



A is for Attitude, B is for Bifurcate: Naming the space between the legs and the pants

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Abstract

In this text, I use trousers and their history as a theoretical meeting place to test connections between areas of my artistic research, and my ability to narrate those connections as they extend between disciplines and frames of reference. The key areas of research are: English-language novels within an expanded Dandy genre; production design in popular American cinema; Historic and contemporary image manipulation; and Western fashion history. Looking for a common formal language to exam these disciplines side by side and contextualise them, I have tried to implement ways of seeing from Federico Campagna's *Technic and Magic*, Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology*, and Dick Hebdige's *Subculture*, and Rosalind Krauss' notion of *Grids*. In the text I alternate between two voices: the first is essayistic, and assumes an instructive tone that is native to fashion advice columns from the heyday of print media. The second voice offers descriptions of a series of images, illustrating the subject matter(s) of the thesis. This voice attempts to be exhaustive and faithful to the source material, while offering analysis through the sequencing and rhythm of description. The images themselves are withheld in order to facilitate this exercise. Furthermore, the structure loosely adopts that of a glossary, inspired by Walter Benjamin's *One Way Street*. Each chapter is in some way a mini essay, setting up a comparison between disparate images and practices in order to heighten the formal use-value of a small vocabulary of recurring terms, themes, and devices. Threaded through the essay are nods to Goethe's *Metamorphosis of Plants*, in which he searches for a metaphysical plant-form from which all others are derived. In a way I am following the same path, trying to separate the material of style itself from the objects that express it.¹

¹ "The Primal Plant is going to be the strangest creature in the world, which Nature herself shall envy me. With this model and the key to it, it will be possible to go on forever inventing plants and know that their existence is logical; that is to say, if they do not actually exist, they could, for they are not the shadow phantoms of vain imagination, but possess an inner necessity and truth." (Naples, 17 May 1787)" (Campagna, 2018)

A is for Attitude, B is for Bifurcate: Naming the space between the legs and the pants

fig. 1

Grainy black and white photo, source is lost (c.1920). A young man stands with torso facing the camera in baggy smart casual dress. One foot is raised up on a stool, and a second figure kneels on the ground, measuring the young man's huge pant cuffs with a tape measure. The cuff is pulled away from the leg forming a large triangle of tweed fabric in the centre of the photo which the two figures turn towards with pride and awe.

Introduction

Trousers have been a fundamental part of the architecture of daily life in the West and its subjects since their widespread adoption at the turn of the 19th century. I am referring to the popularity of *pantaloons* or *sans-culottes* following the French revolution and Regency period in England. It is specifically the bourgeoisie and their tastes, and the development of taste itself as it is understood in modernity which will be the scope of discussion when referring to changing dress trends in history. Styles come and go, in many shapes and sizes, and their proliferation into a set of archetypes that are traded between classes can give us a rough sketch of the changes in society that define the present hegemonic consumer culture. Symbols are bought and sold, their seductive power becoming a primary motivator for both work and leisure. If ‘material’ here means fabric, I could go on in this direction and take a misunderstanding of *historical materialism* to its logical limit. However, I am not interested in re-telling the history of modernity through the eyes of a pair of trousers, and it is instead a certain immaterial object which concerns me here.²

When I try to describe fully the negative space between the legs and the trousers, language fails me. This volume, which is immaterial by definition, remains in motion; it possesses a grammar and a genealogy. Pants

² For a strange stab at this, see Eric Gill, *Trousers and the most precious ornament* (Gill, 1937)

sit high and low, pleated, tapered, striped, and the weight of the shoes determines the swing of the feet as they move through space. Rosalind Krauss uses a notion of centrifugal and centripetal grids to describe opposing ways of seeing the grid as it emerges in Modernist painting; *the centrifugal grid* expands beyond the frame of the painting, and each instance of it is merely a view or scrap of a larger metaphysical grid fabric which is shared between all representations of it. Conversely, *the centripetal grid* seems to outline the object, substrate, or moment on which it is inscribed. This grid sits on the material of the painting, tracing the surface and volume in space and time (Krauss, 1979). I look to these opposing definitions and see that what little they share in common might be a working definition of form, an object which doesn't yet cast a shadow, the axis from which the left and right legs swing in order to walk and animate a terminology that would allow me to describe the space between the legs and the pants.

