

A Second Skin: Investigating the Role of Dress in Identity Formation

By

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Abstract

This thesis is a secondary component to an artistic practice-led process and as such, is guided by my own artistic practice in that way. In this body of work, I use myself as the main character or protagonist for the artworks that I have created. However, both the thesis and the exhibition also respond to social issues of identity beyond the personal and examines the construction of identity in a South African, and more specifically Makhanda context, as that is the larger context in which I am situated. The work itself is inspired by memories and experiences of feeling uncomfortable in my own (first) skin, and how I found that comfort in my second skin (dress).

My professional art practice and my thesis are based on the concept of clothes as a *second skin* for human beings, specifically observing the ways in which we utilise dress to construct and express our identities. As such, this thesis is an attempt at understanding the relationship between clothes and the body through the lens of identity politics. Through the topics and artworks discussed in visual and textual analysis, this thesis intends to unpack the properties of dress as a complex medium individuals can utilise as a tool to construct their identity. This is partially achieved through the exploration of my own personal experiences of dress and of the spaces that shaped and mediated the construction of identity.

Lastly, it is an attempt to understand the experiences of dress in parallel to the experience of the body/self, which consists of the world within and the one outside.

Declaration

I declare this thesis is my own work and that all the sources I have used have been acknowledged by complete references. This thesis is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for Master of Arts at Rhodes University. I declare that it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at another university.



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Introduction

Nothing is more singular, more personal, more ordinary, more inexorably present every single day than clothing. It moulds to the body that inhabits it and, like some sort of 'storage tank', defines its space. By adhering to the body, it absorbs its humours, adopts its silhouette and shares its experiences. It covers us like a second skin. (Scardi, 2010)

This quote highlights the interest of this mini-thesis quite accurately, providing a statement that demonstrates clothing's intimate relationship with the physical body and, by extension, the personal identity of the individual. This research seeks to investigate the role dress plays in identity construction, and extend that into an aesthetic display or expression of the self/identity in everyday life through the daily ritual of dressing oneself.

Dress has been part of human existence since prehistoric times, as the first known humans to make clothing, the Neanderthals, survived from about 200,000 B.C.E. to about 30,000 B.C.E. At some point, Neanderthals learned how to use the thick, furry hides from animals to keep themselves warm and dry. With this discovery, clothing was born (Hermson 2014).

This mini-thesis makes its departure point from memories as the underlying concept is deeply rooted in *memories*. To be more specific, memories of discomfort in my own skin growing up and how I found that comfort in a "second skin", otherwise known as "dress". In a paper titled "*The Second Skin: A study on the relationship between clothes and human bodies*", Emmi Flodin (2019) reinforces this notion by articulating that, "Clothes become a second layer on the human body when they are worn, also seen as a *second skin*" (Flodin 2019:1). Thus, the title of my exhibition, *A SecondSkin*, refers not only to dress as a second skin through which we can construct, communicate, and express our identity. But as an extension of the human body physically as a material, and metaphorically as a means of expression for abstract ideas and emotions. Furthermore, dress is also a means of protection that extends beyond the physical or elements of nature, but rather protects what is inside, *myself*. As such, I also consider the materiality of clothing and how it covers the body like a protective layer, a shell or a cocoon.

Moving forward, I will be using the terms "dress" and "clothing" interchangeably to refer to material and other body supplements or coverings. Notably, it is the terms "fashion" and "clothing" that are often used synonymously or interchangeably. However when it comes to the

term “fashion”, it can be said to have many different social meanings that do not exclusively refer to dress or clothing. I acknowledge that the term fashion is also applicable in this thesis, however, the term lacks the precision of the word dress, for it refers to many different kinds of material and non-material cultural products (e.g., houses, music, automobiles, scientific theories, philosophy and recreation). Furthermore, like “ornament”, fashion as a term forces positive and negative value judgments on body modifications and supplements and their properties, based on their relative positions within a fashion cycle of introduction, mass acceptance, and obsolescence. In addition to this, not all types of dress even qualify as fashion. As an example of this, religious dress in many societies resists fashion change and is, therefore, automatically excluded from the study of fashion. (Eicher and Roach-Higgins 1992: 3)

Clothing, on the other hand, has a more direct meaning, as it refers to the general raw material of what an individual wears (Kawamura 2016: 19). Thus, when we talk about clothing or an individual item of clothing, it refers to any covering for the human body. Once humans had evolved from simply using animal skins or fur to cover themselves, their coverings started historically from just one piece of woven fibre, and have since developed in contemporary times as a result of technological improvements. However “Fashion, in the context of dress/clothing is a look or a style that is popular at a given time” (Rath, Peterson, Greensley and Gill 1994: 3).

The last term defined here is “dress”, which has a more inclusive definition and takes into account all elements of an individual’s outfit or “look”, not only the materials or coverings such as the term clothes does. Dress, according to Eicher and Roach-Higgins’s definition is an assemblage of modifications of the body and/or supplements to the body. As they state:

Dress, so defined, includes a long list of possible direct modifications of the body such as coiffed hair, colored skin, pierced ears, and scented breath, as well as an equally long list of garments, jewellery, accessories, and other categories of items added to the body as supplements. (Eicher and Roach-Higgins 1992: 1)

This mini-thesis, although acknowledging the vast aspects of dress, focuses more on the visual aspects, such as the long list of garments, jewellery and accessories, and less on aspects that are of less visual importance like scented breath. Therefore it is worth noting that our system for identifying dress imposes a somewhat arbitrary conceptual separation between biologically

determined body characteristics and dress, each of which is always perceived in relation to, the other as a whole

Practice Methodology

In the process of making this body of work, I am harnessing my own lived experience as a departure point. As such the subject matter consists largely of depictions of me referenced from photographs I take, or have taken over time. I investigate my relationship with my own clothes (dress), as a visual tool that was able to assist me in constructing and communicating my identity, narratives about dreams and desires, belonging and community, fears and insecurities, language (visual) and communication. This is the creation of the person I am today, depicted through the medium of printmaking in a body of work that investigates and explores this complex process.

Although the work is about me, it is not exclusively about me, as it also holds up a mirror for the audience to look at themselves and to regard society in a more introspective way, asking questions about the relationship between us (humans) and this material (dress) we engage with on a daily basis. Dress and the act of dressing have become so mundane because we interact with them daily, so we might not realise their importance entirely as something that directly influences how we experience the world around us and ourselves. It could be said to be closest to us both physically and beyond the physical; constantly in close contact with or in close range of the physical body. Because of this, we might not always consciously pay attention to our mode of dressing, which results in the common misconception of it being very unimportant or superficial, when in fact it is quite the opposite.

When I think about my own work and how it comes about, I always see it as a process, more than an end or finished product, never really ending, always in flux, open to reworking and reimagining. The process of making the work, more specifically the type of mark-making can be described as being instinctual, intuitive and very experimental because I hardly work from a pre-planned draft or a sketch. However, I do not just make random marks; I always work with some type of reference imagery like fashion photography, Instagram source material, or personal photographic material, especially when I am drawing the figures (me). Although there might not be a sketch, I still work with an idea and with a concept in mind, and that, together with a vast

visual vocabulary attained through years of experience informs my mark-making and the result of the work. Therefore, although the marks are unplanned and have a sense of playfulness and curiosity to them, they are still informed by my experience as a practising artist.

Elaborating further on the marks, these can also be described as being very diverse, as the works I make may sometimes come across as being made by different people due to my interest in different styles of creating and my need to explore new ways of creating through experimentation

What I look forward to when I am creating is the element of the unknown; this keeps me interested in what I'm doing. I have previously worked in a more realistic way, doing tonal drawings and accurate depictions of the world around me. However, I have come to realise that my best work comes from being met with a problem during the process of creating and finding a solution to it as I go. These "problems" are most likely to arise from the unknown. This method of working was developed in the process of making my undergraduate work, which was where I really pushed myself to break out of the formalities of Fine Art.

In all of my works, I make it a point to use more than one medium, fusing together printmaking, drawing, painting, and sometimes collaging, to construct the image. This is where the process of making is at the centre of the work, guiding my hand and dictating what direction the work goes in. As such I always have to trust my instincts and trust the process, even though I am unaware of what the work will look like when it is time to exhibit it.

The process always starts off with a print and from there I just keep building on it, working with it, around it, and sometimes cancelling it out completely with my layering. It starts with a monotype printing method because it allows for a looser way of working compared to other printing methods such as linocut and etchings, where the image on the matrix¹ is fixed once you have carved or etched the image you want to print. Monoprint, as the name suggests – mono, meaning one – can only be printed once. One can attempt to recreate it and may even come close but because it is not a fixed mark on the matrix it cannot be identically duplicated. This means

¹ A matrix is essentially a template, and can be made of wood, metal, or glass. The design is created on the matrix by working its flat surface with either tools or chemicals. The matrix is then inked in order to transfer it onto the desired surface. Source: <https://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-met/collection-areas/drawings-and-prints/materials-and-techniques/printmaking>

that after you have printed what you have made on the matrix, it is cleaned off afterwards and you start with a clean matrix. There is, however, a method referred to as a “ghost print” which can duplicate the image of a monoprint, but the majority of the ink will have been transferred onto the paper already, leaving only a thin and light layer. One can reprint this straight after the original is printed but it will be light and barely visible, almost see-through, thus the name, “ghost print”.

For monotype printing, I use Perspex, which is a see-through piece of plastic, glass-like, material which comes in various sizes and is soft enough to cut through and resize as required. When making a monoprint one can use various methods to get the desired outcome. Once you have your Perspex how you want it, the next step is to soak a piece of Fabriano paper, which is specially made for printmaking and can withstand being soaked in water. While the paper is soaking you may start inking up the Perspex with ink made for printmaking. There are various ways to get the ink onto the Perspex, such as rolling it on with an ink roller, and painting it on using the printing ink (for this I have used thinners and linseed oil, making the ink easier to move around).

Once that is done and you have the desired image on the perspex, you remove the paper from the water and dry it off (but not completely) using blotting paper. The Fabriano paper is sandwiched between the two sheets of blotting paper; you then press down and roll over the top of the blotting paper, allowing it to soak in the water from the Fabriano. The final step is to set the press to the desired pressure, however, you cannot make it too tight as you might rip the now delicate Fabriano paper. After the press has been set, you place the perspex on the register, which is a way of measuring and lining up your paper and perspex making sure you get a straight print, this is done with the image facing upwards. You then place the paper on the plate as well, making sure to line it up straight with the Perspex. Another piece of paper is placed over that to ensure there is no mess, and lastly, on top all of that you place the blanket. The blanket is situated between the metal roller of the press and the print, providing a cushion and the needed pressure necessary for the print to show up clearly and evenly. Lastly, when rolling the work through the press one would only roll it through the press once all the way. Thereafter I take the printout on the other side, peel the paper off the paper, clean off the perspex with some turpentine or thinners and place my paper on the drying rack to set for a few hours or overnight until it is completely

dry, and then you have a monoprint, which I use as the starting point for the work as the it is a very long process that requires a lot of time.,

For me, that is usually where the work starts, as I use the print as a base for what I do on top of it. Once that process is done and the ink is dried up, I move the print into my studio to continue working on it. Furthermore, the image I make on the perspex is not a complete image, but rather an initial mark that starts the process of making the work. The first mark can be anything from a colour, or many, to shapes, textures, or lines. Usually, I go with the very first thing that comes to mind, or the first thing I feel when I think of the topic at hand, therefore it comes out as abstract depictions, utilising the elements of fashion design, which consist of line, colour, texture, and silhouette. In this stage of the process, I make multiple works at a time so that I can have sufficient material to work on at once. Sometimes after this is done, I do not look at the work for a few days before engaging with it.

The next step I describe as a conversation between me and the work, a dialogue of sorts, back and forth. When I am in the studio I am adding (talking) to the work, inserting new information, and new ideas and experiences into it. This act of layering can be likened to how one layers items of dress. Starting with just a T-shirt, you can keep adding, a jersey, a jacket, a scarf, and so forth. This makes an outfit visually more interesting and can add more meaning with each item of dress. In a similar way, the layering of the artwork makes it more visually complex and adds more layers of meaning. However, because I do not plan it beforehand I have to allow the work to guide me as well. This is where the idea of conversations comes in, as there is a back-and-forth tension between me and the work, it is in constant limbo between what it wants to become and how I am interpreting that. This constant limbo speaks back directly to the nature of identity, which is in constant flux.

Every day when I get back to the studio and look at the work surrounding me, I read it in a different way than I did the day before. Therefore, even though I am the creator of the work, my perception of it changes constantly, nothing is fixed. The work now speaks back to me, revealing messages I might have not seen in the beginning.

This constant interaction with the work is the reason it is so layered, this is a result of the constant changes I make on a daily, weekly, or even monthly basis. I go back and allow myself

to revisit a work and allow it to grow for as long as it ‘lives’ in the studio. At the same time, the work becomes like my clothes, hanging/living in my own wardrobe (studio) existing like my clothes do and awaiting interaction from me, waiting to receive meaning and to give meaning, such as the relationship between wearer and worn. In this way the studio becomes the metaphorical wardrobe in which I hang my clothes; as such the works are an artistic or creative representation of my second skin.

Consequently, multiple works are hanging up at a time and I am working on multiple works at a time, pulling references from multiple places, such as fashion photography, Instagram source material, brands and logos, fashion design, contemporary or pop culture, personal photographic material, and – perhaps one of the most important – my imagination. Usually while I do this, I also have some readings referenced in my thesis or even my actual thesis open as well and I use that to inform what I am making as well, as it speaks directly to my practice.

As I begin to work into the prints, my “go to” materials are paint (acrylic paint, fabric paint, oil paint, and spray paint), and oil pastels. Sometimes I might use whatever I can get my hands on. I draw not only what I see/have seen, but also what *I want* to see, and what *I feel*. I enjoy the psychological aspect of dress and as a result, I am always aware of how I feel when I am in the process of making the work. I jump from one work to the next, in limbo between the pieces, adding here and there. Sometimes I make small changes, sometimes I make big ones, and at times completely working over a print or another already developing work. The process of layering can become very intricate and complex as I navigate what to cover up or conceal and what to reveal to the audience. This is a very personal body of work and required me to be vulnerable and deal with a lot of personal issues I might not have been ready to deal with. That is what (I) individuals do with dress; when they do not like a part of themselves they utilise the layering of dress to conceal it, and similarly when they do like it, they use dress to emphasise it.

The types of marks in the works, especially in the background, come from extensive experimentation making various works in the process of developing my Masters exhibition. Some of the work serves as a canvas for me to develop my visual language of mark-making as I try and find parallels between my processes of getting dressed every day with how I approach the process of making this body of work. The graphic element is largely inspired by the graphic design (usually logos) element present in fashion, which is most commonly very bold and

defined. Furthermore, the medium of printmaking itself is very graphic medium and is often also used in the making of designs on clothes, using methods like silkscreen printing, so this emphasises the fact that fashion is being referenced in the work.

I have an extensive language of mark-making, from a very controlled line to a very expressive one. One of the common threads in the work is the use of masks, to mask the identity, and give its wearer a sense of agency or power in controlling what the onlooker sees, which is the managing of perceived identity. Another commonality is the grid, which is always present behind and sometimes in front of the figure. The grid references the creating, building or designing of the self, as it is commonly used as a backdrop when designing or planning, helping to maintain perspective and body proportions. Shapes are also very prominent in the work, especially circles. Shapes allow you to break down things into their simplest form and act as a foundation for building something from there into something as complex as identity.

The works are never too clean or polished up simply because I think it would not be an accurate depiction of the process of identity construction. Therefore I believe I should have some restlessness in the work and a sense of “controlled chaos”. An example of this controlled chaos I find in the process of making the work, where I draw parallels between getting dressed or making an outfit and making the work. The unknown plays a big role in both of these processes as I enjoy this element, starting with a single idea and allowing it to develop through interaction. Before I get dressed I do not have any idea of what to wear. I mostly start by choosing one item I feel like wearing and build the rest of the outfit around that, often making changes and sometimes changing the whole outfit completely whether it is the jewellery, shoes, pants, or the shirt, for instance. This is also how I make the work, as explained earlier, starting with a single idea and developing the idea from there. Sometimes making small changes but sometimes completely working over what is already there, making a whole new work over the one that was previously there. Furthermore, the process of identity construction is not a process of certainty and it is definitely never complete and polished.

Although clothes are not the sole factor in identity construction, it is evident through the topics discussed throughout this thesis that dress indeed plays a significant role in the process of identity construction. This is because, even though the construction of identity and self is an internal and somewhat personal process, it is reflected and displayed across the surface of dress.

The process of identity construction through dress is demonstrated through my experience of identity and the parallels drawn between clothes and skin. It starts with the creation of self and swiftly moves on to the cognitive response to dress and the psychological aspect of constructing a sense of self and personal identity. It then looks at the memories embedded in our second skin or dress and how these memories contribute to the identity of an individual. From there, it probes the very personal and intimate act of storing and caring for one's second skin as you do for the first. Storing away different aspects of your identity and accessing it when it is needed

Research Methodology

For this mini-thesis I employ an autoethnographical or life-writing approach, reflecting on my own memories and experience. In contemporary research, the notion of life-writing is used in several ways. Zachary Leader, a professor of English literature, defines it as a “generic term used to describe a range of writings about lives or parts of lives, or which provide materials out of which lives or parts of lives are composed” (Leader 2015: 1).

According to Renders and De Haan (2014: 172) who are both biographers, life-writing as an ideology focuses on “misunderstood individuals” who represent “social groups such as women, coloured people, transvestites, victims of the Holocaust and others”. It is a general term “for writing that takes life, one's own or another's, as its subject. Such writing may be biographical, novelistic, historical, or explicitly self-referential and therefore, autobiographical” (Smith and Watson 2010: 4). In contrast to the written forms of life-writing, Smith and Watson broaden the scope of “life narrative” as a “general term for acts of self-presentation of all kinds and in diverse media that take the producer's life as their subject, whether written, performative, visual, film, or digital” (Smith and Watson 2010: 4 cited in Sonja, S, 2020).

In addition, new impulses to the study of (auto)biographical texts have been provided by the rise of life-writing as a critical concept. The term itself is often traced back to Virginia Woolf, who used it in her autobiographical essay *A Sketch of The Past* (1939) in which she tackled the inadequacies of conventional biography (Leader 2015: 1-2, Lee 2005: 100, cited in Meert and Peeters 2019: 3).

Furthermore, the practice of telling life stories is omnipresent in cultures across the world and encompasses a large variety of genres and media. Life stories may take the form of biographical, autobiographical or hybrid narratives and may deal with historical or fictional characters. Presenting one's own or someone else's life appears to be a cultural universal and continues to spark the interest of many readers. At the same time, this practice confronts those readers with historically situated genres and shifting notions of self and subjectivity, narrative, memory, identity and (social) space. (Meert and Peeters 2019:1)

Through this method of life-writing, I will look at the properties of dress beyond protection, and take a different approach as described by EfratTseëlon (2010: 155) in *critical studies infashion and beauty*, suggesting a shift from the *stereotype* approach, found in subcultural theory, towards a *wardrobe* approach. This approach moves away from solely researching the external dimensions of clothes (e.g., features of fabric and tailoring, historical styles, fashion trends) to including the internal dimensions (expressed in the lived or reflexive experience of wearing particular clothes in particular contexts for particular reasons or ends). Life-writing thus exceeds the literary notion of “genre” and can become a “critical practice” (Kadar 1992: 10).

