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Masculinity, Identity and Body Politics in the Interzone: A Queer Perspective on Raf Simons's Critical Fashion Practices (1995-2005)

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Abstract

Belgian designer Raf Simons is internationally known for his leadership in avant-garde menswear and his willingness to break with conventional perceptions of masculinity. Nevertheless, his intervention in this field has not been the subject of a thorough academic investigation to date. Focusing specifically on the revisioning of the male body and men's fashion in Simons's critical fashion practices, this article aims to offer an original reading of the designer's work. Drawing on queer theory, I will theorize the image of the interzone, which has been dear to the designer's *modus operandi*, as a queer trope that allows Simons to critically engage with masculinity, identity and body politics. By building a theoretical bridge between the fields of fashion studies and queer theory, the article seeks to expand the literature on Belgian fashion and the Antwerp fashion scene, providing a perspective on its relationship with masculinities, the body and queerness.

Keywords

Raf Simons, interzone, queer, male body, menswear

Introduction

During the last decades, the field of menswear has arguably come into its own, liberating itself from its previous role of womenswear's "little brother" or from its classic, timeless and modernist approach. This evolution toward independence has not only reflected interesting changes in the socio-cultural definitions of masculinity but has offered the possibility to finally look at men's fashion as "a site of radicalism and resistance" (McCauley Bowstead 2018, 29).

In this landscape, a pivotal role has been played by Belgian designer Raf Simons, known worldwide for his redefinitions of the relationship between fashion, masculinity and the male body through his iconic subcultural, post-punk and youth aesthetic. However, despite the international recognition of his influence on contemporary menswear, Simons has not been at the center of a thorough academic investigation concerning masculinity yet. With some scholarship focusing on his interdisciplinary approach to fashion (Rees-Roberts 2015; Kessler 2015), Simons's revision of masculinity and the male body still remains an underexplored and promising field of research.

This article seeks to open up a critical discussion of Simons's renegotiation of masculinity, the male body and menswear in the first decade of his career, a period that is considered to be crucial for the evolution of the brand. In order to do so, I aim to develop a theoretical contribution through the conceptualization of an image dear to the designer's *modus operandi*: the interzone. Indeed, through the use of queer theory, the interzone will be considered as a queer trope, a zone of possibilities, an intersectional site of Simons's fashion practice, in which masculinity and the male body are rethought and renegotiated.

The suggested theorization will be supported by an empirical investigation of the designer's work between 1995 and 2005. More specifically, the analysis will be divided into two parts whose aim it is to understand the modalities through which Simons has reacted, on the one hand, to normative understandings of the male body and, on the other hand, to a static conception of menswear and the male silhouette. In conducting my research, I will not be claiming that Raf Simons's menswear is visually and overtly queer. My principal interest, rather, is to position the designer's work in a queer tradition, understood here as a flexible conceptual space that problematizes the limits and meanings imposed by normative culture while expanding its semantic horizons.

Methodologically, the article is based on a qualitative visual and textual analysis of audio-visual materials and on an object-based analysis of garments belonging to the period under study, both collected during archival research at MoMu, the Antwerp fashion museum, and at the Hasselt ModeMuseum.

In exploring Raf Simons's intricate relationship with masculinity, the male body and menswear, the article seeks to provide an original perspective on the Belgian designer, understanding his contribution through the image of the interzone. Furthermore, I intend to move the perspective on Simons away from the most common association of his work with youth culture, which, however relevant, has become "a kind of stigma" (de Looz 2019).

Raf Simons 1995-2005: Contextualizing the designer's operational field

In his twenty-five-years-long career, Belgian designer Raf Simons has become one of the leading figures in contemporary fashion, both through his eponymous brand and through the creative direction of different fashion houses (Jil Sander 2005-2012, Dior 2012-2015, Calvin Klein 2016-2018 and Prada from 2020). His personal vision of fashion, which distinguishes him throughout his career, finds its roots in a multidisciplinary dimension that brings together design, architecture and art, influenced by an educational trajectory which differs from the more conventional one undertaken by his Antwerp fashion colleagues.

This vision is accompanied by an intricate, nonconventional perspective on masculinity and the male body through a redefinition of menswear, concepts that are at the core of this article. However, before focusing on Simons's creative practices in relation to masculinity, this section aims to introduce the designer's career to better understand the context that made his fashion debut not only possible but also revolutionary and acclaimed.

Born in 1968 in Neerpelt, in northeast Belgium, not far from the Dutch border, Simons spent his teenage years between Catholic school and alternative music, two realities that would

have an important impact on his later artistic imagery. Before landing into the fashion world, Simons studied Industrial Design and Furniture Design at the LUCA School of Arts in Genk, where he graduated in 1991. The year before, he was hired for an internship at the flamboyantly queer “Antwerp Six” member Walter Van Beirendonck’s studio to work on the design of the showroom displays and invitations, a job that he did until 1993. This experience became a decisive moment for the development of his career, since it was during these years that Simons understood he could find an equilibrium between form and meaning through fashion.

Following Van Beirendonck to the seasonal appointments at Paris Fashion Week, Simons was led to a pivotal encounter that brought him to completely reconsider his vision of fashion. If before he thought fashion was rather superficial, all glitz and glamour (O’Mahony 2016), the Martin Margiela spring/summer 1990 collection, also known as the “White Show,” became Simons’s decisive turn to fashion, because it allowed him to discover how a fashion show could become an emotional, intimate and immersive experience.

I cried. I was so ashamed, “Fucking hell, why am I crying at a fashion show?” I knew they were glamorous events from TV, but when I saw Martin’s show, I was nailed to the ground. It was so socially aware, psychological, and surreal. At that show I said, “That’s what I am going to do.” But I didn’t tell anybody else. I didn’t tell my friends, Walter, my parents, nobody. (de Looz 2019)

Convinced that he should pursue a career in fashion, Raf Simons presented his first tentative menswear collection in 1994 after Linda Loppa, Head of the Antwerp Royal Academy fashion department, suggested that he follow a training with her father Renzo Loppa, a well-respected Antwerp tailor, and take up fashion professionally. To better understand Simons’s contribution to contemporary fashion, it is important to contextualize his operational field, more specifically the changes brought by 1990s fashion.

