

## DRESS FOR DISSENT: READING THE ALMOST UNREADABLE

Dress is a significant material practice we use to signal our cultural boundaries, social separations, continuities and, for the present purposes, political dissidences. The intention here is to inquire into the changing ways clothing in Australia has communicated disaffection within the public sphere in recent times. The express purpose is to explore the relationship between clothes as protest in everyday public life, and those exceptional, socially disruptive clothes on view at specific protest gatherings. In order to do this a comparison will be made between media coverage of dress worn during the 1988 Aboriginal 'Long March of Freedom, Justice, and Hope', and more recent World Economic Forum (WEF) Melbourne (S11, S12 and S13) protests in September 2000, and the 2002 May Day (M1) protests in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne.<sup>1</sup>

My intention is to show that dissident dress twenty years ago demonstrated a greater degree of solidarity in its radical 'difference' from mainstream dress than today. It could be read as having nothing to hide. Nowadays clothing worn at protest events is often hard to distinguish from everyday dress, thus appearing to lack ideological solidarity. Dressed subjects seem to offer little visual coherence of meaning, aside from their visibly dichotomous relationship to the uniform of law enforcement personnel. One must of course bear in mind any reading of clothing can be fraught with complications.<sup>2</sup> Moreover the messages which dress sends are not always the same as those received.<sup>3</sup> This makes matters complicated if, as here, we are concerned with issues of resistance. Dress does not speak to a single cultural audience. It is variously decoded by those of different political persuasions, and certainly further reinterpreted or reframed by the media.

Beyond offering physical protection clothes have many functions, not least of which is attractive bodily covering. More significantly, clothing can inform us of national or ethnic belonging, and signify relations of power, along axes of class, religion, gender and race. Cultural hierarchies of western dress, constructed by the socially dominant, have traditionally been intended to maintain stability and coherence, and sustain existing power structures.<sup>4</sup> In Australia, as elsewhere, such messages have been, and are, intentionally linked to cultural and ideological strategies to maintain social position whether through particular forms of visibility, or deliberate

social discretion.<sup>5</sup>

Having said this, the classed appearance and dress of the dominant stratum of society, by its very existence, has always been under challenge at one time or another. This has sometimes occurred via oppositional or subversive clothes, often assumed by the underclasses, or by more subtle transgressive dressing. In Australia's early settlement years convict women in factories and houses of correction in New South Wales refused to wear government issue and did their best to scandalise officials by bold attire acquired through proceeds of prostitution.<sup>6</sup> This was a determination to defy the strictures of middle-class notions of appropriate dress for women prisoners. It represented a rebellious clash of cultural meanings centred on the nature of appearance, and a deliberate challenge to those who endeavoured to police it. But if we are tempted to imagine that dress is always easily 'readable' in these dichotomous terms, we may be disappointed. Transgressive or cross-gender dressing is an example which calls into question any notion that clothing can be unambiguously understandable.<sup>7</sup>

Ironically, according to Christopher Breward, it was the affluence of post-world war II society and the props of consumer culture, especially in London, that allowed working-class youth to buy into exaggerated, oppositional (subcultural) clothing, setting itself against the drabness of regular mainstream dressing.<sup>8</sup> Overtly rebellious subculture dress, whether Teds, Mods or Punk, has always had an ambiguous relationship with everyday consumption. Today, in a globalised and trans-territorial world, a world in which fake can have as much purchase as original, the meanings of clothes are more abstruse. Within the 'hypersegmentation' of lifestyle niches, they have become ambiguous, fragmented and less readable artefacts.<sup>9</sup> In an age where individuality reigns supreme in the west we have 'no more mega systems', just mutable trends and the 'casual intoxication of consumption'.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, the very fact of commercial globalisation has brought with it a deadening sameness of western attire, but also its obverse, a fragmentation of any visible sense of hegemonic order. So in terms of identifying and representing personal and social identity, in relation to what Bleiker calls our 'mobile subjectivities',<sup>11</sup> everyday dress today is far more problematic and mutable than thirty years ago. This has implications for the study of protest dress.

