Tailoring Gender:  
The Past, Present, and Future of Queer Dress  

by  

Hope Fourie  
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# Table of Contents

**Introduction:**
Whatever You Put on Your Ass is Drag.................................................................4

**Chapter I:**
Past Modes of Queer Dress: Analyzing Change and Stagnation.........................11

*Alice Austen's Private Resistance*

*Queen Resists While Still Acknowledging the Binary*

**Chapter II:**
Current Modes of Queer Dress: Limited Options and Unreached Potentials.........23

*Tomboy: A Flip of the Binary with a Better Fit*

*Potato Sack: Uni-Gender Limits the Infinite Possibilities of Queerness*

*Wearable Art: Formalism at the Expense of Accessibility*

**Chapter III:**
Queer Styling: A New Type of Repeating..........................................................33

*Ezra Miller's Use of Disidentification*

**Conclusion:**
How to Employ Queer Styling.............................................................................46

**Bibliography**......................................................................................................49

**Creative Component**......................................................................................52

**My Process**.......................................................................................................53

**Budget**..............................................................................................................55

**Isaac**..................................................................................................................65

**Zurich**.................................................................................................................81
Sammy.................................................................97
Saam........................................................................113
Matthew....................................................................132
An............................................................................151
Jackie.......................................................................167
Group Photos..............................................................184
In a 1993 interview with *Rolling Stone* magazine drag icon RuPaul declared, "I'll tell you the lowdown: Whatever you put on your ass when you get out of the shower is drag, and I'm not having any disputes on that." At this moment in history, RuPaul had recently become the most famous drag queen the world had ever seen. After performing in nightclubs and on public access television for years, RuPaul gained national recognition from his role in the B-52's 1989 music video, "Love Shack." Riding this new fame, he released a single, "Supermodel," accompanied by a sensational music video in November of 1992.

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2 Ibid.
In the following year, this release landed him a performance at the Gay Rights March on Washington, and an international tour.³

In this interview that took place within a year of his release of "Supermodel," RuPaul is making an important and often overlooked claim: the clothing that you put on your body is, irrefutably, drag. Within a year of introducing the drag scene to many people around the world, RuPaul claims that everyone is in drag everyday. RuPaul's comparison between daywear and drag claims not only the unavoidable performative nature of clothing, but also the heavily gendered aspect of that performance. In her book Transgender History, Susan Stryker defines gender apart from sex: "Gender is generally considered to be cultural, and sex, biological (though contemporary theories posit sex as a cultural category as well)... Gender is the social organization of different kinds of bodies into different categories of people."⁴ Everyday, we perform gender through the clothes we wear.

In this paper, I am interested in leaning into this inevitable performativity of the everyday, and exploring the queer possibilities of self-styling through clothing. Although the word queer can refer to sexuality, I am focusing on its use in relation to gender, specifically in opposition to the gender binary. Drag is a performance that draws its meaning and appeal from gender's limits and possibilities. In drag performance, queens and kings simultaneously exaggerate and blur the gender binary through comic and sensational lip-syncing and dance. However, drag performance relies on its binary-parodying clothing. So, by

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⁴ Susan Stryker, Transgender History, (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2009), 11.
claiming anyone’s day-to-day clothing is drag, RuPaul is calling everyday clothing a performance, a performance that hinges on gendered associations. In *How to Do Things With Words*, J.L. Austin defines a performative as a word that not only describes something, but also *does* something; in saying the word you are performing an action\(^5\). I propose that clothing can also be viewed as a performative, in that is has the potential to control and restrict, as well as affirm and empower. Clothing doesn’t just describe gender, but clothing *does* gender.

The performativity of clothing is just one piece of a much larger and ongoing corporeal strategy: constituting the gendered subject. Judith Butler explains this corporeal strategy in her essay, *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution*.\(^6\) She posits that we constantly perform our gender through the repetition of recognizable actions. In this way, we might see gender as mutable, since it is dependent on the ever-shifting actions we perform. Gender does not precede our performance, but instead is constantly shaped by it. Consequently, our gender does not precede the garments we wear, wherein gender is a given and the garments simply adorn the gender leaving it unchanged. Instead, as I argue in this thesis, garments are an integral part of this "stylized repetition of acts" that constitute the gendered subject.

Using this model of thinking, clothing not only reflects a person’s gender, clothing constitutes it, and through its repetition, holds the possibility to transform a person’s gender. This constant reconstitution of gender highlights

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the fundamentally fluctuating nature of each person’s gender and opens up a
space for infinite becoming.

In this paper, I will be exploring the link between gender and everyday
clothing by tracing this link’s constructed nature, oppressive power, and
transformative potential. In order to explore future possibilities, I will analyze
past moments of dress that transgress the gender binary, examine what
currently calls itself non-binary clothing, and put forth a new strategy for
resistance: queer styling. Throughout this paper, I will be working with the term
garment, which I borrow from *The Dictionary of Fashion History* to describe "any
item of clothing for the body." 7 By using this word to define clothing in relation
to the body, I hope to evoke the use of garments as a corporeal technique, a
performance strategy, and a method of communication.

In the first chapter, I analyze two past moments in American history in
which artists have crossed the gender binary. These historical attempts at
resisting normative gender performances through clothing illuminate the ways
in which clothing speaks to those around us and how this form of
communication is policed. An Alice Austen photograph from 1891 and a Queen
music video from 1984 exemplify the power that clothing holds to call people
into being or cast them out. The 93 years between these two moments
demonstrates the unique temporalities of gendered associations and the
possibility for transformation through those associations flimsiness.

In the second chapter, I observe and assess clothing that is currently

7 Valerie Cumming, C.W. Cunnington, and P.E. Cunnington, *The Dictionary of Fashion History*
(Oxford: Berg, 2010), 90.
marketed as queer in some way. Some phrases that are used in the campaigns of these lines are "gender neutral" and "non-gender". Based on my observations, I sort this field into three broad categories: tomboy, potato sack, and wearable art. Wearing garments that fit into these groups can be considered dressing queer, or queer dress, an umbrella term I use to describe clothing that puts pressure on predetermined gendered associations. Yet, the resistant potential of such categories is limited, as they try unsuccessfully to completely ignore or remove a garment's binary associations. These categories further mark the impossibility of making a garment that is free from gender due to clothing's deep gendered histories and the mutability of gender across people and over time. Through tracing the tomboy, potato sack, and wearable art styles, I come to the conclusion that we cannot eliminate gendered associations; we can only morph them into something disobedient.

Furthermore, because gender interacts with each individual differently, a garment that feels queer to one person in regards to their body, might not feel queer to someone else on their body. Each of the categories outlined above is trying to queer clothing in some way. Queer dress cannot be defined monolithically, as queerness refers to a multiplicity in opposition. Claiming that one type of clothing is definitively queer ignores the infinite possibilities of queerness.

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In chapter 3, I respond to the desire for non-gendered clothing by proposing what I call, a practice of queer styling. In our current moment most clothing is created and sold within the binary. Even the few sources that attempt to queer this binary look towards reducing or eliminating the gendered associations of a garment, limiting the infinite possibilities of gender constitution. Queer styling is not only about what you wear, but how you wear it. Queer styling acknowledges the gendered associations that garments have and twists the assumed links between clothing and one’s gender by wearing the garments in new and surprising ways. One method of queer styling could involve wearing a garment on a body that it is not normatively associated with, paired with another garment that the first item is not traditionally worn with. Another method might be simply putting a garment onto the body in a new way. Queer styling focuses on the specificity of bodies and the variability of gender and takes back the power of being seen how you want to be seen. Such strategies lean into your own sense of gender to queerly manipulate your own specific body and self-presentation. In utilizing queer styling, I focus on the everyday and the functional; I position queer styling in everyday clothes as a form of silent assembly.

