

# INTRODUCTION

## Men Who Shop



Although male heads of state wear suits at summit meetings, male job applicants wear them to interviews, and men accused of rape and murder wear them in court. . . the pants-jacket-shirt-and-tie costume, formal or informal, is often called boring or worse. . . but men's suits are neither post-modern nor minimalist, multicultural nor confessional – they are relentlessly modern, in the best classical sense.

—Ann Hollander, *Sex and Suits*

This morning I woke from a dream filled slumber. I stirred, and the extraneous limbs that fell beyond the comforting protection of the blankets felt a soft, gently-cooling breeze meander its way in through the open window. Dave (the monstera gigantea) cautiously steadied himself in the new morning light like a drunk who thought he could get away with hiding the excesses of last night's revelry and the hackles on my neck responded to the ingress of new oxygen. Beyond the window the builders had arrived at the half-built skyscraper next door – a skeletal hand reaching into the clouds. The sonorous sounds of angle grinders on steel and scaffolding being dropped cut through the last vestige of sleep, letting the dream filled world I had been enjoying spool out of my head like letting go of a full, untied balloon. Try as I might, no amount of grasping in the gloom could bring back the dreams, once so vivid, that had whizzed across the room into intangible nothingness.

Swinging my legs out of bed I stood, felt the blood rush to my head, and sat down again defeated. Reeling slightly, I retrieved my iPhone from the bed-

side table and squinted as the black rectangle lit up with a slew of bright vivid colours, shocking my retinas into consciousness. This momentary orbital distress was quickly forgotten as I saw a series of affirming notifications laid out in neat rows. The image I had posted to Instagram the night before had amassed 74 likes while I slept, a new personal record. The digital version of myself had been abroad, seen in America, South Korea and a handful of European countries while the tousled haired offline me slept. I stood again, this time with more purpose, and moved toward the wardrobe. Getting dressed had once been a haphazard event but over the past two years I have thought more about clothes than I thought possible, with my wardrobe growing corpulent as a result.

I reached into the dark folds and felt around, gently passing my hand over the shoulders of the assembled jackets that waited patiently on the rail. Textures passed under my fingertips, coarse tweed, soft cotton, stiff denim, ridged corduroy and luxurious velvet. After lingering over a particular linen favourite I gave the subtly textured shoulder a nostalgic squeeze and then found it – sartorial salvation – right at the end of the rail: an unassuming black suit made of achingly soft moleskin that made me smile quite uncontrollably when my fingertips brushed over the short pile of the cloth. My concerns about what to wear that day were banished to the dark, like the dreams that preceded them.

Pulling the soft suit from its wooden hanger, I threw the jacket gently on the bed – it looked back at me mischievously, crumpled and demure – while I slid into the matching trousers, slim as a pair of skinny jeans. Pulling a shirt from the same tailor from a drawer, I slipped the soft fabric over my head and fastened the cuffs with black mother of pearl buttons that felt cool under my fingers. The slightly stretchy fabric (cotton with just a hint of Lycra) shimmered in the reflected light of the still glowing smartphone screen. One might almost have mistaken it for silk but it was even more comfortable next to the skin, a masterstroke of cloth selection. The Cuban collar sat flat against my chest, like a luxurious pyjama, and as I slid my arms into the unlined jacket I felt an instant comfort as the soft fabric enrobed me, banishing the chill from the cool morning air.

The jacket fitted like a second skin, somehow touching the whole of my torso, yet without clinging in any one place, simply hanging beautifully from the tips of my shoulders. As I cast my eyes down on to the subtle details of the cuffs, cloth and collar I remembered why it was one of my favourites. The cuffs were secured with a single button, larger than the three or four smaller buttons one would typically find on a suit jacket's cuff. There was a working buttonhole and where the sleeve ended at my wrist, the edge of the cuff was bound in obsidian-black silk grosgrain ribbon, with the hand stitches visible on the inside of the cuff.

Fastening the jacket at my natural waist, I stood in front of the floor length mirror and reflected on how my form was framed by the simplicity of the all black outfit. The jacket appeared to be a three roll two closure – a three-button front, where the top button is part of the lapel that rolls away, giving the elegance of a two-button cut with the versatility of a three. Yet as I popped the collar, thumbs brushing the black suede where usually there would be melton, I smiled back at myself as the hidden buttons under the lapel became visible and the option for a five-button closure and Nehru collar peeked out at me. Diverted by the playfulness of my plain black suit I absentmindedly pulled back the bedroom curtain and stared out at the autumnal city.

