


HAUNTED THREADS:  
AN EXPLORATION OF TENSION,  
DETERIORATION AND STORYTELLING  
IN GARMENT CONSTRUCTION

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A thesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Master of  
Design.

Figure 1. Ella Cook, *Close Up of Draping*, Silk Chiffon 2025.  
Figure 2. Ella Cook, *Pins in Skirt*, Silk Yoryu, Metal Pins, 2025.

### *Attestation of Authorship*

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted or the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed:

4th May 2025

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# ABSTRACT

This research delves into the nature of deterioration and emotional storytelling in garment construction by exploring how garments can carry a hauntological presence.

My exploration of this focuses on reinterpreting traditional hand-stitching within a 21st-century context, drawing from Arts and Crafts philosophies, artisanal methods, storytelling and the lingering spectres of history.

The work explores how clothing can embody fragility—how it holds spectral traces of time and emotion, blurring the lines between past and present.

The creative inspiration references include Victorian mourning clothes, silhouettes from the late 19th to early 20th centuries, and designer alignments with Yohji Yamamoto, Ann Demeulemeester, John Alexander Skelton, Paul Harnden, Oliver Church and Elena Dawson.

The project examines the interplay between organic disintegration and structured precision through slow, deliberate hand-stitching, controlled seam manipulation and the experimental process of *rétrécirage* (intentionally shrinking and distorting woven wool). I question whether clothing can exist

in the liminal space between control and collapse.

Fashion is more significant than simple body ornamentation; it is a poetic artefact that can hold personal and societal histories in its very fabric.

I am not alone in this quest to bring quality, heritage and narrative contained within clothing to the forefront of conversations around fashion design. The importance of making with integrity is one championed by the designers I align with, and it is becoming increasingly significant in the world today with fast fashion empires like Shein asphyxiating the fashion landscape.

This research contributes to the ongoing conversation around fashion's ability to embody fragility, trauma, and the poetics of decay through interlacing historical references with a contemporary subversion. Can clothing carry ghostly traces of time and emotion? Perhaps fashion is not just a means of dressing but a haunting conversation between history, memory and the body itself.

*Keywords: fashion design, poetic, artisanal, rétrécirage, hauntology, historical hand stitching, arts and craft, spectres, deterioration.*

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## RESEARCH QUESTION

How can the interaction of tension, deterioration and narrative in garment construction materialise a hauntological presence in fashion, evoking fragility, spectral traces of time and memory and emotional impact?

# INTRODUCTION

This research explores how tension, decay and storytelling through garment construction can elicit fragility and ghostly/spectral presence, while addressing hauntological themes of memory, loss and temporality.

Drawing on historical stitching techniques and experimental material processes, the project examines how garments can function as wearable yet haunted artefacts with traces of past wear and emotional imprints.

Reflecting on love's treacherous unravelling and the spectral remains of human connection, the project investigates controlled seam manipulation, wool shrinkage (rétrécirage) and hand-stitching techniques to explore the interplay between structure and collapse, preservation and erosion, on both a physical and theoretical level.

This research sits within an increasingly visible and important movement in contemporary fashion—one that embraces slow, small-scale artisanal production, nostalgic storytelling, visible decay, historical sewing techniques, with the use of vintage or reclaimed fabrics. It investigates how fabric manipulation techniques, auto ethnography, and slow-making practices can create spectral traces of memory and emotion in clothing.

This pre-industrial way of working resonates with many of today's designers; and my take is that it is due to the rise of technology and the

distance that technology brings between the designer and the skills of making. There is so much evolving technology like Clo3D that separates the designer with the materiality of making clothes and sewing machines that complete previously hand done tasks with a complete automation.

This desire and feverishness to bring the hand made skills back and to highlight them once more feels so urgent and meaningful. It is a political endeavour because it says, here is where we went wrong with the invention of machines.

My practice converts poetic and emotional narratives into clothing with methods of textile ageing and distressing techniques to produce lived-in haunted clothing with evocative qualities.

These garments are neither wholly intact nor entirely unravelling, but suspended between states, becoming a visual and tactile articulation of the hauntological.

This research uses hauntology (Derrida, 1993), fashion deconstruction (Evans, 2003) and the philosophy behind the Arts and Crafts movement to position clothing as a poetic form that displays both presence and absence through suspended temporal states.

Aiming to mirror the passage of passing time through a process-driven

approach, and through materials as they shrink and distort, to create clothing artefacts that carry the weathered marks of historical ageing.

Each piece within the collection tells a story, yet collectively, they make up a fragmented narrative, speaking to each other like echoes of a vanished time.

This body of work contributes to contemporary fashion discourse, re-framing historical craftsmanship using a hauntological lens, to reveal how garments can haunt.



# CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND OF INQUIRY

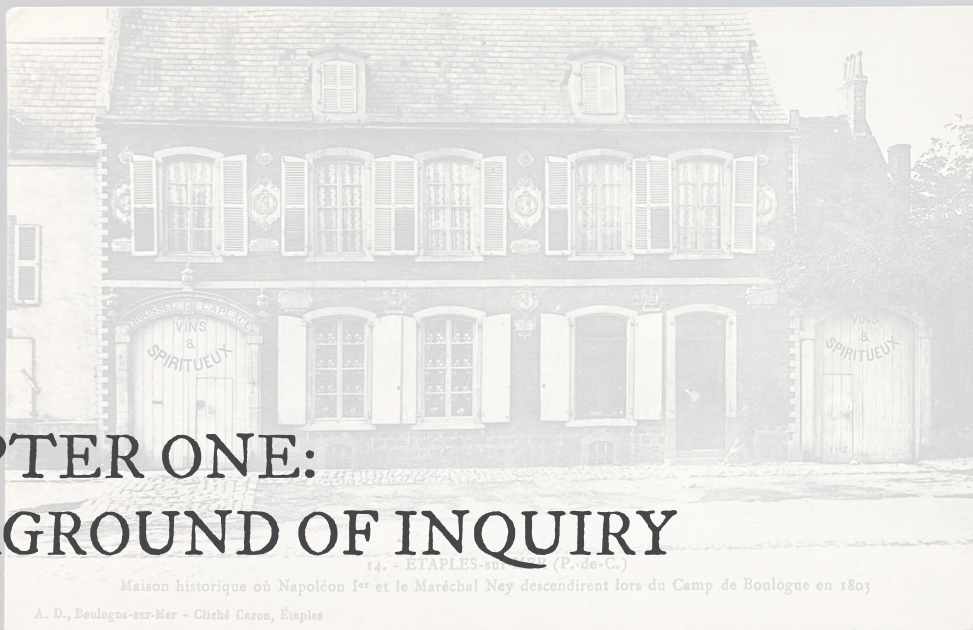


Figure 6. Ella Cook, *Antique Post Cards Collected from Cambridge*, 2025.

# ARTS AND CRAFTS MOVEMENT

The emergence of the Arts and Crafts movement in Britain in the late 19th century signalled the beginning of a shift in society's importance of how things were produced. This societal shift reacted to the negative impacts of industrialisation and the ornamental arts' low status. At this time, post-industrial revolution, there was an increased understanding that values and priorities needed to be made regarding how things were made.<sup>1</sup> The movement revolutionised the design and production of everything from furniture to jewellery. Its key principle was about making things with more integrity.

William Morris was the figurehead during this movement; however, he “only became actively involved with the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society a number of years after it was set up (between 1891 and his death in 1896), but his ideas were hugely influential to the generation of decorative artists whose work it helped publicise.”<sup>2</sup> He felt strongly about the value of making beautiful, well-constructed goods that could be utilised in daily life and produced in a way that allowed their artisans to stay connected with their products and simultaneously with other people.

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<sup>1</sup> Victoria and Albert Museum, “Arts and Crafts: An Introduction,” Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A, 2023), <https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/arts-and-crafts-an-introduction>.

<sup>2</sup> Victoria and Albert Museum, “Arts and Crafts.”

The Arts and Crafts movement was motivated by a conviction in a set of ideals rather than the development of a particular aesthetic look. Even so, this movement had an impact on the fashion industry. Between the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Arts and Crafts practitioners created eye-catching designs for women's clothes, accessories and jewellery while supporting the survival of craft-based enterprises and the Dress Reform Movement.<sup>3</sup>

These ideals and the perspective shift from mass manufacturing back to the days of small-scale craft-based methods are central to the project.

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<sup>3</sup> Victoria and Albert Museum, “How Arts and Crafts Influenced Fashion,” Victoria and Albert Museum, (V&A, 2019), <https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/how-arts-and-crafts-influenced-fashion>.

# JOHN ALEXANDER SKELTON

John Alexander Skelton is a clothing brand started by John Alexander Skelton after graduating from Central Saint Martins. Skelton was born in York and now lives in London where he has his brand.

His design philosophy is what is most relevant to the project. His practice and choices within fashion and how he makes are grounded in his political and societal beliefs. He uses only naturally occurring materials like wool, linen and hand-woven cotton from India (as it uses less water in its production). Working with mills to produce unique fabrics and village artisans to add an extra dyed aspect to the fabrics.

The key aspect with Skelton's work is about engaging with as many hand-sewn practices as possible that are sustainably feasible for him to undertake within each piece. It is about finding the balance between what is nice to have and what is necessary. Skelton said in a live interview (2020) with Charlie Porter that the narrative underpinning all of his collections are "things that have been overlooked that I think should be celebrated."<sup>4</sup>

Skelton's brand is small, and he emphasised that this is what allows him to remain in control of all aspects of the brand so that it keeps its integrity, personal standpoint, and never loses sight of that.

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<sup>4</sup> Fashion Revolution, "JOHN ALEXANDER SKELTON: In Conversation with Charlie Porter," YouTube.com, April 21, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zYNIPxDWwOo>.

Skelton stated: **"If I'm going to produce anything at all, I really want to think about it before I do it."**<sup>5</sup>

I really resonate with this view, and it is an important point of consideration for my own practice. If I am going to put something new into the world it must have a positive impact, be highly considered and not cause further detriment to it.

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<sup>5</sup> Fashion Revolution, "JOHN ALEXANDER SKELTON."

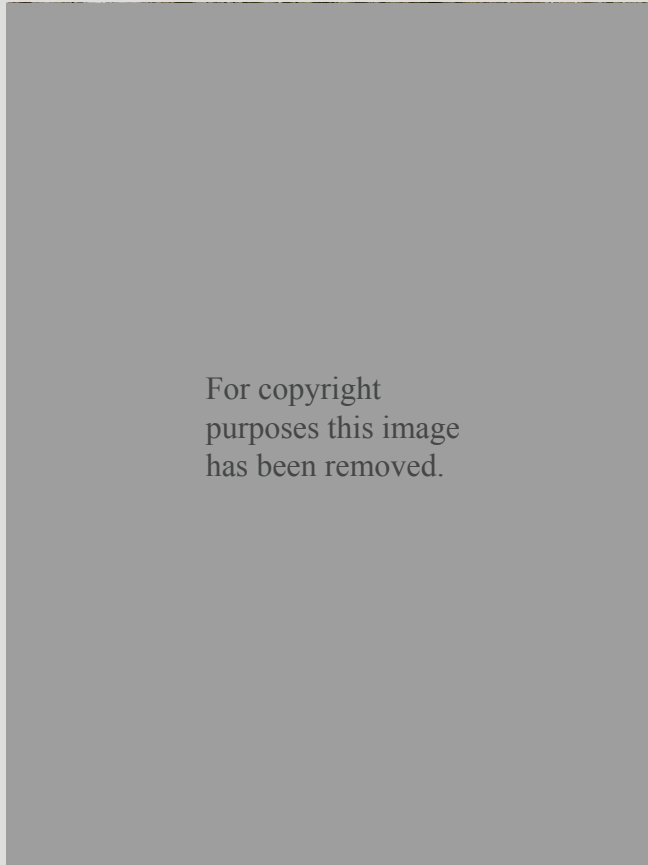


Figure 7. John Alexander Skelton, *Collection XVI*, 2024.