Hidden in a 1993 interview about tucking, RuPaul dropped drag’s biggest secret... that everything is drag. But how do we perform gender in its infinite mutability? By utilizing queer styling we can resist repetitions of binary assumptions and work toward the utopian potential of clothing. In this utopian

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10 Queer dress is an umbrella term for any type of dress that disobeys the gender binary, whereas queer styling is a specific type of queer dress that I put forth which relies on body specificity.
imagining, clothing's gendered associations do not limit a garment's ability to constitute an individual's gender, but instead enhance it.
Chapter I
Past Modes of Queer Dress: Analyzing Change and Stagnation

In this chapter I will compare two works of art, created nearly a century apart: a photograph taken in 1891 by Alice Austen entitled "Julia Martin, Julia Bredt and Self Dressed Up as Men" and the music video for the 1984 song "I Want to Break Free" by Queen. At first glance, these two pieces have one obvious commonality: both center on people dressing across the gender binary. However, when analyzing the manipulation of gender and clothing in both works, they highlight the complexities of what changed, as well as what remained the same over those 93 years.

Alice Austen's Private Resistance

![Figure 2. Alice Austen, Julia Martin, and Julia Bredt, pose for a photograph dressed as men.](image)

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In Figure 2, there are three figures pictured. Austen, the photographer, stands to the left. In the background, there is a wall of greenery and the entrance to what is likely "Clear Comfort" the cottage on Austen's private estate. Austen is wearing a deerstalker hat, collared shirt, vest, suit jacket, and pants. Her hands rest on the front of her pants, and her elbows are pointed back, relaxed. In her right hand is a cigarette. The middle figure sits on a wooden chair, wearing a straw boater hat, frock coat, collared shirt, tie, and striped pants. In their left hand is a cigarette. Her legs are crossed in such a way that her left ankle rests on her right knee. Her expression is jovial, perhaps mid laugh. An umbrella rests between her legs, sticking up in a phallic manner. The figure on the right is wearing a bowler hat, collared shirt, vest, suit jacket, and striped pants. Her hands rest in her front pockets as she leans forward, with a condescending expression on her face. All three figures have long hair tucked into their hats. Additionally, their faces are painted to look as though they have mustaches and thick, pronounced eyebrows.

These women have gone to great lengths to imitate the men of this time period accurately: acquiring their clothing, painting their faces, and imitating their body language. They leave normative notions of femininity behind to pose for this photo. Thus, the way that gender interacts with clothing and the body in this photo is a flip of the binary. The clothing that Austen and her friends wear in the photo is constructed for men. This means that the clothes have a boxier shape to fit the broad shoulders, flat chest, and narrow hips of a normatively masculine body. However, Austen and her friends identify as women and
possess normatively feminine bodies. These women successfully execute a flip of the expectations for women and men's clothing of the time period.

It is not only their clothing that mocks masculine associations of that time period, their body language also pokes fun at the freedom and amount of space men were able to have. In numerous other photos that Austen took of herself, in which she is dressed in period women's clothing, her body language is very different. She does not smile, and she sits stark upright, very tense. In most photos, her hands are clasped together in her lap and her legs are crossed. In this photo however, her and her friends' relaxed poses not only convey a greater level of freedom and enjoyment, they also physically take up more space. For example, Austen's relaxed, outward elbows and the sitting person's legs, crossed in a manner that extends the knee outward. By dressing and posing in this way, they are able to subvert the traditionally feminine roles that seem to physically constrict them.

Upon seeing this photo much later in life, Austen remarked, "We did it just for fun... maybe we were better looking men than women."\(^{12}\) Though their intentions were just for fun, the mere fact that these photos exist is remarkable and scandalous. Austen's family was rather well off and open minded, which allowed her the luxury of a private estate and access to photo equipment, something which very few women were granted access to at the time. Because of these conditions, she was able to play with gender and document these experiences hidden from the public eye. In 1890's New York, the depicted

\(^{12}\) Ibid.
garments were to be worn only by men, under penalty of law. These laws, restricting the transgression of gender roles through clothing, persisted until the 1970's. According to Ann Novotny, a biographer of Austen's, this photo would not have been taken if men were watching. This photo was intended for the purposes of personal entertainment, and meant only for those close to Austen to see. Under the threat of legal penalty, this privacy allowed the women to perform their styling, as well as their physicality as masculine, and in jest. The subjects look as though they are making fun of the men they are posing as. By assuming masculine positions by physically occupying as much space as possible, they mock common body language associated with men. The satirical nature of the photo reflects the artist's, as well as the other subjects', views on the strict enforcement of gender through clothing of the time period.

Novotny describes Austen's work as a "mockery of the conventional strictures of their society." Photographs like this one were Austen's own private way of rebelling against the strict social roles imposed upon women, both physically and ethically. Both the content of her photographs, as well as the act of taking them, were in direct conflict with codes of femininity. Besides social and political rebellion, these photos were likely an exploration of her own gender identity and expression. Additionally, though the law preventing this type of queer dress penalized deviance, it simultaneously acknowledges the

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15 Ibid.
powerful potential of said deviance, as well as the codification of clothing as a tool of social control. By performing an excessive version of masculinity, Austen and her friends mock and destabilize the power that is associated with masculine garments without words. Because clothing acts as a visual language, Austen is able to convey this mockery through the medium of photography.

In Ferdinand de Saussure’s *Course in General Linguistics*, he proposes the idea of a linguistic sign system. For Saussure, a sign is composed of two parts, a signifier and a signified. The signifier refers to the physical and material aspect of a word. Thus the signifier is separate from any actual use of the word, as it does not incorporate the inevitable social associations connected to the word, effectually positioning the word as a fact of language. The signified, on the other hand, represents the social associations theoretically unconnected to the fact of the word. However, in practice, neither can exist on their own, and instead together form the sign. Within the sign, the signifier and signified are constantly at work, both challenging and supporting one another. The very construction of the words that represent the two parts of the sign suggests both their opposition and their codependence.16

When applied to Alice Austen’s use of garments, legally designated as men’s, Saussure’s system positions the garment as the sign. The signifier of these particular garments is their material representation, outside any actual use of it in wearing. It is the physical jacket, hat, or trousers, untouched by any social value system. But, as exemplified by the photo, the signifier cannot exist on its

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These suits are not just pieces of fabric sewn together. If they were, there would not be laws in place preventing these women from wearing them. It wouldn’t matter whether these women were wearing dresses or suits, and this photo would not hold the intrigue that it does. The suits that they wear are imbued with social value, the signified. In this case, what is signified is the power and freedom that comes with being a man in the 1890s.

What Austen was doing was risky. At the time this photo was taken, New York law forbade impersonation of men through legal sanctions. Austen used her unique position and resources to satirize the arbitrary yet malevolent power that these garments held. And yet, the dichotomous restrictions of these garments still have a hold on her. By identifying as a woman and wearing men’s clothing, Austen subverts the binary while still beholden to it. Austen imagines a world in opposition to the binary, but not one without it. That being said, gender is so deeply woven into the history of garments, that it does seem impossible for anyone to imagine a world untethered from the binary. A piece of clothing cannot be worn in a void. The physical item of clothing and its social implications are inextricably connected, their materiality and meaning complexly interwoven and inseparable. Every garment carries a history, riddled with generalizations, preconceived notions, and perceived social value.

I am specifically interested in the gendered associations of the histories of the garment and how they continue to affect the communicative and self-actualizing potential of clothing. To approach these questions from another angle, I look to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s use of the term "gender-y." She uses this
term to quantify the manifestation of gender, "whether [it] be masculine, feminine, both, or 'and then some.'" 17 Every garment is gender-y, and when dressing, we inevitably interact with that gender-y-ness. The easiest way to interact with a garment's assigned social and material gender is to abide by it and reproduce it. So, if every garment is gender-y, which is to say that these binary dictated gender associations (the signified) are, as Saussure claims, inextricably linked to the materiality of a garment (the signifier), how then, can we think and act in opposition to this binary when dressing?

**Queen Resists While Still Acknowledging the Binary**

To begin to unpack how to oppose the binary when dressing, I will compare the previous photo to a music video by Queen, an internationally famous rock band from the 1980’s. Their lead singer, Freddie Mercury, is known for his amazing voice, and boundary-pushing wardrobe choices. Almost 100 years after Alice Austen's photo, this British rock band attempts to make light of the gender binary through costumes in their 1984 hit, "I Want to Break Free," directed by David Mallet. Though this is a British band and video, I include it in this paper due to its controversial reception in the U.S. Though there was no threat of legal action against them, the video was not aired in the U.S. until 1991, seven years after it was released, due to its subversive content.