Unlike the majority of my suits, the one I was currently inhabiting was almost entirely unstructured. There was no shoulder padding, canvassing or lining (bar the sleeves). This form of soft tailoring is supremely comfortable, but lacks the feeling of insulation and impregnability offered by heavier-weight tailoring. These qualities were not needed indoors, but as I stood by the window and the wind exercised a gaggle of troubled umbrellas below I realised a little more insulation would be needed before I ventured outdoors. Moving back to the wardrobe I rummaged for a coat and pulled out a suitably intemperate offering. This piece of tailoring was far more structured and as I slid my arms into the thick wool sleeves, this time over my jacket, the coat fell heavily over my frame, grazing the backs of my knees and weighing down on my shoulders with a gentle thump as it slid into place like a pair of paternal hands.

I ventured down onto the street, pausing at the threshold to take a number of photographs with my iPhone. These selfies would be reviewed later and posted to Instagram at my leisure; I made sure to include some variation displaying different facets of my outfit so that I could post multiple times, commenting on different aspects of this look. Ignoring the bemusement of several passers-by, I finally slid my phone into the inside pocket of my suit jacket where the tailor's label bearing a secret message was hidden: Spencer Hart sincerely hopes you get laid in this product.

What are you wearing? I have told you how I got dressed this morning but what about you? This is not a sordid enquiry or sarcastic insult but a genuine question – a question that has become even more important as an object of anthropological study with the advent of the increasingly globalised phenomenon of social media. There are many words in English for the objects we use to cover our bodies from dress, clothing and attire through to apparel, garments and costume and even slang like clobber, gear, togs and threads. Yet these terms do not linguistically define individual garments or details of garments; for this the lexicon is vast. From civvies and mufti to lounge suits and morning dress, spaces, events and class can be navigated through an understanding of the dressed body. So I reiterate the question. What are

you wearing, right now? Or perhaps why are you wearing it? This may seem simple but is it? Throughout life we learn how to successfully navigate social spaces, and the right kind of costume that we must wear to be admitted and thrive in certain social spheres. Even those who defy convention do so with an awareness of these rules. Life is a performance, and whether you are a dedicated follower of fashion, or not, we all wear clothes that, no matter how hard we try, will to some extent define us.

Yet here we reach the rub. For some people, each morning's transformation from undress to dressed marks a set of carefully choreographed decisions vital to their self-making, yet for others it is a far less marked endeavour with clothes scattered on the floor being pulled on with little more than a weary shrug. This disparity between those who live to get dressed and those who get dressed to live, is central to a whole host of magazines, advertisements and other media, with the assertion that those who dress well will be more successful in their work life, social life and love life. Yet despite this all pervading narrative surrounding being well dressed, western menswear has for the most part evaded scholarship.

In this book I combine ethnographic accounts of meeting tailors and attending fashion shows with the purchasing and wearing of garments as methodology to rethink why we wear what we wear. The journey has been interesting and I have worn many strange and flamboyant combinations of clothes as I have travelled it, with outfits frequently garnering comment from strangers, ranging from the rude – 'why are you wearing that hat' – to the admiring – 'sir, that is the maddest jacket I've seen in a long time'. Dress which stands out serves to empower the wearer, as one can dictate one's visibility in space. Yet such a move can disempower in equal measure, leaving one at the mercy of the gaze.

It is this phenomenon which drew me to tailoring and the reason why tailored menswear dominates this book. The suit can equally empower and disempower depending on the context, wearer and suit in question. A suit can be invisible in a room full of suits or stand out if it is made of a vibrant fabric. Cost may have some impact on this, but then again it may not. What if a bespoke suit originally retailing at between two and three thousand pounds and handmade for a specific client is later sold for fifty pounds to someone else? This is the case for the Spencer Hart suit I describe in the opening vignette, that I acquired during my fieldwork from the online auction website eBay. Does this change how the wearer is perceived, and why do some men choose to spend such large sums of money on fairly unremarkable clothing, which only a few others will notice?