As an umbrella term, life-writing is often mentioned when “different ways of telling a life story – memoir, autobiography, biography, diary, letters, and autobiographical fiction – are being discussed together” (Lee 2005: 100). The concept also pertains to life stories that explicitly question generic boundaries and instigate “generic fusion” (Saunders 2010b: 321), that is, “when the distinction between biography and autobiography is being deliberately blurred” (Lee 2005: 100). This blurring of (generic) boundaries helps to account for the growing acceptance of life-writing, “reflecting a wider distrust of fixed forms, simple or single truths or meanings, narrative transparency, objectivity, ‘literature’ as opposed to writing” (Leader 2015: 2).

The genesis of the concept for this particular body of work lies embedded in the memory held in the folds of my skin. It is inspired by my own personal concerns with identity politics and my relationship with clothes and dress, or should I say the “second skin” that comes from my love for fashion. My curiosity about identity politics lies deeply rooted in memories, memories of discomfort in my own (first) skin deriving from my lived experiences at the time. These

memories are not only deeply embedded within my (first) skin, but also in the folds of my *second skin*, and I carry the remnants of it around with me.

The discomfort I felt raised a lot of questions about identity internally and identity politics within the broader social domain, as it largely stemmed from a visual aspect of how I was being perceived and how I perceived myself. I felt as if I did not fit in anywhere, and I couldn't help but feel a sense of isolation, which turned me into an observer of people, watching and never really speaking, on many occasions. What interested me the most about watching people was how they chose to display themselves or show up in the world, and how they chose to express themselves through what they wore every day.

I found my identity and sense of self very confusing when I was growing up. However, in retrospect I can say that part of my confusion was also influenced by other people's confusion in their perception of me, that is, my social identity.

This is relevant to my mini-thesis because I grew up in a "Coloured location"² where the majority of people living there were Coloured, as classified by the apartheid government. This means that they dressed a certain way, and looked a certain way, specifically referring to a lighter skin tone and a variety of hair textures, than, for example, those classified as Black under apartheid. The way people dressed in the respective areas (i.e. regarding popular brands and trends present in the area) also played a big role in the perception of identity. On the other hand, I grew up with a much darker skin tone, so one can imagine I kind of stood out amongst whichever crowd I was in, whether it was amongst friends or even family for that matter. Speaking of family, not all of my family is Coloured, according to the classification of the apartheid government. In fact, a lot of the family from my father's side who I have either met or grown up with are Xhosa people, and live in the Black location. The majority of the people in that area look a certain way too and here I am specifically referring to a darker skin tone and a different variety of hair textures. The way people dressed in this area was different from those in the Coloured location (e.g. the trends and popular brands were different).

² In South Africa's past, under the apartheid government, people were separated into their own 'areas' or 'locations' based on their "race", which is an apartheid construct i.e. Coloured location, White location, Bantu location, Indian location.

When I was with the Xhosa side of my family, I would stick out much less because they all looked more like me; specifically their skin. However, what would make me stand out with them was the language barrier as well as how I dressed. My aesthetic and style was different to theirs and it was clear that I was from a different “location”. When we were still very young our family lived in the Black location, but before my sister and I could pick up any of the language, chiefly isiXhosa, the family moved to a house in the Coloured location. Consequently, not only was our home language Afrikaans, but that was now the dominant language being used around us even outside the house.

On top of all that I attended a school in the white suburbs, at an institution called Graeme College, which was historically an all-white school. In the suburbs, the type of people I would encounter looked different to those in both of the places I had mentioned before. Here I am specifically referring to a very light (white) skin tone and a variety of different hair textures and in this case more of a variety in colours too. Of course, just like the two locations mentioned before, the way they dressed differed as well and the brands and trends were different to the first two.

That is the environment that I grew up in; it is an example of the dichotomous nature of visual, cultural and ethnic influences from my childhood. I was a Coloured kid, who looked like a Xhosa kid, growing up between the Coloured and Black locations, and going to school in the white suburbs.

The irony was that, where my first skin fit in, my second skin did not and where my second fit in the first did not. I was torn apart, and it felt like I had to be three different people. How do I stitch the pieces of myself together and make sense of my identity? At the time this meant first establishing a sense of self internally and, thereafter navigating how to communicate that to the external world. I found answers to my questions right in front of me, a medium that would assist me in navigating the complexities of identity – dress, which is an external medium I could use for expressing internal ideas of myself as well as managing my own perception of myself, as well as other people’s. Dress consists of materials an individual can wear on their body as part of themselves. From there my interest in dress and fashion started, and I became more curious about it as time passed.

Part of my body of artwork is inspired by how I found the comfort I desired in clothing and fashion. My work also explores how the second skin became a tool that I could use to help me construct and express my identity in a way that I couldn't do verbally. My clothes became a middle ground between the internal and the external worlds, becoming a way of stitching the two together and creating a passage or window through which the internal could be perceived from the outside world. This notion is also articulated by Joanne Entwistle (2001: 93), who says "Dress, [...]. forms part of our epidermis – it lies on the boundary between self and other."

This body of artwork and research explores fashion and clothing's intimate relationship with the physical body and by extension the personal identity of the individual. It explores the role that fashion or clothing play in constructing and expressing our identities in our everyday displays of self. Both the practical work and the mini-thesis are inspired by personal experiences, with the central character of the work being me.

For my MFA, I created an exhibition that looks at dress and fashion as a tool to construct identity while using a personal narrative as a vignette to explore the concept of clothes as a *second skin*. I am taking the audience through an introspective narrative of self-expression, depicting how I navigate the complexities of identity, specifically my own identity, through the medium of dress. My hope is that the work elicits the audience to look within and challenge assumptions of identity based on appearances.

The exhibition is an experience of the intimate relationship between the physical and the material, and highlights aspects of identity construction. All these aspects, highlighted through how we adorn our bodies, also communicate messages about an individual, whether it is on the street or even on social media, which is a common platform for expressing how we dress in contemporary times. Whether it is intentional or not, an individual's style or dress can speak volumes about who they are, telling stories about aspiration, belonging, community or isolation.

In the practical work, which is the leading component, clothes are creatively conceptualised as a second skin, and in some instances, they are depicted taking on the properties of our 'first' skin but also allowing for a type of fluidity and expression that the first does not allow. It merges my love for art and fashion with my curiosity and interest in identity construction. The work also brings in notions of memory and materiality, belonging and community, concealing and

revealing, communication and visual language. To put it bluntly: What does what we wear every day have to do with how we construct our identity on a daily basis?

The artwork is also fun and visually ambitious in terms of my use of colour and bold graphics. It marries a figurative style of drawing and painting together with an abstract style of printmaking. I believe those two together can capture the relationship between dress and identity, as it is essentially a relationship between the human figure and the abstract depictions of internal perceptions of identity and emotions. The works are firstly intended to look visually interesting and exciting; this is, however, only on the surface level of reading it as all of the works also have strong conceptual backing and meaning achieved through extensive layering.

At the beginning of my degree, I spent months trying to figure out what my master's body of work would be about, at the same time I had to manage the isolation and all that came with Covid-19 regulations. During this time of self reflection and introspection, I ended up asking myself a few simple questions that helped me realise what direction my work was heading in already and where I wanted to take it. These questions were: What do you like? What issues in society is your art engaging with? How do the two relate? The three answers were: fashion, self representation and identity politics, and the fact that we construct our identity through dress (*second skin*). As I started exploring this and engaging with the research materials, I started to flesh out more interesting angles and build on what I already had.

Extension of 51 Currie Street

In my undergraduate exhibition *51 Currie Street*, I also dealt, in part, with self representation of identity. One of the ways I dealt with that was through dress and fashion in works such as *Span* (2019), and others that dealt with how the clothing we wear affects how we perceive our identity. This in turn affects our desires and aspirations for ourselves, as well as how those observing, specifically the younger generations, are affected by seeing, for example, people in overalls being such a dominant 'look'. It was very much about the visual representations of people in my areas (Coloured and Black locations) and the role this played in perceived identity. This exhibition titled, *A Second Skin*, extends the earlier undergraduate exhibition.

Fashion is something I can understand and I can relate to, and as with art, it is a visual language I have become fluent in. One of the goals for this MFA body of work is to create my own visual

language of brands, symbols, patterns, shapes, styles, colours and textures which are recurrent in my life and on my visual radar that I can use to talk about issues of identity. By inserting my personal experience I am essentially putting this research topic through my ‘filter’. I want to engage the audience and get them to think about what their clothes mean to them and how it assists them in conveying who they are to the world on a daily basis. I am essentially utilising the daily ritual of dressing the body, which the majority of the world’s population engages with, as a common ground or universal language in order to make the topic more relatable. As such, it becomes about narrating the human experience through dress. What we wear, our fashion and personal styles contribute to who we are, where we are from and a lot more. I want to allow the topic of fashion to become an expression of identity and speak to our experience of the world around us.

Outline of chapters

The chapters in this mini-thesis are structured in a way that narrates the process of identity construction from an internal perspective, outward to the external.

It starts with the creation of the self, internally. Chapter One discusses the creation of the self through dress and fashion, looking at how we create the perception of our *selves*. It then shifts slightly, still dealing with the internal but this time looking at the psychological response to dress. Even as this mini-thesis speaks about the materiality of dress, the head, or mind is an important aspect of it and we see this in the construction of identity with the memory of dress. The chapter concludes by investigating the wardrobe as a site of imagination, which can be viewed as external, however, the wardrobe is a very private aspect of the external and imagination takes place in the mind of an individual.

In chapter two I step outside of the head slightly and deal with the body and its immediate surroundings that influence dress and identity. This chapter first investigates a shift in the meaning of dress by examining the influence of capitalism and consumerism in the fashion industry and how this affected our relationship with dress, from function to aesthetic expression. It then takes a step further and looks at the role of dress in constructing a social identity, navigating how others perceive you as a result of how you express yourself through dress. Furthermore, it goes on to evaluate how dress can be utilised as a form of language used to

communicate identity and internal perceptions of one's *self* externally. Lastly, it expresses a personal period of transitioning my identity from a young boy to a man, demonstrating the importance of dress in how identity is socially perceived.

The last chapter takes a complete step outside of the body and looks at the space in which identity is being created and what external influences and platforms play a role in this process. It explores streetwear fashion as a space or site where the interaction between dressed bodies takes place. To demonstrate why the street is an ideal space for this to occur, the final chapter utilises the photography of Nontsikelelo Veleko in her *In The Eyes of the Beholder* photographic series as a case study, as it depicts individuals in that space utilising dress to manage the perception of themselves.

Chapter One: Fabricated identity – The role of clothes in constructing a perception of self and personal identity

In this chapter I introduce the protagonist and start to explore the process of identity construction from an internal perspective, exploring the individual's relationship *with* their clothes. It investigates how we construct our personal or individual identity with clothes serving as the tool for this process.

1.1 About myself as an artist

I remember being incredibly young and going through my parents' wardrobe, looking through the clothes that my father had. I found a pair of brown shorts that particularly interested me for some reason and I felt inspired. I channelled my inner fashion designer and proceeded to cut little slits all around the edge of both of the leg openings in the shorts. I stepped back and admired my work, which I was obviously very proud of. There I was with a pair of extremely oversized brown shorts with a bunch of dangling ruffles from cutting the slits in it.

Needless to say, my father was not too happy about his shorts at all. What I did not realise yet, was that I was already exploring dress as a medium to express myself creatively. I desired to be someone else and that was one of the ways in which I attempted to transcend my identity and express who I wanted to be. I was also exploring different ways of intervention and ways of wearing; moulding the cloth just like it moulded me. From there I would often write on my clothes, cut them, paint on them, bleach them and so forth as a way of customising them. Up until today interacting with, and customising my clothes is something that I still do on a regular basis.

Other than visual arts, fashion is my go-to medium for creative expression. It has such an inextricably intimate relationship with the physical body to the point where it cannot be separated from it. That factor alone makes it very personal and important to human existence and the way we perceive ourselves and other people. I would describe it as a way of synching the internal with the external. As a child, I was already extremely intrigued by the idea of fashion and the way adults were styling and dressing themselves, creating these different visual representations of themselves. With the main character for this body of artwork being myself, I

find it fitting to start by giving some background context about myself in order to better understand the work.

I am a nineties baby, born in 1996, so that means I am currently 25 years old. I was born here in Makhanda, formerly known as Grahamstown until recently. I have lived here my entire life and I went to school here. Now that I am nearing the end of my master's degree, I am still here. Our family moved twice, but never outside of Makhanda. However both times my twin sister and I were still too young to remember anything that took place in the move.

First, we lived in the Coloured location on Frere Street, across from an old, now burnt down church. At this time, I was still a baby, however my brother recalls part of his childhood being spent there. Tragedy struck and the house we lived in burnt down, and as a result, we were forced to move out and relocate. We moved over to live in 'O' Street, As strange as this may sound, some of the street names in the Xhosa location are labelled by letters of the alphabet. We lived in the Xhosa location for a short while at my grandmother's sister's house which was a huge yard with a main house in front and about four other outside rooms or shacks in the yard. These were all made from mud and sticks at the time. We eventually moved out one last time to our current place of residence, back in the Coloured location, to 51 Currie Street, which was also the title of my undergraduate exhibition. It is also where I spent the rest of my childhood and beyond.

However, throughout my upbringing we would frequent both the Coloured location and the Xhosa location because the other half of the family (my father's side) still lived there. My twin sister and I went to school in the suburbs; I went to an all-boys school called Graeme College from grade 4 to grade 12. During this period my sister went to an all-girls school called Victoria Girls School which is also in the suburbs and is actually right next to Rhodes University. Before that, both of us were at Oatlands Preparatory School which was from Grade 0 to Grade 3.

I am saying all of this because it is important to get a picture of the sorts of people I would encounter daily and the variety of aesthetics I would be surrounded with. This is also the visual culture that would inform the way I dressed and how I constructed my identity. The three spaces (mentioned above: Coloured location, Black location, and suburbs) that I was navigating also played a part in influencing my appearance because the visual expression of identities varied in all these spaces.

In my household growing up, there were initially eight people living there: me, my mother, my father, both my father's parents (grandparents), my mother's father (grandfather), my older brother, and my twin sister. Everyone had their own sense of style in the house, each with their unique 'second skin' they would utilise to construct and express their identity. These people were the closest to me, and would be the ones who influenced my style or the way I dressed my body at first, but as I grew older, I started to develop my own sense of style and I was influenced by a lot more as my world got bigger. As noted by Emma Rawlings (2006: 269) when speaking about the early influences in an individual's style of dress, "Some influences may change through time, for example, the role of the family may decrease as the influence of friends and peers increases in parallel with the greater personal freedoms that often come with age."

I am verbally painting a family portrait because I want to give a context to the conditions of existence and embodiment of my identity, as pointed out by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1968: 242) while discussing the importance of expression and style in a more general sense:

A personal style is never simply given or chosen. It is a response to and founded upon the conditions of existence and embodiment. It constitutes the establishment of a lived coherence which gathers the elements of existence into life, a project with direction and character. Style ensures my existence of stability while allowing for the possibility of growth and change.

My Grandfather: Mother's Side

My Oupa³ (Figure 3) was already very old when I growing up. He was a tall lean old man with a hunched over back. He used to be a military man, a war veteran and he had the medals to show for it too. His main concern was comfort for his days spent on the stoep⁴ in the sun or in the comfort of his warm bed, so if anything influenced him it was the weather. He would either be in a fleece set or just the pants with an old knitted jersey or a faded T-shirt with slippers and warm socks. On a hot day, he would be in the classic shorts and old worn-out vest combo paired with an old faded cap. On his feet were either slippers, which he lived in, or some Velcro sandals. He always kept it simple because he was rarely active in his old age and his main concern at that

³ Oupa is an Afrikaans term which translates to grandfather in English.

⁴ Stoep in an Afrikaans terms which translates to verandah in English.

point in his life was comfort, so he never saw any use for jeans or shirts and shoes and anything of that nature outside of comfort. He would also have items from old military uniform in his rotation.

My Grandfather: Father's Side

This man, my second Oupa (Figures 3 and 4), was always busy with something, fixing things around the house in his own creative ways, doing some garden work, or even drawing. So, his attire was very active. Nothing was ever loose fitting; he would be in some type of shirt, either a golf shirt or a formal shirt. I hardly ever saw him in shorts; in fact, he would be in old suit pants with a belt most of the time as if he was going somewhere, even though he was long retired from work. He also had his fair share of jerseys and some fleece pants he got on occasion when people were shopping for him. I would say he was very much concerned with staying active and the clothes he wore were meant not to get in the way of that.

My Grandmother: Father's Side

My Ouma⁵ (Figure 4) was a very old-school woman; I guess I could say she was a housewife. She would always be up early, cleaning the house or cooking, baking, washing dishes, ironing, and the list goes on. It is safe to say she was always busy as well, she would always dress in her house clothes or 'under clothes' because it didn't matter what she put on she would always wear her overall or apron over her outfit. The overall was a green dress with pockets, the same one, commonly associated with domestic workers. Most times she would wear long dresses or skirts and they would always reach over her knees or down to her ankles. She wore a variety of *doeks*⁶ that she would always wrap around her head. Due to the fact that she was always on her feet, majority of times she would be in her slippers or her pumps.

My Mother

My mother (Figure 5) was never really into dressing fancily, unless there was an occasion or event, but she still took a lot of pride in her presentation. While I was still very young, my

⁵ Ouma is the Afrikaans term which translates to grandmother in English.

⁶ A doek is an Afrikaans term which refers to a headwrap/scarf, most commonly worn by women of colour.

mother would always be in work clothes; outside of work, she would just halfway undress so it would look something like a semi-formal outfit. When she eventually got the time, she would wash and change into her pyjamas on weekdays because she got home after 5 p.m., so her outfit would always have an ‘on the go’ look. But at weekends she would get dressed up in her casual clothes and, unlike my grandparents, my mother had a way more extensive wardrobe. She had a wide range of coordinates or two-piece items where the pants or shorts have a matching top, as well as a lot of jeans and leggings and lastly, some formal clothes for the odd wedding or funeral. But for the most part, my mother would prioritise casual, comfortable clothes over wearing fancy clothes on a regular basis.

My Father

My father (Figure 6) is a policeman and has been one for as long as I can remember. Clean and presentation-orientated, he also had the sort of ‘clean’ approach his father had. Years spent in the police academy were evident in the way it influenced his presentation. He is the type of person who would never wear an item of clothing unless all the creases were ironed out. He used to have a high-top fade haircut⁷ he kept cut regularly; that was of course before he lost his hair. I remember quite well how my father would frequently shop for new clothes and shoes. He would mainly get denim jeans and cargo pants with T-shirts, as he was very casual when he was out of his uniform. Now that he is older, his style has switched dramatically and he only wears sweatpants and hoodies with his slippers every day; occasionally on a weekend he would revert to his old self and sport the jeans and T-shirt combination again with a pair of clean shoes or sneakers. Overall he remains very concerned with appearance and the way he presents himself.

