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**Forming Bodies:
Interrogating Transgressive Dress Practices**

**Tasha Maree Dangerfield Smith
2015**



**Forming Bodies:
Interrogating
Transgressive Dress
Practices**

**Finger through pages
Get a good look**

**SMITH-SMITH
Made In New Zealand
xx**

Forming Bodies: Interrogating Transgressive Dress Practices

Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts endorsed with Design at Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand.

**Tasha Maree Dangerfield Smith
2015**



Abstract

This research project consists of a written exegesis and a creative component that consists of a fashion collection and a conceptual short film that interrogates the formation of gendered identities in dress practices. The directive of this thesis is to push the boundaries of gender through transgressive dress practices. It will go beyond the debates regarding the validity of unisex and androgyny and will focus on gender as a construction and the way dress informs identity and sexuality. This body of work seeks to reflect on the shock value techniques used within the framework of high-fashion spectacles in catwalk collections and their ready-to-wear disseminations in order to explore the act of dressing as a form of performance and sexual expression. Drawing on the design oeuvre of Vivienne Westwood, Thom Browne, Walter Van Beirendonck, Hood By Air (HBA) and Comme des Garçons, this study draws attention to the politics of the body as a site of transformative dress practices.



SMITH-SMITH

Brush & Tuck
with mild detergent
Massage lightly in a
warm bubble bath
MAX. 30°C (86°F)
Wash in dry for 15 min.
Machine Drying
Made in New York

SMITH-SMITH

Brush & Tuck
with mild detergent
Massage lightly in a
warm bubble bath
MAX. 30°C (86°F)
Wash in dry for 15 min.
Machine Drying
Made in New York

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Preface

From a young age I have had a playful relationship with dress. My parents gave me the freedom to decide what and how to wear my clothes without restriction. I recollect a few moments in my childhood where my dressed appearance was cause for concern among peers, family, and friends. I remember exactly what I was wearing and how their judgment henceforth affected my sense of self. I started my life in Wellington wanting to feel a part of something, having just recently come across my 'deviating' sexuality¹, I continued to play with my dressed presentation, somewhat more consciously. I was intent on reflecting my sexual identification through visual signification. I felt the need to embody a static representation, or what could be understood as looking like a stereotypical lesbian while battling with the desire to identify with an absolute label (something I couldn't and still cannot really do). I started to critique gender, its boundaries and binary nature. Too anxious to publicly push boundaries I play, often alone, with the way I wear dress, colours, combinations, and proportions. This sense of play translates to my design process. I'm not afraid to exaggerate, to test proportions of dress on the body and levels of detail. I experiment at the boundary between theatrics and everyday. Fashion has provided an outlet for my unrestricted play, constructing with the imaginary, creating garments that interrogate the stability of an absolute gender and sexual identification. I am interested in testing out roles and activities. Forever attentive to the relationship between bodies, garments and other bodies, I like to look, to predict and analyse dress practices (both other people's and my own).

My undergraduate fashion collection in 2013, [EXPANSION], had a strong influence from Matthew Barney's *Cremaster Cycle*². [EXPANSION] used leather and sheer organza as materials in which to explore the interchangeability of Barney's ascension and descension concepts. Garment construction and texture was manipulated to create vulvic and collapsible yet phallic representations, genital-inspired signifiers as an extension of the body. This four-look collection was performed by a group of women; they caressed each other's dressed bodies forcing the viewer into an uncomfortably voyeuristic position. The refusal of reciprocated gaze resulted in the loss of the viewer's autonomy. As the models increased the parameters of their caress, they started helping each other undress. They embodied varying and changing power roles in the exchange, they stood back and watched, became a little violent in their caress, and focussed toward one at a time as they licked and slapped each other. It was framed as though the performance was the beginning of something more, something pornographic: a women-centric orgy. Rather than being made for the viewer's gaze, the models were presented as completely engrossed in what they were doing and exhibited a shared inwardness.

Early in 2014, at the start of my Master of Fine Art (MFA) degree, I was invited to construct a four look collection that was focussed on creativity rather than commercial viability for the Wellington Fashion Week Leather Competition. I chose to construct the same dress four times with the leather provided, each a variation on the last. These garments were designed

to represent a multiple of the same, a uniform approach to sameness while accounting for the potentiality of misinterpretation within fashioned dress practices. Fit and comfort were intrinsically challenged, as the first iteration was form fitting flowing into an A-line skirt. The second garment took on a more hourglass silhouette. The third garment presented itself as too big, the body was not enough to 'fit' and the fourth, an exaggeration in the opposite direction, side-breasts were pushed out, the hemline significantly shorter, and shoulders shrunken. Each of the dresses were decorated with wax-moulded textures to further exaggerate the proportional shifts.

The Purple Project (2014) tried to use a generative daily 'becoming', through daily construction and intimate colouration ritual that saw me apply gendered colour stereotypes (through blue and pink food colouring) to my recently constructed dressed body in a specially constructed boudoir/tent in the studio. This month-long labour-intensive ritual saw by bodily autonomy decrease and my senses of comfort evade. The clothes were made at such a pace; thoughts of ideal embodiment were misconstrued in the garments, forced into the excruciatingly bold uniform. The pink and blue colours became discomforting, too much in themselves, they started merging, becoming multiple, and shades of purple. Near the end of the month, I invited critique participants to participate in the colouring ritual. I fell into an educationally passive role. The encounters were awkward, exposing and telling of an out of context intimate caress. They avoided touching my sexed body wherever possible, laughed and censored themselves. They wanted a moment to think, to plan, organise a way to be comfortable with their caress, movement. Upon completion, I became yet another 'Other'. I lost my way in dressing for comfort; I forgot how I used to dress and present my body to the social world. All my clothes suddenly became irrelevant, a shell that helped my body blend into the background.

I finished the first year of MFA dressing my peers in a uniform – exploring the connection and the caress of the uniform, and experimenting with decoration. Minimal, utilitarian shapes were decorated with ruffle, excess colour, gaudy and tacky embellishment and any utilitarian function was restricted to the joining together, the clipping on, whether it be another individual or another garment. Throughout this master's project, I have been experimenting with the way in which I present myself. I wanted create a singular garment structure that catered to my everyday activities making me feel comfortable, appropriate and desirable. It was over this time that I grasped the everyday social uniform as a platform for my thesis. From here, I continued to explore the parameters of self-imposed uniform and self-imposed dress practice with reference to gendered signifiers. My taught naturalisation of a feminine aesthetic exposed itself while confining boundaries of comfort. This extended into an experiment where I attempted to re-ritualise the process of getting dressed. I wore bodysuits (with no crotch snaps) altering my daily interactions between bodily function and dress practice and creating new intimacies. This project combines my interest in everyday perceptions of dress practices, censorship and ritualised embodiments with my desire for a representative instability of gender and sexuality.

1 I use the term 'deviating' due to the complicated nature of my sexual identity at the time; it created a sense of strong personal un-ease, of perversion. I now see deviancy as a constructive term, one that resists the insistence of a hegemonic identity. 'Deviant' as Other to 'normal'.

