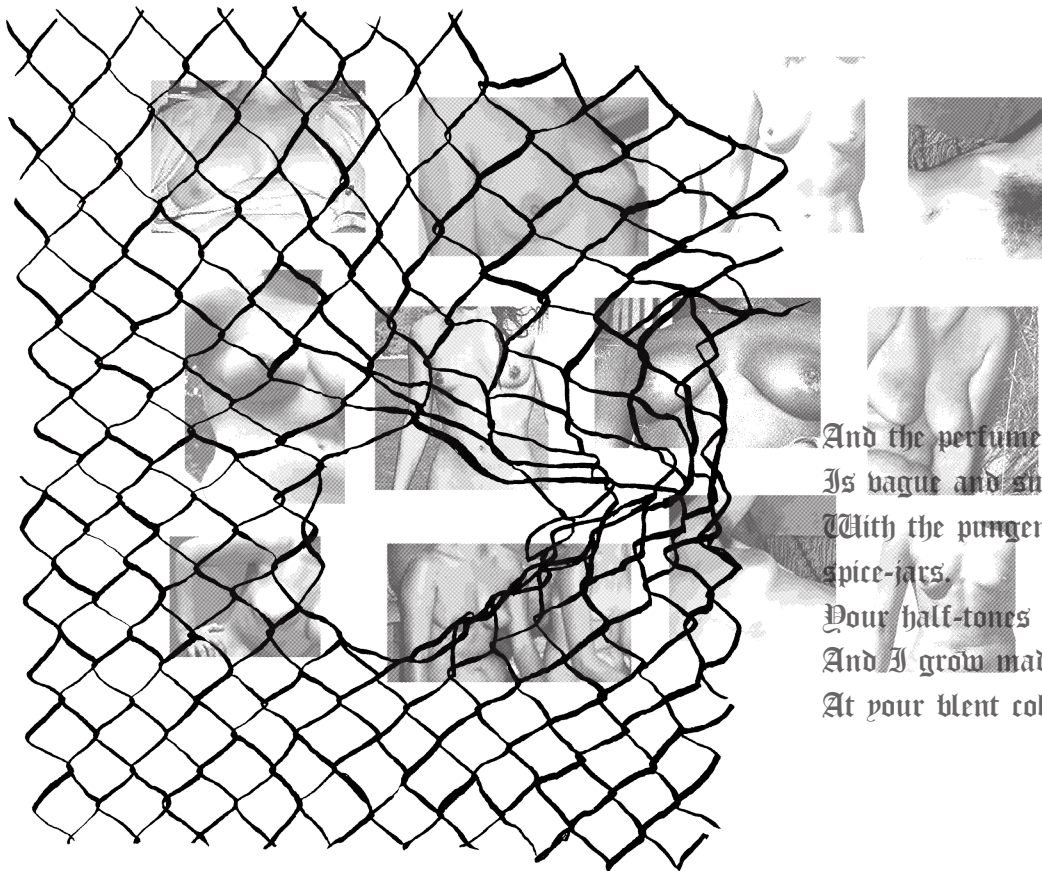


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LESBIAN STYLE



*And the perfume of your soul
Is vague and suffusing,
With the pungence of sealed
spice-jars.
Your half-tones delight me,
And I grow mad with gazing
At your blent colors.*

**Designing a lesbian fashion
collection.**

Lesbian Style: designing a lesbian fashion collection.

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of
Master of Design
Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand**

**Neneh Browne
2019**

LESBIAN STYLE

Designing a lesbian fashion
collection

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2019

ABSTRACT

Lesbian style and expression is an area of fashion which is underrepresented in the fashion industry as well as in the teachings of fashion. Fashion as an industry is overwhelmingly viewed as a gay man's domain as men make up a majority of creative director positions in western fashion houses and many of fashion's most influential figures are openly gay men (Pike 2016). Lesbians by comparison are associated primarily with being unfashionable – and more harshly in accordance with heterosexist feminine standards – ugly (Karaminas 2013). Through this research project, I explore how style is utilised and influenced by the lesbian experience and propose that, despite stereotypes, lesbian style goes beyond Birkenstocks and dungarees and can be used as an influence for subversive contemporary design.

This research is made up of two components – an analysis of lesbian style history in the 20th century culminating in the 1980's, followed by an exploration of 80's club and subcultural styles. There is a particular focus on the design practices of Vivienne Westwood, Walter Van Beirendonck and Elsa Schiaparelli. This analysis acts as the primary focus for the second component: a design practice outcome of five fashion looks using a bricolage and historic revivalist methodology inspired by 80's subcultural style. The design outcome aims to showcase how clothing can be designed with specific lesbian coding.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the support and input of my supervisors Justine Taylor and Vicki Karaminas throughout the development of this exegesis. Their vast experience and expertise in both my focus subject and fashion design has been invaluable to my work and I wish to thank them for their guidance.

I also wish to acknowledge the ongoing support of my family and friends, who sacrificed many hours to lend me ongoing assistance and support, thank you to my parents, Lara, Tim and Quang for helping me in the studio, Maya for her wonderful photography and for driving me late at night. As well as the Massey COCA fashion and textiles faculty staff, thank you Jess, Carol, Hannah, Amy, Robyn and Deb for your feedback and technical support, I couldn't have done it without all of your assistance.

Thank you to all my fellow masters students, as well as Caroline and Paula for being with me on this masters journey.

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INTRODUCTION

Figure 1:

By Sage Sohler from the
photoseries "At Home
with Themselves."

Marty and Rip, New
Orleans, April 1988

If stereotypes and jokes about flannel and bowl cuts are anything to go by, lesbian style is often viewed as an oxymoron, while gay men are often considered blessed with aesthetic sensibilities and good taste in fashion their female counterparts are more commonly considered "style-challenged" (Tongson 2005 p. 281-282). Lesbian style however does in fact have a long-spanning history – while we cannot make any assumptions into the nature of a person's sexuality without both proof of an individual's sexual expression and considering how our contemporary understanding of sexuality may inflict a biased interpretation on the subject – there are still ample examples of lesbian style codes spanning the 20th century and onwards. Lesbian style primarily draws from the subversion of masculine clothing to visually divulge erotic agency and desire towards other women. Often lesbian couples would assume contrasting styles; one masculine and one more traditionally feminine which later became termed as "butch and femme" roles. Since the early 20th century, lesbian women have adopted menswear and masculine tailoring, such as the tuxedo, as a way of clarifying their romantic and sexual preferences often in correlation with a feminine presenting partner. Over time this dynamic has endured, known as the butch-femme relationship, while shifts have occurred in the particular styles in accordance with social change. Ultimately, the adoption of masculine dress can be seen as a consistent cornerstone of lesbian style. However the butch-femme dynamic and adoption of masculine style and mannerisms was not always universally welcomed and at times faced critique from lesbian feminists for re-enforcing patriarchal ideals of the masculine sexual aggressor. The most recognisable form of lesbian aesthetic is tied to gender non-conformity and mannish dress, as it stands apart from the social expectations of feminine beauty. While many may consider masculine lesbian women to simply be imitating men, I assert that by removing traditional masculine (and feminine) codes from their heterosexual context the styles gain a different nuanced reading and subversive quality.

For the purposes of my exegesis, I define “queer” as a broader term for someone who is either non-heterosexual, transgender or gender non-conforming. For example; “queer design” refers to design aesthetics, choices or intended readings which are informed by gay or trans experience (such as design work of Walter Van Beirendonck which draws on visual aspects of gay culture and sexual experience). Heteropatriarchy refers to the state of global social hierarchy where heterosexual relationships and a corresponding binary gender system place men as the dominant power are considered a natural default. The terms heteronormative and heterosexism consequently refer to theories, beliefs and actions which assume and place priority on a heterosexual experience. Whilst turn-of-the-century lesbianism transformed and claimed dandyism and butch style, I will be subverting 1980’s club style and subcultural fashion by reclaiming aspects of subcultural style, which have historically been centred around men.

My design has been informed by appropriated styles of punks and the new romantics, influenced by Vivienne Westwood’s late 1970’s and 1980’s design and female cultural icons who use androgyny, masculinity and implied homoeroticism in their performance; such as Madonna, Annie Lennox and Grace Jones. I aim to achieve this 1980’s homage to lesbian style through historic revivalism for a contemporary design collection. By employing bricolage, as a design methodology, I have designed works which honor the luxe masculine tailoring of historic lesbian style and club style of the 80’s, while using a more explicit and confrontational punk appropriated treatment and iconography; to be undeniably lesbian in a contemporary design context where masculine aesthetics in womenswear are less of an instant indicator of sexuality.

