“This is all fake, this is all plastic, this is me”

A study of the interrelations between style, sexuality and gender in contemporary Stockholm

Philip Warkander
Philip Warkander’s doctoral thesis, “This is all fake, this is all plastic, this is me”: An ethnographic study of the interrelations between style, sexuality and gender in contemporary Stockholm, is the first thesis published by the Centre for Fashion Studies in the new ACTA series *Stockholm Fashion Studies*.

The Centre for Fashion Studies was established in 2006 through a generous donation from the Familjen Erling-Persson Foundation, thereby launching fashion studies as an academic field in Scandinavia. The Centre has since the start been located within the Humanities Faculty of Stockholm University.

The intention was to establish the Centre as a research institution, with a doctoral programme and an international masters programme. The masters programme was launched in 2006, and the first PhD candidates were admitted in 2008. However, massive demand for undergraduate training in fashion studies spurred the Centre to offer two introductory courses in 2006 and 2007. In 2008, the undergraduate training was expanded into a one-year introductory programme and a bachelors level thesis module. Each year approx. 300 students are admitted to the undergraduate and masters programmes, following a highly competitive process.

The Centre for Fashion Studies has established fashion studies as an interdisciplinary field within Scandinavian academia, recruiting faculty members, teaching staff and visiting faculty from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds, including economic history, film studies, comparative literature, art history, marketing and semiotics. At the same time, the Centre has managed to develop a distinct intellectual profile by integrating theory and material culture, pursuing a close engagement with fabrics, garments and visual representation through critical analysis and theory. Located within a university rather than a design school, this makes the Centre internationally unique.

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Professor Klas Nyberg
The Centre for Fashion Studies
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The focus on the concept of style stems from an on-going dialogue between the PhD candidates at the Centre and a PhD group at London College of Fashion, in which Ane Lynge-Jorlén and Rachel Lifter have been particularly committed. Without you, the subject of this thesis would have been completely different, and – I’m sure – much more boring. Thank you! And, among the PhD candidates at the centre, I want to especially thank Ulrika Berglund and Marco Pecorari for your help over the years.
I have also had a number of close friends, helping me take my mind off things and forcing me to remember that life is bigger than academia. I want to thank all of you but a special thanks goes out to Andreas, who has had continuous belief in me, and of course to Tomas, for putting up with me when I had little energy left after long days at the office, and was probably not the most pleasant company to be around.

In 1985 my father completed his PhD in medicine at Lund University. During the first years of writing this thesis, my father was always happy to see that I was making progress and doing what I wanted, but sadly he didn’t live to see me finish. He died of the same kind of cancer he had spent his professional life trying to eradicate. I want to thank him for showing me how rewarding academic research can be. This thesis is dedicated to him.
In the summer of 2009 Makode turns 28, and in celebration of this event he throws a party at club 2.35:1, located in the basement of large entertainment venue Berns in central Stockholm. Free entrance is promised to those who click ‘attending’ on Facebook, if they also bring a wrapped gift.\(^1\) Berns is housed in a large nineteenth-century building, and besides 2.35:1 it also holds a hotel, bars and restaurants. Originally built in the early 1860s, it has held an important position in Swedish cultural life for more than a century.\(^2\) Twice a year, Berns plays a pivotal part in the Stockholm Fashion Week as it hosts many of the fashion shows, intimately linking the venue to the Swedish fashion industry.\(^3\)

In order to gain access to the specific part of Berns where Makode holds his birthday party, potential guests first have to pass security guards posted outside of Berns. If your name isn’t on the guest list a pointer will decide – based on what you wear and how you look – if you are to be allowed inside, and also, in case they decide you fit the criteria, if you have to pay the entrance fee or not.

Passing this first security point in no way guarantees access to 2.35:1, which has a separate guest list and pointer, and inside 2.35:1 there is an additional VIP bar, with its own security staff making sure only a few of the people let in at 2.35:1 are allowed through. In this way, the mere act of being present at Berns becomes a question of having the right look, of fitting with the unspoken but strongly enforced terms and conditions of the place.

Makode’s choice of venue for his party is far from random; it is both made possible by, and functions as a manifestation of, his status in Stockholm. For several years, this position has been strengthened by Makode’s presence in venues such as this, where he has performed as DJ, host and

\(^1\) The event was hidden from common view on Facebook; only the ones who were personally invited by Makode could see it and thus click attending.

\(^2\) Already in 1879, August Strindberg published the novel *The Red Room* (Swedish title: *Röda rummet*), whose title alludes to a room located here.

\(^3\) During the time of this event, the week was called “Stockholm Fashion Week by Berns”.

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guest. Makode is well known in the city, active in both the art scene and the club world as well as regularly appearing in the culture and lifestyle sections of newspapers and magazines, thus epitomizing much of what Berns aims to be associated with in terms of brand value.  

In the written text on the Facebook-page for his birthday event, Makode describes himself as an “artist, entrepreneur, mistress and fellow human-being”, while also stating:

NO PANSIES!! STRAIGHT ACTING PARTY

When I arrive at the birthday celebration I wear short shorts, a lustrous T-shirt, black canvas shoes and carry a large leather tote bag. In front of Berns there are hundreds of people, all eager to get inside: men dressed in baggy clothes and women wearing tight-fitting and revealing garments. Being a man dressed in a body-conscious way, I notice how my look differs from that of the other men, and instead I am dressed more like the women present. I also notice that I am the only man who stands out in this way and this makes me feel rather exposed. I experience that I somehow am in the wrong category, and the looks and glances I receive from others make me aware that I am not the only one who has come to this conclusion.

Through our differences in dress, I sense that the crowd and I are divided into different categories. This sensation is repeated once more when I am let inside the venue, leaving most of the others, dressed in a different style than I was, waiting outside. This time, the feeling of vulnerability is combined with the fact that I fit the notion of what the pointers wanted at the club. However, there is also a racial aspect to this distinction process between bodies; I’m white while many of the other people in the crowd are not. In this context, to partake in the process of categorization is also to partake in an ethnically charged differentiation of people.

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4 At one point in his career, Makode was invited as an artist to decorate part of the walls of 2.35:1, becoming one of a select group of artists who through the years have been part of the decoration team at Berns. Other names include artist Lennart Jirlow and designer Josef Frank.

5 In Swedish: Konstnär, entreprenör, älskarinna och medmänniska.

6 In Swedish: OBS! OBS! OBS! OBS! OBS! OBS! OBS! OBS!

INGA FJOLLOR!! STRAIGHT ACTING FEST

7 Initially, I thought I would be on the list because I had clicked “attending” on Makode’s Facebook-event, but apparently the technology had failed and none of the names of the people invited had shown up on Bern’s guest list. Instead, my outfit that night functioned as a sort of key, opening the otherwise closed door.
I go inside and enter the great salon, decorated with ancient chandeliers and magnificent balustrades, but everywhere I go there is the same gendered dress code, and since it is in direct opposition to how I look, being the only man revealing as much of my body as the women, I decide to go downstairs to the birthday party. When I arrive I find Makode wearing a gold-sequined jacket, cycling shorts with gold sequins, large white pearls around his neck and sunglasses even though it’s dark, sitting by the entrance to the club, handing out cake to arriving guests. I give him my token gift and stay with him for a while, eating cake, but after a while I decide to enter the club. I am expecting to see many of his friends and perhaps the usual queer-looking club crowd I have – at least visually – grown familiar with during my fieldwork, but the inside of 2.35:1 is dominated by the same kind of style as upstairs: women in snug dresses, short shorts and tight tops, men in baggy jeans and large T-shirts. I keep receiving hostile glares from other guests at the club, and eventually I leave.

Ironically, I understand the Facebook text as coming alive when I, who could not be said to have been acting or dressing straight that night, am made uncomfortable and finally leave because of the charged situation, even though I sincerely doubt this had been Makode’s intention. That evening, several different discourses come into existence, becoming visible through the interactions carried out in this place and point in time, as well as by how they are orientated within the context of Berns.

The event outlined here is a participant observation carried out as part of the ethnographic process of gathering material for this thesis. Many of the key themes of this thesis – the terms and conditions surrounding the regulations of power highlighted through how people dress and interact – are discernable in this brief description. During the evening I spent at Berns, people were continuously appraised, categorized and separated through differences in appearance, enforcing differences through what they wore and whose company they were in. Being white and in my early thirties, I experienced the sensation of fitting in while at the same time noticing how others were left out. However, at the same time, Makode and I were part of a small minority of people not adhering to the same concept of dress as many of the others.

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8 My outfit was not planned for the party but rather a consequence of my everyday style and the activities I had been engaged in before going to Berns.
present. Some of the actions that took place supported a more diverse take on gender expressions, while others instead reinforced and strengthened heteronormatively organized styles.9

Makode’s party was made possible through his long history with Berns, at which he has operated in a number of different functions but often as a strongly visible factor in late-night club crowds. This particular night Makode’s style was particularly discernable in contrast to how the other guests were dressed; in comparison with others, his style appeared more striking and gender-blurred. During the time I spent at the club, differences in meaning and worth were continuously articulated through differences in appearance, further emphasized through the physical differentiation of space as well as by various forms of communication, including Makode’s “NO PANSIES” on Facebook, the pointer’s scrutinizing looks by the entrance as well as the glances and stares I continuously received throughout the evening from other guests.

In order to understand the complex interplay of bodies, appearances and hierarchies during that evening and in other encounters that make up the empirical material of this thesis, I will examine the appearances – styles – of people, places and occurrences. By using ‘style’ as a tool of research, I will answer questions on how the interrelations among the actors in events such as the club night at Berns are constituted, and with what effects. ‘Style’ will be used as a lens to investigate questions regarding the circumstances surrounding how people dress, specifically focusing on the regulations of expressions concerning gender and sexuality.

My presence at the club was ambivalent, and I experienced that being alone in a situation generally supposed to be fun was straining and at times deeply uncomfortable. The relations between a researcher coming from an ‘outside’ to study the events of a supposed ‘inside’ are seldom unproblematic, making me simultaneously both a researcher and a participant.10

9 In this context, “heteronormatively organized style” refers to an understanding of how male bodies are expected to correlate with masculine clothing, and respectively, female bodies with feminine clothing. This understanding stems from a distinction of ‘men’ and ‘women’ as two dichotomous categories, different from one another regarding both behavior and appearance, implicitly complementing one another through their respective differences. For further discussion, see “The Performativity of Gender”, 24–31.
10 These issues are central to the ethnographic process and will be explicitly discussed further on pages 49–52.
Aim and Research Questions

In this thesis, I aim to understand the many interactions involved in the production of a style, with particular focus on how actors become associated with one another, and with what effects. I will investigate the specificities of events in this empirical material, in order to answer questions regarding the conditions and terms of style production, especially in relation to matters of gender and sexuality. As argued by Elizabeth Wilson, the act of wearing clothes is part of what continually situates people socially.\textsuperscript{11} What I, in this thesis, term ‘sartorial practices’ include all matters of sartorial relevance: garments, jewelry, makeup, bags, shoes, et cetera. These practices constitute styles and are determined by a number of different factors, from financial to emotional and cultural; thus styles operate as a form of distinction, linking some practices to each other through similarities in appearance, while at the same time distancing them from others. In this way, I base my understanding of the sartorial in Wilson’s discussion on the social relevance of clothes, but widen her perspective to include other, more ephemeral, parts as well.

In this process, the articulation of matters concerning gender and sexuality is particularly distinct, continuously intertwined with variables of ethnicity, age, class and lifestyle. According to Joanne Entwistle, the practice of dressing in a certain style is influenced by contextually specific understandings of what this style might signify in a certain place and point in time.\textsuperscript{12} Therefore, in this thesis, I will demonstrate that ‘style’ is the result of a complex and collective process, temporally and spatially organized in highly specific ways, related to but not always necessarily understood through the concept of ‘fashion’.\textsuperscript{13} In effect, this project is not only an analysis of a specific place and point in time but contributes also to a development of the concept of style, often in relation to but not limited by its relation to ‘fashion’.

I have chosen to focus on three aspects of style production: verbal communication and the politics of naming, the wheres and whens of sartorial practices, and lastly bodily matters as a point of intersection, where styles

\textsuperscript{13} The relation between these two terms within the field of fashion studies will be explicitly discussed in sections “The Importance of ‘Style’”, 31–37, and “‘Style’ as Bricolage”, 38–44.
are constituted as bodily materializations through gestures, movements and orientation in space. All three aspects are – in different ways – materially constituted but through the performative interactions this materiality is constantly shifting, and by structuring my questions into three perspectives, I hope to address these processes in their complexity. These perspectives are in some ways overlapping but there are distinct differences in focus, articulated in three thematically organized clusters of research questions:

How does the act of verbal communication influence the materialization of styles? In what ways do verbal interactions enforce distinctions of the sartorial? How are matters of gender and sexuality articulated through the production of styles?

How do spatiotemporal factors influence the production of styles? In which ways does the specificity of contemporary Stockholm enable or constrain the production of styles in this context? How are matters of gender and sexuality accentuated through the physical orientation of a style in a specific place and point in time?

What are the effects of the continuous interactions between body and dress as they appear in the empirical material? In terms of power regulations, how are the relations between bodies, clothes and other sartorial elements constituted in regards to the production of style? How are dressed bodies gendered through the wearing of certain styles?

These questions need to be further contextualized, as well as more directly related to the empirical material of this thesis. In the next two sections I outline my theoretical perspectives, and after that, two sections on my understanding of the concept of style in a fashion theoretical discourse will follow.

**Theoretical Outline**

Explicit in the initial case study is the fact that the evening at Berns involved many more concerns than merely the style of Makode’s outfit; in actuality, it is a study of how different discourses intersect on many different levels and
in a variety of ways. That night, Berns was a site of conflicting forces, made apparent through the strongly enforced regulations of the place. Gatekeepers continuously scrutinized everyone: allowing passage for a few while keeping many others out. At the same time, normative expectations on matters of gender and sexuality were communicated through styles of dress and by harsh glances, distinguishing between different types of ways of looking and acting.

This categorization process was based on appearances and concerned not only the styles of the potential guests, but also in what ways these appearances were considered to be of value for Berns itself. Certain styles, such as Makode’s and mine, were thought to enhance the connotations of the club, while other styles were generally considered of lesser value. However, that night, styles organized through a binary understanding of gender were in the majority, successively weakening the position of the more gender-blurred style category to which Makode and I belonged. Therefore, to investigate the production of styles is to conduct an analysis of power relations in networks, involving not merely the actual garments but concerning the entire production process and contextualization of a style.

Writing on the subject of power, Bruno Latour has argued that power should be understood through effects, and not thought of in terms of causality, and therefore “power […] varies not according to the power someone has, but to the number of other people who enter into the composition”.¹⁴ Forces are dependent on the members active within a network to be recognized; if actors stop behaving in accordance with the rules of their group, the group ceases to exist. Applied to the events at Berns, this means that it is not merely Berns, in the shape of an independent force in itself, that enforces certain regulations of dress. Instead, these norms are the effects of a number of interactions carried out in this place. The more actors that behave according to the same set of norms, the stronger the associations between these actors will be, and thus the norms will be more forcefully articulated. Therefore, power is not inherent in norms themselves, and neither is it placed in institutions or positions, but rather in how it is regulated through the production of norms through associations and interactions.

The fact that Makode held his birthday celebration at Berns is the result of a long process, spanning over many years, during which Makode has strengthened his relation to the venue by regularly appearing as guest, host

and artist. However, according to Latour, an action is not produced by one single individual but is the result of the combination of the characteristics of many different actors. An actor, in this line of reasoning, is not defined by his humanity, but instead Latour emphasizes the importance of also including nonhuman entities. Applied to the example of Makode, this includes the ways in which sartorial artifacts such as Makode’s jacket, cycling pants and pearls signify him as a conceptual and artistic character within different networks in Stockholm, as well as how his art on the walls of 2.35:1 place him, even when he’s not physically present, in the context of Berns. The figure of ‘Makode’ consists of much more than mere biological matter; it includes also artificial elements and sartorial objects such as pants, sneakers, jackets and sunglasses, as well as artworks and media coverage.

Returning to Latour’s argument on the production of norms, it is through the repetitive and long-lasting presence of Makode at Berns – and in the name ‘Makode’ I include also the objects listed – that this style is recognized as Makode, as well as being considered of importance for the context of this club. Conversely, the club also gains meaning through its associations with Makode, and in this way, they are partially mutually defining. The same process is applicable to both Berns and 2.35:1, which are sites produced as coherent places through the interactions of walls, music, guards, guest lists, e-mail lists, strobescopes and a number of other actors. When these different networks – of Berns, 2.35:1 and Makode – are temporarily aligned, as they were during the night of the birthday party, the actors in the different networks will for a brief moment in time be organized in a larger and thus stronger (although contextually specific) network, joining forces in the act of defining the events carried out in this particular place and point in time.

Latour speaks about “the folding of space and time”; to fully comprehend the effects of action-producing characteristics, it is important to unfold facts (time and space), and go back in time to see how these actions have come about. This places the production of meaning and agency in the actual interactivity of networks, while also stressing spatiotemporal elements in the production of styles. In order to understand the night at Berns, it is therefore important to include the entire process of events, from the Facebook invitation sent out a week in advance, the outfit of gold sequins and white pearls in relation to how ‘Makode’ is usually constructed style-wise, to the connotations of both Berns and 2.35:1. In addition to this, the categorization

process of potential guests needs to be explored through the temporal flow of that evening; by looking at how the connections between people, places and styles were organized, power regulations become elucidated.

Basing my arguments in this Latourian perspective, I understand sartorial styles as produced collectively, as part of larger discourses, and involving many more actors than merely the actual wearer of certain garments, or simply the garments themselves. Latour defines these collectives in terms of networks, held together by the continuous execution of actions. According to him, actors can meet and interact in a number of ways and on many different levels, but must be in each other’s proximity and range to establish contact. This understanding explains the events at Berns, where different lifestyle categories became spatially separated from one another.

During this night, networks were both being brought together as well as separated from each other. In these processes, the spatiality of ‘Berns’ as well as the preconceptions of ‘club night’ and ‘night club’ operated together with the garments, bodies, accessories, music, drinks, cigarettes, makeup, glances, emotions, words and ideas to create two main different kinds of networks: one organized around a binary understanding of the interrelation between gender and garments, and one oriented towards a more gender-blurred perception of the ways in which bodies and garments can be combined. This way, the differences in how networks are organized may result in a process of distinction.

These processes are not always clearly demarcated, but are multidimensional and complicated, defined by how often and in what ways actors within networks engage with each other. Thus, matters of domination and subordination are not definitive but are constantly “produced, made up, composed”. This results in an understanding of agency as a shared activity, described by Latour through the example of a puppet show:

So who is pulling the strings? Well, the puppets do in addition to their puppeteers. It does not mean that puppets are controlling their handlers – this would be simply reversing the order of causality – and of course

17 Bruno Latour, “On actor-network theory. A few clarifications plus more than a few complications”, in Soziale Welt, vol 47 no. 4 (1996 [1990]): 369–381. This proximity needn’t be geographical, but can be of cultural character as well. The laws determined by the government affect citizens even if the citizens never actually meet the people who have made the decisions. However, they all exist within the same cultural sphere, constituted by the idea of the country as coherent system.

no dialectic will do the trick either. It simply means that the interesting question at this point is not to decide who is acting and how but to shift from a certainty about action to an uncertainty about action – but to decide what is acting and how.¹⁹

Questions of action and agency are then, according to Latour, not something we can answer in terms of black and white but rather, shades of gray.²⁰ Ma-kode was not elevated to his position solely because of his personality traits or conceptual style, but because of a long series of overlapping interactions that temporarily placed him in this position during this particular evening, involving a great number of actors, both human and nonhuman. The same holds for my position as visitor and researcher at the same site, as well as for the people waiting outside and for the ones selected to enter.

To briefly summarize, actors are defined through how they interact and become interconnected, since this holds effects for the ability to express agency and articulate meaning. All situations are created through the interaction of a variety of actors, thus constantly carrying a high degree of complexity and instability. Understanding agency as shared places focus on interrelations and actions, as these are occurrences where norms are communicated through networks of varying shape and size. Power is therefore not about having authority, but is rather defined, by Latour, through “[t]he actions of others”.²¹ As such, it must be defined by movements and not as something possible to possess; rather, power should be understood as “the final result of a process” and not as a causal entity.²² Latour’s understanding of power is in this way closely related to how Michel Foucault writes on the topic.²³ Foucault outlined his definition of power as,

the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and finally, as the strategies in which they take ef-

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¹⁹ Latour (2005), 60.
²⁰ Latour (2005), 72.
²² Latour (2005), 64.
²³ Latour (2005), 86n.
fect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies.

Foucault doesn’t consider power to be inherent in one particular individual or position but describes instead value systems as functioning smoothly when all actors within a particular network are in agreement. Behaving in accordance with normative expectations ensures, according to this line of reasoning, a regulatory flow of power through organizations and networks. The similarities between Latour and Foucault are evident, but Latour has developed Foucault’s perspective on power by also explicitly including non-human actors in his definition of interactions, stating that these are equally important to consider within regulatory networks. Normative expectations are communicated through the interaction of many different kinds of actors, coming together through the execution of repeated interactions, thus creating the effect of a stable and continuous force.

The Performativity of Gender

Foucault’s work has been a strong influence on feminist theory, but has also been heavily criticized for neglecting a perspective of gender. In the words of feminist theorist Sandra Bartky, Foucault “is blind to those disciplines that produce a modality of embodiment that is peculiarly feminine. To overlook the forms of subjection that engender the feminine body is to perpetuate the silence and powerlessness of those upon whom these disciplines have been imposed”. In Foucault’s description of how power is regulated, little attention is directed at the specific gendered form of bodies. In concurrence with Bartky, I state that the materiality of all actors present in a network needs to be accounted for in its specificity, and this entails a detailed analy-

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26 Latour (2005), 70–78.
28 For example, see Foucault’s writings on “docile bodies”, in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, (London: Penguin Books, 1991 [1975]), 135–169, where the “bodies” are implicitly male.
sis of how all kinds of materiality, bodies especially, are marked. The marking of gender affects how actors are organized and interrelated, and therefore it also influences how the distribution of power is organized, and with what effects.

In her article “Throwing like a Girl” Iris Marion Young has discussed the relation between gendered bodies and gendered objects by looking at how movement in space is actually a matter of interaction between the two. The body is gendered (and in Young’s text, this means specifically marked as feminine) not only by its position in space but also through its relation to the gendered materiality of objects in its proximity, which affects bodily movements and how the body becomes situated.29 Also, as Young points out, by constantly being looked at while interacting with objects, the feminine person becomes herself an object, and thus being feminine means being both subject and object simultaneously. Being feminine is therefore a matter of constantly becoming feminine through a complex set of interactions, not all articulated or pronounced, but at times existing only in forms of glances and looks.30

Even though I am male-identified and biologically male, during the visit to Berns I was positioned as feminine through my way of dressing, enforced by how others glanced and stared at me. This experience is aligned with Young’s argument of how femininity comes into being through gendered interactions. The femininity of my style was not inherent in the actual clothes, or in my biological body, but was part of a categorization process of defining my style as feminine that took place when I reached Berns. I was gradually made aware of this by the ways in which others looked at me, making me conscious of how revealing my outfit actually was, implicitly categorizing me as deviant, a biologically male body in clothes adhering to feminine logic. The act of categorization that night thus included a number of different actors: the short shorts, lustrous shirt and biological matter but also looks, glances, thoughts and emotions.

Judith Butler has claimed that body and gender are interlocked in a mutual and constant negotiation, one never existing beyond or before the other but always engaged in an ever-ongoing process of performing gender through bodily practice, in which sartorial artifacts operate as tools, or gen-

29 Iris Marion Young, “Throwing like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Compartment Motility and Spatiality”, in Human Studies vol. 3 no. 1 (1980): 140.
dering devices. When Makode wore the gold-sequined jacket, large white pearls around his neck, cycling shorts with gold sequins, and sunglasses, he acted in accordance not only with the expectations of him as an artistic person in this specific place, but also in abidance with the ways gay masculinity can be staged according to the networks present in this particular context. The meaning and value of his style is dependent not only on the interrelation between body and garment but also in how the dressed body is orientated in relation to the network it is part of. However, as argued by Erving Goffman, norms are contextually defined, and transgressing the boundaries of one normative system and entering another alters the connotations of a style.

According to Butler, gender is performed through bodily matters, and the body is gendered through the repetition of actions, which produces certain patterns. These patterns become discourses, and in relation to bodies, “regulatory norms of ‘sex’ work in a performative fashion to constitute the materiality of bodies”. The more a certain type of action is repeated, the stronger its normative hold will be. However, with every repetition, there is a slight “displacement from its former moment”, and the meaning of performative acts should thus be considered unstable and volatile. Butler is clear on the fact that the actions she describes never are carried out in a void, but should be considered in relation to, or interlinked with, the constraints of context. Actions are constricted by their place in a particular point in time, and the possibility of expression severely limited:

Thus, “sex” is a regulatory ideal whose materialization is compelled, and this materialization takes place (or fails to take place) through certain highly regulated practices.

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31 Judith Butler, “Preface (1990)”, in Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1999, new edition [1990]), xxviii–xxix. In this text, Butler uses the example of drag queen Divine’s performances to demonstrate the potential destabilization of “the very distinctions between the natural and the artificial, depth and surface, inner and outer through which discourse about genders almost always operates”. The emphasis on the sartorial is added by me but nevertheless implicit in Butler’s discussion.


35 Butler (1993), 1.
Basing my claims on this quote by Butler, I don’t consider actions and materiality as oppositional; rather, I wish to describe them as interlinked in complex and multifaceted ways. There is no clear division but instead a co-constitution of events; Makode’s pearls, the short shorts worn by me and the physical orientation of everyone at Berns are in this way both coproduced while simultaneously coproducing gendered meanings through the interactions of bodies, artifacts and the spatial organization of the place we are in. As Butler has stated, materiality is not a result, but part of an ongoing process, affecting but also affected by the actions executed.36

I find support for this argument in the works of Lois McNay, who has claimed that it is through an investigation of the materiality of relations that power regulations and matters of agency can best be illuminated. The appearance of an object is determined not only by its place, but also of how it operates in relation to other objects.37 This is particularly relevant in terms of gender, as it outlines the importance of perceiving gender as a “lived social relation”.38 Following a similar line of reasoning, Young has stated that she offers, “a way of articulating how persons live out their positioning in social structures along with the opportunities and constraints they produce”.39 Drawing from both McNay and Young, I perceive gender to be staged through mutual and shared relations of bodies, as well as comprised by the actual materiality of bodies.

Continuing this line of thought, I characterize the materiality of relations as a fundamental part of what defines gender, while gender is also part of what constitutes bodily materiality. This interrelation is strongly characterized by a normative framework. Butler has stated that the “norm governs intelligibility, allows for certain kinds of practices and actions to be recognizable as such, imposing a grid of legibility on the social and defining the parameters of what will and will not appear within the domain of the social”.40 This quote has a precedent in works by Goffman, who already in 1959 claimed that the system of enforcing normative practice is articulated through interactions, where the effects of different actions determine what is considered ‘appropriate’ conduct and what is thought of as subversive,  

38 McNay (2004), 175. Italics in original.
40 Judith Butler, Undoing Gender (New York: Routledge, 2004), 42.
possibly offensive.\textsuperscript{41} I therefore argue that gendered behavior is to be understood as both an effect of and a prerequisite for societal norms and ideals.

Furthermore, gendered behavior can be discussed through the concept of ‘heteronormativity’, and more specifically, by outlining the relation between a heteronormative understanding of gender and the materialization of sartorial styles. In her definition of “the heterosexual matrix”, Butler has stated that she draws from the concept of “compulsory heterosexuality”. She defines the heterosexual matrix as,

that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalized. […] [A] hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality.\textsuperscript{42}

Central in this definition of the heterosexual matrix is not only a binary understanding of gender but also a gender coherency between inner core and outer appearance. Heteronormatively structured styles may have different influences and stylistic references, but their common denominator is that they are organized around the concept of a linear alignment between bodies and garments: male bodies wearing masculine clothes, and female bodies wearing feminine. In her book \textit{Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity}, Butler asks rhetorically, “what configuration of power constructs the subject and the Other, that binary relation between ‘men’ and ‘women,’ and the internal stability of those terms?”\textsuperscript{43} This formulation of a question is deeply connected to an understanding of sex as a signifier, bringing together, in Foucault’s words, “anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations, and pleasures […]”.\textsuperscript{44} To answer her own question, Butler subsequently explains, explicitly inspired by Foucauldian theory, that the notion of gender and sexual identity as authentic and in correlation with an “inner truth” should be considered to be the \textit{effects}, rather than the \textit{origin or cause} of identity categories.\textsuperscript{45}

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\textsuperscript{41} Goffman (1959), 75.
\textsuperscript{42} Butler (1999), 194, n6.
\textsuperscript{43} Butler (1999), xxviii.
\textsuperscript{44} Foucault (1990), 154.
\textsuperscript{45} Butler (1999), xxix. Italics in original.
\end{flushright}
If materializations of gender and sexuality are the effect of “institutions, practices, discourses with multiple and diffuse origin”, as Butler has stated, then the ways in which gender is articulated are important to analyze as a way of understanding the politics of normative belief systems. In regards to gender, the perception of two binary opposites (‘men’ and ‘women’) is a frame for the materialization of masculinity and femininity as seemingly constant and stable. Butler’s suggestion is that instead of searching for an original source, it is more relevant to investigate ways to center – and decenter – these compulsory mechanisms. This stance is similar to how Diane Coole and Samantha Frost describe a research focus on materiality as a necessary tool in understanding the politics of power. Their suggestion is to “pluralize” materialisms, in adherence to the many different kinds of materialities that constitute the social world.

Inspired by Judith Jack Halberstam’s *Female Masculinity*, I perceive masculinity and femininity to be flexible and unstable expressions, not limited to or defined solely by biological matter. Rather than understanding gender as grounded in a certain type of biologically sexed body, I understand gender to be performatively executed, further enhanced through the materialization of sartorial practices. As Entwistle puts it, “[…] items of clothing do not neutrally reveal the body, but embellish it”, stating that, “the male suit does not just accentuate male bodily features, but adds ‘masculinity’ to the body […].” However, in alignment with Halberstam’s concept of gender as flexible, while also referring to Butler’s discussion on the heterosexual matrix or as I choose to call it, heteronormative matrix, I don’t perceive the gendering processes of bodies and garments to always adhere to a heteronormatively structured correlation, but may also at times contrast one another, creating complex and gender-manifold styles through the ever-changing interrelations of body and garment. This claim is supported by the works of R W Connell, in which gender expressions are considered plural and multiple. In Connell’s research, forms of masculinity are not articulated only through a binary relation between masculinity and femininity, but gender expressions are also articulated within their own gender category. Different forms of masculinity are created and positioned through intercon-

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46 Butler (1999), xxix.
49 Entwistle (2000), 141.
nections not only with different forms of femininity but also in relation to one another.\textsuperscript{51} Of particular importance is the concept of ‘hegemonic masculinity’, which Connell describes as,\textsuperscript{52}

not a fixed character type, always and everywhere the same. It is, rather, the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations, a position always contestable.\textsuperscript{52}

This perspective of masculinity as produced through interrelations among different forms of masculinities is equally applicable to the production of femininity (or rather, the production of femininities). Thus, femininities are also produced and hierarchically organized in relation to one another and, in my reading, the heteronormative matrix is also about hierarchizing within gender categories.

These theoretical approaches, joined by their common understanding of gendered meaning as created through volatile and performative interactions, also share (in various degrees) an awareness regarding the importance of material specificities.\textsuperscript{53} This susceptibility is described by Coole and Frost as informed by the notion that “materiality is always something more than ‘mere’ matter: an excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-creative, productive, unpredictable”.\textsuperscript{54} The shapes, sizes, orientations and organizations of different kinds of materialities, together with how they become associated with each other through networks, determine what kind of styles are produced. By studying the style of networks, I will create knowledge about the ways different kinds of actors have become entangled with one another, and with what effects.

Caroline Evans has cited Butler’s theory of performative actions as a model of interest for studies on fashion, style and culture. Arguing through the case of skinhead style, Evans claims that “I am not a skinhead before I get the clothes and haircut; rather, I constitute myself as a skinhead through the act of dressing and acting as one […].”\textsuperscript{55} According to Evans, actions, bodies and sartorial matters co-constitute one another through the creation of

\textsuperscript{52} Connell (1995), 76.
\textsuperscript{53} For an understanding of Connell’s relation to the materiality of the body, see Connell (1985), 51ff.
\textsuperscript{54} Coole and Frost (2010), 9.
a style, producing a look through the coming together of a number of variables. By applying the theory of performativity, developed by Butler, to study objects of sartorial matters, Evans has demonstrated that the transitivity of identity projects is a central point of intersection, connecting gender analysis with studies on style and culture.

In her article, Evans argues for a much needed “new model of culture, one which is both more heterogeneous and unstable”, in order to understand the world as “[b]oth complex and contradictory […] both dominant and resisting”.56 This kind of analysis needs to be sensitive to local specificities, and therefore Evans contends that it preferably should be combined with ethnographic fieldwork.57 In many regards, this research project can be seen as a response to the inquiries articulated by Evans more than a decade ago, filling the gap in academic research by combining ethnographic research methods with a focus on gendered meanings of style, adding to the academic production of knowledge regarding locally specific sartorial practices.

The Importance of ‘Style’

Etymologically, the term style has two origins, the Greek stylos and the Latin stilus. There is a difference in meaning between the two languages; stylos refers to columnar forms and architecture, while stilus has to do with writing: George Kubler has written that, “[i]n effect, this double etymological history of our word style differentiates time and space from one another”.58 This information is important considering that the term style functions as both noun and verb; referring to a process of creating an appearance as well as to an actual aesthetic, seemingly already in place. Kubler defines style as consisting of “synchronous situations composed of related events”.59 This opens up the understanding of style as flexible, its expressions possible to be redefined over time, while also stating the importance of understanding style as interlinked with its spatiotemporal specificities.

Within the academic field of fashion studies, ‘style’ is often but not always related to the term ‘fashion’. Roland Barthes has noted – by comparing

59 Kubler (1979), 127.
the classic style of Chanel with the fashionable look of Courrèges in 1967 – that there is a difference of temporality between the two words; where fashion is intimately connected to changes between seasons, style is thought of as changing at a slower pace, over longer durations of time. This is an effect of the separation between fashion as part of a capitalist system and style as related to matters of tradition and convention.\(^60\) The system of two annual fashion seasons has developed since Barthes’ text, but I claim that the term fashion is still related to the specific system of the fashion industry, in which the regular emergence of new trends is vital to its temporal character, while style generally has a slower and less-defined temporality.

However, the terms fashion and style are not strictly dichotomous but part of the same fashion theoretical terminology, sometimes used as opposites but at times overlapping. Malcolm Barnard has stated that even though terms such as ‘adornment’, ‘clothing’, ‘fashion’, ‘dress’, ‘costume’, ‘style’ and ‘decorations’ often are used as synonyms or near synonyms, it is important to distinguish between the differences and similarities of their respective meaning in order to fully comprehend their specific use and relation to the object of analysis.\(^61\) Barnard emphasizes that there is “no single sense or meaning that is common to all of the words used” in texts on fashion, style and dress, and that the inherent differences between these terms, existing within the same fashion theoretical vocabulary, “prevent any simple or straightforward substitution of one of the words for another […].”\(^62\) The close relations among the terms don’t necessarily imply that they are interchangeable, but that they are, in the words of Wilson “curiously resistant to being imprisoned in one … ‘meaning’”.\(^63\) While this thesis is explicitly concerned with the concept of style, I recognize that style is constituted by dress in the shape of clothing, which at times may be a costume or a fashion garment. Subsequently, the term ‘style’ encompasses more specialized terms such as garments, accessories and jewelry, while at the same avoiding the intimate connection with capitalism of the term ‘fashion’.\(^64\)

The close interrelations between ‘fashion’ and ‘style’ as part of the same network of terminology are demonstrated by the concept of ‘anti-


\(^62\) Barnard (2002), 11.

\(^63\) Wilson (2003), 10.

\(^64\) On the relation between fashion and capitalism, see Wilson (2003), 13–15.
fashion’, thoroughly outlined by Ted Polhemus and Lynn Procter in the introduction to *Fashion and Anti-Fashion: Anthropology of Clothing and Adornment*. In a more contemporary case study, Barnard bases his analysis on the work by Polhemus and Procter, using the British royal family to discuss the differences between fashion and anti-fashion in terms of sociality and gender. Barnard analyzes the terms through the differences in appearances between Prince Charles and Princess Diana, stating that Diana “wore fashion and was constantly photographed wearing fashion”, thus suggesting that this was part of her position as “upwardly mobile”. In contrast, Charles wore anti-fashion, continuously dressed in the same traditional manner, fitting with his image of being a stable, conservative force. Through Barnard’s example, the terms are not only temporally different but also carry highly gendered connotations.

In this example, Barnard emphasizes the relevance of the terms ‘fashion’, ‘anti-fashion’ and ‘style’ for the analysis of matters of power and gender, since appearances are understood not only as gendered but also implicit-

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65 Ted Polhemus and Lynn Procter, Introduction to *Fashion and Anti-Fashion: An Anthropology of Clothing and Adornment*, edited by Nikos Stangos (London: Thames & Hudson, 1978). Using two examples of dress designed in the same year, 1953, the two writers differentiate between ‘fashion’ as a form of modish dress and ‘anti-fashion’ as a fixed sartorial expression. The modish example is a gown from Dior’s tulip line, while anti-fashion is represented by the coronation gown worn by Queen Elizabeth II. Polhemus and Procter state that the Dior gown is fashion since it is different from the collections of previous years, presenting the concept of novelty through continual change. The coronation gown, on the other hand, represents continuity and permanence, and as such is detached from the ever-ongoing changes of fashion.


67 Apparent in this example is not only the articulation of gender but the ways in which gender and class are interrelated through matters of lifestyle, dress and appearances. The fact that fashionable Diana was seen as “upwardly mobile” was due to the fact that in a class-defined hierarchy, she was positioned below Charles, born royal. This points to how fashion and style are not only obsessed with gender but also with class. Already in 1863, Charles Baudelaire wrote about how feminine appearances function as a tool of social distinction not specifically between sexes, but within the category of femininity, operating to socially distance “decent” women from prostitutes. In this text, Baudelaire didn’t see fashions as separating men from women, but actually working within the category of femaleness, in order to socially distance the subversive from the mainstream. Baudelaire argued that the chic of the disrespectful woman might in fact drive the fashion system, making it increasingly difficult to distinguish between demimondes and the bourgeois. This way, the forces of imitation and distinction muddled and confused the sartorial categories of modern life, not only regarding gender but also matters of class. For further reading, see Charles Baudelaire, “The Painter of Modern Life”, in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon, 1995, 2nd edition [1964]), 34–39.
ly, through this aspect of gendering, involved in regulatory power processes, determining how they are contextually defined as well as interrelated. Based on Barnard’s case study of Charles and Diana, I suggest that within a contemporary context, the concept of fashion has been used to categorize individuals as feminine, subsequently also defining them as socially mobile (implicating vulnerability) and thus subordinate to others, labeled as seemingly stable, conservative and masculine.

In her book *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*, Wilson has placed her definition of anti-fashion in a chapter fittingly named “Oppositional Dress”. Tracing it back to the dandies of the mid-nineteenth century, Wilson defines anti-fashion as having gone in two directions; one being the classical and elegant kind of style outlined by Barthes concerning Chanel, the other being a form of oppositional dress, aiming to “express the dissent or distinctive ideas of a group, or views hostile to the conformist majority”. In Wilson’s text, ‘anti-fashion’ is not conservative per se but instead assumes many of the characteristics Barthes considers to be defining of ‘style’, however with an interesting twist; not only does anti-fashion represent a static look in contrast to the ever-changing appearances of fashion, but through its resistance to these constant changes, brought on by capitalism’s need of new commodities to sell, it may also hold an oppositional edge, exemplified in Wilson’s text by punk aesthetics.

The styles I investigate and analyze in this thesis are not always part of dominant fashion, such as Chanel, but neither do I consider them to be inherently subversive or part of a neatly defined underground culture, such as the punk movement. This is exemplified by the case of Makode’s birthday celebration, where several style discourses become interconnected, resulting in clashes and social tensions during the evening at Berns. Berns plays an important role in the biannual event Stockholm Fashion Week as the site for many fashion shows and parties, which connects the discussion on terminology back to the case study at Berns.

Berns is involved in a continuous struggle to define itself as relevant to the Stockholm fashion industry, while at the same time emphasizing its cultural heritage as a seemingly constant and stable force. In many ways, the conceptual and gender-warping style of Makode, together with his actual artistry, can be considered a tool used by Berns to elevate the venue’s cultur-

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70 Wilson (2003), 184.
al status in the city, making it appear contemporary and up-to-date through this association. Makode, on the other hand, relates to the connotations of Berns as a significant site in Stockholm to signal his own elevated status in this context.

Barbara Vinken has written that the modern fashion system was initiated through the industrialization and urbanization processes of the Western world, and was characterized by seasonally structured temporal changes. It lasted for approximately one hundred years, beginning with the launch of the House of Worth in the late 1850s and ending with the invention of the prêt-à-porter-system by Yves Saint Laurent in the 1960s.72

During this century, Paris was the social, cultural and financial center of the fashion system, and all trends emanated from its fashion houses.73 Vinken states that the focus was on the appearance rather than the being of women, and since this system allowed for only one look to be fashionable at a time, gendered norms and regulations of how women were expected to look were forcefully communicated. Within this fashion system, feminine artifacts were not fetishized per se but rather, in Western society during this time, the ultimate fetish was woman herself. Fashion and a misogynist societal structure are in this way, according to Vinken’s arguments, intimately linked.74 To a large extent, I agree with Vinken’s conclusions, but would add that also in mainstream and dominant fashion there is room for gender subversion and alternative versions of femininity, while conservative interpretations of femininity may appear in contemporary, subcultural contexts as well.

The end of the dominance of the modern fashion system marked a beginning of a democratization of the fashion process, challenging the hegemonic position of Paris fashion, and trends could now develop and spread in a variety of levels, places and ways. Vinken calls this the start of the “postfashion” era, structured in complex networks, a completely contrary kind of organization compared to the vertical and hierarchical system that


73 The role of Paris as a fashion city is explored in Agnes Rocamora’s Fashioning the City: Paris, Fashion and the Media (London: I B Tauris, 2009).

had defined the century of fashion. In this current state of postfashion a multitude of more or less fashionable styles can exist simultaneously. Vinken’s theory is supported by Polhemus, who has stated that the ‘fashion’ of the 1950s and 1960s turned into the ‘fashions’ of postmodernity. In contemporary Western society it is no longer considered a mark of forwardness to be too perfectly aligned with fashion trends since, in the words of Polhemus, “a growing number of people seem dubious about the proposition that what is new is necessarily improved”.

According to Vinken, one major consequence of the paradigm shift from fashion to postfashion is that the market for sartorial commodities has become differentiated into a multitude of different segments, from high street to high fashion, all levels citing various forms of street styles, art and subcultural looks as sources of inspiration. Fashions and styles share parallel existences, confusing a hierarchical interpretation while also questioning the set dichotomy of normative and subcultural styles. In this postfashion era, what is considered hegemonic in one milieu isn’t necessarily so in another; context, instead of seasonally structured temporal flows, determines what style is in fashion and what is not. This also affects what kind of gendered appearance is considered normative and what is culturally provocative.

This kind of brief outline of how the modern fashion system was transformed into a postmodern heterogeneous field may be correct, but nevertheless it neglects one of the most defining concerns regarding fashion and style. Even though the postfashion context is defined by a development away from the former hierarchical fashion system towards a more hybrid state, in which low and high forms of symbolic value are confused and merged with one another, one of the most central functions of fashion and style remains the distinction of class.

I claim that even in contemporary hybrid fashion

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75 Vinken (2005), 29.
77 Polhemus (2010), 10.
78 Vinken (2005), 61–76.
79 Georg Simmel stated that one of the key characteristics of fashion is its function to mark social distinction, creating different categories of people through division in dress practices. Specifically, according to Simmel, fashion separates along the lines of class distinction, see “Fashion”, in American Journal of Sociology (1957 [1904]): 541–558. This can be contrasted with Yuniya Kawamura’s claim that one of the most significant traits of postmodern fashion is that “[s]tyle differentiation no longer distinguishes social classes”, (2006), 98. Regarding the term “hybrid fashion culture”, I refer to the subsequent hybrid forms of aesthetics where fashions from different levels of the system have merged, such as when retail company H&M collaborates with high fashion brands Maison Martin Margiela and Commes des Garçons, in line with the dynamic organization of the postfashion era.
culture, matters of taste remain a matter of class, albeit in more subtle and less explicit ways than during the era of the modern fashion system.80

This becomes apparent in Vinken’s text, where she discusses the concept of postfashion through a number of case studies of high fashion brands.81 These design houses produce exclusive and high-end commodities, and even though the looks of such labels, together with fashion editorials and commercials, have influenced some of the styles in my fieldwork, the actual garments or references to fashion stores where they could be purchased are generally absent from the wardrobes and narratives of the people in this study. The styles I analyze are not constituted by the wearing and using of high fashion commodities, nor are they structured through the ever-changing of fashion seasons. Because of this, and even though I agree with Vinken’s conclusion that the present moment can be defined as a postfashion era, I don’t consider fashion to be an applicable term in this study. I also perceive the close etymological connection between fashion and anti-fashion to be confining, and while I find the concept of anti-fashion useful in studies limited to very specific forms of conservative or seemingly stable sartorial practices, for the purposes of this study it is too limiting. Here, my interest lies in understanding the processual character of how sartorial practices are put together and with what effects, and thus ‘style’ is a more appropriate term.

80 Pierre Bourdieu wrote that, “…the tastes actually realized depend on the state of the system of goods offered; every change in the system of goods induces a change in tastes”. Thus, when the fashion system is changed due to new forms of relations within the capitalist system, transformed from ‘modern’ to ‘late-’ or ‘postmodern’, the ways in which tastes operate as forms of distinctions also change. This doesn’t imply, however, that taste is no longer related to matters of power, merely that the ways in which power relations are organized through taste have shifted. See Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste, trans. Richard Nice with a new introduction by Tony Bennett (London and New York: Routledge, 2010 [1984]), 228. Connected to the question of how taste and power are interrelated is the concept of ‘capital’, which according to Bourdieu can exist in different forms and guises, suggesting that assets can be measured not solely in economic terms but may be relevant in forms of cultural knowledge and social connections, see “Forms of Capital”, in Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education, ed. John G. Richardson (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1986), 243. Bourdieu has, together with Yvette Delsaut, written on the topic of capital in high fashion production, in “Le Couturier et sa Griffe: Contribution á une Theorie de la Magie”, in Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales vol. 1 issue 1 (1975): 7–36, but this text deals specifically with the production and not consumption of fashion capital. For a more in-depth discussion on Bourdieu’s relation to the topic of fashion, see the article “Fields of Fashion: Critical insights into Bourdieu’s sociology of culture” by Agnes Rocamora, in Journal of Consumer Culture vol. 2 no. 3 (2002): 341–362.

‘Style’ as Bricolage

Both in fashion and in style discourses, the actual objects which constitute a look – clothes, accessories, makeup, hair styling products, perfume, et cetera – are essential parts. In her book *Fetish: Fashion, Sex and Power*, Valerie Steele uses ethnographically gathered material on fetishism as a bodily practice to study how different forms of value are attached to various forms of fetishized objects. Steele’s analysis focuses on how the materiality of artifacts is combined with the ways in which they are employed and used as part of an outfit, in order to understand the production of gendered norms.\(^\text{82}\) Inspired by her approach but not limiting myself to fetishized objects, nor to an understanding of objects only in relation to human users, I also employ a combination of perspectives – studying different kinds of relations and actors – in order to create a multilayered understanding of how the gendered connotations of a style are produced and maintained.

Through Steele’s work it becomes evident that the materiality of objects is essential in the analysis of style, but in understanding how the connotations of a style come into being, I am particularly inspired by the concept of “bricolage”, originally developed by Claude Levi-Strauss but contextualized in a contemporary style analysis by Dick Hebdige, in his *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*.\(^\text{83}\) According to Hebdige, the production of subcultural style entails the disarrangement or displacement of objects; a safety pin, ordinarily used to hold pieces of cloth together, is within punk style made into jewelry and now pierces a cheek or ear. This way of thinking about styles focuses less on objects themselves, to instead be more concerned with

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\(^\text{83}\) Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen 1979), 102–106; Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, trans. John Weightman and Doreen Weightman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966 [1962]). At the time of this publication, Hebdige was part of a research unit at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham (BCCCS), which has been an important part of the academic production of knowledge regarding style as a form of social and cultural communication. Central in the research carried out at BCCCS is its use of the term resistance, which it uses to describe the actions of many of the subcultures that are investigated. See *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, eds. Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (London: Hutchinson for the Centre for contemporary cultural studies, 1977). This is comparable to how the scholars at the Chicago School a few decades earlier instead had described their research as studies of deviance. See for example Howard S. Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: Free Press, 1963).
how they operate within a sartorial practice, affecting the symbolic meaning attached to them. Hebdige argues that when the pin is in a place where it had not previously been, norms of past style practices are broken. This new practice takes the shape of resistance through a deliberate displacement of the pin, placing it on the body instead of on the garment. A new kind of logic is created, called “bricolage”; based on a specific knowledge on the traditional practice of safety pins, which subsequently is contrasted, novel meaning is produced.\textsuperscript{84}

To summarize Hebdige’s concept of bricolage, it is not the aesthetic expression as such, but the relation between new and prior style practices that produces the connotations of punk. This is reminiscent of what Barthes wrote two decades before, that “a ‘style’ is arbitrarily inferred from an item of clothing, this style is then linked to other styles which are just as arbitrary and then, to finish, we are all impressed by the close relationship of the forms”.\textsuperscript{85} I thus understand both Hebdige and Barthes to imply that a style is both limited and defined by matters of context; what came before, and how a style is organized through sartorial practice, determines how it is perceived.