Although in the 1990s the fashion industry may be said to have shifted to a fully global scale, especially through the emergence of corporate giants like LVMH and Kering (English 2013), the period also witnessed a recurrent reaction against the conspicuous consumption promoted in the 1980s, with a particular focus on the idea of authenticity. Caroline Evans describes this movement as

[...] fashion “at the edge,” fashion which exists at its own margins. [...] Often permeated by death, disease and dereliction, its imagery articulated the anxieties as well as the pleasures of identity, alienation and loss against the unstable backdrop of rapid social, economic and technological change at the end of the twentieth century. [...] Conceptually as well as stylistically experimental, this strand of fashion design addressed anxieties and speculations about the body and identity. (Evans 2003, 4-5)

Beyond reflecting the collapse of older epistemological certainties in the West, this subversive side of fashion assimilated the problematizations brought by postmodernism. The latter influence is reflected, for instance, in the rejection of “previously meaningful coded references to race, gender, status” but also by a “disregard for assumptions about the naturalness of relationships between the structure of garments and the structure of the body” (Morgado 1996, 46-7). Several designers became protagonists of this scene, such as the London-based Alexander Lee McQueen and John Galliano, a number of Japanese designers (i.e. Rei Kawakubo, Yohji Yamamoto), who had already started their innovations in the 1970s (Kawamura 2004), and several Belgian designers.

After being historically influenced by Parisian fashion, during the 1990s Belgium built a name in the international fashion world, partly thanks to institutional and state support and partly due to the impact of the so-called “Antwerp Six” by the end of the 1980s (Teunissen 2011). The latter were followed by a second generation of designers, which included Raf

Simons, A.F. Vandevorst, Veronique Branquinho and Haider Ackermann, who between the years 1995 and 2000 “offered a kind of antidote to the showmanship, and ultimately the commercialism, favoured by the big corporate brands” (Horyn 2007, 112).

Such a contextualization allows us to understand the climate in which Raf Simons started to develop his vision of fashion and his career, which were also favored by the rise of “[a]ttention-grabbing collections and a sharper focus on male models [that] have led to greater exposure of menswear on the international catwalks, in fashion photography and in magazine coverage since 2000” (English 2013, 159). Indeed, the increasing interest in menswear and the affirmation of a more conceptual approach to fashion, intended as “the effective transmission of ideas, innovation, experimentations [and] challenges it poses to its audiences and wearers” (Clark 2012, 74), gave shape to that territory in which Simons managed to develop his critical and material perspective on masculinity. Thus, it seems advisable to position the designer and his work in this larger landscape, in which fashion is used as an arena to discuss and challenge ideas on identity categories, the body, and more broadly on societal issues.

As an emerging brand, Raf Simons entered the world of fashion through showroom presentations, in both Milan and Paris, and video presentations, which even today remain significant to the understanding of the brand identity. Indeed, in these locally produced videos, Simons already introduces his fascination with subcultural bodies and identities, together with a predilection for ambiguity, including the casting of gender-fluid models, and for sci-fi and horror imagery, as the early collections *We Only Come Out At Night* (fall/winter 1996-97) and *How To Talk To Your Teen* (spring/summer 1997) clearly illustrate.

In the following part I aim to theoretically develop the idea of the interzone, which may be regarded as fundamental to Simons’s work. More specifically, I will do so creating a parallel between Simons’s conceptual fashion and queer theory, in order to demonstrate both how the interzone can be considered to have a queer dimension in which it is possible to rethink fashion

and how its interactions with masculinity, the male body and menswear provide a theoretical framework to reconsider the relationship between these criteria.

The interzone: Conceptualizing a queer dimension for fashion

Fashion journalist Cathy Horyn, who has extensively reported on Raf Simons's work, defines him as a "fashion mystery" (Horyn 2005). This interpretation does not only imply his shyness and personality, but it also reflects an artistic state of mind, the different and tangled ways in which he operates. Indeed, his approach to fashion can be considered highly intelligent, psychological and unconventional. It is, in other words, norm-breaking and subversive, terms that are also at the heart of the queer theory simultaneously emerging in the 1990s. At the root of what we can define as Simons's overall attitude towards fashion and his artistic practice, the designer recognizes the presence of a habitual element that he calls "the interzone." In an interview with *i-D* magazine, he affirms its relevance as follows:

The interzone is a very important idea for me. [...] I think it's interesting when you cannot really explain something, where there is a very strong attraction to a certain thing but you can't really say why, you haven't a clue. [...] I don't really want to dig and dig for the meaning. I like the mysterious element to it, that's part of the interzone. (Furniss in Jones 2013, 91)

According to Rees-Roberts, this image seems to capture "fashion's inherent porosity (the in-between space connecting art, design, and commodity culture) and the importance of interdisciplinary activity to Simons's creative practice" (2015, 18), which he develops in collaboration with artists such as Peter Saville, Peter De Potter and Sterling Ruby. As demonstrated by Marco Pecorari's research on fashion ephemera, these spaces of intersection, or "zones-in-between," blur the boundaries and stimulate interaction with other disciplines,

creating a new fashion praxis (Pecorari 2014). Thus, Simons's interzone appears as an imaginative space in which his creative practices exist in a boundless dimension that goes beyond any one specific discipline and in which multiple convergences take form.

In order to understand the genealogy of this image, it is important to highlight that it has not been coined by the Belgian designer himself. Indeed, its origin can be identified in American queer writer William Burroughs's work, followed by post-punk British band Joy Division's later appropriation, with their song *Interzone* featured in the *Unknown Pleasures* (1979) album. The former introduces the term in his controversial postmodern cult classic *Naked Lunch* (1959), where it refers to his four-year experience with the use of drugs and the lack of authorities' control over his homosexuality in the city of Tangier, which between 1923 and 1956 was defined as an "International Zone" governed separately from the rest of Morocco by a dissolute collection of foreign governments (Gutteridge 1957). In a letter to his friends and colleagues Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, the Beat writers who visited him during his stay and helped him with editing the novel, Burroughs states:

The meaning of Interzone, its space-time location is at a point where 3-dimensional fact merges into dreams, and dreams erupt into the real world. In Interzone dreams can kill... and solid objects and persons can be as unreal as dreams. (Burroughs in Eburne 1997, 74)

Resisting total identification either as vision of a real city or as an allegory of a mental state, according to Eburne, in Burroughs's work the interzone is "neither an inner space nor an outer space. Rather, it is a between space, a crossroads at which textuality, alterity, and identity collide" (1997, 74). Thus, this indefinable dimension emerges as a metaphorical and imaginary space in which the real and the unreal flow into each other and become indistinguishable. Consequently, we can claim that the interzone is characterized by a fluid ontological status that questions categorizations, definitions and boundaries.

