

FASHIONING THE NOT-SELF: SPECULATIVE NON-HUMAN FASHIONS

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Drawings by participants of the negative space around me, images have been layered to highlight the interconnectedness and relationality between the different drawn bodies and possibilities for new fashioned forms.

The fashion system only works for a minority of elite individuals. To create equality in fashion requires a radical departure away from enlightenment notions of the human. To do this, we need to create a fashion movement seen through alternative counter-human concepts characterized by different fashion narratives and shaped through a reconfiguration of space, gender, and belonging to encourage relationality, solidarity and planetary justice. What might that radical starting point be? To counter systemic sexist, racist,

body ableist, classist, heteronormative and unjust design representations of the body in fashion, we need to re-think what being a human being means, and to explore human vulnerability that emerges from humanity's exposure to other existences and social relations – human and non-human. Many critics of colonialism address the fundamental question of humanity and how the project of colonialism not only denies colonized people humanity, but in fact colonialism is the antithesis of humanity. British sociologist and professor Akwugo Emejulu goes further in her work *Fugitive Feminism* (Emejulu 2022) to explore a different kind of politics that emerges when we don't try to reclaim an idea of the human, and instead explore the concept of wanting something more than just better humans. What might those possibilities be? Emejulu questions what would it mean if we reflected further on the idea of being this other non-human subject who is not subjected to the constraints of colonial identities, and questions what would it mean to embrace the idea of liminality? What would it mean to embrace an idea of ambivalence and hesitation? Here Emejulu suggests we should not reclaim a different way of being a human and instead adopt a state of insecurity and instability. Inspired by Emejulu's ideas, life drawing could be used as a tool to decentre the heteronormative body in fashion. I attempted to work with the audience and collectively challenge idealized representations of the human form to subvert heteronormative norms and draw anew, with a radical starting point of the space around the body as a way to consider how that space – society and systemic injustice – shapes the body; thereby shifting the focus to looking at that space around the body and seeing it as a space of possibilities for alternative conceptions of the body.

Instructions for the audience were to:

Draw the negative space around me: the empty space around and between the subject(s) of an image. Negative space in art, also referred to as "air space", is the space around and between objects. Instead of focusing on drawing the actual object (me), for a negative space drawing, the focus is on what's between the objects, what is behind/above/beside me.

There cannot be a right or wrong here.

Turning to counter-human concepts offers scope in fashion to re-think who the idealized body is that fashion designs for – and, for an imaginative opposition drawing from anti-colonial black radical thought. We must re-think Western humanism and encourage dialogue on what it means to be human: what might a non-human be in fashion, how might hybrid identities re-shape and re-orient fashion away from heteronormative norms?. Could Emejulu's writing help fashion as a discipline re-think and speculate on just fashions?