The notion of the bricolage explains to a great extent how the meaning of a style is produced, but missing in Hebdige’s text is an understanding of the importance of matters regarding gender. Similar to Hebdige, Angela McRobbie has also researched subcultural styles from the perspective of power and resistance, but often with an explicit emphasis on gendered issues.\textsuperscript{86} In her work, McRobbie has, for example, analyzed feminine dress practices in British media, demonstrating how gendered ways of dressing designates the tensions and struggles between different forms of femininity regarding the preferential right of interpretation of sartorial styles. Even though gender never comes into existence by itself but always in connection to other variables, it is a dominant force in the production of styles, holding the possibility to subvert or support, undermine or strengthen normative expectations of how gender and sexuality are aestheticized. In McRobbie’s

\textsuperscript{84} Hebdige (1979), 107.
\textsuperscript{86} See in particular Angela McRobbie’s (ed.), Zoot Suits and Second-Hand Dresses (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989).
text, and similar to how Connell outlined the interrelations of masculinities, femininity is articulated not only in relation to masculinity but also to other forms of femininities.  

Samantha Holland’s *Alternative Femininities: Body, Age and Identity* – continuing the line of research initiated by McRobbie – investigates through ethnographical methodology the relationship between subcultural style, femininity and age, by interviewing women who keep their subculturally defined style even after they have reached adulthood. Holland argues that even in subculturally defined collectives, mainstream ideals of femininity are central reference points, and thus the dichotomous categorization of mainstream and subcultural needs to be nuanced, in order to more comprehensively understand the processes regarding the staging of alternative versions of femininity.  

Inspired by the works of McRobbie and Holland, I perceive Makode’s pearls and tight-fitting cycling pants at the Berns event as not only a question of reinterpreting or reinventing a way of combining different sartorial elements, but as a practice that needs to be framed within the concept of questioning ingrained notions of gendered styles. Only by contextualizing the gendered meaning of Makode’s garments and accessories is it possible to understand how Makode’s style is constructed through the clashing of gender discourses.  

The night of his party, Makode’s outfit was put together by a variety of objects with strong but divergent gender codes, communicated and distorted through the interrelations of body, garments and accessories. The connotations of white pearls, typically signaling conservative middle-class femininity, enhanced by force of contrast the tightness of the gold-sequined cycling pants. This tight-fitting garment emphasized Makode’s masculine and muscular body, ultimately creating a gender-blurred conceptual club style. How-

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88 Samantha Holland, *Alternative Femininities: Body, Age and Identity* (Oxford: Berg, 2004). McRobbie and Holland have actively sought to problematize previous research carried out at BCCCS, since much of this work lacked a gender-perspective, often using boys and men as seemingly unproblematic ontological tools. Much has been written about the criticisms that the BCCCS received for their work, its importance having been heavily revised in the last fifteen years, but I won’t go into further detail about this process here since it is not pertinent to the thesis. For more information, I recommend David Muggleton and Rupert Weinzierl’s (eds.) *The Post-Subcultures Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2003) which summarizes the most important criticisms. Holland was not however connected to the Birmingham group.
ever, the new meaning of Makode’s style was dependent on the preconception of white pearls as conservative and feminine, and of the notion of gold-sequined cycling pants as gay to become evident. Therefore I argue that styles cannot be considered isolated occurrences but are always constructed in relation to previous looks, defined through a collective source of references.

The sharing of stylistic traits is a powerful way to create a community and sense of belonging. In *The Times of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society*, Michel Maffesoli writes about how joint practices concerning style, lifestyle and taste bring individuals together, temporarily creating informal communities of people, and only a few years before, Michel de Certeau had published *The Practice of Everyday Life*, in which he claimed that how all acts carried out in the everyday are a matter of power relations. De Certeau’s theory is based on a distinction between strategy and tactics, where strategy “assumes a place that can be circumscribed as proper (propre)” and is thus part of an established and dominant institution, while a tactic “insinuates itself into the other’s place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety”. He continues by clarifying that “a tactic is an art of the weak.” This distinction is important since it defines the differences in power differentiation through how actors are interrelated. In this text, de Certeau underlines the relevance of understanding strategies and tactics in relation to the context in which they are carried out.

Sarah Thornton has studied how subcultures are demarcated by their participants’ mutual tastes, thus developing Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of capital by applying it to subcultural contexts. In her book *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* she places strong emphasis on the materialization of style in the structuring process of subcultures. Thornton claims that sartorial markers both position the wearer as belonging to a subculture (and subsequently distance the wearer from the mainstream) while also, in that subcultural context, operating as distinctions of subcultural capital.

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91 de Certeau (1984), 37.
During the Berns club night, Makode held a powerful position, allowing him to partially define the events taking place. Of particular interest is the strong discrepancy between his conceptual style and his act of naming the party “straight acting”, creating a seemingly paradoxical tension between what is said and what is worn. In order to understand the gendered meaning of Makode’s style that evening, I suggest that it be defined as belonging to a camp tradition. ‘Camp’, according to Shaun Cole, is a style that has been a recurring theme in gay male culture, and has been described by Susan Sontag as “love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration”. She has stated that it operates as “something of a private code, a badge of identity even, among small urban cliques”. Subsequently, I interpret this to mean that the people invited to Makode’s birthday event knew how to decipher the codes in his message, understanding the camp irony in the phrasing as a “badge of identity”; a way of culturally delimiting the clique through the use of a mutual language. In the context of the Facebook invitation, the act of knowing that the seemingly harsh words “NO PANSIES” should be interpreted in a camp and humorous way functioned as a form of distinction, marking members’ associations with this network by acknowledging an understanding of this text as ironic.

To briefly summarize Thornton’s findings, what sets the wearer apart from the ordinary is what simultaneously elevates her within her own cultural sphere, and here Thornton also touches on many of the same issues as Maffesoli and de Certeau. In particularly, they all stress the sociality of styles, while emphasizing the strong regulations of power articulated through how different actors interact and become associated with one another. However, also in these processes of categorization, matters of gender and sexuality play pivotal parts. In Martin P. Levine’s book *Gay Macho: the Life and Death of the Homosexual Clone*, studies were conducted around the overly masculine style of the gay clone, which was a popular style within gay subcultures in the seventies and early eighties. The look was inspired by the wearing of masculine attire such as jeans, T-shirt and leather jackets, but exaggerated and emphasized to accentuate the masculine body underneath

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95 Sontag (1999), 53.
the garments. Even though Levine neither applies the term ‘tribe’ nor refers to de Certeau’s work, he describes in similar ways how influences move between hetero- and homosexual contexts, demonstrating how the same item of clothing is styled differently in the two cultures, refashioned to adapt to the connotations of a specific culture.

I consider this specific gay style to be a version of bricolage, while also claiming that it can be defined in terms of strategy and tactics. In mainstream society, the straight version of the clone style is a strategy used to demonstrate a form of hegemonic masculinity. In contrast, within the context of the gay community, the style is instead in many ways undermining the expected coherency between male bodies and masculine garments through the tactic of exaggeration, in this way highlighting the artificiality of this type of gender correlation. However, the relation between gay and straight masculine styles can also be analyzed through George Simmel’s model of distinction-imitation, in which Simmel argues that fashion is driven forward by socially weak groups’ constant imitation of those in hegemonic positions. According to this model of analysis, the gay imitation of the straight fashion thus functions to reinforce straight-acting styles as desirable and hegemonically positioned, in gay and straight communities alike. Both interpretations are equally valid, and both perspectives point to the importance of including an analysis of the context of a style when investigating gendered perspectives of sartorial matters.

In the field of studies outlined, fashion and style have been used as organizational devices, signifiers for belonging and distinction and defined through the distribution of power. My ambition is to add to this body of knowledge, not only by using the concept of style as a tool of research but also by developing the definition of the term. Therefore, in this thesis, I aim to perform a detailed analysis of the empirical findings of this study, while at the same time proposing a development of the notion of style.

I would once more like to return to the notion of bricolage as outlined by Hebdige. In his example, the style of punk is created by the presence of familiar objects in new contexts; by a shift in objects’ placement, removed from their ordinary setting and materialized in new and unexpected ways, a novel expression is created, and a new kind of meaning is thus attached to this look. This practice of mixing and matching in accordance to the ambi-

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tions of punk culture has inspired me in creating the analytical framework for this thesis, with added emphasis on how matters of gender and sexuality are articulated, contextualized and materialized. This dynamic approach will draw on different kinds of theories, not always in perfect harmony, but my ambition is that the differences in perspectives will, through the analytical lens of ‘style’, create a more complex understanding of the empirical material.

**Thesis Outline**

After this introduction, a chapter on my choice of method together with information regarding the specificities of the empirical material will follow. Thereafter, the thesis is organized in three thematically structured chapters, each respectively answering one of the three clusters of research questions.

The chapter “Articulating Style: Understanding the Verbal Aspects of Style Production” answers the first set of questions, regarding speech as a form of action in the regulations of power, and the importance of verbal categorization in the style process. “Exploring Stockholm: The Wheres and Whens of Sartorial Practices” deals with the second set of questions, on the specificities of conducting ethnographic fieldwork in contemporary Stockholm. The third theme, focused on issues of corporeality in relation to the production of style, is addressed in the final chapter, “Mapping Bodily Matters: Points of Intersection in the Style Process”. The thesis concludes with a summary and conclusions.
In this chapter, I will address both theoretical and ethical concerns in regards to the research project’s ethnographic practice, and I will also describe the three research methods I have employed: participant observations, semi-structured interviews and organic wardrobe studies. I have not spent two years constantly engaged in ethnographic activity; my contact with the empirical material – which includes activities, events, places, humans, objects, relations, emotions and thoughts – has been consistent but irregular, in line with the notion of studying certain kinds of situations rather than understanding styles as representative of individual life narratives or cultures. Often, I would see participants perform on stage, or I would engage in interactions at club events, and in this way, the material has a clear focus on happenings and club-related contexts, making the ethnographic moments of this material highly specific. In this study, ‘workplace’ will often equal ‘nightclub’ and ‘living room’ may refer to a downtown bar. Often, the ethnographic research has taken place at night, or on the Internet, on blogs and in online communities. This distinction is important since the specificities of the material hold a central role in relation to the research questions posed.

98 This statement emphasizes this project’s poststructuralist perspective, described by Magdalena Peterson as a way of understanding the narratives articulated by the study participants as creating discourses of meaning, which in turn creates the selves they claim to be outlining through their speech. Identitetsföreställningar: Performance, normativitet och makt ombord på SAS och AirHoliday (Göteborg: Mara, 2003 [Conceptions of identity: Performance, normativity and power onboard SAS and AirHoliday, my translation]), 10.
In the early stages of the research process, I aimed specifically at exploring styles that could be defined, in some way or other, as queer. This aim directed my search in a direction towards more visible and conspicuous styles than the ordinary and mundane. However, after some time conducting fieldwork, this predetermination regarding the categorization of styles studied appeared narrow and defining, and I let go of the notion that the styles were in any coherent sense ‘queer’, or even necessarily subversive.99

Since I did not have a fully developed social network in place in Stockholm, I asked co-workers and old acquaintances for help, while also employing an approach of dynamic visual screening for possible participants: I visited bars, clubs, cafés, and shops, and I went for long explorative walks and enlisted in two online communities, the Scandinavian queer community Qruiser and the community Facebook.100 These excursions were important, because each time I visited a new venue, more experiences were added to my understanding of how Stockholm was spatially and socially organized, and thus these ‘field trips’ also gave me useful information to be applied in a later stage of the project, in interactions with the study participants. The time spent walking around the city, going to cafés or simply searching Qruiser and Facebook for interesting forums and groups, helped me to gradually map out the city, understanding it not only geographically but also as a site defined through intersecting forms of distinctions.

I continuously met with possible study participants, whom I had begun to establish contact with either by personally initiated contact or through mutual friends. I also continued to visit places, venues and sites where the

99 In defining queer styles I used the definition as outlined by Halberstam: “excess (of form, color, or content) becomes the signification of the feminine, the queer, and the monstrous”. In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 121.
100 http://www.qruiser.com; https://www.facebook.com (May 11, 2012). Qruiser, and specifically the web-based presentations belonging to trans-identified members, has been the object of study of a doctoral thesis, where Martin Berg analyzed the self-presentations of transvestites on the site. The aim of this thesis was to use the empirical material to develop theories – from a mainly Butlerian perspective – on ways to “relate to and discuss sex, gender, desire and the dressed body”. Martin Berg, Själrets garderobär: Självreflexiva genuslekar och queer socialpsykologi (Lund: Sociologiska institutionen, 2008 [The cloakroom attendant of the Self: Self-reflexive games of gender, my translation]), 34. My translation.
interactions that were of interest to me were specifically highlighted, such as gay bars, queer clubs and cafés for trans-identified people. This first meeting was usually the first chance I had to study the participants’ sartorial practices in detail, as well as present the project and answer any questions they might have, while the places I visited gave me knowledge of the city, which I could use in conversations and in understanding what sites could potentially be of interest to explore further.

Eventually, ten people had agreed to participate in the study, ranging in age from early twenties to early seventies. All of them lived, more or less on a regular basis, in Stockholm. In making sense of this dynamic process of selection, I have relied on Howard S. Becker’s approach of letting the material shape not only definitions but also research questions. Becker’s advice is to be flexible concerning what questions you ask, letting them develop as you become acquainted with the material.\(^{101}\) This demonstrates how the process of selection isn’t only the starting point of the study, but also intimately connected with what conclusions I can draw from the empirical material.\(^{102}\) However, the process isn’t (as I first feared) circular; instead, the process of getting to know the material has helped me develop new research questions and to understand sartorial practices in often unpredictable ways.\(^{103}\)

In relation to this process, it is important to explain the seemingly strong discrepancy between understanding style as an ongoing production while simultaneously, when describing the material, referring to specific individuals.\(^{104}\) Becker has written knowingly also about this paradox. In his book

\(^{101}\) Howard S. Becker, *Tricks of the Trade: How to Think About Your Research While Doing It* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), 121.

\(^{102}\) This stance is reflected in Fanny Ambjörnsson’s study on the connotations of the color pink, in her *Rosa: den farliga färgen* (Stockholm: Ordfront, 2011 [Pink: the dangerous color, my translation]). Employing an ethnographical approach, Ambjörnsson states that she has allowed herself to “be free in how she uses the material”. By this, she claims that the focus point of the study is encounters with and observations of people who “in different ways have a relationship with pink”. Events and occurrences that have appeared to be related to this research aim have been incorporated in her study, and thus her methods have been adjusted to her aim, and not the other way around. Quotations from discussion on page 12. My translations.

\(^{103}\) In this text, I sometimes write styles, sometimes sartorial practices, sometimes sartorial styles. I recognize that there is a difference between these terms, and that readers might be confused by my switching between definitions, but this is purely done to avoid a repetitious overuse of “style”. In this empirical context, styles are constituted by sartorial practices, and “style” is thus an overarching or inclusive term, in which “practices” are incorporated.

\(^{104}\) A point which is also important to stress is that the study participants were not before the start of this project, nor are they, after its conclusion, to be understood as coherent representatives of certain sartorial styles.
Tricks of the Trade: How to Think About Your Research While You’re Doing It, under the aptly named rubric “Turning People into Activities” Becker explains how he uses the terms “individual” and “people” as shorthand, when he actually claims to be studying (human and non-human) interactions.105

Similar to Becker, the fact that I use the names of the participants in the study, and partially discuss their lifestyles and personal preferences, does not imply that I primarily analyze them as individuals. Instead, this practice is to be understood as a kind of abbreviation for the various aesthetic expressions used within their sartorial practice.106 In his text, Becker explicitly states that this perspective is influenced by Latour, directing attention away from an understanding of humans as independently acting individuals, to instead focus on situations that include both human and nonhuman actors. These situations are defined by interactions involving a great variety of different kinds of participants, successively producing meaning through the many ways in which the actors become interconnected with one another.107

To elucidate this stance, I turn to an example involving the title quote, “this is all fake, this is all plastic, this is me”, articulated one day during an interview by Klara. The conversation concerned how she would describe her sartorial practice, and her answer involved a situation she had been in during a Pride parade a few years before, dressed in “[…] corset, gloves, high heels and strap-on […]”.108 In Klara’s story, the interactions of the context of Pride, together with the garments and objects that were assembled into a sartorial practice along with her body and gestures, emotions and thoughts, produced a variety of meanings. These meanings could not have been produced had not the concept of Pride events existed, or if the combination of the list of objects in her statement had not carried special significance through the ways in which they are interconnected. A strap-on is considered a private kind of object, not worn in public, and therefore it has particular significance in how it is situated in the public site of the Pride parade. Klara’s style becomes materialized through the linking of (to name just a few actors) biological body, gloves, high heels and the concept of Pride. This combination results in a number of meanings, articulated at different places and points in time: first during the festival, later during conversation with me and now in the context of this chapter.

108 In Swedish: […] korsett, handskar, högklackat och strap-on […]
Applied to this project, I state that the primary research aim is to understand the production of style, and that involved in this production are many types of actors, networks and events. To make sense of these constant activities that I trace in this thesis, I will discuss style using the names of respective participant, even though I recognize that there exists a slight discrepancy between perceiving styles as constituted through matters of context and performative actions, while at the same time referring to the styles on an individual name-basis.

**Participant Observations**

I have a great quantity of observations, a few lasting only a few minutes, while many others continued for several hours. Because of the intertwine-ment and lack of distinct boundaries between personal life and ethnographic research, the participant observations are difficult to count in exact numbers, as I sometimes would meet participants on the street and be drawn into conversations and situations, while I at other times happened to encounter interesting phenomena or participate in events that would influence my thoughts and give me additional knowledge of the field I was exploring. On occasions when the observations were planned in advance, I brought a camera and would take pictures but I rarely wrote down comments during participants observations; after a few initial attempts I realized that this activity influenced the situation to such a degree that I decided it was best to instead document my accounts after the conclusion of each observation.

Almost all of the participant observations took place in Stockholm or in suburban areas surrounding the city, roughly between the years 2009 and 2010, even though I began meeting with possible participants already in 2008, and continued to meet up with a few for a few months in the beginning of 2011. At one time, I met with Lady Oscar for coffee in London for a semi-structured interview, and occasionally I communicated through e-mail and Facebook correspondence with Makode and Steffy when they were in Berlin. This seemingly erratic way of engaging with the material is due to the fact that I was becoming acquainted with its characteristics while engaging with it. This process is mentioned by Magdalena Petersson (later Peters-son McIntyre) in her doctoral thesis on the performances of gender and dress in the context of commercial airlines, in which she states that only after she had initiated her participant observations did she fully understand the extent
needed for her project. Similar to Petersson, I explored my choices of research methods as I successively outlined the project by becoming familiar with its specificities. For example, beforehand I had not known that F12 and Berns would become sites of particular interest, and at the time of the initiation of the project, Knast hadn’t even opened. The development in direction of these places was due to what was said, done and implied in conversations I took part of, on blogs, newspapers and magazines that I read, as well as through things I would see and events I participated in.

Generally, the relationship between the ethnographic field and the researcher has often been described as dichotomous, and the researcher has been said to ‘approach’ and ‘enter’ a field, this way clearly demarcating a difference between empirical material and academic researcher. Before the initiation of this project I had visited Stockholm many times, but my knowledge of the city was nevertheless scattered and superficial. I had lived most of my life in other Swedish cities, but until the beginning of my doctoral studies, when I moved there, I had not spent any longer durations of time in the city. In her research, Ulrika Dahl has questioned this assumed dichotomy of the academy as “home” and the field as “away”, suggesting that “the positivist roots of social science live on in the sense of privileging and encouraging analytic distance and that there is a continued split between theory and practice”.

Dahl writes that even though the format of the academic text requires articulated limitations of the research project, “research subjects and objects always already exist in the same universe and they are always in intra-action”. In her writing, Dahl explicitly places herself in close relation to the material, emphasizing her role as both researcher and part of the research material, thus questioning the supposed neutrality of “scientific objectifying distance”. This has influenced my approach to partially include my own experiences, not directly placing myself in the same category as the participants but nevertheless confusing the line between researcher and researched.

110 Ulrika Dahl, “Femme on Femme: Reflections on Collaborative Methods and Queer Feminist Ethnography”, in Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theories and Social Science Research, eds. Kath Browne and Catherine J. Nash (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 153–154. However, the term “community” is contested in Dahl’s text.
111 Dahl (2010), 155.
Her thoughts have been central to my approach for conducting fieldwork in this project, for even though I hadn’t previously been part of the exact situations and contexts outlined in this project, during this process my actions were nevertheless often influenced by past experiences and preconceptions, stemming from other places and points in time. Therefore, to define my relation of becoming or already being part of the empirical field poses several difficulties. Before the initiation of this project, I had never visited any of the places that appear in this text, but at times during fieldwork I would recognize social codes and cultural references, influencing my understanding of the occurrences I was taking part in.

By applying the Latourian concept of networks as a loosely and temporarily organized way to produce sartorial practices, together with the Butlerian focus on performatively executed actions, I have outlined an ambition to explore situations, occurrences and events taking place in the Stockholm area, specifically in cases where the materialization processes regarding gender and sexuality are highlighted.113 However, these situations were not always to be found outside of the seemingly ordinary, or considered dichotomously distinct from other and more mundane events; even though the styles I investigate often are highly visible, the contexts they are part of may appear trivial: cycling through the city, waiting in line outside a club, dressing up in accordance with stories heard on the radio.114 The act of ‘highlighting’ may therefore occur in a number of different kinds of sites and

113 I share the focus on events as part of ethnographic research with other scholars, see for example Erik Ottoson’s doctoral thesis Söka sitt: Om möten mellan människor och föremål, in which he investigates “relations and emotional states produced through contexts which shift and are charged with meaning through human actions”. (Uppsala: Etnologiska avdelningen, Uppsala universitet, 2008),13. My translation. Also Anna-Sofia Lundgren’s article “Störning på Holland Avenue” is of interest, as she focuses on “exceptions, or disturbances, in city life”. These disturbances are part of urban events she wishes to explore. In Etnologiska observationer, eds. Gösta Arvastson and Billy Ehn (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2009), 85. My translation.

114 In The Secret World of Doing Nothing, Billy Ehn and Orvar Löfgren study what they define as non-events – waiting, routine and daydreaming – in order to investigate how meaning is produced as part of seemingly ordinary everyday life (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 4–5. In this way, their project is both similar and different from this project, as I also include similar kinds of activities in my empirical material. However, in my perspective the on-goings that take place during the acts of waiting, routine and daydreaming are often charged, tense and complex. I understand this difference in perspective as partially due to our different perception of activities; Ehn and Löfgren take as their starting point the human subject, while I focus on the interactivities of both human and nonhuman actors as essential parts of meaning-production, and in this way, my focus will emphasize activity, where Ehn and Löfgren at times will see tranquility and lack of movement.
points in time, depending on where the styles intersect with either similar or diverging styles, but the common denominator concerns matters of how style, sexuality and gender become interrelated, and with what effects.

Connecting this perspective with an ethnographically informed way of working, I have turned to the ideas of Norman K. Denzin, who states that “[a] text is not a mirror of reality; rather, a text is embedded in narrative logics of science, sexuality, desire, and capitalism”. Denzin argues that ethnographic practices need to be contextualized and recognized as heterogeneous narratives, this way questioning the hierarchy between the seemingly trivial and what is generally assumed to be significant. In their study on matters of gender, dress and performance at shareholders’ meetings in Sweden, Magnus Mörck and Maria Tullberg conducted participant observation studies as a method of gathering material. They claimed that by becoming involved in the physical and spatial organization of their empirical material, they could reach knowledge productions that would have been difficult to acquire otherwise. When the study of object are dressed bodies, Mörck and Tullberg argued, the practice of participant observations allows for a close and nuanced understanding of the material specificities regarding the many and detailed performances taking place. In addition to this perspective, I claim that by engaging in participant observations, I could place myself in the very networks I had set out to investigate. This process allowed me to become part of the events I wished to analyze; becoming, in a way, my own tool of research.

Every participant observation I engaged in was different because of the variations in time, place and other conditions. The circumstances surrounding my presence at the sites of observations would vary, but a constant denominator was my orientation in this context as stipulated by my position as

116 Magnus Mörck and Maria Tullberg, *Catwalk för direktörer: Bolagsstämma – en performativ performance av maskuliniteter* (2004 [Catwalk for directors: The shareholders’ meeting – a performative performance of masculinities, my translation]), 11. Rapport from Centre for Consumer Science, University of Gothenburg. http://hdl.handle.net/2077/23193. There is a slight difference between Mörck and Tullberg’s aim and the aim of this thesis, as I don’t limit the objects of interest to merely “dressed bodies”, but also include, in addition to bodies and garments, an emphasis on matters of context and different forms of communication.
117 The concept of “using oneself as a tool of research” has been outlined – primarily using a phenomenological approach – in Ottoson’s article “På drift”, in *Ethnologiska observationer*, eds. Gösta Arvastson and Billy Ehn (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2009 [“On the road”, in *Ethnological observations*, my translation]), 148–150.
researcher. However, during the course of observations, I would often become involved in interactions in which this position was merely one of many, and I would also, in addition to gathering material, act according to the informal setting, and – at least superficially – be part of a collective. These positions have organized my understanding of the situations I was part of, and thus I have had access to several perspectives simultaneously, some overlapping, others more distinct. By way of example, when Klara invited me to her birthday party, it was both as a researcher and a friend, thus I brought a present as well as wrote down observations afterwards.

A process of selection had to take place regarding when and where meetings occurred. These choices were determined in part by what situations were possible for me to participate in, and what I was excluded from. A few times I was away when important things seemed to take place, and at other times I was unable to attend because the event didn’t accept male-identified guests. However, for the most time, if someone hosted a club I attended, and if someone performed, I went to watch. If someone was active online, I would try to trace that activity. At the same time, I am sure many things went on in the participants’ lives that I was not aware of. My knowledge of the material depends on the ways in which the material allowed for me to be included, as well as of the ways I was separated from it.

To make a line in time or around a place is to construct an artificial limit in people’s lives. Prior events will inevitably have an impact on what occurs in the present, as will other places outside of Stockholm. Many of the participants lived partially in other cities, such as Berlin or London, during the period they were part of this study; others traveled extensively, or reminisced during interviews about things that had taken place in other towns, during their childhood or adolescence. Still, demarcating the study to the city of Stockholm, in (approximately) the years 2009 and 2010, has helped define the focus point of the study, structuring my understanding of the material. Locality is an important aspect to consider since the place we inhabit to a large extent defines expectations, obstacles and possibilities in our lives. The place itself has to be understood as a process, not fixed but continuously being redefined, by geographical position, weather condition, usages and history, to name but a few factors.\textsuperscript{118} In relation to this project, the fact that many of the sites that are recurring in the text are places of entertainment directs focus towards of a certain kind of interaction, often occurring at night.

and delimited from other places by guards, pointers and queues. Anna Sofia Lundgren has studied how different forms of gendered expressions become articulated and defined in public spaces. She states that norms and conditions surrounding disturbances of an assumed order regulate and control what actions are allowed to be carried out in ways that define the public as differently structured from the private. In Lundgren’s study, matters of gendered and sexual expressions are highlighted, as she, for example, points to different standards regarding the expressions of gay and straight acts of endearment in public spheres.\(^{119}\)

Stockholm is not one place but several, and even a place as small as a local bar or a subway train may hold an almost indefinite number of connotations, none of them solid or perpetual. The city is thus several processes intertwined. Within the city, there are infinite possibilities of experiencing and relating to occurrences taking place, and thus there is never merely one discourse present in a specific context, but always multiple.\(^{120}\) According to Becker, this is a perspective we should understand as part of the research process, as he states that “rather than trying to ignore or “control” local variation, we should find these local peculiarities and build them into our results”\(^{121}\).

An example of this is when Makode hosted a queer-club at Berns, and one of the employed security guards called him a “fucking faggot”.\(^{122}\) Makode reported the incident, which was subsequently categorized as a hate crime, but acted out in a queer environment by one who was paid to serve and protect the guests. The connotations of the club thus became twofold, since Makode had been invited to organize a queer club, and then, after performing this task, was insulted for looking queer. The site of these incidents was one and the same, making obvious how the meanings of a place are ever shifting and negotiated among the actors present. The connotations of a place are always \textit{produced} through various forms of interactions, thus liable to variations and alterations of atmosphere and mood.\(^{123}\) As Halberstam puts


\(^{121}\) Becker (1998), 56.

\(^{122}\) In Swedish: Bögjävel.

\(^{123}\) David Bell, Jon Binnie, Julia Cream and Gill Valentine, “All Hyped Up and No Place To Go”, in \textit{Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography} vol. 1, issue 1 (1994): 32.
it, “[o]ur relations to place, like our relations to people, are studded with bias, riven with contradictions, and complicated by opaque emotional responses”. 124

Occurrences on a micro-level of life are never isolated events but are always connected on a larger scale to what happens in other places, in other points in time, as well as with discursive changes on the societal macro-level. The homophobic slur directed towards Makode is not an isolated incident but should be viewed as part of a cultural homophobic discourse, demonstrating the correlation between the specificities of the empirical material and larger issues on a general level. However, the relations between specific and general are not always linear or logic; according to Paul Willis, this relation “encompasses the contradiction that general social forces or determinations are enacted only through the particular will of individual agents, even though all or most of them may individually oppose, seek an alternative to, attempt to exploit in their turn, or remain indifferent to the whole they also constitute”. 125 Because of this, it has been important to me to closely and in detail examine the events taking place during the gathering of material, in order to understand the networks involved in the production of sartorial styles in these particular places and points in time.

Semi-Structured Interviews and Websites

The interviews I have conducted were semi-structured, by which I mean that they followed a loosely outlined framework, allowing for flexible follow-up questions and possible new directions of conversation. Each interview followed a thematically organized but brief list of questions, its content organized according to the style and events specific for each particular participant. I followed the list loosely, often using it as a kind of starting point for the conversation but usually leaving it behind as the dialogue became more dynamic and spontaneous.

Even though I both initiated the discussion as well as asked most of the questions, the character of the dialogue was meant to be open, and I was consciously trying to avoid the relationship becoming too hierarchical. This is an important point to make in relation to both methodological and ethical concerns, thoroughly researched by Ann Oakley, who has claimed that the

124 Halberstam (2005), 22.
process of constructing knowledge needs to be mutual. Even though it is impossible to completely avoid imbalances of power, I have tried to always be aware of our different positions, and of the possible consequences this could hold for the structuring of our conversations.

Closely related to these issues, Michelle Göransson, in her doctoral thesis on the materialization of sexualities and genders in urban spaces in the Stockholm area, has decided to let the interviews be determined by what kind of matters her interviewees are orientated towards. Like in my studies, Göransson has not only included but rather allowed for material matter to structure the interactions taking place in the interview setting, in this way attempting to interlace verbal communication with material objects, bodies and places. This approach is noticeable also in texts by Willis, who has reflected on the importance of words in relation to other forms of communication. He states that assuming that language is a “total explanation” is greatly misleading, and should never overshadow, but instead be viewed as an intricate part of, other more sensuous ways of communication.

In addition, Signe Bremer’s doctoral dissertation is also concerned with these matters. Based largely in knowledge gathered through semi-structured interviews, Bremer nevertheless focuses on the narrativization and materialization of bodies, as discussed, defined and orientated through the speech acts of the interview situation. In this approach, her work becomes closely related to Göransson’s, through the notion of how the interlacing of words, objects, thoughts and emotions operates as a way of materializing bodily orientations.

I did not record the conversation taking place during the first meeting with potential participants, since I determined that this would disrupt the casual atmosphere required if we were to talk informally. If we mutually decided that we were a good fit, and that they suited the project, we would – in addition to participant organizations and wardrobe studies – meet for two more interviews, and these would generally last between one and two hours.

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127 Michelle Göransson, Materialiserade sexualiteter: om hur normer framträder, förhandlas och ges hållbarhet (Göteborg: Makadam, 2012 [Materialized sexualities: on how norms appear, are negotiated and given durability, my translation]), 32–33.
129 Signe Bremer, Kroppslinjer: Kön, transsexualism och kropp i berättelser om könskorriger- ing (Göteborg: Makadam, 2011 [Body lines: Sex, transsexualism and body in narratives on sex reassignment, my translation]), 56–57.
and be digitally recorded and later transcribed. I also wrote down a summary of the encounter afterwards, in which I could include information on things not always noticeable on audio.

During the act of transcribing the interviews I reproduced the conversation thoroughly. Pauses, laughter and giggles were marked, but dialects lost, as I did an approximately literal translation, aimed to express the principal cognitive content. Gestures, looks and mimicry were not documented either, but to compensate I always wrote down a statement after each finished interview or participant observation, describing the situation. During the process of transcribing I heard things and picked up patterns not always apparent to me at the time of the interview. I also noticed the subtle ways we had interacted with each other. Often I saw how I had unconsciously adapted to their ways of speaking or using certain terms. This influenced how I would act during the next encounter: if I had seemed too controlling I held back; if I lacked in structure I tried to be more specific. The process of analysis is in this way intertwined with the gathering of material.

There are many similarities but also notable differences between participant observations and interviews. The interview situation is in many ways more neatly defined, beginning when I meet the participant and ending when we part ways. The interview gives structure to the events carried out, and is also more intimate in setting; the participant and I often face each other over a table in a café, drinking coffee or having dinner but all the while concentrating on the ways we connect with each other, primarily though not exclusively through verbal communication.

The relationship between the format of the interview and my claim to not be primarily interested in sartorial styles as representative of individual identities raises question about the narrativization of life trajectories. Inspired by Butler’s text Giving an Account of Oneself, I view the stories created during the interviews as multiple and dependent on that specific situation; these stories are part of a larger networks, made visible through the terms that are used, always affected by the cultural context we are part of. And returning once more to Denzin, he has stated that “communication is

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indispensable to the processes which articulate cultural meaning […] These meanings are symbolic, never singular, always multiple, and always carried through the processes of direct and mediated communication”.

In her doctoral thesis, with theoretical and methodological parallels to this project, Karoliina Ojanen has interviewed young girls about their dress habits when spending time in horse stables. Ojanen combines the method of conducting interviews with a clearly defined post-humanist approach, while outlining her research aim to be an exploration of how gendered norms are articulated through the interactions of the many actors, both human and non-human, present in the context of Finnish horse stables. Even though she bases her analysis in interviews carried out with the girls, in her interpretation she includes all actors that are brought to life through these narratives, this way using the verbal communication as a way to make visible also actors that are not physically present during the time of the interview.

Since I met with the study participants repeatedly, relations evolved that weren’t strictly professional. In conversations, I would refer to situations that had taken place years before, or in other places, and I also tried to be open and explicit about how clothes and accessories at times had operated and functioned in contexts of my life unrelated to the doctoral project. Bourdieu has claimed that the researcher, when encountering the material, endures two “breaks”: first the “break with native experience and the native representation of that experience”, and after that she “makes a second break and questions the presuppositions inherent in the positions of an outside observer”. By this, Bourdieu means that it is not sufficient to state that the produced knowledge is contextually specific; the researcher must also be aware of how her practices of conducting research become part of the material. This includes both the relations study participants have with her, as well as how she relates to the experiences of the participants. This is especially important since the claimed preconceptions of the researcher mark how she perceives

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133 Karoliina Ojanen, “‘Man går inte i minikjol’ – Befriande, begränsande klädsel i stall-flickors gemenskap”, in Modets metamorfoser: Den kläddas kroppens metamorfoser och förvandlingar, eds. Lizette Gradén and Magdalena Petersson McIntyre (Stockholm: Carlsson, 2009 [“‘You don’t wear a mini-skirt’ – Liberating, constraining dress in the community of stable girls”, in Metamorphoses of fashion: The dressed body’s metamorphoses and transformations, my translation]), 55–75. Her theoretical understanding is primarily informed by Karen Barad’s agential realism, briefly outlined in footnote 359, page 188.
the actions carried out during the gathering of material; participants are transformed into empirical material through the eyes of the researcher, and thus the researcher sees what she expects to see. Because of this, these relationships are important to problematize, as a way of loosening the constraints between analyzing researcher and analyzed participant.

Karen Davies has stated that closeness to the study participants is not only inevitable but in fact a prerequisite for the possibility of constructing fruitful knowledge. If there is no “mutual trust” and openness there is no access to the material. Still, even if the relationship is built on sensitivity and trust, the positions are never equal, and ethical matters are therefore highly sensitive. As a researcher, I have uninvited asked permission to become part of the participant’s existence, carrying an agenda: to scrutinize in detail the activities of him or her. This information will then be published and discussed in an academic context the participant seldom has access to. Therefore, the participation of the ethnographer is always superficial; the role of observer, as well as participant, is constant, separating me as a researcher from the others. Thus, the researcher’s feelings of community during fieldwork, of being merely one of many actors in a loosely defined network, are always partially illusory, a fact seldom realized until afterwards, while transcribing or analyzing what has taken place.

However, without study participants there will be no thesis; as a researcher I am completely dependent on their goodwill and possibility to fit me in their schedule. In my particular case, many of the participants had

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136 However, this statement should be slightly modified, as many of the participants are engaged in queer activist work, have studied gender theory at the university and regularly partake in different academic events. This makes the questions of how we are interrelated more complex, as the participants are not only part of the empirical material but at times also part of the academic system. Occasionally we share mutual points of reference, often noticeable in conversation when someone will causally refer to “cultural capital”, “theory of performativity” or other theoretical discourses. When this happens, it becomes apparent that we share a common language, placing us within the same kind of network, even though we might be differently positioned therein.

137 Billy Ehn and Barbro Klein, Från erfarenhet till text: Om kulturvetenskaplig reflexivitet (Stockholm: Carlsson, 1994 [From experience to text: On reflexivity in cultural science, my translation], 32.

more developed social networks in Stockholm than I did; many of the doors open to them were closed to me. These power relations are therefore complex, influencing how I understand my position in relation to the participants within the various networks that constitute the empirical material. For example, Makode was in charge of Ficks, a popular and often-frequented club during the summer of 2009. Generally, among young clubbers in Stockholm at this time, it was considered a conceptual place to be, with an entrance fee of 100 SEK.\textsuperscript{139} During an interview he suggested that I receive a VIP card to the club, which I accepted. A few weeks later a card was sent to my home address, with the name “Philip Phashion Warkander” printed at the bottom.\textsuperscript{140} To own a VIP-card, with an ironic nickname written on it, I considered a sign of playful intimacy between Makode and myself. Later on, when I met him at the club, I felt pride along with gratitude, and as if an invisible intimacy connected us, I linger in his presence longer than I think I would have, had he not made this gesture. In this way, the card shared agency with Makode and me, binding us together through associations in relation to the site of F12, where the club was located.

Makode had access to a world I desired, made visible through the gesture he made seem so trivial by simply asking if I wanted a card ensuring access to the club. This is a clear example of how the power positions are not fixed or evident, but instead are to be understood as multifaceted and flexible. The power relations are therefore to be understood as regulatory processes, produced through and determined by a multitude of variables, often made apparent through interactions taking place in the relations between participants and researcher. This is in alignment with Latour’s claim that power is not an inherent quality or position, but a result of a certain chain of events.\textsuperscript{141} The same is true for the role of researcher, which is not given but produced through the combination of a variety of performances.\textsuperscript{142} Because of this, I strive to be particular when describing my place in the material, making explicit both my own position as well as that of the study participants.

\textsuperscript{139} The equivalent would be about ten euros.
\textsuperscript{140} A reference to the premises of our relation, as well as to my personal interest in fashion.
\textsuperscript{141} Latour (1986), 264–266.
\textsuperscript{142} Joan Acker and Joke Esseveld, in collaboration with Kate Berry, “Problemstillinger i kvinnerforskningen: Rapport fra et forsøk på å praktisere det vi preker”, in Kvalitative metoder i samfunnsforskning, eds. Harriet Holter and Ragnvald Kalleberg (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1982 [“Presentations of problems in women’s research: Rapport from an attempt to practice what we preach”, in Qualitative methods in social science, my translation]), 61.
In her ethnographic analysis of a larger Swedish company, Lena Martinsson has described the process of interacting with study participants, outlining in her text the process of how she as a researcher was continuously defined as belonging to or being excluded from different sets of categories by the informants in her study. The communication between her and them was – similar to my experiences – not only about her understanding of them, but in equal part, about how they defined her through their preconceived ideas and notions of how people are categorized. In my case, my (at the time) youngish appearance and informal way of dressing created a relaxed situation, making me seem accessible in other ways than merely as a researcher. I believe that this influenced the ways in which the participants related to me.

I also followed blogs kept by the participants who engaged in this kind of online activity. This proved to be a vital source in keeping up with events and style influences at times when I was not physically present. Online time is different in that past events can linger; snapshots of the participants were made accessible to me, along with comments and notes, written both by them as well as by their friends and acquaintances. Facebook has been a considerable source of material, and during interviews, I have often referred to things I had seen online. Even though it is important to bear in mind that pieces of information posted on Internet forums have been selected to fit certain criteria, it has nevertheless been useful as a way to initiate conversations on certain themes, happenings and events that I otherwise would not have been aware of. I also regard the possibilities of being visual through online communication as a way of enhancing, enforcing or multiplying the styles that were materialized in conversations and during participant observations.

**Organic Wardrobe Studies**

My defined field of interest was the networks, interactions and events that organize and structure the sartorial practices in this empirical material. The three methods I employed to conduct this investigation were in some ways

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144 The participants engage with online social networks in different ways. For example, Tommie X has a blog which I read on a regular basis while Vivianne and Leonora don’t have Facebook accounts (which the other participants had).
overlapping, as it was at times difficult to separate an interview from a conversation during participant observation. This is also true of the third method employed: organic wardrobe studies, which I conducted with seven of the participants. This brought me into contexts other than the participant observations and the interviews; the spatiality was more intimately defined, and our interactions were organized not merely through verbal communication, but through the sensuous and tactile feel of garments and favorite outfits. Documenting wardrobe studies was at times difficult, as I recorded the conversations but often these recordings proved difficult to use, since we had moved around in apartments and sorted through closets while leaving the recorder in its place. At times we had touched and felt garments under silence; such sensations were not easily translated into visual or audio formats. I brought a camera but the photos often turned out blurry and I was not always comfortable taking pictures of intimate settings where sometimes underwear and sex toys would be in clear sight. Therefore I would also, after each wardrobe study, write down a summary of the experience.

The term “organic” refers to the process of letting the garments become the starting point of improvised and personal conversations about style and dress practices. The organic wardrobe study allowed the participants to discuss more freely their feelings about specific garments, showing me what clothing combinations they appreciated, or how favourite outfits were stored. Actual garments and accessories are distinct and highly relevant parts of the construction of a style, as outlined by Marianne Larsson in her doctoral research on the Swedish postal uniform, influenced by a combination of Foucauldian and Latourian thought. In her thesis, Larsson bases her analysis on the notion that meanings are created not only through “naked human bodies or their voices” but also through material objects, and concludes thus that such objects are relevant to study as actors in meaning-producing networks.

In concordance with Larsson, and by applying her thoughts to the methods of wardrobe studies, I state that the sorting and organization of the actual clothes reveal a great deal about how the garments function in relation to the participants.

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145 Two participants, Fux and Elin, declined the wardrobe study, due to reasons of integrity. Another, Steffy, moved to Berlin before I had a chance to conduct one at his apartment, and when I went to Berlin, I was unable to get in touch with him due to my inability to operate my cell phone abroad.


to their wearer. Habits and patterns of consumption are not only visible in how clothes are worn but also in how they are kept. According to Sophie Woodward there is a “sensual relationship” between wearer and garment, often making it hard for individuals to verbalize how they feel about their clothes.\textsuperscript{148} To discuss events and feelings while looking at, sometimes even holding and touching, an actual garment in a person’s closet helps articulate feelings which otherwise would have been hard to get at. Also, as pointed out by Mark Graham, objects “have stories of their own to tell”, which makes the empirical material more complex than had I focused on narratives constructed solely through interviews.\textsuperscript{149}

In this perspective, my approach is aligned with the arguments outlined by Willis, who has stated that the process of ‘making sense’ is “concretely articulated […] in, of and by the connection between different elements of a cultural form or set of practices – action, language, interaction, the use of objects and artefacts, bodily presence, disposition and style, configurations of gesture and posture, ways of walking and talking”.\textsuperscript{150} In order to grasp all these different practices – and not only seeing objects and artifacts as merely ‘used’ by humans but as actors in their own right – I needed to experiment and employ different methods especially since, as Sarah Pink has noted, it is important to let the method adjust to the project and not the other way around.\textsuperscript{151}

\textit{Translation and Transformation}

All ethnographic research has been conducted in Swedish, and thus all interviews, participant observations and wardrobes studies were documented in Swedish. On my computer, I had one file containing my field journal, one containing photos I had taken and then ten more separate files, one for each participant. Trying to make sense of the material and understanding what I actually had collected has not been an easy task, and I spent weeks with hundreds of papers on the floor of my office, highlighting in different colors

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various themes I noted in the empirical material. When I began writing the text that would eventually become this thesis I wrote in Swedish, and not until I had completed about ten drafts did I eventually translate the text. This means that the quotations from participants together with the written documentation by me was initially incorporated in the text in its original language, and not translated until a later stage. The original text was at that time moved to a footnote while I translated it into English, at the same time also translating the rest of the text. When translating the quotes I made minor adjustments for the sake of readability. The Swedish version, in the footnote, is however left intact.

The translation from one language to another is not an easy task to undertake, as all languages have unique stylistic trademarks. This means that no word is possible to translate without alterations; in this process nuances will be lost while new meanings will be subtly added. Had this thesis been in Swedish, not only would my analysis have had a different rhythm and structure, but also the ways in which the materials are represented would have had significantly different characteristics. While acknowledging this fact, I wish to emphasize that already in the transformation of events taking place in a club late at night to being documented in my notebook, or of occurrences being hastily shot with my camera, the material has been drastically altered. These alterations should be recognized, but instead of considering them a problem, I understand them as part of the continual and ever-ongoing process during which the material specificities of the events I investigate are constantly changing. This is not a study of an ‘authentic’ reality, but an analysis of a network of situations, and with every shift in materiality, regardless of where and when this shift occurs, there will be a respective shift in meaning. Instead of viewing this as a fact which distances this text from an assumed objective reality, I wish to underline the processual organization of all matter related to this thesis, including not only the empirical material but also the ethnographical methods as well as the theoretical texts applied. In the interaction between these different kinds of matters, new meaning will be added while former connections will be lost.

Nevertheless, the choices I make concerning language, citation and descriptions will have serious effects on both the presentation of the empirical material and on the relevance of the analysis. The translation of the words expressed to articulate meaning affects the ways in which I can analyze the events taking place. Analyzing translated material has shifted the material away from its prior position in the context of Stockholm, and orientated it towards its present circumstances, in the pages of this thesis.
Producing an ethnographically informed study involves not only employing a variety of methods for the gathering of different kinds of empirical material, but concerns also the sorting of field notes, going through blurry photos and trying to make sense of electronic documents and files on the computer. This was done in order to map the documentation of all the unpredictable and erratic events that occurred during the time I spent exploring the situations I wished to analyze. Again, I draw on the metaphor of bricolage; the empirical material is not a coherent representation of one specific place or point in time, but operates as a set of case studies regarding the production of sartorial styles.

When these case studies are taken out of context and placed in the folders on my computer, or put in the Word document that is to become this thesis, a new kind of meaning is given to them, or rather, new meaning is articulated through how they are positioned in this new setting. The empirical material thus takes on many different material forms, and exists in a number of spatiotemporal contexts, relatable to how Karen Barad has stated that, “matter and meaning are not separate elements that intersect now and again. They are inextricably fused together, and no event, no matter how energetic, can tear them asunder”. Applying her thoughts to this project, I understand the practices of moving quotations between Word documents, photographing outfits and then keeping the digital photographs on hard drives and memory sticks, to enhance the fact that the materiality of this project has often acted in volatile and dynamic ways. This makes it difficult to retrace the many different steps taken in the many processes of handling, moving and transporting the empirical material between notebooks, conversations, nightclubs, computers and printed drafts of the thesis-in-becoming. But with every change in material circumstances, the meaning of the empirical material has shifted, interconnected as it is with its context.

