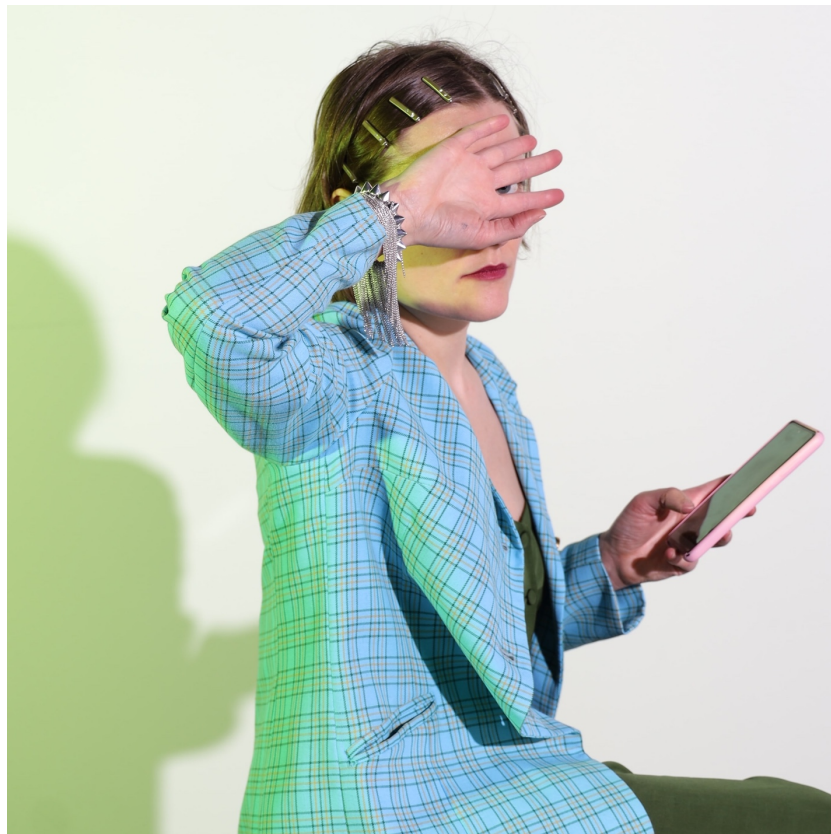


You look amazing!

Between performance and performativity

TINA JERANKO



ABSTRACT**DATE:****AUTHOR**

Tina Jeranko

MASTER'S OR OTHER DEGREE PROGRAMME

Live Art and Performance Studies

TITLE OF THE WRITTEN COMPONENT/THESIS*You look amazing!* Between performance and performativity**NUMBER OF PAGES + APPENDICES IN THE WRITTEN COMPONENT**

70 pages + 13 pages in appendix

TITLE OF THE ARTISTIC/ ARTISTIC AND PEDAGOGICAL WORK*the Fabric of Identity*

performance artist: tina jeranko / duration: March 2022 – March 2023 / garments borrowed from the costume department wardrobe: Kati Autere, Sirpa Luoma, Arja Nuppola, Mervi Palo and Havina Jäntti / photographer: Tangmo, Ladapha Sophonkunkit.

today it suits me

concept & poster & performer: tina jeranko / fashion designer: Autuas Ukkonen / performance venue: fashion boutique *Liike* / voice mentor: Mari Kätkä / sound support: Heikki Kaakso / written thesis supervisor & artistic work script: Freja Bäckman / artistic work supervisor: Justus Kantakoski / photographer: Antti Ahonen / video: Jyrki Oksaharju / producer: Nina Numminen.

Premiered on 17th of August 2023 at *Liike*, Helsinki.

The artistic work is produced by the Theatre Academy. ☒

The artistic work is not produced by the Theatre Academy (copyright matters have been agreed upon). ☐

There is no recording available for the artistic work. ☐

This thesis unpacks the concepts of performativity of the dress, the gaze, and layers of the self within the context of Occident by exploring the durational performance *the Fabric of Identity*, and performance *today it suits me*.

Through the method of dress up, borrowing garments from the Theatre Academy's costume department wardrobe, and the dress up repetition in *the Fabric of Identity*, the concept of performativity of the dress up is revealed. Commitment to this dress up weekly for a year leads to uncovering the layers of the self while layering the body with the fabrics of attire. This thesis is written with the author's journals from the dress up days, reflections of the performances, references from their colleagues, and theories from scholars.

This process leads to the main question, which is how the materials of fabrics affect and shape the immaterial self.

The thesis addresses the main question concerning the social sphere, the language of clothes, and how different types of gazes, particularly the 'male gaze', external or internal, make the author feel and guide their dress choices. It describes the liminal space between performance and performativity, the body of the author being stuck amidst them. The thesis continues with the author's embracement of the sensual aspect the dress entails, returns the gaze, and highlights the perspective of the wearer.

It continues with the concepts of the gaze and the dress empowerment, describing the process of performance *today it suits me*, introducing the venue, the fashion boutique *Liike*, and the collaboration with the fashion designer Autuas Ukkonen. It follows with the description of the dress design for the performance that helps the author to transition into the performance diva and return the gaze unapologetically. The author's pop influences on their teenage self are revealed and how they modify them into a tool to boost the performing self. Differences and similarities in performing durational performance and performance as spectacle are introduced after. Based on the research executed through the two performances, this thesis proposes a definition for durational performance and performance.

Finally, the thesis concludes with the role the institution has played in enabling research into the performativity of the dress and its power, the author's struggles encountered on the journey of unconventional use of garments originally intended for theatre play, and the unconventional way of performing in them they choose to do.

KEYWORDS

performativity, dress up, fashion, garments, self, gaze, performance, durational performance

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INTRODUCTION

Before joining LAPS and moving to Helsinki, I was active in the visual arts scene in the Western Netherlands, and before that, I had studied art pedagogy and fashion in Eastern Slovenia, where I had also been involved with the visual arts. During my BA studies in Fine Arts at the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague, I dived into performance-making among multimedia artists, where I was largely surrounded by visual but also sonic and spatial art and art practices. My way of thinking and making is informed and shaped by my exposure to the field of visual arts outside and inside of institutions, as well as by art pedagogy practice and studies and fashion studies I did at the vocational school.

I like to work with what is at my hand, in proximity to my body, and what seems to be pressing; what matters to me, immaterial as well as material matter. Working with text and the theme of voice are recurrent in my work. Both are present in this thesis: the voice as the concept of self and its layers through collaboration with the fabric of attire, and text in the manner of my writing to present the subject of my desire—the dress and its effect on the body and self.

In this MA thesis, I will guide you through two performances that I created and was involved in during my studies at the Theatre Academy of Helsinki in the Live Art and Performance Studies (LAPS) Master program. The durational performance *the Fabric of Identity* and the performance *today it suits me* took place in Helsinki between March 2022 and August 2023. They are not separate works but part of the same story, the one about the dressed self. *the Fabric of Identity* is a year-long durational performance wherein I dressed up weekly and walked around the city and the academy in a carefully created look. *today it suits me* is a performance I performed and shared at the fashion boutique *Liike* in the center of Helsinki, created from the materials I had accumulated during *the Fabric of Identity*. Both are pillars to my performance research during time spent within and outside of the academic circles in Helsinki and are also pillars of my written thesis.

I value experiential knowledge; I desire to follow the body and its knowledge in the making since I trust that self, contained in a body with its senses, can offer a more dynamic depiction of the performance experience I pursue. In this thesis, I describe the two performances that I experienced as the main protagonist, translating the embodied physical experiences and the accompanying emotions into a written form. My colleagues played an important role in directing me towards relevant references during *the Fabric of Identity*. I mention them by name. Some of the findings are similar to the essays and theories of fashion scholars. I write in the fashion of autotheory; I use my journals from the durational performance—marked as (journal entry) at the end of a sentence or a paragraph—and with the help of my colleagues merge them with the reflections and memories of the two performances. The journals, reflections and memories are accompanied by the theory of other scholars to point towards the contexts this work is part of. These are three main types of text – journals, reflections, and memories – three different universes that alternate and coexist throughout the thesis. I am writing this artistic thesis from my position as an artist.

My main subject of exploration is what it means to be a dressed body in the Occidental context, the experience taking place in the city of Helsinki, through my self, contained in a body, in relation to its constant becoming within a social sphere. I am interested in the ways the material—an outfit: garments, shoes, and accessories—affects and shapes the immaterial—the self. How do I perceive myself within an outfit, and how am I treated by others in my immediate surroundings? Along the process, I discovered the concept of performativity, more precisely what it does, by carrying out the weekly dress up, *the Fabric of Identity*.

I unintentionally but willingly created not one but two artistic components, which are suitable examples for comparing the concepts of performativity and performance. As I was engaged in comparing the two, and even more so in the phase of reflecting on them, the concept of the gaze, among other bodily senses, turned out to play a significant role in the shaping of the self. Next to the many categories of the gaze, I find the sensory atmosphere of a dressed body to be as relevant to the way in which the self is shaped. I approached the dressed experience from the phenomenological point of view by giving

credit to the body's sense of sight, smell, sound, and touch, addressing the self holistically.

I lay out the collaboration between my self, as experienced through my body, and the materials of garments that protect and enhance it. I ask, how do the two affect each other? How does the public sphere affect my and others' dressed bodies and vice versa? Instead of undressing and revealing the body, exposing the naked body, which, in my opinion, is already exhausted in the performance field of visual arts, I am looking at the gesture of layering garments on the body with the body as a revealing process of the notion of self.

In this thesis, I refer to the female body commonly read as feminine and perceived as a woman's body in a predominantly heteronormative patriarchal society. I write from the perspective of that female body, although I do not always identify as a woman, nor is it the only filter through which I wish to be perceived.

The structure of this text

This thesis contains three main chapters. I devote the first chapter to the durational performance *the Fabric of Identity*, and the second to the performance *today it suits me*. The first part of these two chapters deals with the process, and the second part discusses and reflects on the process. In the third chapter, I try to define the two different types of performance that I ground on *the Fabric of Identity* and *today it suits me*.

I start chapter one with *the Fabric of Identity*, where I lay out the work process of the performance. I share how I perceive the term work, the need for repetition in the weekly dress up, and introduce the wardrobe of the Theatre Academy's costume department. I continue with subchapter *Visual references, and peers shaping my work*, where I open my archive, and name my colleagues in relation to the references they gave me. In the chapter *Body trapped between performance and performativity* I present the term performativity by scholars, among them Judith Butler and Llewellyn Negrin. In the following subchapter, I present the uncomfortable feeling of standing out during the dress up days and the conflict and confusion I had, whether I was performing or not. In

subchapter *Social sphere and the gaze*, I open how the context and public sphere shapes the dressed self, my experience of being in a female body in relation to the ‘male gaze’, and talk about the blazer and its visual function. I do so with the help of fashion scholars Sara Chong Kwan, Maria Walsh, Mo Throp, and Llewellyn Negrin. In the last subchapter, I address the dressed experience through the perspective of the wearer and talk about taking the gaze into my own hands.

Chapter two is about the making of *today it suits me*, where I take the concept of returning the gaze from the previous chapter and write about its embodiment and presentation. In the next subchapter, I present the fashion designer of the dress, Autuas Ukkonen, and our collaboration in the making of it in relation to the dress up experience. I continue with the site, fashion boutique *Liike*, and its relevance in the presentation of the work. In the next chapter, *Solo speech performance*, I describe how the idea of the performance was conceived, how I made the script, my preparations to step into the performing self, and present the poster made in reference to the fashion magazines. I then reveal the complete description of the look in the *Full look* chapter, along with how the dress and its materiality affected my body mannerisms. In *Pop media influences*, I disclose what affected my teenage self and how this has resurfaced in the performance *today it suits me*. In the last two subchapters, I write about the emergence of the extravagant self in the solo performance, the empowered dressed self, topped off with the thoughts of cultural critic Madison Moore, and reflect on the shift from the performing role in the dress up performance on the streets and corridors to the one at the fashion boutique.

The third chapter is reserved for the definition of performance as I understand it through my extended practice, by the side of scholars Bojana Cvejić and Francesca Granata. I follow with the attempt to define durational performance alongside the essay *Durational aesthetics* by Adrian Heathfield and based on my work, *the Fabric of Identity*.

In the conclusion of this thesis, I offer you some of my most significant takeaways from the artistic component and this thesis.

1. THE FABRIC OF IDENTITY

1.1. The state of affairs

Cream white cotton corduroy jumpsuit walks me through the hall; a one-piece garment, a 'onesie', touches my skin throughout my body. I sense a light tension in the waistline with a drawstring splitting my torso in half. Heavy golden hoops are twisting the lower parts of my ears. I am excited about what I wear. The way the jumpsuit is tailored allows flexibility for my movement and matches, as well as emphasizes, the mischievous undertone I already experience in my body.

In dialogue with Maja Kalafatić, a performer, friend, and colleague, we flirt with the idea of using the costume department of Theatre Academy as our regular wardrobe. What would it be like and feel like if I suddenly had access to a wide array of garments, shoes and accessories for my daily look? The Academy's wardrobe is the size of a walk-in closet, where one can easily get lost among the shelves and racks with approximately 30.000 different items, according to an inventory from a couple of years ago, intended for Theatre Academy's plays and performances. My body's blood sugar levels rise imagining the act of choosing, putting on garments, wearing them for no special occasion other than the occasion of the everyday, feeling the garments on my body, and showing off the freshly adorned self. I need this idea to be fleshed out.

I started the dress-up practice as a one-month project, one day a week. I visited the costume department between 12 and 14 o'clock, in the opening hours. By that, I limited my time to choosing an outfit to an hour, to think less and follow the algorithm of intuition and feeling, and due to other courses I had in parallel with this project. That would make four outfits in total. Yet, as the ritual of going to the wardrobe and wearing outfits started rolling, I had to continue. I realized that the more I do it, the more layers of fabric I go through and the more layers of my relationship to the dress I uncover. As if dressing up my body is undressing the self.

After several repetitions, I decided for this repetitive dress up act to be a durational performance and dedicated a year to it. I began in March 2022 and continued until March 2023, one look per week if the circumstances allowed me.

With the lack of dedicated time for practice within the LAPS program and with the lack of studio space—to my point of view, in relation to what I used to have access to in the past and how I understand having a practice—I found detours to do what I need to do, my version of performance art. The studio space which does not exist, and which would serve as the base for doing practice and having social peer-to-peer activity—a space that would bring spontaneity to creating—is like gates to sustaining and having a stable practice are being closed. If they are closed in a direct way towards the space for performance art, as in timewise and physically, they are open in other, indirect ways.

As a Theatre Academy student, I had access to the costume department, with which I decided to explore garments and the possibilities of different looks in my every day. The wardrobe became my studio, and curating a look became my practice. Outside that wardrobe, the rest of the academy, the streets of Helsinki, public transport, shopping malls and other public and semi-public spaces became my stage, and people in my proximity, passing by, became my audience.

I cannot deny that this is an already existing situation for everyone living in a city or in any social situation in general; we all wear clothes and look at each other. We all exchange roles as spectators and actors daily. However, through my conscious choice of specific clothing—curating a look—I made my body, covered with textile fabric and other materials, stand out more than usual. For myself, for others who are familiar with my otherwise chosen clothing and noticed an unusual change, for the unknown spectators who are avid observers and pay attention to their visual field and the culture that garments create, and for other unknown spectators who happen to notice a carefully chosen combination of items on a dressed body. In *the Fabric of Identity*, I was performing in the flow of life.



Outfit 15, *the Fabric of Identity*, 2022/23, Photographed by Stefanía Ólafsdóttir

1.2. The wardrobe in the costume department

1.2.1. The term work and the need for repetition

To be officially granted permission to borrow clothes from the wardrobe repeatedly, week after week—besides giving this action an official title, noted by the costume department team for the organization means and tracing activities within the department—I had to follow a pattern. A steady act would show I have a serious approach to work, and with this gesture I present myself as a responsible student, committed to their research and work. I do not deny my commitment to research; however, I am weary of calling all the games I play work.

As soon as I frame what I do as work, for myself as well as presenting it as such to others, my approach to doing and being with the task changes. Firstly, I connote the term work with something that I must do and not something I want to do. This does not exclude the possibility and reality of the turning point in the explorative process where ‘I do what I want to do’ turns into ‘I do it because I have to do it’, and it turns out to be

laborious. Within the process of *the Fabric of Identity*, I reached a turning point where I continued ‘the doing’ despite feelings of discomfort and weariness. Secondly, with the work label, instead of being in the moment with the process, I become more concerned with how I will present what I do, where I will present it, and to whom. As a side effect, my time perception shifts towards a linear one, and the attention of my exploration moves towards ‘what can I extract from this?’. A product-oriented approach that divides the roles of the work process in such a way that gives me an illusion of being the main creator and the one in control of the encounters with the subject of my research, which I cannot claim for *the Fabric of Identity*. In this process, I physically and emotionally engage with the garments and experience the reciprocal relationship we build together with the garments. They make me feel and behave in certain ways; they affect how I embody my self with their materiality in touch with my skin. Moreover, garments, activated on a body, with their visuals in relation to my body, have an impact on the social spheres I move through.

I learned to use the term work in relation to the moneymaking environment, consumer society and survival, and to the ‘hard worker is a good worker’ perception, until I am worn out. In this way, the term work sounds hefty and has a notion of bitterness, so I prefer to see the work I do as play and exploration. If I call exploration work too early, I might risk limiting the capacity to discover something new in the process as well as cutting the joy out of it. However, the framework can also be encouraging and provide structure once I deconstruct and reconstruct my existing perception of it and attach a playful point of view instead. Additionally, I had to frame my idea and doing with the culture of attire as a working project for the purpose of receiving access to the costume department. This frame served as a tool to support and realize my need for exploration.

