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**Uniformly Speaking
How Rhetoric and Clothing Addresses Materiality at Work**

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Uniformly Speaking
How Rhetoric and Clothing Addresses Materiality at Work

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Dedication

For William M. Crosswhite, Ph. D.

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It will take a lifetime of studying language to have any hope of being able to properly acknowledge Daniel Garcia, my friend and husband. So, I will keep trying and give it that lifetime, my love. My basics, Marnie, Kristyn, and Lamiyah: you holding me dear is the best thing I've earned through this process. I thank you, this assembled committee, for your patience, tenderness, and good humor. My advisor, Barry Brummett, you have given me the compassion, the kindness, and the freedom I did not know I needed to discover myself as a researcher, and these gifts I will carry with me always. Dawna Ballard, your infinite wisdom, practicality, and good taste have become touchstones for me that I cannot do without. Diane Davis, the sense of wonder and humility that you impart in everything you do inspires me, invites me, and reaches out to me in ways I could never have anticipated. Josh Gunn, your courage and clarity to say what needs to be said and to do what needs to be done is a gift to those of us lucky enough to be in your orbit; in some of my scariest moments over this process, you've seen me and you've called me friend, and that means the world to me. My grandfather, Bill Crosswhite, to whom this dissertation is dedicated, was a first-generation college student at Berea College who saw himself through a doctorate in agricultural economics at Michigan State. I acknowledge his loving presence and spirit of curiosity guiding me always, even after death. The community of my cohort, peers, and professors from UT have given set the bar very high for future communities, and I am grateful for the imprint of this place. Words are not sufficient, and I look forward to being the kind of researcher, teacher, and person who honors all of these gifts you all have given me.

Abstract

Uniformly Speaking

How Rhetoric and Clothing Addresses Materiality at Work

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The question guiding this dissertation is: what do we manage with uniformity of clothing? More specifically, how does uniformity of clothing (including actual uniforms) manage our sensing, feeling bodies, our sense of self (subjectivity), and social interaction (intersubjectivity)? Through theory, method, and analysis, my work here collapses dualities of mind and matter, object and subject, body and clothing, not merely as an intellectual exercise but as a development of a potential site of negotiating ethical action. I examine fast food worker uniforms at three restaurants and contrast those to various forms of self-adopted uniformity of dress. The analyses conducted in both case studies highlight the power of style as a experience of materiality of thinking.

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Chapter One: The Uniforming of Everyday Life

My friend Jan lives in the High North of Norway and he has a middle-school aged daughter with three best friends: two of whom are white Norwegian descent just like his daughter and one is the daughter of Syrian refugees with darker features than the other girls. One night when all four girls had a sleepover, this young Syrian friend began crying as she shared with her friends her experiences of feeling alone, singled-out, and unattractive. The young woman is Muslim, and while she does not wear a hijab, she always wears modest clothing. This had become a source of teasing and negative attention from her schoolmates, but even more than the teasing, she said she often just felt invisible. The girls circled her offering comfort, and eventually they were all giggling and hyper again. But in the next days, Jan noticed his daughter shifting in her clothing choices to more loose-fitting long-sleeved tops and leggings under her skirts. He thought little of it, assuming the trends were changing, until when attending a school event later that month he saw how *only* his daughter and her small circle of friends had adopted a style closer to their Syrian friend, and were clearly different than any other students. The four of them had quietly started dressing alike, adopting a uniformity to match the modest young woman and offer her aesthetic companionship – the protection of being in a group. These girls addressed the bullying and racism their friend experienced as well as the invisibility she felt through adopting a uniformity of clothing to render her style (their guide) less remarkable.

Another friend Mark recently visited a cemetery, which as a history-lover is a usual excursion for him. While there, he noticed a detachment of several soldiers in Army blue (dress uniform) waiting to participate in an internment. As Mark had served in the Army from 1971-1973, he could easily pick-out from the group the three chevrons on the sleeve of the sergeant. He approached saying, “Sergeant,” to which the young man replied, “Yes, sir.” In the Army, "sir" is what sergeants call all officers. Even though Mark was not an

officer (he had been the same rank during his time as this young man), he is older by far, thus he qualified for the honorable title. That the young man replied so immediately is, possibly, because he was called by rank, not by ‘hey guys’ or without a title at all. They had a short conversation, throughout which the young man never relaxed into regular, casual banter, and he never wavered in his military manner. Although this was not a dangerous situation, protocols were observed, and Mark was recognized as an insider. Because the uniforms placed these young men, Mark could address them using a uniform-like language, which opened and then governed their interaction.

In 2019, a group of young white men chanted their support for Donald Trump while congregated at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC. This gathering led to several encounters from other individuals, and the primary understanding of this event was as a racist confrontation with an indigenous, prayerful man through their ubiquitous red MAGA hats (Mervosh and Rueb, 2019). Images of this confrontation, the seeming sneers and taunts of the boys in the earnest face of Nathan Phillips, are understood as racially charged immediately by the presence of those red caps. This a form of clothing declaring a group membership that comes with specific attitudes about race and national identity to the point where all it takes is a person of color stepping closer to a young man (who remains silent in word) for it to be seen as a clash and confrontation. The clothing of the young men was meant to say something about who they believe themselves to be; their rowdiness in using public space to display their unity carried an ominous entitlement or goofy childishness, depending on the audience’s feelings about those red hats.

These examples are everyday examples of how we know how to address (or ignore) those around us and ourselves because of what they and we wear, and both examples rely on a sense of uniformity to shape that knowing. In these two instances, uniformity of clothing makes the relationships possible and implicates lived experiences of race,

organization, discourse, and style. Writing in the second half of 2019, I concluded my dissertation prospectus stating, “when we operate without challenging beliefs about consciousness determining being, we run the risk of dehumanizing those around us and ourselves. We belittle embodiment to our own detriment.” I had no way of knowing that less than 6-months later, a global pandemic would challenge even the non-rhetoricians among us to realign and alter ways of understanding thought and being; an airborne, deadly virus created an urgency of attuning us to ways of bodying forth into (or bodying back from) public spaces and connecting anxious affect and thought to tactile, embodied activity (like wiping down groceries or washing hands with focused attention and longer time). New kinds of uniformity, like mask wearing, popped up, accompanied by new assertions about consciousness controlling being, like “my body, my choice” as a response to vaccines or that rejecting the fear of this time is as simple as not wearing a mask¹. This also led to new kinds of dehumanizing acts, like deliberately coughing on food and even people at the grocery store. Thus, the importance of keeping the material world (including bodies and viruses and respirators) in ongoing alignment with ontology has only heightened.

The question at the outset of this dissertation is: what do we manage with uniformity of clothing? More specifically, how does uniformity of clothing (including actual uniforms) manage our sensing, feeling bodies, our sense of self (subjectivity), and social interaction (intersubjectivity)? Through theory, method, and analysis, my work here is to collapse dualities of mind and matter, object and subject, body and clothing, not merely as an intellectual exercise but as a development of a potential site of negotiating ethical action.

¹ <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2020/05/masks-coronavirus-america.html>

The conception of clothing as a form of communication is often cited as a way of using clothes to express one's self or to say something about the wearer. This relies on a model of communication with a clear sender (and "I"), message (who I "am") and receiver (those who are "not me"); this is a conception of language with a distinct, bounded self who uses a tool to make thought visible to others. When I "use" clothing to say or be something, who is the "I" and how distinct can it be from the materiality of clothing, body, and the web of meaning making? Communication and language entails much more complex systems and rhetorics than this model would allow for, yet, as I will show here, this complexity has not extended to the networks of meaning enacted and at-play in clothing.

To better understand clothing as communication, more must be known about how clothing may operate as a thinking, a materializing, and an organizing system. Both clothing and language are often encountered as two, separate formats or forms for the content of our minds, meaning, language and appearance fall on the side of style while thought (imagined to be free floating, I suppose) falls on the side of substance. This model naturalizes and legitimizes boundaries between form and content, as well as internal and external – just as when I speak or write an idea (externalizing) I am sharing a thought (internal), when I dress myself it is presumed that the appearance, I create is a reflection (externalizing) of my sense of self (internal). In this dissertation, I explore how form is already content while and that which we think of as internal needing a vehicle to move to the external may also work the other way wherein external action creates new internal pathways (put another way, rethinking the separateness of internal and external).

Clothing, and especially uniformed clothing, is a unique text to explore in rethinking such dualisms. If we tend to think of saying something with clothing, it is often in uniforms and uniformity that meaning is most direct and agreed-upon. Uniforms are

largely meant to be clear indications with univocal visual cues. By uniforms, I mean a genre of clothing with understood underlying gathered values and norms that legitimizes group membership (Joseph & Alex, 1972). I will further develop my definition, but this definition, founded on Nathan Joseph's (1986) basic definition given in *Uniforms and Nonuniforms* places this study in the social, organizational, and rhetorical dimensions of dressing.

This means that uniforms are also the most purposefully coded form of clothing, meaning, they follow a set of controls meant to condense their meaning into a distilled, recognizable form. Police officers are not allowed to decorate their ties with funny clips or wear statement earrings on the job. Such coloring outside the lines is strictly forbidden--in part, as certain accessories may endanger the officer, in part, as too many deviations could threaten recognition of the police officer, and, most salient to this project, in part, to protect the image, authority, and expectations around what it means to be a police officer. There are also rules and laws about who can wear many official uniforms (Post Office worker uniforms, for example) and punishments for using uniforms to impersonate positions (such as jail time associated with impersonating a doctor by wearing a doctor's scrubs or white coat).

Uniformity is a different degree of image and authority, but it still guides our expectations around what it means to wear the right thing in the right situation. Uniformity of style shapes our understanding of place, time, events, and belonging. In announcing a study in the *MIT Technology Review* examining uniformity and what the authors named "the hipster effect," a perfect example of uniformity and identity unfolded. The study announced itself as examining "how nonconformists usually act unconventionally in the same way — to end up being exactly the same" (arXiv, 2019). While the study itself proved this theory (and I will look at the details of this study in my literature review), right after

publishing the review, the authors received an irate email from someone claiming they had used his image for the top photo without his permission. Crying, “slander!” he went so far as to threaten legal action. NPR (Garcia Navarro & Feingold, 2019) shared a portion of the letter in which he states:

"You used a heavily edited Getty image of me for your recent bit of click-bait about why hipsters all look the same. It's a poorly written and insulting article and somewhat ironically about five years too late to be as desperately relevant as it is attempting to be. By using a tired cultural trope to try to spruce up an otherwise disturbing study. Your lack of basic journalistic ethics and both the manner in which you reported this uncredited nonsense and the slanderous unnecessary use of my picture without permission demands a response and I am of course pursuing legal action."

The team at *MIT Technology Review* quickly checked to see if the model in the Getty Image they'd used had given consent, and found the model in the image was not, in fact, the person who wrote the email. In relating this story via Twitter, the author of the study, Gideon Lichfield, shared, "In other words, the guy who'd threatened to sue us for misusing his image wasn't the one in the photo. He'd misidentified himself. All of which just proves the story we ran: Hipsters look so much alike that they can't even tell themselves apart from each other."

We may wonder, how could a person so egregiously misrecognize himself? And if this is how he chooses to dress, why so much anger over the title of “hipster”? This example of a clash between how he sees himself (or *where* he sees himself reflected) and the categories of style, clothing, and uniformity he's citing all requires attention. The study on the “hipster effect” describes what we can observe as an effect, yet the knee-jerk anger at being classified as such is a conundrum. The desire to be unique, known, authentic,

ourselves, while only having so many items of clothing and categories of style to choose from, would seem like a recognizable limitation. Yet, what I examine in this dissertation includes questions around our ongoing actions towards *further limiting* categories of style by opting-in to uniformity. This points me to questions of how much control we have (and don't have) over our appearance, and what we are doing by uniforming as an active, ongoing process. The self-misidentification of the hipster in this example gathers-up what I seek to learn through this dissertation: how uniformity can be so valuable and so disdained, so important and so rejected. In this first chapter, I start with several research questions that gather-up my curiosities into a dissertation, then I offer definitions for several key terms that are central to my research. I move on to explore some of the ways uniforms and uniformity has been studied along with several key examples that help me identify the gaps that remain, and I conclude with a preview of the remaining chapters in this dissertation.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

My project elaborates the idea that subjectivity happens through the orchestrations and interventions of style, performativity, and materiality. With clothing not being cast as style separated from substance, or a stand-in for language and thought, but a materialized way of thinking and differing and relating our beliefs and ideas about uniforms and what they do for the wearer and observer require attention. Insofar as uniformity of clothing has become seemingly normalized, a central question of my dissertation will ask is:

- 1) how does regulation and limitation through uniformity in clothing also regulate other aspects of our systems of meaning (language, embodiment, interaction)?*

With this question set up, I will concentrate on the rhetorical function of uniforms and seek to understand:

- 2) *What is the rhetoric that upholds uniforms and uniformity? Especially, how is uniformity perpetuated through visual, material, and discursive rhetoric?*
- 3) *What strategies are enacted in order to justify and naturalize uniforms and uniformity's operations within interaction? And how are issues of uniformity negotiated rhetorically?*

I see that uniforms are a unique category of clothing to study as they are most explicitly linked to social structures, direct meanings of elements of clothing, and (perceived) legitimacy and agency for the wearer. To this end, I seek to learn:

- 4) *How can rhetoricians best describe and account for the material effects of uniformity in clothing?*

DEFINITIONS

Before going much further, it's important to define key terms I will use throughout this chapter and the rest of the dissertation. I will define clothing, uniformity and uniforms, discourse, and workplace to offer clarity for each term while also embedding each term in the definitional research that has been done in these areas (sometimes, outside of the field of rhetoric and communication). As a fair warning, none of these terms has a clean definition. So, for each I seek an agreed upon definition and then build out and connect to other definitions from that foundation.