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The video fades in from white, into rows of roofs, a picture of British suburban monotony. It then cuts to a steaming, sparking, high-powered alarm clock. Then, Brian May, a curler filled wig atop his head, wears a pink nightgown and socks as he begrudgingly wakes up and puts on a pair of pink bunny slippers. As this happens, the shots alternate between more close ups of the repetitive suburban home exteriors. As the drum kicks into the audio, the video cuts to a vacuum being pushed through a doorway. The camera pulls back to reveal Freddie Mercury, dressed in a voluminous bobbed wig, fluffy pink earrings, a pink turtleneck tank top, and leather mini skirt with black tights, as the operator of the vacuum. He is also proudly sporting his signature mustache. As Mercury continues to vacuum around what is revealed to be a living room, his other band mates make appearances as other members of the household.

John Deacon sits on the couch, often getting in the way of Mercury’s cleaning. He wears a curly gray wig, long black overcoat, gloves, large pearl earrings, and a cloche hat with small tulle flowers. Brian May runs through the living room wearing his ensemble from the beginning of the video, and pushes through a door to the right of the room. The next shot is in the kitchen, the room behind the door, where the camera pans up the legs of someone with long blonde hair, wearing knee high socks, black tights, a plaid mini skirt, and a white blouse. When they turn to the camera, it is revealed to be Rodger Taylor. One minute and 19 seconds into the video, this binary crossing fantasy ends, and the visuals moves on to a new narrative arch.

In Austen's photo, she manipulates the meaning of 1890's men's suits by putting them on her and her friends' bodies, bodies which personally and socially identify as feminine. In Queen's video, the members of this famous rock group similarly use clothing to question the binary. As the camera pans up Rodger Taylor's legs, the garments he wears are traditionally associated with schoolgirls. By waiting to reveal that it is in fact, a 35 year-old man dressed in a mini skirt and knee-high socks, Mallet and Queen make the viewer rely on their preconceived gendered associations with these garments, and then defy their expectations, potentially leading to some self-reflection on the part of the viewer.

Like Austen, Queen is still restricted by the dictates of the binary within their resistance. However, when observing the differences in gendered ideals across these two works, the flimsiness of the binary becomes clear. The
weakness that is found in the repetition of the binary is also what upholds and fortifies it. The gender binary works as a social structure that makes another person a subject of a code by promoting the enforcement of certain acts, behaviors, or modes of being. Subjectivation to the gender binary through clothing starts before we are born. Our gender, often determined for us before birth, designates what color our baby clothes will be: pink for girls, and blue for boys. After birth and throughout our lives, the binary is consistently reinforced by depictions of gender in the media, as well as by the majority of the population. This socialization is particularly monitored in early childhood, in which children are vulnerable to ridicule from other kids if their clothes do not adequately express their assigned gender, i.e. if a girl refuses to wear skirts and instead dresses like a "tomboy".

The gendered organization of clothing continues from childhood gender policing into adolescence and adulthood. Virtually every retailer, both online and in store, organizes their clothing starting with one crucial delineation: men’s and women’s. This mode of organization creates a physical, emotional, and intellectual barrier for those who are attempting to transgress the gender binary. Not only is it extremely difficult to begin to think outside of a code that has been forced upon us since before we were born, it is also dangerous to act outside of this code. This danger comes from the risk of losing relationships with those who don’t understand the need or desire to move outside of the code, as well as the risk of physical violence from those who are so entrenched within the code that those who move outside of it are seen as a threat. The gender binary is
one such code, but it is not *just* a code. Its rules and regulations are much more insidious as they threaten penalization if not followed. An additional layer of insidiousness is added by the fact that the code is "transmitted in a diffuse manner," making its conventions a seemingly implicit aspect of human behavior, and thus its subjects are unaware of the social control it wields. The less questioned and the more natural such codes appear, the stronger their normative force. Normative patterns rely on repetition to survive and wield their violent influence.

It is in this temporality that the ambiguity of queerness may enter. Over time, social conventions are changed through resistant repetition, and with them, garments strictly tied to one side of the binary may float one way or the other. As for garments’ positions as signs, Saussure writes, "language is a system of pure values which are determined by nothing except the momentary arrangement of its terms." Here he acknowledges this flux in meaning, as well as the arbitrary nature of their given value. Though the signifier and signified are intimately connected, their relationship is fundamentally unstable. The signified is not a rigid, unchanging concept, inherent to the signifier. On the contrary, the ways in which garments acquire a gendered meaning is unmotivated. In contrast to the way clothing is perceived and carried out, there is nothing natural or apolitical in the pairing of a garment and its assigned gendered associations.

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This is not to say, however, that these associations don’t matter. Though unmotivated, these associations have become an integral part of how we view others and ourselves. Realizing that they are unmotivated does not relinquish their potential for social control. The importance of their arbitrary nature is not to claim that we can ignore or forget the gendered meanings of garments, but acknowledge their flimsy foundation, and thus explore it as a possible site of resistance. It is here, in this "momentary arrangement" that we may find room for deviation. Sign systems, including clothing, are not set in stone; their arrangement is intrinsically momentary.

Though subverting the gender binary, both Austen and Queen leave traditional notions of masculinity and femininity intact. As exemplified by the laws and actions against them, this flip of the binary is common enough to motivate suppression tactics. Because we are socialized within the gender binary, its framework is ingrained in us. Everything has been designated as gendered; everything is gender-y. Because of this, it is extremely difficult to imagine new possibilities, despite how unnatural these forced associations may feel. Transgressing the gender binary through role reversal is the easiest way in which to imagine an alternate organization of power, because it does not require a new structure. This method does hold resistant value, but it is in the arbitrariness of these ideals, as expressed by their change over time, where greater possibilities for deviance may be found.
Chapter II
Current Modes of Queer Dress: Limited Options and Unreached Potentials

When interacting with a garment, we are forced to interact with its predetermined gender associations. With each interaction that abides by and repeats these associations, the binary is reinforced and revalidated. In this chapter, I trace three attempts by queer fashion designers to create clothing that sets itself apart from gendered associations.

In this chapter, I will move into the present, giving a brief overview and analysis of what options are currently available for dressing queer. When searching for current modes of queer dress, I have observed three general trends that most options fall into. Some brands that name themselves in opposition to the gender binary include Gender Free World, 69, and Hood by Air. Each of these labels fit into one of the three categories that I name: tomboy, potato sack, and wearable art, respectively. These designers are fighting against a deeply rooted system, and they are moving in the right direction. Though they leave a lot to be desired, they are laying groundwork for a more inclusive and comprehensive future of queer dress.
Gender Free World (GFW) identifies their clothes both as gender neutral and androgynous. They are best known for their button-downs (see Figure 4), because they are made to fit a variety of body types. The fit of their clothing is boxy and loose, characteristics of normatively masculine clothing. While they are attempting to cater to a wide range of body shapes, by offering exclusively masculine clothing to everyone they are still relying on the gender binary. In this way, GFW’s marketing is in many ways similar to the techniques of Austen and Queen - the binary structures their conceptions of "gender free."

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However, their sizing makes this contradiction of the binary a bit more complex. On the homepage of their website, GFW writes that their clothes, "are designed to fit your body rather than your gender... A unique unisex design which accommodates physical differences... Bodies do not come as 'one size fits all', and neither do our shirts... Be yourself - no labels." And they follow through on these claims. Unlike other similar brands, GFW has a sizing system that is more comprehensive than simply numbers or letters. This is very important when dressing queer. The generality of mass-market clothing is in direct conflict with the specificity of queer dress. Mass-market clothing relies on the generalization of bodies. As stated by Claudia B. Kidwell, "the manufacture of clothing for a mass market presupposed standardized patterns designed to fit a certain number of body sizes." By choosing to purposefully ignore the specificity of an individual's body, companies severely limit an individual's options for dressing queer. The proportions of a garment constructed for a normatively feminine body will not look or fit the same on a traditionally masculine body, and vice versa. Therefore, the patterning and consequently the proportions of any garment severely limit who can wear it comfortably.

GFW fights against this generalization by having a more specific sizing system, ensuring the desired look and fit. Before even taking measurements into consideration, GFW has customers select one of three body shapes (wider chest, wider hips, wide chest and hips, or narrow chest and hips), which determines

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the shape of the pattern the shirt is cut from. Once the shape is selected, the shopper can select their desired size. This method ensures that not despite, but because of the costumer’s body, the shirt will fit them a certain way.