The need for repetition, on the other hand, came from a more personal nature, from the internal space of the self in relation to the subject of my desire. The spectator was not relevant at this point—I was the performer and the spectator in the same body—and I was not performing, to begin with. When the dress up was not a project yet, I did not know what I was after, what that desire was. The unknown was drawing me in, I could find small joyful moments in the encounters with garments, and I gave one day a week

to getting ready a special attention. That is all I needed to know. It was pressing and urgent; I had to do it again and again and again, come closer and press against it.

The dress up rhythm had a grounding effect. It gave me comfort against the (then) recent changes in the environment and the people I was surrounded with, moving to Helsinki for studies. With the mundane element of repetitive acts via the means of institution, I could bridge the familiar and intimate with the unfamiliar and public. As a side outcome of this necessity, it became a project central to my research on performance, which you read about at this very moment.

Immediately, now, and presence is a vital ingredient of performance to my point of view, in whichever way one experiences it. I perceive presence as a connection between one another, between two places. The dress up endurance and insistence on a rhythmic movement once a week, enabled ‘affective experience’ (Kartsaki, 2017, 76), with which I encountered (dress) performativity and durational performance. I was enduring repetition with the performance of my body in touch with the dress which revealed layers of my (past?) self, in the now.

1.2.2. Wardrobe visits and choosing an outfit

The project is taking its own shape. The more I let it sink and be what it is, the more ideas and thoughts come to it. For me, this is a very playful and loose approach to performing and exploring performance. I have no deadline or presentation for *the Fabric of Identity*. I am not trying to impress anyone, not even myself (journal entry). This gave me the ability to enjoy and discover small-scale performances that happen within those parameters. I was not trying to attach any meaning or theory to it; I did the task, and that is about it. Through the body’s ‘about’, different parts of the choosing act came to light. The guideline I followed was no conscious thinking beforehand: choose an outfit as swiftly as possible, surpass potential thoughts, and follow a feeling. I chose clothes based on how I felt that day or how I have recently been feeling; clothes became extensions of those vibes; one piece inspired another, creating a ‘dressed atmosphere’ (a term borrowed from Sara Chong Kwan).

The project was forming slowly and steadily, and the parameters of choice were forming alongside. When choosing an outfit, I had the desire to follow my intuition and the accumulated information my body brings about. During this process in the wardrobe, when I detect preconceptions through my inner voice, I try to mute them. Thoughts of ‘what others might think of me’ lurk on the fringe of my mind, and they could (self-)censure the outfit. I cannot entirely dismiss others' opinions, though; the social gaze co-creates what I put on my body. I walk up and down the wardrobe, using my peripheral gaze to glance at the neatly stored clothing, shoes, and accessories. In this way, I can give space for indirect taste and interest.

With the help of a ladder on wheels, I climb high up the shelves and find many potential shoe pairs. I take all of them down to the floor and make an exhibition in front of the mirror next to the shoe shelves. One by one, I try them all with the outfit. There is no doubt about which ones I am going to wear; now it is only the question of socks, stockings, or leggings. What color and texture, fishnet? I pass by hats, browse through them, and my mouth starts feeling dry. I realize I’ve been inside for a while. Stockings or leggings? Grey leggings and white socks—I am tender for their combination with shoes. On my way out of the wardrobe, I think lipstick would do well with the look, so I borrow one. Two. I’ll mix them together (journal entry).

Besides imagining my body in combination with items, I paid attention to their materiality and shape alone, which allowed me to be surprised by the look I create. I narrowed the choosing process by the first item policy—the first item that evokes a spark will guide and build the rest of the look. That item could be included in the look itself or serve as an inspiration for it. As I was often impatient and in a hurry for other obligations, I gave myself a time limit of one hour, although I broke that rule often, spending 15 to 30 minutes extra, and towards the end of the durational performance, spending significantly more time in the wardrobe, allowing myself to get lost and confused. Regardless, time limitations were important to regulate and distribute my energy since the scope of the project could have easily over-occupied my days.

1.2.3. Costume department team as my co-workers: the labor and materiality of a seemingly ephemeral practice

I did not have a team of people to work for me around the clock like celebrities do, but I did have help from the costume department of the Theatre Academy. A team of employees who maintain the clothes I borrow; they wash them, dry them, mend them, sort them, and listen to my project's needs. I received the support from the institution by being its member, one of its body parts.

Despite the membership privileges and support later on, I did not receive a green card for the project immediately. The liminal space and ambiguity that this form of work, *the Fabric of Identity*, withholds, created doubts and confusion along the way. The conventional practice of borrowing items from the costume department usually happens in the frame of performances and plays, an occasion happening inside the theatre institution, in spaces like a black or white box. These performances or plays usually have a shorter time frame, ten minutes to three hours. This sums up a familiar form of work within the Theatre Academy. On the other hand, the practice of dress up—a performance—in a setting that is every day, the unannounced schedule and a varying time span, depending on the schedule and errands I have on the day, where passers-by are the spectators, and where the stage is mobile—social spaces I walk through—adds up to an unconventional form that is less clear and less comfortable to grasp.

Creating a look takes time, and although I cannot say I was very eccentric with the looks, and I did not make my own pieces—I played with the fine line dividing the everyday and the extra—it nevertheless occupied a big chunk of my time. That is, to produce a single look to explore the dressed self for myself as the wearer, and for the onlookers and the environment I appeared in.

1.3. Visual references and peers shaping my work

In this chapter, I lay out my visual archive—the references which shaped the content of my work. Usually, when I was in the outfit, more times than not, my colleagues pointed me to the relevant references in fashion, pop culture and visual arts. We have peer-to-peer ‘studio talks’ whenever and wherever we can.

How we are identified based on our looks is one of the questions that came up during these discussions. A topic of identity construction and gender performance became relevant through the dress-up repetition. Nevertheless, I gave more attention to my and western society’s tactile and visual relationship with the materiality of garments and the (re)construction of the self, rather than identifying with a look and presenting a character.

In the first months of *the Fabric of Identity*, a reference to Cindy Sherman was brought up in the conversation with my colleague Amanda Hunt, a cue to revisit Sherman’s performative practice of photographing herself as a character. Cindy Sherman is a well-known artist from the US, active from the late 1970s until today. The artist’s work primarily consists of photographic practice creating portraits through her body as a model in different disguises, addressing a multitude of identity stereotypes, and dismantling them (Ridge, n.d.). Instead of her photographic works, I was interested in Sherman’s approach to her works. How did she decide to build a character, choose clothes, and props, and make-up? Did clothes choose her? Sherman’s work was inspired by the representation of contemporary identity by “movies, television, magazines, the internet, and the art history.” (Respini, 2012, 13). I felt supported by her work, especially when I had doubts about my dress up practice, whether I should stop. Sherman as an example of an existing, well-represented (by art institutions in writings and publications) female artist, using her body and self to play and reflect on a mass media landscape motivated my practice. Along my repetitive dress up work, I read her interviews where I learned that Sherman liked to dress up as a character regularly in everyday life (Respini, 2012), which resonates with *the Fabric of Identity* in the everyday.

Another colleague, Onur Tayranoglu, was curious whether I follow fashion shows, after which I started following fashion shows even more closely and threw myself into designers' current collections through the *Vogue Runway* app. My intention was not to recreate the looks from the catwalks on my dress-up days; rather, I was curious about the current fashion scene, what kinds of forms, colors, and shapes receive attention, and on what kind of bodies. Simple cuts, details seem to play an important role in altering established shapes, visibility of materials' texture, patterns, black is prevailing, lots of white and beige tones, monochromatic looks. Predominantly, bodies are (still) abled, tall and skinny, face expressions are plain, and walks on the runway are subtle, rigid or turn into a performance. I come across a female-fashioned body more often than the male (maybe it's my algorithms). Although I do notice mid-sized, plus-sized and curvy models, and androgynous looks, unfortunately, the bodies on which fashion is presented are not diverse enough. Not everyone is able-bodied, tall and skinny as fashion likes to show it.

I have been following imagery from *Vogue*, an American monthly fashion and lifestyle magazine, and other fashion magazines, like *Elle*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and *Cosmopolitan*, on and off for years. The dress-up project propelled my visual research, and I surrounded and exposed myself to all sorts of digital visual archives.

On the social media platform YouTube, I came across the video series *Vogue: Life in Looks*, where celebrities break down their most prominent looks in life. They sit at a table, where a photobook with their memorable outfits from different occasions is placed in front of them. Flipping through their outfits, they comment on who designed the dress and who was involved in choosing it, how they felt about the look then, and how they feel about it at the very moment. A peek into how various established performers see themselves in different looks and how the looks were created supported my own dress-up practice as well as gave an angle to the performativity of the dress from the music, film, and fashion worlds.

Alongside fashion magazines, I was interested in celebrities on the red carpet in the film and music industry: the *Academy Awards*, *Cannes Festival*, *Annual Met Gala*, *Oscars*, *Grammys*, and *MTV Music Awards*. As a ceremony, the red carpet gives space

for prestige, status, and celebrity, where the gowns and tuxedos—the dress code—are performed through bodies in the film and music industry.

Both performing worlds offer eye-catching attire creations on bodies whose profession is to perform—not specifically in the gala dress though. Yet, for a glimpse, they perform their non-fictive selves (or a public persona?) through their walk and the photoshoot on the red carpet. That is the space between the car they arrive in and the inside of a building where the official ceremony happens, the spectacle, available to passers-by, and the audience outside of this profession. These looks are made to embrace and shine a light on the performers outside of their work. They are often created in collaboration with a team of people—makeup artists, hairdressers, stylists—working for the show industry (keeping the glam high and challenging to reach).

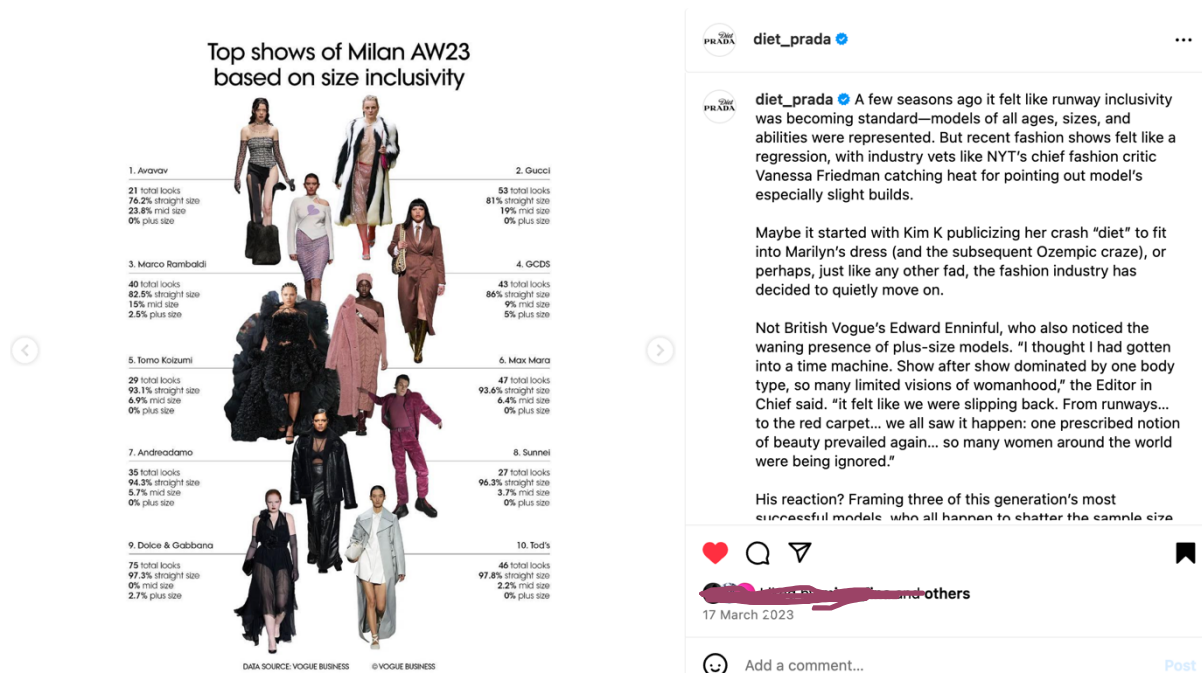
Celebrities can strike a pose and spin in front of a Glambot camera on the red carpets of the Grammys and Academy Awards in the United States to capture the details of their looks, including their makeup and texture of the dress and accessories. A high-speed 360-degree camera in front of which celeb outfits are captured in slow-motion footage, is directed by Cole Walliser, a Canadian filmmaker and music video director whose Instagram profile I came across on my rabbit hole fashion journey.

I find the red-carpet spectacle a liminal space, heavily performative, where I witness the non-fictional performances—the everyday self in the extravaganza dress—by bodies trained to perform fiction.

I have shared part of my visual research on my Instagram account in the Stories section, where I share work-related content. Gradually, I created another Instagram profile dedicated to the project, called *@artistasbouquet*, where I share my looks in posts and other visual material in stories. On Instagram, a photo and video sharing social networking service as a parallel world of communication through images, my colleague Lindon Satoru Shimizu asked me whether I had seen the *Next in Fashion* show on the streaming service Netflix. The reality show and fashion design competition *Next in Fashion* has two seasons, both hosted by Tan France, a fashion designer, co-hosted with model Alexa Chung in the first season, released in 2020, and co-hosted with

model Gigi Hadid in the second season, released in 2023. The show is informative of the fashion world and its current relevant designers and looks that are in and will be in the future, as well as entertaining. Fashion research and pop culture swallowed me. By watching *Next in Fashion*, I had a glimpse into the different criteria fashion judges have for the creations designers made, what looks they found relevant, and in what context.

My Instagram feed became saturated with fashion, with accounts like *@diet_prada*, a fashion watchdog group, *@dazedbeauty*, *Dazed & Confused* as an alternative style and culture magazine, and *@ideservecouture*, operated by fashion commentator Hanan Bešović as the forefront content, where I could (can) follow the current fashion scene and who is shaping it. I often came across fashion's influential figures like the editor-in-chief of *Vogue*, Anna Wintour, fashion designers like Vivienne Westwood (who passed away recently, at the end of 2022) and fashion stylists like Law Roach (who retired at the beginning of 2023).



Screenshot from *@diet_prada*, IG post on runway models' body type in 2023

Exploring the fashion world, I started paying close attention to the catwalk performances of models presenting dresses. How they carry themselves in different

designs, and the whole spectacle the fashion show is – the performers, the performance, the performativity, the scenography, the music – who are people that sit in the front row and who sits next to whom.

Some of the models' walks and attitudes are eye-poking; their individual approach to presenting a dress includes their runway persona, which I find an additional feature to the existing performance on the catwalk. Specifically, supermodels that dominated fashion in the 1990s occupied my visual and performative interests. The ones I came across 15 years ago when I studied fashion design were: Naomi Campbell, Linda Evangelista, Christy Turlington, Cindy Crawford, Claudia Schiffer, Tatjana Patitz, Kate Moss, Tyra Banks, Carla Bruni Sarkozy, Shalom Harlow, and Milla Jovovich. 1990s fashion that consisted of top crops, baby tees—exposed belly button—, slip dresses, sheer fabrics, combat boots, smudged eye make-up, and lip liner (all coming back now), presented on the runway in over-the-top self-confident walks: hips swinging, arms swinging, sassy and bold facial and body expression. Supermodels in the 1990s re-entered my visual sphere, now in the context of the performance and performativity of the dress instead of in the making of the dress.

1.4. Body trapped in between performance and performativity

The garment performs itself; I have a feeling that I need to perform pressing in the background of my mind due to the unordinary look I have (journal entry).

1.4.1. Genealogy of the term performativity

The references to scholars and essays I present in this subchapter are the chronology of the term performativity according to the accessible content of my findings, readings, and understanding of them.

When discussing the looks I wore as part of the durational performance *the Fabric of Identity* with my peers, they would share how they experienced them, make comments on the look, compliment combinations I made, bring associations to the table, and ask me how I feel in a certain look. Through these discussions, the term performativity entered my process, a tool I discovered along the way. Performativity is what I experienced in the dress up practice with my body.

Later, I turned towards its definition in the academic context, where J.L. Austin and Judith Butler are mentioned in abundance. In the book *The transformative power of performance* (2015), Erika Fischer-Lichte, a performance scholar in the German academic landscape, starts chapter two of the book with “The term “performative” was coined by John L. Austin.”. The neologism officially happened in 1955 in the lecture series he gave, *How to do things with words*, stressing linguistic utterances not only as statements but as an action that performs, and is as such a performative utterance (Fischer-Lichte, 2015, 24). It constitutes reality. From speech to aesthetics, in the 1990s, American philosopher and gender studies scholar Judith Butler introduces the term performative in relation to gender constitution and identity, focusing on the body and how stylized repetition of mundane acts and gestures builds one’s self (Kollnitz, Pecorari, 2022, 10). Butler explains the term leaning on the philosophy of phenomenology by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Fischer-Lichte, 2015, 27), French philosopher from the early 20th century. Core to his phenomenology is the body and its awareness “as the medium through which we experience the world”, as Llewellyn Negrin formed it in her essay *The Corporeal Experience of Fashion* (Rocamora, Smelik, 2019). Performativity of clothes that are placed on the body as the second skin and move with the body – visual and tangible intertwined – influence mode of bodily behaviour and therefor co-create the self.

