing for the dances on the weekend. The sewing machine was set up on the end of the kitchen table, the rest of the table being used to cut out the fabric. The kitchen was a flurry of activity with many fittings of the dress, the whirr of the electric sewing machine and the cursing when a bobbin ran out of thread. The floor was strewn with bits of thread, pieces of discarded fabric and the occasional escaped pin for Mother to sweep.

In reflection, there were always a few short tempers and much anxiety on Thursday nights as the frock neared completion. Buttons were sewed, hems measured and stitched, press-studs and tape applied to the shoulders to keep the bra and petticoat straps in place. The horror if a stray strap slipped, or worse still, slipped down one’s upper arm when one was dancing!

The most boring part for Irene but fascinating part for me was when the hem measure exercise took place. Irene would put the almost finished dress on and Mother would use a wooden height measure to ensure that the hem was even. Irene would turn slowly as Mother inserted the pins into the dress. Sometimes this exercise would take several turns. Irene would sigh in exasperation and Mother would say, ‘keep still’ yet again. Eventually both Irene and Mother would be

satisfied with the length and Irene would take off the almost finished dress. The length would be cut, zigzagged and hemmed before the final touches were sewn – a bow, a pearly button, some lace. All this before Mother (never Irene) would give the dress a final press with a warm iron and damp cloth. The dress would then hang on the door to be admired until Saturday night.

I don't remember how many dresses there were but there must have been many as it took Irene a long time to find a husband or so it seemed to me. But I didn't mind as I had my favourite dresses. There was a straight figure-hugging (but not too much) royal blue satin waisted dress, the scooped back was lower than usual below Irene's shoulder blades. But what made it special was the royal blue organza train that fell from the back of the dress to the hem. A bow was added at the top of the train as a finish to the dress. The hem was sewn decorously just below the knee. The fabric shone and gleamed and I could only wonder what the train would look like when my sister danced.

My second favourite was made of a pale pink sateen fabric. It was a tightish fitting dress but what made it special was that it had an overlay skirt to the waist. It was open down the front and a belt that had been stiffened and sewn was clasped at the waist with a small diamante. I could only dream of what she would look like when that pink overlay skirt would swing out as a boy would spin her around during the military two or three step. But the best parts of the dress were the narrow straps of the dress which were finished with hand sewn diamantes. How those diamantes would glitter in the evening light! As the dress had such narrow straps it seemed so risqué to me as it meant that Irene had to be fitted with her first strapless bra. What fun I had opening the drawer to the dressing table and touching the padded strapless bra. I had never seen one before and I was filled with wonder. There was no point trying it on as a 10 year old as the wonders of the padded bra, let alone a strapless one, would be a long way from my experience.

During the week I would open the door of the big white wardrobe that held the dance dresses and touch the smoothness of the materials and trace their outlines with my fingers. Sometimes I put on the dresses. Although they didn't fit me and slipped off my shoulders and the hems would hang just around my ankles I would whirl around in front of the mirror and dream of wearing one of these dresses one day. I always made sure that Irene was never at home when I did this as I shudder even now to think what she would have done or said to me if she had caught me. Irene found her youngest sister an irritation and annoyance and had banned me from entering her bedroom. Little did she know what fantasies were being played out in my secret world of her dance frocks. I still don't know if it was the dresses themselves or what lay in store for me one day that captivated my imagination.

For Irene and her youngest sister this almost weekly dressmaking and preparation for the dance ritual continued for many years. By the time I was 18 the local dances were but a distant memory. Life was very different for me by then.

Irene eventually married a local farmer and I don't think she was wearing any of my favourite dresses when she met him. She had wanted to attend the local annual ball and she needed a partner. You could attend a dance with your girlfriends but you had to have a partner for the local annual ball. These country rituals fascinate

LLIAN MERRITT

me still. In desperation (her words) she rang a blond and handsome boy called Ian. Ian and she had 'gone steady' for four months previously but she broke it off as she said he was too quiet. So when she rang him two years later on that Wednesday night even she was surprised when he said yes. Four years later they married. The cost of my bridesmaid dress was as follows: material \$12.00, lining \$2.16, notions \$1.20, shoes \$20, stockings \$1.50, hair set \$2.60. Total cost \$39.46. How times have changed!



*Figure 5. Irene's 21<sup>st</sup> birthday party, 1963.*



**BROTHERS AND SISTERS –  
SONS AND DAUGHTERS**

NICOLE BRUNKER

**“HAVING A CLEAN OUT ARE YOU?”**

They are sitting in the hallway  
They have been for weeks  
There are so many, they extend the full length of the hallway  
We squeeze past them many times a day  
We don't mention them  
Family and friends skirt past them  
Some knowingly don't comment  
Others do  
“Having a clean out are you?”  
No, this is no clean out  
Cleaning suggests mess, being dirty,  
Ridding ourselves of things that have no use  
Everything there is loved, treasured and yet sadly unused  
It is the ‘out’ that may bring use and yet they continue to stay in.

Out is exactly what I have not been able to do  
I have tried  
Many times  
After all, they are in the hallway!  
And yet not all ...  
There sits bag after bag after bag of clothes

Not my clothes  
Now that is where I need a clean out  
Holding onto clothes is nothing new to me  
I have vintage clothes that have known no other wardrobe than mine  
So this is nothing new.

But these are not my clothes  
These are my son's clothes  
There are so many bags as he has always had so many clothes  
Too many to wear  
That sounds grossly excessive  
It is  
More so when they continue to sit

NICOLE BRUNKER

Unused  
Yet so very, very loved.

I didn't buy or even choose what he wore home from hospital  
Perhaps unimportant  
And yet so significant  
Choosing such clothes was kept for a special moment  
Hospital came long before we were ready  
My treasured baby wore home clothes bought by my sister-in-law  
A gorgeous navy and white onesie  
Size 00000  
Still too big for my tiny boy  
The first real clothes he wore  
Bought by someone other than me  
Better than his scratchy hospital gown  
I still wish I had stolen one of those  
And where would that be now?  
In the gathering of bags consuming our hallway?

No  
That would be in the most important bag of all  
The bag so precious that it lives in my parents' attic  
Lest it be consumed by the monster of 'other' bags  
The 'never to part with bag.'  
Holding that first onesie  
The shirt he was wearing when he first tasted an apricot  
Stolen from the hands of his Pa  
The first step shorts  
His first jeans  
Worn til velvety soft and faded  
What a little man he looked in those.  
His first pair of knickers  
Such an achievement  
For us both!  
His first 'skinny' jeans  
The glimmer of the adolescent waiting to emerge  
The hat bought on our first holiday  
A reminder of the family I thought we were building.

So many firsts  
Too many lasts  
My first baby  
My last baby

“HAVING A CLEAN OUT ARE YOU?”

The never to part with bag even holds a nappy!  
Surely parting with a cloth nappy should be easy  
Too many memories of the seeming endless washing  
But no  
They too are a reminder of something I will never do again  
Parting with those – with any of his clothing is a loss  
One loss in many...

A loss of my beautiful baby  
Who is growing into a most spectacular young person  
It is the baby I will never hold again  
Never again rock off to sleep in my arms  
Snuggled up in deliciously cosy jarmies.  
The toddler I will never again see  
Stumbling in his first pair of shoes.  
My ‘mille feuille’ – layer upon layer of clothes  
Discovering the joy of running mid-winter.  
The emerging child  
Selecting what he would wear  
Tights, then shorts, then knickers  
Hoping to be superman.

The never-to-part with bag  
The first acceptance of the need to part  
Yet this mountain of bags  
Slowly making their way out of the house  
Remains solid and unmovable in the hallway.

The t-shirts, jumpers, jeans, hats, shoes,  
Even socks  
Oh those first socks  
My dad bought those  
Such a surprise  
And how perfectly fabulous they were  
How tiny they were.  
The t-shirt he was wearing  
The day he decided to ride his bike down the stairs  
Tears long since washed away  
But not the telltale blood stain  
The secondhand fairy dress  
He loved to wear to dance  
The significantly larger bags of before-school clothes  
Marking the end of the daily choice in what to wear  
His beautiful free spirit now captured in the sameness of a uniform.

NICOLE BRUNKER

The size one yellow striped onesie  
Holding the toddler finding his feet  
And the four year old  
Who wore it an entire day  
Trying to comprehend his growth  
The stained singlets  
Destined to be rags  
They smell of my greatest love  
A morbid attachment  
Like the mother in that movie  
I recall nothing else  
Other than her assemblage of a baby  
From her lost child's clothes  
To hold and smell  
And weep.

Six years tomorrow  
Madly rushing about in preparation for the birthday party extraordinaire!  
Can't leave these in the hallway ...  
They have to go ...  
I can't.  
They move ...  
Back to consume my office.  
I'm holding on.  
Just for a little bit longer ...

VAL HORRIDGE

## **MY SISTER'S CUMBRIAN WEDDING – A LIFT IN THE FORD**

To set the scene on the day ... it was early July 1995, a sunny day in the county of Cumbria, in the north of England. Three sisters; Ann, married to Nick both school teachers in the UK, Val (me) married to John, both designers living in Sydney, Australia and Gail, a wine specialist, about to get married to Steve, a master builder, both locals of Appleby.

Appleby-in-Westmorland is famous for its Gypsy Horse Fair, held over a week each June. It's also famous for the Appleby Carnival, which is held on the second Saturday in July each year. As it happened, the very same day as my younger sister's wedding to her partner, Steve.

The wedding was extra special as it was the first one we had all managed to attend, and Gail gave us each jobs so we could feel part of things. The day before, Ann organised a small group of us to go on a raiding party around the local hedgerows to gather wild ivy and flowers to decorate the inside of the church. This done everything was set for the next 'big day.'

Living in Sydney, my role in the wedding was to make and deliver Gail's earrings for her special day. That morning I helped her transform into a bride and then ride to the church in the front of the bridal car!

Arrangements had been made that after the wedding ceremony at St Lawrence Church Appleby, the whole wedding party would repair to the Courtfield Hotel on the other side of the river Eden for photographs, as they had very pleasant grounds. They had also offered the use of an open landau with horses for wedding photographs.

So with the nuptials completed, the wedding party then drove in convoy across the only bridge in the village, the few kilometers to the Courtfield Hotel to enjoy drinks and a fun photo session. Once the photo shoot was almost complete my husband, John and his 80-year-old mother Joan, were offered a lift with Ann and Nick. They piled into their car, a five door Ford Escort to return to the Tufton Arms for the wedding reception. However when in the car, they realised that the Appleby Carnival Parade had already started and they would have to wait until it had passed through the town if they were to use the same route back over the Eden River Bridge.

