XOXO – introducing a new male dominance
(WARNING: this paper contains explicit material)

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A goodbye to sexual intimidation of gays

Creation of a new gay alpha male

A young guy is waiting in a park for his date whom he met in one of those chat rooms online. As gay guy it is not easy to make first steps into the dating scene but this time it seemed easy and the other guy was fun, until now. From here begins the guy’s worst nightmare. Instead of a date he faces Maxim ‘The Hatcher’ Martsinkevich and one of his ‘Occupy Paedophilia’ troupes (see fig. 1). Their aim is to ‘heal’ gays and erase homosexuality in Russia and so will they treat the young guy, humiliate him, harass him and fix everything on tape to publish this video later, celebrating another successful treat (Grekov, 2014).

Fig.1: Anna Nemtsova, 2013, www.thedailybeast.com

It is not easy to be publically gay in Russia, neither is it in a lot of other countries. The 2014 published numbers by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (in the following referred to as LGBT) right organisation ALL OUT are alarming. Worldwide there is no country offering the same laws for LGBT people like they do for heterosexual citizens, in 77 countries it is still illegal to be gay and in 10 countries death penalty is persecuted for being gay. Those are intimidating numbers and show that there is still a long way to go until people of different sexual orientation are treated equally (Allout.org, 2014).
When one discusses sexual liberation, there is mostly a short cut to women rights. Men have always oppressed women and it took women almost a century to liberate themselves. Starting the development in the provocative roaring 20s, women never were as successful as they are now in the 21st century. Feminists will not agree that women are treated equally yet, but the feminist movement gives a clear idea of how provocation over a long period helped to change the perception of this oppressed group in society. Could the same liberation happen to LGBT people? Yes, it could.

What one sees today in pop culture with female icons such as Miley Cyrus and Rihanna seems to be living sexual freedom. Explicit body language and showing off outfits are technically normal to the viewer. It appears that they are not forced to presenting themselves like this but use it as tool for success. Sex still sells and society was apparently never so open for it. Men in comparison are less sexual although claiming to be dominant. The male sexual dominance seems to be grounded on being passive and getting served by women. Being considered gay would be a Faux Pas.

This is key to the creation of a new male figure, which is sexually active and dares to be gay: a rebel who likes to provoke. This provocation is a fight to support LGBT rights and to show that being gay does not mean to be weak but can be powerful. It is a statement against the restricted picture society created around being masculine and enforcing it with a new layer of free spirit. This spirit would embrace a more open-minded society worldwide and would help people to tolerate every individual.

Putting this idea into a menswear collection is a logic next step as fashion always offered the platform to make statements and is constantly interested in changes. The following paper will discuss what is generally considered masculine and dominant and in how far this is source of inspiration for the collection XOXO. Furthermore it will state in how far a strong and outspoken statement can help changing the perception of gay men. The upcoming thoughts are a base to understand the full meaning behind the collection, explain the realisation of it and try to argue why attitude, porn and cross-dressing have such an impact on the outcome of this graduation project and why it is so up to date.

Homme Fatale – a modern perception of gay masculinity (concept)

Looking back in history it becomes clear that the male gender always had a dominant role and that therefore patriarchal structures are most common in all societies. Discussions about patriarchy do not come to a conclusion about its origin but argue the continuity of male dominance. Through early manifestos like the ones from Aristotle stating that males have the perfect gender, their dominance became part of our social structures. By accepting this role model the man could empower himself in connecting positive
symbols to men and the life-death nature to women. The idea of the survival of the fittest shows that the male gender proved to be dominant as it managed to dominate all women and some men during history (Lerner, 1986).

This accepted male dominance, being based on the tradition of generating rather than proper arguments, might be the reason why the male itself is stereotypically so limited. The whole idea of male dominance is based on perception and is therefore extremely fragile (Tono Jr., 2014). As much as the one patriarchal structure is accepted in society, the one male ideal is accepted which connects dominance only to heterosexuality and sees homosexuality as weakness. Seeing this, it becomes clear why straight acting and the adoption to a male ideal is used as tool of being accepted in society and why everything different is so broadly disapproved.

This is a reasonable base for protest and gives a vast opportunity for provocation. As the conservative ideal of men has so many limitations it is rather easy to cross boundaries and create something tasteless and shameless in the eyes of some. And this is where a rebellion always starts: a counter movement to something accepted. The accepted is clearly how men are seen nowadays. The man is mostly characterized as the money-maker, he is successful, he is in business, he is a gentlemen and protector. In short: he is supposed to be a hero.

This hero picture and the connected dominance is not what XOXO tries to destroy, it is more the restricted visualisation of this power that it tries to challenge. Instead of dressing up and showing off statements, straight and straight-acting men are rather toned-down in their dressing behaviour. But why should they be restricted if they embody all the dominance they are supposed to have? Is it the fear of being perceived weakly and effeminate? Therefore XOXO wants to be out there and state that gay men are sexually visible and have power. Being gay means to be different from straight men and that is something one can emphasise and empower.

