

CHAPTER 13

THE BODY AS FACTORY: A POST-PRODUCTIVIST FASHION PRACTICE THROUGH FILM

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Introduction

This chapter builds upon the methodologies developed throughout a practice-based PhD at the London College of Fashion, University of the Arts London (UAL). Entitled “Towards a practice of unmaking: the essay film as critical discourse for fashion in the expanded field”, this artistic enquiry proposed a strategy for critical fashion practices in a research context at the intersection of fashion, fine arts, and film. The research started from a need to understand if there was a change to the role of the fashion designer in response to the growing concerns regarding sustainable fashion in the twenty-first Century and if so, what would that role comprise? As a fashion practitioner, I am looking at fashion ¹ as Kawamura puts it, in its material and immaterial manifestations (Kawamura, 2005:1); but also, as a theoretical and methodological framework for understanding the complex dynamic relationship between the body, dress, and culture. I describe my practice as being rooted in fashion but no longer limited by its disciplinary boundaries.

A matter of memory

As fashion practitioners, our relation to materials is very significant. They provide the means through which we connect to our practice and communicate concepts. Materials allow us to engage on an aesthetic, emotional and conceptual level. In 2005, when I began my own practice as a fashion designer, I was interested in developing a way of translating fashion’s mechanisms of memory into form, because I believed that to understand fashion I would have to understand its relation to memory. The poetics of fashion were explored in processes where I would translate the notion of ‘forgetting’ (via the physical erasure of shape and motifs and/or the destruction of some fabrics) and ‘remembering’ – through collaging and stitching pieces together. My project *Mimesis*² emphasised the importance of

process, or procedural stages of making (as opposed to completing a predetermined design composition or plan).

The question 'What is fashion?' has constantly been foregrounded in my work. As a result, my fashion practice represents a departure from the traditional role of 'designer as producer' towards an alternative form of creative production based on the exploration and embodiment of my own questions. I have constantly tried to redefine the territory of fashion practice, and my work is presented in a broad spectrum of media, but follows a consistent conceptual path: to understand the nature of fashion. By experimenting at the borders of the discipline through the mediums of sculpture, performance, and film, I had to learn how to use unfamiliar media within a fashion practice allowing for a certain critical distance that came from applying other perspectives when looking at fashion. During the 1990s there were large exhibitions documenting conceptual approaches to fashion such as the Florence Fashion Biennial (1996) entitled "Looking at Fashion", directed by Germano Celant, and the exhibition *Addressing the Century, 100 years of Art & Fashion* (1998) at the Hayward Gallery in London, curated by Fiona Bradley, Julia Coates and Ulrich Lehmann, which assembled 250 works of art, fashion, photography, video and film.

However, the procedure that I have developed is different from former artists and fashion practitioners working through conceptual fashion insofar as I use film montage in order to assert fashion criticality. In my attempt to depict 'thought in the process of being formed', I have used montage itself as a form of thinking fashion through film.

Archival practice: crafting garments as objects of memory

By describing and recollecting remnants as in an archaeological station,³ the results depend far more on the mode of enquiry and research methods than in the end itself result. The picture below (Figure 13.1) depicts 'archaeological cataloguing' used to document my working processes, allowing the audience to understand the manufacturing process – where the tasks undertaken were strongly connected to failure, repetition, and acceptance of failure, and as a result the relevance of experiments with materials, shapes and forms in the fashion creation process.



Figure 13.1 Top image: Archival of project *Mimesis* (2008) from the catalogue *Collecting Collections and Concepts* for Guimarães European Capital of Culture (2012). Bottom Image: porcelain t-shirt with V neck in archive of the project *Mimesis*. Image credit and copyright Lara Torres.

During *Mimesis*, the importance of ‘trace as an archival form’ (Merewether, 2006:10) was very significant. As in Walter Benjamin’s model of thought that underlines the importance of the trace and its meaningfulness towards deciphering the debris of the world, archaeological cataloguing enabled the exhibition audience to dive into a complex manufacturing process by accessing information that was not usually available to the general public. As Neil Leach puts it in his *Benjaminian* reflection regarding mimesis, this accurately describes the author’s approach:

Mimesis here should be understood not in the terms used, say, by Plato, to refer to simple ‘imitation’. To reproduce something is to step beyond mere imitation. Here Benjamin challenges the inherited view of mimesis as an essentially compromised form of imitation that necessarily loses something of the original. For Benjamin ‘mimesis’ alludes to a constructive reinterpretation of an original, which becomes a creative act in itself. (...)To understand the meaning of mimesis in Benjamin we must recognise its origin in the process of modelling, of ‘making a copy of’ (Leach, 2006).