Are all of these volumes the same place? Facets of the same pair of trousers? Or are they each short-lived organisms, dying each morning, dying each time you let your pants fall to your ankles when you sit on the toilet? We could take a few different approaches when searching for an answer. This knowledge-object, this shadow, certainly lends itself to drawing, and drawing is involved in its production, or at least the production of its negative, the pants themselves. The process of pattern cutting involves taking sheets of gridded paper and carefully adjusting a set of lines to fit the intended wearer. The flat rigid sheets reveal nothing of the wearing experience, but contain all of its parameters. Conversely we could cut apart the real pants and see what we can learn from this experience, from attempting to describe it. This is a challenge of description itself. Perhaps other means of representation can save us when vocabulary fails. Conventional cameras produce an image from a fixed vantage point due to the nature of their lenses and sensors, however, it's possible to construct a camera that sees around corners, or renders a scene with no vanishing point (Shane Wighton, 2024). If a camera can be broken down to its most basic parts and reassembled with this other way of seeing in mind, I'd like to try this approach with words and pull together a glossary from various sources a glossary of gaps that will serve as a test site for further acts of description.

As the cigarette of history burns ever closer to the butt, the space where angels tread shrinks down to the gaps between things. Here I will present a series of superimposed vignettes, a pair of slide projectors running in tandem, with a slight overlap, and map some constellations that will orient us in the dark:

fig. 2a, 2b, 2c [title, author and source unknown]

Three digital photos downloaded from second hand clothing marketplace, 2024. All three show the same man wearing tailored form fitting leather trousers by Versace. The photos show the man from the waist down, standing in front of a typical white bedroom door, first from the front, then in profile, then from the back. The black leather pants, which have many panels and zips, reveal a stocky muscular physique. His thumbs are tucked into the waistband, and his hands sit in loose fists, tanned, in a confident superhero pose, which also holds up his grey t-shirt. The leather is glossy, and the highlights taper smoothly down to matching black Chelsea boots with an exaggerated modern sole. The terracotta tiled floor seems to promise a context that is never fully given.

fig. 3 [title, author and source unknown]

A pre-internet hand drawn meme seen c. 2016 circulating on image site tumblr.com. Not yet found again. Original context unknown; probably a t-shirt or print magazine. From memory: four (young, white, American) archetypes are walking on a plain background, clockwise at intersecting angles. There is a bookish girl with glasses and skirt, a skinhead guy with boots, a preppy guy in college football jacket, and a punk girl with choppy green hair, fishnets, and studded leather jacket. Each one is checking out the next, forming a chain of street-level attractions. Each in turn is thinking “He looks cute...”, “She looks nice!”, “He looks fun”. The image seems to say “you never know who’s into you” but also “the one you desire is looking for something else”. The drawing has a generic matter of fact style, similar to flight evacuation instructions.

A. Attitude

There exists somewhere above or below us (at strange latitudes) a library of attitudes from which we pull our gestures, gaits, and advances. In Susan Sontag's *The Volcano Lover*, we witness the intersecting paths of several real historical figures: Goethe, who is seeking the elusive 'Primal Plant-form' (Urpflanze) in Naples; William Beckford, a disgraced nobleman who, in the pursuit of sublime sensory experience, accidentally invents virtual reality as part of a ruse to seduce a young cousin (McCalman, 2007). They orbit the disintegrating affair that hangs between Lord Hamilton (the British ambassador to Naples), his young lover Lady Hamilton, and the obliterated but virile Lord Nelson, who has lost leg, arm, and eyeball to cannon fire from French revolutionaries. Lady Hamilton, an actress, singer, and muse, develops a popular genre of performance where she stands before a rapturous crowd, draping a shawl on her body in various guises, adopting the *attitude* of art-historical women from antiquity. As trousers fall in and out of fashion, so do forms of cultural capital. In the time of *The Volcano Lover*: '*Knowledge was fashionable, and philistinism unfashionable*'. Lady Hamilton's audience falls into fashion by demonstrating that they recognise the attitudes that she is representing: '*She unbinds her hair, she rises from her haunches, she lifts her arms in supplication, she drops the goblet to the floor, she kneels and points the knife at her breast ... Gasps. A murmur from the audience. The beginning of applause, while somebody who doesn't recognise the figure is coached in a whisper by a fellow guest. The applause mounts. And he shouts. "Brava, Ariadne!"*' (Sontag, 2004)

While the self-absorbed Goethe returns to Weimar with the Urpflanze seemingly unaccounted for, Lady Hamilton has gotten closer to the substance of form, not by driving to the centre of things in search of its purest form like Goethe, but instead playing dispassionately with those superficial layers of fabric, accessory, and posture which mediate the object (observed, body) and the subject (audience, camera). Her attitudes appear temporarily to produce a recognisable image, a communicable form that her audience can parse, before she goes on to take another pose and evoke another art historical figure.