The events described and the conversations reproduced have all taken place, but are communicated in this text through my interpretation and in connection to the theoretical framework outlined in the previous chapter. Catherine Belsey has stated that it important to address the issue of how interpretations and theoretical frameworks influence the written text. Belsey points to the fact that all language holds strong ideological implications, and that the words that describe the world never are neutral. In this way, the practices of detailing an event and interpreting it are in many ways overlap-

This points to an understanding of the meaning of the empirical material as constantly being processed and produced as it is transformed and organized through the ethnographical research as well as through the writing of the thesis.

The writing process has followed my development of thought rather than a linear production of the text. Because of this, many study cases and quotes from the material have been moved around, as I experimented with the analysis and structure of the text. The themes of the thesis – verbal articulation, contextuality and bodily matters – were not given until a late stage, and were constructed through my constant reading and rereading of the material. This process was in large part ongoing while I was still gathering more material, and therefore, the two processes affected and inspired one another.

Another important issue to address is of choice. What have I chosen to bring into the thesis, and what parts have I chosen to leave out? What are the consequences of these choices, and how to convey this to the reader? Also, sometimes I have included direct quotations from participants, while I at other times have described events taking place, or re-told in my own words, stories told to me. These different ways of presenting the material give access to different types of interpretation.

In earlier phases of editing, I gave significantly more space to direct quotes and long descriptions of participant observations, thinking this would give the reader a more direct connection to the material. However, I noticed that even when including the actual quotes, the meaning of what I wished to convey to the reader of the situation that was discussed often was lost, as the quotations were excerpts from longer conversations, and the actual meaning of discussions therefore seldom concisely spelled out. Therefore, I would need to add a summary after the quote, before I could move on to a more analytical level, and this made the text repetitive and difficult to read. During the many editing processes, I successively realized that this had been a partially misguided effort based in a reasoning of the quotes and descriptions as somehow being closer to the actual events than more analytical and condensed passages, and thus I rewrote it to give a more coherent understanding of the events described. However, in line with the notion of the material being heterogeneous and consisting of many different voices, I understand

the inclusion of actual quotes from the participants to be of great value, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the situations described.

Willis has stated that all forms of communications are different, and therefore not always comparable. The form of communication affects the kind of meaning it produces.\(^{154}\) Translated into the both methodological and ethical concerns I voice here, I recognize that the empirical material will appear differently dependent on its stylistic form. Whether it is a direct quote or rewritten in my words, these forms are the consequence of my concerns regarding what is most beneficial for the reader’s understanding of this text while at the same time respecting the confidence I have been entrusted given by the participants who have allowed me to be part of their lives. Also, the re-telling of claims and narratives told to me by others does not necessarily mean that I consider the stories to always be fully accurate accounts of events that have taken place, but instead, I view them as important keys to the understanding of how meanings concerning sartorial practices are produced and conveyed.

Concluding this discussion, I argue that all research methods, including the act of writing and analyzing, affect the material, transforming it while translating it from one shape to another. Even the mere act of demarcating empirical material structures our understanding of how the world is organized. This way, ethnography is itself part of the analytical process. In the words of James Clifford, “[e]thnography decodes and recodes, telling the grounds of collective order and diversity, inclusion and exclusion. It describes processes of innovation and structuration, and is itself part of these processes”.\(^{155}\) Because of this, I find it important to be clear and explicit in not only what questions I attempt to answer in this thesis, but also how I will go about this process. Making sense of empirical material in an academic context involves critical engagement with the transformation process of interpretation, understanding that also words chosen for mere descriptive purposes hold strong cultural connotations, and that observation and analysis aren’t neutral practices.

\(^{154}\) Willis (2000), 19.

Presentation of Participants

In this section I present part of the material by describing the style of the participants. Already in this brief description, it is possible to discern strong ideas, references and desires; components of the assemblage that I define as constituting a sartorial style. Some of the participants are well known through their artistic work, or because of their strong profiles within their respective community. Fux appears regularly in Swedish media due to his work as an actor and performer, while Makode has reached international fame through an art performance in the spring of 2012, which occurred after I had finished gathered material for the thesis but before its publication. Through their highly visible appearance, Tommie X and Leonora are easily recognized club organizers in Stockholm, while Klara is a high profile name within the Swedish burlesque scene. The participants’ social status affects the production of style because of its forceful effects; to some participants, media visibility and access to VIP events and parties in Stockholm are integrated part of their everyday routines.

Throughout the thesis, most of the participants will be described by their actual names. This is because their names to a large extent are part of their style practices. To state the names of the participants is an unconventional practice in ethnographic research, and was not an easy decision to make. However, through interaction with the participants and during analysis of the material, I realized that the names did not merely signify identities but also functioned as parts of larger style practices and in this respect, operated as essential parts of the networks and contexts I wished to investigate.

This decision was not made overnight, and initially, I wrote a few texts where I employed the use of aliases. This practice made me realize that there was an additional problem to the employment of aliases; in a city of Stockholm’s small size, people with notable styles would be easily recognized even if I had changed their names in texts. There are a few exceptions to this rule: Vivianne – due to personal reasons – has chosen to be presented with a pseudonym (which she selected herself), while Robert Fux requested that I primarily use his last name. Leonora felt that since it was the female aspect of her sartorial style that I am primarily interested in I should refrain from referring to her male name in this text. Because of that, I have left out not only her male name, but also omitted basic information about her life in

men’s clothing. I should also mention that, in this thesis, the style of Tommie X is more relevant to the research questions than the style of Daniel, and thus I will focus on the aesthetics constructed under this name (even though they in many ways are one and the same). Consequently, I will mostly refer to this participant, who employs both names, as Tommie X. I have strived for transparency and respect, letting the participants read the text before it was published, and removed information they have not wanted to be included in the text.

The choice to use their actual names was inspired in great deal by Dahl’s and Del LaGrace Volcano’s *Femmes of Power: Exploding Queer Femininities*, written in the form of letters addressed to the book’s informants, where each letter was joined with a picture of the person outlined in the text. The list is in alphabetical order and contains ten names. More detailed information will follow in the subsequent chapters, in relation to more in-depth analysis of the sartorial styles.

*Anthony*

When Anthony, currently in his early thirties, was a teenager in Sweden in the 1990s, British pop band Pulp was popular. During this time, Anthony was especially fascinated by two of its members, Jarvis and Candida, and would switch between the 1960s inspired and thrifty look of Jarvis, and the sequined and colorful style of Candida. The dialectic between these two styles has remained, but in later years they have begun to integrate and Anthony’s style ideal, the feminine man, has emerged.

In Anthony’s case, style is about producing a tension between two gendered styles, combining them to create a glamorous version of androgyny. Since he is biologically female he must constantly be aware of his body shape, modifying it in accordance with his stylistic ideals to fit the clothes and create the femininely masculine appearance he wishes for. During the time of this dissertation, he would often combine a British schoolboy uniform with a pink feather boa, his hair dyed in different colors.

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Elin

Elin’s appearance changes dramatically depending on context. During daytime her style is often subdued and discreet: hardly any makeup, and clothes chosen out of comfort rather than style such as soft pants and monochrome tops. Her blond hair is worn in a comfortable way, often hanging freely around her face. This look is in sharp contrast with her way of dressing at night, when she goes clubbing, or when hosts her own club; at these times her style becomes theatrical and maximalistic and her outfits contain a great variety of colors. Her hair is often done up in extravagant styles, her facial features accentuated with strong makeup.

Socially, Elin is part of a larger group characterized by their mutual interest and fascination for conceptual aesthetics. Often they prepare their looks together before going out, thus linking the personal appearance with each other’s, the community being a strong force in the creation of their styles. She and her friends are all in their early twenties, and participants Klara, Lady Oscar and Tommie X are also included in this group.

Fux

Being in his early thirties, of Austrian descent but raised in Sweden, Fux’s style of dressing is divided in two separate looks. One is discreet and proper, often consisting of a pair of blue jeans and a T-shirt, used on his time off from work. His other look, used mostly when he works and sometimes when he goes to clubs, is diametrically different; using artificial expressions and synthetic materials he subverts and distorts the body.

Through his work as a conceptual drag show artist, Fux gets a chance to channel his fascination for alternative ways to define and view reality. Through bodily distortions, exaggerations and alterations, new expressions are created, at times beyond or in contrast to archetypes of what is defined as typically human appearance.

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158 Fux’s full name is Robert Fux, but he has expressed a desire to, in this dissertation, only be called Fux, and hence, after this brief introduction, he will be referred to simply as “Fux”.
**Klara/Blanche Neige/Velma Voluptuous**

Klara is involved with the burlesque scene in Stockholm, not only as a club-goer but also as an artist. This interest is apparent in her choice of dress, which often includes elaborate feminine attributes such as a tightly laced waist, big bows and sequins. Klara is her birth name and the one she uses offstage, while Blanche Neige is the stage name she used in the beginning of our relation, and Velma Voluptuous the one she used towards the end. The change of names signified a change in bodily appearance, as Klara rapidly gained weight.

In the construction of her style, artifacts are employed as a tactic to undermine the supposed authenticity of gender, and femininity in particular. This way, her political agenda is interlaced with her sartorial practice.

**Lady Oscar**

Influenced by the styles of punk, post-punk and 1980s mainstream womenswear, Lady Oscar mixes women’s and men’s garments and accessories to create his sartorial look. Lady Oscar is in his early twenties and a friend of Klara’s, whom he went to school with as a child. His style holds distinct style and fashion references, but often in a reworked and recited manner, used in different ways and combinations.

Through his style Lady Oscar expresses his concerns about being a man. He explores the notion of being masculine through his clothes, and creates stories surrounding his outfits. One day the outfit tells the story of a British explorer in Asia, another of a woman traveling on an airplane in the 1950s. This practice charges the clothes with affective value, often related to different ways of being gendered.

**Leonora**

Leonora is one of the best-known transvestites in Stockholm, and the hostess of one of the city’s oldest and most well-known queer clubs. She is in her early seventies; tall, blond and tanned, she often wears dresses and skirts that display her long and slender legs. Born in Sweden, she has spent much time in Stockholm but also lived abroad for many years.

Through her club, Leonora aims at producing a fun and liberal space; by being revealingly and sexily dressed she personifies the club, and tells me
repeatedly that she *is* the club. Wearing low cut dresses, blond wigs and heavy makeup she claims to represent not only a way of being, but also a place to be.

*Makode*

Makode is tall and fit, combining his male body with garments, materials and accessories holding feminine connotations. At the time of this study, Makode is in his late twenties and divides his time between Stockholm and Berlin. Born and raised in Stockholm, he is well known in the city, often instantly recognizable through his long dreadlocks worn on top of his head. Also, in a country whose colonial history is distant and with relatively low numbers of immigration, Makode’s dark skin is often emphasized in contrast with the general whiteness of Stockholm, something he often refers to in his role as club host and in his artistic work.

Through this combination of sartorial practices, Makode combines a masculine body with feminine and revealing garments. This aesthetic operates as a way of promoting Makode as playful and expressive of his creativeness, articulating an often provocative take on gendered clichés and stereotypes.

*Steffy Pop*

Steffy is the youngest of the participants, of Bosnian descent but raised in Sweden, and had recently finished high school in another town before moving to Stockholm. Halfway through this project, he moved to Berlin with a few friends. Steffy is queer-politically active and defines himself as queer.

Similar to Klara, Steffy’s political conviction influences how he dresses. This ideological conviction shows in how he names himself in a gender-neutral manner, as well as in his way of dressing, often wearing rainbow symbols and political slogans printed on pins.

*Tommie X (Daniel)*

Tommie X is a character invented by Daniel, and functions as an outlet for his great interest of conceptualizing different styles. The styles of Tommie X are not limited to a set number of appearances but can be used and transformed into the look Daniel is most interested in at the moment. The dynam-
ics between Tommie X and Daniel are difficult to trace, often merging the two into one.

Tommie X uses his body to realize different aesthetic visions; in this process he makes no difference between masculine and feminine sources of inspiration. Instead, he tries to create looks based on what artifacts are accessible at the moment, producing a style based on what he has within his reach.

**Vivianne**

Vivianne’s style of dress is feminine in color, cut and choice of materials; the garments are often pink, burgundy and violet, at times worn with jewelry in amber. Her hair is styled in a perm and she often wears shoes with low heels, a ladylike look common among middle-aged women. What is most noticeable about her style is her beard, which she has chosen to keep even though it obstructs her contacts with the medical service she wishes will help her with her hormonal treatment and reassignment surgery. During the time of the study she had not yet begun any such treatment, and her body is biologically male.\(^{159}\)

Vivianne’s bodily practice is feminine, which to her confirms her identity as a woman. She does not perceive the beard as a signifier of masculinity, but chooses to view it as yet another decorative practice, referring to the fact that some born-women also are able to grow beards, although it may be socially problematic. She is also acquainted with and refers to work of beard-adorned born-female activists such as Jennifer Miller. Thus, she decides on another interpretation of facial hair, displaying a different understanding of the gender determination of aesthetic expressions than the normative.

\(^{159}\) When I meet with Vivianne in the summer of 2012, she tells me that since the summer of 2011 she is now finally part of such a treatment, and for the summer of 2013, there are plans for her to undergo sex-reassignment surgery.
3. ARTICULATING STYLE: UNDERSTANDING THE VERBAL ASPECTS OF STYLE PRODUCTION

Introduction

The act of speaking is part of what defines and categorizes people, interlaced with the forms of communication carried out through what we wear and how we look. Important to note, however, is that there is no inherent meaning to words; according to Butler, their value shifts depending on discursive context. From a slightly different perspective, Latour has claimed that words are equal to other types of meaning-producing actors, which I interpret to mean that words function at the same level, though not in the same way, as garments. This brings focus to the actual word itself in the process of creating meaning. However, as Latour puts it; “[w]ords are never found alone, nor surrounded by other words; they would be inaudible.” Therefore, I won’t focus solely on the words themselves, but will look at their place and function in a larger context. In this chapter, I explore and investigate the correlations between the spoken word and other ways of articulating a style.

While writing this chapter, I found that my thoughts kept returning to the scene in William Shakespeare’s play Romeo and Juliet, where the two lovers first meet to talk. The reason for this is that the scene contains many of the themes I have found important in understanding the material. This is a short excerpt from the key part of their dialogue:

Juliet: ’Tis but thy name that is my enemy:
     Though art thyself, though not a Montague.
     What’s a Montague? It is nor hand nor foot.

Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part
Belonging to a man. O be some other name.
What’s in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet.
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo called,
Retain that dear perfection which he owes
Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name,
And for that name, which is no part of thee,
Take all myself.

Romeo: I take thee at thy word.
Call me but love, and I’ll be new baptized,
Henceforth I will never be Romeo.  

In this famous part of the first conversation between the young lovers, Romeo and Juliet discuss the relationship between an actor and the name by which the actor [potentially confusing using the Latourian actor when talking about theatre!] is categorized and recognized. Juliet suggests that there is an inherent instability in the relationship between the name and the person who is named. According to her, this uncertainty gives room to possibilities of altering the meaning produced; if Romeo widened the gap between himself and his surname, by refusing the label of ‘Montague’, he would be associated with another kind of network, where actions currently forbidden would now be allowed. Without the attachments of the Montague name he would be able to approach her, an act prevented by his present name.

Apparent in this dialogue is the distinct agency of words and names; the names themselves are actors that restrict Romeo and Juliet’s movements and possibilities to engage in interaction with each other. In order for their communication to function, usages of names and language need to be reorganized; they need to be “baptized” as another, as someone new, in order to overcome the limiting structures of the family feud holding them apart. This is made clear when Juliet speaks of a separation between the physical body and name of an object; the qualities of the rose would remain the same even if the flower were called ‘tulip’.  


164 In this part of their dialogue, it is apparent that names may hold several types of agency, some conflicting, a linguistic theme further explored in Laura M Ahearn’s article “Language and Agency”, in *Annual Review of Anthropology* vol. 30 (2001): 109–137.
If I look closely at Juliet’s words, she seems to imply that the rose holds certain characteristics, such as its scent, and that the scent itself would remain the same even if the flower were categorized differently. Subsequently, she claims that the flower’s name does something to the scent; in the interaction between name and scent a meaning of what a rose is supposed to be is produced, and that this meaning is open to change, if the scent were to be combined with a different label. Latour states that names and words are mobilizing factors, categorizing individuals through the act of articulating words of specific meaning. Names create a sense of belonging, of being part of a family, which simultaneously is the same thing as creating a distance to those outside the family, those with different names.\textsuperscript{165}

Louis Althusser’s theory of hailing, central in much of Butler’s work, concerns the process of becoming a subject through the act of interpellation; when hailed by a policeman (or other) in the street, a person stops and turns around. In this response lies the realization of the subject; through the response (stopping, then turning) to the hailing, a person is made aware of her position in regards to the person who has interpellated her. (Naturally, this affects also the person who has interpellated the other, who is then made the instigator of the interactions that follow). This way, the act of hailing is at the same time an act of naming another, as a subject.\textsuperscript{166} Butler writes,

Consider for a moment the more general conditions of naming. First, a name is offered, given, imposed by someone or by some set of someones, and it is attributed to someone else. It requires an intersubjective context, but also a mode of address, for the name emerges as the addressing of a coinage to another, and in that address, a rendering of that coinage proper.\textsuperscript{167}

This interaction – the event of being named by another – is seldom unproblematic. Names produce meaning in that they are gendered, hold connotations of class, lifestyle and generation, all of which the subject of the name is made aware of through interactions with others. Language is an inherently

\textsuperscript{165} Latour, “«Thou shall not take the Lord’s name in vain» – being a sort of sermon on the hesitations of religious speech”, in RES Anthropology and Aesthetics no. 39 (2001): 215–234.


\textsuperscript{167} Butler (1997), 29.
social phenomenon, a system of communication directed by the personalization of words and grammar.\textsuperscript{168}

An important lesson can be learned from the tragic ending of Shakespeare’s play. Romeo and Juliet tried to escape the connotations of the family names, to exist only as lovers, beyond the conflicts between the two families. But as this tactic was not anchored socially, their new positions were weak, and Romeo could never truly “doff” his name, but remained a Montague in the eyes of others. Once again, I am reminded of the importance of the social dimension of names; how the interaction of what is verbalized affects future implications and effects. According to Goffman, this dimension holds not only sentences and words, but also nuances, pronunciations, pauses, looks, glances and gestures.\textsuperscript{169} The spoken word is part of a network consisting of many actors and processes, and must be viewed as part of a web of associations also including expressions other than the verbal.

The chapter is divided into subsections, beginning with (omitting this introduction from the list) “Gendering through Naming”, regarding the act of naming as an act of producing gendered meaning. “What’s in a name?” demonstrates the complexity of the act of naming when more than one name is attributed to a body. Thereafter follows the section on “Categorization through Interaction”, on performative actions with an existential resonance, after which I investigate styles orientated toward the creative and artistic, under the rubric “Labels and Appearances”. All four sections are written from the perspective of sartorial style as constructed partially through verbal articulations; the pronunciation of certain words structures an understanding of the body through which they are expressed (or, in other situations, influences an understanding of the body which they address). At the end of the chapter, a brief summary follows.

\textbf{Gendering through Naming}

\textit{Feminine Masculinity}

Through my interaction with the empirical material I have found that the act of naming is an important theme in the construction of a style. The develop-


ment of a name has often been interlaced with the process of exploring different ways of looking and dressing; in this way, names, words, accessories and garments co-produce each other, jointly creating various forms of meanings. I will examine this aspect of style production by studying participants who go by names other than the ones given at birth, claiming that this circumstance makes the matter of interpellation more complex. In many ways, this creates another kind of understanding of their sartorial practice, in which the new act of naming becomes interlaced with the act of wearing garments.

Anthony’s body is biologically female but his definition of his own gender identity is blurred, preferring to position himself as femininely masculine. This stance correlates with his style, as the gender categorization of his biological body is unevenly aligned with the gender connotations of his sartorial practice. During the time I know him, he experiments with ways of making his body more masculine, and has taken a male name, while at the same time keeping his female body intact and also implementing feminine garments into his style of dressing, such as the pink stole he favors and the colorful makeup he frequently wears. He binds his chest to adjust his silhouette to a more boyish style, dresses in shirts and formal jackets but contrasts these ‘proper’ attires with short shorts, dyed hair and excessive amounts of colorful makeup. When asked by me to describe his style, he calls it “feminine masculinity”, which points to a desired obtuseness of gender expressions, adhering to masculine sartorial practices but at the same time featuring feminine connotations.

In his diary at online community Qruiser, he writes that he doesn’t “understand all this talk about identity”, because he could “only see different powers of will”. He continues:

I don’t think I AM “man” “girl” etc. I am simply a person who is in a situation where I have different possibilities to choose.
I think men are more attractive than women. I am vain, thus I’d rather look like a man than a woman.
It is merely a matter of taste.
If there were a possibility to attach functioning wings onto the back, I would probably fret over that as well.
You, who think you know who are, if you were given a magic wand, wouldn’t you defy your so called identity and transform yourself into a (...)?
I’m only asking?

\[170\] But male, nevertheless, and thus also in the trans-category.
\[171\] In Swedish: feminin maskulinitet.
Ugh “identity” sounds so 90’s, go hang yourself everyone, I’m going to become a dirty trash queen. Or I don’t think I am going to become anything at all. I have stopped becoming.
I only do.  

According to the diary entry, the reason for his masculine looks is vanity, since he desires to resemble the masculine ideal he is attracted to. This desire marks masculine aesthetics as preferable to feminine; the wish to appear as the man he is attracted to seemingly eradicates the distinction between subject and object. He directs his desire not only toward the men he has a proclivity for, but also toward the person he wants to be. At the same time, Anthony’s style is not a completely masculine look but can best be defined as a kind of assemblage, organized through the citation of many different sources of reference, holding both masculine and feminine connotations.

The name ‘Anthony’ operates as part of this gender-blurring process, a label to direct the reading of him by others, distinctly marking him as non-female while the materiality of his body places him in a less specific gender category. The process of creating the appearance of being in-between genders by blending a biologically female body with a masculine name, dressing in school uniforms for boys while also wearing heavy makeup, is enhanced by his articulation of his refusal of believing in static gender identities, and here, the way Anthony speaks about his body and the way it is materialized through dress are mutually enhancing.

Bodily materiality is one of many kinds of actors involved in the creation of speech acts and must thus, in these situations, be understood as exist-

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172 In Swedish:
Jag förstår inte allt tal om identitet, för jag kan bara se olika viljor.
Jag tror inte att jag ÄR ”man” ”tjej” etc. Jag är bara en person som befinner mig i en situation där jag har olika valmöjligheter.
Jag tycker män är snyggare än kvinnor. Jag är fåfäng, alltså vill jag hellre se ut som en man än en kvinna.
Det är blott en smaksak.
Skulle det finnas möjlighet att skruva fast fungerande vingar på ryggen skulle jag med all säkerhet ha beslutsägest över det med.
Du som tror att du vet vem du är, finge du ett trollspö skulle du då inte trotsa din så kallade identitet och förvandla dig till en (...)?
Jag bara undrar?
Usch ”identitet” känns så 90-tal, gå och häng er alla nu. Jag tänker bli en dirty trash queen.
Eller jag tänker inte bli nånting alls. Jag har slutat att bli.
Jag bara gör.
ing in symbiosis with the spoken. This way, the spoken word not only describes a process but also helps produce it, as a performative act.\textsuperscript{173} J L. Austin writes about “illocutionary acts” as central to the understanding of performativity, meaning speech acts which hold a different meaning than the one pronounced in words.\textsuperscript{174} There are many examples of such acts, one being the act of calling someone ‘faggot’ or ‘nigger’, which of course holds many derogatory implications, none of which are explicitly stated in the terms.

I consider Anthony’s change of name to be such an illocutionary act, since the transformation of names holds deeper and larger questions of his identity practices than the names show at a surface level. The name holds a spectrum of emotions and positions, and in this way I understand the characteristics of the name as affecting what kind of meaning is being produced. Anthony’s knowledge of language affects the name change, and in this way the knowledge itself becomes an influence in this process, and the names become actors with specific skills and talents, making the combination with other names and words possible. This interaction is complex, not least as, in the words of Butler, “[…] speaking is itself a bodily act”.\textsuperscript{175} Through the interconnections between words, body and garments, Anthony’s style is created. The name is British, and not Swedish, which categorizes the style as British-inspired. Applied to the case study of Anthony, I understand the name to not only directs the reading of Anthony’s style toward a gender-blurred territory but also, through its British connotations, to emphasize the connections between his current appearance and the aesthetics of 1990s indie-pop culture.

\textit{Becoming Steffy}

During an interview, Steffy tells me that already from an early age he experienced an anxiety about not fitting with the correlation between biological body and gendered appearance expected at the school he attended. His high-pitched voice and nervous manner categorized his gendered practice as deviant and not fitting the standard. It was thus not words, but the way they were articulated, which categorized him as behaving beyond normative gender

\textsuperscript{174} Austin (1975), 100.
\textsuperscript{175} Butler (1997), 10. Italics in original.
practice. This led to criticism and bullying from his classmates, further escalated due to his interest in fashion and dress, considered generally unsuitable for a boy.

He tells me of the difficulty in acquiring clothes as a child, not always knowing if a garment was meant for a boy or a girl. According to Steffy it wasn’t the shape or function of a garment that mattered, but the way they were gender-categorized by their placement in the store. Being a feminine boy, he shunned away from all things not clearly marked for boys, developing a tactic of constantly asking sales clerks about the gender code of the garments. The labeling of the commodity by others functioned as the defining factor, determining whether the garment should be purchased or not.

Patrizia Calefato has written about how “[p]ersecuted groups have often been objects of manipulation and control”, describing how the “political, social or religious élite has attempted to regulate or control the syntax of either language or clothing they have done so as part of a totalitarian regime (whether actual or planned)”.\textsuperscript{176} I claim that in many ways the continuous and forceful repetition of required gender coherency between body and garment, described by Steffy, is equal in character to politically totalitarian states, as the effects of a strong normative system at times resemble the regulations in place in such systems. What Steffy is outlining is the development of a tactic to avoid being branded as an outcast, defined by shunning sartorial practices not fitting the moral code of the school he attended. By subordinating his appearance to the normative views on how boys should dress, Steffy becomes part of sustaining the system of gender distinction through sartorial practice.

This tactic holds an illocutionary act; the questions he posed to the salesclerks are in fact asked in order to avoid the harassment a feminine appearance would lead to. In this way, Steffy conformed to the binary logic of his classmates, producing a gender normative version of a boy appearance. This version comes into being through the forces of normative stereotypes of what boys should look and act like, enforced every time Steffy needed to choose new clothes for himself. He had to constantly ask the question regarding a garment’s gender connotations, to make sure that no other ways of expressing gender than the normative ones are articulated. In this example, Steffy himself functions as the device for hindering alternative ways of dressing; he is the one asking the question, and making the articulated decision not to buy clothes labeled ‘unisex’ (or ‘girl’). Even though others

introduced the idea of normative behavior to him, in the clothing shop he was the one who enforced the notion that this is the way to categorize clothes. Here, normative values are spread through actions even when the actors are not fully visible; they are communicated through unexpected intermediaries, and in this instance it is Steffy who is turned into a guardian of normativity.

Steffy tells me that when he grew older and started high school, the circumstances around him changed. His new school was more liberal, and this change in environment brought about an alteration of his appearance. His style practice, he informs me, signaled this transition through the implementation of Converse shoes and the act of dyeing his hair red. In his second year, he came out as gay to his parents, but tells me he had “probably” come out to his schoolmates before that.\textsuperscript{177}

At the time of the interview, Steffy no longer categorizes himself as gay, but as queer. This was however not an option when he was in high school, since he during that time lacked sufficient knowledge of this term.\textsuperscript{178} During his high school years, even though he defined himself as gay, he would never categorize himself as male. Instead, he adjusted his male name to the more gender-neutral ‘Steffy’, in this way attempting to find a way out of the gender dichotomy.\textsuperscript{179}

The name ‘Steffy’ signals that the body shouldn’t be categorized as male; it functions as a map for orientation, pointing Steffy in another direction than what was considered hegemonically masculine in this situation. The speech acts carried out – naming him Steffy, refusing to be categorized as male – interact with the materiality of the body; created as they are through the body parts which are the prerequisites for the articulation of verbal sounds, coming out of Steffy’s lungs, throat and mouth. This way, the interaction is complex and involves both Steffy’s body as well as potential others, who respond to the words produced through the body.

However, from another perspective the act is anti-social, since it is pronounced in order to distance Steffy from people who label themselves ‘men’, while also separating him from the category of ‘women’. Instead Steffy

\textsuperscript{177} In Sweden, high school is three years.

\textsuperscript{178} The term ‘queer’ was at the time of Steffy’s high school years widely known, also in Sweden, but as knowledge is contextually specific, Steffy’s young age and limited access to situations outside his high school operated as constraints, keeping him from learning about its existence.

\textsuperscript{179} This practice is paradoxical, since ‘gay’ implies same-sex desire, which requires a clearly defined category of ‘sex’.
wishes to – through the articulation of these specific speech acts – orientate beyond normative understandings of binary gender distinctions. His spoken words can be considered a petition regarding the categorization of his body, a wish for further distance from the gender-stereotypical way he dressed as a young boy, which subsequently also removes him from the gendered categories in place in this specific high school context.

I want to connect this verbal act of gender blurring to Steffy’s new alternative style. Going once more back to Calefato, she speaks of how “the conflict between fashion and censure is above all a matter of style, that is, of the forms in which fashion manifests itself”. Drawing on the work of Hebdige, Calefato uses punk style as an example of how an oppositional style can be created; only by having knowledge of normative behavior is it possible to subvert its aesthetics. During his childhood, Steffy had learned how to dress gender-appropriately, and therefore, as a teenager, he had acquired sufficient knowledge of these codes to deliberately “misplace” them – the way the punks did with safety pins in the practice of bricolage – in order for a new look to be produced. This was carried out through combining many of the iconic attributes associated with contemporary youth, such as the Converse shoes and the dyed hair, in this way citing the style of youthful rebellion from previous decades. The style development follows a quite conventional path, incorporating attributes already defined by others as alternative or subcultural. Steffy’s new name is incorporated into this traditionally alternative look, but adding a gender-blurring element, further enhanced by his coming out and refusal to define himself as either male or female. Together, these practices construct a stylistic pattern discernable to others, which both holds conventional subcultural attributes but also involves subversive and anti-social elements, simultaneously.

The Stories of Lady Oscar

Inspired by a Japanese manga story of a girl, named Lady Oscar since she – a biologically female girl – was brought up as a boy, Lady Oscar has employed it since he was around fourteen years old. What he especially claims to appreciate is the mirrored relation between his own life and the manga narrative: a boy in present-day Stockholm growing up with the sense

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180 Calefato (2004), 22. Italics in original.
of being different, of not being like other boys, which is reflected in the fictional Japanese story of a girl growing up, with the sense of being unlike her peers, gender-wise. According to Lady Oscar, the name of the manga character signifies conflicted gender discourses in the narrative of the girl’s socialization process, raised by a man who had preferred a son. When Lady Oscar chooses the same name, the gender-blurred associations of the name remain, even though the actual characteristics of his life narrative differ from hers.

Similar to Anthony and Steffy, Lady Oscar has invented a new name; he is the one both interpellating and being interpellated. According to Butler, the act of interpellation implicates a forceful power relation between the one who names and the one who is named.182 But, in the case of Lady Oscar, it becomes equally important that others recognize that this is the name he goes by; for the interpellation to be successful, it isn’t enough that he recognizes the name, but it has to be enforced socially as well.

The name is part of the gendered organization of Lady Oscar, of particular importance in regards to Lady Oscar’s difficulties of identifying as a man:

> It’s also, it’s mostly just that what is considered traditionally masculine is quite far from who I am. And by coming to terms with my masculinity I guess I mean coming to terms with my form of masculinity.183

I argue that in this narrative, the correlation between words and the objects to which they are ascribed is fluctuating; to Lady Oscar, the name is a way of approaching the matter of his own masculinity, but the practice of getting dressed, combining garments in different ways to experiment with different ways of looking masculine is an equally important part in this process. During the time I am acquainted with Lady Oscar, I see this process materialized through his different takes on gendered appearance; successively his style approaches a more hegemonic way of looking masculine. During the years I know him, his long hair is cut shorter, his makeup becomes less noticeable and he dresses less conspicuously.

182 Butler (1997), 32.

183 In Swedish: Det är också, det är mest bara att det som anses vara traditionellt manligt är ganska långt ifrån vem jag är. Och det jag menar med att förlika mig med min manlighet är väl att förlika mig, sig, med min form av manlighet.
I claim that Lady Oscar’s problem is not the vague and general overarching term of masculinity per se, but in actuality, how to come to terms with his own way of being and looking masculine. This is done in a meticulous and slow-paced way, gradually including more masculine accessories into his style, knowing this will alter the gender connotations of his sartorial practice.

I understand Lady Oscar’s quest to come to terms with his masculinity through the concept of multiple and hierarchically organized masculinities. Lady Oscar’s description of not being at terms with his masculinity can be analyzed through Connell’s research on masculinities, related to the problem of identifying with a subordinate position of being or looking masculine. The exploration of different ways of creating masculine styles by experimenting with the combination of feminine attire and male body—enhanced by the name Lady Oscar—can be viewed as a practice that attempts to circumvent subordination. Lady Oscar’s style tactic is a way of questioning ingrained ways of marking gender distinction within the category of masculinity, of materializing ways out of, or around, claustrophobic definitions of what is required to be fully categorized as male.

Jacob Östberg has studied men’s fashion in the area surrounding the area of Stureplan, located in the bourgeois part of Stockholm called Östermalm. He points to the conformity of dress among men in this culture, saying that there are tendencies towards a “feminization of masculinity”, inviting “men from all social positions to partake in the carnival of consumption in ways previously reserved predominantly for female consumers”. To summarize Östberg’s key points in this text, the young men in this very specific club scene are ready to adapt to new styles if these styles are thought to have the right kind of cultural capital; in this culture, an interest in fashion, appearance and vanity is not necessarily considered a feminine trait but can also be understood as a new way of being positioned as hegemonically masculine.

During the time I spend with Lady Oscar, he is a regular visitor at the venues around Stureplan, but even though his style also can be described as a form of feminine masculinity, it is through a radically different source of references. With his flamboyant looks, Lady Oscar cites another kind of style references than the men in Östberg’s study. Despite superficial similarities, such as the fact that Lady Oscar consistently visits Stureplan venue Spy

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bar and is at times also featured on the online site Stureplan.se (argued in Östberg’s text as an important part of this lifestyle), I claim that his feminine masculinity is labeled and perceived on the basis of other criteria than for the bourgeois men, and thus the definition of his gender position remains subordinate. This is signified by his name, which through its strong link to Japanese manga culture continuously orientates his look in the direction of the conceptual and artistic, distancing him from the hegemonically positioned category of bourgeois men Östberg has studied.

**What’s In a Name?**

*Klara, Velma Voluptuous and Blanche Neige*

In my empirical material there are many examples of how names function as a form of tactic of separating style practices, such as the styles of Klara and Velma Voluptuous, which share both similarities and differences in appearance. Velma Voluptuous is the name of a stage persona, and therefore the style related to this name is exaggerated, adjusted to fit the specific requirements of being on stage. The correlation between the burlesque name and sartorial style supports the notion that the performance is separated from the mundane; the name ‘Velma Voluptuous’ has a more artistic tone than the more ordinary sounding ‘Klara’.

During the time I spend gathering material, I see both Klara and Velma Voluptuous frequently. With Klara, I can sit down over coffee or drinks and discuss things; we talk about the weather and mutual friends. Often she is dressed in feminine skirts, colorful shirts, wearing makeup and hair in ways reminiscent of a 1950s style. When I see Velma Voluptuous, on the other hand, there is almost always a physical distance between us; I’m often standing in the audience, a few feet below her place on the stage. At these times the style consists of sequined dresses, sometimes a whip or a feather boa, often in combination with excessive makeup. In the character of Velma Voluptuous, she is rarely engaging in casual conversation but instead performing professionally as an entertainer. The difference in name signifies the difference in style, while also underlining the separate kinds of interactions involved in respective style practice. Klara is – physically – approachable; Velma Voluptuous on the other hand, is elevated, supposed to be observed from a distance, almost revered by the ones positioned on the floor in front
of the stage. The styles are thus not only different in appearance but also contextualized differently in space.

However, there is a third name associated to Klara/Velma Voluptuous, and that is Blanche Neige. During the first year of our acquaintance, the concept of Velma Voluptuous hadn’t been articulated and instead, the persona I would see on stage was called Blanche Neige. Blanche Neige had black hair, red lips and a tightly laced waist. A few years before she became part of this study, Klara suffered from an illness that made her put on considerable amount of weight, drastically changing her appearance. After the weight-transition, the physical prerequisites for her style practice had been altered, which led to a successive change in her aesthetics. Her black hair was dyed pink, her clothes became more colorful, and after a few years, her stage name was changed from Blanche Neige to Velma Voluptuous. The old name didn’t fit the new body shape, or its new aesthetic expressions.

When Klara and I discuss this process, she points to how her aesthetic ideals have changed simultaneously with her bodily changes. After her physical transition, she is drawn to softer contrasts, and now prefers color to the previous black and white-look. It is apparent that the change of names signifies a change of style, but also that the change of style simultaneously enforces the change of name. The alterations in hair color, outfits and names should not be viewed as separate practices, but as a sort of crosscommunication between the different parts that constitute her style.

Even though Klara and Velma Voluptuous share many of the same style features, the latter is associated specifically with the act of performing, and because of this, larger bows, more sequins and longer gloves enhance the style. This enhancement of an excessive sartorial practice is further articulated by the name Velma Voluptuous, which signifies an elaborate style and curvaceous body figure. The alliteration is also important, as it underlines the style as part of the physical and vocal performance. The materiality of the styles is partially defined through the act of naming, and therefore I consider the processes of applying makeup, putting together outfits and using different names as interlaced with one another, creating meaning and distinction through the different ways in which these practices become interrelated. The line between personal and public personas is made distinct through these differences.

An important factor in the understanding of how the three styles – of Klara, Blanche Neige and Velma Voluptuous – are produced is the interaction between semiotics and materiality. The act of naming is not an activity that takes place outside or beyond the materiality of the style, but is
instead intimately involved in the process and subsequently placed partially within an assemblage. By looking at how style is articulated through Klara, Blanche Neige and Velma Voluptuous, I see that they share much of the same materiality; corporeality, context and social relations are remarkably similar in the production of the three styles. However, there are noticeable differences in how, when and where material entities are combined.

One quality that is shared among the three styles is the strongly enforced notion that gender, and particularly femininity, is a cultural construction. In their book on femininity, fashion and the postmodern, Evans and Minna Thornton claimed that in the postmodern era of the 1980s, “because sexual difference was construed as old-fashioned it could be recycled in postmodern fashion”. Even though I am unsure to what extent I would define contemporary Stockholm as definitively “postmodern”, I acknowledge that there are many mutual reference points between the urban worlds of London then and Stockholm now. According to Evans and Thornton, the postmodern concept of viewing gender as simply one term among many when it comes to constructing style and creating fashion made it possible for women to explore more traditional ways of looking and dressing feminine without the assumption that they were necessarily traditional individuals. Translated into this case study, I consider this type of contemporary feminist discourse (which states that gender is performative) to be an important factor in the style production of Klara/Blanche Neige/Velma Voluptuous, operating as a core in the staging of all three styles.

Conflicting Performances

When performing professionally, Fux operates under his own name. According to him, this practice links his personal situation with his professional; since they are connected through name, he must take full responsibility for both. He claims that his name in this way becomes linked to specific expectations connected to the idea of the practices signified by the name ‘Robert Fux’. Because of this consistency in using his personal name onstage, he says that he must take comprehensive responsibility for what is done onstage as well as off. This is related to de Certeau’s claim that words and sentences are marked by their usages; the ways in which the name ‘Robert Fux’ oper-

ates determines its meaning and value, in this way structuring the connotations of the actions related to this name. However, I would add that the name is not only used, but also designates an understanding of the name as blurring the lines between personal and professional situations. These relations are further complicated by the fact that his public performances to a large degree stem from personal proclivities:

Fux: Well, the question is if I am hired as a character or as Robert Fux.
Philip: Yes.
Fux: Therein lays the answer to that question.
Philip: Do you know that, when you are hired by someone?
Fux: I seldom do characters, it’s only at Hootchy Kootchy that I do that. But I think it’s really fun. But most often it’s like Robert Fux and then I am expected to bring a lot of myself. I do that also with the characters, of course, but then I mostly choose clothes after what I personally… what I like, you know. And not based on a character. Because it’s just an extension of me, and then it easily happens that it’s what I like personally, what I think is attractive. Then at some jobs I’ve had, carefully, carefully posed requests about… I had a very long period when I always covered my face with nets; I always wore net stockings over my entire face, with holes cut open for eyes and mouth. And I collected different types of net stockings and I managed to get some sponsorship from Wolford as well, so they sent me stockings that weren’t available in Sweden, because they thought it was so funny that I was wearing it over my face. I thought it looked really good, I loved it, and then I got carefully posed questioned regarding if it were possible to remove that net because, well yes… And I never understood why, because I became incredibly hurt, and provoked by it, because I felt that it was my, in a way, artistic freedom they wanted to encroach. I find it really difficult when people have opinions about stuff like that, like “if you were to do it a little like this instead?” Because I feel like, either you get this, or you don’t. There are so many other areas where you have to compromise, like with drag, or whatever you call yourself. I’ve had such difficulty in denominating myself for so many years.

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188 See outline of de Certeau’s theory on page 41.
189 Hootchy Kootchy Club is the name of a Stockholm burlesque club.
190 In Swedish: Fux: Alltså, frågan är ju om jag blir inhyrd som karaktär eller som Robert Fux.
Philip: Ja.
Fux: Däri ligger svaret på den frågan.
Philip: Vet du det, när du blir inhyrd av nån?
In this quote, Fux speaks about the effects of being perceived, and thus defined, in a certain way through interaction with others. In this case, it concerned his professional position, where potential employers had preferences regarding the kind of show they wanted him to produce. Since he often performs under his own name, the shows are reflections of his personal preferences, but recontextualized to fit the context of a stage. In this case, the employers were interested in hiring the appearance and concept of ‘Robert Fux’, but adjusted to fit their specific needs. Fux’s sense of discomfort stems from the confused feeling of having been addressed as someone else, interpellated as another. Subsequently, this interaction affects his artistic integrity, and he feels that commercial interests have interfered with his aesthetic expressions.

However, there are two companies present in this narrative, with conflicting ideas of what kind of style can be of value for them. Wolford appreciates Fux’s unorthodox take on their stockings to such a degree that they send him free pairs, while the other company experiences the same style as wrong and out of place. This demonstrates that the correlation between artistic expressions and corporate promotion is rarely self-evident and often dependent on the specificities of both artist and company.

Fux claims to seldom perform as a “character”, by which he means that he rarely creates expressions aiming to portray someone or something essentially different from himself. Yet, he appears to be aware that the styles produced on stage are carried out in a context where he has to relate to other kinds of regulations than in situations off-stage. I find the example of the Wolford-net stockings particularly interesting. Through Fux’s description, I can outline a network of different actors, engaging with one another to create the specific style that, in artistic contexts, is named ‘Robert Fux’.

The stockings interact with Fux’s facial features, based on a set of conceptual ideals, customized to be worn over the head by cutting holes for eyes and mouth. These acts create an unexpected fit between stockings and face, in which the company Wolford is an active participant, creating a new style through the concept of bricolage, putting the stockings over the head and thus producing a new look with different connotations than had the stockings been worn on his legs. In the next set of interactions, the created aesthetics are considered not fitting the vision of the company who wished to hire Fux, impacting the style itself. Fux never reveals to me if he decided to accommodate the employers or not, but the fact that he feels hurt is itself enough to alter the setup. In this way, what is considered – by himself and by others – to be the stylistic content of Robert Fux fluctuates depending on which actors are present in the construction and context of his look. I therefore state that the bricolage is dependent on contextual support in order to be maintained.

By using terms such as “hurt” and “provoked” when explaining his emotional reaction to the employers’ request, Fux emphasizes the relevance of this verbal exchange, which he considers an infringement on his “artistic freedom”. This reaction gives cause for a wider question of definitions, regarding how his style should be categorized in a professional perspective. Had he been able to find the right words to convey the meaning of his style, perhaps he could have facilitated the reading of his appearance, making the potential employers understand his creative process. However, failing to find the right words, he describes himself as being at a loss in discussions regarding the parameters of his stylistic expressions, making him more vulnerable to criticisms and suggested alterations. In this way, the lack of words might be a factor in the production of style regarding Fux, at least in this specific situation.
In order to avoid the type of confusion described by Fux, Tommie X has separated his different style practices by naming them differently; generally ‘Daniel’ signifies ordinary situations, while ‘Tommie X’ is related to more artistic expressions.\footnote{This manner is similar to the practice of Klara/Velma Voluptuous.} This is reminiscent of Leonora, who stipulates that since it was she (and not her male counterpart) who was approached as a possible participant in the study, the male name shouldn’t appear in this thesis. I meet Leonora both in and out of drag, but mostly, our conversations center on the style practices of her, and not of him. By employing this tactic, Leonora, as well as the other participants, are able to define the expectations of their appearances, differentiating the public sphere from the private.

During our conversations, Tommie X talks about this name separation, focusing especially on the connotations of a name as related to the expectations of others, when they hear that name. Since he doesn’t always work on an actual stage, but also as club host socializing with other club guests, there often occurs a blurring of the line between private and professional styles, and it is not always apparent what style is Daniel and what is Tommie X. The job as host is also in part a professional performance, but since it doesn’t take place on a stage he isn’t physically separated from the audience. In fact, the performance as club host is often centered on his interaction with the audience as appearing to be one of them, though in fact he isn’t, as he is paid to be there (in contrast to many of the guests, who instead have to pay to gain access to the club and his company).

He tells me he invented the name Tommie X a few years back, when he started a band together with a few friends, and it was initially articulated in relation to his stage persona. The story behind the name was a sort of modern fairy tale, he says, and he pictured the persona Tommie X as part of a group of “[…] Russian glue-sniffing street kids who were picked up by a manager in a limousine […]” and then placed on stage.\footnote{In Swedish: […] ryska limsniffande gatubarn som blev upplockade av en manager i en limousin […]} This kind of explanation is not unusual for Tommie X, and is similar to the imaginative stories Lady Oscar often tells about his outfits. I perceive the interlacing of fantasies and dreamlike narratives with the materiality of garments, in combination with different kinds of outfits, as adding more (and at times, unexpected) dimensions to the practice of wearing of garments, makeup and accessories.

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\footnote{This manner is similar to the practice of Klara/Velma Voluptuous.}
Tommie X tells me that he started using the alias ‘Tommie X’ on a more regular basis when socializing in the online-community Skunk. Gradually, people whom he met through the site started referring to him as Tommie. He would reply that his actual name was Daniel, but eventually came to realize that the different names were a good way of keeping distance to people. The ones who now call him Tommie are people who know, or rather know of him, on a more superficial level, while the ones who call him Daniel are closer friends. This demonstrates how the two names don’t actually operate as opposites, but instead describe different kinds of relations; with some he is Tommie X, with others Daniel. The name that figures in conversation designates the status of the relation. In this way, the difference in names is actually less related to different sartorial strategies and holds more of a social implication, and I perceive the names to create a distinction between primarily social, not aesthetic, categories.

The reference to Russian glue-addicted children is provocative, especially since it seems to be merely citing them as a source of fashionable inspiration, turning their misery into a stylish statement. This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that the hit that made the band famous, “Pro Ana Party Slamma”, seemed to promote anorexia nervosa as a way to stay fashionably thin. In many of our conversations, we touch on the matter of weight, and through the imagery conveyed by the pop song as well as the continual writings on his blog about weight loss, I come to understand thinness as a way of positioning the style of Tommie X as avant-garde; the celebration of unhealthy thinness in order to be fashionable signifies in this situation an emphasis on the interrelations between fashion, modernity and youth. Here it is apparent that the terms ‘fashion’ and ‘style’ aren’t operating as direct opposites, but actually may cite the same kind of references and in similar ways.

In her work *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity and Deathliness*, Evans has described (basing her empirical research mainly on 1990’s fashion) contemporary avant-garde fashion as a form of response to the

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193 The band was called Kitty on the Catwalk, and the song is accessible through http://www.myspace.com/kittyonthecatwalk/music/songs/pro-ana-party-slamma-24638444.