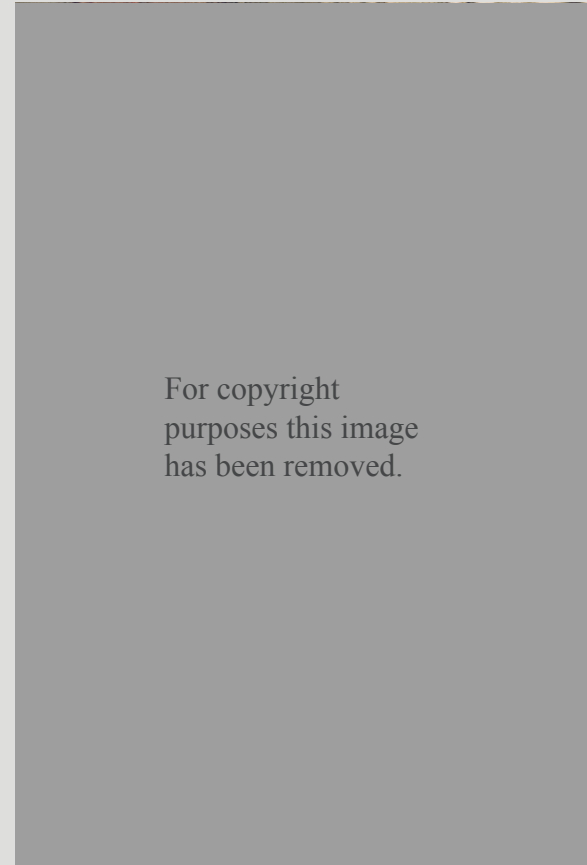


Figure 8. John Alexander Skelton, *Man in long jacket from Collection III*, 2017.

Figure 9. Oliver Church - Singular Garments, Close Up of Label Detail in Long Lined Jacket, French Linen/ Cotton, undated, Online Image.

# OLIVER CHURCH

Oliver Church is a New Zealand born, Paris-based clothing designer who runs his own brand Oliver Church Singular Garments producing singular garments often inspired by historical French workwear silhouettes.

Church is another designer who seems to be influenced by a post-industrial nostalgia for the pre-industrial. He tends to work mostly by hand pouring hours of work into each garment he meticulously creates.

Scouring reclaimed fabrics from vintage markets is his preferred way to source materials for his clothes, “using mostly vintage and antique cottons and linens, often between 50 and 150 years old, which are sourced from markets around Paris.”<sup>6</sup>

Church comments on his reasoning behind sourcing vintage fabric in a Viva article by Jessica Beresford, saying “in France, you can find beautiful old fabrics, either dead-stock or in used condition, that don’t need anything done to them. And the reason these aren’t used more widely is because they’re not suitable to any kind of industrialisation — [brands] would have to accept too many faults and everything has to be standardised. But that’s what I like about them.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Jessica Beresford, “Oliver Church & Emma Songeon Have Advice on How to Dress Sustainably,” NZ Herald (VIVA, December 5, 2022), <http://nzherald.co.nz/viva/fashion/oliver-church-emma-songeon-have-advice-on-how-to-dress-sustainability/16GMLMQEOHAQK7C5N33GI7OXAA/>.

<sup>7</sup> Beresford, “Oliver Church & Emma Songeon.”

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Church’s principles are similar to that of Skelton’s. He would rather prioritise slow fashion practices and making in a sustainable manner than prioritise big commercial success when he says: **“I don’t have intentions to turn my brand into a big business, or to have a fashion empire. I don’t see the point in producing a lot of bad clothes. You could set up a very green business, but then still make a million pieces in a year and I don’t know how sustainable that is.”**<sup>8</sup>

What I appreciate about Church’s work is his commitment to keeping both an unassuming scale and being all handmade. He is cutting and working all the hand-stitches in his garments by himself. It isn’t a big company making large runs of one style, rather made to order or limited drops.

<sup>8</sup> Beresford.

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has been removed.

# HAUNTOLOGY

With the current state of the world, and the overwhelm of mass manufacturing and the steady rise of consumption brought on by the Industrial Revolution (1760-1840), there is a haunting perspective that seeks to characterise the 21st century as a period of both grieving for lost futures and yearning for unrecoverable pasts.

Furthermore, this also ties into a post-industrial nostalgia and desire for the pre-industrial. Hauntology theorises this desire that is silent but nevertheless present and felt.

In *Spectres of Marx* (1993), French philosopher Jacques Derrida proposed the theory of hauntology, which examines how the past lingers in the present and how history, memory and lost futures continue to haunt modern society, art and culture.<sup>9</sup>

Historical allusions, material deterioration and the incomplete or deconstructed form of clothing are ways hauntology can be portrayed in fashion.

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<sup>9</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, 1st ed. (1993; repr., Milton Park: Taylor & Francis Group, 2006): 1–281, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aut/detail.action?docID=668662#>.

### *The Spectral Presence of Craft: Reviving the Past Through Making*

Hauntology is an evocative lens through which the practice is positioned—the garments bearing the haunting spectres of historical artisanal skills that too often give way to more industrialised methods of manufacturing that are infiltrating our fashion design landscape.

Yohji Yamamoto states: **“With my eyes turned to the past, I walk backwards into the future.”**<sup>10</sup>

This thinking fits agreeably with the Arts and Crafts philosophy of resurrecting and re-establishing value for historical crafts. There must always be an eye looking back at what has come before as a guide to where we will go next, a consideration and acknowledgement of the past. I think it is a beautiful sentiment when viewed in this manner.

This mindfulness aligns with the concept of hauntology in that the past is never truly lost. In a fashion context, it can be seen through the revival of slow, intentional garment construction.

Yohji Yamamoto is a designer who often utilises deconstructed tailoring and textural interest with fabric manipulation to explore the notion of clothing as an archive of memory.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Ligaya Salazar, *Yohji Yamamoto* (London: V&A, 2010) 14.

<sup>11</sup> Caroline Evans, *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity and Deathliness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003): 35.

In the 2002 book *Talking to Myself* by Yamamoto and Kiyokazu Washida, Washida speaks about Yamamoto’s ability to capture things in the fleeting moment of ‘now’ and how he faces the future with his back turned towards it.<sup>12</sup>

In regards to this, Yamamoto is quoted in the 1989 Wim Wenders documentary, *Notebook on Cities and Clothes*, saying:

***All I know and all I am capable of understanding is the ‘me’ that is here now, the ‘me’ that has dragged his past with him to this point. So, to borrow a neat turn of phrase, you could say that people in the present are standing in a window on the past and on the future; you might say that they live their lives balancing themselves between these two sides.***<sup>13</sup>

Yamamoto’s work starts with either the fabric or the form. In the documentary, he debates which truly comes first for him, ultimately deciding it must be touch first and then form follows.

His philosophy is that fabrics will tell you how they want to behave, “fabric is everything. Often, I tell my pattern makers to just listen to the material.

<sup>12</sup> Kiyokazu Washida and Yohji Yamamoto, *Talking to Myself* (Milano: Carla Sozzani Editore & Yohji Yamamoto Inc, 2002): 2.

<sup>13</sup> *Notebook on Cities and Clothes*, directed by Wim Wenders (DVD, Axiom Films, 1989).

What is it going to say? Just wait. Probably, the material will teach you something.”<sup>14</sup>

Letting the material speak for itself is central to this project as I traverse a new area with experimental fabric draping.

Wenders (1989) comments about a shirt and jacket he purchased from Yamamoto’s line: “From the beginning they were new and old at the same time.”<sup>15</sup> As depicted in August Sander’s photographs of working-class people in his book *People of the 20th Century*, the clothes are humble, showing traces of wear and tear and a lived-in quality. Hinting to evidence of a life it has lived and the stories that lie within.

My own exploration also incorporates broken needle embroidery, hand-stitched seams and *rétrécirage* (shrinkage processes) to make the garments feel like they belong to a different era, neither entirely historical nor completely contemporary.

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<sup>14</sup> Salazar, *Yohji Yamamoto*, 14.

<sup>15</sup> *Notebook on Cities and Clothes*.

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Figure 11. Yohji  
Yamamoto,  
*Autumn/Winter  
2024-25 Collection:  
Jacket*, 2024,  
Online Image.

For copyright  
purposes this image  
has been removed.

Figure 12.  
August Sander,  
*People of the  
Twentieth  
Century: Gypsy*,  
1930, Gelatin  
Silver Print.

## *Lost Futures*

In the 2014 book, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures* English writer and philosopher Mark Fisher contends that our present is shaped by the loss of potential futures that we have been denied and deprived of.

The point is made in his 2012 journal article “What Is Hauntology?” When he states: **“The future is always experienced as a haunting: as a virtuality that already impinges on the present, conditioning expectations and motivating cultural production.”**<sup>16</sup>

There is also this consequential haunting of the future that looms over us now; in a post-industrial climate where mass manufacturing is plummeting the world towards climate crisis, one cannot help but feel the ominous haunting of the lost future. Fisher (2014) also makes the claim that:

***20th-century experimental culture was seized by a recombinatorial delirium, which made it feel as if newness was infinitely available, the 21st Century is oppressed by a crushing sense of finitude and exhaustion. It does not feel like the future. Alternatively, it does not feel as if the 21st Century has started yet. We remain trapped in the 20th Century.***<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Mark Fisher, “What Is Hauntology?,” *Film Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (September 2012): 16.

<sup>17</sup> Mark Fisher, *The Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures* (Hampshire, UK: Zero Books, 2014): 18.

As a designer in this paradigm/landscape, I am driven by an urge to revive pre-industrial techniques and a wish to grasp nostalgia. A purist perspective on fashion design perhaps? Nevertheless, there is something to be said about this postmodern anachronistic fascination with craft fever, which is reviving traditional techniques/methods of making echoed by designers like John Alexander Skelton, Oliver Church, Elena Dawson and Paul Harnden.

In my clothing artefacts I explore this concept, as they act as an encounter with broken time (trapped in the 20th century) through unfinished hems, raw edges, ethereal fabrics, slow hand-sewing methods: garments that seem in a state of flux suspended between being finished and unfinished, like memories shifting and disintegrating, haunted by what once was.

Australian activist-poet Natalie Harkin talks about how archival erasure threatens the loss of knowledge, contributing to this ominous landscape of a ruptured future. Her conversation is discussed through an epistemology of haunting. Harkin distinguishes in her 2014 article “The Poetics of (Re) Mapping The Archives: Memory in the Blood:”

***We are presently haunted by what has been excluded in the colonial record...the interrogation of what is remembered and what is not known: the recovery of the forgotten and the revelation of the act of forgetting; and what transpires in our***

*attempts to disrupt...national amnesia.*<sup>18</sup>

The omissions from the colonial record oppress specific groups, primarily indigenous women. These people were often the knowledge holders of craft-based skills within communities, so if their knowledge is disregarded, then we will find ourselves in a time where there is a deficit of this tacit knowledge. Derrida's theory links to Harkin's, when he says that:

*The modus operandi of silence and forgetting in consignment of the archive rebreeds these silences. It frames what is consigned to the archive as a unified whole and suppresses what is left out; discards it; denies its existence, so it is consigned to the world of oblivion.*<sup>19</sup>

This is a powerful idea that aligns with this project. If we continue to perpetuate this oppressive cycle of knowledge, it will fade into oblivion. In this instance, concerning fashion and garment construction, reviving craft and refocusing on quality construction and hand-sewing skills is of heightened importance to change the fate of these techniques.