Further to these questions, this book also moves beyond the world of wardrobes, workshops and catwalks, into the digital world of Instagram where many of these tiny tailored details are photographed in high definition and

posted for other users to enjoy. This book is the first to take Instagram, the image sharing social media platform, as a primary anthropological fieldsite, providing a timely commentary on our digitised modernity, but also allowing the online and offline worlds surrounding fashion and personal representation to be approached as a single cohesive field. Many of the themes of this book will be things you already intrinsically know, whether it's the instinctual revulsion at the thought of wearing hot pants to a funeral or the horror of turning up to a black tie event wearing a Hawaiian shirt. Have you ever been refused entry into a club for wearing the wrong kind of shoes, or felt over-dressed at a party? This book may not answer these specific questions, but I hope it will give you a chance to reflect more broadly on what you are wearing and why. By the end of the book, I can guarantee one thing, you will never look at a man in a suit in the same way.

I hope that the same is true for selfies and Instagram posts. This book ventures into a digital world with a plethora of available images of every conceivable type to view at one's leisure – a 'post-scarcity' space (Slater 2000: 123). The sensation of using a platform such as Instagram is that there are infinite images to consume, a factor which irrespective of thematic genre radically changes the manner in which notions of self, identity and personhood are constructed. This is something worth considering when we look around ourselves, on the train or at a neighbouring café table, where hunched digital consumers endlessly scroll. This has become a familiar sight, and perhaps the repetitive nature of this scrolling speaks to the endless sensation of content, but also the dissatisfactory nature of digital communication. Miller notes that 'people do not regard sending an e-mail greeting card as satisfactory as being there when one's child blows out the candles. . . They do, however, understand that an animated and personalized egreeting card is much better than no card at all' (Miller 2003a: 17). The key idea here is that digital communication is a 'better class of substitute' (*idem*). However, my work on the digital platform Instagram differs subtly from this avenue of analysis as it does not directly replace a previous form of communication or technology. There are elements of other technologies that it incorporates such as photography, postcards, letters and the publication of images found in fashion magazines, but Instagram is not a direct substitution of anything, yet it is highly compulsive: but why is looking at other men's clothing so engaging?

Whether it's a beautifully tailored suit or an old pair of jeans, scuffed trainers or those shoes you can hardly walk in (but look fantastic when you sit down), the visible nature of dress is abundantly clear. However, by bridging the online and offline world, this issue becomes more complex. The notion of visibility and invisibility in the digital world is one which has been noted by Horst (2009: 107), who suggests that digital social media gives access to spaces which would otherwise be invisible, such as into one's bedroom. Yet

Instagram is more pernicious than this, with a lens that lives in our pockets and offers a view that often only one who had violated our personal space would be able to achieve. I concur with Horst (*idem*) that this implies a blurring of the boundaries identified by Goffman (1980) between public and private spaces, but I would go further than this to suggest that smartphones have established themselves in the lives of heavy users to such an extent that they become a cybernetic object of intimacy. For users who take their smartphone to the bathroom, place them on their bedside tables during moments of extreme intimacy, diarise their lives through them, and never let them run out of battery, there is not only an intimacy in the relationship crafted between phone and user – usually reserved for lovers or family – but a curiously perturbing agency exerted by that combination of screen, lens and speaker that is at best symbiotic and at its most sinister parasitic.

The lens that Instagram offers, teamed with the kind of user this book is concerned with, highlights the clothes we wear as aesthetic objects of desire. Yet this is not a universal way of engaging with the clothes that we wear. The term depth ontology (see Miller and Woodward 2012: 89–120) has been used to explore whether the clothes we wear are a true representation of who we are – a shallow or surface ontology – or whether the true nature of ourselves lies deeper within. Miller and Woodward's (2012: 89) work on denim explores this idea, and they give blue jeans the moniker of the 'post-semiotic garment'. This concept is used to explore why people choose to wear intellectually invisible garments, as blue jeans are labelled, as well as the layers of meaning that can be read through one's decisions to shop in particular shops and wear specific garments. For these blue jean wearing participants of Miller and Woodward's (*idem*) work the thought of wearing semiotically loud garments engenders a palpable sense of concern, drawing on the fear that they will be judged as superficial by others for trying to define themselves through their dress. This book sits at the other end of the spectrum, as for my informants the invisible denim is treated with vehement repugnance and contempt. These individuals actively seek out unusual or flamboyant tailoring and these semiotically loud garments and their wearers allow for the often facile interpretation of western menswear to be explored. That is not to say that certain tailoring is post-semiotic. Indeed, an off the peg black suit worn at a funeral could be conceptualised in this way. Such a suit can render the wearer devoid of discussion as to their sartorial inclinations, instead presenting the world with a uniformed body ready to perform the tasks required without distraction. This is why the suit is ubiquitous, worn by heads of state and those on trial for murder (Hollander 1994: 3), yet a bespoke suit, or one made by one of the tailors I have worked with, are hugely semiotic objects, and far from being invisible become an indispensable part of an individual wearer's performance (see Bluteau 2021: 68).