William Burroughs is known to have been a source of inspiration for Ian Curtis's lyrical compositions. The Joy Division's singer found in Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* and in the trope of the interzone a dimension that resonated with the band's artistic nature. The idea of the interzone is not only present in the intrinsic linkages between different materials in the creation of the band's sound, vision and meaning (Power et al. 2018), but it also reaches its peak of parallelism with Burroughs's work in the homonymous song included in the *Unknown Pleasures* (1979) album.

The urban environments described by the American writer find their correspondence in the urban malaise evoked in the song *Interzone*, in which "the lyrics refer to inner cityscapes, using a decaying urban setting as a metaphor for alienation and desperation, a sense of being transplanted to an uncanny place that is home, but at the same time feels like an outlandish, strange place" (Schütte 2018: 66). In Joy Division's interpretation, Burroughs's fictional city of Interzone becomes an undefined force in constant motion that affects an aimless urban wanderer, as Curtis sings: "I walked through the city limits [...] Attracted by some force within it [...] And I walked round and round, nail me to a train [...] Trying to find a clue, trying to find a way to get out."

The uncanny and fluctuating psychogeography presented in the British band's *Interzone* reflects Burroughs's vision of an indefinable dimension where boundaries are blurred and individuals suspended in an imaginary place operating under its own laws. As Greenwood and Tarpey (2018) note, an appreciation of Michel Foucault's concept of "heterotopia" provides a useful framework to better grasp both Burroughs's and Ian Curtis's imagery. According to the French philosopher, "heterotopia permits an exploration of how nonhegemonic spaces exist in an undefined dimension as a precise mental-physical state" (Greenwood and Tarpey 2018: 156).

Interested in the idea of space in contemporary culture, Foucault claims that heterotopias are a sort of “counter-site [where] all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (1986: 24). Thus, heterotopias juxtapose “places that are opposed to all the others, that are destined in some way to efface them, to neutralize them or to purify them” (Foucault 1966), becoming spaces of critical resistance. When we apply this framework to both William Burroughs’s and Joy Division’s use of the trope of the interzone, we can understand the appeal of the interzone as that of an ontologically transitive space, whose internal dynamics remain boundless and instable, providing a territory in which it becomes possible to deconstruct meanings.

If the extant critical analysis of this concept in relation to Simons, as suggested, focuses on his multifaceted fashion practices, in this article I aim to extend the understanding of the interzone to its relationship with identity, masculinity and the body, in order to show Simons’s contributions to the redefinition of menswear. The designer’s difficulty in defining his favorite term reveals a fundamental epistemic insecurity at the base of the interzone, which seems to be simultaneously a source of stimulation and inspiration for the designer. Indeed, in not being a fully developed concept, the interzone presents itself as an inspirational trope around which Raf Simons can organize his artistic inventions, while also reflecting the epistemic opacity at the heart of 1990s queer theory. Hence, I argue that the interzone can also be defined as a queer trope and its conceptualization developed in parallel with queer theory.

Since its emergence as a field of investigation in the 1990s, queer theory has been exponentially growing as a critical impulse aimed at destabilizing and rejecting the normative understanding of reality, mostly concerning gender and sexuality regimes. According to one of its leading proponents, David Halperin:

Queer is by definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers.* It is an identity without an essence. [...] it describes a horizon of possibility whose precise extent and heterogeneous scope cannot in principle be delimited in advance. (Halperin 1995, 62, original emphasis)

With its introduction in academia in 1990, following Teresa de Lauretis's formulation on the occasion of a conference organized at the University of California, queer theory aims to suggest "another discursive horizon, another way of thinking the sexual" (de Lauretis 1991, iv). More specifically, queer theory interrogates the field of lesbian and gay studies' limitations in relation to its dominant discursive articulations about a general "gay" and "lesbian" identity, which entail the risk of naturalization, essentialization and assimilationism. Typically, the use of the term *queer* marks a certain critical distance from the more stable and convenient definitions of *gay* and *lesbian* (de Lauretis 1991, iv). As Jagose states in her classic introduction to the field:

Both the lesbian and gay movements were committed fundamentally to the notion of identity politics in assuming identity as the necessary prerequisite for effective political intervention. Queer, on the other hand, exemplifies a more mediated relation to categories of identification. Access to the post-structuralist theorisation of identity as provisional and contingent, coupled with a growing awareness of the limitations of identity categories in terms of political representation, enabled queer to emerge as a new form of personal identification and political organisation. (Jagose 1996, 77-78)

In declining any generally acceptable definition, queer can be considered as a category in the process of becoming, whose elasticity and very mobility allow it to become a "zone of possibilities" (Edelman 1994, 114) detached from any specific identity category. Therefore,

what we can find at the core of queer theory is a constructionist problematizing of any supposedly universal term, whose aim is to denaturalize the dominant understanding of sexual identity. As argued by Hall and Jagose:

Queer studies' commitment to non-normativity and anti-identitarianism, coupled with its refusal to define its proper field of operation in relation to any fixed content, means that, while prominently organized around sexuality, it is potentially attentive to any socially consequential difference that contributes to regimes of sexual normalization. (Hall and Jagose 2013, xvi)

Thus, although its ambiguity and indeterminacy make it a difficult object to study, queer theory aspires "to open a wider space [...] for reflections of a theoretical order, to introduce a problematic of multiple differences into what had tended to be a monolithic, homogenizing discourse of (homo)sexual difference, and to offer a possible escape from the hegemony of white, male, middle-class models of analysis" (Halperin 2003, 340). As a consequence, queer theory offers a critical open space characterized by "a relation of resistance to whatever constitutes the normal" (Jagose 1996, 99).

Bearing in mind this impulse at the heart of the term queer, I argue that the interzone and Raf Simons's perception of this trope strongly resonate with queer theory's intrinsic tendency to evade programmatic description and to reject definitions. Queer theory offers us a historically relevant theoretical context for framing Simons's trope of the interzone, while helping us to unpack it. In what follows, then, I aim to expand the conceptualization of the interzone to a queer understanding of the renegotiation of identity and body boundaries. More specifically, my investigation wants to address this issue locating the dressed body in the interzone, reflecting on fashion as a form of resistance against normative regimes of identity and the body.

The power of the concept of queer to open up new narratives and alternatives coincides, as stated by Halberstam, with the development of other logics of location, movement and identification (2005, 1). Queer theory's adherence to all aspects of non- and anti-normative cultural production and reception indeed allows the concept of identity to undertake multiple trajectories, defying its crystallization and sensitizing us to what Diana Fuss defines as the "precarious state of identity" (1989, 100).