194 The look of Tommie X doesn’t follow actual high fashion-trends and rarely incorporates high fashion-garments. Consistently in our conversations, when I causally refer to current commodities of high fashion brands, Tommie X will think that I’m speaking of their more financially accessible beauty line products. At the same time he is knowledgeable of high fashion trends, and this miscommunication makes me realize that even though he is not a consumer of high fashion garments and accessories, he is nonetheless consuming fashion in its visual form, through magazines and online journals and websites.
traumas of Western twentieth century culture. This perspective is informed by Evans’ empirical material on high fashion, which in many ways is radically different from most of the situations in which the style of Tommie X is materialized, but nevertheless I see interesting parallels between her thoughts and this project’s empirical material. One possible understanding of Tommie X’s style practice, as articulated through Evans’ work, is that it functions as a kind of aesthetic scavenging; Tommie X uses the strained living situations of homeless children in Russia to enhance the conceptuality of his style, in this way adding to the subordination and power imbalances of East and West. Another perspective, also informed through Evans’ perspective on experimental fashion, is that the style of Tommie X operates as a reinterpretation of an echo of cultural trauma:

On the edge of discourse, of ‘civilisation’, of speech itself, experimental fashion can act out what is hidden culturally. And, like a neurotic symptom, it can utter a kind of mute resistance to the socially productive process of constructing an identity.\(^{195}\)

Basing my arguments on this quotation, I view the reference to Russian orphans, as well as the song “Pro Ana Party Slamma”, as a “neurotic symptom”. This perspective is strengthened by the presence of the limousine in Tommie X’s narrative, which I argue articulates an implicit understanding of how power distribution organizes the relations among the actors in the story. The narrative is thus not only about aesthetic scavenging, but is also a way of making visible economic inequalities, between countries (such as Sweden and Russia) as well as within societies (such as between the music manager and the glue-sniffing children). This act of articulation, formulated in the production of the name ‘Tommie X’, is enhanced by the organization of the name: The ‘X’ following ‘Tommie’ demonstrates the conceptuality of the persona while underlining the idea that the style is an artistic construct; a symptom of the fluidity and deconstructive processes often inherent in postmodern fashions and styles.

Tommie X operates in a very visual manner, creating many different styles and kinds of bodily practices. Through wigs, dresses, jeans, jewelry, chains around his neck, makeup, fake flowers in his hair and playful hats his appearance is constantly and very visibly changing. Towards the end of the period of gathering material, he begins experimenting with ways of arti-

ficially making his lips bigger, in ways reminiscent – though citing completely different references – of Fux when distorting and rearranging human forms. During my first interview with him, he claims to have six hundred photos of himself on Facebook, this way clearly demonstrating the importance of the visual aspect of the persona Tommie X. Online visibility is part of his sartorial practice; the apparent temporal and spatial flatness of internet offers a possibility to exist in many different forms, but simultaneously and seemingly in one place. When I ask him about the apparent diversity in styles visible in these photos, he answers:

I will probably become Peter Siepen when I’m forty, but that’s just something I have to live with. But it’s fun because it’s so very dead boring, that it’s what Sweden needs. I know that when I was a kid I thought that all of those people were the most fun, if you looked at a celebrity event, or if you looked at a reality show, or anything, a soap opera, and there was a character like Tanja in Tre Kronor who had trolls in her hair, or the one in the [TV show] Robinson who had dyed red hair… or XLNT Marc and Leila K at premieres among Pernilla Wahlgren-down jackets. You are drawn to it because it is so much fun. Because it is a ray of hope. It’s a cliché, but that’s how it is. You become happy by seeing such pretty things.

In this quote, the style of Tommie X represents a possibility to experiment with different looks, defined through by contrasting it with the supposed blandness of the Swedish mainstream. He operates with a dichotomous perception of Swedish style practices: the general blandness, represented in the quote by celebrity Pernilla Wahlgren, and the obvious exceptions to that

196 Peter Siepen is a Swedish celebrity known for his colorful and eccentric looks.
197 Robinson is the Swedish version of the reality show “Survivor”. What Daniel is doing in this quote is contrasting Swedish celebrities with strong personal looks, such as XLNT Marc and Leila K, with a more subdued celebrity look, represented by family entertainer Pernilla Wahlgren. Also worth noting is that he mixes fictional characters with real ones, not making any distinction between fact and fantasy, but instead focusing on aesthetic expressions.
In both national and international media discourses, contemporary Swedish fashion, often exemplified through street style-photos of people in Stockholm, has been conveyed as up-to-date and trend-conscious in a monochrome and conformist manner. In her book on contemporary Swedish fashion, Karin Falk has quoted fashion blogger Scott Schulman (known as the Sartorialist) who is reported saying that during Stockholm Fashion Week, “he could have shot the same kinds of clothes a thousand times, of beautiful, thin people in tight jeans, short trenchcoat and plimsoles”. Falk connects this simple and minimalist look to concepts such as wearability and function, in this way making the claim that Swedish fashion has been dominated by ideas of accessibility and democracy.

This statement is enforced by Emma Lindblad, who writes that in Swedish mainstream culture, conformity and homogeneity signify Swedishness; “a democratic fashion with low prices and thin and unisex-inspired [jeans]models connected to a particular kind of Swedish ethics…” Lindblad’s article is in this way closely connected to art historian Patrik Steorn’s research on Swedish unisex fashion during the second half of the twentieth century, when the Swedish monochrome, unisex and often ‘democratically’ priced look was considered an effect of the Swedish political system, constructed by the Social Democratic Party in the decades following the Second World War. Aesthetics and politics became interlinked in the Swedish functionalist fashion with its unisex-inspired garments.

The image of Swedish fashion as minimalist, functionalist and democratic is thus established both in media and as a popular discourse, and so is

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201 Patrik Steorn, “‘Men can be Attractive and a Little Sexy…’ Swedish Unisex Fashion in the 1960s and 1970s”, in *Nordic Fashion Studies*, eds. Peter McNeil and Louise Wallenberg (Stockholm: Axl, 2012), 19–36. Steorn has researched this field through the case study of the Swedish unisex-trend in the 1960s, linking the look to interesting ideological stances on gender equality. The correlation between Social Democratic politics and Swedish style qualities of comfort, neutrality and discretion are specifically outlined. This tradition continues to mark much of the contemporary fashion discourse in Stockholm, even though there of course is a distinct difference between media and popular culture discourse on fashion, and what people actually wear.
the link between Swedish style in general and Stockholm as a kind of ‘shop window’ or area of specific concentration for Swedish fashion. In my understanding, Tommie X attempts to contextualize the style of his persona as a form of opposition to this kind of media imagery, playing on cultural stereotypes of Swedishness as monochrome and functional, in this manner emphasizing the creativity of his own appearance, in the position of the avant-garde. However, the style of Tommie X is signified by a gender-blurred correlation between his male bodies and his often feminine outfits, and in this way, his style highlights that what is defined as ‘unisex-inspired’ is actually a fashion that adheres to a concept of gender-aligning bodies and garments. This again brings my thoughts to Evans’ text, as she writes:

However, if fashion is part of the ‘civilising process’, in the form of conventional and mainstream fashion design, it is also and equally, in its experimental and avant-garde manifestations, capable of providing a resistant and opposing voice to that process.²⁰²

I argue that the provocative style of Tommie X can be understood in several different ways. One perspective is to view this kind of practice as purely aesthetic; by referring to interesting motifs, Tommie X produces fascinating looks, often with intriguing stories and fantasies surrounding their belongings. This perspective includes articulating a romanticized image of anorexia nervosa and the rag-picking of the exposed situation of Russian orphans, two deeply controversial occurrences. Here, the complex position of Tommie X becomes evident; as a young, gender-blurring and artistic individual, he creates interesting looks by citing unusual and controversial style references, but as a citizen of the West, living a relatively comfortable life in Stockholm, using a glamorized image of Russian street children becomes ultimately a question of power and dominance, in which Tommie X has the final word. In this respect, Tommie X is far from the subversive avant-garde, even though his style in many ways highlights what, in Evans’ words, “is hidden culturally”, especially in regards to conservative views on gender inherent in the fashion of contemporary Stockholm.

However, while acknowledging this stance, there is another perspective as well, in which Tommie X’s style practice can be considered a form of resistance. This understanding of Tommie X is based on a reading of his style as conceptually situated and part of an artistic kind of network, through which the tactic of opposition takes the very shape of the occurrences that

are considered problematic and flawed. By incorporating disturbing themes, while simultaneously dislocating them and re-organizing them during this transformation into a new kind of network, the style of Tommie X operates according to the logic of the bricolage. Thus, what may initially appear as mere reiterations of colonial and fat-phobic perspectives can, through the concept of ‘bricolage’, add new meaning through the reinterpretation of problematic aesthetics.

Interaction and Categorization

The Verbalization of Vivianne

During the past few decades, Vivianne has moved between two continental countries and languages, while also traveling through different experiences of being a gendered and sexual individual, before eventually settling in Stockholm. This journey has brought new languages – Swedish being one – as well as a new sartorial practice, linked to her gradual process of becoming a woman. It has taken place on many levels, simultaneously, but all these levels are interconnected, and as her sense of femininity has evolved, so have her feminine sartorial practices. The network of events linking her to the sense of being female has gradually grown stronger, making the gendering process of interactions more important. This makes the traveling back to her former home country a particularly difficult process. The journey takes place not only between countries but also between genders, since she has to go back in time to when she was a man, and perform socially as a man again, when in her hometown (however, it is only when in this town she dresses like a man, in all other places, including when traveling in her former home country, she is dressed and acts like a woman).²⁰³

The emotional and existential journey during which she has slowly transformed into a woman began in her initial home country, which is thus her departing point: the point in time and space when she still dressed in male clothing, while also identifying as a man. This period was brief and existed only in her very youth; as she grew older, the realization that she wasn’t actually a man began to develop. It wasn’t until she had left the country that she began experimenting, gradually moving from seeing herself as a

²⁰³ Since the spring of 2011, she now lives as a woman full time, even when visiting her former hometown.
gay man to a transvestite, to a lesbian woman. During one of our conversations, Vivianne describes an incident taking place at a department store in her former home country, which “[…] made [her] woman’s heart happy, and that doesn’t happen that often in Sweden; that I was addressed as ‘lady’ […]. Vivianne had been dressed as a female, but worried that her beard would confuse the salesclerks, but “[…] without blinking, totally relaxed […],” the salesclerk had recognized her as a woman. Until the salesclerk had spoken, Vivianne says that she had not known if she were to be approached as a man or a woman; she did not know how she would be categorized by this unfamiliar other. The joy she describes shows that up until the moment where she knew she was considered female, she had been anxious that the clerk wouldn’t be able to read her correctly.

Sara Ahmed has written, inspired by the Butlerian notion of performativity, that “… bodies take the shape of repetition; we get stuck in certain alignments as an effect of this work”. It is because of this that Vivianne worries about being addressed as a woman or as man; her sense of being gendered is affected by how her body is categorized in conversation, and being wrongly addressed would therefore temporarily destabilize and dealign her from the repetitive act of becoming (and thus being) a woman.

Shortly thereafter, our conversation about her stay in her former home country continues, and Vivianne goes on to describe how her sartorial style functions in her old hometown:

What I have done so far is that I have signaled that I am queer. I’ve had my long hair, I haven’t used nail polish but I’ve made sure that my nails are a bit styled, and my ladies watch, I haven’t switched watches or anything. And when there have been comments from some older man about women and such, then I’ve made sure that he understands that I don’t identify with him but with the women. I’ve done stuff like that, but naturally I haven’t been there as a woman, socially.

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204 In Swedish: […] gladde mitt kvinnohjärta, och som inte händer så där jätteofta i Sverige, att jag blev tilltalad som ‘damen’ […] utan att blinka, helt avspänd […]  
206 In Swedish: Det som jag har gjort än så länge är att jag har signalerat att jag är queer. Jag har haft mitt långa hår, jag har inte haft nagellack men jag har sett till att naglarna är liksom lite stylade och så där, och min damklocka, jag har inte bytt klocka så. Och när det har kommit lite så här kommentarer från nån äldre man om kvinnor och sånt där, då har jag alltid sett till att han förstått att jag inte identifierar mig med honom utan med kvinnorna. Sånt har jag gjort, men jag har naturligtvis inte varit där som kvinna, socialt.
In the quote, Vivianne talks about one of her latest trips, during which she hasn’t completely acted as a man but has instead let some of her feminine accessories remain visible, while also gendered forms language have operated to distance her from an understanding of her as completely male. In the language of this country, many terms are gendered in ways they aren’t in Swedish, and when Vivianne speaks, she talks about herself in the feminine form. The relations between accessories, gender and speech become evident, demonstrating how these are interconnected through Vivianne’s refusal to acknowledge herself as male-identified in certain situations, particularly when engaged in conversations with older men. The reason for her trip was personal and difficult; her parents had grown old and had both developed dementia, and Vivianne returned to help organize their lives.

The feminine accessories she describes in the quote partially change the way her masculinity is produced, and display a more multifaceted gender position to the inhabitants of her former hometown. This is emphasized in the quote by her usage of “queer”; in Vivianne’s narrative the term categorizes and explains the way her hair, nails and watch potentially are perceived. The term also demonstrates the production of gender through sartorial practices; it becomes a way to make sense of the balancing act between the masculine clothes and the feminine position she takes through language. This is further enhanced when Vivianne describes her verbal interaction with different categories of people, particularly “some older man”, by which she means a type of individual who tries to position her as masculine through a dialogue about women.

What Vivianne describes in this part of the quote is how a verbal resistance to this positioning is carried out. While her sartorial practice – during this particular visit – produces masculine connotations (and she has been read through her overall sartorial practices as a man) her style opposes this labeling through the watch, nails, haircut and language.

I don’t consider the quote as a representation of an actual event, but rather as a summary of how she experiences going back in time, to a place she in many ways has left behind. When she goes there she is forced to retrace her steps, to produce a (to some extent) socially acceptable man. I believe that the reason Vivianne feels forced to present a masculine appearance against her own conviction is due to a number of reasons, all connected to the fact that her feminine practice has a very weak link to the context in which she has always been known as a man. Had not her parents been ill, she
wouldn’t have felt the need to return in a gender disguise, but the social context, she decided, was difficult enough without having to address the question of why she wore feminine garments.

Many actors in this environment expect her to produce a masculine appearance, and even though her new hometown of Stockholm holds many contrary factors, instead facilitating feminine expressions, the masculine connotations are more strongly related to the actors present in her old country. However, the way her watch is made visible, how her hair and nails are styled, together with the ways in which the feminine form operates in language, show that these relations are negotiable; when more actors from Stockholm are included into the context of her former hometown, the network which fosters the masculine connotations is successively challenged.

The journey she describes goes in a direction that is almost backwards in time, to a place Vivianne used to call home. This place is no longer completely familiar to her, and she is not recognizable to her former home in her current style. According to Ahmed, familiarity is an effect rather than a constant factor, shaped by how we relate to our surroundings, what objects are within reach, and for what duration of time. The sense of being at home, or being familiar, is thus a performative act. This sense is produced through actions meant to comfort and make us feel safe.\textsuperscript{207}

Vivianne has turned away from the place where she was born and grew up, to instead turn toward other places and ways of being. This way, she is no longer familiar with what she once was, but instead recognizes Stockholm, together with her femininity, as sites of familiarity and zones of comfort. This transition has taken place over many years, gradually shifting how she is situated in networks, allowing for a transformation of her masculine appearance into her current feminine. When she returns to her old hometown, and needs to become physically familiar with menswear again, she becomes ill at ease, the garments now appearing strange and uncomfortable.

\textit{Citing Gay Culture as Sartorial Reference}

There are many similarities but also strong differences between Vivianne’s narrative and Anthony’s perspective on matters of passing or being recognized as queer. I define Vivianne’s femininity as (despite her beard) ladylike

\textsuperscript{207} Ahmed (2006), 7.
and rather mainstream. Anthony’s sources of inspiration are more subcultural in character, and he explicitly cites the works of writers Jean Genet, Dennis Cooper and JT Leroy to explain his thoughts on dressing like a “[…] feminine man in makeup”. In these works, gay and queer masculinities are often described in terms of difficulties, as being marginalized in straight society.

When Anthony and I talk about the process of identifying as a queer man, Anthony expresses a conflicted position: even though he enjoys the safety of passing, he is also interested in causing confusion, making people uncomfortable and unsure of how to properly address him. Through an e-mail discussion, Anthony tells me that the reason he wants to create instability and uncertainty is connected to the cultural image of how feminine men are portrayed within subcultural writings; by connecting with their experiences, he would feel aligned with this particular culture.

Based on this, I understand the style production of Anthony as an assemblage containing fictional narratives of gay male culture; by citing the iconic works of Genet and Cooper, Anthony identifies himself as part of a larger network. In these works of literature, the issue of fitting in, of living a life in contrast with mainstream society is central, and thus this is also one of the questions Anthony dwells on.

Anthony spent one year living in London, and talks about the differences between London and Stockholm in terms of gender and style. In London, he says, gender differences are articulated, and being a feminine man in London created more confusion than in Stockholm, where, as pointed out earlier, many styles are gender neutral and unisex-inspired:

Anthony: I mean in Sweden I get so few comments, Swedes don’t say much generally, and in London girls dress so much more like in short skirts, and skirts overall, and they’re shorter, and it’s a lot easier to get attention there, and here, I don’t know what people are thinking, I think mostly that people keep their distance. I can imagine how it is, when you can’t place someone, when you’re afraid of saying something wrong, it can make you not want to approach someone.

Philip: That’s right.

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208 In Swedish: […] feminin, sminkad man.
209 Anthony’s story demonstrates that his style is perceived differently depending on context: In London, where the expectations of linear gender correlation between body and garment are more articulated, it becomes easier for him to express a gender-blurred style, where in Sweden, dominated by unisex silhouettes, it is more difficult for him to position himself as gender ambiguous.
Anthony: That it feels like that. The thing about the negative experience is that I have almost romanticized it a bit, I think it’s a bit embarrassing when you know that people have actually gotten into trouble, but still it’s something I can long for, to be seen...

What Anthony refers to in the quote is the sense of confirmation he experiences through the speech acts directed at him by others; he wants to know that others have noted his presence. In addition to this, he wants to be noticed in a certain way, reminiscent of how the fictional characters of the books he refers to are treated. This would distinctly connect his style to the aesthetics of the specific gay male subculture he is fascinated with. He knows that there is a discrepancy between the fantasy of being an outcast and the actual event of being ostracized from society, yet he wishes to create confusion and disturbances through his appearance; to have a slight feel of being an outsider, while not wanting to suffer the full consequences. Because of this, he claims to prefer London to Stockholm, since he perceives gendered aesthetics in England to be more dichotomous. The more conservative context in England makes it easier for him, through his style, to appear transgressive in a British setting. His style, though superficially the same in Stockholm and London, has different functions depending on context, and which other actors are present.

As someone who has experiences of being both physically assaulted and socially excluded due to my way of looking and acting in a non-normative manner, I agree with Anthony’s own insight regarding the problems of wishing to be considered an outcast. However, having grown up reading the same novels by Jean Genet and Dennis Cooper that Anthony refers to, I know how central the concept of being marginalized and defined as an outcast is to the construction of the gay subcultural narrative.

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210 In Swedish: Anthony: Alltså i Sverige så får jag så lite kommentarer, så svenskar säger inte så mycket överhuvudtaget, och sen så i London är det mer så, tjejer klär sig mycket mer så där korta kjolar, och kjolar överhuvudtaget, och så är de kortare, och allting är så här, mycket lättare att få uppmärksamhet där, och här, jag vet inte vad folk tänker, jag tänker mest att det möjligtvis känns som att det är [ohörbart], folk håller sig lite mer på avstånd. Att dom, jag kan tänka mig själv hur det är, när man inte kan placera nån, när man kanske är rädd för att säga nåt fel, det kan göra att man inte tar kontakt med nån.

Philip: Just det.

Anthony: Att det känns mer på det viset. Eh, alltså, den grejen på den här negativa upplevelsen det är väl något jag nästan har romantiserat lite grann, jag tycker det är lite pinsamt när man vet att folk verkligen har råkat illa ut, men det är väl ändå nånting som man kan längta efter för att bli sedd…
Novels, films and songs on this theme have gradually grown into a sort of informal canon; I consider the citation of these particular references as a common way to articulate belonging to this network. On a general level, the same system is recognized within most contexts; contemporary punks model their look on how they know that punks in the past have organized their style, emulating mohawks and studding leather jackets in ways they have seen in old pictures of original punks. The style Anthony attempts to materialize must be understood in this perspective; his desire to create confusion is part of a gay subcultural tradition. These citations are less immediate and not as easily recognizable as the practice of a safety pin through a cheek or bangs dyed green. This stylistic discretion is equally part of the style; being a feminine and/or gay man leads almost inevitably to harassment, both physical and verbal, and thus the style codes of this culture are often more subdued and less obvious than, for example, the punk look, which today often is considered as mainstream as preppy fashion, part of youth culture rather than a statement of subversion. This is the reason Anthony talks about harassment in connection to being a feminine man; it is part of the style traits of this particular gay male subculture.

Gay as the Exotic Other

One day I had a conversation with Tommie X regarding the same issues as Anthony had talked about, but from a slightly different perspective. In the following quote, Tommie X discusses how he has experienced the act of visiting places that are structured around other values than the ones present in contemporary Stockholm. In the places he describes, his sexual orientation as gay has become an essential variable regarding how others define him:

It’s really scary when you’re somewhere that isn’t Stockholm, that it’s even an issue, and that’s how it is everywhere. Suddenly, you’re this big thing. I used to go to festivals in the summers and meet a lot of hillbillies, and they’re so fascinated with me being gay, alternatively, they’re pissed off at you. Because it’s so strange, it’s not like people do that in Stockholm, like, “fuck, are you gay?! God how exciting”. Like that.

I would think it was really uncomfortable if someone did that.\textsuperscript{213}

Here Tommie X attempts to show how different actors create different pre-requisites for interaction, which then subsequently will hold different effects for the production of meaning. When he leaves the environment where he feels at home – Stockholm – he has to stop interacting with the familiar and instead attach himself to unknown and strange actors. These have characteristics he is unaccustomed to, and he becomes unsure regarding how to communicate with others in this new context. He claims that usually in Stockholm his sexual orientation isn’t a defining factor. What, according to him, usually goes unnoticed becomes at the music festivals of vital importance, and impacts how others label him. The festival-people he temporarily interacts with react with curiosity and/or animosity, either way thinking he is a foreign element. This makes Tommie X in turn exoticize them, categorizing them as different from the people he normally meets with in Stockholm, derogatively defining them as “hillbillies”, by which he implies that they are people with rurally orientated life patterns, lacking insight into urban lifestyles.

I argue that this kind of language creates a dichotomy between places and people, where the rural is defined as being unfamiliar with homosexual practices, and Stockholm is constructed as sophisticated and worldly. After having created this divide between rural and urban, Tommie X goes on to reflect on what would happen if the two worlds were to be blurred, and rural people were to come to the city, his sexual orientation continuously constructed as an important signifier in his everyday interactions. This time, the rural is made out to be a menace, threatening the urban tolerant value system.\textsuperscript{214}

According to this quote, what constructs differences in places is not the sexual orientation per se, but how it functions as a communicative signifier in interactions with others. This separates his narrative from Vivianne’s, whose femininity becomes less defined when she travels back to her home.


\textsuperscript{214} The dichotomy of urban tolerance and rural phobia as part of a HBTLQ cultural discourse has been questioned and analyzed by Judith Halberstam, particularly in her chapter “The Brandon Archive”, (2004), 22–46.
country. Where Vivianne adapts to the expectations of others, Tommie X’s sexuality is not downplayed and instead he engages in overtly queer aesthetics also at places where people react with aggressiveness and hostility. One of the differences is regarding how they travel; Tommie X merely traveling from a city to the rural, while Vivianne also, in a way, travels in time, back to a point in time and place she has once left behind. But if I take a closer look at what Tommie X is saying about the events where he was labeled gay, I notice that what he takes offence at is the meaning others put into the term; ‘gay’ functioning as a device to label him exotic. What Tommie X articulates is actually a sense of discomfort at being categorized as divergent, defined by a set of ideas articulated by others. Denise Riley writes, based on the act of being positioned as a woman, about this process:

> [...] a car slows down, a shout comments on your expression, your movement; or there's a derisively hissed remark from the pavement. You have indeed been seen 'as a woman' ... But again, the first thought here, surely, is not, 'Now, humiliatingly, I've become a woman', but rather that you have been positioned antagonistically as a woman-thing, objectified as a distortion.\(^{215}\)

In the interaction with others, both Vivianne and Tommie X describe a sense of discomfort at being classified and labeled. This sensation is not only regarding what they are being classified as, but is equally about the effects of the labeling-act itself; to be considered a thing for others to respond to is something they both wish to avoid.

**The Right of Interpretation**

A few of the conversations I had with Steffy also touched on issues of speech, context and clothing. Steffy grew up in Sweden but was born in Bosnia, where he still has friends and family. He travels there on a regular basis, and must at those times, in a manner similar to what Vivianne describes, consider what constraints the change in context places on his sartorial practices. This is also related to how he defines himself verbally; how his style is articulated through words. Different terminologies are used in different contexts, and these differences force alterations in his ways of act-

ing and speaking. During one of our conversations, Steffy and I discuss the issues of how he categorizes himself in the context of his former home country. In Swedish situations, he often uses the term ‘queer’, but since this isn’t a term commonly known in Bosnia, he compromises and will instead respond affirmatively if someone asks if he is ‘gay’.

Steffy goes on to describe a situation that took place when he visited his former home country in the summer of 2008. After a night out, a man is provoked by his style and asks Steffy if he is gay. Steffy contemplates answering instead that he is queer, but realizes that the man wouldn’t understand the terms as distinct from one another, and thus agrees to be labeled gay. The question is not regarding how he defines himself, but how he would agree to be defined by this other person, and therefore the term ‘gay’ is what he had to ascribe himself to. ‘Queer’ is lacking in social characteristics in this conversation and is therefore of little use, denoted from signifier to a mere word, almost devoid of meaning. ‘Gay’, however, has specific meaning to the man who asks the question, and when Steffy confirms, he also validates that the man’s reading of his outfit as ‘gay’ is correct. This infuriates the man, who doesn’t wish for gay men to be present. The man then asks others to step in to create a barrier between himself and Steffy, allegedly so Steffy wouldn’t be hurt by his fury, but in actuality setting up a physical divide between the two and a definite stop to their conversation.

What the man initially had reacted to was Steffy’s appearance. Even though Steffy had attempted to fit in, he had obviously failed. Citing the work of Mary Douglas, Entwistle applies Douglas’ anthropologically developed ideas in a sartorially oriented context. She states that,

[i]f […] the boundaries of the body are dangerous, it is therefore no surprise that clothing and other forms of adornment, which operate at these ‘leaky’ margins, are subject to social regulation and moral pronouncements. It is no surprise either to find individuals concerned with what to hang at these margins.\textsuperscript{216}

What occurred in the example of Steffy and the anonymous man is not merely a verbal disagreement, but a blatant reaction to a sartorial style deemed inappropriate for the context Steffy was in. This is in alignment with Entwistle’s continuation of this line of reasoning, when she claims that the “the

body becomes a symbol of its cultural location”. When Steffy travels from one context to another, he thinks he can easily perform a sartorial transition as well, but since it’s more complicated to transform the sartorial imprint than a geographical location, a collision occurs. The clothes he had considered neutral when packing his bags in Sweden become, in a Bosnian context, unconventional and odd.

During our conversation about this incident, Steffy tries to analyze what had led up to the violent discussion, where the question of his sexual orientation had acted as the triggering factor for the man’s fury. Steffy’s appearance, and the following categorization of him as gay, provoked the man so that others had to step in and physically separate the two. This is uncomfortable for Steffy, particularly as it parallels his experiences as a child, when he constantly worked at fitting in, at not looking or acting differently from the other children. He tells me of how the queer signifiers of his style had been removed, and his style adapted to more normative ideals. This process of adjustment brings back memories from his childhood, leaving him with a sense of powerlessness; he has tried to adapt but this queerness is still partially discernable, creating turbulence in some situations.

It is obvious that the act of categorizing Steffy as gay is related to his looks. Before the question is asked, he had been unaware of the connotations present in the outfit, but the violent reaction tells him that his attempt to blend in had failed; the ‘gayness’ of his sartorial practice is still visible enough to bother the drunken man. When placed in the category of being gay, he doesn’t know how to respond or act, and thus he remains silent, letting instead the man verbally abuse him. His silence, as well as the subsequent outburst from the other man, is a direct consequence of the labeling of him as gay. The act of naming him gay silences him, while simultaneously giving voice to the gay-basher. In order to better explain these incidents, I turn to Ahmed:

For bodies that are not extended by the skin of the social, bodily movement is not so easy. Such bodies are stopped, where the stopping is an action that creates its own impressions. Who are you? Why are you here? What are you doing? Each question, when asked, is a kind of stopping device: you are stopped by being asked the question, just as asking the question requires that you be stopped.218

I argue that one of the reasons it is problematic for Steffy to be called gay is because it is another actor who decides it *for* him; the word is placed on him as a sort of restriction, marking what he could and could not do. This kind of interchange is familiar also to others, who have learned to employ certain tactics when this occurs. For example, when Vivianne is refused a sex-reassignment surgery, and her biologically male body parts are (against her will) left intact, she decides to name them differently, to give them names according to her own liking. This was a practice she had begun already before the refusal, but became even more articulated after, thus circumventing the regulations set up by medical expertise.

Makode, on the other hand, has developed a different tactic, in which certain words and phrases with strong political connotations operate to describe his own appearance. Much of his art deals with issues of ethnicity and the exoticization of blackness in Western culture, and the words “negro” and “mulatto” when talking about himself or his friends correlate this practice.\(^\text{219}\) In Sweden, these terms have gone from being part of a general but unreflected upon way of describing black ethnicities to now rarely being employed outside explicit racist terminology. However, Makode doesn’t limit himself to charged terms regarding ethnicity, but also words such as “whorish” and “tranny prostitute” appear concerning his style.\(^\text{220}\) Through these words, he becomes connected with a type of femininity often described disparagingly, similar to the process of attempting to reclaim the words “negro” and “mulatto” through their association in new networks.

When Makode speaks, these terms become interlaced with other words, appearing on the same level as these, but with very different connotations. This kind of mixing of words with different characteristics creates a confusion of the actual meaning of the terms, as they simultaneously are blended with, while also being contrasted to, ordinary and mundane words. These double movements create a disturbance in Makode’s speech. During our conversations, this tactic leaves me, as the other person involved in the discussion, unsure of my right to the same terminology. It is particularly unsettling since the terms are usually applied to refuse someone agency, while they now have the opposite function, that of demonstrating that Makode is in control of how he is described. The fact that I am white, and that I during these particular conversations probably not would be consid-

\(^\text{219}\) In Swedish: “neger” and “mulatt”.
\(^\text{220}\) In Swedish: “hörigt”. “Tranny prostitute” was pronounced in English by Makode.
nered to be “whorishly” dressed, makes me uncertain of the degree to which I may reflect the terms.

For the interaction between Makode and me to operate smoothly, I had to understand the meaning of these terms in specific conversations. What do they signify? And why is this an important part of Makode’s style practice? In an attempt to reach clarity, I look at the detailed level of the conversation, and notice that it is when describing the specificities of the style – both the actual look as well as the tactile feel of it – that these terms appear most often. This way, it is more than an ironic play with words; it is a politically charged categorization of his sartorial practice, as well as that of his friends:

Makode: Yes but in the summer you can dress like a tranny prostitute and in the winter it’s more practical.
Philip: Mm. But you’d rather look like a tranny prostitute all year round?
Makode: All year round, yes.
Philip: Mm. So what is it you like about that, then?
Makode: Ah, it’s nice, and it’s so much more fun when everyone runs around and is a bit half-naked.221

It is noticeable in this example how the term is introduced and then picked up by me, in order to make Makode expound on the matter. This is done through affective terms, linking the concept “tranny prostitute” to a physical sensation, where it is pleasurable and fun to be semi-clad in a social gathering. The terms are as such therefore evaluative while also functioning as a sort of labeling-device, not regarding transsexual prostitutes per se, but of Makode’s sartorial style, where “half-naked” is a key concept. However, the semi-clad condition, as understood through the connotations of the term, makes me understand it as dealing with feminine garments on men’s bodies. This in turn elucidates the concept’s function also as an actor in the creation of a specific type of gender-blurred sartorial categories.

221 In Swedish: Makode: Jo men på sommaren kan man klä sig som en så här tranny prostitute och på vintern så är det mycket mer praktiskt.
Philip: Mm. Men du vill hellre se ut som en tranny prostitute året om?
Makode: Året om, ja.
Philip: Mm. Vad är det du gillar med det då?
Makode: Ah, det är skönt, och alltså det är mycket roligare när alla springer omkring och är sådär lite halvnakna.
Labels and Appearances

Defining Fux

One day in the summer of 2010, Fux and I meet over coffee to discuss the details of his professional career. Fux tells me that he recently has gone through boxes of old press clips, trying to map out the characteristics of his jobs so far. The first word he had spotted among his clips is ‘freak’, which in subsequent clippings was more specifically defined as ‘drag-freak’. When the two terms are merged, a definition of drag that goes beyond a purely gendered form is created, referring instead to a more general subversion of human expressions. The conventional drag procedure of staging feminine characteristics through the appropriation of archetypical female styles becomes, in this process, subordinate to the subverting of human features.

Even though Fux wishes to expand the parameters of what drag as a category can entail, he doesn’t want to be perceived as critical to conventional drag culture, and claims to be on good terms with others, more traditional drag queens, within the drag scene. Instead, he wants to question the limitations placed on the drag queen by others. ‘Drag queen’ and ‘actor’ are two epithets which appear to describe Fux’s professional life, but he says that the latter is always in danger of being engulfed in the context of the former, especially since his performances as drag queen seem to overrule his performances as an actor.

To exemplify, he tells the story of when an actor colleague named him as drag queen; the connotations of that epithet were so strong that the other people in the conversation stopped seeing him as a professional actor, to instead only view him as a drag queen. After that, he remained a drag queen in the eyes of the others, and no words he could find were potent enough to override the connotations of the drag queen he had been defined as.

What Fux especially points to in this scenario is that when he is named drag queen, he is simultaneously labeled a gay man. The two are not strictly synonymous, but are nevertheless inextricably linked. As Fux states, when he is named drag queen, he is revealed as someone feigning being to be an actor; he becomes simply a gay man longing for the glamour of the stage, of being the object of the audience’s adoring eyes. He is thus not only pretending to be an actor, but also simulating that he should be an actual man, which
he subsequently is exposed as not being, through the categorization of him as gay:

And behind this mask of masculinity, then, that I’m wearing, there is a woman, in gold lamé, just waiting. I mean, do you see, it’s completely absurd. It means that this drag show-artist is so stuck onto you that you can never rid yourself of it, you can never get rid of it. Everything that you add, everything you work with, it becomes just something added on the outside. It becomes fiction. Because in reality you’re a drag show-artist. Deep down, inside.222

Since Fux’s own name is part of his professional performances, he is unable to avoid being seen as the woman in gold lamé; she shares his name, and they are in some ways one and the same. What this demonstrates to me is the force imbedded in the term drag queen, as it spills over into other words in its close proximity. As soon as those words had been uttered, Fux is positioned as gay and effeminate. Fux believes it to be the strong charge inherent in the term that hinders the development of more innovative drag; people who become associated with the term are subsequently constantly defined by it, unable to break free from its confining forces. There is little room for artistic ambitions within the space given to the drag queen; she is not an artist but simply an attention-seeking gay man, stating the sexual orientation of the drag queen to be implicitly gay. When Fux is named ‘gay’ he thus becomes that name, with all of its characteristics. Similar to the incident concerning Steffy in Bosnia, the term operates, in the words of Ahmed, as a kind of “stopping device”, limiting Fux’s position in the described interaction.223

During our conversation, Fux emphasizes the fact that the master suppression technique employed by his colleague stems from a feminization of his professional role. By linking him with a typically gay professional category, he is removed from the category of professional actors to the margins, to the amateurs. Butler has stated, on the topic of the postmodern subject, that “the subject is constituted by power, that power does not cease at the moment the subject is constituted, for that subject is never fully constituted,

but is subjected and produced time and again”. Applied to the situation Fux was in, I state that it is clear that he wasn’t made gay or positioned subordinate by the articulation of the words ‘drag queen’, but that a discourse in which the gendered distribution of power was already in place. By naming him drag queen, and in this manner emasculating him, he became, for that moment, a gay man, but this process of becoming was enabled by an already existing discourse. Normative networks regulate performative acts, and gender expressions are materialized through existing conceptions. In this situation, Fux was subordinated through the act of categorization; the straight man verbally defined Fux as the Other, as feminine (and thus inferior) in relation to his own hegemonically positioned masculinity.

**Articulating Gender and Sexuality in Stockholm Queer Clubs**

Late one evening in December 2008, I visit queer club Ficks, located in the Södermalm club venue *Marie Laveau*, housed in the basement, separate from the restaurant and bar above ground. It is difficult to get a general overview of the place since there are a number of rooms, interconnected through a long and dwindling corridor. In one end, there is a large room with a bar along one side and a number of small couches and coffee tables along another. It is crowded and hard to move freely; people everywhere, socializing, dancing and drinking. It’s dark and the techno music is loud, obscuring people’s faces and drowning out their words.

At the end of the corridor is spacious room, with a DJ booth and dance floor. The place is full of expectant guests, most of them turned toward a small stage. There, dressed in black lingerie, made in shiny, synthetic material, Makode stands. Makode is tall, his hair carefully done up; legs clothed in red stay-ups show under his minuscule skirt. On his feet is a pair of black sneakers. He appears giddy, in the process of conducting what he calls a “whore-tombola-lottery” where a few members of the audience stand a chance of winning a night with one of the men lined up in a silent row be-

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225 Butler (2006), 198.

226 At the time, Ficks was housed at a nightclub called *Marie Laveau*, but later on, it moved to Fredsgatan 12, where it became part of the club network F12.

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hind him.\textsuperscript{227} In contrast, the men are fully clothed in jeans and T-shirts. I am standing by myself in the crowd, facing the stage, part of the event but at the same time not. Many of the other guests seem to know each other well and there is a sense of familiarity in the room that I am, as a temporary visitor at Ficks, excluded from.

In many other environments, the naming of people as ‘whores’ would by all means have been viewed as offensive and deeply controversial (and many would argue that the same effect is obtained also when carried out at a queer club). I perceive the play with words, as well as the staging of the men being rented out to the winners of the tombola-lottery, as partially operating as a trivialization of the many problems regarding prostitution. At the same time, I understand the effectiveness of charged concepts in discussions regarding notions of what is prohibited and what is allowed. The articulation of an aesthetic generally considered vulgar, while subtly questioning the laws concerning buying and selling sex, alters the meaning of the terms in this particular place and point in time. The club context creates a significant distance to the actual meaning of the term and its practices, especially since the bodies displayed on stage are not perceived to be actual prostitutes, but part of a performance. Makode’s sartorial practice operates in relation with the two words “whore” and “tombola” together with the actual tombola-lottery on stage, this way creating the conceptual and sometimes uncomfortable, disturbing place the club Ficks sets out to be.

In their study on fashion and femininity, Evans and Thornton commented on the value of feminine styles by men in club environments. They claimed that even though cross-dressing holds a subversive quality, femininity often appears “colonized” by cross-dressing men, who “sometimes reinforced a stereotype of femininity, rather than upsetting preconceptions of gender”.\textsuperscript{228} While agreeing with the idea that Makode’s sartorial style that night played on a stereotypical image of femininity and gay male culture, I nevertheless also see the event as an exploration of issues of masculinities and power. Even though Ficks is a queer club, the venue Marie Laveau, where the club is held, holds mainstream connotations, and the clientele that evening was mixed.\textsuperscript{229} The guard at the door informed everyone who wished to enter that it was a queer club, and I noticed that this made a few people upset, not wanting to socialize with gay men but nevertheless wanting to

\textsuperscript{227} In Swedish: Hortombola.
\textsuperscript{228} Evans and Thornton (1989), 44.
\textsuperscript{229} The term ‘mixed’ refers to the fact that some visitors came for Ficks, others for Marie Laveau, not knowing that the venue that evening housed a queer club.
spend the night at this particular venue. Because of this, Makode was continuously exposed to potential threats in regards to his dress practice. This potential was further highlighted when, after the club closed, Makode decided to change into jeans and a black monochrome shirt before leaving the club, in order to avoid being assaulted on his way home. The outfit that had elevated his status inside the club would have made him a target for violence and assault outside of it, the same way that his definition of the event as a “whore-tombola-lottery” can be considered as both upsetting and reinforcing stereotypical interpretations of gendered relations between dominant and subordinate types of gendered practices.

During the time of this study, Anthony never visited Ficks. However, he did attend several other queer clubs in Stockholm, such as Mums Mums and a few of the events that took place at the queer feminist venue the Headquarter (in Swedish: Högkvarteret). In our conversations on his experiences of these visits, Anthony states that his main objection regarding gay and queer places is that many gay and queer clubs are organized through gender distinction; gay male clubs often marked by schlager music and mainstream ways of dressing, while queer feminist clubs are dominated by butch lesbians. Not wanting to be mistaken for a butch lesbian, and without romantic and sexual desires for women, Anthony found the queer venues difficult, while at the same time – being biologically female – not fitting in at the gay male clubs.

For some time, he enjoyed Mums Mums, a queer club that claims to be inspired by the more eclectic London scene. There, he could enjoy himself without being ignored for being a feminine gay man (otherwise a common problem at misogynist gay clubs) or mistaken for a butch woman (deeply problematic for a transsexual man). He says he misses the “[…] decadent mysteriousness […]” of more varied scenes, which he associates with more urban places than Stockholm.230

In Anthony’s opinion there is a difference between how queer culture is organized in Stockholm versus how it is in London. He associates the lack of more ambiguous clubs in Stockholm with a widely asserted political aim articulated within Swedish gay society of wanting to assimilate with straight culture, rather than maintaining and exploring differences. In our subsequent e-mail correspondence, Anthony returns to this matter, now stating explicitly his point. He says that during the time he lived in Stockholm, his sartorial style required a more conservative context in order to be deciphered. His

230 In Swedish: […] det här dekadenta mystiska […]

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style demanded him to be fully clothed, in school uniforms, long-sleeved shirts and ties. This kind of appearance was not appreciated in the mainstream gay clubs, where the majority of the others guests wore either tank tops or showed off their naked torsos. Also, looking flamboyant is not always appreciated in queer feminist clubs, where he claims that the pressure to adhere to specific (and often butch) dress codes is equally strong. For effect, Anthony gives me an example of where his sartorial style would have had proper effect:

[...]

Imagine I had shown up in my boy school-uniform with blue eye shadow at some men’s club in Cambridge 1932 where everyone wears tweed? Or, more distinctly, at a contemporary club with those ideals. What’s the point in playing Bosie when there’s no Wilde? 231

Yet again, Anthony cites strong literary references to make his point regarding sartorial matters. This demonstrates his aspiration to seen as part of a society of femininely dressed men; the references function to position his style in relation to the literary and sartorially famous Lord Alfred Douglas, nicknamed Bosie, and his lover Oscar Wilde.

Anthony’s observation regarding the regulations of Swedish queer contexts has a strong parallel to Simmel’s article on the paradoxical character of modern fashion. In the text, Simmel argues that fashion holds a twofold function: the simultaneous generalization and differentiation of individuals. Mutual employment of sartorial practices binds people together, making them relate to others through the act of recognition. Class, gender and lifestyle categories are separated through divergent practices of dress. At the same time, fashion is used to distinguish the individual from the group. Thus, fashion has the ability to produce group affiliation while concurrently providing space for expressing individual features. 232

Applying Simmel’s conclusions to Anthony’s experiences, it appears that the sartorial styles of gay, lesbian and queer clubs are organized in similar ways to their straight counterparts, operating in paradoxical patterns of conformity and individuality. Simmel’s observation is echoed by Butler, who notes on a more general level that, “[h]eterosexuality does not have a

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231 In Swedish: [...] tänk om jag hade dykt upp i min pojkskoleuniform med blå ögonskugga på någon herrklubb i Cambridge 1932 där alla bär tweed? Eller rättare sagt en nutida klubb med de idealen. Vad är det för poäng med att leka Bosie när det inte finns någon Wilde?

monopoly on exclusionary logics”.

Even if Anthony’s style follows a queer pattern, it adheres to codes that are irrelevant at the venues he visits, and therefore he has difficulty in establishing connections, of finding a ‘Wilde’ to his ‘Bosie’. The similarities between how mainstream fashion and queer styles operate are obvious, thus the two systems should not be considered opposites but as organizationally corresponding.

Summary

Through the acts of naming, labeling and interpellating, style expressions are performed and produced, and in these constant acts of production, new meaning is added and former connections lost, as the repetition of acts is never identical, but always slightly shifted. How people are labeled impacts the gendered meaning of their style, as well as determines what constraints are placed on their possibilities for self-expression. Sartorial styles are determined through the gendering of bodies and, in turn, gender is to a large extent constituted in language.

I argue that this process is defined by strong sets of constraints, and the articulation of gender through speech acts and the production of sartorial styles are highly regulated through different forms of interactions, of varying extent, degree and longevity. One major concern is not merely what is said, or how, but in which context, and between what kind of actors. Spatiotemporal variables thus define and categorize the articulation of words and the materialization of sartorial styles.

Language can operate as a form of orientation device, which is made apparent through the case study of Anthony, who attempts to express himself in a manner that places him beyond a normative understanding of gender. At the same time, language can operate as a stopping device, exemplified through a case study of Tommie X, who was called ‘gay’ primarily as a way of marking him an outcast, an Other, defined and delimited by this label. In this respect, words may be both social, in the way that they unite and bring together, as well as anti-social, in how they separate and isolate. In both cases, words are interlaced with the sartorial, producing gendered versions of style through the combination of speech acts and sartorial practice. For Tommie X it is not, contrary to Anthony, about how he labels himself, but instead of how his appearance makes others speak to and of him. The label-

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233 Butler (1993), 112.
234 This line of thought is inspired directly by comments made by Ulrika Dahl during my final seminar in June, 2012.
ing of him as gay is a reaction to how his style of dressing is categorized as not fitting with the normative in the context of certain music festivals, which makes him in turn label the other festival visitors in a derogative manner. This dialogue, ongoing through both the sartorial and the verbal, taking place at festivals and during the interview I conduct with him, concerns a struggle of power regarding who has the right to label, categorize and appraise, and with what effects.

In this chapter, Vivianne travels not only between two sartorial genders but also between continents and languages. Swedish is not as strongly gendered as her native language, and therefore her gender is communicated differently in the two contexts, verbally speaking. In her original language, it is possible for her to explicitly be defined as female through the linguistic position she speaks from, and in this way, the words she uses in this language enhances an understanding of her gender identity project in opposition with the general gendered connotations of what she wears during this stay. This shows that language and garments needn’t be in correlation but actually at times are part of different networks, disconnected from one another and engaged in a struggle over the right of interpretation. The feminine forms of language available to Vivianne in this situation were a way out of the confining masculine sartorial practices she had felt forced to wear, and operated thus as a form of escape out of the clothes that no longer fitted her.

Thus, language can stake out new directions and open up new potentials for producing appearances. By adopting the already existing name of a fictional character, Lady Oscar implements into his own story a narrative of someone else, and this combination of experiences enhances his explorative journey through styles and aesthetic expressions. In particular, it helps guide him through the limiting experience of being bounded to a set number of options in regards to being male, and creates instead new – albeit temporary – opportunities. In a similar manner, the development of names from Blanche Neige to Velma Voluptuous demonstrates a flexibility concerning the naming of styles; when the style is altered, the name changes. This instability is aligned with the feminist practice of Klara, informed by performative theory, and thus, this name change is also partially political, as it demonstrates the volatility of gendered bodies. Interestingly, the name Klara remains the same, which shows that there are different prerequisites for the two styles, making Klara more determinedly durable than the others.

As exemplified by Tommie X, style may imitate and cite fashion references but is defined also by its lack of organized connections with the fashion industry. The empirical material is characterized by a lack of discussion
of styles in relation to seasonally defined trends; instead subcultural codes will determine what signifiers are important, and how they should be incorporated into the larger networks. However, similar to fashion, style is performatively executed, related to the performance of repetitive actions taking place in certain patterns in specific contexts. Also, the practice of articulating distinction through the sartorial is similar between fashion and style discourses.

Words are merely one of many types of actors involved in style production. They interact with one another, as well as with bodies, thoughts, places and garments, creating a kind of – more or less durable or transitory – network. I concur with the Latourian notion that words constitute only a small part of the communication taking place, and that language needs to be understood in relation to other forms of expression.\textsuperscript{235} Words that describe our lives bring us forward; but when words are added to each other, they act as performatative actors, engaged in the production of a series of events, in this way both outlining as well as taking part in the situations that are being outlined. As writer Toni Morrison put it during her Nobel prize speech in 1993; “[w]e die. That may be the meaning of life. But we do language. That may be the measure of our lives”.\textsuperscript{236} In these brief sentences, Morrison summarizes the function language holds in our lives. Ways of speaking and interacting verbally function as orientation devices, and together with the materialities of bodies and garments, words help interconnect all kinds of different actors, creating associations and relations for longer or shorter durations of time.