Organised western political dissent has frequently used dress to present a visibly coherent and symbolic resistance to the dominant. At the same time, there

have been less dramatic inversions or alternatives to mainstream norms of clothing, including those relating to gender.<sup>12</sup> Here there can be minor underpinnings of small-time, persistent and day-to-day challenges to authority, with teenagers or school pupils but one instance. On another level, personal dissent in dress can almost be invisible. It can simply mean the choice to withhold shopping in one brand name store rather than another. These apparently low-key resistances are now dispersed into the maelstrom of global attire, making radical dress difficult to identify, for it can be anywhere. The exception might be instances of fear-generating 'cultural clashes' of dress. An interesting example in Australia, as in other Western countries such as France, is the controversial wearing of the hijab by Muslim women. Whilst the hijab is the habitual affirmative attire of a minority group, it is sometimes deliberately assumed as a self-conscious gesture of solidarity, perhaps signaling resistance to stereotypes constructed by the white-controlled media. Unquestionably it is often over read for its motivations and meanings, and can draw out antagonism by its overt visibility and 'difference'.

We supposedly live in a world that exists without borders, a nationless, raceless community of consumers as claimed by multinational corporations such as Nike World, Diesel Planet and Benetton One World.<sup>13</sup> My examples for analysis, drawn from Australian political life and activities, are not intended to suggest anything specific about resistant dress in Australia, especially these days. But the essay does consider issues, including those of race, that are particular to us as a nation. My main question focuses on whether western-style clothes in this country still demonstrate alternative or dissenting views today. Street theatre protest costume is not the principal issue here, nor is customary ethnic or religious clothing. But has everyday dress, and what stands for dissident, become so blended into a complex, universal, mix of micro cultural clothing that it is almost impossible to conclusively identify anything as 'different'? Can dress signal any notion of a visibly bounded political identity in globalised Australia?

Naomi Klein, in her international best seller *No Logo*, underlines the current ironic problems of dissenting dress in relation to anti-corporate brand-busting protests. The danger for protesters lies, she suggests, in campaigns that can simply degenerate into 'glorified ethical shopping guides'.<sup>14</sup> Her book is an exposé, and a call to arms, against multinational corporations, their manufacturing practices and the insidious ways the logo always appears to win in the end. Persistent media exposure

and re-exposure of brand named clothing, worn by everyday consumers as much as protestors, has the ironic affect of creating more advertising space and thus more revenue. Perhaps this is why many now direct their attentions toward creative theatrical effect and punning, the carnivalesque rather than subversive or ideologically coherent forms of protest dress. A further question is whether the collective terms 'alternative' or 'protest' clothing have become obsolete. Is all dress simply another aspect of the 'supermarket' of style described by Ted Polhemus in his popular book *Streetstyle* (1994)?

I pursue this matter using two important pieces of writing. First I want to draw on Caroline Evans' significant revisionist essay centering on discourses about 1980s and 1990s subcultural appearances in the UK, entitled 'Dreams that only money can buy ....or, the shy tribe in flight from discourse'.<sup>15</sup> Here she urges that we cease to think of subcultural dress as the resistant 'in your face' dialectical opposite of mainstream dress, as it has formerly been theorised. Even muted visibilities can be radical gestures.<sup>16</sup> We should, she argues, adopt a new, contradictory, even oscillating model of culture against which we can reconceptualise our understanding of any fixity in dissenting subcultural identity (here I include identity signalled by protest clothing in Australia). Secondly I want to use Evans' work in conjunction with Naomi Klein's views in *Fences and Windows*, a text she describes as 'a record of dispatches from the front lines' of the fall-out from her 2000 book *No Logo*.<sup>17</sup> In this more recent book she argues the case that within our globalised environment, 'fencing' (both real and virtual) of the good, socially protective kinds are being torn down, at the same time as others, more sinister, are being erected. Her main concern is with corporate privatisation which is setting up new forms of social exclusion and selective entry to spaces based on the capacity to pay. Barriers are being erected separating people from previously free resources, preventing their ability to cross borders or to express their political dissent.<sup>18</sup>

Despite Klein's catchy tone and journalistic rhetoric, her examples provide support for the present discussion. Importantly, in the transnational world of 'fences' she describes, against which international global protests are directed, she sees small scale 'windows' of low-key disruption. These more personalised resistances seek liberation at the grass roots level, deliberately challenging classic or centralised power struggle frameworks. And they can be quietly effective, perhaps reclaiming things that should not be privately owned, such as water, seeds, music and ideas. Her story, she

says is: 'One about people pushing against the barriers that try to contain them, opening up windows, breathing deeply, tasting freedom.'<sup>19</sup> I am interested in exploring whether her 'windows' metaphor of small cracks, interstices and the less dramatic, can in any way be applied to the clothing, general appearance and issues evident in recent Australian political protests.