The deconstruction of a monolithic understanding of identity seems to be a fundamental aspect of Raf Simons's work as well. As we can read from the brand's mission, "[t]he most important message [the designer] wants to communicate is: PRIDE IN INDIVIDUALITY [...] presenting a radically different image of masculinity"¹. This position is also confirmed in an interview with *Dazed*, in which Simons states: "I see there is a lot of behaviour in men's fashion, which is systematic. [...] I'd prefer to come from out of the world to push [men] and give them all the possibility" (Burley 2013). Therefore, a vision of masculinity as a notion that is to be persistently investigated and not defined emerges as a fundamental criterion in the designer's critical fashion practice.

Moving the critical understanding of the interzone in Raf Simons's work from his interdisciplinary approach to his vision of masculinity allows us to engage more directly with the designer's relationship with menswear and the male body. Furthermore, it helps us to position these concepts at the heart of the interzone, while offering an occasion to theoretically reflect on the relationship between queerness, fashion, identity and the body. Thinking about the dressed body in the interzone, as I have previously theorized, not only reveals the plural and transitory reality of fashion, but also unpacks its complexity as a dimension in which normalizing cultural discourses on gender identity and the body take shape and as a site in which the anti-normative project of queer theory can find terrain for political action. In this

¹ <https://rafsimons.com/about>

sense, the queer trope of the interzone has the capacity to be a valuable lens through which to analyze the process of denaturalizing fashion's cultural meanings and to decenter static and stable conceptions of the dressed body.

The suggested theorization shows its innovative contribution on different levels. First, it introduces the idea of the interzone directly into the realm of queer theory. Second, via a theorization of this trope from a fashion perspective, it becomes possible to bring fashion and its relationship with the body to the heart of queer studies, which has often been criticized for its insufficient attention to this topic. Finally, I seek to build a bridge between the fields of fashion studies and queer studies by offering a critical example of how fashion can be a useful lens of analysis through which to engage with identity and body politics.

In the next part of this article, the proposed theoretical framework will be of help in the empirical analysis of Simons's work and in expanding the theorization of the designer's interzone. To do so, I will focus on how the interzone can be seen as a queer trope in which masculinity blurs into an opaque and fluid concept. Specifically, the suggested analysis aims to discuss how Raf Simons thoroughly reconsiders the male body and menswear through a critical revision of male aesthetic boundaries.

The male body in the interzone: The body politics of Raf Simons's concave beauty

In 1985, journalist Michael Gross reflected on the remarkable influence of fitness on menswear in *The New York Times*, claiming that men “are getting into better shape and seeking clothes that display their accomplishment,” and referring to men's fashion advertisements that had arguably turned the muscled body into a new “erogenous zone” (Gross 1985). Almost twenty years later, this relationship seemed to have deeply changed, when in 2003 the chic silhouette moved to the complete opposite, the skinny (Voight 2003).

The emergence of the slim silhouette as a new fashionable male archetype does not simply represent a turnaround in fashion, but it also reflects deep cultural changes in the cultural and social perception of masculinity. Indeed, considering the wider history of the visual representation of the male body, which has been characterized by the omnipresence of the strong, virile and muscular body, the skinny type enters the fashion world as a break with the past, and thus also as a promise for new types of representation.

Belgian designer Raf Simons can be seen as one of the main instigators of this visual and cultural shift in the representation of the male body in the fashion world. His challenge to the “one-size-fits-all” kind of masculinity was not only an aesthetic choice, a reflection of the designer’s sense of authenticity inspired by his everyday life in Antwerp, but also a conscious positioning “to counter fashion’s muscle-bound dictate at the time” (Voight 2003). As the designer states in the documentary *Antifashion* (2012):

It just started as “Okay, I want to show what a man can be also.” I wanted to make what I wanted to wear and what an environment of people around me wanted to wear, which was the opposite of our perception of what men were wearing back in the days. We could not identify our bodies with how the bodies looked from the people who were at that time representing fashion. Huge and sun tanned and muscled and blunt and very Americano. So, we went the opposite, you know, like skinny, and very adolescent, and you know, like white [...].²

In this section of the article, I intend to explore the meanings behind Simons’s fashionable body. The latter will be considered as a reaction against a normative perception of the male body, which is here contested and reconfigured, acquiring different significations. My

² *Antifashion* (2012), documentary directed by Olivier Nicklaus, produced by Arte France.

empirical analysis brings together the designer's queer trope of the interzone, and its anti-normative project, with the idea of the male body as a surface to be read in search of cultural meanings (Bordo 1999), in order to highlight the strategies through which Simons reacted to normative standards. However, in order to fully understand the Belgian designer's contribution to the cultural and visual redefinition of the male body, I believe a brief detour concerning the cultural and historical structures behind the male body, in both its social reality and fashion, is called for.

Looking at the body from a constructivist perspective reveals how its corporeality is the terrain in which the biological/material and the social intersect (Buchbinder 2013; Douglas 1996; Mauss 1968). To argue that bodies are socially constructed means that their signification and identification depend upon the particular culture and context in which they are located. The body is directly involved in and formed through an engagement with cultural regimes, outside of which the body cannot make sense or be interpretable (Butler 1990).

One of the main social-discursive categories through which these cultural regimes make sense of the body is that of gender. In his theorization of the concept of *habitus* (i.e. any form of bodily disposition or comportment that encodes a certain cultural understanding), cultural sociologist Pierre Bourdieu defines genders as manifestations of a “sexually characterized habitus” (2001, 3), which materially and symbolically characterize the male and female body in a binary and dichotomous way. The effects of the binary understanding of the body can be grasped most readily when we focus on the way bodies are represented. The reality of genders reveals itself first and foremost in the reality effects produced by their representation. Thus, by analyzing the ways in which bodies are depicted, we can better understand how cultural products contribute toward the circulation of male and female stereotypes that show us how to behave, to move and to connect with each other (de Lauretis 1999). As far as the male body is concerned, its representation has historically been a testament to power and authority, rather

than to intrinsic physical beauty (Berger 2008), especially through characteristics such as muscularity, activity and virility.

Applying this perspective to our previous contextualization of 1980s and 1990s fashion is revelatory for the understanding of Raf Simons’s intervention. McCauley Bowstead argues that “[a]s we move into the 1980s, contradictions between increasingly sharply polarized versions of masculinity and representations of the male body emerge” (2018, 83). Indeed, despite the presence of an alternative experimental horizon on different and more subversive masculinities (Cole 2020; Jobling 2006; Nixon 1996), 1980s and 1990s mainstream men’s fashion seemed to be obsessed with the bulging muscular body. The latter, according to Jobling, becomes a “phallic body,” an ambiguous symbol of power that is “continuously reiterated so as to sediment patriarchal ideas of masculinity and, by extension, femininity” (2006, 172). However, during the nineties, the body became the main site through which the normative and mainstream standard was rejected.