4. EXPLORING STOCKHOLM: 
THE WHERESES AND WHENES OF 
SARTORIAL PRACTICES

Introduction

Stockholm – in the shape of an actual site but also as an imagined or emotional space – is a forceful variable in this investigation. In this chapter, I investigate the importance of context when producing sartorial practices: how differences and variations in time and space can influence the materialization of a style. Similar to, and also closely interrelated with, the ways in which sartorial styles are ever changing, so is the city itself constantly shifting, evolving into something other than it was moments before. There is no way of separating space from time; the two concepts are interlaced with one another. Andy Merrifield emphasizes the importance of stating the semantic difference between the more general term ‘space’ and the specificity of ‘place’. Merrifield writes that “[t]he space of the whole thus takes on meaning through place; and each part (i.e. each place) in its interconnection with other parts (places) engenders the space of the whole”. Here, Merrifield focuses on the processual character and flows of interaction between many different parts, which is an important reminder of how time and space define each other as part of the same phenomenon, and that one is impossible to comprehend without the other.

According to Butler, time is what constitutes the possibility of “stylized repetition of acts”, thus stating that all acts are performed through an already


set framework of norms and beliefs. This is relatable to how Latour defines the ‘network’ of actor-network theory, claiming that the network has a transformative quality; when an event is executed through a network, this impacts the meaning of things, which becomes altered. By combining these two perspectives in the understanding of the spatiotemporal variables of style production, I consider the question of where and when sartorial styles come into being to be an inherent part of the production process. To explain, I will begin with an example told to me by Fux, in one of our conversations on his thoughts on living in Stockholm:

I love to bump into, I remember when [the amusement park] Gröna Lund had a few of these maniacs who ran around in these outfits a few years back, and I lived in Djurgården in Djurgårdsstan, and then I passed through Lilla Allmänna Gränd, on my way to the ferry to go to work. And then I met, in the alley, two of these creatures, and they walked with stilts on both legs and arms. They were like large four-legged, animal-ish creatures with big thorns on their heads and they had some kind of mask over their faces, not the ugly Venetian kind but these were, just sort of holes made for the eyes. And in really strong colors. And the suits covered the stilts. And they came like giant spiders. And I was so affected by this, I was just standing and I had tears in my eyes and... I love this. I love this so much that I… Because it is like you step into another dimension and it is real, even though it isn’t. I love it.

In the quote, Fux describes what he perceives as a potential alteration of the place he was in, a momentary shift in how the city is organized. The crea-

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241 In Swedish: Jag älskar att träffa på, jag kommer ihåg när Gröna Lund hade nåra såna här galningar som sprang omkring i såna här outfits för nåra år sen, och jag bodde på Djurgårn i Djurgårdsstan, och då gick jag genom Lilla Allmänna Gränd, på väg till färjan och skulle jobba, och då träffade jag på i gränden två av de här varelserna, och dom gick med styltor på både ben och armar. Som var som stora fyrbenta, djuraktiga saker med stora taggar på huvet och de hade nän form av masker i ansiktet, som inte var så här fula venetianska utan de var så här, det var bara hål för ögonen, typ. Och i väldigt starka färger, liksom. Och dräkterna täckte styltorna också, liksom. Och dom kom som jättelika spindlar. Och jag, jag blev så himla drabbad av sånt, så jag blev bara ståendes och liksom fick tårar i ögonen och… jag älskar sånt. Jag älskar sånt så mycket att jag… För det är som att man kliver in i en annan dimension och att det är på riktigt, fast det ändå inte är det. Jag älskar det.
tures he describes had been sent out to advertise the amusement park *Gröna Lund*, but the commercial intent behind the performance is irrelevant to Fux. Instead, what he considers important is the potential alteration of the site where the encounter takes place. When Fux says that he “love[s] […] that it is like you step into another dimension” he is referring to what happens when a place is overtaken by unexpected practices. Here, the instability of what otherwise might be considered seemingly solid – streets, houses, parks – is made apparent through the highly transient presence of a few odd actors. Connotations of places may shift depending on what occurs, just as, according to Merrifield, the actors themselves are defined by the physical and geographical materiality of the place.²⁴²

In the meeting between Fux and the creatures, there exists a possibility for him to define this shift in reality; a transgression takes place and the imaginary and absurd unexpectedly holds a place in central Stockholm. At the same time, this reaction is an effect of Fux’s interest in subversive aesthetics and is not the only possible interpretation of the event. Nevertheless, it shows how Fux’s perception of what occurs around him is influenced by past experiences and preferences, in this way partially conflating time and space.

In this chapter, I will address the importance of context in the production of sartorial style. The first section, “Regulations in Public”, deals with interactional regulations in public parts of the city (as well as of other places), while the next section, “Fiction and Fantasy”, explores how the blurred boundaries of what is real and what is fictional can function as operational devices in the everyday organization of sartorial practices. Explicitly, I look at the contextual importance of these occurrences. After that, “F¹² and the Case of Fashionable Ficks” begins the exploration of how certain sartorial styles can be used as a kind of capital within mainstream economic systems, which is a theme I continue to investigate in the section that follows, “Fashion, Style and Cultural Capital”. The chapter ends with a description of how certain clubs function as a kind of spatial pocket in the city, called “Blondie and Blackie, Kinks and Queens”, after which a brief summary concludes the chapter.

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Regulations in Public

*Vivianne Goes for a Walk*

Vivianne’s place of residence is situated in a suburban area near the city. One day when we have coffee and biscuits in her apartment, we discuss the organization of the area. Vivianne explains it as structured through class differentiation. To illustrate the implications of this division, she tells me the story of how one summer’s day she decided to go for a long walk in the neighborhood with a friend. They go farther and farther from her apartment, following a trail close to the water. Eventually, they reach an adjacent suburb, and find themselves on a small beach where many children are swimming and playing. Vivianne tells me that this suburb is different in character from her own, being situated farther from Stockholm, its inhabitants generally less middle class.

She continues her story by saying that when the children see her, they start shouting questions and comments about her gender identity. On the beach, there are also adults present, supervising the children to ensure their safety, but when the children start their shouting the adults remain silent in the background. Vivianne and her friend had kept walking, but the shouts from the children are unsettling and disturbing. The last comment she hears is the children calling out that they actually had understood that she “was a girl”, but by then they were already leaving the beach behind.\(^{243}\)

In the scenario described by Vivianne, she emphasises that the children's inability to easily categorize Vivianne’s appearance makes her an anomaly in their eyes; she describes their confusion by pointing to their shouting, which then appears to act as a circumvention around the place Vivianne is in. In this story, the children’s voices transform the situation; the quiet stroll is no longer described as pleasant, but instead Vivianne becomes disoriented and is no longer in the same place she had been before the shouting began. According to Butler, interpellations may in this manner displace the individual who is pointed out, separating her from the ones doing the calling out.\(^{244}\) Interaction can in this way structure physical orientations. Vivianne is affected by the events taking place and the site is transformed by these disturbances. During our conversation, taking place many months later, she speaks of how the site she had been in was overtaken by the noise of the

\(^{243}\) In Swedish: [...] att jag var en flicka.

\(^{244}\) Butler (1997), 33–34.
many voices coming together, turned toward her, claiming the right to question her appearance. In this story, the acts of naming and positioning the others – children and adults – become intertwined with the understanding of the different suburbs as not only separate geographies but also as partially contrasting places.

I interpret the chain of events as dependent on many things coming together, producing a certain kind of action in that place and point in time. The fact that the children were semi-clad on a beach while Vivianne was fully clothed plays an important role; the semi-nakedness of the beach emphasized the gendered practices of everyone there. Kath Weston has described the act of communicating the appropriate or desired gender as passing in the eyes of others; if read correctly, the interaction is smooth and orderly, while a failure to pass disrupts the organization of gender and leads to unruly and disorderly situations. She notes how the body must present a coherent notion of gender, including “[h]air, dress, posture, stylized ways of calling the muscles to action […]”. These matters are highlighted in areas where bodies are more exposed, such as on the beach, bodily materiality being a central concern in this type of context.

The consequence of being cornered and questioned in the way described in the narrative hold strong emotional responses, often including fear and the sense of being intimidated. Ahmed states that emotions align “bodily and social space”, organizing the interactions of bodies, and that fear “works to enable some bodies to inhabit and move in public space through restricting the mobility of other bodies […]”. By understanding the incident through Ahmed’s perspective, I explain the children’s behavior as part of a compulsory fixation with the act of gender classification. At the same time, Vivianne classifies the children and adults through her articulation of their different positions in her narrativization of the events.

Even after the incident, Vivianne makes the connection between the past with her present by not going back to the place of the incident, thus letting it also, in some ways, determine what places are available for her in the future. The children considered her way of looking and dressing as being out of place; she had failed to live up to the normative values of the context she was in. Based on this story, I claim that it is apparent how actions both constitute and are constituted by the connotations of places as well as the

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245 Weston (2002), 10.
orientation of the actors present, by which I refer not only to the children, the adults and Vivianne’s friend but also to the beard, the beach, the path and the buildings surrounding the events taking place.

The Attack on Makode

Makode lives only fifteen minutes by subway from Vivianne’s suburb, in a central area of Stockholm called Kungsholmen. One winter night he is walking home after a night out at a queer club, dressed in a glittery sequined jacket, tight jeans and his long dreadlocks artfully placed on top of his head. When he is approaching the building where he lives, he suddenly hears a man calling out obscenities. At first he doesn’t react, thinking the slurs aren’t meant for him, but when the man persists he turns around, only to find that two men are rapidly coming toward him. Makode rushes to the entrance of his building, presses the entry code, but the men follow. As he runs up the stairs to his apartment the men also press the code, apparently knowing it beforehand, and it is with only a few seconds to spare that Makode manages to slam the apartment door shut behind him. The men remain in the apartment building’s hallway for some time, shouting homophobic slurs and threatening his life, all the while trying to knock down the door with their hands and feet.

After the attack Makode is frightened, at ease in neither his apartment nor his clothes. He contacts his landlord to change address and move to another part of town, known to be more bohemian and queer-friendly than the one he lives in now. Temporarily he changes the way he dresses, softening his flamboyant style to instead dress in monochrome T-shirts and wearing jeans with a wider fit. This is the first time Makode has ever been subjected to a hate crime, which makes the project of toning himself down confusing. How will he know if a sweater can be considered gay or a pair of pants provocative? Was the attack perhaps connected to the darkness of his skin? This tentative act of categorizing his look involves viewing himself through a homophobic and racially-charged lens; a new and disturbing exercise. How will he know where the line is between enough and too much, understated and excessive? Prior to the attack, Makode tells me he had mostly thought of clothes in terms of affect; if he were fond of the fit, cut or feel of a garment he would wear it, otherwise not. His self-assurance had pre-

247 The move was from Kungsholmen to Södermalm.
vented him from thinking that someone might be angered by his dress. The attack had been directed toward his visibility, and when he changes his clothing habits, he also downplays the queer elements of his style. However, even though some elements of his style are possible to adjust by rearranging and downplaying the usage of accessories and revealing garments, his dark skin remains a constant factor.

In the production of sartorial styles, the materiality of the body often operates as a central point of intersections, and thus, the specificities of the look, size, shape and color of bodily matters play a pivotal role. Even though the body isn’t static, changes in its materiality are often slower and extended through time. Makode can remove openly gay signifiers from his look, but the materiality of his body is more durable. Ironically, when subduing his style, he receives more compliments from many friends and schoolmates, commenting on his new discrete look as a positive and flattering change, fitting with the general notion of what constitutes an attractive style in Stockholm.

The attack has several consequences in regard to his appearance. Makode’s habit of standing out from the crowd, which prior to the attack had been closely linked to his artistic capital, placing him in fashionable clubs and at elite social events, is now infused with fear. He looks over his shoulder and avoids certain types of places where he thinks his style might be too provocative (for instance, fast food restaurants late at night). I understand him to now recognize that there is a dark edge to the playfulness of his aesthetics, further enhanced by the compliments he receives; when toned down he is considered looking more proper than before: less excessive, less queer. This understanding is aligned with Halberstam’s definition of queer aesthetics as maximalist and excessive, a kind of tactic of upsetting the minimalism she associates with straightness. Applied to the case of Makode, I therefore state that when his style is subdued as an effect of the attack, he momentarily dresses in a way that coheres to a correlation between male body and masculine garments, which partially may explain the compliments.

However, the term “minimalism” is also applicable to the general definition of contemporary Stockholm style, which may also and equally explain

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248 Halberstam (2005), 121.
249 I claim that the terms maximalism and minimalism must not be taken literally. My interpretation of Halberstam is that she uses the term maximalist in comparison to the supposed neutrality of heteronormative aesthetics, as being excessive in relation to the regulations and definitions of heteronormatively gendered behavior.
the compliments. When Makode tones down his style, as a reaction to the threat of violence directed toward him, he incidentally adheres to the codex of the Stockholm look. According to Foucault, aligning with normative expectations is generally rewarding, which explains why Makode is now complimented by his peers; not only is his look more aligned with a less queer statement, it is also closer to the dominant fashion trends in the context he is in.\footnote{Foucault (1991), 135–169.} This chain of events, which consists of connecting Makode’s frightened response to a hate crime with his subsequent style which more closely resembles the general Stockholm look is paradoxical. The paradox consists of the fact that the style is induced through fear, while the look itself often has been associated with the Social Democratic discourse of feminism, democracy and equality, values which signal opposite connotations from racist and homophobic hate crimes.\footnote{For more information, see discussion in note 201, page 95.}

In her article “Everyday Shame”, Elspeth Probyn writes, influenced by the works of Bourdieu, of how bodies incorporate tacit knowledge of their contextual settings. She states that, “our bodies seem to know when they are at ease in a situation, when they know the rules and expectations, and conversely they also tell us loudly when we are out of our leagues, fishes out of water”.\footnote{Elspeth Probyn, “Everyday Shame”, in Cultural Studies vol. 18, issue 2–3 (2004): 334.} By applying Probyn’s writing to Makode’s situation, I claim that this socialization process had been unpronounced in Makode’s life until he suddenly is made aware of the fact that his sartorial style doesn’t always fit the expectations of others. This makes him experience the familiar in a strange and unsettling way, and the city he thought he knew is now, at least temporarily, charged with new meanings and more threatening sensations. This spills over onto other places than where he was attacked, in the shape of the compliments made by his friends at school, which creates uncertainties in a supposedly safe environment.

It is also important to point out that Makode had been to a queer club, where this kind of style would not have been considered ‘maximalist’ but rather one of several similarly looking appearances. It wasn’t until he left the club and entered the anonymity of the Kungsholmen streets, where he was alone in this sartorial practice, that the attack occurred. This way, the connotations of his style are defined through interactions and thus deeply contextually dependent.

The men’s knowledge of the building’s entry code makes Makode believe it wasn’t a random hate crime, but that he had been singled out and
pursued. Often featured in Stockholm media, Makode has a high degree of
visibility in the city. This links the actual place of Makode’s home, which is
the site of the attack, to the written and spoken words existing in Stockholm
newspapers and on Internet servers around the world. Makode’s Stockholm
is thus more than asphalt and concrete; it consists also of newspapers, flyers
and online websites. In this way, what happens to Makode is determined not
only by what occurs in the physical site of the city as a geographical location
but also by what is written online and by journalists in magazines.

The attack is noticeable on many scales simultaneously, and similar to
the incident involving Vivianne, it includes several noteworthy spatiotem-
poral aspects. Further adding to the emotional injuries after the attack is the
uncertainty of why it was carried out; not knowing what provoked it makes it
impossible for Makode to prevent it from happening again. The anxiousness
of the past, when the attack occurred, is transplanted into the present, shap-
ing his movements, thus structuring present and future interconnections
between him and the city. This way, actions transform space, while space is
affected by the actions that are carried out, in a manner similar to how Henri
Lefebvre has outlined the relation between space and time. According to
Lefebvre, there is a symbiosis between actions and the city, a negotiation
between inhabitants and the streets on which they tread. Dialectically and
processually, inhabitants and city are engaged in a constant act of producing
one another.253

*Klara in Riga and Kungsträdgården*

Klara was born and raised in Stockholm and she tells me that because of this
there are many layers to her recollections and attachments to the city; places
that bring forth positive feelings may also harbor negative emotions. During
an interview in early 2009, she talks about an incident that had occurred
some years back, in the downtown area of Stockholm:

> Klara: But I’m also thinking of a time, I was wearing a red polka dot
dress, really tight-laced corset, no bra, and was cycling home [---].

So I was riding my bike, home from Kungsan. And just a month before I had been to Pride in Riga, and had things thrown at me, and been very, very frightened. It was scary.

Philip: Hard to feel Pride then, right? [laughs]

Klara: Right. I tried to get a sense of things before the celebration by having a cigarette in a park, with a Pride flag in my hair, and people just really unprovoked started throwing gravel at me, it was insane. And then there was someone who throws an empty Coke-can at me. I was like, "what the hell are you doing?"

Philip: This when you were on your bike, on your way home from Kungsan?

Klara: Yes, from a car. And they start threatening me and saying that I’m a feminist and a communist and that I’m going to die, I’m going to get shot in the neck, and they spit at me. They force me in toward the sidewalk with their car, a rather large, fucking, what’s it called, van or something. And I’m so surprised that I don’t think to look at the registration plates or anything but just continue riding the bike home. And my leg is a bit injured so it’s not going so well. And then I think, what the hell was I thinking, how can I let this person go around harassing other people? You’re so surprised. Do you understand how a human being can do something like that? And do I look like a feminist?

In this narrative, matters of context are articulated through emotional responses, while Klara articulates her reactions as organized through interac-

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254 Slang for Kungsträdgården, a large square in the Stockholm downtown area.

255 In Swedish: Klara: Men jag tänker på nån gång, jag hade röd klänning med vita prickar, skitsnörd korsett, ingen BH, och cyklade hem [...]. Så skulle jag cykla hem från Kungsan…

Och då hade jag precis varit, en månad tidigare hade jag varit och firat Pride i Riga, och blivit kastad saker på, och varit väldigt, väldigt rädd. Det var läskigt.

Philip: Svårt att känna pride då, eller hur? [skratt]


Philip: Alltså när du cyklade hem från Kungsan?

tions regarding the situation she is in. The trip to Riga is echoed through the incident in Stockholm, and the Pride flag in her hair becomes connected, through her way of describing the two events, to the red polka-dot dress. The two outfits carry partially different meanings, as the Pride flag is an explicit political symbol while the tightly laced waist and lack of bra signals a more implicit femme-feminist stance. However, there is also a difference in context, since Latvia has less liberal human rights laws and Pride festivities in Riga often are contested events. Stockholm, on the other hand, has a reputation for being open-minded, a claim severely contested in Klara’s story.

The act of throwing gravel at someone marks that person as unclean; the dirt on the ground becomes connected with the dirt Klara’s appearance represents to them. Through this ritual, she is defined as an anomaly, categorically separated from her attackers. Physical coercion can become a violent form of communication between actors. The violence is a direct response to a perceived threat; a presence that is not visible before and therefore considered unfamiliar, possibly threatening. For Klara’s sartorial connotations to be considered non-provocative for others, they need to have seen it, thought of it as part of their own networks and associations. By throwing things at her, the park is made into contested ground, a site for physical tension between different ways of looking, dressing and acting; in Lefebvre’s words the “exercise of hegemony” is enacted through the aggressiveness directed toward Klara’s appearance.

There is an important difference between the events taking place in Riga and the one Klara describes occurring in Kungsträdgården, Stockholm. Riga is a place Klara visits temporarily, while Stockholm is the place where she spends most of her time. The violent interaction with the men in the van makes her suddenly aware of having been, yet again (but in a different place) categorized as an anomaly. The difference is that this time she had not been prepared for the men’s aggressiveness, as her primary concern had at that moment been to simply get home. By interlinking the incidents when retelling the story to me, Klara highlights the provocative nature of her appearance, creating an association between Riga and Stockholm through her presence and sartorial practice. The actions against Klara in Riga become joined

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256 Mary Douglas has written on this matter, that “[…] dirt is essentially disorder. […] Dirt offends against order”. In this situation, Klara, in the shape of an unknown anomaly, is categorized as dirt, marked as such by the throwing of gravel, which thus is simultaneously an act of naming and an act of categorizing her as unclean. In Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo (London: Routledge, 2002, new ed. [1966]), 2.

with the ones in Stockholm, stigmatizing her as different, in both cities. Also, both places become potential sites of assault; through Klara’s recollections, both Riga and Stockholm are made into places where she is exposed and potentially unsafe.

The attack had involved calling Klara, derogatively, ‘feminist’, but when she retells the story, she asks rhetorically if I think she actually looks like one. What I understand Klara as referring to is her exaggerated femininity, which was outlined in the narrative through the extremely marked waist, lack of bra, and feminine dress pattern of red dots. By pushing signs of femininity to the extreme through her sartorial practice, Klara attempts to deconstruct the concept of femininity as seemingly authentic and stable.

In one way, Klara’s feminist tactic is successful, as the reasons for both situations are related to how Klara’s appearance operates as a disturbance in the places she is in, making visible alternative versions of gendered appearances. In this perspective, the aggressive actions taken against her don’t primarily concern her but are rather an effect of a force attempting to maintain the existing hegemonic order.

In the situation described by Klara, the size and structure of the street define the possibilities of movement at this specific place and point in time. The van decreases Klara’s space of movement and limits her possibilities to get away by cutting her off from the rest of the street. Also, in a way similar to Vivianne’s experience, the misogynist incident impacts this particular part of Stockholm during the time it occurs. The width of the street facilitates the attack on Klara while also, ironically, annually being used as a passage for the GLBTQ Pride parade, its size at that moment in time securing the parade’s passage through the city. Places are never neutral but always defined in symbiosis with the actors present, and the interactions they engage in. As Elizabeth Grosz puts it:

The body is not, however distinct, does not have an existence separate from the city, for they are mutually defining [---]. I am suggesting a fundamentally disunified series of systems and interconnections, a series of disparate flows, energies, events or entities, and spaces brought together or drawn apart in more or less temporal alignments.258

The context of acts is part of the performative process, not as a prerequisite but integrated in the actual actions. Grosz emphasizes that these must not be

seen as isolated in time and space but as part of a larger continuum.\textsuperscript{259} Regarding these three examples – Vivianne, Makode and Klara – threats, violence and mechanisms of expulsion are clearly present, with the intent to regulate the movements and visibility of different kinds of sartorial practices in the city. These actions are carried out as a way of sorting them out from the crowd, organizing sartorial practices in a hierarchical order.

Different moments in time are connected through the emotions stirred up by a violent attack; the discomfort and fear Vivianne, Makode and Klara have articulated link their past to the present, and affect their potential for the future. In the words of Ahmed, “… the unpleasantness of fear also relates to the future. Fear involves an anticipation of hurt or injury. Fear projects us from the present into the future”.\textsuperscript{260} The case studies described in this section are not local examples of general occurrences, but are instead parts of large networks spanning and stretching over and through all of Stockholm, reaching Riga on the other side of the Baltic Sea, including occurrences at suburban beaches and night-time hate crimes.\textsuperscript{261} They are what constitute an important part of the power concentrations and regulations, defining what kinds of sartorial styles are acceptable in Stockholm and which can be considered potential threats.

**Fiction and Fantasy**

*The Fictions of Reality*

During the period I spend researching material, Anthony only sporadically lives in Stockholm. He is unsure of in what city or even in which country he actually wants to live, and his temporary living arrangements in the city are partially the result of his difficulty of deciding where to stay. For most of the time he lives in Stockholm he stays in a flat-share in Gärdet, a residential area in the northeast part of town, known for its high population of senior citizens and close proximity to more affluent parts of Stockholm. During one of our conversations, he described a day off from work, when he had experimented with makeup and ‘extreme’ ways of dressing:

\textsuperscript{260} Ahmed (2004), 65. Italics in original.
\textsuperscript{261} This kind of conflation of micro- and macro-levels is a key point in actor-network theory, outlined in Latour (1999b), 15–25.
When I went out in Gärdet in a kind of tiger-make up, and had painted my eyelids black and orange and pretty extreme outfit overall, one day when I was bored. I was just going do to my makeup but then it got out of hand, and I thought, ”I’ ll go out looking like this”. People don’t turn their heads, they don’t raise their eyebrows. I believe they think, “but it’s so close to Tevehuset”, or they think they don’t want to dignify you with a look, because they think that’s what you want. Really, people in this city…

Anthony had gone for a walk, but no one he passed on his way had seemed to take any notice. This had confused Anthony, who had expected to create some kind of disturbance by breaking with what he perceived to be the common norm of dressing in discreet and monochrome outfits. Gärdet is a quiet and residential area, geographically close to the city center, but in many other ways detached from the rest of the city. Without speaking to the people who were at Gärdet that day it is impossible to know how, or even if, they thought about his appearance. Nevertheless, the non-response of his environment spills over onto Anthony’s view of Stockholm in general, and in our conversation, he defines the atmosphere of the city as forced and blasé.

Butler has written about “collective disidentifications” as necessary criteria for the destabilizing process of normative bodily materializations. I suggest that what Anthony hadn’t taken into consideration is the indifference of the norm, and the instability of oppositional force. His staged rebellion fails due to lack of response, and therefore his tiger-make up and extreme outfit go unnoticed. Walking around Gärdet by himself, for a limited time, Anthony doesn’t experience the desired effects; he had needed to be part of a larger collective to leave a mark. However, this is an interesting parallel to the incident described by Klara in the previous section, where the situation was reversed, as she was by herself when involuntarily subjugated by others’ aggressive behavior.

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262 The headquarters for the state television, SVT, situated on the border of Gärdet.
263 In Swedish: […] När jag gick ut på Gärdet i nån slags tiger-make-up, och målade svart och oranget på ögonlocken och ganska extrem klädsel överhuvudtaget nån dag när jag var helt utträkad. Jag hade bara tänkt sminka mig lite men så spårade det ur, men så tänkte jag. ”jag går ut så här”. Folk vänder inte på huvet, de höjer inte på ögonbryn, jag tror dom tänker att, ”amen Tevehuset är ju här”, eller dom tänker att dom vill inte bevärda en med en blick, för de tänker att man vill det. Alltså, folk i den här stan …
Anthony goes out of his way to make a queer political statement but is met with nonchalance. This shows that a person’s intent isn’t always aligned with the reaction of others, and that coincidences are important factors in social developments and movements. The effects of a particular style are difficult to assess, determined as they are by chance occurrences. Nevertheless, there exist important distinctions between different places in a city, some – such as residential area Gärdet – being more private and semi-private and thus also generally safer from harm acted out by strangers than other, more public areas, such as the very central area of Kungsträdgården.

In our conversation, Anthony speculates that perhaps he had been mistaken for a fictionalized character, part of a TV production at the nearby TV studio. Implicit in his line of reasoning are thoughts on what is authentic and what is not, how to define and categorize fiction and what the actual meaning of the unreal, or surreal, is. The difference between the fictionalized and the authentic lies in how they are perceived: if they are recognized as ‘authentic’ actors or treated as ephemeral and imaginary beings. There are parallels also between this example and Fux’s meeting with the human spiders, outlined in the introduction to this chapter. The spiders had obviously been hired by an amusement park, but Fux didn’t care, instead interpreting the spiders as opening the city up to another dimension. This reflects the seemingly thin line between reality and fantasy, outlined by Lefebvre, who has stated,

The most extraordinary things are also the most everyday; the strangest things are often the most trivial, and the current notion of the ‘mythical’ is an illusory reflection of this fact. Once separated from its context, i.e. from how it is interpreted and from the things which reinforce it while at the same time making it bearable – once presented in all its triviality, i.e. in all that makes it trivial, suffocating, oppressive – the trivial becomes extraordinary, and the habitual becomes ‘mythical’. 265

What Lefebvre is discussing in this excerpt is the very physical humor of Charlie Chaplin. Chaplin’s jokes often involved the relation between Chaplin’s body and “the relation of this body to something else: a social relation with the material world and the social world”. 266 In his movies, the characters Chaplin portrays are often puzzled and amazed at the shape and function

\[\text{265} \quad \text{Lefebvre,} \quad \text{Critique of Everyday Life, vol. 1, trans. John Moore, preface Michael Trebitsch} \quad \text{(London: Verso, 2008 [1958]), 13–14.}\]

\[\text{266} \quad \text{Lefebvre (2008), 10.}\]
of everyday objects (Lefebvre mentions umbrellas, deckchairs, motorbikes, banana skins), making his audience wonder and laugh at otherwise trivial aspects of life; through his interaction with the objects they become remarkable. In this way, there is no opposition between the everyday and the fantastic; it is through repeated interaction that meaning is produced. Through Lefebvre’s text, I realize that in order to create magic through mundane activities, Anthony wouldn’t have to construct the conceptual and artistic as existing in opposition with the mainstream world, but should perhaps have incorporated it in the details and pieces of information already existing in Gärdet, the same way Fux decided to interpret the people on stilts as a subversive element of Djurgården.

_Tommie X’s Private Moment in Public_

In the spring of 2009, I meet with Tommie X at Café String, Södermalm. Over coffee, we talk about how he interprets the city in relation to his sartorial practices. Since he already separates Tommie X from Daniel, implying that there are many different layers and assemblages co-existing in the same corporeality, I want to know how these different styles are related to different places in the city. To explain, Tommie X begins by describing an evening out when he and Elin, “had a UFO-party, and we celebrated our birthday, so we wore space costumes to that one. We had gold silver helmets, me and Elin”. In order to get to the party, they had to go by the metro, and had travelled the subway system dressed in identical silver costumes.

Only few moments later, Tommie X reacts to his telling me this story, saying that he is frustrated with the contemporary obsession with documentation and communication of events, and that the widespread use of internet has left us a society without secrets. As soon as someone does something similar to the time when he and Elin took the metro in silver costumes, it is immediately posted online as part of public communication. He goes on by sharing a secret memory he had until now savoured for himself:

> I have this great memory that could be a typical thing to take a picture of, ‘see how cool I am’, that I was going for a walk when Condoleezza Rice was in town, it was closed off below Rådmansgatan, where I had been to a wine-tasting event before. With white wig and a lot of makeup and looking like a tranny I went to the premiere of Ficks. And some

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pleated jacket and glittery sequined dress and really high heeled shoes. So I walked all the way, with my drink, and it’s one of those things that looks really amazing, like I owned the entire town, like it was sealed off for me, and there were all these helicopters, like a rock band, and I walked through the city, and it was so funny. And that is such a beautiful thing, that you savour in your mind. It’s so beautiful…  

To Tommie X the public places of the city can also be among the most intimate, secrets he doesn’t share with anyone but keeps to himself. He understands the incident as memorable precisely because it hasn’t been recorded and hasn’t been retold to anyone; he keeps it alive in his memory instead of sharing it by posting it on a blog, or making it into a visual statement. Being dressed in a treasured outfit and not sharing it with anyone can become an essential part of the sartorial practice; even though Tommie X is in public, the style is structured around the intimate and private. The fantasy of being connected to the helicopters through the white wig, pleated jacket and sequined dress enhances the style, and the image he conveys through the narrative is made up of many actors and events coming together. The glamour of the outfit becomes even more important since it isn’t shared with anyone. The city is read as a site of protection and comfort, as a place where Tommie X feels at home and safe, and thus not, at that particular time, having the need for attention.

Listening to Tommie X tell the story, I understand that his pattern of movement can be seen as a result of the ongoing interaction between him and the context he is in. In the quote, it is apparent that Tommie X knows his way around Stockholm; he is familiar with street names and how to get from

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269 That is, until this text is published, and this specific memory will be made public.
one point to another. The persona of Tommie X is a public figure, often hired to front clubs and events, and as such, it is perhaps not always necessary for him to have the attention of others. Therefore, a quiet moment on a downtown street, while dressed up and on his way to a club premier, doesn’t need to include others in order to matter, in his opinion. Instead, he considers the experience of not being seen or noticed exclusive and sought after. However, this moment needs to be understood in its relation to where Tommie X was going, a club premiere where he knows he – being a well-known person dressed in this highly noticeably manner – will be in focus. The intimacy of the moment he describes must be balanced with the intense sociality of the site he is on his way to, where he will be photographed and his look thoroughly documented.

Writing on space, Lefebvre speaks of the nonlinearity of time in a way reminiscent of this process: “The past leaves its traces; time has its own script. Yet this space is always, now and formerly, a present space, given as an immediate whole, complete with its associations and connections in their actuality”. The connection between the sartorial practices and the temporality of space is evident in how time operates in these examples, as a motion of going back and forth, but always, paradoxically, being part of the moment. Several levels of time are present in the production of the now as it is articulated through the stories of the participants in the study. The materialization of styles is not limited to a few locations, but takes place throughout the city without distinct boundaries between the real and the imagined, the secret and the public.

*Lady Oscar and the Flight to Barcelona*

The blurring of lines between fact and fantasy is a pivotal part of the production of style, brought to my attention yet again during a conversation with Lady Oscar. We are sitting in his apartment, when I express curiosity regarding the relation between his style references and sartorial practices. The topic had been initiated through a photo of Lady Oscar, dressed in white, with pearl earrings and a pearl collier, wearing a hat with wide brims, sitting on a chair at a street side café in Spain, laughing together with a friend. I want to know more about the circumstances around the photo, and Lady Oscar explains:

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270 Lefebvre (2010), 37.
I think it’s so much fun with all kinds of escapes from reality, really. You could say. Theatre is fun, it’s fun with dance and song and art and everything that is more of a mirroring and reflection of reality than reality itself. It’s much more interesting and fun. And then, the picture is taken when we just had landed in Barcelona, together with the club Paradise that I worked for as a stylist, and we were to perform that night so that’s the first beer of the day, at a street side café [laughter]. And I was dressed like that because it was my airplane-outfit. Because I had listened to a radio-show about some old woman who talked about how amazing it was when people started traveling by commercial airlines. And people really dressed up when they were to go on the airplane, with hats and jackets and gloves and so on, and I thought it sounded so nice that I wanted to do it myself. So it’s a lot like that.

In this quotation, Lady Oscar is saying that his style partially operates to shift reality, to organize situations by not only including but actually emphasizing elements of fantasy and fiction. Through the interactions of a number of style references; other worlds and ways of being are created, temporarily materialized through his sartorial practice. This way, imagination can be defined as an important actor in its own right. Space and time are transformed and subverted as a result of the interconnections of a story told on the radio, linking Lady Oscar with a woman he has never met. The spatio-temporal prerequisites of his appearance are challenged when the anonymous woman’s memories of a time he has never experienced firsthand are transformed through him, imagination being the force but also the tactic concerning his traveling style. As Butler puts it:

Fantasy is what allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise. Fantasy is what establishes the possible in excess of the real; it points, it

271 Jag tycker det är så roligt med olika typer av verklighetsflykt, är det väl nästan. Skulle man kunna säga. Att det är roligt med teater, det är roligt med dans och sång och musik och konst och allting som är mer en spegling och reflektion av verkligheten än verkligheten i sig. Det är mycket mer intressant och roligt. Och då, det där är precis när vi har landat i Barcelona, med Paradise-klubben som jag jobbade för som stylist, så vi skulle uppträda på kvällen och då är det dagens första öl, på uteserveringen [skratt]. Och då hade jag klätt mig sådär för att det var min flygoutfit. För att jag tänkte mycket på, jag hade lyssnat på nåt radioprogram om nån gammal kvinna som pratade om hur fantastiskt det var när flygplanet kom, när det kom i bruk. Och folk verkligten klädde upp sig när de skulle flyga, med hatt och kavaj och handskar och så vidare, och då tyckte jag det låt så mysigt så då ville jag göra samma sak själv. Så det är väldigt mycket sånt.
points elsewhere, and when it is embodied, it brings the elsewhere home.\footnote{Butler (2004), 216–217.}

By linking this Butler-quote with the Latourian refusal of thinking in binary terms, I state that fantasy and imagination are important parts of sartorial practices. Actual garments and the fantasy surrounding them are not dichotomous but engaged in reflexive interactions, together part of the assemblage that constitutes the sartorial.

_Displacing Fux_

Different types of sartorial styles are contextualized differently depending on their relation to place and point in time; consequently they also evoke different types of responses. The matter of when and where sartorial styles appear determine, in part, the reaction of others, while this matter also holds effects for how the context itself is perceived. If contexts become constituted and defined through interactions, their connotations are neither fixed nor stable; for example, places can be queer when used in a certain way for a certain period of time.\footnote{David Bell and Gill Valentine (eds.), introduction to _Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities_ (London: Routledge, 1995), 18.} This is described by Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner in the case of Christopher Street in New York City. They have claimed that even if not all but merely some of the street’s visitors engage in gay and queer activities, the fact that a few do affects all. This is because a “quantitative change is a qualitative change. A critical mass develops. The street becomes queer”.\footnote{Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, “Sex in Public”, in _Intimacy_, ed. Lauren Berlant (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 326.} In the example, it becomes clear how habits and customs create and shape meaning, while of course the fact that Christopher Street is situated where it is, affects the growth of a gay population.

I claim that Berlant and Warner’s example implies that when there are many similar and forceful interactions occurring, over a longer period of time, a certain type of place is produced. Certain connotations become fortified. A site can thus become seemingly coherent in style, if the interconnections between actors are similarly organized and the actions carried out point in similar directions over longer durations of time.
One day I meet Fux for coffee, and we come to discuss matters of contextuality and subversion. He tells me the story of how he, when in high school, used to attempt to stage ‘otherness’ in a traffic circle outside of his old hometown:

[…] I used to, I gaffed my whole body with duck tape and then I played the cello in a traffic circle, I remember, in the largest highway traffic circle in Kalmar [laughs]. I sat there for four hours and some poor friend had to sit 400 meters away with a thermos with like hot coco, I was freezing to death. And it was incredibly, incredibly hard, but I thought it was so great, because I knew it gave the people going round this traffic circle something completely warped. Like something they talked about, that they didn’t understand, in their grip on reality, because we all grip reality, we think we do it so well. But when it is just a little bit warped, it creates something like this, why is there a person in the traffic circle doing that, what the hell is that about? In the quotation, Fux asks rhetorically how people construct their understandings of reality, and connects this to certain practices, and the misplacement of himself spatially. During our discussion, Fux argues that wrapping oneself in duck tape to play the cello in a traffic circle is a way of disorientating and upsetting the way bodies are usually ordered in public space. I understand his claim as an opposite kind of act to what Berlant is describing in her quote; Fux is not aiming at creating a new sense of normativity – a norm consisting of queerness – but rather, he wishes to question the realms of reality. Because of this, it is essential to his performance that he is almost by himself, and not in connection to others who carry out similar actions in close proximity. No one stops at or in a traffic circle; it is meant to be driven through, while on your way somewhere else. It is not constructed as a place to linger, thus not understood to change qualitatively through quantity.

Fux based his performance on the notion that there are boundaries for how bodies may be presented and shaped in public space, and that these

275 In Swedish: [...] jag brukade, jag gaffade hela kroppen med gaffatejp och så spelade jag cello i en rondell, kommer jag ihåg, i den största motorvägsrondellen som ligger i Kalmar [skratt]. Där satt jag i fyra timmar och nån stackars kompis som fick sitta fyrahundra meter bort med en termos med varm choklad liksom, jag höll på att frysa ihjäl. Och det var så otroligt, otroligt jobbigt, men jag tyckte det var så härligt, för jag visste att det gav människorna som åkte runt den här rondellen något fullständigt skevt. Alltså nänting som dom pratade om, som dom inte förstod sej på, som dom i sin grepp om verkligheten, för vi grepper verkligheten, tror vi alla, så himla bra. Men när det skevar lite grann, så skapar det nåt sånt här, varför sitter en människa och gör det i rondellen, vafan är det om?
boundaries are overstepped by the style in which he appears, as well as of the connotations of the place it is presented in. Outlining a completely contrary kind of activity, Goffman defined “orientation gloss” as the obligation to appear “to be engaged in some recognizable activity patently occasioned by objectives defined as the official ones for that time and space”. The act of playing a cello wrapped in gaffa tape while in traffic circle in the outskirts of town is a direct questioning of this kind of “glossing”. I thus understand Fux’s style as an attempt to disrupt normative expectations, to question the dichotomy of reality and imagination, but similar to Anthony’s experience in Gärdet, Fux has no way of knowing what people driving past thought of his act, or if anyone even noticed he was there.

F12 and the Case of Fashionable Ficks

Wednesdays at F12

Since late eighteenth century, Fredsgatan 12 in central Stockholm has been the address of the Royal Academy of the Arts (in Swedish: Kungliga Akademien för de fria konsterna). The building is a lavish former private palace, rich in ornamentation and craftsmanship. The past years the Academy has shared the ground floor of the palace with upscale restaurant F12, one of many restaurants that together constitute a well-known conglomerate of luxury restaurant venues in Stockholm. During a few months each summer the restaurant, the adjoining bar as well as the great stairs and its two adjacent terraces are all turned into one giant nightclub. The club is subdivided into seven different ones, one for each day of the week. In the summer of 2009, for the third consecutive summer, one of these clubs is queer club Ficks, previously held at Marie Laveau, hosted by (among others) Makode and Tommie X. This year it’s designated to take place on Wednesdays. Makode is one of the main organizers, while Tommie X hosts The Saloon (in Swedish: Salongen), an indoor bar, situated so that everyone who visits Ficks has to pass through in order to get to the restrooms.

F12 is a complex place where many discourses intersect; the sumptuous restaurant, the Academy, the historicity of the building itself, as well as the

277 Even though others also acted as hosts I will only mention Makode and Tommie X, since the others are not part of the study. This logic will apply to all clubs mentioned.
summer clubs all define the site in different ways, with different connotations and sets of value. The connection to an exclusive part of Swedish art society gives the place a strong cultural capital, while being a part of a high profile restaurant conglomerate brings an air of bourgeois luxury. The summer clubs are thus generally very popular, and among young, trend-conscious people in Stockholm it is, in the summer of 2009, considered socially important to be seen in these stairs during club nights.

In this way, F12 is a good example of what Lefebvre calls “interpenetration”, meaning that “each new addition inherits and reorganizes what has gone before; each period or stratum carries its own preconditions beyond their limits”. The additions to the site of F12 are organized around the previous activity in the building, and the layers of meaning that are constantly being added exist in relation to what has been before. This gives shape and structure to the events taking place at F12, and traces of all the former ways the palace has functioned can be found also in the contemporary club nights. Superficially, Ficks resembles the other club nights, attracting partially the same crowd of young club goers as the other F12 clubs. However, there are also many differences, Ficks epitomizing the clash of a number of cultural discourses, simultaneously present in the same place. Ficks is in itself a provocative club, creating tensions not only in relation to other discourses but also within its own framework. When it is fitted into the format of the bourgeois restaurant F12, this responds to, in the words of Merrifield,

[...] the inextricable tension between the usage and appropriation of place for social purposes and the domination of place (and space) as a productive and commercial force through private ownership. 279

By this, I mean to say that even if many of the discourses present at F12 are overlapping, they are also competing for the right to claim the place as their own. These conflicts I perceive as partially politically charged, internalized in the locality of the place and materialized through the tensions between the context of the queer club and the commercial interests of the restaurant owners.

The evenings at Ficks follow a certain pace, beginning with the restaurant guests finishing their meals around nine pm. Sometimes they linger at one of the terraces for a bit, but usually they leave directly, making the place accessible to the club goers. This is also the time the club formally opens,

278 Lefebvre (2010), 164.
even though there seldom is much staff present at this hour (besides a person by the door and the occasional bartender). During the first hour, between nine and ten pm, there is no entrance fee, making it an attractive time to arrive for many of the guests who move in the periphery of the club crowds, and who thus avoid paying the 100 SEK it costs to go inside.

To have your name on the list, or owning a VIP-card, signals that you are in close social proximity to the club hosts, which in this context is a validation of having strong social capital. A card, or your name on the list, has also a practical component, namely that these guests don’t have to arrive early to avoid paying; for them, F12 is always free, and the line virtually non-existent. The VIP-card creates a sense of territoriality: individuals who have access to a VIP-card can, for a limited time, symbolically claim a certain right to be at F12; the card shows that they are desired guests with personal invitations. However, this status is temporary and contestable, only actually noticeable to others during the short seconds it takes to enter the club, at the moment the card is showed to the doorman, through a different entrance than the ones paying visitors have to use.

Every week an e-mail is sent out and a message is posted on the Ficks Facebook wall, describing the theme of the club that particular week.280 Guests who adhere to the theme belong to yet another category of visitors who don’t have to pay the entrance fee. This is a way for people lacking the VIP-card to avoid paying (while of course also avoiding having to be in place before ten pm), following the whims of the hosts by dressing the part required of them. This makes the guests part of the club activities, further enhancing the hedonistic and adventurous claims the club is making.

I argue that the effect of this system is that conceptual and artistic styles are integrated into a commercial system, used as a strategy to elevate the cultural values of a bourgeois restaurant conglomerate. By subsidizing the expenses of guests who adopt the conceptual look, the style itself is turned into a sort of currency. Parallel with the elevation of the restaurant’s cultural value, an increase in the status of the guests occurs as they are incorporated into the club aesthetics, thus being in proximity with the club hosts Makode and Tommie X (who, in this context, are key actors in deciding the course of events at the club).


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The shared aesthetics is also a result of the fact that, in the words of Thornton, “[c]lub cultures are taste cultures”. The club aesthetics are not only the result but also a display of joint interaction among the guests and organizers of the club. The shared taste in style functions as an organizational device, and primarily it is mostly guests who would already be categorized as belonging to this kind of club scene who actually aspire to be part of it. I state that this is also how the collective of conceptually dressed club kids is produced and maintained within the locality of F12.

Many of the people in this study are of limited financial resources, often lacking steady jobs and the economic stability this may bring. Instead, their sartorial styles provide them with a strong symbolic capital, making them attractive guests at fashionable clubs and bars, as their presence at certain venues increase the cultural capital of the place they are in. Their capital is considered to temporarily become part of the place they are in, the same way their presence at the fashionable club enhances their personal social status. This way, the club guests’ lifestyles, understood through the terms of capital production, situate them in certain desirable places in the city. According to Bourdieu, the social field is thus defined as a complex and multi-dimensional space of various positions, each working in its own specific way. The club guests’ appearances become part of a commercial system, where the styles are being used as marketing commodities by the venues they visit.

Beverley Skeggs claims that individuals who are perceived as having generally low societal status sometimes reflexively redefine their position by contesting the dominant view of society: “[r]ather than taking on the view of the dominant, queers have been copiously involved in reworking what it means to be dominated and refusing the value that is attributed to domination”. By applying Skeggs’ idea of challenging the normative view of what ‘respectability’ is (a term very much associated with the bourgeois dinner clientele at F12), the club guests of Ficks may challenge the connotations of the word, redefining their position as societal outsiders, instead placing artistic and controversial styles in the center of things.

“glittery, pansy and GALA Hollywood party”

Tommie X hosts a smaller part of F12, ordinarily known as the Saloon but during Ficks nights transformed into ‘Studio Tommie’. Studio Tommie doesn’t always have the same theme as the rest of the club, since this part is semi-separate and run solely by Tommie X. When Makode, through his participation in Ficks, one Wednesday in July 2009 organizes “Straight Acting Party” Tommie X reacts strongly, introducing an opposite theme of his own; “glittery, pansy and GALA Hollywood party”.284 This reaction has to be understood in the context of mainstream gay male culture, obsessed with the representation of hegemonic masculinity, often articulated through affirmative responses to “straight-acting” behavior among gay men. Effeminacy is often frowned upon and feminine men have generally low status. To act and look straight is, in mainstream gay society, a dominant trend, and gay men who can’t, or won’t, live up to these standards are in this context often considered to be socially inferior.285 When Makode chooses such a theme, especially at a queer club, I perceive this to be done ironically, as a queer-political stance against gay culture’s uncritical adoration of hegemonic masculinity.

Tommie X, on the other hand, rebels against this playful behavior and attempts instead to create a place for resistance at the same site, and during the same evening, as that of the “straight-acting party”. The two opposing sartorial practices are interconnected and exist within the same category of conceptual club styles, but are at the same time vastly different. However, both concern the materialization of gender and sexuality in direct relation to a misogynist situation, in effect highlighting the fear of femininity prevalent within gay club culture. The style of Tommie X is the more distinct statement, but I claim that the irony of Makode’s “straight-acting”-theme becomes discernable when studying his style at Ficks over time. During the time I spent at the club, I noticed that he was often seen wearing large pearls in excessive quantities, regularly wore dresses and other flamboyant items, and therefore I interpret his club theme as part of a camp tradition, not to be taken literally but as a humorous way to make visible a problematic discourse.

284 In Swedish: glittrig, fjollig och GALA Hollywoodparty.
The night of the event I’m at Tommie X’s place, in the apartment he shares with his boyfriend. Tommie X has decided to go dressed as Jean Harlow, in a white silk dress from the 1930’s and wearing a platinum blond wig. While I’m in the room, he puts on 1930’s-inspired makeup, transforming himself from an ordinary young Swedish man to a queer-looking version of the American film star. His boyfriend is dressing in the style of a club version of Clark Gable, in extreme platform shoes and heavy makeup; pale face, painted black mustache, his black hair parted to the side. I understand his resistance towards the irony of the club theme as articulated through the affirmation of classic gay icons. At the same time I see him creating a gap in the general space of F12, in which effeminacy is openly celebrated and feminine men explicitly welcome. That this is done parallel with the straight acting-theme accentuates the political message, underlining the implicit gendered connotations of everyone’s attire, regardless of which theme the potential guests adhere to.