In studies of fashion, Andrea Kollnitz and Marco Pecorari, editors of the book *Fashion, Performance & Performativity* (2022) define performativity as “a concept used to address the effects of shaping the real” in juxtaposition with performance seen “as operating in the realm of fiction” (Kollnitz, Pecorari, 2022, 4). They refer to the writers Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Andrew Parker, who both wrote on queer theory.

Kosofsky and Parker explain performativity as a form of permanent effects that ways of communication have in our day-to-day (Kollnitz, Pecorari, 2022, 3).

Embedded in the quotidian, like garments and activity around them, I understand performativity as one of the main aspects of the self. Contained within a body, the self is layered with experiences and encounters with another; it can be taken apart, part by part, through a process of constant becoming, dressing, and undressing, made up of continuous change.

1.4.2. Is it time yet? Do I perform now?

When I slide out of the outfit at the end of the day, I feel like it was a performance day. It took energy; I am aware I look extra, at least more extra than usual, and I attract more attention than on other days. I feel like I am carrying certain meanings, associations, or feelings for those who see me (journal entry).

If dress-up act is an act of performance that I have decided to do, then I should be above it (the perception I have at the time but do not necessarily agree with) and know what I am doing, but I do not. If performance is defined as “a self-conscious act of volition by a performer”, as fashion scholar Francesca Granata suggested (see more in chapter 3.1. ...*performance?*), then that means my dress-up act is a performance. I consciously curated a look and walked in it through the social sphere. But the mannerism the dress evoked in me was the will of the dress combined with the will of my established everyday self.

I am confronted with a conflict: I have no desire to perform directly, as in a performance; however, paradoxically, I clash with my established experience of performance: “I should perform, I should have ‘the material’ ready (as in theatre circles), I should improvise”. The outfit is pushing me to think about the presentation of my-self, of my appearance. And as I appear distinctly different from my usual style and that of the Theatre Academy community (lots of sportswear), I feel exposed in an uncomfortable way. Yet, at the same time, exploring garments and their performativity

gives me satisfaction. In my head-to-toe dressed self, I hear myself convincing: “I do not need to perform; I can enjoy being as I am; I do not need to do anything; I am in clothes as any other day.” Do I need to convince myself in this way?

The dress is pressing against my skin, touching me, and reminding me to embrace the dressed form within social space. Who or what is in charge? Where is the pressure to perform coming from? I feel pressure to perform partially because people who know me, at least vaguely, are asking if I am performing and if this is a performance—I mostly move through spaces made to exhibit and discuss performance and in performance contexts. On the other hand, even when I do move in other spaces, the Finnish social atmosphere is not exactly encouraging in engaging with random people on the street. People tend to avoid small talk.

Low-key blurring the lines of art and life, the dress I wear is pushing me towards performance, but I have nothing else to give than the carefully styled look on my body and the self as the product of my environment, layered in encounters with another. The visual surface of the dress and my body communicate on their own, they are a language of its own, which is also an integral part of my-self; the repetition of acts and the speech I do, the performativity with which I explore. The choice of my dress as an expression of my feelings, how I interpret its language my-self, how I estimate others interpret it, and how the dress materials press against my body, all of which affect my mannerism, the way I embody the self. In the dress, I expect something spectacular from myself; I am accustomed to a spectacular performance mode and hence expect a spectacular thing to exist within this newly established angle to my practice.

An expectation to perform lingers as a confusing undertone within me, the self is now alert. It asks, what is the aim? With clothes, I activate another layer of my-self previously quiet. I am conscious of myself, of the way I look, the way I appear, and the way I present my body to the other. With different clothing, I speak another language. By doing so, I potentially attract different attention and activate the spectator’s role in people around me.

With garments and the way I combine them on my body, I break the dress norms in my environment and activate a saturated self-conscious state of being. I am alert because I am aware of the aesthetic norms in the social sphere - dull colors, black, pale shades, jeans, T-shirts, sweatshirts, and trainers – which I go against with bright colors, dresses, skirts, bright stockings, boots, handkerchiefs, hats, jewelry... I am now alert to my presence in the space, as if another layer of clothes on my body, the shift in my second skin, sent a signal. It comes from the garments that are not in my possession, the ones I am not accustomed to being in, and not familiar with them visually and materially as they do not exist in my everyday visual access. They activate another way of being in me as if something is about to happen. Performance?

The outfits I wore, and sartorial practices overall, have transitional aspect between performance and performativity due to the dialogue created between the language that clothes entail, and the performance created by the body (Kollnitz, Pecorari, 2022, 8). Performative language of garments and what performance body makes of them appears to be the liminal space of constant becoming. It is performance and performativity at one and the same time, self, contained in a body, trapped in between them in transitional quality of dressing, undressing, and being dressed.

1.5. Social sphere and the gaze

My look calls for attention: how I behave, how I feel and how I interact with people. The look gives me the liberty to bend the way I talk and walk. It certainly makes me feel different and more glamorous, I am aware that I attract attention. And I do not mind it. It does not make me talk more; I feel reserved (journal entry). Even from the first day on, I noticed the different shades in my way of being and movement – the garments, the look, affected my physical and social body. They excite me; I step into another dimension of self. The shift is exciting. At the same time, I feel the tension between the excitement and the eccentricity of the look I bring to the space and the more reserved part of my-self, the two being in conflict. I feel simultaneously reserved and excited due to the new layer of the self being created at the very moment, ‘the becoming’ I am unfamiliar with, bringing a layer of insecurity.

When preparing to leave my home and getting dressed in the privacy of my room, I am usually aware of the upcoming social setting. This serves as a mental checklist of where I will be seen. I decide what to wear based on where I will be and the occasion or situation I will enter. While examining the clothing in my wardrobe, I experience different feelings, such as the mood of the moment, memories that certain items in the closet bring, and anxiety to fit in with the occasion to a certain degree – all of these factors influence my choice of attire. I consider the occasion, the people I may encounter, the time I have to prepare, and the temperature both indoors and outdoors. My decisions are not solely based on my visual appearance in relation to my own opinionated gaze and that of others, but also on my emotional state alongside the climate and weather conditions. By taking these factors into account, I am able to create a look that is appropriate and comfortable for the given situation.

On days when I dress up, within *the Fabric of Identity*, I wear clothes that are not commonly seen in public but are still suitable for everyday urban life. Although my attire may resemble special occasion dresses—perhaps it has theatrical elements, and it does come from the theatre academy’s costume department wardrobe—it is not a costume. I am not trying to cover the existing self with a character or “create the appearance characteristic of a particular period, person, place, or thing” as the Merriam-Webster dictionary defines it (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). In the wardrobe, when I assemble a look, I try to avoid cultural appropriation, or styling a look that would resemble a recognizable era (for example the 1920s and *The Great Gatsby*). Nonetheless, with my look, I might have given certain connotations of which I am less aware or unaware.

But what I am aware of is the attention I receive, with heads turning to look at me. At times, I am flattered by this effect; at other times, I wish to blend in despite my unconventional appearance. Others' responses to the garments I carry on me and how the garments carry me affect the way I feel in my surroundings, whether my dressed self is accepted or not, and how it is accepted. The visual appearance of the dress as a presentation of myself created a self-conscious effect through the gaze of another and contributed to the way I inhabited a social space.

I cannot focus, my mind is all over the place, I am full of impressions from people, I am full of the outfit I am wearing (journal entry). Inside *the Fabric of Identity*, where friction is created between the dressed self I am used to and the new layer of the self created with a different look, I am concerned about how my curated look might be perceived. This creates a conflict between how I want to create a distinctive look and the directions my established pattern of creating a look is giving me.

I want to self-censure the choices I make, I feel ashamed of parts of the taste I have. However, my interest is to bring to the surface the materials, shapes, colors, and textures that stir interest in me. Some of these are cashmere, fur scarfs, leather, lace, transparent fabric, glitter, pink or bright and vivid colors in general, miniskirts, and shoes that make me look taller. Any garment that is tight, tailored to my body, showing my figure, showing my legs and feminine, I am reluctant to wear. I would like to wear materials and shapes despite the origins of these interests (pop culture media) and despite my own judgement towards the language those garments might bring for me as well as for others. Despite how others would judge me based on my dress choices. In fact, I would want to indulge in and embrace the feminine and own the feel and the look of it when I want to. But what if the feminine on my female body will give the impression that I am seeking ‘male gaze’ attention? (see chapter 1.5., *Social sphere and the gaze*, and 1.5.1. *Whose gaze?*). Will I risk being objectified? Will others think I objectify myself? What if I do not create a look that is classy and chic? And if I do?

The dress, positioned between the social environment and the body, creates a boundary that defines the limits of the body, situated between the public and private spheres. In her essay on the ‘ambient gaze’, Sara Chong Kwan refers to the dress “as a form of material culture”. The dress presents itself as a two-sided activity: a public one, which is socially engaging, and a profoundly personal one. It is in constant contact with the body in its immediate physical proximity (Chong Kwan, 2020, 59).

How do I feel the outfit in different locations? And how does it feel to be in the outfit around the city on my own and in the company of my friends, people I am familiar with? I experienced these questions as notions in the process of *the Fabric of Identity*.

Later, in the process of making *today it suits me*, they became outspoken questions by the fashion designer, Autuas Ukkonen, who interviewed me and gave me space to articulate and share this notion (see chapter 2.1., *Collaboration with fashion designer, Autuas Ukkonen*).

When I walked in the chosen outfit around the academy, it felt like I was a project, although at times I forgot what I was wearing in terms of how I appeared to others, and the whole performance disappeared. In East Helsinki, I felt like I was overdressed and that I was well off, while in the center of the city, I either felt like I just walked off a film scene or that I was an artist. These are some of the impressions I had in different locations of the city and its contexts, along with feeling fabulous and extra, as well as embarrassed and timid.

While I was with peers in public spaces, my look might have been more accepting to the majority of the unknown spectators due to the acceptance within the group I was socializing with. However, the majority does not exclude exceptions; taste is learned and is as individual as it is collective. In my opinion, we are creating taste collectively and through the social groups we belong to. It is an ongoing adjustment in co-creation with individual needs and desires of the constant ‘becoming’, intertwined with the environment through a physical sensing body.



Outfit 21 on the metro station Kontula, *the Fabric of Identity*, 2022/23,
Photographed by Maja Kalafatić

Different social classes seem to have different styles. With the fashion designer of the dress *today it suits me*, classes and styles led us towards the so-called ‘trickle-down’ theory by Georg Simmel. The upper class, ‘superior’ class, is invested in having their own style, distinct from other classes, ‘inferiors’, to keep their rank in society, and as soon as it is appropriated by and has reached the average consumer, the upper class will change what they wear in order to differentiate themselves from the other classes—they keep their aesthetic look recognizable (McNeil, 2016, 75). Simmel was a German sociologist, active in the late 19th century—beginning of the 20th, who was interested in the dress and its aesthetic experience in relation to societal forms (McNeil, 2016).

I imagine that the intense experience of differentiation by distinct looks would dim if I practiced it every day; perhaps I would get used to it, even though not completely. Simmel also referred to as the ‘philosophical Manet’ of his time (Rocamora, Smelik, 2016), proposed that an individual has infinite choices about what to wear but also tends towards social conformity, as a paradox in fashion where one simultaneously has a need for a sense of belonging and standing out (McNeil, 2016, 71).

1.5.1. Whose gaze?

In the Western social and cultural spheres, historically, the emphasis was given to the visual experience and what intellect makes from it, perpetuation, and traces of which, *modus operandi*—the “Cartesian dualism and the privileging of the mind over the body” (Laing, Wilson, 2020, 5)—I notice, is still present today. With my background in the visual arts in the West and Southeast Europe, I have learned to use sight as the primary sense, an approach to the world that is generally prominent in the so-called Western context. Nevertheless, my interest in other senses, the somatic and holistic experience of the world I live in continuously pushes me to question other perspectives. With the sight in focus, ocularcentric approaches tend to turn our body into an object to be gazed upon, surveilled, and potentially controlled. In the past years, ocularcentrism and ‘the male gaze’ have been critiqued and challenged by feminist theories and feminist philosophers

(Chong Kwan, 2020, 62), with the shift taking place from mind to body, considering other senses as well: touch, sound, smell, taste, and proprioception.

The term ‘male gaze’ and its concept were introduced in the essay by the British film theorist Laura Mulvey in 1975 in relation to cinema narration and spectatorship (Laing, Wilson, 2020, 6). Since its conception, the term has been used widely in relation to the objectification of female and other bodies. In the essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* in 1975, Mulvey laid out a binary perception of pleasure and split looking into an active male and passive female, where the female figure is styled according to the ‘male gaze’ desires (Throp, Walsh, 2020, 35). These binaries are being challenged within the academic circles; however, observing my self, as well as others, and tracing my views inside and outside of these circles, I have internalized and embodied the ‘male gaze’ notion, including looking at my own body.

I understand this type of gaze as a heterosexual male gaze dictating how a female body should look and behave. In the mainstream circles, preferably in the package of cisgender, feminine, and accommodating, serving certain aesthetics fabricated, and propelled by multiple sources: individuals through social media, fashion magazines, and influential individuals in the music, film, and fashion industries. The act of objectifying a person's body and reducing its aesthetics to a constructed set of learned visual pleasures has been influenced by a camera lens primarily operated by straight cis male bodies, most often referred to as men. For example, in the film industry, if I write ‘film directors in the 1990s’ in the Google search engine, the first result is a list of *20 Big-Name Directors Who Debuted in the 1990s* by MovieWeb, 18 directors are men, most of them white, and 2 are female directors, which makes up 10% of the list. British Film Institute’s list *Directors’ 100 Greatest Films of All Time*, includes 5 female directors out of 100, that is 5% of the list, the rest, 95%, is men (BFI, n.d.) I need to dig deep to be able to find female bodies represented behind the camera in the Western mainstream context in the past decades as well as today. Men still occupy a lot of positions with power.

In the digital age though, who is in charge behind the camera has shifted, with the lens and shutter button at our fingertips, built into pocket-size smartphones used daily.

However, that type of gaze, the ‘male gaze’, can be applied to and used by anybody, regardless of their body, gender identity, or sexual orientation, and can feed into patriarchal power relations (Throp, 2020, 41).

Yet again, it is important to note that the gaze itself is plural, also female and queer, and can be adapted to different needs and desires. In *Revisiting the Gaze*, Maria Walsh, a writer and art critic, says, “feminist theorists have long argued that ‘the gaze’ is culturally marked and embodied in much more plural ways” (Walsh, 2020, 36). I find pleasure in certain dress aesthetics and enjoy seeing a person who willingly exposes themselves to be looked at, who enjoys the gaze, such as a performer showcasing their piece, as I do myself. Or like François Chaignaud did in *Un Bolero* (see chapter 3.1. ... *Performance?*). Walsh argues that exhibiting oneself—demanding to be looked at—is a powerful subject position (Walsh, 2020, 41). The repetition of dressing up in durational performance *the Fabric of Identity* helped me to understand that this position exists, while also being vulnerable as I exposed myself in an unfamiliar way. Through persistence and repetition, I was able to activate, acknowledge, and embody a degree of this power and appreciate the plurality of gaze.

1.5.2. Dress as a visual shield

Often, when I got dressed for the day, while getting ready as well as already existing in a social situation, I had mixed feelings about the look; I felt ashamed, and I did not feel ready to walk out. The eccentricity of my look pushed me outside of my comfort zone and created a new space for being with my-self. I appreciated the deviant appearances of my dressed self, and yet, this was on my body. This is my body, not detached from the garments; although detachable, now I am the eccentric look, exposed to the other. In this patriarchal society I am a part of, it feels uncomfortable to stand out from the norms, which are defined by white heterosexual men – those who traditionally wear the blazer as part of a suit with coordinating trousers or as a separate piece and sit in positions of power.

When creating the outfit for the day, I had a tendency to add a ‘man’s’ item into the looks – a blazer, considered a ‘power dress’ in the professional and corporate worlds, a term that emerged in the 1970s alongside the ‘technology of the self’ (Entwistle, 2007). Sociologist of fashion, Joanne Entwistle suggests that when women enter the “previously male-dominated arena” occupying power positions at work (e.g., law, politics), the business suit is altered to fit and emphasize a female body shape. Matching tailored skirt and blazer, blouse from soft materials, high heels – smart looking, but still sexualized (Negrin, 2016, 124).

Power dressing—a ‘female’ equivalent for the blazer and business suit—has been creatively reinvented today, often seen in youth circles (Gen Z). Nevertheless, the blazer connotes intellect, which is dominantly represented through a male body. The blazer as such could, to a certain degree, serve as a visual shield. I have learned as well as experienced that exposing parts of a female body and exposing my female body in a sexually provocative way could potentially be risky due to its sexual objectification in a patriarchal society. The gendered nature of a dressed body influences the way one is perceived and impacts how the dress will be read. As Llewellyn Negrin, who has written extensively on theories of fashion and the body, and on the function of aesthetics in everyday life explained, bodies themselves are not a “neutral surface onto which signs are imprinted” (Negrin, 2016, 124). She argues that bodies, too, have their own materiality, which affects how garments are experienced by the wearer and perceived by the viewer. In the book *Fabulous* by Madison Moore (2018), wherein acts of fabulousness are looked through the lens of political gesture, I came across a mixed-media artist and public speaker, Alok Vaid-Menon, who expressed that it is ironic that they are forced “to find safety and security in “man’s” clothing, something that has been so violent in my life.” (Moore, 2018, 52). The blazer in the Western context shows itself as a performative tool. It is commonly understood as a sign of intellect and power, attributes that can give a person a sense of security and comfort. When I was unsure of the look I had, the blazer was a quick back-up choice.