The project *Mimesis* and the exhibition *Fac-simile* (2008) were a turning point in my fashion practice⁴. During the making process, instead of copies, what was achieved more closely represented ‘spectres’ of the original pieces. In the *End of fashion* (2019), Geczy and Karaminas refer to Elizabeth Wilson’s understanding of garments as “congealed memories” of the past suspended like “spectres” in the mausoleums of culture, vestiges of a life once lived but now long gone” (Geczy and Karaminas, 2019: 28). In their understanding,

Not only do garments function as signifiers of loss and absence, they also serve as a representation of death and as a reminder of the past that is lost. Garments in this sense become a substitute, a surrogate, or consolation for something that is missing (Geczy and Karaminas, 2019: 28).

This understanding is shared with the fashion historian Caroline Evans in her book *Fashion at the edge* (Evans, 2003: 43-73). This project marked a departure from a productivist to a post-productivist⁵ fashion practice. The fashion objects were developed as ceramics, whereby clothes were dipped in liquid porcelain and crystallized at high temperatures;

losing the original garment and leaving a new materialised form made of porcelain, a record of every detail of the garment such as the fabric's textures, folds and wrinkles, while the original piece was lost in the fire.



Figure 13.2 Top image: Film still Latex reproduction technique (2014). Image credit and copyright Lara Torres. Bottom Image: Fashion performance at the Lisbon Fashion Week Photography: Rogério Martins, (2008) courtesy of the artist.

In the case of latex ‘translations’ (see Figure 13.2), the original garment was reproduced in latex, taking advantage of the material’s ability to retain all surface detail to safeguard the object’s memory. The reproduced pieces consisted of found objects that the participants of the project collected in their family homes in Portugal; there was a need to keep a record of these objects and, at the same time, an inevitable failure because we knew that the original items of clothing would disappear during the “remaking” process. The gesture of reproducing found objects, such as jewellery, accessories, and garments and its proximity to failure reproduced the mechanisms of memory, as memory often fails to reproduce an event⁶. The process of reproduction was approached through methods that used both traditional plaster mould making techniques and innovative technical skills such as using liquid latex to reproduce garments, developed while searching for ways to translate the metaphor of memory into clothing.

Film as fashion matter

Traditionally, fashion explores both material and immaterial constructs. My film project, *An impossible wardrobe for the invisible* (2011), translated this idea into an installation composed of seven films (see url: <https://vimeo.com/album/1533464>) documenting seven crafting actions discussing the importance of clothing and the transience of fashion. The project was based on the creation of ‘temporary clothes’ produced with the aim of being destroyed. Made of a soluble material, these clothes would dissolve in contact with water, leaving only visual impressions of the pieces on film.



Figure 13.3 film stills from 'An impossible wardrobe for the invisible' (2011). Image credit and copyright Lara Torres

The process of disappearance highlights the ephemeral nature of fashion, acting as a metaphor for the speed of the contemporary fashion processes (i.e. fast fashion) and the current speed of the fashion system (Bhardwaj and Fairhurst, 2009: 165-167). This process, a design process itself, leaving sometimes only a drawing on the performer's bodies, the 'skeleton' of a particular garment. The symbolic lines of the seams against the performer's body induce a sense of the intimacy of clothing, its facility to enhance personal agency and loss. In each of the seven situations filmed, a performer becomes an archetypal character that the audience can relate to while watching each film. The clothes relate to stereotypical garments that make the performers identifiable characters. The bodies represented in these films are not only an essential part of clothing, but also act as sites where fashion as an event takes place. These films morph the body and garment into one. After the dissolution of the garment, a body is left with seams and buttons added to the skin, a body-garment of sorts, in which there is no longer separation between subject and object.



Figure 13.4 Documentation illustrating seams on the body after dissolution of the garments during the shooting of 'An impossible wardrobe for the invisible' (2011) Image credit and copyright Lara Torres.