This way, however, is a traditionally masculine, loose and boxy fit. Other brands, with styles similar to GFW, call themselves androgynous or dapper. Some of these brands include labels such as Androgynous Fox, VEEA, and Wildfang. This style is usually categorized by button up shirts, slacks, blazers, and occasionally bowtites. It combines normatively feminine bodies with traditionally masculine silhouettes. In this way, it is similar to the aforementioned binary flip of Austen and Queen, with the key difference of specifically tailored garments. This manipulation of the garment in relation to an individual’s body is the type of specificity that queerness encourages. However, the lack of feminine silhouettes does limit this style's possibilities within the greater method of queer dress. By only offering normatively masculine fits, GFW and its contemporaries' clothes aren't queer for everyone. Though they may include sizing options that fit normatively masculine bodies, their clothes do not break repetitions of the binary when worn by these individuals.
Potato Sack: Uni-Gender Limits the Infinite Possibilities of Queerness

Figure 5. A photo collage depicts models wearing a variety of garments made by the brand 69.  

69 specializes in denim clothing that is purposefully oversized. The information page of their website reads, "69 is a non-gender, non-demographic clothing line... 69 is timeless and classic yet made in our present and meant for the future." Their clothing, rather than being categorized by gender, is sorted by type (i.e. tops, bottoms, outerwear, etc). By not sorting their clothing (and thereby their customers) by gender, 69 boldly refuses the binary in an industry that hinges on perpetuating it. However, their potato sack silhouettes interact with the body by obscuring and concealing its shape. Other brands that follow this pattern include H&M, Zara, and Agender. These brands are a version of the potato sack design, selling mostly t-shirts, sweatshirts, and sweatpants.

69 is reacting to the same mass-market sizing issue as GFW, but they take a different route. Because of their corporate nature, 69's attempts at making

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"non-demographic clothing" hinge on the fact that the clothes must be able to fit many different bodies. While most mass-market clothing is built to accentuate the unmotivated preconceptions linking gender and bodily features, 69’s purposefully oversized clothing does not. Though this is generative and reparative for some, clothing meant to fit everyone also ignores the intricacies and specificities of bodies. I am interested in queer dress that moves away from the gender binary by moving towards variance, not towards a singularity. I believe that queer dress should not mean that everyone looks the same, but that everyone looks different.

Instead of classifying 69 as non-gender, I would classify this style of clothing as uni-gender. In an attempt to produce "non-gender" clothing, potato sack companies end up creating clothing that looks the same on every body, allowing only one option for gender expression. In these cases, one size fits all becomes one gender fits all. These brands do succeed in imagining a future outside of the gender binary, and this is no small feat. However, they create new limitations by reducing options for expression from two categories to one. I am interested in queer dress that instead creates infinite possibilities.

To more thoroughly explain these infinite possibilities, I look to one of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s definitions of queer: "Queer is a continuing moment, movement, motive - recurrent, eddying, troublant." She later adds, "the the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender…"
aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically.” Queer here marks not only sexuality, but also gender. Queer is not the absence of gender, but any version of gender that does not align with a normative binary organization. This means that queer can have varying levels of gender-y-ness, unlike 69 which aims to eliminate their gender-y-ness. Clothing that exists outside of the gender binary we are socialized within is not intrinsically good. Reductive categorization exists outside of those specific dichotomous boundaries. Here, queerness is defined in opposition to the norm, and therefore refuses to be located. It represents infinite possibilities of embodiments. Thus, a utopian notion of queer dress is a multiplicity, not a singularity.

**Wearable Art: Formalism at the Expense of Accessibility**

![Figure 6. Five models pose wearing Hood by Air's Spring/Summer 2015 menswear collection.](image)

27 Ibid, 8.
Though the line being worn in the above image is labeled as a menswear collection, the models are of varying genders. The garments they wear are literally deconstructed menswear, which figuratively deconstruct what it means to be a man. Hood by Air's (HBA) collection represents the wearable art portion of my analysis. Mostly designer labels fall within this category; their avant-garde clothing is made for the runway and those few individuals with the means to buy it. Designer brands such as Hood by Air occupy the most formal institution of clothing, so they are the most seen. Although high fashion is not accessible to most people, financially, aesthetically, and functionally, introducing queer dress into the visual world holds value for its formal challenge to binary narratives of garments.

Designer labels are able to achieve a greater level of bodily manipulation because their clothes are tailor made for the people who wear them. The more a garment is tailored for a specific body, the more potential for the manipulation of gendered meaning. Like clothing, many body parts hold gendered associations. Hips, waist, chest, shoulders are just a few key areas that signify normative gendered meaning. Unlike potato sack clothing, wearable art takes these measurements into account and purposefully manipulates them to confuse preconceived notions of gender.

Take the person third from the right in the above photo, wearing the all black ensemble for example. This person has a masculine appearing body: one with broad shoulders, a flat chest, and narrow hips. However, they are wearing a dress, a garment normatively associated with femininity. Because of this
association, mass-market dresses are constructed to fit a feminine appearing body: one with narrow shoulders, breasts, a small waist, and wide hips. Because mass-market dresses are made to fit this specific body shape, their patterns are cut and constructed in a way that makes them physically uncomfortable, and sometimes impossible to fit, on broad shoulders, a flat chest, and narrow hips. However, because this garment is a designer label, it was made in reference to this specific person's measurements. Thus, this person is able to wear this dress comfortably. The ability to construct for specific bodies allows wearable art to manipulate garments' gendered associations with greater finesse.

Wearable art, however, is almost always created for thin bodies and sold to the unimaginably wealthy. It is under these expensive and individualized pretenses that this type of clothing can manipulate gendered meaning through fit specific to the buyer. Additionally, these clothes are not meant to function as clothing. They are, as their title suggests, works of art. Garments such as the ones made by HBA are concerned with questions of form and ask the viewer to question the way they view the world. In Jennifer Doyle and David Getsy's conversation on queer formalism, Doyle recounts an anecdote about Andy Warhol turning around all the books in his library so that the spines faced the walls. She writes, "It literalized the ambivalent place of narrative within contemporary art: to insist on the book as an object - not an art object, but as a block shaped by one formal logic and deployed in another."29 Hood by Air’s collection, and others like it, do similar work. They illuminate the garment as

object and bring attention to the formal elements of the clothing thus questioning its significance.

By literally and figuratively deconstructing menswear, HBA is looking at the physicality of the garment, its formal logics and rejecting their normative deployments. Later in their conversation, Getsy writes, "genders' mutabilities and transformations [arise] from the collision of abstraction and metaphors of personhood or the body."30 Though everyday clothing can accomplish these "abstractions and metaphors of personhood or the body" to some degree, its mass production and functional requirements prevent it from reaching the level that wearable art can. It is precisely because of wearable art’s abstraction and formal experimentation that it is able to convey personhood and bodies in a way that everyday clothing cannot. While it remains inaccessible to everyday consumers, it is that inaccessibility which keeps its formal logics at the forefront.

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30 Ibid, 63.
Chapter III
Queer Styling: A New Type of Repeating

There are infinite possibilities for queer dress. There is not one type of clothing that can be designated as queer. Queer dress means something different for everyone, and may mean something different to the same person at different times. Going back to Eve Sedgwick’s definition of the word queer, queerness is understood as any constitution of gender in which meanings do not line up.

When analyzing tomboy and potato sack clothing, both were attempting to reduce or ignore the binary associations of their garments. Though this is one strategy for queer dress, I am more interested in a method that encourages the "mesh of possibilities" that Sedgwick describes. I am interested in a type of queer dress that makes room for any configuration of gender, whether that is to reduce, heighten, or contort. Queer is the refusal to locate oneself in relation to the gender binary. The only static element of queerness is its position as "troublant," its opposition to normativity. In other words, due to the infinite possibilities of constitution and embodiment, gender cannot be represented monolithically, in clothing or otherwise.