As Rebecca Arnold states, “[c]ollective fears are reflected in the clammy skin of models” (1999, 285), highlighting a new type of embodiment that refuses the conspicuousness and the glamour of the 1980s and 1990s mainstream fashion representation, a reaction that also involves the male body. In due course, the desirable and sexualized model of the muscular body was challenged by a more ambiguous, fluid and androgynous archetype, as the case of Raf Simons shows (see Table 1).

Normative male body	Raf Simons’s preferential body type
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Muscular • Binary (male vs. female) • Eroticized • Conforming • Strong • Mainstream • Alluding to male myths • Static 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skinny • Gender fluid • De-eroticized • Alienated • Fragile • Subcultural • Demythologizing male myths • Nomadic

Table 1. Raf Simons's body iconography in opposition to hegemonic representations of the normative and mainstream body.

In the designer's more ambiguous, less containable interzone the normative corporal capital of the male body and its associated values are rejected, giving space to a transitory, almost nomadic, reconfiguration of the body. In fact, despite the centrality of the skinny body as a counteraction against normative standards, Simons's preferential body type evades fixed configurations, changing throughout the first decade of the designer's career.

Here it is worth recalling that Simons had already displayed an interest in figurations of the body before entering the world of fashion. In 1991, for his graduation collection, he presented a project titled "Corpo," after *corpus*, the Latin for body. It consisted of a series of accessory cabinets with a skeleton of four metal tubes "dressed" in different materials in the form of a corset (De Schauvre 2019). Presenting parallels to fashion in the furniture pieces, "Corpo" can be regarded as Simons's first fashion project, already showing the important interdisciplinary quality of the designer's interzone.

The Belgian designer's first attempt at fashion per se is represented by the fall/winter 1995-96 collection. Conscious of his brand identity and attentive to his ideal of masculinity from his earliest works onwards, Simons's first collection already displays an intentional ambiguity and confusion from a gender point of view. Taking the form of a video, the presentation displays two male models who walk back and forth and change outfits in front of a white backdrop – whose neutrality I suggest could visually represent the unspecified and boundless reality of the interzone. Although here the male body is not yet revealed in its fragility, the models display the first features that clash with the mainstream ideal, such as their paleness, gawky postures and ways of walking, and overall corporeal style, in particular their hairstyle, which winks at a subcultural aesthetic.

Simons's iconic link with the world of subcultures and youth culture finds its roots in the very first years of his career, an exploratory period during which he experimented with

references to punk and post-punk aesthetics, music and rebellion. Drawing on Therèsa M. Winge's work (2012), I would argue that Simons's preferential body type, especially during this period, can be defined as a *subcultural body*, "a visual celebration of the body" that is "a representation of a subculture's visual and material culture and ideology" (Winge 2012, 1). The complexity of the subcultural body is expressed by its being in continuous flux, by its figuring an ever-changing embodiment of the "postmodern assertion that individuals have fragmented existences and are resistant to being defined as one thing and not another, suggesting alienation" (Winge 2012, 6).

Alienation is arguably a fundamental signification of the prototypical Simons body. The concept, a central theme in the history of sociological thought (Durkheim [1897] 1951; Marx 1988 [1932]; Weber 1991), connotes a sense of loss or estrangement related to "the 'unattached,' the 'marginal,' the 'obsessive,' the 'normless,' and the 'isolated' individual" (Nisbet 1953, 15). In his classical writings on modern society, Émile Durkheim ([1897]1951) uses the term *anomie* to denote "a situation in which the social norms regulating individual conduct have broken down or are no longer effective as rules for behavior" (Seeman 1959, 787). This state of disorder within a local system – *normlessness* – is embodied and represented in Simons's work through social isolation and the rejection of the integration of social standards.

Characteristically, Simons's alienated body is depicted at the margins of society, as symbolically breaking with a social mold of values, behaviors and expectations. An interesting example is the fall/winter 1996-97 collection *We Only Come Out At Night*. Likewise presented in the form of a video presentation, it displays a group of friends at night hanging out at home while watching B-horror movies, consulting a Ouija board and dressing up to go out. The gothic and dark tones suggested by the title of the collection and the video setting are perfectly embodied by the protagonists, who enhance this atmosphere with their dyed black hair and pale

faces. Most importantly, the casting presents an interesting gender fluidity, making the distinction between male and female models very ambiguous in both bodily and stylistic features. Throughout the video, the camera zooms in on emaciated faces, marked by dark circles under the eyes and protruding, sharp cheekbones, while the models smoke cigarettes, itself an emblem of an intentional non-beauty that defies the glitz and glamour of mainstream fashion.

This aesthetic resistance is further experimented with in the spring/summer 1997 collection *How To Talk To Your Teen*, where the theme of alienation takes both a social and a sci-fi turn. Here teenagers running from school are catapulted into a parallel reality, in which they are abducted by aliens to an imaginary all-white dimension (which could again represent something of the indeterminacy of the interzone, as seen in the fall/winter 1995-96 collection). This dimension appears to stand in contrast with the outside world's restrictions and expectations. In the collection's catalogue, close-ups of the teenagers' androgynous faces are accompanied by the first images of the skinny male body, accentuated by the skin-tight fit of clothing and more particularly by the sleeveless tops that give a glimpse of the models' slender arms.

After five seasons, with the spring/summer 1998 collection *Black Palms* Raf Simons made a strong statement on his alternative iconography of masculinity, the male body and beauty. Set in a parking garage in the Bastille neighborhood of Paris, Simons's second-ever runway show was an ode to the skinny physique. The show opens with a bare-chested model wearing loose black trousers, the first such model in the designer's work to be presented in a semi-naked state and projecting Simons's slender body type in its materiality and fragility. The model's concave chest and hunched posture give a rough and rebellious attitude to his walk, which sets the mood for the entire show. Followed by four other models in the exact same depiction, this introductory procession constitutes a direct attack on the muscular body as the

hegemonic embodiment of normative virility, strength and masculinity. Thus, what Simons is providing in this arresting and captivating collection is the conscious affirmation of the previously introduced skinny outline as a reappropriation of the male body outside the boundaries of the mainstream ideal.