In order to properly describe our pants-object, some qualitative language is needed. In each pair of trousers lies a pose, an inclination, which is articulated through the way cloth interacts with the wearer at various focal points between the waist and the feet: The distance between the groin and the inseam ("drop-crotch"),

the width of the pleats, the tapering or flaring of the hem. These lines and relations give us the attitude, the general posture of the pants. These postures are always borrowed from elsewhere. Somewhere in the wide waters between the New World and Old Europe, you can find this lending library.³

fig. 4a [*Summer of Sam*, 1999, dir. Spike Lee]

Adrien Brody's long face extends the full height of the frame. The mouth is twisted into a wry pout as he tries out unfamiliar sounds. The stubble is blue around the mouth, and he is looking sleepily away from the camera towards the ground. An even healthy tan removes any suspicion that he might be British, and his well-nourished shoulders threaten to burst open the baby sleeves of his tiny Union Jack t-shirt, which is accessorised with a modest black dog collar. Gelled spikes of black hair pierce the blank sky, which seems to hang inches behind his head. His small earlobes remain unpierced.

RUBY (*in thick Italian-American accent*): Hey I like the new look... what... it's punk?

RITCHIE: Yeah you should come t'the city some time, check out the band...

RUBY: Hey, you livin' in Manhattan now?

RITCHIE: Yeah, since last night, got evicted

RUBY: Been in London too?

RITCHIE: No... but 's all in the atti-tude, all in the att-i-chude...

RUBY: In the att-ee-tood?⁴

Summer of Sam opens with a young couple dancing in stretchy late-disco attire, twirling and kicking across an empty dance floor. Strobe lights animate their dancing as Machine belts out *There But For The Grace Of God Go I*. Crystalline beads of sweat decorate Vinny and Dionna's faces, and we hear the famously misleading lyrics: "...find a place to stay/ somewhere fa-ar awa-ay/ with no Blacks, no Jews, and no Ga-ays!" (Machine, 1979). In a typically reflexive move, director Lee plays the only Black role; a self-hating news anchor who is terrified of his own inner-city audience. Ritchie, a young New Yorker infatuated with the

³ See chapter 3, 'Exodus: a double crossing' (Hebdige, 2012)

⁴ Directly transcribed by author (*Summer of Sam*, 1999)

British punk image wears a tight fitting union jack t-shirt, latex pants, and his hair is gelled into a crown of points extending from his scalp. Played by Adrian Brody, he speaks in a mock-cockney accent, memorably chewing up the word attitude into “attah-chude”. This is but one of the marionette strings which travel back and forth across the Atlantic, forcing those in search of cool to adopt sounds and postures that are foreign to them (see: ‘Blink-182 accent’). Framed by Lee’s character and against the backdrop of Berkowitz’s serial murders, the film surveys differences of style and mannerism within a homogenous extended family of Italian-Americans undergoing a kind of cultural breakdown. Through a ‘90s does 77’ lens, Vinny and Ritchie take on the postures of Disco and Punk respectively, two oppositional countercultures that are foreign to their codes of masculinity and fit them both like costumes. Unable to protect their womenfolk from a serial killer, the men issue them blonde wigs (David Berkowitz targeted brunettes). Brody’s character is flagged as a suspect by his cousins and brothers. His latent bisexuality manifests as the wrong pants, the wrong hair, the wrong accent: the wrong attitude. He is a free agent, not sufficiently attached to the monoculture to earn protection from the lynch mob. During the Blackout of ’77, Ritchie is seconds from death at the hands of his brothers when the TV comes back to life, showing the real killer as he is dragged into the police station. The city lights up in celebration as life returns to normal.

fig. 4b [Summer of Sam, 1999, dir. Spike Lee]

A police sketch describes in fine economic lines a young man with short dark hair, soft features, and an unfeeling facial expression. A Mohawk is graffitied onto him in loose fat lines on both the front and profile sketches. Zooming out, the camera hangs above two balding heads, pointed at the concrete ground. The man on the right holds a black marker pen, which he uses to draw this exaggerated mohawk onto the imagined likeness of the ‘Son of Sam killer’ that adorns the front page of a New York daily newspaper. He wears a printed lilac shirt with an open collar. The man on the left grips a brass toned beer can, and on top of his rust coloured t-shirt sits a gold chain with gold aviator glasses dangling from them. They both have similarly short wide finger nails on their thick hands. It is easy to believe the actor is also acting through the drawing; the choppy matter of fact lines are defiantly heterosexual, superimposed over the delicate police sketch. One recalls the repetitive zig-zag of Donald Trump’s 2005 doodle of the New York skyline (Trump, 2004).