Exploring the performative nature of clothing can be helpful when trying to imagine new modalities of resistance beyond the gender binary. According to Austin, a performative is a social doing. The actions that clothing perform are just a small piece of a much larger and ongoing corporeal strategy: constituting the gendered subject. Judith Butler explains this corporeal strategy in her essay, *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution*. She writes, "gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is
an identity tenuously constituted in time - an identity instituted through a 
*stylized repetition of acts.*”31 Here, she posits that gender is not a static fact that 
precedes and determines how we act, but instead it is mutable, based on the 
actions we perform. According to this, gender does not precede our 
performance, but is instead shaped by it. When applied to the performative 
nature of garments, gender does not precede garments; but rather, garments are 
an integral part of this "stylized repetition of acts" that constitutes the gendered 
subject.

Gender as a sustained corporeal strategy hinges on the notion of change 
over time. In the above quote, Butler states that gender is "tenuously constituted 
in time," which we might take to mean that gender is variably formed through a 
series of acts, acts that inevitably mutate and shift over time. This is, in part, the 
basis for Butler's conception of gender as a "social temporality." She writes that 
"if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, 
then the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, 
a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, 
including the actors themselves, come to believe and perform in the mode 
of belief."32

Here, she not only elucidates the internal discontinuity of the acts that make up 
gender, she goes on to point out the insidious nature of the "appearance of 
substance," or the naturalization of the gender binary. This naturalization occurs 
through ongoing socialization, organization, and penalization. Thus, styling 
one oneself in accordance to the gender binary is unchallenged as the default. Even

more insidious, every time this default is perpetuated, it reinforces itself and grows stronger. The supposedly natural ways in which we are conditioned to style ourselves within the code of the gender binary acts as a form of self-policing through clothing. It is so naturalized that the social actor is not aware that they are constituting themselves as a subject within the binary. Therefore, not only is gender socially produced through the clothing we wear, but we are also a crucial enforcer of our own subjectivation. However, being our own enforcer also allows us to resist subjectivation by dressing away from the conventions of the gender binary, what I call a sort of queer self-styling.

Conceptualizing gender as a performative social temporality is liberating. Instead of being a fixed identity that we can either act towards or against, gender is constantly realized, and repeated. Gender is an embodiment of our past and our present, with the guarantee that it will continue to be transformed in the future. But the multiplicity of gender is not the only complex element of dressing queer because no two bodies are the same, and bodies change over time. No two bodies have the exact same shapes, angles, or measurements.

As each person holds the two idiosyncratic and ever shifting facets of gender and corporeality, what may be perceived as queer dress to one person in relation to their body may not feel queer at all to another person in relation to their body. Sedgwick goes on to write about this phenomenon, stating,

"Anyone's use of the word 'queer' about themselves means differently from their use of it about someone else... 'Queer' seems to hinge much more radically and explicitly on a person’s undertaking particular performative acts of self-perception and filiation... there are important senses in which 'queer' can signify only when attached to the first
Because each person's body and gender are specific to them, they are the only person who can determine for themself what is and isn't queer dress. Whether or not a garment is queer is subjective and personal, based on "performative acts of self perception and filiation." So, if a garment cannot be inherently queer, I propose a strategy of dressing queer allows for any level of gender-y-ness, by focusing not on what you wear, but how you wear it.

In distinction to queer dress or dressing queer, I refer to this type of dressing as queer styling. Queer styling is form self-styling that works against harmful repetitions of binary normativity by manipulating the gendered associations of garments. It leans into the specificity of bodies, using their gendered associations to manipulate the binary associations of garments. By working in opposition to mass-produced clothing, it manipulates specific characteristics of bodies that hold gendered social meaning (breasts, hips, shoulders) through styling and construction. Unlike brands like GFW, it utilizes both masculine and feminine silhouettes, colors, and textures. By employing an everyday aesthetic, it places accessibility as its focus, both aesthetically and functionally. By concentrating on the everyday, instead of Avant-garde or shapelessness, outfits that employ queer styling work with the body to defy the binary.

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Ezra Miller’s Queer Styling: Disidentification and Historical Situations

In Figure 7, Ezra Miller exemplifies queer styling. Miller identifies as queer as well as gender fluid, and this photo shoot popularly cemented them as a queer style icon. In the photo, they wear a short and thick gold chain necklace, a blouse - unbuttoned and tied at the waist - green high-waist wide-leg pants, short heeled boots, and a knee length fur coat. Leaning back with their hands in

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their pockets, hips cocked, knee popped, they simultaneously blend and reject a gender binary clothing performance. By drawing on signifiers of the gender binary to then use them in new ways, they utilize queer styling.

The shirt and pants are sold by Bode, a company who does not categorize their clothing by gender. With an emphasis on history and craftsmanship, each garment is one of a kind as the material is up-cycled from textiles with a past: tablecloths, quilts, and grain sacks, to name a few. Bode’s garments are inspired by work wear and characterized by boxy, masculine silhouettes. This choice of boxy silhouette was, in part, made because it can physically accommodate a range of body types, and since the garments are one of a kind this keep the garments open to a range of options outside of preconceived notions of gender.35 This sizing accommodation done through loose and boxy fits is similar to the motivation behind potato sack designs.

It is not the designer’s choices, however, that make this queer styling. Though the garments’ boxy silhouettes are normatively associated with masculinity, it is the way the pieces in this photo are styled that makes them appear not masculine. Unbuttoned and tied at the waist, the shirt is styled in a traditionally feminine mode of dress which accentuates the body's curves in the chest and waist, and exposes the stomach and chest. This emphasis and exposure is highly feminized and sexualized, and can be attributed in large part to pin-ups, illustrations or photos of seminude women most popular in the mid 20th century. These models were often celebrity sex symbols, such as Betty

Grable and Bettie Page. Wearing a shirt unbuttoned and tied at the waist recalls this highly feminized and sexual history. However, on Miller’s flat and hairy chest, the shirt doesn’t read as high femme as it would on a traditional pin up model who would typically possess a small waist and large bust. Using body and styling, Miller’s juxtaposition of meanings is one of very few examples of this modality of resistance. In this image we can see that by manipulating what is worn, how it's worn, and who wears it, garments’ meanings are transformed.

One way queer styling plays on the weakness of the gender binary is by manipulating and juxtaposing preexisting social assumptions regarding clothing and the body. Calling attention to the arbitrary link between form fitting clothes accentuating femininity, and boxy clothes accentuating masculinity, undermines normative associations. It is impossible to create garments untouched by gendered associations because, as Butler writes, "living styles have a history, and that history conditions and limits possibilities." In self-styling, it is important to take into consideration the social associations of a garment. For example, when a person puts on a skirt, that skirt is unavoidably imbued with social meaning regarding femininity. However, depending on who wears that skirt, how it works with their bodily attributes, how they style it, and the other garments they wear it with, they are able to manipulate the preconceived notions and predetermined values of the garment. In other words, queer styling tells us that it is possible to work within binary conditions, and still resist them.

This resistance hinges on the ability to imagine a queer futurity while still acknowledging the past. Unlike other modalities examined in this paper, queer styling is not limited by dominant social structures, nor does it try to erase them. This is similar to a strategy outlined by José Esteban Muñoz in *Disidentifications*. He argues,

"Disidentification is the third mode of dealing with dominant ideology, one that neither opts to assimilate with such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather, disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology. Instead of buckling down under the pressures of dominant ideology (identification, assimilation) or attempting to break free of its inescapable sphere (counteridentification, utopianism), this ‘working on and against’ is a strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from within."  

Following Muñoz, I argue that the techniques used by Austen, Queen, and Gender Free World are closer to assimilation, whereas the techniques used by 69 and Hood by Air are utopian in their imaginings. Though Austen, Queen, and GFW flip the binary, their modes of resistance are still beholden to its rigid structure. In the work of 69 and Hood by Air, we can imagine a world not dictated by the gender binary. In a critical utopian longing for a "not yet," queer styling acknowledges and manipulates the rules and taboos of dressing within the gender binary to create a space for new potentialities.  

When employing queer styling, an individual invests energy into taking garments with preconceived assumptions and transforming their meanings. In Muñoz's words, "a disidentifying subject works to hold on to this object and

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37 José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 11.  
invest it with new life.”39 In this way, we are not allowing the binary to dictate our clothing choices, nor are we claiming a world where gender does not affect the meaning of the garments we wear. Instead, we are using objects that are imbued with social meanings to imagine a future that is not dictated by gender norms.