<sup>18</sup> Natalie Harkin, "The Poetics of (Re)Mapping Archives: Memory in the Blood," *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature* 14, no. 3 (September 16, 2014): 8.

<sup>19</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (1996; repr., Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998): 7, <https://doi.org/10.2307/465144>.



Figure 13. Ella Cook, *Close Up of Buried Skirt*, Buried Silk Yoryu, Metal Pins, 2025.



Figure 14. Ella Cook, *Close Up of Skirt Detail*, Silk Mesh, Cotton Thread, 2025.



Figure 15. Ella Cook, *Distressed Hem of Skirt*, Silk Mesh, 2025.

### ***Garments as Ghostly Narratives: Clothing as Storyteller***

As Derrida's hauntology argues, the past never truly disappears; this project acknowledges garments as storytellers that recall and bear the weight of history and emotions.

Clothes are a second skin, an extension of the self that contains personal and societal histories.

Through integrating unfinished hems, aged fabrics and layered distressing, the artefacts in this series contribute to the concept that clothing has a spectral presence, much like personal memories that are neither entirely whole nor wholly lost. It is my aim that each garment in this collection communicates with one another, creating a dialogue of memory fragments.

# CONCEPTUAL FASHION/ EMOTIONAL DESIGN

## *Clothing as a Carrier of Emotion*

Clothing can be an archive of time, emotion and memories. This project has allowed me to channel these things into creative practice.

Trauma is an intriguing temporal experience that is a focus of the work. Past events continue to impact the present—those who have experienced trauma worry that the traumatic event may occur again. Trauma, from my perspective, is intrinsically tied with hauntology. Derrida argues that to exist is to be haunted, and that each person is a sum of their history.<sup>20</sup>

A connection then forms between the notion of hauntology and the lived experience of trauma. This is reflected in the language used when speaking about a negative or painful experience—we often say that we are ‘haunted’ by it or that the experience will ‘come back to haunt us.’ Therefore, hauntology is felt, even if not entirely understood by most. Our past traumas haunt us and they linger, affecting our present and leaving us yearning for a different future.

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<sup>20</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, ed. Bernd Magnus and Stephen Cullenberg, trans. Peggy Kamuf (2006; repr., London: Routledge, 2012), 22–24, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aut/reader.action?docID=668662>.

# WHISPERS OF WORN THREADS

In a room where shadows entwine,  
Two figures dance, but not divine.

A love once dazzling, now frayed at seams,  
Their whispered words become harsh screams.

Under the gloom of a stormy sky,  
Petrichor lingers as tears run dry.

The air is heavy, a storm's embrace,  
Yet love is lost in this fractured space.

Fingers wrench at garments tight,  
A battle waged in fading light.

Hearts once laced now pulled apart,  
Leaving scars on the skin and heart.

A pulverising voice, a thunderous clash,  
Minds caught in a tempest's thrash.

Concrete bears witness, cold and grey,  
To lovers' fall, their joy in decay.

Grazing the ground, the fabric tears,  
Bleeding hues as the end nears.



Figure 16. Ella Cook, *Close Up of Sequined Blouse*, Embroidered Silk Yoryu, 2025.

The poem *Whispers of Worn Threads* was inspired by my personal experience of a breaking point during a tumultuous relationship I was in. The poem's verses speak to a conflict during a violent altercation that strained and ultimately broke apart the relationship.

The verses "love once dazzling now frayed at seams" and "love is lost in this fractured space" speak to a deterioration of affection and the emotional toll the unravelling relationship took on the protagonist. Delicate bonds that form the foundation of any good relationship were strained to their limits. Trust was broken, as conveyed in the lines "Hearts once laced now pulled apart, Leaving scars on the skin and heart."

The poem offers inspiration to pull on when thinking about translating these traumatic emotions into garment design, and an origin story/scene within which they can fit.

One can only evoke emotion in a viewer/wearer if they know what that emotion feels like at its deepest. My experience has meant I have felt the depth of these feelings and therefore can attempt to conjure and evoke them.

*Whispers of Worn Threads* is my description of the emotions I felt, and the clothing are artefacts representing those traumatic emotions that have haunted me.

Clothing is undeniably able to touch our senses and portray these feelings because **"they are the mediating layer between our bodies and the world; we feel, smell and see them as they form a membrane between self and world, enveloping us, touching us."**<sup>21</sup>

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21 Louise Crewe, *The Geographies of Fashion: Consumption, Space and Value* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017).

## Deconstruction

In “Deconstruction Fashion: The Making of Unfinished, Decomposing and Re-assembled Clothes,” Professor Alison Gill explores the notion of deconstruction within fashion by looking at contemporary designers like Martin Margiela and Ann Demeulemeester. Gill defines deconstruction as “the dismantling of clothes and the embodiment of aestheticised non functionality.”<sup>22</sup>

Deconstruction is discursive; Gill quotes American fashion commentator Amy Spindler, who said it is “the undoing of fashion as we have known it.”<sup>23</sup> Deconstruction is a **“critique of the fashion system: it displays an almost x-ray capability to reveal the enabling conditions of fashion’s bewitching charms.”**<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Alison Gill, “Deconstruction Fashion: The Making of Unfinished, Decomposing and Re-Assembled Clothes,” *Fashion Theory* 2, no.1 (February 1998): 25–26, <https://doi.org/10.2752/136270498779754489>.

<sup>23</sup> Gill, “Deconstruction Fashion, 26.”

<sup>24</sup> Gill, 28.

As Gill points out, the fashion-making process is typically unidirectional—cut, sew, finish—but deconstruction turns this on its head. It becomes bi-directional and ironically, an elevated level of knowledge around construction is required.

Given the project, Gill’s exploration of deconstruction through philosophy and fashion practice is compelling. Deconstruction in the form of deterioration will be engaged in the project, for example ageing garments to make them appear older or worn in, or deconstructing pants to reconstruct as a vest.

Hauntology similarly investigates the incomplete, fractured and eroded—ideas important to deconstructionist designers such as Margiela and Rei Kawakubo. Margiela’s use of exposed seams and rough edges depicts clothes as an incomplete process.



Figure 17. Ella Cook, *Deconstructing Old Trousers*, Wool Herringbone Tweed, 2024.

Similarly, the combination of controlled seams and unravelling edges in the creative practice produces visual and material tension—clothing that seems meticulously constructed and deconstructed, held together while coming undone.

This duality echoes the emotional issues addressed in *Whispers of Worn Threads* as relationships degrade, leaving only phantom remnants of what once was.



Figure 18. Ella Cook, *Reconstructed Vest - Open*, Wool Herringbone Tweed, 2024.



Figure 19. Ella Cook, *Reconstructed Vest - Belted*, Wool Herringbone Tweed, 2024.

### ***Disgusting Fashion and Soma***

A doctoral student at Cyprus University of Technology, Danae Ioannou, talks about an intriguing concept called the ‘disgusting soma’ which she philosophically unpacks in her 2023 article “Negative Aesthetics, Grotesque Bodies and Disgusting Fashion in the 21st Century.”

Negative aesthetics are about aesthetic objects that are “painful, distressing or repellent.”<sup>25</sup> Ioannou states, ‘disgusting fashion’ is “clothing linked to negative emotions such as horror, fear and repulsion.”<sup>26</sup> Often, this feeling is associated with clothing because of its effect on the wearer, for example: restricting them, or making them seem distorted and deformed.

A soma (based on philosophy professor and movement theorist Thomas Hanna’s somatics theory) is the conceptual body instead of the physical. Disgust is, in a way, a protection of the body’s health. When the body is portrayed in a disgusting state the immediate connotation is negative. There is often a leap of the human mind to connect gross and repelling things with being substandard.

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<sup>25</sup> Danae Ioannou, “Negative Aesthetics, Grotesque Bodies and Disgusting Fashion in the 21st Century,” *ZoneModa Journal* 13, no. 1S (October 23, 2023): 66, <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.2611-0563/17944>.

<sup>26</sup> Ioannou, “Negative Aesthetics”, 66.

Within fashion, the concept of a disgusting soma can be applied in a few ways:

- ***Clothing whose subject is disgusting and whose vehicles are disgusting.***
- ***Clothing whose subject is not disgusting and whose vehicles are disgusting.***
- ***Clothes whose subject is disgusting and whose vehicles are not disgusting.***<sup>27</sup>

There can be traces of a body left on garments that can make them sticky, odorous and repulsive. Alexander McQueen was a designer who played with disgusting soma, and explored the grotesque through garment design, for example his *Highland Rape* Autumn/Winter 1995 Collection.

*Whispers of Worn Threads* draws a connection to this concept of disgusting soma in the emotional rupture that occurs and is elucidated in the verse “Fingers tug at garments tight, A battle waged in the fading light.” This shows how clothing can carry the remnants of past experiences, becoming victims of struggle and a battleground where they

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<sup>27</sup> Ioannou, “Negative Aesthetics,” 68.

are clutched and tugged at as a violent argument throws people around.

The poem is harsh and raw, describing a subject that is disgusting and personally traumatic. While the vehicles used to portray this in clothing construction may not always be disgusting, the philosophical concept of the disgusting soma is central to this project.

The relevance of this concept to the project is how disgust can be provoked in a viewer through different approaches - one more subtle and nuanced, or one more blatant and obvious. My approach will be more subtle and in line with this statement of Ioannou's, "clothing can elicit disgust because it reminds or refers to morally disgusting actions. In this case, the subject is disgusting, but the vehicle is not."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ioannou, "Negative Aesthetics," 68.



Figure 20. Ella Cook, *Detail of Patches on Blouse, Buried Cotton*, 2025.

If you want to evoke emotion in a viewer/wearer, you need to know what that emotion feels like at its depth.

my own stories & emotions

intimate → anonymous

"Clothes touch our senses; they are the mediating layer between our bodies and the world; we feel, smell, and see them as they form a membrane between self and world, enveloping us, touching us" Louise Crew

catharsis

emotional evocation

a collection

vulnerability & real life events

re-written & re-contextualised

feeling of time moving for everyone else but I am stuck.

the breaking down of self

sinister violation of soul

terrified fear doubt  
sadness anger confusion

betrayed

destroyed

trepidation

optimism  
hope

renewal transformation

i didn't deserve to know what that feels like

violence

knuckle Velvet - Ethel Cain

'I'd lost myself in the abyss of ...again.'

being somewhere physically but not mentally present. extracting the mind from the body.

over brimming present with the haunted past.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE PATH TAKEN

flow of collection

I am finally becoming the person I want to be and all it ever cost me is everything I ever was.

the abyss - sphere of annihilation

darkly enigmatic

breaking down of past  
degradation

psychology of clothing

Being  
You can feel all of your feelings

Figure 21. Ella Cook, *Mind Map of Emotional Concept*, 2024.

# METHODOLOGY

I believe that a revival of hand-craft techniques in a time of mass consumption and industrialised large-scale manufacturing provides a provocation for thinking and making designs outside of a commercial framework.

The practice engages with multiple research methodologies: practice-based research, material-led research, auto-ethnographic/reflective practice, historical research and philosophical research to examine how tension, deterioration and storytelling in garment creation can conjure a hauntological presence in fashion.