Clothing

If I am asking what are we managing with uniforms, it may be helpful to first consider what are we managing with clothing? This is a big question – one that I address throughout my dissertation project. The term clothing is often grouped with dress, fashion, garments, and so on, and each of these terms has many meanings to discuss what we wear

at every level of society. Defining what these mean individually is complex as they are ever changing. As Mary Lynn Damhorst and Reilly (2006) writes on fashion, “Meanings are not usually handed down by some inhuman force of cultural or political correctness,” rather, “Meanings are created by individuals living day by day within cultures and interacting daily with the objects and materials of dress” (p. 5). As clothing is something we interact with daily, the meanings being created and circulated shift. Much of this project will be looking at meanings of clothing, where and how they originate and shift. But to define the term is different priority.

For the purposes of this study, I will use the term clothing as my baseline. Defining this word is to wade into deep waters right away. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Thomas Carlyle (1987) in defining clothing proposes a sequence of functions of clothing and argues that the first function of clothing was not utility but *ornament*. “[C]lothes... began in foolishness love of ornament” he writes, before going on to provide “increased Security and pleasurable Heat” (p. 31). He argues there can be no creation of objects even for protection that is not also embedded in culturally specific aesthetic preferences, thus the decoration is *as originary* as the utility. He offers the next function of clothing was to provide cover for modesty and finally became that of making distinctions between ourselves and a “social polity” (p. 32) or organized society. This account of clothing makes possible his claim that society is “founded upon Cloth” (p. 48), meaning clothing makes society possible. Malcolm Barnard (2014), in discussing Carlyle’s ordering of functions, mentions “he is not in fact moving from the natural to the cultural or from the simple to the complex because as soon as there is clothing, all the functions arrive at once” (p. 43). The question becomes, then, how do I include this layered, varied function in a definition of clothing? Or, put a different way, is there a way to talk about clothing that does not shut-down these multiple (and multiplying) functions and meanings?

To simplify and distill, in this study by clothing, I simply mean the items we dress ourselves in and encounter others wearing (in my study, I will also occasionally attend to appearance, which can include accessories, body markings, and hair styles, but my focus will remain on clothes). This includes high fashion and Old Navy, depending on your position in the world and in life. This includes all the functions assigned to and enacted in the act of making and wearing the items. This definition of mine is distilled from many different takes from scholars on what this term means, and I primarily rely on Joanne Entwistle's (2000) definition of dress as "a situated practice that is the result of complex social forces and individual negotiations in daily life" (p. 65). I want to keep the emphasis on the active – not the utility of the piece of clothing, but the ongoing interaction (whatever that may be) with the materials.

Uniformity and Uniforms

I define uniformity and uniforms in relation to one another avoiding pitting them against each other, while also exploring what the literature has said for each and expanding on these definitions. There are differences, which are salient to our understanding of these two terms in practical life, which I will explore in this whole project. But these terms are interdependent, and by avoiding a binary between them I believe that interdependence will prove generative.

Uniformity

While specific uniforms may be easy to picture (military, sports teams, school uniforms all come to mind quickly), the concept of uniformity as a *unified appearance* is more generalized as the idea leading to specific uniforms. Oxford Dictionary's definition of uniformity is "the quality or state of being in uniform." I hope to show in this project

that uniformity of clothing does not only pertain to specific formal uniforms but shows-up in a myriad of ways that are important and distinct.

Take the typical undergraduate woman's outfit for daily life. At my public university, there is no school uniform, nor even a strict dress code, yet walking around campus there is a huge amount of young women, in particular, who dress extremely similarly: oversized cotton tee shirt in a light color, short running shorts in a dark or saturated color, Nike running shoes. The ubiquity of this outfit and the relatively minor differences between the items makes this similarity across a campus of 50,000-plus simultaneously surprising and common place (even more so when I realized this look springs up on campuses across the country); who (or what) coordinated or organized this and why does it feel so normal so quickly? It would be easy to colloquially name this particular look as a "uniform" for undergraduate women that some choose not to wear but still know they are opting-out of it. But Hertz (2007) reminds us that, as discussed above, all clothing operates at the symbolic level with consensually held ideas about what is appropriate or inappropriate--meaning sameness shows up often. She warns:

[S]imply sharing the same aesthetic, social, and symbolic system should not indicate that all members of that culture or group wear the same uniform. To an outsider, the members may certainly appear similar because of this shared semiotic system. Internally, however, individuals may recognize a wide range of stratification and diversity. The 'uniformity' is only an illusion to the casual viewer. (p. 49)

Thus, uniformity does not carry with it the more direct denotative aspects of uniforms. Nathan Joseph (1986) in his in-depth study of uniforms offers that uniformity in everyday clothing most often occurs out of functional necessity, realistic limitations, or tradition (pp. 114-116). Scholars across disciplines have seemed to see these causes of

uniformity as less important than the structural and hierarchical machinations of crystalized uniforms, and therefore have given theoretical and historical significance to formal uniforms (Brunsma, 2004; Ewing, 1975; Gullatt, 1999; Holloman et al., 1996; Keenan, 2000; Meadmore & Symes, 1997; Parker, 1993; Rafaeli & Pratt, 1993; Synott & Symes, 1995; West et al., 1999). Even Joseph (1986) is quick to scold and spurn the colloquial language of suits or sameness of outfits as an adopted uniform and seeks to downgrade this practice as *not* uniform dressing (pp. 114-116). It is as Miller and Woodward (2012) noticed that “the less people wore particular genres of clothing, the more those were the clothes that seemed to be written about” (p. 3).

This has created a large gap in our knowledge of uniformity of clothing that does not meet the criteria of uniform, and even in defining the term there is little to go off of. In fact, the primary academic discipline where uniformity is taken as important with its own circulation of meaning is in folkloric studies of costume (Bogatyrev 1937; Dalby 1993) wherein, “cultural uniformity may be the product of either the retention of traditional custom (dictated, in part, by a semiotic system and the availability of materials, techniques, and technology) or the self-conscious display of a constructed identity to outsiders” (Hertz footnote, pp. 54-55).

I would add to this area of study, the work that has been done in anthropology, specifically by Daniel Miller (1987, 1998, 2008) and Sophie Woodward (2006, 2007, 2009) and their attention to ubiquity and ordinariness of clothing. In their co-researched project on blue jeans (Miller & Woodward, 2012), they hone-in on the aspect of *ubiquity* and *ordinary clothing* and present them as key to why jeans matter to so many people. They offer that jeans uniquely allow us to present ourselves as “citizens of the world” and that, “people want to lay claim to being part of that world, but fear that in doing so they will lose their sense of individuality and specificity. So to have one garment that is

simultaneously extremely personal and extremely ubiquitous can be important in its own right” (p. 6). They focus on how through this ubiquity their study participants see jeans as the ideal in “thoughtless automation” in that they just turn to jeans over and over. They offer that participants “seem to equate loss of consciousness an implied triumph over the burden of self-consciousness” they feel with other clothing. Ubiquity of specific items/objects is different than a uniformity of style or aesthetic. There are many (ubiquitous) yoga pants on the market and in people’s closets. Uniformity works at the level of how those items are employed or engaged as part of an ensemble that becomes recognizable and short-hand for various social positioning, group membership, etc. As the dictionary definition of uniformity states, there is a “state of being” that is aligned, not simply the fact of appearing or a commonality of objects.

Instead of dismissing how many people are using the term “uniformity” as some type of incorrect or slang categorization, I would like to discover the appeal and meanings uniformity of dress offers us as it appears in many, many settings (more than formal uniforms). This mode of dress is ever-widening as new styles are adopted, the social pressures and rules shift as to what is appropriate in different settings, and as social media and a fully globalized market speed-up the circulation and availability of styles and items. Rhetorical methods of study is uniquely situated to discover what is managed, gained, and negotiated through not only uniforms but our immense attraction to and employment of uniformity in dress.

Uniforms

Uniforms can be broadly defined as a genre of clothing. From this starting point, in defining uniform clothing the question that arises (with little agreement reached) is how much of an ensemble must be regulated for it to qualify or be identifiable as a uniform?

For example, when all employees tie the same apron over individual outfits, is that enough to constitute a recognizable uniform? How many different elements can there be between military ranks and insignia before the members of the group are wearing different uniforms? How personalized can an item of clothing be and still fall within the code of uniform? With this central question in mind, research on uniforms has largely functioned to delineate a boundary between uniform and mere uniformity of clothing and style.

Carrie Hertz (2007) positions uniforms in relation to clothing generally by offering that the latter is regulated via social etiquette which is “tacitly and inconsistently enforced” through various means of social pressure (p. 43) while uniforms are “overtly regulated through precisely outlined and disseminated visual (and often written) codes” (p. 44). These codes always have space for differences, resistance, and personalization without compromising the uniform’s standing. Brunnsma (2004) specifies that uniform codes dictate a clear and narrow rule of what must be worn, which differs from dress codes, which specify what may *not* be worn (p. 15).

I’m interested in the types of uniform (both official and unofficial, self-adopted) that seemingly carry no honor or particular power – uniforms that are not dishonorable but *unremarkable*. Thus, the definition of uniforms I will need to work-from may include a power-hierarchy but will not rely entirely on a uniform as power-giving. For example, I would guess that there are few to no special affordances that come from a fast food worker’s uniform. The food worker’s uniform is meant to help him/her disappear into the machinery of the fast food restaurant and to further the business goals, and that invisibility perhaps carries even outside of the workplace with *implications* for power and subject/object dynamics to explore but with no special affordances or access to power.

Defining what I mean by uniforms will help separate what I include in this category of clothing. However, this task proves far more difficult than it may seem because in

practice, there are as many instances of breaking and resisting a uniform's codes as there are codes. Carrie Hertz (2007) synthesizes definitions of "uniform" across disciplines², and she finds, "In their construction of a definition, scholars writing on the uniform tend to rely on an idealized depiction of the garment and its functions. This uncomplicated characterization ultimately leads to a breakdown in the definition and a misrepresentation of the object" (p. 53). Defining without essentializing is not an easy task, and so I am forming a definition that I hope opens up the sightline of uniforms to including many inputs instead of pinning it down and cordoning it off.

Although they've been used for thousands of years by different people the world over, Craik (2005) places our contemporary understanding of uniforms—very much reflected in Hertz's definition—in the context of modernity saying, "Of all forms of clothing, those with instantly recognizable codes and signifiers become a convenient form of shorthand – hence the uptake of uniforms in modern civic life" (p. 180). Thus, to begin my own working definition, *a uniform will have individual elements that carry a readable, regulated, and symbolic code of meaning to the wearer and to group members.*

Many scholars define uniforms through their network of function and relation to hierarchy/power. Joseph and Alex (1972) offer that uniforms uniquely function by identifying or concealing the wearer's status, emblemizing group membership, conferring legitimacy, and suppressing individuality. Many studies focus on how uniforms require giving up individual identity in order to correspond with specific structural relations and align a group of individuals under a purpose by placing them in relationship to others in the same organization/event/function (Craik, 2003, 2005; Fussell, 2002; Joseph, 1986; Keenan, 2000; Meadmore & Symes, 1997; Rubinstein, 1995; Rafaeli & Pratt, 1993). Craik

² Including anthropology, folklore, history, sociology, fashion theory, psychology, and art history

defines uniforms—both informal and formal uniforms—according to that which *manages* their uniformity; formal uniforms are rigorously managed through codification while informal uniforms are managed by censure and praise (often via gossip and commentary in various forms). To add to my working definition, *uniforms operate within the semiotic system and power structure of uniformed groups.*

While iterable codes and intended functions are part of a uniform's design, any uniform's meaning can be both interpreted and manipulated by wearers and observers. Hertz sees a lack of acknowledgement of this feedback loop when she points out the scholarly neglect of “uniforms as worn garments has led to the assumption that uniform designers and enforcers have exclusive control over the messages transmitted by the clothing” (p. 47). She ends her synthesis with recommendations for future study which form a foundation to constitute what I can take as a partial definition: *uniforms, as both physical and communicative articles of clothing, are co-constructed among various participants.*³

My working definition of a uniform, then, is this: *a uniform is a genre of clothing that operates within the semiotic system and power structure of uniformed groups, that will have individual elements that carry a readable, regulated, and symbolic code of meaning to the wearer and to group members, and, as both physical and communicative articles of clothing, are co-constructed among various participants.*

Discourse

Throughout my dissertation, I examine uniforms and uniformity's (uniforming's) discourse. As a rhetorical project, I connect discourse with “text,” which includes the

³ Hertz states this a series of questions that future researchers must ask. See p. 53 of “The Uniform: As Material, As Symbol, As Negotiated Object”

visual, material, and discursive aspects of uniform discourse. Though some would argue that discourse lies solely in the linguistic (something I briefly critique in Chapter Three), the definition of discourse I work with here expands beyond this usage to incorporate texts including cloth, clothing (designs and objects), restaurants and places, imagery, and architecture. Whether in material, visual, or linguistic form, discourses are forces that have persuasive and material power. This dissertation connects many kinds of texts to trace the rhetorical patterns located in uniform discourse. Clothing can function rhetorically and the ways we shape our discourses about uniforms and uniformity also shape our understanding of its imprints.