On this topic, Muñoz writes, "Potentialities are different in that although they are present, they do not exist in present things. Thus, potentialities have a temporality that is not in the present, but, more early, in the horizon, which we can understand as futurity."40 By presenting queer dress as a utopian potentiality, we can begin to imagine a futurity of queer styling and clothing options even if it has not yet arrived.

In order to define your own utopic style, it is important to understand the symbiotic relationship between clothing and the body. The perceived corporeal aspect of gender is its supposed link to certain bodies. Normative notions of men and women are associated with certain bodily attributes. Because the meaning of a garment is contingent on the types of bodies that are supposed to wear it, manipulating this meaning is also contingent on the body. Unlike potato sack clothing, Miller’s outfit acknowledges the gendered associations of their body as well as their clothes, and uses this relationship to challenge these associations.

To better understand the relationship between garments and the body, I look to Butler's notion of the body as a historical situation, or a "set of possibilities to be

39 José Esteban Muñoz, Disidentifications (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 12.
continuously realized." She writes,

"These possibilities are necessarily constrained by available historical conventions. The body is not a self-identical or merely factic materiality; it is a materiality that bears meaning, if nothing else, and the manner of this bearing is fundamentally dramatic. By dramatic I mean only that the body is not merely matter but a continual and incessant materializing of possibilities. One is not simply a body, but, in some very key sense, one does one's body and, indeed, one does one's body differently from one's contemporaries and from one's embodied predecessors and successors as well... As an intentionally organized materiality, the body is always an embodying of possibilities both conditioned and circumscribed by historical convention. In other words, the body is a historical situation... and is a manner of doing, dramatizing, and reproducing a historical situation."  

Butler asserts that the body is not just an unalterable physical entity, but rather "materiality that bears meaning." The body is a historical situation that is continuously realized; its meanings are always changing. Because the ongoing repetition of acts define the body, the body is "fundamentally dramatic." And to consider the body a historical situation is to acknowledge that the body is created through the acts it performs and that those acts are conditioned and limited by the social values they have previously been assigned.

Following Butler's theory of the body as a historical situation, I propose that clothing is a way of doing one's body. Simply put, clothing is performative. However, this notion is complicated by the fact the garments, like bodies, accumulate social meaning over time. The shifting meaning of a garment is ongoing and depends on the ways in which it is used and by whom. Thus, the body's "continual and incessant materializing of possibilities," and the garment's

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42 Ibid.
complex social history become intimately connected, both constantly evolving in relation to one another. They are caught up in an endless cycle of action and reaction, in an eternal autopoiesis of meaning.

In the photo of Miller, we can see some of the ways that they are dramatizing the historical situation of their body using garments. One prime example of dramatizing their body’s historical situation is exposing their flat, hairy chest. A chest with these characteristics is normatively associated with masculinity and maleness. However, using garments to dramatize their body manipulates these associations. It does not directly challenge normative masculinity or maleness to show a bare chest. However, it is not normatively considered masculine to expose one’s chest using an unbuttoned shirt, tied at the waist. Styling a button down shirt in this historically feminine way on Miller’s masculine appearing body opens up the work that Miller does regarding the fashion and perception of their body. Miller does not attempt to invert the binary, but instead in Muñoz’s terms plays with and against it, by wearing a traditionally masculine shirt in a normatively feminine way.43

As mentioned in the wearable art section, an important aspect of queer styling is its everyday element; it’s ability to be used as a form of silent assembly. Clothing’s link to communication allows us to use it to relate to and uplift one another. It allows us to see and be seen. In the intro to her book *Trap Door*

43 It is worth acknowledging that Miller not only had a professional stylist for this shoot, but also the budget of an international magazine. The clothing they are wearing comes from brands Neil Barrett (coat), Bode (shirt and pants), Saint Laurent (boots), and Tiffany & Co (necklace), and range from $408 to $10,000. So, the way in which it visually moves throughout and against the gender binary is consistent with the intentions of queer styling, but the accessibility as well as the visibility is not.
Tourmaline writes about the communicative potential of clothing. Referencing the New York cross-dressing laws, those same laws that restricted Alice Austen, she explains "the laws underscored the power of being together and of fashion's potential to destabilize the state-sponsored morality underpinning the gender binary, and, moreover, the basis for who should or should not appear in public. Here, she points out that the very laws that prevent cross-dressing simultaneously emphasize the possibilities that dressing queer holds to undermine these laws by revealing the fragility of the gender binary. She also highlights the power of being together - the power of recognizing one another. Laws that regulate queer dress attempt to prevent people who oppose the gender binary from appearing as such in public, thereby preventing them from recognizing one another and assembling. Attempts at regulating the way people dress, whether it comes in the form of a questioning glance or legal penalty, are all ways in which the queer communicative potential of clothing is policed. Such policing acknowledges the power that recognizing one another and coming together in public holds.

By employing queer styling we are able to harness this communicative potential, at once declaring that we oppose the restrictions of the gender binary, and that we stand with others who do as well. This silent solidarity finds its strength in numbers. After Doyle shared her anecdote about Warhol’s back-facing books, Getsy mentions this solidarity, stating, "For those viewers searching for sites of resistance to the enforcement of the normal and the

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supposed 'natural,' the mutual recognition ushered in by identifying with this move could offer the embrace of solidarity."45 Here, he is talking about the back-facing books appear "as a sort of queer formalism"46 only to those who are seeking this resistant potential. By utilizing queer styling, people are able to be seen as queer by those who are looking for sites of resistance to the gender binary. Being recognized by others like you is affirming and validating to those who are told that they do not, or should not exist. In response to Getsy's statement on solidarity, Doyle writes, "One book back-faced wouldn't do it, but a room full of them reminds us that it's not a chance or a mistake - but a tactic and a signal."47 Like Warhol's books, one person employing queer styling would be merely an outlier. However, multiple people being able to recognize their shared disobedience to normative systems of organization and power, in this case the gender binary, is a tactic. This tactic destabilizes the supposed naturalness of the gender binary and acts as a form of silent assembly. I offer queer styling as a tactic and a signal to people everywhere who feel the limitations of the gender binary. Through queer styling, we tailor a world in which clothing works with every body to ensure their gender constitution's perfect fit and develop a sort of queer formalism that allows us to recognize and affirm our fellow back-facing books.

46 Ibid, 58.
Conclusion
How To Use Queer Styling

I have only begun to unpack the past, present, and future of queer dress. But by offering up *queer styling* as a performance strategy I hope to begin a language for the queer potential of clothing. In the section that follows I present concise tips and tricks to aid in the carrying out of queer styling. Queer styling can be a daunting and sometimes dangerous task, but hopefully this list provides support in this difficult but important undertaking.

1. Remember the cornerstone

   It is not always about what you wear, but how you wear it. When shopping, don’t ask, "is this garment queer?" Instead, ask, "how can I queer this garment?"

2. Shop between sections

   In order to employ queer styling, it is likely, if not crucial to shop in both men's and women's sections of clothing retailers. Not only will this help to unlearn boundaries, it is also unlikely that any company's gender distinctions align perfectly with your complex and variable embodiment of gender.

3. Know your body

   Don’t rely on websites, magazines, and other media to decide what is flattering. These determinations are historically dictated by white capitalist patriarchal beauty standards. Instead, examine your own body. Decide in what ways you want your body to look in clothes. Try not to
assign positive or negative qualifications to specific parts of your body.

When shopping, work towards your own ideals.

3a. **Expect the way you know your body to change**

Both the way you view your body, as well as your body's shape, will inevitably change over time. The clothing you choose to wear is not permanent. The way you feel about gender and your body is prone to change, so don't be afraid to change your style whenever and however you choose.

4. **Know your measurements and bring a measuring tape**

Clothing made for the mass market is inevitably constructed using generalized and binary sizing guides. By knowing your own body you can decide what clothes are right for you, even if their marked size and fit is not intended for your body. The four measurements that will help you most often are chest, waist, hips, and inseam. Other measurements such as shoulders may also be helpful depending on your specific bodily and gender desires. If you know these measurements, you can compare them to the measurements of the garment, and decide for yourself whether or not the fit is right for you.