My Brother

My brother (Figures 1, 2, and 3) is probably the person I mimicked the most. Because of the age difference, he was my closest male reference and at the time I wanted what he had. He is older than me with a four-year age gap between us, and because of that he was able to experience everything before me. He was always very interested in what he looked like, and always made sure his dress, (hair, shoes, clothes, face, jewellery), and everything else was on point. My

⁷ A high-top fade is a style of haircut where hair on the sides is trimmed off and hair on the top is longer and shaped.

brother is a big sports fan. He was an athletic person at school and was even in the school's 1st rugby team. His clothes mostly consisted of tracksuit pants or straight-leg jeans and somewhat low or flat shoes; he was never really into sneakers and loose-fitting clothes in the way that I am now. He also enjoyed wearing earrings and chains (coin earrings and Cuban link chains), always in gold, which was and still is the most popular jewellery one would get in our community. My brother, unlike my sister and I, actually went to school in the neighbourhood where we grew up. All of his friends were Xhosa, so he would frequent the Black location far more regularly than any of us.

My Sister

From the day we were born, my twin sister (Figures 1 and 2) and I shared almost everything, and my parents would always have to get two of everything. This duplication was also carried over into the way we were dressed and what our parents bought for us in terms of clothes. I remember we always had outfits that matched in some way. Sometimes it would just be in different colours and sometimes it would be identical. This continued until the days when we were allowed to dress ourselves and our individual identities started to become more visible. After this point, my sister started to develop her own way of dressing and moved on to make-up, hair, dresses, high heels and things of that nature. I would even go as far as to say that, in terms of variety, my sister is probably the most versatile of us, from dresses all the way to sweatpants, her wardrobe consists of items from the entire spectrum of clothing.



Figure 1. (left to right). My sister, me, my brother.



Figure 2. (Left to right). My sister, My brother, My Cousin, Me.



Figure 3. (Left to right). My Oupa (Mother's side), Me, My Oupa (Father's side), My Brother, My Aunt, My Ouma.



Figure 4. (Left to right). My Aunt(Father's sister), My Oupa(Father's side), My Ouma(Father's side), My Aunt (Mother's sister).



Figure 5. My Mother. From family photo album.



Figure 6. My Father. From family photo album.

1.2 The Creation of the Self Through Dress and Fashion

In this section, I explore the role of dress in the perception of the self by investigating the parallels between dressing the body and constructing the bodily self. I investigate how we use dress in the ongoing process of becoming and constructing our identity. In *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Jean-Francois Lyotard, a French philosopher, sociologist, and literary theorist states:

A self does not amount to much, but no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before. ... The modern self-concept defines each of us as an individual, with a distinct identity that remains the same wherever one goes. ... We think of the self as a whole, but see it only in fragments. We think of it as somehow distinct from its surroundings, but never experience it apart from an environment. (Lyotard 1979).

Dress is conceptualised as a *second skin* and an extension of the self, which means all of your items of dress are a part of you. As such *myself* cannot be seen in its entirety, meaning it is only seen in fragments because I cannot wear all of my clothes at the same time. Furthermore, we cannot experience *ourselves* apart from our environments. Thus my surroundings, which consisted of the three prominent spaces in my life I was constantly navigating, also influenced how I both experienced and expressed *myself*. Existing in the fabric of relations meant that I was constructing a social *self* or social identity through interactions with other individuals and groups I encountered in social interactions.

Dress has always played a meaningful role in my lived experience, firstly in terms of how I experience *myself* and how I experience the world around me. Secondly, how I perceive *myself* (individual identity), how I perceive other people around me, and how other people perceive me (social identity). As explained above, no self exists in isolation and each of us exists in the “fabric of relations”. However, each of us still has our individual identity intact that “remains the same wherever one goes”. As Lyotard (1979) posits, the self can only be seen in fragments, and it is this fragmented nature of the self that allows it to be expressed through the daily ritual of dressing and redressing the physical body each day, rotating the clothes one has in order to

express all the fragments as our style keeps changing. Lastly, it is also important to note that we never experience ourselves “apart from an environment”. This means that what is around us and the type of spaces we occupy also have an influence on how we experience ourselves.

I grew up with two prominent cultural influences, Coloured and Xhosa, and one less prominent, Western culture. From a young age, I noticed that because of my dark skin tone, I did not resemble the vast majority of people in the Coloured community where I live. I also observed that people who I had more of resemblance with in the Black community could not really understand me because of the language barrier; I spoke predominantly Afrikaans and they spoke predominantly isiXhosa. This led to many very awkward exchanges in English, which would most often start in vernacular before the individual realised I wasn't going to respond in isiXhosa. This caused a sense of visual displacement from always looking different from everyone around me, as well as a lack of communication that was a result of my anxiety from so many awkward social interactions. Consequently, it resulted in my not feeling very comfortable in my own (first) skin as I did not quite fit into either space. As a result of this, I found myself from a young age always questioning my own identity and the concept of identity as a whole.

As a response to my internal feelings of alienation and dislocation, I turned to the external domain. Here I am referring to dress, which is also referred to as the *second skin* (Scardi, 2010). In doing so the act of adorning my body with items of clothing and accessories every day became a way for me to navigate and explore the complexities of identity, starting with myself and expanding out to the rest of my environment. Dress became a (*second*) *skin* that I found comfort in. It also offered a platform for connecting and communicating with the world in ways that did not require a verbal language but a visual one.

According to Svendsen (2006:75) “The shaping of self-identity in the postmodern era is in a crucial sense a body project and we can see the body to an increasing extent, tending to become seminal for an understanding of self-identity.” This shows the importance of the physical body, which is dressed for the majority of the time and only in the nude or without clothes on very few occasions all of which are usually private, for example, taking a bath. Therefore at the core of understanding self-identity and identity lies the connection to the body and, following that, the connection to dress. Further highlighting the significance of dress and fashion in the shaping or construction of self-identity and identity, Bennet (2006: 115) pointedly notes, “Fashion is a key

resource through which individuals construct their identities and position themselves in relation to others.”

Who we are at any present moment, narrates who we have been and who we want to be. Furthermore, the way we dress and our clothing helps us navigate who we are at present, who we fear to be (or who we do not want to be) and who we want to be. Therefore, one has to consider the influences of clothing choice on an individual from an internal perspective first. How an individual dresses externally can be internally influenced, not only by how you perceive yourself but also by how you want people to perceive you. This means that while an individual is concerned with the self and how to present the identities associated with the self, they are also influenced by controlling their perception of themselves through dress. It creates a tension between what the individual’s desires are and what is socially expected of that same individual.

Growing up frequenting between three completely different spaces and experiencing the distinctively different cultures on a regular basis made me look at myself differently because part of constructing an identity involves a certain amount of emulation or imitation. The three spaces as mentioned before were, the two I grew up in (Coloured location and Black location) and the one I went to school in (white suburbs). Graeme College, the school I attended, had a colonial history and was racially segregated in its past, only accepting white students. The fact that it was segregated stems from the racially oppressive history of apartheid in South Africa⁸. The school’s former segregation is an indication of the foundation and the systems in place at the school and indicates that it is a space that was clearly not built with any intentions of having people of colour present. Therefore, many times I did not feel welcomed in that space. Being at Graeme College as a student of colour played a big role in my feeling uncomfortable and, more than that, played a role in distorting my perception of myself and my self-image.

Apartheid was the regime under which these spaces were created and the segregation they enforced. The suburb, which is located closest to the town area in Makhanda is a space that was

⁸ The term “apartheid” literally means “separation,” in Afrikaans. As a formal government policy, it came to embody racial segregation and discrimination. Borstelmann (1993) defines apartheid as a more rigorous system of segregation that accelerated the racial polarisation of the country. This meant the oppression of all races that were not European or white. It was a system of oppression that predominantly produced race and class inequalities in South Africa, mainly from 1948 to 1993 (Borstelmann cited in Mphambukeli, 2019).

predominantly associated with white people, as such areas were predominantly reserved for them only. There was also segregation between the areas where people of colour lived (Coloured, Xhosa), however, these two areas did overlap and bleed into each other a lot and that changed the way I experienced the separation. As such, my experience of the suburbs was different; the disconnection from that space was very apparent as the suburbs were (and still are) predominantly white populated areas.

For instance, the majority of the people of colour I encountered at school were not in teaching or coaching positions, but rather worked as grounds staff or cleaning and maintenance of the premises. Furthermore, because this was classified as an English-speaking school, the 'home language' was considered to be English and therefore we had to speak English at all times while at school. There were obviously many times we broke these rules to speak our own 'home languages' outside of the classroom and in informal conversations with each other. However, we still had to sneak and do it because if we were caught speaking any of our various home languages we would be swiftly reminded of the appropriate language to speak while in school uniform, especially on school property.

Another issue we had with representation and expressing our various cultural backgrounds at school was directly linked to the initiation of Black Xhosa boys into men. This is a continuous problem I experienced during my time there. Because it is an all-boys school, there were always new initiates. We also had Muslim students at school who faced the same problems with religious and cultural practices. Uniform naturally limits an individual's ability to express any aspect of themselves fully, or even at all at times. In the Xhosa culture and many other Black cultures, it is a rite of passage for a young boy to go through an initiation process in which he transitions into manhood. This process usually takes place when an individual turns 18 or older and they become eligible to partake in the tradition (will be discussed more in-depth in chapter two).

After the initiate has been through the first few phases of the process, which take place in isolation from the rest of society, they return to society after three to four weeks. During the final phases of the transitioning, there is a strict dress code that a young initiate must observe, which can last up to six months after their return. In these final stages of the process, certain items of

dress are absolutely crucial to the initiate's dress code. These items include: formal or semiformal shoes, long pants, a belt, a long sleeve shirt, a blazer, and a hat on to be worn at all times when outside. However, inside the house or yard the dress code can be more relaxed and lenient.

The problem with this at school was that there was an equally strict dress code, which was the school uniform. This was understood and by no means would we expect to replace the whole school uniform with traditional attire. All the elements of an initiate's dress code could be found in the school uniform. This was naturally not exact but it consisted of similar elements, such as school shoes, grey socks, grey pants, a white shirt, a navy jersey, a gold and navy tie, and a navy blazer. As such, an initiate could still get away with wearing school uniform, but one of the crucial elements was strictly prohibited and this was the headwear.

This experience serves as an example of the type of space school was, and as a result, a lot of new initiates were not able to fully express their cultural identity and their authentic identity as a whole. Historically created to accommodate white students and Western culture, the institution did not cater to the variety of cultures present at the school, and the strict rules made it even harder to feel accepted into that space. While wearing the school uniform, one had to behave a certain way, look a certain way and even talk a certain way at all times, even outside of the school property. The uniform represented more than an individual or a collective of students; it represented the history and legacy of the school. As such we were not allowed to mix any other items of clothing with any items from the school uniform. We had to keep our identity as a Graeme College students and the school's identity very 'clean' especially in the public eye and put our own individual identities in the backseat and the two had to be separate.

One of the biggest issues we faced at school was hair politics. The school had a tendency of repeatedly calling out students of colour for issues regarding hair styling or haircuts. From my time of arriving at Graeme College all the way to leaving, I experienced this. I encountered it on multiple occasions, perhaps even daily. The issue would usually be around length, 'neatness', styling, and haircuts. The most common hairstyles for students of colour from my personal

observations were: fade⁹, high top fade (pressed flat¹⁰), afro (pressed flat), brush cut¹¹, shaven head, and curls (mostly Coloured students with curly hair texture). One of the ways in which we express and construct our identity through dress is hair, as it is classified under body modification. This form of expression was oppressed the most out of all the examples given above.

Growing up in the between spaces that I did, excluding school, the most popular and most sought-after haircut was probably the fade. This was the most prominent cut in the Black location and in the Coloured location. This was a haircut that I could not wait to have when I was growing up, a haircut I saw my father have for as long as he had hair, the same haircut I saw my older brother have, and every male figure I looked up as well as my peers. Overall the fade was a very neat haircut, which complied with the school rule book of no hair over your ears and a certain standard length. This haircut became essential in the process of identity construction to me, because I could identify with the groups I wanted acceptance from. However, the haircut was not accepted as openly at school, as students would often be sent home and instructed to recut their hair to a different style

The way I experienced issues of hair politics was when I was growing my hair out into a small afro. However, to adhere to the rules of the school, I would press it down in the morning so my hair would still look neat and not be a fully combed out afro. In the morning assembly, one of the teachers walked up to me and pointed out that my hair was too long even though it looked short and neat. I know this because in order to see how long it was he had to pull it and extend it out and unfortunately I was forced to cut my hair just like many other students. This could have just been the result of the institution not understanding the variety of hair textures that students of colour had and seeing the styles as untidy. However, it became clear as I got older and more informed that what I (and all the students of colour) were experiencing was in fact racism. These experiences serve as examples of how my appearance was always being met with

⁹ Fade refers to a haircut where the sides of the head are shaved shorter than the top and the hair is cut in a gradient from top to the bottom.

¹⁰ In order to stay within the hair rules at school we would often press our hair flat so it did not look very long or untidy, and because of the texture of our hair it would stay down.

¹¹ Brush cut refers to a style where the hair is cut to an even length, low enough to be brushed flat.

resistance and critique in all of the spaces that I navigated, contributing to how I perceived myself and the way I constructed my identity.

Because part of constructing an identity involves a certain amount of emulation or imitation, all of my surroundings played a significant role in how I perceived myself, especially when it came to how I saw the image I was made in being reflected around me. At times I felt like I had to be three different versions of myself and put on a different ‘mask’ (represented as a balaclava in the practical work) in order to navigate these spaces. According to Storry and Childs (1997: 171) “The way in which we dress can serve, either to confirm or to subvert various facets of our identities, such as our gender, race, class and age.” This statement suggests that by assembling items of clothing in particular ways through experimentation with dress and appearance, individuals can create and express their identities, designing it to both situate the self and send out culturally coded messages to others about the internal ideas of self. Thus, dress embodies a variety of different meanings that are collectively understood differently within and across different social groups and different spaces.

As a result of this, my external appearance (dress) would change in each of these spaces ever so subtly, until eventually all these different contributing aesthetics would merge together, and the different cultures create a sort of hybrid aesthetic and identity. All of it was formed from the school uniform to the jewellery and branded clothes, to the culturally appropriate dress codes. Lastly, there was also pop culture, or just the general international influence all wrapped up into it. Although this is a social concern, highlighting it helps understand navigating individual identity. These spaces influence identity, therefore the space in which the individual exists, influences the space that exists inside the individual. This ‘space’, I suggest is the landscape across which the self/identity of an individual is created (body), a sort of internal space reimagined externally by the individual. In the practical work, this space is represented in the abstract backgrounds that are present in contrast to some of the more visible figures in the foreground. These are all imagined backgrounds that represent the landscape across which the self is created, mixed with the geographical space, represented by parts of the map of Makhanda in the areas I was navigating.

According to Anthony Giddens (1991: 62) “In all cultures, dress is vastly more than simply a means of bodily protection. It is manifestly, a means of symbolic display, a way of giving external form to narratives of self-identity.” This was evident in my navigation of different spaces where I encountered different cultures. An example of this in South Africa is the celebration of the public holiday known as Heritage Day. On this day, all individuals, whether at home, work, or school, are encouraged to dress in their traditional attire or attire that represents their culture.

The processes of establishing an identity and connection with something else, are absolute necessities, and this connection must be contingent (Laclau 2000: 142). During the time I was experiencing the peak of my identity confusion, I did not feel as if I was connected to anything or anyone. This was around the time I first started developing a sense of self-awareness and an individual identity. As far back as I can remember, this was when I was first allowed to dress myself, choose my own clothes, and how I wanted to express my authentic self. Therefore I would say this is as far back as Grade 3 at Oatlands Prep, as we did not yet have school uniform back in 2006.

Dressing myself brought my deep, underlying identity confusion to the surface and it showed because I did not have my own sense of style yet. I was more like a chameleon, moving through different spaces mimicking the dominant aesthetic of where I was just to feel as if I fit in with who and what was around me. As articulated by Rawlings, how we dress conveys our self-concept and components of our identity, as the body is “constantly re-clothed and re-fashioned in accordance with changing arrangements of the self” (Rawlings 2006:360). Therefore, the internal changing arrangement of the self is reflected externally by changing arrangements of dress in the daily process of dressing and re-dressing the body. In my deep underlying identity confusion, I would use dress to navigate and deal with this confusion. By this I mean using my clothes to change my outer appearance as an attempt to express how I perceived myself and even my desire for what I wanted people to perceive me as. “Vain trifles as they seem, clothes have [...] more important offices than merely to keep us warm. They change our view of the world and the world’s view of us” (Virginia Woolf cited in Scardi 2011: 13).

Clothing can be considered as part of the self-concept, and this reflects the extent to which “clothing is viewed as one with the self” (Sontag and Schlater 1982: 5). Therefore, individuals

who regard clothing to be a crucial part of their self-construct strive especially to use dress in a way that is consistent with their self. I was one of those individuals who regarded clothing to be a crucial part of my self-construct, and clothing became a fundamental part of my identity construction. I started using dress in a way that was consistent with *myself*, meaning that I started associating certain clothes with certain aspects of my identity. I recall a white T-shirt and brown shorts outfit that my older brother and I had in common (Figure 1). It was outfits such as these that used to make me feel like part of the family even more; because in my head I did not necessarily look like them, dressing identically to any of my family made me feel closer to them and to who I was. This was of course one of a couple of identical outfits that we had, but this one in particular was captured in a picture (Figure 1).

The pants were shorts but they were slightly big for me and went over my knees, the T-shirt had short sleeves and a small graphic on the front, with blue and red elastic at the neck. As a young boy growing up with an older brother, I often used him as a reference and looked to him as I did with my father, to inform my own identity, modelling myself after them or trying to mimic them. Dressing like them was one of the ways I used to express how they influenced my perception of myself and informed how I constructed my sense of identity/self.

Dress gave me agency in constructing my identity, in line with Neumann's assertion (2011:2) that "Clothes as agency and in constructing identity, help individuals to explore their divergent identities. Fashion acts as a building block to presenting the self, a method of presentation that has a myriad of options for expressing and performing identity. Options are, literally, limitless." These limitless options make reference to the ambiguous nature of dress, such as that of identity, that can liberate an individual from the limitations of the 'first skin'. I say this with regard to my personal experience, which was felt as if it limited my identity and caused a sort of alienation and separation in my earlier stages of development (particularly pre-teen and teenage years). Although we cannot necessarily let go of the flesh that binds us, we also cannot deny the nature of dress, which has become, to an extent, the nature of human existence and there is no foreseeable future where the two might be separated from each other. Dress has become an undeniable part of the body and offers an extended space for self representation, self-expression and identity construction.