Workplace

The terms defined in the above sections are all interrelated (to a certain extent). They share complex relationships and differences that intersect and come together to connect, contest, and distribute what we've come to understand as common practices of uniforming. Here, I offer a brief extension of the definitions presented so far as they often connect with terms related to workplace(s) in this project.

Our conception of workplace is developing and changing at a pace that struggles to helpfully keep-up and name or categorize the experiences of work at this point in time. The COVID pandemic only sped-up the pace of this shifting sand. Ballard and Siebold (2003) analyze communication structures used to organize work and argue that experiences of time are central to this process. Ballard and Seibold name temporal enactments – how group members perform time (flexibility, linearity, pace, precision, scheduling, and separation) – and temporal construals – how group member orient to time (includes scarcity, urgency, and present and future time perspectives) – as demonstrative of how time is constructed in an organization. Focusing on communication and temporal aspects as

constitutive of a workplace, rather than a certain organizational structure (such as classical) or a leadership chart, brings a wider net to the study of workplaces and communication. Thus, whether someone is in a fast-food franchise as an employee of the restaurant, or sitting at a table with their phone answering emails to colleagues, the workplace in this study is defined by both temporal enactment and construal of group members/workers (even if group members are not in agreement on their experiences of time in the same organization).

Such temporal enactments, in this study, may overlap with discourses and texts beyond the group members. For example, time at work can be performed by a nonhuman pacer (a timer ringing to signal a fried egg is ready). Importantly, workers in this study communicate about their experiences and attitudes about work with their uniforms and ways of dressing while such texts shape and form experiences of time as well.

One way to name (and define) workplaces that are populated by autonomous, creative, often high-income careers, is to think in terms of a shifting demographic Richard Florida (2002) identifies as the creative class.

CLOTHING, DISCOURSE, AND RHETORIC

Discourses emerging from clothing and rhetoric impact not only individuals but commercial and academic perspectives as well. In research on immigration and aesthetics, we can see how blending-in to U.S. style norms gives a sense of safety and status (regarding legality)—especially for women of color (Wang, 2017). Many immigrant women and men quickly find that the most accessible way to blend-in is through clothing (Topaloff, 2018; Treleaven 2017). While the degree of vulnerability immigrant populations experience is often beyond their control, self-presentation is manageable. Looking like you belong is half the battle. In a series of interviews with refugees, one young man from the Ivory Coast

states, “If you're well-dressed, people will respect you, which also helps to keep you safe” (Topaloff, 2018). The fact that immigrants desire to manage respect and personal safety from those in their new home cities and countries is not a surprise. Anti-immigrant sentiment is on the rise across European countries and the United States (Porter & Russell, 2018), particularly for outspoken Republicans in the United States (Brockway & Doherty, 2019).

In looking at how late capitalism reaches into every aspect of relationships, we can see Whitney Lundeen, creator of a dress line she calls Sonnet James, pitching her business to investors on *Shark Tank*: “I found when I became a mom I couldn’t engage with my kids as much as I wanted to. I wanted something that could help me be the mother I always wanted to be” (Wilson, 2019). Her answer: a dress that resists grass stains. The dress is pitched as allowing her customers to better manage motherhood. Instead of tackling issues of paid maternity leave, the still yawning wage gap, narratives about how much of child rearing is to be shared between partners, costs of childcare, and so on, this entrepreneur put her problem-solving skills to picking the right dress. That “something” to help her and other women be the mothers they always wanted to be is not coupled with structural changes or even small changes (perhaps building community wherever mothers are). Instead, clothing is introduced into a conversation that is not about clothing to serve as the tool to managing engagement. That this logic holds water for her, for the people she’s pitching it to, and to her customers says something about what we all believe clothing can accomplish. I don’t believe many people really think the right dress will turn them into good moms. However, the power of that image - imagining myself in the picture-perfect scene of being a “good” mom – is larger than the logic presented.

Clothing, as Kaja Silverman (1986) states, “makes the human body culturally visible” (p. 147). Carlyle saw all the functions of clothing as simultaneous, and I take all

these elements as constitutive and gathered-up creating the person before me. But this kind of gathering has been mostly studied in terms of smaller slices or intersections of different themes. The first intersection is when we think of clothing as representing a kind of language or system of meaning, as in wearing a certain thing “says” something. In this case, the language-system of clothing is “central to the ways in which we perceive and imagine ourselves as social beings” (Dussel, 2005, p. 195). Some studies in this intersection claim that consumer goods can serve as signs which have powerful pragmatic considerations of the marketplace that affect their meaning in ways far beyond what language can convey (Agrest & Gandelsonas, 1977; Krampen, 1979; Mick, 1986).

Twigg’s (2010) study on clothing’s importance to dementia patients is the best example of an approach to clothing as a language system as inclusive of the environment and embodied agent. The dominant narrative of dementia is one of loss in which cognitive impairment inevitably means self-eradication. Twigg argues with Kontos (2004) that this narrative is a reflection of the Western privileging of the mind in the constitution of a self, and she asks us to look to more complex narratives of embodied selfhood for our understandings. In this context she suggests:

[Clothes] represent a continuation of cultural and personal traditions; they are located in social relations that respond to and acknowledge the clothed self, and in which the person is directly embedded, in the sense of being the wearer and bearer of clothing; and they form part of the continuing narrative of self through which the people express their position within particular social worlds. (p. 225)

Here is a sense that clothing does not merely replicate what language could do just as well. Clothing is not only a *display* of the mind. Instead, clothing operates with the legibility, repeatability, and detachability of Derrida’s signature, and it produces while it is produced, refers to that which is not present (Derrida, 1972). “What we

wear is thus more than just how we present ourselves in terms of outward appearance, but part of how we enact our being,” Twigg assesses. As much as we choose and enact a self with clothing, the clothing acts back on us. “Clothes are performative, part of our habitus. In the context of dementia, they have the capacity to enact back on the self, re-presenting to the individual the person they once were and, to some degree, still are” (p. 225).

For Twigg, clothing addresses a self and calls-forth a self in a unique way.

A less helpful look at clothing and dress as a type of language with its own grammar and sentences, comes from Lurie’s (1981) book aptly titled, *The Language of Clothes*. And if language can be understood as Mead (1967) conceived of it, “as a set of significant symbols” where it “is simply the set of gestures which the organism employs in calling out the response of others” (p. 335), then a linguistic model may help us decipher what individuals are “saying” with dress. Roland Barthes’ (1990) exhaustive coding and work in *The Fashion System* sets-up one pole of semiotics wherein all signs have (clear and direct) referents (and Lurie is, in a sense, continuing that work). Yet, there is another pole or side to semiotics wherein there is hermeneutics of meanings that are always deferred and different. For example, Saussure (1959) shows there is not positive identity for any letter of the alphabet, only negative identity in that the letter “e” is not an “a” or an “h.” Any encounter with the letter “e” brings up the whole system of differentiation. Saussure writes “in language there are only differences. Even more important: a difference generally implies positive terms between which the difference is set up; but in language there are only differences without positive terms” (p. 121). For Derrida (1978), this system of difference is the condition for any meaning or being; *différance* comes *before* being (pp. 114-115). What this means for clothing is that it is not simply a tool that is free from the webs of difference: fashion, style, class, race, and so on. While it does call-out a response,

as Mead suggests, the network of differences is vast and unpredictable. Linguist and anthropologist Edward Sapir (1931) notes that with fashion:

The chief difficulty of understanding fashion in its apparent vagaries is the lack of exact knowledge of the unconscious symbolisms attaching to forms, colors, textures, postures, and other expressive elements of a given culture. The difficulty is appreciably increased by the fact that some of the expressive elements tend to have quite different symbolic references in different areas. (p. 269)

Declaring that specific pieces of clothing are stand-ins for specific words and meanings in language emerges as deeply problematic in light of those deferrals and differences (or *différences*). “What most distinguishes clothing as a mode of communication from speech,” according to Davis (1992), “is that meaningful differences among clothing signifiers are not nearly as sharply drawn and standardized as are the spoken sounds employed in a speech community” (p. 13). Rene König comes closest to capturing fashion’s “slippery essence” of change and differences by seeing fashion’s constant changes as a defense against the human body’s mortality; ever-changing fashion serves to solidify and pin-down the body as a constant in the background (König, 1973), thus our very experiences of embodiment interact with and rely on differences in clothing. Malcolm Barnard (2007), in response to Lurie’s project, clarifies that “meanings are not ‘messages’ in any simple sense, and clothing (as well as fashion) does not communicate messages in terms of a ‘speaker/listener’ or ‘sender/receiver’ model” (p. 172). Instead, he offers the notion that “meaning is a product of the interaction between the beliefs and values an individual holds as a member of a particular culture and some examples of visual culture... meaning does not pre-exist the interaction between an individual member of a culture’s beliefs and values and the example of visual culture” (p. 173). This aligns with Derrida’s sense that differences are where interaction and meaning begin.

While clothing as an object in use produces meaning, the term “functional” can still be applied to clothing – even as a sign it certainly does not exist without function – but that functionality must include meaning-making and culture-making capacities as well as acknowledging the nonfunctional needs clothing meets (such as aesthetic pleasure) (Negrin, 1999). For example, Kaiser expresses the possibility that dress and appearance could capture “the true mystery of our realities [which] may reside in the visible, tangible, and taken-for-granted realm of appearances. We may be able to express something about ourselves and our cultures through the medium of personal appearance that we are unable to get across through other means” (Kaiser, 2006, p. 91).

UNIFORMS, WORKPLACES

Observing uniforms in interaction—as opposed to studying idealized uniforms apart from their use—is where I will take the literature review in this second section, as this is where this genre of clothing works within a system. This type of observation is launched with Leonard Bickman’s (1974) study “The Social Power of Uniform.” Bickman sees this study as addressing how wearing a uniform effects interaction with others, not just the effect on the wearer, which had been covered (Singer et al., 1965; Zimbardo, 1969). He focuses on degrees of social power in order to measure how much a uniform wearer possesses when the uniform symbolizes authority. In order to test this power, he places a white male research assistant in the street so he can ask passersby to perform one of three tasks varying in demands (pick up a piece of litter, give a coin to a stranger, or to move away from a bus stop). The research assistant makes these requests wearing regular clothing, a milkman's uniform (a common sight at the time), or a guard’s uniform. Across situations, 19% obey the civilian, 14% the milkman, and 38% the guard (twice as many people obeyed the research assistant when he was wearing a guard’s uniform). In a second

variation of the experiment, Bickman finds that people follow through with obeying the “guard” even when he immediately walks away after making the request (does not stay to ensure their compliance), suggesting that they comply not out of coercion or intimidation but because they believe in the legitimacy of his power.

I find in this article a distinct salient feature of uniforms that ask for further study and that has not been taken-up. The fact that the milkman’s uniform actually garners less obedience than the civilians indicates that uniforms and authority are not automatically aligned, and Bickman calls attention to this stating, “power was related to the type of uniform not the mere presence of a uniform” (p. 52). There may be uniforms that make a person less powerful, less respected, or at least less heard. But because this study was interested in how much authority a uniform can carry, the focus remained on the coercive and reward power associated with the guard uniform and not the degrading of power with the milkman uniform.

Little has been done on uniforms in rhetorical studies. Cathy van Ingen and Nicole Kovacs (2012) point to athletic uniforms and critique their use as a form of sexualizing female athletes, yet the scope of their project only focuses on one sport (boxing) in a small Australian league. Mascarenhas (2014) experiments with military uniforms in a performance-based study where participants create a pulp from their Army/Navy/Marine uniforms and turn it into what she calls “combat paper,” focusing on the paper making process as it “reappropriates this symbol” (p. 94). While these two articles examine different types of uniforms, both rely primarily on an understanding of the uniform as primarily symbolic. Even in use of or repurposing of the physical uniforms, the symbolic aspects are attended to and not the embodied experiences of the wearers and observers.

One area of strong research in uniforms is on school uniforms across the globe. Research on school uniforms in the US school system leads back to roots in racial

segregation in the 1960s and earlier. While less widespread than in other countries, instances of uniform policies in US schools began with disciplining “unruly”, “savage”, “untamed” bodies – “bodies of those who were not able to perform self-regulation or self-government: women, Black, Indian, poor classes, immigrants, toddlers or infants” (Dussel, 2005, p. 191). These types of uniforms were argued to be utilitarian yet acted upon individuals in value-laden ways reminding us that utility is not power-neutral. White and White (2012) show how of these groups American Indians and Black citizens were given the closest scrutiny and surveillance concerning what they could wear and when. Tsianina Lomawaima (2014) documents the uniforms introduced in Federal Indian Boarding schools forbidding all tribal wear to ensure the children dressed in a “civilized” manner down to their underwear. There is a lot to be gained from these studies as they combine an understanding of formalized uniforms with what we gain and lose from uniformity of dress. School uniforms tend to be less about hierarchy or legitimacy within an organization (as compared to the military or police uniforms) and more about stabilizing a population of various ages in relation to the dominant social group in order for other activities to take place; put another way, school uniforms create and maintain a baseline for social interaction, and that interaction is shown in these studies to include control and coercion as well as social mobility and access.

What’s more, while automation in clothing and lack of self-consciousness may feel freeing, it is not hard to find that it easily creates unconscious bias in action and interaction. Specifically, Lefkowitz et al.’s (1955) study “Status Factors in Pedestrian Violation of Traffic Signals” shows the differences in power between a young white man who is dressed in either a sharp business suit and tie or a rumpled (blue collar) work shirt and trousers when he crosses an intersection against the traffic signal (jaywalks). The researchers watched from a distance, noting how many other pedestrians would follow this young man

in his violation of the law. When wearing the suit (indicating high social status), significantly more people followed than when he was wearing the lower-social status worker's wear.