B. Bifurcate, Bette

Now that we have an attitude, we need to take it somewhere; we cannot simply stand in front of the mirror saying to ourselves “you talkin’ to me?!”. Thankfully, like *scissors* and *stairs*, pants necessarily come in pairs. The feature that distinguishes them from a kilt or sarong is the split: their bifurcated nature; one pant for the left leg and one for the right. If we manage to put them on correctly, we can start to walk. If we need a demonstration we might look at *Shaida*, who is always *Walking* (**fig. 6**).⁵

fig. 5 [Shaida Walking, 2016, by Julian Opie]

A tall dark LED panel stands upright in the centre of Broadwick Street, London, adjacent to Carnaby Street, one of the city’s commercialised pedestrian districts. On the monolithic dark surface, an array of white lights sketch out in clean lines the stride of a young woman in profile. The animation loops endlessly at a smooth 50 frames per second. The figure appears to be wearing a leotard, and a high ponytail which bobs slightly with each step. Her feet have been abbreviated to stubs by the artist, making her rhythmic contact with the ground appear measured and self-conscious. She is neither 2D or 3D, all stylistic traces that might point to a given animation technique have been smoothed away by Opie. This purpose-built display will never show anything else, yet its bespoke grid of bulbs contain large areas of darkness which, untouched by Shaida’s walk, will remain unlit indefinitely. The real Shaida, walking for Opie on a treadmill, recreates the moment of moving image’s inception, when Eadweard Muybridge serialised the natural motion of a black jockey and his horse (Han, 2022).

In a similar manner, we find Bette Davis *enframed* by her surroundings. In ‘Sets in Motion’, Mirella Jona and Charles Affron found a sole reference to art direction in their review of American film magazines of the 30s and 40s: Bette Davis tells an interviewer she is seen five times on the same staircase, dressed differently, in a string of dramas directed by William Wyler or Edmund Goulding in *Jezebel* (1938), *Dark Victory* (1939),

⁵ “Shaida is a feminine name with Persian and Arabic origins. In Persian, it means 'in love,' 'infatuated,' or 'lovesick,' conveying passionate romantic devotion.” (Nameberry, 2015)

The Letter (1940), *The Old Maid* (1939), and *The Great Lie* (1941) (Affron and Affron, 1995). She stands before the camera, as the staircase pleats up and away from its lens. Climbing the Y axis, pushing into the Z axis, the staircase is a special kind of ground that folds upward to meet the cinema screen's vertical field of view. It is a recurring figure of these interior dramas, companion and witness to Davis' undoings; she clings to the rail, she runs up and away, her shoes fail her, she eavesdrops from above, and so on (**fig. 6a-e**):

fig. 6a [*Jezebel*, 1938, dir. William Wyler]

The white underside of the stairway (B) forms a backdrop for Julie Marsden (Davis) and the unnamed Servant (uncredited). Julie wears women's riding gear with back turned to camera, feathered hat cocked back self-assuredly. She faces her servant, who bids her to change into evening attire. He is wearing black tie, waistcoat, tailcoat, without gloves. He is old, and his large hands are held akimbo in a noncommittal gesture of bargaining. Behind the vertical lines of the elegant bannister, cascading down like harp strings, stands Zette/Sadie (Theresa Harris) in the upper left. She leans forward in traditional maid's dress, perched above a large cluster of hydrangeas in a silver vase. With a simple rhythm, the trio of dark figures cascade backwards along Davis' line of sight into the rich architecture.

fig. 6b [*Dark Victory*, 1939, dir. Edmund Goulding]

An elegant white handrail whips across the frame from upper left to lower right. Two hands hover on the rail. Standing on the wide, curved, and carpeted stairway (A), Judith Traherne (Davis) with back to the camera wears a dark gown, her face obscured by a crown of curled hair. The body language is opaque. Facing her from half a dozen steps below is Alec (Ronald Reagan), grinning boyishly. He wears a broad shouldered woollen suit over a dark sweater. His hair is lively, curling against the slick product. An appendage from a crystal chandelier creeps in from the right, behind it a Neoclassical column is carved out of the background by harsh studio lights.