2 Barney, *The Cremaster Cycle*.







Introduction

This research project is made up of three parts, a creative body of work that consists of the fashion collection SMITH-SMITH, a short film that communicates the concept behind the collection and a written exegesis that locates and interrogates my fashion practice within a community of fashion designers. This study is primarily concerned with the representation of gender in everyday dress practices. Situated between the fashioned spectacle and everyday uniforms, the creative work aims to performing a spectrum of gender representations. It investigates dominant prescriptions of gender, identity and sexuality in dress practice. The 23-piece collection labelled SMITH-SMITH is adjustable and interchangeable. Gender boundaries are tested to 'pass' and 'trespass' the conventions exhibited in dress practice. Paired together, the creative and written components work to account for the role that gender has in the fashion industry from spectacle, to a more personal everyday experience.

This exegesis unpacks the role that fashion and dress has in the embodiment of identities. It outlines the role that dress practice plays in constructing gender and the way it contributes to signifying prescriptions of gender and sexual identity. The scope of dress spectacle and its dissemination is critiqued in reference to fashion designers Vivienne Westwood, Thom Browne, Walter Van Beirendonck, Hood by Air (HBA), and Comme des Garçons and the representation of transgressively gendered fashion available for everyday consumption, in particular unisex and androgynous fashion. This study discusses performativity and the way it complicates the embodiment of gender. It outlines the way in which gendered signifiers in dress practice inform the way bodies perform constructions of gender theatrically and in everyday practice. Cross-dressing is compared to dominant representations of gender performativity to begin to destabilise the rigid naturalisation of the gender-sex bonding. Furthering on to discuss how performing queer has the potential to signify gender and sexual identification through a spectrum. The relationship uniforms have to the representation of self is used to discuss the construct of 'passing', and counter- 'trespassing' as a transgressive approach to interrogate the stability of gender in everyday dress practice, showing how queer dress practice is highlighted as having the potential to both pass and trespass social dress codes. Finally this exegesis brings together the theoretical underpinnings and the design outputs of the project and articulates how the Smith-Smith Collection transgresses gender distinct structures in fashion. Transgressive design details are unpacked and sit in relation to garments in SMITH-SMITH, displaying how SMITH-SMITH, as a collection, partakes in the scope of a gender-agnostic fashion.



Dress as an embodied practice

“Dress is a basic fact of social life and this, according to anthropologists, is true of all known human cultures: all people ‘dress’ the body in some way...”¹Dress as an embodied practice serves to situate the role that dress has on identity; dressing substantiates the body signifiers of self and social identification. Joanne Entwistle proposes the dressed body as a greater signifier of self than the undressed body.² Dress, an adornment having both decorative and functional purposes, is the result of a process in which objects are applied to the material body, giving “visual form and (a) social incarnation”³ to the body and its presentation. Dress gives the body substance, makes visible relationships with other bodies, and identifies communities, alliances, allegiances and personal, political, cultural and social standings. Dress provides an outlet by which one presents a constructed identity, whether it heightens perceptions of desirability, or marks the wearer as ‘normal’ (or deviant). The dressed body is an interface between self and other, private and public. It is through dress that we come to ‘be’. Through practicing dress, we practice embodying different evolutions of ‘self’. This is complicated by the way clothing, and fashion is constructed, presented, and consumed, by the power endowed in the fashion industry, and by the categorical impositions of gender, size, style and cost impact on garments for dressing.

Dress practice refers to the bodily actions and resulting visualisations and interpretations of getting dressed and wearing forms of dress as natural extensions of the body in everyday life. Our chosen dress determines where we fit in our social world, with whom we associate and with which institutions we align ourselves. Our dressed bodies suggest both sexual inclinations and gendered representations. Entwistle writes that “not only is our dress the visible form of our intentions, but in everyday life dress is the insignia by which we are read and come to read others.”⁴The undressed body is not the source of gender representation; rather it is through the application of dress that the wearer embodies an amalgamation of other people’s fantasies, desires, and expectations of gender.

Fashioned garments are made with an intended application and a range of desired functions in which the garment accommodates. It is through culturally constructed ideals that we are informed as to how dress should decorate, cover up our flesh, keep us warm and what activities are appropriate for our bodies. There is not just one desired, or ideal body—differentiated by gender, age, race, culture, class and environment. There is a dominant zeitgeist, a ‘preferred’ representation of self in relation to the surrounding community governed by dominant structures of power. These governing factors are gendered and strongly impact on the consequences of non-conformity, self-perception, consciousness of bodily appearance and the naturalisation of what’s understood as ‘normal’. ⁵ Idealisations, once adopted within dominant culture, become normalised which then informs what is right and what is wrong, normal or ‘deviant’ in terms of dress practice and identity.

The ideal body, and by extension, the 'preferred' zeitgeist, provides an image of what to replicate, or interpret in everyday dress practise in order to appear 'normal'. The concept of normalcy comes from within the framework in which dress is paraded, advertised, and made desirable. To appear normal is to 'pass' expectations of dress practice. This notion of 'passing'⁶ enforces a selection of appropriate bodies, body shapes, and body coverage. Passing enhances conformity and infers that there is an appropriate form of dress depending on the situation, that dressing requires a set of rules, regulations on what can and cannot be done and can and cannot be worn in set situations. In order for one to 'pass' as a member of the 'everyday', a successful interpretation of the 'ideal' form—to be seen as appropriately dressed—a code is followed. Dress codes can be well known, inferred or unconsciously ingrained in cultural expectations, informing appropriate, and often-inappropriate dress practices. In much the same way that school uniforms are explicitly enforced—the type of garment, the proportions, lengths, cleanliness and insignia—all social spaces including public environments, by way of media suggestion, have presumed expectations of dress practice. While these images typically aren't read as imposing, failure to conform, to be visually inappropriate, "risk[s] censure or disapproval"⁷.

The current (Euro-American-centric) dressed zeitgeist is that which prefers the image of straight, white, middle class men and women with a preferred representation of compulsory heterosexuality.⁸ It is important to look to international fashion designers, and dress practice in order to better understand this Euro-American influence on the local (New Zealand) representation of womenswear, menswear, unisex and androgynous fashion. Fashion is constructed around standardised proportions of sexed bodies, insinuating a 'natural' link between sex and gender. All displays of identity for consumption, the garment label, the silhouette, the shop mannequin and the fashion image differentiate between sexed bodies. In the presumption that sex and gender are one in the same, the fashioned body is reduced to a binary categorisation. One has to choose between menswear and womenswear, between masculinity and femininity. This naturalisation of gender is integral to the current garment-making process. In order to make womenswear, one must choose between female or male blocks, mannequins or measurements, it is near impossible to forego differentiation.