In the context of my design work, I refer to Dick Hebdige’s concept of bricolage, which he describes as the practice of taking an element and placing it into a new context, giving it new meaning or subverting its original meaning. Within subcultural groups bricolage is used to visually separate themselves from aesthetics of dominant culture. By taking items which in their original context are often familiar or unassuming and placing them into a new, sometimes contradictory context, they generate new discourse and disrupt the items original message or use (Hebdige 1979, p. 104).

My body of work focuses on queer culture, drawing inspiration from costume, film and subculture. I am interested in how fabric manipulation and applied details add complexity to base designs, that are often more practical and androgynous in nature. My approach focused on application and alteration to create texture and “story” through traditional and future-tech processes; such as screen printing and laser cutting rather than through deconstructive and reconstructive design. My research aims to provide an understanding of the history of lesbian style through applying historic revivalism as a design methodology in order to create a fashion collection which both celebrates and re-imagines designer lesbian style. The design outcome for this project was a five-look fashion collection showcasing androgynous tailored silhouettes featuring subcultural DIY inspired fabric treatments.

Figure 2:

Alan Jones, Chrissie Hynde,
Jordan and Vivienne West-
wood at 'Sex', Kings Road, in
1976

The focus of the base garments and silhouettes was a combination of classic masculine tailored garments such as tailored jackets, trousers and shirts alongside 1980's inspired jersey, denim and boxy Cuban collar shirts (a reference to an 80's macho playboy aesthetic, inspired by the Hawaiian shirts worn by Magnum, P.I. star Tom Selleck). The tailored jackets in the collection reference women's power dressing trends from the 80's such as extreme shoulder pads and boxy pantsuits and more broadly the lesbian use of masculine tailoring to construct queer visual readings. Lesbian style undeniably exists and morphs with time and trends yet in the context of designer fashion (the collection, the runway and the editorial) lesbian style and lesbian specific design is largely absent especially in comparison to gay men's fashion. My design project aims to take lesbian style as a lived and subcultural experience and construct it for a design collection context.

As a designer, I am drawn to use of humor, sometimes crude, in order to parody certain topics and inflict either discomfort or insider kinship with the viewer/consumer. Take for instance Schiaparelli's designs from her surrealist phase, which play with the body in a humorous and often sexually charged manner. Her frequent use of feminine hands grasping and caressing the waists, breasts and sides of the wearer, alongside more symbolic phallic representations and erotic anxieties in the usage of print in the Lobster Dress (Smith, n.d.). While in a contemporary context Schiaparelli's designs are by all means tame, if not somewhat conservative, the clever use of coded imagery and intent in her designs resonates as a method for exploring sexuality without revealing the body or relying on explicit sexual content. In contrast Westwood's designs, particularly in the SEX boutique years, delved into explicit use of erotic imagery in her prints and fetish wear whose construction imitated bondage.

As culture progresses over time and the parameters for what is considered shocking or sexually abhorrent relaxes, designers must delve into more explicit and in some cases “perverse” references in order to garner an emotional response from viewers or simply just acknowledgement that a design is clearly linked with a sexual preference (Karaminas 2017).

In the case of Westwood and Walter Van Beirendonck this has led to looks and runway shows that feature bondage references. Items of clothing which symbolise gay male eroticism such as leather daddy harnesses and vests alongside prints and shapes that feature genitals or reference sexual acts such as Beirendonck’s 1996-1997 Autumn/Winter Wonderland Collection’s hairy chest printed t-shirts. Or his 1997-1998 Autumn/Winter Avatar Collection which contained genital baring pants and the cage like designs featuring simplified penises from his 2009 Autumn/Winter Paris Runway Collection. Cumulatively Westwood and Van Beirendonck’s design provide guidance for how I may play with sex, code and fetish imagery in order to create designs which host undeniable lesbian sexual codes.

This exegesis will first outline a brief history of lesbian style in the 20th century leading up to the 1980’s. Building from this background, I will explore 80’s club culture and subculture fashion, uniforms and lesbian style as transgressive (particularly, masculine aesthetic, uniform and military dress in sexual identity, and the androgynous uniform). In particular, I will also be focusing on the design work of Vivienne Westwood, Walter Van Beirendonck and Elsa Schiaparelli in order to analyse how these three designers apply subversive design practices to fashion. While these designers (excluding Beirendonck) are not known to be gay or lesbian their various practices and approaches to sexuality, humor, illusion and garment manipulations, as well as Westwood’s relevance in the 1980’s subcultural scenes, provide major influence for how I may attempt to design fashion with clear lesbian readings.

Top Left
 Figure 3:
 Schiaparelli dinner dress designed by
 Elsa Schiaparelli in collaboration with
 Salvador Dalí 1937.

Bottom Left
 Figure 4:
 Walter Van Beirendonck. Avatar.
 W.&L.T. Autumn/Winter 1997-98.

Walter Van Beirendonck. Wonderland.
 W.&L.T. Autumn/Winter 1996-97.
 From book: Belgian Fashion Design.

Top Right
 Figure 5:
 Schiaparelli evening belt with hand
 shaped clasp.

Mid Right
 Figure 6:
 Walter Van Beirendonck. Autumn/
 Winter 2010-11.

Bottom Right
 Figure 7:
 Walter Van Bierendonck 2009 men's
 fall collection (Paris).



A BRIEF HISTORY OF LESBIAN STYLE

In order to provide context for my research into lesbian fashion in the 1980's, an understanding of the broader history of lesbian style, codes and performed roles from the late 19th century throughout the 20th is necessary. When it comes to analyzing same-sex history however, there is only so far we can go with any semblance of conclusive "proof" necessary to deem someone or a certain practice "gay". The 'burden of proof' on same-sex practices is always far more complex than that of assumed heterosexuality; but not only that our understanding of homosexuality and the queer experience in society is much different to the views of sexuality across historic periods and cultures. This means that we are unable to apply a modern reading of queer to them without inflicting our own bias or categorisation onto the subject. The concept of homosexuality as we understand it today was not introduced until the late 19th century, a particular turning point from 'sodomy as sin' to the medico-legal term 'homosexual' or the 'invert' was marked by the 1895 trial and conviction of Oscar Wilde for homosexuality (Steele 2013). By pathologizing and applying legal discourse to certain sexual and romantic practices, sex and sexuality, which deviated from heteronormative reproductive sex, became part of an individual's identity rather than simply the isolated act (Foucault 2008).

In the late 19th century we start to see evidence of a lesbian subculture emerging in large metropolitan areas such as Paris and Berlin, with a style closely associated to the male dandy figure and upper class male attire, subverted by its placement onto the female body (Steele 2013). However, it must also be acknowledged that masculine dress on women prior to the 20th century was not a solid indicator of the wearer's sexuality. Other motives such as economic security, early feminism and dress reformists (against the harmful and constricting demands of popular women's fashion) also adopted masculine dress as a means to their own agendas separate from homosexual desire (Wilson 2013). While there are obvious implications of lesbianism from this period – such as accounts of unmarried women spending their lives together, surviving personal letters between women which read in romantic and sometimes sexual nature – it is not until the early 20th century that the existence of lesbian desire crept into greater social acknowledgement. From here onwards we also start to see, with greater clarity, the use of style and dress to publicly solidify the romantic and sexual nature of female couples. The first hurdle for recognition as lesbian or bisexual was the ability to explicitly communicate that the union between two women existed deliberately and held a sexual element rather than a connection of convenience or as consolation for having not yet found a man. By using similar dress, the lesbian couple could emphasise closeness and unity, however this only extends to emotional closeness and thus can be more easily dismissed. By appearing as sisterly or twin like, their dress is still missing an implication of a physical relationship and active desire which is a trait socially confined to the masculine 'pursuer' counterpart to the feminine 'pursued' (Rolley 1992). In order to become sexual a woman must cross over into the 'male world', by adopting masculine looks and mannerisms she was claiming active desire through being more masculine in appearance (Newton 1984).