5. **Shop in Groups**

When shopping for queer dress, there is power in numbers. Resisting structures that are deeply ingrained in you can make you emotionally and physically vulnerable. By shopping in groups, you can support and protect one another from potential stress and harm.
6. **Be ready to be disappointed**

   Dressing queer is exhausting. You will be met with unceasing resistance and obstacles. Being seen can be both affirming and exhausting. It is ok to take a break for your mental and emotional health. But don't let yourself be completely discouraged. Find people and places that support you and allow you to feel comfortable, not regardless of what you wear but because of what you wear.
Bibliography


http://www.ruthlessmagazine.co.uk/i-want-to-break-free.


UNRAVEL

by

Hope Fourie
Class of 2019

The creative component of
Tailoring Gender: Past, Present, and Future Modes of Queer Dress
A thesis submitted to the
faculty of Wesleyan University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts
with Departmental Honors in Theater and Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

Middletown, Connecticut
April, 2019
My Process

I set out to make a full ensemble for seven individuals, employing queer styling. Because queer styling is very personalized to a specific person's body/mind, I viewed this process as designing a costume for the characters' of themselves. I started by taking each person's measurements and having a conversation with them about clothes and gender in general, as well as their own experiences with these subjects. In each conversation, I asked some form of the following questions:

- When did you first start thinking about gender?
- What is your relationship with gender now?
- What are some of your initial thoughts on gender's relation to clothing?
- How would you describe your style?
- How would you describe your style in relation to gender?
- What types of garments do you usually wear?
- What type of clothing interacts with your body in a way that you like?
- What types of clothing interact with your body in a way you do not like?
- What colors and patterns do you usually wear?
- Who are your style icons?
- What is your ideal style?
- Does the way you dress reflect your ideal style?
- Are there any types of garments that you specifically love/want to wear/wish you wore?
- Are there any colors that you want to wear?

Using their answers, I conducted visual research and compiled inspiration images. From these images, I created initial designs for their ensembles. These sketches went through many drafts after meeting with each of my collaborators and getting feedback. While making these designs, I strove to employ queer styling by conflating, defying, and exaggerating gendered associations both of bodies and of clothing, while maintaining looks that my collaborators would feel comfortable wearing in an everyday setting. The type of
queer styling that I am engaging with in my creative component is similar to that which I explore in my paper, with the added benefit of being able to build and alter clothing.

Once each person felt that my sketch accomplished queer styling in a way that worked for them, I began construction. Some clothing I thrifted and altered, while other garments I made from scratch. My goal was for each piece to fit the person's specific body, despite how that type of garment is normatively constructed. Mostly I altered the measurement ratios of preexisting flat patterns, but for some garments, I draped the item myself to ensure the perfect fit.

The following material outlines each step of my process, including quotes from interviews, research images, sketches, fabric swatches, process photos, and photographs of the final pieces.
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**Total**                                               | **$153** | **$93** |
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**Total**            |     |       |      |          | $185     | $109   |
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Isaac
"I went to Jewish day school. Everything was pretty heteronormative. I didn't know that I couldn't believe in god. In a similar way I didn't know I didn't have to be a boy. I didn't think that was an option."

"Coming out, I was like, I can't be masculine at all. That's what's holding me down, equating masculinity with being a boy. I think that's false and I definitely have bro energy. But my bro energy goes into make up and partying."

"All these straight, or gay boys will paint their nails and wear earrings and women's pants. I'm like well I do that so why am I any different? Like I'm not but then at the same time of course I am. Here specifically, at Wesleyan, what clothing makes somebody queer? And if you look queer are you queer? If you paint your nails it's like oh, maybe something's going on over there. If somebody is like 'oh you are gay' does that make you gay? It seems like it's all about presenting."

"Last fall it was very high femme do whatever the fuck I want. It didn't even matter, as long as it was flashy and a lot, that was it. Now looking back, I wish I had a cooler dress to wear, but it wasn't even about what the dress was, it was more about just having it on."

"I'm 'phony skater chic'. That's my brand... 'phony skater chic: what makes me gay today?'"
Photo of Princess Nokia as featured on her Instagram @princessnokia
Jared Leto photographed for *My So Called Life*
Photo of King Princess by Ryan Duffin for Them.
https://www.them.us/story/king-princess-make-my-bed
Photo featured on fashion Instagram, @fuckyourhype
https://www.instagram.com/p/BsgUNxmFl7z/
First Render
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Build Sheet: Isaac's Shirt

Pattern Used: McCall's 4974

Alterations Made:
- Shoulder seams taken in .75"
- Side seams taken in 2"
- Cropped at naval
- Collar re-patterned

Fabric Swatch:
Isaac's shirt mid-process
Integrating my own collar pattern into the shirt
Zurich
"When my brother came out as gay, I started understanding a lot more of the dialogue and the way things could be gendered. It's so crazy for so many POC to experience things, we can talk about sexuality and gender, but that experience is so separate from being able to articulate that experience."

"When I came to Wesleyan, I started realizing that baggy clothes and a certain style is more masculine, and what I'm wearing to parties is incredibly feminized or sexualized. Growing up more conservative, my mom never really let me go out like that. I never had those opportunities to explore."

"There is something that is so situational about clothing and being able to put something on your body and change how people are interpreting you. That is something that I always think about in work settings or when I go to see professors. It's really interesting, wanting to appear more, not docile, but agreeable, to be dressing more feminized."

"Sometimes I am very willing to subscribe and not care that I'm subscribing. I just don't question too much if it is subscribing. But I am also very conscious of it, especially on days when I am searching for more comfort. Sometimes I don't find as much comfort in femininity because it feels so structured and it feels like there are so many rules."
Bonnie Cashin, Playsuit, 1947, Metropolitan Museum of Art
https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/157203?searchField=All&amp;sortBy=relevance&amp;when=A.D.+1900-present&amp;where=United+States&amp;what=Costume&amp;ft=*&amp;offset=1060&amp;rpp=80&amp;pos=1062
Bella Hadid wears boilersuit
https://www.savoirflair.com/fashion/339673/boilersuit-style- inspiration-shopping
Christine Mullin models Dior Spring Collection 1968, Photograph by Mike McKeown
Initial Sketch
First Render
Final Render
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Build Sheet: Zurich's Jumpsuit

Pattern Used: Kwiksew K3389

Alterations Made:
- Completely re-patterned to fit Zurich’s measurements
- Darts added at waist, bust, and buttocks

Fabric Swatch:
Adjusting flat pattern to fit Zurich's body
Top of muslin mock-up of Zurich’s jumpsuit mid-process
Zurich wearing muslin mock-up in fitting
Sammy
"I have a lot of thoughts about who gets to identify as gender non-conforming, and how that plays with race, class, and access to an education, and access to understanding gender in more complicated ways."

"I'm really interested in what does my maleness mean to me, and what does maleness look like as a spectrum, rather than just trying to do away with maleness or femaleness, and what does those to things mean. I think eventually they don't mean anything once you make each of them individually a spectrum."

"I identify as a cis gendered man but I also have a lot of ties to femininity and would also identify myself as femme to some extent."

"I think about what I do when I'm in drag, and what I wear when I'm in drag, and how I feel when I'm in drag, versus what makes me feel like I'm not in drag."

"What has been interesting since I've started wearing heels, which are very gendered and give me a very different presence and confidence, most people don't even notice that I'm wearing them, because of my presence and confidence. It's that kind of thing, how you slip it into a daily space."

"There is that kind of androgynous feel for beanpole men, the stringy tall or short white boy that definitely smokes. When I think about race in that space as well, or my body, a pretty full body, I have a butt, and I have hips, and I have legs."

"My ideal style is definitely queer professor. I'm getting there. When I really think about it, the queer academic in all of its totalities. I want it."
Tracee Ellis Ross sporting clothes from her new J.C. Penny line.
Photograph of Indya Moore by Courtney Justin Bettman
Rickey Thompson posing for High Snobiety's Best Dressed Youtuber Awards
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Build Sheet: Sammy's Shirt

Hand Draped by Hope Fourie

Fabric Swatch:
Build Sheet: Sammy's Pants

Pattern Used: Simplicity 7999

Alterations Made:
- Pockets added
- Legs tapered -5" at ankle
- +1.5" to heighten waist

Fabric Swatch:
Detail of Sammy’s turtleneck
Sammy wearing muslin mock-up in fitting
Saam
"I started to notice the homophobia in my dad. It usually derived from me doing something 'effeminate' and him steadfastly discouraging it."