The early gay movement happened in exactly the same way. It was about celebrating the difference. Taking a look at the gay community in New York at the end of the 80s, as seen in Paris is burning (Paris is burning, 1991, Paris is burning (movie)
makes this clear. LGBT people created strong communities, the so-called houses. Getting mutual support from there, they went out onto the streets. Provoking pedestrians and showing an almost clownish behaviour was a start of communication between the homosexual and heterosexual community (see fig 2 and 3). This happened partially in a humoristic way and partially it ended brutal, but the point is that they had the courage to do so.

This courage and the continuity of penetrating the socially accepted seems to be almost gone in Western societies by 2014. Societies are more democratized than they used to be and people tend to fall back into ordinary behaviour. Now there is the point where straight and LGBT people are no longer separated and all look alike, which is not an issue until people lose their awareness about their differences. Referring back to the numbers mentioned in the introduction, one can clarify that gay liberation has not succeeded yet.

**Dress for Sexass – the materialization of change (collection)**

To push the awareness about the necessity of sexual gay liberation all over the world, XOXO dares to celebrate masculinity and its sexual features in the purest sense. Menswear becomes here a crossover of modern street feeling, traditional tailoring, tacky show-off, bad taste and cross-dressing. The overall look of the collection is meant to be powerful and bright: an in-your-face propaganda of freedom.

Freedom in menswear means in this case the adoption of the female wardrobe to break with masculine gender norms. Cross-dressing for men was, and still is, very controversial. Putting a man into a skirt, dress or stockings is mostly considered a weakening of the wearer’s masculinity. This might be based on the overall gender role rigidity for males: men face discrimination easier than women when deviating from their gender related norms, in particular when it violates heteronormativity¹ (Warner, 1991).

¹ Heteronormativity is a term popularized by Micheal Warner in his first major work of queer theory in 1991. Heteronormativity sees heterosexuality as only form of sexual orientation.
Ignoring all of this, XOXO adopts skirts both mini and maxi into the male wardrobe. In giving them sharp lines and strong straight pleats they loose parts of the female, soft appeal and become more masculine. Ancient armours had this appeal too. Looking at Roman dressing behaviour in the second century confirms that skirts, fringes and pleats have been worn by men in all social classes up to the Emperor as well as in battles (see fig. 4).

These strong lines stand in contrast with the fragile appeal of the lacy lingerie pieces. Semi see-through materials are layered with flower-patterned lace and break therefore with everything that is known as accepted for men’s underwear. The construction stays the same like the usual men’s tight boxer shorts but features a high waistline reaching the belly button. With this the proportion of the male body gets distorted and the materialization does the rest to create a complete new sort of lingerie for men embracing what is seen as effeminate.

The cross-dressing appeal becomes even more provoking with adding corsetry into the collection. The corset itself is an inspiring garment as it represents an armour for the dominant sexual partner (Steele, 2013). The protected feeling and the upright posture enforce this dominance even more. The corset is not only shaping the waistline but by merging it into a jock-brief it becomes a full underwear garment. This new underwear combines two gay porn related fetishes: on the one hand it uses quotations of SM sex games (corset, see fig.5) and on the other hand it refers to lately very trendy gym changing room phantasies (jock-brief, see fig.6). It is a truly sexy garment.

Creating a sexy show-off is the essential part of the collection. Men known for their show off abilities are the Spanish toreros. Their extremely tight non-stretchy trousers pulled up into the waist and the cropped tiny jackets in bright colours with loads of embroidery are key inspiration. The
Traje de Luces (see fig. 7), so the original term for this suit, is extremely labour intense and worked out into the tiniest detail (Dunn, 2009). Therefore the focus qua silhouette in this collection is on the waist and in terms of quality on a high-end handcrafted level. The catchy show-off silhouette in XOXO is done by cropping tops, opening trouser crotches and raising the lingerie waistlines. In terms of finishings there will be a lot of tapes, invisible seams and little topstitchings as seen in most traditional tailoring.

But looking at traditional menswear also shows that this show off attitude cannot only be approached in a very obvious way but also subtler by emphasising shoulder lines and tailoring the garments to the exact fit, to make them body conscious. Tops are within the collection very tailored in the waist and trousers drop down to the hips. This gives a cool and baggy street feeling but also a very tailored strictness.

The mentioned finishings and the tailored look in total are the clean base to be treated with colour and prints to support the strong appeal. The colourcard is based on the three base colours cyan, yellow and magenta as they are the most powerful colours the human recognizes. To emphasise their power they are accompanied by light and dark greys as well as dark blues and purple and the non-colours black and white. The colourcard screams for attention, which is in comparison to latest trends quite outspoken. Colours are right next to the everlasting all-black look up and coming again but mostly in a combination with mud tones. XOXO is more saturated.