Aligning itself with the indeterminacy of contemporary queer theory, the representation of the male body in Raf Simons's interzone not only reacts to normative logics and embodiments, but also evades the risk of being crystallized into one specific programmatic form, becoming a nomadic entity in continuous flux. This shift seems to take place as Simons approaches the turn of the new millennium, when the sharp and rough visual imagery introduced by the *Black Palms* collection appears to be replaced by a more ambiguous, mysterious and darker allure. In the *Disorder-Incubation-Isolation* collection (fall/winter 1999-2000), a title referring to songs by Joy Division, the procession opening the show introduces an approach to the body that stands in marked contrast with the previous collections. Indeed, the straightforward and rough exposition of bony physiques is replaced here by an apparent loss of the visual and tactile body, which disappears under voluminous black capes even as it is always characterized by striking features such as constructed hair in sharp lines, transforming Simons's image of the male body into a disturbingly dark and ethereal presence.

This metamorphic approach to the body in Simons's work is confirmed by his iconic fall/winter 2001-02 collection *Riot, Riot, Riot*, which represents a clear break with the hyper-slim aesthetic of the previous collections. Here, the loss of determinacy and alienation of Simons's prototypical body is depicted throughout the collection with models covered in layers and oversized shapes, offering a new vision of the brand. The models walk in a cold and industrial warehouse as an urban guerrilla, while wearing heavy coats and oversized sweatshirts, with their bodies floating in this game of volumes and layering. Furthermore, the alienated body is also portrayed through the covering of the face with maxi hoodies or three-

fold wrapped scarves during occasional appearances. This visual strategy was the main feature of the *Woe Onto Those Who Spit On The Fear Generation...The Wind Will Blow It Back* spring/summer 2002 collection, which shows an army of what Simons defines as “fighters for independence and freedom” (Menkes 2001), walking barefoot with their heads and faces covered. Another interesting example of this renewed approach to the body is the *Virginia Creeper* fall/winter 2002-2003 collection, where the body is seen wandering in a swamp scenery in heavy and loose coats, appearing once again detached and lost in its own corporeality.

Despite its swerve from the exposed emaciated body of the mid-nineties, Simons’s lost body continues the critical revisioning of the male physique’s normative standards. Indeed, this type of embodiment transgresses the sexualized overexposure of the muscular body, locating the body itself in a chaotic scenario made of oversized and heavy garments, layering and ambiguities. Such a de-eroticized iconography also challenges the boundaries of the male physique, positioning the body into uncertain frames in which the corporeality seems to blur, becoming an alienated shadow rejecting standardized conformities. The direction taken by Simons after his comeback was pursued through several collections. However, it would soon merge again with his previous mid-nineties approach, once more confirming the ontological indeterminacy at the basis of his body imagery, which is continuously reconfigured in the flux of the interzone. Variations on these visual strategies start to take place, creating an interesting dialogue between the ideal of the angular and lean physique and the evaporating or lost body of the early 2000s.

To conclude this first empirical analysis, I would argue that in Raf Simons’s queer trope of the interzone, the male body eludes the cages of corponormativity, which aim to trap and discipline the body through normative discourses and technologies (Foucault 1977). If these discourses consider the body as a territorialized site where, in this case, normative assumptions

of men's physiques are maintained, Simons's interventions can be considered as a Deleuzian de-territorialization of the male body which, in rejecting standardization, offers the means for an alternative ontology of becoming, a new critical horizon for a subversive embodiment of masculinity. In the words of Deleuze and Guattari:

Majority implies a state of domination, not the reverse. [...] One territorializes, or allows oneself to be territorialized, on a minority as a state; but in becoming, one is deterritorialized. [...] There is no subject of becoming except as a deterritorialized variable of the majority; there is no medium of becoming except as a deterritorialized variable of a minority. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 191-92)

In the final section, my empirical analysis will now move to a reading of Simons's menswear in the interzone. More specifically, I will look at how the Belgian designer responded to normative prescriptions of masculinity through the dressed body, which may be situated at a crossroads between tailoring and streetwear. Here the analysis will focus on the concept of the silhouette and how it changed in the first decade of the designer's career, once again reflecting the deflection of programmatic definition at the heart of the interzone.

Menswear in the interzone: Tailoring and streetwear in nomadic conformations

In his essay "To Cut is to Think", art critic Germano Celant reflects on the mechanism of cutting in modern art, especially in Cubism, showing a peculiar sensitivity for the realm of fashion:

Cutting structures language, but also clothing. It is an intervention into the traditional conventions of representing and seeing a body or thing, and thereby produces a new sensation. [...] The cut puts an end to the traditional representation of the image, dissolving

it and then restoring it as a testimony to the artist's vision and understanding. [...] The thinking spawned by the Cubist cut opened up an infinite universe. It even insinuated itself into people's interpretations of the world. It ignores the world's hardness and absoluteness so that it can make and unmake its representation, subjecting it to a whirlwind of furtive, momentary meanings that shun all mummified order. (Celant 2009 [1997] 187-88)

The idea of the cut as a material and metaphorical method for disturbing the rigid perception of reality has an interesting affinity with the anti-normative project of the interzone, as both disrupt traditional boundaries. This analogy can be extended by looking at the etymology of the word queer. As suggested by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, its origin can be found in the German term *quer* (transverse, oblique, crosswise). In its material translation, it is interesting to notice how the German formulation *kreuz und quer* stands for "criss-cross," so that the label of queer may be particularly apt for a discussion of unconventional cutting in tailoring.

This queer perspective frames the cut and its physical result – in this case clothing – as the vector of an impulse toward transformation, becoming a cultural, social and political act in the aesthetic construction of identity. Celant's theorization of the cut can therefore be taken into consideration as a theoretical background against which to analyze how menswear has been challenged and reconsidered in Raf Simons's queer practice of the interzone. The designer's radical thinking has indeed given shape to an attire that has been internationally recognized as transformative in contemporary menswear.

While continuing the discussion introduced in the previous section on the body, the following analysis aims to highlight two specific practices in the designer's work. First, how his approach to men's fashion has managed to create interesting crossings between apparently opposite terrains, such as the one of classic tailoring and the uniform, and the rebellious taste of streetwear and subcultures, creating a synthesis capable of reformulating the male attire. Second, reflecting the queer qualities of the trope of the interzone, I seek to highlight Simons's

escape from the risk of aesthetic crystallization. To do so, the concept of the silhouette will be of help to unpack the first decade of Simons's career and to show how his approach to the dressed male body has been continuously renegotiated, giving shape to what I define as nomadic conformations, material and symbolic representations that refuse to be solidified in a unique definition.