Practice-based research forms the foundations of this project with knowledge gained through an iterative process of making. The creative practice is the primary site of research. By interacting with fabric manipulation methods such as wool shrinkage, controlled seam manipulation and historical hand stitching, the study emphasises a material-led approach that allows textiles to drive form, tension and change. It starts with the fabric, letting that lead how it will be draped or constructed, and into what shape/silhouette.

The auto-ethnographic and reflective practice component places the designer's personal experiences at the centre of inquiry. The practice becomes profoundly personal and entails self-reflection on the act of creation, decision-making processes and how clothes evolve as emotional and narrative artefacts.

Historical research design is “a methodological approach that investigates and interprets past events, cultures and phenomena through the analysis of historical sources.”<sup>29</sup> It is about investigating the past to produce conclusions that may be utilised in the present or future. This study uses this methodology to investigate traditional slow-hand-sewing techniques and historical garment production methods in the Victorian/Edwardian period to draw connections between previous practices and modern experimental methods.

This project's conceptual framework is based on a philosophical research approach incorporating hauntology, deconstruction, and the theory of the disgusting soma. This entails the application of Jacques Derrida's hauntology in *Specters of Marx*, Natalie Harkin's take on hauntology and blood memory, Danae Ioannou's negative aesthetics and the disgusting soma, deconstruction theory, the palimpsestic nature of textiles, and the relation between absence and presence in fashion. This philosophical research enables deeper consideration of the critical theoretical frameworks that direct the practice.

These methodologies unite to form a cohesive research framework between material inquiry, critical reflection, historical grounding and philosophical theorisation. Thus presenting clothes as material artefacts and spectral hauntings.

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<sup>29</sup> Dr. Syed Hafeez Ahmad, “An Introduction to Historical Research Design,” Exploringacademia.com, March 17, 2017, <https://exploringacademia.com/introduction-to-historical-research-design>.

# METHODS

## *Design Process: Creation as Catharsis*

At the start of 2024 I went through a confronting time in my life due to a tumultuous relationship that led to an incident of physical abuse.

“I lost myself in the abyss of someone else’s tyranny” (Cassandra Giovanni) and experienced the stages of grief, having lost myself and someone I thought I loved.

It broke me down to the core and was a sinister violation of myself and my affection for another person. It left me with a lot of trauma and fear. I could not deal with these feelings for some time, but I realised this could be explored through my fashion design as a catharsis to channel those feelings into a meaningful and liberating outcome.

This project is innately personal because it is my experience. However, I also wanted to create a narrative that told my story in a way that did not have to be so evident and specific to myself. Therefore, I crafted a poem to be the project’s unpinning narrative – *Whispers of Worn Threads* and the garments became the vessels and artefacts that tell this story.

## *A Reflection on Catharsis and Self-Indulgence*

Thinking about how this project is a cathartic experience made me consider whether I was allowing it to become too self-indulgent in its processes.

**However, that also begs the question, is art not inherently self-indulgent?**

Furthermore, as a designer, should I not allow myself that moment of self-indulgence within my practice because as much as the artwork created is for others, it is also for myself.



Figure 22. Ella Cook, *Sketch of Hands Wrapping around Back*, Charcoal, Pencil, 2024.

### *My 'House Codes' or 'Designer Handwriting'*

- \* Curated found/antique/second-hand/dead-stock materials and buttons.
- \* Textile sensibility - shrinkage, texture, feel, palimpsestic textiles.
- \* Honouring historical construction techniques - hand stitching.
- \* Engaging with the weathering of garments – the patina.
- \* Narrative-driven design: a personal narrative, in this case drawing upon my experiences of relationship trauma.
- \* Fascination with symbols of Catholicism through growing up in a Catholic school environment.

- \* Deep interest in Victorian period/European centric styles through a 2023 trip to Europe with my Mum that influenced my aesthetic design and the desire to connect with traditional historical ways of making (Venice and Burano the lace making island).
- \* Opulent relics of the past, and the melancholic romance in the clothes.
- \* My hand doing the making - hand-sewing was something introduced to me by my Nanna (Robin Daggar) who enjoys hand-sewing and often sits with me and helps me with pieces I am working on.



Figure 23. Robin Daggar, *Kay Pyne wearing Fox Fur Stole*, 1950, Film Photo, Personal archive.



Figure 24. Robin Daggar, *Kay Pyne*, 1932, Film Photo, Personal archive.



Figure 25. Robin Daggar, *Mabel Helena Wilson with Aidan May Frances Lanham*, 1942, Film Photo, Personal archive.

### *Connection to Lineage...*

My great grandmother (Kay Pyne) worked as a tailor's assistant and was an incredible dressmaker. She would do a lot of hand stitching work on clothes she made. For me to work in this way, alongside her daughter (my nanna), feels like a homage to her. A lady I never got to meet but feel a sense of connection to through my practice.



Figure 26. Robin Daggar, *Mabel Wilson, Aunty May and her daughter Aidan walking on Queen Street Dunedin, 1939*, Film Photo, Personal archive.



Figure 27. Robin Daggar, *Kay Pyne in Handmade White Jacket and Dress, 1939*, Film Photo, Personal archive.



Figure 28. Robin Daggar, *Mabel Helena Wilson - Mother to May and Kay Wilson, 1910*, Film Photo, Personal archive.

### ***Mind Mapping: Threads of Thought***

Central to design thinking is the method of mind mapping. The Interaction Design Foundation – IxDF, describes mind maps as “tools that empower designers to visually structure information and organise it in a clear way.”<sup>30</sup> This method’s benefit is in the ability to “find relationships, prioritise information and create logical flows within their designs.”<sup>31</sup> Mind mapping is a key method for me. It helps untangle my mind by laying everything out clearly on a page. It often helps to draw connections between ideas and form a broader field around whatever project I am working on. This often translates into a visual mind map/mood board of imagery related to the content of the mind map.

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<sup>30</sup> Interaction Design Foundation - IxDF, “What Are Mind Maps?,” The Interaction Design Foundation, June 6, 2016, <https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/topics/mind-maps>.

<sup>31</sup> IxDF, “What Are Mind Maps?”

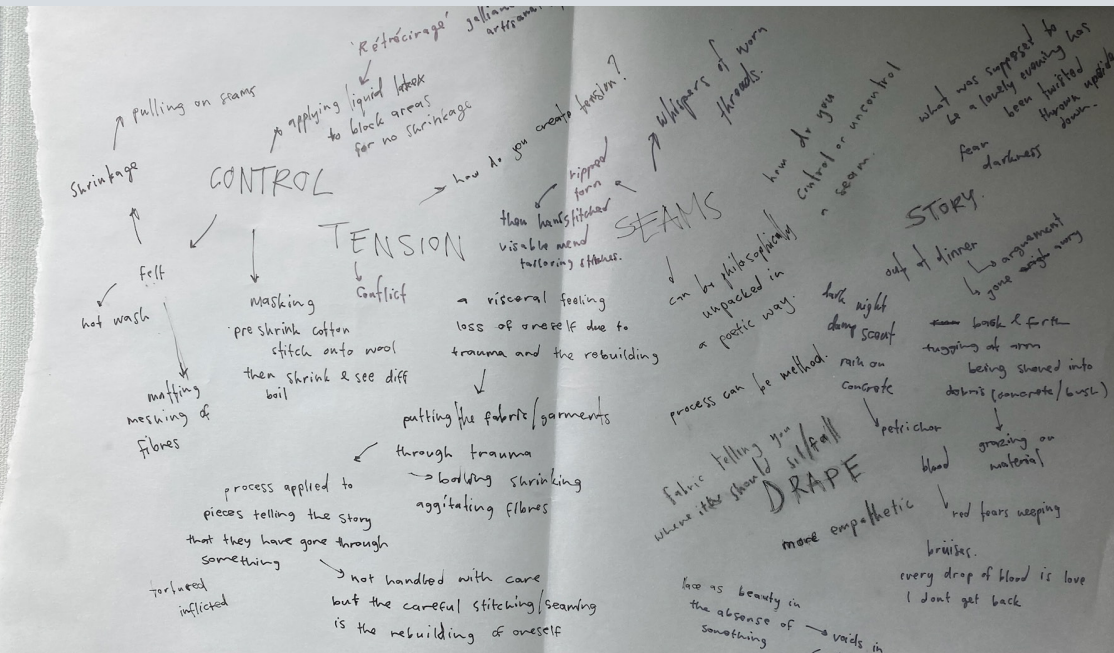


Figure 29. Ella Cook, *Mind Map of Storytelling in Garment Construction*, 2024.

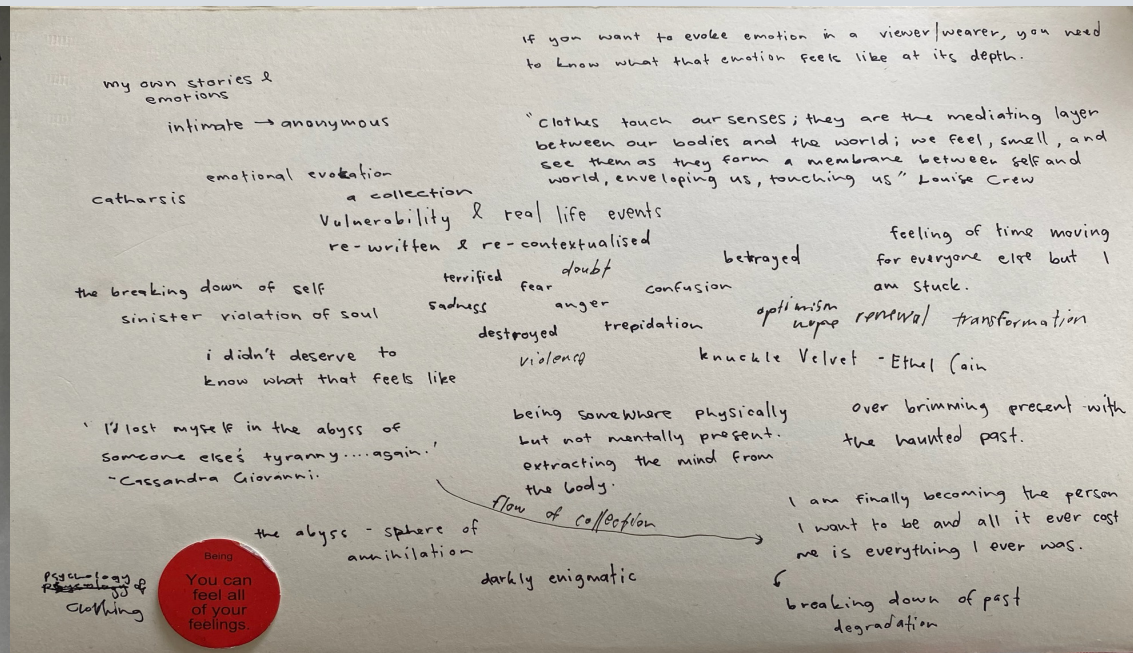


Figure 30. Ella Cook, *Mind Map of Emotional Concept 2*, 2024.

### *Unravel, Refine, Repeat: The Poetics of Iteration*

Prototyping is the iterative process of making and actualising the design or idea by physically presenting it in a tactile, moveable and testable form.

**“Prototypes evoke a focused discussion because the phenomenon is actualised...[they] confront the world because the theory behind the artefact, the idea, is no longer abstract.”<sup>32</sup>**

Prototyping will be engaged throughout the designing and making stages of the project.