Productive fashion bodies

In their book *The Productive Body* (2014), Guery & Deleule ask how the human body and its labour have been expropriated through successive stages of capitalism. When Guery & Deleule refer to the 'productive body' in Marx and the capitalist 'appropriation of the body's powers,' it is in the sense of 'the subjugation of the organic body to capital, becoming the body of capital' (Guery & Deleule, 2014: 51-62). The productive body resonates with Joanne Entwistle in *The Fashioned Body* (2000: 1) where she states that 'fashion is about bodies: it is produced, promoted and worn by bodies.' Addressing the body from this sociological perspective, my film *Unmaking* (2016) depicts the relevance of bodies in fashion – both as a site of performance and production. This notion is central to my film's content, in creating sequences 'of production', like in a factory production line. For example, in sequences 7 and 8 (see figure 13.5 and figure 13.7) which depict hand gestures related to clothes, making is juxtaposed with women getting dressed or undressed, suggestive of a relation between the bodies that make our clothes, the dressed body and a deconstruction of fashion, a disordering of the fashioned meaning. *Unmaking* was assembled as a composition of thoughts on the process of how we 'make the body' through action, material etc. Research into fashion is necessarily bonded to the concept of 'being' due to fashion's own nature of materialising identity. As sociologist Joanne Finkelstein observes in *The Fashioned Self* (1991):

'We know that appearances are created and that dressing after a particular fashion, is done in order to convey a certain impression' (Finkelstein, 1991:1).

Michel Foucault is interested in how power is enacted through bodies; thus, his theories are particularly useful in an analysis of the practices and rituals around regulation clothing and everyday dress. Whatever private meanings clothes hold, they also have a profoundly social role. The choreographic aspect of activities that constitute fashion at different levels include dressing, producing, and consuming. As Entwistle writes in relation to Turner: 'there is an obvious fact about human beings, they have bodies and they are bodies' (Turner, 1985:1; Entwistle, 2000: 6). These bodies, in fashion, are at the same time the bodies that produce, promote, and wear fashion, composing a system of bodies that together constitute the fashion system. For Foucault, the body is critical to how power works: its visible construction shapes social and political discourses (Tynan, 2016: 186). For Finkelstein,

‘fashion is collective, systematised and prescriptive’ (Finkelstein, 2007: 211). Such perspective is Foucauldian; it is critical to note that manufacturing also bears down on the bodies of garment workers, ‘whose employment conditions are often made hazardous and precarious by a globalised fashion industry’ (Tynan, 2016:190-191). Finding parallels across ‘discursive fields’ prompts Foucault to consider social life in terms of systems of representation and their reproduction through the operation of institutional power. Thus, in her analysis of fast-fashion, Tynan points to a major theme in Foucault’s work: the concern with accountability. For me, within my film *Unmaking*, the matter of accountability is central and defines a political positioning of my fashion practice. *Unmaking* represents the several types of bodies in the fashion system – the bodies that wear, promote, and produce. The meaning of the film lies in the semiotics of fashion, in deconstructing the ‘sign of fashion’ (Barthes, 1985, 2010) and the principle of signification itself, just as the alternative to political economy can only lie in the deconstruction of commodity and production itself.

The creation of meaning through film images: critical discourse

My approach to generating visual images as a method for creating meaning in essay films is used not to illustrate ideas but to embody them, to actualize them in the film itself.

Discourse, as developed in Foucault’s *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (2004), refers to the creation and organization of knowledge, which determines how and what we know, both as individuals and as a society (Foucault, 2004). In 2009 the sociologist and fashion theorist Agnès Rocamora, drawing on both Bourdieu and Foucault, developed the notion of a ‘fashion discourse’. Rocamora explores the complex formation of texts, statements, and ideas articulated in the French fashion media to demonstrate how and where fashion discourses proliferate, and the social and material practices that give them life and meaning (Rocamora, 2009). Fashion discourse is critical to the maintenance of the fashion system, through which fashion also ‘constructs dominant narratives about health, gender, sexuality, class and race, or at least, fashion colludes with dominant narratives in any given social framework’ (2016, Tynan: 186). The creative development of *Unmaking* as a practice-based research method involves building on fashion discourse through layers of images and meaning, with a strong focus on the juxtaposition of image sequences; the film’s narrative is used to discuss what fashion is by using images of the body dressing, sewing, and unravelling as thought, memory, and representation metaphors. The principle of montage is

that a third meaning is created by the juxtaposition of two images (as shown in figure 13.5, below, that simulates the editing process) rather than any immutable meaning inherent in each separate image frame.