Outfit 32, *the Fabric of Identity*, 2022/23

1.5.3. Clothes with and without the body

Clothes existing on their own in the wardrobe, without a body, do not convey much meaning; once they are activated on a body and placed in a social situation, meaning comes through, and conversation starts rolling. With our bodies, we activate the two-dimensional pieces of fabric into a meaningful second skin, a skin that brings a certain modality to the self. Cultural critic Madison Moore, along with cultural historian Anne Hollander, remind us that “clothes must exist in a specific social or embodied context to have meaning” (Moore, 2018, 76). When I put the zipper jacket on, I bring life to it; it is now an expression of my-self. Clothes in the wardrobe alone barely mean anything until we activate them through the body, creating a dressed body—the dressed self.

I do not get dressed to call for attention, to be stared or pointed at – I get dressed to express my-self creatively, to try out different versions of the self, and to empower myself through clothing, inserting that image and sensation in the social space. I do this knowing that I can change and transform as I go, while the dress supports me in that. Madison Moore expressed from the black gay perspective that he “would love to live in a world where I could wear whatever I desired without getting verbally harassed, being followed or fearing for my safety. But that’s not the world we live in.” (Moore, 2018, 11). The dressed self is impacted by others in the socio-cultural world where not every dressed self is welcomed. The unfamiliar and the unknown break the normative and for some dressed selves, this is perceived as a threat to which they might respond with verbal and/or physical aggression. This influences the way one presents themselves in a dress, for example, dressing down to not be in the way of socially accepted appearances, like jeans and T-shirt—normcore—(notwithstanding the two items can be a dress-up too, especially with shoes and accessories) or the other way around; punching back aggressively with an eccentric look, poking the eye visually and provoking the normative dressed-scape fearlessly, despite potential hazard. That is, seizing one’s own place in social space.

If I expose my-self with an eccentric style through the white female body I am, as I did in Helsinki, I do not fear verbally expressed harassment, at least it is not on my mind in the predominantly white environment of Northern Europe. While in Maribor,

Slovenia, a small city on the border of Central and South-Eastern Europe, I will feel unease for verbal harassment in the predominantly white heteronormative environment as a white female body. An eccentric look in every day is like making a spectacle of oneself, and it is not excepted well by the normative and misogynist-oriented individuals and groups in the city, who will also express that.

As an alternative exposure—performance as fiction, an alternative world to the streets in every day, like performance *today it suits me* addressed in the following chapter – a stage can be used as a site for an eccentric look. Dress codes for special occasions, or carnivals can function similarly. Or calling a look a performance, where within its frame the self perceived as fictional is accepted, visually and psychologically, and where the levels of safety are higher. As such, eccentric looks on a body on stage, in a fictional setting, or in a dress code context, are more likely to be accepted.

1.6. The other side of the power of looking: The experience of the wearer

1.6.1. Sensory aspects of the dress and their effect on the self in my body

If I neglect other bodily senses that co-create my existence, living in multiple realities of the senses, I neglect feeling the flesh and emotion of my body, which are essential to my presence. Full body experience means that I understand the world around me through me, from inside out and from outside in, intertwined with the world while I move through it.

The dress up project *the Fabric of Identity* I invested myself in, as well as the everyday dress outside of this project, is and was an embodied and holistic experience. The dressed self is not only an object to be gazed upon but an active subject with agency in meaning-making. The self that dresses, decides what they will wear according to their

emotional mood and imagination, what is available in their wardrobe and how that reflects their attitude, and where they will go. The occasion and the people they might come across, memories that an item of clothing can bring to the self, based on color, shape, smell, or texture—all play a role in this process.

Often, these choices are made quickly and subliminally; any wearer is contributing to the dressed landscape, aware of it or not. Once dressed, the self can reinforce, complement or challenge social norms through their clothing choices (Chong Kwan, 2020, 57). The way in which an individual presents themselves through their clothing is influenced by their personal understanding and interpretation of clothing, as well as the perceptions of others. It is important to recognize that clothing and the bodies that wear them can hold different meanings and connotations for different selves.

The dress is what Entwistle calls a ‘situated bodily practice’ (Laing, Willson, 2020, 12), and lecturer in the fashion field, Sara Chong Kwan, refers to it as a ‘multisensory act of self-creation’ (Chong Kwan, 2020, 55). I, as the wearer, feel the dress sitting against my body, touching me, providing a sensual and haptic experience. I am aware of the dress on a subconscious level, the materials drawing a limit to my physical body – I do not always pay direct attention to what I sense, especially when it brings me comfort. Certain materials of clothing are unpleasant, like polyester, acrylic, and nylon, in which skin does not breathe. My body, trapped in an enclosed space of clothes, will start to heat up and produce sweat. Resulting in odors potentially unpleasant for others and consequently socially unpleasant for me, I would avoid close encounters with people, and in the first place, wearing such materials at all, if possible. The olfactory experience of clothes can play an important factor when choosing what to wear, or how we perceive a person based on their scent that can be accentuated by materials of the dress they wear. Or/and when paired with the scent clothes have on their own, depending on where they are stored in, and what substances they are maintained with. Additionally, clothes and accessories have an auditory element, with shoes more likely to stand out in the soundscape of a dressed body, creating a clacking sound when walking, in particular, when shoe heels are lifted.

All these dress aspects surround the wearer's body, creating a 'dressed atmosphere', an alternative notion proposed by Chong Kwan in her essay *The Ambient Gaze: Sensory Atmosphere and The Dressed Body* (2020), alongside the term 'ambient gaze'. The adjective ambient suggests that when observing a dressed individual, one draws from their own experience of wearing similar clothing, such as the texture of the fabric against their skin (Chong Kwan, 2020, 62). When viewing a piece of clothing, I draw upon my sensory knowledge, which is informed by my personal memories and socially constructed associations based on my background and the cultures I am part of. With this knowledge, I can imagine the weight of a coat or the swirling of fabric around my legs when I see a plisse dress. Considering how well a garment fits a body is not always the first thing I am interested in when I pay attention to a dressed individual. Materials and their sensory aspects, play an important role in the dressed composition.

The dress makes me feel overly self-conscious. All my movements, details to how I sit, where I put my purse and coat, where I direct my attention, is my blazer open or closed, my legs are crossed. I tend to be in a power pose. I feel powerful and elegant in that outfit, I love the feeling of earrings close to my neck, tiny nickel strings touching my skin. Padded shoulders, the garment changes the shape of my body, my chest area is wider. I feel fine and elegant in silk pants, I sit carefully. I carry around a small brown leather purse with a clasp (journal entry).

The way clothing made me move and act shaped the way I inhabited social space. Being dressed up put me in the spotlight, and I drew more attention than usual. Consequently, I was more aware of my movements, gestures, voice, and the content of my conversations. Overall, I became self-aware to the extent that I no longer felt comfortable in the performing skin of garments. Despite encountering these unpleasant moments, my curiosity drove me to continue with the project. My interest in dress and its impact on the self ultimately prevailed. I was convinced that enduring the repetition would reveal parts of my relationship with clothing I could only see unfold with time and patience. The act of dressing and being dressed as an intrinsic aspect of daily life is an automatic gesture, that makes breaking down all its dimensions challenging. In the dress up repetition, I found the sensory element of dress captivating; once I established the weekly dress up rhythm, I cared less for the attention I received.

1.6.2. Taking the gaze into my own hands: the perspective of the wearer

I no longer care about the outfit I am wearing; I cannot be bothered anymore. Have I gotten used to wearing an eccentric look every week? (journal entry). During the weekly dress-up repetition, I gradually find comfort. The more I do it, the more phases I undergo, the more layers I discover, the more familiar different dresses and their materials become to my skin. This process helps me understand and acknowledge the social impact it has on the self. I grow to accept the many possibilities of my-self and care less about the potential self-criticism of my own dressed self.

In the urban cityscape, *the Fabric of Identity* led me to dress performativity and the ambiguous space the body exists in, between the linguistics of the dress and the performance of the body. The performative language of garments and what the performance body makes of them appear to be the liminal space of constant becoming. With different clothing, I speak another language. With the same clothing, I can speak another language in a different context. And feel differently in different contexts according to my socially and culturally conditioned self.

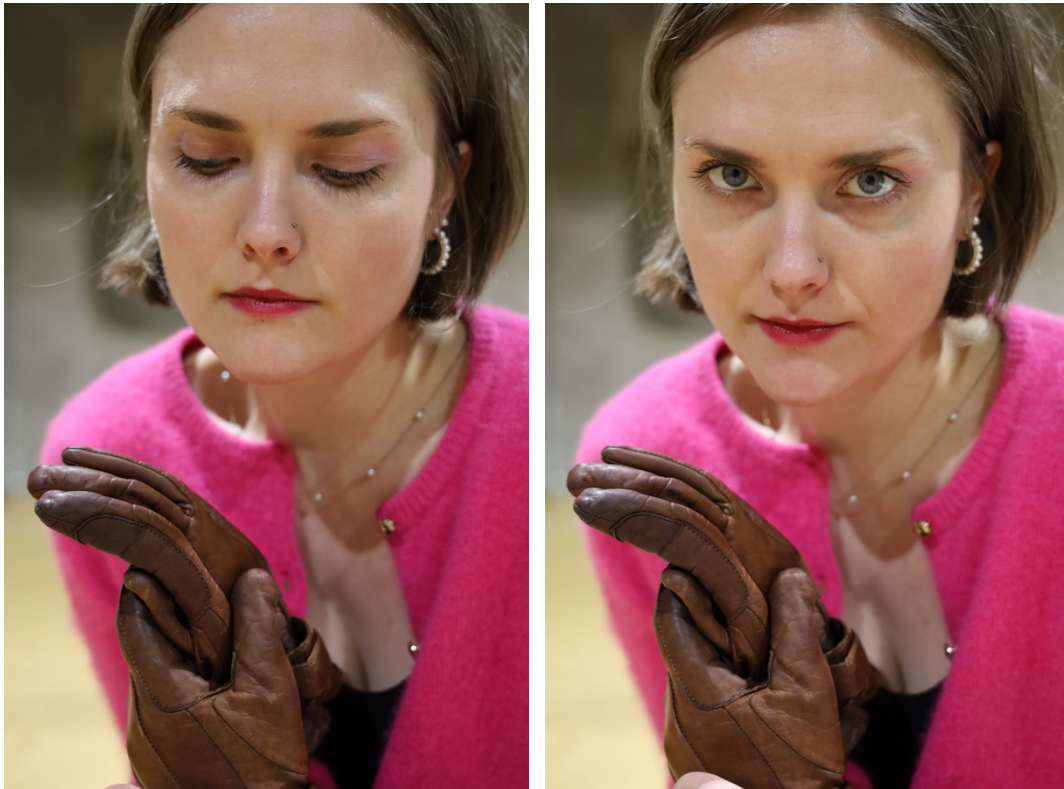
The dressed selves I created caught the eye of others and my own. During that time, I, as a female body, touched upon the internalized 'male gaze', and how uncomfortable it is to stand out from the norms created in patriarchal social structures. Bodies themselves are not a neutral surface onto which we layer garments.

Reducing my identification with the choices I had made and the look I had created allowed me to appreciate the materiality, form, movement, and sound of the dress, enhancing my sensual experience. Occasionally, I managed to break the hierarchy of senses by putting sight to the side, creating more space to mingle with other senses, increasing the area of experience. Instead, I chose to pay attention to the sensory quality the dress accommodated.

When I see my dressed and styled self in the mirror, I have an idea of how I appear to others and what I potentially present to the other with the complex system of signs

clothes entail. Instead of dismissing the gaze, I take it into my own hands and do the looking I need and desire myself. In the book *Fabulous* (2018), Madison Moore, a cultural critic, DJ, and creative director based in the US, asks, “But what happens when we take control of our own image as a way of returning the gaze, not to be passively looked at but to do the looking ourselves?” (Moore, 2018, 29). As a body, I see and I am being seen at the same time – the way the dress shapes me is a mixture of embodied cultural ideas I have, as well as my necessity for sensory and aesthetic pleasures. Sara Chong Kwan says that “the wearer can never be sure how their appearance will be interpreted by others, nor can the observer be sure of how the wearer feels.” (Chong Kwan, 2020, 58). It is not in my control how others perceive me, and there might be a clash between how I feel and how others interpret the visual language of my enclothed body.

To do the looking myself can bring liberty to my choices of clothing and the way I feel and want to present my layered self to the world. In this way, returning the gaze is a powerful tool you and I as the wearer have, altering the atmosphere we bring to the space.



Outfit 30, *the Fabric of Identity*, 2022/23



Outfit 30, *the Fabric of Identity*, 2022/23

2. TODAY IT SUITS ME

Nobody tells me what to do, I do it because I want to do it and because I need to do it, and because I owe it to myself (script).

When *the Fabric of Identity* was unfolding in front of me and through me, I was pulled by it by my sleeve unexpectedly. The repetitive process swallowed me; I had not planned the work, nor was I prepared for it. *today it suits me* came as a necessity for a clearer form for a performance, after I have been entangled with the ambiguous stage and the blurry role of the performer in *the Fabric of Identity*.

Bit by bit, outfit by outfit, I grew the desire to be in the spotlight: to claim the space and to return the gaze. Now I wanted to stand out, I wanted to look extra, a look that is distinct from those in the durational performance, and I wanted to have a chance to be comfortable with the uncomfortable. I craved to do that while facing the audience in the clear role of the performer.

I continuously desire to work with text, to memorize it, and to repeat it until it becomes embodied. As a result, I no longer have to think about what comes next; the text stored in my body lays itself out and allows me to surrender myself to the present moment. Not only words' concepts and meanings, but I am also curious about their vocal form, their sound and motion, and their rhythm in relation to my body.

The repetitive weekly outfits challenged me with their durational performance form and introduced me to the term performativity by practice. This led me to the following questions: how does a performer's body find power to perform on its own? What does it mean to face an audience by myself?

I felt intrigued by the thought of performing by myself for a change; how would I manage without relying on my co-performers and without counting on the chemistry created among us in the rehearsals? How does one prepare for a raw solo performance facing an audience in an everyday setting?

2.1. Collaboration with Autuas Ukkonen, fashion designer

I met Autuas Ukkonen, the fashion designer of the dress I was to wear in the performance *today it suits me*, in the later process of my thesis production, at the time when my first plan of presenting the work in the department store Stockmann was out of the game (see chapter 2.2. *Performance at Liike, fashion boutique*). I had to come up with an alternative solution for the venue and remake the plan for the performance, where I envisioned a boutique-like vacant space on a street level with a big shopping window so that the performance could be in proximity to the street and attract passers-by to join in or observe from the outside. Following the department store's rejection, my first impulse was to uplift and boost the project with new energy, and a collaboration with a fashion designer was it. Autuas took that position, with my supervisor Justus Kantakoski, an art director and fashion designer based in Helsinki, as our matchmaker.

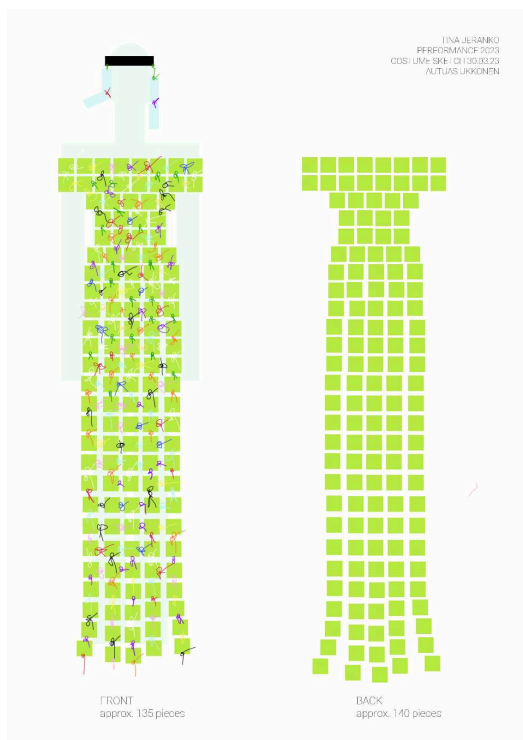
Autuas Ukkonen is an artist from Finland, mainly focusing on fashion and costume design, drawing inspiration from materials that others might see as disposable or worthless. Their visual style is influenced by personal experiences related to queer identity, good taste and materialism, with the key being to embrace a sense of play.

I met with the designer after I had sent them my proposal on Instagram, where I could scroll down through their account and get a glimpse of their visual aesthetics and interests. We shared our views on how we think the fashion world comes together and falls apart and how the dressed experience shapes us.

At our first meeting, I briefly explained what I have been up to, how the project is taking shape, and what I envision the performance to be like in the upcoming space (yet to be found). Our common interest in the performance and performativity of fashion, which I referred to as the culture of attire since I am not involved with the making of the fashion world, propelled the conversation towards personal experiences as the basis for perceiving and interrogating those terms. By that time, I was deeply involved with the dress-up, the constant becoming I experienced in relation to the garments and other

materials, and the impact fabric, form, and language of clothes had on me, shaping my relationship with the culture of attire.