In his volume *The Silhouette*, historian and sociologist Georges Vigarello (2016) retraces the evolution of this term from its eighteenth-century appearance as a long-standing general interest in drawing the body to physical and sartorial appearance, with the quest for a perfect balance between image and identity. As he writes:

The silhouette and its instantly visible contours have become indicators of well-being, or even conformity; they may equally be seen as warning signs heralding potential trouble or even danger. [...] Associated with the theme of the body size, the outlines of the silhouette form an immediately visible sign profoundly linked to our identity; this presents an increasing challenge to our daily practices. (Vigarello 2016, 9)

If we look at the evolution of this phenomenon from a gender perspective, we can see how the shaping of both the male and female silhouettes contributed to creating a binary visual categorization. In particular, the treatment of the masculine form developed in a specific way, rejecting loose or curved shapes and focusing on “the most muscular contours of the body” (Vigarello 2016: 116).

However, postmodern fashion scholars also critically engaged with the concept of the silhouette as a site for identity and bodily borders. Anabela Becho identifies this challenge in the conceptual and aesthetic proximity of Japanese and Belgian designers (2016). She argues that these kindred spirits “actively question the concepts of clothing, but also the body and its limits, causing the wearer to question their own assumptions about what is clothing, or about

the act of dressing and its physicality” (Becho 2016, 153). This new lexicon of clothing, which moves from the deconstruction of conventional patterns to an interest in unusual volumes and asymmetry, can also be found in Raf Simons’s approach to menswear. More specifically, I argue that, in the time frame under consideration, we can identify three pivotal periods in which the male silhouette and its aesthetic features are reconfigured.

The first takes up the period 1995-2000, when Simons’s fascination with the psychology of men and with what happens on the edge of adolescence and maturity takes shape in the tension between tailoring, youth culture and the aggressiveness of subcultures. This period is characterized by a slim, tight and close-to-the-body silhouette, which emphasizes Simons’s trademark imagery of a concave beauty introducing an innovative interpretation of menswear and the dressed male body.

This seems to be already emerging in the designer’s first attempt at men’s fashion, with the fall/winter 1995-96 collection, which highlights Simons’s capacity to make the ordinary seem subversive. After Simons was tutored by tailor Renzo Loppa, this collection introduces the young designer’s fashion as an in-between territory where the precision of tailoring meets the transgression of youth. Men’s ensembles that consist of narrowly cut coats, waistcoats and trousers in classic materials and dark colors are accompanied by clashing elements, such as tight-fitting leather tank tops, and the nonprofessional models’ hairstyles and performances in the video presentation, characterized by long hair and the act of smoking.

One of the most interesting takes on tailoring in Simons’s work is the one involving school uniforms. His approach reflects what Jennifer Craik defines as the uniform’s ambivalent connotations between control/conformity and subversion/transgression (2005). The suggested ambivalence develops in Simons’s interzone through the disrupting metamorphosis of the collegiate look, epitomizing “the relationship between the contemporary body and postmodern

senses of identity as arbitrary yet contingent, unstable yet legible, changing yet distinctive” (Craik 2005, 194).

The fall/winter 1997-98 collection, Simons’s very first fashion show, tells the story of an exchange between the American Youngsville University and the British St. John’s Highschool, with students influenced by punk and new wave. The show opens in impeccable college style, presenting tailored uniforms and coats with the schools’ logos, to then evolve into an increasingly subversive style which blends with punk elements, signified by t-shirts and tank tops with logos of English punk band “Eater,” the introduction of Simons’s iconic oblique zips, and loosely woven knitwear. This collection is a perfect example of Simons’s menswear in the queer imagination of the interzone, where the collision between the discipline of college uniforms and tailoring, on the one hand, and the nihilistic and chaotic deconstruction of punk, on the other, gives form to a cross-fertilization between seemingly antagonistic elements. The collection lookbook clearly displays this metamorphosis. For example, look forty-one embodies the transformation from the starched and impeccable blazers and sweatshirts with college logos to the rebelliousness of punk through the reworking of the collegiate *ensemble*. Here the blazer is reinterpreted in stiff black leather with horizontal zips on the front pockets and with an additional cigarette holder pocket on the left sleeve, matching the punk band black t-shirt, black skinny jeans and All Stars-type sneakers.

Approaching the end of the 1990s, we can notice how the previous punk toughness is replaced by a shift towards suiting, as shown in the spring/summer 1999 collection *Kinetic Youth*, which continues Simons’s reshaping of the male silhouette transforming the lean-on-top, large-on-bottom silhouette of ravers into structured, sleek garments (Yotka 2017). The latter is aptly illustrated in the second part of the show, in which a group of models walk down the catwalk to the tune of David Bowie’s *Life on Mars?* wearing the designer’s iconic skin-tight turtlenecks with the embroidered logo on the left side of the neck together with loose-fit

tailored trousers, a contrasting match enhanced by the slim fit of the upper part of the body. Moreover, in this transition we witness a loosening of volumes, which anticipates what we can identify as the second period of reinvention of the male silhouette in Simons's work in the period 2000-2002. This frames a distinctly new phase, a break from the previous sartorial aesthetic, characterized by the rejection of his early predilection for the slim silhouette, which is replaced by oversize and heavy volumes combined with layering and disorienting effects.

Anticipated by the introduction of voluminous heavy black capes with the fall/winter 1999-2000 collection *Disorder-Incubation-Isolation*, Simons's fall/winter 2001-02 collection *Riot, Riot, Riot* can be considered the starting point of this new approach to the male silhouette, described by fashion journalist Suzy Menkes as a "frustrating game of layers" (2001), a statement which recognizes the destabilizing effects of Simons's newest intervention. Inspired by East-European youth of the 1990s and their own creation of volumes through layering, the collection introduces youth protest and rebellion through a wide range of garments that challenge Simons's previous sharp suiting. Handmade-looking ripped oversized sweatshirts and unfinished hems project a sense of rage that is further underscored by heavy padded outerwear and distressed camouflaged bomber jackets featuring a subcultural DIY aesthetic with patches referencing popular culture (i.e. David Bowie, the 1974 poster of "The Texas Chainsaw Massacre" movie, and Christine F.'s "Wir Kinder Vom Bahnhof Zoo"). This alternative approach to the male silhouette, together with the aesthetic sense of unfinishedness, develops in Simons's queer imagination of the interzone as an impulse for a new narrative of male embodiment, which dissolves the common perception of proper fitting together with the designer's previous skin-tight approach.

The frustrating layering pointed out by Menkes and its distressing effects on the male silhouette emerge clearly in some outfits that display the overlapping of up to three outerwear pieces, such as nylon trench-coats and wool coats finally topped by bomber jackets.