This study wanted to understand how higher social status correlates with higher compliance and authority giving on the part of observers. I find it important that no official uniform was required, rather, strangers on the street recognized the suiting or the shirt and pants as connected to specific codes and groups. This study has been cited and relied upon to better understand social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), group membership and symbolism (Belk et al., 1982; Hechter, 1988), as well as methods of sociological research (Crano et al., 2014). But we have not looked at how employing specific styles of uniformity in dress may align with class-awareness.

We have strong explorations of uniforms and their semiotic function and limitations. We understand that uniformity of clothing plays a (sometimes surprising) role of social individuation and simultaneously brings a sense of belonging to wearers and observers. But studies of uniforms and uniformity have yet to widen the focus from effects-oriented research. We know that clothing communicates with language-like systematicity, but flawed models of communication and language have limited our understanding of just how we circulate and produce meaning through clothes, including uniforms. Much of the literature does not address the embodied aspects of uniforms and uniformity, meaning, not only the relationship between the clothing and the body it dresses but also the relationship between the genre of clothing and how we understand our own bodies or a sense of embodiment at a given time. We have clear studies of how formal uniforms are often developed to address class-related concerns, but no one has extended this function of class-consciousness of uniforms to chosen uniformity. Theoretically, as we move away from dichotomies of subject/object, interior/exterior, mind/body and so on, the literature has yet

to address what we may be doing with clothing that does not rely on interpretation, intentions (of the wearers or the designers), or interiority.

CHAPTER PREVIEW

While this introductory chapter provides a synopsis of how uniforms and uniformity has been studied in relation to rhetoric and communication, chapter two develops on these ideas through a theoretical framework for this dissertation. I assemble my theoretical lens from Butler's performative theory, Malafouris' Material Engagement Theory, and Barry Brummett's rhetoric of style to light the way in looking at uniforming. I ultimately theorize uniforming at the intersection between performativity, materiality, race, and style in order to claim that uniforming is itself a rhetorical style.

Chapter three describes my methodological framework for this project. I first describe my case studies and the artifacts that comprise my research. I then articulate a method of rhetorical criticism informed by the theory set up in chapter two. This particular methodology invites the critic to begin to name particular elements of uniforming's connection to performativity, materiality, and style. This methodology also invites me to question and rethink my different roles and what to call myself in this dissertation.

Chapter four and five are case studies. In chapter four, I examine uniforms in fast food restaurants, including McDonald's, White Castle, and Burger King. Chapter five explores adopted and self-styled uniformity in high-pay creative and tech work. Both case studies are distinct, and taken together put into relationship some of the ways in which rhetoric is often put to use to normalize and instrumentalize uniforming.

Finally, chapter six will serve as the conclusion of the dissertation. In this chapter, I offer a summary of the work and examine the larger importance and limitations of my dissertation and make recommendations for future research.

Chapter Two: Theorizing a Rhetorical Style of Uniforms and Uniformity: Clothing as Materialized Communication and How Clothing Thinks

In her article “The Rhetoric of Urban Space” Elizabeth Wilson (1995) describes uniformity as she sees it proliferating through consumer spaces:

Yet the consumerization of space appears to lead not to diversification but rather to a uniformity of the kind that was always feared in the traditional anti-socialist critiques. True, it is a uniformity the opposite of what was seen as the dreary uniformity of Eastern Europe socialism, the uniformity of scarcity: this is the uniformity of plenty, when every shopping mall has the same Laura Ashley and Benetton, not just nationally but internationally: the uniformity of a population, highly stratified on economic lines, so that the poor may, be physically excluded from the shopping mall and sent back to their K-Mart or Kwiksave. Economic and social inequalities remain as gross as ever, yet the global shopping mall renders them curiously invisible. (para 26)

In this description of 1980s malls, Wilson illustrates the intersection of uniformity, style, class, and physicality. While dated in its specifics (although vintage Laura Ashley is having a resurgent moment), Wilson’s observations connect the theories that inform my dissertation. In this chapter I gather and interpret established theories of J.L. Austin’s and Judith Butler’s (respective) performativity, new materialist theory, and Barry Brummett’s rhetoric of style in order to take-up a new approach to uniformity and uniform dress.

Most often uniforms have been looked at in terms of how they function in an organization/social setting or how they work upon the wearer to change a state of mind. The intervention of communication and rhetorical theory is the possibility that uniforms and uniformity are communicative phenomenon and can be studied as such. I would like

to argue that rhetoric plays a strong role in the production and experience of uniformity and uniform clothing, and yet this important dimension of clothing is not well understood. As stated in chapter one, the default in describing clothing as communicative is often to discuss it as a personal expression. In order to investigate more layers in uniformity and uniforms, I will theorize uniformity at the intersection of performativity, materialist theory, and style to argue that uniformity, even at the institutionally prescribed level – is a rhetorical style.

In this chapter, I explore the theoretical approach and illustrate what I mean by rhetorical style. Performativity (defined in the following section) is an overarching theory for this project. As I see it, performativity functions as the fertile soil in which language and materiality and experience become potentialities. From performativity comes the constitutive possibility of materiality. And style, in both a linguistic and a material sense, is a guiding logic of any discourse on clothing, uniformity, and uniforms.

This chapter is organized from the linguistic to the material. I begin by discussing J.L. Austin's performative speech, and I go on to explore how Judith Butler broadened this concept and the intersections between Butler's and Derrida's theories of performativity. I then survey new materialist theory and where this work may propel my approach in opening new ways to discuss bodies, language, and class. I conclude by zooming-in on specifics in Brummett's theory of style as a focused approach to uniformity and uniforms.

PERFORMATIVE RHETORIC

In the above example from Wilson, the power, and therefore the rhetoric, of uniformity in her described urban space is the ability to make visible and invisible chosen aspects of the environment. The seamlessness of this experience in consumer space (which has extended much further than 1980s global brands' reach via the internet and smart

phones) is presented as a whole, without fragmentation, while it reproduces fragmentation of class and access. Wilson argues, “Those without the passport of money are simply an absence, not so much an underclass as an unclass” and she describes the proliferation of “public spaces with hidden, private areas” that hide both extreme wealth and poverty (para 26). John Fiske (1990), a contemporary of Wilson, argues that all popular culture is a bottom-up route to push-back against the hegemony of the powerful by looking for contradictions in texts to read them oppositionally. Fiske applies this perspective to verbal and nonverbal texts arguing “popular culture lies not in the production of commodities so much as the productive use of industrial commodities” (p. 28). The transgressive nature of this bottom-up approach is a dimension of the appeal of popular culture texts. This rhetorical power of transgression mixed with appeal may best be explored through the concept of performative rhetoric wherein declarative texts or speech make it so, or, put another way, the saying is the doing. J.L. Austin (1962) developed in his teachings that language is not only connotative or denotative, but also performative. For Austin at times to say a sentence “is not to describe my doing... or to state that I am doing it: it is to do it” (p. 6). In the example from Wilson, there are no signs with text warning the poor to stay away; the rhetoric of the space is declarative enough. To include clothing as performative, I argue that wearing clothing is not communication meant to only describe or to state, but in the wearing to make it so. In my case studies I will explore how this is enacted on both ends of the economic spectrum by looking at minimum wage uniforms (chapter 4) and self-adopted uniformity of clothing for white-collar workers (chapter 5).

Most (in)famously, Judith Butler (1990) explores performative rhetoric in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* by arguing that gender is performed through “words, acts, gestures, and desires” that are “performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured

and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means” (p. 136). Using this as a framework, performative rhetoric can be defined as utterances that do not only describe but through language and embodiment constitute the things they say.

For clothing as a text, when we assemble what we will wear, we are both writer and reader, wearer and viewer, representation and original. With uniforms (both chosen and enforced) as a text, each of these layers is heightened. One of the aspects of uniforms and uniformity is the repetition – not only in style between different wearers but the repetition of wearing the same clothing over and over. Butler (1993) offers, “performativity is construed as that power of discourse to produce effects through iteration,” to “produce what it declares” (p. 20, p. 107). This study looks to expand discourse to include clothing.

In this direction, I follow Jacques Derrida (1972) who begins ‘Signature, Event, Context’ with a call to expand the word ‘communication’ to ‘a semantic domain that precisely does not limit itself to semantics, semiotics, and even less to linguistics’ (p. 1). Rather than simple exchange of meaning, performative rhetoric takes communication and meaning as force and displacement that is proliferated as it is utilized. Derrida offers two proposals to expand our language discovery. The first locates absence in the very origin of language and writing; any chance at specificity in writing depends upon absence of all the other meanings (p. 7). This very much can be seen in Wilson’s uniformity of plenty that can only “write” or exist as a public space because the wealthy have their private space and the poor are rendered invisible.

The second proposal from Derrida extends this absence found in writing to all of language, undoing any privileging of speech over writing. It is not only written discourse that must rely on absence but all of communication emerges out of difference from what it is not. The social and political messages urged on audiences, readers, consumers, viewers, and so on, are not deterministic but productive and disruptive, in this case, of clothing and

wearer. When applied to uniforms and uniformity of clothing, this second proposal would perhaps serve as a reminder that while dressing and going about the world in a certain uniform has communicative and rhetorical force, that force operates within constantly shifting contexts. Just because someone is wearing the same clothing and that clothing is communicative does not mean it is also deterministic. This leaves an understanding of what we manage with uniformity and uniforms more open than may be imagined within a different theoretical framework.

Performativity and Uniformity

Kim Sawchuck (1987) offers a performative direction (following the work of Derrida) for fashion scholars stating, “inscriptions of the social take place at the level of the body, not upon it” (p. 55), and I follow her lead as fashion scholars move the focus away from clothing as representation of a centralized power or identity towards how specific clothing (texts) are taken up and constitutive in various contexts. Rhetorical theory opens a conversation for this focus. For this study, an understanding of performative rhetoric and clothing expands uniforms and uniformity beyond the intentions of a creator/designer and beyond the goals of an employer or individual. Many studies of uniforms have focused on them as controlling apparatuses and strictures meant to be applied upon certain bodies (i.e.: school children in inner-city public schools, low wage workers, military service members, etc.). Performative theory recognizes the power of a uniform in its enactment and how uniforms are taken-up by wearers and observers allowing us to look at clothing as constituting the very thing the wearer would like to say while also moving beyond clothing as representing a mind behind the design or body wearing it. This theory points me to look at clothing in action, not just the clothing and not just the intentions of the wearers/designers.

NEW MATERIALIST THEORY

While performative rhetoric expands language beyond speech or writing, the unique dimension of clothing as a rhetorical material is that it is *material*. While in rhetorical studies we refer to texts and include in that term many physical artifacts, this study focuses on the textuality and materiality of rhetoric through objects of cloth. While other theories of rhetoric offer valuable insight into the metaphors of taking-up texts, I chose the theoretical lens of new materialist work because it recognizes that thought and language have material consequences and products. Why not start with something visible and physical to explore this relationship? In the following section I provide an overview of what I mean by New Materialist theory followed by a guide to focused areas this theory explores that intersect with clothing in new ways starting with emplacement (highlighting how to include bodies in study), mark making (how to include language and thought in material study), and material force (how to include economic class enactments in study).

An Overview: New Materialist Theory

In general, New Materialist theory attends to a gathering-act to bring materials into language and/or representation. As Barad (2003) states, in representationalism “there are assumed to be two distinct and independent kinds of entities – representation and the entities being represented” (p. 804) creating an ontologically disjoint between words and things, “leaving itself with the dilemma of their linkage such that knowledge is possible” (p. 811). Rouse (1996) offers that the lopsidedness of Cartesian thinking privileging what something represents over its fact of being creates a “presumption that we can know what we mean, or what our verbal performances say, more readily than we can know the objects those sayings are about,” and that this presumption reinforces our (mistaken) insistence “that we have a direct and privileged access to the contents of our thoughts that we lack

toward the ‘external’ world” (p. 209). Alaimo and Heckman (2008) set up the problem helpfully stating, “many commentators have argued [that] the linguistic turn in philosophy and critical theory has entailed an almost exclusive emphasis on epistemology . . . [which] necessarily skews philosophical discussions in the direction of words rather than matter” (Alaimo and Heckman, 97–8). For this study of uniforms, I argue that uniforms can become something else when taken out of the context that makes them uniform but that process is always going to be part of a matter-ing process wherein the materiality contributes to the development and changes in discourse.

The goal is not to reassert materials as more important but to find a way to include and even start with the material to guide how we understand and operate. I can start with Heidegger for whom rhetoric is world-disclosing and not manipulation or simply the counterpart to dialectic. For Heidegger, words are things - a nexus of relations of the world – and to use them is to bring the relations into our on-going being in the world (integrated into every aspect of who we are, our body, compartments, in every way we can imagine). For example, when Heidegger describes the jug it is already both a gathering of a thing and an idea. How does a jug gather? It’s something people make to hold something and we talk about it/create it and have some sense it’s ours. But the idea to hold something is not unseen elsewhere in the world – birds create nests, lakes appear in craters. Vesseling is already in the world. As life goes on, things in the world respond to these vessels. The human is part of the ensemble that is going on with jug making, but is already part of the world that does this. The jug is a gathering not solely by human craft: humans are responding to the world and making the world in meaningful ways. It is a form of what Heidegger calls dwelling in that the jug sustains a way of life and is needed as both a gathering and an outpouring (a way point) of relations that receives and gives.