Garment function is also influenced by these pre-established links. Expected applications for notions like zips, fabric weights, pocket sizes; garment ease and drape are affected by gendered distinctions. It is in menswear we see long lasting closures, zips, materials and garment formations. While in womenswear there is often an appropriation of menswear aesthetic but its also it is the only place you'll find invisible zips prone to breakage, delicate silks and voiles prone to ripping, and tight-fitting garments that wear easily. Womenswear is 'naturally' assumed to be feminine and decorative, with more attention to aesthetic value with influence from high fashion spectacles and media-led trend projections from celebrity culture. Each of these suggests, "[w]hat a woman wears is still a matter of greater moral concern than what a man wears."⁹ She is idealised to be slim, curvy, gracious, and above all sexually enticing, a presentation appealing to the male gaze. In contrast, menswear doesn't seek to attract a gaze in the same way, it is less about placing expectation on the body, as Entwistle proclaims, "...rendering 'invisible' the male body, the suit hides sexed characteristics, but more importantly, 'this body is normative within the public sphere, it has come to repre-

sent neutrality and disembodiment' (Thornton and Collier 1998: 34)."¹⁰ Menswear focuses more on the functionality and comfort of the dressed body than that of sexuality. Visuality is considered to be of less "moral concern"¹¹ even with taking into account the growing populace of hyper-masculine idealisations and tight-fitting menswear options.

The fashion industry often uses terms like 'unisex' and 'androgynous' as alternatives to menswear and womenswear. Unisex and androgyny begin to deconstruct the parameters of gendered dress practice, but still enforce distinction; relying on the undressed, sexed male/female body for situating a gendered representation. Unisex dress seeks to provide a shapeless silhouette. Prioritising ease of mobility and care, it is characterised by simple, functional garments that attempts to singularise gendered representation in dress. Unisex uses menswear proportions and silhouettes to do this and in doing so, unisex dress exemplifies the different ways in which male and female dressed bodies are sexed and gendered. The typical functional, active garments for doing things in much like the typical unisex garment are associated predominantly as menswear, while womenswear attributes are harked back. Womenswear focuses too much on the body, visuality and decoration in order to be represented equally in unisex dress. Rather than the singularising of gendered representations, androgynous dress seeks to merge the boundaries of gender. Androgynous dress re-creates menswear to fit a female body and vice versa. It is easy to assume, the androgyne is a tame cross-dresser, one that still fits within the confines of 'passable' dress practice. It has historical roots in lesbian culture, and more recently in the representation of bisexual women and mainstream dress practice.¹² Unisex and androgynous dress practices are inherently, biased toward the masculine. For if any eccentric form of decorative element or bright colour, any extra attention to sexed body characteristics applied on a male body has the potential to pigeonhole a gay identity. For a male to present as feminine, rather than masculine, is to counteract, to discredit naturalised cultural, social dress codes.¹³ For the female body, to lose any sense of her bodily visuality is to discredit her primary features, her autonomous identity, and her desirability. Her sexuality and desirable identity is questioned.

Vivienne Westwood's *Fall 2015 Unisex* fashion collection (Fig. 1, Fig. 2) exemplifies this in the relationship between the fashion spectacle and associated dissemination line that caters to an 'everyday' application. The dressed body in fashion spectacle works as a heterotopic¹⁴ space, where codes, conventions and boundaries of dress practice are lessened or made extravagant. In everyday application, transgressively dressed bodies perform differently, often causing "offence and outrage and be met with scorn or incredulity."¹⁵ It is important to note that idealised dress practice is strongly influenced by the appropriation of fashion spectacles through dissemination in mainstream and high street fashion brands, by buyers, photographers and journalists. The *Unisex* spectacle consists of an amalgamation of differently gender-coded garments, forms and details. The typical womenswear garments are constructed in a way that they are presented on both female and male models (corsetry, dresses, excess drape). Menswear fits the female models too (suiting, coveralls, loose-fit). Each look on the models is a compilation of differently gendered representations and applications of garment, make-up, and posture. Through the fashion spectacle, gender differentiation is of less insistence, boundaries are pushed and gender signifiers are blurrier, less categorical. The spectacle is afforded more decoration, and becomes a space for exaggerated proportions.



Figure 1. Vivienne Westwood, Look 2, Fall 2015.



Figure 2. Vivienne Westwood, Look 47, Fall 2015

This however, doesn't translate in Vivienne Westwood's *Unisex AW15* dissemination line (Fig. 3), the commercially viable ready-to-wear collection. Removed from the spectacle, the dissemination appropriates the themes and styles, and tailors to an everyday application, a consumable reality. Through its dissemination, Westwood's transgressive themes and proportions are transposed onto already successful manifestations of dress. The saleable unisex garments are confined to a series of shorts, t-shirts and shirts that conform to the desexualised, shapelessness of menswear and masculine appearance. Feminine, womenswear aesthetics are reduced to the printed imagery and the odd silky-feel fabric option. The concepts are appropriated in order to 'pass' within pre-existing structures of gendered dress practice, and through this process, the transgressive collection is censored from all that is challenging, discrediting and treating 'unisex' as mere aesthetic theatrics, unsaleable to an everyday public.

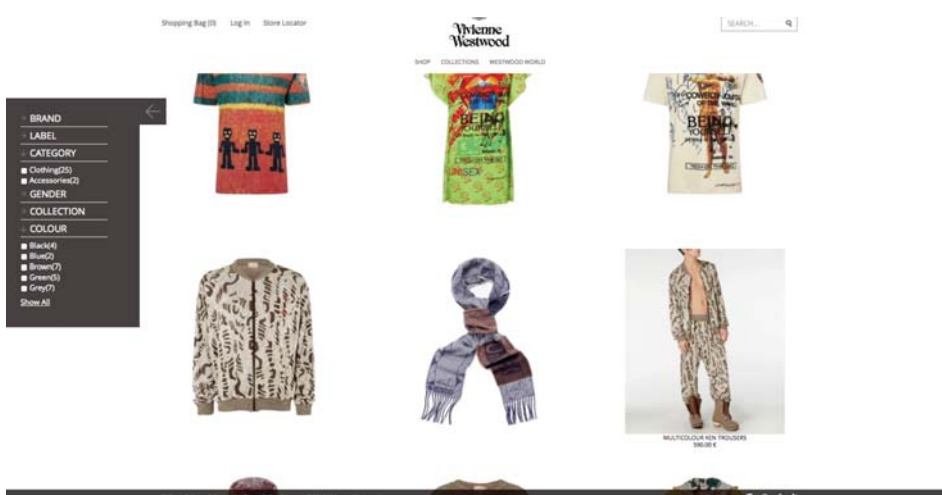


Figure 3. Vivienne Westwood, screenshot from Unisex online store, Fall 2015

Even if we were to overlook the discrepancy of transgressive gender representation, in the manifestations of the spectacle and the dissemination of Vivienne Westwood's *Unisex*, there is still a strong reliance of the body underneath still needing to 'pass' specific gendered codes—for men to come off as masculine, dominant, buff and active and women adorning excess, asserting their sexualisation, and revealing their bodies in a feminine way. This suggests a failure to account for the polarities of sexualisation between men and women's dressed bodies. Entwistle continues, "For the most part, the regime of representations of masculinity and femininity, while broader, are nonetheless resolutely gendered and fashion continues to play on gender, even while it periodically deconstructs it."¹⁶ It is through fashion that we are given an idealised form to aim for, a range of appropriate garments to choose from. Through fashion, our gender is managed;¹⁷ the garments available for consumption are complicit with that of the reigning zeitgeist, that of the gender-distinct menswear and womenswear.

