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From Driza-Bone to Moving in Air: Reimagining Fashion Practice as Part of Environmentally Attuned Fashion Futures

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Abstract

This article makes a case for the value of an experimental fashion practice-based methodology to explore the design and cultural dimensions of human-climate relations, in relation to historically significant items of clothing. Its aim to demonstrate how critical and creative approaches inherent to fashion practice can explore and communicate human-weather dynamics that could otherwise only be theorized or hypothesized. The article focuses discussion on a project entailing a critical and conceptual reimagining of a Driza-bone coat, a garment that has become synonymous with Australian colonial mythologies of masculine endurance and hardship and ultimate mastery of an inhospitable environment.

methods, approaches, and frameworks for the exploration of embodied experience.
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The novel approach utilized a decolonial orientation, along with design, and performance-based expertise, to address divergent perspectives between the Driza-bone as a colonial symbol of protection and endurance and at the same time a medium for exploring human embodiment, exposure and environmental connection. The article concludes with discussion of *Moving in Air*, an improvised movement workshop informed by focused study on the Driza-bone coat, and the provision of a set of recommendations to guide practitioner-researchers to engage with environmental relations and colonial legacies in transformative ways.

KEYWORDS: environmental relations, weather, climate change, practice-based research, decoloniality, air, Australian dress, embodiment

Research context

This article draws upon research undertaken during a research fellowship at the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney *titled "Futuring weather: Making, thinking and wearing through the weather collection."* The study took place against a background of increasing frequency of extreme weather events, notably severe bushfires in 2019, and flooding events across Eastern Australia over 2020–2023.

The research involved study of garments and accessories in the Powerhouse collection associated with the "weather," with the weather conceptualized as a lived meteorological context and an experimental practice-based response through the design and performance-based exploration of new fashion garments. The outcomes included a video work titled *Moving in Air*, composed of edited video footage of an improvised movement workshop catalyzed by study and a critical reimagining of the Driza-bone coat.

This research positions itself as an experimental practice-based fashion research method that engaged the design and cultural dimensions of human-climate relations in relation to historically significant items of clothing. It demonstrated the transformative capacity of experimental fashion design practice to use design expertise to investigate and reimagine historical, cultural, corporeal, and environmental relationships that are often challenging to explore or represent through traditional means. In doing so, the research generates a novel perspective about how fashion practice can facilitate more open, embodied, and sustainable ways of relating to climate in an era increasingly defined by the urgency of climate change.

Introduction

This article explores the potential of practice-based methodologies within the field of Fashion studies. Over the past two decades, practice-

based research has evolved into an accepted approach in fashion research. However, as a domain of knowledge and practice, the full extent of its potential remains undetermined.

Historically, practice-based research was defined by Frayling (1993) as the generation of knowledge by, through, or with making. Gaugele and Titton (2022) further delineate the evolving boundaries of practice-based research as it pertains to fashion, describing a *"paradigmatic shift toward a permeable, collaborative field of critical practice and research "in, for, and through"* fashion (2022, 1). They trace this shift through three overlapping lineages. First, they identify the critical turn of the 1980s and 1990s, when fashion practitioners began adopting a more self-reflexive approach to fashion's conventions and ideologies, in relation to a group of innovative fashion practitioners including Martin Margiela, Helmut Lang and Hussein Chalayan among others. Second, they highlight the formalization of Fashion studies as an academic discipline in the1990s, alongside the integration of postgraduate degrees in Fashion, influenced by similar developments in creative practices of design, fine art, and architecture since the early 1980s (Gaugele and Titton 2022; Valle Noronha and Chun 2018). These conditions fostered an environment conducive to critical research-based fashion practice.

Fashion theorist Jose Teunissen (2022) has characterized emergent strands of practice-based research approaches as *transformative*. She argues a number of fashion practices that integrate artistic and activist agendas, are "re-positioning fashion as a cultural and symbolic force integral to post-industrial restructuring, rather than solely as an industry producing apparel" (Craik 2019, 133, in Teunissen). She identifies practitioners such as Aliki van der Kruijs, Eco-fashion designers VIN + OMI, and Tania Candian and D&K, the creative vehicle of fashion practitioners and curators, Ricarda Bigolin and Nella Themelios, as designers that pursue practices and projects, that extend and transform fashion design's traditional purpose of production, to fashion as a tool of social, cultural, political and environmental imagination.

It's notable that these critical practitioners consider fashion practice not exclusively the creation of garments, but a discursive and epistemic realm, which may include films and video, performances, installations, exhibitions, publications or pedagogical activities. However, by using artistic and activist approaches they implicate fashion garments within the social, cultural, environmental and material systems through which they intersect in a multitude of ways. For example, they might investigate the representational systems and process of the fashion system itself, as in D & K's Lookbook inspired *All or nothing* (2019) or van Joolen's $11'' \times 17''$ project (2014) which critically examined intersection of branding and image making in fashion, whereas Candian's *Constancia Dormida* (2006) creative work sensitively documented the socio-cultural-historical conditions of a defunct fashion manufacturing factory; or van der Kruijs's project *Made by Rain* (2012) which enlisted

environmental processes, namely "rain" to co-create garments. By operating in this way, these fashion practitioners exemplify the way experimental fashion practices can possess critical and potentially reparative dimensions.

Its arguable these emergent practices are emblematic of a broader self-reflective mood pervading the field of fashion studies. Vänskä (2018) notes fashion's current "self-critical" mode and the need to redefine fashion beyond human-centric, commodity-based models. Similarly, von Busch (2019) questions the agency of fashion industry actors within the fashion system to effect meaningful change. Against this backdrop the growing ethical and environmental impacts of fashion have become a persistent concern, underscoring the urgency of fashion research to address these critical challenges.