Subsequently butch and femme style and “roleplay” came into existence as a means to communicate desire and which assumed-role a women would take in a romantic and sexual context. While butch and femme roles appear to mirror heterosexuality this is not entirely the case, by subverting the aesthetics and mannerisms of the “male” and “female” counterparts in heterosexual relationships butch and femme women make clear their erotic involvement and the responsibilities they take-on within the relationship (Karaminas 2017).

The relationship between British writer Radclyffe Hall and Una Troubridge is potentially the most visible exemplar of a relationship between the mannish woman and her feminine counterpart. Hall who referred to herself as an ‘invert’ became highly influential in the wider lesbian community in the early 20th century for her novel *The Well Of Loneliness* (1928). The novel deals with the protagonist’s relationship with her sexual ‘inversion’, sexual and romantic relationships with other women and issues of self-hatred and dysphoria. Hall exhibited a perfect example of how lesbian women used the adoption of masculine dress to convey her sexuality with little uncertainty. Often seen in photos wearing men’s tailored jackets, starched collared shirts with men’s ties, bow ties or scarves, Hall wore her hair cropped short like a man, slicked back with a slight part on the side. Her appearance was undeniably mannish, even the skirts she can be seen wearing in some photos do not detract from the carefully maintained, masculine image she exhibited. When positioned next to her lover Troubridge, who is in contrast dressed feminine, it is immediately clear their relationship goes beyond simply “womanly friendship”. (Newton 1984)

Figure 8:
Radclyff Hall (right) and
partner Lady Una Troubridge
(left).

Whilst the masculine woman is an important form of presentation in the lesbian context, she cannot always be viewed exclusively as a lesbian phenomenon. From the beginning lesbianism and feminism have been conflated often due to dominant patriarchal culture's inability to understand why heterosexual women would seek to gain rights and display traits considered innate to men, and impossible for women to possess naturally unless there was some kind of 'disturbance' on the psychological level coined as 'inversion' (Wilson 2013). For a heterosexual women to gain independence and earn a better wage, claim ownership to one's own sexual desire or to simply move about the world with the freedom and safety afforded to males, adopting masculine dress and social identity proved practical. An example of this can be seen in French writer and famous historical crossdresser Georges Sand's adoption of masculine dress, male pronouns and mannerisms while also (as far as we are aware) exclusively having relationships with men (Wilson 2013).

By the 1940's femme and butch style had gained a prominent presence in the working class lesbian bar scene in America. These styles became increasingly popular with working class lesbians, while for middle and upper class lesbians a more androgynous style was gaining popularity (Karaminas 2013, p. 185). In the 40's however, for working class women, dressing butch was limited to mostly bars and parties and traditional feminine dress was necessary to stay closeted in order to avoid issues with employment. By the 50's a new generation of butch women adopted the style full time, the price of visibility meant however that they were limited to certain job positions which did not enforce feminine dress codes (Karaminas 2013, p. 32). In America, the McCarthy era ushered in more frequent waves of violent attacks against lesbian women, as a result the communities and culture formed around lesbian bars became closer knit and willing to fight back. Butch image therefore gained an element of hardened aggression and violence making clear their position as protector of their communities from male and homophobic violence. Similarly in the early 20th century, role playing masculine and feminine positions increased visibility and instilled code for women to court each other, however as mainstream fashions changed so did the styles adopted by butch and femme women (Karaminas 2013). In America, popular music and cinema culture had a great influence on the dress styles of Butch women, an edgier 'working-class heartthrob' aesthetic of leather, white t-shirts, jeans and slicked hair gained popularity among white butches, for its carefree and erotically enticing image (Karaminas 2013). For African-American women however the butch style was much more formal, similar to the dandy style of the early 20's.

By the late 60's androgynous fashion had gained significant popularity, not just within feminist and lesbian circles but in mainstream fashion as well. Arguably the western style icon of the 60's Twiggy embodied a major change from the 50's feminine ideal. She was skinny, hair cropped short and somewhat angular, with an overall "boyish" silhouette. Feminists of the period advocated androgyny as a means for equality, arguing that certain traits should not be explicit to either masculine or feminine roles (Wilson 2013, p. 186).

For feminists and lesbians alike, androgynous style meant rejecting the socially dominant ideals of female beauty. Lesbians rejected butch-femme roleplay in order to try and separate themselves from the idea of a male and female binary, which they considered to be mimicking heterosexual power dynamics that placed men above women (Karaminas & Geczy 2013, p. 34). The feminist androgynous style became a new means for politically focused lesbian women to identify each other. The style was characterised by loose fitting and oversized jackets, denim and flannels, short cut hair and comfortable flat footwear, along with a strict no makeup minimal grooming appearance (Karaminas & Geczy 2013). The rejection of masculine and feminine identities and style ultimately culminated with the 'lesbian sex wars' in the late 70's and throughout the 80's. Feminist critique targeted pornography and politicised sexual practices, particularly those which held unequal power balances such as bondage, discipline or dominance and sadomasochism (referred to as BDSM) practices and butch-femme relationships, for reinforcing male dominance over women. Women who partook in these practices were labeled as anti-feminist by feminists who believed that were being coerced by patriarchal thinking (Karaminas 2013, p. 195). As pornographic content in non-sexual situations became more common place and discussion around female desire and sexual agency began to counter second wave feminism's sex critical stance, arguing that pornography could be used as a transgressive and radical platform (Karaminas & Geczy 2017). This was the birth of Third Wave Feminism, which focused more intently on individual choice and sexual autonomy as liberating for women. Third wave feminism also argued that gender and sex are both socially constructed categories. Judith Butler's theory of performativity plays a major part in discourse around the idea of gender coded behaviours as reinforced learning rather than biologically natural (Karaminas 2013).

By the 1980's a resurgence of butch-femme roleplaying in the lesbian community began, potentially in reaction to feminist androgynous style being thought to be too sexless and diminishing of the presence of sex within lesbian relationships (Wilson 2013). The diversity of sexual identities and practices within lesbianism grew causing style to become even more important as a means for communication, BDSM accessories, uniform, gender play and cross dressing all increased in popularity in the club scene (Karaminas 2013). While feminist androgyny considered itself the most radical freedom from socially constructed gender, it can be argued that butch-femme relationships have always been subversive and rather than reinforcing gender binary they expose the fact that masculine and feminine roles are positions which can be co-opted, recontextualised and performed by anyone rather than an innate truth of men or women's biology (Wilson & Karaminas 2013).

As a result of the return of butch-femme role play and in lesbian spaces, style in the 1980's nightlife acted as a place for sexual expression. Lesbian style reflected this by crossing boundaries that were no longer "gender neutral" as they were in the 1970's but rather gender fluid or "gender fucked". Nudity and bondage gear mixed with exaggerated masculine tailoring and other popular underground styles (depending on the venue and location) were not uncommon in the lesbian club scene of the 80's.

Opposite

Figure 9:
At Home With Themselves, Stephanie
and Monica, Boston 1987.

Figure 10:
Two women kissing at pride.

Figure 11:
Musician and performer K.d. Lang.

**SUBCULTURES,
THE
UNDERGROUND
AND CLUB
SCENES IN THE
1980's**

“In Impressionable minds everywhere, the fashion capitals of New York City and London and Paris were populated by men in skirts and eyeliner and women dressed like something out of a Thierry Mugler sci-fi fantasy... these people were not just sporting a total look, they were living a total life. New Wave wonder, New Beat freak, New Romantic Rebel, Pirate, punk, supermodel. Madonna/Boy George/Robert Smith wannabe. It’s not what you wore in the eighties, but who you were.” (Browne 2004)

To talk about fashion in the 80’s, especially within youth culture, subculture and queer culture, “club cultures” and the influence of music, nightclubs and the rave cannot go unmentioned. To understand club culture we must define subcultures and the “underground”. According to Hebdige’s definition, subculture occurs when individuals alienated by mainstream culture (which is defined by those who hold social, economic and religious power) create their own conventions, codes and style as a rejection and subversion of dominant culture (Hebdige 1979). By “underground” I am referring to the extent to which a subculture is removed from or invisible to broader mainstream understanding (as well as acceptance), often the legitimacy of subcultures and their continued lifespan hinges on their status as “undesirable” or incomprehensible to the values of mainstream culture (Thornton 1996). As by default those who are not heterosexual or cisgendered (see footnote) fall outside of the mainstream cultural values of acceptability, it is not surprising the overlap between gay, queer and trans experience and various subcultures is fairly commonly observed. For my examination of 1980’s subcultural style I focused on the decline of Punk and the rise of the Blitz Kids and club cultures referencing Hebdige’s research on subcultural style, Thornton’s text *Club Cultures: Music Media and Cultural Capital* and Susan Driver’s *Queer Youth Cultures*. It should be acknowledged however that Thornton’s analysis of club culture comes from a mostly heterosexual and white-scene, as do many texts which record and analyse the nature of subcultures, ultimately painting them as a primarily male and often white social phenomena. In Judith Halberstam’s writing for *Queer Subcultures* she explains that often subcultures are placed in a research hierarchy, with movements linked to women and especially lesbian women often receiving less acknowledgement and suffering from a less comprehensive recorded history (Halberstam 2008, p. 34). With this in mind, I will start by exploring what the 80’s club culture was, what it looked like, its relationship and differences from punk subcultures, how lesbian style fits into the greater picture and how designers have been influenced by these groups styles.