In my perspective, the style of Tommie X is a network of many actors coming together, all within the discourse of gendered blurriness and the diffuseness of the sexed body. The evening gown is not combined with a cleavage, but instead the chest remains flat; the wig is styled in the fashion of the 1930’s, but the makeup heavily exaggerated in the special trademark of Tommie X. The lack of coherency in gendered and stylistic statements makes the sartorial practice volatile and unruly, which is also marked in the way Tommie X moves, not altering his way of speaking or gesturing to fit the new outfit he changes into. This kind of citing or sampling feminine practices in club culture is a dominant theme in the previously quoted *Women and Fashion: A New Look*, by Evans and Thornton. In a critique of the 1980’s London subcultural club scene, they write,

> The style was constructed by a manipulation of images, stereotypes and assumptions. In so far as it was men who were seen to be most dominant in their manipulation of gender, male sexual power was symbolically reasserted within subculture. Men could magically transcend both masculinity and femininity by juggling with the signifiers of gender. In cross dressing they had access to the semiotic possibilities of the control and manipulation of the signifiers of femininity. As masquerade, femininity was up for grabs.286

Even though Evans and Thornton write on a different era and geographical location, many of the style practices are remarkably similar. Both Tommie X and Makode orchestrate their symbolic capital through “a manipulation of images, stereotypes and assumptions”, specifically demonstrated at densely populated club nights in fashionable venues. By sampling scattered feminine practices, I claim that Tommie X elevates his own status as conceptually inventive and knowledgeable of pop cultural references. His masculinity is partially questioned but operates also as a way of creating innovative imagery, in the process implicitly subordinating femininity to a kind of masquerade.

Later that night, I follow Tommie X and his boyfriend in a taxi to F12. When we arrive, the tall and slender figure of Tommie X makes a striking contrast in white. Since F12 is a fashionable place, most guests are dressed in dark, often black, monochrome garments, adhering to the most dominant fashion of contemporary Stockholm. I notice how many people turn their heads when he walks by, disturbing the dress code of F12 on many levels while also, through his role of club hostess, defining it.

One day a few months later, Tommie X tells me of an incident that had occurred when he had been just outside the restroom at F12. He had overheard a man asking his friend, in an astonished voice, if “he had seen the gay guy outside?” The man had clearly referred to Tommie X, who had been bothered, but had thought to himself, “then you’re in for a treat” since “twenty thousand gay guys would rush in shortly” (though he never confronted the man openly). What Tommie X silently had been referring to is the temporal pattern at F12 during Ficks-nights. As outlined, the people arriving early are generally not socially closest to the club hosts. For example, the night Tommie X was dressed as Jean Harlow we didn’t arrive at the club until 11.30 pm, well after it had opened (and this even though Tommie X was expected to DJ the entire evening).

The people who arrive early, touched on by Tommie X in his reaction to the comment made by the anonymous man, are for the most part bourgeois youth, attracted by the luxurious yet trendy connotations of the restaurant. These guests mainly keep to one of the terraces, while the Ficks club guests go to the other one, sit in the stairs, and later on, dance to the music Tommie X plays in the Saloon. This way, the place is divided into different categories depending on what network of styles the visitors are part of; the bourgeois acting in the pattern of a homogenous collective, defined by their particular proclivities, while the clique belonging to Ficks behave according to their own pace and spatial organization.
This division of place is part of an unspoken agreement between the two networks, but as the night progresses, many of the bourgeois visitors leave, going to other venues in the vicinity, while more Ficks-guests arrive, a pattern related to the fact that many of them are on the list or have VIP-cards, which of course also implies that they are more desirable guests in the eyes of the club hosts. Here, it becomes evident that movement through F12 is structured around the differentiation between financial and cultural kinds of capital, made visible through its spatiotemporal effects. Bourdieu has written, on the matter of social space and capital, that,

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\text{[...]}\text{agents are distributed in the overall social space, in the first dimension, according to the overall volume of capital they possess and, in the second dimension, according to the structure of their capital, that is, the relative weight of the different species of capital, economic and cultural, in the total volume of assets.}^{287}
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Materialized through the VIP-card, conceptual and artistic styles become linked to a higher degree of social capital, with financial consequences for the guests, affecting how they may move in and out of F12, and at what times. The fact that it’s the Ficks-guests who often have VIP cards is ironic in two ways: partially because F12 (as opposed to Ficks) is a mainstream upper-scale restaurant, targeting people in the bourgeois category, and partially because this places partially queer elements in a capitalist system, with the specific aim of increasing the restaurant conglomerate’s cultural worth.

My main point in giving this description is that I wish to emphasize that F12, and Ficks in particular, is transformed into several different kinds of places, at different points in time. During the course of an evening, the site becomes more and more concentrated with artistic styles and conceptual practices; more same-sex couples will make out, while the conventionally-looking crowd will seek out other venues. This process should not be simplified, since many of the queer-looking may actually hold heterosexual desires, and many of the conservatively-dressed may be gay, but I am not speaking specifically of individual desire, but of the general connotations of the place (even though these are, on many levels, intimately connected). Often, the club will engage in more artistic performances later in the evening, questioning the seemingly bourgeois setting of the club. To reconnect with Lefebvre, this shows how place is contested through the different usag-

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es and appropriations occurring at F12 during the course of one evening.288

The parallel existences of conceptual and mainstream styles at the same club venue sometimes result in unexpected aesthetic merges. One of these crossovers occurs when the signature style of Tommie X and his female cousin, regularly sported by them in bourgeois venues around Stureplan, F12 included, slowly started to spread outside of their group, to gradually become a dominant, mainstream trend among young women. Tommie X explains:

It feels like I have a silhouette that has been violated and stolen by a bunch of Stureplan-girls; long hair parted in the middle with a band strapped around, thick fur and tight pants, and some large shoes. It feels like my silhouette but now it’s more like, everyone has copied it. And I’ve had it constantly, for several years, so I feel really at home with it. It’s one of those extreme Tommie X-things…289

What Tommie X is describing is how a certain sartorial style is transformed when it becomes part of another discourse, spilling over onto others’ bodies. Paradoxically, Tommie X’s style remains in the same geographical place (and, roughly, time), but when it is materialized as part of a feminine mainstream look, its meaning shifts. This is primarily not due to the change of the wearer’s sex; Tommie X’s cousin, who claims to have initially invented the trend, is female, but since the two are part of the same subcultural club collective, the underground connotations of the look were in place already when Tommie X adopted it. When the style is passed on to Tommie X from his cousin, the original subcultural values had remained (even though the complexity of the gender codes is intensified as the bodily practices are differently sexed), but in the appropriation of the style by mainstream consumers, it suddenly signifies another kind of lifestyle.

288 Lefebvre (2010), 164.
289 In Swedish: Så känns det som att jag har en siluett som visserligen har blivit skändad och stulen av massa Stureplanstjejer, långt hår i mittbena och band runt, yvig päls och tajta byxor, och några stora skor. Det känns som min siluett men nu är det mer kanske, alla har ju tagit den. Och den har jag haft jämt, i flera år, så den känner jag mig jättehemma i. Det är en sån über-Tommie X-grej…
Steffy is a regular visitor at Ficks and belongs to the category I would define as the Ficks-collective. During our conversations, he has also commented on the division of space between the two categories of guests, however pointing out the fact that there is one place where the two crowds intersect: the restrooms (for obvious reasons of bodily needs). He tells me of one incident when he went into the men’s restroom but didn’t feel comfortable using the urinal, and instead stood in line to use the toilet stall. One man took notice, turned to his friends and said, “it’s really easy pissing standing up, you just imagine you’re pissing on your girlfriend’s face”. This comment made the division of guests more than just a matter of a difference of appearance; according to Steffy, the men in mainstream attire laughed, while the men dressed in conceptual club styles remained silent. Steffy says he was upset but didn’t respond. The remark, both homophobic and misogynist in character, is a demonstration of power; Steffy was explicitly made aware of the fact that the queer-looking group he belonged to was thought to have lesser right to the place than the other, bourgeois-orientated style collective. I claim that this exclusionary procedure aims at undermining the strength of non-normative appearances. The fact that all the other men laughed, while the ones dressed in the style of the Ficks-group remained silent, enhanced this effect, interlacing the articulation of words with the aesthetics of the clothes together with the spatial organization of the restroom.

I perceive the comment as part of a power struggle of who had the right to define the place they all occupied. By ridiculing Steffy’s preferred choice of sitting down while urinating, linking this to the absence of a girlfriend (for Steffy to presumably urinate on), Steffy’s lack of ‘proper’ masculinity is connected to an insufficient heterosexuality (while heterosexuality concurrently is made into a matter of men’s domination over women). The incident is twofold; while attempting to weaken the position of the Ficks-collective, the men simultaneously strive to confirm and enhance the sense of acting in a way that could be considered hegemonically masculine, by aligning their speech with their bodies, garments, manners and behavior.

These interactions bring forth the question of agency; how are matters of agency produced and maintained in the different sites of F12? Engaging with texts by Bourdieu, McNay has stated that, “… the reproduction of

290 In Swedish: Det är ju aslätt att slappna av när man ska pissa, det är bara att föreställa att man pissar sin tjej i ansiktet.
normative identities cannot be understood simply as a question of positioning within language but as a lived social relation that necessarily involves the negotiation of conflict and tension.\(^\text{201}\) If I translate McNay’s claims into a more Latourian terminology, the question of agency thus involves also issues of how space is regulated between different networks of actors, joining forces in different and sometimes conflicting ways. However, I want to emphasize that it is not my intent to give an oversimplified view of the reality of Ficks, as these two categories by no means are to be understood as strictly homogenous. Among the bourgeois people, perhaps even among the men who laughed at Steffy, there may be men who sexually or romantically desire other men, and among the apparently queer many may hold conservative views.

One day, when Elin and I discuss the club scene in general – and Ficks in particular – she, as a key figure in subcultural club collectives and at these events, expresses a weariness regarding the stylistic theatricality of this world. She claims that the conceptual aspect of the style is emphasized to the extent that the actual person embodying the look becomes replaceable. What Elin is implying is that the club style is a confined and narrowly defined way of materializing agency; the artistic style has, in her opinion, become severely constraining.

In this case, subcultural contexts and styles are not merely an expression of subversion but hold also a narrowness that restricts and delimits movements and growth. When Elin discusses the subcultural club scene, I understand her to not view it as a force of resistance, but rather as a network set out to acquire different forms of capital. Therefore, I conclude that subcultural styles can hold as many restrictions and regulations as conservative ones, and strong sets of constraints can be said to regulate both mainstream and subcultural expressions.

This point, argued specifically through the perspective of femininity, is also made by Evans and Thornton. According to them, in clubs defined by subcultural theatricality (such as Ficks), women have limited ways of articulating themselves, either dressing “just like the boys” in “outrageous corseted satin dresses and diamante”, or “like a party piece, drag-queeny but humorous” or in a “dark, loose, androgynous” style.\(^\text{202}\) During the time I knew her, Elin often adopted the second strategy, dressing in fun and conceptual ways, generally adopting the style of Tommie X and other men in their

\(^{201}\) McNay (2004), 185.

clique. The sartorial practices available to women were in this way defined by the club context, which was set up primarily by men.

**Fashion, Style and Cultural Capital**

*Hybrid Styles of Fashion*

Yuniya Kawamura describes contemporary fashion as the result of a system; through regulatory processes, the discourse of fashion is created. Kawamura’s system is neat and orderly, each actor (i.e. designer, journalist, stylist, fashion photographer, editor, etc) having a specific function. This affects the temporality of fashion, with continual change and renewal marked by prêt-a-porter fashion weeks, haute couture fashion weeks, fashion weeks for menswear and brand presentations in Paris, Milan and New York. All important dates are defined, every new launch meticulously planned.\(^{293}\) The core of the fashion system is the modern market economy, continually in need for new commodities for shops and department stores to sell, and potential consumers constantly craving the novelty of things.\(^{294}\)

Styles are in similar ways organized through their place in time and space, but the temporality and locality of style expressions are differently organized than trends within the fashion system. This affects the roles of the actors in the production of style, as they are less articulated and not as properly defined as they are within the explicitly capitalist system of fashion. However, it is important to make the distinction that even if the participants don’t wear clothes or accessories from high fashion labels, they may still put together high fashion-inspired looks. It is not primarily as consumers of high fashion commodities, but through their citation of certain details from high fashion trends, that their styles become hybrid expressions, combining second-hand garments with inspiration from contemporary high fashion brands.

Often, I’ve noticed how some study participants include in their outfits things that are prevalent in high fashion blogs or featured in high fashion magazines, and at times I have seen pictures of Tommie X and Lady Oscar in fashion books and magazines, as examples of interesting street styles.\(^{295}\)

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295 With the term “high fashion blogs” I refer to blogs that both cover high fashion as well as hold a strong fashion capital, which not always is the same thing. Due to the often brief
Their interest in fashion influences the way they look and defines their sense of style, which demonstrates how hard it is to completely separate the two terms from each other. For instance, when I meet with Lady Oscar in London, he tells me he is very inspired by a certain kind of Hermès belt he has seen in recent fashion spreads, but financially unable to buy the actual Hermès commodity, he has ransacked flea markets for similar ones. At the same time, I notice how he wears decorations in his forehead, ornamentations temporarily placed between his eyebrows. Almost identical ones had been published a few weeks before in an editorial spread in *Vogue Homme Japan.* This aesthetic is not to be viewed as a mere imitation of high fashion but as a personalized retake, where Lady Oscar incorporates fashionable items into his own sartorial style, adapted to his financial constraints as well as creative preferences. The expressions of style and fashion are in this way continuously intertwined, while still being separate concepts and defined by different criteria.

According to Diana Crane, this complex interconnection between fashion and style is due to changes in societal structure. The modern fashion system was deeply linked to the nineteenth century-industrialization of the Western world, during which the growing urbanization created an anonymous context for people to interact beyond the social control of the small village. Simultaneously, garments were for the first time mass-produced, creating the new, faster consumption cycle associated with the fashion system. However, since the mid-twentieth century, a postindustrial society has begun to emerge, where fashion no longer is dictated from Paris, but instead various looks can be in style at the same time, in different societal contexts. Because of this, fashion is now, in Crane’s words “more ambiguous and multifaceted, in keeping with highly fragmented nature of contemporary postindustrial societies.”

I consider Crane’s thoughts on the postindustrial to be deeply connected to Vinken’s on the postfashion era, albeit from a slightly different perspective.

Agnes Rocamora has written that consumption of fashion commodities communicates interests and lifestyle distinctions through differences in longevity in the lifespan of blogs, the ones I followed while gathering empirical material are no longer in existence, but for more general examples of the type of blog I am referring to, see *The Sartorialist* (www.thesartorialist.com) and *Man Repeller* (www.manrepeller.com). At the time of the gathering of material *Vogue Homme Japan* was considered one of the men’s fashion magazines with most fashion capital, and being notably inspired by fashion spreads in this publication I perceive to be a sign of high fashion awareness.

dress, even though this communication may be muddled and not always the result of the wearer’s explicit intentions. By quoting looks currently in fashion, consumers can create an appearance with a high degree of fashion capital.\textsuperscript{298} In this study, Tommie X, through his social network and occasional jobs as makeup artist and stylist, is the one with closest access to the Stockholm fashion industry. This affects his style, while at the same time his conceptual appearance strengthens his position within this fashionable context. In this way, his style is an effect of the information he has access to regarding upcoming trends, but only occasionally, through jobs or social networking, is he actually working inside the industry.\textsuperscript{299}

Often during conversations, or when reading his blog, I note that Tommie X will refer to different fashionable looks, such as for instance the hairstyles at the Louis Vuitton-runway show of S/S 2010, as possible inspiration for a new personal look, in this way positioning himself in our conversations as fashion conscious. I perceive his way of re-working current fashion trends into conversation and personal style as a way to employ his knowledge of fashion in the form of capital, a potential transformation into a currency which later on may be traded in for publicity in media, or jobs as club host or temporary work at MTV. At one time, he tells me a story that I found illuminating. This is a scenario he had previously been told by an acquaintance that had worked as a model in the 1990’s:

She told me one of the world’s most attractive scenarios from the time she lived in a models’ flat in London. So, she stayed there with four other girls in the whole apartment, with lots of rooms, and when they didn’t work they just laid around painting their fingernails, removing the polish and then painting them all over again. And I think it’s such an attractive scenario, to lie around and laze away one’s time in a models’ flat, painting your fingernails, removing the polish and then paint them again, in a different color. And working as a model. I just see this scenario in front of me. That they’re scattered around, like this, on a floor, just lying around and waiting.\textsuperscript{300}


\textsuperscript{299} The hybridization process of street style and high fashion, exemplified here by the case of Tommie X, is also discussed by Rocamora, but with focus on how it is carried out in the context of fashion brands (2002): 348.

\textsuperscript{300} In Swedish: Hon berättade ett av världens snyggaste scenarion för mig om när hon bodde i London i en modellägenhet… Så bodde hon med fyra andra tjejer i hela lägenheten med massa rum, och bara låg hela dagarna när de inte jobbade och målade naglarna, och tog bort det och målade om dem igen… Och jag tycker det är ett så himla snyggt scenario, att ligga och slöa i en modellägenhet och måla naglarna, ta bort och måla dem igen, i en annan färg.
In the story there is a sense of detachment from the world outside of the models’ flat. Time appears to be frozen, in sharp contrast to how it passes outside the apartment, where everyday routines mark the transitions of the day. Inside the flat, the girls create motion in time by changing the color of their nail polish, an activity that actually has the reverse effect, stressing the fact that in this scenario, there is no real movement. The flat is portrayed as a place in limbo and the girls’ existence as vacant, with no mention of relations between the girls, potential partners or family ties. The focus on bodies (rather than personalities), along with the freezing of time, makes it reminiscent of a music video or fashion magazine spread. In this quote, Tommie X is invoking one of his prime sources of inspiration: the mainstream fashion and music scene of the 1990’s.

I consider Tommie X’s way of describing this scenario to be vital in relation to his style production for mainly two reasons. The first is that this kind of citing of a 1990s aesthetic is a central part of the production of his style; the image operates as inspiration for his understanding of how to dress according to a 1990’s look. The actual women in the narrative, or their understanding of the situation, are subordinate to his interest in the aesthetic qualities of the story; his interest is not in an authentic image of the lives of young models in London, but in a narrative constructed in alignment with his stylistic inclinations.

The second reason is that Tommie X tells me that the person who told him this story is now, according to him, an important person in the Stockholm club scene. Through this statement he places himself close to someone influential, telling her story as a way of displaying a shared intimacy. He lets me know, indirectly, of his close proximity to key figures in Stockholm club life and fashion system, as well as the importance of these relations for the development of his personal aesthetics. Gilles Lipovetsky has written about this kind of “unprecedented aesthetic self-observation”, stating that fashion “makes narcissism a constitutive and permanent structure of fashionable individuals [… ]”. The narrativization of the aesthetics of others are, in this

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Och jobba som modell… Jag ser bara scenariot framför mig. Att dom ligger slängda såhär, på golv, och bara ligger och väntar.

301 London was considered the centre of pop culture during the 1990s, an assumption based on the trend of Britpop music and enhanced by the slogan “Cool Britannia”, presented during the early years of Tony Blair’s government.

situation, used to promote the style of Tommie X; a kind of cultural scavenging as part of the production of style.

The harshness of Lipovetsky’s words is softened by Crane’s assessment of how fashion consumers in postindustrial societies are required to express a sense of individuality, as part of a dominant discourse promoting self-expression. She states that “[c]onsumers are no longer perceived as “cultural dopes” or “fashion victims” who imitate fashion leaders but as people selecting styles on the basis of their perceptions of their own identities and lifestyles”.303 Linking this to the case of Tommie X’s story, I claim that by citing a specific source, while also explicitly stating the social relevance of the person who initially had described the scenario, Tommie X emerges as highly fashion-conscious in a fragmented postindustrial culture.

This claim is further supported by my visit to Tommie X’s flat, where I find a life-sized doll-box, in the style of Barbie but with the name ‘Kajsa’ imprinted instead, written in the well-known Barbie logotype. I recognize the box as part of the 1990s music video “Angel Eye” by Swedish pop star and one-hit-wonder Kajsa Mellgren. The box now functions as Tommie X’s closet, this way not only physically framing his clothes but also culturally positioning them in a highly visual way through a piece of Scandinavian 90s pop culture memorabilia. In addition to this, the box also frames Tommie X in contemporary Stockholm, demonstrating that he has the required social capital to not only be acquainted with Kajsa Mellgren but also know her well enough to be given an important memento.

In his article “Haute Couture and Haute Culture” Bourdieu described how to recognize which Parisian fashion houses and designers that hold the dominant positions: “[t]he designers who possess in the highest degree the power to define objects as rare by means of their signature, their label, those whose label has the highest price”.304 The Parisian fashion context analyzed by Bourdieu is significantly different from the empirical material in this study, as outlined partially in the text by Crane on the societal development from industrial to postindustrial culture, changing the ways and directions in which fashion is communicated. However, if I were to translate Bourdieu’s work into the into the context of this study and apply it to Tommie X’s situation, I would substitute the word ‘designer’ with ‘actor’, and understand ‘highest price’ in a more general way, to mean ‘highest value’. That way, I can understand that by telling me this story, Tommie X demonstrates his...

strong fashion (intertwined with his social) capital by showing me that he has access to one of the central figures within his cultural sphere. The style he articulates through the story is therefore already defined as valuable, approved by a key player in deciding tastes and trends in this context. Here, style becomes interlinked with the idea of mutual taste, defined by Thornton as a key aspect for the production of subcultural worlds.  

When Tommie X makes use of his proximity to actors in the fashion system and club world, his sartorial style becomes defined through more commercial contexts. The effects are not merely spatial – through his connections and well-known sartorial style, he has become a regular at fashion shows and similar events during Stockholm Fashion Week – but also cultural, as shown by the anecdote he retold to me as well as by the doll-box he stores his clothes in. The same holds true for Lady Oscar, who reads the same fashion magazines and visits the same fashion websites as Tommie X, habits which give their conceptual looks a fashionable and contemporary edge. Their access to certain forms of capital, together with their simultaneous lack of other forms, structure their respective positions in the network of contemporary Stockholm, related to Bourdieu’s claim that,

…”the structure of the distribution of the different types and subtypes of capital at a given moment in time represents the immanent structure of the social world, i.e., the set of constraints, inscribed in the very reality of that world, which govern its functioning in a durable way, determining the chances of success for practices.”

Thus, I state that definitions of fashion and style are not to be considered complete opposites, but overlap and interact in a process of hybridization, as part of the development of a modern fashion system into a late (or even post-) modern era. Even though fashion’s intimate connection to capitalism is at the core of its definition, and often used to differentiate it from the concept of style through the temporal aspect that continually produce new commodities within the fashion system, it becomes evident through this study that also style is deeply connected to matters of different forms of capital.

“FUN! ACID! SPA!”

In the summer of 2010 Tommie X and Makode, among others, host “Stockholm’s most exclusive spa and relaxation area” [sic], called “FUN! ACID! SPA!”, just outside the main entrance of Berns.307 Behind a small demarcation in the shape of a green hedge together with a red velvet rope they have placed a large Jacuzzi, along with a mirror and some lit candles to set the mood, for guests to swim in. This event takes place in connection to 2.35:1 FUN!, which is the summer version of the club 2.35:1 + GAY!, charging the club with gay connotations while also defining it as open to non-gay visitors. The demarcation of the area around the Jacuzzi functions to define it as an informal VIP-area, hosted by Tommie X and Makode, who primarily but not exclusively invite their friends to join. This kind of informal invitation leads to a separation of styles at Berns; more conceptual and artistic styles centered around the Jacuzzi area while the rest of Berns is left more or less undefined, operating as a kind of backdrop and thus subsequently adding focus to the VIP area. The division of space is created by small means, but the effect is that different styles appear to be valued differently by the establishment. According to Bourdieu,

[…] this work of categorization, i.e., of making-explicit and of classification, is performed incessantly, at every moment of ordinary existence, in the struggles in which agents clash over the meaning of the social world and of their position within it, the meaning of their social identity, through all the forms of benediction or malcription, eulogy, praise, congratulations, compliments, or insults, reproaches, criticisms, accusations, slanders, etc.308

The lines between the two aesthetic categories aren’t fixed, and a few of the guests in the VIP-area regularly go inside to dance, while every now and then someone from inside will cross the line and approach the pool. However, the separation of styles show that the styles function not only as references to different lifestyle cultures (for example, subcultural and mainstream), but also to how these are valued differently in this setting. This

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307 The slogan was originally in English.
308 Bourdieu (1985), 729.
time, Berns systematically places styles with a clear subcultural edge in the VIP-area, which is also the most prominent part of the building, visible to the people waiting in line outside. Conceptual styles are thus defined as culturally significant, exposing how similarities in fashion capital can produce spatial limitations in context. Differences in status are defined not only through differences in styles of dress, but also in how spatiality is structured at Berns, enhancing these differences between sartorial styles by making certain areas, in which specific styles become concentrated, more desirable than others.

Blondie and Blackie, Kinks and Queen

Fridays at Knast

The area north of the Central Station, known as Norrmalm, is a partially residential area but also the place for many offices, restaurants, hotels and shops. During 2009, approximately every Friday night Elin and Tommie X host a club called Blondie, later renamed Blackie, at a restaurant and bar called Knast, located in a semi-basement on Upplandsgatan in this slightly anonymous part of town. Knast is targeted at the alternative music scene, but the profile of the club Blondie/Blackie is somewhat unclear, Tommie X initially proclaiming it not to be “a gay club, but with gay music”, but later writes on their Facebook page that the club has a “gay vibe”. When I ask Elin about this, she says the term gay is used in order to attract a distinct crowd who would be willing to pay the entrance fee (20 SEK, approximately roughly 2 euro); but after observing Tommie X’s club at the Saloon, F12, I believe that he might have other, more idealistic, aims. Hosting a semi-gay club at a place like Knast opens up for new definitions of the concept of gay clubs, moving away from mainstream culture into a more subcultural landscape.

The clientele at Blondie/Blackie is young; I estimate the average age being around twenty, and somewhat correlative with the category of concep-

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309 Bourdieu (1985), 726. In this text, Bourdieu doesn’t specifically discuss “fashion capital”, but I claim that his thoughts on the relation between distribution of capital and the organization of space is possible to translate also to this specific category of capital.

310 Parenthetically, the name FUN! ACID! SPA! is a reference to the 90s revival popular at this time. This subtle reference works to strengthen the fashion connotations of the club, while of course also spilling over to the hosts as well as the guests of that specific VIP area.
tually clad club visitors at Ficks. The most important difference is that at Knast there is an almost complete lack of bourgeois style. At Blackie/Blondie contemporary club styles are in majority, regardless of time at night. This is related to the discourse of Knast, which in no way, aesthetically or historically, resembles F12, even though both clubs appeal to young and trend-conscious club goers. This creates a more homogenous crowd than at Ficks, but subsequently it also attracts fewer guests. Many of the people are regulars and go to Blondie/Blackie almost every week; most of them also seem to know Elin and Tommie X. This leads to another kind of pace during the evening; at Blondie/Blackie there is no speeding up of events, no tension among visitors, but instead simply a slight increase of club guests as the evening progresses, perhaps a bit more dancing after midnight but then, at one am, the club closes and the crowd disperses.

The young age of the clientele at Blondie/Blackie determines the events taking place in the venue. Thornton has argued that youth is defined by its “momentary reprieve from necessity”, by which she means that young people enjoy a transitory liberty between the constraints of childhood and the responsibilities of being an adult.311 Young adults can engage with subcultural capital – buying drinks, clothes, music, going regularly to clubs and bars – in ways that many others can’t. Thornton’s study is from the late 1980s and since then, much has happened; the delimitations of ‘youth’ has been widened to include both younger and older individuals, while the financial recessions have limited the possibility to reject responsibility for many people, even momentarily.

Nevertheless, in the production of meaning at Knast, age is clearly a defining factor, as the youth of the visitors is part of what brings guests together. The guests share style references and appear to be connected to each other through a loosely connected web of interrelations and events, often appearing and leaving in different constellations.

When entering Knast, you pass a small table where often either Elin or Tommie X will sit between 10pm and 1am, charging the 20 SEK entrance fee (though this is done sporadically and many people pass without paying). After this, there is a staircase of perhaps ten steps down to the entrance, followed by a small corridor before you reach the bar. This room has red wallpaper, with mostly everything else (chairs, tables, bar) painted black. The bar is in one corner, and in the opposite there is a sitting area with sofas and chairs. The music is played at a DJ-booth between the bar and the sitting

area, with the dance floor spontaneously being created in front of the bar. There are few possibilities to wander around at Knast, as the place itself is small; instead, many guests spend their time moving between the bar (often to buy beer) and the sidewalk outside (to smoke cigarettes or to keep smokers company). The smallness of the place creates a sense of intimacy, enhanced by the homogeneity of styles and the familiarity that marks the ways in which interactions take place.

One Friday in early July 2009, it’s “Absolutely Fabulous”-theme at Blondie/Blackie. The week before they had announced the theme on Facebook:

Last week when we stood outside Knast smoking and talking about how fucking awesome we are, we thought we were beginning to run out of festive themes at Blackie-party nights! But phew, then we realized we actually haven’t yet celebrated our childhood idols Edina Moonson and Patsy Stone from the possibly best TV series ever, Absolutely Fabulous!

We wondered: “But eh, do people who come here even know what this is, they’re so young?” etc, but the fact is that as long as you’re gay/faghag/alcoholic into the very core that’s enough to know these fantastic ladies, old as well as young! And you are all gays, faghags and alcoholics, sweetie darlings! And how funny wouldn’t it be to force the ugliest guest to dress up like Saffron? 312

That evening, Elin is dressed in the character of Edina in a curly red-haired wig, black hat and a gold coat. Tommie X imitates Patsy, in alligator boots, matching top, black skirt, black leather jacket and a big blond wig. They are both wearing heavy makeup and act in line with their respective character: Elin dancing wildly, Tommie X presenting himself in a more aloof manner. Even though Knast is small, it is still apparent that there are very few guests present; Elin walks around trying to create a good mood by dancing and

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312 In Swedish: Förra veckan när vi stod och rökte utanför Knast och pratade om hur jävla bra vi var så tänkte vi på att vi börjar run out of festliga teman på Blackie-party nights! Men puh, så kom vi på att vi faktiskt inte ännu hyllat våra barndomsidoler Edina Moonson och Patsy Stone från den kanske bästa TV-serien någonsin, Absolutely Fabulous! Vi bah: “Meh, asså vet ens folk som går hår vad det är för nåt?”, ”De är ju så unga?” osv, men det är ju faktiskt så att bara man är böög/faghag/alkis ända in hjärtat så räcker det för att känna till dessa fantastiska damer, gammal som ung!
Och bögar, faghags och alkisar är ni ju allihopa, sweetie darlings! Och hur roligt är det inte att tvångsklä ut kvällens fulaste gàst till Saffron?
joking, while Tommie X is taking a more blasé stance in the DJ-booth, even if he also sometimes dances and poses. While they play euro-techno about five people dance together in front of the bar, a few others are outside smoking. A laser machine sends out red and green beams through smoke from a smoke machine, creating beautiful and dreamlike effects.

This night is representative of many nights at Blondie/Blackie, with no sense of anything actually occurring. The dramaturgy of Blondie/Blackie is hard to grasp, there being an evasive quality to it, created by the lack of guests, early hour of closing and absence of activities. People arrive late and leave just one hour after midnight. The atmosphere is amiable and slow; one song is replaced by another, someone is smoking, someone else is drinking a beer. The music is too loud for actual conversation and therefore people will often merely stand or sit in groups, making an occasional comment but otherwise mostly just looking around, waiting for something to happen. There is an obvious discrepancy between the fast-paced text posted on Facebook and the actual club.

In contrast to F12 and Berns, the place of Berns together with the clubs it hosts – Blondie/Blackie in particular – is defined by its lack a mainstream audience, thus presenting subcultural styles on slightly different premises. The atmosphere is more relaxed, and the subcultural connotations therefore more articulated; the place itself operates in symbiosis with the styles of the guests to create a kind of youth recreation center. The lack of pointers, queues and large entrance fees emphasize the difference between Knast and the clubs at F12 and Berns, while of course many of the guests at Blondie/Blackie go to either of the two other clubs when Knast closes at one. This way, there are both important differences as well as obvious cases of overlapping among the three clubs.

Leonora’s Club Vision

Leonora’s club, Kinks and Queens, is both different and similar to the other clubs. On a few occasions during the period of gathering material, Leonora will invite me over to her apartment for dinner and drinks. We informally chat about her past, her current activities as well as about her club. Leonora tells me that the club is inspired by her past experiences working as hostess in the New York club Wednesday Night Saloon in the early 1980s. This club was part of the famous Studio 54. During her time there, she appreciated the dynamics of the club and was inspired by its mix; that it was neither defined
as gay nor straight, but both. The club was very popular; Leonora estimates that they would have six thousand guests already around six pm, even though it wasn’t until after midnight, when “[…] all fancy trannies, gays, dykes and all sorts of other people would arrive” that the club really came alive.313

There is a relevant (if also slightly stretched) parallel between this description and how Ficks is temporally organized; the arrival of queer-looking visitors after midnight mixes the connotations of the place and adds to blurred gender and sexuality discourses at the club. The similarities in movements in time between the queer styles at the two clubs, separated by both time and geography, imply that there might be a common denominator in how queer patterns are temporally organized.314 Many years after she stopped working at the NYC club, Leonora moved back to Stockholm. She tells me that when she arrived, she had sensed that something was lacking in the Swedish context, and thus she decided to set up a similar type of club. She named it Kinks and Queens, the motto being “total mix, total u, total fun”.315 During her first years in the mid-nineties she drew a large crowd, enabling the club to be held on a weekly basis, but lately visitors have been dropping in numbers and now the club only takes place once a month.

When I ask Leonora what she thinks is the reason for the club’s initial success and longevity, she claims it to be two things: herself in a dress, and the mixed clientele. In this description, Leonora connects the connotations of the club with her appearance, thus claiming that she is not only the front figure but also the main attraction. Physically, Leonora is taller than average, blond and attractive, and in the role of representing Kinks and Queens, she is often dressed in elegant but revealing outfits. She tells me that this has been her signature look since the club was first initiated, sixteen years before I meet her for the first time. Her tall and slender silhouette, along with the heavy use of makeup and revealing dresses have over the years taken on a life of its own, becoming signifiers for Kinks and Queens, enforcing the

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313 In Swedish: […] alla tjuiga transor, bögar, flator, fan och hans moster anlände.
314 Halberstam has claimed that parameters such as work, living arrangements, habits, routines, desires, cultural structures and many more organize queer discourse, at times separating it from heteronormative patterns of organization. Halberstam, “What’s that Smell? Queer Temporalities and Subcultural Lives”, in International Journal of Cultural Studies vol. 6 issue 3 (2003): 313–333.
315 The motto is originally in English.
connections between the persona of Leonora with the concept of these club nights.316

In late February 2010, Kinks and Queens celebrates its 16-year anniversary. The club is often housed in temporary venues, and this evening the club is housed in Vasastan, a bourgeois but slightly non-descript part of town. The club opens at nine and closes at 2.30 am, but Leonora had told me that I shouldn’t arrive until midnight, since the first hours were mostly a period of ‘warming up’. I arrive together with an acquaintance shortly after 11.30 pm. At that time, very few people are present; the atmosphere is friendly and intimate and I notice that many seem to know each other. I recognize a few from F12 and Blondie/Blackie, and some of the others I have met casually during my time in Stockholm and in other Swedish cities. All guests have abided to the dress code that strictly prohibits blue jeans: one man is completely naked, while another is simply wearing a mesh tank top.317 One woman is wearing a dress that leaves the chest bare, and many of the transvestites are dressed in party outfits.

Leonora is acting as hostess, in a short, shiny dress, blond wig and large jewelry. There is great variety in age, but few of the guests appear to be younger than thirty, Leonora possibly being the oldest. The music is “schlager”, a music genre associated with mainstream gay culture, but the connotations of the club in general are much more subversive, creating an unexpected discrepancy between audio and sartorial styles.

The general style is characterized by either partial or complete nudity. Many of the guests are dressed provocatively; a few humorously, others overtly sexual. Full or partial nudity operates as a determining force in the characterization of the style prevalent at Kinks and Queens; it signals subversion in a quite conventional way of breaking gendered norms, while at the same time also creating a sense of intimacy among the few guests present.

Shortly after my arrival the performances commence, with Leonora and two other transvestites singing playback songs on a small stage. I notice that

316 At one time, she invites me to come to her club and watch her perform, and I gladly accept. This invitation is similar in structure to when Makode asked if I wanted a VIP-card to Ficks, with the notable difference that this offer was limited to one evening only. Nevertheless, my feelings of gratitude toward Leonora for giving me free access to the club affected my feelings of being at least temporarily part of the club life at Kinks and Queens.

317 The motto states: “Blonds with no shame! High Heel Erotica! Miniskirts! Leather and Rubber Goodies!! Whipping and Flogging! Open Minded! Internal Therapy! Hairy Ladies! Cleaned shaved Men! Mixed Music! Superb Guests! Bring Your Body To The Party! No Blue Jeans!!”. Original in English. In this way, there is a similarity to Blondie/Blackie as well as to Ficks, as all three clubs operate with dress codes that the guests abide by.
there seem to be different regulations for what is possible to say on-stage and off-, and Leonora takes advantage of this, making explicit jokes and gestures while on-stage, often engaging in sexually implicit dialogue with the onlookers. This interaction is made possible by the difference in floor levels, placing her above us, in the spotlight, with the microphone in hand, once again showing how places and actions are mutually defining.

Many of the onstage puns are allusions to the contrasts between Leonora’s biologically male anatomy and the feminine gender she performs. This type of performance signifies the cultural core of the evening, suggesting a multitude of discrepancies between gender, sex and performance. Through the use of the microphone, spotlight and other props, Leonora is able to perform in ways that before weren’t possible had she not been ‘in character’. According to Dana Berkowitz and Linda Liska Belgrave, the dressing-in-drag, and presence of a stage in the club for the dragqueen to perform on, alter and redirect the regulatory processes of what is considered socially acceptable.318

The drag styles at Kinks and Queens are both similar and difference in connotations compared to the drag look of Tommie X as Jean Harlow and Makode at the whore-tombola at Ficks. Compared with the Butlerian notion that drag performance is a potential subversion of the concept of an ‘authentic’ gender, I notice how they all have a humorous relation to the heteronormative assumption of correlations between exterior style and inner core.319 However, I also see discernable differences. The looks sported at Ficks were organized through a set of regulations, in which styles were separated on the basis of the strength of their various forms of capital, eventually becoming in many ways fashionable and commodified performances. At Kinks and Queens, on the other hand, style appropriations function in a slightly different manner, the club being defined in many ways through its lack of fashionable signifiers. This lack implies a difference in connotations between this club and Ficks. At Leonora’s club, styles aren’t commodified to the same extent, and looks aren’t to the same degree valued on the basis of artistic qualities or trendiness. Instead, I consider Kinks and Queens to be a kind of materialization of Leonora’s memories, thoughts, values and ideas.318

318 Dana Berkowitz and Linda Liska Belgrave, “‘She Works Hard for the Money’: Drag Queens and the Management of Their Contradictory Status of Celebrity and Marginality”; in Journal of Contemporary Ethnography vol. 39 no. 2 (2010): 163. This is reminiscent of how the DJ booth at Blondie/Blackie allows the hosts to stage drag contests and dance in the characters of Patsy and Edina.
319 Butler (1999), 175.
When her American past was transported into contemporary Swedish society it was transformed to fit its new context, thus shifting shape and becoming something else along the way. At the same time, the introduction of a new club changes the meaning of the club location where it is held. Through its translation through time, space and language, the notion of a Swedish Studio 54 resulted in 40 guests instead of 6000; instead of being on Manhattan, NYC, it is housed in Vasastan, Stockholm. The club is created and induced by and through Leonora, and even though she charges an entrance fee and the drinks cost money, it is not to the same extent a commercial project in the manner of Ficks, but rather more reminiscent of the idealistic venture Blondie/Blackie.

Summary

The kind of meaning a place holds is defined through the interactions of a number of different actors; it can shift depending on perspective, or place in time. A street, seemingly friendly during daytime, may at night seem threatening and dangerous to walk in. A restaurant, dominated at lunchtime by properly dressed office workers can in the evening be turned into a venue for scantily clad club-goers. The situations described in this chapter mostly take place in the same geographical area – the city of Stockholm and its near suburbs – but at the same time, I consider the city to be multilayered, containing many conflicting elements.

Stockholm is defined as a city largely because of its density; consisting of buildings, streets and parks, it is situated by the sea on the Swedish east coast, home to almost one million people. In many aspects, Stockholm resembles a number of other European cities of similar size; it has tourist attractions, business complexes and large residential areas outside of the city center. At the same time, these systems of buildings, streets and subways are the ongoing result of interactions; the mapping of the city is continually changing depending on the movements in and through it. Places are shifting and amorphous sites of contestation, often holding many kinds of meanings, constantly changing with the passing of time.

Within this city, a multitude of styles and fashions are produced and maintained, for longer or shorter durations of time. What effect these aesthetic practices have depends on the type of context they are executed within. At times, hybrid expressions are created, interlacing commercial and artistic aesthetics into the same network of events. Because of this, the pro-
duction of style must be considered through its contextual specificities, in
which I include not only the actual walls and floors of a place but also the
emotions, fantasies, values and distinctions that are being articulated through
all forms of interaction taking place. However, the context is not a mute
backdrop, but is an actor in itself and therefore equally affected by the ac-
tions carried out.

The materialization of gender in public spaces can be deeply traumatic
if it diverges from normative expectations, made apparent through the
assaults on Vivianne, Makode and Klara, as well as through the encounter
between Steffy and the anonymous man in Bosnia. In all cases, emotional
residue lingered, affecting particularly not only the spatial orientation of
Makode but also his sartorial practices. In all cases of assault, the victim was
alone, as was Anthony when he attempted to subvert the connotations of the
residential area in which he lived. This points to the requirement of collec-
tive force; the more actors that are involved in a network, the more durable
its impact will be. This is demonstrated through the case studies of night-
clubs, in which various types of styles that otherwise risk being assaulted
instead may become part of the production of capital, by which I mean many
different forms, from social to economic. Styles that otherwise are suscept-
ible to attacks from others for not fitting the norm become, in these contexts,
part of the dominant discourse. This shows that vulnerability is a question of
where, when and in what ways actors are interconnected; the more connec-
tions between similar types of actors, the less they are exposed to threats of
danger and violence. The more isolated an occurrence is, the more marginal-
ized it will be.

Consequently, I argue that networks accumulate in force when they
expand, which demonstrates that the distinction between subcultural and
mainstream styles is not always neatly distinguishable, and that the differ-
ence is instead to a large extent related to spatiotemporal variables. It also
shows that the two types of aesthetic organization are actually at many times
interconnected and mutually benefitting from each other’s specific kind of
capital. Subsequently, I claim that both fashion and style are financially or-
ganized, however in vastly different ways and to different extents. Styles can
be a form of commodity, but they are not as intimately linked to the system
of capitalism as fashion goods; instead, their relations with the capitalist
system are more disparate, dynamic and irregular.

There are often inherent tensions between different networks of styles,
as demonstrated through the narratives of Tommie X and Steffy. Even
though they were both central parts of the club nights at Ficks, Tommie X’s
presence even being an effect of his employment at F12, they nevertheless became objects of ridicule and scorn in encounters with actors who were part of the other, more affluent dressed, collective. This demonstrates the volatility of the interrelations as well as the fragility of temporarily aligned networks, such as the complex associations between the restaurant F12 of and Ficks-club hosts Makode and Tommie X.

In more homogenous contexts, such as Knast and Kinks and Queens, the tensions were fewer and there was a distinct lack of verbal harassments. This is due to the specificities of these networks, as they attract a distinct kind of niche clientele, mostly orientated in the same direction. Most acts taking place within these places are synchronized, a result of the networks being smaller as well as of the fact that many actors share stylistic traits, implying a collective source of preferences and references.
5. MAPPING BODILY MATTERS:
POINTS OF INTERSECTION
IN THE STYLE PROCESS

Introduction

Fashion constitutes a central tool in the performative repetition of normative gender roles. Particularly in its mainstream variety, it most often partakes into normative, and, to use Judith Butler’s term, “punitive” constructions of gendered identities. Yet its partaking in the performativity of gender is also what allows it to upend and denaturalize those norms. This potential is, however, different from an overly simplistic reading of fashion as primarily a means of self-expression.  

As Francesca Granata writes, there exist profoundly important interconnections between performativity, fashion and gender expressions. Sartorial styles are produced in a number of different ways, and thus far in this investigation I have covered aspects of verbal communication as well as matters of the spatiotemporal. What binds these together is the corporeal dimension.  

According to Butler, the execution of performative acts marks the body; they constitute constraints of bodily movements and ways for it to be classified. In this way, performativity is not located in any one specific act, but is rather to be defined as a system, through which the body is created, and within the framework of which bodies are negotiated. However, the actions

320 Francesca Granata, The Bakhtinian Grotesque in Fashion at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century (London: Central Saint Martins School of Art and Design, University of the Arts, 2010), 9.
321 Wilson has commented on the strong connection between physical bodies, garments and the ways the interrelations between these material categories influence the production of meaning. See Wilson (2003), 1–2.
wouldn’t be carried out without the materiality of the body, and thus performative acts and bodily matters are intimately and reciprocally integrated.\footnote{Butler (1993), 12.}

In the introductory quote, Granata highlights the Butlerian stance that actors are not expressing a completely free or purely personal desire, but emphasizes the concept that actors are, if I translate her words into a Latourian phrasing, defined by their part in a larger network of events. When networks grow in number and strength, other networks can be questioned and challenged; this is how paradigms are overturned. Thus, neither actors nor acts are to be perceived as isolated individuals or incidents, but are to be understood as parts of collective developments within a larger discursive field.\footnote{Latour (2005), 217–218.} This theoretical understanding of actions influences also how I view the concept of corporeality; I don’t consider the body as delimited by solely biological matter, but as part of larger contexts. In the words of Ahmed:

To examine the function of cultural difference and social antagonism in the constitution of bodily matters is not then simply to read differences on the surface of the body (the body as text), but to account for the very effect of the surface, and to account for how bodies come to take certain shapes over others, and in relation to others.\footnote{Ahmed, “Embodying Strangers”, in Body Matters: Feminism, Textuality, Corporeality, eds. Avril Horner and Angela Keane (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 89.}

By focusing on how the body partakes in the production of sartorial styles, I intend to avoid enforcing a simplistic theoretical division of nature and culture. Instead, I investigate what part bodily matters play in the constitution of the styles that are created. It is important to stress that the concept of the body does not operate in dichotomy to an understanding of agency as shared among many different actors. On the contrary, understanding bodiliness as a kind of ‘situation’ opens up for relations among a variety of actors, especially since this perspective emphasizes the orientation, and thus interrelation, of the body among other bodies and artifacts.\footnote{Toril Moi has written extensively on the body as a situation, see in particular “What is a Woman? Sex, Gender, and the Body in Feminist Theory”, in What is a Woman and Other Essays (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3–120.} The body becomes a site where relations are made apparent, and in this intersection appearance, aesthetics and style become pressing matters.
In this process, fashions and styles are not mute actors or merely instrumental frameworks, but act according to their own logic. ‘Fashion’, similar to ‘style’, is a wide term, including many differentiated expressions within its scope. The spectra of these aesthetic practices are vast, holding possibilities for both transgressions as well as for the reproduction of normative opinions and values.\textsuperscript{326} In this chapter, I aim to answer research questions regarding the realization of style through the realm of the corporeal.

The chapter is organized thematically, beginning with a section on inter-human relations, called “Style as Collective Activity”. In this section I will discuss corporeal aspects of style as a collective activity. The bodies will not always be actual, physical bodies, but may also be imagined, fantasized or visualized. The central aspect in this section is the impact they have on each other – as Ahmed was quoted saying – “to account for how bodies come to take certain shapes over others, and in relation to others”. Thereafter I investigate the more bodily and tactile part of style processes, in “Embodiment of Style”, followed by an analysis of bodily possibilities and constraints, “Corporeal Constraints”. The chapter ends with a section named “Fluctuations”, about bodily instability, and finally concludes with a brief “Summary”.

\textbf{Style as Collective Activity}

\textit{References and Preferences}

Already during the first few weeks of my search for possible study participants, I began to notice a crowd consisting of several people, who all seemed to share a similar look. The style was hard to pinpoint, since I never saw them together all at once, but their silhouettes, ways of dressing and general aesthetics were all reminiscent of one another. In one, I could see traces of the others. On repeated occasions, I would see Lady Oscar in makeup and style similar to famous Swedish fashion stylist Ingela Klemetz-Farago, with hair pulled back from his face, a red plastic sun-visor, large ear-clips, and the stylist’s signature dots painted in a line under his eyes. At other times I would see Tommie X, thin body and bleached hair, in worn-out and ripped

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{326} Rebecca Arnold, \textit{Fashion, Desire and Anxiety: Image and Morality in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century} (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 109–110.
\end{footnotesize}
clothes and wearing a lot of pale makeup with large circles of dark eye shadow around his eyes, or Elin, in large hair, colorful makeup and 1990s inspired outfits. Other people figured as well, in equally conceptual and inventive outfits. The individuals in the group were not interchangeable; they all had their distinct look, setting them apart from the others. I tried looking at details in their use of accessories, in how their makeup was applied, or how they wore their hair in order to find what connected them, but the common denominator seemed to be more abstract, an ephemeral practice linking them together through shared fashion and style references.