A key part of my argument compares media coverage of 'The Long March of Freedom, Justice and Hope' in Sydney, organised by the Reverend Charles Harris, President of the Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress during the Bicentennial Celebrations in 1988, and two later protest events. In the former, the representation of the clothing of black and white protesters offered a remarkable degree of visible and ideological coherence in opposition to mainstream dress. This fitted well with former models of writing about subcultural clothing that Evans terms those of 'heroic' resistance.<sup>20</sup> Protest dress in 1988 was very different from the more dispersed incoherence of dress worn by the WEF protests in Melbourne in 2000 and the 2002 May Day protests. In using these examples, there is no intention to create some exaggerated polarisation between 'old' social movements and their values, and 'new' ones in terms of the present day.<sup>21</sup> But an argument will be put forward that any clear and visible difference between everyday clothing and resistant dress has mostly dissipated, outside complications of meaning engendered by habitual affirmative dress. Carnival-like giant puppets, seen at S11 2000 and similar events, may be exceptions as subjective signs of resistance to the corporate, or else entertainment forms that strengthen social solidarity.<sup>22</sup> But what I suggest is that everyday attire, which some might view as 'ordinary' dress, gives the temporary dissenting community social visibility (small scale windows) in ways that can only be understood in terms of the *opposite* of solidarity, a freer, even individualistic sense of incoherence. This is not deliberately set against the mainstream. Rather it becomes visible precisely by virtue of its difference from the clearly demarcated 'thin blue line' of the police, and the uniformity of global corporate and professional wear (fences).

To answer the question about differences apparent between dress for dissent in Australia today, and twenty years ago we need to establish a general picture of mainstream dressing and consider what form, if any, a resistant alternative might take. What in fact do we mean by everyday dress? Our dominating mode is western-style clothing, sometimes termed global or 'world' dress.<sup>23</sup> This is clothing we see around us at the mall, commonly jeans, tee shirts, skirts, business suits, trainers and so on.

But the notion of the homogeneity of current dress needs to be qualified, for western-style clothes are unevenly taken up here as anywhere. As Australia's migrant population increases, we find customary African and Asian clothing infiltrating city streets. Garments (the hijab say) or hairstyles may be assumed for religious reasons, or co-opted for personal or ideological ones. And the so-called homogeneity of global dress, particularly branded clothing or cheap copies thereof, is tempered by factors such as income level, personal preferences and the common necessity for purchasing of clothing second-hand. There are regional and urban inflections too. In fact any visit to a rural fringe settlement or outback Australian town will show multifarious differences from metropolitan living. Inner-city Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth demonstrate a preponderance of city suits over more casual clothing. But in the suburbs, home to migrants with their own ethnic beliefs and practices, the situation is likely to be different. Noble's study of Arab-speaking youth in south-western Sydney shows that identity formation moves between essentialism, a given ethnicity and a strategic hybridity of elements drawn both from the parent culture and from Australia; these youths adopt what he calls a repertoire of socially useful subject positions.<sup>24</sup> In many instances dress follows a similar path.

So whilst no-one would deny a pervasive uniformity in global clothing today, there are complications inherent in accepting the notion of so called 'world' dress. We are all engaged in multifarious style accommodations and compromises in day-to-day choices of self-presentation.<sup>25</sup> In the present climate, everyday dress is as much constituted by sameness and global branding, as an incoherent montage of mass-produced clothing, disparate retro styles and the aestheticisation of 'alternative' clothes. It is composed of an untidy, even confused range of garments from mall fashions to personal retro and vestiges of hippie attire, with little regard for their original significance or substance. 'Alternative' dress has become commodified. Knitted beanies, tattoos, loose skirts and wraps, tight headscarves, billum bags and dreadlocks, visible at events like Woodstock, still remain within the repertoire of protest clothes, but can equally be everyday street dress or temporarily assumed for festivals like the Woodford Folk Festival. Alternatively these clothes appear on the catwalk in more luxurious forms, made from prestigious fabrics, for high fashion has comprehensively cannibalised both the dress of the past and ethnicity.<sup>26</sup>

Dissenting clothing, formerly the style of visible 'difference', would seem to have little purchase against such fragmentation, for it closely replicates the practices

of everyday global clothing. But there is a proviso. Those who support indigenous claims, and feel dismay at white indifference to their cause, can use 'alternative' adornment such as Rasta-style knitted 'tams' on a regular basis to mark their opposition to white respectability, and what is deemed their privileged degree of anonymity. For all these complex reasons, we need to find some new model on which to base our understanding of the dress of political protest.