"I probably haven't been thinking about my gender too much because I'm afraid of what I'll figure out."

"I love coats so much. I do think I perform masculinity. Obviously I do, but sometimes in a way that feels unnatural. I feel when I'm doing it. In the same way I feel femininity. That's why I sometimes have trouble with my gender identity, because I feel when I'm performing masculinity. That's how I feel when I wear big coats."

"Queer men of color have a hard time finding middle ground between performing gender and performing strength through fashion."

"I don't want anyone to be able to pin me down. I have really been trying to embrace androgyny. As a man of color, and a child of immigrants in the United States, it's very hard to have a specific identity. I do think I try to express that through my fashion."
British Coat, 1959, The Metropolitan Museum of Art
https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/81206?searchField=All & sortBy=relevance&when=A.D.+1900-present&what=Costume*ft=fur+coat&offset=80&rpp=80 &pos=110
Photo of Saam’s grandfather, Ali Niami, 1965
Gucci Suit, Fall/Winter 1996-97, The Metropolitan Museum of Art
https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/81370?searchField=All
&amp;sortBy=relevance&amp;when=A.D.+1900-
present&amp;what=Costume&amp;ft=lounge&amp;offset=0&amp;rpp=80&amp;pos=24
https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/115733?searchField=All&sortBy=relevance&when=A.D.+1900-present&where=United+States&what=Costume&ft=*&offset=20&rpp=80&pos=61
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Build Sheet: Saam's Shirt

Pattern Used: McCall's 4484

Alterations Made:
- Moved inner edge of shirt front 1.75" to the left on either side
- Sleeves lengthened 5"

Fabric Swatch:
Build Sheet: Saam's Pants

Pattern Used: Simplicity 5019

Alterations Made:
  • +1" to curve of center back seam
  • -1" from back side seams
  • -1.5" from side seam
  • Pocket added
  • Zipper fly added

Fabric Swatch:
Build Sheet: Saam's Fur Collar

Hand draped by Nzinga Rawlins and Hope Fourie

Alterations Made:
- Reduced shoulders to account for lack of shoulder pads
- -10" from hem

Fabric Swatch:
Altering a flat pattern marketed to women to create Saam’s bell bottoms
Matthew
"My main conception of gender was focused on presentation and gender expression. It's more switched to understanding gender not in terms of how it's expressed or how it's represented. That has been a major shift in what it means for me."

"I never realized the physical differences in how garments are constructed. There will be things that my shoulders just do not fit through. Even though every other part does. Proportions are something I'm becoming more aware of."

"I do a lot of painting. Most of my pants are covered in years of paint, holes, and rips. In my head I have this vision of style and fashion that I like, but I just don't wear it, at least now, because I would just wreck all that clothing. Now, my style is mostly impacted by function and ease of use, and most significantly its ability to be wrecked without caring about it."

"Before this year I associated masculinity with maleness. I'm now understanding butchness. So I see my style as masculine, but a butch version of masculine. I always thought of masculine presenting as a male body as inherently male presenting, but now I'm realizing I feel it as more butch presenting."

"If I wear a women's garment that is shaped, I feel more like a man in a dress, whereas if I wear a boxy dress, it makes it feel like it's more not for me. The physical pressure of trying to change my body is like a metaphor. Whereas, if it's a box, my body feels fine in it. I feel like it is made for me."

"My ideal style is punk latex, with a Marie Antoinette silhouette."
Vivienne Westwood Suit, Fall/Winter 1991-92, Metropolitan Museum of Art
https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/159752?searchField=All&amp;sortBy=relevance&amp;when=A.D.+1900-present&amp;what=Costume&amp;ft=vivienne+westwood&amp;offset=0&amp;rpp=80&amp;pos=28
Bonnie Cashin, Evening Blouse, 1952, Metropolitan Museum of Art
https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/175804?searchField=All&sortBy=relevance&when=A.D.+1900-present&where=United+States&what=Costume*ft=*&offset=820&rpp=80&pos=853
Stephen Sprouse, Fashion Sketch, James Dee Collection
https://library.artstor.org/#/asset/AWSS35953_35953_22932061;prevRouteTS=1547945872621
Vivienne Westwood, Anglomania Bondage Pants, Autumn/Winter 1999, Metropolitan Museum of Art
https://www.philipbrownemenswear.co.uk/products/vintage-vivienne-westwood-anglomania-bondage-pants-red
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Build Sheet: Matthew’s Shirt

Pattern Used: McCall’s Easy Stitch n' Save M5374

Alterations Made:
- Re-draped side front and side back pattern pieces on a traditionally masculine mannequin, ultimately changing the curve of the bust

Fabric Swatch: 

Lining Swatch:
Build Sheet: Matthew's Pants

Pattern Used: McCall's Costumes M7399

Alterations Made:
  • -1.5" from waist

Fabric Swatch:
Shirt made from flat pattern
Re-draped muslin mock-up of Matthew's shirt
Matthew's pants mid-process
Matthew during fitting with muslin mock-up of shirt
An
"When I think of myself, woman is never one of the first ten things that come to mind. It's usually like, oh yeah, that's another thing that the world that I live in categorizes me as, but I never thought of myself in a gendered way."

"I would define myself as a lesbian before I define myself as a woman. I don't know why that is. I feel more defined in relation to my ability to love and have sex with women."

"In terms of women's clothing being framed, especially in consumer heavy societies like we live in, they're framed in more expensive contexts, more fragile, they're designed to be less robust than men's clothing. They're more expensive and sometimes they can be more derogatory, in terms of how form fitting they are."

"I dress like a young boy from the 1930's who got time traveled into modern times and is trying really hard to fit in."

"I'd say I bounce between a Danish schoolboy and a 1950s greaser."
Harry Styles in the One Direction music video "Perfect"
https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7312068/mediaviewer/rm197608192
Photograph of Oscar Wilde by Napoleon Sarony, 1882
https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/283247
Karamo Brown at the 2018 Emmy Awards, Photo by Jordan Strauss. 
https://accesswdun.com/print/2018/9/714457
Photograph of James Dean, featured in Glamour Magazine.
https://www.glamour.com/story/fall-fashion-essentials-jacket-denim-c
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Build Sheet: An's Cape

Pattern Used: The Vogue Woman 9329

Alterations Made:
• Reduced shoulders to account for lack of shoulder pads
• -10" from hem

Fabric Swatch:  Lining Swatch:
Applique placement on An's cape
Jackie
"I don't think of myself as feminine presenting entirely, but I think at Wesleyan I am not read as that. When I go home it's really different, because I live on Long Island. I feel very masc presenting when I go home, but that's a product of me feeling uncomfortable by my environment."

"I'm trying to present myself in my everyday life as more butch or butch-leaning, which can be hard because what a lot of people think of as butch is like one specific way of looking and dressing, but don't really think of butch as existing on a spectrum."

"Feminine clothing doesn't work for me, and masculine clothing also does not work for me, in the way that my body is and the way I want to present. I want not to accentuate my body, like masculine clothing, but it doesn't fit properly because it is for different proportions."

"I would describe my style as butch leaning and doesn't want to be seen. But, also wants people to think I'm gay all the time."
Photo of Alyssa Evans by Karla Olvera for *DapperQ*, December 2015
https://www.dapperq.com/2015/12/style-dossier-alyssa-evans/
American Suit, 1967, Metropolitan Museum of Art
https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/91963?searchField=All
&amp;sortBy=relevance&amp;when=A.D.+1900-present&amp;where=United+States&amp;what=Costume&amp;ft=*&amp;offset=260&amp;rpp=80&amp;pos=291
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Build Sheet: Jackie's Shirt

Pattern Used: McCall's 9358

Alterations Made:
  • Did not use darts

Fabric Swatch:
Build Sheet: Jackie's Pants

Pattern Used: Weekend Designer "Classic Jeans"

Alterations Made:
- +2" at waist
- Darts added at buttocks
- +4" at hips

Fabric Swatch:
Jackie's shirt mid-process
Jackie in a fitting wearing the muslin mock-up pants
Added welt pocket so that Jackie could have the pocketsquare she desired
Group Photos