

An Excellent Methodological Investigation of Queer Life and Style in Stockholm

Warkander, Philip *"This is all fake, this is all plastic, this is me": A study of the interrelations between style, sexuality and gender in contemporary Stockholm* (diss.). Stockholm University: Department of Media Studies 2013 (234 pages)

PHILIP WARKANDER'S DOCTORAL thesis takes as its main theme an investigation into the ways in which gender, sexuality and style – the latter one a concept that Warkander dedicates a considerable section of his text to defining – are related within, and expressed through, the sartorial practices of a number of participants on the contemporary Stockholm club scene. Much of the information and analysis of style as a dressed bodily practice is based on ten case studies, and in the second chapter Warkander briefly describes the style of each of these participants, setting each "actor" in the readers mind, before they are located within spatial and temporal perspectives throughout the rest of the book. While he creates a descriptive picture of each of these ten participants, it was a shame that there are no images in the book. Style is such a particular and visual concept that providing pictures of the participants and key locations would have greatly enhanced this book and understanding of the participants' style practices.

Warkander employs three research methods – participant observation, semi-structured interviews and organic wardrobe studies – to gather his information over the five-year period of his research (even though the

occasions and incidents cited in the text are restricted to 2009 and 2010). In relation to participant observation, Warkander notes that he is also placed within the very networks of actors that he was investigating, and takes time to situate himself and his awareness of his own subject positions (Kaiser 2012), and to identify the ways in which relations change and evolve with his case study participants. Indeed, in the introduction, as well as describing Makode's outfit for his twenty-eighth birthday party, Warkander also notes his own outfit and how this situated him in relation to Makode and the other club goers. He significantly notes the interrelatedness of his three methods, how in observation he engages with conversations and while conducting wardrobe studies and interviews he is observing body language and physical responses that are not apparent in the transcriptions of texts or the participants descriptions.

Warkander's research methods are underpinned with a combination of two theoretical frameworks: Bruno Latour's actor-network theory and Judith Butler's theory of performativity. It is this second theoretical framework's idea of speech acts as a central underpinning of performativity, which is the focus of the first of three chapters dealing with Warkander's empirical material. Here, Warkander firstly identifies words as actors in style production and secondly, investigates the importance of names, particularly in the gendering of his participants. He reflects on both the self-choosing of names and external categorizations through names. The selection of a British male name is important for "Anthony" in the self-construction and positioning of this male identified biological female, and offers an element of control over his life and identity. For another of Warkander's participants the use of three different names – Klara, Blanche Niede and Velma Voluptuous – assists in her self-positioning in different contextualized spaces. Warkander is also concerned here with how speech acts and names work in conjunction with the transformative qualities of fashion and style.

Stockholm itself becomes a more central focus in Chapter Four, where Warkander addresses the "importance of context in the production of sartorial style" (Warkander 2013, 121). He contrasts the "safe" spaces of Stockholm's alternative nightclubs with other areas of the city

and the ways in which certain participants – Vivianne, Steffy and Anthony – have negotiated their dressed appearance and identities when outside Stockholm, or have been subject to verbal and physical abuse. In the latter part of this chapter Warkander introduces a number of Stockholm nightclubs that are both "actors" and case studies in the work. He particularly focuses on F12 and Ficks club where two of his participants, Makode and Tommy X, are club hosts and other participants have visited. These sites of sartorial expression and the position of his participants in relation to these clubs allows Warkander to invoke Pierre Bourdieu and his theories around both cultural and fashion production and capital, to demonstrate the currency of style in the contexts of place and space. As Stockholm is key to this text providing a fuller account of the cultural and social history of the city and its particularities, especially in relation to Berlin and London where some of his participants have also resided, would give those less familiar with the city a better understanding of Stockholm, its nightclub scene and social attitudes.

Chapter Five – "Mapping Bodily Matters" – the third and final of the empirical chapters focuses more explicitly on the corporeal and the materiality of the embodied experience. The chapter opens with an investigation of observed networks within Stockholm and amongst Warkander's participants, where style operates as a collective activity and individual style is determined by collective practices. He notes the ways in which participants incorporate the style of other Stockholm clubbers and more universally known style leaders, and how fashion and style is employed as artistic and conceptual forms of expression. Warkander returns specifically to notions of gendering in and of the body; considering how those who are both biologically female, such as Klara, and those who are biologically male – Makode, Tommy X and Steffy – construct versions of femininity, and also how Anthony, who is biologically female, and Steffy (once again) fashion masculinities through their dressed appearance and behavioral traits, highlighting the "instability of body and gender" (213). In the cases of Tommy X, Klara and Steffy these are also related to body size, height and weight.

Warkander's book offers an excellent methodological investigation

and ethnographic study of the way style is employed to present, reinforce and question sexuality and gender in contemporary Stockholm. The case studies offer a sympathetic presentation and are underpinned with a clear theoretical framework. For readers who only read English (like me) this book also provides a very useful opportunity to engage with the work of Nordic theorists, such as Anna Sofia Lundgren (2006), Lena Martinsson (2006), Magnus Mörck and Maria Tullberg (2004), that otherwise would have remained unavailable. This book rightly takes its important place on the fashion studies bookshelf as a new and invaluable work on gender, sexuality, fashion, and style.

SHAUN COLE
LONDON COLLEGE OF FASHION,
UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS LONDON

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