It is not uncommon to see those who identify themselves in a way that deviates while adopting and conforming to the dominant structures of dress practice. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Andrew Parkers introduction to *Performativity and Performance* describes, "...a populous and contested scene in which the role of silent or implied witnesses ... bears as much explanatory weight as do the particular speech acts of supposed individual speech agents."¹⁸ This suggests that, in dressing in accordance with the dominant, naturalised structure, one is implied to act as an agent. This is reiterated when Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas, in *Queer Style*,¹⁹ argue that the adoption of a queer style, purports a queer identity and sexuality; and Elisabeth Wilson in *Forbidden Love* suggests that, in being described as homosexual, it is assumed that "a "master" identity ... defined all aspects of their lives and behaviour, not just what they did in bed."^{20 21} The rejection of dress codes offers a space in which to transgress dominant constructions, to challenge social normativity and idealisations of gender, are not without consequence. By outlining the disparity between representations of dressed bodies in high fashion spectacles and their associated dissemination lines, it is possible to expose the hetero-normative gender-distinct zeitgeist. It is from this perspective that I come to understand, to unpack gender representation through dressed bodies. That is to say, to explore the way in which the management of dressed bodies is determined by implicit and naturalised gender boundaries. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Michael Moon, in their collaborative chapter *Divinity*,²² discuss how it's not just the dressed body or its aesthetic surfaces that associate gender. Gender codes are reflected "in habitual and largely unconscious physical and psychological attitudes, poses, and styles of bodily relation and response."²³

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- 1 Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 6.
- 2 Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*.
- 3 Parker and Sedgwick, *Performativity and Performance*, 154.
- 4 Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 35.
- 5 Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 31.
- 6 'Passing' will be discussed in more depth in *Passing/Trespassing*
- 7 Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 33.
- 8 Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence."
- 9 Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 22.
- 10 Ibid., 174.
- 11 Ibid., 22.
- 12 Geczy and Karaminas, *Queer Style*, 35.
- 13 Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 8.
- 14 Michel Foucault's essay *Of Other Spaces* discusses heterotopic spaces. Spaces that run on a different arrangement of codes and conventions, where there are different expectations of what is appropriate, that, when applied to the fashion spectacle, in terms of gender representation, differentiation is of less insistence. In the fashion spectacle, designers don't have to follow dominant dress codes or conventions. These representations have their own reality, where, for example, it is not uncommon to have uncensored female nipples, males more likely to be adorned with feminine aesthetics, and body-proportions being hyper-exaggerated.
- 15 Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 8.
- 16 Ibid., 180.
- 17 Ibid., 35.
- 18 Parker and Sedgwick, *Performativity and Performance*, 7.
- 19 Geczy and Karaminas, *Queer Style*.
- 20 Wilson, "Forbidden Love," 215.
- 21 The text *Forbidden Love* was written in 1984 since then, a more contemporary account of the role of dress in determining "master" identities is seen in the text *Queer Style* that makes reference to a range of different cultural embodiments of queerness while also accounting for the historical prevalence of a queer style.
- 22 Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, 215–251.
- 23 Ibid., 220.





Performing Gender Through Dress

Accounting for the performativity of gender in active dress practice provides a space for transgressive approaches of dress application and interaction to destabilise naturalised transitive body and garment relations. "Dress in everyday life is always located spatially and temporally: when getting dressed, one orientates oneself to the situation, acting in particular ways upon the body. However, one does not act upon the body as if it were an inert object but as an envelope of the self. Instead, our bodies are 'the visible form of our intentions', indivisible from a sense of self."¹ Our everyday dress practices, the processes and body movements we employ, become commonplace, comfortable, even normalised, through repetition. These practices can often reflect or re-iterate our desired or assumed linkage to gender representation. This iterative process, like our sense of 'self,' develops, changes and evolves. Our dressed bodies represent a temporal space reflective of current cultural, social and desired lived environments.² In repeatedly getting dressed and adopting the motions of putting on particular gendered garments, it comes to feel normal, even natural. The female body is labelled 'woman' through repeating the practice of dressing in womenswear. The iterative practice naturalises this praxis. The way in which the body interacts with dress in order to get dressed is subject to the intended body for a garment. The sexed body is gendered through the labelling, proportions and silhouette of a constructed garment. In the everyday interaction with our dressed bodies, we are ritualised into gender-confirming practices. Clothes are constructed in ways that rely on pre-existing gendered parameters and these determine the ease or difficulty of wear in relation to physical, anatomical and sexed binary difference. Pockets in particular are represented with different levels of function based purely on gendered assumptions. By looking at typical garment manifestations it can be understood that men need large pockets, and women very small, almost purely decorative, or non-existent pockets. Aesthetics of the dressed body cannot be discounted in terms of articulating one's presumed identity. As Geczy and Karaminas make clear, "Experimenting with fashion is a way of both displaying and accepting difference—or a way of passing and becoming invisible under the guise of heterosexuality. Dress is therefore a visible and conscious marker of a constructed or performed gender."³

Historically, it has been commonplace to assume that sexuality is a term that defines much more than the practice of sex. Wilson suggests that it "was about identity and gender, about masculine and feminine, about desire, fantasy, and the whole construction of the self."⁴ By deviating from normalised dress practice, by dressing queer, one inhabits a deviant identity. One discredits the naturalisation of gender-distinct dress practice and, by extension, the stability of heterosexuality. Similarly Geczy and Karaminas discuss Judith Butler's assertion of the body as both a natural and artificial construct, stating that, "gender is always an active phenomenon: what we say or think we are is a result of something we do. We perform our gender to ourselves and to the respective communities we inhabit."⁵ This suggests what we

understand to be our 'natural' gender, sexuality, and identity is an artificial interpretation or representation. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler discusses the construct of a primary and secondary identification that is presumed in everyday social perception and culture. A person's 'primary' identity refers to their physical, biological anatomical sex—an 'original' presentation. The secondary identification is associated with bodies that deviate from performing that 'original' reality. In having one's presentation understood as a secondary identity, the transsexual, the cross-dresser, the queer becomes an (un) reality, purported to be "mere artifice, play, falsehood, and illusion."⁶ The primary and secondary identity model accounts for the re-assertion of the hetero-normative performative as a 'natural,' or 'original' identity. Femininity represented by a body of male origins is seen as costume, decoration or impersonation more than identity. The same occurs with masculinity represented by a person of female 'primary' reality. However, to be a man or a woman that asserts the normative singular, 'primary' identification is to perform inasmuch as queers are presumed to be performing their secondary reality. To be woman or man is to repeatedly embody a straight, white, and middle-class construct. If we look to sexual practice as a means to activate and transgress, as Butler discusses, "one is a woman, according to this framework, to the extent that one functions as one within the dominant heterosexual frame and to call the frame into question is perhaps to lose something of one's sense of place in gender."⁷ If the stereotypical lesbian is to be understood as an androgyne, for example, with a presumed renouncement of 'femininity',⁸ can she still be a woman? A lesbian's renouncement of femininity disassociating her from the normative representation of womanhood in turn destabilises the presumed 'original' identity or reality being a marker of primary or original gender. However, the adoption of butch and femme aesthetic coupling by lesbian partners could also be argued as a reassertion of hetero-normative visibility as a means to bargain for 'equal' treatment, "that they were really just like everyone else,"⁹ that, even in 'deviant' partnering, there are inherent masculine and feminine roles or visibilities that are played out in intimate relationships. The naturalisation of dominant gender binaries is re-iterated even when sexed body characteristics don't correspond to gendered representation.