Prototyping includes design sketches, mood boards, stitching samples of different techniques, calico toiles. These all allow me, the researcher/designer, to test the scale of stitching techniques, placement on a design, the pattern/fit of a garment, material and techniques for deterioration.

This is a crucial method for the project and any fashion design project, as without this prototyping stage, the outcome would not be as considered and tested.

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<sup>32</sup> Elizabeth B.-N. Sanders and Pieter Jan Stappers, “Probes, Toolkits and Prototypes: Three Approaches to Making in Codesigning,”

*CoDesign* 10, no. 1 (January 2, 2014): 6, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15710882.2014.888183>.

### ***Craft Contextualisation: Hand Stitching and the Mark of the Maker***

Craft contextualisation is key to exploring how hand-stitched seams, deconstruction and historical techniques can embody tension, decay and spectral presence.

Hand-stitching is an intentional, slow-making process that embeds labour, imperfection and traces of time into garments.

Through this project, I have found a love for this way of making by hand, often desiring to find how to hand-stitch a seam or detail rather than using the sewing machine. Hand-stitching allows me a moment of peace in which to come back to myself.

This has meant things have taken a lot longer to complete, but it has also given the work a beautiful quality that is non-replicable by an industrial machine. These garments are bespoke artefacts, the construction is often laborious and time-consuming, and the fabrics are unique and expensive.

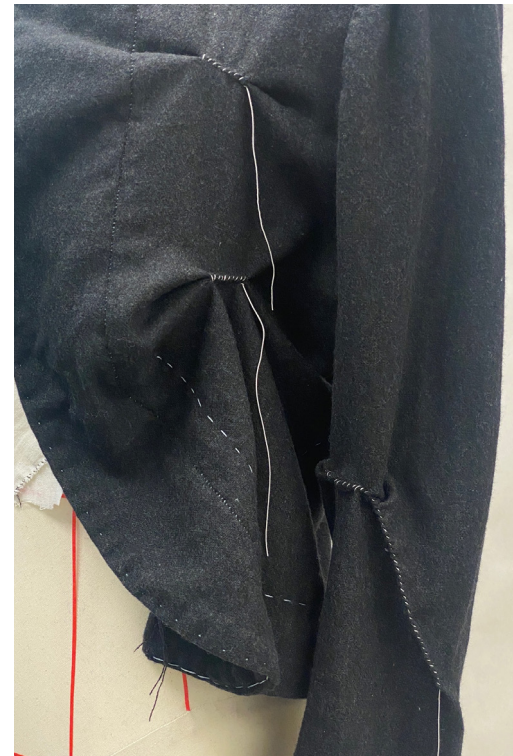


Figure 31. Ella Cook, *Whip Stitch Detail on Jacket*, Wool Gaberdine, 2024.

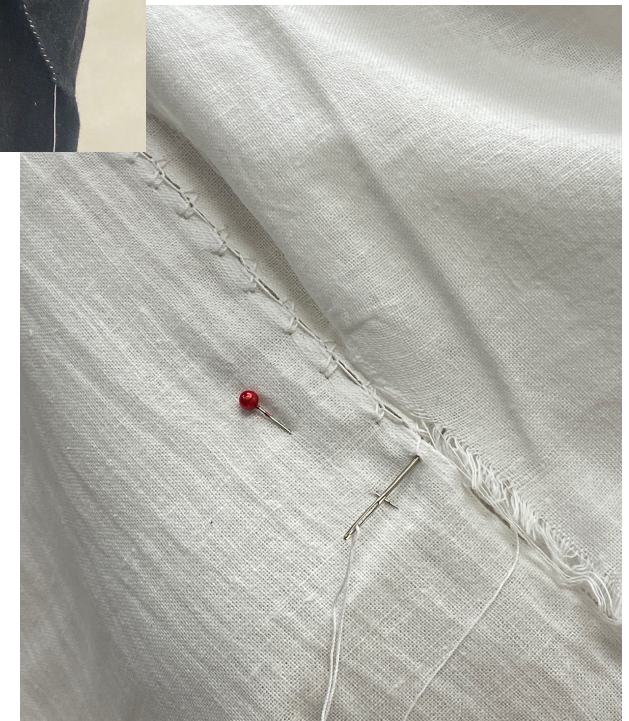


Figure 32. Ella Cook, *Cretan Insertion Stitch*, Cotton, 2024.



Figure 33. Ella Cook, *Close Up of Hand Stitching Work - Pick Stitch, Plaited Insertion Stitch*, Cotton, Antique Lace, 2025.



Figure 34. Ella Cook, *Close Up of Hand Stitching Work - Whip Stitch*, Embroidered Silk, 2025.



Stitches I have used to convey emotion and engage with the theoretical elements of the project:

- \* Whip stitch and overcast stitch – used as a decorative element to create a scar-like appearance on garments with loose threads hanging down to suggest the potential unravelling of the scar, exposing the wound below. This has been added to darts so that when the fabric is laid flat, it pulls at the stitching, leaving bars of stitching down the dart leg.

- \* Gathering, cartridge pleating & knife pleating – throughout the brown silk skirt the fabric has been draped in controlled knife pleat folds. These knife pleats create constricted sections which have been juxtaposed with loosened, freely draped areas of voluminous folds that give a bustle effect. Cartridge pleating involves running three parallel lines of 5mm spaced running stitches which are then equally gathered to form pleats. This style of pleating is reminiscent of 19th century sewing and has been explored through my Victorian style shirt with hand pleated cuffs.

- \* Raw edges & pick stitching – within the range of garments, some have high-level finishes and pick stitching, which is a tailoring technique for keeping the edges of a jacket or other garment sitting as they are supposed to. While others have untouched raw edges, creating a conflict between finished and unfinished, adding to the hauntological presence of garments in flux.

Figure 35. Ella Cook, *1900s Inspired Shirt - Garment Washed*, Cotton, Antique Lace, Metal Buttons, 2025.

### ***Textile Manipulation in Garment Design: Tension Between Control and Unravelling***

Deconstruction within fashion design is about challenging norms and breaking down the traditional forms of garment construction. It often involves unfinished/raw details and fragmented/exposed seams that reveal the inner structure of the garment.

This study investigates how fabric distressing, shrinkage and weathering can capture the passage of time in textiles. I have been inspired by bespoke tailoring techniques (hand-stitching) and John Galliano's Maison Margiela Spring/Summer 2024 Artisanal show where the clothes are supposed to seem as if they have been left in the rain for too long, seized up and shrunken by time. This technique of *rétrécirage* enables garments to act like haunted objects.

Much like palimpsests that retain ghostly imprints of previous writings, these garments' fabrics can hold traces of wear, distress, trauma and imagined histories.

Broken needle embroidery is another interesting fabric manipulation method. It is where a broken sewing needle is punctured through fabric using the sewing machine. It creates snags and holes in the fabric.

This is a kind of 'anti embroidery' and deconstructs the traditional notion of embroidery by creating a cloth that is beautifully damaged.

Figure 36. Ella  
Cook, *Broken  
Needle Embroidery*,  
Cotton, 2025.





POST CARD.

THE ADDRESS TO BE WRITTEN ON THIS SIDE.



## CHAPTER THREE: ECHOES OF MAKING

*I am in the company of others who labour creatively as visual artists, poets, writers, intellectuals and who labour creatively in the everyday-mundane. We are haunted and we haunt. We write to create, to survive and to revolutionise; we write to haunt and we ache because we refuse to leave the past alone... We dig up the archives and project them to reclaim places and voices, to invoke memory in our blood, to reveal what is missing in all the gaps, cracks and in-between silences.<sup>33</sup> – Natalie Harkin.*

<sup>33</sup> Harkin, "The Poetics of (Re)Mapping Archives," 10.

## ***Burial***

I explored the method of clothing burial because I was interested in looking at how I could age a garment that was newly produced and how could I make it look lived in or deteriorated.

I brainstormed several ways I could tackle this, but after researching Hussein Chalayan's 1993 *Tangent Flows* Collection, I decided to employ his method of clothing burial. Chalayan's graduate collection displayed garments he had made and then buried for months before unearthing them before the show.

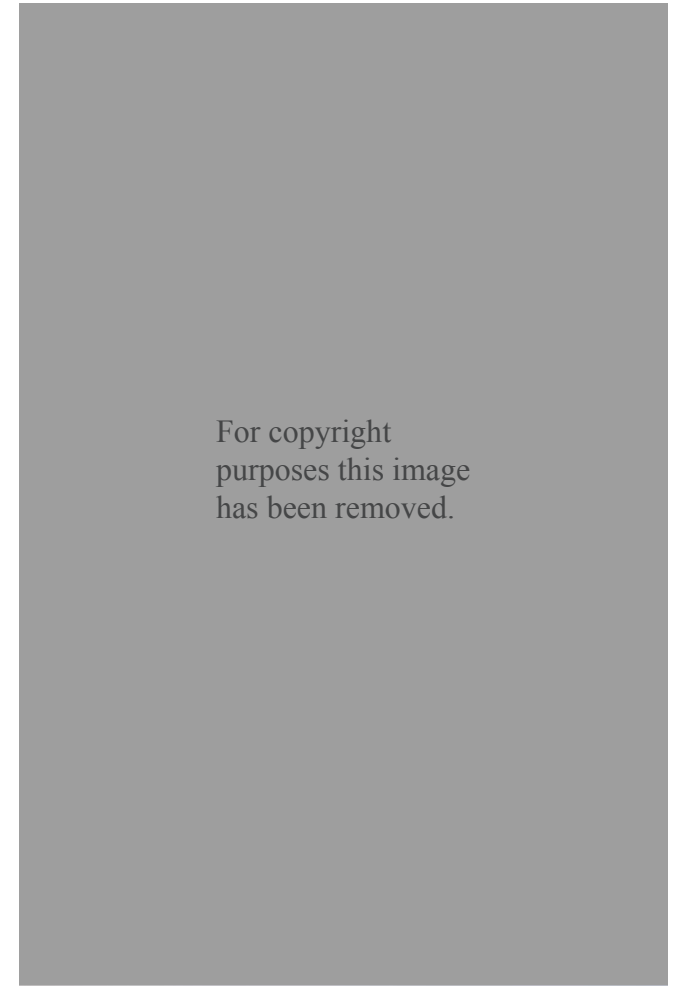
Upon reading more about Chalayan's methods, I discovered that he buried the garments with iron filings to get the effect of rust stains. The process of oxidisation that occurs between the iron filings and the earth gives the fabric this beautiful patina.

The process of digging up dirt, laying out the cloth, scattering iron filings for rapid oxidisation, and replacing the dirt on top felt ritualistic – perhaps not dissimilar to a Māori Hangi - letting

the earth cook the cloth below the surface. Then came the unearthing and the expectations that loomed in that moment.

## ***How This Plays into the Work Now***

Post-construction meant the garments needed the treatment of distressing and burial to give them that worn-down patina stain and a haunting sensibility. The process of layering these treatments on to the constructed garments is like a palimpsest.



For copyright purposes this image has been removed.

Figure 38. Hussein Chalayan, *The Tangent Flows - Buried Vest*, 1993. Photograph by Ellen Sampson.

*Thoughts and reminiscence...  
The Cyclical Nature of Time*

Looking back on this process I undertook, I felt emotional. The act of the burial became a full-circle moment in my thesis project because the last time I engaged in that practice was the day the argument broke out, which led to the physical abuse and turmoil that followed. That day was the end of things but also the genesis of this project and the themes that would prevail throughout the following year. I have been on a journey with it ever since.