The answer, I believe, lies in reconceptualising former dichotomous understandings of the ways dress expresses disaffection. Evans urges that, as mainstream society is now so incoherent and unstable, we should reconsider any notion of clearly identifiable subcultural or alternative identity.<sup>27</sup> The basis of her argument lies in the notion that accounts of subcultures, especially those from the 1970s onward, have tended to explore them in terms of fixities of meaning. Cultural theorists such as Dick Hebdige viewed subcultural clothing as a dichotomy between dominant versus resistant dress. This may once have been a useful way to explain the UK social environment in which, for instance, punks used their spectacular appearances to challenge the complacencies of middle-class Thatcherite Britain. But it is not applicable today. Cultural theorist Malcolm Barnard in *Fashion as Communication* sees clothing performing the ideological function of either a bridge (community cohesion), or a fence which keeps identities separate. In fact he accepts there can be a stronger version of this, where the terms 'weapons' and 'defences' seem more apt.<sup>28</sup> The present argument suggests that visibly aggressive appearances, which amount to an attack on mainstream culture (punks), have far less relevance today.

Evans offers a preferable model of both culture and subculture, one which is more complex. Here resistance is not necessarily obvious but can be constituted by a passive form of understatement. She argues that recent subcultures are not necessarily clearly defined, but may move fluidly through identities and as such are diasporic.<sup>29</sup> They are 'becoming' processes, continually made and unmade. This concept of resistance as always in a zone of 'being made', is well illustrated in media coverage of recent events discussed below, where dressed protestors are inchoate groups moving almost amoeba-like within ever shifting public spaces. Apart from masks and theatrical devices, there is little to distinguish them from any crowd. The only way in which we can identify their intent is in their 'difference' from the appearance of law enforcement agents, who temporarily define the site of their resistance.

In his book *Models and Mirrors. Towards an Anthropology of Public Events*, Handelman examines what he calls the technology of officially orchestrated public celebratory events, which are self-consciously and formally marked out from everyday life, both spatially and temporally.<sup>30</sup> He suggests that such events, constituted by their official intentionality, are symbolic, sequential enactments that address and redress problems of social relations, and herein lies their validity.<sup>31</sup> This is somewhat different from the kind of loose public protests I am examining, although these can occur in demarcated spaces on the street. The street is of course never truly public, according to Cohen-Cruz in his analysis of radical street theatre, in that it is always controlled by someone.<sup>32</sup> But dress for dissent in protest marches, and more unpredictable occasions, is an aspect of a particular, yet amorphous, mutating ritual. Protest marches have an entirely different rationale and resolution from a coherent street performance. Sometimes, but not always, they appear in areas that spontaneously shift from moment to moment, apparently without clear direction. On the other hand many WTO and WEF protests have had the careful planning of significant organisational backing, including survival websites giving advice about clothing best suited to personal protection.<sup>33</sup> Importantly the recent Australian protest events, perhaps initially conceived as spatially separate, spontaneously shifted location, or were, in some cases, artificially bounded by the 'fencing' of police presence. One also has to bear in mind that today dissent is globally constituted. It has no precise locatable or containable essence. We need to accept its contingent foundations and cross-territorial flows rather than regard it as fully and precisely delineated. As Bleiker argues:

Dissent has become what could be called a transversal phenomenon — a political practice that not only transgresses national boundaries, but also questions the spatial logic through which these boundaries have come to constitute and frame the conduct of international relations.<sup>34</sup>

I suggest that nowadays dissident crowd behaviour operates in terms of a framework of confusion. Protest dress, often disproportionately that of young people<sup>35</sup> can scarcely be distinguished from dress worn anywhere. On the other hand, protest events are sites where non specific meanings in dress can actually acquire meaning. The crucial point here, one which must be stressed, is that these provide a solidarity of incoherence that can only be understood in relation to the clearly demarcated 'thin blue line' of uniformed police and the uniformity of corporate and professional wear



(Figure 1). The militaristic metaphor of the 'thin blue line', coined by the Los Angeles reformist police chief William Parker in the 1950s,<sup>36</sup> is useful here, for the visibility of police clothing at protest events offers this containment and boundary limitation against which protestors can act out their amorphously dressed selves.<sup>37</sup>

Paasonen's analysis of the ways Australian newspaper coverage of protests have, since 1983, used their editorial voice to construct the idea that protests are inevitably violent is pertinent here.<sup>38</sup> He finds that texts set up polarised differences between 'we' (that is the police), and 'them' (that is protestors) and terminology frequently focused on 'battle' and 'assault' metaphors.<sup>39</sup> He also discusses the terminology of 'the thin blue line' which he views as an ideological construct. It sets up a barrier between 'us' and 'them', in the sense that 'we' are the ones to be defended against protestors, often described as 'weird' or non-serious in appearance, who can then be written off on the basis of appearance.<sup>40</sup> This thesis was written in 1995 when the disparity of appearance between law enforcement and protestors was strongly polarised. Today the sense of protestors whose appearance is 'ratbag' and 'offbeat' has less purchase. Even so the notion of a visible and bounded line of militaristic police presence (dressed in blue, black, white or sometimes yellow) is still relevant. It creates a temporary containing boundary against which everyday dress can signify solidarity, clothes which in everyday life are likely to be little different from mainstream attire.