Building on these transformative approaches, and the need to re-envision fashion beyond purely commercial objectives, while utilizing fashion's unique capacity to engage audiences via esthetic and affective means this article advances a critical, environmentally engaged fashion practice. The article argues for the value of experimental fashion-based approaches to foreground human beings' deep intertwinement with environmental phenomena, namely the "weather." This approach can be understood in proximity to a larger body of research work in climate change communication, that advocates for the value of creative and artistic approaches that address human being's relationship to climate, as that grounded in environmental connection, creativity, and adaptability (Moser 2016).

This article is divided into three sections. The first section addresses work in anthropology, human and cultural geography, and cultural studies that examine human-weather relations as well as where climatic and weather-related themes have intersected with Fashion studies. The section highlights the potential value of these fields for interdisciplinary exchange, suggesting it provides an alternative perspective from sustainable fashion's emphasis upon environmental impacts of the global fashion system's resource-intensity. This perspective goes beyond issues of environmentalism defined by a focus on manufacturing, resource-depletion, waste, and consumption, to offering a critical basis to explore how experimental fashion practice can shape our relational practices with weather and the environment.

The second section addresses the concept of "decoloniality" which has been mobilized in the field of Fashion studies as a critical framework to address fashion studies' European bias and emphasis. The discussion focuses on decolonial frameworks also an avenue for fashion practice that has the potential to challenge dominant narratives associated with colonialism, by proposing new interpretations of garments embedded in colonial narratives, histories and practices. This establishes a critical framework for the decolonial dimension discussed in an experimental fashion project titled *Moving in Air* in the third section, that

explores the way in which narratives of coloniality and environmental relations are intertwined but also how they can be reimagined.

Moving in Air was an improvised movement workshop and associated video work (see supplementary material) that was catalyzed by a transformative encounter with a Driza-bone coat, held in the fashion collection of the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. Widely known in the Australian context, the Driza-bone coat has become over recent decades synonymous with settler-colonial mythologies of masculinity, endurance and perseverance, promoted by nationalistic narratives propagated in a range of cultural outputs including films, TV advertising and sports promotion since the 1980s. The movement workshop was catalyzed by garment-based study of the coat's "aerated" materiality and design and integrated fashion design, choreography, and movement improvization to visualize human-atmospheric relations. This critical and creative process envisioned the Driza-bone—and fashion more broadly—as dynamic artifacts that interact with wearers and their environments.

I conclude with a set of recommendations on how experimental practice-based fashion practices can address our embeddedness within atmospheric and environmental contexts, as well as decolonize and critically reimagine colonial garments. The recommendations focus on how methods inherent to creative and experimental fashion practice, provide a novel way in which fashion can address the problem of climate change and colonial legacies by cultivating environmental awareness and fostering affective connections between humans and the non-human world.

Cross-disciplinary dialogues: fashion and the weather

Human being's relationship to climate has become a global imperative instigating a deep questioning of how societies should respond to environmental, social, political, and economic consequences of rising global temperatures. Moreover, discourse surrounding climate change often revolves around statistical modeling of global temperature rises, largely abstracted from how individuals and communities experience, understand and are affected by weather (Hulme 2017, 2015). However, an emerging body of work addressing "weather-relations" (Orlove and Strauss 2003) within geographic and anthropological research is considering ways in which investigations of social and cultural relationships to everyday weather can provide valuable knowledge of the ways in which communities and individuals understand, respond and relate to their environment. This work advocates for finer-grained knowledge as well as more accessible models, stories, and examples of human-climate relations. Put simply, this work foregrounds the importance of representational, behavioral as well as artistic understandings of how weather is understood, experienced, and responded to by individuals and communities and emphasizes the value of artistic responses in doing so (Hulme 2017, 2015). Given these insights and considering the urgency of climate

change, there is a crucial need for enhanced engagement between fashion studies and the work of cultural geographers and cultural studies scholars on climate and weather-relations.

Perhaps due to the risk of making asinine assertions about fashion and the weather—such as equating raincoats with wet weather and wool knitwear with cold—the field of fashion studies has generally avoided explicit discussions of climate, weather, and fashion. Moreover, the issue of climate and fashion emerges only implicitly in the context on sustainable fashion, wherein climate change is embedded in a nexus of issues associated with the deleterious path of the global fashion system including fast-fashion and over-consumption, resource depletion, environmental degradation, carbon emissions and exploitative labor practices (Black 2008; Fletcher 2014; Gwilt and Rissanen 2011; Hethorn and Ulasewicz 2015; Rissanen and McQuillan 2016). When clothing and climate perspectives do feature in academic enquiry they do in domains of consumer studies, textile design, engineering and building most often with an emphasis on thermal comfort (Bougourd 2009; de Carvalho, da Silva, and Ramos 2013; Khan, Roper, and Rogers 1993; Morgan and de Dear 2003; Rossi 2009; Salata et al. 2018). Notably the focus upon thermal comfort omits broader conceptions of comfort (Chappells and Shove 2005) while also ignoring variables beyond temperature, such as wind, precipitation, humidity, light that combine to form a meteorological context.

Moreover, existing research on fashion, dress and climate in Australia features as part of historical studies of colonial life (Craik 2010; Maynard 1994a) and in anthropological studies of pre-colonial indigenous societies (Gilligan 2019; Strauss and Orlove 2003). When more recent studies have engaged with climactic themes, it is most often taken granted as a dimension of Australian lifestyle and culture that influences the popularity, use, and design of specific items of clothing. For example, significant studies of iconic items of Australian fashion and dress such as the Akubra hat (Craik 2009; Maynard 1999), Chesty bonds singlet (Cramer 2021) the Driza-bone coat (White 2009; Berry 2013) or Burquni (Khamis 2010) are considered emblematic of Australian national, gendered, and cultural identity rather than shaped and influenced by climactic conditions.