To get to this point where I can undertake another burial process on a garment with a new concept, at a point in my life where things are resolved to the level they have, feels beautiful. It was a complete full-circle moment and I am proud of myself for getting to the position I am in now. It makes me consider the power of the spirit to keep moving forward, resolve conflicts, overcome things, and become stronger for them. It is not just about the act of burying clothes in soil, it is a statement about my journey, and it feels special.



Figure 39. Ella Cook, *Burying Blouse in Garden*, Cotton, Iron Filings, 2025.



Figure 40. Ella Cook, *Unearthing Garments from Garden - 3 Weeks Later*, Silk Yoryu, 2025.



Figure 41. Ella Cook, *Buried Blouse - 3 Weeks in Ground*, Cotton, Iron Filings, Salt, Water/Vinegar Solution, 2025.

### *An Exploration of Lace and Ceramics*

I am endlessly intrigued by lace, its fragility and beauty. It is intricately detailed and laboriously crafted by artisans with generations of practice and skill. Lace is fascinating for what is not there; the nature of its shadowy intricate voids brings the pattern to life. It becomes a metaphor for the beauty in the absence of things.

*And when you left  
You left lace everywhere*

I like the idea that there is beauty in absence. Maybe we become like lace in our lives as things come and go. Perhaps that makes us more fragile as people—fragile like lace, like porcelain. I explored the intersection of lace (doilies) and ceramics (ceramic slip); merging these two mediums using ceramic slip-on lace doilies to mould into 3d forms. I also experimented with chain and wire, creating similar doily forms.

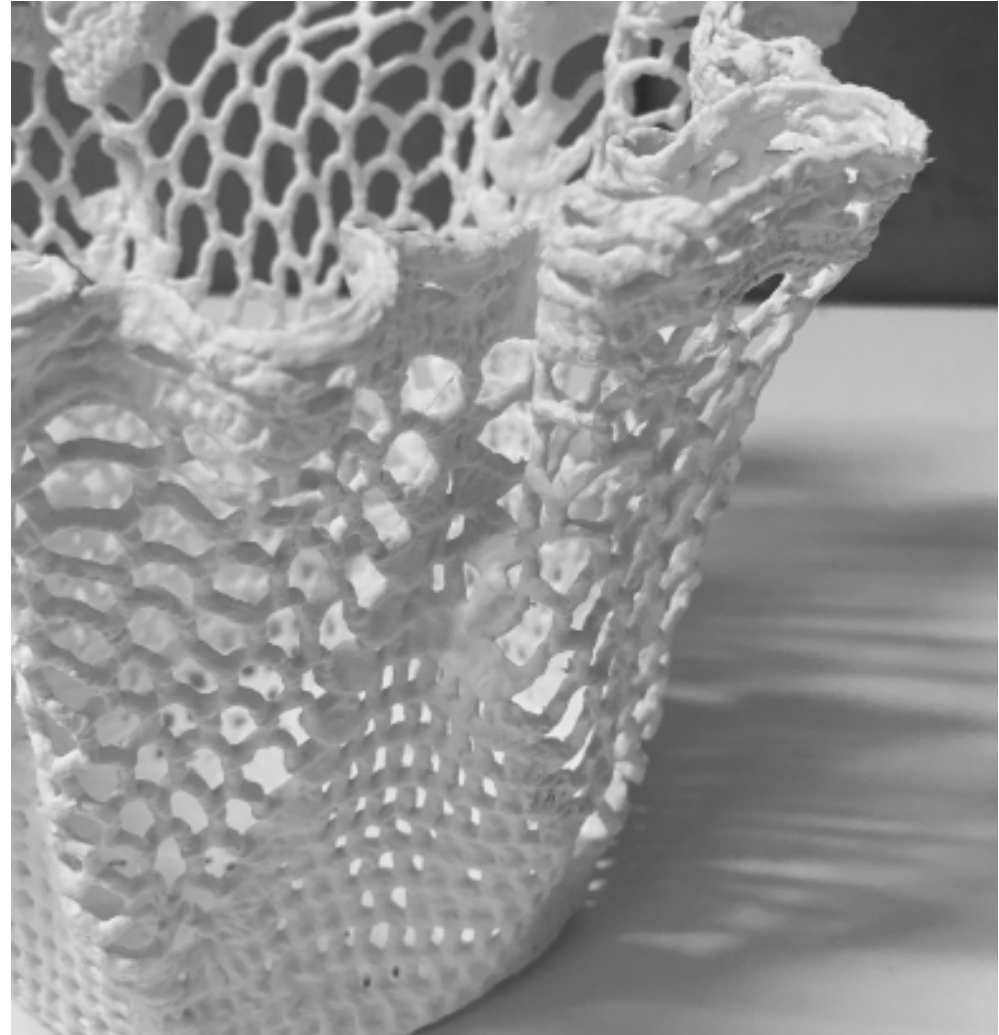


Figure 42. Ella Cook, *Ceramic Doily*, Hand Crocheted, Ceramic Slip, 2024.

## Mood Board One

Mood boards are a productive way through which I find and communicate the visual language and aesthetics of a project. I often collate images that help convey a sense or feeling related to a project. It is said that mood boards can “assist in the transmission of a mindset or vision by aligning the different stakeholders and getting them on the same wavelength.”<sup>34</sup> As a visual person I find the collection of images the most efficient way to portray this feeling to others. The first mood board was created immediately following the poem. I worked with the poem in mind to create a visual depiction of the scenery and ambience surrounding it. Bill Henson’s photography from 1998 (exhibited March-April 2000) was influential and I deeply connected with its sensibility.

Henson’s work was melancholic, imbued with a haunting presence which resonated with me immediately. The adolescent female pictured in a lot of the imagery seems vulnerable, and something is unsettling about her expression. She has a deep sadness – a coming-of-age fragility mixed with an eerie stillness. It is like she has something to tell the onlooker but feels unable to do so. Henson’s subjects often appear lost in thought, their expressions unreadable and their bodies often half cast in shadow, half illuminated by light (a method called *chiaroscuro*). Looking at these images, I felt as though I was stepping back into the remembered moments of my traumatic personal experiences as they lingered on the precipice of disappearance.

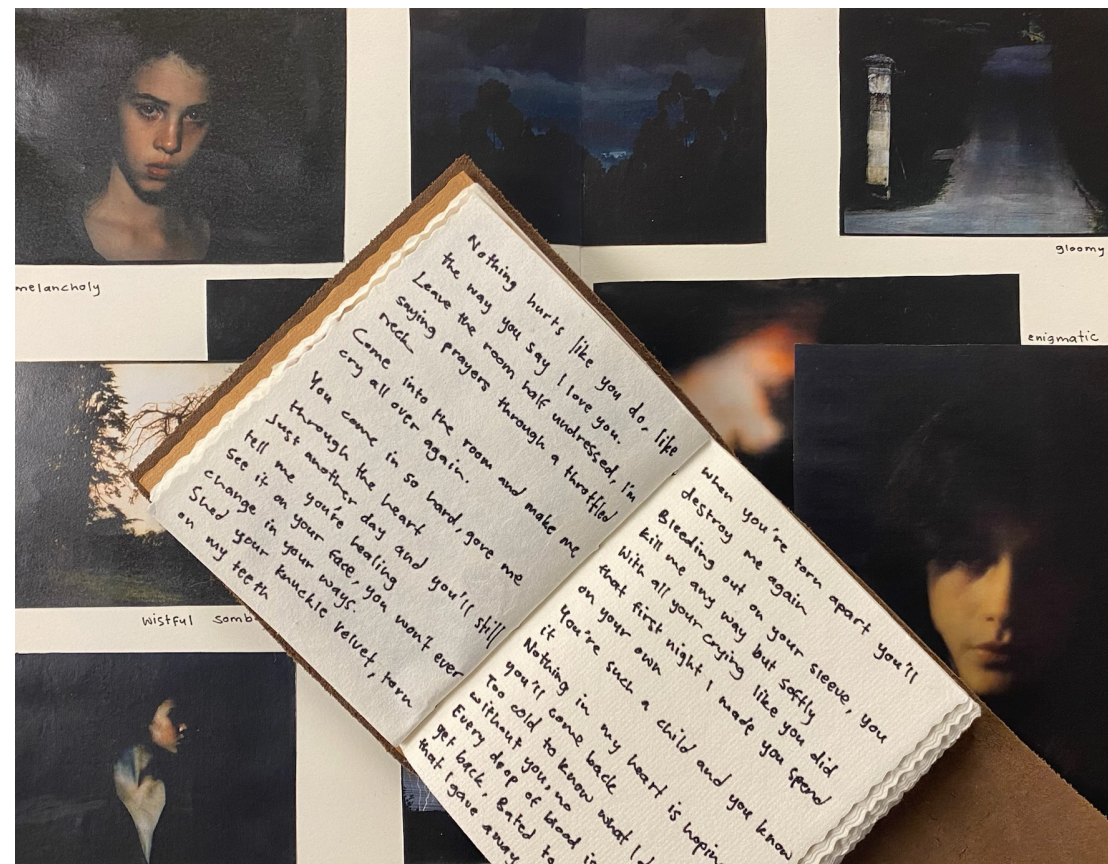


Figure 43. Ella Cook, *Mood Board - Bill Henson's Photography and Notebook with Lyrics from 'Knuckle Velvet' by Ethel Cain*, Printed Images, 2024.

34 Andrés Lucero, “Framing, Aligning, Paradoxing, Abstracting, and Directing: How Design Mood Boards Work,” *Designing Interactive Systems*, June 2012, 438–47, <https://doi.org/10.1145/2317956.2318021>.



## Millinery Experimentation

The Victorian mourning period inspired me to experiment with creating a headpiece. The reason this was explored was because I felt there was a strong connection between Victorian mourning and this project. Clothing was used as a public display of grief, loss and sorrow. Black clothing and veils acted as both a physical and mental shroud that were worn for up to a year or the rest of one's lifetime. It was known that "the recommended length of time for mourning a parent or child was one year, six to nine months for a grandparent, and six months for a sibling."<sup>35</sup> It symbolised carrying the past with you into the future.

I found a vintage pillbox hat I could use as the base for a form to sit on. I then shaped and contorted some black sinamay fabric to create a shape reminiscent of the mourning headdresses I had seen. Victorian veils and garments are strict about symmetry. I wanted to subvert that in my work and play with asymmetry and off-kilter sculpting of the sinamay to suggest an unravelling of tradition.

<sup>35</sup> Dawn Reid Brean, "Memory and Mourning: Death in the Gilded Age," The Frick Pittsburgh, September 19, 2019, <https://www.thefrickpittsburgh.org/Story-Memory-and-Mourning-Death-in-the-Gilded-Age>.



Figure 45. Ella Cook,  
*Sculptural Head Piece*,  
Sinamay, Vintage  
Pillbox Hat, 2024.

## Rétrécirage: Maison Margiela Artisanal Collection 2024

*Rétrécirage* is a new cutting-edge technique in which a tweed garment is strategically placed with elements of glue and fine wool crêpe which shrink the cloth when boiled and suppresses the volume into a specific shape. Through this process, anatomical or coquettish sweetheart shapes take form in tailored silhouettes, framed by an illustrative shoulder line. *Rétrécirage* – derived from the French term for shrinking – is employed in tweed jackets and skirt-suits, some constructed inside-out.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Maison Margiela, "Press Release Artisanal Collection 2024" (Maison Margiela, January 2024), [https://www.showstudio.com/cms/documents/2782/MM\\_PRESS\\_RELEASE\\_ARTISANAL\\_2024.pdf](https://www.showstudio.com/cms/documents/2782/MM_PRESS_RELEASE_ARTISANAL_2024.pdf).