Fashion film meaning-making: a critical fashion practice

Films are built on layers of images and meaning, the intervals between the images, the gaps through which the images can appear. The notion of the image as trace, memory, and representation has been central to my film practice. My films *Fragment* (2008) and *An impossible wardrobe for the invisible* document a performance and stand as traces of garments that no longer exist. In *Unmaking*, the parallel lines of the layered narrations lead to the 'reveal', working like a mirror, pointing back at us as observer participants in our own fabrication. We are all bodies, we are all human, and both *Unmaking* and *An impossible wardrobe for the invisible* seem, in the end, to talk about and to all of us, even if it seems to be about something or someone else. The fashion image is never a given, the fictitious reality of fashion only reveals its relationship to humanity, the body, and work in a crisis situation, like the present one in which human conditions, climate change and environmental damage become clearer (Rockström et al., 2009; Zalasiewicz et al., 2011). In *Unmaking*, the fragmentary narrative makes it clear that no obvious answer will be given. No uniform meaning is intended to be given to the film's audience. The form would be defined by the relationship between the images. My intention when making the film was that this would better translate 'thought' as the process that I intended to portray in the film. This simple process also contributed to the politics of reduction that I tried to keep in the making, with the use of minimum resources possible and 'dematerialized practices' (Lippard, 1997). The fashion apparatus deployed by fashion practitioners in recent decades has become mostly centred upon visual strategies, due to the internet and online communications (Wolbers, 2019). Although I have been very reticent about providing an explanation of each sequence as I don't want to provide the audience one possible meaning – I prefer an open-ended narrative with room for speculation. I can, however, provide a declaration of my intentions towards each sequence and, perhaps inevitably, a speculative exercise where I interpret my own ideas in the film.



Figure 13.5 Editing Sequences 1, 2 and 9 in *Dressing Shirt* date. Image and copyright Lara Torres 2016.

Unmaking: film contents

In sequence 1 *Dressing Shirt* (see figure 13.5) the performer, a woman, stands in front of the camera with the sky as a backdrop during the seemingly banal gesture of putting on a shirt. Slowly, the performer buttons the shirt until it is entirely buttoned up. While the banality of this common gesture seems empty of meaning, my intention was to bring the audience close to the performer through a gesture that is familiar and relatable. By making the image so clean and technical I wanted to avoid the so-called 'male gaze' (Mulvey L., 1975: 6-18). I composed the frame carefully to reflect feminist video works such as Martha Rosler's *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975), where the camera technically documents the action, placing the performer in the centre of the frame captured by an objective still camera. Rosler's film is a feminist parody video and performance piece considered a critique of the commodified versions of traditional women's roles in modern society. In Sequence 1, *Dressing Shirt*, the

images of dressing are juxtaposed with others of sewing and a spectral sequence of 'imagined sewing' and 'imagined dressing' that refer to bringing together productive bodies (Guery and Deleule, 2014) and dressed bodies. Montage brings the second sequence in: *Dressing Shirt* (see figure 13.5) by mimicking gestures, the performer repeats the actions and positioning of sequence 1; she once again stands in front of the camera with the sky as set. Slowly, the performer pretends to button the shirt until it is entirely buttoned. My intention with this juxtaposition, is to enhance the familiarity of the gesture of buttoning, because it has been repeated so many times we would be able to reproduce it by heart. Juxtaposing them with *Sewing* and *Mimicking Sewing* and sequence 9, I intended to move between the actions of 'real sewing' and mimicking sewing. The performer I chose was himself a maker, familiar with the actions he had to reproduce; I was interested in having a male figure doing the sewing and knitting actions because somehow these are activities usually related to traditional women's roles which I did not want to perpetuate as such because I wanted to move away from traditional stereotypes regarding women roles. In sequence 7 *What a factory might be: fabric*, refers to an idea from a William Morris pamphlet (Morris, 1886 [online]) by expanding on the notion of factory. In figure 13.5, on the right, the performer uses embroidery hoops as a 'jewellery piece' to enact an idea for 'what a factory might be,' reducing the notion of 'factory' to an extreme – as part of a simple mechanism where fabric is wrapped around the body (reminiscent of the ancient Greek *Chiton* or *Himation* or *Peplos* shapes), where a cloth is draped around the body and can afterwards be undone, suggesting that we could put things together temporarily and undo them when necessary.



Figure 13.6 Lara Torres, Film Stills *Unmaking*, 2016, clockwise sequences 6, 4 and 8. Image and copyright Lara Torres 2016.