The semiotics of dress and the complexities of visibility have long been established in menswear, yet often symbols can only be read by those who are part of the same network. This is the case for homosexual men who have historically dressed to make their sexual orientation invisible to others (Cole 2000: 59–69) and visible to each other (Cole 2013: 135–65). Such nuance has not been lost on designers, nor the way in which men present themselves, with historical garments and cues from subculture frequently re-emerging on catwalks and high streets. Yet for all of this reinterpretation there is still a deeply engrained suspicion of men who do not fit within the bounds of typical dress for the time. Even in the world of formalwear there are strict rules and well used adages that accompany wearers of certain objects that breach these guidelines. ‘No brown in town’ is a prime example, urging men not to wear brown coloured clothing such as tweeds in the city, though this phrase is now more often limited to an assault on those who wear brown shoes with lounge suits. Shoes have their own mythology, certain shapes are seen as staid, others daringly racy, and one friend during my fieldwork recalled a cautionary tale told by a fearsome housemistress while at school, urging her to beware of men with overly shined shoes – who would employ such footwear to see up her skirt. Whilst I have doubts about the practicalities of this, perhaps it speaks to a broader suspicion towards men overly invested in their appearance – an allusion again to depth ontology.

Yet for all this rhetoric about the rules of menswear and the numerous books, blogs and media outlets that reinforce such patterns, there is equally a growing presence advising how to break these rules, and how to break them correctly. This is naturally just an extension of the previous ‘rules’ and a relaxing of certain diktats, yet it is in this space that many of the Instagrammers I work with reside. Despite this sartorial evolution, it appears that many men actively police their dress to avoid being seen as not conforming to ‘masculine norms’ (Barry 2017). This is particularly noticeable for men who are inclined to dress in a more flamboyant or exuberant manner than their work colleagues who have been observed to choose ‘dark jackets in lieu of colorful tops when . . . interviewing for a promotion’ (*idem*). Approaching the layered nature of both physically and intellectually clothing the male body will form a thread that is drawn throughout this book, tying together the online and offline fieldsites by concentrating on the presentation of the self in this blended single field.

The fieldwork for this book employed a blended approach, with individual methods for both the terrestrial and digital aspects of my research being used to complement each other. This allowed me to develop a comprehensive methodology which provided me with the ability to move between terrestrial and digital fieldsites without treating them as distinct separate entities, assisted by supplementing my research diary with a large number of digital

images. My fieldwork is not truly multi-sited or even fully multi-local, but the blend of terrestrial and digital methodologies employed calls for an acknowledgment of this book as a study with a quasi multi-local approach, perhaps best described as multi-dimensional. As a result of this I developed a blended methodology termed immersive cohabitation (see Bluteau 2019) that prioritised producing digital content as a means of cohabiting in the digital space.

It is worth noting at this point that I use the terms digital and terrestrial in this book as a means of labelling the online and offline worlds in which I conducted my fieldwork. The term digital is used over other possibilities such as virtual as it is used by both my informants and other digital anthropologists, while the choice of the term terrestrial is carefully chosen and specific to the context of my research. It conveys being temporally and geographically bounded, contrasting the digital, but does not imply the same disconnect inherent in the terms online and offline. It became apparent very quickly that this was not a useful way of engaging with a post-digital field where the online and offline worlds were so deeply enmeshed into each other that it was impossible to separate the two. Consequently, I developed a blended approach, combining terrestrial and digital research, both given equal prominence, to mirror the world in which I situated my research, one where the presence of my informants in the digital world was impossible to ignore.

