

Kitchen Sink Kids

by Silvia Bombardini



Queue For Lancs Away Day by Roy Stuart Clarke, 1988 – via SHOWstudio

It's said that stereotypes are the new normcore: clichés file past on the runway as they would on the high street of any one small town, and unsurprisingly it's Vetements that once again illustrates the seasonal curve at its most divisive extreme. But if Gvasalia's commonplace parade could be ascribed to the label's renowned penchant for reappropriation and provocation, it's equally tempting to look for a higher purpose in the newfound and widespread elevation of sameness, of localisms and domesticity across the industry spectrum.

'Fashion is about the everyday and the everyday is the political stage of our freedoms' reads one of the posters at Prada's FW17 womenswear show, hanging amid a concentric set of tiled indoors designed by Rem Koolhaas' studio AMO, where guests are invited to sit on beds. Though normcore has hardly been missed once it was gone, we shan't forget that one major reason why the style was so vilified in its wake was its ostensible pointlessness. What school of thought there was back when the term was coined – in favour of versatility perhaps, of liberation to be found in blandness – was lost as normcore became popular, a detachment no

longer critical but idle. But a handful of seasons later, and the world has changed: the times are ripe to fill the discreet shell of stylised normalcy with all the weighty substance of our ideals.

To reclaim the codes of ordinariness feels particularly urgent on days when extremist groups attempt to do the same, taking advantage of an unthreatening appearance to promote radicalised views that are anything but. *“If traditionally skinheads donned a specific subcultural uniform”* argues an article on the [Vestoj](#) website *“this is no longer the case”*. The author refers to the declaration by neo-Nazi Andrew Anglin, editor of *The Daily Stormer*, that New Balance trainers be *‘the Official Shoes of White People’*. *“For white supremacists ditching the skinhead image means leaving behind their status as subculture, which defines itself in opposition to the mainstream, to reaffirm whiteness as the mainstream”* it continues. It’s in this light that we may choose to take the elevation of everyday dressing in the limelight at fashion shows as a direct response, their ennoblement as resistance against the insidious threat of populism and alt-right rhetoric. Miuccia Prada’s leftist leanings are common knowledge in fashion circles, she was a member of the Italian Communist party in the 1970s. And Gvasalia’s have been made obvious with the endorsement of socialist Senator Bernie Sanders as inspiration of his latest menswear collection for Balenciaga. *‘The revolution starts at home’* was another promotional slogan to feature prominently on Prada’s social media channels, and the homeless character in Vetements’ line-up of archetypes wears a sweater bearing the flag of the European Union, at a time when its very existence is questioned. Elsewhere, it’s the soundtracks that offer interpretative clues. Raf Simons’ first collection for Calvin Klein has been universally lauded as a homage to the United States in the eyes of someone who just moved there – *“its reality, the clichés and the mythology”* wrote [Robin Givhan](#) *“America as an ideal, rather than a place”* – steel-toed cowboy boots, a stars-and-stripes wrap skirt, Brooke Shields. Shown to the notes of David Bowie’s *This is not America*, however, it’s a celebration that doesn’t fail to remind the audience of the discrepancy between the ideal and the country’s present reality. Meanwhile in Paris, Christophe Lemaire’s menswear show comes as a row of meticulously crafted workwear staples, as low-key and down to earth as the signature style his eponymous brand has come to stand for over the years. But a soundscape composed of British call-centre operators informing the unemployed, always silent, about their jobseekers’ benefits and allowance adds to the collection a sombre contemporary context: one that the designer later described to [Vogue](#) as *“the loneliness of dehumanization”*. With Brexit on our minds, it’s particularly poignant.

In times of uncertainty throughout history, most creative fields and practices have been known to forgo escapism in favour of social realism in its various forms. As fashion reaches literate maturity as a site of cultural production, it shouldn’t surprise us that luxury brands begin to do this too, with plenty of parallels to be drawn. Take the Kitchen Sink tradition in Britain. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the country’s finest filmmakers, playwrights and novelists lent their best skills to tell the stories of ordinary working class folks from poor industrial areas in the north of the country – the so-called *‘angry young men’* disillusioned with modern society, a label soon taken to identify both the authors and their protagonists. *“The narratives in sixties films [...] still hold up as being quite radical today”* notes academic Adam Murray in an essay for [SHOWstudio](#), *“yet the clothing worn and appearance of each character certainly has a heritage feel”*. Themes ranged from homelessness to

abortion, to joblessness – cue in Lemaire’s soundtrack. They were often set in the working-class home, which was at the time a markedly matriarchal space, where mothers and wives kept the family budget in check while men spent their days at the factories. This calls to mind how Prada described its show space in the press release: “AMO questions and looks at the role that women have in shaping modern society [...] the scenography identifies the intangible centrality of the contemporary female role both at the domestic and public scale”.



Wakefield Kids by Jamie Hawkesworth

Murray’s essay was written in relation to *North: Identity, Photography and Fashion*, an exhibition he curated together with SHOWstudio’s Lou Stoppard earlier this year at the Open Eye Gallery in Liverpool. Its aim was to shed light on the unsung influence of Northern English culture on international style, from tropes to tributes. “The north of England has a particular aesthetic or set of visual and cultural codes in people’s mind” said Stoppard in an interview with [Dazed Digital](#) “is it about debunking myths? To an extent. But it’s also about celebrating them [...] to make a case for the interesting link between place and aesthetic”. To embrace regional stereotypes, just like Raf Simons would do in America. One of the Belgian designer’s legendary FW03 parkas, featuring graphics from Peter Saville’s archive, was part of that show too. *North* ended the day after J.W.Anderson’s *Disobedient Bodies* launched at The Hepworth Wakefield, also in Northern England – a sign, perhaps, of a post-Brexit vote awareness on part of London-based creatives to step outside the capital’s bubble, as well as of the ever thinning line between creation and curation. Though upper-class in its outlook – the exhibition was apparently designed as a ‘cocktail party’ where figurative sculptures and artworks meet and ‘converse’ – one of *Disobedient Bodies*’ real highlights is the series of portraits by British photographer Jamie

Hawkesworth, featuring 123 Yorkshire kids from local schools dressed up in luxury garments from J.W.Anderson's and other designers' archives. Realism and playfulness meet.

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