Sequence 8; (see figure 13.6 sequence 4) *Consumption*, perhaps the most literal of the sequences, was filmed in Oxford Street⁷ on a Saturday morning from walking up and down the street collecting images of the many people shopping and carrying bags of new things. The intention of this sequence was to record the movement of people in an area dedicated to consumption and to produce documentary images, bringing the film into contemporary reality and familiarity. Sequence 8 was juxtaposed with Sequence 4 (see figure 13.6); *Overdressed*, featuring the performer Liz Vahia: a still camera observes her as she dresses in a vast array of clothing items. It uses a largely static camera and her home as a set. Vahia navigates a lexicon of 'dress objects' (Skjold, 2016: 139). Else Skjold uses the term "dress objects" in her research referring to the "real garment" in the sense that she addresses the physical object of dress—the signified—from its signifier, the "written garment" or "image garment" (Barthes, 1983, 2010). Combining it with the wording "design object" highlights how people are affected by design characteristics of what they wear. In my film, Vahia's

body is layered with her wardrobe: she begins with a skirt, adds another skirt, adds a dress... and by the end of the sequence, she can barely move due to the number of garments she has on, inducing laughter, giving the sequence a tone of parody (which is purposely very distinct from the rest of the film). The focus on the different garments is important, since I intended the film to suggest how diverse this wardrobe is (multiple identities). Vahia's own wardrobe is used in this sequence; initially it was intended to film Vahia putting on her entire wardrobe, but we had to abandon that idea as Vahia is a collector of vintage items and had an entire room as a wardrobe. Instead, she randomly selected pieces and did not pre-determine an order, although she used tighter clothing for the start and larger outerwear for the ending. This sequence parallels today's excess of production, referring to someone's wardrobe, in this case a sort of archetypal wardrobe because it is made of vintage and contemporary outfits that translate a certain lack of temporality. The sequence is juxtaposed with sequence 6, with the woman unravelling a knitted dress (see figure 13.7): Unravelling refers to the illustration of cyclical movement of production and destruction, so familiar to fashion in its transient nature. Recorded in Hilly Fields in South London with the intent of being a literal representation of unmaking, it was included to illustrate parallel movements of making and unmaking in fashion, juxtaposing this with the making of a thread structure over a body (see figure 13.7), and gesture of hands knitting (Figure 13.7), connecting these three images in the idea of circular movement – where the thread becomes dress > is unravelled > becomes thread again > becomes structure and can be re-knitted.

This is a simplification of the idea of 'circular fashion' based on Niinimäki (2017). However, I believe that we can think about the circulatory movement of production (body as factory is how I see it – productive bodies) and explore how we could perform it and document it, philosophically. I am interested in the idea of production–destruction, as I explored previously – always a quiet gesture – but trying to understand how to reveal this 'circular' movement of materialisation and dematerialisation through the action of the body itself. Sequence 6: Unravelling, originally juxtaposed with images of making, now acts as a huge contrast when juxtaposed with the documentary footage of Oxford Street in London, where people walk around with their shopping bags, resonating with Benjamin's or Baudelaire's notion of the urban *flaneur* (Benjamin 2002: 448). Both sequences 4 and 8 (see figure 13.6)

illustrate the excess of shopping and an exaggeration that gains a comedic tone in this desperate attempt of wearing multiple layers. It is a reminder of all the skins we put on, how they play with the construction of our identity and the self. This conjures a sequence of literal making and unmaking: a woman in a park unravels a knitted dress while another sequence constructs a structure of thread around her body. A 'factory' made by her own hands that makes and unmakes, her body is displayed with numbered sections that evoke, in the minds of fashion designers and workers, the patterns that are used to make clothing.