At the start of my fieldwork I began by approaching tailors, initially by email and later in person; this led me to engage with a small number of tailors who were happy to talk to me. I repeatedly visited their shops, observed them at work and conducted informal interviews throughout the course of my fieldwork, typically with notes being written up afterwards. The tailors that allowed me access were Mark Powell, Joshua Kane, and Gieves and Hawkes. In addition to this I also spent time visiting shops, acquainting myself with areas of London and purchasing garments which I would later wear during the course of my research. This included incorporating notions of walking through the city (Lee and Ingold 2006; Yi'En 2014), taking photographs as a complementary form of narrative to the traditional field diary (Irving 2010) and dressing in a similar style to my informants (Coffey 1993, 1999). Furthermore, I managed to obtain invitations to a number of fashion shows from the tailors Joshua Kane and Sir Tom Baker which I attended.

As I began fieldwork in the terrestrial world, I set up an Instagram account to begin complementary digital fieldwork. This Instagram account, set up under the name @anthrodandy, enabled me to view the digital content being produced by the tailors I met in person, but it also afforded me access to a wider network of other tailors, manufacturers and retailers. At this point I identified myself as a researcher in my Instagram bio and made the ethical decision to only engage with open access accounts. As I delved deeper into the digital world, I began to discover clients of tailors, who became visible

through the interactions that take place in Instagram; I followed them too. This practice of following those whom I believed had links, either in the terrestrial world or shared interests in tailoring and sartorial matters, eventually led me to a network of interconnected individual accounts where I conducted my primary digital fieldwork. Initially, this amounted to a kind of digital participant observation – using my smartphone screen as a portal into this digital world – but it quickly became clear that in order to gain a fuller insight I needed to move beyond this and work as an observing participant (see Holy 1988; Wacquant 2004; Luvaas 2016).

I began to produce content which I posted on my Instagram account. This was inspired by, and to a certain degree imitated, the images that I had observed from the accounts that I was following. I set a goal of posting one image every day, a goal which I did not meet in the early days of my digital research as often I could not think what to post – or what the network would find interesting. However, as the number of hours I spent online increased, I attempted to produce regular unique content as often as I could, and in the later stages of my digital fieldwork I sometimes posted multiple images in the same day. This process of conceiving, capturing and posting images on a regular basis formed a key facet of my methodology. In the early stages of my fieldwork, I observed that many of the tailors I followed were prodigious users of social media, regularly updating their followers as to their stock levels, current outfit, and what they were doing that day, often posting multiple images in any given day, practically every day. These included photos of their shops, new items of tailoring they were working on, and, most frequently, images of their current outfit, a trend that accounted for the majority of published images in the digital network I worked with.

As a reaction to this realisation, I began posting images of myself in various outfits to Instagram. This became crucial to my methodology, as through this digital fieldwork I did not merely observe my participants, but actively engaged in the same processes that they undertook on a daily basis. I completed twelve months of terrestrial fieldwork, returning on a small number of occasions over the following year to attend fashion shows. In contrast, I completed twenty-four months of digital fieldwork, published 850 images, and continued working online once I had returned from my terrestrial fieldsite and begun the process of writing this book. Given the length of time it had taken to establish myself in the digital world, with most of the connections and insight only coming after the first year of interaction, this extension to my digital fieldwork was invaluable.

One Sunday morning, early in my fieldwork, I was perched on the narrow bench, pressed to the shop front at what would become one of my favourite coffee shops – the Flat White. Typically, Berwick Street in London's Soho is thronged with bustling stalls but on Sundays the market is closed and the

street takes on both a visual and olfactory calmness. Despite being devoid of the customary sumptuous scents of the street food vendors from Afghanistan, the Caribbean, Spain and others, the overwhelming aroma of freshly ground coffee surrounded me in a cloud of caffeinated air every time the shop door opened. One of the joys of conducting fieldwork in London is the people watching, and the excellent coffee. This was a particularly fine cup. Served in a short glass, perhaps three or four inches tall, with a knurled fluted pattern pressed into the glass where my fingertips nestled comfortably. This double espresso was unlike anything I had tasted before. The dark brown, almost black liquid had a creamy coloured head and as it touched my lips and the hot black liquid ran through the crema into my mouth, I tasted coffee as it should be for the first time. Acid first, fresh lemon zest cut through the bitterness of the potent drink. A burst of toasted almonds and then just a hint of burnt sugar slowly fading to warmth made up of the intense flavour of coffee. Finally, as the slightly oily residue from that first mouthful left a coating on the inside of my mouth, I took a breath, and the city air mixed with the last vestige of that mouthful – analogous to that earthy headiness that one gets from trudging through autumnal leaf litter.