I shared with Autuas that the dress-up act gradually became my physical, emotional, and philosophical space where I allowed myself to be extra, to play, and to be bold for myself on my own terms in the first place. This notion of liberty in the *the Fabric of Identity* eventually spilled over from different angles into my personal wardrobe and style. The outfits' aspect of attracting attention turned out to be bothersome at times and to a certain degree. At the same time, I was interested in challenging the norms within me and around me. Autuas and I both agreed that creating a look is time- and energy-consuming; one needs a whole team of artisans to keep up with the style.



Left: first sketch for the dress by Autuas Ukkonen,
Right: fitting in the Theatre Academy studio, Photographed by Autuas Ukkonen

2.1.1. Play and plastic, meetings and fittings

My affinity for glitter, our shared appetite for plastic, and recycling-oriented working etiquette rendered well in Autuas' proposal, making the dress for the performance out of plastic material they already had at hand. These were leftovers from Daniel Buren's, a French conceptual artist, exhibition at the Emma Art Museum in Espoo, and from the recycling centers.

I had the idea to wear a dress made of price tags, and Autuas came prepared, bringing bright lime green plastic squares and plastic craft lace to our meeting. I saw price tags in those squares, and their work with the concept of the green screen fitted well for the multitude of outfits and ways of being I carried out in *the Fabric of Identity*. The idea subtly came together in form.

They pointed to a visual reference to the iconic sculptural chainmail dress from 1966 by Spanish fashion designer Paco Rabanne, known for his unconventional use of materials and style. Rabanne left a mark in the fashion world with his haute couture collection "Twelve Unwearable Dresses in Contemporary Materials" in 1966 (McLaw Helms, 2019).

The dress's eccentric design, an imaginary sketch with visual reference props at the time of our meeting, was remarkably different from my weekly outfits, with spaces between squares revealing skin. I was asked by the designer whether I was comfortable exposing my body like this and wearing a dress with a vastly distinct aesthetic look in comparison to my weekly looks. For the performance I planned, the dress I would wear needed to be uplifting and help me transition into the performing role.

We worked efficiently. Autuas sent me the first sketch of a green gown, and soon after I had the first dress fitting of a cocktail dress relatively heavy to wear, and a headpiece. Together we agreed on details of the upper bust of the dress, making the dress maxi length, and removing the headpiece. I needed to be comfortable and mobile enough to move in and with the dress in the performance, even if the dress was to have a sculptural quality to it. When my performance script was ready, I asked Autuas for parts

of it to be engraved in the plastic squares. For example, ‘What do you expect? Nobody’s perfect’, ‘golden maxi hoops, heavy’, and ‘I am full of myself’.

For the last fitting, they added fringes made of green squares to one side of the hip area of the dress and a deep, high slit on the other, not as a final design but rather as a weight test. We agreed on the look to stay asymmetrical for its aesthetics as well as practically, for the plastic craft lace and my body bearing the weight throughout the performances. A beach bag and earrings were in the fashion of the dress, and a 1990s violet plastic zigzag hairband completed the look that was introduced to me as an accessory surprise. I ordered shoes online, consulting on my selection with Autuas first; our preferences coincided.

It was a real pleasure to collaborate, work, and play with someone who shares aesthetic language layered through the visuals and music of the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s pop culture, is skilled in craft and thought, and takes play seriously, work playfully, and in a detailed manner.

2.2. Performance at *Liike*, fashion boutique

I came across *Liike* as the third venue option for *today it suits me*, via my supervisor, Justus Kantakoski, familiar with the city’s fashion scene, places, and circles.

Performance *today it suits me* took place at the end of August 2023 in *Liike*, a boutique shop with fashion from local Finnish designers, located in Punavuori, a design district in the center of Helsinki. The shop is operated by a group of fashion designers who all take part in sustaining it, collectively making decisions on how to run the business. I was in contact with Merja Seitsonen, one of the *vainio.seitsonen* designers, who listened to my performance pitch and forwarded the information to the rest of the team; they were willing to host my performance in the shop.

Before *Liike*, I had two unfortunate cancellations at the previous venues: *Recover Laboratory*, a studio of an art collective on Vaasankatu in June 2023, and the

department store *Stockmann* on Aleksanterinkatu in May 2023. I had a vision of what the performance would look like – my initial plan was *Stockmann*, its accessory department for the main performance score, meeting the audience under *Stockmann*'s clock. I met *Stockmann*'s creative director at the location, received a yes, sent a PowerPoint sales pitch for my project happening at their space as a formality, which was presented by the creative director to the rest of the board, and then received a no. Fortunately, I left enough marginal space in the performance idea to adjust it to the site. I kept the elements of an operating shop, a window, and a street.



today it suits me at *Liike*, performance, 2023. Photographed by Antti Ahonen

2.2.1. Site and context tailored to the body of work

Despite the struggle of finding the right venue for the performance *today it suits me*, *Liike* turned out to be the best fit for various objectives. One of the reasons is the shop's street proximity; it is located on the ground level, facing the street with two large shopping windows, and therefore in immediate visual and physical contact with passers-by and potential visitors of the shop. My wish was to bring the performance and the topic of garments closer to the attention of urban citizens and to highlight the aspects of garments in our everyday.

Another objective is that *Liike* is an operating shop for sustainable Finnish fashion. It is a context where individuals come to browse garments, try on different fits, look at themselves in those fits, and potentially purchase them. As such, it points towards the culture of attire, its relevance and involvement in the everyday, as well as emphasizes sustainability over mass production. Context and the site of *today it suits me* at *Liike*, and *the Fabric of Identity*, meet at the crossroads of a wardrobe space—browsing clothes—, and walking the streets of Helsinki, as we – dressed selves – do. *Liike's* team, (their shop primarily functions to exhibit and sell unique designs of garments and accessories), with the shop's premises as the venue for the performance *today it suits me*, gave me an opportunity to highlight what is already there: our relationship with clothes and their performance in the everyday.

Liike's space is located on the street level in the center of Helsinki and has a narrow and long floor plan. From the street view, it has two ceiling-high windows; the left one is 2,55 cm in width, fitting three mannequins; the right one is 1,64 cm in width, with one mannequin and a jewelry stand. The entrance is in-between the two windows, through a narrow wooden glass door, 80 cm in width, from where the space stretches 11,5 m in depth to the back; the counter is on the left side of the entrance; the clothing racks on the right walls all the way to the back; the clothing racks on the left side behind the counter; and a round staircase leading to more garments and accessories, some of them available for rent. In the middle of the shop stands a pillar with a mirror; in front of it is a long metal table with accessories laid out; around the pillar are shelves with accessories; and in the back of the pillar is another narrow metal table with garments,

placed between the pillar in the middle and a wide mirror in the back, behind which is a small fitting room. During the performance, the audience positioned themselves wherever they pleased.

2.3. Solo speech performance

2.3.1. The script

In *today it suits me*, I kept one of the familiar ways of working: creating and collecting the text which would potentially become the script for the performance. My writings, and cuts from external sources, whatever triggers me, excites me, provokes me, or does not let me go. Excerpts from books, articles, news, magazines, commercials, comments on social media platforms, comments from online news and magazine pages, an embodied couple of words by a converser, proverbs, film quotes, music lyrics; I take anything that sparks my interest—intuition first, filter later. In the process of making the script, I had the chance to link and bridge my personal writings with that of external sources and by that interweave different voices into a singular body of (my)self.

The journal entries I wrote about the outfits during *the Fabric of Identity* were my reflection of what was going on, and an important way to track and map the unknown territory of the dress-up process and situations. I produced a textual archive which was useful material for the collage I was about to create, and for the monologue for the coming performance. Journaling is part of my existing practice; a habit I created throughout the past decade, a grounding tool, and a potential material for my performances, to be approached anew every time.

Due to the personal nature of my journal entries, I was too close to see the relevant content that I could use in making the script. A friend and a colleague, Dafni Trikatsoula, an artist, animator, and pedagogue, who I trust and who was not physically part of my weekly performances, nor is she part of the Helsinki social landscape, helped me go through the outfit journal entries. Over a video call and screen sharing, she read

them all out loud and thus created a distance between me and the content, via another voice and body, unfamiliar with the body of journals. This method allowed me to detach myself from the material and quicken the process of choosing the parts I would use for the script.

Once I had a collection of existing text, I produced more for the script: associations and connotations arose with some phrases—in bodily sensations, personal memories, melodies, sounds, different types of rhythms, and music lyrics—which I played around with. Translation of body–text–body–text–body–text.

The pillars of the script were detailed descriptions of the outfits from *the Fabric of Identity*, the ones that left a significant mark on my relationship with my dressed self, shed light on how I choose to wear clothes and which ones I chose, and shifted my perspectives.

I read out loud the first draft of my script, discussed how to flesh it out, and addressed my insecurities about performing it with Nora Rinne, a Finnish performance artist and actor, who was my mentor in the 2nd year of my MA studies. Freja Bäckman, an artist and lecturer at LAPS and supervisor for the textual part of my thesis project and written thesis, supported and discussed the content, dramaturgy, and form of the script throughout its creation.

In both work processes, my voice has been interlaced with the voices of others, whether directly and in person, or indirectly and through media.

2.3.2. The preparations

Unlike the weekly outfits, where preparation meant putting the clothes on—what I already do every day—walking out into the public space and dealing with the performativity of the dress on the go, the performance *today it suits me* called for a more focused and planned preparation. I was to announce the performance, call everyone to see the spectacle, and expose myself to the other. I feel accountable and responsible for the time and attention I take from the spectator.

The form of the performance *today it suits me* required me to memorize the text, embody it, and make myself comfortable and at home at the venue. I received mnemonic techniques from my supervisor Freja to begin with. Like ‘memory palace’ where in my mind I walk through a familiar place and attach to each object in the space part of the script, and acrostic mnemonic, where I write the whole script with the first letter of each word. Once I had the script memorized, I repeated it every day at least once, in different orders of chapters or chunks and at different speeds, silently and out loud. My aim was to engrave it in me flawlessly, until the performance premiere in mid-August, altogether for about two months.

Voice is an ongoing interest in my artistic practice and research; its phonetic part played a key role in the performance. With the grant I received from the Theatre Academy, I took training in voice and body with Mari Kätkä, a musician and music pedagogue based in Helsinki. I came across her when witnessing DIY singing performances by the MA in Dance Performance in the lobby of Theatre Academy’s 5th floor. In voice training lessons, Mari assisted me in opening my voice and body in a physical and emotional sense with vocal and chest opening exercises, as well as with practical explanations. Once again, with every such performance, I recognized the voice as a resonance that moves through the body, and for its maximum potential, it requires a lot of energy from oneself to unlock and activate it. Especially after sitting for months in classrooms and intellectualizing performance more than embodying it.

Rehearsing on my own in the studios of the academy, I was the performer, director, and spectator in one body. I continued with a range of speech and singing exercises like tongue twisters and lip buzz vocal warm-up, repeating the script, and allowing my body to dictate the choregraphical scores for the performance.

The transit from the academy’s studio spaces to the atmosphere of the shop was needed in August; I upgraded performance scores at the venue’s site. I visited fashion shop *Liike* during their opening hours, observed activities inside and outside of the shop, and engaged with designers who granted me permission to rehearse after the shop closed, outside of their opening hours. This permit gave me an opportunity to pay

attention to the qualities of the space: acoustics, lights, garments, and accessories as the visual landscape, as well as observing the traffic in front of the shop's windows, all of which is part of the bigger body of the performance *today it suits me*.

2.3.3. The poster

Images and videos—the visual presentation of fashion—affect and co-create individuals' tastes in clothing. All the outfits from *the Fabric of Identity* are photo documented, the last few ones in the photo studio at the Fine Arts Academy. Professional photo studio features such as a blank built-in backdrop and an infinity curve (no floor corner) prompt the subject to pop out. They create an impression of them floating in the picture, with lights and light modifiers as tools to emphasize the details of the garment's materiality, form, and colors, making them crisp and attractive to the eye.

Doing a course Basics in Photography-Lightning at the Fine Arts Academy, I, and my classmate Tangmo, Ladapha Sophonkunkit, received access to the studio, where she often took the role of a photographer for my looks to be documented. Together, we created an atmosphere with lights, soft boxes, and color gels according to the outfit I wore.

I made a poster with fashion photography and fashion magazine covers in mind; they served as visual references for the layout. I used one of my weekly outfit photos Tangmo took in the studio, the outfit I picked with one of my colleagues, Hanna Ijäs, an artist and performer, who I invited to join me once in the wardrobe as a project guest in the role of my stylist. In the poster, the model—I, the performer—is in the middle, and the title of the performance is in the upper middle behind them in *Didot* typeface (of French origin), widely used in fashion magazines like *Harper's Bazaar*, *Vogue*, and *Elle*, among other fashion-related brands. The dates and location informative text are on both sides of the model, with the performer's name on the lower part of the text circling the main protagonist. One item of the poster's outfit is particular to the Nordic, Baltic, and Russian winter gear: the karvalakki hat, handcrafted from denim jeans. The language of the hat subtly suggests the broader geographical and cultural context both performances are created, representative of Finnish dress culture.



TODAY IT SUITS ME

AUG
2023

Liike
Fredrikinkatu 24
00120 Helsinki

Liike is located in Punavuori district,
15 minutes walk from the Railway
station. You can get here by trams 1, 2, 3,
6, 6T and buses 14, 17, 21

17.8.2023 18:00

24.8.2023 13:00
24.8.2023 18:00

25.8.2023 13:00
25.8.2023 18:00

26.8.2023 13:00

tina jeranko
performs

PHOTO Tangmo, Ladapha Sophonkunkit STYLE Hanna Ijäs

UNARTS
HELSINKI
THEATRE ACADEMY

liike



today it suits me poster, Photographed by Tangmo, Ladapha Sophonkunkit

2.3.4. Performance description

today it suits me is an approximately 40-minute solo speech performance. It starts with a live soundscape of the performer walking on the stairs of the building where the shop is located, entering Fredrikinkatu street from the backyard, and appearing in front of the shopping windows of *Liike*. The performer wears a headset connected to two speakers placed in the shop, one in the front, close to the entrance, and one in the back, close to the fitting room. Technical gear aside, the performer is adorned with a bright lime green dress constructed from 6 by 6 cm plexiglass squares connected to each other with multi-colored plastic craft lace, an updo hairstyle, pulled back with a zigzag band, a beach bag, and earrings made from the same materials as the dress, pointy nail extensions, and purple sandals. A detailed description of the look follows further in the chapter *Full Look*. In front of the shop's windows, the performer observes its content and soon after enters the shop, with gaze focused on the items of the shop, dismissing the audience, and in a moment occupying the platform of the window, next to two dressed mannequins. When the time is ready, the performer begins with the monologue standing on the window, facing the street, describing in detail one of the looks from *the Fabric of Identity* performance while demonstrating the forms and textures with hand gestures. The monologue continues with associations between the look described and the experience of being in it. Eventually, the performer turns towards the audience inside the shop and continues to the closest mirror on the pillar, engaging with their appearance and occasionally with the spectators. Walking all the way to the narrow end of the shop and back, the performer claims their space while uttering the monologue, changing voices and moods, and every so often touching the garments hanging on the racks of the shop. The monologue consists of three different descriptions of the outfits, in between which a collage of performer's thoughts, journal entries, conversations, social media comments, and pop music lyrics are combined, accompanied by the performer's gestures. At the end of the live show, the performer browses through the shop's items in silence, eventually leaves the shop through the main entrance, and walks away down the street.

2.4. Full look

You are not dressed up if it is not from head to toe (script).

To embody a presence for a performance, wherein I know I will step in front of the audience, wherein I know performance is about to happen and so do others, expectations are being built. In the meantime, I am working on that saturated presence, preparing my-self to stand in front of others and to stand up for my-self, I will confront the observer, own the look, and claim the space, while at the same time, I will share that self with the other.

As much pleasure as I derive from performing, the pleasure of being in a present moment in front of and with another, in the same proportion, I need to build a ‘presence muscle’ and sculpt the work I will present so that I can feel confident within my own company. I need to be in proximity to the work I do, so close that I do not see the work anymore; I become the work. The accumulation of energy I spend on the work creates a certain atmosphere I feel when I step into the performing role. Atmosphere as a layer of encounters with the work I present to the audience in the performance.

2.4.1. The materiality of the look and its effect on the body's mannerisms

Different tools are available for me to make the shift into the performing role, and one of them is the look I present—the costume. Its visual and tactile aspect helps me to activate performativity in the performance.

Shoes: Slip-on style, open toe, high block heel – 10 cm.

The purple plastic shoes make me look taller, I am taller now and I feel taller. The way the heels of the shoes are pressing against my feet’s heels—the point of contact makes me aware of my pelvis and my chest, and the way I hold my body up against gravity, I become conscious of my posture. As it elongates my body shape, I feel like I can reach further, and I have a better overview of what is going on and where I am going. As I walk, heels from the shoes that become part of my body create a noise, ‘clack click

clack click clack’, with which I do not mind creating an impact within a social situation. During the performance, I want to feel bold, and I am in the look-at-me mode. The aural dimension of the clothing can “contribute to the individual’s presentation of self” providing a means to manage feelings of self-confidence and self-consciousness. “As a result, the sound of clothing can have an important effect on how a person inhabits a social space, whether making them stand out or blend in, garner negative, positive or a confused response from others.” (Chong Kwan, 2020, 67). Toes are exposed in the front of the shoe, sticking out as an accessory, nails are painted carmine red and match the scarlet red lipstick.