The cross-dressing body in everyday dress practice can help articulate to what extent naturalised incarnations of gender are prevalent, even enforced, in social dress codes. Cross-dressing is often linked to theatrics, stage shows and drag culture. While it may seem as though this body conforms to a segregated man/woman gender binary, the cross-dressed body does not. Rather, it heightens the performativity of a gendered identity, imitates and mimics (to quite often exaggerated proportions) that which is understood as inherent and natural. By deviating from gendered representations, the cross-dressed body has the potential to transgress. However, cross-dressing can also segregate deviant or queer identities or realities into a void of non-reality, illusion, and invisibility. Seen as something that can just as easily be removed, something secondary, and thus treating queer identities as decorative aesthetic choice, erasing it as an alternative to dominant everyday embodiments. Therefore if the way in which dress is applied to the body, the bodily interactions with aesthetic and utilitarian garment constructs detours from the expected, if the stationary fit is distorted, tight-fitting in unexpected ways, pockets and closures interact with the body in ways that don't rely on an obvious function or gender, we are forced to experience our bodies in new ways, unfamiliar ways, recreate our ritualistic dress practices. In doing this, displacing what

seems normal in dominant dress practice, beyond pure visibility, inclusive of the way we interact, get into, or strap on our dress could be understood as a sort of 'queer dressing' – one that destabilises, negates dominant dress practice, while non-definitively asserting itself as 'other'.

1 Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 29.

2 De Certeau examines everyday practices, like conversation and reading, as tactics with "innumerable connections between manipulating and enjoying." Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xxiv. His theories correlate with the imposition of dominant, or popular forms of everyday dress practice.

3 Geczy and Karaminas, *Queer Style*, 7.

4 Wilson, "Forbidden Love," 217.

5 Geczy and Karaminas, *Queer Style*, 7.

6 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xxiii.

7 Ibid., xi.

8 Elisabeth Wilson suggests this has been a common presumption over many decades. Wilson, "Forbidden Love,"

9 Wilson, "Forbidden Love," 215.



Passing/Trespassing: Transgressive Uniformity

Returning to Kosofsky Sedgwick and Moon, the performer Divine (Fig. 4) and her drag style proposes that “male drag performance, (is a way of) inhabiting the body with a defiant ef-feminacy, ... (Divine’s) unsanitised drag disgusts and infuriates many people”¹ through her adoption of challenging gendered and sexual aesthetics.



Figure 4. Divine, still from *Pink Flamingos*, 1972

Having what presented as an inconsistent gender identity, Moon suggests that Divine constitutes a “new sense of an impossible body” “in the process of her self-creation... that refuses to keep its place as merely one level among many; as an ontological status that disarticulates the intersections among the person, the artist, the fictional character, and the commodity.”² This examination of Divine exemplifies the role a queer body has in potential to transgress. That it’s not just about the dressed body, that the performing queer body also serves as a transgression from naturalised gender codes in everyday dress practice. In constructing dress that explores the way in which we perform gendered rituals in a zone non-irreducible to a singular ‘primary’ identification, the dressed body discredits the assertion that woman/feminine=hetero-female and man/masculine=hetero-male. By understanding that ‘conventional’ men’s and women’s dress practice is just as performative as that of cross-dressing, or gender ambiguous, queer dress practice, the assumed natural states of gender become alienated and ‘deviant’ applications of dress become something more than aesthetic choice. Queer dress practice becomes more accessible inasmuch as a queer identity, another reality.



Figure 5. Casey Legler, 2015



Figure 6. Andreja Pejic, 2015

To 'pass' is to succeed in representing the expected or coded signifiers of dress. To pass is to exhibit an appropriate, or the expected representation of self-relevant to its surrounding environment. Passing marks the successful embodiment of a dominant identity. It is reflective of the social and cultural context in which the dressed body is presented. Often, subject to covert judgement, whether or not a dressed body passes is up to other inhabitants of the space and pre-existing expectations. To pass is to successfully embody, to adhere to dominant normalised signifiers of identification of which gender is included. Used as a tool to categorise appropriate dress practice, to pass or successfully appear 'right', is to fit in to what is socially, morally and culturally acceptable, to be one in many or to successfully embody an idealised image or representation. Passing affords the emotional attachment of being included, being a part of something. Using dress to successfully embody provides a platform for which the embodiment of self is judged, "there are no universal or unchanging ways of seeing and looking."³ Passing requires a subjective eye, whether it is from an 'Other', or from conscious or unconscious self reflection. A 'passable' presentation can be examined by looking again at the fashion spectacle, in particular the growing trend, or adoption of deviant-identified models. Casey Legler (Fig. 5) is a top menswear model, irreverent to her gender identification as female. Her presentation is successful, marketable because she 'passes' as male. Another example is Andreja Pejic (Fig. 6) who, throughout a changing physiology, has successfully visualised dominant womenswear representation. Pejic began her career in the fashion industry as a man modelling menswear and womenswear. Since transitioning to female, Pejic now works primarily as a womenswear model.

To trespass is to transgress, push the boundaries of 'passable' identification in dress practice. Based on Halberstam's discussion of shadow feminism, "a feminist politics that issues not from a doing but from an undoing, not from a being or becoming women but a refusal to be or become woman as she has been defined and imagined within Western philosophy."⁴



Figure 7. Boychild, 2013

Trespassing works as a counter to the notion of passing. To trespass everyday dress practice, is to intentionally fail at successful communication of the intended, or idealised embodiment of identity. Through “embracing artifice, pretence and exaggeration over ‘conformity’ to an imaginary truth”⁵ the queer body trespasses through, as Halberstam discusses, a productive un-becoming, “that save[s] us from being snared by the hooks of hegemony and spared by the seductions of the gift shop.”⁶ The body dressed queer transgresses normative idealisations of gender embodiment. Queer is a deviant representation; it is the disidentification with “a model that is ‘straight’, namely heterosexual, conventional and middle class.”⁷ Queer is strangeness, an unconventional embodiment. To dress queer is to embody polyvalent, often contradictory identifications of gender and sexuality irreducible to the dominant signification of man and woman, heterosexual and homosexual. In comparison to Casey Legler and Andreja Pejic, Boychild (Fig. 7) represents more a queer embodiment, where the multitudes of changing appearances in her modelling and performance art challenge and trespass the parameters of gender representation.