The first example I wish to examine makes clear the ways in which dissident dress twenty years ago was clearly demarcated from the mainstream and where police presence was unobtrusive. This was the indigenous response to the bicentennial celebrations in Sydney on Australia Day, 26 January 1988. In the introduction to his edited volume *Celebration of a Nation*, Tony Bennett argues that, as part of the discourse of nationalism at the time, large-scale events were organised specifically to show Australians to themselves in their best light. On the surface these were intended to present a harmonious unity within diversity, bringing together all Australians under the rubric of the national. In the process, however, Aboriginal people decided to exclude themselves.<sup>41</sup> The bicentennial celebrations were a festivity centered on cultural diversity but one where the indigenous population was effectively marginalised. Although they had been invited to participate, they preferred a year-long boycott of the whole thing. By so doing they hoped to highlight their concerns to the world. However, they put together several events, including the Aboriginal march

in Sydney for Australia Day, 26 January, a day that has now come to be called either the Day of Mourning, Survival or Invasion Day.<sup>42</sup>

Australia Day events were given widespread media coverage. Parts of the march featured in 'Australia Daze', a film directed by Pat Fiske consisting of a compendium of opinions about the celebrations. The film is marked, however, by a sense that Aborigines were physically and culturally separated from the picnic atmosphere of the 'other' celebrations. The latter focused on the spectacle of Sydney Harbour filled with small craft and replica tall ships of the first white newcomers. This event is believed to have brought 1.5 million people to the harbour shores.<sup>43</sup> With some exceptions, the film shows a far more racist and complacent Australia than exists even today, clear evidence of the politics of representation at work. Whilst it provides a montage of views from different social classes, including interviews with rural as well as urban Australians, it simultaneously highlights the vast differences between celebrations orchestrated by whites, their picnics, parties, food, playful activities and their general economic prosperity, compared with the concerns voiced by indigenous people.

In contrast to the official celebrations, Aborigines staged a large, orderly march in inner Sydney, called the 'The Long March of Freedom, Justice, and Hope. It proceeded from Redfern Oval via Belmore Park to Hyde Park, and was followed by a concert. The demonstration was peaceful, a joining together of individuals and communities from the Kimberley, the Torres Strait, Tasmania and Central Australia. Whilst indigenous people gathered initially to observe the harbour festivities, at what they termed the 'Embassy' at Mrs Macquarie's Chair,<sup>44</sup> they moved away to take part in the march. Estimated as bringing together over 50,000 Aboriginal and non Aboriginal participants,<sup>45</sup> the march was regarded at the time as the biggest and the most unified gathering of indigenous people in their history. The general tone echoed the idea of 'invasion', picking up existing cultural themes to show this was a year of mourning for indigenous people, but also a year of surviving. One of the march slogans spelt out the words we 'want to talk to our land and want our land to talk to us'.<sup>46</sup> It was a plea for self-determination and greater recognition for the plight of indigenous Australians. Shots included in the film show that many activities took place well away from the harbour and its festivities. Although not emphasised in the film, some historians see the evening concert performance at La Perouse (where Cook had landed) with its traditional singing, dancing, stories and final ritual cleansing as

even more important than the march.<sup>47</sup>

The daytime protest march was dominated by the colours of the Aboriginal people – red, yellow and black on flags, huge banners and clothing. There were logo-inscribed tee shirts, red, yellow and black hatbands around black Akubras, as well as red headbands. Some tee shirts were yellow, with images of the Australian continent in red, others had inscriptions like ‘White Australia has a Black History’ and ‘Our Land Our Life’. Still others were inscribed ‘Mourn 88’ (Figure 2). Participants were also in customary dress with body paint. Older indigenous people wore headbands inscribed with the words ‘Our Land’, and tribal elders from the Northern Territory, in loin cloths, carried spears and clapping sticks, their bodies marked with feathers, white clay and red ochres. Without question, at this most significant event for Aboriginal peoples, their dress was a highly visible and cohesive aspect.<sup>48</sup>