‘Club culture’ and ‘club kids’ refer to the youth cultures who based their social hubs and style identity off the trends and environment of the nightclub and rave. These communities differed to that of previous subcultures by their fluid boundaries and ability to adapt and change to constantly evolving styles and trends of “coolness”. Club kids defined space for themselves separate from adult authority; in Britain particularly, but also in some denser American cities, the club became a refuge space for youths to define their own cultural hierarchies based on shared taste (Thornton 1996, p. 3).

Cisgender:

Defined as; a person who identifies with and lives as the gender they were assigned at birth. It is the opposite of transgender wherein a person lives as a gender different to what they were assigned at birth.

The Blitz Kids, the name given to the youths who frequented the Blitz club in West End London were often students from the nearby art schools; St Martin's School and Central School, pioneered an unconventional aesthetic which combined art, history, androgyny and costume influenced by the music and style of artists such as David Bowie, Adam Ant and Boy George (Johnson 2009). This style eventually came to be referred to as the New Romantics, the name taken from the lyrics of the song 'Planet Earth' by band Duran Duran.

For club kids, the desire to break away from an alienating mainstream culture, defined by their parents, generated an intense outpouring of creativity and experimentation across many creative fields of a hedonistic nature. By carving out their own space influenced by the shifting post World War II social ideologies around sex, gender, race and civil equality; style and particularly its relationship with gendered performance and sexual expression became increasingly more liberated and playful (Karaminas 2017, p. 145). For 80's club fashions, playing with gender became a major component of style referred to as "genderbend" or "genderfuck" (See footnote). For lesbian women, the club scene triggered a renewed interest in the sexual and playful aspects of style, while androgyny did still prevail it was in a much different form to that of 1970's feminist androgyny and instead of the desire for a complete absence of gender it delved into a hedonistic performance of crossing and collaging gendered traits into an amalgamation of feminine-masculine style. An example of this performative style can be seen in the various incarnations of Madonna's style over the years, as well as in Annie Lennox's various stage "characters" and Grace Jones' sharp androgynous figure. Madonna's performance regularly flirts with sexual culture outside the mainstream, her usage of drag, camp and BDSM imagery, alongside references and performances of homoerotic implication solidified her status as a lesbian icon. Her transformation from material girl, edgy yet virginal to gender-bending tuxedo-wearing dominatrix, is parallel to club style's fluid changing image and constant testing of the limits of gender and control over one's own identity (Karaminas & Geczy 2013, p. 38). For performers such as Madonna, Lennox and Jones, the suit, drag, lingerie and fetish objects afforded them the freedom to self-define and alter their identity and sexual image through artifice. For Madonna, this allowed her to credibly move across and between mainstream and the fringes of culture; and for Lennox to subvert mainstream expectations of sexual expression (Karaminas & Geczy 2013, p. 40). For Grace Jones, her masculinity was not just tied to her performance but to her lived experience with gender expression and fluidity which she explains in her memoir *I'll Never Write My Memoirs* (2015) as being two distinct selves, a masculine and a feminine.

Genderfuck:

A form of gender non-conformity which is often intended to be confronting and playful in nature. It intends to make a mockery of heteronormative gender binary and expose its restrictive and unnatural roles.

Opposite, Top left to bottom right

Figure 12:
Grace Jones portrait by Jean Paul Goude.

Figure 13:
Grace Jones Honda scooter commercial.

Figure 14:
Madonna *Justify My Love* album cover.

Figure 15:
Annie Lennox and Eurythmics in concert.

Figure 16:
Annie Lennox and Eurythmics.

Figure 17:
Annie Lennox.

Figure 18:
Madonna and Chris Finch on the "Open Your Heart" video set.

Within club and underground cultures, hierarchies are built on what is considered 'hip', always in opposition to the preferences of the 'mainstream', cultivating an attitude of elitism and separation from popular culture. By creating the binary 'us vs them' attitude the club became a place of youth ownership and free expression with ideologies unaffected by what is considered "normal" in conventions of dress and expression (Thornton 1996, p. 3). Not too unlike the concept of social capital, subcultural capital decides your place in the hierarchy based on how "in the know" one is with the ever changing trends and ideals of "coolness" (Thornton 1996, p. 5). Often a certain thing or topic ceases to be 'hip' as soon as it in some way becomes accessible or palatable to mainstream cultures. This is not just the case for 80's club culture but subcultures as a whole, as Hebdige theories; the decline and abandonment of certain subcultural styles is a consequence that occurs when the media's removal of the subcultures exclusivity results in their styles losing subversion through mass production and imitation (Hebdige 1979, p. 96).

Historically lesbian style embodies a suave, upper class masculine aesthetic and later on in the 20th century an adoption of working class "James Dean", yet no less suave, aesthetic. A key component to both of these styles is the use of masculine uniform as a transgressive indicator of non-heterosexual identity. In a broader context the uniform exists as a means of asserting subordination, conformity and ultimately to create group identity. The military uniform is the dominant example of this however the concept applies to the social uniform (e.g. pants and suits for men, skirts and dresses for women) which separate and identify the sexes in a binary system (Craik 2005). In lesbian style the implications of dominant sexuality associated with masculine uniform is used to subvert the social and sexual assumptions of the wearer, by taking coded items of one gender and applying them to another, the reading of the body is altered (Karaminas & Geczy 2013). Subsequently early 20th century lesbian fashion can be identified by the adoption of the suit and riding gear.

Figure 19:
Billy's Club, Bowie Nights
patrons. Early Club Kids 1978

Figure 20:
Billy's Club, Bowie Nights.
pictured: Martin Degville.
1978

Figure 21:
YSL Le Smoking

Yves Saint Laurent's adaption of the tuxedo for women's wear in 1966 "Le Smoking" arguably birthed a new "androgynous" woman, fit and altered in a way which explicitly intended the garment for a women's body and styled it in such way, yet held the implications of male social power (Museeyslparis 2017). Club and subcultural styles also make use of appropriated and subversive uniforms in the construction of their stylistic identities. However while lesbian style uses the existing reading of uniform to transgress the reading of the body wearing it, club and subcultures give context to elements of existing uniform giving them different meaning – often counter that of their original purpose (Hebdige 1979). Examples of this can be seen in the borrowing of highly decorated romantics era military and naval garments in the style of New Romantics which at the time directly juxtaposed mass cultures fashion focus on bold, strong and modern shapes in the 1980's. By physically altering and degrading pieces of existing uniform subcultural styles such as Punk take symbols of conformity and lack of youth authority (particularly school uniforms) and give them a new rebellious context (Hebdige 1979).

When applying these concepts to my design collection, I have designed with the intent of not simply recreating whole garments from an isolated subculture or time period but rather using a bricolage approach to combine various different elements. By doing this I have attempted to reconfigure these styles to be socially relevant in a contemporary design context as simply re-creating 1980's, early 20th Century or subcultural styles lack subversion. Instead what can be drawn from is the reasoning and methodology behind what made club and subcultural style the way it was in the 80's. Therefore when designing the collection the key elements which make up the overall bricolage approach can be broken down into historic lesbian style (focused particularly on masculine tailoring) and 1980's subcultural style (with focus on Blitz Kids, the club and androgynous style) informed by Vivienne Westwood, Elsa Schiaparelli and Walter Van Beirendonck's design approaches.

DESIGN OUTCOMES

Opposite, Top left to bottom right:

Figure 22:
New Romantic fashion.