To dress in uniform is to both pass and trespass the impositions of socio-cultural dress codes. In uniform, bodies are made interchangeable, categorised, repeated representations of the same; uniforms instil a sense of sameness, community, and insight order and categorical association. The uniformed body is not unlike another body in the same uniform. The uniformed body in social space makes reference to an ‘Other’ space, an environment for which the uniform is appropriated, enforced, expected. Unlike social spaces, where everyday dress practice is most noticeable, institutional environments⁸ are often explicit in terms of successful implementation, successful appearance. Social, public spaces are more implicitly coded where passable dress practices are implied, suggested and promoted through idealised media projections. Uniformed bodies are seen to belong somewhere Other. This idea of a

heterotopic space,⁹ mentioned in regard to the fashion spectacle, legitimises the uniformed body being seen as belonging to an Other space, the public social space appears transitory. Through this, the uniformed body can be understood as both a passable representation and a trespassing embodiment. Focussed more on direct communication through visual signifiers than desirable aesthetic, the uniform represents a dress practice that seeks to communicate hierarchies, dominant and subordinate power positions.

The uniform has the potential to order groups of people, to segregate the leaders from their workers or players, and to identify and isolate the miscreant. Visual signifiers of power, class, order and discipline, the uniform demonstrates authority and rank. Through the use of badges, labels and insignia the decorative elements inform an appropriate aesthetic and behaviour "exhibited by the wearer and expected by the observer."¹⁰ Uniforms both adhere to and challenge constructions of gender in dress practice. They are used to signify a categorical conformity, a visual signifier of disciplined order, "an apparatus for training the body and refining particular techniques." The uniformed body "entail[s] a discipline of being looked at, of looking and of performing as particular types of person."¹¹ It is important to note the masculine origins that are still prevalent in fashioned counterparts, with the uniform having "significantly shaped our aesthetic codes."¹² Jennifer Craik suggests "In the case of uniforms for men, there is a close fit between the attributes of normative masculinity as inscribed in uniform conduct and normative masculine roles and attributes. However, for women, there is a discrepancy between the gendered attributes of uniforms and normative femininity."¹³ Craik argues that a woman in uniform transgresses what is to successfully embody a 'woman', womenswear and feminine dress aesthetic. With the role of the uniform to reflect discipline and obedience, the role of the women's uniform is to remove distraction. Through the masking, the hiding away of bodily contours and proportions, there is space for imagination and the potential hidden desires. The women's uniform treats the female body as something inappropriate, that, "women in uniforms are inevitably caught up in ambivalent and highly charged concepts of gender, sexuality and sensuality... imbued with sexual frisson and erotic possibilities."¹⁴ These strictures are adopted in fetish and bondage and sado-masochist subcultures (BDSM)¹⁵ where the use of insignia and decoration in uniforms communicates positions of dominance and subservience and is as a means of sexual play. The garment structure, construction, proportion and details of uniforms are used as erotic signifiers in fetish and BDSM culture, representing different roles in sexual activities. Craik argues through the uniform, "carnivalised power relations"¹⁶ are exhibited. Take for instance, the representation of a schoolgirl in uniform, while adhering to a strict dress code seeks to desexualise, to censor the 'female' attributes, the school uniform transgresses the normative, and dominant idealisation of femininity, imbuing the body with erotic possibility, sexual frisson and sensuality. Similarly, male bonding in military-like institutions, through shared ritualistic dress practices, promotes (without the use of violating or prohibited verbal language) intimate interactions or homosexual encounters.

Thom Browne's menswear spectacles make reference to these shared rituals and military uniformity as erotic signifiers. The back drop for the Spring/Summer 2015 show (seen in the lower left corner of Fig, 8 most prominently) consisted of multiple rows of men sitting in a uniform pose, with their face masked, their dressed bodies became interchangeable uniformed props that alluded to a shared discipline. While both menswear and womenswear

spectacles make reference to the eroticisation of the uniform, Browne’s homoerotic spin on military uniform signifiers serves a transgressive spectacle. His spectacles are a heightened account of discipline and obedience, tied with the military decorative detailing, the stiff starched collars, and the utilitarian details and often-institutional colour ways are met with exaggerated masculine forms. Muscular proportions are pushed to the excess, while clothes are presented in a way that they appear a size too small, trouser hems and sleeve lengths are shrunk and materials are often overtly decorative directing extra attention to the body. Browne’s Spring/Summer 2015 collection (Fig. 8 and Fig. 9) exaggerated physiological male proportions, boxed out muscular and genital protrusions and accentuated the tonal grey colour palate with pastel tones. Hyper-masculine components are regularly decorated with delicate floral and utilitarian components to further accentuate proportions. This is particularly relevant in terms of the zippers used for the suit jackets – these were short, altering the perspective of the rest of the garment. Similarly, Tom Browne’s The Fall/Winter 2014 (Fig. 10) collection used exaggerated proportions and shapes to camouflage the physiology of the wearer’s body whilst using camouflage print with deep-seeded origins in active military uniforms.¹⁷



Figure 8. Thom Browne, Look 45, Spring/Summer 2015



Figure 9. Thom Browne, Look 25, Spring/Summer 2015



Figure 10. Thom Browne, Look 42, Fall/Winter 2014

Consistently, Thom Browne’s collections exaggerate and intensify the physiological proportions of the dressed body, heightening notions of masculinity, and using decorative insignia to challenge direct communicative gender identification. By heightening the masculine signifiers and physiology of his collections, Thom Browne projects a potential future that destabilises the desexualisation, productivity and active role of a man in uniform with erotic potential and illusion. This is similar to the way women in uniform transgress and destabilise normative femininity. Where the role of the uniform – to communicate obedience and discipline - is made sensual, sexual and desirable. The uniform is fetishized, while still adhering to strict power relations; Browne’s fashion spectacles reflect the aggregate of conformity and transgression. It is through the appropriation of uniform detailing’s that Browne’s collections transgress gender boundaries. Once the structural conditions of ‘passing’ are known, the implicit dress codes, expectations naturalised in everyday dress practice are easier to disrupt and trespass the “mass delusion,”¹⁸ that restricts ‘passing’ as man or woman in a heterosexual paradigm.

As long as you socially appear to be conforming to what could be presumed an obedient visual representation, a uniformed dress code, you can be whomever you want, you can embody whatever you please or desire within the strictures of everyday dress practice. It is from this perspective that, for the creative practice of this thesis, SMITH-SMITH was designed, constructed and displayed. A collection that appropriates uniformed signifiers from a range of different gender-specific uniform outputs to allude to another space, an appropriate space that enforces a dress code beyond the parameters or the expectations of conventional everyday dress practice.

1 Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, 220.

2 Ibid., 227.

3 Craik, *Uniforms Exposed*, 185.

4 Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 124.

5 Geczy and Karaminas, *Queer Style*, 2.

6 Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 2.

7 Geczy and Karaminas, *Queer Style*, 2.

8 Examples where an explicit uniform is enforced include workplaces, sports teams, schooling institutes and other authority-driven institutions.

9 Foucault, "Of Other Spaces."

10 Craik, *Uniforms Exposed*, 5.

11 Ibid., 76.

12 Ibid., 5.

13 Ibid., 12–13

14 Ibid., 99.

15 BDSM stands for Bondage, Discipline, Sadism and Masochism. BDSM signifies a range of power roles common in fetishized erotic practices.