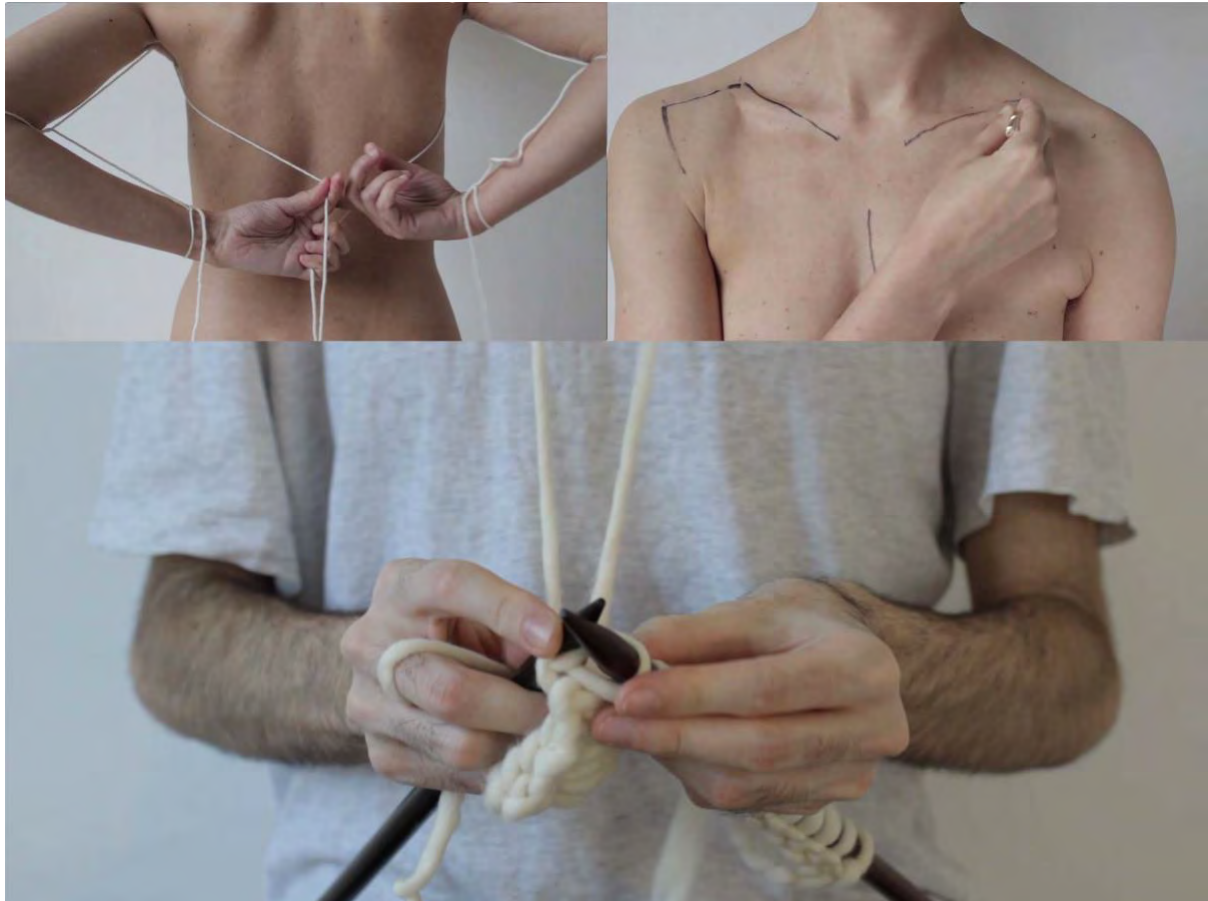


Figure 13.7 Lara Torres, Film Still *Unmaking* (2016), clockwise sequence 12, 11 and 10.
Image and copyright Lara Torres 2016.

In Sequence 12; *What a factory might be: thread* (see figure 13.7), thread is wrapped around the body as if mimicking the places where seams could be; the structure becomes an almost non-existent garment (film sequence 12, see figure 13.7). Once again, the body is seen here as a tool and a site, a factory for making, but it is also the same body that is dressed. I was interested in the gestures of making the structure and representing the body

as being both the producer and the consumer, in a reference to the invisibility of the bodies of producers in capitalist systems (Baute et al., 2009: 53). The gestures in Sequence 12 (figure 13.7) were filmed so that all the actions were recorded, and, in the end we filmed the body with the structure of thread 'dressed' on the body. The intention of the film is to capture the presence of makers, *making*. The repetition of gestures, the implementation, choreographed movements, and the body itself become a signal system in themselves. In Sequence 11: *Pattern drawn on the body* (see figure 13.7), the sequence of pattern self-drawn on a female body could be said to be reminiscent of Croatian artist Sanja Iveković's video *Instructions No.1*, 1976, where a close-up shot shows the artist as a young woman painting black arrows over the contours of her face, as a surgeon might when preparing her for cosmetic surgery. She then massages her face along the arrows, erasing them and leaving a smudged residue across her skin. As in Iveković's video, the performer draws on her own body with a dark pencil. Although in the sequence that I have created, while the performer's drawing refers to patterns for clothing, the reading is ambiguous and could be interpreted as marks for cosmetic surgery or to open-up the body. It is a somewhat a violent gesture to mark the body in this way even if done by oneself. Juxtaposed with the Sequence 10; *Hand Knitting* (see figure 13.7), in the same way as sequence 9 (see figure 13.5), real knitting and mimicking knitting. In this sequence, the thread from the unravelling Sequence 6 (Fig. 13.6) is made again, introducing the notion of a cycle of deconstruction and reconstruction. This sequence makes a connection with *An impossible wardrobe for the invisible* where clothes are also destroyed, except this time it is within a cycle of destruction and reconstruction (the woollen thread is reused later in sequence 10, see figure 13.7). The dress was knitted with the intent of being destroyed, so its construction was planned as such; the movement of the performer was dictated by the unravelling gestures. The film as a parallel with Francis Alÿs art project of 1995 *Fairy Tales*, where the artist documents the action of walking around the city in his unravelling blue sweater, leaving a trace everywhere he passes, like a trail of colour, a drawing in the city landscape – a fable of loss, the thread becoming an urban drawing of his journey. The procedure that I developed is unique insofar as I have used montage to juxtapose these different sequences in order to assert a new