Where distinctive styles of dress and clothing of Australian fashion are examined in detail, as in "beach" and "surf-wear," they are taken to represent the "informal" and "casual lifestyle" of Australia and a disposition toward outdoor recreation, bodily exposure, and sun tanning (Craik 2009) rather than fashion and clothing practices and material artifacts shaped by atmospheric conditions. In the wider context of climate change research, bodily experiences and atmospheric phenomena are represented in several studies (Maller and Strengers 2013; Strengers and Maller 2019) however, the specific experiences, and relations of the body in relation to fashion and weather and climactic phenomena are

less clearly articulated. Clothing may feature in studies as one aspect among others, usually in relation to a single meteorological element such as heat, or cool, or precipitation, or a discrete practice, such as work or location, notable for severe meteorological phenomena, notably heat. (De Vet 2017; Oppermann et al. 2018; Oppermann and Walker 2019). This gap underscores the urgent need for greater cross-disciplinary engagements between fashion studies and cultural approaches to climate in order build knowledge of the interaction between climate, weather, and sartorial practices, and to support work toward more sustainable futures.

Fashioning decolonial practices

Decoloniality is a framework that seeks to challenge and dismantle the legacies of colonialism embedded in our western-centric knowledge systems, geopolitical power structures, and cultural practices. Emerging from the work of theorists like Aníbal Quijano, Walter Mignolo, and María Lugones, decoloniality critiques the Eurocentric worldviews imposed during colonial expansion, which continues to shape global hierarchies of race, sexuality, nationality, language, religion, economics and environmental relations. By rejecting the "dislocated, disembodied, and disengaged abstraction" of Western thought and seeking to "disobey the universal signifier that is the rhetoric of modernity," Mignolo and Walsh (2018, 3) argue that the aim of decolonial thought is to admit and "reclaim local histories, subjectivities, knowledges, narratives, and struggles against the modern/colonial order and for *an other-wise*." In other words, decolonial approaches seeks to reclaim marginalized ways of being and knowledge systems, advocating for epistemic diversity and resisting colonial structures of dominance and control. Central to decoloniality is a delinking of coloniality with modernity. Within decolonial thought, modernity is viewed to originate within the hegemony of the European colonial project; and hence decolonizing practices seek to challenge assumed universality of European thought, by recognizing a plurality of epistemes and modes of life erased or marginalized by colonial project.

Most recently, decolonial-oriented researchers have begun to utilize and embrace this framework to re-imagine Fashion studies discourse and research. Recent journal special issues (Cheang, Rabine, and Sandhu 2022; Slade and Jansen 2020; Tse, Semerene, and Kurkdjian 2024) as well as the resonant *Conversations on Decoloniality and Fashion: Hosting, Listening, (Un)Learning* (de Greef and Jansen 2023) have been devoted to advancing discourse around decoloniality in fashion and the development of decolonial frameworks for fashion studies. While a relatively recent feature of fashion studies the primary concern of decolonial thinking in fashion is to address fashion studies' Eurocentric bias and emphasis. This involves critiquing the way/s

western fashion systems have historically appropriated, commodified, and marginalized non-Western cultural expressions, reinforcing hierarchies of taste and value. It is also the case, colonialism is an anthropocentric program of theft, racial exploitation and resource extraction (both human and natural) that separates human beings from the earth – an ontological mode referred to by Vazquez as "earthlessness" (2018, 192). Jansen (2020) points our despite contemporary fashion's rapaciousness and polluting nature; it remains "superior" to other models of fashion. There have also been various efforts at applying decolonial frameworks to education (Barry 2021) and fashion research methods with a view to challenge Eurocentric and binary thinking (Medrado 2023).

Cheang, Rabine, and Sandhu (2022) thoughtfully observes in their special issue, "decolonization is a "process"- a forever incomplete, non-linear process, ever revised, reevaluated, revisited and relived" albeit with inherent risks of academic commodification and misappropriation. I too, approach the term, with some circumspection and humility. Being an Australian, of Anglo-Celtic heritage, living and working on unceded indigenous (Gadigal) lands, I am acutely aware colonization is not an abstraction nor confined to academic discourse, but a system of violent dispossession and injustice suffered by indigenous Australians. I defer to first nations and indigenous researchers to have led this area, notably in indigenous-led methodologies and perspectives (Clark 2024).

Moreover, fashion garments, their design, material form, as well as the meanings ascribed to them, may be the product of colonial, narratives and processes that extend and amplify colonial worldviews. As a critical practitioner in fashion, this elicits the following questioning: How can garments closely associated with colonization, its systems, narratives and practices be re-envisioned and reimagined in other ways? How can the ways of wearing clothing, ways of relating to the body, ways of being gendered, and ways of relating to the environment elided within colonial systems be cultivated? And what might be the significance of cultivating alternative ways of being-in-garments? I will explore these questions in the following via discussion of research centered on a Driza-bone coat in the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.

The Driza-bone: colonial climatic entanglements

The origins of the Driza-Bone can be traced to last century when, Edward Le Roy, a Scottish migrant began making wet weather coats for windjammer sailors from cotton sails, waterproofed with linseed oil. The coat itself was trademarked in 1933, however "Oilcoats," as they were known, were a common item of workers clothing within colonial Australia, in rural as well as maritime environments. Over time, Le Roy's coats became very popular with rural workers. As the coat became more popular its design evolved to meet the needs of