16 Craik, *Uniforms Exposed*, 40.

17 Camouflage is expanded on in the SMITH-SMITH section

18 Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 3.





SMITH-SMITH

Collection Views

The SMITH-SMITH Collection

Garments are interchangeable, combinations as modelled

Look one	Bruce's Tee Jock's Bib Max's Chaps
Look Two	Bruce's Tee Butch Frank's Ball Sack
Look Three	Bob Cap Johnny's Jacket Johnny's Shorts
Look Four	Dolly's Brace Bobby Wrestler
Look Five	Dolly's ap Patti's Sheath Bobby Wrestler
Look Six	Bruce's Tee Dolly's Brace Bambi Boxing Pam
Look Seven	Max's Trench-Sheath Daisy's Ball Sack
Look Eight	Bruce's Tee Fanny's Jacket Johnny's Shorts
Look Nine	Candy's Shirt-Sheath Bobby Wrestler Daisy's Ball Sack
Look Ten	Candy's Sheath-All Ball Harness ft. Muff Ball Harness ft. Cod Piece, Pussy Pocket, and Fanny Pack
Look Eleven	Bruce's Tee Bobby Wrestler Daisy's Ball Sack

























The SMITH-SMITH Collection

SMITH-SMITH is an evolution of my creative practice that continues to explore the notion of gender, sexuality and dress practices. It expands upon previous collections that have investigated the significance of parameters, boundaries, intimacies and sexualities. SMITH-SMITH consists of a series of 23 garments and accessories. The collection seeks to de-authorise the singularity of gender identification, disidentifying¹ with the structures of menswear and womenswear in such a way that the 'primary' identification (male/female) is indistinguishable from the 'secondary'.² This collection seeks to be interchangeable, accessible, variable and intersectional – where garment combinations have the potential to both pass as, and trespass the everyday embodiment of normative gender expectations. The garments are designed to fail to meet the expectations of menswear and womenswear representation, however, it doesn't directly insinuate a particular deviance, that of a 'lesbian' or that of being 'gay', it deviates in a more queer sense. It could be considered to be fluid, existing on a spectrum of potentiality. In constructing dress that isn't completely tied down to any clearly defined gender, or sexual categorisation, the queerly dressed body can perform. Through a failure to align, it can act in way less abiding to a "master identity"³ These clothes, unlike the conventional unisex model of garment construction, are formed off an amalgamation of female proportions and womenswear blocks, and male proportions and menswear blocks. They seek to displace bodily proportions, and direct attention toward differently sexed body parts, enhancing the sexualisation, while also desexualising the body. The garments, from one view, might appear masculine, or of unisex origin, however they also appear to completely fit and taper to a 'woman's' curves. The SMITH-SMITH collection has taken on a relationship with that of everyday social uniforms: sportswear aesthetics are embedded and paired with typical working class uniforms and safety – based accessories. The wearability is an important factor; in constructing an image that sits on the borderline between theatrics and consumable, the collection speaks more eloquently as to the relationship between an interchangeable, 'every' body and queer dress aesthetic. Smith-Smith draws its influence from designers whose creative work interrogates dress practice and the construction of gender through embodiment, performance, and the transgression of disciplined uniformity.

Walter Van Beirendonck, Hood by Air (HBA) and Comme des Garçons are among some of the most innovative design companies exploring different ways in which to design beyond conventional gender ideologies in the fashion industry. Walter Van Beirendonck is known for his hyper masculine, overtly phallic and alien decorative features paired with distinct cuts, colour combinations and utilitarian detail. Beirendonck seeks to reflect ethnic and nature inspirations to humorously interpret a masculine (homo) sexuality. Beirendonck "create[s] desire around unacceptable or marginal things."⁴ Beirendonck's suit jackets in particular interrogate the relationship between body and garment. The jacket in Figure 11 is split in two, with lower half appearing to float, the curved lines accentuate the body in an unexpected

way, the underarm cut-outs reveal the body's flesh in a way that challenges normative, or dominant (even in the fashion spectacle) suit ideologies.



Figure 11. Walter Van Beirendonck, Look 34, Spring 2016

This transgressive aesthetic is taken to the extreme by HBA's Spring 2016 collection. HBA reveals the body, or alludes to the 'reveal' in a way that interrogates 'passable' levels of coverage in dress practice. The boiler suit (Fig. 12, Fig. 13) appears functional from the front while from the back, the body is near naked and the suit more smock like. HBA and Beirendonck use utilitarian structures, details, dominant menswear aesthetic to over-turn gendered and sexual praxis. This notion of revealing (by way of cut-out sections, exposed naked body) and concealing (ideological formations of utilitarian and masculine suiting) is strong element of SMITH-SMITH. Hems and bands have cut-out portions and aprons with cut-out chest cavities form incomplete body tunnels (Fig. 14).



Figure 12. Hood By Air, Front view of boiler suit, Spring 2016



Figure 13. Hood By Air, Back view of boiler suit, Spring 2016

Facing page: Figure 14. Close Up of Max's Chaps Trousers cut-out



Irrespective of the underlying body Comme des Garçons creates hyper-exaggerated proportions and componentry that are non-relative to that of either menswear or womenswear.⁵ Proportions seek to unpack or represent the dressed body in new ways, that its “not about revealing or accentuating the shape of a woman’s body, its purpose is to allow a person to be what they really are.”⁶ Comme des Garçons presents themes of sex in dress practice in a way that transgresses the conventional hegemonic model. A regular detail is the pulling forward, the exaggeration of the shoulders, a part of the body that reflects a gendered statement. The Spring 2012 (Fig. 15) and Autumn/Winter 2014 (Fig. 16) show seasons in particular adopt a reduced cross-chest measurement and bold accentuated shoulders and sleeves. In SMITH-SMITH, the loose fitting ‘unisex’ t-shirt (Fig. 18) is complicated by the bodily accentuation, the pulling forward and the collapsible collar – no longer directly linked to the shapelessness, desexualised menswear under-structure. The t-shirt broadens the back, shoulders, tapers, compresses the chest and makes clear that its not quite a men’s tee and also not quite women’s – something with a non-definitive ‘primary’ identity. This is a common feature in all of the sleeved garments. At times, the front sleeve is differentiated by its contour, its tailored detail, while the back is ballooned out to create a shapeless flat aesthetic. This is also reflective in Comme des Garçons designs Fall 2012 collection (Fig. 17) that focused on the flattened silhouette of garments as a dressed aesthetic.



Figure 15. Comme des Garçons, Look 19, Spring 2012



Figure 16. Comme des Garçons, Look 1, Fall 2014



Figure 17. Comme des Garçons, Look 27, Fall 2012



By pushing garment details forward, and pulling back, SMITH-SMITH accentuates sexed connotations of the female and male body. The accessibility of each garment is carefully considered by altering the intimacies of getting dressed and the intimate and exposing relationship gendered dress has with the body. This can be seen in the pink harness most explicitly; the buckle closures sit on the upper back, a place where the dressing body has to manoeuvre in a way unfamiliar to conventional dress practice.