Body make-up, the dress, and the accessories: Parts of the body are covered with glittery mineral powder: the backs of the hands, shoulders, upper back, collar bones, neck, muscles of legs: calves and quads. The rest of the body is covered in a plastic dress made of lime green six by six cm squares, tied to each other with multi-colored plastic craft lace, also called scoubidou strings. The squares have sharp edges and a glossy surface that reflects light. They are hard to the touch and the material is solid, in contrast to the scoubidou strings between the squares that create flexibility and provide space to move in. The dress is straight at the bust line, and it has a deep slit on the right hip from where the dress continues in a diagonal shape towards the opposite foot, covering the left leg. From hips downward, squares are in loose vertical lines, hanging from the hips like fringes. Some of the squares have a text engraved in them, parts of the *today it suits me* script. These pieces are visible from close by and at an angle towards the light, where matt texture letters pop out against the glossy surface of the square.

The dress has an open shoulders design with spaghetti straps, with an additional strap around the neck. The scoubidou strings are knotted to the squares on the upper bust in the front to help distribute the weight of the dress and are attached with metal snap hooks to the squares on the upper bust in the back for efficient dressing and undressing. The dress is heavy although manageable to wear on my body and to move and walk around. However, the strings and sharp edges of the squares leave marks on the skin. When the fringes of the dress hit against each other while I walk, they produce a clicking sound. Accessories match the dress—a squared beach bag, made of plastic

lime green squares and plastic craft lace, and the earrings, made in the same fashion as the dress and the bag.

Hairdo: a mix between a high messy ponytail and a bun, with a 1990s zigzag headband – a flexible full circle hair comb, pulling the hair from the forehead towards the back of the head, with the style and the hair accessories becoming props to reveal the face and earrings hanging from the side. Hairspray helps the hair stay in place.

Make-up: The skin of the face is covered with foundation, a highlight lotion on the cheeks underneath, and with extra highlighter on top, on the cheeks, brow bones, between the eyebrows, down the nose bridge, the tip of the nose, above the upper lip, and on the chin. The eyeshadow in a glittery ombre tone is placed in the corners of the eyes and under the eyes, a navy-blue mascara on the lashes, and a translucent lip gloss on the cheeks, the tip of the nose, chin, and the eyebrows, aiming for the high-gloss look – a 2022 sweaty look trend (Kallor, 2022). The makeup is fixed with a fixator spray for a long-lasting effect.

Nails, made by Helsinki-based artist Phan Nguyen: On my hands, I have nail extensions in purple and pink, they affect my hand movement and bend the way I can operate in my every day – I ask and receive help from others with reaching deep into the pockets of my bag and backpack, I avoid touching objects with my hands in general and I use a different point of contact on my fingers.



Photo shoot, 2023, Photographed by Tangmo, Ladapha Sophonkunkit

The whole look turns me into a diva presence for a short amount of time. My performance body is covered with a variety of materials from head to toe; they activate fabulousness in me and my performing self. I work together with the materials, they work with me, and I merge with them in layers to present the look to the audience, the look which supports me claiming the space and attracting attention – demanding attention and saturated presence.



Photo shoot, 2023, Dress design by Autuas Ukkonen, Photographed by Tangmo, Ladapha Sophonkunit

2.5. Popular media influences

In my early teenage years, my friend and I were regularly buying *BRAVO* magazine, a teen magazine in the German-speaking sphere, where we followed the music scene, TV series, their style, and their stars. If we did not buy the magazine, then we flipped through it right at the store with our backs turned to the cashier. In the 2000s, I followed trends through printed magazines and TV channels, and most of these were either in English or German. *BRAVO* Magazine back then was in German, which neither I nor my friend spoke, understood, or cared to understand because we understood the visual language (as well as the melodies and rhythms in music), which was important for us and to which we liked to expose ourselves. In this way, we could follow trends from Germany, the EU in general and the US—these were areas from where the content was streamed on TV and printed in magazines—in the context of the Occident, one that I liked to follow as an external source, a source outside of my immediate surroundings.

One of the biggest stars I followed was Britney Spears, a pop diva who holds the record for most appearances on the cover of *BRAVO* magazine, 54 times (All about Pop Music!, 2017). The way she was presented in the media, alongside Christina Aguilera, Jennifer Lopez, Destiny's Child, Rihanna, P!nk, Nelly Furtado, Aaliyah, Kyle Minogue, and Madonna (pop diva), and the visuals of their music videos and concerts, influenced my style and the way I presented myself to my peers and others.

When I look back at that period and my styling, it was not that I followed style trends in particular; rather, I was inspired by the curated looks of individual music stars and of the looks characters had in TV series, like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997), *Charmed* (1998), *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* (1990), *The Nanny* (1993), *Ally McBeal* (1997), and *Sex and the City* (1998), as well as by the attitude those stars had in their performances, both in music and in TV series.

As a teenager, I styled my look and aspired to be creative in how I curate my look and what kind of atmosphere I bring to my social circles, according to the visual presentation of these dressed bodies in popular culture I saw on TV and in magazines. It was one of the angles that influenced my dress presentation next to what others in my

proximity were wearing, what garments were available to me in the shops I had access to with the financial means of my family, and what was appropriate to wear, according to the adults who were saying this (my parents, my parent's parents, other people's parents, teachers).

Despite the attempts to straighten out my looks with gazes I at times received from certain adults in my environment, or my family trying to prevent me from wearing nail polish or make-up to school, I have an impression that I succeeded in avoiding those judgmental gazes and comments like "too much". At least back then in that shameless rebel period. I had the need to go against the grain, to be creative and to stand up for myself. Receiving attention was my goal, just like pop stars, whom I so admired. But feeling confident and showing confidence was akin to calling for trouble. As a teenager, I lived at the intersection of two strong external influences: one is the white Catholic Christian community I grew up in, and the other is neoliberalism and the pop culture I was exposed to. The adult social circles in my proximity seemed to be constraining, and the media I could not touch appeared to be liberating.

2.5.1. Pop resurrection in *today it suits me*

From my surroundings and the social gaze, I received signals to restrict my dressing and, in this way, discipline the body—through garments covering my body with what is considered decent clothing: pants and shirts, not too tight and not too loose, preferably no low-waist pants. Shapes that create a dressed form of a body, which is acceptable for the social circles I move in and through. The body, my body, as contained by the self. The predominantly patriarchal and heteronormative environment was persistently pressing to censure the self I was curious about and implied feelings of shame and potential danger if I deviated from the existing aesthetic norms. The rebellious spirit I had against these norms was not rebellion without a cause, and going against them was not in my forefront in the first place. What I was troubled with was that a part of the environment tried to subdue my way of being, which I expressed with the dress and inhabitation of that dress, and implied that there was something wrong with it.

Madison Moore, the author of the book *Fabulous: The Rise of the Beautiful Eccentric* (2019), points out that “great style is never simply style for style’s sake. It is not just about looking good and feeling confident. It’s also a form of protest, a revolt against the norms and systems that oppress and torture us all every day, things like white supremacy, misogyny, transmisogyny, patriarchy, toxic masculinity, gender policing, and racism.” (Moore, 2019, 8). I internalized the censure I was pressed with, in the way I assemble my appearance, and how I construct my-self. With the durational performance *the Fabric of Identity* and the performance *today it suits me* at Liike, I approached the suppressed dressed self, and little did I know, I started unpacking the nuances of the role that the dress plays in everyday social life.

Media influences and my surroundings created associations I attached to the specific colors and forms in clothing as well as make-up on a female body. They left a subtle mark on the self that I, together with the social other, created and kept with me to the present day.

With the durational performance of dress up, I started paying close attention to the established samples of styles I created in the early phase of fabricating a self. When in the process of my artistic thesis I was transiting from one form of the performance—the durational one—into another—the performance as a spectacle—I revisited the visual aesthetic of the dressed body in the early 2000s, as well as the preconceptions I have regarding social circles and behaviors that are attached to the visual aesthetics of popular music and its style (or any other styles and social circles for that matter).

For the purposes of composing the script for the performance *today it suits me*, I revisited the YouTube archives and watched concerts and music videos from the late 1990’s and early 2000s with a focus on visual and musical content by pop stars Britney Spears and Madonna. This motivated me to create a fictive diva self.

As linear and non-linear time passed between 2000 and 2023, I gained the ability to look at the two pop divas without the identification with their created selves for the public. Rather, I observed the form of styles and powerful atmosphere these divas were bringing with their dressed bodies to the social spheres. Their loud and bold

performances were inspiring for me then as they are now: the garments and how they inhabited those garments in performances together with the dance group on the stage, the choreography, the music, the rhythm, and the lyrics.

From my teenage self, excited about pop culture, I went through numerous different styles and dressed selves. Later, I felt ashamed for having an affinity for pop culture. In the phase of creating performance *today it suits me*, within the academic context, I charged my-self with the pop scene from the early 2000s.

2.6. Performance as spectacle and the fictive self: “I'm that bitch”

I wear make-up because I like to, and because I like the act of applying it, because I like to enhance, reshape, and adjust the look I present to the potential observer. Underline and highlight your needs (script).

I created a distinct performance body to feel the difference between the everyday self and the performing self, inserting that performance body into the normative social dress-scape. Insecurity and a lack of confidence are something I experience daily, I had the need and felt like I could turn that around by creating an eccentric look. Alongside the visual and sensual pleasure of the eccentric dress, the complete look, and performing in it, I used eccentricity as a tool to feel self-confident. In this fashion, with my performance and style, I could assert my (performing) self into the space unapologetically.

Kollnitz and Pecorari remark that “The body can be seen as not only a magnetic device on which garments performatively alter their meaning depending on certain contexts but also an agent and a space of performance and self-transformation.” (Kollntiz, Pecorari, 2022, 8). My aspiration was to accept the many selves I encapsulate in the body I am, and to fearlessly show an array of these through the visual and sensual aspects of the dress in the context of the urban environment. Topped with zero fucks given whether others accept that self or not. I needed to feel an indefatigable sense of self, as Amy Cakes words it regarding fabulousness; empowered amid a misogynistic, patriarchal,

and body-shaming world (Moore, 2019, 83). Rather than being passively looked at, I took control of my own image as a way of returning the gaze and did the looking myself (see chapter 1.6.2. *Taking the gaze into my own hands: the perspective of the wearer*).

Declared performance means anticipation – mine, and others – and it means planning and preparing the performing body mentally, emotionally, and physically, it is a process of emergence. It was my intention to appear in a spectacular look, in a spectacular way; a spectacular appearance, what Madison Moore, a cultural critic and a DJ, thinks of “as the ritual of preparing the body to be consumed visually and socially.”¹ (Moore, 2019, 90). *today is suits me* required voice and body training and working on being comfortable with the extravaganza self, or at least accepting it, in parallel to writing and preparing a bold script.

If I was to perform a memorized embodied script, I had to train to be focused and stay present, not drifting away – except for the performance’s sake – but to endure immediate presence. In broader terms, for me, that means being in my body here and now, listening attentively to what happens inside and outside of it, but also just being (fabulous). I memorized the text to the extent that I no longer think about what I will say next rather the text exists stored in my body autonomously and I use it in accordance with the given moment; listening to the work’s needs in accordance with others and other in the space. In this way, I have leeway for improvisation and can play with the work’s rhythm then and there.

I received help from my peers and other performance practitioners, who commented and discussed with me the whole picture of the piece, and pointed out details of the work while I was immersed in it, being the maker, director, and performer, all at the same time. I allocated the time to write the script first and began memorizing the chapters that I knew would remain in the work. At the same time, Autuas was making the dress, which served as a tool to play with the execution of the text and the fictive self that the text was shaping. In the script, I used text that resonated with me and had an empowering effect on me to perform the fictive version of my-self – past revisited

¹ In relation to Eddie Sedgwick, Andy Warhol’s 1965 film *Poor Little Rich Girl*.

self, and the imagined self that could be, happening in the now. Now, not later, and not as a concept, but as an embodied version of the self right now, in my body exposed among other bodies.

The planned nature of the performance allowed me time to try out variations and create a self-collection for the audience to experience. This performance type enabled me to reveal aspects of myself that I would not typically expose in everyday situations. The direct and full attention of the audience during the performance served as a trigger to enhance my presence in the work and to empower myself.

2.7. From hiding in open to revealing myself in the open

During my two-year study, I was immersed in the physical and psychological spaces of the Theatre Academy, which, I believe, influenced my view of performance. The academy offers programs such as dramaturgy, scenography, directing, acting, lighting, and sound design, and I saw a seemingly clear division between the roles within the concept of theatre and the way performers operate within them. Although I have not been much in touch with these programs, I have seen others dry rehearsing in the lobbies, heard voices singing and shouting behind the walls, and witnessed a couple of plays in the Theatre's studios.

For *today it suits me*, I received assistance in various aspects of performance production, similar to the way a theatre play is created. Theatre staff from departments for light, sound, costume, stage, props, and AV were available to guide and support me in fulfilling the needs of my project. This presented an opportunity to utilize the theatre context for performance beyond its traditional setting, but it also presented a challenge: how to create a work that is within my limits of time and energy. Simultaneously, I desired to make a performance, where the audience is aware of their spectators' role, and where I announce the exact time and location of the performance, implying its linear duration (it is only an illusion). From hiding in open to revealing myself in open.

I aimed to face the audience and expose my vulnerability in broad daylight, outside of the traditional (theatre) performance space, like a black or white box, or a white cube. Instead, my goal was to reach out to the urban crawlers—dressed individuals who all perform themselves in everyday city life. When I was to perform on the site, I wanted the work to be in physical proximity with the audience, outside and inside of the performing space, vis-à-vis street level.

My need to create this type of performance grew stronger throughout the durational performance of *the Fabric of Identity* and its ambiguous form. I was eager to invest in my performing body and self and to execute a performance as a spectacle, apposite to performativity and durational performance. I appreciate performative scores and experiments, although I see so much of it in the performance scene, everything seems to be a performance nowadays. I cannot prevent you from choosing to experience something as a performance—however you desire and need.

Thirsty for a clear role for me as a performer and for the audience to know this in an instance, and thirsty for dedicated attention towards performance and performing from my and the audiences' side, I created *today it suits me*, performance demanding a high level of attention for a significant amount of time. A scent of theatricality? A shift from performing throughout the day in a carefully chosen dress once a week, emphasizing performativity where attention is lingering as an atmosphere to the performance in which the attention is sharp, pointy, and intense. *today it suits me* demands immediate attention and presence from the spectator exposed in the everyday setting just like the performer is, the audience not hiding in the dark as in the traditional theatre setting behind the black box lights. The gaze is seen, and it is returned. During the performance, the spectator is approached by the performer occasionally, by direction of their gaze, body proximity, or addressing the spectator verbally. I, the performer, expose the spectator as they are exposed, and so the spectator becomes observed by others, and by that their role shifts into a performing one. Now they are a performer, too, for a glimpse, aware of their presence in space, as the perspective rotates throughout the performance.

In the urban environment, all styles are visible, the body sees and is seen at the same time, and the dressed self is, with no exception, a sight to see and discuss as a visual, sensual, and socio-political subject.



today it suits me at Liike, performance, 2023. Photographed by Antti Ahonen

3. HOW CAN I DEFINE...

Through the body, my body, with which I experience the world, and the performance in this world, I continuously learn about my self and that of others. Change is inevitable, and it seems to be the only constant element in the everyday. Thus, continuous re-learning, remembering, updating, and adjusting are welcomed.

In the following two subchapters, I try to define how I understand performance by means of my practice. In the first subchapter, I look at a performance through the lens of my extended practice, the performance I have done thus far, alongside thoughts by scholars Bojana Cvejić, and Francesa Granata. In the second subchapter, I look at the durational performance and time through the recent work I have been entangled with, *the Fabric of Identity*. I think with and through it, alongside visual arts, and philosophy.

3.1. ...Performance?

From the perspective of a performance practitioner, performer, maker, and spectator, I perceive performance as a live event I pay attention to in any of these roles, involving both human and non-human participants. It can vary in terms of duration, location, movement, number and type of performing and audience bodies, as well as in its impact on the environment. The same performance can be repeated, although it will never be exactly the same, since any of the variables can change at any given time for any given reason. For performance, a performer and a spectator are needed, an action in space, and an observation of that action with any of the senses of a living body, optionally the two roles having the same body (Cvejić, 2015, 23). The definition of a living body can vary for different definers. Performing and attending can be disjointed; performance does not require the performer and the spectator to be at the same location, and the realization of performance can happen at a different time than spectating. The performance theorist and performance maker Bojana Cvejić proposes that the term performance in performance art “commonly signifies a live event with spatio-temporal coordinates, implying a process of carrying out an action.” (Cvejić, 2015, 22), while a fashion

scholar Francesca Granata defines performance as a “self-conscious act of volition by a performer.” (Kollintiz, Pecorari, 2022, 4).

I started paying attention to performance and its ingredients more closely when I was involved in the visual art field, interested in its failures more than success, anchoring my making in what I feel strongly about. So far, the latter has not changed, what shifts in my performance practice every so often is the angle from which I investigate it; that is, which part, and dynamics of its parts, constitute a performance I play with. My previous experience in performance from the visual art field perspective is making pieces for groups and duets, which I create, direct, as well as perform simultaneously, and which typically last between three to fifteen minutes.