There are few in-depth studies of tee shirts and the role they play as a medium of resistance. In Australia tee shirts worn by indigenous people are deeply politicised garments by virtue of use and design, as well as garments that have empowered communities in their drive for self-sufficiency within the tourist industry.<sup>49</sup> They have readily borne the inscriptions of resistance, especially since the early 1980s. Some of the earliest examples are the black, red and yellow shirts, worn during marches organised by the Black Protest Committee during the 1982 Commonwealth Games in Brisbane.<sup>50</sup> The most iconic image we carry through from the event is by well known photographer Brenda Croft. It is a frontal portrait of Michael Watson at Redfern, his face inscribed with white body paint with both arms upraised in a defiant gesture. He wears a tee shirt showing the Aboriginal flag between two inscriptions ‘Cook Who’ and ‘Cook-OO’.<sup>51</sup> His hair is tied back with a head band titled ‘We Have Survived’. Anti-global economic protests have been of an entirely different order. They have a universal dimension, driven by activists who, to simplify, believe that fewer and fewer large corporations are distorting the market place by controlling what everyone eats, drinks and wears. Yet they are not necessarily opposed to all aspects of globalisation, and the terms anti-corporate or global justice movements are considered by some as being a more accurate reflection of their agendas.<sup>52</sup> Opponents of the unfettered aspects of globalisation are engaged in new forms of protest, often spontaneous street drama, increasingly underwritten by the internet. Constituted fundamentally by a non-hierarchical and loose organisational format, they are thus prey to many different interests and are far less ideologically coherent. In many cases

they make use of theatricalised dress, dramatic effects and punning.<sup>53</sup> But within reason and practicality, protestors wear what they please. Even so, McFarlane's analysis of the Seattle WTO protests in 1999, covered by the *Australian* newspaper, still shows derogatory comments on appearances featured heavily, thus shifting focus from the protestors' political views to what they wore.<sup>54</sup> For dissidents this is clearly a negative media response. If dress steps outside the accepted norm and is termed 'alternative', it clearly stereotypes its wearers as radical, and may work against their aims to be taken seriously.

More recently protests in Australia have been characterised, as already indicated, by the prevalence of everyday clothing. This blandness was evident in 2000 at the S11-S13 protests where, on 11 September, 20,000 protestors caused a mass blockade of Melbourne's Crown Casino, preventing delegates entering the Asia-Pacific Economic Summit of the WEF. Images on one website<sup>55</sup> show protestors dressed in tee shirts, beanies and other forms of casual dress. Yet if we observe the represented event in its totality, what is starkly obvious is the contrast between this clothing and the uniforms of the police, here white jackets and caps, as well as blue.

Media coverage of the May Day protests (M1) in 2002 anti-globalisation and anti-refugee detentions demonstrations in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne was broadcast on the ABC, on channels Seven, Nine and on SBS. Protests in Sydney and Brisbane were violent and confrontational. Most arrests were in Sydney, although arrest numbers were down from the previous year. In Sydney protestors blocked access to the headquarters of Australasian Correctional Management, contracted to manage government detention centres. In Brisbane the protest took place outside the Department of Immigration building. The issue of law and order has increasingly been on the Howard political agenda and indeed on that of the Queensland government. An excessive and premeditated police presence was on show, their solidarity visibly confirmed by their dress. Police constables wore blue shirts and baseball caps, the latter trimmed with the familiar checked band - the Sillitoe tartan - of blue and white.<sup>56</sup> This highly obvious 'blue' presence in Brisbane was described by Channel Nine as the 'Thick Blue Line'. The commentator noted the intense visual and uniform contrast with the confused jumble of mostly youthful protestors. At one stage, the media showed vivid shots of two parallel and brightly demarcated lines of police attempting to contain a crowd of about 200 protestors who had begun to march. The general impression of the clothing of these protestors, as has been said, was

unremarkable although the media did focus repeatedly, if not gratuitously, on one attendee who had sewed his lips together.

In Sydney the mounted police were brought in and formed a more sinister presence, all in militaristic black leather jackets and helmets. Police uniform being different from Brisbane, the other ranks wore blue shirts with the word Police in large white letters. Here the containing blue line as well as the black line of the mounted police formed double lines of aggression. The ABC commented that attempts were made to blockade the building running detention centres. Interestingly office workers trying to enter their building showed their difference from the heterogeneous dress of protestors as well. Their conservative corporate business suits presented another kind of barrier of protective 'uniformity'.