Figure 46. Maison Margiela, *Shrunkn Jacket and Glue Pattern for Rétrécirage Technique*, 2024. Retrieved from: *Maison Margiela Artisanal 2024 'Nighthawk'*, YouTube, [https://youtu.be/d13q-V-FBRk?si=DHmXM8Fd\\_CFUW4ol&t=2193](https://youtu.be/d13q-V-FBRk?si=DHmXM8Fd_CFUW4ol&t=2193)



Figure 47. Ella Cook, *Shrunken Jacket with Whip Stitch - Front*, Wool Gaberdine, 2024.



Figure 48. Ella Cook, *Shrunken Jacket with Whip Stitch - Side*, Wool Gaberdine, 2024.



Figure 49. *Shrunken Jacket with Whip Stitch - Back*, Wool Gaberdine, 2024.



Figure 50. Ella Cook, *Buttons*, Metal, Savant Pacific, 2025.

### *Fabrics*

Looking at this array of fabrics, it is no secret that I have a deep infatuation with textiles and fibres. It all starts with the fabric. I meticulously trawl fabric rolls in search of something special and unique. I look for wools with a textural quality, silks with a soft hand feel or embellished with exquisite beading and linens that have a body but also the ability to soften with wear. The buttons have come from savant pacific and some have been tarnished with liver of sulphur solution.

It is a calculated decision process and a coordination of a colour palette. Ice blues, greys and chocolate browns are the main highlights. Collecting fabric is collecting stories, whether it is dead-stock, old kimono fabric, or scraps found at an antique store; I present not just fabric to the viewer but an offering.



Figure 51. Ella Cook, *Collection of Fabrics - Dead-Stock, Found, Antique*, Wool, Silk, Linen, 2025.



Figure 52. Ella Cook, *Folded Collection of Fabrics - Dead-Stock, Found, Antique*, Wool, Silk, Linen, 2025.



Figure 53. Ella Cook, *Collection of Fabrics Samples*, Silk, Wool, 2025.

***A love letter from me to you that speaks in quiet textures.***

The garments are experiential and have a sense of soul (past lives, haunted, spectres of a lost future) which comes not only from the form they take but also from the fabric they are comprised. This is why the fabric selection and balance of textural qualities, the hand feel and weight are critical. It is also through wearing them and understanding the work as a whole that this is felt.



Figure 54. Ella Cook, *100% Silk Fabric with Sequins and Embroidery: Dead-Stock from Lillian Khallouf*, Silk Yoryu, 2025.



Figure 55. Ella Cook, *100% Linen Fabric with Overlock Stitch*, Antique Linen, 2025.



Figure 56. Ella Cook, *Doro-Oshima/Mud Dyed Fabric from Asia Gallery*, Silk, 2024.



Figure 57. Ella Cook, *Pleated Skirt Made from Doro-Oshima Fabric*, Silk, 2024.

## *Draping*

Draping is a technique of dressmaking that involves creating a garment by working directly on the mannequin/stand.<sup>37</sup> It allows for a more three-dimensional approach with all sides of the garment observed as you drape to create a more interesting unique silhouette. I feel it tends to be more playful or intuitive which aligns with the emotional aspect of my practice.

Renowned couturier Madeleine Vionnet is known for her exquisite bias draping work in the early 20th century and gave this method of making its prominence.<sup>38</sup> This came at a time when women were exploring less restrictive garment silhouettes and her flowing bias cuts were the perfect answer to this.<sup>39</sup>

I have explored draping on the bias using silk fabric as it lends itself to this soft, ethereal style of garment.

<sup>37</sup> DOT School of Design, "Draping: Unravelling the Elegance of Fabric Manipulation," Medium, November 7, 2023, <https://medium.com/@dotsod/draping-unraveling-the-elegance-of-fabric-manipulation-88312f69f67b>.

<sup>38</sup> DOT School of Design, "Draping: Unravelling the Elegance."

<sup>39</sup> Gaylene McCaw, "The Art of Draping," CAFA Fashion College & Sewing School, Sydney, January 15, 2021, <https://www.couturearts.com.au/blog/fabric-draping>.



Figure 58. Ella Cook, *Draped Dress - Back View*, Silk, Dead-Stock from Lillian Khallouf, 2025.

### *The Stories In The Garments*

The silk draped dress I have titled ‘Ghost of Lost Futures’ embodies the concept of Lost Futures. This piece, in figure 59 and 60, essentially plays the character of the apparition that is haunting the present. The spectral omen that returns to highlight how we have tried to erase the historical in favour of industrialised processes.

The dress is asymmetrically draped and has a hem that spirals around the body elongating the figure. The use of bias draping allows for a beautiful flow and movement to the dress that gives it a fluttering ghostly quality, which is important given the contextual themes. I have hand sewn ties that wrap around the body which holds the drapes in position. This method of securing the draping means that a corset isn’t required. It was important to me this garment be as non-restrictive as possible because of its connection to ghostly spectres. It is sheer which creates an intimacy to the body and a revealing purity to it.

This is the opener and creates a foreshadowing effect for narrative arc that follows with the more historical pieces that show the specific sewing techniques and silhouettes that are repressed by commodity culture.



Figure 59. Ella Cook,  
*Draped Dress - Front  
View, Silk, 2025.*



Figure 60. Ella Cook,  
*Draped Dress - Front  
Side View, Silk, 2025.*

The draped silk blouse with sequinned vines to me feels poetic; speaking to themes of romanticism, an innocence through its delicate nature and transparency. It has an opulence to it.

The higher neckline and cowl back is echoed from the dress showing a connection in design features, but this piece progresses the storyline further with its front detailing.

The focal point is the front of the garment where folds have been secured with whip stitches creating a warped silhouette. This distortion is a connection to the poem's verse: "Fingers wrench at garments tight." It is a subtle gesture of someone clutching at their stomach, drawing the centre of their blouse in.



Figure 61. Ella Cook, *Shoulder Hand Stitched Seam*, Silk, 2025.



Figure 62. Ella Cook, *Draped Top - Side View*, Silk, 2025.

Figure 63. Ella Cook, *Buried Grey Skirt - Side View*, Buried Silk Yoryu, 2025.



Figure 64. *Buried Grey Skirt - Close Up of Staining*, Buried Silk Yoryu, 2025.

The grey silk skirt experiments with a bias drape with pins rusted in place securing the seams. The only stitched component is the hook and eye closures done by hand. Its ‘seams’ unconventionally spiral down the skirt splitting and slashing at the hem.

The closeness to the figure gives the garment a soft compression of form. I wanted the skirt to sit close to the body to have a level of intimacy with it which juxtaposes the grittiness of the burial treatment – linking to the disgusting soma. It has been buried for 3 weeks alongside the white bias-cut blouse. These pieces both speak to the emotional aspects of trauma; the breaking down of a relationship and self but ultimately endurance and resilience to hold on despite it all. The burial has made them a physical manifestation of fragility; they rip if handled harshly and this ephemerality poetically shows how they have changed.

Figure 65. Ella Cook, *Buried Grey Skirt - Back View*, Buried Silk Yoryu, 2025.



Figure 66. Ella Cook,  
Buried Grey Skirt -  
Staining and Holes  
Caused by Burial  
Process, Buried Silk  
Yoryu, 2025.



Figure 67. Ella Cook, *Washed Jacket with Hand Stitching* - Open View, Wool, Metal Buttons, 2025.

The woollen jackets shrunk through wash cycles are laden with hand stitching work. The jackets, which is one of my favourite garments to make, are explorations of how fabric can warp and tighten with shrinking making them appear aged, worn or mistreated. There is a contextual connection to the disgusting soma and also a connection to each other as pieces in the series. They serve to contrast the softly draped garments and provide a provocation and consideration of techniques. They each take a long time to produce from pattern drafting through to all the hand stitched details like buttonholes and pick stitching. The Arts and Crafts philosophy is deeply imbued into them.

The garments all function as wearable pieces because I believe it is necessary for clothes to be worn and continue their story with the wearer. I hope there is a femininity that is felt even within the more tailored pieces – my values, the women in my life and even those no longer with me, have impacted how I make clothes and I hope this is felt. I intentionally reduce the emphasis on proportion in order to shift focus away from dramatised silhouettes and to elevate other aspects of my work like the texture and intricacies of stitching. Therefore, I hope these garments make the wearer take a conscious moment to look at the handwork within them and appreciate them as repositories of memory.





Figure 68. Ella Cook, *Washed Jacket with Hand Stitching - Closed View*, Wool, Metal Buttons, 2025.

Figure 69. Ella Cook, *Shrunken Jacket - Closed View*, Wool, Rabbit Fur Brooch, Metal Buttons, 2025.



Figure 70. Ella Cook, *Shrunken Jacket - Back View*, Wool, 2025.

# CARTE POSTALE

CORRESPONDANCE

ADRESSE

M

CHAPTER FOUR:  
DRAWING A CLOSE

# CONCLUSION

This research project, ‘Haunted Threads – a Study of Tension, Deterioration and Storytelling in Garment Construction’ has explored how tension, deterioration and narrative in garment construction can manifest a hauntological presence in fashion, evoking fragility, spectral traces of time and emotional resonance.

I have found that material-led experimentation, controlled deterioration and hand stitching practices have allowed me to explore these themes in clothing. Resulting in a series of garments that exist as living relics—archives of the past brought into the present, shifting and unravelling as they are worn.

This series also follows the arc of opulent draping and sheer transparencies to more gritty buried fabrics then textural wools. The silhouettes also get progressively more fitted and tailored as the narrative hones in on the details within the garments to tell the story.

I cultivated a deeper understanding of the contexts of: hauntology, pre-industrial nostalgia, the arts and crafts movement, conceptual fashion, and somatics concerning fashion. This study has demonstrated that clothing can serve as a palimpsest, bearing the weight of theoretical concepts overlaid with imprints of personal memory.

The tension between control and dissolution and between restriction and

release has been explored in practice through techniques of wool shrinkage and manipulated seams, and in the choice of fabrics. This has created garments that do not remain fixed, but instead continue to tell their stories through time as they gain further patina or deteriorate and break with wear.

Therefore, the role of the wearer is intrinsic to this process. These garments do not merely clothe the body they respond, shift and erode. They record a passage of time, like fabric-bound spectres, and are archives themselves. They are both personal and conceptual - worn objects that materialise hauntological ghosts of experience shaped by those who wear them.

By bridging and existing in the liminal space between artisanal craftsmanship and conceptual fashion, this research contributes to a broader discourse on fashion as poetic medium—one that is not static or dismissive of the past but in constant dialogue with it.

It asks:

- \* How does a garment remember?
- \* How does it decay and evolve?
- \* What story does it tell and how does it bear witness to the body it holds?
- \* How does the body enact on it?

In a world with globalised mass production, climate change and over-

consumption of material goods, there is a collective desire and yearning for garments made by the hand with integrity and embedded with historical narrative. There is an urgency to this feeling, an awareness of an impending doom and an emerging ethos about how garments should be made because it does affect us now. The state of the world is not something that we are projecting will happen—it is happening.

There is an unequivocal desire to return to the hand made, things with a beautiful tactile sensibility. My garments embody this aesthetic and it is one I align with socially and politically. It is a quiet resistance and form of activism. A rejection of mass production and trend-driven capitalism. It values the meticulous labour of artisans who craft in this way, it values history and the tacit knowledge of our ancestors.