During my MA in Live Art and Performance Studies, I developed an interest in the process of creating and performing a solo piece. Partially, I was motivated by the solo performance I witnessed during the contemporary dance festival *Moving in November* in 2021, *un Bolero*, performed in Kunsthalle Helsinki by François Chaignaud and choreographed by Dominique Brun and François Chaignaud. I was moved by the presence of the performer and how shamelessly they exposed the pleasure of performing, desiring I could do so myself. In the solo format, I specifically wanted to explore how to prepare myself to face an audience without the support of other performers and how to fully claim the space and the momentum. Meanwhile, and in parallel with the conception of the intentional solo piece, the durational performance absorbed me as it unfolded in front of me and through me, by giving it the space to do so through the circumstances in which I found myself—a durational performance that first happened to me and which I later decided to prolong and explore further. I acknowledged its becoming and surrendered to the role of transformation. It is perhaps more accurate to approach performance as a process of transformation rather than a fleeting action, as Cvejić observes in *Choreographing Problems* (2015, 25). I applied to the LAPS program in 2021 wishing that I would expand my knowledge, approach, and understanding of performance among other performance enthusiasts, and I am convinced my wish was granted. I cannot describe this accurately enough in written language – the closest I can come is through the method of collage, metaphor, poetry,

and repetition, which I use sporadically in this thesis. The rest is accessible in other sensory parts of my being and other beings, and in less rational ways.

3.2. ...Durational performance?

the Fabric of Identity moved through the year in a weekly rhythm; from seven days a week, one day contained a wardrobe visit, trying on clothes, journaling on the choosing process, and, taking clothes to another location—a preparation for the outfit day. It feels like I am going up towards the peak of the outfit, I am brimming with anticipation. I leave at least one day between choosing an outfit and wearing it, for the wardrobe visit to settle in my body and to look at the clothes hanging in another space than the wardrobe, admiring them, and observing details of different materials in different light. The outfit day is the peak of the performance. I feel like I am the center of attention even if I am not, I am overly self-aware. The day or two after, I write about the experience, my thoughts, feelings, and conversations I had with others in relation to the look and dress performativity, a mini reflection period. I return the outfit three or four days after I wear it, on which days I scroll and scan with my eyes the visual references that come under my attention by the algorithm of people I meet in person during the outfit day and social media on my phone. Once I come “down” from being hyper self-aware on the outfit day, the cycle repeats – a day prior to the wardrobe visit I am already occupied with the thought of being in the wardrobe, what will I choose next? In sum, one wave of durational performance *the Fabric of Identity* in my body includes the act of choosing the outfit—going up, the performance of the outfit—peak, reflection and return of the outfit—coming down, repeat.

I understand *the Fabric of Identity* as durational performance on a smaller scale too: the performance day has a couple of hours where I exist in the unfamiliar skin of clothes, meaning, my body endures hours trapped between performance and performativity, waiting to perform directly, although that kind of performance never happens, or rather, it is happening all the time while I am in that outfit, through the agency of the dress.

Durational performance would then mean a performance that is present over a long period of time wherein the performance focus (attention) shifts elsewhere—to different

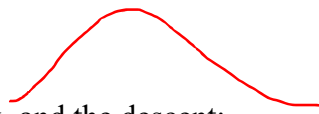
compartments of the work that become present for a short amount of time until something else takes over the attention of the encounter, for me as the performer, as well as for the spectator. The presence of the performance blends in the rhythm of the everyday and for me as its operating vehicle turns into an additional limb of my experiential body.

Durational performance, constantly present performance,
stretched out, the rhythm is even:



Classic performance

with the ascent, the peak/climax, and the descent:



In relation to a year's time.

In the essay *Durational Aesthetics* (Heathfield, 2014), writer and curator working across the scenes of live art, performance, and dance, Adrian Heathfield, explores the notion of duration in relation to the visual art field and curatorial practices. According to his essay, durational works rose in the 1960s by conceptual artists, with one of the memorable performance practitioners according to the Western performance art canon, Tehching Hsieh, a Taiwanese artist who created a series of one-year performance works in New York in the 1980s. In those pieces, the artist follows a system of rules that restrict and structure his existence throughout the year (Heathfield, 2014, 138), works that the artist himself calls 'lifeworks' (mplus, n.d.). In this way, attention to the work is dispersed—spectatorship happens at various locations and points of the work, and the corporeity comes forth—the spectator most probably will not (be able to) follow the work for the entire duration from up close due to capitalist economy, physical endurance reasons, privacy, etc., as well as the artists themselves might shift in their attentiveness to the work. As such, durational work blends in the everyday, and the mundane, and becomes uneventful.

However, it could appear as a small-scale event, a shift in the everyday for an individual who just recognizes change taking place in front of them—they notice a detail unfamiliar to their daily rhythm and ordinary view and as such it becomes a 'pocket' event – thoughts detour for a moment.

A previous summer on Helsinki streets, I saw a person roller-skating in mini shorts and a top for a fleeting moment. My flow of thoughts and conversation I had then were interrupted by Laserskater entering my image, skating down the Hämeentie street in the Hakaniemi area. According to *Ilta-Sanomat*, a Finnish evening newspaper, Laserskater is a familiar figure on Helsinki streets. They have been roller-skating in the warm months in their eye-catching look for a couple of decades already. Their style is an appropriation of the American Pacific Comics character Skateman, who had adventures for one issue in the early 1970s – Laserskater considers themselves a real-life superhero with a mission to help people in need and to perform good deeds, such as tipping a street musician or a bartendress (Ruohisto, 2017).

Apposite to art and culture, Heathfield thinks and writes on duration with philosopher Henri Bergson's perception of time. Bergson divides time into the thought of time and the experience of time, from where time in durational work is felt by a spectator as a force and relational exchange (Heathfield, 2014, 142). Instead of time experienced as linear, past, present, and future co-exist in durational pieces where time shows itself as a malleable subject, and a cultural construct, open to be revised (Heathfield, 2014, 143).

During *the Fabric of Identity*, I revisited memories evoked by wearing certain clothes, memories whose existence I forgot, inhabited my being. They appeared to be stored in specific clothing items – the way they felt on my body, the way I put them on, the way I think others look at me and think of me in dress, based on the experience I had in the past in similar looks and materials. These feelings, notions, and memories, came to the surface unexpectedly during the year, unfolding and revealing layers of myself I forgot were there while I was putting layers of dress on me, where past became present and linear time disappeared with an item of garment. I increased 'the surface area of experience' (Kartsaki, 2016, 55) by enduring the repetition – a couple of months into the project, worn out from garments wearing me, and troubled by the lack of clarity regarding the project's purpose, other parts of my-self and my understanding of its presentation lurked into the picture.

From the spectator's perspective, if they are unaware of the project's concept, my dressed self is just another dressed person, although with a pinned look, in their physical proximity and visual field, just as any other dressed individual in the sea of people wearing garments. A subtle tilt of the everyday, *the Fabric of Identity* interfered with the attention experienced in performance. If I do not declare my approach to the dress I am enhanced with, as a performance, and if I do not inform spectators of the context, how do they know they are an audience witnessing a performance? If a look is memorable for someone, it will stay with them in parallels, relevant to their own self, regardless of whether I call it a performance or not. Exposed to the public, the look performs itself for the duration I and the other happen to share the same space—from one metro station to another, from one corner of the street to the other, for the time spent in a bar, a couple of moments in the elevator, a brief encounter on a staircase, in the grocery store aisle.

Once a performance is placed on a body in the everyday, it is bound to the body's flesh and fabric's skin working together, proposing meanings for others to interpret according to one's own background and culture, as one wishes and as one is programmed to.

4. CONCLUSION

Now, I will try to retrace this thesis, what is relevant in the works I have done, and what stayed with me.

With the help of my colleagues at the theatre academy and in the social sphere, I created and co-created the durational performance *the Fabric of Identity* and the performance *today it suits me*, both works belonging to the same narrative. The narrative of the self, contained in the body, and its relationship to the culture of attire. Although they are separate works, *the Fabric of Identity* prepared me for the performance *today it suits me*, and the second work would not exist as it does without the first. Therefore, chapter one prepared you for chapter two.

Firstly, I described how *the Fabric of Identity* dress up project came together: how my need for practice as well as the studio took me on the exploration of concept performativity and the gaze, via access to the wardrobe in the costume department of the Theatre Academy Helsinki. I explored dress performativity with the resources of the institution and its members; the costume department team, who maintained the garments I borrowed, and my colleagues, who are all interested in performance from different angles and who pointed me to references, like Cindy Sherman and fashion shows in general, and thus contributed to the work I created. I opened my archive and laid out the visual materials I came across during the dress research. My pleasure was (and still is) watching *Vogue: Life in Looks*, where celebrities reflect on their looks in different period of their lifetime. I wish Vogue would do it with Grace Jones. I re-discovered the beauty in Italian designer Elsa Schiaparelli designs, Maison Schiaparelli designs, fashion company Bottega Veneta, and fashion designer Vivienne Westwood. I discovered Instagram account @ideservecouture where I enjoy the humor and criticality of the fashion looks by Hanan Bešović. In *body trapped between performance and performativity*, I dug deeper with fashion scholars like Sara Chong Kwan, and Llewellyn Negrin on how intimately fabric of garments, its materiality and language touch and form the body and the self. In *Social sphere and the gaze*, I addressed the active role the environment and context play in shaping the dressed self, whether I appear in downtown Helsinki, at an art academy, or in the Northern Balkans, all hit

differently. This led me to the concept of gaze, who looks at who, and how it affects the body and the self; especially the female body, as I speak from myself. I wrapped up the chapter with the transition from the external—relation between my dressed self and the other—to the internal—relation between the dress materials and my body and the self—the sensory aspect of that relation, and the agency I, as the wearer, have.

I took the concept of the gaze and the agency of the wearer into *today it suits me*, where I described the performance *today it suits me*, the process of its making, and how in this work I returned the gaze built on the work of *the Fabric of Identity*. I returned the gaze to the performing self in the dress made by fashion designer Autuas Ukkonen, a dress made to attract attention, and which functioned as a tool for me to step into the extravagant performing self. Collaboration with Autuas Ukkonen was relevant in the process, as together we could reflect and share how a dress is read differently in different environments, and we shared our affinity for plastic, recycling-oriented working etiquette and pop culture. I felt supported by their knowledge and experience and could trust their skills in making the dress. I then presented the venue of the performance—*Liike*, a fashion boutique—which provided an appropriate stage to reach out to passers-by, expand my work outside of the institution, and attempt to highlight the spectator as the dressed self contributing to the dressed landscape and its atmosphere. In *solo speech performance*, I approached how I made the script – I collaged my journal entries with pop lyrics songs, movie plots and social media comments. I was looking for a combination of vocal rhythm and the content of what empowered me or what I found disturbing. I craved to be daring and bold with the script so that I could claim the space and own the presence at *Liike*, also the street in the front of the shopping window. I prepared myself by taking individual voice classes with Mari Kätkä who helped me with exercises to open my chest and my emotional body. To present and advertise the performance *today it suits me*, I created the poster in which I used the concept of the fashion magazine cover with myself as the model on the photo. In *popular media influences*, I reveal to you the pop influence that for example Britney Spears, Madonna, and characters in TV-series in the 1990s had on my teenage self, as well as the influence of immediate Catholic environment. Followed by *pop resurrection*, I shared how I embraced the pop culture to empower myself in the performance (and outside of it). I conclude the second chapter with how I moved from

being exposed in *the Fabric of Identity* to being exposed in *today it suits me*, the disclosure of my dressed self returning the gaze unapologetically.

Based on the two performances, in *How can I define...* I articulated how I understand performance through the lens of the performances I have done and experienced so far, as well as *today it suits me*, and how I understand durational performance through *the Fabric of Identity*, the new experiential knowledge I brought to the surface in my body and proposed a definition for both.

My main interest in this thesis was in the visual and material effects of garments on myself and others—how do I perceive myself in an outfit and how am I treated by others in my immediate vicinity? It was clear to me how I research, the method, but what I researched, came with repetition and persistence. I discovered performativity of dress and performativity as a term and a tool on the journey of durational performance, although I was aware of the notion before starting the MA and before starting the work *the Fabric of Identity*. Yet, articulated and pointed out during the process, I can look through its lens; according to one's abilities and awareness, one can use the performativity of dress according to one's needs, whether one wants to highlight a part of oneself, to deem it, take the spotlight, blend into the background, or simply enjoy the dressed experience.

I have not anticipated the concept of the self to be so relevant, and I have not gone into the theories of the self in this thesis. I perceive the self as a blend of encounters I have with the environment and the other – material and nonmaterial – in relation to my physical body, translated through its senses into the psychological sense of self. The one I see myself, and the ones others see.

Access to the wardrobe in the Theatre Academy played an important role in making this research happen. I could try on, and test an array of garments, accessories, jewelry, make-up, and shoes, without buying them. The collection of items in the wardrobe is an already existing collection, unrelated to my taste, purchase choices, and perceived identity—I could play without thinking about how and where I would continue wearing those pieces (not to mention storing them). I wore outfits borrowed from the costume

department in an unconventional way, not for plays in the black box, but for the everyday play outside of it, and outside of the theatre institution. This was breaking the permission to lent clothes and I had to defend my project zealously. The collection of garments accessible to me, and the dress up play affected the way I look at my wardrobe at home today; I am reinventing the existing items by how I combine them; I try to be less judgmental of my choices, embrace the sensual, and I want to give away pieces I am over with and bring in fresh items. It also affected how I look at what others wear, and how, and I became more and less critical at the same time.

I have only touched upon the surface of the dress performativity and fashion performance, and I am intrigued to know more. Especially regarding the relationship between the psychological body and the dress, through the writings of authors, such as Llewellyn Negrin and Francesca Granata, and the history of fashion houses that I came across, like Gucci, Margiela, and Schiaparelli.

the Fabric of Identity and *today it suits me* both earned the title ‘my first’. For the first time in my artistic practice, I made a durational performance and a solo performance. I position these works at the crossroads of performance, visual arts, and fashion. They are experiments I made within the framework of the Live Art and Performance Studies program, where I was able to take a chance because I could draw on the resources of the institution—that of materials and that of being surrounded by rigorous performance enthusiasts. Anyhow, I struggled to get the official permission from the wardrobe since it was so difficult to understand what I was doing; not even I knew what I was in for, and that was a struggle too. The initial blocking of the project pushed me to formulate what I was doing at the wardrobe and meet with the head of the LAPS MA program and the head of the costume department, where I explained that I dress up for a day every week at the Academy. I was encouraged to wear undergarments as well as reminded of how to fold and store garments when not in use.

Finally, through repetition of weekly dress up, I discovered how the dress can subjectify my body, and by that, I felt empowered by the dress.

The more I write about performance and the work I do, and through writing try to understand what I am doing, what is happening to me, how much I am an active agent in the process, and how much others and the other are active agents in the process, the more details of this fluid form of being alive and present I discover.

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Page 18 “Top shows of Milan AW23 based on size inclusivity” Screenshot from @diet_prada

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Page 54 “detail of *today it suits me* dress” Photo: Tangmo, Ladapha Sophonkunkit

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THANK YOU NOTE

I wish to thank my family who genuinely supports me on all my (art) journeys, whatever they are. Thank you, mum, Roswita, and Nina.

Thank you, Maja Kalafatić, my colleague and family in the time being in Helsinki.

Thank you for your emotional and professional support and love, and for listening to my overthinking.

Thank you, Dafni Trikatsoula, for the love and support from distance.

Thank you Tangmo, Ladapha Sophonkunkit, for the photo shoots and supporting my process.

Thank you, extended LAPS family, colleagues, and friends.

Thank you, Emma Johansson, for bringing up the idea of studying at LAPS and moving to Helsinki, and for all the support, understanding, and friendship.

Thank you, Autuas Ukkonen, for a terrific dress for *today it suits me*, and the conversations around pop culture and fashion.

Thank you, Justus Kantakoski, my supervisor for the artistic component. Thank you, for trusting the quality of my work, for introducing me to Autuas, the dress designer, and for finding the alternative performance venue, *Liike*.

Thank you, Freja Bäckman, my supervisor for the script and the written thesis, for listening to me and being kind.

Thank you, Mari Kätkä, for your voice guidance and pointing at my power.

Thank you, *Liike* team, for trusting me with the space and letting me practice outside of the shop's opening hours. Thank you, Sonja Aaltonen, Saana Ott, Heta Nuutinen, and Mikko Korsulainen for the help with the performance at *Liike*.

Thank you, costume department team, for your patience and acceptance of the unknown in this project. Thank you, Teak production support team, and all the Teak staff. Thank you, Nina Numinnen, for I could lean on your skills as a producer.

Thank you, Nora Rinne, my mentor during *the Fabric of Identity*, for the conversations.

Thank you, Tero Nauha, program supervisor, for being a fantastic matchmaker for my mentors and supervisors.

Thank you, Tanja Kunej (via Katarina Pongračić), for proofreading this thesis.

Thank you, examiners Pilvi Porkola, and Elina Peltonen, for seeing *today it suits me*, and for reading this thesis.

APPENDICES

JOURNAL ENTRY EXCERPTS

I wear a mini skirt with a glittery green shirt and a black blazer. We are asked to form duos and talk about our identity in relation to our art. It seems that that's all I do currently. Thinking about it, I said, that the dress up act is an act of claiming the aesthetics, fashion, and style. (Nice aesthetics are perceived as shallow, my idea). If I decorate myself, am I then not seen as serious enough? Is this my idea? I took it as mine, and now when I dress up, I hear my own voice saying: you shouldn't stand out, looking nice means you are here to be taken, only to satisfy the other, to be here to please others. If I am dressed well or colorful, if I wear make-up, I am not taken seriously, and potentially, I am patronized as well. Do I dress up and call it a project to hide behind the pleasures of this particular action?