What can we take from the comparison between the dress at the 'heroic' Freedom, Justice and Hope' march and more recent protests? Surely it is that 'alternative' is now diffused and undifferentiated. The foci of public protest have shifted from the visible strength denoted by coherence in dress, to a bringing into visibility of the repressiveness of the 'thin blue line'. This is now the 'border presence' against which protestors object. Building on Evans' reconceptualised notion of subcultural dress (or as here protest dressing) as process not fixity, the relationship of dissident dress to the mainstream has become, for the most part, less dichotomous.

If the apparent blandness of 'protest' dress is to have any purchase, it must be reassessed for the political critique it offers. On one hand it deflects stereotypical labeling of participants as those with 'fringe' interests. But it is possible to read from it what at first sight might seem unreadable. Everyday dress has political import, for it is clothing defined in relation to its dramatic obverse, what Klein speaks of in another context as 'fences'. In other words, recent clothing at protest events has the effect of making obvious official and corporate borders, symbolized both by police and corporate uniforms, that claim to protect the fabric of our society. Where once the radically attired protestor was the subject of resistance to the mainstream, today we are all potentially vulnerable to the obvious and contained deployment of state aggression, embodied by 'the thin blue line'.

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- <sup>1</sup> Relationships between clothes and controversial public protest have been a feature of Mardi Gras parades since 1978. Space does not allow exploration of this particular area of importance.
- <sup>2</sup> M Barnard, *Fashion as Communication*, Routledge, New York, 1996.
- <sup>3</sup> A Hollander, 'Accounting for Fashion', *Raritan*, vol 13, no 2, 1993, pp 123-4.
- <sup>4</sup> D Crane, *Fashion and its Social Agendas. Class, Gender, and Identity in Clothing*, Chicago University Press, Chicago, 2000, p 7.
- <sup>5</sup> M Maynard, *Fashioned from Penury: Dress as Cultural Practice in Colonial Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994, p 98.
- <sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p 25.
- <sup>7</sup> M Garber, *Vested Interests. Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*, Penguin, New York, 1993, p 32.
- <sup>8</sup> C Breward, *Fashion*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003, pp 222-3.
- <sup>9</sup> Crane, *ibid.*, p10.
- <sup>10</sup> G Lipovetsky, *The Empire of Fashion. Dressing Modern Democracy*, trans C, Porter Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1994, p 205.
- <sup>11</sup> R Bleiker, *Popular Dissent, Human Agency and Global Politics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, p 207.
- <sup>12</sup> The wearing of masculinized dress for sport and leisure by late 19th century bourgeois women is a case in point (Crane, p 128).
- <sup>13</sup> T Polhemus, *Diesel World Wide Wear*, Thames and Hudson, London 1998, p 54.
- <sup>14</sup> N Klein, *No Logo*, Flamingo, London, 2000, p 428.
- <sup>15</sup> C Evans, 'Dreams that only money can buy ... or the shy tribe in flight from discourse', *Fashion Theory*, vol 1, no2, 1997, pp 169-88.
- <sup>16</sup> Evans, *ibid.*, p 170.
- <sup>17</sup> N Klein, *Fences and Windows. Dispatches from the Front Lines of the Globalization Debate*, Picador, New York, 2002, p XIII.
- <sup>18</sup> Klein, *ibid.*, p XVIII.
- <sup>19</sup> Klein, *ibid.*, pp XXVI-II.
- <sup>20</sup> Evans, *op.cit.*, p 185.
- <sup>21</sup> V Burgmann, *Power and Protest: Movements for Change in Australian Society*, Allen and Unwin, St Leonards NSW, 1993, p 5.
- <sup>22</sup> V Burgmann, *Power, Profit and Protest. Australian Social Movements and Globalisation*, Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest NSW, 2003, p 306-8.
- <sup>23</sup> J B Eicher & B Sumberg, 'World Fashion, Ethnic and National Dress', *Dress and Ethnicity. Change Across Space and Time*, ed. J. B. Eicher, Berg, Oxford 1995, pp 295-306.
- <sup>24</sup> G Noble, S Poynting and P Taybar, 'Youth ethnicity and the mapping of identities: strategic hybridity among male Arab-speaking youth in south-western Sydney', *Communal/Plural*, vol 7, no1, 1999, p 40.
- <sup>25</sup> M Maynard, *Dress and Globalisation*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2004, p 8.
- <sup>26</sup> Maynard, *ibid.*, pp 79-83.
- <sup>27</sup> Evans, *op.cit.*, p 183.
- <sup>28</sup> Barnard, *op.cit.*, 1996, pp 38ff.
- <sup>29</sup> Evans, *op cit.*, p 185.
- <sup>30</sup> D Handelman, *Models and Mirrors: Towards an Anthropology of Public Events*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990, p 11.
- <sup>31</sup> Handelman, *ibid.*, p 17.