Now, Ann and Nick knew Appleby well and on numerous occasions Ann had driven a mini bus on school trips through the nearby shortcut, the River Eden Ford, as a bit of country life experience for the Liverpoolian kids. So going from memory

VAL HORRIDGE

she thought the alternate route would avoid a long wait. To check she even went back and asked the new groom if the ford was still down the lane from the Courtfield Hotel and was told, 'yes.' So the party of four set off with the vicar following in his car.

On first sight that day the river Eden had what looked like a moderate amount of water running. So any real idea that the exhaust was not going to 'clear' the water level was at that point not in the equation, let alone how the engine would keep running. An avid driver, years before Ann had successfully completed an advanced driving course, but I don't recollect her mentioning fords or weirs. Just how exciting it all was being instructed by police and driving on skid pads, clearly demonstrating that there was a modicum of dare-devil about her.

So there they were, all in their wedding attire, approaching the River Eden Ford. Ann driving, peering from underneath the brim of her new straw hat, Joan all buttoned up in her Sunday best in the passenger seat. In the back seat, Nick behind the driver, in a new suit and John behind his mother, in his Italian navy blue suede shoes and a new linen suit, holding the groom's camera, now with a full load of precious wedding photos. Unwitting participants to what was about to transpire.

On the riverbank, Ann took a quiet moment of contemplation, before revving up and pitching the car at the ford crossing. When about a third of the way across it became abundantly clear that the terrain of the riverbed had changed somewhat and as Ann resolutely talked, even begged the car forward to the middle of the river, she realised that the car and all its occupants, were not going to get any further!

Looking out of the side window, it was evident that the car was now only a couple of meters away from the Eden weir, which had a drop of about fifty centimeters on the driver's side, down stream. Mild panic set in. What to do next so they don't end up floating and toppling over the weir? Ann tried to reverse, but the car was not having any of it. Desperate to keep the engine going, she asked Nick to get out and push the car as he was in the back and importantly, on the side of the river downstream of the flow. Both he and John got out through Nick's door, and watched in alarm as the back of the car raised in response to their exit, edging slightly towards the weir!

Sitting in the passenger seat Joan, ever the boy scout and a gung-ho octogenarian, decided it was also time to help and started to open her door. In her best school ma'am voice, Ann shouted "NO!" Alas too late – the river poured in at a great pace. Joan closed the door and a cold wet experience gradually took hold of them both in their nether regions!

Apart from his mother's unceremonious baptism in the Eden, John's other concern was Stephen's expensive camera full of precious wedding photos, which he went back to grab from the rear seat and proceeded to carry above his head to the far side of the river, putting it in a safe place to then help Nick push the car. While Ann kept her nerve and the car engine going, Nick was examining the bubbles created by the exhaust, and reporting on them encouragingly to Ann and Joan. Both women coincidentally had chosen varying shades of rose pink for their wedding outfits, and by this time must have been getting a good idea of what their

collective backsides looked like. "Oh for a printed outfit" they must have been thinking.

Eventually with two men frantically pushing, enough momentum was provided and at great speed the car went back to whence it had come, leaving John and Nick to wade back across the ford. Ann drove the car up onto a bank to allow the water and Joan to pour out. John crossed the river a second time, to retrieve the camera and its precious contents. By this time his Italian shoes were squelching and squirting blue water, and being a good Catholic Joan had probably crossed herself more times than John had crossed the river.

Meanwhile upon seeing what was unfolding in the middle of the river, the vicar hastily returned to the Courtfield Hotel for more help. When he arrived having told the tale and rallied help, he ordered five double brandies, one for himself and one for each of the river party. He then drank the lot.

The first the River Eden party knew of this proposed rescue was when the groom, his two brothers and father came panting down the lane with a large rope, after abandoning his new bride, leaving strict instructions, not to follow! The vision on the riverbank was unfortunately not photographed.

So, yes the ford was still there but the wrong question had been asked i.e. was the ford still passable? And so just in time, the wedding cars each joined the back of the Carnival procession and had fun waving to the crowds. I was again in the bridal car when one policeman on duty looked into the back of the car at the white fluffy apparition that was my sister and asked, "Are you getting married?" to which she replied, "No I dress like this all the time." At this, he handed her new husband Steve his handcuffs!

After a few more laughs with the Carnival Stewards, we all arrived at the Tufton Arms carpark for the much needed champagne toast and the 'wedding breakfast.'

Amongst the many cars was one bedraggled carload of four, which hurried inside to the sanctuary of their rooms, leaving others in the wedding party with a lasting impression as each one tried to sneak upstairs unnoticed. First Ann and Joan with distinctly wet rosy bottoms! Followed by Nick and John, whose trousers were drenched, each holding onto their very wet shoes. Grace at the slightly delayed reception was pronounced by the then beaming vicar as follows "For food and friends and fellowship and safe deliverance from the waters of the River Eden, we thank you Lord. Amen."

It was at least two years before the groom's father stopped greeting Ann with the words – "up periscope."



**LOVED, LOST OR STOLEN**

JOSHUA BARNES

## WHY THE COLOUR WHITE?

I was born in the tropics. Australia in the late 70s was well removed from places where fashion changed with each season. We didn't wear much at all and I don't remember being versed in how I was to dress. But even as a young boy I was intent on wearing white clothes. At times, I would get to wear a matching white ensemble – white linen shorts, white collared short sleeve shirt and matching white blonde hair.

As I have grown older, my proclivity for wearing white has not diminished. Even if you didn't know me, you would probably know it was a special occasion if you found me dressed in white – particularly if on the lower half of my body. Favorites have included a remarkable pair of white drill sailor pants – high waisted with big bellbottom legs; a pair of precisely fitted DKNY slacks – slick and beautiful, bleached and worn until they awkwardly ripped; I've sported many a pair of white tennis shorts (and even a white tennis dress – but that's another story). This story is about a white safari suit that is indicted in trans-Pacific migration, elephant conservation and Elvis impersonations. It is also my tale to explore why the colour white? If I wanted to be colourful, what underlies an obsession with wearing white clothing?

I have found there to be notable serendipity in the moment of acquiring great items of clothing. I moved to Newcastle around 2004; into the community of artists and activists that I lived was an unusual girl named Bethany. Bethany identified herself with a deliberate awareness of her awkwardness and amplified this appearance through an Andy Warhol like art practice. She was a prolific self-photographer and publicized her identity across the town on street posts, flyers and in galleries alike. A climax for her work was the '*Death of Bethany*' where in a clearance sale she auctioned her complete artistic works and some of her belongings. Somewhere in this purge, her grandfather's white safari suit came my way.

Bethany's accent like her personality was impossible to really place – but it was clear that she had some connection to USA. As it turned out we were both queer characters who had rejected our mutual hometown of Townsville and found our way to post-steel city of Newcastle. And the suit – a full length, stark white polyester ensemble, circa 1970-something, completed by red and blue threads that ran the opposite sides of the seam along the slacks – had found its way via Tuscon, Arizona.

JOSHUA BARNES

Apparently, the suit had been tailor-made for Bethany’s grandfather, William (Bill) C. Lacey. The style of the suit with its wide lairish collar, four white plastic buttons and bell-bottom pants, places the suit somewhere in the late 1970s around the time that Bill came to Townsville as “the foundation Professor of Geology at James Cook University.” Along with his apparent collection of safari suits, “Bill brought many attributes” as noted in the February 2014 newsletter of *The Queensland Geologist*, remembering Bill Lacy, who had died the year before.



Figure 6. The original safari suit owner – Professor Bill Lacy and wife

My own grandfather who had died the year before I moved to Newcastle attempted to educate me that the way a person dressed had intimate implications for their behaviour. A child of my generation I argued with my grandfather not wishing to see the truth in his reflection. I assumed he was just trying to make me behave when in fact his fashion maxim was talking about a frank relationship between dress and deportment. I preferred to ‘lark’ social norms and have always relished the capacity of an outlandish get-up to shift the gears of my mood. Indeed the late Professor’s safari suit became a perfect outfit for my natural outlet.

Whilst still in Newcastle, I turned up to the *David Jones* Boxing Day sales in the stark white suit ready to shop from the moment the doors opened. A few years later, now living in Sydney I sported the suit as I spruiked out the front of the *Art House Hotel Bar* on Sydney’s Pitt Street – me, my Scottish friend Tom and a large inflatable elephant.



*Figure 7. The white colonial conservationist*

The occasion was to support another friend, a committed animal conservationist who had asked for some help in getting people into a fundraiser to ‘Save the Elephants.’ With high visibility potential, we corralled people into the event and smirked at the irony connoted by my colonial couture.

The most recent outing of my white suit came with an opportunity to head to the City of Sin for my Auntie Barb’s 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. I correlated the occasion with a

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unique opportunity to sport an original safari suit in Vegas and take the ensemble back across the Pacific to its home in the Red, White and Blue.

Myself and 36 of my relations stayed last Christmas on the edge of Las Vegas in two ridiculous mansions, styled like ‘Gone with the Wind’ (and made out of styrofoam – literally!) Not to be outdone, I employed the sweeping staircase to revive a little Elvis and sing ‘Blue Christmas’ whilst sporting the white safari suit. So it ensued that Elvis masqueraded as Santa Claus and the following day, the suit once again went shopping.

I am proud to say that I had never been to Las Vegas by choice until this family festivity led us to gather in the Nevada desert. What struck me in the end was that I had brought the famed suit to the one place where my polyester white reflection would hardly draw attention.

We ended up in *Caesar’s Palace*, a gargantuan casino with full sized marble statues and a painted sky ceiling that can almost pass as the real thing. We passed every exotic store known to opulent shoppers, but stopped upon sighting a real – deal-hunky doory 10 gallon hat on a horse in a window. Fortunately it wasn’t a real horse but what I found inside takes human capitalization to whole new level.



*Figure 8. The white colonial conservationist*

The store was your premium cowboy outfitter. Delightfully decked out with every piece of country paraphernalia, I added to the 70s suit with a white Stetson to match. ‘8 beavers’ it was – apparently the codification for Stetson hat quality

relates to Beaver density and this store didn't go below 7. Moving on to see what else was in the store, I was struck by the most beautiful looking pen knives. Jewel encrusted I suppose I would have anticipated, but it was the marbled material that were used for the casing of the knives that had my eye. Magnificent veins of green bleeding with ivory coloured material. I discovered that for around \$12,000 USD, I too could own my own dinosaur bone dagger. Las Vegas had not disappointed and my own white extravagance had been outdone. The dissipation that Vegas presents cannot be dealt with in statements of white suited irony. You have to be iron clad to not notice the emptiness that the artifice attempts to overshadow.