fashion criticality. In my attempt to depict 'thought in the process of being formed', I have used montage itself as a form of thinking in images. Although my film deals with recurrent 'dress' themes, and unoriginal themes (represented throughout artistic and fashion practices), my original contribution lies in the dialogue established between the juxtaposed images via editing. The montage of these 'leitmotifs' is what generates a critical understanding and stimulates questioning from the audience. Although I did not expect to receive formal feedback from audiences, they nevertheless responded to my film during screenings and exhibitions. Some of the insights I have received from viewers have related to the way the film reminds them of something they have experienced, and how it makes them question fashion's role and how they think about it.



Figure 13.8 film stills *Unmaking*, left sequence 13 and 14 and right sequence 1 and 2. Image and copyright Lara Torres 2016.

Finally, a white shirt being put on by a male body seems to close the cycle but also connects the drawing of the body with the shapes of the shirt and the gesture of drawing with the gesture of dressing (drawing over the body), resonating with the making-unmaking aspect. The final section is layered with a text that connects bodies-identities-dress. In Sequence 13: *Dressing shirt* (see fig.13.8 above) the performer stands in front of the camera once again with the sky as scenery for the banal gesture of dressing a shirt, once again connecting the film to the audience via common action. In the last sequence, Sequence 14; *Mimicking putting on imaginary shirt* (see figure 13.8, sequence 1) the male performer repeats the imagined gesture of putting on a non-existent shirt, resonating with the female performer in the earlier sequence. My film has a 'very little almost nothing' approach in some of its 'factories sequences', where you see the body of the performer working with a frame of thread around the body; the performer's body becomes the factory and hands and the product a simple thread with tied knots, being 'very little almost nothing'; if we rethink production to the very minimum, maybe we could have a minimal factory of hands putting together frames.

Discussion/Conclusion

The use of film as a medium in the development of my fashion practice allows for reflexivity, using film editing as a language of thought: video-thought, proposing a conceptual framework for cinematic modes that acknowledge fashion film as 'thought experiment'. At once speculative and self-reflexive, film when understood as a thought experiment invites a variety of hermeneutic approaches, relating to the meaning of texts and the ways in which they are understood and permitted to 'think the unthinkable', while generating rules that may redefine what we understand by 'narrative'. This strategy allows describing the relationships within the fashion system through metaphor and allegories that would allow a juxtaposition of meanings and content, using the minimum means possible, simplifying it, dismantling its parts. The matter of the linearity of the narrative became secondary as I became interested in the density of associations that an image allows, the idea of Benjamin's 'dialectical image' (Penksy, 2004). The questions posed when building a practice of fashion through the use of film as medium used montage as a way to self-interrogate

fashion, to ask the question of 'What is fashion?'. Understanding that 'montage is conflict', as Eisenstein famously proclaimed (1929):

Just as cells in their division form a phenomenon of another order, the organism or embryo, so, on the other side of the dialectical leap from the shot there is montage. By what, then is montage characterised and, consequently, its cell - the shot? By collision. By the conflict of two pieces in opposition to each other. By conflict. By collision (Eisenstein, 1929: 37-70).