In *Ambient Rhetoric* Thomas Rickert (2013) specifies dwelling as more expansive than even Heidegger may have suggested with his own obsession with the rural and rustic provincial life. Rickert offers, “Dwelling is an ongoing and never stilled process of attunement, disclosure, and building. Thus, dwelling is rhetorical in an ambient sense: disclosure and attainment emerge out of a worldly affectability, so that dwelling’s coming to manifestation is a matter of ongoing differentiation” (248). For a rhetoric that includes materiality, dwelling and its constant reordering, shifting, and responsiveness is an important concept. This leads to differentiation as a process that is constant as an important aspect to examine if I want to look at materiality.

The way Kirby (2017) summarizes these questions is with the question, “How is difference - which already assumes the existence of identities and their separation - determined?” (12). I would add to this question, how is difference enacted and active with clothing that is meant to limit difference? For Derrida, minimal referral, not representation, creates reality. This minimal referral operates as the most elemental operation in life itself (with no conscious intent – think about genetic coding or DNA). As soon as there is differentiation (meaning/matter), there is meaning. And the flip-side is true: there’s no differentiation without meaning (originary synthesis).

One way to explore this differentiation is through Karen Barad’s intra-action wherein we don’t have some “thing” just out there; we have a mattering process in both senses of the word (value and materiality). Forces and practices are always material-discursive: at once productive of matter and of meaning. Interaction relies on distinct, independent entities with agency to act upon one another. Intra-action by contrast, involves the “mutual constitution of entangled agencies” (Barad, 2007, p. 33) where material practices configure in specific ways to produce specific phenomena; intra-action occurs in a reality that is continuously re/constituted through material entanglements. Her way of

illustrating this is through the Heizenburg Principle where particles change from particle to wave when observed. In short, the observer becomes part of the phenomenon they are examining. That's a micro level version of all that we do. Any apparatus of measurement/constraint that allows us to know something or perceive something is by necessity automatically part of the phenomenon that we are trying to witness, and for Barad, we get entities and difference out of this flexibility.

Emplacement and Clothing (Including Bodies)

In this project I argue that we understand and sense our bodies through the clothing we wear, not in spite of it, and we understand our clothes through our physical beings occupying them. Clothing's connection to identity and role in social settings is also a factor; there are some sartorial codes that insist on a connection between identity and uniform such as a police officer or doctor's white coat. These uniforms *can* be taken away from their context of use but the larger context is that there are consequences to impersonating certain roles. But first, the question of language and to talk about "the body" without essentializing, or defining it against dualisms such as mind/body, is a tricky one. How can rhetoricians discuss embodiment while removing that "against"? Put another way, how can I discuss semiosis and interpretive work with an understanding of what is material, what is matter?

Emplacement, as conceived of by sensory anthropologists including Howes (2005), Ingold (2000), and Pink (2011) offers a shift from embodiment. It is a term that New Materialist theorists from various disciplines have begun to explore that focuses on "thinking about bodies as parts of places" allowing researchers to "recognise that the body provides us not simply with embodied knowing and skills that we use to act on or in that environment, but that the body itself is simultaneously physically transformed as part of this process" (Pink, p. 347).

The implications and possibilities this shift opens from embodiment to emplacement are wide ranging, and I will focus on two here. First, the emphasis on the biological nature of the body and its presence/appearance in a built environment/infrastructure (or, more broadly, a place) has implications for the relationship between the body and environment. While classic approaches identify built environments as powerful sites of reproduction of meaning across the bodies that may move within them (Bourdieu, 2003), other scholars have expanded such views by describing infrastructures as fragile, unpredictable assemblages (Bennett, 2010) and as things that exist apart from their pure functioning which “need to be analyzed as concrete semiotic and aesthetic vehicles oriented to addressees” (Larkin, 2013, p. 329).

While uniformity extends to places and decoration and architecture, I focus on uniformity of clothing as my guiding text even as it interacts with places, buildings, etc. I explore clothing by investigating how we access the materiality of our bodies through how we dress ourselves, as well as how we access our sense of selfhood by being addressed and addressing others in public. Emplacement offers a chance to examine clothing with each of these layers plus a new layer: how our moving, sensing, dressed bodies make places. We can only participate in this communication of address because we dress our bodies. Clothing is a part of social interaction and goes hand-in-hand with the places we inhabit, the people we meet, and the things we make.

Second, the emphasis in emplacement on movement of a perceiving, sensing body involved in the making of place (Casey, 1997; Warner, 2011) offers a chance to re-think knowledge and ways of knowing as a “practical and continual activity” (Harris, 2007, p. 1) wherein place is “an *event* rather than a *thing*” (Casey, 1996, p. 26). For Harris, “knowing is always bound up in one way or other with the world. A person does not leave their environment to know... neither does she stop in order to know: she continues’ (Harris,

2007, p. 1). What Harris calls knowledge, Casey (1996) calls *perception* which is “an affair of the whole body sensing and moving” (p. 18).

Representationalism is how we have long discussed clothing and bodies with the idea being that at the individual level, identity or something interior in the mind is expressed via the clothing, and at the social level, culture and discourses are reflected in and worked-out in the clothing we buy and wear. This has been a fruitful way of understanding the ways we use dress as larger and more abstract than mere utility as is well exemplified in feminist critiques of utilitarian approaches to clothing (see Negrin, 1999; Wilson, 1987). Yet this approach pits biological knowing against cultural knowing resulting in a passive, a-temporal viewing of perception or knowledge. For example, Negrin argues that “the assumption that there is a ‘natural’ or ‘functional’ mode of dress which serves universal, biologically determined needs such as warmth and protection is untenable, since what is considered ‘natural’ and ‘functional’ is itself culturally determined” (p. 100). By breaking away the larger concept of “utility” answerable only to the biological or the bodily response to an environment, the material aspects only recover rhetorical force within culture and discourse. I argue this is not reflective of the entangled experience of wearing clothing in any environment, or, argued a different way, what environment is free from culture and what culture is so free from biological needs? With emplacement, rather than embodiment or representation, knowledge is not subsequent to perception but an element in that perception.

A uniform prepares and situates a body appropriately for a place and at the same time, the strategic use of uniformity can create and change a place, thus the uniform is a unique form of emplacement. Looking at present-day modes of uniformity and uniforms, I use emplacement theory to examine strategies used to manage and preserve those systems in the process of uniforming. Emplacement theory helps me better conceptualize how

uniformity functions as a rhetoric that is not necessarily intentional but often shows up as subtle and quietly expansive and as forces that “raise the ambient envelopes of life” and “challenge us to understand the collective stakes of being emplaced within those envelopes” (Fennel, 2015, para 2).

Mark Making and Uniformity (Including Language)

Having New Materialist theory’s connections and inclusion of bodies through the concept of emplacement, I can better enter into the conversation of ways to theorize including language and thought in the study of material goods (in the form of clothing for this study). In *How Things Shape the Mind*, Lambros Malafouris (2013) explores historical evidence for the ways in which material artifacts are not only aids in the cognitive process but part of cognition itself. Much like the work of emplacement wherein knowing and perceiving are entangled with place, the work of what Malafouris calls Material Engagement Theory is to posit that a mind is a distributed, embodied, and situated process with external materials. With new ways of identifying what he calls the “marks of the mental” (p. 179) Malafouris identifies mark making as his object of study where he specifies that unlike other researchers who position mark-making as primarily representational and symbolic, he understands it as “an evolving enactive cognitive system of material engagement” (p. 180). Making marks is a perceptual means of sense making. He shifts the question from what did certain marks (as seen on historical artifacts) mean as carriers of symbolic messages to what did the activity of mark-making do for the mind (p. 190)? I will explore more of how this approach constitutes new methodologies of discovery in the next chapter, but here I will point out that Material Engagement Theory offers that instead of marks representing the physical end product of the marker’s thoughts, “mark making action and thinking are the same” (p. 190) and understanding material signification

show how all kinds of work that went into the pattern is what enabled the process. We cannot just say the end point is the representation; it has to go through layers of inscription that influence and change how we perceive.

When considering uniforms and uniformity in this study, I'm looking at clothing that has often been considered both primarily representational (uniforms as enacting the hierarchy of an organization) and utilitarian (clothing meant to enable work or certain action). Understanding this form of clothing as a kind of mark-making that does not have the thinking somehow front-loaded, but is the thinking itself, may help foster an understanding of all clothing as mark-making and thinking. The question for this transition is, when is the mark-made? Is it in the wearing of the clothing? The manufacturing? What is the relationship between the clothing making a mark through wearing it and entering a web of marks already in place? These are new and exciting questions that Material Engagement Theory introduces to the conversation.

There is much space to grow in attention to the material in rhetoric through this theoretical lens, and I should note that there are a few voices in fashion studies who have called for increased focus on materiality of clothing in study. Ilya Parkins' (2009) call to build a feminist theory of fashion centers Karen Barad's agential realism (which I will explore briefly here and in more detail in Chapter 3). Pamela Church Gibson (2013) asks us to include the materiality of clothing and the processes surrounding its production in any analysis or study of fashion, and she is the first to ask that we not only include it in understanding modes of production but in "'figuring' fashion on its own terms":

And fashion is material in two senses: on the one hand, the world of fashion is a world of material things; on the other it is a world of constant change, transformations, shifting surfaces. (p. 355)

While others fear this materiality as a shallowing of sorts, such as Craik's (2003) concern that we've lost the "deep strata" (8) that we supposed was underlying the surface, both Parkins and Church Gibson sees this as an expansive move. Aligning with Braidotti's (1994) sense of the world of contingent material surfaces needing to be newly "figured," Church Gibson points to Butler's concept of performativity (1990) wherein "interiority itself become[s] an effect of a public and social discourse" (356).

Church Gibson is not alone in finding Butler's performativity instructive towards understanding materiality. Karen Barad (2003) reconceptualizes performativity to develop her concept of intra-activity. She states, "Matter is not simply 'a kind of citationality' (Butler, 1993, 15), the surface effect of human bodies, or the end product of linguistic or discursive acts" (p. 822). Rather, for Barad, matter is an "active 'agent' in its ongoing materialization" (ibid). I mention this attention to performativity not to repeat what I have already discussed in this chapter but to reinforce the path to the theoretical lenses I've selected here. Barad argues that "identity formation must be understood as a (contingent and contested ongoing) material process through which different identity categories are formed and reformed through one another" (2001, p. 99). I posit that this description of materialization is one nearly all of us have experienced through trying on different clothing.

Clothing as Material Force (including class)

Hannah Arendt (1958) tells a story in *The Human Condition* from ancient Rome in which a proposal was put forth to publicly identify slaves by requiring a uniform dress for every slave. This proposal was rejected on the grounds that it was considered, "too dangerous, since the slaves would now be able to recognize each other and become aware of their potential power," and she summarizes this move declaring, "What the sound political instinct of the Romans judged to be dangerous was appearance as such" (p. 357).

I argue that Arendt's notion of appearance as creational or at least as a potentiality in which power rests/activates opens the way for understanding rhetoric and the negotiation of meaning first through the visual or through what appears, rather than first through the linguistic. For Arendt, appearance and power are inextricably entangled. There are seeds of challenge to the metaphysics of epistemology in that appearance and being are united in her ideas of natality (rebirth through becoming part of the public square - through appearance). In her story of Romans denying enslaved people uniforms so that they do not see how many of them there are and revolt (there were many more enslaved than there were enslavers), she sees appearance as a threat in that it would claim a power they already have but cannot *see therefore it cannot be acted upon or moved into being*. This is what sumptuary laws monitor: appearances through clothing.

In his study titled, *The Civilizing Process* (1978), Norbert Elias examines how and why Western society moved "from one standard to the other" as a process towards what he calls increased civilization, which he states, "describes a process or at least the result of a process.... Something which is constantly in motion, constantly moving 'forward'" (p. 5). Elias' work is also about how standards and the requisite substandards are communicated and enacted within and across different classes, countries, languages, and so on. He points out that similar to sumptuary laws regarding clothing (such as, the king may only wear purple), current laws rarely include the sort-of manners-centered legislation governing interaction. Elias claims this is because, "reading has sharpened seeing, and seeing has enriched reading and writing" (p. 78). He locates even his own work in the on-going process of how standards go from enforced to natural. For example, he presents clothing according to Erasmus who says, "Clothing is in a sense the body of the body" (p. 78), and who goes so far as to give "what manner of dress corresponds to this or that spiritual condition." Elias claims that using the material goods of clothing is the *beginning of a type*

of seeing, or observation, that later we call “psychological” and that, “the new stage of courtesy and its representation, summed up in the concept of civilité, is very closely bound up with this manner of seeing.”

Uniforms, then, have the potential to empower through visibility and to empower actual seeing and/or thinking. I argue we have found many sophisticated and intricate ways to make sure uniforms can keep people in their place while representing upward mobility as well. If anything, Arendt’s story highlights the slipperiness of uniforms: one group can claim they will reinforce social and economic hierarchy while another groups can claim this will unite the workers against the masters creating an upturn of social and economic hierarchy, and both are correct. The potential in clothing for exercising power is what we are managing. Hunt’s (1996) study entitled, *Governance of the Consuming Passions: A History of Sumptuary Law*, places this tussle over the symbolism of clothing at the center:

The right of an aspirant group to wear some symbolic item of apparel or to participate in some rituals are important forms of social conflict. The history of sumptuary law reveals a general pattern of a widening of the privileged circles as successive waves of pressure come from below and concessions are granted. The result is that far from clarifying social differences, sumptuary law actually provokes increasing competition and imitation. (p. 105).