The material combinations have been chosen to reflect a multitude of different price points, levels of wear, leisure and uniform references to reflect a spectrum of class-based dress practices. Plastic componentry, elastic and synthetic fabrics, typical of sporting applications are mixed with twills and leather – common materials for hardwearing applications. Commonly used in work and sports safety fields, leather is also symbolic of a higher class and dominant power visuality, all the while being a strong component in fetish culture.

The colour palate of the collection seeks to reflect a spectrum of fleshy tones as multiple—representing the diversity of skin tone and ethnicity in the social world. The spectrum of fleshy tones counters the presumed naturalisation, the dominant preference for binary race distinction and by extension, their gendered associations. On the one hand, fleshy tones appear banal, boring and nuanced so as to not distract the uniforms communicative function; and on the other, the tones are brightened, textured, and blended, creating an overtly ‘camp’ feeling. The flesh tones almost blend in at times with the body, asserting a second-skin feel to the garments, as though they are an extension, as though they are just as important, or relevant as the skin they are covering up. The camouflage print used in SMITH-SMITH (Fig. 20) transposes an arrangement of naked bodies to make up the variable shades, not too dissimilar to a sexual orgy of entwined bodies in copulation. Camouflage is most commonly associated with militarism and hunting, while also prevalent in fashion, is a print that renders nature. Rounded shapes are block-filled with varying shades of the surrounding natural environment to blur the boundaries between the foreground and background; the print structure is “an artistic form that attempts to approximate nature.”⁷ Camouflage refers to a ‘natural’ environment for which to blend in, to pass, where nature-like leafy foliage, trees and ground matter are depicted in a non-descript manner, it’s less important to identify the differentiated components, than to, as a collective of plants, project a visual account of the ‘natural’. Camouflage is a purposeful approximation; its abstraction to the intended surrounding environment is a blurred aesthetic. When appropriated by the use of naked bodies, an orgy of many differently raced and gendered bodies referencing a natural sexual environment where, by dressing in the camouflage print, one is rendered as a part of the orgy while also suggesting a spectrum of difference. It was important for this print from a distance to be perceived as a flesh-toned version of camouflage and up close, reveal a spectrum of sexualised, intertwined bodies to be sure that its everyday application infuses a sexuality that isn’t too theatrical and also non-reducible to a binary gender or sexual representation.

Facing page: Figure 19. Close up of shoulder buckles on Dolly’s Brace, the only closure securing the garment on the body.







Facing page: Figure 21. Close up of Label on Bob Cap
Figure 20. SMITH-SMITH Camouflage Print

The uniform signifiers, beyond camouflage and construction, extend into the garment labelling. All components of the collection are distinguished with a name, suggesting an ownership of someone other, an ownership of a highly gendered nature that often counteracts what could be perceived as intended. Embroidered name badges are paired with the care labels and placed in exposed positions on the garments (Fig. 21) to make a decorative statement identifying the disidentifactory nature of the garments.. Care labels are written with sexual innuendo, resistant to familiar, gendered sizing ratios, they are measured from the most restricted part of the body, at times only reflective of the front, the labels insist a getting dressed as a gauge for fit. Care instructions are personified, as though to speak to dress being an extension of the self. SMITH-SMITH is used on the name badges on the one hand to allude to a profession (i.e. black smith, silversmith). These also are translated in some of the garment types – aprons and back braces are re-imagined. On the other hand, the collections name, Smith-Smith represents an ownership of one of the most common familial names in Western Culture.⁸

The concept behind the SMITH-SMITH collection is communicated and performed through the interaction of bodies and queer aesthetics in a short film (Fig. 22, Fig. 23). Consisting of a series of short clips exploring everyday movements and practices of dressing, the models are portrayed in a transitional space. Posed as though they're waiting, preparing, becoming while sensuously fidgeting, shrugging, getting dressed and undressed. Their gestures are transitively gendered and make connections to the performativity involved in asserting the naturalisation of the construction of gender. By re-imagining familiar everyday practices of waiting, or preparing, the dressed bodies insist on the "potentiality or concrete possibility for another world"⁹, that isn't too far from reality, a world that highlights the desirability of embodying a queer performance. I use queer identities and representations as a 'deviance' to that of the naturalised hetero-centric zeitgeist of the dressed body.

Facing page: Figure 22. Screenshot of short film, 02:12

Facing page: Figure 23. Screenshot of short film, 00:46

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- 1 'Disidentification' is a term used by José Esteban Muñoz as a "third term that resists the binary of identification and counter identification... a reformatting of the self within the social" Disidentification, rather than counter identification, doesn't reinstate the discourse it seeks to counteract. Muñoz, "The White to Be Angry," 83.
 - 2 In terms of unisex, male would be the primary and the non-gendered, secondary. In terms of androgyny: female would be primary and masculine secondary. With the reverse also considered androgynous, but considerably less likely.
 - 3 Wilson, "Forbidden Love," 215.
 - 4 Beirendonck, Blanks, and Debo, *Walter Van Beirendonck*, 88.
 - 5 Jones, *Rei Kawakubo*, 8.
 - 6 Kawakubo, *Ibid.*, 69.
 - 7 Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 132.
 - 8 This thesis is formed on the dominant ideologies outlined in western dress practices.
 - 9 Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 1.



0:02:12:00 Fit



0:00:46:20 Fit



Conclusion

Through my willingness to experiment, to push my own boundaries, play with my own dressed body; I have come to appreciate just how much performances of dress practice impose the naturalisation of a dominant gender construction. SMITH-SMITH is a gender agnostic collection that is made up of a series of interchangeable garments and accessories. Drawing on the work of Vivienne Westwood, Thom Browne, Walter Van Beirendonck, Hood By Air, and Comme des Garçons, it critiques the representation of gender in the fashion industry as an idealisation of gender in everyday dress practice. While fashion shows are afforded a platform to transgress dominant inscriptions of gender, the correlation with an everyday dress practice is minimal. Gendered difference in consumable fashion, the distinction between menswear and womenswear, and their naturalised association with sexed bodies—male and female—re-iterate the naturalisation of dominant gender constructs. In this way, garments are constructed to interact with everyday body functions, where gendered aesthetic is bonded with sexed bodies.

The SMITH-SMITH collection adopts a spectrum of gendered signifiers, of uniformed aesthetics in order to promote a queer disidentification with these dominant structures. Influential theorists Judith Butler, Joanne Entwistle, Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas, Jack (Judith) Halberstam, José Esteban Muñoz and Elisabeth Wilson have informed the theoretical and creative work and provided key philosophical frameworks to contextualise the realities of gender and sexuality as a fluid identity rather than an essential binary. Each of the garments and accessories are representative of a different amalgamation of gendered signifiers. Through their interchangeability, dressed combinations have the potential to be labelled in line with conventional gender distinctions while, in other combinations, they trespass the imposed dress codes of everyday dress practice. While the collection could be understood as unisex, it performs with the body in a way that displaces the act of dressing. This collection seeks to disidentify with already prevalent constructs—unisex, androgyny, and cross-dressing—and by doing so, transgresses the formation and construction of gender-distinct dress practice.





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