How do we define ourselves, and our identity? How do we express it through what we choose to wear and not to wear on a day-to-day basis? The role of dress and fashion in identity construction is in the process of dressing and undressing the body every day, as it is one of the most consistent daily rituals (of self-creation) that human beings engage in. Today, alongside the easy and comfortable “normcore” approach to fashion, there exists a variety of trends that embrace a time-consuming, elaborate manner of dressing, driven by the interrelationships between ritualistic process, perceptions of cultural and social elite, and masquerade-like results (Almond, Swindells and Powell, 2015). Furthermore, the act of “dressing up”, as opposed to purely dressing, seems never to have lost its appeal. In this respect, dressing becomes a way for social identities to be performed towards social interactions as a form of “social skin”, whereby gestures and attitudes facilitate integration into larger groups and related hierarchies (Almond, Swindells and Powell, 2015).

The act of dressing itself is described by John Twigg (2010) multidisciplinary author (working in the fields of engineering, architecture, planning, geography, sociology and psychology) as an everyday bodily practice concerned with clothing the body, which is however influenced by numerous factors. These factors include social environment or context, age, culture, and several other unspoken rules, norms, or expectations that are present within a society. Therefore, everyone’s identities are in many ways influenced by these rules, expectations and norms. This further implies that dress and the act of dressing the body are evidently present and do play a role in the construction of the self and constructing one’s identity as they are intertwined with many other factors that also influence how humans construct identity.

1.2.1 MellaJaarsma: Shelter Me I

An artist who works well with this concept of building or constructing identity and the bodily self in a more physical or literal manner is MellaJaarsma¹². Although she was born in the Netherlands, Jaarsma continued her art education in Indonesia. Since 1984, she has lived and worked in Yogyakarta. As such, the need to adapt to a way of life of which she had no

¹²Born in the Netherlands in 1960, Jaarsma studied visual art at Academie Minerva, Groningen, followed by studies at the Art Institute of Yogyakarta and later the Indonesian Institute of the Arts. Working as both an artist and curator, Jaarsma has recently become known for her complex costumes. Works such as *Hi Inlander (Hello Native)* (1998–9) focus on cultural and racial diversity through clothing. (Coppard 2010: 243).

previous knowledge led her to an understanding of the indissoluble link between culture and social mores, and to develop a particular regard for the “cultural capital” of a place. This is the heritage transmitted by the lifestyle and expressive-symbolic aspects of a society: fashions, rituals, traditions, language, customs and food. Impelled by the need for cover and shelter, and also the need for display, she asks: How do we live and what do we wear? (Coppard 2010).

In her work (Figure 7) titled *Shelter Me I*, what particularly interests me is how Jaarsma visually marries ideas of construction or building with the concept of identity or self and the physical body as a site of creation, construction or *reconstruction*. The body covering, which is the sculptural element of the work, becomes a tool used to symbolise the construction of identity by way of building this structure around the physical body. Moreover, while this shelter is built in the resemblance of a house or ‘shelter’ as the title suggests, it was still created with the physical body in mind, which means it has the same intention or motivation as clothes do. Lastly, this structure is also a means of expression, as it is not just a made-up structure but rather a structure with visual reference to a certain culture and identity in reality. Her work is a physical depiction of construction as she creates these houses or buildings in the form of dress or garment. This to me speaks back to the thesis topic of constructing the self through dress, reinforcing the notion of using bodily covering to both construct and express an individual’s identity.



Figure 7. *Shelter Me I*, 2005. Four one-person shelters: a Chinese shrine, a movable shelter with tattoo images, a shelter made out of flexible bark, wood and zinc, a curtain shelter with digital images from Iran. Image: OneArt <https://www.oneart.org/galleries/mella-jaarsma-shelter-me-i-iiii-iv> .

Jaarsma's work systematically deals with garments that cover the face and most of the body, leaving only the eyes uncovered (Coppard 2010). This is similar to my own work, as the figures representing me and those representing other individuals are all covered up almost entirely with only sections of the (first) skin showing, like the hands or parts of legs and arms (Figures 8 and 9). This is done intentionally because my first skin made me feel so uncomfortable and still does to some extent, it made me want to hide and cover up as much of it as I could with the second skin. The heads are also covered up with a balaclava (mask) (Figures 8 and 9) which only leaves the eyes showing. This represents having to be a different version of yourself depending on what type of space you are in or what groups of people you are around and having to switch 'masks' essentially to navigate different aspects of your identity in order to fit in.



Figure 8. Juanito Featherstone *What words can't say*, self-portrait 01, 2021. Monotype print, ink, acrylic paint, oil paint, oil pastels, collage on Fabriano paper. 100cm x 70cm



Figure 9. Juanito Featherstone. *Untitled self-portrait 02*, 2021. Monotype print, ink, acrylic paint, oil pastel on Fabriano paper. 71cm x 54cm

Jaarsma's constructions are described by editor Abbie Coppard (2010) as being similar to the burqa¹³, as restrictive as a shroud, as protective as a cocoon. The work Jaarsma has made, in the form of coat-tents that cling to the shape of the body like a second skin, also envelop and conceal

¹³ A burqa is a long, loose-fitting garment that covers the whole body from head to feet, worn in public by women in many Muslim countries.

it, revealing only certain parts of it, but different parts are visible in different works. She elicits questions about gender and religious identity, while implicitly confronting problems about

relations between ourselves and others, about who influences whom and who is influenced by whom (Coppard, 2010).

That is yet another visual language that I utilise in my own artistic practice, where dress, our bodily covering, is conceptualised as a second skin. This (second) skin covers and consumes the first almost completely in some instances, but sometimes allows the first to be dominant. This device helps the artist utilise the power of concealing and revealing where the wearer chooses what the viewer sees and what they do not see. In my own experience, I used this a lot in my development to hide certain parts of my identity and to reveal others in order to visually construct an image of myself. This helped me manage the public perception of myself and construct the image I wanted onlookers to see. Thus, I use dress in a way that allows me to manage my perceived identity.

In my own series, *The daily ritual, a very human experience* 2022 (Figures 10-13), I explore the concept of actively constructing the self through the act of dressing the body. The daily ritual of dressing the body is such a common experience shared among humans and as such it acts as a universal language everyone can relate to. I use it to speak about identity formation, thus the title, “*The daily ritual, a very human experience*”. The four-part series depicts a figure (me) partaking in this seemingly mundane act of getting dressed. In each frame the figure adds another item of clothing, layering the body and constructing the *second skin* step by step. It starts with the pants, then a T-shirt, shoes, and finally a jacket; apart from the order of the series, this might not be too different from what anyone else does when getting dressed.

The figure in the first frame (Figure 10) is depicted as being barely visible, almost transparent, hinting at the fact that the identity of an individual can barely be read without the assistance of dress. By no means is it insinuating that without dress we do not have any identity at all, but the first skin is harder to manipulate in order to express internal perceptions of the *self*. As such, this series speaks to my experience of utilising dress to construct and visually display *myself* and my individual identity.

Furthermore, with the progression of the series, more items of dress are being added to the body of the figure, allowing the self or identity of the individual to become more and more visible to the onlooker. This demonstrates how the act of dressing allows us to. The last frame (Figure 13) shows the figure completely covered in items of clothing and because of that, the figure itself becomes clearer, in fact it is the clearest to be seen. The work is a narrative, highlighting the act of using dress in the process of constructing and expressing *yourself*. Because this is such a familiar experience among humans, people can relate easily to what they are seeing and that is why I intentionally did not want to overcomplicate the artwork visually.

However, these artworks, like all the artworks in my exhibition, are also very layered and have deeper meanings beyond the surface level. Immediately upon first look, what catches the eye of the viewer is the bright colours of the background, with a gradient of blues, oranges, yellows, reds, and whites blending almost seamlessly into each other. This is paired with the brightly drawn flames drawn with oil pastels, in yellow and orange variants.

The flames surrounding the figure signify the creation and transformation of the individual, as flames can only exist in the process of change. For flames to exist, something else has to burn and give up its form whether it is wood, paper, or anything else flammable. Therefore flames are unable to exist by themselves; something has to change for the flames to occur due to their transformative nature. That transformative nature symbolises the transformative power of dress as well as the unpredictability and unfixed (flux) nature of the physical flame. It also speaks to the constant shifting and managing of an individual's self-image through the process of identity construction through dress.



Figure 10.



Figure 11.



Figure 12.



Figure 13.

Figures 10-13. Juanito Featherstone *Adorn1-4* (series), 2022. Monotype, ink, acrylic paint, oil pastels on Fabriano paper, 46 cm x 35,5 cm.

Jennifer Craik, professor and head of the fashion discipline at the Queensland University of Technology, explores the term “dress” and reveals that fashion practices are inherently tied to agency. Furthermore, Craik finds:

Fashion is often thought of as a kind of mask disguising the ‘true’ nature of the body or person. It is seen as a superficial gloss, yet we can regard the ways in which we clothe the body as an active process or technical means for constructing and presenting a bodily self as the ‘life’ of the body is played out through the technical arrangement of clothes, adornment, and gesture (Craik, 1993:1).

Even though dress can be a captivating intersection where the individual and society meet, an individual’s external expression of the internal is inevitably mediated by the display of the external. The validity of external expression is still deeply ingrained in the psychological. Which means that any attempt at self-styling is therefore very visually embedded in the structures within an individual’s mind during the process of self-imaging” (Mountain 2010: 28).

1.3 The Psychology of Dress

In the second section of this chapter, I investigate the emotional and psychological influence of dress and fashion on the wearer. By the 1950s, social science theories from economics, psychology, social psychology, and sociology were being used to study dress and human behaviour (Rudd 1991: 24). The social psychology of dress, which may include a number of topics under its umbrella, refers to research that attempts to answer questions concerned with how an individual’s dress-related beliefs, attitudes, feelings and behaviours are shaped by others and oneself. As such the social psychology of dress refers to how an individual’s dress affects the behaviour of self as well as the behaviour of others toward the self (Johnson and Lennon 2014).

Enclothed cognition theory describes the systematic influence that clothes have on the wearer’s psychological processes. ‘Enclothed cognition describes the systematic influence that clothes have on the wearer's psychological processes’. (Adam and Galinsky 2012: 1).

In my practice, I explore cognitive aspects of dress in somewhat nuanced ways, as nothing in the work is really direct or literal. One of the ways in which I do so is by enhancing the details that

are so important in depicting abstract feelings of the wearer. In many instances I play with dimensionality to enhance the layers and highlight smaller details that might otherwise go unnoticed, applying acrylic paint thickly and building it up to make it stand out in a three-dimensional way. These techniques are present in the depiction of the accessories, for example, chains, pants chain, rings, buttons and bags. This can be seen in the close-up images in my lifesized works such as *Perception of the Self*, 2022 (Figure 14). The close-ups (Figures 15 and 16) show the small details mentioned above, with a black rope bracelet, my watch, chains and pearl necklaces, and my pants chain.

In Figure 14, the outfit immediately stands out and is intentionally made more visible than what is around it. This technique also emphasises dress as the main focus of the artwork by foregrounding it and making it look as if it could jump off the page, for example, by making it very tonal in a seemingly realistic way but not fully realistic, still keeping a lot of the immediacy and the more stylised and graphic techniques present in printmaking.



Figure 14. Juanito Featherstone. *Perception of the Self*, 2022. Monotype, ink, oil pastels, spray paint, acrylic paint, fabric paint on fabric 1.77m x 2.12m



Figures 15 and 16. Juanito Featherstone. *Perception of the Self*, 2022 (close up) Monotype, ink, oil pastels, spray paint, acrylic paint, fabric paint on fabric. 1.77m x 2.12m.

I intentionally did not include any other physical objects in this and other artwork, other than dress and the physical body. This is done deliberately because the focus in this exhibition is on the relationship between dress and the body or the *self* and all objects that exist in the world already carry their own meanings. Outside objects already have their own meanings and therefore might distort the intentions of the artworks and their meanings, as they would be open to different interpretations by the audience once inserted into the work.

The background depicts abstract concepts and ideas, such as emotions or emotional responses to interaction with dress because emotions cannot necessarily be depicted as a fixed or tangible object. Not only does the background depict emotional responses, but it is also a landscape across which the process of identity creation takes place, imagined as textures, shapes, colours, and patterns made intuitively over the course of creating the artworks employing continuous layering. *Perception of the Self*, 2022 (Figure 14) reinforces the argument that clothes offer a platform for the wearer to express their internal perception of themselves in an external space. This means that if one were to critically analyse an individual's outfit, it would be possible to get an idea of who an individual is and how they are going about the process of identity formation based on the outfit that they are wearing and have worn over the course of time.

Gregory Stone (1962), a scholar in social psychology, is among the scholars who have studied the concept of enclothed cognition, theorising that when individuals wear clothes it is linked to their navigating the particular aspects of their identity, which in turn evokes corresponding behaviours from the wearer. This is an essential part of constructing different identities through dress. It means that not only are the clothes we wear part of us in a physical way, but their wearing goes beyond that and becomes part of us in a psychological, emotional and even behavioural manner as well. Therefore, whether I was dressing for school, church, or sports events, these acts of dressing *myself* allowed me to navigate aspects of my identity, and would also evoke corresponding behaviours.

For example, a school is an institution that is very structured in terms of the fixed rules all students and staff abide by such as dress codes, hair, language and time. When one puts on the uniform of a particular school it is supposed to compel one to act in accordance with the school rules. This is extended even further, for example when someone is not in that space of school but still wearing the school uniform, it is still a part of their identity, not only as a student but in some aspects it also bleeds into your personal life outside of school. That example suggests that wearing clothes can cause an individual to 'embody' clothing or dress along with its symbolic meaning. As a consequence, when a piece of clothing is worn, it exerts an influence on the individual's psychological processes by activating associated abstract concepts through its symbolic meaning (Adam and Galinsky 2012).

Growing up in the multiplicity of cultures meant that I experienced different symbolic meanings of clothes in the different spaces that I navigated. As such, to elaborate on the example of school uniform, it is seen as absolutely normal within the school premises or within school settings, as well as in the more suburban areas, as that is where the school is located. While wearing the school uniform, I would be able to navigate the space with less resistance and more acceptance because my identity was now aligned with that of the school. I would be seen as just another student passing by, as the uniform made me part of a collective identity that is already accepted in that space. However, in my 'home area' it would be seen as a symbol of privilege because of the fact that the school was perceived as a 'white' school for many, and this would affect the physical experience of wearing it.

Wearing the school uniform in my home areas made me feel as if I stood out even more than I already did because attending a 'white' school was not exactly embraced in my home area and the uniform was a symbol of that school. With that being said, I was not the only person in my area who went to school in the suburbs; there were quite a few of us. As such, a uniform from the schools in the suburbs (Graeme College, Victoria Girls School, Kingswood College, St Andrews College, and DSG)¹⁴ was seen as a symbol of privilege and class. This was due to all of those schools' legacies and histories, paired with the fact that fees are seen as expensive to the majority of the people living in my home areas as they are the more impoverished parts of Makhanda.

Wearing my school uniform in my home area, therefore, made me feel disconnected from the space I grew up in, which was also where I desired to be most embraced. The reason these uniforms stood out so much in my home areas is because the uniforms were associated with schools in the suburbs, which is a space that was already historically so disconnected and segregated from my home areas, and still is in contemporary times.

The aspect of identity associated most with my school uniform was linked strongly to class. I felt as if I was in a better position than most people could afford to be where I am from, and I was very aware of the privilege my parents afforded me. The uniform came with a lot of associations when one looks at the role of dress in how identity is perceived because it

¹⁴ All of these schools are in the suburbs, however Kingswood, St Andrews, and DSG are private schools, and Graeme College and Victoria Girls are government schools.

represented me being part of a larger collective identity. This skin had a lot of ‘weight’ to bear and as such was very ‘heavy’ to carry around due to all the history that was embedded in it concerning past and contemporary times. Here I was as this student of colour in a uniform designed for white students; two radically opposite identities met and created another sort of hybrid identity where the past collided with the present. The uniform represents a space that is systematically and historically very opposed to where I am from and what I am. As a result, this second skin distorted my perception of self and disrupted the process of identity construction for me

The two main factors of enclothed cognition theory are: the symbolic meaning of the clothes and the physical experience of wearing the clothes (Adam and Galinsky 2012). I would experience the uniform in different ways depending on the space I was navigating; the two spaces I was most comfortable in – the Coloured and the Black location – would also be where I felt most uncomfortable with wearing the uniform. These spaces would have the most intersecting points where the meanings of clothing items would overlap. The example of uniform also demonstrates the physical experience of wearing the clothes, and how different clothes can make you experience your body in different ways.

In an artwork titled *Distorted Identity*, 2022, (Figure 17) I depict the physical experience of wearing my school uniform and how it informed my perceived identity. The artwork makes use of the school colours, which were navy blue and gold, as well as the school badge. The badge represents the school and what it stands for, and I use elements from it, such as the leopard and the giraffe, to signify this. In the artwork I show myself wearing the school uniform; however, the physical body is distorted, alluding to how the uniform distorted my identity and my perception of myself. My body is warped, and on top of the way I am posing is very awkward and uncomfortable, reminiscent of a school photo one would take on the first day of school. The uniform, as articulated above, drew a different type of attention from the people in my home area, shown through the depiction of eyes on the side of the work, staring at the figure, enhancing the awkwardness. A lot of what was originally around the figure is covered by white paint, as a metaphor for the colonial legacy that had now become part of my identity while wearing this uniform.

1.4 Constructing Identity Through the Memory of Dress

Dress becomes a part of our everyday lives from the day we are born, bearing witness to, and informing the process of identity formation as well as sharing experiences in the life of the wearer and through this process, we start to form a relationship with dress. “One of the very first lessons learned by young children is to cover their bodies. By dressing they realise that it is possible to interact with society, and that nakedness is not an acceptable option in public space” (Rawlings 2006: 262). It is by receiving it’s wearer, that clothes become a part of or an extension of the wearer like a *second skin*. Therefore, whenever one recalls personal narratives or memories, clothes are inseparable from these memories of our *selves*. What this means is that the majority of the time when we think of ourselves in retrospect as far back as our memory allows, it is hard to recall a time when we were living without clothes. As such we can see how the materiality of clothes may be considered a kind of memory (Stallybrass 1993: 38).

Furthermore one cannot discuss the role of dress in identity formation without acknowledging the relationship between dress and memories tied in with those identities. The body is always dressed (in public), and therefore clothes are always attached to an individual’s body, bearing witness to their life experience throughout their whole lives. This makes them (clothes) part of that individual’s memories and personal history as it “receives the human imprint” (Stallybrass 1993: 37). The personal history of an individual speaks to the personal identity of that individual and informs their current identity. Dress also receives the human scent, which is a significant point when we look at the memory of dress as smell is a sense that is linked to evoking memories. I can recall countless times I have encountered a smell that instantly evokes a memory associated with that smell. For instance, when I encounter the smell of an item of clothing that belonged to someone I know, or that is scented with cologne or deodorant I have smelled before, the memories of that individual just come pouring into my head almost instantly.