What I see this study adding to this point of view is the fact that it is not only the symbolism that is provoking – it is the material goods themselves as well. One way to explore this potential clash between the top-down approach and Fiske’s bottom-up oppositional reading of texts is to look at the transgressive uses of uniforms. Jennifer Craik’s (2005) foundational work, *Uniforms Exposed: From Conformity to Transgression* is an exploration of the “*overt* and *covert* lives” of uniforms. Craik argues that cultural transgression with uniforms, such as cross-dressing (often part of carnival celebrations) or

fetish dressing (including school uniforms, military uniforms, and material-based clothing such as “rubberwear” as a kind of sadomasochistic practice) is intrinsic to any understanding of the order and conformity of uniforms, meaning, we only understand order and control in relation to the absence of disorder and impulsivity. She states that uniforms are intriguing because of their “combination of ‘not’ statements (rules of wearing and not wearing that are often unstated or only partially stated – or arbitrarily applied) and transgressive messages” (p. 4). There are many examples of this in study including The Village People (Sims, 1999), liturgical dress (Ribeiro, 1999), and kitsch (Keenan, 1999), and all of these help to point Craik to the ways that transgression “is a means of simultaneously undermining *and* reinforcing rules of uniforms since an effective transgressive performance relies on shared understandings of normative meanings” (p. 210).

In addition to Elias’s and Craik’s foundational works, there are few studies that model how to give consequence to visuals and materials in their own right, not as stand-ins or representations for more important meanings but as forms and substance of meaning. Dick Hebdige’s *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979) is one important example of how this can be done. Here he discusses the work of Cohen on style and socioeconomic class in looking at clothing:

Rather than presenting class as an abstract set of external determinations, he showed it working out in practice as a material force, dressed up, as it were, in experience and exhibited in style. The raw material of history could be seen refracted, held and ‘handled’ in the line of a mod’s jacket, in the soles on a teddy boy’s shoes. Anxieties concerning class and sexuality, the tensions between conformity and deviance... were all frozen there in a form which was at once visible and opaque, and Cohen

provided a way of reconstructing that history; of penetrating the skin of style and drawing out its hidden meanings. (p. 78)

The *material force* of class is part of its felt, everyday form. Rather than limiting clothing to this one-way street of only giving image or packaging to thoughts or speech, much work is needed to better understand it as a system of communication with rhetorical influence and force. Another example of how attending to the materiality changes the whole approach is in Angela McRobbie's work, first as an article in *Feminist Review* (June 1997), and later as a book (1999) wherein she critiques the debates over consumer culture as missing any discussion of production, labor, poverty, working conditions at all levels of the system of production (including the shop assistants at the mall stores), and childcare. Much as Brummett (2011) finds style is "a means by which power and advantage are negotiated, distributed, and struggled over in society" (xi), I want to explore how clothing is a gathering (to use Heidegger's word) and an agential intra-action (to use Kirby's term) in its material existence as an effect of representation and public discourse.

This is how the materiality of clothing works: in a networking of meaning making wherein, "no element can function as a sign without referring to another element which itself is not simply present" (Derrida, p. 246). This means that even in its material form, clothing as communication is produced and understood in relation to non-present elements. An example of this in study is in Stuart Ewen's (1990) metaphor of style as aesthetic "skinned" from material. This ability to "skin" means "all manners of human expression and creativity are mined for their surfaces: their look, their touch, their sound, their scent" (p. 52). This mirrors Brummett's assertion that we must explore the heightened importance of style wherein being collapses with looking (p. 8). Hebdige challenges that, "Our task becomes, like Barthes', to discern the hidden messages inscribed in code on the glossy surfaces of style, to trace them out as 'maps of meaning' which obscurely re-present the

very contradictions they are designed to resolve or conceal” (18). What I’m offering here is that the task may not be to find *hidden* messages as much as it to account for and encounter those glossy surfaces as meaningful and connected already.

In each of these examples meaning and matter, surface and material seem to be separated but are, in fact, constituting and activating new signification and sensemaking. “Reasons, motives, and so forth are activated aesthetically in a culture that is aesthetically dominated, as is ours,” according to Brummett (p. 5). Clothing is a materialized force of history, concepts, and power while it also makes-material contradictions, motives, and ways of being. It “skins” surfaces of established material and ideas while it also offers a skin for that which is contingent and emergent.

Aestheticization of Everyday Life

While not a concept associated with New Materialist theory, I think the notion of the aestheticization of everyday life is an important bridge to begin thinking about style and how it has become an ever-present feature in the entanglements between place, bodies, language, and class. *The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology* definition for this concept, it refers to:

The claim that the division between art and everyday life is being eroded. There are two senses: (1) artists are taking the objects of everyday life and making them into art objects; (2) people are making their everyday lives into aesthetic projects by aiming at a coherent style in their clothes, appearance and household furnishings. This may reach the point where people see themselves and their surroundings as art objects. Benjamin claimed that mass consumer commodities had liberated artistic creativity, which had migrated into everyday reality. Consumers had broken down the hierarchy of high and low culture. (Abercrombie et al., 2006)

With this definition, we can see how when talking about emplacement, mark-making, and material force, the environment is infused with a sense of aesthetic project in the form of seeking coherence. One way to understand this project is the sense of “betterment” people may perceive when making aesthetic changes.

Aesthetics as enacted in everyday life were theorized by Max Weber as a kind of secular salvation from the “iron cage” of routine and labor. “[Art] provides salvation from the routine of everyday life, and especially from the pressures of theoretical and practical rationalism” (2003, Protestant ethic, p. 181). How ironic that the aesthetics of middle-class life, then, are so often dull and repetitive (not what many would call art). However, this connection between everyday life and art is traced by Mike Featherstone (1991) in *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*. He looks at the ways modernist art “strives to efface the boundary between art and everyday life” (pp. 66-67) by (1) replacing high works of art with everyday objects, (2) transforming life into art by making it aesthetically pleasing, and (3) filling everyday life with a saturation of “signs and images” (ibid). This aestheticization creates a sense of accomplishment and progress, or, put another way, “To aestheticize is to strategize” (Brummett, p. 17). Virginia Postrel (2013) calls this phenomenon *glamour* and argues it functions by obscuring/ignoring certain details while highlighting others and, most importantly, it (glamour) “does not exist independently of the glamorous object – it is not a style, personal quality, or aesthetic feature – but emerges through the *interaction between object and audience*” (p. 12). This theory of Postrel’s accounts, in part, for the attraction and influence aestheticized objects of everyday life hold and for the possibility that the relationship between object and audience is far more complex than consumer and mass communication studies have explored.

UNIFORMITY AS RHETORICAL STYLE

Barry Brummett's theory of style will help explain some of the ways that style has influenced perspectives on bodies, language, and class and the project of aestheticization of everyday life towards uniformity. It is not a stretch to think of clothing and style as connected in significant ways, and while uniforms and style have been explored to some degree, much remains to be seen in terms of learning uniformity's rhetorical style. In the following sections I explore the ways in which a theory of style may contribute to the study of uniformity as an aestheticizing force. First, I look at some components of style as a theoretical approach, then I connect rhetorical style to studying uniformity, and lastly, I offer a map for understanding and identifying uniformity as a rhetorical style.

Theorizing Style

In his book, *A Rhetoric of Style*, Barry Brummett develops a theory of style arguing that style is the main arena where political, social, and cultural practices are negotiated, and being a particular way is collapsed with looking a particular way. For Brummett, it is precisely in the connecting of rhetoric and values that struggle emerges making style far from a neutral practice. His definition of style includes this:

Style is a complex system of actions, objects, and behaviors that is used to form messages that announce who we are, who we want to be, and who we want to be considered akin to. It is therefore also a system of communication with rhetorical influence on others. And as such, style is a means by which power and advantage are negotiated, distributed, and struggled over in society (xi).

For Brummett, this is the "rhetoric for the social system that we all have in common" (p. xiii), and the rhetoric of style crosses boundaries, both global and economic. For the rhetorical critic, Brummett categorizes five basic components for a rhetoric of style:

primacy of the text, imaginary communities, market contexts, aesthetic rationales, and stylistic homologies.

Primacy of the Text

Brummett (2006) defines a text in *Rhetoric of Popular Culture* as “a set of signs related to each other insofar as their meanings all contribute to the same set of effects or functions” (p. 34). When applied to style, the text is a performance “designed to be read and noticed by others” and as such, it is a strategic text with motivations that can be read (Brummett, p. 118). In the case of identifying uniformity, we see patterns and convergences that signal texts of uniformed style which can be read by the critic. Brummett points out that texts amalgamate with the building of identity and social allegiance. He is careful to write that this is not a dismissal of aspects like class, race, gender, sexuality, or ability, but that these aspects become merged with texts and exist as texts. In this way, even if it is outside of consciousness, style is not accidental. In the example of the uniforming of clothing, we can distinguish style through a collection of texts that allow us to identify the style of uniformity. Shirts, hats, shoes and other elements of uniforms, as well as work spaces, architecture, and designer statements all signal texts of uniforming style.

Imaginary Communities

With the text first, an audience (or imaginary community) is called into being and manifested by the text itself (pp. 119-120). Brummett points out that “Style is the medium in which this socially charged process of imagination takes place, and thus we construct, call to, and respond to imaginary communities” (p. 121). If we take for example a uniform, it is not until there’s a textual, stylistic element that is declarative of the wearer’s position that a certain type of consumer or imaginary community can form around it. In the case of

White Castle's uniform, which I examine more closely in Chapter 4, the choice of designer and the hip-hop styling of the uniform itself are created not only for workers but some pieces are available for purchase by customers creating a whole new way of interacting with fast food uniforms. In the case of autonomous workers creating their own idiosyncratic uniforms through repetition and design, which I examine in Chapter 5, that person is creating an imaginary community around their own role by preparing a uniform for themselves to go out into the workplace. Brummett outlines this process stating, "By imagining who we are and who are the others to whom we want to speak through style, we construct the schemes of signs and images that present a representation of ourselves to others as we have image-ined them" (p. 121).

Market Contexts

Rhetoric today takes place in the context of the market and this results in the equation that consumers are citizens and vice versa. This can be both empowering and limiting. For example, the proliferation of creative thrifted fashion Instagram accounts offers a seemingly democratized outlet for anyone yet it has been quickly taken over by expensive resale accounts offering \$250 thrifted denim jackets which in turn becomes mainstream fashion creations mass produced. Recently, this process happened with the uptick in popularity of coats made from quilts; once a hard-to-find thrifted item, these coats began to appear through small retailers (such as Haptic Labs in Brooklyn) while also being sourced and sold for hundreds of dollars through Instagram or Etsy, and they quickly moved into the mainstream to the point where Target featured quilt-coats in their Spring 2022 clothing line-up (at a price point of about \$35 which was then moved to clearance racks for far less). This process of incorporation and excorporation is one that seemingly only responds to market contexts rather than the history of such a piece which is rooted in

African American material preservation practices with quilts. And yet, the sense of “heritage” that comes with such a style can extend to a murky sense of Black style that is also incorporated and excorporated.

Aesthetic Rationales

In a rhetoric of style, aesthetic is the thing that influences people and is the rationale that presents the rhetoric. Image and aesthetic are enacted and managed to produce desired effect (pp. 127-130), and sometime this is through elements of beauty or smoothness, while in other cases ugliness may be the desired effect. Brummett assures us, “Reasons, motives, and so forth are *activated aesthetically* in a culture that is aesthetically dominated, as is ours” (p. 127). This is why it is important to this project to look at both the effects of an aesthetic *and* the ways in which an aesthetic is invoked.

Aesthetic rationales are plentiful when looking at just about any workplace, and certainly when it comes to fast food and even remote work. Much of the presentation of fast food happens on the level of style, and this includes far more than the food (in fact, while the food itself is styled through machinery of production, the food is perhaps the least styled part of the fast-food experience). Matters of image, aesthetic, and pleasure guide and disguise and/or distract from issues like access to healthy food, industrial meat production, and economic forces ensuring cheap labor.

At the same time, much of the presentation of autonomous, high-pay work, and even especially remote work, happens on the level of style – sometimes to comedic effect. From a “Zoom uniform” of appropriate clothing only worn from the waist up (with, perhaps, various states of undress below) to “tech-bro” vests taking over the formerly staid (and iconic) suits of Wall Street spurring memes and spoof-Instagram accounts. In creative and tech industries, perhaps following the lead of Steve Jobs, having a leader with an iconic

style (created through repetition) is increasingly the norm as seen with Jenna Lyons (formerly creative director and president of J Crew) or Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook. At a nearly absurd level, the disgraced Elizabeth Holmes, founder of Theranos, mimicked Steve Jobs' uniform by exclusively wearing a black turtleneck and lowering the register of her voice. This aesthetic decision on her part made the (seeming) reasons of her company's existence clear: to change the world through technology. But it also was a rationale for her as *the* leader; to oppose her would be akin to opposing progress. Brummett connects aesthetic rationale to narrative values asserting that texts tell stories through style, and those stories must be good, or at least plausible, with coherence, character development, and conflict and resolution (in short, following Walter Fisher's narrative theory). Insofar as style is telling stories, it is also connected to performative rhetoric and political reverberations in that "Politics can be played out in quick flashes in the rhetoric of style, in aesthetics, and through today's quick-cycling communication media" (p. 130). As uniforms and uniformity as style is a form with its own rationale, we can expect that people are accustomed to judgement based on aesthetics and that we move through our lives as though those judgements were true-enough to merit ongoing action.

