*SOMA POIESIS*

Todd Robinson

**UTS Gallery**

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Representational practices play a significant role in fashion. At a general level they depict and display fashionable bodies. Fashion images foreground aesthetic practices showing bodies wearing a variety garment styles, understood with reference to brand or designer, or visual properties such as form and silhouette as well as novel combinations of surface characteristics such as colour, image, pattern and texture. Fashion images circulate within the global fashion system providing an array of fashionable opportunities for consumers but also design possibilities in the form of styles, materials, themes and colours as well as novel garment features that represent an emergent creative context for fashion design.

Critical perspectives argue fashion images negatively impact participants in fashion through the propagation of narrowly defined body aesthetics. These arguments contend fashion images place inordinate emphasis on how one’s body appears to others and generates a distance between observers of the image and those depicted. Such a view also conceives images as ideological mediums through which recognizable messages are conveyed and that fashion itself is a symbolic system.  While this highlights the impact of fashion images, more recently there has been a focus on understanding fashion beyond a visual phenomenon by considering the interaction between bodies and garments in terms of the body’s comportment and movements in space. This foregrounds living bodies and material garments in specific acts of wearing.

These new perspectives are informed by gendered concepts of wearing and renewed interest in the materiality and agency of bodies that reminds us fashion cannot be understood without reference to somatic experience. A focus on the experiencing body shifts emphasis from bodies as passive objects of the gaze to something experienced at a first person somatic level. This also highlights the potential of corporeal experience to enhance rather than decrease the potential benefits to people who participate in fashion.

This research is concerned with an exploration of the significance of embodiment in fashion and considers the re-directive opportunities embedded within presentational and representational practices of fashion.

The videos Robinson has produced are associated with the question of how corporeal representation can offset forms of corporeal detachment realized by representational practices germane to fashion. He draws on Sensory Ethnographic practice and uses moving images to foreground tactile, kinaesthetic and interoceptive aspects of wearing clothing.

The films themselves emerged from an iterative process encompassing making garments and their use in sartorial sessions. This involved participatory activities where individuals wear purpose-designed fashion garments in combination with sensory-tactile materials such as water, sand and seeds. The sessions generated responses such as bodily movements, which were then subject to examination and exploration. The movements the anonymous subjects enact would pass unnoticed within the vast majority of our face to face interactions; not only because they are ephemeral and transitory, but rather their embeddedness within unfolding flows of human movement mean they don’t carry the legible meanings we are conditioned to see. They are the ordinary and mundane micro-bodily adjustments bodies are always making - a small movement of the hand to smooth a garment, or to emphasize expression, a scratch of our face, or a small step to vary posture or orientation; or any of the multitude of movement variations human beings enact.

In the project Robinson extracts incidental and mundane micro-bodily movements and amplifies those movements so they become available to others. The videos offer an invitation for observers to identify directly with moving images through representations of sensorial experience of those depicted on screen.  Thus the significance of this research emerges from examination of the relationship between fashion and embodiment and the re-directive potential stemming from representations of sartorial experience grounded in the shared-ness of sensorial experience.