Furthermore, from this view one can see hoods emerging, which not only tend to hide the models' faces, but are in some cases tightened by voluminous keffiyehs rolled several times around the face, leaving only the wearers' eyes visible in a threatening atmosphere.

The heavy and oversized silhouette is again a locus for experimentation in the fall/winter 2002-03 collection *Virginia Creeper*. Drawing on the darker fantasies of both American school uniforms under the lens of 80s horror movies and the duality of nature, divided between its beauty and its threatening forces (i.e. the poisonous Canadian Virginia Creeper of the title), the collection displays models wandering in a deep wood hidden by hoods, in a kind of “The Blair Witch Project” (1999) tension and isolation. As described by the catalogue, the collection presents heavy and loose coats, almost sliding off the body, sometimes with shapes that are tricks of the eye, such as a “double” coat looking like a bomber jacket worn over a long coat, which is in reality cut in one piece, a magisterial example of Simons's layering techniques and destabilizing effects. The wandering silhouette dragging heavily through the woods is well represented by look twelve in the collection's lookbook. The model's figure is overwhelmed by an oversize double-breasted faded black leather coat worn open that leaves a glimpse of another lighter nylon coat worn underneath. In the collection this overlapping is further topped in some cases by see-through plastic capes with hoods, which enhance the horror atmosphere of the fashion show. Moreover, the models continue to keep their figures mysteriously hidden behind knitted baklavas and nylon padded caps.

Starting from the spring/summer 2003 collection *Consumed*, we can see how the Belgian designer continues his transformative work on the male silhouette with what we can define as the third period of his experimental reconfigurations. Indeed, in this phase, Simons begins to show an interesting synthesis of his first approach to the dressed male body, with its focus on tailoring and the skinny silhouette, and its later rejection through oversize layered solutions. As a result, the designer's new take on the dressed male body shows an innovative

mixing of volumes together with the blending of Simons's iconic graphic and linear tailoring and elements of streetwear, producing a stimulating and rich reformulation of high fashion for men and confirming his mastery in cutting and volume.

The *Consumed* collection already displays some of the features of this third phase. Inspired by contemporary artist Ashley Bickerton's work on commodification and corporate logos, the spring/summer 2003 collection is a "spontaneous attempt to chart the multiple guises and forms of consumerism,"³ portraying a dystopian future affected by globalization and the generic influence that branding has on consumers. *Consumed* brings back Simons's taste for the bony bare chest – which had last appeared in the spring/summer 1998 collection – as a surface on which to display references to famous commercial logos, combining it with tailored coats and suits transformed into parachuting attire. The stylistic alternation between slim and oversize also takes shape through narrowly cut shirts contrasted with oversized cut-out sweatshirts, black nylon bomber jackets, and loose fishnet tops showing the model's torso.

Nevertheless, the ultimate configuration of this third phase in Simons's work is represented by the fall/winter 2005-06 collection *History of My World*. Following the spring/summer 2005 collection *History of the World*, which brings back the focus on tailoring while paying tribute to people who changed the world (i.e. philosopher Giordano Bruno, activist Rosa Parks, queer mathematician Alan Turing), *History of My World* marks Simons's first decade in the industry. However, contrary to what the title may suggest, the collection is not a glance backwards at his previous collections. Indeed, Simons seems to look at the future of tailoring and male elegance. At the heart of the show, we can notice how the formality of the suit and necktie is broken through by a baggy-versus-skinny silhouette enhanced by crop jackets, paper-bag waists, and ultra-baggy trousers, which focus the attention on a loose, gathered waistline. Throughout the show, however, we see how the restless nomadic motion

³ From Raf Simons spring/summer 2003 catalogue. Antwerp ModeMusuem.

within Simons's approaches to the male silhouette takes shape. The collection develops as an interesting dialogue between contrasting elements, in a transient movement within uber-baggy volumes and skin-tight forms, where long oversized nylon trench-coats are topped with tailored wool blazers and matched with skinny trousers.

Having thus surveyed and analyzed the evolution of menswear in the first decade of Simons's career, we begin to understand how his approach to fashion, conjured up by his queer trope of the interzone, contributes to the creation of a semantic disorder and subversion of the dressed male body in a restless motion between different, and sometimes conflicting, identifications. This aesthetic and stylistic nomadism reacts to the would-be static and stable system of representation belonging to normative signification through what Dick Hebdige, in his seminal work on subcultures, defines as *intentional communication* (1988). The latter, in opposing the representational forms of normalcy, aims to stand apart through a visible construction of new aesthetic discourses that reposition and recontextualize objects in different positions, and juxtapose different realities.

As a result, Raf Simons's menswear and approaches to the male silhouette participate in the rejection of a material and symbolic stabilization of the male dressed body, using his critical fashion practices to constantly reshape masculinity. This unruly intervention, I argue, comes from the interzone's resistance to the normalization of identity and the body, which allows Simons to operate in a fluid ontological realm where masculinity and its aesthetic translations appear as unfixed entities in nomadic conformations. In other words, as in Celant's theorization of the cut, the Belgian designer's critical intervention puts an end to the traditional representation of masculinity, dissolving its monolithic understanding and opening up a multiplying universe, in which the anti-normative project of queerness can take shape.

Conclusion

In October 2020, Raf Simons presents his very first womenswear collection together with the menswear spring/summer 2021. The video presentation titled *Teenage Dreams*, which has to stand in for the physical fashion show made impossible by the covid-19 pandemic, displays interesting similarities with the material under investigation. In an atmosphere that might be described as “Alice in Wonderland” on acid, a group of youngsters carries messages such as “Welcome Home Children of the Revolution,” “Disorder,” and, most importantly, “Question Everything.”

The tone set by this collection clearly continues to project Simons’s willingness to oppose fixed normative perceptions of reality and his critical interventions inspired by the queer trope of the interzone, a perspective and attitude that find their roots and maturation in the period under study. Operating imaginatively and creatively in the interzone, Raf Simons is not only capable of resisting mainstream and normative representations of menswear and of the male body, but he also refuses to define and crystallize his vision of masculinity and the male dressed body in a unique stylistic configuration. Indeed, in transgressing the conventional representations and figurations of masculinity, Raf Simons proposes a materially heterodox approach to gender categories. This quality, I would suggest, allows him to remain a major source of artistic inspiration in the field of contemporary men’s fashion while constantly redefining his approach to the body and the silhouette, in which he remains faithful to his ideal of individuality and resistance.

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