I had been perched on the rickety bench for about fifteen minutes sipping gently at the aforementioned beverage, watching tourists and locals go about their daily pursuits, when I saw him. Looking up from my glass I saw a figure walking up the street on the opposite pavement from where I sat. This tall and lanky gentleman, instantly stood out from the others meandering down the street. His gait was purposeful, long legs making easy progress, with a confident swagger. The lollop that began at his shoulders radiated through his strides and seemed to carve its own path through space. A shock of ginger-orange hair surmounted his frame with punkish spikes twitching in the breeze.

My eyes followed the man, entranced. He was wearing black skin-tight jeans over metallic red boots that had a severely pointed toe and cuban heel. Over this ensemble he wore a long black topcoat. Longer than a jacket with a cutaway front taking style cues from the morning coat and frock coat. Yet this garment was wilfully modern, a beautifully almost viciously tailored coat that was cut close to the body and featured a myriad of handcrafted details from top stitched lapels, a pointed rear collar, leather trim and metal skulls at the cuffs. Before I could take any more in he had walked on, and the details had begun to blur. I watched him until he disappeared out of sight and then realised – I knew who it was. Reaching into my pocket I pulled out my phone and searched for an article I had recently read about London's best bespoke tailors who were not situated on Savile Row. The 'Savile Rogues', described by the article, featured the man I had just seen – Sir Tom Baker. I finished my coffee and went to find his shop.

Throughout London there exist many small tailor's shops, and if you are lucky enough to walk past them you can see all sorts of items on display, from traditional window displays to the more avant-garde and even ceremonial military uniforms. On London's famous street of establishment tailors, Savile Row, mannequins are typically festooned with tweed jackets, evening suits and seasonal accessories. These range from the accoutrements of society events to seasonal offerings such as quilted smoking jackets and cream linen suits. A walk from Savile Row in Mayfair to one of London's other districts, such as Soho or Shoreditch, would lead you to similar tailor's shops. However, if you looked through the gleaming plate-glass windows a little more closely you might get the sense that these shops cater to a slightly different client, one equally concerned with quality and production, but looking for something a little different. In Soho, Mark Powell's shop is full of three-piece gangster inspired, modernist and neo-Edwardian suits in a variety of hues, ranging from sober greys to bright purples. A little deeper into Soho's winding alleys there is Sir Tom Baker, whose shopfront bay window is topped with a huge silver skull and typically features suits in garish fabrics, including sequins and lamé, sometimes deconstructed, or distressed with a shotgun blast. Walking into this dark shop you will find punk inspired accessories and long black fur-collared coats, and if you were to take a peek inside one of his jackets you might find the words FUCK OFF stitched in large letters into the lining. A little further from Savile Row is the nouveau-cool Shoreditch, home of tailor Joshua Kane, a relative newcomer to the world of bespoke tailoring but one who is rapidly making his presence known. Gazing through the windows at the front of Joshua Kane's shop is akin to a looking into a brightly lit wonderland; handcrafted umbrellas hang from the ceiling, and rails of exotic prints and wildly pigmented woven fabrics, tailored into tight fitting short-cut jackets or dramatic long overcoats, hang on rails and clothe the mannequins that stand in the window wearing signature wide-brimmed hats and mirrored sunglasses. Despite the riot of colour and pattern this shop still maintains an achingly calm coolness, and somehow manages to evoke a minimalistic aesthetic, despite the exuberant fabrics on display.

Before beginning fieldwork in London I lived briefly in Oxford. During that period I was in the habit of working in a coffee shop – part of a large chain – that looked out over the market square called Gloucester Green. This location afforded me both the Wi-Fi that was required for pre-fieldwork scoping, but also ample opportunity to begin thinking about how and why people dress. One day, I sat outside in a waft of roll up cigarette smoke, drinking (what I now know to be a disappointing) espresso. Little Green Bag by the George Baker Selection, distorted by old speakers but nevertheless unmistakable, drifted through the still air from the vintage record stall. The market was in full flow as a lunchtime rush of tourists and office workers

weaved in and out of each other searching for trinkets and sustenance. In the distance the butcher's refrigerated van and the greengrocer's stall vied for attention. 'Strawberries . . . pound a bowl . . . buy two get one free . . . three for three quid', boomed the greengrocer, who despite the illogical arithmetic managed to drown out the butcher's deals. Behind me the deep rumble of a diesel engine heralded the arrival of buses that each disgorged a new phalanx of tourists who trundled past where I was sat. Their wheeled suitcases trailed behind them, adding to the hubbub, and overhead pigeons swooped ever lower settling near the market bins to pick through discarded detritus for lunch. As I sipped at my coffee the wind picked up and I could nose, for the briefest moment, the whiff of freshly spread manure, doubtless from one of the college gardens.