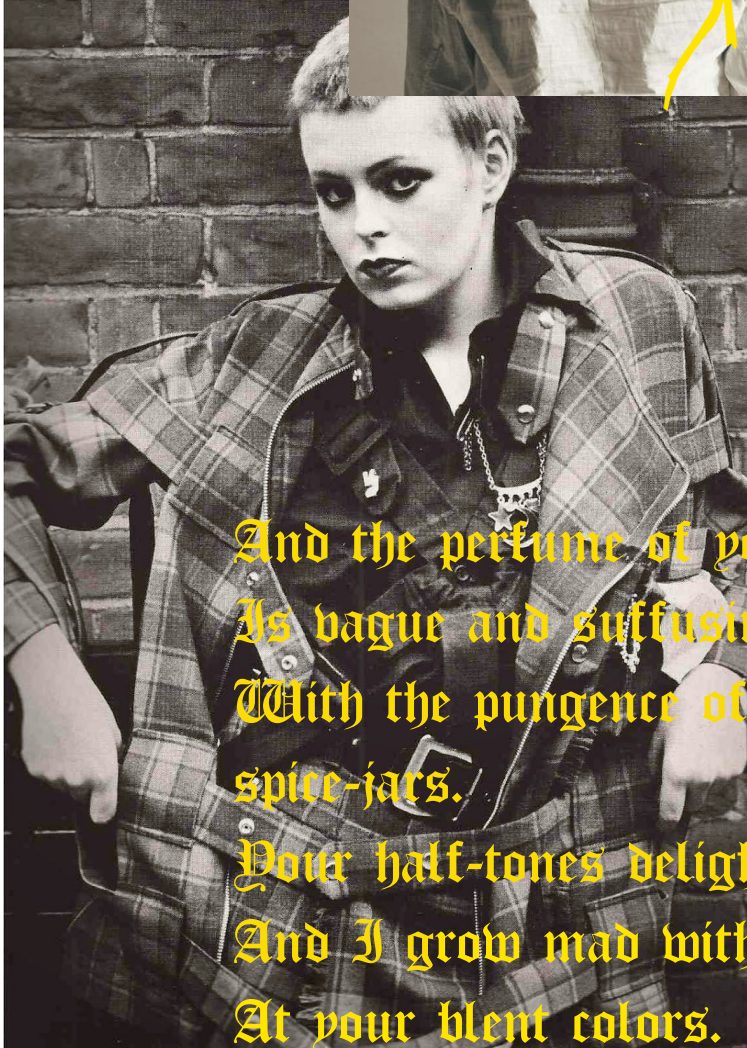
Figure 23:
Linen Grukha trouser navy.

Figure 24:
Annie Lennox by Richard Avedon.

Figure 25:
Vivienne Westwood tablecloth for
Cool Earth.

Figure 26:
Vivienne Westwood 'Seditionaries'
Collection.

Figure 27:
Dior Homme Men's shirt.



And the perfume of your soul
Is vague and suffusing,
With the pungence of sealed
spice-jars.
Your half-tones delight me,
And I grow mad with gazing
At your blent colors.



Figure 28:

Original collection concept illustration.

Figure 29:

Double Pants toile.

Figure 30:

Circular pocket detail construction.

Figure 31:

Rack of samples and patterns.

Figure 32:

Screen printing process.

My final design outcome is comprised of a collection of six looks featuring tailored and casual garment silhouettes. By designing a range of silhouettes, I intended for the collection to be more flexible in how and where it can be worn as well as drawing from my research into 80's club style, which is diverse and often unrestrained in its mixing of garments of different formalities and styles. In this section I will firstly deconstruct my inspiration, intent and detailing in the construction of each piece followed by an explanation of the prints and applied trims spanning the collection as a whole. The full collection is made up of twelve garments, broken down into six tops, six pants and two jackets. While feminine coded garments such as dresses and skirts can still be considered androgynous in their styling, I have chosen to intentionally avoid them to focus more on lesbian styles appropriation and subversion of masculine tailoring.



Garment I:

Second Skin shirt

White button up cotton shirt with a half stand collar featuring three silver metal buckles, eyelets and combination screen and handpainted print.

For the “Second Skin Shirt” I drew inspiration from Vivienne Westwood’s early designs which used hardware and print to juxtapose the base form of the design - a white button up shirt. As a standard element of the traditional masculine suit I wanted to retain some elements of classical construction while instead focusing on garment detailing such as cuffs and collars. The collar stand and cuffs of this garment both feature extensions which wrap and secure into metal buckles instead of buttoning shut. The wrapping and industrial fastening is a feature more commonly found in leather wear and workwear, and can be seen appropriated and exaggerated in punk and DIY fashions for its industrial look and references to bondage and restraint. By applying metal hardware to a business shirt I aimed to create a visual juxtaposition between the elegant and higher class nature of tailoring and the tough and fetishistic implications of metal buckles restraining the wrists and throat. The half collar continues in this vein keeping the appearance of a refined shirt from one side then exposing the buckle. The print on the shirt is a collage style print referencing my ‘bricolage’ of elements and periods of history using different print styles: a mixture of screen printing and hand painting. The concept relates to the recurring theme of being dressed but also “undressed”.

Another designer who I drew inspiration for this garment from was Schiaparelli – in her designs she often plays with exposure, inappropriate implication and humour through visual ‘jokes’. Her designs, such as the Lobster dress, the Tear Dress and a pair of black gloves with ‘fingernails’ subvert the concepts of decency. In Beirendonck and Westwood’s design work this concept of ‘covered yet sexually exposed’ continues with Westwood’s use of nudity and sexual imagery in print (breasts shirt, naked cowboys, orgy print) as well as by using sexual and fetish wear such as bondage and leather. Beirendonck also employs these strategies creating garments which technically leave the wearer ‘decently covered’ yet sexually exposed or artificially exposed (use of phallic elements and fake penises in designs.) The shirt as a garment is traditionally a conservative, fully covering and often considered formal or professional. However, through use of print, I reveal an idea of what the body beneath looks like, by re-exposing it again. By using a collage of screen printed photo realistic print and hand painted contours of the body I have continued my own take of visually expressing the idea of “bricolage” as well as adding a third level to the garments idea of multiple layers and methods of exposure; from the real body, covered by artificial exposure, underneath a simplified representation of the exposed body.



Top to bottom

Figure 33:

Second Skin shirt.

Figure 34:

Second Skin shirt print detail.

Figure 35:

Second Skin shirt buckle and collar detail.





Garment 2:

Lie On Me shirt

White button up cotton shirt with exaggerated stand collar and fray detail, featuring a metal O-ring, insert frayed panel, gathered sleeves and wide cuff.

The detailing on the “Lie On Me” shirt more directly references subcultural style of the 1980’s. The silhouette features tightly gathered sleeves with extra wide cuffs and an elongated collar inspired by the romantic pirate ‘blouse’ look. However, instead of elegant ruffling on the neck and openings, I have used wide bands of fraying to create a ‘grungy’ decaying parody of lace and frills. Drawing on Westwood’s historic inspired ruffled blouses and her earlier slashed and torn punk ensembles, the garment is both soft and refined and degraded and scruffy. On the left side an insert panel with fray down the edge creates the silhouette of a nude woman lying on her side ‘resting’ on the wearer’s chest. I drew inspiration from Schiaparelli’s use of illusion and bodily shapes in her designs for this piece, similar to her use of a female figure in her jackets and coats interacting with the shape of the garment to create surrealist illusions. While visually the shape of the “body” on my blouse is less obvious than the intricate embroidery of Schiaparelli’s jackets the design overall is intended to be less explicit in its meaning than some of the other pieces in the collection, less obvious than the Orgy Jacket hinting at a softer tenderness which is directly juxtaposed by the harsh trims. Linking to the Second Skin shirt the garment also features a metal o-ring at the joining of the collar which alongside the frayed trimming creates visual difference from the softer aspects of the base design referencing punk aesthetics of the fetishistic ‘collar’. The garment hem is split at the sides to allow for part of the shirt to be untucked to show the panel’s frayed detail.

Top to bottom opposite

Figure 36:

Lie On Me shirt

Figure 37:

Lie On Me shirt frayed detail.

Figure 38:

Lie On Me shirt panel detail.

Garment 3:

After Party Smoking shirt

White and gold lurex stripe button up cotton shirt with winged collar.
Featuring frayed fake pleat detail and foldback cuffs.