Anyway the suit and I made it back to Australia and I now live back in the tropics, calling Darwin home (for now). There was no point in long sleeved polyester up here so the well-travelled safari suit rests in a stored suitcase in Sydney. Darwin offers its own version of post-colonial life and I am reminded of an explanation I once heard of why the colour white is used more in lush climes closer to the equator.

Just before I travelled to India (equipped with aforementioned white bell-bottom pants as my only full length slacks) I went to a talk by a visiting Indian architect and academic. She addressed the vast diversity of the subcontinent and in particular, the variation in the use of colour between north and south. She referred to the colour of clothes worn by people in different regions and when it came to Southern India, she theorised the preference for paler hues. "There is already so much natural colour in tropical regions," she explained. "It is the north that is famous for bright red and yellow saris against the monochromatic desert landscape but in the lush south people use more white." The explanation resonated clearly with me – finally an ecological explanation that justified my obsession with wearing white. Perhaps it is that such grounded theory defers attention from more colonial and hegemonic connotations associated with why a white man should prefer a white suit.

A friend told me the other day that white is not a colour – that in fact, it is all colours. White is also a colour of renewal – of spiritual death and presumably the beginning of another? The memory of my white clothing offers a window into my subliminal wrestling and reasoning. This story, like the white safari suit acts as an artifact and the cloth and the colour as metaphor makes meaning in an intersection of narratives not so unrelated. Professor Lacy's safari suit migrates with trans-Pacific memories; white gem creates reflection.

CHRISTINE BRUNO

## SCREW YOU, JIMMY CHOO!

I have this theory. You wanna know who a man is, or how good he'll be in bed? Check out his shoes. Most women, they meet a guy. They check out his left hand. For a ring. Or a pale band of skin where a ring is supposed to be. Not me. First thing I do is suss out the shoes. If they're clean – 'cause nothing's worse than dirty shoes – then maybe I chat him up. Or maybe not. Depends what's on his feet. Red high-top Converse All-Stars? Definitely. Those guys aren't big spenders, but they're wild in bed. Topsiders, with socks? He'll take you to an art film, then fuck like a dead fish. Birkenstocks? Please. That's like dating your brother. Best I ever had was a guy who wore regulation San Francisco police motorcycle boots and read philosophy for fun. Foreplay was listening to him read Plato's *Republic* in the original Greek. I have no idea what it meant, but it sure sounded sexy.

The guy I currently have my eye on is a jazz musician named Nick. Black hair, pale blue eyes – my favorite combination – and a pair of broken in Old Gringos on his feet. The heel just slightly worn down, the edge a little scuffed, and a polished steel toe peeking out from under the frayed hem of his jeans. Now that is a man!

*(pause)*

He's a friend of a friend slash director slash sanctimonious bore, Marcy, who likes to impress everyone with how progressive and sensitive she is. She's always putting together readings of plays about women who've been damaged by the patriarchy. Or about how capitalism has corrupted us all. I think she secretly keeps Jimmy Choo in business.

Lately, Marcy's been on a disability kick. She keeps calling me to do these readings, and the only reason I say yes is that some of them actually involve real human beings, not one-dimensional victims, misunderstood villains or symbols of dysfunction. Though last week, I did play a metaphor. Liberty. A whore with CP who "symbolizes how immobilized we all are within the capitalist system that fails to recognize or reward the true value of the human spirit." The playwright's words, not mine.

Why do I always have to stand for something? Can't I just want to get laid?

Anyway, Nick – the jazz musician in the Old Gringos – came to the reading. And afterward, he complimented me on my performance.

*(Nick's voice)* "Tough material. You really made it sing."

*(CASSIE laughs)*

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*Um, thanks.*

Those pale blue eyes, so friendly and inviting. That easy smile. All six feet of him, filling out those jeans very nicely. Thank you. Then I saw the boots. And that was it.

Turns out he's pretty witty, too. And not afraid to flirt. Most guys think I'm too frail for the double entendre. Too delicate for the arched eyebrow. Either that, or they assume I'm a virgin. Sometimes that turns them on. The prospect of being the one to initiate me into the mysterious, manly arts of seduction and deflowering.

*(beat)*

So. Marcy's got another party coming up, which I was planning to get out of. She's forever trying to set me up with these corporate types. Overgrown frat boys in penny loafers. By the way, penny loafers? Premature ejaculators.

*(pause)*

But then I heard Nick was going to be there. *(pause)* If those boots are any indication, things are looking up.

So I need to find just the right pair of something that will send him the unmistakable message: Meet me in the hallway, next to the Kandinsky.

From *Screw You, Jimmy Choo!*  
by Christine Bruno and D.W. Gregory  
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When people ask what my solo show, *Screw You, Jimmy Choo!* is about, I like to distill it down – with my tongue planted firmly in my cheek – to a single sentence: *Screw You, Jimmy Choo!* is a story about the men I can't have and the shoes I can't wear!

I've discovered that few things grab a woman's attention, or a man's, more than the words "men" and "shoes" in the same sentence when uttered by a woman. I often think if I were to substitute the words "men" and "shoes" with the word "sex," they would be interchangeable. So here goes:

*Screw You, Jimmy Choo!* is a story about the SEX I can't have and the SEX I can't wear! See what I mean? All I did was strip away the metaphor and the subtext and got right to the heart of the matter. By the time we reach age six or seven, most girls understand on some level that the shoes we wear will become inextricably linked with sex – or the lack of it. All hail the almighty high-heel! Women covet them and men covet the women who wear them.

Regardless of gender identification or sexual preference, sex is one of the most powerful instincts and motivators of any species – and humans are far from an exception to that law of the jungle. Evolutionary biology – or in my case, my first college acting professor – teaches us that all animals are governed by four basic



drives: Fleeing, Fighting, Feeding and Fornicating. If we're not engaging in one, we're concentrating on another, and sometimes more than one simultaneously.

Like many little girls, my obsession with fashion began early. From watching my parents transform into movie stars Faye Dunaway and Warren Beatty as the bandits, Bonnie and Clyde for Halloween to driving my mother to the point of exhaustion until I found just the right pair of shoes to wear with my First Holy Communion dress – a practice I would repeat dozens of times until my wedding day 16 years later – I came to understand that most people, whether we admit it or not, do, in fact, judge a book by its proverbial cover, at least upon first inspection.

As a person, particularly a woman, with a mobility disability since birth, I have experienced that judgment first hand from the time I was able to crawl. Like anyone who falls outside the imposed norm of the community in which he/she/they live, stares, glares, invasive comments, myths, assumptions and judgments have always been an integral part of my everyday life. And like many disabled people of my generation, I did my best to assimilate, particularly with respect to fashion. I prided myself on being the best dressed and most put together of all my schoolmates – comfort be damned! I flew in the face – and sometimes still do – of all practicality. It made no difference to me whether or not I could actually *walk* in the shoes I wore! I subjected my mother to countless shoe-shopping marathons, which more often than not, resulted in both of us crying copious tears and leaving the shop empty-handed – only to return the next day to repeat the process.

My mother has always been my best friend, and she would be the first to tell you we never argued about traditional mother-daughter issues: boys, grades, staying out late, drugs... Most of our battles were about shoes. She simply could not grasp that I would rather fall on my face than endure the humiliation of a fashion *faux pas*. The story that best exemplifies our struggle – and her favorite one to retell – involved my begging for a new pair of shoes for a school concert in which I was performing. I wore her down with the argument that all the girls would be wearing shoes with heels that matched their outfits and that, if I couldn't wear heels, I at least needed a new pair, so I wouldn't embarrass myself in front of the whole school! It seemed, to me, a perfectly logical argument. We found the shoes – a trendy pair of Buffalo sandals with a wedge heel. I was thrilled! I could now be just one among 25 girls on that stage and if I were going to stand out, it would be only because my voice was stronger, brighter and more melodious than the others!

On the evening of the concert, as my mother took her seat in the auditorium, she was horrified to look out into a sea of teenage girls in long dresses wearing *dirty sneakers*, except of course, yours truly! But mom – or maybe it was karma – had the last laugh. Weeks later, still proudly sporting the precarious sandals, I received my first and only concussion to date when I twisted my ankle, lost my balance and banged my head into a glass door! I never saw those sandals again. I'm sure my mother never envisioned that years later my grandmother's mantra, "You have to suffer to be beautiful," would take on an even more complex meaning. In our case, not only did *I* have to suffer to be "beautiful"; my *mother* was forced to suffer *for me* to be "beautiful." In retrospect, as evidenced by the literally dozens of pairs of

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shoes I threw out when I left home for university and the battle scars associated with each one, I suspect she probably suffered more than I.

Puberty came and went and by then, I had figured out that no matter how hard I tried to fit in, I would always stand a little askew and that if I was going to not only survive, but thrive, in a society that hypocritically claims to value and embrace difference, but is, in reality, deathly afraid of it, I would have to live according to my own rules and develop my own sense of 'style' which I did. I, along with many of my disabled brothers and sisters, am living proof that necessity is, in fact, the mother of invention. I've been pairing dresses and skirts with boots – combat, motorcycle, cowboy, you name it – since the '80s! It's impossible to flip through any fashion magazine or walk down any city street across the globe today without catching a glimpse of my look!

Once I began to own that there were certain prescribed standards of beauty and sexuality to which I could never conform – despite all my best efforts – two things happened: I gained a sense of internal freedom my external body never had. I began to let go of the notion that in order to be considered attractive and desirable to men, and more importantly, to myself, I had to compete in a world of long legs, shapely hips, short skirts and high heels. To claim, however, that I have successfully silenced the voices in my head that remind me who I am every time I gaze longingly at a pair of stilettos in a shop window and fantasize about how different my life would be if I could wear them, or spy on a man fawning over a woman whose only job is to be within eyeshot for him to notice her, would be a lie. Those voices are a part of me. I have accepted – no – embraced them.

The second discovery was a complete surprise. Letting go allowed me to see clearly, for the first time, that I was a hypocrite. I had been unconsciously guilty of judging others by their appearance – the very judgments against which I had spent my entire adolescence internally rallying.

Moving in and with the cerebral palsy body requires a constant negotiation and awareness of yourself, others, inanimate objects and the space around you. It necessitates looking down rather than up when walking – if for no other reason than to avoid tripping over everything in your path!

Most nondisabled people will say the thing they notice first when someone is walking toward them is the face – or some aspect of it, such as the eyes or the lips. What's the first thing I see? You guessed it – the feet, or more specifically, the shoes – and I move up from there. Upon first glance, what's on a person's feet, if I allow myself to listen, can speak volumes.