One night during the summer of 2010, I am at a burlesque club, located in an industrial area of a suburb north of Stockholm, when I meet Tommie X in the crowd. He is dressed in a black dress and black stockings, carrying a small handbag. The high heels he is wearing make him look like an incredibly tall and slim elderly lady. He wears heavy makeup and a black wig, but is quick to tell me that he is present at the club only because of Klara. For this evening, Tommie X functions as her stylist and has created her look; double eye lashes, gold sequins between her eyes and a large pink coiffure. Shortly after, when Klara joins us, I see that she is also dressed in a salmon pink dress and with her bare shoulders covered with gold glitter. I also notice that her makeup carries many of Tommie X’s signature trademarks, such as dramatic eyes and pale skin. They tell me that the dress Tommie X is wearing is an old outfit of Klara’s, bought when she weighed less.

By applying his preferred style of makeup on Klara, Tommie X alters her appearance to resemble his version of beauty, while Klara, by the act of lending him her old garments, partially determines how he is to be dressed. By this blurring of bodily boundaries, the materialization of style becomes a mutual project. In this case study, preferences are articulated through collective practices.

Two years before my visit to the burlesque club, in the summer of 2008, I saw Lady Oscar for the first time, dancing in the White bar at Spy bar. His long hair was pulled back in a ponytail, he had makeup on his face and on his head he wore an SS-hat. A few weeks after that incident, I had asked him about his choice to flaunt the SS-symbol. He told me that by wearing the uniforms of a regime that had wanted the likes of him (by which I assumed he meant gays) extinguished, he attempted to drain the symbols of their original hateful meaning by adding more layers of symbolic value. A few years after this conversation, I found myself in a similar discussion with Klara, in which she explained why she uses a Luger gun, generally known as a Nazi symbol, in her burlesque performances, saying that they not only mark a
totalitarian government but also operate as historical references and are important tools in the construction of her style as deliberately anachronistic.

In her article on this kind of style bricolage, Evans has cited the use of the swastika among punks, stating that the use of it “does not mean adherence to fascism, but has been pulled away from this to mean ‘transgression’ of the existing order – even ‘being hated’ for wearing such a nasty symbol, or ‘being an outsider’”. 327 This analysis is aligned with how I understand Lady Oscar’s club outfit to function when I see him dancing in the bar; the style is fashionable but at the same time deeply transgressive, the SS-symbol reflected in the mirrors around us, constantly emphasizing his position as a kind of outcast in this mainstream venue. Even though there are distinct organizational differences between how Klara and Lady Oscar appropriate the items, and also in the ways Klara and Tommie X stylistically merge their sartorial practices at the burlesque event, the effects are partially the same: from an outside perspective, distinct similarities in their way of dressing and acting are discernable and this way, the shared style represents a community of joint taste and implicit knowledge. Rob Shields has written that aesthetics, in the form of an “art of living”, hold particular functions within specific groups, thus organizing internal communication and a sense of togetherness within the group, defined by a mutual approach to style. This way, style can be considered a form of sociality, rather than being defined merely as an expression of individuality. 328

Klara, Lady Oscar, Tommie X (and also Elin, which I will demonstrate shortly) are all part of this clique, defined through the sharing of a mutual style. Exactly who else is part is not always evident, as the connections between the participants fluctuate; individuals come and go, while the rudimentary elements of the style persist. The collectivity of this style practice fascinates me, and once I’m better acquainted with Tommie X, I ask him about how this works:

Philip: But do you synchronize your looks?
Tommie X: Yes, sometimes we do it on purpose, sometimes it just happens, like we styled ourselves in the same way, and that’s fun.
Philip: Yes.
Tommie X: Our collective subconscious is really linked. Because we do many things together, and then you develop a collective subcon-

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I consider his reference to the notion of a “collective subconscious” in relation to an aesthetic activity particularly interesting. Tommie X claims that their activities have been carried out to such an extent that it has synchronized the group’s aesthetic values and expressions, as well as influenced the actual ways the style materializes. Listening to Tommie X, I understand this approach to fashion and style as being collectively shared; the process of creating and sharing style ideals is carried out jointly, produced through common efforts. Also, I note that Tommie X implies that the mutual style preferences are an effect of repetitive interaction; being in close proximity with each other on an almost everyday basis has successively led to a common approach regarding sartorial practices.

Continuing this line of thinking, focusing on bodily processes, I understand a body as holding many other bodies within its corporeal realm. Former interactions, as well as the ones we are currently engaged in, mark our ways of moving, being and feeling. What is considered normative respectively subversive sartorial practices is constituted through the field of collectivity, determining how bodies are interrelated and articulated through the repetition of performative acts. This is an example of the Foucauldian understanding of how normative perceptions are communicated within the flow of networks; by acting in collective agreement, contextually specific aesthetics become the norm, regardless of how these aesthetics are considered on a societal level, outside of the small collective.

Tommie X claims that his style is part of a collective subconscious, in which a number of individuals participate. I concur with his claim, and add that this collective is performatively constituted, and that the individuals are

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329 In Swedish: Philip: Men brukar ni synka era looks?
Tommie X: Ja, ibland gör vi det med flit, ibland blir det bara så, som vi stylat oss likadant, och det är roligt.
Philip: Ja.
Tommie X: Vårat kollektiva undermedvetna är väldigt länkat. För vi gör väldigt mycket saker ihop och då får man kollektivt undermedvetna, det är väldigt länkat. Så man nästan kan se likadana ut utan att ha pratat innan.


331 For reference to the discussion on Foucault’s theory of power regulation, see pages 22–23.
connected to each other through the execution of interactions. Subsequently, what appears as an individual style, such as the one of Tommie X, is actually influenced by a variety of other looks within this network, linked to each other through the actions carried out. Every time Tommie X puts together an outfit, he executes part of a sartorial practice, creating a continuation of the collective style. This way, a style is not defined as limited to just one body, but as many, through the gradations between them. These repeated bodily actions, in the words of Gail Weiss, “[…] form a series of overlapping identities whereby one or more aspects of that body appear to be especially salient at any given point in time”.332

This series, materialized in the style of Tommie X but also present in the sartorial practices of Elin, Klara and Lady Oscar, results in a kind of dress code.333 I claim that the people who adhere to this code are defined as belonging, while those who (for various reasons) don’t become visibly disconnected from the group. This style series is held together by common practices, one of which is the materialization of particular sartorial appearances. In this perspective, sharing mutual style practices is a prerequisite for membership in the collective, and the act of dressing individual bodies represent not only individual personalities but symbolize also a participation in a specific context. In the words of Calefato, subcultural styles “oblige mem-


333 The concept of ‘series’ is described by Jean-Paul Sartre in “Collectives” in Critique of Dialectical Reason, trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith, ed. Jonathan Rée, foreword Frederic Jameson (London: Verso, 1991, new edition [1960]), 256–342. Implementing the concept on the category of gender, Iris Marion Young summarizes it in her article “Gender as Seriality: Thinking About Women as a Social Collective” published in Intersecting Voices: Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy, and Policy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997). In her text, Young states that: “Unlike a group, which forms around actively shared objectives, a series is a social collective whose members are unified passively by the objects their actions are oriented around and/or by the objectified results of the material effects of the actions of the others. In everyday life we often experience ourselves and others impersonally, as participating in amorphous collectives defined by routine practices and habits. The unity of the series derives from the way that individuals pursue their own individual ends in respect to the same objects conditioned by a continuous material environment, in response to structures that have been created by the unintended collective result of past actions”. Young (1997), 23–24. The term has been applied to fashion by Kate Soper, who states that “high-street fashion may offer the individual a kind of way of belonging, but only in the pseudo-mode of the serial collective – in the mode of the market itself, which flourishes on constantly renewed ways of providing essentially homogenous forms of consumption […=”], in “Dress Needs: Reflections on the Clothed Body, Selfhood and Consumption”, in Body Dressing, eds. Joanne Entwistle and Elizabeth Wilson (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 27–28.
bers of urban tribes to follow precise dress codes, otherwise they run the risk of being an outcast […].” The act of coming-together is materialized through the specific act of imitation and influence of one another’s sartorial practices.

The Act of Dressing as a Form of Art

The idea that styles may be collective implies not only that the aesthetic characteristics of a style are shared among a number of actors, but also that they operate in the same manner, thus—at least in a general sense—signifying the same kind of meaning. In his book *Art and Agency – an Anthropological Theory*, Arthur Gell discusses at length the relation between the general (or collective) and the individual. He attributes the ability to express agency specifically to human actors, claiming that when agency appears in other types of (nonhuman) actors, it has to do with transferred agency. In this matter, my perspective differs from Gell’s, since I adhere to the Latourian notion of ‘shared’ agency, but I still find many valuable ideas in his text regarding how style can function as expressions of meaning.

The style Gell categorizes as “general” is described as the result of a collective activity: a consequence of contextual premises, to be understood as the symbolic expression of a culture. However, this collective activity is made up of a variety of smaller units, working on another level, which Gell perceived as connected to an individual “psychological saliency”. In this phrasing, I detect our divergent opinions regarding the definition of agency, but I choose to instead focus on the notion that expressions of style can exist on different levels simultaneously, both within larger networks, as well as within smaller ones. Applied to the case studies of this and the previous section, I would thus characterize the participants’ styles as being representative of both their relation to the larger collective and as representing the style on a level of a smaller unit; on the level of ‘Tommie X’, ‘Klara’ and ‘Elin’. The variations between these two levels of expressions become apparent when I study the styles more closely.

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337 Gell (1984), 159.
Elin is also part of the crowd described by Tommie X as constituted by a “collective subconscious”. During the time of gathering material, I see her many times in various club contexts, dressed in a distinct style yet resembling the appearance of her other friends within the same clique. Her style consists of certain attributes, which makes her easily recognizable both as part of the larger collective and as ‘Elin’. Specifically, I have noticed the way her long blond hair is often pulled back from her face, which is then heavily made-up for dramatic effect. This aesthetic trick can be applied to many different kinds of cultural influences, citing either the 1960s or the 1990s depending on its execution. Since Elin often repeats hairstyles, her appearance is given a sense of continuity linked to this aspect of her appearance, creating a sense of coherency even though her overall look might change.

Often, her feminine style has a streak of harshness to it; the way her makeup is applied reminds me of how feminine artifacts operate in the production of Klara’s style, and also her hair, when done up in extreme styles, marks distance to others outside of her own group. Once again, there are aesthetic similarities present in this group. Even though Elin and Klara cite different style references, they share a similar approach to the aestheticization process. During one of our conversations, I ask Elin what influences her style. She answers:

Well, it depends a bit on where I’m headed. If there is a special event to go to. And what I’ve done before. So, time plays a major part. If I have three hours to do my makeup, then I will end up doing my makeup for three hours just because it’s so much fun. But if we’re at a pre-party and are having what we call a makeup pre-party, then we’ll just sit at a table and pour out all of our makeup and divide among us, using bits and scraps, and eventually you’ll have something which has derailed into something… yes, whatever it can be. And then you sit there and talk, “you look a little like that person today, you should do so and so”, and that’s how it often ends up… Nowadays I work a lot at some crap job every night, and then I often take the easy way out, and then it ends up like it did when we met at Klara’s…

Klara’s attitude toward feminine attributes is discussed further on in this chapter, in section “Exploring the Boundaries of Femininity”, 185–190.

In Swedish: Asså lite vart jag är på väg. Om det är nåt särskilt evenemang. Och vad jag gjort innan. Så tid spelar väldig mycket roll. Har jag typ tre timmar på mig att göra nånting då kommer det sluta med att jag sitter och sminkar mig i tre timmar bara för att jag tycker det är kul. Men sitter vi på en förfest, och har vad vi kallar för en sminkförfest, då sitter vi bara vid
I am intrigued by what Elin tells me about the common pre-parties, as they seem to revolve around highly articulated regulations of the aesthetic process. Elin says that she and her friends share makeup with each other, without regards as to who brought what. This act, material in character, is interlaced with commentaries and suggestions on how to apply the makeup to the face. When they give each other advice while doing the makeup, sharing the same colors and shades, this will influence how their hands move in synchronized manners, drawing eyes and mouths, accentuating chin- and cheek-bones in coordinated movements.

The event Elin is referring to in the end of the quote is an incident when we met spontaneously at Klara’s birthday party. At the time, Elin had just left work and was dressed in a black turtleneck sweater, her blond hair pulled back from her face, which was subtly made-up with a simple black eyeliner-line drawn over her eyelids. This style, she now explains, had been the effect of a pressed schedule, where there had been no time to prepare any lavish outfits or dress up. At the party, she was the only one dressed in this particular (and subdued) look, which demonstrates that for style to be a shared activity there must also be time allocated to come together.

Elin has worked at various clubs that often have had different theme nights. Being a club hostess, Elin has had to conform to the theme aesthetics, something she, in hindsight, does not miss. She claims that the theme nights created a restraint for her sartorial practice, limiting the options of how she could look, and that she now, after having stopped working as a hostess, enjoys the freedom of dressing as she pleases:

Elin: Mm, I think it was after the Knast-period, when the club was once a week and it was compulsory to adapt to a certain theme.
And if you weren’t in the mood, you had… to face the consequence and just do it anyway.
Philip: Compelled by whom?
Elin: Well, we felt we wanted to offer something, now that we had invited people to a party, and we had said that the guests were welcome to come in costume, then of course we wanted to set a good
example. Well, at least I did. How much fun would it be to go to a party with a boring gray mouse who... At least I don’t think so?

Philip: So, do you think you are a gray mouse, when you’re not wearing makeup?

Elin: Yes, in terms of how I look. I mean, it has nothing to do with the color of my hair or so...

Philip: No. It’s simply more fun with makeup.

Elin: Yes, or expression in some form. Maybe you don’t have to use makeup, you can do whatever you think is fun. But it’s fun if people can tell that you’ve done something. 340

What Elin says concerns the expectations she perceives others have on her, particularly in the club environment where she acts as hostess. In her article “Gender Symptoms, or peeing like a man” Teresa de Lauretis quotes the work of Gesa Lindemann, who defines the body as consisting of two separate bodies: the objectified body and the living body. The two are connected through a reflexive relationship, in which the “modern living body is disciplined by the objectified body’s pictorial form”. 341 In her article, de Lauretis speaks of how bodies are gendered through the socialization of identifying the lived body with the image of how bodies are supposed to behave and look. In the case of Elin, these two bodies are in dialogue through the notion of what others expect her to look like in the context at Knast. De Lauretis is writing about how bodies adapt to normative views of gendered appearance, but I suggest that the logic of her thoughts are equally applicable to how gender is materialized within other, more subcultural, discourses.

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340 In Swedish: Elin: Mm, det var väl så här efter Knast-perioden när det var en gång i veckan och det var typ tvång på sig att anpassa sig till ett särskilt tema. Och var man inte sugen på det fick man... stå sitt kast och göra det.
Philip: Tvång från vem då?
Elin: Asså, från att vi kände att vi vill prestera nånting när vi har bjudit in folk till en fest och vi har sagt att gästerna får gärna klä ut sig, då ville vi så klart föregå med gott exempel. Och, eller i alla fall jag. Hur kul är det att gå på fest med en tråkig grå mus som… tycker inte jag i alla fall?
Philip: Är du en tråkig grå tänker du, när du inte har smink?
Elin: Eh, alltså vaddå, ja, rent utseendemässigt. Alltså det har ju ingenting med hårfärg eller nåt, men… jag vet inte.
Philip: Nå. Roligare med smink, helt enkelt.
Elin: Ja eller uttryck i nån form. Kanske inte behöver sminka sig, man får väl göra vad man själv tycker är kul. Men kul om det syns att man gjort nånting.
Elin is aware of what expectations others have on her, and adapts her physical appearance in accordance with these standards, thus creating a version of femininity aligned with the standards of venues such as Blondie/Blackie. In the words of de Lauretis, the experienced body is applied to the experiencing body, since Elin mimics the ideals of subcultural club style in order to meet the approval of others.\(^{342}\)

When she speaks of these expectations, I notice the actual reflexiveness between these two bodies. By imagining how others view her, Elin sees herself, and thus learns how to look and how to stylize her appearance. The process is seemingly smooth, and Elin changes position without evident problems. When she talks about makeup, it is apparent that she connects its effects with the general aesthetics of the club. It helps her transform her from feeling like a “boring gray mouse”, suggesting that it mediates a sensation, that things are “more fun with makeup”. Makeup is defined as an object that adds to the style Elin otherwise would have had difficulty achieving. However, the makeup not only adds to the experienced body, but also to how she experiences it, making things, in her words, “more fun”. In this case study, makeup is thus not a passive item but an actor that adds meaning when introduced, and therefore, it becomes apparent how the articulation of experiences is conditioned by spatiotemporal variables, as the result of interactions between many different kinds of actors.

When I study the case study of Elin’s style in relation to the club environment, I see that the constraints of materializing different kinds of femininities are determined partially by how Elin is orientated in relation to other bodies, and how they become gendered through their relations with each other. Being the organizer of a subcultural and conceptually defined event, she relates to the expectations of living up to the kind of femininity Evans and Thornton described in their study of London club culture: a kind of femininity which functioned as “a party piece” in the subcultural discourse, where conceptual and queer aesthetics often are defined through the implicit framework of the masculine body.\(^{343}\)

When Elin claims to not want to look “like a gray mouse”, an objectifying gaze is integrated into the construction her look, subsequently making her feel ill at ease when not dressed according to the set of norms of the place she is in. However, she also expresses the possibility to distance herself from this context, of taking control of how her style is to be contextual-


ized, and through which kind of network. This way, she is part of the defining process, partially deciding how her appearance should be gendered.

This conversation makes me curious about Elin’s consumption of clothes and makeup in general, and in order to learn more about how she goes about acquiring the artifacts that become part of her style, I ask her to explain. She tells me she buys a great quantity of clothes, both secondhand and new, but rarely in a planned or orderly manner. Her shopping sprees are random, and she will let garments hang in her closet for a few years before wearing them. This, she explains, is because she isn’t interested in clothes, claiming to “hate fashion and all of that. I think it’s boring”.

I understand Elin’s statement as a way to position her style in opposition to a look structured through trendiness and fashion-forwardness. By saying that she “hates fashion” she explicitly rejects the following of seasonally-structured sartorial change connected to fashion, and this is also the reason why she describes her shopping behavior as eclectic and sporadic. By articulating her habits in this manner, while also telling me that she will buy clothes but not wear them for a long time, she distinctly places a temporal distance between the time of purchase and the time she incorporates them in her sartorial practice, thus underlining the insignificance of being dressed in accordance with contemporary trends.

Through this articulated positioning of her style as non-fashion, Elin attempts to define it as independent of the fashion cycle. Her look would thus be detached from the dictates of the fashion system; instead, she wants to incorporate the concept of artistic taste in the production of her style. Here, the distance Elin articulates toward the fashion cycle places her instead in closer proximity to other cultural spheres, emphasizing the importance of an articulated self-control in regards to how her appearance is constructed. This is made even more evident when Elin continues, explaining that, “[…] as I see it, it’s my way of expression. Like, it’s my art form. Or, maybe that’s pretty obvious”.

By bringing in the notion of “art form”, Elin attempts to make the claim that her expression is less of a capitalist fashion and more of an expression

344 In Swedish: […] jag hatar mode och allt det där. Tycker det är tråkigt.
345 Elin’s statement is aligned with the Ted Polhemus-quote cited on page 35, in which he claims that in a postmodern world, it takes more than merely novelty for a commodity to be desirable.
346 In Swedish: […] som jag ser det, det är mitt uttryckssätt. Alltså, det är min konstform. Eller, det kanske är ganska självklart.
of art. This correlates with the articulation of her initial carelessness regarding whether her style is in or out of fashion. I claim that the distinction of being ‘less fashion’ and subsequently ‘more art’ is central when analyzing Elin’s appearance and style. It enhances her description of the regulatory system of conceptual ways of dressing as the opposite of ‘gray mice’, of dressing independently rather than following seasonally structured trends. By defining her style through the notion of art forms, Elin attempts to distance her appearance from the fast-paced fashion system. However, the decision to instead define her style as ‘art’ places equally strong constraints surrounding what is acceptable to wear, and the conceptual and artistic connotations enforce strong gendered effects on the materialization of her appearance.

**Imitating and Incorporating the Styles of Others**

One night at the Saloon at F12, I am having a drink in the bar when I see Tommie X arriving dressed like Agnetha in ABBA, wearing a blond wig and tight, shiny blue clothes. His shoes are typical 1970s platform shoes and I consider the look to be a combination of contemporary club style and classic ABBA outfit, but when I ask him about it, he tells me the shoes are poorly made, limiting his possibility of walking due to sharp nails cutting into his feet through the sole of the shoes.

This brief example demonstrates the importance of material constraints when discussing the staging of a style. Here, the outfit of Tommie X cites a well-known Swedish costume event: ABBA performing the winning song Waterloo at the Eurovision Song Contest in Brighton, 1974. In a Swedish context, this performance has an iconic standing, and as a source of inspiration, Agnetha’s outfit was seemingly easily integrated into the Stockholm club night more than thirty years later. However, when the actual outfit hinders Tommie X’s movements and limits him to stay in the DJ booth, the style becomes more complex; the materiality of the garments restrains him in a very physical sense to a few square meters. The materiality of the outfit engages with the conceptual part of his style, forcing him to adjust to constraints he hadn’t foreseen. That night, his sartorial practice, in the image of Agnetha, holds both joy and physical pain.

The practice of citing others as a source of inspiration Tommie X shares with Anthony. During our conversations on style, Anthony claims to interact, style-wise, with people whom he doesn’t know, though in a completely
different manner than when Tommie X imitates Agnetha. According to Anthony, this activity had begun already in high school.Majoring in Science, Anthony felt cut-off from students who majored in other subjects, but didn’t know how to approach them. Eventually, instead of getting to know them, he would imitate their looks. In our conversations, he especially notes that in the 1990s, a signifying look of the indie scene was boys with black-dyed bangs parted to the side. When he failed to connect with those type of boys, he decided to grow similar bangs himself, thus in the process, in his words, “[becoming his] own boyfriend”. This practice continued after high school ended:

Anthony: […] I haven’t had that many relationships, so it’s like you observe, but then you acquire more and more of the attributes yourself, instead of thinking there’s any point in trying make these people interested in you, so you nick it… And when you do that, you lose interest in the people who had those attributes.
Philip: Ah, how interesting!
Anthony: Yes, and very often nowadays it happens that I see someone around town, and then I start checking him out, but then I realize that, no, I’m not the least bit interested, but he is dressed rather nicely, I could nick this and that.

I see strong similarities in the way Anthony describes this process and how Tommie X incorporates style attributes of Agnetha. At the same time, there is also a notable difference, since Anthony, in this narrative, focuses on an initial desire for intimacy and emotional commitment, including also the personalities of the people he fetishized. This separates his practice from that of Tommie X’s, who doesn’t mention any fantasies of becoming friends with

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347 In Swedish: Och det var det som jag skrev också, på Qruiser, “I am my own boyfriend” [...].

348 In Swedish: […] Jag har inte haft så många förhållanden, så det blir som att man går och tittar på men så skaffar man sig, man tar mer och mer attribut själv, istället för, det är ingen idé att försöka fanga in dom här personerna utan man snor det… Och i takt med att man gör det, tappar man också intresset för dom som haft just dom attributen.

Philip: Ah, vad intressant!
Anthony: Ja, och så händer det jätteofta nu att jag ser nånting på stan och så börjar jag kolla på honom, och så inser jag att nå, jag är inte det minsta intresserad så, men däremot så ganska snygg klädsel, jag skulle kunna ta det och det.
Agnetha by dressing in her image. To Anthony, the style would make himself more visible to the men he wanted to become close with; connecting him, through the shared style preference, to their world.349

This reflexivity is reminiscent of the relationship between the lived and objectified body previously explained in relation to Elin. However, the situation is slightly different in this situation, since Anthony first attentively studies the sartorial practice of others before incorporating it into his own style. In the case of Anthony, the idea of mimicking a pre-established way of dressing or acting is not imposed from a normative value system, but sought out in order to further enhance his sartorial style. The relation between the objectified and the lived body is therefore articulated as an active part of his style practice; the style schemas of others are incorporated into his own.

An important aspect of Anthony’s citation-practice is that it is part of his process of dressing like a man. Moving away from the days when he transitioned between the styles of Brit-pop stars (male) Jarvis and (female) Candida, I understand Anthony to gradually have moved towards a femininely masculine style. This is acquired by incorporating the looks of men around him, adding what they wear into his own sartorial practice.

Anthony’s interaction with others involves a constant citing of their ways of dressing. When listening to him describe how this operates in his daily life; how aesthetics are transferred from body to body through a technique of citations, I am reminded of the works of Walter Benjamin. Benjamin has described the temporal process of fashion as a “tiger’s leap into the past”. To summarize Benjamin’s thoughts, fashion is temporally complex and non-linear, constituted by the constant and repetitive act of citing and reciting past fashions, incorporating them into fashions of the contemporary (by acts of transformation). This way, history is filled by “now-time” [Jetztzeit], and the present is always involved in a dialogue with the past.350 Ulrich Lehmann has elucidated Benjamin’s thoughts, claiming that periods in this way can be “charged with ‘now-time’, filled with meaning and revolutionary potential for contemporary expressions.351

349 The style Anthony describes, symbolized by the bangs, was central within the European indie pop scene of the 1990s, and the hairstyle was sported by both of the idols he continuously refers to, Brett Anderson and Jarvis Cocker.
By citing, or in Lehmann’s words “re-writing”, history, cultural expressions are forever caught in a complex dialectical process, materializing the past in the present. This challenges the supposed linearity of time, to instead create a pattern of links and networks, communicating through different times, places and practices. The logic of Benjamin implies that there is no beginning and no end to the fashion cycle, but instead a constant repetition of looks, slowly changing and altering its shape and form in adaption to new situations. \(^{352}\) This is similar to how Butler writes about gender being an imitation without an original, as the execution of a gendered act is a citation of a previous act. \(^{353}\) Both Benjamin and Butler reject the idea of an original, to instead focus on the act of citation and repetition as the place where meaning is produced.

In the case of Anthony, he cites the styles of others, incorporating them into his own sartorial practice in an organic and non-systematic way. The styles are given new material life as part of his corporeality, but simultaneously they hold a link back in time to the people he thinks he has turned away from. I claim that Anthony carries traces of them with him, in the style of his hair or the way he wears his shirts. Different garments and artifacts, or ways of combining different sartorial objects, become mementos of events and situations he has – in various ways – encountered or been part of, and now they remain in his presence, locked in his sartorial practice. In this way, the style practices of other times and places are evident in Anthony’s way of dressing, long after the other actors have left his proximity. In this example, the theories of Benjamin and Butler merge in my definition of style; through the non-linearity of sartorial citation processes the performative and temporary character of style is made evident.

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\(^{352}\) In Tigersprung: Fashion in Modernity (The MIT Press: Cambridge, 2000), Lehmann writes that “irreverence toward the past is best achieved by quotation as imitation rather than mimicry, since the constant change in fashion cannot be satisfied by a historically accurate copy” (p. 165). I have adapted Lehmann’s thoughts to fit the empirical material of this study, and as Anthony in this case is citing his contemporaries and not historical fashions, I have read Lehmann from a dynamic rather than an orthodox perspective. If Anthony imitates or mimics the people he mentions, I am not sure, since I have never seen the actual people he is influenced by, and only have his own words, and appearance, to go by.

\(^{353}\) Butler (1991), 21.
Style and Femininities

Exploring the Boundaries of Femininity

In her book on female masculinity, Halberstam has strived for a less reductionist understanding of the ways gender is perceived through the biological body, thus aligning herself with Butler in the questioning the effects of a coherent correlation between masculinity and male bodies, as well as femininity and female bodies. By separating the assumed interconnections between masculinity and male bodies, and subsequently also similar assumptions between femininity and female bodies, Halberstam claims that it would be possible to understand the gendering process of bodies in more subtle and nuanced ways. In her interpretation of Halberstam’s book, Dahl argues that this line of reasoning brings forth the need to “investigate femininity beyond its ties to femaleness or women”.

One day when we meet for coffee, Klara tells me the story of how she, through a series of transformations, has come to find her current sartorial style. She describes her sartorial point of departure as a state of confusion, defined by the narrow choices of existence in a society constituted by a binary definition of gender. Klara tells me that already early in life she had sensed that masculinity was coded as the intellectual gender, while femininity was being constructed as its opposite: sensual, bodily and natural. This gendered dichotomy had clear sartorial effects, and women were feminized – transformed into the category of women – through the care they took in adhering to gender ideals. When Klara describes this organization of gender she casually refers to feminist theorist Simone de Beauvoir’s writings, implementing this reference into the description of how her style is structured. This way, de Beauvoir’s theory of the gendered division of labor and appearances becomes the lens through which Klara wants me to understand her style.

According to this binary system, the concept of intellectual femininity is a paradox, since masculinity has traditionally signified intellectual clarity and femininity a pleasant appearance. Klara tells me that in her experience of being a young intellectual girl, she saw no choice but to follow these gen-

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dered regulations, and she thus dressed herself in a grunge fashion, wearing flannel shirts and disheveled hair. The grunge look was not physically revealing and did not show off her body, and Klara could, through this style, position herself as mind rather than body, as masculine rather than feminine.

Looking grunge was, according to Klara, the logical consequence of being intellectually inclined, not fitting the cultural norms of femininity, and this became further enhanced when she gradually began to develop same-sex romantic and sexual desires. Once again in our conversation, she makes the connection between gender identities and sexual practices, underlining the effects of adhering to a gender dichotomous perspective. She says that she thought that if she were attracted to women, she – according to this logic – must be a man, and hence, also appear as one. This phase she describes as an attempt to live as female-to-male, an effect of the internalized expectations of a discernable and linear correlation between gender, behavior and sartorial style.

Klara says that when her body hit puberty and became more feminine, others reacted to her appearance as they would to a woman, regardless of the flannel clothes she wore, Klara describes how anonymous men would violate her on the subway, and this made her “[…] even more aware of my feminine body, and I was even more aware of the wound I call my vagina because it bled”. To Klara, this is deeply upsetting, and the discrepancy between the grunge style and her feminine body, with all its female functions, became marked as a troubled and vulnerable situation. Eventually, this sensation gave way to others, where the relations between desire, appearance and sense of identity were more complex, leaving the neat binary order of masculinity and femininity behind her, instead engaging in pushing the boundaries of what it means looking and acting like a woman.

Klara’s first step in this direction was induced by a gift – a pair of high heel shoes – from a gay hairdresser, who in the narrative quoted below symbolizes a type of person who doesn’t fit a heteronormative definition of gender. I perceive the hairdresser and his gift to represent an opening to an alternative world, where it is possible to dress, act and behave beyond the limits of normative gender expectations. Klara does this by exaggerating the signifiers of feminine style, and eventually defining herself to be, gender-wise, ‘female-to-female’:

357 In Swedish: […] ännu mer medveten om min kvinnliga kropp, och jag blev ännu mer medveten om såret jag kallar min vagina därför att det blödde.
Klara: So then I noticed, that if I pushed it one bit further, suddenly I was associated with something other than a woman. And very early, I got my first high heels from the gay hairdresser where I had my hair cut, and I felt a very strong connection to that type of femininity. Because it felt like so much plastic, it didn’t feel like it had anything to do with running menstrual blood.

Philip: No.

Klara: I felt strong, the culmination was reached at Pride 2005, when I had gotten a strap-on by my girlfriend, and we went through whole fucking Pride with… I had on corset, gloves, high heels and strap-on, and I was so fucking happy. And I felt, this is me. This is all fake, this is all plastic, this is me. So I tried living female-to-male, but it didn’t work. So that’s what I like.

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Klara: For me, there are very strong connections to power and aggression in feminine attributes. Heels and nails and makeup and corsets are kind of like armors and weapons and…

The young Klara never managed to accept the role of being an objectified female body in patriarchal society, and therefore never completes her transition into a normative version of femininity. According to me, it is obvious that in this narrative Klara’s femininity is not solely processed or made sense of through her female body, but rather through the combination of several different networks, of which her bodily practice is one, where the connotations of femininity are at times detached from the biological body, in order to deconstruct the notion of what the concept of being feminine actually entails.

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In Swedish: Så då märkte jag att det fanns, att om jag drog till det ett snäpp, så plötsligt blev jag associerad med något annat än en kvinna. Och väldigt tidigt, jag fick mina första klackskor av hårbögen som jag klippte mig hos, och jag kände en väldigt stark dragnings till den typen av femininitet. Därför att den kändes så mycket plast, den kändes inte som att den hade nånting med att göra med rinnande mensblod.

Philip: Nej.

Klara: Jag kände mig stark, kulmen var nådd på Pride 2005, när jag hade fått en strap-on av min flickvän, vi åkte genom hela jävla Pride med… jag hade korsett, handskar, högklackat och strap-on, och jag var så jävla lycklig. Och jag kände, det här är jag. Det här är bara fejk, det här är bara plast, det här är jag. Så jag testade att leva female to male, men det funkade inte. Så där är det jag gillar. [---] Det finns väldigt starka kopplingar till makt och aggression i feminina attribut för mig. Klackar och naglar och sminkningar och korsetter och liksom rustningar och vapen och... 

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In line with Klara’s arguments, I state that this is done through the enhancement of feminine codes and the exaggeration of a feminine style. The process Klara describes is articulated through emphasis on certain items – corset, gloves, high heels and strap-on – and in the story, these artifacts become important actors in the production of Klara’s femininity. The blurred and shared agency of actors is a central point in actor-network theory, but is also similar to how Donna Haraway has used the image of the cyborg to illustrate how a network of different actors together forms the context of contemporary culture. In her work, Haraway speaks about how challenging boundaries and normative perceptions of human and nonhuman actors holds political potential, upsetting the dichotomy between nature and culture, and thus also questioning the supposed authenticity of gendered behavior and appearance.\(^{359}\)

Haraway’s cyborg is present also between the lines of Dahl’s text, in which she suggests that “rather than being the expressive and visible resources of an autonomous and rational human subject who at best aspires towards better tool-use or make-up, femininity, and thus feminine subjectivity, is irreducibly co-constituted through soma and techne; as a body of flesh and knowledge”.\(^{360}\) Applying this line of thinking to Klara’s narrative, it becomes clear that by destabilizing the essentialist notions of what it means to be a woman, Klara attempts to, through her process of aesthetization, transgress the gendered limitations she describes in her narrative.

Klara’s narrative concerns not only matters on femininity and fetishization, but is also a story of being in a specific place and point in time. The coming together of body and objects is far from simplistic interaction, but includes also the physical orientation, with all its complexity, of the body.\(^{361}\) In what direction is Klara turned, and which objects are within her reach, possible for her to interact with? Her practices are negotiated and processed.

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\(^{359}\) Donna Haraway, “A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s”, in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. Linda J. Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1990). Haraway’s work has been hugely influential within feminist research on materialisms, inspiring among others Karen Barad, whose text “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter” (in *Signs* vol. 28 no 3 (2003): 801–831) is very much inspired by Haraway’s thoughts. In this text, Barad develops the notion of “agential realism”, which in many ways is similar to the Latourian approach to agency, as it also views agency as shared, through an intra-activity which connects human and nonhuman actors through their performative actions.


\(^{361}\) Ahmed (2006), 2.
based on her position at a certain time and place, and subsequently the strong emotional reactions she discusses are intertwined with this orientation.

Crane has researched oppositional dress as a form of non-verbal resistance among women in the nineteenth century. Her research shows that fashion at that time was dominated by the French influence. French fashion for women was very feminine, often designed in a way that hindered mobility and practicability. At the same time of this fashion, there existed a British style, stemming from a physical and sport-orientated outdoor lifestyle, fashionable in England.  

According to Crane’s research, women at this time would show a subtle form of resistance to the French fashion by incorporating details of a more masculine and British look; “ties, men’s hats, suit jackets, waistcoats, and men’s shirts, sometimes singly, sometimes in combination with one another, but always associated with items of fashionable female clothing”. In this way, an oppositional style could exist within conventional fashion, not in the shape of an external force, but more related to the subversive tactics de Certeau describes as operating within normative contexts. Klara’s approach is an inversion of the tactics researched by Crane; instead of implementing masculine attributes in a feminine appearance, the feminine styles of the already physically constraining garments become emphasized. The artificiality of femininity is highlighted, demonstrating that what signifies “me” is actually “all fake, all plastic”.

Klara wishes, through her sartorial practice, to upset the supposed authentic interconnections between femininity and femaleness. Even if this narrative is theoretically enforced by her articulated reference to thinkers such as Simone de Beauvoir, I find it uncertain if others who causally encounter her are aware of her theoretically advanced gender-subverting tactic. Often, there are discrepancies between the intention to be perceived, and how styles are actually understood by others, and therefore Klara’s overtly feminine appearance might hold both subversive and conventional connotations, depending on perspective and interpretation. Nevertheless, the actors that are part of Klara’s practice of feminine style – heels, nails, makeup and corsets – produce an effect of both artificiality and a sensation of being pro-

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363 Crane (1999), 242.
364 de Certeau (1984), xix.
365 I wish to point out that I don’t view Klara’s story as an “authentic story of actual events”, but analyze it as part of her way of making sense of her experiences and articulating to me, within the context of this project, the theoretical reasons concerning her sartorial practice.
tected and secure. Together, these actors constitute the network defined as ‘Klara’.

*Constructing Femininities through Bodily Appearances*

One of Tommie X’s recurring looks he calls “Madde from Farsta”, and is supposed to emulate the style of an imaginary fourteen-year old girl from a Stockholm suburb. Madde is prepubescent, which makes her bodily style similar to Tommie X’s. Through his slim and boyish figure her appearance is created without adjustments of body shape. The bodily appearances of Madde and Tommie X share common denominators, relating them to one another through weight, size, height and skin color. However, when Tommie X gains weight after having quit smoking, he isn’t sure if the look of Madde can survive. It becomes clear that for Madde from Farsta to come into production, the look, shape and feel of the materiality of all actors need to fit together. The makeup, clothes and hair style of Madde won’t interact properly if the body isn’t the right shape and size; the connection between all these materials will weaken and the style fail to appear.

The femininity Tommie X wants to create is dependent on, to use Dahl’s terminology, a certain kind of soma”, and when this specific corporeality ceased to exist, the “techne” failed to be articulated in the way it had in the past. This example reinforces Dahl’s statement of the co-constitution of these two elements, of how they are not dichotomous or binary but mutually dependent.

“Madde from Farsta” has been a highly conceptual creation and as such she was deeply vulnerable to any alterations, of either flesh or knowledge. She was not a person meant to live for more than the occasional club night, and thus the constraints surrounding her becoming made her more vulnerable than the becoming of Klara had been. These two versions of femininities are different not only due to differences in biological bodies, but also regarding important matters of temporality and context; Madde is defined as a kind of fiction, coming into being only during certain club nights.

This distinction is further enhanced when I compare Tommie X’s approach to gender with Vivianne’s. In the example of Madde from Farsta, Tommie X considered his weight an obstacle for the production of the style

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366 In Swedish: Madde från Farsta.
367 For reference, see discussion on page 188.
of Madde, while Vivianne, on the other hand, talks about her sense of identity as constructed through the unity of physical and psychological matter. Vivianne’s biological maleness is an obstacle for her being medically defined as a woman, but in our conversations, she claims to view herself as being constituted by a dynamic dialogue between psyche and body. Vivianne’s way of describing her view of how she is constituted as a person reads closely to Dahl’s argument of how gendered expressions are articulated:

It is in the body, it is in the cells, it affects how I behave towards my fellow human beings. Then of course I am socialized as a man. I can’t pretend to be unaffected by that, I’m not, so I know that in some cases I might act in ways that are typically male. But I think that happens mostly when I’m not feeling well. Then, I bring out something that I’ve simply been taught, like a trick, or a tool, to deal with people, and it works in some situations. But when my heart is with me, and by that I don’t wish to imply… that it’s generally nicer to be… but for me, that’s how I can be more myself. Then I don’t have to use any tools or tricks. But being a woman affects my way of being with people, there is a softness … how can I explain, it’s a different way of relating things.  

When I later ask Vivianne if she thinks that external attributes, such as garments and makeup, enhance this feeling of femininity, she disagrees. To Vivianne, her sense of femininity is constituted by other elements, and again she turns to the explanation-model reminiscent of Dahl’s argument on the interrelation between soma and techne. Vivianne claims that in her case, she experiences the relation between body and mind as femininely gendered, and that is what constitutes her gender. When other people interact with her, this sense is partially communicated through her sartorial practice, and in this

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369 In Swedish: Den finns i kroppen, den finns i cellerna, den påverkar hur jag är mot mina medmänniskor. Sen har jag ju också en socialisering som man, jag kan inte lätsas vara opåverkad av den, jag är ju inte det, så jag vet att jag i vissa fall kanske kan bete mig på ett sätt som är typiskt manligt. Men det tror jag är när jag inte mår så bra. Då tar jag fram något som jag bara lärt mig, som ett knep, eller ett verktyg, att hantera människor, såsom fungerar i vissa situationer. Men när mitt hjärta är med, och därmed vill jag inte säga… att det är överlag finare att vara… men att det för mig är så att jag kan vara mer mig själv. Då slipper jag använda några verktyg eller knep. Men att vara kvinna påverkar mitt sätt att vara med människor, att det blir en annan mjukhet i en [ohörbart], det blir en ganska … vad ska jag säga, en annan sätt att relatera.
way, garments and accessories may help define her as a woman, but this is only in relation to others, not regarding how she sees herself.

At the time of this interview, Vivianne has lived fulltime as a woman for two, three years, and the feminine aesthetics have by now become an integrated part of her routines. I claim that in the case of Vivianne, garments operate as communication devices, making it easier for others to categorize her, gender-wise. This is another way for garments to operate in the production of femininity than in the cases of Klara and Tommie X. In Klara’s case a feminine appearance is part of an investigation into the production of gender, while in the case of Tommie X, a feminine style is part of his conceptual look. In all three cases, femininity is partially staged through dress, but the ways in which the soma and the techne are interconnected are vastly different.

One day I arrive to conduct a wardrobe study at Vivianne’s apartment, which consists of one room and a kitchen. Along one wall, there is a row of bookcases, and in one corner is a shelf with clothes. In the hallway, there are small closets, also full of clothes. When Vivianne thoroughly takes me through her shelves and closets with neatly folded skirts, tops and blouses, I am astonished at the quantity of garments, many remarkably similar in color, cut and design. A few items she has actually bought repeatedly, apparently not remembering that she had already purchased that particular skirt or blouse. Sorting through the garments, Vivianne is equally surprised at the amount of clothing she actually owns, but as we go through the collection, the emotional bond between her and the garments become evident, making me understand the importance of the garments to her sense of self.

When sorting through Vivianne’s clothes, it becomes clear to me that the reason that so many garments are similar (and in some cases, even identical) is that she knows exactly what she likes, and this preference is vital for her to communicate to others. At one point she shows me a sleeveless pink top and says, “[this top is really me, me as a woman”.” 370 In light of how she previously explained garments as communication devices, I would not argue that these artifacts function as part of what constitutes her sense of femininity, but rather, that the top operates as a form of communication. The function of the top within the sartorial practice is to facilitate the reading of Vivianne’s style and to categorize her style as feminine.

This is slightly different from how Makode describes the circumstances concerning his style in regards to matters of femininity, body and dress. In

370 In Swedish: Den här tröjan är verkligen jag, jag som kvinna.
Makode’s sartorial practice, his biologically male body is often contrasted with feminine garments, at times creating a look he describes as sexy, fun and revealing: “Yes, contrasts, yes. And at the same time it’s, I think attaching a bow to your neck makes you look even more whorish. Really”.

And, on the subject of short shorts:

The effect is so dirty, people become provoked as well. Especially, and it’s even dirtier if you wear knee-length stockings. I mean, short shorts and then you just show a glimpse of your thighs. People become like, they don’t know what to… think. It’s really funny.

During the time I spend with Makode, I see many examples of this practice. His body is tall and slender, and with his hair done up on his head, his silhouette is even more towering. Makode’s style brings my thoughts yet again to Haraway’s concept of the cyborg: Within his sartorial practice garments, toned muscles, dreadlocks, dirty effects, pearls, bows, sense of whorishness all interact as separate parts, creating a temporary whole through their interactions. The combination of feminine attire and a masculine body produces a kind of gender-blurred sartorial practice; Makode’s femininity is only partial, put into production through the condition of his male body. I consider Makode’s sartorial practice to play with the idea of masculinity and femininity as binary terms, implementing the two opposite gendered aesthetics into one sartorial practice. The aesthetic effect of Makode is the sum of many different and divergent pieces and parts put together according to a dynamic and non-binary logic.

This practice leads to the question of how norms and bodily matter interact, and with what effects. What constitute norms and what is defined as subversive is contextually dependent. In the words of Grosz, “there are only cultural forms of body, which do or do not conform to social norms”.

Basing my thoughts in Grosz’ stance, I claim that if the effect of Makode’s “whorish” sartorial practice is considered subversive or not depends on how his body is orientated. The issue of context brings forth the important question regarding whom the style is seen by. Turning once more to Evans and

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371 In Swedish: Ja, motsatserna, ja. Och samtidigt är ju det här, jag tycker att en rosett i halsen gör att man bara ser ännu horigare ut, liksom. Egentligen.


373 Grosz (1994), 143.
Thornton’s study on British club culture, they claim that in their empirical material, men’s sartorial practices often are homosocial acts, aimed at attracting attention from other men. In some cases, they state, it appears to be “unfashionable to be a woman, fashionable to be a man, and most fashionable to be a man dressed as a woman”. Applying this perspective on Makode’s implementation of feminine attire, I state that it implies a gendered dimension of power, as the male homosocial context marginalizes the same femininity it humorously implements.

At the same time, it is also important to note how Makode speaks of the joy he experiences in dressing this way. This way, there are also strong relations between the cut and feel of the garment, and the emotions they stir up. Breaking cultural norms of what a man is supposed to dress like makes Makode feel “whorish” and “dirty”, creating a disturbance that he finds “funny”. This way, questioning normative conceptions of gender through dress may also hold emotional effects. Makode’s outfits produce powerful emotional reactions: feelings of exuberance or, as in the case of the attack on him outside his building, involving strong sensations of terror and fear.

Corporeal Constraints

Understanding Body Size through Clothes

I initially came in contact with Steffy through a mutual acquaintance. Steffy is young and slender, a fact he often emphasizes by wearing short shorts and tight jeans. Before I got to know him, I had seen pictures on Facebook of a person who seemed to be moving in the same crowd, and who partly shared his aesthetic preferences, but it wasn’t until I had known him for some time that I realized that the pictures actually were of him. The photos had been taken a few years back, and showed him weighing more than he does now. Since I had noted that many of his friends on Facebook when commenting on his photos focused on his weight loss as something significantly positive,

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374 Evans and Thornton (1989), 46.
375 This claim is further emphasized by how Makode on repeated occasions would state that one of the consequences of being a gay man was that he was mainly interested in other men.
376 In the definition of “corporeality” I include both biological and non-biological matter. It is important to separate the definition of corporeality from the concept of “practice”, which I perceive as a process over time, while corporeality has more to do with issues of spatial orientation. However, these distinctions should not be understood as conclusive or definite, since the variables of time and space are interdependent and mutually defined.
I was curious to learn more about the circumstances regarding this transformation. Steffy explains:

[...]

The thing is that I used to think so, I was conscious about the fact that I was big. I think I weighed roughly one hundred kilos. The thing that made me want to, because I was very political and open and like, “I’m gorgeous and I refuse…” even my mother would say, “you have to work out” and “it’s not healthy”, and I just, “no way, no way”, I was so anti-weight loss. Then I wanted to buy Cheap Monday jeans. In Örebro there is only one shop that carries that brand, and it’s called Entertainment, and then I wanted to buy a pair of black jeans, so I tried their largest size, 34, and it didn’t fit. And then I decided, there and then, to try to fit into a size 34 because I had to have them, you know. So I started a carbohydrate diet, and begun working out. But then when I moved to Stockholm, I can’t really answer your question. Because I don’t know. But I just stopped eating. And then I developed a bit of an eating disorder, the light version… 

What Steffy is describing in this quote is a wish to be able to dress in a certain style, epitomized by the Cheap Monday jeans model. The physical constraints of the jeans size made him want to change his body, which he subsequently did, apparently in contradiction to his political conviction. The change in bodily size changed not only his appearance, but also his eat-

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378 Cheap Monday is produced in several different models, not all of them tight, but I assume Steffy is referring to their slim fit, as this is the one they are most famous for, and which the brand has become synonymous with.