The dress of the market goers is the one thing that keeps me staring out at the passing footfall, and the aspect that truly piques my interest is how unremarkable it is. Most of the people who pass me are in blue jeans with the rest of their garments made up of shades of black, blue and grey. There is the occasional flash of colour but they are few and far between. If you were to view the crowd from afar it would be akin to looking at a bolt of Donegal tweed – predominantly grey/blue with the occasional coloured fleck. Then, two men walked past, one dressed in leopard print tights, tiny denim shorts, fur boots and a leather jacket, while the other, significantly taller wore a long purple dress, to match his long hair. These two individuals might easily have been viewed by onlookers as cross-dressers, but I instinctively took their personal styles as more ambiguous and androgynous than this. There was the faintest flicker of interest from the other café-goers before they relapsed into indifference and returned to their coffees, cigarettes and conversations.

This observation fed the kernel of an idea that I had been ruminating over for some time. How do we think about men who look different? This notion of difference could be men who dress to defy social convention or those who intentionally craft their identity through the clothes they wear. In this book this is mostly explored through tailored menswear and bespoke suits, but I also want to consider a broader question of where men go to seek out clothes (of any sort) that they use to make themselves look a particular way – both online and offline.

A considerable part of this crafting of identity through dress (see Wulff 1988: 162–64), is not only the clothes themselves, but also the retail space in which such clothes are purchased. Such spaces can be highly performative and in this book we will visit an eclectic mix of retail spaces from the avant-garde Dover Street Market, to the consultation rooms of bespoke tailors. In some ways these spaces are far removed, but the performance inherent in such spaces makes them closer together than the normality of the majority of high-street retail (see Miller 1998 and Miller et al. 1998). The atelier is a perfor-

mative space that is able to craft certain types of individual, by offering more than simply garments for sale. By offering an experience too, the specific shop is elevated and it resonates on a spectrum of desirability and authenticity for its customers.

The intentionality of individual customers finding unusual spaces to shop exemplifies the purchase of performance, that can be purchased alongside a material object. Such a purchase can be the aesthetics of a shop, the age of a garment or even a fashion show. All of these are performances which become attached to the garment which is finally purchased. These acquired performances, attached to and purchased alongside the basic garment, add to the native narrative of authenticity, raising the garment above comparable objects and giving it the allure of being special. This allure commands a higher price but is crucial in the creation of certain types of individual through their dress.

As we accompany one another through this book, you will encounter a number of individuals – which is only right as the question about what it means to be individual looms large throughout. Individuality is therefore conceived as a native category – how my informants think of themselves – where the individual is an autonomous actor beyond the restrictions of society (Dumont 1986). In this sense, my informants' individuality is not 'innate but learned' (Morris 1991: 263), crafted through the habitual digital and terrestrial actions that they undertake. These actions are performative (following Goffman 1980: 245), but can be altered for differing situations allowing my informants to present different individual selves in the digital and terrestrial worlds. These selves are able to adapt to the changing digital and terrestrial landscapes in which they exist, yet inevitably are moulded by the society in which they live, becoming 'collective constructs . . . reflecting social position' (Berger 1970: 375).

This juxtaposed nature of individuality allows for my contention that the individuals I worked with performed in a way that made them both different from those they regarded as normally (or badly) dressed members of society, yet alike those in the digital network they inhabited. In the words of Battaglia, 'the placedness of the subject is important', as is 'the dispersed habitation of the self in various forms' (Battaglia 1995: 3). Essentially, the performance of self in different spaces is bound to differ, however once there are multiple habitual spaces where selves perform across both the digital and terrestrial spectrum this becomes less clearly defined. Crucially, we must consider what 'effect this has on . . . sites of self-encounter' (*idem*), and bear in mind the dangers of self-loss and self-corruption when living and working across boundaryless interconnected interdimensional spaces.