This saturation comes back in the prints, which are explicit. Talking about the celebration of masculinity gives a direct link to the one thing that is clearly and only masculine: the phallus. The phallus was in Ancient Rome a symbol for not only masculinity and sex but also luck (Lifeinitaly.com, 2011). The act of penetration on top of that is a clear act of dominating someone else and having power (Sex in Ancient Pompeii, 2013). Nowadays seen as unmoral and provocative it is time to re-establish the phallus as sign for luck and male sexual desire. In the prints the representation of the penis is less photographic but more geometric and
incorporates the penis into floral shaped eye catchers and check-like structures. This again creates a contrast between more organic and floral parts and those rather geometric and masculine parts.

The same contrast can be found in the materials. Mentioned were already the more organic and female laces and semi see-through jerseys in the lingerie that face high quality suiting wools and satin woven cottons as sturdy bases for jackets and trousers. Additionally added flowy silks meet finely woven Baptiste shirting, thick raw denim and hairy structured knits. It is a merge of very traditional menswear materials and more trashy add-ons, which create an overall sleek look with a lot of attitude.

**A gift for all – entering the free market**

Attitude and rebellion on the catwalk is lately presented through brands like KTZ. This brand seems to embrace a new attitude towards fashion and steps out of the commercial feel of long established brands such as Luis Vuitton and Armani. This outspoken niche of the menswear market still offers new opportunities for fashionable expression. The renewing part is the use of references and sportswear influences. By bringing streetwear into high fashion the target and dynamic of the market changed. The urban references play an important role by attracting a new young spirited target such as K-poppers and hip hop fans who became a new elite in trendsetting and seemingly change their styles with every season (Blanks, 2014).
That reaching this target is good for the establishment of a new brand is also seen in the quick success of KTZ. Originally an in-house line of the concept store Kokon To Zai (Kokontozai.co.uk, 2014), the shows became quickly popular and are now fully featured on style.com (Blanks, 2014). XOXO is aiming for the same target: a young spirited group of men. This group is not characterized by age range or living circumstances, neither restricted to the gay community, it is characterized simply by the mind-set of living the moment. Referring to marketing theories of archetypes, XOXO shows the attributes of the revolutionary or hero archetype. It breaks with conventions (revolutionary archetype) but also fights for gay liberation (hero archetype). The archetype theory gives values to brand identities rather than allocating a specific target group to the brand (Allegory Studios, 2014). Hereby the target group stays more broad which is, as mentioned, the case with XOXO.

A broad variety to style looks to match different occasion is the strength of the collection. For the secret pleasure in the office, the lace underwear could be worn under a normal suit and be a surprise for who is unwrapping it. The plain tailoring pieces in the collection offer renewing suit cuts but stay formal for occasions where the dress code should be understated. On top of that the showpieces represent a very outspoken way of dressing to maybe provoke in public or differentiate oneself from the mass.

Offering this broad variety of garments helps to sell the collection in a variety of stores. A perfect selling point would be areas like the Parisian Marras or London’s Soho, where small fashion boutiques are merged into a combination of Sex shops and nightclubs. In these locations the whole collection would be presented, whereas in bigger stores like the Dover Street Market in London or I.T. in Hong Kong the selection of pieces would be less outspoken and more sellable. Competitors in this segment of the market are Jeremy Scott, Thome Brown and partially KTZ. The similarity here is that they all combine traditional garment references with urban attitude.
Wrap it up

Born out of frustration about hatred against gay people who want to live their lives freely and a newly created wave of a *fuck it* mentality in the young spirited society, XOXO is the starting point for a new outspoken development on the streets. It should not only be seen as a gay right movement in action but as a materialization of change. The creation is meant to challenge the perception of masculinity and creates a new dominant, sexual male who provokes in public and creates tension to raise awareness. The collection itself is a bright statement embracing being different from the main stream and focussing on an even brighter future. It is positive, although being aware of what happened, but trying to get rid of that burden of oppression to live freely.

This free-living goes along with the celebration of expression. Every individual itself has to decide how much of a statement one wants to be, but from now on there is the possibility to use XOXO to visualize this quite explicitly. As graduation project this clearly will not change the world but it might be the start of some bigger development.

This development has a love for details and is crazy about traditional handcraft. It sees the value of quality and is meant to last longer than just one season. Using something distasteful and unaccepted and taking the challenge to make it beautiful rephrases the open-mindedness that XOXO wants to raise in people. It is time for another level of mutual acceptance. Physically men will always be men, no matter which sexual orientation they belong to and how they represent themselves. Anyhow, let the men be sexy and give mankind pleasure.
References

books


e-books


online


**imagery**


Fig. 2 and 3 compare: *Paris is Burning*, 1991, movie

Fig. 4: authors own (2014). National Museum, London, UK


Fig. 8 and 9: authors own (2014). print development


**movies**