The “After Party Smoking” shirt references the pleated winged collar shirt often paired with a men’s tuxedo suit and bowtie worn at more formal black tie events. The collar draws from the traditional men’s tailored winged collar however I have slightly elongated the crease around the neck to soften the shape. Instead of pleats, ripped lengths of fabric are sewn to the chest of the garment imitating the lines of pleats, yet are fraying away and uneven in length directly disrupting the overall luxurious implication of this specific detailed shirt. The fold back cuff detailing on the garment is inspired by 1980’s James Bond fold back cuffs, through this I am continuing my appropriation of typically “macho” 80’s styles. The length of the fold back on the collar as well as the uneven and degraded “pleats” and the inclusion of cotton with a gold lurex stripe make the garment’s formal design features a parody of the traditional garment, making my design at home on a nightclub dancefloor, slightly too “camp” for a refined masculine dinner getup. While the garment can be styled in a variety of manners, it was designed with the intention of being paired with the Orgy Jacket in order to add to the garments tuxedo references.

Left to right.

Figure 39:

After Party Smoking shirt

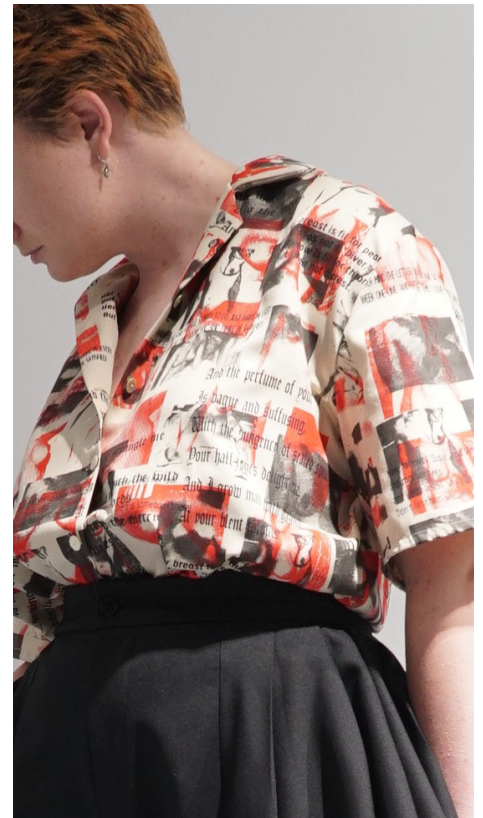
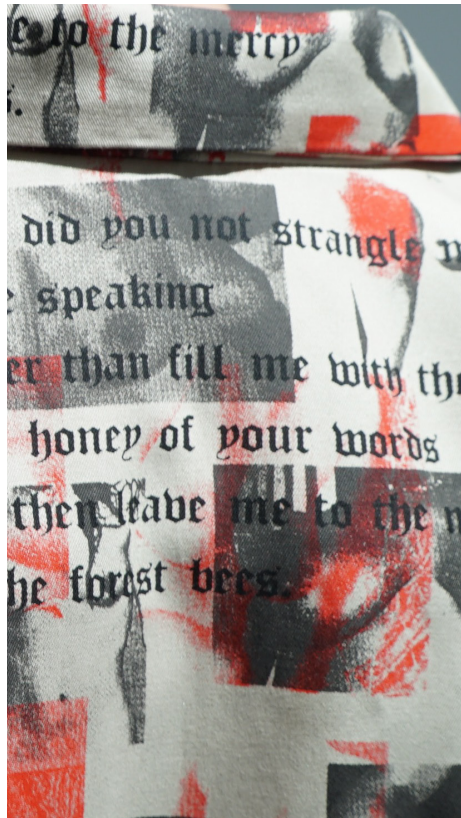
Figure 40:

After Party Smoking shirt cuff detail.

Figure 41:

After Party smoking shirt collar detail.





Garment 4:

A Woman's Shirt

Beige silk cotton camp collar shirt featuring screen printed placement prints.

Left to Right

Figure 42:

A Woman's Shirt back

Figure 43:

A Woman's Shirt print detail.

Figure 44:

A Woman's Shirt.

The design choices for the base garments of “a Womans Shirt” draws from the 1980's ideals/trends in the masculine fashion rather than historic classical men's tailoring. If historically lesbian fashion has drawn from either middle-class menswear, of the same period or from historic periods prior, then in exploring lesbian design for a contemporary context it makes sense to draw reference from mainstream masculine dress and ideals in the 1980's. For the 80's an example of pure machismo is that of the cuban collared Hawaiian print shirt, only half buttoned up to expose the chest, epitomised by Tom Selleck's character, Thomas Magnum, in the 80's television series Magnum P.I.. Magnum's character is an example of the 80's ideal man; a confident, wealthy, playboy type, the costuming further displays this – particularly through the unbuttoned Hawaiian shirts showcasing his pectoral region. This trend was a style not embraced by the underground and subcultural movement, however, in a contemporary context it makes the perfect garment to appropriate lesbian style. Slightly oversized to create a 'squared' shape for the torso and intended to be worn buttoned low semi exposing the breast, the shirt features a collage style print with similar theme to the Second Skin shirt, layered underneath text from romantic (with lesbian implications) historic letters and poetry.

Garment 5:

Collage Tee

Cotton Jersey T-shirt featuring various placement prints and “ruffle” detail. The original garments are 3 separate T-shirts sewn then deconstructed and sewn together once more.

The “Collage” T-shirts draw from Westwood’s graphic t-shirts of the 70’s and 80’s alongside the historic and contemporary relevance of t-shirts in LGBT political contexts and DIY underground fashion aesthetics. By combining multiple T-shirts into one the various openings expose different parts of the body than the original garment intended. The cut and sew style reflects the collage prints featured on other designs in the collection – however rather than images cut and pasted together it is whole garments being deconstructed and reformed into a new singular silhouette. By combining, rearranging and merging the prints, the collage creates an overarching story out of disrupted text and graphics. From more formal shirting to casual shirting to the t-shirt, the collection encompasses and combines a variety of different garments which ordinarily are worn in different contexts yet within the club scene of the 1980’s it would not be uncommon to see a full spectrum of casual to formal garments, sometimes mixed on the same body (Thornton 1996).

Figure 45:

Collage Tee sleeve.

Opposite
Figure 46:

Collage Tee detail.

Figure 47:

Collage Tee detail 2.

Figure 48:

Collage Tee.







Left to right

Figure 49:

Orgy Jacket leather detail.

Figure 50:

Orgy Jacket pocket detail.

Figure 51:

Orgy Jacket belted.



Garment 6:

Orgy Jacket

Black wool jacket featuring silk screen printed lining, leather panel detail and singular flap and breast pocket.

Left to right

Figure 52:

Laser cut leather.

Figure 53:

Orgy Jacket with Gurkha
Pants black and After
Dinner Smokes shirt.

Figure 54:

Orgy Jacket sleeve detail.

The “Orgy Jacket” is arguably one of the more kitch 80’s referenced garments in the collection. Oversized and boxy in cut, with large shoulder pads, the garment more directly references 80’s ideals of power and excess. The detailing of the jacket draws from the same inspirations as the “Lie On Me” shirt focusing on fraying and abstracted bodily shapes as well as paying homage to lesbians adoption of the tuxedo and traditional masculine formal suiting. On the left side of the jacket, a leather panel laser cut into a “lace” made up of female bodily forms tangled together into an “orgy” protrudes from a frayed torn seam. The use of leather, particularly in a fetishistic context, imitates flesh acting as a “second skin” to the wearer. By cutting a mesh of bodies into the leather I intend to use leather’s sexualised implications to further eroticise the trims of the garment through texture as well as graphics. On the back lining of the jacket I have printed the same naked torso image as the second skin shirt, however in this case the print is hidden from the viewer “hugging” up against the wearers back. The jacket therefore exists as both a reference to 1980’s style and lesbian sexual “play” through fetish and roleplay and a call back to early lesbian style through the tuxedo reference and the “hidden” messages within the coat intended only for the wearer, or whoever is witness to the garment being removed.



Garment 7:

Winged Jacket

Grey Checked wool linen blend jacket featuring silk acetate screen printed lining, twin flap pocket, twin circular breast pocket detail and twin side vents.