Stallybrass’s seminal article in the field of psychology *Worn Worlds: Clothes, Mourning, and the Life of Things* (1993) has prompted studies of fashion that “consider cloth as a type of memory *archive* in itself” (Hunt 2014: 229). Stallybrass reminds us that the wrinkles in clothes, for example in the elbow or any type of area with folds, are in fact called ‘memory’ in the “technical jargon of sewing” (1993: 36). This refers to the physical folds in the clothes that occur through being worn by individuals. It speaks to the ability of the material to ‘remember’ a particular

form, or shape that it has taken. An example of this can be in leather, specifically, the leather used to make shoes, which demonstrates the way one's shoes can crease, as can any material or item of clothing that is worn by an individual.

A very prominent example of this in my personal experience is with the crease in all the shoes for my right foot. There is a very distinctive fold that is almost identical in all of the shoes I have ever worn in my life. Due to pre-birth complications, I was born with a broken right ankle and as a result of that I had to get surgery when I was still an infant, so I had to wear a cast when my body was still rapidly growing and expanding. As a result, my right foot developed abnormally and never really caught up with the left leg which makes them look obviously different from each other in size. Not only that, my right leg and foot grew slightly shorter than their opposite sides. Since my parents could not buy two pairs of the same shoe, I had to go with the size that the bigger foot fit, which meant that the other shoe was a size too big. That, paired with how abnormally my foot is shaped because of how the broken bones bonded together, really affected the way I walk, as I had to walk on my toes almost to compensate for the height difference. This meant the shoes on my right foot would always fold in a very particular way, as the shoe was moulding to the shape of my foot and how I was walking, remembering in its folds parts of the wearer (me). Furthermore, even when I do not have my shoes on and they are stored away with no contact from me, they would hold their form and the fold would still remain. The memory of the wearer (me) would still remain embedded in the folds of their (my) second skin.

This further reinforces the relationship between dress and memory, while simultaneously articulating just how much the technology of memories is deeply embedded in the technology of dress. The clothes we wear, the fabrics and material we cover our bodies with every day act as the perfect repositories for storing the wearer's experience of life over time – the course of their life). Prasad Boradkar (2010: 19) articulates this idea in a more poetic manner, stating that “woven into the faded fabric and ripped seams are memories and stories”.

1.4.1 Waters That Tie / Waters That Untie, 2007

Working with the materiality of dress and memories, Handan Börüteçene¹⁵ places her own memory at the core of her artwork. Her memories are of places with long, eventful histories, in which culture has been created by the mingling of ideas, tastes, identities, dreams and knowledge. This is an idea I can identify with, as some of my work also draws on memories however, the memories that inspired my work are memories of feeling uncomfortable in my own (first) skin in different spaces in my home town (Makhanda), and explores how I found that comfort in my second skin (dress).

Börüteçene's work, *Waters That Tie / Waters That Untie*, 2007 (Figure 18) consists of a very modestly tailored green silk gown, with long sleeves, and the torso stretches all the way down to what would probably be an individual's ankles. Sewn into this beautifully tailored gown are ancient ceramic pieces covering the whole front of the dress from top to bottom with a fair amount of breathing space in between. The dress has patterns embroidered around the edge of the rounded collar and similar patterns can be seen on the hem of the sleeves and the elbow area.

"The dress itself is then exhibited together with a series of photographs that are a documentation of a symbolic and 'diplomatic' journey made by the garment to various cities along the shores of the Mediterranean. The long, green, silk dress, inspired by the fashions of the Byzantine court, is encrusted with original fragments of Byzantine pottery. This magnificent dress, woven with history, emphasises the importance of progressing towards the new, but wearing what was best about the past, conserving it and saving it from ruin. It speaks of the need to re-knot the threads of memory, thus overcoming the terrors of the past and the contradictions of the present." (Coppard, et al. 2010: 69).

¹⁵ Börüteçene was born in Istanbul in 1957, and studied at Istanbul State Academy of Art and the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts Paris. Her work focuses on memory and the paths of body and culture over time, further influenced by her heritage and the history of the Mediterranean. Exhibiting worldwide, notable works include *Break and See* (1985) and *Reserved: For Freedom – motus animi continuus* (2002). (Coppard, 2010: 243).



Figure 18. Handan Börüteçene. *Waters That Tie /Waters That Untie*, Venice, 2007. Silk dress covered with ancient ceramic pieces, and twelve prints mounted on aluminium, each. 40 x 60 cm. UniCredit Art Collection © Handan Börüteçene Installation

1.4.2 Memory in my own work

In my own artwork, I utilise the materiality of memory in the form of installation (Figures, 19 and 20). Remnants from my past (old clothes) that I have worn and interacted with are brought into the exhibition space. The materials are from garments that have been on the journey of identity construction with me and carry part of me imbued within them. Using this discarded second skin to create something new symbolises the ongoing body project of identity construction where one is moving towards the future but carrying what is needed from the past. Both for function and display, items of dress showcase the attributes of being on display for the

viewer and functioning as material memories that speak directly to the wearer.



Figure 19. Juanito Featherstone, *Remnants of self*, 2023. Found objects (clothes) on wall, each 190cm x 40cm



Figure 20. Juanito Featherstone, *Remnants of self*, 2023. Found objects (clothes) on wall, each 190cm x 40cm

Dress can be accessorised or used purely for function. Although I am inserting my clothes in the gallery as artworks, they still carry my very essence, making them useful and powerful materials that suggest my physical body.

Memory can be evoked in various ways through the human senses such as smell, touch, sight, hearing and taste. All of these are ways to either experience or evoke memories of an individual. Perhaps one of the most effective ways in which materials like dress evoke memory is through sight and smell. Although memory is linked to all the senses, these two senses are most applicable when looking at the relationship between memory and dress and identity. This is mostly because dress receives the wearer and through interaction with dress the scent of an individual is imbued in the materiality of dress (second skin).

Consequently, when it comes to evoking memory of an individual through dress, the most effective ways for me are sight and scent. One allows you to visually experience the material and how it has moulded to the identity of an individual, such as the scratches, rips and folds in the clothes. The second allows you to experience the smell of an individual. Each individual has their own unique natural scent even before they might use enhancements such as deodorant. The properties of dress allow it to become a second skin of the individual; adopting the smell of its wearer is just one more example of how this idea is demonstrated.

Wearing the clothes on my body on a daily basis as if it were my own skin allows dress to receive much more than just the smell of its wearer or the marks from wear and tear. As such, after experimentation and attempting to capture the memory of dress in such a way through the medium of printmaking, I realised that the only way for me to suggest my own body and identity through practical work is to physically insert my second skin into the exhibition space.

Printmaking however does allow for the nuance of suggesting memory as it is a method which transfers whatever mark is on the matrix to the paper. Methods such as collagraph printing¹⁶

¹⁶ Collagraph printing refers to a method of printing that utilises the surface of a material. Any object if flat enough can potentially be used, whether soft or hard. Varnish is applied to the surface of the object to prevent it from soaking up any ink. Thereafter ink is applied directly to the prepared surface and wiped off, leaving only the ink in the crevices of that object allowing it to pick up all of the object's textures and that is what is printed onto the paper using a print press.

allow for a direct translation of the material onto the paper with all the little details and intricacies that one cannot get from hand drawing. However, a piece of paper can only take this idea so far and this concept speaks so much to materiality and the essence of an individual that can only be transferred through close contact with a material such as clothing. Furthermore, the Fabriano paper cannot receive my scent in the way that dress can. I can spray it with the same cologne I wear but it would just give off the smell of cologne and nothing about me.

Because of this, I decided to insert my own clothes in the exhibition, the actual material that I have interacted with throughout the years in my process of identity formation. The clothes I have worn throughout my life all contain memories of my experience and how my identity has formed. Dress, in this sense, contains all the aspects of me I might have left behind and some that I still carry with me to this day. Material memories ensure that the past is always carried with us into the future (Cronberg 2009:8).

As such, featuring my own clothes by means of installation will allow the audience to experience my second skin through almost all the senses – sight, touch and smell – as they will be allowed to touch and interact with the clothes in more ways than just visually. The audience will be able to experience my scent, feel the textures, and visually experience my second skin, creating a heightened experience of my body and self. There is something about the hollowness or emptiness of an item of dress not donned by its wearer that suggests the physical body of the wearer even when they are not in direct contact. This emphasises dress as a second skin and a crucial signifier of an individual's identity. As such the installation is a visual metaphor for my (second) skin and ultimately me (my self), showcasing the memory (folds), marks from wear and tear, scent, and suggesting my physical body and perceived identity. Therefore, even though I am not literally there wearing the clothes, and standing in the exhibition, my presence is felt through this installation, highlighting the very intimate relationship between dress and identity.

We are immersed in materials, as material objects are all around us, but we transform materials through interaction, which is essentially construction, acquisition and use. As a result, materials are in a constant state of flux much like identity and the materiality of things changes over time (Ingold 2007). As such, the material world around us and the metaphorical world within us are so intimately linked, that one reflects the other. As such, dress becomes an external expression

shaped by the internal aspects of my identity and the self, and the internal aspects reflect the external aspects as well.

Elizabeth Wilson, a British independent researcher and writer best known for her commentaries on feminism and popular culture, writes that clothes “are congealed memories of the daily life of times past” (2003: 1). Therefore clothes, or rather the *second skin* we adorn our bodies with on a daily basis, become part of us as they form an intimate relationship with our bodies. As they become part of our lives and lived experiences, one can argue that clothes become a type of material memory.

Memory is a very crucial part of my creative process, as the concept as a whole is inspired by memories of my experiences of interacting with and through dress. A lot of the works start from a memory that evokes a feeling that gets the process started. Because I work in a very intuitive or instinctual manner, the work often starts with a single colour, shape, texture or line. This mark is usually in the form of a monotype print, which consists of ink printed on Fabriano paper using perspex as the mediator between ink and paper through a process of transferring the marks onto the surface of the canvas. From that initial mark, the conversation between me and the work commences and the work keeps on growing through this back and forth dialogue. As well as the sense of mark making and layering the rationale of the work also develops during the process of making the work.

The medium of printmaking also lends itself to the idea of dress receiving the wearer. There are certainly a few parallels between the process of printmaking and the experience of wearing clothes. For example, the matrix acts as the physical body while the paper on which the work is printed acts as dress does, waiting to receive meaning through interaction from its wearer. Furthermore, the process of imprinting and mark-making, from a matrix to paper speaks back to the experience of the physical body imprinting or leaving its impression and its “marks” on dress, from wearer to worn. As such the relationship between matrix and paper is parallel to the relationship between the physical body and dress.

The back and forth consists of me hanging up multiple works in the studio at once, working on them simultaneously, which results in the works often being a series or grouping. I print a few at

a time, anything from two to five. During the process, I am making small and sometimes big changes to the work through daily conversation and interaction with it.

It would seem that dress has become difficult to separate from human existence, from human history, and in many ways from our identities. Clothes helped me navigate the ever elusive question of Who am I? Left unanswered too many times, it keeps resurfacing, always prompting an answer. Our identities as “expressed in dress, become, not only an answer to the question of who one is as an individual, but extends further into how an individual *is*, and how an individual approaches the definition of the *self*” (Eicher and Roach-Higgins 1992). Dress has always been present, constantly informing our identities, and by simply ‘remembering’ one can access the evidence of this.

Furthermore, clothes provide a surface, much like a canvas or matrix does for an artist, where we can aesthetically express our inner selves, ideas, feelings, multiple aspects of ourselves, and ultimately our identity. Rawlings reinforces this idea, articulating that “the body is constantly reclothed and re-fashioned in accordance with changing arrangements of the self. In addition, the fluidity of the ‘fashionable body’ therefore reflects the ever-changing nature of one’s identities and sense of self.” (Rawlings 2006: 260)

The way clothes helped me construct my identity was by allowing me to become me outside of people’s perception of me, as “the importance of fashion in young people’s identity formation lies in the possibilities it presents for change and the reinvention of the self” (Rawlings 2006: 260). It also marked letting go of who my parents made me up to be to become the person I wanted to be. As noted by Stallybrass (1993), clothes are a form of memory, however, they can also be a true stepping stone upon which one walks away from an unbearable present and the past of childhood, when one’s identity is constructed by one’s parents.

Stallybrass’s image of the stepping stone illustrates a very significant memory and turning point in one’s life, demonstrating the relationship between clothing and the body as identity. This of course, is the moment one is allowed to dress oneself, being allowed to transition and progress from being dressed by your parents or guardian to dressing up yourself. However, I acknowledge that a person may not have a conscious memory of this exact event, but perhaps one can think back to the earliest memory of when you first got dressed by yourself or even when you were

allowed the agency to choose what clothes would be purchased on your behalf. When I compare how I looked before I dressed myself with how I started dressing once I started to dress myself, there is a very clear difference.

1.5 The wardrobe as a site of (re)imagination.

The wardrobe is a very imaginative space, especially for younger children, like myself when I was growing up. The physical space, intended for the storage of clothes, often transforms into any space using the tools of imagination. I can recall a time when our own wardrobe turned into a ring for wrestling, the perfect hiding spot for games like hide and seek, a spaceship, a house and so much more. It was even imagined as a gateway into another world in the popular movie series, *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

For the vast majority of their ‘lives’, clothes are stored away and not in direct contact with the body. Therefore, when discussing the relationship of dress as a tool we use for identity construction, it has to be acknowledged that we can only wear a few of the clothing items we own at a time. The rest of the time they are stored away in a wardrobe. In English the term ‘wardrobe’ has two meanings: one refers to spaces of storage, and the other to a collection of clothes (Hansen 2000: 102).

The wardrobe here is then understood as both a physical space holding an individual’s wearable belongings and a more abstract comprehension of where one’s clothes exist (Fletcher and Klepp 2017). This definition aims to take into account how different individuals and cultures understand the physical or abstract space of their wardrobe. Considering that within a wardrobe, garments come and go, change hierarchical positions and are accessed with different frequencies of use the wardrobe can be seen as a non-static space, always in constant flux (Valle-Noronha, 2019:49). Furthermore, the term ‘wardrobe’ may be taken literally or metaphorically as one may have several wardrobes for various occasions and situations. Some may be for social functions, work, or exercise. Others may be for different aspects of *ourselves*, as indicated by the expression – using a synonym for wardrobe – “to come out of the closet” in relation to homosexuality. This could also be linked to ideas of privacy or secrecy, controlling what is seen and what is out of the public eye. These different wardrobes may, but will not necessarily, be physically diverse or equally private.

As such, my wardrobe can be described as a personal biography of sorts, and it would reveal aspects of my identity just as the outfit(s) I have on my body does. It consists of all the items I have accumulated over time and narrates the process of identity construction. Some items may never see the light of day again, like the skinny jeans I used to wear in high school and early in my time as a student at Rhodes University. These items reveal parts of my identity that I have left behind, part of me that I have grown out of, forgotten aspects of the self. They speak to the process of becoming and reveal the flux of an individual's identity throughout this process. They are simultaneously revealing the negotiation of the wearer's identity in the three prominent aspects that dress affects: the person we fear to be (or who we do not want to be), the person we are now at present, and the person we hope to be in the future. All of that lies in the contents of the wardrobe, serving as material evidence and artefacts of creation; it becomes a spatial-temporal site containing items from the past and those of the present simultaneously.

A wardrobe is a material and immaterial space holding stories that often cross paths, both within and beyond its limits. When a new piece is brought (or allowed) inside the wardrobe, it enables new stories to collide (Valle-Noronha 2019:49). Such a space holds the potential to be a site of imagination because it offers a platform where items from the past and the present can exist together. The past and the present inform the future, that which has not yet materialised and become reality. In the case of identity construction, the past and the present identities contribute to informing an individual's identity construction as well, in the sense that who you were informs who you are now, which finally informs who you are going to be, all of which exist in constant flux.

A wardrobe in many ways, demonstrates the relationship between the individual item of clothing and the larger material entirety. Furthermore, a wardrobe can be 'read' using an experience based methodology called 'wardrobe interventions' or wardrobe studies. Wardrobe interventions as described by Valle-Noronha (2019), a designer-researcher and educator rethinking the ways we design and experience clothing, as "probing artefacts and garments. The wardrobe interventions are deployed as a method to harvest information on how individuals and clothes relate". Furthermore, wardrobe studies share an interest in the materiality and physical storage of dress objects, and an interest in the way the objects are handled, worn, maintained, acquired and discarded in the wardrobe by their wearers. (Skjold 2018)

Although I have not made an artwork that directly engages the wardrobe, I have considered it in the installation of the exhibition (Figure 21). As mentioned before when discussing memory, I am inserting my own clothing items into the exhibition space. This will not only allow for an enhanced experience of the exhibition, but it also references the wardrobe as described above, as a physical space holding an individual's wearable belongings or an abstract comprehension of where one's clothes exist.



Figure 21. Juanito Featherstone, *Remnants of self*, 2023. Found objects (clothes) on wall, each 190cm x 40cm

The gallery essentially becomes the wardrobe where all my clothes are at rest, presumably awaiting interaction from me. However, I take a slightly different approach to the idea of the wardrobe as a private space by presenting it in a completely opposite manner and bringing it into a public space. This also challenges the idea of the wardrobe and ideas of secrecy around clothes at rest and personal belongings of the wearer, out of sight to the onlooker until they come into contact with the wearer. By inserting the wardrobe into a gallery space I am also reinforcing the concept of the wardrobe as a imaginative space by reimagining what it means and what that

looks like in my own way. As such, the audience is physically in the site of my imagination, as I invite them into my “wardrobe” reimagined as an art gallery. This is a playful and imaginative way of reinterpreting the wardrobe and speaks back to how the wardrobe can be transformed using the tools of imagination as well as what is seen and that which is unseen, drawing on the tension between that which is concealed and revealed about an individual’s identity.

Despite the focus being on clothes ‘at rest’ so to speak, one has to draw attention to what happens in and around wearers’ wardrobes, because, for the most part, clothes are also being worn. As such, dress is simultaneously viewed as both ‘at rest’, and existing outside, in the open, and in movement (Cwerner 2001: 79–92). The duality of what is seen and what is considered unseen, what is concealed and what is revealed, not only points to the clothes but also points to the material frames within which they are kept (the wardrobe). These frames refer not only to the physical walls of the wardrobe, but also speak to an entire structure of different storage spaces with corresponding criteria for where and what clothes should be stored in, and how clothes should be moved between them.

Maintenance, cleanliness, acquisition, and disposal are parts of that structure, as is the practice of dressing, in which garments and accessories are chosen and put together. This highlights the ‘care’ element in the relationship we have with dress. We are essentially looking after it and protecting it just as it does for us – almost like a mutual relationship. However, much of what concerns our clothes practices will be ‘tacit knowledge’¹⁷, knowledge that we have that is more difficult to express to others by writing down or verbalising. This could be because clothes are involved in a number of everyday routines (Gronow and Warde 2001) that, among other things, are characterised by being automated and thus invisible even to the person who practises them.