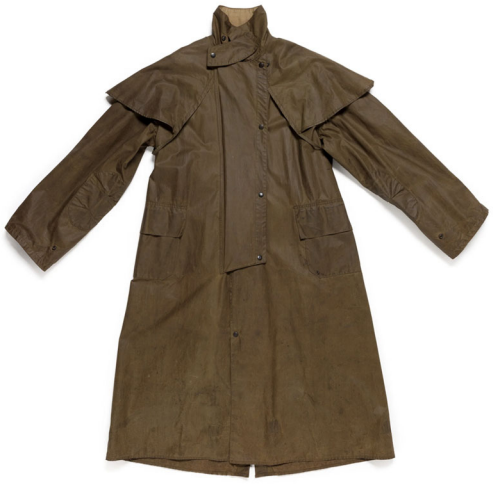

Figure 1
Photograph of the Driza-bone held in the collection of the Powerhouse Museum Sydney. Courtesy Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.

agricultural work. It was made longer for horse riding (also suitably designed for motor bike riding) and a fantail was inserted at the center back so it could expand over the horse and keep the saddle dry. Wrist and leg straps were also added to stop the garment flapping and minimize getting wet and cold. These modifications resulted in a design of hardwearing, practical garments widely utilized within rural and agricultural contexts in Australia (Powerhouse 2020) (Figure 1).

While the coat, has become a staple for agricultural workers in rural Australia, it has also played an important rhetorical role in narratives of nationhood and heritage practices. This stems from an association of the Driza-bone to the masculine figure of the bushman, pioneer or stockman – key figures of Australian history central to the dominant origin myths of Australian nationhood (Curthoys 1999; Lawrence 2003; Smith 2012) It is important to point out however, that while "bush dress," has a long association with a white vigorous masculinity, (Maynard 1994a, 1994b) represented in the figure of bushman or stockman, the integration the Driza-bone within these narratives is a relatively recent phenomenon.

This has taken place since the late 1980s whereby the figure of the Driza-bone clad bushman, has been mobilized in novels, films, a television series, advertising, a theater production while the coat itself has been a feature of Olympic games uniforms and opening and closing ceremonies. This process has taken place as a part of wider practices associated with a commercial nationalism, surrounding Australian cultural products. The feature film *The Man from Snowy River*' (Miller 1982) arguably did most to establish the bushman in the modern Australian imaginary, wherein the central male protagonist, a young horseman

"Tom Clancy" wears a Driza-bone coat, (https://celebrity.nine.com.au/latest/tom-burlinson-man-from-snowy-river-actor-what-happened-what-is-he-doing-now-explainer/c25a20a1-eb1f-47b2-8608-199632cb96a1) and succeeded in confirming the image of the bushman, as one who is dressed in a Driza-bone. Whereas the Olympic games uniform for the 1988 Seoul Olympics was a botanically inspired "golden wattle" color Driza-bone, while in the Sydney 2000 Olympics Welcome Ceremony, Driza-bone clad performers are led by a horseman, who contrasts starkly against a desolate and stark scenography, designed to signify harsh Australian environment (Berry 2013) (https://sconevetdynasty.com.au/sydney-olympic-games-opening-ceremony-2000/). The coat has also been employed in international political and diplomatic contexts, where in 2007, APEC conference leaders of Asian Pacific countries were gifted a Driza-bone and duly photographed wearing them.

The coat, along with several other items of Australian dress, including RM Williams boots, the Akubra, hat, moleskin trousers, have been characterized in popular media as uniquely Australian dress, in as much as politicians will wear this outfit when venturing into regional Australia or the "bush". Despite there being no officially sanctioned folk or national dress (Maynard 1994b) it is arguable that to contemporary Australian mainstream audiences, this outfit, with the characteristic Driza-bone as its centerpiece has come to signify a rugged rural individualism, a kind authentic Australia of hard work, and gritty perseverance.

The original manifestation of the mythic figure of the skilled bushman is attributed to the Australian poet Banjo Paterson, and his poem "The Man." The poem's narrative revolves around a skilled horseman, "*The Man from Snowy River*" and his efforts to catch and ultimately subdue a wild horse, and in doing so, surmount and subdue an unforgiving and challenging environment (Welberry 2005). However, the figure of the bushman, clad in a simple, yet practical ensemble of coarse fabric trousers, plain cloth or checked shirts or guernseys often belted and bloused, along with boots and straw hats, emerged as a distinctive masculine "type," shaped by colonial life fifty years earlier, in the mid nineteenth century. Maynard observes that these conceptions of masculinity embodied in figure of the bushman, combined the notion of a "natural self," freed from the constraints of the old world—namely Britain—with the Australian bush and a set of physical and moral traits, including physical prowess, practicality, perseverance, and an egalitarian ethos (1994, 111). The bush is this scenario is stereotypically harsh and unsettled, but also a mythic territory "outback" and beyond the fringes of urban cities and towns (Lawrence 2003).

These myths of settler-pioneers and bushmen were given further impetus toward the end of the nineteenth century as part of nationalistic debates, aimed at cultivating a sense of collective national character, in the years leading up to Australian federation in 1901. These debates

were played out in *The Bulletin* magazine which sought to promote masculinist and idealistic expressions of national identity, as that embodied in Banjo Patterson's poem "The Man from snowy river," idealistic accounts of rural life by Henry Lawson as well as romanticized depictions of bushman and rural life by the "Heidelberg school" painters such as Tom Roberts and Frederick McCubbin.

Such idealized figures of Australian life have been critiqued because of their masculinist bias, as well as the fact their proponents were part of the urban cultural elite, rather than people with a lived affinity with the Australian bush and rural life (Lawrence 2003). Moreover, historians who've examined the emergence of the bushman mythology note, it was one of several competing mythologies at the time – alternative masculine ideals embodying domesticity, civility and family around the late nineteenth century were, in fact replaced by the romantic ideal of the bushman (Lawrence 2003).