379 This is ironic, since the Cheap Monday jeans, in a Swedish context, is commonly considered a form of distinction of alternative lifestyles, which would be in alignment with the political issues he had to set aside in order to be able to fit into a pair.
ing and exercise habits, as well as his relationship to food, described here in vaguely negative terms.

This perspective on food and eating habits in relation to jeans size is something Steffy has in common with Tommie X. When Tommie X quits smoking, he rapidly gains weight. He is uneasy in this new body, and there is one incident, at Knast, when I initially don’t recognize him. Not until we have spoken for a few minutes do I realize it’s him. Even though my lack of recognition is partly related to the fact that he at the time is dressed as Death, it is also based on the fact that his weight gain happened so quickly that I hadn’t had time to adjust to his new appearance.

Being slim is a central aspect to Tommie X’s style. During the weight gain, he feels unattractive, which makes me curious in regards to how it affects his way of dressing:

Philip: But has it affected how you dress? That you’ve gained weight.
Tommie X: A bit, because I was so annoyed, because this is the general way I’ve thought about it, that so many of my clothes now are too small for me, they’re really tight. I used to be a 24 in jeans and now I’m a 30. Or maybe a 28. But still, I get dressed and all of a sudden I’m reminded, “I’m so fat”. So I think I’m changing my eating habits. Just because of that. But I also know that you’re thinner in the summer, and I’ll probably start smoking again and then I’ll lose weight. But it’s tough that it’s even an issue, and that it’s been like this my whole life, that you’re never left alone. Can’t the body be static? I don’t know. Not change.

Tommie X is outlining an opposite development compared to what Steffy went through. Steffy describes his perception of his body as “gorgeous” before he became interested in Cheap Monday jeans. The limited size system of the jeans made him reevaluate his appearance; since he longed for a more alternative look, he needed to alter his body to fit the standards of this style. Tommie X, on the other hand, had been used to buying one of the smallest

jeans sizes, but the added weight has forced him to buy sizes in larger models. Both of them describe garments functioning as gauges, measuring the physical dimensions of the body through the numbers stitched into the jeans waists. These numbers categorize the body, positioning its shape and weight on a scale, making it relatable to other bodies. However, there are differences in the effects of the categorization. To Steffy, the size itself didn’t matter; his aim was to fit into a general look, of which the jeans were an essential part. Tommie X, on the other hand, enjoyed knowing he was slim, which the size 24 confirmed every time he bought a pair.

After Steffy’s weight loss, and when he has grown accustomed to the sensation of being slim and fitting into the desired jeans model, the change in appearance and habits affects his health. During our conversation, he doesn’t want to address the issue in more specific terms, but in discussions with Tommie X, eating habits and body size is a recurring theme. The thinness of Tommie X is one of his trademarks, and as noted both in the case of his song “Pro Ana Party Slamma” and through the construction of “Madde from Farsta”, thinness is central to his look.381

There are strong ideological discourses present in these narratives. Through the repetitive act of regularly trying on and fitting in jeans, both Steffy and Tommie X know how their bodies are measured within the system of jeans sizes. The numbers stitched into the jeans communicate an estimated value regarding body size; the lower the number on the jeans, the more the body is worth. This fact worries Tommie X, longing for his body to be frozen in the constant slimness of youth, while Steffy has avoided food as a way of staying fashionably thin.

Dani Caravallo and Alexandra Warwick have written, in their Fashioning the Frame: Boundaries, Dress and Body, on the ideological discourses apparent in the regulations of corporeality:

If it is the case that cultural identity relies on boundaries as ideological and psychological structures designed to individuate the self, dress would seem to challenge boundaries. It frames the body and insulates private fantasies from the Other, yet it simultaneously connects the individual self to the collective Other and fashions those fantasies on

381 This song is discussed in more detail on page 92, and the style of Madde from Farsta is discussed on page 190.
By understanding their bodily shapes through jeans size, Steffy and Tommie X relate their bodies to the bodies of others, through a numeric system that involves everyone who buys and wears similar jeans. Their comprehension of this practice is marked by how their bodies are evaluated in a particular system of determining size. Through this system, their body sizes and practices become connected to the sizes and practices of imaginary others, who also engage in the wearing of these particular jeans brands.

Steffy and Tommie X view their own corporealities mainly from an outside perspective; it is through the size and fit of their jeans that they measure the size of their bodies. This understanding places distinct ideological and aesthetic constraints on how they regulate their personal fitness, the two of them in different but equally unhealthy ways attempting to distance themselves from the living body. In both examples, objects that have been part of their corporeality eventually become incorporated into the body image.

According to Grosz, bodily practices are constantly developing and shifting in accordance to how the interactions with objects, norms, artifacts, food and cultural discourses are organized and maintained. By applying this line of thought to Steffy’s narrative, I note that the idea of the Cheap Monday jeans actually began affecting his bodily practice even before he had started wearing them. The fantasy of owning and wearing the jeans made him change food habits and patterns of movement, making him lose the weight required for him to fit into a pair. This demonstrates how not only actual and concrete objects affect bodily practices, but that also imaginary and abstract versions of objects affect disciplinary regulations of bodies.

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383 Grosz (1994), 80. In Grosz’ text, the term is ‘body image’ instead of ‘bodily practice’, as this is a passage inspired by Paul Ferdinand Schilder’s work. I have chosen to be inspired by Grosz’ thoughts but have adapted the terminology to better fit with the theoretical perspective of this study.
Learning How to Get Dressed

During my initial online contacts with Anthony, I was unsure of his biological sex as well as of his sexual orientation. This continued during our first actual encounter, at a café in Södermalm. Anthony is shorter than most men, vaguely displaying a feminine physique and speaking with a soft voice that left me guessing. A few months after this first encounter, we decide to meet again, to discuss this blurred bodily border territory. In the quote below, recorded during our second meeting, he talks about how the process of creating the look he desires has come about:

[…] But since I was totally unaware about the body and stuff like that, I was really disappointed when I found something that would look good on Jarvis and it didn’t look the same on me. So there was a great deal of compromising… with large shirts, with weird fits, and really large jackets. Or, if you wanted to look like both Jarvis and Brett Anderson, whom I became interested in after a while, like they look in certain photo shoots, wearing women’s blouses… The blouses hang on their skinny flat bodies, incredibly attractive when they pose, but when you have an ordinary girl’s body with breasts and all that, then it just looks like you’re wearing an ordinary boring blouse, making you look really feminine and curvy. So it’s really strange if you want that garment, but when you wear it, it doesn’t look like you want it to, like it did in the picture. And it’s kind of similar to how the mainstream ideals work, when you see a garment on a model, and you think that if you buy that makeup or if you buy that garment, you’ll have her body, or whatever it is, it’s just that in this case it’s a male model you wish to emulate instead. 384

Anthony is describing the discrepancy between how he saw clothes being worn on the male bodies of Cocker and Anderson, and how they looked on his own body. Disappointed, he realized that it is his feminine physique that causes the problem, since its curves prevent the garments to fit the way he desires. When he wears blouses, there is no disconnection or contrast between body and garment, only an enhancement of his feminine shapes. The two pop stars had “skinny flat bodies” which created an androgynous charge, something his body can’t produce. This enforces how objects and artifacts that yet haven’t been included into a person’s corporeality may impact sartorial practices. Anthony fantasized about women’s blouses being implemented into his style, but hadn’t yet realized that they would interact with his body in a completely different way than they do with Jarvis Cocker’s and Brett Anderson’s.

Instead, Anthony had to get acquainted with the different materials and fit of shirts, while also learning how to bind his chest to create a more androgynous silhouette. This process has taken years and involves the repetitive act of getting dressed, trying on and discarding a number of options before finding the right kind of shirt for the style he wishes to convey. Joanne Entwistle has written, on the topic of learning (in the most practical manner) how to dress, in a manner reminiscent of Anthony’s problematic process:

> The individual and very personal act of getting dressed is an act of preparing the body for the social world, making it appropriate, acceptable, indeed respectable and possibly even desirably also. Getting dressed is an ongoing practice, requiring knowledge, techniques and skills, from learning how to tie our shoelaces and do up our buttons as children, to understanding about colours, textures and fabrics and how to weave them together to suit our bodies and our lives.\(^{385}\)

Anthony vividly describes his first tentative efforts to create the style he desired, and how these failed due to his lack of knowledge concerning the relationship between body and garments. As Entwistle points out, the matter of how a piece of clothing interacts with the body is due to a number of things – material, fit, size, just to mention a few – all of which Anthony at the time only is dimly aware of. This slows his attempts to materialize the

effeminate male look he desires, and makes him wonder why he can’t look the same as the male Britpop stars. His knowledge of how to produce a style has accumulated gradually, by trying different clothes, wearing different materials and experimenting with cuts, sizes and models of various garments.

Entwistle describes this process as ever ongoing, an unarticulated skill learned by doing through everyday practicing. But, as she also points out, this practice positions us as situated in specific contexts. Anthony has few friends who can help him practice, and the people whose style he cites are both geographically and socially unavailable to him. The masculine style he wishes to construct is, at this moment and point in time, a mere fantasy, not shared with others around him. The world he wants to get ready for exists elsewhere, far from his position in time and place; he prepares himself for a world he has not yet met. This makes this process even more difficult, and is the reason he finds it so frustrating to learn how to dress in the style he desires.

What I find especially remarkable in the quote is the parallel he goes on to make between himself and girls within a mainstream discourse, who yearn to own a pair of pants as they are advertised by female models, or how they want to apply makeup in order to look like the women on magazine covers. Here, he relates his own experiences of discrepancies between imagined and actual bodies to the discrepancies of others, in other contexts. He compares himself with women who desire to look like female models, claiming that the only difference between him and them is that they are of the same biological sex as the models, while his body differs from that of his idols. During a night out with Anthony and an old friend of his, I notice how this discrepancy comes to life, as his friend refers to him as “her”. The balancing act of materializing a marginalized masculinity though maintaining a biologically female body is tricky, and even though this instability is part of Anthony’s stylistic aim, it creates unwanted uncertainty in some situations.

Fashion and Gender

One night Klara and I, together with a few of her friends, are in the subway system on our way to an indie pop club in downtown Stockholm. We are a group of perhaps six or seven people about to exit the Hötorget station when Klara is suddenly stopped by a group of young men. Klara’s black hair has made the men think she is Romani, and in a matter of seconds they have
formed a human wall around her, started pulling her hair and making fun of her long skirt, physically and verbally forcing the message that she doesn’t belong in Stockholm, and should leave. An ethnic categorization has occurred based on the men’s perception of her appearance; by reading her style as Romani, the men have assumed that she has lesser claim to the place we are in.

The incident is quickly over, but leaves us all shaken. I understand the young men’s reaction to Klara’s appearance as a response to someone who is breaking the norms of that context. When attacking her, they are marking her presence as unwanted, claiming her to be an infraction. Klara is defined by her attackers as overstepping, as looking the wrong way in the wrong place. This time the communication of norms isn’t concerned strictly with gendered appearance but also with ethnicity, demonstrating how bodily variables are continuously interlaced with one another. This kind of negative affect can, according to Ahmed, be defined as a kind of shared inheritance among people who socially deviate, and is a constant risk included in the act of deviation. The exposure to such attacks can create a sense of togetherness among the victims, forging imaginary links between those susceptible to violence and hateful slurs, in a way connected to Anthony’s romantic vision of the signifiers of marginalized masculinity.

The incident makes me want to know how Klara thinks about her personal style, in terms of being aligned versus breaking with normative expectations regarding how to look, act and dress. Instead of discussing the subway incident, she describes another example, taken from a similar discussion she had been in, a few years before. The debate, taking place between Klara and former Big Brother-celebrity and glamour model Linda Rosing, on the topic of feminism and femininity, had been televised:

Klara: [...] I reach roughly up to here on her [points to her chest]. So she looks at my waist, I was tight-laced and had perhaps twenty inches or so, and she said, “but doesn’t that hurt?” And I looked straight forward, on her breasts, and said, “I could ask the same”. And the exact things people thought were as natural as silicone implants disgust people today.
Philip: Right.
Klara: So the anachronism makes you think about if what we view as a female body is really consistent, given by nature, something

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authentic and true? The anachronism is always a good thing to use in contexts where you try to question naturalness, gender, sexuality.\textsuperscript{387}

Of particular importance here is how the bodies of Klara and her discussant Linda Rosing are described. According to Klara, Rosing brings attention to the slim waist of Klara, emphasizing its artificiality by asking if maintaining the size hurt Klara. What Rosing is getting at is that the thinness of Klara’s waist is constructed, its shape imposed and forced on the body. Klara responds by asking the same about Rosing’s breasts, enhanced through cosmetic surgery. This way, Klara attempts to demonstrate that there is no natural femininity, that both Rosing and she are, to once again cite Grosz, different “cultural forms of body”\textsuperscript{388}. Asking this question in a TV studio is highlighting the issue, but the intermezzo I witnessed at the underground station where Klara is harassed shows that deviant forms of appearance also risk exclusion and expulsion from safety in everyday life.

These examples bring me once again to the Butlerian suggestion that performative actions lack a specific origin; they are merely an imitation that causes the effect that there somewhere seems to be an original gender. Butler has claimed that there is no ‘authentically’ sexed body, no original which forms the foundation of our cultural notions of what is male, female, or even human. Instead, there are an infinite number of actions, which together form the illusion of a natural and coherent gender. By marking biological matter as a stable core, and simultaneously defining cultural actions as the effects of this matter, the original is made to seem inherent in human bodies. And, because of this, the material has been discursively separated from the abstract, and the natural from the realm of the cultural; they are classified, and thus valued, differently.\textsuperscript{389} This model (here described in a simplified manner) constitutes Western cultural discourse: the biological body is separated

\textsuperscript{387} In Swedish: Klara: […] Jag går ungefär hit på henne (måttar i bysthöjd). Så hon tittade på min midja, jag var tightlaced och hade kanske tjugo tum eller nånting, och hon sa, ”men gör inte det där ont?” Och jag tittade rakt framåt, på hennes bröst, och sa, ”jag kunde fråga detsamma”. Och just det som folk tyckte var lika naturligt som silikonbröst då äcklar folk idag.

Philip: Just det.


\textsuperscript{388} Grosz (1994), 143.

\textsuperscript{389} Butler (1991), 21.
from the cultural factors which shape and define its meaning through specific patterns of behavior. Charmain Eddy summarizes:

To think of the body as ‘marked as’ is to intervene between the materiality of the body and the materializing of cultural difference, because the ‘marking’ of the body ‘as’ sexed or raced suggests that something other than corporeality is made visible through this representation, and what is made visible is never represented as such.390

What Eddy suggests is that we should think of corporeality as an interactively functioning whole, while stressing the point that the occurrence of events rarely follows a straight path. Listening to Klara define her style in terms of anachronism, I claim that there are strong similarities between how the performance of gender uses past references as a stabilizing effect, and the process of imitation within the discourse of fashion, both forms of expressions creating a sense of continuity over time. If I were to push the comparison further, the notion of fashion expressions operating as a constant citation through time implicitly questions the idea of an original expression. Instead, there is constant dialectic communication through aesthetic references, carried out over spatial and temporal boundaries. Therefore I argue that neither gender nor fashion has an authentic origin, instead there are actions carried out as if they were the effect of a stable core.

The point of intersection for the discourses of fashion and gender consists of the dressed body. Here, in the sartorial expressions of corporeality, the performative expressions of gender and fashion merge to create a joint discourse. Both fashion and gender enhance mechanisms of classification. The dressed body functions thus as a point of intersection for the interlacing of these discourses, and is simultaneously the place where norms may be both reinforced and challenged.

Fluctuations

Order and Disorder

One Sunday evening in October 2009, I visit Anthony in his apartment at Gärdet in Stockholm in order to conduct a wardrobe study. Anthony shares the apartment with a few others, and the room he rents is about twelve square meters in size, with access to a number of closets in a corridor included in the rent. Clothes are everywhere: pants on the floor, a British school uniform-jacket hangs over a chair, and in the window several ties are placed over a hanger. On the walls, I can clearly see his sources of inspiration, from paintings of Jarvis Cocker to photos of American drag queen Divine. This physical proximity between the garments Anthony wears and pictures of people who have aesthetically inspired him shows how strong the connections are between Anthony’s aesthetic ideals and sartorial practices.

In one corner of the room there is a small closet, and when we look through it, Anthony decides to pull out a dark suit, size 46. He tells me he bought it in a mod shop in Gothenburg, many years before, and that it has special significance to him since it was one of the first men’s items he bought. At the time, it was a bit big in size, and he hasn’t always been comfortable wearing it, since it hasn’t correlated with his bodily size. For several years it has been kept at his mother’s place without being worn, and when we now have a close look at it, it appears stained and in need of cleaning. The years have altered it.

However, other things have also changed during this time period; when he wears it now, many years later, he claims it fits him perfectly. This way, the suit functions as a kind of gauge for the bodily changes that have occurred since he first tried it on in the shop in Gothenburg. Through the relation between suit and body, the shift towards a more masculine appearance becomes noticeable. This means that since he bought the suit, the shape of his body has shifted so that he now can stage the androgynous look he initially could only aspire to.

At the same time, Anthony is sure to mention to me that he wouldn’t wear the suit without putting on some kind of extreme makeup, either painting his face white, or using a number of different colors of makeup. The makeup would decrease the masculine connotations and create the gender-ambiguity that is of particular interest to him. Hence, the suit is only one of many actors effective within Anthony’s bodily practice, participating in the creation of his gender-ambivalent yet masculine style. If the fit between
garment and body is too convincingly executed, and the style subsequently too coherently masculine, he wouldn’t reach the desired effect of gender-subversiveness.

Therefore, when wearing the suit, he needs to apply makeup in order to keep the sense of gender-instability of his body intact. Whenever he risks looking either too much like a man or a woman, he implements an additional object or artifact with opposite gender connotations, to keep the look messy and unruly. I therefore claim that Anthony’s way of looking operates as a kind of distinction, placing him in a specific and effeminate category of masculinity. In this way, his attire, makeup and living quarters all interact, operating in the same direction to create the well-planned unkempt style.

When explaining how meaning is produced, Latour separates between intermediaries and mediators. According to him, an intermediary “transports meaning or force without transformation”, while mediators “transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry”. This distinction between two types of actions is essential when understanding how, and subsequently also what kind of, meaning is produced. In his text, Latour uses an example of stockings to demonstrate:

If, for instance, a social difference is ‘expressed in’ or ‘projected upon’ a detail of fashion, but that this detail – let’s say a shine of silk instead of nylon – is taken as an intermediary transporting faithfully some social meaning – ‘silk is for high-brow’, ‘nylon for low-brow’ – then it is in vain that an appeal has been made to the detail of the fabric. It has been mobilized purely for illustrative purposes. Even without the chemical difference between silk and nylon, the social difference between high-brow and low-brow will have existed anyhow; it has simply been ‘represented’ or ‘reflected’ on a piece of cloth that has remained wholly indifferent to its composition.

Applying this example to my understanding of Anthony’s style leaves me initially confused. In one way, his appearance can be understood as a simple case of mediating distinction through the mod suit and bohemian way of living. No meaning is added, no transformation of actors occurs. However, in combination with the materiality of his biologically female body, together with how the makeup adds to and contrasts with the mod look, the overall communication between the different objects is muddled and difficult to

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392 Latour (2005), 40.

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grasp. There appears to be many contrasting wills and directions in Anthony’s look, going back to his difficulties in learning how to dress, pointing forward to his inability to settle on a place to live in, articulated through the masculine style embodied through a female body. This way, I argue that there are many layers to how Anthony’s style is communicated, involving both mediators and intermediaries, in a constant state of flux.

It strikes me that there are many similarities – as well as differences – between how I perceive Anthony’s room in the flat-share at Gärdet, and how I view Leonora’s apartment in Södermalm. By viewing the apartment as an extension of the bodily sphere, I claim that it is apparent how Anthony’s ideals shape not only the way he dresses but also how his room is decorated, thus extending the aesthetic vision to also include the room he lives in. This is a practice I also recognize when visiting Leonora. Though her apartment is more spacious than Anthony’s room, her jewelry, makeup and garments are spread out and clearly visible around the apartment.

In Leonora’s apartment there is a gendered logic to the display of things; most things that appear to be carelessly placed in the apartment belong to her feminine look. Her masculine clothes are kept in closets, drawers and wardrobes, hidden from sight. This way, even though Leonora is dressed in masculine attire every time I visit her, her feminine aesthetics are nevertheless constantly emphasized. The apartment is a reflection of her feminine self, exemplified most notably by the fake rubber breasts on display on one of the walls. This balances the masculine garments she wears during my visits, making her feminine style present even when not directly visible. Also in Leonora’s home, there is a state of confusion and contrasting ways of interacting among the objects in place.

**Patterns of Consumption**

Klara has told me that certain items are custom-made for her, but that she also buys things secondhand. In addition, she sometimes purchases old but unused pieces of clothing, and says that when she wears old stockings, which she at times finds in original packets in flea market, she is not specifically trying to savor the tactile sensations of yesteryear, but instead wears them to enhance the feeling of the moment. Old stockings often don’t stretch, and Klara says that the ephemeral quality of the garments, only possible to wear once, adds a sense of exclusivity to her sartorial practice. For Klara, the stockings do more than represent mere nostalgia of products now
out of production; to her, they are a way to live, intimately connected with
the anachronistic character of her style. I claim that within this network of
practices, the stockings operate as actors, connected to Benjamin’s notion of
fashion leaping through time, and thus, they are also a kind of memento mo-
ri. Evans has linked this leap to one of Benjamin’s other symbols, of the
labyrinth, in order to illustrate the illogical and non-linear temporality of
fashion:

The metaphor of history as a labyrinth allows the juxtaposition of his-
torical images with contemporary ones; as the labyrinth doubles back
on itself what is most modern is revealed as also having a relation to
what is most old. Distant points in time can become proximate at
specific moments as their paths run close to each other. Although
there is no repetition without difference, nevertheless the conditions of
post-industrial modernity are haunted by those of industrial modernity
when fashion designers dip into the past for their motifs and themes.
These traces of the past surface in the present like the return of the
repressed.393

Klara is not a fashion designer, but should instead be perceived as one of
many in the network that produces her distinctive, anachronistically laden
style. Like Benjamin’s labyrinth in Evans’ interpretation, references and
artifacts from past times to resurface in Klara’s style, this way emphasizing
the momentary and transient. To Klara this is part of a feminist tactic, but in
our discussions she claims that the material qualities of older garments also
hold other kinds of meanings than merely gendered. I understand her to im-
ply that the stockings are a link to a former industrial period, an era before
the introduction of the modern inventions taken for granted today. Klara
experiences this link through the wear of the garment; its tactile qualities
allow her, for the briefest moment, to make an imaginary leap through time.
When she wears the stockings, her style cites a time that no longer exists. To
her, this is a luxury she indulges; by accentuating that the pleasure she expe-
riences is temporary – by wearing stockings no longer in production and
only to be found in street markets and rag shops – she is reminded of time’s
unreasonableness as well as of her own mortality.

I claim that Klara’s and Latour’s stockings make for good comparison.
The stockings, when they were newly produced, operated as smooth medi-
tors, signifying acts of imitation and distinction. As the years pass, the con-

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393 Evans (2003), 9.
text around the stockings changes, and thus, so does the meaning of the stockings. The stockings hold a temporal contrast, between how they functioned now and how they are contextualized in the present, from exclusive commodities to things found in a flea market, but also in how they now are worn by Klara. This way, connotations are temporally and spatially distorted and rearranged, new meaning briefly emerging during the one day Klara wears them, before the stockings are forever discarded.

If Klara describes her sartorial style as a kind temporal leap, Tommie X relates to these issues from another angle, approaching aesthetics from previous eras based on how his own preferences change and evolve. He tells me that certain looks he previously appreciated he now finds trivial, while some styles he has thought of as trite in the past, he now considers beautiful. The style of Tommie X becomes re-arranged and altered depending on how it engages with trends of past eras:

Before you thought the kickers look was totally awful, and you joked about people who picked their eyebrows to obliteration, and used brown lip pen, you thought it was really trashy and ugly. And now, I idealize that style so much, and really think it’s a nice aesthetic.  

By relating to ideals of past fashion trends, and subsequently incorporating these expressions into his own, Tommie X reinterprets the reference. When it is placed in another (contemporary) context then where it first appeared, new connotations are produced. The same is true especially of the example he gives, which is of the feminine version of the so called “kickers style”, prevalent mostly in poor, urban areas in Sweden during the 1990s. When the feminine fashion is applied to a male body, both the kickers style, as well as Tommie X’s body, are transformed. Once again, I am reminded of the “labyrinthine relay between past, present and future”, as Evans puts it when applying Benjamin’s work to her own. Tommie X cites street fashion from the past, but it is brought into the present through an assimilation process, in which it is blended with other forms of style and fashion refer-

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394 In Swedish: Förut tyckte man ju kickersstilen var helt fruktansvärd och skämtade om folk med bortrakade ögonbryn och brun läppenna och tyckte det var jättetrashigt och fult. Och nu idealiserar jag det jättemycket och tycker verkligen det är en skön estetik.

395 In “The Painter of Modern Life” Charles Baudelaire wrote on this topic, describing how works of art always are a result of the time they are painted in. When someone attempts to replicate this artwork, it is destined to fail, as it is impossible to fully imitate the aesthetics of times past. (1995), 12–15.

396 Evans (2003), 11.
ences. However, by implementing this style into a fashionable club scene it becomes fragmented and transformed into a fashionable statement, signifying above all else Tommie X’s aesthetic skills.

Tommie X’s articulated style choices are completely different to how Makode claims to find, and subsequently incorporate, clothes into his sartorial style. Where Klara meticulously looks for certain items which will fit her anachronistically defined look, and Tommie X articulates meticulous plans for how to stage certain aesthetics, Makode is random and inconsistent in how he shops for clothes. He tells me that one day, when he was walking through central Stockholm he found a small shop selling large quantities of fake white pearl necklaces. Makode liked how they looked, and bought 40 necklaces, which he then often will wear all at once. At another time, he was visiting San Francisco, where he found two sequined jackets at a low price, and bought both. Later on (and without asking) he is given a pair of new Nudie jeans by a friend, and they quickly become his favorites. In this way, garments and accessories are constantly being incorporated into his life depending on how he moves through places, and on whom he interacts with. This makes his style dynamic and fluid in character, and he claims that the only times he actually makes conscious dress choices in when he works as a club host somewhere, when his appearance can be considered part of his job. At these times, he will rarely buy something new, but will instead create combinations from what he already owns.

Makode presents his way of finding objects and garments as haphazard, and I perceive this to be an important part of his own style, representative of how he chooses to present the organization of his life. But, as Ahmed reminds us, the ability to reach certain things (due to proximity) is an effect of how we are orientated in life. This orientation is far from random, but should be considered as the result of a number of acts carried out previously. At the same time, the consumption of these objects will play an important role in bringing Makode to other places in the future. Though his perception of these activities is that they are random, I would instead argue that they are part of a certain pattern that constitutes his style, but that the characteristics of this pattern requires that they appear to be spontaneous and unplanned.

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397 Some of these pearl necklaces were among the ones he wore at his birthday party at Berns, described in the introductory chapter, see in particular pages 15, 20, 25–26, 39–40 but also 144 and 193.

One evening, Elin and Tommie X decide to have a drag-themed night at Blondie/Blackie, including also a drag competition. When Steffy hears about this, he is eager to participate. That night, I am also there, and the club is unusually crowded and intense. Relatively late in the evening, Tommie X announces that Steffy is the winner of the drag completion, after which a spotlight circles in on a very happy Steffy. When Steffy enters the small stage, I see that he is dressed as a drag king.

A few months later, we meet for coffee and he tells me that his initial idea had been to go as a drag queen, but that he hadn’t felt up to it. Earlier that evening, he had put on a wig and fake breasts, but hadn’t enjoyed it, and instead decided to go as a drag king. At the time I saw him collect his prize, he had a mustache painted on his face, and was dressed in an imitation of a stereotypical straight guy. He wore a long-sleeved T-shirt with a tribal pattern, and a pair of baggy jeans, pushed down on his hips, along with what apparently was his father’s old gym jacket. At Blondie/Blackie, the ironic stance was celebrated, but after the club closed, he tells me he had decided to go to a mainstream gay venue, where the situation had quickly changed.

Being an effeminate man, he usually receives little attention at mainstream gay clubs. This night, the club clientele responds in a different manner; men are pinching his buttocks, while quite a few of the guests attempt to pick him up. He finds the situation uncomfortable, especially since the men at the club are responding in an affirmative manner to what he had considered a pun – a humorous take on style and gender.

In the context of a club night at Blondie/Blackie, Steffy’s drag king had been in perfect alignment with the connotations of the place; his queer understanding of masculinity reinforced the gender codes already in place, and thus his style had operated smoothly, in the form of a Latourian intermediaries. However, without changing his look, but merely seeking out another venue within another kind of culture, this style suddenly takes on another, vastly different, function. Now, instead of being categorized as queer, Steffy’s look is considered a version of hegemonic masculinity. The meaning of his style is transformed, the quiet intermediaries now operating as mediators.399

399 For reference regarding the difference between Latourian intermediaries and mediators, see theoretical outline on page 206. This transformation in how the style was perceived is also relatable to Vinken’s outlining of the ‘postfashion era’, in which context rather than time
The fact that Steffy thought he could go as either drag king or -queen I perceive as being in alignment with his practice of positioning himself between genders, of naming himself neither male nor female. His style is part of a queer political stance, and he considers femininity and masculinity to be different expressions he can use in a fluid and flexible manner. By this, I don’t mean that he thinks he can become male or female by what he wears, but that he can stage gender-specific expressions through different sartorial practice. When he changes from wig and fake breasts to a painted mustache and baggy pants, he describes this staging of gender in a concrete and practical way. This stance seems to be shared among many others at Blondie/Blackie, epitomized by the fact that Steffy wins the drag-contest. Naming him a winner implies that club hosts Elin and Tommie X not only approve, but also wish to elevate, this kind of style practice. However, when he enters the mainstream gay venue, his political views are insignificant; what is visible in this context is his stylistic adherence to the codes of hegemonic masculinity, in the shape of how he wears his jeans, the tribal-pattern on his T-shirt and his fake facial hair.

The incident is in many ways similar to Tommie X’s Jean Harlow-oufit. That time, a style had been created as a critique of misogynist structures of mainstream gay culture. Steffy’s story holds many parallels, but highlights also important differences. Tommie X had worn a wig and dress, while Steffy leaves his at home to instead stage a version of a stereotypical masculine appearance. This is a more subtle form of gender subversion, and in the mainstream gay environment, no one picked up on the fact that Steffy had intended to make a political statement. Tommie X and Steffy share a mutual perspective, recognized within their own collective in the subcultural club scene, but when Steffy ventures into another context, his supposedly subversive tactic has the opposite effect, and instead his style is interpreted as representing the kind of straight-acting expression he aims at criticizing.

Summary

Throughout this chapter, I have investigated the body as part of a network of actors that jointly produce a sartorial practice. This network is dynamic and flexible, and I therefore perceive the body as an ongoing process, defined in
large part by its place in different forms of interaction. This interaction is
dependent on the type of context the body exists in, as well as on the ways
the body is orientated, in time as well as space.

The question of bodily processes is central to sartorial matters; it
determines how they can be constructed and maintained, and with what
effects. The body is not an isolated entity but always part of different forms
of networks, including other physical, imagined or fictional bodies, as well
as objects, artifacts and accessories. Together, these constitute temporary
collectives, recognized through mutual aesthetic practices. The sharing of
aesthetic expressions enforces the delimitations of collectives, simulta-
neously both excluding and including.
The styles that are shared are not defined in terms of fashion-forwardness
but are instead discussed in terms of being conceptual and artistic forms of
expressions. This separates these styles from trends prevalent within con-
temporary fashion systems, but nevertheless, looks from both kinds of
discourses intersect and interpenetrate one another in various ways. There-
fore, style is both distinctly different from fashion while at the same time it
may share many of the same aesthetic traits.

The body functions as a point of intersection where many issues are
made particularly noticeable, not least matters of gender. The instability of
body and gender is what holds the promise of the possibility of producing
other – alternative – courses of events, of challenging the realms of the nor-
ma tive. This is highlighted by matters of weight and body size, discussed
through case studies of Steffy and Tommie X. I have also explained the ten-
sions arising inside different kinds of collectives, by showing how sartorial
practices are shared, this way creating a sense of togetherness through the
sharing of mutual signifiers. However, garments hold more than mere sym-

dolic meaning; the materiality of them can constrain ways of moving and
expressing bodily motions. Bodies are defined both by how they experience
the world, but also by how they are viewed and categorized by others, as
demonstrated by Steffy’s drag king, who was first valued in one way in one
type of context, and then considered to represent an entirely different kind of
masculinity when he entered a new club environment. This also shows how
the definition of what is normative and what is subversive is a matter of
context.

Through the case study of Vivianne, the relation between what I, using
Dahl’s terminology, call the “soma” and the “techne” became highlighted,
specifically in matters of gender. Vivianne claimed that it was the experi-
ence of how mind and body co-constituted one another that was the founda-
tion of her femininity, and therefore I claim the two concepts are not dualistic but interrelated and mutually defining. This line of thought was apparent also in other case studies, most notably Klara’s, and therefore, I have stated that femininity should be understood in plural, as femininities.

The interrelations between physical bodies, garments, accessories and artifacts may at times be complicated and difficult to read, as they often are combined in highly specific ways. In the case of Vivianne, garments often acted as communication devices, enhancing the relation between soma and techne. For Elin, on the other hand, clothes acted as a form of distinction, while in the case of Anthony, garments, makeup and hair-dye categorized him as gender-blurred. However, all interpretations of these relations are contextually specific, and might change depending on what new actors are introduced and what former connections are lost.

In regards to Anthony’s practice of incorporating the stylistic qualities of others into his own sartorial practice, thoughts on the non-linearity of time in relation to style became elucidated. Through this practice, events and situations that had taken place many years prior, and in other places, could live on, however in new shapes and in new kinds of corporealties. This stance was mirrored in the anachronistic character of Klara’s style, which underlines one of the major themes of fashion, style and dress: the constant passing of time, and the ways in which this is materialized in garments and fashion aesthetics. Klara demonstrates this in her daily routines, creating a sort of memento mori in her approach to wearing old stockings. The stockings are not only ephemeral in themselves (in that they only last one day), but also through the fact that they are artifacts from a time that no longer exists.

Klara’s old stockings symbolize a rare luxury; she claims to be citing a time now passed, enjoying the tactile sensation of feeling the garment slowly losing its shape and comfort, in a way which is radically different from the fit and feel of modern stockings, which adapt to the body and remain crease-free. In this practice, the ephemerality of the garment heightens her sense of joy in wearing them. The fact that they can only be worn once also adds to this sensation, as this reminds her that all things, events and practices must come to an end. Knowing that all everything is temporary makes the moment matter. I claim that this connects the phenomenon of sartorial practices to the theory of performativity, in the intersection of the corporeal.
When I write this last chapter of the thesis, almost five years have passed since I first started working on this project. During this time, much has happened, and since I finished my ethnographic fieldwork, the sartorial practices that constitute the empirical material have continued to develop in different directions as the styles I have studied become part of new networks, at times leaving old associations behind.

During approximately two years, and on an irregular basis, I have explored different kinds of situations, events and relations, focusing explicitly on how matters of style affect but also are affected by what occurs. Much of the ethnographic process has involved the Stockholm club scene, especially venues Berns, F12 and Knast. A select few of the actual case studies made it into the final editing stage, but even though much of what I ethnographically gathered is omitted from the finished text, these experiences have nevertheless influenced my understanding of the empirical material, and are present between the written lines. I have proposed a development of the notion of style through which I have studied a series of case studies, highlighting matters of gender and sexuality in the materialization process of sartorial practices.

I have devoted this thesis to an exploration of how style is constituted, to investigate how style is produced and maintained, and to learn more about the conditions that concern the sartorial practices outlined in this study. Following Barnard’s discussion, I understand style as part of a fashion theoretical vocabulary, partially defined through, but not always synonymous with, terms such as ‘fashion’, ‘dress’ and ‘adornment’. Important to consider is the relation between the contemporary context of the case studies and the notion of the ‘postfashion era’, defined by a shift in production and distribution of fashions and styles which has affected the accessibility of different types of garments, allowing for a heterogenic array of styles to be in fashion,

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400 Barnard (2002), 10–12.
simultaneously (even though of course there also exist styles that are not fashionable).\textsuperscript{401}

The aim of this study has been to account for the interrelations between style, sexuality and gender in contemporary Stockholm. This has been executed through a number of ethnographically gathered case studies where the materialization processes regarding gender and sexuality have been highlighted. The investigation has been thematically organized around three different perspectives: verbal communication and the politics of naming; the spatiotemporal prerequisites and effects of sartorial practices; as well as bodily matters as a point of intersection, where styles are constituted as bodily materializations through gestures, movements and orientation in space. The three perspectives have all focused on the same empirical material, with some partial overlap in cases studies, but with different focus on how sartorial practices are produced and maintained.

The theoretical perspective through which these matters have been discussed is a combination of Butlerian theory of performativity and Latourian actor-network theory.\textsuperscript{402} This combination has emphasized the fluid and flexible character of style, demonstrating how, in the core of style production there is not, in contrast to Roland Barthes’ claim, a stable expression or lack of movements.\textsuperscript{403} Instead, I argue that style is highly performative, organized through networks and defined by contextually specific sets of constraints. However, these performative acts should not be considered an effect of independent agency but as executed within strongly regulated networks of events. It has been my aim to develop a notion of style that shifts focus from the wearer to the actual networks that styles consist of and within, in which the human body is only one of many actors. I claim that this shift facilitates a more nuanced understanding of the production of style, as it includes in its scope all forms of ongoing interrelations, regardless of size or number of associations, instead of highlighting only one of the actors.

The sartorial practices described in this project are made up of a number of actors loosely associated with one another. Based in performative theory in combination with actor-network theory, I have claimed that the production of a sartorial style is fluid and ever changing, thus placing change and transformation in the center of my definition of style. Latour has stated that, “if you stop making and remaking groups, you stop having groups”.\textsuperscript{404} By this,
he means that in order for meaning to be produced, there must be constant movement and change; if this ceases, so does the group’s existence. Style is thus temporary and transient; defined, similar to fashion, by its ever-moving temporal schema, but structured through another type of organization, less systematic than the capitalist fashion system.

As demonstrated in the empirical material, the two concepts fashion and style are not dichotomous; in some of the styles I have examined, the frequent citation of high fashion trends, inspirations, and scenarios is a recurrent and defining occurrence. On the other hand, the financial economies of fashion and style are remarkably different: Makode claiming to buy clothes randomly, Elin stating that she is disinterested in fashion and Klara buying garments that are no longer in production. Seldom have any of the study participants referred to actual contemporary brands or shops as part of their shopping routines or of what they would regularly wear or keep in their wardrobes. Because of this, I argue that there remains a clearly discernable difference between fashion and style, noticeable in this study through habits of consumption. Capitalism is one of the strongest driving forces of fashion, but regarding style I conclude that financial resources operate as only one of many constraints regarding sartorial practices.

Through case studies, I have argued that the expression of gender is a performative act, to be understood as highly contextually specific. Normative expectations are materialized through interactions carried out in a specific context, as exemplified by Steffy when he goes from one kind of club venue to another. At Blondie/Blackie, his style is recognized as a pun on hegemonic masculinity, but in the gay mainstream club, the very same style operates instead as reinforcement of the kind of masculinity Steffy aimed at undermining. This shows that differences in context influence the ways in which matters of gender and sexuality are produced and affect how they become interrelated, subsequently determining the distinction of what is considered hegemonic and subordinate expressions.

I have demonstrated that matters of the sartorial are not limited to garments and accessories, but also that the ways in which we communicate and verbally interact are part of how expressions are labeled, appraised and categorized. With reference to Ahmed, I have discussed the material and affective effects of speech acts. The participants’ names have often changed in relation to the development of the style, in this way making the name aligned

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405 On the relation between fashion and capitalism, see Wilson (2003), 13–15, and on the subject of fashion as a system, I refer to Kawamura (2005).
with the sartorial practice, interlacing garments and words with each other. The name ‘Steffy’ is part of a process directed towards a place beyond heteronormative ways of defining gender, and in a similar process, ‘Lady Oscar’ has been appropriated from a Japanese manga character, who in the context of fiction has found a way to be both masculine and feminine. I understand these actions through Calefato’s concept of the interlacing of control of “the syntax of either language or clothing” by totalitarian regimes, which is how I view the heteronormative understanding of gender expressions prevalent in contemporary Western society, Sweden included.\(^{407}\)

In contrast, Klara, Leonora and Tommie X are part of a different approach, consisting of a partial separation of their different sartorial practices through the act of naming. Klara becomes ‘Velma Voluptuous’ when in character, ‘Leonora’ functions as an enhancement of the feminine style while her male birth name is used when he/she is in male garments, while Tommie X’s birth name ‘Daniel’ signifies closer and more intimate relations than the more performance-orientated ‘Tommie X’. In this way, the names emphasize the sartorial practices, separating the private from the professional performance, and therefore also context becomes an important variable to understand how names operate in relation to the sartorial.

Tommie X’s conceptual appearance is strongly regulated and defined in part by his sociocultural position; by ‘rag picking’ the styles of Russian orphans he engages in a sort of scavenging that is potentially disturbing, highlighting social and national inequalities through the appropriation of style while at the same time using them for material gain. To understand the gendered aspects of conceptual club styles, I have turned to Evans and Thornton, whose work on the conditions of the staging of femininity in the postmodern London club scene has been highly influential, linking this project of styles in contemporary Stockholm to events executed in London more than twenty years prior.\(^{408}\)

Ahmed has claimed that individuals grow accustomed to objects in their proximity over time, and thus, the feeling of familiarity can also be defined as a performative act.\(^{409}\) Familiar words and ways of expression are part of identity projects, and matters of speech hold therefore more than merely symbolic value; according to Riley, words may function to objectify and label a person as a distortion, a claim supported by Ahmed who states that

\(^{407}\) Calefato (2004), 20.
words might operate as “stopping devices”. In Vivianne’s case, it is highly relevant how she is categorized in verbal interactions. In her native language, distinctions between feminine and masculine forms are articulated, and when she travels to this country and has to temporarily limit her sartorial practices to masculine dress, she still finds a way to signal her femininity through the feminine form in language. Once again, the intimate relations between language and dress become apparent, as they operate in different forms, but on the same level of meaning, in regards to the production of gendered appearance.

Tommie X defines himself as ‘gay’ in Stockholm, but in the situations he partakes in, he claims this act of labeling to often be considered as irrelevant. When he travels to other parts of Sweden, to visit music festivals, the same labeling act of him as ‘gay’ has unexpected and forceful effects; here the term confines him to a certain position, orientating him as an outcast. Ways of speaking and choosing words become in this way integrated with the categorization process of individuals, and thus I conclude that speech acts are in this way central to the production of style, enhancing the position of the wearer as being at home or out of place depending on how they are spoken to and valued through language.

Returning to Klara’s statement “this is all fake, this is all plastic, this is me”, it demonstrates how different kinds of actors co-constitute the production of style, creating a temporary assemblage through the ways in which they become interrelated. The actors may be of different forms, shapes and materials, but are of equal value within the network and produce meaning through mutual and joint interactions. Klara’s definition of herself as “plastic” and “fake” must be understood through her theoretical perspective, which therefore also becomes a central actor in itself this assemblage, directing the reading of her as constructed and temporary. In this way, her choice of words are aligned with the theoretical outline of this thesis, and the two perspectives become mutually enforcing.

The speech acts are defined not only by what is said or who is talking, but also by when and where they are carried out. Therefore, I argue that styles must be contextualized through what place and point in time they exist in. Through the case studies of Klara, Makode and Vivianne I claim that Stockholm and its near suburbs is a place of ongoing contestation; in all examples, the participants experience forceful reactions to how they are dressed in public space. The reactions are induced by the participants’ high

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degrees of visibility, which trigger an angry and anxious response from others. I have argued that dressed bodies are in this way interconnected also with the materiality of the place they are in: garments interact with architecture in the shape of buildings, sidewalks and streets, together with the people that inhabit these contexts. This understanding is supported by Grosz, who has stated that bodies and buildings are thus “mutually defining”.411 I add that all these forms of actors can be part of the same network; producing – temporarily – different forms of meaning through the ways they become interconnected.

The interconnections do not, however, only affect the dressed bodies, but the aesthetics and activities of the bodies will also affect the connotations of a place. This is demonstrated through the event staged by Fux in a traffic circle, where he tries to disturb and unsettle what actions are considered fitting this kind of anonymous site. But, since he doesn’t have an opportunity to speak with the drivers in the passing cars, he has no way of knowing if he had succeeded, or if he has even been noticed. This he shares with Anthony, who attempts to temporarily queerify the residential area Gärdet by dressing in a conceptual and artistic manner. No one appears to take notice and Anthony becomes frustrated by this lack of interaction. Basing my arguments in these case studies, I claim, through Butler, that “collective disidentifications” are required in order to destabilize normative notions of how styles should be articulated in a certain place.412

This claim is connected to the question of size and organization of networks. The smaller the network, the more limited its possibility to influence and alter how it is associated with other actors. Anthony could not impact the context of Gärdet because in this situation he was barely noticeable; in order for his actions to matter, he had needed more actions, orientated and synchronized with his aesthetics. Networks accumulate in force when they expand, which makes questions of associations and the size of the collective pressing concerns.

This discussion relates to the more complex question of how style is understood through the regulations of power and distribution of capital. Using Bourdieu’s concept of capital I have argued that the distribution of capital structures social space, as exemplified through case studies at Ficks.413 My conclusion is that matters of capital (by which I mean both access to and lack of) determine which situations are made available and

411 Grosz (1998), 34.
which doors remain closed. The fact that Makode holds his birthday celebration at Berns and that Tommie X can host his own club at F12 are in large part due to their social capital in the Stockholm club scene. These positions have been created partially through the strong visibility of their appearances, which communicates a high degree of knowledge of pop cultural references, an often-desired quality in these networks. However, the fact that their aesthetics have become associated with these sites implies that they are intimately involved in events taking place here. They are no longer to be considered subcultural or marginalized styles in an otherwise mainstream venue; had they been, they would not have been able to endure for this long, nor would they have had the opportunity to define and create events of their own. Styles that otherwise are prone to be questioned for not fitting the norm have, at these clubs, become part of the dominant discourse, as a direct result of how their networks have grown in size and over time, in this way creating strong and powerful relations.

Consequently, the styles can be considered tools of power regulation, and the actual person wearing the garments become, as demonstrated through interviews with Elin, partially replaceable. Club styles are severely limiting in the process of creating contexts for artistic interpretations, as only the styles with the most capital can endure, while others risk becoming marginalized. Therefore, these styles are not self-evidently subversive in character, but may also hold conservative and constraining effects regarding the contexts in which they are dominant. Evans and Thornton have also made this point, with added focus on the production of femininity, as they claim that these types of networks prevalent in a certain kind of club milieu offer few stylistic options, in particular for the women who participate.

The garments and accessories used to create these pop-culturally inspired styles are neither products of the current season nor from recognizable fashion brands, but nevertheless they can be marked as exclusive commodities, possible to convert into other kinds of currencies in the commercial contexts of club venues. This is due to the ways in which they are assembled into certain styles at specific places and points in time. I claim that the articulation of knowledge through artifacts partially defines the categorization of sartorial practices, but in addition to this, I state that different sartorial practices hold different types of capital, determining how they are perceived and categorized through interaction.

Drawing on the works by Hebdige and Evans, I have stated that the concept of style as a bricolage has been an essential tactic of communica-
Within the project many of the participants share collective references, and this act of sharing mutual taste inclinations define them socially, determining them as a group while simultaneously distancing them from other network, in which other references dominate. In particular, the styles of Tommie X, Elin, Lady Oscar and Klara share strong similarities, even though they are also defined by differences. I have also drawn on Dahl’s concept of the processual character of the co-constitution of “flesh and knowledge” regarding how bodies are gendered through dress as well as how they are contextually orientated.

Even though this study is qualitative in character and thus not representative on a general level, my conclusion is that the staging of style through sartorial practices is heavily regulated through various sets of contextually specific norms. Many of the styles I have investigated diverge from the monochromatic denim-clad unisex stereotype often claimed to be prevalent in Swedish fashion and style discourse, and therefore I hope that this study opens up for a discussion on Swedish style. Through the case study of Makode, I have demonstrated that this look is not unisex-inspired per se but actually enforces the assumption of a gendered correlation between male bodies and masculine garments, and in effect also between female bodies and feminine garments, thus enforcing a binary understanding of gender expressions. Nevertheless, the contrast between the two styles make the conceptual and more gender-blurred more striking, and thus the monochromatic look actually elevates the status of the latter in certain situations, even though the same contrast at other times will place this kind of style in considerable danger.

In conclusion, in this study I have elucidated conceptual and artistic ways of dressing, which I hope will contribute to a broader and more diversified picture of contemporary sartorial styles in Stockholm.

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