This could include things that happen with/to clothes/the second skin after we have removed it from our body/first skin, like the wardrobe practices of storing, caring for and selecting what to wear. It is also worth noting, as Boomsma (2020) articulates, that our wardrobe choices are, at least to some extent, influenced by the fashion industry because they offer us their selection of

¹⁷ Tacit knowledge is ... that component of knowledge that is widely held by individuals but not able to be readily expressed. (Dampney, Busch and Richards, 2002: 3)

clothing. Thus, what we decide to show others through our wardrobe choices, might not entirely be our decision, this is because it is also strongly influenced by social expectations (Boomsma, 2020). This can be linked to the social aspects of identity creation which will be further discussed in the following chapter.

1.6 *Aware: Art Fashion Identity* exhibition

The relationship between dress and identity creation is explored in an exhibition titled *Aware: Art Fashion Identity* (Royal Academy of Arts, London 2 December 2010 – 30 January 2011) consisting of various artists working with the materiality of dress. In this exhibition “the interpretation of the artists and designers allows clothing to become an expression of identity and to speak of our experience of the world around us, its history, its political and social complexities and its changing nature. The artists achieve this by reflecting on the relationship between our physical coverings and our ‘constructed’ personal environments; our individual and social identities; and the contexts in which we all live, through clothing that has been designed or constructed to fulfil a function that goes beyond the limitations of ornamentation or fashion.” (Soriano 2010:6). “The exhibition has been developed by the Royal Academy of Arts with a view to exploring the opportunities that exist at the edges of contemporary art and how they relate to and interact with associated practices such as, in this case, fashion and clothing” (Soriano 2010:6). Furthermore, this exhibition challenges the viewer to consider the everyday elements that are involved in defining our individual and collective identities. What we wear denotes who we are, where we come from, and what ‘tribe’ we belong to because clothing has the ability to illustrate our way of life and even our unconscious, communicating our beliefs, status and aspirations” (Soriano 2010:6).

Lastly, the distinctions between both disciplines have intersecting points as both are rooted in history and therefore, look back as much as forward. Furthermore, dress has the ability to provide vehicles to present and question key issues and needs of our time. The interpretation of the artists and designers allow clothing to become an expression of identity and to speak of our experience of the world around us, such as its history, its political and social complexities and its changing nature. ‘Aware’ reflects on the relationship between our physical coverings and our

“constructed” personal environments. It also reflects on our individual and social identities and the contexts in which we all live, through clothing that has been designed or constructed to fulfil a function that goes beyond the limitations of ornamentation or fashion. (Soriano 2010:6).

My own exhibition *A Second Skin* investigates this relationship between physical coverings (dress) and the role they play in constructing identity, as well as the influence of my ‘constructed environment’. The exhibition also explores three aspects of identity construction, starting from the inside and moving outward to the external to investigate the space where the two (dress and identity construction) intersect or draw parallels. “By withdrawing clothing from the fashion circus, as represented here, the artists involved in this exhibition root their own creative activity in everyday life, infusing it with commitment and critical sympathy.” (Soriano 2010:6). Similarly my work does not rely heavily on the fashion industry but still draws inspiration from it and focuses more on the materiality of identity (dress).

Although my exhibition, *A Second Skin* is a concept inspired by past memories, the process of identity construction is not one that occurs once and produces a fixed result, as such there are also contemporary influences in the body of work. This process is continuous and never stops or becomes stagnant. It is very much a process rooted in the everyday interaction with, and experience of, dress and much like the artists that are part of the *Aware: Art Fashion Identity* exhibition, my exhibition also does not focus on fashion as the core catalyst but rather on the dress or clothing (material).

Chapter Two: Combos are communicating – social identity and communicative properties of dress

Building on what was discussed in chapter one, this chapter moves from the internal domain into the external, and from interaction *with* dress to interaction *through* dress. Therefore it deals with the social aspects of one's identity, and how that identity is communicated *through* dress after an individual has essentially constructed their identity internally.

2.1 Shift in the meaning of dress, examining the influence of capitalism and consumerism

Dress was very influenced by the dominant Western fashion system, which was itself influenced by capitalism. The introduction of these two factors by the seventeenth century influenced how people acquired clothes, what types of clothes they wore (materials), and who could afford to wear what (class). In the last quarter of the seventeenth century, France – and more particularly Paris – became the universally recognised arbiter of fashion in Europe. Today that is still evident, as Paris has remained the world capital of fashion right up to contemporary times, influencing taste within the fashion system and consumer habits, which directly affect dress as it dictates what is available and 'in fashion' for the individual. (Sewell 2010)

Studies by Daniel Roche, Cissie Fairchild and others demonstrate that the market for fashionable goods of all sorts expanded by the late eighteenth century. "The goods involved included stylish textiles and clothing, and also fashion accessories like wigs, fans, snuffboxes, canes, gold watches, and umbrellas" (Sewell 2010: 83) and more fashionable goods not limited to dress. At this point, textiles, which in France, as in nearly all pre-industrial societies, constituted by far the largest industrial sector, demonstrating the demand for dress (Sewell 2010). This means that there was a rise in the demand for "fashionable" dress around that time, which is what I am particularly interested in here, the capitalist shift that influenced dress from function to an expression of identity.

The progression of consumer taste directly influenced the mode of producing cloth and clothes, and the merchants who directed production also did their utmost to shape taste. Taste meant that certain types of cloth were deemed more valuable than others, for example, fashionable cloth that contained a hundred hours of labour had a higher value than ordinary cloth containing the same

number of hours of labour (Sewell 2010). Taste also creates a desire to be associated with the group that is considered fashionable rather than the one that is not (hierarchy). Today the same dynamic is present, especially considering how fast trends are coming and going.

As early as the eighteenth century, silk manufacturing companies, such as the Lyonnais producers, began to introduce new designs each year, in order to distinguish their cloth from that of the imitations that were appearing in other European centres. In fact, they would do this twice a year, as there were seasonal spring fashions and winter fashions. Consequently, the expansion of the market and the quick pace of innovation in design went hand in hand (Sewell 2010). The introduction of new designs twice a year could be said to have been very early examples of trends, as introducing a ‘new’ design, automatically meant that there was now also an ‘old’ design. As such fashion was on the rise and new in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was the distinct taste for ‘newness’ itself and the gradual democratisation of competing for status through consumption (Sewell 2010).

“In this new European, Paris-centred fashion system, old clothing and accessories lost value quickly: fashion-conscious consumers wished to have new, up-to-the-minute styles. This meant that they had to replenish their wardrobes much more quickly and that they would pass out-of-date clothing along to poorer consumers, especially to their servants, who would thereby enter into the lower levels of the fashion system themselves.” (Sewell 2010: 103). However, because styles no longer lasted as long, by the mid-eighteenth century it was becoming difficult to read position in the social hierarchy from public bodily adornment (Sewell 2010), because as soon as something was no longer new, it would be passed on to the lower class population. On the other hand, not everyone was up to date in terms of being informed about the latest trends or styles.

However, the individuals who were informed about style achieved this by conversing about new fabrics or designs with acquaintances, as well as by educating their children in the ways of fashion. Thus, they reproduced the restless desires that are fashion’s defining psychological characteristic, indeed, a defining feature of capitalist culture in general (Sewell 2010). The influence on fashion by the capitalist culture becomes more evident when one starts to see the role it played in society as a driver of fashion, changing the way people designed dress, as now they were also accommodating the needs of the consumer.

By the 1780s, white muslin cotton dresses, in the bucolic style made famous by Marie Antoinette became the height of fashion and caused an expansion of cotton consumption, which cut dramatically into the consumption of linen at all levels of the social hierarchy, as cotton shirts and undergarments became extensively popular and were in high demand (Sewell 2010: 107). However, among the poorest categories such as domestic servants and low-wage earners, cotton massively displaced woollens. Woollens had made up about three-fifths of domestic servants' and low-wage earners' wardrobes in 1700 but amounted to only between a quarter and a third in 1789. Cotton was increasingly used for workaday breeches, trousers, kerchiefs, smocks, skirts and aprons for the poor (Sewell 2010: 107). Now we see dress, which was originally intended purely for function, being influenced by capitalist culture, with certain styles and fabrics now being assigned to specific social groups.

The most obvious shifts over the century were the displacement of linen by cotton and the substantial rise in consumption of silks among all classes (Sewell 2010: 112). These accounts of early (seventeenth and eighteenth-century) capitalism demonstrate the shift in focus towards consumption (Sewell 2010), highlight the role it played in the visual aesthetic of a time and how people were dressing, as well as the factors that influenced this, which accounts for the 'why' the role of dress shifted. The role of dress was shifting due to the customer needs which were influenced by capitalism (Sewell 2010).

2.2 The Role of Dress in Constructing a Social Identity: How Do Others Perceive Me?

Fashion and clothing are experienced as carriers of social symbols, or as a cultural manifestation, focused on how meaning was built by society. Social identity theory and self-categorisation, developed by psychologists Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1979), refers to the perceived identity of the groups to which people belong. Before getting to the communicative properties of dress and fashion, I first look at the role it plays in constructing a social identity through interaction with other dressed bodies, as this informs what is being communicated through dress. Social identity theory posits that a person's self-concept is based on his or her group membership. This theory consists of two dimensions: social identity and personal identity (Turner cited in Tajfel 1982).

Dress is an inherent part of human social interaction and not just the creation of an elite group

(designers, producers, or marketers). However, because of fashion's basis in individual social comparison, it cannot be controlled without underlining its purpose, which is the expression of individual identity. As such, if self-identity were never in doubt and social comparison never took place, there would be no demand for fashion, and there would be no need or opportunity for style change (Kawamura 2004: 28).

It is through social interaction between dressed bodies that the individual's identity is communicated through dress and ultimately identity construction. It allows individuals to position themselves in relation to others in the broader social context. Social interaction determines how information about the individual is expressed across the surface of dress, and how it is constructed, communicated and read. As Gabi Scardi notes "Clothes have always been the foremost pointer to individual and social identity. Clothing is fundamental to physical survival, but also a vehicle of identity; as mask and costume, it is an interface between self and others, an element of recognition or discrimination" (Scardi 2011: 13).

What was interesting about how my social identity formed was the multiplicity of cultural influences that I had in my everyday social interaction. Due to my culturally overlapping upbringing, I had to navigate between different races, cultures and spaces where the people in those spaces were all so different from each other. Understanding myself in the midst of understanding what was happening around me, was a task on its own. This created a tension between navigating who I was individually and who I was as a part of the larger social groups I belonged to while navigating different spaces. Social identity reflects membership in various social groups (e.g., clubs, social class), and personal identity represents the unique attributes that differentiate one person from another (Howard 2000; Tajfel 1982).

My body of work for the *A Second Skin* exhibition itself channels this sense of urgency in its abstract elements. I grappled with this aesthetic of making my work, both very clean and polished, or having a more expressive brush stroke. I went with a more abstract and sometimes playful or messy aesthetic because to me this process of identity construction, mine specifically, was not very clean and polished at all. It is something that is very unpredictable, and in my case, certainly very chaotic and that chaos is present in the work. This can be seen throughout the entire body of artwork, however, a specific example of this is seen in (Figure 22). The style of drawing, very loose and free-handed, emphasises this playfulness and messiness of identity

construction. The abstract aspect of the work is also seen in this example in the immediacy of the brush strokes and the imaginative shapes and forms present in the background. This work, like the others, marries a figurative and an abstract style of creating together and the figures and the physical body are very prominent in the works, but around and inside the figure are a variety of abstract marks and contrasting colours of blue, orange and green.



Figure 22. Juanito Featherstone. *Fit Pics 3*, 2021. Monotype print, ink, oil pastels and acrylic paint on Fabriano paper, 100cm x 70cm

George Simmel (1904) highlights this ‘need’ for an individual to be both part of a larger social group, and yet not to be so bound up in that group that they possess no individuality. He states that people appear to need to be social and individual at the same time, and fashion and dress are ways in which this complex set of desires or demands may be negotiated, as fashionable clothing is used in largely Western capitalist societies to affirm both membership of various social and cultural groups and individual, personal identity (Simmel, 1904: 12).

Social interactions were always very confusing to me, in many cases because of ‘misidentification’ from others’ perception of me in these interactions. As such, I have to acknowledge that part of dressing up is indeed for others, and not only for one’s self, after all “clothes are intended to be worn in public space; we dress for others, not for ourselves” (Crane 2000: 237). Crane’s statement here is, of course, in reference to the larger societal impact of clothing as a part of material culture, as previously discussed, and how clothing may be used to fit into certain social groups or identities.

Fitting into our various social groups is among the main concerns for human beings, and I do not believe we are meant to be isolated. One can see how dress plays a big role in determining which of these social groups one would fit into. I was an individual with an underlying sense of identity confusion, and I did not yet understand the concept of identity, as such I did not quite know how to deal with my identity confusion I would essentially use the act of mimicking and start to emulate the group I wanted to be part of or accepted by, navigating through different styles that would facilitate my desires to move around and find where I fit in, where I belonged. In this way, dress allowed me to construct an identity in relation to other individuals. One does not exist in a vacuum or isolation; I am part of the social, and as such I am interacting with other dressed bodies on a daily basis, whether they are strangers, friends, or even family members. I used social interaction to guide my identity construction and to navigate the different aspects of it, using society as a mirror.

In social environments, individuals can utilise their identification with ‘in-groups’ (i.e., their own group) versus ‘out-groups’ (i.e., other groups) to align their appearance (i.e., the total and composite image created by clothing) with a desired social group and to differentiate themselves from the undesired, or avoidance, reference group (Banister and Hogg 2004). I was struggling to

fit into the social groups I desired to be in and I found myself struggling with the tension between the social groups I wanted to be in and the undesired social groups. Here, I am once again referring to the misidentification of my identity again by onlookers. Those were the interactions I would try to avoid consistently and I would do so through utilising the properties of dress. It finally got to the point where I would even purposefully mirror the stereotypical image of my environment to avoid any confusion. In this process, I often felt as if I lost the individuality of my identity and assimilated into a group identity.

This is linked to a concept of “identity kits” that are explored in one of my larger scale or rather, life-sized, works. The ‘kits’ or rather outfits would essentially allow me to fit into different social groups. These ‘kits’ also allow for the navigation of identity and simultaneously the navigation of the different spaces all these social groups are located. However, the three that I explore in my work are linked to my own experience and the three spaces I navigated where I experience(d) all social groups that informed my social identity. The kits are a play on how I would mimic stereotypical images of my environment to avoid any confusion and awkward interactions.

Therefore, these kits explore three stereotypes that I was associated with: the ‘cheese boy’¹⁸, ‘the gangster’ and ‘ibhuda’. These also represent the intersections of my social identity groups and how they overlap because they only exist within social interaction with one another (the different social groups). The cheese boy (suburb area) only exists in the other two social groups (in the Coloured area and the Xhosa location) meaning that is the stereotype I was perceived as in the latter areas. The gangster (Coloured area) only exists in the other two groups (Xhosa location and suburb), because that is how they perceived my identity. Lastly, the bhuda (Xhosa location) only exists in the coloured location and the suburb area, and that is how I would be looked at in that area.

Within their social groups, these identity kits are read differently compared to how they are read outside of that. Within the corresponding space, it is an attempt at fitting in and speaks to a desire for belonging and community. On a second note, outside of the corresponding space they may also speak to stereotypes and the effect of dress on the perception of social identity. Fashion and

¹⁸ Cheeseboy is a slang term used by people of colour to describe people of colour who are said to exhibit more Western characteristics than African, like speaking English at home, however it extends to how you look and act as well. Another term to describe this that’s more common and widely accepted is ‘coconut’.

dress are one of the channels through which people can most readily give voice to their identities. Beyond words, people can convey themselves through dress and fashion, thus creating their social identity (Bennett 2005). The work (Figure 23) is a life-sized depiction of myself as I currently am and where I am in the process of identity construction. This work is based on the confusion I had to deal with which led me to develop these identity kits in order to cope. This confusion is shown through the body posture in the image, which conveys the feeling of being faced with a situation that is particularly difficult to deal with. The hands on the head gesture can be read in different ways, as it is associated with different emotions, such as being shocked and awed. However, it is commonly associated with the feeling of being faced with a difficult decision, confusion in a situation, disappointment, frustration and even sadness.

I am surrounded by the choices available to me, yet I do not see one that I would like to choose. The different spaces are represented in this work and others as spheres or circles as a reference to a different “world” I would experience in each space. In this work, they are red circles drawn in oil pastels, which are linked to each identity, depicted as three different balaclava masks directly across from the circles. This is also reminiscent of a multiple-choice question one would encounter in a test, where you would have to link the options on one side with the best suited options on the opposite side. The identity kits are also represented in a choice form in boxes labelled A, B, and C, further reinforcing the notion of choices that had to be made. Each box depicts a stereotype that I had to deal with in all of the spaces I navigated. This artwork depicts the difficulties of using dress to construct an identity, as it does not always go as planned and the onlooker is free to make their own assumptions informed by their own individual experiences of dress.



Figure 23. Juanito Featherstone. *Navigating Identities*, 2022. Monotype, ink, acrylic paint, fabric paint, spray paint on fabric, 1.27m x 2.12m

“The body becomes a canvas, with clothes acting as the paint, expressing and intellectualising a visual presentation of internal, distinctive aspects of self ... the meaning inscribed in fashion, as with identity, is fluid, constantly changing” (Neumann 2011:42). This idea or concept of fluidity and constant change is explored in the series titled, *Social Camouflage*, 2021 (Figures 24-26).

The type of mark-making in particular is very graphic (Figure 24), yet dynamic, suggesting a lot of movement. The process of making that mark involves a lot of body movement from myself as

the artist which is evident in the energy that the marks display. I start with just a small dab of black ink straight out of the tub. As my 'brush' I use small cardboard cuts with straight sides, which makes it better to move the ink around. I proceed to move the ink around, slowly forming the body of the figure.

Furthermore, the way the figures are positioned, the composition of the work and the poses are inspired by fashion photography. Fashion photography particularly interests me because of how the physical material of dress and the physical body almost become one. And the idea of posing to get the desired results or look from the photo also suggests movement of the body as the poses are often very dynamic. The series of five, *Social Camouflage, 2021* interrogates a need to be individually identified and noticed, while simultaneously exploring a desire to be embraced by society. The work is an exploration of the tension between social and individual identity. The figure is fighting to be seen, but what is around the figure is fighting just as much. The colour also plays a role in this series, as the figures are shown to have the same coloured outfits as their background in an attempt to blend in and be embraced by their surroundings. The (first and second) skin in this work is depicted with a dynamic mark-making technique to capture identity as being fluid and constantly changing. When you look at the figure it is as if the marks are actually moving around in real time and regardless of how hard I tried I would never get the marks to look the same on any two attempts.

One of the figures in the series is me and the other four represent other individuals I would encounter through social interaction. However, it is hard to tell which is which because they all look very similar. This speaks to my own desires to be socially accepted and many times a desire to just blend in and go unnoticed, avoiding any social interaction.



Figure 24. Juanito Featherstone. *SocialCamouflage 1*, 2021. Monotype print, ink and acrylic paint on Fabriano paper, 100cm x 70cm.



Figure 25. Juanito Featherstone. *Social Camouflage 2*, 2021. Monotype print, ink and acrylic paint on Fabriano paper, 100cm x 70cm.



Figure 26. Juanito Featherstone. *SocialCamouflage 3*, 2021. Monotype print, ink and acrylic paint on Fabriano paper, 100cm x 70cm.