These cultural symbols and ideals of rugged masculine figures are not just about national identity—they reflect deeper narratives about colonial Australian's relationship and understanding of their environment. Such narratives are rooted in the mythology of early settler-colonialists and their encounters with the Australian landscape. These narratives center upon the male, white, Anglo-European pioneers, typified in the "bushman" and their adversarial relationship with the Australian environment. The environment in these narratives is alien and hostile, and the settlers on the frontier work to subjugate the harsh and unforgiving land. Historian Ann Curthoys (1999) notes that like many settler-colonial societies, these popular Australian historical narratives emphasize settlers' relationship to the environment as adversarial and one of perseverance and ultimate success over hardship, and suffering.

However, this mythologization of the Australian bushman and their relationship to the environment is an exclusive one, that disregards first nations indigenous Australians, women, non-white, non-European, and LGBTQI+ individuals. Moreover, as Smith notes the myth of the bushman is an "intensely rural Anglo/white, rural and masculine narrative" of European mastery and ultimate domination, which erases Aboriginal presence and agency from the environment, and marginalizes the presence of femineity to a part of the landscape to be controlled (2012, 474). In fact, indigenous stockman, whose deep knowledge of the land was exploited within the pastoral industries, were given rations including clothing items (and are also known from photographs to have worn Oilskins) and food in place of wages in a colonial system of exploitation and wage theft (McGrath 1987). The archetypal figure of stockman elides according to Flannery, "the fact that the men of the cattle frontier were the shock troops in our Aboriginal wars … There is a deep current in our colonial Australian society that resists these simple facts and clings to the great founding lie" (2003, 6–7).

However, the Driza-bone coat has, over recent years, via a wide range of cultural products from films, theater, advertising as well as sport and politics has become inextricably intertwined with the figure of the bushman within these narratives, with its weather-beaten appearance, three-quarter length, and armor-like design serving as a defining sartorial foil (White 2009). Put simply, the Driza-bone has become entangled with these discourses, meanings and narratives. However, the bushman is an archetype that remains deeply problematic, given it narrates a mythical story in which be white European men are the rightful owners and rulers of Australia, granting them the authority and duty to oversee and regulate others, notably ethnic minorities, indigenous Australians and women (Hogan 2003).

It is also the case such mythologizing establishes a foundational narrative that features as part of Australia's authorized heritage discourses (Smith 2012). These discourses are expressed in a variety of cultural outputs discussed above. The foundational narrative of which the Driza-bone has become increasingly visible and is part of what has been referred to as Australia's authorized heritage discourse. Heritage is a broad and inclusive term referring to anything that an individual or group deems valuable enough to be preserved, catalogued, displayed, restored, and admired. Heritage is a discourse that shapes our thoughts and discussions about the past, and it is reinforced by specific practices (Smith 2012). Heritage involves the process of heritage making, where societies negotiate and legitimize narratives and the cultural values supporting them, concerning both the past and present (Smith 2007, 44).

The Driza-bone: a material encounter

The Driza-bone itself is a three-quarter length, raincoat, made from oiled cotton canvas with a center front opening, fastened with press studs, a fantail design, which splits with an open vent at the center back, and front paper bag pockets. It is a notable for its functional form, features, and detailing, with a detached cape on shoulders and back, straps on wrists and upturned collar with tab extension to neatly enclose the neck ensuring no water would enter. I had an opportunity to encounter and examine a Driza-bone, held in the collection of the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, an institution that holds an extensive collection of Fashion and textiles of Australian dress and fashion (Figure 2).

While unable to wear this coat[1] given preservation practices of collecting institutions, I was able to examine and handle the piece, albeit with gloves and explore its complex form, structure, and detailing, noting signs of wear as well as age. The Driza-bone coat in the Powerhouse collection, was once owned by a property manager John Joiner, on a property in Coonamble in the western plains of NSW. The piece was cotton, manufactured by E. Le Roy, Pty Ltd worn, donated to the Powerhouse Museum. The relatively good condition of the piece, with

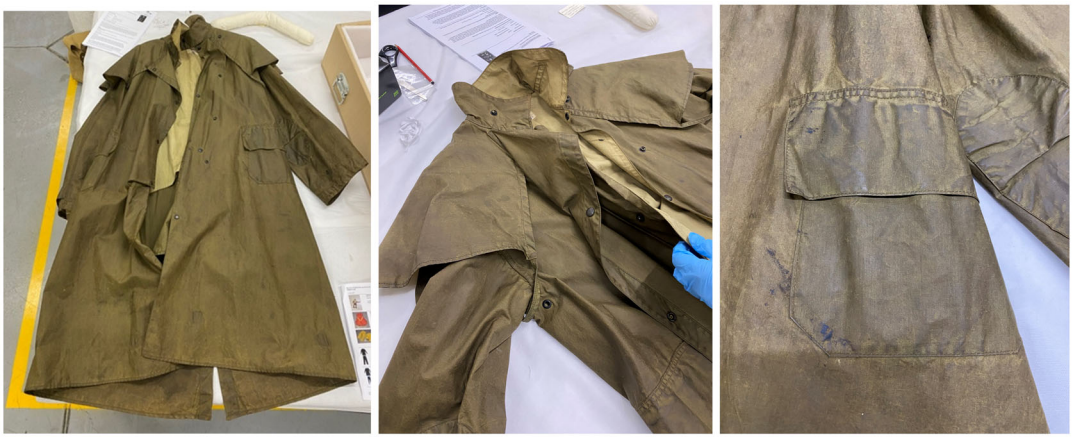

Figure 2
Images of Driza-bone from Powerhouse Museum collection. Images © Todd Robinson.

no visible fraying or wear on the sleeves or edges, suggested it was either a later piece than the 1954 provenance suggested or that Mr. Joiner, did far less cattle mustering, and more filing in the office.