In contrast to the fit of the “Orgy Jacket” the “Winged Jacket” is more form fitting in its tailoring. The style of the lapel, the side back vents and the overall fit are also quite formal in terms of masculine suit detailings and I have chosen to use a grey wool linen blend with a square check pattern, inspired by Westwood’s quintessentially British checked and tartan suits. The breast pockets of this suit are circular constructed in a similar method to a welt pocket, as they sit directly on bust point, the curve of the garment over the body causes the circular “facings” to sit forward and slightly out from the body, showing the inner facing of the pocket simulating a bra cup. The detailing for the pockets was partly inspired by Madonna’s Jean Paul Gaultier cone bra, in how it sits out from the body and exaggerates and parodies the sexualised female form.

Left to right

Figure 55:

Winged Jacket lapel detail.

Opposite

Figure 56:

Winged Jacket pockets.

Figure 57:

Winged Jacket with
Gurkha Pants grey and
Second Skin shirt.





Garment 8 and 9:

Gurkha Pants

Pant 1: Grey wool linen blend checked fabric featuring twin back flap and slash pockets and wide inward facing pleat with silver metal buckle and eyelets.

Pant 2: Black wool featuring Gurkha style waistband with silver metal buckles and eyelets, wide leg with twin outward facing pleats and double welt pockets.

In matching fabric to the two suit jackets (Grey wool linen and black woolen suiting) I have designed two pairs of wide leg pants. The intention of the “Gurkha” pants is to show a variety of different masculine tailoring and uniform references that are ultimately similar with different takes on fine detailing. The first pair of pants features a double width waistband with two extension tabs fastening into silver metal buckles, for this style of waistband I have drawn inspiration from a historic masculine waiter’s uniform which features a wider (often with some element of wrap around) waistband. The pants also feature one large inward facing pleat imitating British classic men’s tailoring rather than the more common outward facing. On the back of the pants I have included two welt pockets with flaps featuring a frayed detail and underside facing using contrast fabric matching the pocket detail of the “Winged Jacket” and the fabric of the “Double Pants”. The second pair of pants includes a more classically styled Gurkha waistband with silver metal buckles. The Gurkha pant is originally from a 19th century Nepalese men’s military uniform and is typically a double pleated wide leg short with a double wrap around waistband. In its military context this was traditionally made in tan twill however throughout the 20th and 21st century the style has been applied to more formal woolen suiting fabrics and extended from shorts to full leg trousers. I have given the pants slash pockets in the front and two welt pockets on the back as standard detailing, in similarity to a traditional gorkha pant as well as referencing a popular 1980’s men’s trouser silhouette the pants are wide legged with double outward facing pleats.

Left to right

Figure 58:

Gurkha Pants grey buckle.

Figure 59:

Gurkha Pants black buckle.

Opposite

Figure 60:

Gurkha Pants black second buckle.

Figure 61:

Gurkha Pants grey.

Figure 62:

Gurkha Pants black.

Figure 63:

Gurkha Pants grey back pocket.







Top to bottom

Figure 64:

Double Pants waist detail.

Figure 65:

Double Pants.

Opposite

Figure 66:

Double Pants print detail.



Garment 10:

Double Pant

Cotton inner pant with fly zip, outer pant is a wool-poly blend with screen printed detail of my own illustration. Garment features two slash pockets on the outer pants and functional button up fly.

For the design of the “Double Pants” I have taken inspiration from Schiaparelli’s design “illusions” and the construction intricacies of Yohji Yamamoto’s trouser designs (featuring abnormally placed fly closures and openings) and Maison Margiela’s double waisted and double legged trouser. The concept of this design is to imitate pants being “removed” from the body, to do this I have constructed a pant with two waistbands, one at natural waist and one at hip which sits permanently open at centre front, the inner pant is a neutral beige close to my own skin tone while the outer is a Westwood inspired yellow and grey tartan wool. Similarly to how Schiaparelli uses print in her designs to give the illusion of movement or depth I’ve chosen to pair the open waist with a placement print design of hands “grabbing” into the fabric. The hands hold a double implication of sexual innuendo, firstly the grabbing at the fabric “pulling” the pants down and secondly the insinuation of grabbing into bed sheets while the second hand is grasping the hand of a lover. Through this the body can be viewed as either a participant in an implied sexual action or the site which the action is taking place on.



Garment 11:

Riding Pants

Black wool pants with side panel draped detail, fishtail back waistband with adjustable tab featuring two silver metal D-rings.

Returning to a historic lesbian reference I have re-constructed the shape of a traditional women's riding pant with four pleats and extra fullness to further exaggerate the shape of the side seam panels inspired by harem pants. Riding pants are considered in Western society to be some of the first socially acceptable styles of pants for women to wear in the 19th and early 20th century, as a result riding habits gained popularity as everyday dress for early feminists and potentially lesbian women (Wilson 2013). The final garment has been made in black wool matching the "Orgy Jacket" and second "Gurkha" pants for a more formal appearance than typical harem pants of the 80's. The waistband features a fishtail back with adjustable tab for a complete tailored finish and potential for attachment of suspenders.

Left to right

Figure 67:

Riding Pants.

Figure 68:

Riding Pants back waist.

Figure 69:

Riding Pants back detail.





Garment 12:

Wire Fence Skort

Tan cotton wide leg pants with pleated half skirt featuring hand painted fence print and laser cut chain ties.

Left to right

Figure 70:

Wire Fence skort.

Figure 71:

Wire Fence skort chain.

Figure 72:

Wire Fence skort pleats.

The “Wire Fence Skort” was designed with subcultural 80’s styles in mind and is both more casual and modern in shape than the Riding and Ghurka pants. Particularly referencing Westwood’s punk pleated kilts and bondage pants I have designed a wide leg base pant with a pleated overskirt hand painted with a black chain link fence pattern. By using a tan colour cotton base and juxtaposing it with knife pleats, custom cut plastic chain and rough hand painted texture my aim was to combine aspects of mainstream 80’s men’s style with DIY school uniform styled aesthetics of underground youth culture. The use of industrial imagery and texture such as the fence pattern and fake “metal” chain made of clear laser cut acrylic calls back to punk and club-kid’s use of found and industrial trims reflecting an urban working class environment.

Print Design

I have generated a series of placement prints using screen printing and hand printing methods for the final print design outcomes. The main aesthetic approach for these prints are inspired by Vivienne Westwood's early 70's and 80's T-shirts from the SEX boutique, which feature collage style imagery mixing photographic prints and handwritten text. The key elements of my collage imagery are found images from an estimated 1950's to 1970's period, as the images were non traceable to their origins, owner or dates and due to the nature of these photos featuring nude imagery I have approached usage by obscuring any identifying traits of the persons in the image and wish to state original ownership is with the photographers and subjects of the photos and thank them for their content. Over this I have used a series of poetry and letter segments by Emily Dickinson which I have interpreted with a lesbian lense and works from Amy Lowell a notable American lesbian poet. Excerpts used are from the poems Carrefour from Coterie (1920) (Lowell 1920) and A Lady (Lowell 1914) as well as from personal letters by Emily Dickinson – Amherst Manuscript # 651 - Her breast is fit for pearls (Dickinson 1894), as well as two letters to Susan Gilbert;

“Never mind the letter, Susie; you have so much to do; just write me every week one line, and let it be, “Emily, I love you,” and I will be satisfied!”
(Dickinson 1852)

and

“Now, farewell, Susie, and Vinnie sends her love, and mother her's, and I add a kiss, shyly, lest there is somebody there! Don't let them see, will you Susie?”
(Dickinson 1852)

By combining nude imagery from a mid 20th century origin and late 19th century poetry my intent was to both juxtapose but also create links between two historic periods. Alongside photo imagery and text I have created hand drawn patterns of contours of bodies, chain link fence and hands “grasping” at the fabric of the garment to add texture and an extra “DIY” layer to the cleaner screen printed images.

Top to bottom, left to right..

Figure 73:

Print sample 1.

Figure 74:

T-shirt sample.