A woman wearing six-inch Christian Louboutins on the streets of Manhattan in the middle of the day? She's either a wealthy, middle-age woman who's trying too hard to attract her third husband or a 12-year-old, 12-pound fashion model sneaking off set to grab a hot pretzel smothered in mustard.

A man wearing size 13, pristine white tennis shoes in the middle of Times Square? He's on holiday with his family from the Midwest and has been complaining all day that his feet hurt, so his wife insisted they pop into Footlocker and buy him a new pair – which he proudly chose.

SCREW YOU JIMMY CHOO!

Once the realization hit me, I began to catch myself judging everyone, everywhere. My doorman, my mail carrier, my barista, my hairstylist, my co-workers' spouses, my friends' partners, my mentors, prospective employers, potential lovers. Especially potential lovers. I imagine elaborate scenarios from their childhoods, how their first kiss felt, what books they read, food they eat, music they listen to, their greatest successes and deepest disappointments. But mostly, I imagine what it would be like to make love with them. The shoes are never wrong.

At first blush, my elaborate practice may appear harsh and dismissive to the unsuspecting male who innocently threw on his go-to pair of loafers coming apart at the seams to take out his Boxer puppy to do his business. The truth is, I'm anything but dismissive – discerning, definitely – but never dismissive. Is there an upside, then, to judging a potential lover by his shoes? Absolutely. There's always room for improvement ... and I'm just the woman to lead him down the path of footwear righteousness!

I guess the evolutionary biologists – and my college acting teacher – were right after all: All roads do lead back to sex. Yet, while I still believe that shoes and sex are inextricably linked, at least for human beings, I've also come to understand that the power of the almighty high heel – or cowboy boot – is fleeting. In the end, we're all barefoot.

JACQUELINE MOLLOY

## OFFCUTS

I trim the blush red silk into the perfect final squares for the quilt, cutting with care, mindful of the fabric's delicacy. It snags on my calloused, swollen fingers.

The night air slips unchoreographed through my open windows: it is restless and humid making me sleepy but I force myself to concentrate. The silk grows limp and curls under the sharp blades as I snip and shape.

Sydney in December can be stormy and unpredictable: the heat merciless and the warm rain frequent. My windows have been wide open for weeks and every night the same two sounds blend: the repetitive mechanical whir of my upstairs neighbours' sewing machine and the lazy whoosh of the waves breaking on the sand. Tonight is no exception. Even the waves are drowsy as though the heat has done them in.

My neighbour above, Lola, has no such problem. She sews late into the night full of verve and purpose. She makes beautiful dresses for beautiful movie stars. She is an up and coming costume designer – *one to watch* – as they say. It is thanks to her that my quilt exists but she doesn't know that.

Too tired now to sew the final squares into place, I lay the quilt into the cotton storage bag, switch off the lights and savour the darkness.

I imagine, just for a moment, that I am cool.

In bed reading, I am soothed by the steady whirring of Lola's machine, the sluggish waves and the distant bass rumble of thunder. At three am I wake to find my open book sprawled on my chest, sweat lapping in the hollow above my breast bone and my glasses at half mast.

I listen. Silence. Lola and the waves are slumbering.

Disorientated with sleep, I stagger from my bedroom for a glass of water. It takes me a moment to register an unfamiliar scratching noise and I hang back from entering the kitchen.

I regret falling asleep whilst reading a book on the early lives of serial killers. The visions in my head fuelled by the heat, loud scratching and my nocturnal reading choice are violent and bloody, involving axes, nimbly wielded shiny blades and skinny boy-men with missing front teeth and insatiable murderous intent.

I take a breath, hug the wall and flick the light switch on prepared to do battle.

There is a possum in the kitchen.

He stares at me, surprised, his little brown head just visible from the depths of my white Belfast sink. On first glance it looks sweet: on second glance, I take in its pointy talons twitching at the end of its busy claws, doing damage to my reclaimed

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enamel. We make eye contact; a hungry look in its shiny brown eyes. Then it is gone.

Just like that.

A smooth, silent escape back out through the kitchen window and down the sturdy trunk of the avocado tree. I lean over the sink to close the window behind it and plump droplets of tepid rain fall onto my bare arms.

Summer rain in Sydney has a distinct disposition. It creeps up furtively. One afternoon last week the rain was so forceful on Coogee Bay Road that it filled the gutters within minutes. It rushed my feet and stole my left shoe. I watched as my red and white striped ballet pump was battered by the makeshift waves and taken around the corner. I waited, hoping it might be returned on a cross current, but I never saw it again.

Tonight though, I am safe in my flat. The rain can do what it likes. I drift back into sleep; all thoughts of possums and serial killers banished. I am comforted by the quilt on a chair at the end of the bed, imagine it glows from within its protective cover: a spectral of luminosity shadow dancing on the ceiling. I listen to the rain tap dance on my closed windows and wonder if it is wearing my stolen shoe.

The next morning I am woken early as usual by Lola slamming her front door as she leaves for yet another film set. The noise reverberates down through the stairwell, bounces off the tiled floor and dies against the wooden hand rails. Then the *clip clop* of her summer sandals as she makes her way down the stairs.

I wait for it – the sound I wait for every weekday morning – the rustle of plastic as she drops a bag containing last night’s fabric off cuts into the communal wheelie bin. Then thump as she lets the lid fall shut, the beep as she unlocks her red mini, slams the door, revs the engine into life and races up the silent street as though she is being pursued.

Lola is a busy woman, *always on a deadline*, so she once told me.

I throw on a loose, brightly patterned sun dress to combat the already hot morning and shunt any escaped tendrils of my silvery hair back up into the topknot on my head. I follow in Lola’s noisy footsteps with my own light tread.

Outside it is as though the night rain had never fallen: even the cement path is parched. The wheelie bin is sheltered in a discreet spot behind a frangipani tree. Hidden beneath its unruly crimson blooms I remove Lola’s bulging plastic bag. I once read that frangipanis thrive on neglect and have felt in simpatico with it ever since.

I put the kettle on, resist opening the window above the sink in case the possum is a wily opportunist, and tip the contents of the bag onto my kitchen floor. This is my favourite part: watching the wisps of fabric glide onto my cream tiles. The palette is clearly of leading lady calibre: shimmering satins in raspberry hues, organza in periwinkle blue and trims of startlingly white, dainty guipure lace.

A potent blended aroma of Chanel No 5 and last night’s curry accompanies their descent. The final piece – a morsel of shiny gold and red sequined chiffon illuminates my small kitchen like a light from a movie set. Reminds me of childhood and of my mother in luminous ball gowns.

I wonder whose leftover it is, imagine Lola in a sun drenched rehearsal room, with pearl-headed pins stuck into her T Shirt and a worn tape measure around her neck. She would be kneeling at the feet of a starlet who ignores her and gossips into an iPhone while Lola patiently pins and calculates, making notes for alterations in a purple leather note book.

On the rare occasions that our paths cross, Lola is always smiling – and rushing: her arms full of garment bags. Precious cargo. Hush Hush. Top Secret. I'm sure I'm the only one in our building who knows what Lola does.

And who would I tell?

I stroke the fabrics, aware I no longer have a use for them. The quilt is almost finished and is a one off: a special gift.

Time to break the habit.

I replace the bag into the bin just as the clouds release today's first drops of rain. The irritable thunder of last night finally vents itself and I hurry back upstairs. I make myself a coffee while the air around me closes up, unwilling to surrender its heat to the rain.

I spread the quilt over my bed for the last time. It is vibrant and comforting and made up entirely of Lola's discarded fabric, stolen over the past two years.

It holds secrets, scandals and scraps of other lives: glamorous lives that shine with good fortune that most of us can only dream about. I stitch on the final, red silk squares and stand back to admire it while the summer rain rumbas on my windows and the thunder accompanies it with a steady bass beat.

I imagine the look on my daughter's face when she opens my parcel. She has promised me that next year she'd send a plane ticket so I could spend Christmas with her.

Just like she promises every year.

I fold the quilt for the last time, pack it carefully into a large box for posting, and think of my missing shoe still adrift held captive by the summer rain, and of Lola's discarded fabrics. And of the possum, out there hungry and alone in the storm.

I open the kitchen window wide, place a bunch of luscious red grapes in the sink, and wait.

ROBBIE MONKHOUSE

## THE DRESS



I once stole a dress from a rival in love! It was a really lovely 1940s, raspberry pink rayon dress with a cream dot pattern running in rows horizontally.

The minute I saw that dress I wanted it! I can't exactly tell you why. Maybe because she had the boy I loved, so I'd take something she loved. Sounds melodramatic now, but at the time I was heart broken.

I imagined the dress in question was an *aspirational* dress for her, she was never going to fit in to it, she was Amazonian, 6ft and big (but not in an unflattering way). I on the other hand was nineteen, and as thin as a pin, the dress fitted me like a glove.

ROBBIE MONKHOUSE

That dress represented a settling of scores. I feel quite sure she probably never even missed it, but to me it was a small victory. I lost the boy, but I gained some gumption.



IAN WERE

## SWEET MEMORIES OF SCENT AND SWEAT

Clothes and fabrics worn on our bodies retain their own memories in several ways. Clothes take on part of the wearer, a memory by way of perspiration, or traces of other bodily fluids, like blood – evident through a scent or stain. These can be fresh smelling, a bouquet really, or bitter-sweet or sour. Or, if left for a long time, strongly perfumed from bacteria, mixed perhaps with whatever the wearer was doing at the time, as in dust, food or grease from the day's toil. Many clothes are made to get dirty; some are simply disposable, along with their memories. Hats and textiles often grow into the shape of the wearer: we've all seen a certain shaped head or body echoed in their apparel.

Clothes can also leave a memory of themselves on our bodies. The mark left around the waist or stomach from a tight elastic band or belt, for example. Even images of fashion models with trim figures show such signs – pre-photo-shopping that is. On some people these marks appear as a semi-permanent reminder of something long-worn. The traces made from tight socks or the band of a wristwatch, or the altered hair shape or impression left on a brow from a hat worn all day. Likewise, a naked sun-tanned or sun-burned body can faithfully reflect an image of an item of clothing previously worn, a singlet or bathers – a simple photogram through exposure and development.