Despite the appearance, indicating a quite a heavy-weight material, the piece is made from a relatively lightweight cotton. However, the oiling, its large size, and protective structural elements, contributes to the appearance of weightiness, while influencing its waxy olive-green appearance. Its construction is characteristic of a raincoat with seams flat-felled, and hems rolled, openings faced and bagged-out and pin stitched, rather than featuring tailored construction methods. It is half-lined in cotton though the body and full length in the arms. Closures were press studs that secured the center front opening with stolid efficiency. It possesses suggestion of the journeyman, a riding coat, but also a casual, distinctly Australian elegance in its hardwearing, yet elegant appearance, that would bring a striking three-quarter, length silhouette, and sculpted appearance to agricultural settings and no doubt has contributed to its ongoing popularity.

Moreover, when examining the piece and subsequently reflecting upon its relationship to the Australian climate of high summer temperatures and high variable rainfall and temperatures as well as the nature of agricultural work that it provides protection. However, it also possesses an unexpected flexibility given its design, with vents and openings, enables a flow of air, and arguably relief from both humidity and heat. The design with button through opening at the front, a long back vent, press studs that can be opened and closed with ease, enable a wearer to secure it in such a way to enable to enable or constrain the amount air that could move into it around the body. This observation runs counter to the dominant understanding of the coat, as a protective barrier from a harsh, unforgiving Australian climate. In fact, the dominant attribute to emerge from my material encounter with the coat was it

possessed a particular kind of "airiness" – attributes of its crispy fabrication,[2] but also its ventilated and flexible design. A consideration of this property instigated a shift in perspective and understanding of the Driza-bone as a "rugged," "hard-wearing" and protective garment that has come to symbolize aspects of Australia's settler-colonial and pastoral history to a material artifact characterized by its relation to air.

Moreover, its subtly lustrous, yet crisp fabric and construction conveys an almost metallic appearance and signifies more than simply practical attire for working in agricultural and rural environments. Its olive green/brown coloration and waxy texture convey a tarnished appearance, like that associated with kinds of metal, including copper, brass. Given these metallurgic allusions, its surface signifies strength and resilience, that confer upon its wearers' protection. It's also worth noting these metallurgic allusions conjure the image of another iconic item of Australian colonial-sartorial history, that of bushranger's Ned Kelly famous DIY protective suit of iron armor. The extent to which the Driza-bone covers and encloses the body reinforces this sense of protection, which is further bolstered by the addition of the cape, and storm flaps which shield the body. However, the Driza-bone's oiled, waxy looking surface also has a propensity record indentations and marks, to absorb dirt resulting in color variations around the pockets and cuffs, from bright olive to deeper brown tinged greens. This propensity to absorb dirt and reveal wear, contributes to its "weather-beaten" appearance.

These material significations of the Driza-bone can be understood to encode the relationship of the settler-colonists with their environment, whereby their bodily surface mediates environmental encounter and relation. In other words, the settler-colonialist wears garments that signify material attributes of strength and protection from a hostile and unforgiving landscape while the accumulation of marks and indentations on its surface reveals processes of environmental action, signifying narratives of endurance and perseverance. Furthermore, the articulation of its form as an exterior shell covering the body from neck to calves conveys protection, separation, and a kind of corporeal exclusion from the environment. This reading produces an environmental mise en scène that reinforces metaphors of human-environment separation, division, and difference. Considering these observations, it is not surprising how this reading of the coat as protection or a barrier from the environment reinforces and promotes metaphors of difference, separation, and an adversarial relation to the environment.

Geographical thinking highlights the influential role these kinds of metaphors can play within the Australian geographical imaginary. According to Howitt (2001) metaphors such as "frontiers" and "boundaries" have shaped notions of division and separateness, while the adoption of alternative metaphors can foster models of encounter and interaction, and can promote inclusion, co-existence, and reconciliation. Its arguable the figure of the bushman, is encoded within these

metaphors as he roams the margins of a colonial imaginary, bounded by and ultimately, alienated from his environment and its original inhabitants, indigenous Australians.

Given this limiting and arguably damaging model of environmental relation, based on division, separation and alienation, how might we develop new models of environmental and cultural encounter and exchange, and furnish new metaphors of environmental and cultural connection that are regenerative and inclusive, less exploitative and damaging? And more to this, how can fashion decolonize such models, with creative use of its disciplinary expertise and potentials to undertake a critical re-imagining of garments to foster a sense of corporeal exposure and continuity with the environment, and new models of environmental and cultural relation?

By centering these questions upon the Driza-bone coat, a critical and creative re-reimagining can challenge its symbolic association with a masculinist bushman mythology, which frames it as a protective, impervious barrier against a hostile and alien environment. Instead, a re-envisioning of the coat as relational, porous, and inclusive provides an alternative way of conceptualizing our connection and relation to our atmospheric and environmental context. This suggests that creative and conceptual reimagining of fashion garments—ones that activate and amplify these material and embodied properties and relations—can offer powerful alternative ways of understanding our relationship to the environment (Figure 3).

Moving in Air: activating human-atmospheric relations: fashion, movement, and the Driza-bone reimagined

Given this critical reading of the Driza-bone coat; a reading that shifts its meaning from a protective barrier promoting corporeal separation and difference to one of airiness and exposure and potentially new modalities of environmental relation and understanding, how might these new modalities be activated, explored and communicated? This question was explored through an approach that leveraged the conceptual, material, and collaborative potential of fashion practice to explore and communicate relationships and dynamics that are challenging to examine through other means. In this sense the project draws on both creative and artistic methods inherent to experimental fashion practices but also the embodied and tacit disciplinary knowledges (Wenger 1998) of design and materials (Cramer 2021) and their relationship to the body, inherent to fashion practice and research (Figure 4).