When Davis recalls this staircase, she insists it is one staircase. Indeed, the whole anecdote derives its value from this. Upon viewing the films however, it becomes clear there are in fact two staircases in the same

sound stage; one is right-handed and curved (clockwise), while the other is left-handed and right-angled (anticlockwise). If we take Davis at her word and make them one, we have one staircase which turns in both directions, like a strand of DNA. These opposing *chiralities* take turns, like the left and right leg, stepping through time. The effect is a kind of haunted house that only Hollywood could produce. Like Dorothy's home in Kansas, it seems capable of moving, crossing longitudes from New York to LA, to Cambodia. And Davis, having the special talents necessary for this kind of travel, is able to follow the house's dancing steps, always dressed for the occasion, and with the kind of dynamic ambivalence necessary to inhabit both oneness and two-ness. Bifurcation here is neither one-becoming-two or two-becoming-one but the capacity to be whole and cloven simultaneously. Her characters, always desiring more and knowing more than they are permitted, inevitably meet tragic ends. One cannot take apart their trousers and wear them at the same time.

fig. 6c [The Old Maid, 1939, dir. Edmund Goulding]

Large double doors block the left and right thirds of the frame, held ajar by Charlotte Lovell (Davis) who stands before us, back turned, in a fitted satin gown with crimped collar and cuffs. She holds the door for support, looking with us towards the out of focus staircase (A) before her, where two shadows, arm in arm, walk gaily towards an unknown light source. These shadows repeat the journey up the stairs that their likenesses have only just completed. The handrail curves darkly past the the doorframe, its stairs turning up and away to the left.

fig. 6d [The Letter, 1940, dir. William Wyler]

The lowest level of a dark staircase (B) can be seen in the middle distance, this is the only glimpse we get. Before it a young house boy (uncredited) walks, in a white linen suit. He looks thin and timid under the loose fabric while carrying a potted Monstera plant towards the front door. Several yards of varnished floorboards and Persian rugs separate him from the foreground, where Leslie Crosby (Davis), faces Dorothy Joyce (Freida Inescourt). They stand backlit by a small electric candelabra; Dorothy who is taller, wearing a dark full length satin evening dress, extends an arm to Leslie who clings to her lacework. Her lightweight viscose dress is pleated and puffed at the shoulder, with a plunging neckline. Their faces are in near-total shadow, like two new moons, while their arms catch another light, and appear as young tree-limbs, entirely foreign to the clothing they spring from.

fig. 6e [The Great Lie, 1941, dir. Edmund Goulding]

Maggie (Davis) stands in the empty space formed by the open left half of a grand double doorway. This cuts the image in two. Visible from the knees up, she wears a fitted deep black velvet dress, with a large white split collar sitting atop it, spread winglike across padded shoulders. She is mid stride, hip cocked slightly, hands hanging down with forced calm, her light hair subtly rising away from her. She is walking away from us at speed, towards the curved stair (A), whose handrail arcs down to meet her exactly at the neck. The dark carpeted stairs curl away from us and out of frame in the upper left corner. The right side is blocked in by a closed white door, in front of which stands an older couple, visibly taller than Davis (Lucille Watson, Grant Mitchell). They look rational and reproachful, in dated evening wear consisting of a mid toned sheer gown, with high neck and long sleeves that blouse at the cuffs; the gentleman is seen in profile in a broad black tailcoat and white shirt.

We encounter Shaida and Davis at work, in their work attire. We hope Shaida's leisure time is more exciting, and Davis' perhaps a little less so. Meeting Davis at a historic Hollywood address,⁶ we can follow her up the staircase along a chain of older traditions of organised storytelling wherein, like mechanical automata, actors walk through a sequence of motions, attitudes, and spaces strung together to entertain a paying audience. These sequences are predetermined, repeatable, and scaleable; and serve to supply an increasing demand for entertainment. In this way we can say that cinema (and home viewing) are an apparatus for an 'infinitely' reproducible labour. Articles abound where writers claim in his *Fragment on Machines* that Marx predicted the emergence of software, or AI, or some other useless garbage, however it seems clear to me what he describes is the act of recording a performance on camera, and pressing it into a DVD:

“Once adopted into the production process of capital, the means of labour passes through different metamorphoses, whose culmination is the... automatic system of machinery... set in motion by an automaton, a moving power that moves itself; this automaton consisting of numerous mechanical and intellectual organs, so that the workers themselves are cast merely as its conscious linkages.”
(Marx, 1939)

⁶ Warner bros. Burbank Studios, 4000 Warner Blvd. CA, USA

The machine of filmmaking, mediated by the camera, traces the pathways that are agreed between the actors and the architecture. This choreographic form, a net of virtual train tracks, a pattern block for repeat viewings, constitutes that which Campagna would describe as a 'position' from which individual viewings of the film can emanate (Campagna, 2018). This imposition between agent and material structure, between Shaïda and her LED matrix, between Bette Davis and the staircase(s), which can only be recorded as virtual lines of air, is materially the same as the space between the legs and the trousers.