The research is meaningful because it investigates fashion's conceptual ability to express memory, emotion and preserve histories, in addition to the typical glorification of aesthetic value. I have investigated how clothes may preserve time, convey personal narratives and blur the distinction between garments and ghosts. And in doing so, it challenges fashion's fleeting nature and prioritises slow craftsmanship, which is increasingly important in today's fast-paced landscape.

Connecting the wearer to the maker through the handmade details will make the clothing feel personal. There is significance in investigating how clothing ages, evolves and can portray a hauntological presence, as it lends weight to the stories hidden within garments of those who laboriously constructed them have to tell.

I am drawn to create garments that feel like relics that have endured something. In the end, these garments are never truly finished and I hope they continue to unravel, deteriorate with wear and share with the wearer the ghostly secrets that lie within their seams.

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Figure 72. Ella Cook,  
*Haunted Threads Collection*  
*Thus Far*, April 2025.



# APPENDIX - FURTHER EXPLANATION

## *Burial Experimentation*

As part of the textile manipulation processes for Haunted Threads, a series of burial trials were undertaken to explore how oxidation through iron filings and soil interaction could affect different fabric types. The aim was to test how material deterioration could become an active storytelling device, aligning with the project's core themes of tension, trauma, and transformation.

The first trial involved burying two fabric samples: a cotton/linen blend and wool roving. These were buried in compact, clay-heavy garden soil during a rainy period for a duration of one week. Upon excavation, the cotton/linen sample showed light staining, suggesting early signs of oxidation, whereas the wool exhibited minimal visible change—appearing only soiled rather than chemically altered. This led to the observation that plant-based fibres responded more visibly to oxidation in these conditions than protein-based ones like wool.

For the second trial, a cotton shirt was buried for two weeks in a swampier, moisture-retaining area of the garden. Additional iron filings were incorporated into the burial. The results were markedly more successful: rust stains were more pronounced and distributed across the garment. Notably, the most intense staining appeared in areas where iron filings had direct contact with the fabric, whereas unstained areas revealed the limitations of passive exposure. This experiment



Figure 73. Ella Cook, *Cotton/Linen burial sample*, March 2024.



Figure 74. Ella Cook, *Wool Roving burial sample*, March 2024.



Figure 75. Ella Cook, *Cotton Shirt Washing Post-Burial*, April 2024.



Figure 76. Ella Cook, *Buried Cotton Shirt*, April 2024.

highlighted the importance of targeted layering for effective oxidisation.

In the final trial, a hand-stitched cotton top and a silk skirt (seamed together only with pins) were buried together using a more methodical approach. The same swampy location was used, but a 50/50 solution of water and white vinegar, along with table salt, was introduced to accelerate the rusting process. The burial was carefully layered: first the soil was wetted with the solution, followed by the cotton top laid flat, then iron filings, salt, more solution, and additional soil—repeated for the silk skirt in this same manner. These were left buried for one month to maximise deterioration within project timeline's.

Upon excavation, the results were highly effective. The garments exhibited widespread rusting and staining. The silk skirt had developed a mottled appearance, and the rusted pins clung to the fragile grey silk, embedding further visual narrative. The rust formed hard, textured crusts, and attempts to clean the garments often resulted in tearing—revealing the extent of material degradation. The cotton top similarly showed comprehensive staining, with a soft rust wash even in areas with less direct contact. Both fabrics had become brittle and were partially torn, but this was embraced as an opportunity for visible mending and material storytelling through patching and repair.



Figure 77. Ella Cook, *Iron Filings, Table Salt and Water Vinegar Solution for Burial*, March 2025.



Figure 78. Ella Cook, *Hole in Garden for Burial*, March 2025.



Figure 79. Ella Cook, *Burial Location*, March 2025.

This series of burial trials contributed significantly to the conceptual aims of the project, physically embedding the garments with evidence of time, damage, and transformation. The results were not only visually evocative but also metaphorically rich, reinforcing the narrative of resilience through deterioration.

*Burial Method Imagery*

Figure 80. Ella Cook, *Cotton Top Placed in Hole*, March 2025.



Figure 81. Ella Cook, *Iron Scattered on Cotton Top*, March 2025.



Figure 82. Ella Cook, *Table Salt Scattered on Cotton Top*, March 2025.



Figure 83. Ella Cook, *Vinegar Solution Layered on Cotton Top*, March 2025.



Figure 84. Ella Cook, *Soil Layered on Cotton Top*, March 2025.



Figure 85. Ella Cook, *Soil Dampened*, March 2025.



Figure 86. Ella Cook, *Silk Skirt Spread over Dirt*, March 2025.



Figure 87. Ella Cook, *Iron Filings Scattered over Silk Skirt*, March 2025.



Figure 88. Ella Cook, *Vinegar Solution Scattered over Silk Skirt*, March 2025.



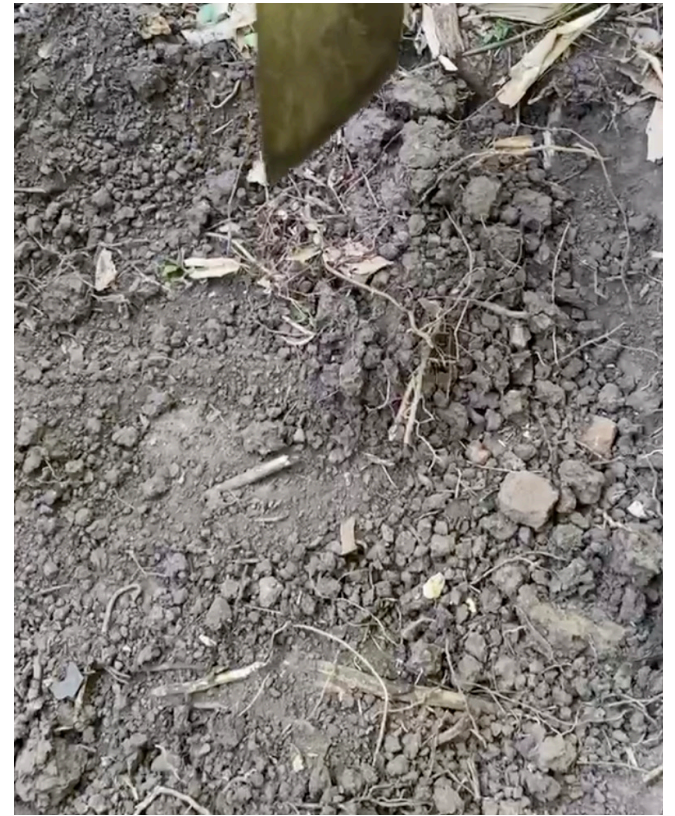
Figure 89. Ella Cook, *Table Salt Spread over Silk Skirt*, March 2025.



Figure 90. Ella Cook, *Soil Spread over Silk Skirt*, March 2025.



Figure 91. Ella Cook, *Soil Fully Covered Over*, March 2025.



# CONCLUDING ARC FOR THE PROJECT

This project explored the intersections of garment construction, deterioration, and storytelling through a hauntological lens. The outcomes reflect a sustained engagement with themes of slowness, impermanence, and pre-industrial making techniques, approached as methodology and metaphor.

The most resolved works—particularly the shrunken, tailored wool jackets—clearly synthesise conceptual intention and material execution. Other garments, such as the draped pieces revealed the critical role of embodiment and movement in the communication of material narratives.

A key insight gained through this research has been the value of process over perfection. Not all of the garments were fully realised, specific ideas remained deliberately unresolved. Limitations—including time, material availability, and physical constraints—shaped the project, yet also offered opportunities for discovery.

Time constraints restricted the number of toiles and iterations and limited the ability to explore more material processes, such as more natural dyeing or longer-term burial experiments. Some ideas, such as integrating oral histories or collaborating with craftspeople who preserve traditional techniques, had to be set aside due to logistical and monetary limitations. Material availability also played a role; much of the work relied on found, recycled, or dead-stock textiles, which sometimes dictated design outcomes rather than

purely conceptual intent.

On a methodological level, the balance between practice and written reflection proved challenging. While the making process was highly intuitive and emotionally driven, documenting and critically analysing that process in real time was more difficult. As a result, some decisions, particularly those related to form, were made through embodied knowledge or intuitive response, and later had to be reverse-analysed for inclusion in the exegesis. Additionally, not all garments were as fully realised as others. Some garments remain incomplete or conceptually underdeveloped, yet still contribute to the overall narrative by embodying the project's core themes of fragmentation and deterioration.

Rather than detracting from the research, these limitations hold true to the central premise: that imperfection, incompleteness, and deterioration are valid and powerful storytelling tools within garment construction. Elucidating the fact that unfinished garments can articulate themes of deterioration and memory just as powerfully as fully completed works. They also revealed important questions for future investigation, including integrating lived experience, community craft histories, and archival silence into a more expansive research project.

Positioned within the discourse of slow fashion and craft revival, this project

frames garments not merely as objects, but as emotional artefacts—textiles that carry scars, traces, and embedded histories.

Future research may expand upon the material and conceptual foundations established here by delving deeper into folk handcraft, hand-sewing traditions, and the politics of craft memory. This would include critical reflection on how institutional archives have historically preserved specific craft knowledge while marginalising others, particularly tacit/embodied knowledge of Indigenous and oral traditions. Drawing from Derrida’s concept of the “death drive” in *Archive Fever*, this presents a compelling framework for interrogating the omissions in textile and craft histories, and the role of archival silence in shaping what is remembered and what is forgotten.

While this inquiry was initially proposed in my PGR1 application, its scope was deemed more appropriate for PhD level research. Nevertheless, the threads of that larger investigation remain woven throughout this project, offering a foundation for future scholarship and deeper critical engagement with memory, making, and loss.

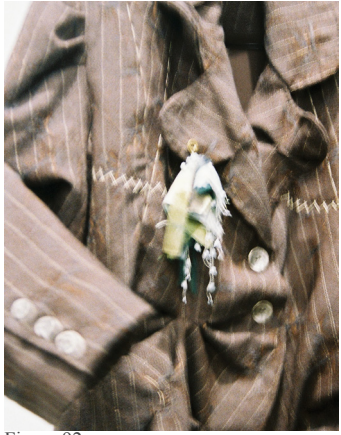


Figure 92



Figure 93



Figure 94



Figure 95



Figure 96



Figure 97



Figure 98



Figure 99



Figure 100



Figure 101



Figure 102



Figure 103



Figure 104



Figure 105



Figure 106



Figure 107



Figure 108



Figure 109



Figure 110



Figure 111



Figure 112



Figure 113

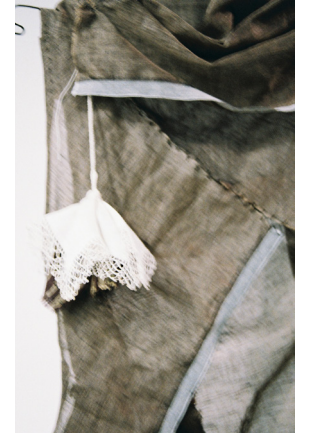


Figure 114



Figure 115



Figure 116



Figure 117



Figure 118



Figure 119



Figure 120



Figure 121



Figure 122



Figure 123



Figure 124

# HAUNTED THREADS LOOK BOOK



Figures 125-144. Ella Cook,  
*Haunted Threads Look Book*  
Images, Shot on Digital Camera,  
July 2025.



























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Figure 145. Ella Cook, *Doily*, Cotton Crochet, 2025.