On occasions the memory of a person can be vividly recalled simply by looking at an item of clothing. More so if touched and smelled. Remember the intense scene from *Brokeback Mountain* when Ennis, following the death of Jack, visits Jack's parents? In Jack's boyhood bedroom, Ennis finds the bloodstained shirt he thought he'd lost on the mountain. Realising that Jack kept it alongside the shirt Jack himself had worn during a fight they'd had, Ennis holds them to his face, breathing in their scent and weeping silently. His fresh saltiness merging perhaps, with Jack's stale sweat. Our world is full of such evocative stories: writers and poets have written about them (Dickens's heartbroken Miss Havisham in her degraded wedding dress is just one); artists have created work, and films have been produced. Or the stories may be more modest.

I grew up in a house full of fabric and a pervasive memory is the 'smell' of my mother's hat-making process, the steam, and the animal and spirit glues she used to create her hats. Both glues were pungent, but I remember the latter being particularly intoxicating. Bolts of cloth, half-finished hats and clothes, hat and dress-making equipment, and tissue dress patterns with cryptic markings were often lying around. My mother was a long-practised milliner and proficient maker of clothes. My grandmother, who lived with us, was an excellent knitter and

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crochet-worker. My mother's younger sister started dressmaking for a small company in Adelaide when she was 14 and soon became a professional. She made and won prizes for smocking, an embroidery technique used to gather fabric to form elaborate patterns. A small, sepia photo that I have shows me, aged 3 or 4, wearing a smocked pastel-blue shirt that my aunt made. As I remember it, my favourite coat at primary school was one my mother made for me. Styled like a bomber jacket at my request, it was sewn using a thick, woven fabric flecked with multiple green threads. I felt enlivened in it and wanted to wear it all the time. When I was at art school my mother also made me a duffel coat of coarse brown woollen material. While the cut was modelled on a popular commercial coat, I loved the unique feel and texture of its cloth. The family also loved it and one of my female cousins wore it to see the Beatles' 1964 film *A Hard Day's Night*. At the time my father worked as a dress materials salesman at a large department store giving us easy access to, and sound advice on, fabrics of all kinds.

My mother constructed her hats by forming, stitching and gluing segments of felt or bands of straw on an adjustable 'block,' an oval, head-shaped piece of carved wood attached to a stand. She steamed hats on the block – over a kettle on a pale-green Metters gas stove – to shape or remodel them, or sometimes just to freshen them up. And she added decorative objects such as brightly coloured fabric leaves and flowers. These hats were mostly created for fellow church-goers, acquaintances and relatives and her expertise was often sort after. They varied from small- to large-brimmed and were brightly coloured or subdued depending on the season or purpose. When I saw how lovely one of her hats looked on a friend – and heard admirers say: 'What a beautiful hat' – I felt very proud of my mother. Almost all the hats she made were for women. Exceptions were a couple of hats she made for me as a youth: a Robin Hood cap of recycled green felt (made after I'd seen a matinee replay of the famous Errol Flynn movie), and a Davy Crockett hat with 'coonskin' tail constructed of leftover rabbit's fur, (made at the time of the *Davy Crockett* TV series and hit-parade song, *The Ballad of Davy Crockett* sung by Fess Parker).

Like many men of his time, my father had a dozen or so dark-grey felt hats, all well-worn but never, it seemed, worn-out. Except for a gardening hat which was in the laundry, they hung on a modest set of coat hooks near our front door. My father's felt hats were small-to-medium-brimmed and of various styles for work, casual wear and Sunday best. I found it satisfying to run my fingers over and around the felt and detect their unique scent. There were also a couple of brown straw hats for summer or the beach and, later, when he took up lawn bowls, an off-white one. They were no doubt freshened up from time-to-time by my mother's skilled hands. Although I didn't keep them when he passed (they were too small for my head), I can still sense his smell on them. A general odour as well as a stronger one from around the interior sweat-band; I remember it as warm and comforting. Their existence no doubt, led to my own interest in hats and caps. I have about 20 of them; mostly fabric and straw and one second-hand felt. Over time they've developed a smell close to those of my father's, my sweat similar to his; memories running together. My father also collected a great variety of neckties

made of silk, satin, rayon, polyester and all the new fabric mixes of the day, woven in various patterns such as stripes, checks, tartans, and paisleys and, by the late 1960s, new and exuberant flower and pop art inspired designs. (I kept a few of these.) The ties, along with the hats, were sourced from the department store where he worked and where he always got a bargain or two.

Most of these little scenarios about outer clothing apply equally or more to our intimate clothes. Traces of bodily fluids end up in most clothes we wear, but notably in underwear. Sweat of course, urine and preseminal and vaginal fluids leaking a little from our bodies can be found in our underclothes almost at any time, particularly following sexual arousal or activity – with that familiar musky, sometimes acrid, odour that's part of it. This simple and natural occurrence has led to many a story, often salacious. In the mid-1970s, for example, a female friend of mine would, from time to time – perhaps after she'd separated from her boyfriend at a party and they'd arrived home the next morning at different times – put his underpants to her nostrils and say: 'Who'd you fuck last night?' (She'd rarely use the term 'have sex with' although sometimes she'd say 'have congress'). It was playfully inquisitorial and said without malice. Just a game really, a little provocation, a perversion. On most occasions she was not innocent herself and both knew this.

Around the same time, I had a lover who nearly always wore white Bonds 'Cottontails.' When she was dressed in tight jeans you could just see the outline of them, more so if she'd put on sheer white pants as she often did. She insisted on lengthy foreplay: standing fully clothed we'd take each other in our arms and gently hug, then kiss and caress in various ways, sometimes facing, sometimes spooning. At the same time we'd slowly remove an item of clothing from each other until we were left in our underpants ... I was infatuated with her body, face, voice and intellect, the way her clothes fitted her and the way she moved in them (and out of them) and, not least, by her scent. Wanting to retain the memory of these encounters, I frequently didn't wash or change my underwear for at least 12 hours after spending a night with her. The sweet smell of her sex on me – hers and mine mixed together – would not only keep the memory alive the following day, but maintain partial arousal as well. Sometimes I'd call her and say in a half-whisper: 'I still have you on me,' meaning both on my flesh and fabric. I'd shower later, just before her scent turned sour on me. Such is the power of these things.

From time to time, however, the opposite applies. That is, a desire to rid our clothes and bodies of all memory, of the day, the night or the act. To cleanse, dispose of or destroy certain clothing. To feel crisp and clean; to indulge in a long, warm bath; to put on a freshly laundered shirt or sleep with fresh sheets; to apply a deodorant or hair spray to mask body odour. And perversely, under certain trickier circumstances, when backpacking with limited water for example, to dust talcum powder in the crotch of pants or, as a last and temporary resort, to turn underwear inside out. From experience I can say that both are feeble courses of action.

Clothes can also take on a fiction of their own. A found item might become the impetus for an imagined story. While staying in New York City near Columbia University in the summer of 1981, I came across a bright-red G-string left in the

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washer of a laundromat on the edge of Harlem. They weren't new – the elastic had already started to go – but the fabric was smooth and slightly shiny with a fresh, newly-soaped smell. While I had no connection with the male briefs, for some reason, I kept them. Whose were they? What was the person like? Was it the wearer who washed them or his girlfriend or boyfriend? More to the point, what did he do in them? While the idea of wearing the briefs had some prurience, I wore them once only; maybe twice. My girlfriend took a couple of photos – imagining, she said, what other penis had previously inhabited them. I still have the Harlem reds; they're labelled 'De Hart Mid Brief by Rich originals, 100% Nylon.' Much later, I picked up a dark grey, male string-brief from the laundry floor of the motel-apartments in Brisbane where I was staying one summer. I still have this item as well. It's labelled 'HOM, Made in France, 65% Cotton, 25% Polyamide, 10% Elastanne.' At one point, I remember thinking that a collection of found male underwear might be the start of an art work. A series maybe, multiples displayed as an installation with a little didactic information including the location and date where the items were found. And perhaps an invented text to go with each one – but this project went no further.

For many contemporary visual artists, however, the combination of memory and clothes using multiples has been a strong attraction, at times resulting in evocative work and emotional responses from audiences. Frenchman Christian Boltanski is a poignant example. In 1988 he began using discarded clothes as a raw material and as a way of exploring memory, loss and death. The items of clothes first appeared in an art work titled *Réserve* – and in a string of 'Réserve' that followed – where he lined the walls of an entire room, several shelves high, with all manner of loft-smelling hand-me-down clothes. While not invited to touch the clothes, you could easily discern their nature. There were old coats and anoraks, once-fashionable things and shapeless items, bright cardigans and children's sweaters, shabby jumpers and forsaken skirts. I saw a version of this work in the group exhibition, *The Interrupted Life* (in New York at the New Museum in 1991). The multiple garments appeared as vestiges of past lives, a contemplation of the body as a temporary vessel. 'Someone's photograph, garment or dead body are pretty much the same thing,' Boltanski has simply said. 'There was someone there, now they're gone.' *Réserve* had an almost overbearing presence, not just visual, but also olfactory. The smell of my aging catalogue of the exhibition has become a small reminder of this work.

Costumes and outfits previously worn by the young and old, the wealthy and the penniless, from governors, emperors and queens to debt collectors, lovers, gardeners and assassins, have been collected and exhibited in a thousand museums around the world. These clothes represent the stories of 1000s of people, often marking particular moments in their lives – birth, confirmation, exultation, ecstasy, degradation or execution. While these items may now be museum-clean and scent-free, their previous real-life can be sensed from the remaining evidence: the little markings, repaired tears and indelible stains.

As others have noted – unless you were born into a nudist colony in the tropics or perhaps a member of a particular African tribe – from cradle to grave our bodies

#### SWEAT MEMORIES OF SCENT AND SWEAT

are covered in one cloth or another. From our birth in swaddling wraps (when the essence of memory begins) to our passing covered with a shroud (when our memories cease to exist or are set free to be taken up by others), cloth is pervasive in our lives. From our child-play, to our eating, to our spiritual lives and onto our working, love-making, dancing, aging and dying, there are particular clothes and fabrics associated with, steeped in or suffused by, each time, place and event that we've been part of.

Sweat memories. Sweet memories.

NB The memories the author has written about relate mostly to events that took place in Adelaide, South Australia from 1938 to the mid-1980s.

## **CHANGING ROOMS**

RAEWYN CONNELL

## THE OUTWARD AND VISIBLE SIGN

I am looking at a clean blue-grey FinnAir interior, currently moving at 850 km/hr to the northwest somewhere over clouded Beijing, or perhaps already Mongolia. We are en route from Shanghai to Helsinki. The polite and sensible hosties are dressed in uniforms apparently meant to evoke Greta Garbo playing Queen Christina, who was neither polite nor sensible (nor even Finnish). I bet their dry-cleaning bills are terrible. And in these neoliberal days, the airline probably does not pay for dry cleaning.