C. Cut

Edwin Abbott's 1884 satirical novella *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions* follows the life of a male square in a two-dimensional world. In Dionys Burger's 1957 sequel *Bolland (Sphereland)* the same square tries to prove to a skeptical scientific community that the Flatlanders are in fact living on a large three dimensional sphere. This is a noble attempt to describe our own relationship with higher dimensions and the unknown, but in many ways fails to communicate the strange ways we might enter the second dimension on a daily basis. Through which dimension do we enter a work of literature?

In *Technic and Magic*, Federico Campagna asks how a Flat Earth might be a more accurate representation of our planet as we experience it. He elaborates on the construction of a popular historical view that medieval thinkers believed the Earth was flat until Columbus circumnavigated it, and how this satisfies a narrative of linear technological progress which is imposed by *Technic*. With a nonlinear view, we can see how *flatness* provides an intuitive understanding that is neither superior to or superceded by the third dimension. The graphic simplicity of 2D space, and the interwoven possibilities of the fourth dimension, can provide different flavours of heaven or hell for us to explore forms and find shortcuts from A to B.⁷

We are brought to these thoughts by life's sticky insistence on space and measure. Living space is in short supply, and ones jeans are always too big, or too small. While cameras conveniently record 3D space as a series of flat images, they are unable to depict the immaterial lines that separate the left and right leg. You are invited to touch the dense work of seams beneath the crotch where the four panels of your pants meet. Imagine the four panels separating into their basic blocks, two mirrored pairs of five sided rectangles, heavy at the top like Cuneiform marks. Almost regular rectangles, but for the anvil-like protrusion that joins them. What does it sound like to separate these shapes? In the minds eye it is likely a silent picture. They curl away from one another like distant ship sails. If we attempt this in reality, we can have a one-dimensional experience that is more visceral and percussive:

On a traditional pair of suit pants we can begin at the already-cleaved meeting place between the two back panels, carefully prying apart the interlocked layers of the waistband structure. A light striped silk is inside,

⁷ (see: Interstellar, 2015)

with a layer of coarsely woven non-stretch rattan interfacing, and finally the main outer fabric which is probably a blend of viscose, cotton, and polyester in black, grey, or navy. Splayed apart, they are like broken book bindings. Once the central stitch is opened at the top, we can grip the two sides, making a Y shape. Look closely at the threads; no more than three stitches will be visible at any time, bridging the arms of this Y shape with fragile lines of polyester. On severing the thread of the outermost pair, a dozen or so can be pulled apart with the hands, a popping, ripping snapping sound which draws to an end when another thread needs to be cut. As we gradually travel along and dissolve this imaginary line that bridges the panels of fabric, we arrive at the meeting point below the crotch. The crackling sound of snapping thread slows down as the denser architecture of this meeting place tries to halt the ripping and renting. Leaning to one side and looking ever closer, some tools can separate the clenched folds of this structure, until we have broken through to the front of this parting line. Lurching towards the zip, we slow down to assess another complicated meeting place of interlocking panels and folds. Pulling the zip away from the split fly, most of the work is now done, and once the rest is separated, we can use the full strength of our arms to separate the left and right pant, then further tear open the inseams and out seams. We now have four useless panels of fabric. Four flags heralding sudden nakedness.

Step back from your hard work and look at the four similar shapes before you. These, like Goethe's *Urpflanze*, represent the basic form of trousers, the four stem cells of this now unfamiliar garment. In Robert Crumb's *Genesis*, we see his stocky Levantine characters rip apart their tunics in moments of extreme grief: "They rent their garments!" (Crumb, 2009). In modern life, we might be required to use the scissors supplied with an AED to cut open the shirt or sweater of a person suffering cardiac arrest. In our case, we can see this traversal and creation of lines, one dimensional movement, as a means of writing shortcuts into the architecture of our garb. If '*measure is the act of creating the world as a catalogue of cuts*' (Campagna, 2018), then we need a camera, not of metal but language, to witness and interface with this world that exists in the rips and cuts between designed materials.

D. Dandy, She-Dandy

Both a literary genre and vocation emerging at the pre-dawn of modernism, the Dandy's skill lies in the study, interpretation and embodiment of forms and designs (**fig. 7**). Theirs is a literature of first impressions made on the streets and interiors of the metropolis. See: Lisa Robertson 'Baudelaire Fractal', Alexander Pushkin 'Yevgeny Onegin'. I will not describe these writings further here; it is an approach that cannot be summarised or abbreviated. The minutiae and motion of description is a technique in itself which I attempt to use in these pages. Referring back to the camera, the Dandy provides a technology for the reading of forms: a *soft camera*, which is biased and judgemental by nature, and using the irregular pixels of the soul, can produce language-images of mixed and fluctuating density.

fig. 7 [Extracts transcribed from The Last Mugler Interview, Loic Prigent]

"And above all it really struck me, that's when I realised the impact of clothes. The way the nuns dress, everything it represents, how it isolates them, how it brings them together, all that. This was my first way of feeling the impact of the clothes."