2.3 Dress as a form of language used to communicate and construct identity

This section explores the communicative properties of dress and its ability to relay messages about the wearer's identity to the onlooker. Communication in the case of this thesis, can be understood as sending messages from the *wearer* to the *onlooker*. Clothing as communication discusses the idea that fashion and clothes can be utilised as a means to communicate our identity. As articulated by Barnard (2002: 32)

We need goods for communicating with others and for making sense of what is going on around us. The two needs are but one, for communication, can only be formed in a structured system of meanings. They imply, first, that fashion and clothing may be used to make sense of the world and the things and people in it, that they are communicative phenomena. Secondly, they imply that the structured system of meanings, a culture, enables individuals to construct an identity utilizing communication.

Using the communicative properties of clothes and fashion was one of the most important aspects of dress for me as a result of my experiences of being misidentified. That fuelled my need to express who I was because it was a means of avoiding the inevitable interaction that I dreaded so much. It would often start with a person coming to me and speaking in isiXhosa assuming because of my appearance ('first' skin) that I understood what they were saying, whereas, in reality, I did not fully understand. I would often laugh it off or just pretend as if I understood and move on because I did not want to disappoint the person or come across as someone who was out of touch with their identity and could not even speak their home language. Thereafter I would usually have to respond in English, assuming they did not understand Afrikaans either, which is my home language. This resulted in my interest in visual language and forms of communication that did not require the spoken word. In the early stages of my life, I was not yet aware of the communicative properties of dress. However, it became evident as I grew and my relationship with dress developed.

"The definition of dress and the classification system we present unites two major human acts (modifying the body and supplementing the body) that invite sensory responses to and interpretations of the resulting outward similarities and differences of human beings. Based on

this heavy weighting of visual impact and what we know about theories of communication, we can expect dress to precede verbal communication in establishing identity” (Eicher and RoachHiggins 1992: 17). As I started to become very aware of how people were dressing and the different aesthetics in these different spaces I was navigating, clothing became a communicative tool I would use in the construction, and expression of my own identity politics.

Dress can be described as material that gains meaning through human intervention, with interaction such as being worn and coming into contact with the physical body. The (physical) body is already deeply embedded with its own meanings and as such, is subject to its own expectations. However, it should be noted that “there is no static, fixed, or intrinsic meaning in clothes, but, instead, that meanings are embedded in a broader cultural context” (Lundén 2020: 249). Therefore, although dress gains meaning through interaction, that meaning is never fixed; through continuous interaction, the meaning is continuously shifting. This became evident in communicating my own identity through dress and fashion. As mentioned before, I was in constant limbo between vastly different spaces and as a result I was also in limbo between different aspects of my identity, emphasising the fact that nothing was fixed about my identity and what was around me. This means that whatever I am wearing is constantly in flux and the identity that is being communicated naturally follows suit.

In my case, because I was navigating multiple spaces and cultures it created a sort of hybrid identity because I felt like I existed in these different spaces simultaneously. Hybridity can be defined as the mingling and blending of different cultures (Pieterse 1996: 1392). As such my identity has also taken on that characteristic and this is one of the narratives I communicate through my dress. The items of dress would be a mixture of different aesthetics, each from their own space, culminating into one communicating that my identity is also a result of the effects being a ‘product’ of South Africa. “Fashion may be socially frivolous but it is not sociologically trivial. Fashion is the result of a great deal of influence which collectively determines the social structure of society” (Kawamura 2005. 13). The way individuals dress within the everyday is an amalgamation of diverse identities, times, places, socioeconomic status, and cultures.

An example of this in my personal dress would be how I mixed the attire from the different spaces to communicate one hybrid individual identity. For instance, I would wear my school uniform items with casual items, or with cultural items of dress. Coming from school, it was

common for students to get home and just put on some casual shoes (sneakers) and a T-shirt, keeping on their school pants. Another popular uniform item was what we called a 'Rain-O-Mac'. The Rain-O-Mac was a zip-up jacket we could wear with our uniform on days when it rained. It got to a point where students were wearing it so much they 'banned' it from school uniform and we were only allowed to wear it with sports kits. However, this item became very popular outside of school as well and was a regular in the outfits of those who owned it.

Another example of this is when I was just finished with my initiation process and I had finished my period of adhering to the dress code of shirts and blazers. I still had all the blazers and the shirts and the shoes and even though I had completed my transition to casual clothes, I couldn't just get rid of all my clothes. As a result, when I started my first year I mixed a lot of my cultural dress code (new initiate/*rwala*) attire with my casual clothes, such as by adding a T-shirt under the blazer, or adding a pair of jeans to a formal shirt and so forth. These examples, although very trivial, serve to demonstrate how I expressed this hybrid identity I had acquired, through dress.

One can say that any item of clothing worn by an individual can have multiple different meanings when applied to a different cultural context, or structured systems of meanings. With the knowledge of that, whether consciously or unconsciously, we are constructing and communicating narratives that in turn, speak about the process of identity construction happening in and around us. Furthermore, visual forms of communication involve a spectrum of terms that are not sent verbally but are also sent sensually (i.e., visually). This means that visual communication is received simultaneously, that is, it does not matter whether we are talking about everyday or "special" clothes; they both, intentionally or accidentally, send various messages about ourselves (Davis 1992).

Therefore, it doesn't matter whether an individual intentionally wants to make a statement with their clothing or not, "clothing is a vehicle of communication – regardless of the individual style or meaning or content of that communication" (Welstein 2013: 112). In the process of art making a similar dynamic is at play as it is not just about the artist's intentions, it is also about how the audience interoperates with the works, which is based on their own context. My work intends to explore the role dress plays in identity construction. However it is layered with personal nuance and among those nuances is how I experienced race, my own and that of the people around me.

Racial identity is explored through the navigation of three different spaces referenced in the body of work.

The language of dress has multiple types of communication that can potentially be “performed” or communicated through garments. “Dress is a powerful means of communication and makes statements about the gender and many other aspects of identity”(Eicher and Roach-Higgins 1992: 8). Thus, dress and fashion are forms of nonverbal understanding and communication. The statements we make about ourselves communicate how we choose to appear in the world and come to understand our perception of *ourselves*. The way I choose to appear in the world reflects statements about identity confusion and struggling with a tension between navigating different aspects of my identity *through* interaction *with* dress in the process of identity construction.

The spaces I would frequently navigate are still so segregated from each other and they each have multiple different aesthetics in terms of the way people are dressing and expressing their identities through dress. The meaning of a message communicated through dress depends on different factors, such as colours, textures, cuts, styles or in this case, the *context* or space. Furthermore, there are many “languages” of dress, each with its own vocabulary, syntax and grammar. An appropriate dress code will enable otherwise impossible courses of action and allow access to places that are defined by more than environmental conditions (Lurie 1992: 5). Therefore, the meaning of dress is constantly shifting and in flux depending on the context or space, which is a contributing factor to the ways in which the clothing is read.

This is related to meanings that a person attributes to various outward characteristics of dress based on that individual’s socialisation within a certain cultural context as well as on the improvisations the person exercises when applying learned meanings of dress within specific social situations. This reinforces the notion that navigating different spaces with different cultures, for example, home (Coloured location) and school (suburbs), also influences the way these messages are constructed by the wearer (me) and read by the onlooker.

Furthermore, appearance or visual language can be as important as verbal communication in establishing and maintaining one’s individual and social identity – the self. The process is

described as a process of self-establishment through interaction with others, a process which includes selecting clothes to communicate a desired aspect of self and convey it to others. (Stone 1962: 87). Similar to this idea but not exclusive to dress, Barnard proposes (2002) an understanding of fashion and clothes as ways to communicate within a culture that functions as a signifying system. Barnard challenges the notion of identity as an expression, to propose that fashioning and clothing are learned pre-existing codes that, instead, construct these identities (Barnard, 2002: 40).

Examples of how I selected clothes to communicate a desired aspect of self can be seen throughout my body of artwork in the exploration of my own personal style, or second skin, depicting on a broader scale how this material helped me to construct and communicate the complexities of my own identity. In two of my artworks mentioned before, specifically, *What words can't say self-portrait 01*, 2021 (Figures 8 and 24) and *Untitled, self-portrait 02*, 2021 (Figures 9 and 25) I reflect on aspects of my own identity and how I select items of dress to communicate the desired aspects of myself (-identity).

These are both introspective works that speak about my second skin (dress) and specifically how I use it to navigate my insecurities within the praxis of my own identity construction. They demonstrate how I utilise the communicative properties of dress, communicating the internal to external world. In the works, I am exploring the properties of clothes in communicating my internal perception of myself to the external world. There is, therefore, a sense of vulnerability in the portraits, almost as if I am bare with no room to hide anything: a form of (un)dressing.

As mentioned above, the work is introspective and speaks to some of my deepest insecurities, such as my right leg, my face or the colour of my skin. In this way I am allowing dress to speak about issues that I am not very open to vocalise to anyone, expressing a sense of vulnerability and discomfort. In these works every inch of my body is covered up except for my eyes, turning myself into an observer, interacting only through the visual and sensual sense. By hiding every part of the (first) skin I am reinforcing the experience of feeling so uncomfortable in my own (first) skin, referencing a constant desire to 'cover it up' and not face all the confusion that came with it.

Another important part of the work (Figure 27) is the lower half of the body. The pants are depicted as an outline and not filled in, revealing an intimate detail about me, the protagonist. On the right leg, a bone can be seen represented in gold paint. This is a reference to the way I was born (see page 49). Before I was born I broke my right foot, as such, my right leg is something I became extremely self-conscious about and as a result I only wear long pants and stopped wearing shorts completely to conceal my legs and the part that I am so insecure about.

One of my Achilles tendons is slightly shorter than the other, causing my right leg to be a bit shorter than the left and as a result, flat shoes were always an uncomfortable fit. However, Nike Air Force 1's are my favourite shoes because they are the most comfortable and make me feel the least insecure. To this day, I can remember the first pair I got. It felt like it was made for me.

Air Force 1's and long loose-fitting pants became my go-to look, as seen in this portrait (Figure 27). These are the elements of dress that communicate certain internal aspects of the individual's identity, and who they are on an external platform



Figure 27. Juanito Featherstone. *What words can't say, self-portrait 01*, 2021. Monotype print, ink, acrylic paint, oil paint, oil pastels, collage on Fabriano paper, 100cm x 70cm



Figure 28. Juanito Featherstone. *Untitled self-portrait 02*, 2021. Monotype print, ink, acrylic paint, oil pastels on Fabriano paper, 71cm x 54cm

2.4 Reintroduction

This section discusses a very interesting time in my progression that took place when I was 19 years old; I had just finished the last of my final matric exams and was transitioning out of

school. I am referring to one of the most valuable experiences in my life, my initiation from being a boy, into manhood. Xhosa boys are usually circumcised between the ages of 16 and 26 (Peltzer et al. 2008). It is worth noting that the initiation process is very layered and intricate, so it will not be discussed in its entirety in this thesis. This section, however, discusses the role of dress in the initiation process as I experienced it, which speaks to the collective experience, as initiates may share similar experiences to their peers. I am exclusively interested in the role of dress, as it holds a very significant role in initiation. This experience reinforced my ideas of how important the role of dress is when it comes to identity and how it becomes a second skin.

This is one of the many Xhosa traditions I would partake in throughout my life as a result of the influence of one half of my family. I would always enjoy these traditions, rituals, and family gatherings that took place on the Xhosa side because it would just be such a beautiful celebration of life and culture. However, this meant that I had to be around all isiXhosa-speaking people, although quite a few of them understood and spoke some Afrikaans. The other aspect was the way I dressed; I would always stand out due to my unique way of dressing, which was not exactly in line with how everyone else dressed.

As the process of initiation, or *Ulwaluko*, was a Xhosa tradition, the language used throughout the process was isiXhosa and as a result, I had immense struggles with trying to fully understand what was going on around me at any given time unless it was translated for me. Furthermore, the initiation process is very exclusive and secretive and because of that, there is a different type of language that can be related to talking in code to prevent someone who has not been there yet, or women, from understanding what is being said about it. This made it even harder for me to understand as I could already not understand basic isiXhosa and now I was introduced to a whole other version of it.

Like all rites of passage, *Ulwaluko* is divided into three phases: separation, transition (liminality) and reintegration (Turner 1995). In the separation phase, the initiate (one who undergoes the cultural circumcision ritual) leaves the society and a farewell traditional ceremony is held for them (Meintjies 1998). Turner (1995) calls the first phase a period of seclusion, which involves the initiates' separation from everyday existence and adherence to certain foods. When I left society I took nothing with me. I only had old torn clothes on my body, and my old Converse All Stars with no laces, and those would be the shoes that carried me through the process. Part of the

starting phase of the ritual included my having to give away all my old clothes and leave with what I had. It felt like a metaphorical shedding of the old self, as my clothes were already a part of me. However it was now a part of my old identity as a boy, and I was starting on my journey to become a man. Once I had arrived at the location and several procedures had taken place already, including building the hut (*boma*) that would be my home for the next month, the doctor arrived and we were called to undress completely; this was the shedding of the last of my old second skin, everything except my shoes. We were each given blankets brought from home, which would become our new second skin during our time there. After the surgical procedure of circumcision takes place one can not exactly wear any clothes as it might interfere with the healing process, therefore the blanket is necessary to keep you covered instead. As time went on and the process continued, I started to heal and could move around more easily. I started to take walks, so I did not want to carry a blanket with me everywhere I went because it could get quite hot and the blanket itself is also heavy. I recall seeing pictures from my father and his peers where they had fashioned clothes out of the blankets they had available to them. My brother is four years older than me, therefore he went through the process earlier than I did and we would often visit him there. During the visits, I also saw hundreds of initiates all with their clothes made out of blankets, each with their own interpretation and their own designs.

With a lot of time on my hands, I asked for some material to construct my own blanket outfit. Usually, people make a robe-like garment to make dressing and undressing easier, as there are regular check-ups from the doctor on a daily basis. I decided to make a pair of pants from my old blanket sent from home. I remember at that time, in 2015, there was a trend of different sweatpants so naturally being a very stylish individual, I decided to make some sweatpants, and I made a hat from cardboard. It was December, so the sun was very hot every day with little to no shade. This would be my dress throughout my time spent there. A pair of custom sweatpants with a front flap to accommodate accessibility. I did not have zips or buttons, so I just used wire as a button. Due to the weather, I did not need to make a shirt, however – as mentioned – I had a hat made out of cardboard, and lastly, I wore my old pair of All Stars. When it was cold some mornings and nights I would simply just drape my blanket over me as I still had pants on.

The initiate is sent away to a temporary hut built of grass, sticks, and cardboard with a sail (tarpaulin) over the top for resistance to rain. The hut is in a space where it is isolated from the

rest of the community (Turner 1995). At this hut, the initiate is circumcised and remains there for a specified period of time, during which he heals and is traditionally taught about manhood (transition), which is the second phase of the process.

Finally, the initiate is welcomed back and reintegrated into the community and the ritual concludes with a celebration of his newly acquired manhood status (Mavundla et al. 2009). Before coming back to society, there is a ritual of being fetched from the place of isolation. Once again, I left everything behind, all the clothes I had made there, the blankets; this time I even left my shoes behind. Everything is burned down along with the hut. I received a different blanket, this time a new one which was an all-white fleece blanket with black stripes along the edge of it. This is how people see me the first time as I walk barefoot, naked, with a blanket covering my bare body, going up the street on the way to the house, which will be the house I have my graduation ceremony (*mgidi*) on the day of return. During the ceremony and celebration, I was seated on a straw mat in my white blanket for the whole day, not permitted to leave my position. In the initiation process, one of the most important elements of a ritual is the graduation ceremony, which celebrates the successful outcome of a long and often painful learning process (Ntombana 2009). In Xhosa initiation the new man is given gifts, new clothes and a new name – all of which are a symbol of a new life (Ntombana 2009).

The day after I returned and had my graduation, was when I put clothes on for the first time in weeks. I had received a new outfit (Figure 29) that was in accordance with the strict dress code rules of a new initiate. I recall going shopping for these clothes a few days before starting my process. The first stage that marks the beginning is *ubukrwa* (the new stage of manhood) which is identified by a specific dress code (Ncaca 2014). This particular dress code relates to the enactment of masculinity within amaXhosa as it is highlighted that those colours symbolise *isidimanesithoze/o* (a sense of dignity), respect and recognition in the community (Gwata 2009; Lungcuzo, 2013; Mhlahlo, 2009; Ncaca, 2014).



Figure, 29 Juanito Featherstone, *Re-Introduction: an Intimate moment II*, 2022, Fabric paint on Fabric. 86cm x 79cm

The outfit consisted of brown Navada pants with a brown stretchy belt, and Dakota shoes to match, with patches of light and dark browns, paired with brown diamond socks. I had a chequered formal button-up shirt made with slightly heavy material in warm oranges, reds and browns in the small blocks of colour. Wrapped around my neck was a black wrap with two white lines all around the edge of it, and a light brown Navada blazer that matched the rest of the outfit perfectly. Lastly, I had a dark brown Navada hat with red satin lining on the inside.

After all of this was done and I was now in the final stages of my transition into manhood, donning the uniform of a new initiate my experience among my Xhosa family changed completely. The whole dynamic of questioning my identity faded away and I was embraced by the Xhosa community without any doubts. While wearing this uniform I felt far more compatible with my Xhosa family and they felt more comfortable around me as well. However, the same uniform that helped me navigate the Black location with ease now was met with stares in the

Coloured location. This experience was yet another demonstration of the role dress plays in the construction and perception of identity.

To conclude, dress holds many properties required for an individual to communicate their identity and position themselves in relation to the rest of society, making statements about individuality, belonging, and community. The topics discussed in this second chapter demonstrate the ability of dress to operate in a social context as a language that allows for non-verbal communication. The interaction of dressed bodies can be described as a non-verbal conversation between individuals or collectives. Through analysing its communicative properties it becomes evident that dress is an essential part of identity construction in this sense because it allows for an individual to assert their position in the world and manage their perception of self, in other words, manage public perception. In short, dress provides the individual a medium to express and communicate their identity externally in a social context.

Chapter Three: We Outside – The broader sociocultural environment and the influence of the social structures in which interactions between dressed bodies take place

In this final chapter, I explore a third sphere of identity construction, which has more to do with external influence and space. After the identity construction of an individual takes place internally and is communicated through social interaction, one has to move on to the external domain and look at the contexts in which the interactions of dressed bodies take place. This chapter therefore continues to build on the first two chapters, and it explores the ‘space’ of identity construction and considers streetwear culture as a metaphorical space case study for the exploration of this concept.

3.1 Streetwear as a space or site for interaction between dressed bodies

What I am most struck by in the space of streetwear is the role that fashion and style play in the everyday representation of the self, allowing individuals to choose how they want to appear in the world with regard to their identity. The elements of streetwear I am most familiar with (such as the fake knockoff slogan tees, expensive Nike sneakers or Adidas slides, to the fake Gucci or Balenciaga) become tools and resources to reflect people’s identities. Furthermore, it can also reflect where an individual is from, for example, their cities’, towns’, or villages’ connections with the rest of the world. Streetwear becomes a space where different styles and aesthetics from all over the world can intersect, culminating in a mixture of influences from different cultures.