As an example of a critical fashion practice methodology, "Moving in Air" adopted a collaborative, interdisciplinary model that integrated fashion design with choreographic and performance-based expertise. The core focus was interaction between movement, garments, and air as a medium that is sensed by the body but also surrounds and is displaced

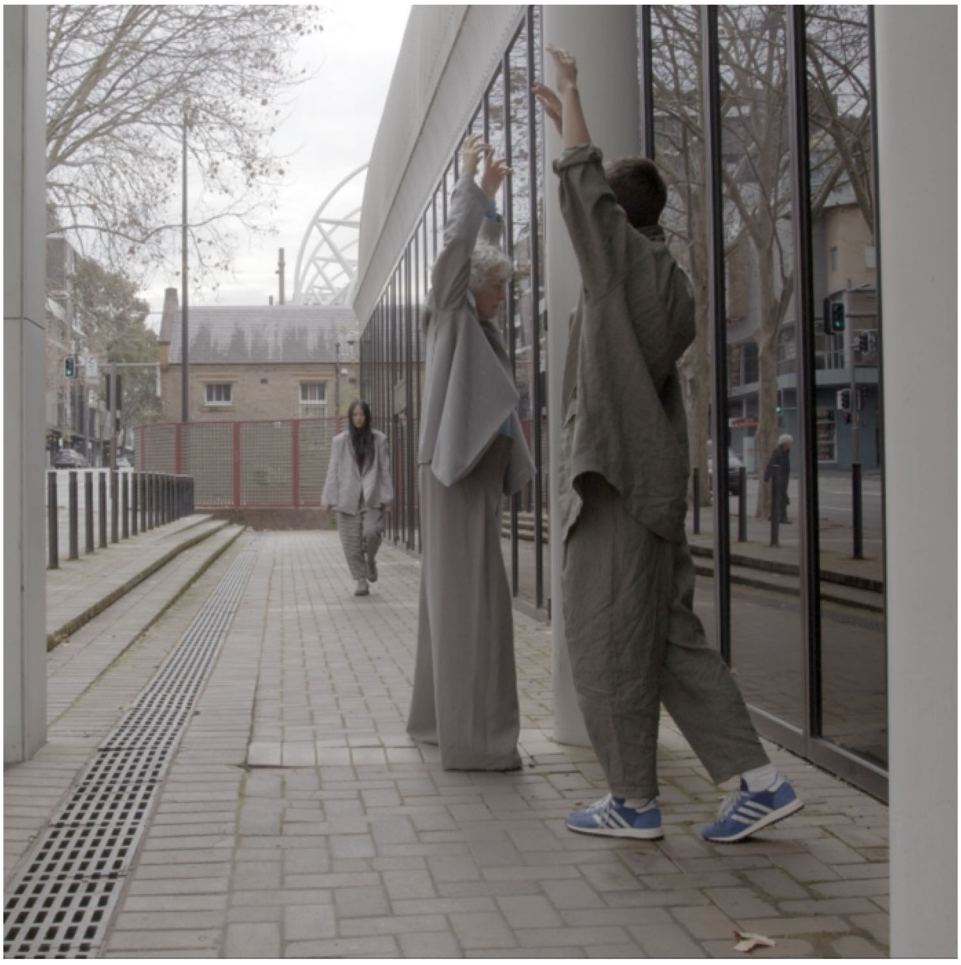

Figure 3
Production video still, *Moving in Air*, improvised movement performance, June 28, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. 2022. © Todd Robinson.

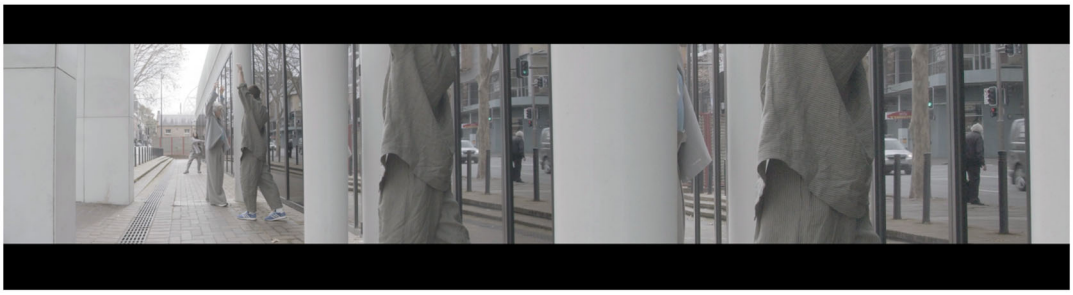

Figure 4
The "Moving in Air": integrating fashion design and performance, high-definition video, © Todd Robinson.

by it (Horn 2018). An improvised movement workshop, led by esteemed Australian choreographer Shelley Lasica, explored how "air" as medium and concept is animated through physical movement.

The workshop's choreographic brief explicitly addressed the meteorological context in which it was set. Performers responded to subtle air currents, and shifting conditions of light and shade, warmth and coolness, in relation to architectural elements including a colonnade, a set of stairs and courtyard as well as a landscaped garden area around the Powerhouse Museum precinct. Central to the choreographic program was the use of purpose-designed garments, whose design was informed by study of the Driza-bone. The garments formed a small, coordinated collection including a grey lightweight wool suit, two shirt/pants sets with side splits/vents for ventilation, in oversized cuts of crisp linen producing an internal space between body and garment. The designs facilitated "aerated movements" and heightened somatic awareness of airflows, aligning with the choreographic direction – design attributes directly inspired by the Driza-bone. Performers' gestures, interactions with garments, and responses to the environment were captured via digital video, culminating in a creative work featuring edited performative sequences accompanied by an original soundtrack. Metaphors of air and aeration, also informed the selection, sequencing and final edit of the video work which was structured around phases of movement and action between performers that formed trajectories that coalesce then dissipate, then recollect to form again. The video work, originally produced as a research outcome of the fellowship has been presented in a variety of settings including, *The Four Elements of Fashion Conference* (Venice, 16–17 March 2023), a Powerhouse Museum, Research Showcase, as well as a revised edit for public exhibition of the work as a wide screen video installation at University of Technology (2023) (see Figure 5) demonstrating the capacity of practice-based research outcomes to engage audiences beyond the confines of traditional academia.