Q: What did you wear at the time?

"It was very elaborate, very studied and very fun. That's how I let off steam."

Every day, a different kind of delirium?

"Obviously, every day, a different version. It depends on the day. It was a permanent show. I was a showman. That's how i got my start in fashion. People hired me by looking at me."

What were you wearing when you got hired? What was your look that day?

"I think I was in the middle of my d'Artagnan Quattrocento period. You know, tights with big stripes like in the renaissance, the shell (grabs crotch, indicating codpiece), d'Artagnan hat, red d'Artagnan boots. Yes, I think that was it. It was really a period when people expressed themselves through clothes. It was really an art and a form of communication" (Loïc Prigent, 2024)

E. Enlarge, Elastic

fig. 8 [Avatar: The Way of Water, 2022, dir. James Cameron]

A scantily clad white youth is seen in profile with long blonde dreadlocks, body paint, and a loincloth. He is gently, artificially held down atop the central table of a futuristic interrogation room. Standing over him is a tall man, with blue skin and elongated limbs, in flattering slim army fatigues and stretchy vest. His crew cut tapers off to a long braided ponytail. A second tail swings from behind him. His digitally rendered hand is big enough to cover the boy's entire torso, and what is a table-sized bench for the boy, is a bench-sized table for the alien man. Behind them, the inner surface of a one way mirror reflects everything but the camera.

With minimal effort, images are stretched and blown up in digital space. grotesquely warped forms proliferate, by accident or choice, and carry with them an implied slapstick humour, a wordless onomatopoeic sound of stretching is emitted from the low resolution faces of humans and animals that carry our feelings across the internet. We cannot see the maths beneath this funhouse-mirror effect, and even more obscure are the analogue processes of manipulation that preceded them. Elasticity itself seems to be a quality that is foreign to the past; to what could Dürer compare his early experiments in anamorphic drawing? How does the image itself experience these growth pains? Prior to this, an oblique view was needed: step to the side of a portrait of Henry VIII and he will start to look more like Henry VII. In *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed deepens the scope of obliqueness and follows terms of sexual orientation back to their spatial roots, reconciling them with experiences of alienation and belonging in contested spaces. In her vocabulary, the queer subject is *slanted*, magnetised tangentially away from straight vision, sites, and modes of interaction: "When one thing is 'out of line' then it is not just that thing that appears oblique but the world itself might appear on a slant." What this implies for us, if we narrow the scope again, is that an encounter with a changed image changes the receiver. When we stoop down and close one eye to align with the anamorphic skull in *The Ambassadors*, we are in turn warping ourselves in order to accommodate this elasticated figure.

What kind of enlargement happens in the space of the pants? In the gulf of time that separates the codpieces donned by Henry VIII (1491-1547) and Gene Simmons ('KISS makeup period' 1973-1983), less direct

approaches are taken by those who want to cast a longer shadow (**fig. 8**). Ahmed writes of how '*women's bodies are perceived as vessels 'ready' to be filled by men. The woman's body becomes the tool in which man "extends himself".*' (Ahmed, 2006) If this is possible, what other vessels can man enter or appropriate in pursuit of expansion, and on what natural resource is this force of expansion fed? We seem to be at the tail end of a 'big pants cycle' in menswear; crowds of middle-schoolers gather in baggy jeans that soak up the rainwater, meanwhile those of us who discarded our last pair of skinnies over a decade ago are starting to forget what our legs look like. A bulging surplus of expansion makes its way slowly down the demographic pipeline, but where did it come from? We can watch trends swing between between the top and bottom of the power structure; the disenfranchised try to access dignity through reinterpretations of formal attire, meanwhile the sheltered simulate the precarity of 'real life' with bohemian or 'edgy' signifiers, codes accessed via the Other. In either direction these changes are driven by the need to differentiate from the centre, to expand or contract, becoming an oblique silhouette of what is familiar and acceptable.