- <sup>32</sup> J Cohen-Cruz (ed.), *Radical Street Performance. An International Anthology*, Routledge, London, 1998, p 2.
- <sup>33</sup> Maynard, 2004, op.cit., p 66.
- <sup>34</sup> Bleiker, op.cit., pp 274-6.
- <sup>35</sup> See the detailed analysis of participants at the S11 protest in 2000 in Burgmann 2003, p 284.
- <sup>36</sup> G L Kelling, 'Crime and Metaphor: Toward a New Concept of Policing', *City Journal*, Autumn 1991, p 2. [www.city-journal.org/article01.php?aid=1577](http://www.city-journal.org/article01.php?aid=1577)
- <sup>37</sup> At the time the force was endeavouring to transform itself into a more disciplined and professional organisation. Parker used the phrase as a way of envisaging a more military-like organisation which could be clearly contrasted with current disruptive citizenry.
- <sup>38</sup> K E Paasonen, Building the Beast. 'Media Construction of Protests and Protesters and the Assignment of Responsibility for Violence', MA thesis, University of Queensland, 1995, p 92.
- <sup>39</sup> Paasonen, ibid., pp 2 & 20-3.
- <sup>40</sup> Paasonen, ibid., p 61.
- <sup>41</sup> T Bennett, (ed. et al), *Celebrating the Nation. A Critical Study of Australia's Bicentenary*, Allen and Unwin, St Leonards NSW, 1992, pp xvi-iii.
- <sup>42</sup> S Kleinert & M Neale, *Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 2000, p 706.
- <sup>43</sup> A Young, 'Veterans of Black Struggle Take to Sydney Streets', *Age*, 27 Jan 1988.
- <sup>44</sup> A Dewdney, *Racism, Representation and Photography*, Sydney Inner City Education Centre, Sydney, 1994, p 154.
- <sup>45</sup> Kleinert and Neale, op.cit., p 286.
- <sup>46</sup> This can be seen in the film 'Australia Daze'.
- <sup>47</sup> Kleinert and Neale, op.cit., p 706.
- <sup>48</sup> The march was captured in the 'Freedom, Justice and Hope' photographic mural, initiated by photographer Huw Davies and developed by Sue Read, Tanya Ellis and Troy Russell (Dewdney, pp51-8). The mural was displayed at the Eora Centre for Visual and Performing Arts, the Koori Campus of the Sydney Institute of Technology. It was thirty three metres long and consisted of twenty five prints.
- <sup>49</sup> M Maynard, in Kleinert and Neale, op.cit., p 388.
- <sup>50</sup> L Watson, 'The Commonwealth Games in Brisbane 1982. Analysis of Aboriginal Protests', *Social Alternatives*, vol 7, no1, 1988, p 40.
- <sup>51</sup> Kleinert and Neale, op.cit., ill p 46.
- <sup>52</sup> Burgmann 2003, op.cit., p 249.
- <sup>53</sup> B Szerszynski, 'Performing Politics', *Culture and Economy After the Cultural Turn*, L. Ray & A. Sayer (eds.), Sage, London, 1999, p 212.
- <sup>54</sup> T. McFarlane, 'The Battle for Seattle: Discourse, the *Australian* and Framing Representations of the Seattle World Trade Organisation Protests', *GEOView*, [www.ssn.flinders.edu.au/geog/geos/mcfarlane2.htm](http://www.ssn.flinders.edu.au/geog/geos/mcfarlane2.htm), 2001, p 10.
- <sup>55</sup> See [www.takver.com/history/s11.htm](http://www.takver.com/history/s11.htm) and [http://www.ozshots.com/20000912\\_WEF/index\\_eng.html](http://www.ozshots.com/20000912_WEF/index_eng.html)
- <sup>56</sup> This distinguishing feature was adopted by police in Glasgow in 1932 and named after the Chief Constable, Sir Percy Sillitoe. After South Australia's Chief Brigadier John McKinna visited Glasgow in 1960, he introduced it to police uniform in South Australia. It was first used by the Queensland police in the 1970s. <http://www.afp.gov.au/afp/raw/Publications/Platypus/Mar00/know.htm>