For my part, I am dressed in polite skirt and sensible shoes, an upper-middle-class, upper-middle-age uniform in black and grey with a touch of colour in a scarf. Unobtrusive, I hope. The carry-on bag is up in the overhead locker with three unobtrusive changes, all non-iron for quick overnight washing and drying in hotel bathrooms.

This is a travel-clothes routine I learnt while going overseas to academic conferences and lectures. And then re-learnt, since starting transition ten years ago. Adult learning. We are supposed to get worse at new learning as we grow older, stiff in our mental ways as we get in our joints. But it has to be done. The re-learning is part of the work we have to do. The “we” in this case being the people who are supposed to be changing sex.

Actually we are not trying to change sex, and are certainly not revealing the fluidity of our gender identity. It is almost the opposite. Transsexual women undertake a transition because gender is *so* intransigent, *so* difficult to change. A massive contradiction has existed in our lives because of the gender we *know* we are already.

Creating a new pattern of life, re-shaping relationships and perceptions – that can mean heartbreak, it can mean losing a job, it can mean contempt and violence. It always means a lot of work. Re-learning clothes is part of that work – since we have to help other people to recognize the “new” (actually old) gender.

European clothing styles, now global styles, are strongly gendered. The manufacturers have not gone unisex. Yes, jeans and T-shirts are less gendered than crinolines and frock-coats. But look at the bulk of what is marketed and worn today, the “dumb fashion” as well as the high fashion. When the gender difference is not obvious, manufacturers make sure it is present in the detail. For what other reason do they put the shirt buttons on different sides?

So, transsexual women are likely to wear skirts rather than slacks, court shoes rather than lace-ups, scarves rather than ties. It is elementary, my dear Watson.

RAEWYN CONNELL

Some go overboard and the result can be an unholy mess of stilettos, frills and scarlet lippie. That will pass; most find a better way early on.

The job involves more than individual items, it means acquiring a style and building a wardrobe. This is slow work for someone with an awkward shape and no dressmaking skills. The shops that have larger sizes are usually catering for wider women rather than longer women. And forget about walking in off the street and finding shoes!

Still, we live in a consumer culture so there are choices. Mostly I have tried to find clear plain styles that I can live with. And other people can live with, of course. Fashion is not the point. Of department stores the most useful are those with a “Classics” section.

I am doubtless channelling my mother, who dressed the family in hard-wearing conventional clothes, wore lipstick only to go to church, and had no respect for mutton-dressed-as-lamb. The result, I am sure, is a bit retro. My daughter is trying to bring me forward into the 21<sup>st</sup> century but I am not there yet.

Friends have helped a lot. A friend in Denmark took me to her favourite shoe-shop and the result is my favourite pair of summer-weight flatties, well-made and a splendid red. I went with another friend to a posh boutique and the result is my only piece of designer gear, a party skirt that rejoices my heart – but which I am afraid to wear. It feels like wearing a Stradivarius.

Travel has helped. On one fortunate trip I found a shop in Manhattan called “Tall Girl.” Despite its name it had quality stuff for the middle-aged. I still have a navy woollen suit I found there, as sober as they come. I also bought from them a not quite sober black-and-white geometric blouse that has seen me through many weary seminars. And a couple of beautifully warm and well-designed night-gowns, made in Canada. (Why is night-gear so badly made, usually? We have to wake up to ourselves in it!)

Unfortunately Tall Girl went broke during the Global Financial Crisis. There was quite a wake for it online; other women had found it good value. The firm was sold to a multinational with a silly name that sources cheap and nasty stuff from God knows where, probably Rana Plaza. I do buy from them at times, there are not many alternatives. But they are not as good. Heavens, am I nostalgic for 2007 already?

Apart from the pleasures of clothing that other women know, there is an extra lift in being able to find gear that simply feels right, rather than always feeling wrong. I have good memories of clothes, but equally I am happy to *forget* what I must have been wearing much of my life.

When I was a second soprano in the choir of St John’s Church of England, Dee Why,<sup>1</sup> I sat, stood and kneeled through many Sunday-morning services and came to know the *Book of Common Prayer* almost by heart. It is wonderful prose, from the age of Milton and Shakespeare, and has something of their way with resounding words.

In the Catechism, written when the Church of England was trying to distinguish its own true doctrine from the idolatry of the Scarlet Woman of Rome on the one side, and the icy heresies of the Calvinists on the other, there is a passage that has



#### THE OUTWARD AND VISIBLE SIGN

really stuck in memory. What a sacrament is, the church declares, is the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.

Well, it is an ambition. I would like my outward and visible existence to have at least a friendly relation with the inward existence, not the old exhausting conflict. Spiritual grace? Despite the years of struggle, I do feel blessed as a woman. In Old Testament words that we sang at St John's towards the end of each year (because they are in Handel's *Messiah*), "Every valley/ Shall be exalted." That is what feminism says too. And I see no reason why a black skirt and a grey jumper and a touch of colour in a scarf cannot be part of the exaltation.

#### NOTE

<sup>i</sup> Dee Why is a beachside suburb on the northshore of Sydney.

NELL GREENWOOD

## THE PURPLE JUMPSUIT

This story is dedicated to the purple jumpsuit that I wore through the summer of 1985. It was cotton, it had elasticated ankles and sleeves to ensure full body protection. When I zipped myself in on a Saturday morning, I knew the day would be good. I was a ten year old intergalactic, roller-skating warrior, switched on, plugged in, cresting the gamma waves of Battersea in the 1980s, racing towards a life of Athena tinged, tropical yacht sailing, Duran Duran dating good times. I wore the jumpsuit everywhere – to kids’ parties where everyone else was wearing shorts and t-shirts and green and white Dunlop sandshoes. I wore it with rainbow shoelaces in my hair. I wore it with complete joy. I have never worn an article of clothing with the same degree of unadulterated, unapologetic joy.

When I was twenty, a good friend of mine, a precociously successful fashion designer, came to meet me after work. She was visiting London from her home in Los Angeles. We hadn’t seen each other for several months. As I came down the stairs to greet her in a crimson top and aquamarine space boots, she winced and said, “You haven’t been wearing that all day have you?” I stopped: what did she mean? She pulled a face: “what are you wearing?” I looked down at the slightly puffy, ill-fitting skirt with its mesmeric swirls of black and turquoise, my tight shiny top, my boots.

Hot panic pricked across my forehead as I tried to inject emotion and affection into our hug. I could suddenly see the outfit from her cool, appraising LA eyes. I was wearing green boots with a Flash Gordon bolt of lightning: why? WHY? I could see now that the skirt that had this morning transported me to a deep forest of aqua pools and the top with its cherry laden beauty looked weird together. A vertiginous tumble of weird outfits flashed before me: the cluster of lacy nylon nighties worn under white cotton t-shirts (who likes restricting, Geisha-waisted clothes?) matched with white cowboy boots that a friend of mine’s boyfriend had said: please don’t ever let Liberty (his girlfriend) wear boots like that. Odd themes: space – shiny, tight, silver trousers; Gothic, leggings with bats on, a black velvet dress, a red ball gown. God. I felt fear and illness seeping through me: I wore eccentric clothes.

I looked at my friend. She was wearing a cream crocheted poncho and dark tight trousers and tasselled boots. I could never have picked an outfit like that. I could see the outfit looked coherent and she looked like lots of other people on the tube and in magazines. The waist was tight, the jeans were tight, the boots were tight, the poncho looked like it might get in the way of eating and useful human activities

NELL GREENWOOD

like using your arms. I looked around the bar: more people wearing clothes that were shaded, colour-blocked, aligned. No space stories. No turquoise swirls.

It was my parents' fault. My mother's. No, it wasn't, I was twenty and had to stop blaming my parents for everything. They were good people: it was my fault. My headstrong will, my over-weening, over confident arrogance. Thinking I had it sussed. They didn't rein me in. I sat over a glass of wine, not listening to any of my friend's stories. I wanted to cry and hit her and tell her about the shiny, silver top hat I'd just brought – thank God I wasn't wearing that. And I wanted to get changed.

I really wanted to get changed. Maybe that was where my life was going wrong. Maybe that's why I didn't have a boyfriend, why the man I was so in love with at university loved someone else. A someone who always wore tight jeans and dainty peasant tops. All the time. She always wore that. And I was wearing multi-coloured tat to tell a story in my head that no one else knew about.

It was Thursday night. We could go shopping. While my friend was here, she could help me. Save me. Rescue me from my bad clothes. Guide me back to the land of sartorial elegance so I could congregate on its happy banks with other happy, well-styled people.

My friend agreed. About time.

We hit Oxford Street, busy, packed, streams of people heading into brightly lit emporiums of style and acceptance. Come spend your money, come fit in.

My friend picked a shop I would never have entered. The clothes looked too tight, were made from un-natural fiber, and there was a lot of brown. I don't like brown clothes, or red clothes. My eye was briefly drawn to a brilliant, deep blue shirt in the men's section, she carefully steered me over to the jeans corner. I didn't like jeans. She said everyone wears jeans. I said they're a bit tight. She said that's the point. So people can see your legs. I wasn't sure about that: people could see your legs wearing tights. She smiled, a sad, wincing smile. I agreed. I had to grow up, face the world and wear jeans, tight jeans. I picked a tight pair of dark blue jeans. She handed me a tight brown top.

I tried on the clothes.

"Finally," my friend exhaled, "I can actually see your body." Another friend joined us: "You look amazing," she said. We then went to a shoe shop and I bought a pair of boots that felt like stilts. My friends were excited: I had to try on the whole outfit together. I looked at myself in the mirror: an impostor from planet tight who would never be able to do anything or say anything interesting. And I smiled. Thank you I said. She said: "You're welcome. Look at you, you look like a model from a magazine." I smiled. "Great." She said: "Now go home and throw those clothes away." And while I didn't throw them away, I did stop wearing them.

I haven't thought about this story in a long-time until the other week when something terrible happened. Watching my seven year old daughter carefully assembling a party outfit of a black shiny cardigan, recently discarded by her four year sister because it was far too small, with tiny black shorts, a black and green flared Irish dancing skirt and a rainbow singlet, I found myself saying: are you sure

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you want to wear that? And she looked at me with a mix of amazement and horror and said: yes.

Then my daughter hesitated and looked at herself in the mirror. She turned to me, “Do I look funny?” I said she looked amazing. She said, “I do look funny don’t I?” I shook my head. She shouted: “Well I don’t care.” And she burst into tears.

My insides collapsed. I was a horrible person. The worst mother ever. A stooge of insidious capitalist forces and homogenizing convention. So brainwashed, I was prepared to crush the spirit and joy out of my own daughter.