Stylistic Homologies

The last component rounding out the rhetoric of style is stylistic homologies. Here, a series of texts, objects, aesthetics, and experiences create a coherent style or discourse. "Our sense of 'a style' is a sense of a formal link across texts, actions, objects, and orders of experience tying them together" (Brummett, p. 131). Thus, there may be more to a style of uniform or uniformity than discrete elements or material objects; it is a system of possibilities with many combinations and forms that can be understood and enacted. For example, an oversized tee shirt is a piece of colored fabric until all the discussed elements

come together in such a way that we recognize that it is, in effect, an undergraduate woman's uniform in-step with other young women around her at this time in history. It is important to note that statistics and data are not enough to reveal the stylistic homology (p. 132). As with the above example, the statistics could point to a positive market change in valuation of extra-large tees, but adding a theoretical layers that has us analyze power and class and gender and how these things exist in style will give a more vibrant and connected view of uniformity and its impact. Brummett points out that such stylistic homologies are connected to the performance of ideologies in that the texts would not have importance were it not for stylistic homologies attuning us to the gathering of signs into a text. Brummett's theory of style goes beyond its status as a form of expression to suggest that style shapes our relationships and connects to imaginary communities.

Connecting Style and Uniforming

Style plays a significant role in how discourses about uniformity and uniforms are enacted and constructed. As Walker and Longaker (2011) declare, "rhetoric is an art of emphasis, of style" (p. 136), and what is a uniform is not a form of emphasis (through repetition, key elements, and so forth)? A look at uniforms and uniformity through the lens of a rhetoric of style provides the chance to see where uniformity shows-up in, perhaps, unexpected places. If we think of the rhetorical concept of genre as "a recurring type of text within a context" (Brummett, 2006, p. 62) with the components of style, substance, and situation (Kohrs Campbell & Hall Jamieson, 1978), uniforms may be understood as a kind of genre of clothing with a style (aesthetic) reflective and constructive of the situation (workplace or organization) with the substance of cultural or organizational power dynamics (communicating clear information on who is who). But what about a particular genre (uniform) of style being enacted and even named outside of the situation or with

seemingly little substance? Thinking about uniformity as a style will allow me to explore the rhetorical and material functions of sameness and difference.

Exploring uniformity and uniforms as rhetorical style will answer questions such as how do difference and sameness interact and cocreate in clothing? What does a rhetorical style of uniform-ing (active) communicate? What kinds of work do styles of uniforming do? How is it active and material form of thinking? Does wearing a uniform imbue particular ways of being or values/beliefs? Whose needs and interests are served or activated by the rhetorical style of uniforming?

In addition to examining these questions, studying uniformity using rhetorical style allows me to question the rhetoric of utility and productivity that often accompany uniformity of dress. Uniformity happens at the level of style and yet, I argue that often the style of uniformity has a rationale that is decidedly anti-fashion or seen as outside of a system of taste. This creates a binary around things like comfort or aesthetic, attractive or careless, trying or not trying. Adherents to uniform dressing (both required and adopted) often point to the distinct lack of thought such an outfit entails. This discourse often reflects a narrative of clothing not communicating much or at least an effortless way of bodying forth into the world. Postrel, looking to early sixteenth century writer Baldassare Castiglione, names this effortless nonchalance *sprezzatura*, a kind of streamlined surface that “conceal[s] all art and make[s] whatever is done or said appear to be without effort and almost without any thought about it” (Postrel quoting Castiglione, p. 80). Postrel is determined to clarify, though, that this is a façade that “demands care to create and maintain” and she connects this to glamour in that very concealment of effort. What is the relationship between a style with such façade requiring hidden effort and Malfouris’ Materialist Engagement Theory with its distributed cognition? How does doing something

with materials of clothing (with especially glamorous effects) challenge the ways glamour presents “the result, not the process” (Postrel, p. 84).

Studying uniformity through rhetorical style also allows me to examine the romanticizing and privileging of particular identities through style and the valorizing of control of particular identities through style. This is where the different types of rhetorics of uniforming style activate conversations of class, glamour, race, work, gender, and so on. It is often in particular kinds of clothing that ideas that should be contradictory are interdependent. For example, something like a simple white button-down can be described as both “timeless” and “modern” without dissonance in understanding or aesthetic. While rhetoric helps me understand the styles of uniforming as a site of struggle wherein a style means something (not something coincidental or neutral), rhetoric also helps me understand that performing or wearing a style (mark making) means something for the mind.

Uniforming as Performative Material Rhetorical Style

Uniforms and uniformity of dress is a rhetorical style that is performative wherein the saying and doing are simultaneous and is material engagement wherein the activity and the thinking are the same. What I call uniforming is a rhetorical style that can be identified in three primary elements: discourse, aesthetics, and material engagement. I will discuss these more in the next chapter on method. These elements will be strands in the web I generate to catch different ways uniforming functions as performative material rhetorical style. As a guide to recognizing uniforming as a rhetorical style, I have several attunements

that have become layers of inscription that influence and change how I perceive and learn about this process. In list form⁴, a rhetorical style of uniforming:

- 1) will have all five elements of Brummett's rhetoric of style.
- 2) involves struggle over style.
- 3) is constituted through acts of ongoing differentiation.
- 4) appears effortless and relies on a sense of utility as commonsense knowledge.
- 5) relies on a common sense understanding of sameness and difference, often ignoring or presenting as natural power relations in class, race, gender, and so on.
- 6) is an activity that is doing something *for the mind*.
- 7) is a distributed, embodied, and situated process with external materials (emplacing).
- 8) exists in the relatedness between in discourse, aesthetics, and material engagement.

In conclusion, looking at uniformity of dress through a rhetoric of style contributes to the interdisciplinary dialogue about emplacement, materialist theory, performative texts, and consumer identity. This chapter has discussed the ways in which performativity, new materialist theory, and rhetoric of style will form my understanding and examination of uniforms in fast food restaurants and uniformity of dress for autonomous and creative-class workers.

⁴ I have a debt of thankfulness to Kristin Eskind's (nee, Stimpson) sense of organization in her own dissertation work on gentrification and style. She helped me think through how such a list format can clarify and gather-up disparate and aggregated propositions into a guiding set of theoretical touchstones.

Chapter 3: A Method for Studying Uniformity as Rhetorical Style

In October of 1989, when I was seven-years-old, my brothers and I obsessively planned our Halloween costumes and my mom snapped a picture of us by the front door in our final ensembles: my two younger brothers in feathered head-dresses as American Indians (something they are deeply embarrassed about now but at the time reflected their love of wild West stories) and me in a polo shirt, jeans, and a Domino's Pizza hat carrying an empty pizza box. Of all the options in the world, I had decided to go as a pizza delivery girl complete with a self-created uniform.

Thinking back on this, it is hard to remember exactly what sparked my imagination regarding this costume. We very rarely ordered pizza, so the presence of a delivery person was definitely an exciting event. Delivery people also had their own car, which already spoke to a level of freedom I could recognize as desirable. As we went from house to house in our neighborhood that evening, my costume was just as recognizable to our neighbors as my brothers'. My uniform, complete with props, declared me to be who I was pretending to be and that in of itself felt as delightful as any princess or figure skater costume I could have chosen.

Coincidentally, when I was a high school junior, I got my first corporate job (I had years of experience with babysitting) through a church friend at an actual Domino's Pizza as a pizza maker and delivery driver. On my first day, I was handed a blue and red polo shirt along with a black money belt and sat in a small concrete office to watch hours of training videos. Those videos included the rules on what I could wear with my polo shirt and "belt" (khaki pants or shorts with pockets, sneakers with white socks, no jewelry or finery that would make me a target for mugging). I felt nervous and excited, and the uniform made it all official: I wasn't just watching some kids at a neighbor's house but in a real job with a paycheck and a clock to punch in and out. For the first time, I was

confronted with the responsibility to work in public, in a place that anyone could walk-in or call and expect me to respond in a specific and appropriate way. At home I would change into my work outfit (complete with khaki shorts and tennis shoes I'd bought specifically for the job) and begin to feel I was already in work time, and before returning home after a shift, still in uniform I would stop at the bank to deposit any tips I'd earned that day.⁵ Moving into different kinds of physicality for work included the rise of anxiety I felt about being so reachable (I was in-the-flesh appearing in places I would never be were it not for work while also being available for requests for me to do tasks for customers or managers).

While working in this uniformed job, I attended the local public high school in my tiny Midwest town where I wore the same kind of late 1990s combination of flared jeans and sweatshirts nearly every day. Calling this a uniform would not have occurred to me at the time, but in many ways this outfit had a similar effect of my work uniform in that putting it on with little to no thought moved me into a readied state to be at school (a place I considered to be mostly out of my control where I was also reachable in different ways than at home or work). While there were general dress codes, I certainly could have worn more creative and expressive styles within those codes, yet, I did not.

I begin this chapter with a personal story because these experiences shape the way I approach uniform wearing and uniformity of dress. What method would be strongest to guide an exploration of sensitive and personal experiences with clothing as well as issues of class and work and time? What would be the most rhetorically sensitive and methodologically holistic boundary set for this project? This chapter describes my methodological framework by looking at a preview of the case studies and the artifacts I analyze, considering how the combination of these case studies, artifacts, and theory create

⁵ Embarrassingly enough, my mother insisted on bringing the photo of me in my self-made uniform from all those years before to share with my new bosses and coworkers. They were delighted and teased me endlessly that I was finally achieving my lifelong dream. I was mortified.

conditions of possibility for a method of rhetorical criticism, and finally, I explore my own role influences and shapes the research presented in this dissertation. In doing this, I will discuss how I enact and include key components of rhetorical criticism in this project by specifying how I am thinking methodologically about text, context, audience, judgement, and ethics. Before adding how I plan to study uniforms and uniformity, I first want to discuss what exactly I plan to study (the text). As seen in Chapter 2, style permeates most of our lives, and uniformity is ubiquitous in many settings. The following section gives some attention into how I selected the texts I explore as well as the context in which I selected these texts.

CONTEXT OF CASE STUDIES AND ARTIFACTS (TEXTS AND CONTEXTS)

Dwight Conquergood (2002) has strong words regarding texts that I would like to take as my caution moving into choosing objects of study: “Only middle-class academics could blithely assume that all the world is a text because reading and writing are central to their everyday lives and occupational security” (p. 147). To be fair, many rhetorical scholars have defined texts in ways that challenge the notion of a text as a static or disconnected object. Leah Ceccarelli (1998) for example, places any text in a process of meaning making and identifies the forces that can multiply textual meanings including rhetor, audience, and critic. However, attuning to performance and practices and senses (including my own) alongside the textual may help me avoid “erasing the vast realm of human knowledge and meaningful action that is *unlettered*” (Conquergood, p. 147, my own emphasis added). The theoretical foundations that direct my sight play a strong role in correcting this textual hegemony by looking for the unlettered. In an exploration of field methods, McKinnon et al (2016) remind us that “understanding texts as discursive practices allows the critic to examine bodies, embodied performances, and feeling/affect as material

worthy of rhetorical analysis” (p. 5). This encourages me to think of texts as active and ongoing and has become a theoretical and methodical commitment for me.

The texts I examine in this study include articles from popular press, magazine-published interviews, opinion pieces, social media posts/reactions to articles and/or images, press releases from corporations, personal (published online, usually) manifesto-style pieces, and even online storefront descriptions of clothing available for purchase. I also include physical uniforms I see in real time (not via circulated images or internet) as texts, and I include the uniforms I can access through photos or images (drawings or renderings) as well as going to places where people wear the uniforms and uniform-like clothing I am examining. For my first case study, fast-food uniforms, I have visited each of the franchises examined. I have also had the good fortune of encountering people wearing parts of their work uniform outside of the work space (e.g. I sighted a Burger King t-shirt uniform untucked over khakis, black hat hanging through a belt loop, at the grocery store late one night). For my second case study, I have frequented trendy coffee shops and coworking spaces over several days in a row with the goal of seeing return customers using that space to work remotely.

There are many ways to see the kinds of uniforms I explore in my case studies, and I’ve found Hebdige’s guidance most helpful:

Style in subculture is, then, pregnant with significance. Its transformations go ‘against nature’, interrupting the process of ‘normalization’. As such, they are gestures, movements towards a speech which offends the ‘silent majority”, which challenges the principle of unity and cohesion, which contradicts the myth of consensus. Our task becomes, like Barthes’, to discern the hidden messages inscribed in code on the glossy surfaces of style, to trace them out as ‘maps of

meaning' which obscurely re-present the very contradictions they are designed to resolve or conceal. (p. 18)

The strange and unique part of studying uniforms and uniformity, is it seems the whole point is to *not* challenge the cohesion but to reproduce it. This is an important tension I explore – the relationship between normalizing and destabilizing in uniforms.