Fashion theorists like Hollander, Barnard, Entwistle, Finkelstein, Roach-Higgins, and Eicher attempted to define the words 'fashion,' 'dress,' and 'clothing,' words that are entangled in the 'complicated network of similarities and criss-crossing' that the terms bring (Barnard, 2002: 11). To me, this entanglement of ideas that form fashion could be represented through the conflict between images, through montage. The question 'What is fashion?' has been posed endlessly by fashion theorists. According to Simmel, fashion is 'a process that consists of balancing destruction and up building' and 'its content acquires characteristics by destruction of an earlier form' (Simmel, 1957: 549). This notion is reflected in the process used in the making of my film - developed between the making of a series of scenes and then editing them together, every time unmaking the sequence and re-editing the whole video. This continuous deconstruction of the filmic sequence is, in a way, a form of reproducing the mechanisms of fashion in the same way I did previously with clothing items within my fashion design practice. In Deleuze and Guattari's *What is Philosophy?* 'The concept is a whole because it totalises its components, but it is a fragmentary whole'; every concept has a history and there are no simple concepts, every concept has components and is defined by them. 'There is no concept with only one component; they all have a multiplicity to them' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2014: 15-17). Fashion is a concept: it has a multiplicity and also has a becoming that involves its relationship with other concepts on the same plane, what Ludwig Wittgenstein calls a 'family resemblance' (Barnard 2002:10-11; Wittgenstein 1968: 66-7). While there is no single meaning that is common with all of them, each of the terms have something in common and draws together a family of terms: clothing, adornments, dress, and fashion. Barnard explains why this gives an idea of the 'difficulty involved in, if not the impossibility of, trying to provide a rigid definition of the meanings of any of these words' (Barnard, 2002: 11). There is no stand-alone definition

and, as Wilson has pointed out, fashion is like all cultural phenomena ‘especially of the symbolic or mythic kind, [which] are curiously resistant to being imprisoned in one ‘meaning’ (Wilson 1985: 10-11). Various sequences are joined together to create a system of meanings into which viewers may descend. We can find similar ‘becoming’ in the film, and also ‘unmaking’, where I have tried to avoid the conventional approaches to linear narrative through the editing process, shaping the discontinuity of the discourse throughout the film, preventing the viewer from drawing on their conventional film habits to comprehend the meaning of the film.

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Notes

¹ In his book Fashion-ology (2005), Yuniya Kawamura describes the connection between fashion that is an immaterial object and clothing that is a material object, mentioning Brenninkmeyer's notes, 'clothing and dress are the raw material from which fashion is formed. Fashion as a belief is manifested through clothing' (1963: 6). Kawamura adds: 'People are wearing clothes, but they believe or wish to believe that it is in fashion that they are wearing and that they are consuming fashion and not clothing'.

² Developed in Lisbon between May 2007 and March 2008, the project *Mimesis* was an interdisciplinary project, between fashion, ceramics and jewellery disciplines, making use of metalwork techniques and the age-old tradition of mould-making using plaster, natural latex and porcelain, to reproduce found clothing, jewellery and accessories from their original form as a disruptive voice regarding functionality.

³ The visitors to the exhibition *Mimesis/Fac-simile* could see an account of the production process of the project *Mimesis* (2008), failures and experimentation. Like an archaeologist, I was trying to put together fragments to recover evidence of a long lost form. The exhibition had vitrines with the contents displayed as archeologic findings. I did not work as a professional archaeologist, but in a similar way to an archaeologist, when they carefully collect and record fragments of old things 'as a study of the human past as inferred from the

surviving materials remains'(Renfrew, C. and P. Bahn, *Archaeology, Theories, methods, Practice*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1996:11).

⁴ In the sense that my studio moved from being a traditional fashion studio producing small commercial collections into becoming an experimental, disruptive artist studio producing often dis-functional, non-commercial series.

⁵ Victor Margolin cites the design theorist Clive Dilnot in the diagnosis of a "movement towards a 'post-product' society, i.e., to one distinguished by a more explicit social management of man-environment relations, is likely to bring back this historic sense of design's significance [as planning]. Design becomes once again a means of ordering the world rather than merely of shaping commodity". Clive Dilnot, "Design as a Socially Significant Activity: An Introduction," *Design Studies* 3:2 (1982): 144. In *Design for a Sustainable World*, by Victor Margolin Source: *Design Issues*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (Summer, 1998), pp. 83-92. Published by: The MIT Press.

⁶ In the 1970s, artists commonly used clothing for its symbolic content. Clothes were used by artists in the way in which they are able to translate someone's presence/absence or memory. The artwork *All the clothes of a woman* (1973) by the artist Hans Peter Feldman is a good example of such practices. It refers to seventy items of a woman's wardrobe photographed one by one and framed as one archival image as a reminder of her existence in her absence. Hans Peter Feldman's work displays something that seems to represent a specific woman whose identity is not revealed to the audience, but who is recreated in their minds by her clothing items. In 1972, Christian Boltanski made the artwork *Les habits de François C.* (The Clothes of François C., 1970) that surveys Boltanski's main motifs of place, memory, and loss through clothing that represents someone's identity.

⁷ Oxford Street being one of the busiest shopping streets in the world with 500.000 pedestrians walking every day. Source:<<https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/assembly/oxford-st-the-busiest-feet-street-in-the-world>>.