I want to add to the visual field of outfits in my environment; I need to stand out and create a broader awareness of what we wear, the visual aspects of our outfits, and what they do to the wearer and their social field. The haptic experience of attire gradually grows in importance through repetition.

I am not eager to choose an outfit a day before going to the wardrobe; I don't know what I want. I don't want to stand out; I don't feel like it. It is tiring in combination with other courses and tasks. Going to the wardrobe on time, picking an outfit, trying it out, fabrics, dry air, closed space, artificial light, walking up and down the wardrobe, existing in the look for a day in social situations, then returning the items the next day or the next week is laborious. It is work, after all—creative labor.

“I think this is real fur and real leather, it is well made. If I am not mistaken it is made by a family with a fur business in Helsinki”. I undress the coat and let them weigh it, it is heavy. It is warm. Coat protects me from the harsh cold and wind outside, I am covered and can endure outdoors with a style, a literal second skin from another animal.

I was excited about the outfit in the wardrobe, and now that I wear it, I feel a distinction between me and others. I feel division between me and others. The outfit makes me less communicative. As if wearing this outfit, I embody something or somebody else and act like a stranger. I don't want to be anyone else; I don't need to be anything else, although I inevitably behave differently. I am aware of the lipstick on my mouth. I constantly press my lips together to distribute the color evenly and to avoid the lipstick turning into an outline. I don't want to perform, but the garment changes the way I interact with people and the environment I am in.

I contemplate the amount of time it takes to compose an outfit; I feel the weight of choosing well. I balance between feelings clothes and accessories create with their visual aspect as items on their own and when they are activated on me, the wearer. Including their haptic and auditory aspect – considering my experience as the wearer, and the potential social spaces, and occasions I will find myself in.

All glamorous, I enter the room with a view. I hear voices raised and cheerful laughs. Artist says, I made their day. I feel glamorous, and it makes me feel good. With the burden of instantly catching the attention of others and the burden of getting compliments, I am blushing. Artist and artist are constantly aware of my outfit; they see me differently. Despite my peers knowing me and being familiar with my usual way of being, the outfit I wear is distinct from my other usual wear and affects the way I am familiar with familiar people, as well as the way familiar people are familiar with me.

Despite the potential judgmental gazes that touch my appearance, I am loving the shortness of the mini skirt I wear, the slit it has on the side that stretches open, and the triangle shape it makes. The stockings are thick, shiny, and green, and the black knee-high leather boots with a straight cut line in the front of my toes complete the stocking's exposure. Aesthetics—the visual pleasures—are not visual alone; they are co-dependent on the materiality by which I am touched and moved. (script that didn't make it to the final version)

OUTFIT ITEMS LIST

OUTFIT 16

Leopard pattern blouse, see-through. Leopard pattern jacket, hip length, padded. Lapis blue stockings. Suede lapis blue sleeveless dress, above knee length, front pockets, concealed zipper in the middle of the back. Plaid scarf, blue, brown. Metal bracelet with spikes. Hexagon shaped hoops, black. Raspberry pink eyeshadow. Hair band with stones, black, transparent. Daisy white boots with a belt, black laces, black platform.

OUTFIT 21

Denim blue lingerie bodysuit left open over the pants. Army green pants with zipper pockets (dysfunctional – for the style), high waist. Color double-sided dark purple and green shade scarf, square shape, fringe edges. Maxi white lace dress, wedding-like, puffed sleeves, elbow length, big opening in the back. Short black fluffy feather-like jacket. Dark grey maxi woolen coat. Black leather purse, atlas pattern, one long strap, purse at the height of my hips when the strap is on one shoulder and the purse on the opposite hip. Metal hairdresser duck clips in hair. Three metal necklaces, varying in lengths, heart-shaped pendants. Long earrings (touching shoulders) with a transparent black gem at the end of the silver string. Brown leather ankle-height hiking boots, zipper in the instep. Cranberry lipstick. Glittery bronze eyeshadow. Black mascara.

TASKS FOR A SINGLE OUTFIT

- visit the wardrobe in the opening times, 12-14,
- try out different looks and choose, dress, undress, clothes off the hanger, clothes on the hanger, climb the ladder on wheels, and hang potential pieces to be borrowed on its fence – the wardrobe has two layers of clothing racks and shoe shelves to the ceiling,
- borrow the items, wait at the desk for the wardrobe team to note the items, or browse more in the meantime without the intention to borrow,
- store items neatly in the bag, take them to another location,
- write a journal about the choosing process and make a list of items borrowed, search for the names of specific colors, patterns, materials, and shapes, (creating a textual archive),
- put the look on for a day,
- spend a day in the look,
- take photos of the look in the mirror, at first with the phone, later with a photo camera in dance studios, until I gained access to the photo studio at the Fine Arts Academy by doing a weeklong course on lighting with my classmate Tangmo Ladapha Sophonkunkit who eventually took on the role of studio photographer,
- before and after taking photos: borrow a camera, book a studio, transfer the photos, look at the photos taken, (creating a visual archive),
- I ask peers to take candid photos of my outfit when I am unaware and do not notice them, in a paparazzi style, Stefanía Ólafsdóttir and Maja Kalafatić as the main photographers, Yun-Chen Chang, and Wiktoria Hladko taking photos as well, (creating a visual archive),
- return the items to the costume department,
- write a journal about the experience in/of the outfit (creating a textual archive).

“You know darling, getting dressed is easy. Planning what to wear is what takes time.” Nightlife personality Susanne Bartsch (Moore, 2018, 94).

SCRIPT *today it suits me*

(the outfit start)

Lime green stockings,
densely spread zigzag pattern raised above the background plane, ribbed,
Pinky width of the zigzag lines,
half pinky depth of the 90-degree zigzag angle,
zigzag horizontally circling legs,
tiny plastic threads sticking out as miniature fluffy balls, lint balls, worn-out stockings,
Narrow tight elastic band around my waist.

High black leather boots: Satin leather – a step above matte, with a very slight sheen to it.

Mid-calf height, zipper on the inner side of the leg from the arch of the foot throughout the shoe length.

Square toe ending in the front mirroring the narrow rectangular black wooden heel in the back of the shoe, 4cm high.

Black elastic mini skirt, just enough to cover my behind,
side zipper closure, high waist.
split on the left side in the length of my palm, matte fabric.

Glittery Pine and Shamrock green T-shirt with a collar.

Pine below the breast, Shamrock above, striped sleeves, and a striped collar.

Necklace with a flower-shaped pendant,
crystal gems in a circular shape,

Midnight blue gem in the middle, size of a cherry pit.

Cherry pit size stud earrings,
crystal gems in a circular shape, dark green gems in the middle.

Black single breasted notch lapel blazer, 3 black plastic buttons down the front,
classic length – covering my bottom,

horizontal pockets at my high hip, hidden in a line.

Medium-length Sacramento green thick fake fur coat, above knee length,
extra wide sleeve ends, horizontally ribbed sleeves,
vertically ribbed torso of the coat,
round green plastic buttons.

Soft Magenta pink scarf with fringes, length of my body, forearm width.

Soft Violet purple scarf with fringes, length of my body, forearm width.

Black satin leather square purse, saddle-like, long thin strap,

Purse at the height of my hips, stud button opening system.

Teal blue nail polish

Power pink Lipstick

Mantis green eyeshadow spread from one eyelid to another over the nose bone.

(the outfit end)

Nothing out there looks the same.

You haven't changed but something external has shifted and nothing is the same,

Virginie Despentes whispers in my ear.

Nobody tells me what to do, I do it because I want to do it and because I need to do it,
and because I owe it to myself.

It's my business if I walk around naked,

if I have a plug in my butt with a long pearl tail attached to it,

if I hang a bunch of doll's arms as a cape around my shoulders or put plastic on my
face,

let's do a showcase.

Should I get my buttocks enlarged?

There is no room to be modest, if you want to be the hottest,
you should be able to talk the talk and shimmy the shimmy.

Shimmy shimmy ya shimmy yam shimmy yay

give me the mic so I can take it away.

The slit on the side of the mini skirt stretches open,
the triangle shape comes through in lime green.

Apply lipstick, stick it to your lips.

Rich creamy pure vibrant colors.

Look at your lips in the mirror,

mirror in the elevator,

mirror in the glass doors,

mirror in my purse, a petit mirror for the go,

a petit mirror for a petit purse, for a petite gesture,
 discreetly open the zipper of the petit pocket of the petit purse with petit items in it.
 Reach in the pocket delicately with your fingers.
 and find the rectangular
 cold and smooth surface of the mirror
 which reveals the reflection of my face.
 With the petit mirror, I have eyes on the tips of my fingers.
 yes
 Yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yeeeeeeeees yes yes yes yes yes yes
 Yes, to make-up, yes to glitter, yes to pink,
 yes to miniskirts,
 yes to plastic,
 yes to fake fur,
 yes to fishnet stockings,
 yes to statement earrings,
 yes to baguette bags,
 yes to oversize hats,
 yes, yes, yes, yes to leather, yes to feather, yes to pointy boots,
 yes to being fabulous,
 yes to an amazing audience.
 Yes yes yes
 luv luv luv luv
 luv luv luv luv
 L U V I love myself I love my body
 luv laugh
 ha ha ha ha
 mmm m mmmm mmmm mm
 me me me
 Mirror, mirror on the wall, I refuse to hear your beck and call.
 You cannot show the best of me, for I am much more than you can see.
 Mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the hottest bitch of all?
 Mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the biggest fool of all?
 Must be the girl who can't stop crying. Or maybe it's the girl who kept on trying.

What does it mean when the mirror falls off the walls by itself and breaks?
 You're not paying enough attention to the real world, like how strong your fixings are.
 What do you expect? Nobody's perfect.
 I wear make-up because I like to, and because I like the act of applying it
 because I like to enhance, increase, intensify, and magnify,
 augment, boost, reshape, and adjust the look I present to the potential observer.
 Underline and highlight your needs.

The ritual.
 You are not dressed up if it is not from head to toe.
 Looking glamorous.
 How can I embody glamour,
 what can I do to feel glamorous?
 Indulge in glamour, feel the glamour, be the glamour,
 it is my desire and need to take up space. If you see something in it, take it.
 I cannot be seductive; I must be seductive.
 I cannot do it anymore
 I don't want to do it anymore,
 I don't want to perform,
 I don't want to represent something or anything,
 I don't want to choose, I don't want to pick, I don't want to think,
 I don't want to defend, I don't want to go to the deep end,
 I don't want to satisfy, I don't want to please,
 I don't want to sacrifice my precious self, I don't want to pretend to be somebody else,
 I don't want to fit in, I don't want to hide,
 I don't want to push, I don't want to do it anymore.
 I think this game is stupid, and I am not playing it anymore.
 Shut it down, shut me down, shut down the screens, shut down the tv, stop the music!
 Scream, go wild, make no sense at all.
 I make no
 You make no sense
 You don't need to make sense, you just need to let it go.
 I can't focus, my mind is all over,

I am full of impressions from people,
 I am full of the outfit I am wearing.
 I daydream, and I drift away to the moments earlier in the day.
 I re-play encounters I had, that artist, artist not saying hello, artist, the other artist.
 I am radiating the outfit vibe.
 I don't feel like socializing, I don't feel like I have anything to say, I want to spend
 some time alone and recharge,

(the outfit start)

White anti-glare mini skirt,
 topstitched side pleat on the bottom, tuck on the top, high waist.
 White oversized shirt in a cotton weave with a collar,
 buttons down the front, and a yoke with a pleat at the back.
 Dropped shoulders, long sleeves with buttoned cuffs, and a rounded hem.
 Tucked in,
 paired with plate belt buckle, misty rose belt,
 Love with the capital L written in the buckle, misty rose background.
 rectangular beaded frame with crystal gems, round edges, curly brackets style.
 Porcelain white single-breasted one-button peak lapel blazer,
 a size too small for me to be able to close it,
 two hidden vertical pockets at the hip height.
 The lining inside the blazer provides ease of entry into the garment.
 Opaque emerald-green tights, 120 deniers for flawlessly smooth coverage.
 Choker Toggle clasp Thick Silver Curb Chain necklace with a heart. Lock me in your
 heart.
 Waterproof handbag, pepita pattern, black bottom, short black straps,
 zipper compartment in the middle,
 side compartments with magnet stud buttons,
 Black & white one eyelet loafers, shiny leather,
 white vamp, and tongue in rhombus shape in the front of the shoe, suggesting a tuxedo.

(the outfit end)

Elite, expensive sport.

Lacoste is what some would call an accessible luxury brand.

Their products are relatively expensive compared to what the average Joe would pay, but they are not so expensive that most people cannot afford them.

Bottom line, never mind if I am showing off.

The belt and the white shirt I wear give me impressions of a North American animal herder style, cowboy, cowgirl.

Stick your thumbs in your pockets.

You don't have pockets? Stick your thumbs in someone else's pockets.

I am the boss around here okay?

That belt saying 'LOVE' in the buckle framed with crystals.

Buckle up! This is a joy ride, is this a joy ride?

Tell me love isn't true

It's just something that we do

Tell me everything I'm not

But don't ever tell me to stop

Madonna tells me.

The skin is covered with comfortably soft emerald-green tights.

I want my legs to be green, the right thickness of tights, and the job is done, the opaque material paints my skin green.

No see-through, one color only, plain, rich, absorbing the light, absorbing the gaze.

No see through, see me,

stop your gaze at my shape, at me,

look at me, don't look away, don't judge me,

admire me, appreciate me, validate me, flatter me,

you look amazing, how flattering,

thank you, no thank you, no thank you for taking the time to tell me this,

thank you so much, thank you, yes, really, thank you.

What a good exposure.

She's so lucky, she's a star! But

all that matters is that you treat me right and give me all the things I need that money can't buy.

(the outfit start)

True purple stocking.

Black ribbed shirt, long-sleeved, wide triangle neckline, open shoulders, short black straps, open back, straight at the bust line.

Translucent Floral maxi skirt, chiffon, pale purple, and cotton pink flowers with asparagus green leaves, high waist, one button back closure.

Wide Plastic Elastic Cinch Belt Stretch Waist Band Clasp Buckle Belt, Black.

Short Hot Pink cashmere cardigan, hip length, round neckline, button fastening, seven golden plastic buttons, size of a Finnish blueberry.

Necklace with fixed seven porcelain white pearls, princess size, thin mesh thickness.

Medium happy hour size C hoops with porcelain white pearls.

Off White leather high knee slip-on boots, triangle cuff facing up, wooden heel.

Deep jungle green double-breasted Leather trench coat with fur lapel, belt, diagonal pockets, single vent, buckled sleeves.

Sepia Leather gloves with adjustable straps.

Louis Vuitton golden chain handbag pouch purse, classic monogram.

Prune purple nail polish.

Cranberry purple lipstick.

Cotton Candy pink eyeshadow, black mascara.

(the outfit ends)

The skirt is elegant and summer-like.

It doesn't match these winter weather conditions.

Pavements are full of slush, puddles, and gravel.

Gray sky, gray horizon, gray buildings, gray ground, pray for light, heaven help me.

I found a cardigan, deep pink, it is super soft to the touch.

Cashmere's soft, lightweight, and insulating properties comfort me.

Thanks to the goats who live through the harsh winters,

their hair is long, thin, and soft

from which the quality cashmere is made.

Snow white, tall leather boots with wooden heels.

I want to make each step heavy,

emphasize each step.

If you're happy and you know it, stomp your feet. (stomp, stomp)

If you're happy and you know it and you really want to show it,
if you're happy and you know it stomp
your feet.

A flick of the tv series Desperate Housewives in my mind.

Another flick of The Stepford Wives from 2004 I saw, starring Nicole Kidman.

A wildly successful president,
after a series of shocking events,
suffers a nervous breakdown and is moved by her milquetoast of a husband,
from the urban city to the chic, upper-class, and very modern planned community of
Stepford.

Why is everything perfect here?

After being expelled from Barbieland
for being a less-than-perfect-looking doll,
Barbie sets off for the human world to find true happiness.

Imagination, life is your creation, it's really ugly.

Life is a mystery, everyone must stand alone.

I am much taller than you, I am taller than usual with these boots, it feels good.

Not many people are so tall, elegant, and beautiful at once
and it makes sense that brands would want to use such pretty people
to promote their products.

Buy a special piece you wouldn't wear every day
and wear it manically day after day after day after day after day, today, today, today
Small, simple, delicate, lightweight Louis Vuitton leather handbag, I love how the
zipper continues into the strap.

Clack click clack click clack click clack click clack click

I'm feeling myself.

I'm feeling myself.

I'm feeling myself.

I'm feeling myself.

I'm feeling myself.

I am full of myself. I follow myself. I take care of myself.

I am fooling myself.

I want so badly to be good

puffed sleeves of a see-through,
 organza rose blouse with invisible stud buttons,
 embroidery with golden, emerald green, and dark violet threads
 ruffles with lace from each shoulder joining in the middle of the torso
 in the front and in the back,
 short ruffles around the waistline,
 more ruffles coming out of the waistline,

(silent monologue start)

I walk around the closet in my bra and I am having such a sensational time.

I notice a coat, it penetrates my eyes,

and I feel a subtle rush through my body – the dark and strong presence of the material,
 exceptionally flamboyant.

My eyes spot a short red dress in the leather section,

but unfortunately, I don't fit in.

(silent monologue end)

How do you choose an outfit?

(silent monologue start)

Almost a year later a friend of mine squeezes me into the same dress,

flesh and fat are pouring out on my upper bust,

my breasts are squished up to my face.

I pick white translucent elbow-length gloves from the box.

(silent monologue end)