A short genealogy of enlarged style codes:

Cybergoth < Hardcore Rap < Northern Soul < Zoot Suiters < Oxford Bags

F. Finale, Fold

Now we try something new; reconstructing the mechanism of Daguerre's double diorama stage (see: Gernsheim and Gernsheim, 1968), we cast Gene Wilder and Joel Grey as unlikely roommates on the shared soundstage of their respective big-budget Dandy films: *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* (1971, Rated U) and *Cabaret* (1972, Rated X). *Wonka* takes place in a non-specific city which is neither German or American, remaining an approximation of the two, and it seems to quote from their shared history of industrialism; big bright factories chug out pristine clouds of vapour into a blue sky, clean cars roll across fresh new roads. The buildings are smooth and cartoonish.⁸ Wilder plays the titular role of Willy Wonka, an isolated chocolate maker who is trying to change the world with technologically advanced candy, and the power of music. In *Cabaret*, Joel Grey is the Master of Ceremonies at the Kit Kat Club, the (fictional) last home of decadence in interwar Berlin. In gaudy makeup and tailcoat, he leads raunchy dance numbers with a trusted band of chorus girls and burlesque performers. Liza Minnelli is his star act, a magnetic young American who is drawn into a bisexual love triangle as the National Socialists begin to dismantle the scene around them.⁹ The interiors of *Wonka* and *Cabaret* were shot in tandem at Bavaria Film Studios in Munich, leading to conflict between the directors as space and time began to run out (Garebian, 2011). Conveniently for the stars, chocolate is made during the day, while the cabaret action takes place after hours, so our reluctant roommates only see each other in passing. We catch one performer stepping into the sunlight as the other takes a bow:

fig. 9/10 [Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory/Cabaret, 1971/2, dir. Mel Stuart/Bob Fosse]

A small ornate door opens from the anteroom of a grand factory, which stands beyond a cobbled driveway and large iron gates. A leg and a cane tentatively emerge from behind it. After a dramatic pause, the Master of Ceremonies swiftly folds his entire body in half, executing a curt bow to the silent audience. Upright once more, his slight frame, in pristine evening wear, turns 180 degrees and exits the stage. Wonka steps into the driveway, hobbling across the red carpet, while the crowd of children and journalists waits with bated breath. The lights shut off, leaving only a dim oval

⁸ see Adolf Loos, 'Enstuckung'

⁹ The film is based on a musical, which is in turn based on a play entitled *I Am a Camera* (Druten, 1995), titled after the first line of the original Isherwood novel: "I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking." (Isherwood, 2011)

spotlight, which pans slowly across the glittering curtains as the band plays a subdued tune. Wonka's cane is stuck between two stones in the ground and he falls forward in a smooth arc, as if instantly dying. As the crowd gasps he tucks his body forward and somersaults back onto his feet, emerging before the camera frame grinning to the ecstatic roars of hundreds of children from around the world. The camera pans beyond the curtains as the music fades to a snare roll, and the screen fills with the reflections of the crowd which slither across a dented and uneven mirror surface. Wonka dusts off his beige suit and places the brown velvet top hat on his frizzy blonde hair.¹⁰ His blue eyes twinkle as he slowly opens the gates to the factory. Superimposed, these strange gestures of passing and greeting try to answer the riddle: what's the difference between rocking and rolling?

¹⁰ A handwritten letter from Wilder to the director dated July 23rd (1970) reads:

"Dear Mel,

I've just received the costume sketches. I'll tell you everything I think, without censoring, and you take from my opinion what you like. I assume that the designer took his impressions from the book and didn't know, naturally, who would be playing Willy. And I think, for a character in general, they're lovely sketches.

I love the main thing - the velvet jacket and I mean to show by my sketch the exact same color. But I've added two large pockets to take away from the svelt, feminine line. (Also in case of a few props.) I also think the vest is both appropriate and lovely. And I love the same white, flowing shirt and the white gloves. Also the lighter colored inner silk lining of the jacket.

What I don't like is the precise pin pointing in place and time as this costume does. I don't think of Willy as an eccentric who holds on to his 1912 Dandy's Sunday suit and wears it in 1970, but rather as just an eccentric — where there's no telling what he'll do or where he ever found his get-up — except that it strangely fits him: Part of this world, part of another. A vain man who knows colors that suit him, yet, with all the oddity, has strangely good taste. Something mysterious, yet undefined.

I'm not a ballet master who skips along with little mincy steps. So, as you see, I've suggested ditching the Robert Helpmann trousers. Jodhpurs to me belong more to the dancing master. But once elegant now almost baggy trousers — baggy through preoccupation with more important things — is character. Slime green trousers are icky. But sand colored trousers are just as unobtrusive for your camera, but tasteful.

The hat is terrific, but making it 2 inches shorter would make it more special. Also a light blue felt hat-band to match with the same light blue fluffy bow tie shows a man who knows how to compliment his blue eyes. To match the shoes with the jacket is fancy. To match the shoes with the hat is taste.

Hope all is well. Talk to you soon.

*All my best,
Gene." (Getell, 2016)*

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