I told her about the purple jumpsuit. The full story. The weekend in July when I’d gone to yet another birthday party with kids in shorts and t-shirts, and this time they’d laughed at me. They’d made jokes about Buck Rogers and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and the fact the zip was a bit broken and there was a small hole in the inner thigh. And I’d said to all of them: I don’t care. And I didn’t. I loved that jumpsuit. And my daughter should love her outfit.

My daughter stopped crying. She sighed at her outfit: did I still have that purple jumpsuit? She thought it could work with the black and green skirt. And I really wish I did have it.

And I wish that I could go back to my twenty-two year old self who stood in front of that mirror with my friends and say: I don’t care. I don’t care that I look like an old woman’s handbag. I love turquoise swirls and aquamarine Flash Gordon boots. This is who I am.

A strange coda to this story is that a year later I went to visit my friend in Los Angeles. As we were leaving the female change rooms of the Beverly Hills Hot Springs, a naked Annie Lennox chased after us and handed my friend back her wallet. No embarrassment. Real women can wear whatever they like and stand tall and proud.

Clothes swathe you in colour, beauty and story. Clothes are your protectors, your armoury, your defense shield and your friend. They may not make you the person you’d like to be, or the person in the magazine, but they can make you person you need to be. My clothes give me strength and power. They calibrate my interior and exterior lives. They allow me to greet the world intact. As I approach my fortieth birthday, I’ve realised the journey of the last twenty years has been one that takes me back to the unapologetic joy of my purple jumpsuit.

BROOKE ROBERTS

## STORY OF A DRESS

I think the key words I searched for were 'vintage' and 'lame.' I love Ebay. I call my favourite and most complimented purchases 'Ebay Treasure.' It takes a keen eye and dedication to find an Ebay treasure, but it is immensely rewarding when I find something unique and rare.



*R. Gibson (Ed.), The Memory of Clothes, 161–164.  
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BROOKE ROBERTS

Ebay unearths clothing that I would never otherwise find, including a floor-length multi-coloured and gold lame gown. I couldn't see the details properly in the photos on Ebay but I imagined what it would feel and move like based on my understanding of the measurements, fabrics and silhouette. When the parcel arrived I opened the box and was instantly enchanted. There was no label – it was home sewn and had travelled to me from the United States. The top layer was transparent with gold lame flowers interwoven, the middle layer was a fun print of multi-coloured dolls' houses and the base was flesh-coloured lining. I put it straight on. It was a sunny day. I stepped out of my flat in East London to go to the supermarket. A few steps down the road a stranger caught my gaze and broadly smiled at me. He held the smile. Strange, I thought. In London, a smile from stranger to stranger is rare. And this smile had warmth and happiness attached. It was a wordless comment. I felt it. Rounding the corner onto the next road the same thing happened. This time a toothy smile to which I gave the same. There was definite friendliness and happiness in the air. A sunny day in London really raises people's spirits, I thought.



Once at the supermarket I wandered the aisles enjoying lots of looks and smiles. A lady approached me. "I love your dress. It's wonderful," she said.

It was the dress. People were smiling at me – men, women and children in equal measure – because the dress was enchanting them as it did me. I have never before or since owned a dress that has drawn such diverse and frequent admiration. On a

## THE STORY OF A DRESS

visit to the *Tate Modern* a woman approached me and said “Your dress is the best thing I have seen in here.” It made me wonder about the power of clothing and how it can make the wearer more approachable and the viewer feel enchanted, happy and inspired. Clothing has the power to change how the wearer and viewer feel. As a fashion designer, I found this exciting and aspirational. Since I first wore that dress I have tried to create unique and unexpected dresses that evoke wonder, curiosity and admiration.



I found my career as a fashion designer via Radiography, my first career. I now create clothing from medical scans using digital knitting techniques. I use mostly CT and MRI brain scans as inspiration and templates for digital knitting programmes, which transform my brain scan designs into knitted fabrics, from which I construct clothing. My favourite brain scan dress is from my *Woman and Machine Collection*. I created it in two palettes; one is on display at The Allen Institute for Brain Science in Seattle, where it represents the inspiration and beauty of their brain research to unlock neurological mysteries through brain mapping; the other I wear to the most pivotal events in my career as a designer, including my TED talk.

BROOKE ROBERTS



The dress is a conversation starter and the embodiment of my ideas. It tells the story of me, the radiographer and fashion designer and it is the first dress I created that received the same sort of admiration as the lame dolls' house gown. It is my goal to create dresses that illicit enchantment, happiness and the feeling of individuality and confidence; dresses that are at once tools of communication and objects of beauty.

*Additional Notes*

\* I feel confident in the dress \* It is not revealing physically but completely reveals of my personality and style \* I always feel the same size in it – never too fat or bloated, always shiny and happy and brave and creative \* It makes every day an event because the dress feels special – it elevates the day. \* I will never see another person in the same dress.

*NB: Comic illustrations created by Moin Islam.*



ROBYN GIBSON

## EPILOGUE

The idea for this book came to me almost 25 years ago when I read then reread France's profound quote about the import of fashion. A lot has happened since that time. A child was born. A marriage ended. A career in academic began.

What was once shelved for retirement resurfaced with the passing of my beloved mother, Mabel Jessie Carter. I desperately wanted to acknowledge the crucial part she had played in my decision to undertake a PhD in an area I had been informed was "unworthy of scholarly investigation." So, I set out to prove the naysayers wrong. In doing so, I learnt a lot about myself and my relationship with my Mother. The lady who loved clothes and embedded this passion into my very core. A self-indulgent, therapeutic whim perhaps but what surprised me was the lasting imprint this deeply personal exercise had on the other contributors to this book.

This not only mattered to me, it had found inroads into the very fabric of other people's lives. It was an opportunity to reveal something lost or forgotten and in doing so, to unpick those memories and reconnect to those who played a part in our 'dress stories.'

An estranged relationship with a sister began to heal when details of their deceased sister's dresses needed to be confirmed. A photograph was located and forwarded.

Three men who had celebrated Mardi Gras together in their twenties combed through photographs of the event some 40 years later. Dates and events were debated and fond memories relived.

A brother was asked to locate the book that lay by his mother's bedside the night she passed away. Could he find the quote she was looking for?

A young man contacts the granddaughter of his safari suit's original owner. Could she share any insights to enrich his story?

An aunt was phoned. Could she tell me about my Mother's wedding dress? The one that now hung in my wardrobe. And as if it were yesterday, she shared a shopping expedition that had occurred more than 50 years previously.

Viewed as visual objects, clothing is not frivolous, flippant or foolish. In telling and talking about clothes, we reveal much about ourselves, our lives and the experiences that we drape around our bodies. Whether bought or handmade, passed down or reconstructed, clothes help us to construct meaning as we recall those

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things in our lives that matter. After all, “clothes are part of the fabric of memory” (Weber, 2011, p. 239) and I thank each who has given me the privilege of collecting and sharing their memory of clothes.

## ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

**Joshua Barnes** specialises in being a Jack-of-all-trades. Mastering in Education mostly, he has been known to teach science to kids on the edge of juvenile detention in Alice Springs, drama to young people and teachers throughout NSW and mathematics pedagogy to pre-service teachers at the University of Sydney. He has a secret love of architecture, artefacts and design, and spends his spare time “Making good use of the things that we find,” to quote the *Wombles*. Similarly, his exertions in educational research, particularly narrative inquiry methodologies, feature the quality of a bricoleur who makes sense of fragmented experience through the gathering and retelling of stories.

**Nicole Brunker** is a teacher educator juggling the joys of motherhood and work. In the shadows of giants, Nicole is unearthing her creativity through the necessity of working in pockets of time. In these spaces Nicole has found the beauty in the everyday prompting her to share what once would have remained hidden.

**Christine Bruno** is a New York-based actor and has worked throughout the U.S.A, U.K. and Australia. She holds an MFA in Acting and Directing from the Actors Studio Masters Program and is a member of the legendary Actors Studio. Credits include her one-woman show, *Screw You, Jimmy Choo!*; *The Glass Menagerie*; *The Good Daughter*; *The Crucible*; *A View from the Bridge*; *Larry Gets the Call*; *Krankenhaus Blues*; *Raspberry* (London/UK tour); the upcoming musical, *The Ugly Girl* (UK tour); independent features *Static*; *This Is Where We Live*; *Clay* and TV’s *Law & Order*. Christine is Disability Advocate for Inclusion in the Arts, and serves in leadership positions on the diversity committees of U.S. performing unions AEA and SAG-AFTRA.

**Victoria Campbell** has been a drama teacher, storyteller and performer for more than 20 years. Her interest in oral storytelling and narrative performance led to sustained research in this area resulting in the completion of both a MEd (2008) and PhD (2013) at The University of Sydney. In her oral storytelling she draws on myths, legends, folktales and fairy tales from around the world. Her contribution to this book marks her first time writing a story for the page. She is currently a lecturer in Drama at The University of Sydney. For the past five years she has been a teaching artist for the Sydney Theatre Company’s *School Drama* program.

**Raewyn Connell** is Professor Emerita at the University of Sydney, and one of Australia’s leading social scientists. Her most recent books are *Southern Theory* (2007), about social thought beyond the global metropole; *Gender: In World Perspective* (2009); and *Confronting Equality* (2011), about social science and

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politics. Her other books include *Masculinities, Schools and Social Justice, Ruling Class Ruling Culture, Gender and Power*, and *Making the Difference*. Her work has been translated into eighteen languages. She has taught at universities in Australia, Canada and the USA, in departments of sociology, political science, and education, and is a long-term participant in the labour movement and peace movement.

**Laurence Coy** has a BA majoring in Theatre Studies from UNSW, he trained as an actor at WAAPA, a director at NIDA and, feeling the need for another qualification in an overcrowded profession, he did an MA in Creative Writing at UTS. Working in the Arts gives him lots of time to read, cook, watch movies and write about himself in the third person.

**Alexandra Cutcher** is an award-winning academic in the School of Education at Southern Cross University (SCU), Australia. She believes in the power of the Arts to transform, educate, inspire and soothe. To this end, the provision of high quality Visual Arts education for students of all ages is a professional priority. Dr Cutcher's research interests focus on what the Arts can be and do; educationally, expressively, as research method, as language, as catharsis, as reflective instrument and as documented form. These understandings inform Alexandra's research agenda, her teaching and her spirited advocacy for Arts education.

**Paul Dufficy** juggles long beach walks at sunset and romantic candlelit dinners with hardcore street art photography. Born and raised a Catholic, he learnt Latin at an early age and was punished by three different religious orders over a thirteen year period. He has been onscreen in only one of the top ten movies of all time and in his spare time he grows tomatoes.