Figure 75:

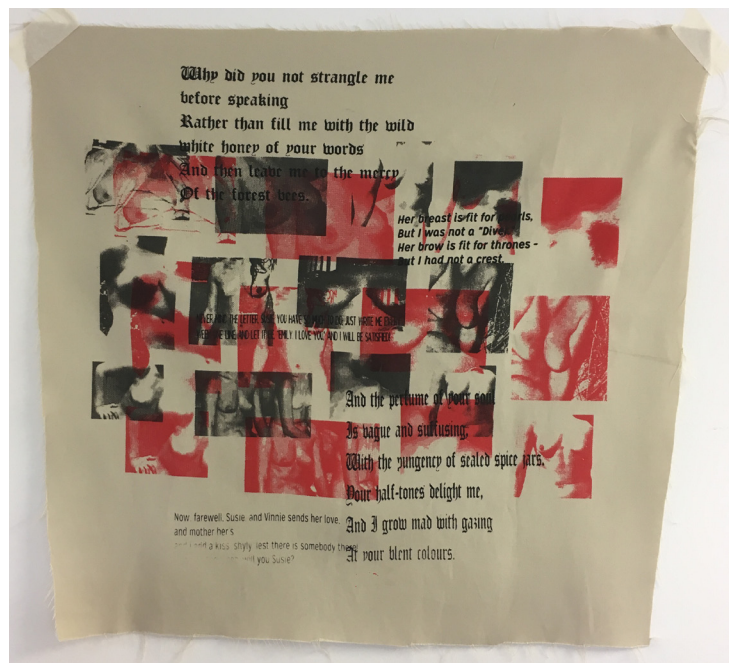
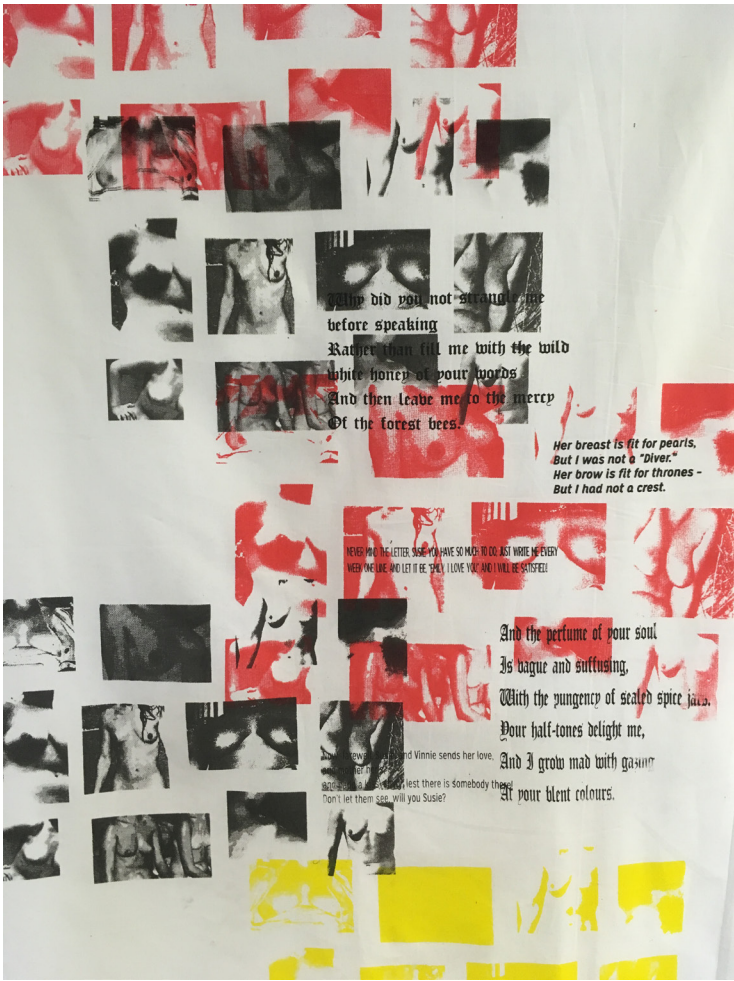
Print sample 2.

Figure 76:

Double pants print.

Figure 77:

Print sample 3.





Top to bottom

Figure 78:

Garments on rack 1.

Figure 79:

Garments details.

Figure 80:

Garments on rack 2.



The final design outcomes in my project are successful in conveying what I wished to express in a “lesbian” design collection. Through the process of conducting this research I have come to a greater understanding of what it specifically means to read “lesbian” fashion code and by then applying these codes to my own design I created works wherein I have carefully considered the intended lesbian specific message I wish to convey. Ways I have achieved this include the base referencing of masculine tailoring and garments (as lesbians have utilised since the early 20th century to identify themselves) and using imagery with sexual implication and humour.

The inherent nature of coded fashions means that for a viewer to understand the references or implied message they must on some level be aware of the “rules” of the code. As Fred Davis notes in *Fashion, Culture, and Identity* that the fashion code cannot be compared to cryptography in the same way it cannot be compared to speech and writing, it may require visual and tactile symbols yet it is in a way which is ambiguous and largely dependent on culture and context (Davis 1992). Even if (as a result of culture or not being “in the know”) a viewer does not understand the intricacies of lesbian style codes, I hope that through my design work there is the potential for exposure to new lenses through which visually reading style can be considered.

Figure 81:

Patterns on rack.



CONCLUSION

This research project originated from my desire to understand what role lesbian women have played in fashion design and the cultivation of an individual style. Prior to proposing this topic I had very little knowledge about the relationship between lesbianism and style, despite being a lesbian myself. It is through the process of my literature review and subsequent application of historic codes to my own design process that I have generated my own perspective on what a “lesbian collection” could look like.

The project could ultimately be extended into further postgraduate practice, ideally I would like for it to be a starting point for my own future practice as a fashion designer so I may design without feeling my work as separate from a core part of my identity and social experience. I would like to extend the collection beyond what was practical for the scope of this Masters and explore how historic revivalism and bricolage can be applied to other periods and aesthetics of lesbian fashion. The final works created were primarily masculine leaning in nature and fail to address that there are also femme lesbian experiences and styles which deserve exploration. Aside from my personal practice I believe this research could contribute towards informing or inspiring other LGBT designers to embrace and explore their personal experiences with gender and sexuality through design.

While having my work critiqued I was presented with the question of why specifically do I want to be “part of fashion” or why I think lesbian style needs to be “part of fashion”. This is something that I have continued to consider while generating this project, the answer I have concluded on is simply that; I am a lesbian and I am a fashion designer, I already exist as these two things separately, and I feel confident in saying that I am not the only one. Fashion as an industry is overall driven by profits and it is valid to consider how commercialisation of LGBT experiences as a means of generating capital with little to no actual social impact impacts on our communities. However, one would not ask a heterosexual designer why they would want to design a collection with romantic or sexual implications or consider it odd for a gay male designer to generate collections entwined with their experiences as a gay man. Therefore my simple assertion is that – I design because it is what I love and I want to be visible so I can contribute to making space for the recognition of lesbian and queer women, who have arguably been here all along despite what stereotypes claim.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Queer - someone or something which is either non-heterosexual, transgender or gender non-conforming.

LGBT - Acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender

Heteronormative and Heterosexist: The assumption that heterosexuality in the context of a male-female gender binary is the default state for humans.

Heteropatriarchy: The state of global social hierarchy where heterosexual relationships and a corresponding binary gender system placing men as the dominant power are considered a natural default

Transgender: A person who lives as a gender other than the one they are assigned with at birth.

Cisgender: A person who identifies with the gender they were assigned at birth.

Gender Non-conformity: those who's expression of gender (including visual presentation, actions and mannerisms) go against normative social expectations.

Genderfuck: Similar to Gender-bend, a form of gender non-conformity which is often intended to be confronting and playful in nature. It is defined in *Out of the Closets: Sociology of Homosexual Liberation* "as a form of extended guerrilla theatre" (Humphrey 1972) the intent of the performance being to make a mockery of heteronormative gender binary and expose its restrictive and unnatural roles.

Role-play: The performance of or to act as someone or something. While role-play is not explicitly a sexual practice in regards to this exegesis I will be speaking primarily about erotic role-play, in this context role-play also refers to the adoption of complementary roles between partners to facilitate a sexual interaction (such as dominant and submissive roles).

BDSM: Referring to a group erotic practices and role-play made up primarily of, Bondage, Discipline, Dominance and Submission, Sadism and Masochism.

Dress: Is the act of adorning the body, not simply clothing but any item or substance which is intentionally placed onto the body such as paints and perfumes (Entwistle 2000).

Style: Refers to the way in which one curates their appearance, can also refer to what is considered of popular aesthetic quality, at a given time.

Fashion: As defined by Entwistle in *The Fashioned Body*; fashion is a more complex system of trends influenced by the ideals and social priorities of the time. It combines the act of dressing the body with style. (Entwistle 2000)

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