In this way *Moving in Air,* drew directly from the actual design of the Driza-bone coat, while problematizing its historical colonially encoded symbolism, aiming to reconcile the tensions between these contrasting aspects. Yet by integrating fashion design, choreography, movement improvization, performance and public dissemination, as part of this experimental methodology, aspects of human-atmospheric relationships that could otherwise only be theorized or inferred through the study of the garment could be activated, explored and shared to a wider public. In this way, settler-colonial conceptions of environmental-relations can be challenged, dislodged and potentially be reimagined.

Following this approach, and reflection upon it, several key recommendations for practitioners to further engage with the intersection of cultural, environmental, and decolonial issues in transformative ways emerges:

Figure 5
Todd Robinson, Moving in Air (installation view), video installation. University of Technology Sydney. Image: Motel picture company.

1. **Integrate collaborative and interdisciplinary approaches**
   While Moving in Air incorporated expertise from fashion design, choreography, dance/movement practice and videography other cross-disciplinary engagements may offer similarly fruitful outcomes. For example, potential cross-disciplinary encounters could involve meteorologists and environmental scientists, age-diverse, remote or regional, LGTQI+ communities or indigenous people, as well as other forms of public dissemination. This integrative approach can reveal new ways to understand, represent as well as communicate environmental and cultural relationships.
2. **Re-envision historical garments through design knowledge**
   Re-envisioning culturally significant garments, like the Driza-Bone, involves firstly understanding how they are encoded and have been mobilized within colonial narratives. While garment-based research and design knowledge reveals insight into their structure, materiality, and embodied use. These insights enable reinterpretation and potential re-envisioning of alternative narratives, while design and artistic approaches can produce impactful and affective outcomes for public dissemination.
3. **Decenter visual analysis and prioritize sensorial experiences and environmental interaction**
   Conventional interpretations of the Driza-Bone emphasize its role as a visual symbol of masculine control, colonial and

environmental relations of distance and separation. Embracing sensory, tactile, and embodied perspectives instead, highlights its materiality and dynamic interactions between bodies, climate and weather. By focusing on properties like ventilation, texture, and fabrication and their relation to bodies and movement, re-envisioning of garments can foreground human-environment entanglements, fostering awareness of climate through embodied encounters. This approach reimagines fashion as a medium for exploring cultural and environmental relations beyond purely visual narratives and or fashion as a product of an industrial system.

4. **Embedding fashion in urban climate contexts and imagery**
   Moving in Air workshop consciously utilized the living reality of climate, focusing on the weather conditions experienced that day. We consciously avoided abstraction, emphasizing embodied-human-climate encounters in an urban setting. Representing people within urban meteorological contexts provides accessible, realistic models of our entwinement with climate, contrasting with idealized depictions of unspoiled nature, distant from human realities. This perspective, largely unexplored, repositions fashion as a cultural and environmental practice within urban settings and climates. Similarly, fashion imagery should move beyond centering garments as isolated or decontextualized objects. Instead, garments, people, movement, and environmental phenomena should form interconnected narratives, avoiding sublime or overly aestheticized visuals for authentic, grounded representations.
5. **Decolonize participation, representation and dissemination**
   Challenge traditional representations of the fashionable body by using nontraditional models and performers of diverse ages, body types, and identities. Performers engaged in this project identified as non-male, were age, gender and culturally diverse, contrasting with normative conventions of fashion practice. Prioritization was also given to collaboration and granting participants' agency to interpret and contribute to outcomes. Decolonial approaches should actively challenge historical power imbalances, allowing for new forms of participation, representation and engagement that disrupt the legacy of colonialism and expand fashion's cultural meanings.

Conclusion

"Moving in Air" was the culmination of a transformative encounter with a single garment, a Driza-bone coat. This encounter catalyzed study and critical reflection upon the garment that held in tension conceptions of the coat as symbol of perseverance, and colonial mastery of

an alien and hostile environment and its material form that revealed processes of human embodiment, environmental exposure, and connection. The conceptualization of the improvised movement workshop, Moving in Air was directly informed by both the design of the coat and its popular and historical symbolism, and sought to resolve tensions between these divergent perspectives. It did this by mobilizing fashion design, choreography, movement improvization and performance to visualize and activate human-atmospheric relations that could only be intuited and hypothesized from garment study alone.

This critical and creative set of activities enabled a conceptual re-envisioning of the Driza-bone and fashion/clothing more broadly as wearable artifacts that interact dynamically with their wearers in close interaction and embedment, with the atmospheric context, offering a novel perspective upon fashion, and how fashionable embodiment reflects our deep integration with the environment. Critical reflection upon the process, provided a set of recommendations to guide practitioners and researchers to engage further with issues of environmental connectedness as well as settler-colonial modes of thinking, knowledge systems and their legacies.

Ultimately, the research demonstrates how fashion when reimagined as an experimental and critical practice, can engage with complex intersections of climate, embodiment and coloniality, by envisioning alternative narratives of environmental relation and by making abstract phenomena of climate science accessible and embedded within everyday social realities. In doing so, this research expands the repertoire of methods and approaches available to critical and research-based fashion practices. *Moving in Air* provides a creative template by which to cultivate new environmental and cultural models and dispositions that build affective relations between humans and the non-human world.

Notes

1. I have tried on Driza-bone coats in the past, outside the context of this research project.
2. The 'crispiness', or dry attribute of the garment, may have been the result product of use, wear and age.

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Supplemental data

Supplemental data for this article can be accessed at https://vimeo.com/motelpicturecompany/review/841726685/6b1e83e4f1

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