**Robyn Ewing**, formerly a primary teacher, is Professor of Teacher Education and the Arts, Faculty of Education and Social Work, University of Sydney. She has a commitment to creative teaching and learning at all levels of education and is passionate about the role that quality arts process and experiences can and should play across the curriculum. In the Arts, Robyn's research and writing has focused on the use of drama with children's literature to enhance children's English and literacy outcomes. Current projects include a partnership with Sydney Theatre Company on *School Drama* an initiative that aims to develop the drama expertise of primary teachers. The experiences of early career teachers and the role of mentoring in their retention in the profession, sustaining curriculum innovation and evaluation, inquiry & case based learning and arts informed research methodologies are also research interests. Robyn is National President of the Australian Literacy Educators Association, Vice President of Sydney Story Factory and a Council member of the Australian Film, Television and Radio School.

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**Josephine Fleming** has worked on several large arts education research studies at the University of Sydney, including *TheatreSpace* and *The role of arts education in academic motivation, engagement and achievement*, both funded through the Australian Research Council. Her research interests include comparative perspectives on arts education in Asia Pacific and her work has been published in Australia and internationally. She has a PhD in comparative education and has worked as an award-winning director and playwright. In her spare time, she travels the world collecting wonderful memories, beautiful fabrics and the occasional pest.

**Tony Fleming** is director of the Australian Government's Antarctic Division. He was previously National Operations Manager of the Australian Wildlife Conservancy (AWC). Prior to this he worked with the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service as Director of the Southern Branch and then as Head of the Service. Tony was Senior Policy Advisor to three Federal Environment Ministers, Senator Graeme Richardson, Ros Kelly and Senator John Faulkner. He has a PhD in Forestry from ANU. His work has given him access to many wonderful photo opportunities.

**Deborah Fraser** is an Associate Professor at the University of Waikato, New Zealand. She has long been fascinated by clothes as aesthetic expression and motifs of identity. The ways in which clothes reveal yet conceal who we are pique her abiding interest in this field. While academic life has its merits, she believes it has much yet to gain from greater appreciation of the poetic and other aesthetic ways of knowing. Her current research interests include curriculum integration, creativity and the arts, and spirituality in state education.

**Robyn Gibson**'s PhD explored the creative collaborations between the Surrealist, Salvador Dali and the Italian couturier, Elsa Schiaparelli during the 1930s. She has long been fascinated with fashion! For the past 20 years, she has been lecturing in visual arts education in the Faculty of Education and Social Work at the University of Sydney. In 2011, she published (along with Robyn Ewing) *Transforming the curriculum through the arts* (Palgrave Macmillan). She is passionate about the role of the Arts in the lives of young people. Her academic research – which utilises interdisciplinary methodologies such as arts-informed inquiry and a/r/tography concerns creativity and creative teaching and, art as research/research as art particularly the connection between clothes and memory. On weekends, she is often found rummaging in secondhand clothing stores looking for more clothes stories.

**Nell Greenwood** is a screenwriter, writing teacher and development consultant with over twenty years of international film and television experience. Recent credits include story writer on a two part mini-series, *False Witness* that won the AFI for best miniseries and co-writer and director on *Pride and Joy*, a television

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film that was nominated for Best TV Film at the 46th Monte Carlo TV Film Festival. Nell is currently Head of Screenwriting at the Australian Film Television and Radio School.

**Warrick Hart** is a Sydney lawyer and a former member of the Board of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras.

**Linda Hodson** was born in a southern suburb of Sydney and spent much of her youth roaming the bush with the other kids and dogs who lived in her street. In between completing a Bachelor's degree in 1985 and a Master's degree in 2002, she enjoyed working as an English language teacher and travelling extensively overseas. Linda returned to Sydney in 2000 and worked as a Lecturer in Media and Communication for over ten years. After completing her PhD in 2012, she moved to Darwin where she works on the Tertiary Enabling Program, at Charles Darwin University.

**Val Horridge** is a design academic living in Sydney, who started life in England, gained an MDes at RCA, almost won their 1968 boat race on the Serpentine, and on a competition win to Paris, was bitten by a donkey while dining. In NZ her 'second job' was creating costumes for drag queens, in Sydney she has designed shoes, swimwear, high and low fashion, even clothes for models in coffins. Her academic progeny work worldwide, share her humour and can do attitude. Val's post retirement studies in jewelry and fashion, connect two sides of the eternal triangle of acquisition, lust and power.

**John Hughes** is a retired academic in Drama Education at the University of Sydney and a former member of the Board of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras.

**Marianne Hulsbosch** was a senior lecturer in Visual Art & Design Education at the University of Sydney. She has extensive experience in lecturing in visual arts, design, technology and textiles education at national and international levels. For her PhD in Creative Arts, Marianne explored identity construction through sartorial means. Marianne publishes widely and amongst her most recent titles are: *Pointy shoes and pith helmets* (2014); *Art & me: Senior visual arts stage 6* (2014); *Rites of passage and rituals in Indonesia*; *Cross-dressing in Indonesia*; and *Colonial influence on the sarong and kain in Java* in J. B. Eicher (Ed.), (2010). *The Berg encyclopaedia of world dress and fashion*. (Vol. 4, pp. 1194-1262) and *Asian material culture* (2009). Marianne has extensive experience in developing curriculum support material for teachers in art-based learning and teaching. Her current research interest focuses on visual culture and in addition, she continues to play with textiles and incorporate a wide range of processes, materials and contextual sites.

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**Lea Mai** completed her PhD at the University of Sydney. Her research revealed how young children engage with and articulate their experiences of artworks in museums. Her research interests include the cultural rights of children in art museums and how visual research methods can be used to elicit participant voices. Lea lectured at the University of Sydney in Creative Arts and Ethics and Social Justice in Early Childhood. She currently lives in Bangkok, Thailand where she teaches Year 2 at the Australian International School Bangkok (AISB). Lea holds a BA (Hons) and an LLB from the Australian National University. She is an Honorary Fellow with the UAW Law School.

**Llian Merritt** spent her professional career in education in both in the secondary and tertiary sectors. Now that she has quit full time work she travels the world writing and talking about her adventures.

**Jacqueline Molloy** was born in Belfast, raised in rural NSW and has been happily resident in Southern England for fourteen years. She is an award winning short story writer and performed playwright with a background in arts journalism. Jacqueline has been a creative writing tutor for thirteen years and currently teaches on community courses and degree level courses. She also mentors writers on a one-to-one basis and has recently been accredited as a writing coach. Jacqueline has a Master's degree in Creative Writing from Sussex University and is currently working on a short story collection on the theme of 'Where is Home?'

**Robin Monkhouse** is a graduate of National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA) where she trained in Costume and Set design. She has worked as an independent set and costume designer, also training at the Australian Film, Television and Radio School (AFTRS) in production design. Robin is currently an Associate Lecturer in Costume at the NIDA in Sydney.

**Marty Murphy** is a writer with a background in horror and comedy. While starting as a stunt director for television, he performed impro comedy on weekends and developed a cult following for his one-man shows *Happy and Clean*, *Mr Stripey Suit* and *Speedy Mustard*. He directed the horror film *Lost Things* (2004) and became a regular speaker for *Art after Hours* at the Art Gallery of NSW, though nobody knows why. Following his underwater adventure for ABC Radio National, *My First Book of Strange Fish*, Marty is writing his first novel, *Star Treatment*, a satire about celebrity.

**Elizabeth Paterson** completed a Graduate Diploma in Visual Arts at the Sculpture Workshop, ANU in 1994. This marked her transition into working in the visual arts after many years of working in professional theatre. Her solo work has been exhibited at the Canberra Museum and Gallery, Craft ACT and the Australian National Botanic Gardens. In 2009 she was commissioned by the ACT Legislative

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*Elizabeth Paterson: A Hill and a Pair of Gang Gangs, 2004 (left) and A Suburban Mix, 2004 (right). Photos: David Reid*

Assembly to create an art work for its public entrance to commemorate 20 years of self-government. She also collaborates with artist Bev Hogg on concrete sculpture commissions.

**Murray Picknett** is an award winning Production Designer in Film and Television. All shared a house together in Paddington during the seventies.

**Brooke Roberts** is an award-winning digital knitwear designer, who draws on over a decade of experience as a diagnostic radiographer with the NHS (UK's National Health Service) in her fashion label. She uses inspiration from scan images of the brain and sinuses to create bold patterns and silhouettes for her designs, using unique combinations of the latest high-tech and luxury yarns in her garments. Brooke was recently invited to speak at a TED Med conference in Athens to explain how she combines these two very different disciplines to deliver science-inspired design. She has also collaborated with The Allen Institute for Brain Science in Seattle, where some of her work is currently being exhibited. Brooke served as a Creative in Residence at The Hospital Club in London, where she was involved in cross-discipline dance and music collaborations, including The Place Prize.

**David Smith**, an ex primary and secondary teacher, worked in teacher education at Macquarie and Sydney University for some 34 years. Retiring from academic life in 2002, as an education consultant for national and state governments he worked in many NSW schools implementing teacher professional learning programs in quality teaching and assessment. Author, co-author and editor of 14 books he still works evaluating *Sydney Story Factory* and the STC's *School Drama Programme*. He spends much time now making music, gardening, house husbanding and having fun with his 11 grandchildren. He has always been a bit 'out there' with his clothes!



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**Laurene Vaughan** is an artist, writer, curator and designer who is fascinated by the ways that people design and make place. Her practice spans the embodied acts of making and performance, including walking interventions to the design of collaborative digital platforms. She is a founding member of the Arts and Cartography Commission in the International Cartographic Association. Her recent projects include *The Stony Rises Project* a curatorial exploration of vernacular practices, immigration and the crafting of landscape in the making of place. This included an associated book *Designing Place*. She was a design researcher on the *Circus Oz Living Archive Project* and co-edited the associated book *Performing Digital* (Ashgate) to be published in 2015.

**Ian Were** writes on contemporary art, design, architecture and associated issues and, more recently, has written short stories. Since 1997 he has edited more than 20 art books and publications, including ten recent books as a freelance editor. He has written regularly for Australian art and culture journals – beginning, in the late 1970s, with street magazines *Preview* and *Adelaide Review*. From 1996 to 2002 he was editor of *Object* magazine (26 issues), and from 2002 to 2009 was Senior Editor at the Queensland Art Gallery where he edited or co-edited 12 exhibition publications and edited 23 issues of *Artlines* magazine. [www.art-random.com](http://www.art-random.com)