This section explores streetwear, which is a more contemporary reinterpretation of traditional fashion and modes of dress, (e.g. high or runway fashion) as it is represented within the domain fashion system. Defining streetwear and street culture is not an easy task because of its complexity and mixtures of influence and cultures. If we analyse the words “street” and “culture” we can soon realise that, without question, it has to incorporate many sub-cultures that take form or expression “in the streets” (de Macedo2015: 13). As such, street style is a space which is a reflection or a product of the different spaces in which we all exist. Furthermore, “street style is defined as the intersection of several domains, namely: the high street, fashion magazines, and the background, relationships and preferences of the consumer and social milieu” (Woodward 2009: 85).

King Adz, an author, and Wilma Stone, a transdisciplinary artist (2018), in giving a brief genesis of the concept that is streetwear state:

The concept of streetwear was born out of a human reaction to the wounds of growing up in the sub/urban environment: poverty, disenfranchisement, trauma, domestic violence, divorce, neglect, abuse, mental health issues, drug dependency, racism, issues of sexuality, gender, class, religion and ethnicity, and other systematic forms of oppression and discrimination. (Adz and Stone cited in Stein 2020: 11)

This demonstrates somewhat of a power struggle within the social hierarchy and the dominant aesthetic while at the same time highlighting issues that can affect an individual's identity, such as their background (e.g. poverty or trauma). Additionally, it highlights aspects of an individual's identity (e.g. race, gender, class, etc.), all played out through what they wear. As such, it is vital to remember that streetwear culture is often born out of feelings of powerlessness and alienation. However, nowadays streetwear embraces a variety of subcultures that have come together to provide a sense of identity, belonging, and feeling at home (Adz and Stone 2018) to those who do not feel that, such as myself.

I would describe my own style using this same definition because it consists of multiple intersecting influences from the different spaces I frequently navigate(d), which were and are mostly in urban spaces. Another contributing factor is the culturally overlapping upbringing I experienced, highlighting yet again the intersection between multiple domains. Utilising street style methods, individuals demonstrate the process of navigating multiple identities while simultaneously utilising subcultural and intersecting styles or trends.

This, in itself, is in some ways a performance, as it creates a space where identities can be explored through the act(ion) of dress. It is in this way that streetwear becomes something of an assertion of one's own culture (Stein 2020: 27). Personally, I attest to the fact that was actively trying to be perceived in a certain way and in relation to a certain identity I wanted to be a part of and that which I did not want to be associated with; I was either attempting to fit in or attempting to stand out.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that streetwear cannot operate entirely outside of a hegemony or a popular culture even though it is a very individualistic style of dress that evokes a sense of difference. Directly contrary to the form in which they are constantly invoked, identities are constructed through, not outside, difference (Menendez and Nitschke cited in Stein 2020).

Stein (2020) suggests that in order to understand the role streetwear plays in an individuals' identity construction, we must first investigate which aspects of streetwear culture are most vital to how we present ourselves to the world. These aspects determine the parts of our identity and our being most affected by what we wear, more specifically in the case of this section, affected by streetwear. Stein continues by iterating that, since our known identity is composed of fragments of a larger whole, we can infer that our identities are more complex than a single piece of a whole. How we visually present ourselves is one such fragment of our identity (Stein 2020).

Anderson suggests that streetwear is typically recognised for its top-selling categories: sneakers, T-shirts, and hoodies. Each of these three categories aids in non-verbal identity communication within the shared streetwear community and culture. (Stein 2020). Besides accessories, these three clothing items are the ones I engage with on a regular or daily basis, similar to the majority of people referred to in this thesis. They are also the three items I found people engage with the most when constructing and expressing their identity through dress.

Building on that, the space for high fashion or couture or runway fashion does not exist in Makhanda in any of the spaces I would navigate. It is appropriate to say that street style is what everyone essentially utilises as it is the form of fashion that is accessible to the everyday person in the street and does not require all the factors 'high fashion' requires. By that, I mean the finances to keep up with the constant trends and always being 'in fashion' with the upper class. It means that street style can also be defined as the style of the everyday individual on the streets.

However, with that being said, it is also notable that these items (hoodies, T-shirts, and sneakers) are not entirely affordable to everyone in the sense that the items that are sought after the most often carry a brand name and a heavy price tag with them. The most popular brands in the spaces I would navigate were brands like: Nike, Ellesse, Le Coq Sportif, Polo, Converse, Tiger, Uzzi, Hemisphere, Grasshopper and Adidas.

Furthermore, street style is an interdisciplinary approach to fashion, producing styles and discourses that intersect and are not solely reliant upon mainstream fashion opinions, such as those dispensed by publications and editorial boards. The street approach to style and fashion is often based on individualism, not simply current fashion trends.

Some of the clothes often associated with street style are just the clothes people can get their hands on. This includes thrifted items, hand-me-downs, or even employing DIY customisations and anything to complete the look and communicate negotiated identities constructed through clothes and dress. In this way, streetwear becomes a form of statement, something young people can use to differentiate themselves and state their “true” selves, their ideas and beliefs. This was how I crafted my style, except for thrifting, which I only started in more recent years. Street style creates a space for demonstrating intersecting identities because it lets the wearer use multiple styles of dress to communicate to the world who they are, and that they are not just one thing.

Furthermore, Woodward (2009: 85) finds that “the well-documented histories of street style chart the transition from more clearly defined subcultures through to less clearly differentiated style groupings”. Woodward doubles down by articulating the types of conditions which street styles are often born from, noting that, “Street style is linked to specific music scenes and location, as its associations with creativity and innovation have become a pivotal means through which style has been imagined and constructed” (Woodward 2009: 85). The culture of that location, like the music scene, is here becoming references for the people involved in those spaces to draw from and become something that informs the way they express themselves through dress, borrowing and reinterpreting, constantly changing and taking from different aspects of what is around them. That could be said to be a demonstration of how fashion practices, such as street style, can appropriate clothing into an expression of the layered identities we hold and maintain.

What is particularly interesting about streetwear in contemporary times is the way it is changing and shifting globally with the influence of the internet. Style, and particularly street style, now represents new hybrid identities, which mix elements of traditional influences with contemporary trends from all over the world and is spreading ever faster as a result of social media. This can be said to be reflective of a wider global trend of individuals utilising dress and fashion as a tool for self-expression, representation, and community building, which is also emerging in South Africa.

Street style can also be utilised to explore how communities express their allegiances and individual identities.

Streetwear culture is explored in my practical work through the series *Fit Pics, 2021* (Figures 22, 30, and 31). As the title suggests, this series borrows from the phenomenon of people taking pictures of themselves, with the emphasis being on their out‘fit’. This is a contemporary form of self-expression and self-imaging that foregrounds an individuals’ outfit, which is an expression of their identity, and how they choose to represent themselves. The three artworks capture the immediacy and vibrancy of streetwear culture, while also showing the various figures in posing posture for the camera. The works consciously employ a hybrid “cut and paste” visual aesthetic that quotes the methods of sampling and borrowing present in streetwear culture as well as the very graphic element of many streetwear designs.

This work starts as a single colour monotype print on a piece of Fabriano paper. From that moment the artwork is “in progress” and still is. Up until they leave the studio, I keep interacting with the works, adding layers on top of each other, and using various materials to achieve a variety of textures. The figures depicted in the series *Fit Pics, 2021* (Figures 22, 30 and 31) are wearing balaclava masks and the bodies have been depicted as being very ambiguous in terms of the different aspects of identity (race, sex, gender, class, etc.). The references in the work are pulled from actual ‘fit pics’ from the online archive of Instagram and my personal photographic archive in order to situate myself within the work, as it is also a reflection of the influences around me. The work represents the most popular brands that I encounter the most in my surroundings. These works ultimately depict the ambiguity of identity in the everyday expression of it through dress and specifically, streetwear.



Figure 30. Juanito Featherstone. *Fit Pics 2*, 2021. Monotype print, ink, oil pastels and acrylic paint on Fabriano paper, 100cm x 70cm



Figure 31. Juanito Featherstone. *Fit Pics 1*, 2021. Monotype print, ink, oil pastels and acrylic paint on Fabriano paper, 100cm x 70cm

3.2 Nontsikelelo Veleko: a Case Study of *In the eyes of the beholder* photographic series

This section seeks to use the work of South African photographer and artist Nontsikelelo ‘Lolo’ Veleko as a case study on streetwear in South Africa.



Figures 32 and 33. Nontsikelelo Veleko 'Nono' and 'Kepi in Bree Street', *Beauty is in the eye of the Beholder* series. 2006. Pigment inks on archival cotton rag paper, 38x25cm, 42x29 cm.
Image courtesy [??]

Beauty is in the eyes of the Beholder, 2005 (Figures 32 and 33) is a photographic series by South African artist Nontsikelelo 'Lolo' Veleko. The series is shot in a classic street photography style, which complements the subject matter of streetwear perfectly. As such the photographs do not have the same qualities as studio photography and are less directed, with specific reference to lighting, costume, and props. However, there is some direction from the photographer to the subject, such as where, or perhaps how, to pose for the camera and things of that nature. The photographic series consists of portraits of strangers the photographer comes across and perhaps finds their style or outfit interesting. Drawn in by the expression through dress, it could be said that Veleko focuses on difference and uniqueness in her work as she specifically chooses

individuals who stand out from the norm (Mountain 2010: 32). Furthermore, the most obvious element of Veleko's photographs is, in fact, the clothing in them (Mountain 2010: 29).

That is perhaps what stood out for me most about Veleko's work, the element of clothing, which is at the forefront, and which is the most obvious element in the work. When one first comes across the work, one almost cannot help but be drawn in by the outfits of the subjects Veleko captures; each with their own unique style that is a representation of how they choose to appear in the world. It is a representation of their second skin and a glimpse of the process of constructing identity through dress, as it cannot be captured in one photograph or one outfit. Clothes can carry many significant signs according to their shape, colour, surface decoration, embroidery techniques and so on. Each item of dress can be the expression of identity in relation to ethnicity, religious beliefs, age, education and social class. Through observation of clothing styles over these items, assumptions could be made about a person's identity.

It is worth noting that by no means is this paper suggesting that the process of identity construction can be captured in one single image, as it is a process that happens throughout the entirety of an individual's life. In constant flux, identity is always being reimagined through the daily ritual of dressing and redressing the body, and streetwear is the everyday style of dress. That constant engagement with identity through the daily ritual of dressing is an interesting element and is something I bring out in my own work through daily/weekly/monthly engagement and layering of each piece.

Furthermore, Veleko's images offer insight into both the individual's identity and collective identity as a society in a South African context, because in this series Veleko captured South African residents' street fashion or style, more specifically in Johannesburg. Her works hint towards some moment of the imagination, a creative act of self-fashioning (Mountain 2010: 28). Imagination is a prominent element in my work because I believe that the act of creating involves imagination, and since I am examining how one creates identity through dress by creating work that questions that process, the element of imagination is always present in my practical work. This is a result of working from memory and intuitive mark-making, often incorporated in the background of the work as abstract; the imaginative aspect is depicted as abstract landscapes, spaces, and the surfaces across which identity is created (Figure 30).

In my artistic practice, I depict myself in my own day-to-day outfits alongside what influenced my style – the brands, certain aesthetics and text that narrates these influences. Although I use my own outfits and myself as the subject for the majority of the work, the works do not exclusively speak about my identity, to an extent they also speak to social or collective identity that is a reflection of society. Furthermore, I do not live in a vacuum; I am also part of a collective identity within society and I am influenced by society.

Streetwear is expressed in the street and dress is a very social material or medium because we not only dress for ourselves, but we also dress for others. Thus, the identities expressed have as many social components as they have personal or individual components. Therefore the work also reflects my surroundings (i.e. society and community), which make up the spaces I navigated throughout my process of identity construction and the influence from these spaces that are imbedded in the memory of my (second) skin. In this sense, an individual's identity has two main platforms. The first of them is about the personal and the second is about the social and community (Akdemir 2018).

The majority of the images I reference when making the work are sourced from photographs of myself accumulated over time, depicting my second skin as it is and as I wear it daily, instead of putting together an outfit that is specifically for an artwork that I have not or would not have worn otherwise. This way I can have a more honest depiction of my second skin and what I actually look like on a day-to-day basis in the street. This is because there is no one specific outfit to express the unfixed nature of an individual's identity, due to the fact that it is constantly shifting. Consequently, the exterior or second skin shifts along with it to keep up with the internal shifts and changes an individual experiences. Dress reflects the internal process of identity construction externally while streetwear assists this process by aiding as a 'space' to facilitate the process.

Veleko however, describes her work as “not specific” and although her “work centres around issues of identity through clothing”, she also describes it as “flirting with fashion, politics, tradition, music, graffiti etc.” (Veleko, cited in Shaman 2008: 69). This is another point of interest for me in Veleko's work, as I find similarities in my own work, such as the fact that my work also deals with “issues of identity through clothing” from a personal perspective. More

specifically, my work deals with the role dress plays in the construction of identity, through self-expression in a South African context. My work, however, makes use of myself as the protagonist while Veleko's work focuses on people who roam the streets of Johannesburg.

Enwezor (2006:

32) describes Veleko as "a scavenger of individuality, a hunter of cool street fashion" who "is partial to subjects who express themselves through their social camouflage".

The photographs from Veleko's signature series, *Beauty is in the Eye of the Beholder* depict bold, funky fashion portraits captured on the streets of Johannesburg. Memorable and powerful, her images pose questions around how identity is perceived, and often assumed. At the same time, they also investigate how her subjects use their clothes to construct their guises of identity. My own work seeks to ask these same questions about the formation of identity through one's clothes or rather what we use as part of our second skin (dress) in the process. This experience for me is deeply rooted in memory and partially stems from dissatisfaction with how my identity was perceived incorrectly due to my (first) skin. This I believe is a South African condition as a result of how race and ethnicity (identity) were previously imposed on people by the dominant group at the time, and this encouraged the labelling of people based on their physical features.

Perhaps the strength of Veleko lies in her unique approach to self-imaging through the locally and globally attractive medium of fashion, more specifically streetwear (Mountain, 2010: 121).

In conversation with Shaman, Veleko states:

Although I use myself as an example, and use my life's history of coming from a mixed heritage, I speak to all people. I decided to use clothing as a way of narrating this because all of us wear clothes. This might not be high fashion but we all dress up or down according to our influences, education, religion, etc' (Cited in Shaman).

One of the reasons I also gravitated to clothes is that sense of universal understanding evoked when using a material like clothes, which is something we all have a connection with regardless of our backgrounds. Although we have different forms of dress, as human beings we all wear some sort of dress or bodily covering.

Veleko's bold and lively portraits depicting South African street style from her series *Beauty is in the Eye of the Beholder* attracted a great deal of attention, shifting previous perceptions of Africa as a whole on an international scale. Alongside this, Veleko has also used clothing in order "to deliberately challenge assumptions of identity based on appearances and historical background". Such is evident in her earlier and more personal project from 2002, *www.notblackenough.lolo*, which depicted an exploration of mixed cultural and racial identity through different costumes of role play. The idea of deliberately challenging assumptions of identity is most certainly one that I can relate to in my own experience.

The imaging and imagining of self become tools utilised by Veleko in attempting to reimagine the South African identity out of the gulag of its past. For Veleko this translates into the vivacity and complexity of many selves (Mountain 2010: 38). For many others, such as myself, this was also the case, constructing many selves to escape the misidentification I experienced. I had only realised this at a later stage in my life. However, it was always present to an extent and a contributing factor to my identity construction and my dress. The areas that I have been navigating, the very same spaces that informed this process of construction are all a product of the country's history as if South Africa itself had many selves (spaces) of its own.

Veleko's investigation of her many selves has led to an investigation of others' many selves which in turn has become not only a kind of self-portrait of her own exploration of selves but by and large a self-portrait of the overlapping intricacies of self in us as South Africans (Mountain 2010: 23). Through her works, Veleko challenges notions of post-apartheid self-imaging, the reductive attempt to create unity through diversity and the convolutions of modernity and globalism (Mountain, 2010, 121). This is because South Africa unfortunately suffered an atrocity in the past in the form of apartheid, which greatly distorted the people of colours' sense of identity and self-concept.

Many of the people Veleko has photographed receive persecution every day, even harassment, because of their refusal to simply blend in with the majority of society, and become examples of individuality (Mountain 2010: 21) Veleko's images can only hint at the act of the imagination because, seen in the light of Ashraf Jamal's *Predicaments of Culture in South Africa*, they disappear and fade and the external act of fashion itself can only be the "permanent condition" of "preparation" (Jamal 2005: 16) for the imagination (Mountain, 2010: 28).

To sum up chapter three, dress is explored through streetwear and street style to demonstrate the use of clothes in an everyday sense and outside of the expectations of high fashion. Street style then becomes a space where the interaction of dressed bodies happens on a daily basis as this is the style of the people in the *streets*. This is the everyday style of dress individuals utilise to construct identity. After explaining in the first two chapters the interaction *with* and *through* clothes, the third chapter demonstrates the context in which these interactions take place. This is achieved through the use of a case study of South African photographer Nontsikelelo Veleko's series capturing how everyday people in the streets of Johannesburg use dress to express who they are.

Conclusion

Dress became a place of comfort for me when I did not have that comfort in my own skin, a site of reimagination and creation of self. After not finding that comfort in my (first) skin and growing up feeling uncomfortable in that skin, dress offered me a second chance, a second skin. Unlike the first, the second skin changes along with you and, as the internal shifts, in order to keep up with that, the external shifts along with it. The process of identity construction happens throughout an individual's life and never reaches a point of being fixed, but rather remains in flux.

Dress is evidently an important part of the human experience and has become inseparable from the body; as such it has become an extension of us in many ways. Furthermore, dress is something everybody can relate to and experience as dressed bodies in society and the world. The topic of self is also becoming more prevalent in society, and more people are concerned with their sense of self and identity. Due to this, I believe that the topics discussed in this thesis –dress and identity – play a very significant role in how we experience ourselves and how we experience the world around us. Therefore, clothes are not only a reflection of our individual identities but how we dress is also a reflection of society and the times we live in.

From the internal all the way the way to the external, the process of identity construction is a complex one that can be discussed in more than one way, and from different aspects. However, this thesis focused on the aspect of dress as a second skin and a tool we can utilise to construct our sense of self and identity. When explored in greater depth one can see how dress can be further utilised, as a tool to manage the perception of an individual's identity and how they chose to appear in relation to others or a social context. Before any verbal communication, there is a different type of non-verbal communication that takes place through the medium of clothes. Utilising it as a language, individuals communicate and read how other individuals communicate who they are through dress.

By exploring the ways in which dress forms a relationship with its wearer and vice versa, we can first see that the two have an undeniably intimate relationship and cannot be separated. Therefore it has become clear that although dress does not play the only role in constructing and expressing

one's identity, it does play a significant role and has become an essential part of the body (as a second skin) and human existence as a whole.

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