While I have discussed some of the larger importance of studying uniforms and uniformity, an added advantage I have in studying this right now is the ways the COVID-19 pandemic has changed my own expectations and thoughts regarding uniformity. In the United States, the cultural standoffs between those advocating for wearing masks in public places and those outright refusing to do so brings to the forefront several tensions uniformity of dress also touches. One tension is the relationship between a sense of autonomy (or individual power) and a sense of community (collective power). Over these years of pandemic living, Americans have turned this tension into an either-or question in a way that other countries have not. For example, in my city of Arlington, Texas, at the height of the pandemic, before we had vaccines available or even protective equipment for frontline workers, I could go to my local grocery store and routinely see people refusing to wear their masks or loudly complaining about the policies enforced by store workers. This experience was not unique to me as videos and news reports from across the country showed individuals causing all kinds of disturbance in relationship to mask wearing policies, and this refusal of simply masking practices became a political platform for an entire party. With a very young baby at home (my son was 4 months old when the stay-at-home orders began), this was the first time in my life where I really understood how much uniformity (in this case, of mask wearing and personal space maintenance) could create a safe or unsafe world. What's more, in this space, those who refused to comply became increasingly conspicuous as *those I must avoid*. As someone who has often found myself

in the role of an outsider, I have always gravitated to identify with those outside of the mainstream, and this was a clear, new experience in a reversal of that stance.

Before this new experience, I may have seen the case study of self-chosen uniformity of dress as a kind of cop-out for the insecure – the kind of practice someone takes up when they cannot really *think* for themselves (that would be my textual bias showing itself). I look at some of the scorn that shows up culturally in terms like “basic” (which I examine briefly in Chapter 5), and I recognize that attitude in myself. Jameson’s (1991) instruction that, “Ideological judgement on postmodernism necessarily implies... a judgement on ourselves as well as the artefacts in question” as we are “*within* the culture of postmodernism to the point where its facile repudiation is as impossible as any equally facile celebration is complacent and corrupt” (p. 62).

This is where the new materialism theory guides me in my method of discovery and wonderment, rather than bias confirmation; the idea that thinking precedes autonomy and individuation and not-thinking precedes community belonging is something I’ve not named before in this way and a surprise appearance of the *cogito* in my reflection. Relying upon uniformity of masking to feel safe enough to go about life away from my home reinforced some of the dichotomies I lean on (private versus public, home versus outside, clean versus unwashed) even while the virus materially undermined those borders. For this project, this heightens the urgency of the new materialist project of undoing such divisions. The importance of exploring and undoing the dichotomies set-up as new norms is unique in this study of clothing as we have all experienced new dichotomies in recent years.

In December of 2021, after vaccinations became more widely available, my partner and son and I took the risk of visiting my partner’s home country of Peru for the first time in three years. Initially I was afraid of going to a more densely populated city in a foreign country, but I quickly learned that fear was unfounded. Masks were worn by every person

I encountered outside of our family's home, and vaccination cards were required in order to enter any store or restaurant. When we needed to be tested for travel back to the US, a healthcare worker in full gear came to the home and tested us in the living room, and it was understood the entire family would be outside or wearing masks during that visit. Stepping off the plane back into the DFW airport, I saw multiple people in the crowded space without masks and I immediately flinched. In such a short time, I had come to rely on an expectation of uniformity of covering as an in-road to being in public. Thus, when conducting this project and thinking about uniforms in a workplace like a fast-food chain being discussed in terms of hygiene or a resource for place-making, I have an increased appreciation for the power that those ideals hold, whether they are accurate and just or not. The dimension of the relationship between *covering* and *being* in a place as a way to provide a *chance* to body-forth into different spaces is a newly heightened dimension for many of us.

I mentioned multiple tensions that arose with the advancing of the pandemic, and one more I will specify here is the question or confusion of what seems to threaten individual autonomy. What I mean by this is that given the strong reactions to mask-wearing by a critical mass of people in the United States, one would think that other bodily autonomy would be strongly protected and celebrated. Yet, as recent Supreme Court rulings have shown, including but not limited to overturning *Roe v. Wade*, bodily autonomy is not a given or a right for all people in this country.

Considering how strongly many people reacted to the mask mandates, the idea of uniformity of dress would seem abhorrent – or at least a compromise of such autonomy. And yet, there is not an increase in that tension. Uniformity of dress seems unchanged and unchallenged. The questions raised by anti-maskers have not attached to anything else in the realm of dressing. While there are clear answers for this lack of tension (namely, culture wars tend to be exclusive to the point of being unintelligible to outsiders – which is often

the point), the mask debates perhaps have named some of what is at stake in clothing. To quote the oft-stated response to Republican politicians: “they said the quiet part out loud.”

While I am not interested in overstating the role clothing can play here, I find it significant that the request to wear a piece of cloth very visibly as way to enact community or public presence engendered such a resistance because autonomy of course is protected as well (with an air-born virus, mask wearing protects the wearer at the same time as it protects others). Ceccarelli (1998) asks scholars to look for “texts that are experienced by both dominant and marginalized groups in a society and that are interpreted within the structure of intergroup conflict” (p. 400). The method I enact in this project is to enter into spaces wherein seemingly less fraught uniformity is at play in order to observe and newly witness that which threatens autonomy. What threatens community? What is being activated and invigorated through uniforms and uniformity?

With this context –of my new experiences and the theories that open-up more expected experiences – it is from the texts of the material, the discursive, and the senses that my method come into focus. Everything from fabrics and colors to articles to physical spaces make up the collage of artifacts that bring about my understanding of uniforming. In the next section, I explain how I will study these texts.

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR STUDYING RHETORIC (AUDIENCE)

The method of rhetorical criticism is unique in the ways it allows for a sensing experience that is both singular (Black, 1978) and invitational. The critic’s deep reading of theory is meant to create a singularity of criticism wherein they “see a thing clearly” and “record what they have seen” (Black, p. 4) while letting that process change them. Rather

than specific texts accommodating themselves to audiences, this method begins with the framework of audiences identifying with texts.

Rather than seeking the replicability of more scientific methods, the rhetorical critic invites listeners to step into the conversation and interpretation and belongs to a group of methods that “require personal choices at every step, methods that are pervaded by contingencies” (Black, p. xi). It is a kind of “looking and hearing with sensibilities sharpened by the theory” (Brummett, 1984, p. 105). Thus, the theories of materialism, performativity, and style guide my analysis of my chosen case studies by bringing my attention to different ways of seeing.

Informed by these theories, I am led to look at particular things when examining uniforms and uniformity as well as to ask certain questions. Brummett (2006) likens this interplay to a dance between the critic and reader wherein the theory and methods forms the music and the text is the floor. While I already explained some of the theories I will use, this next section will include a description of ways I apply the theories for our dance. The theoretical guidance of Derrida’s iterability and citationality already opens the concept of uniformity to many overlapping themes of language, presence, authority, and conflict. There is much work to be done on how we create meaning through processes aside from language. While many rhetorical scholars are working to bring “the body” into this process, the significance of clothing’s role to mediate and construct is lost in the shuffle. By focusing this study not on an essentialized body or a specific experience with a specific body, rather on clothing that is meant to be understood as essentialized (a uniform is meant to be the essential look of a corporation or organization)—and which is impossibly so—this study avoids the pitfalls of both ignoring the embodied aspect of communication and language or over-valORIZING the materiality of a body as if there were only one experience as such. The importance of this is that this may offer a new dimension to rhetorical

scholarship in ways to include embodiment as well as language by looking to how clothing is expected to structure interaction.

In looking at the popularity of uniformity of clothing, I would like to ask, how do we come to desire uniformity? This question leads to examining what is considered interior and what is considered exterior—in the case of this proposed study, is clothing ever an accurate representation of an inner-self? If there is no inner/outer dualism, what is clothing representing/managing? Thus, the importance of the question of what clothing manages links to our understanding of interior/exterior and subject/object distinctions.

Theories of (new) materialism ask the critic to look for new ways to learn how things are inseparable from one another while also differing from one another. This is a “new way of doing cognitive archaeology and a new way of thinking about the past, the present, and the future of human cognitive becoming” as Malafouris states in that rather than an “ontological commitment about how things are” he proposes the method of study be “an ontological recommendation” pointing the researcher to new connections (p. 53). This leads to the question posed by Kirby (2017): “How is difference – which already assumes the existence of identities and their separation – determined?” (p.12). It asks that rhetoricians reconfigure mediation and identity (Kirby). Materialist theory offers a chance to re-think knowledge and ways of knowing as a “practical and continual activity” (Harris, 2007, p. 1) that has material effects. To that end, examining/including seeming opposites in uniformity becomes an important locale for this study. I will look for instances where identity is asserted as juxtaposed to something else. Said another way, “Boundaries do not sit still” (Barad, 2007, p. 817). In terms of method, this means that when I see boundaries, I can look closer to search for ways they move, are renegotiated, and treated as meaningful. For example, there is a proliferation of items of style that originate from specific manual labor jobs. The jumpsuit is a popular item of clothing that is increasingly flexible or

adaptable, thus the boundaries of when this type of uniform or genre of uniform makes “sense” are moving. With materialist theories, this renegotiation of where such clothing can belong is not about denying or erasing a boundary but new connections that are worth exploring. Barad offers a warning for those of us seeking a method that the goal is not:

some holistic approach in which subject and object reunite into some apolitical relativized whole, but a theory which insists on the importance of constructed boundaries and also the necessity of interrogating them... Boundaries are not our enemies; they are necessary for making meanings, but this does not make them innocent. (1996, p. 187)

Recuperating matter into the rhetorical conversation is simply a way to highlight what I believe is already a materialist approach to the world: materialist theory is built-in to this idea of method in many ways, but it’s also taken a backseat. Naming and examining boundaries, interconnectedness, and dichotomies in clothing that is meant to set-apart the wearer while indicating belonging may open conversations around matter in new ways. Malafouris’ Material Engagement Theory (MET) posits that a mind is a distributed, embodied, and situated process with external materials. Malafouris outlines the method and aims of MET stating:

...MET subscribes to what might be called a hunter-gatherer analytic orientation. Like a hunter-gatherer, it enters into a relationship with the world with no intention to achieve mastery and control by slicing a continuous and hybrid reality into several distinct analytic domains. The aim is not to break things apart into a series of easily manipulated isolated entities, comprehensible in themselves yet incommensurable as a whole, but rather to understand how things are enmeshed and related, and to understand through what mechanisms those linkages are effected. MET aims to articulate the path to such an understanding, and to furnish

the conceptual means for such an understanding, by replacing the categorical divisions of modernity with symbiotic relationships. In this sense, MET provides a new ontology of relatedness more than it provides a new way of demarcating between the inner domain and the outer domain. (p. 53)

I will start with external materials of uniformity and uniforms to consider and explore how and what is being situated. Performativity too offers a lens to ask the rhetorical critic to look for places where seeming opposites, such as talking about something versus doing something, come together as indistinguishable. The theory of performativity acknowledges that ways of knowing and being change over time as well as the constant reshaping and re/de-stabilizing going on in any object of study. This opens discussing clothing beyond intended uses while also including the goals and actions of the wearers.

The theories of materialism and performativity lead to thinking about style and uniformity in a particular way. Brummett's theory of style is the third theory informing my evaluation of the case studies in chapters 4 and 5. In terms of method, I plan to look for the tenants of rhetorical style as outlined by Brummett (and summarized in chapter 2) in the discourse, wearing (material engagement), and aesthetics of uniforms and uniformity.

MY ROLE (JUDGEMENT AND ETHICS)

The role I play as the rhetorical critic in this study is influenced by more than only theory and more than the texts that I am studying, and while I will explore this throughout the case studies, I will also consider influences here. My role as a researcher and as a person with my own clothing judgements/opinions.

Rhetorical Critic as Choros

While there is a strong case to be made that being a *critic* is not an arrogant or self-important title, but rather a traditionally held role for scholars of rhetoric, in order to perform some of the malleability encouraged by my chosen theories, I would like to recast the title for my role. This is not merely for experimentation's sake but to address the sense of mastery over a given subject acting as a critic entail. If I am to rethink difference and what something can be without going-against its opposite, where does that leave the word critic? What follows is an experiment in language in research to designate how I gather without centering mastery.

One helpful way to approach this is to reconsider the metaphors I use in discussing my role. Both Brummett and Rickert offer the metaphor of the dancefloor when describing the interplay between theory, researcher, reader, and method. Rickert follows the etymology of Plato's *chora* which he defines as

an ancient attempt to think the relation between matter and activity, work and space, background and meaning, and thus is already starts to broach issues concerning relations among bodies, minds, and world.... Plato also suggests that something like the *chora* is crucial for bringing life to otherwise static and overly bound conceptions of world and activity. (p. 43)

This is a dynamic word that is important in the study of rhetoric, and his tracing the different meanings through time offers Indra McEwen's argument that *chora*'s characteristic "continual remaking or reweaving of its encompassing surface" (p. 82) comes from *choron* and *choros* from Homer's *Iliad* where they designate a dance and a dancefloor. Rickert points out that McEwen's argument regarding the *choros* or dancefloor offers "an emerging recognition that any activity presupposes a place for it to occur, as

dancing requires a dance floor” resulting in a “growing realization that place and making are conjoined” (p. 48).

Perhaps, instead of a rhetorical critic, then, I can recast my role as a *choros*, the dance floor that appears when the dancing starts. In this role, I am not free from material constraints myself but I also do not dictate nor master the dancing. Thinking of myself as *choros*, offers three important distinctions to this role. First, I am a gathering and even conductor (in the sense of material conducting energy) of theories and ideas, not an orchestrator. This allows me to include even the parts that do not seem to fit-in yet with the possibility for transformation and discovery. Second, this recasting of my role highlights how the rhetorical method is invitational and invent-ational. In Brazil, there is a kind of jazz-like music called *Choros* that translated means *a gathering of lament* or a *cry*, and this depiction of invention through lament – a feeling we may not want to think of as inventive or creative or lingering – is an important way to think of my role as a researcher. If a goal of rhetorical criticism is to teach or to invite readers into an interpretation, my goal in *choros* is to invite readers to newly attune and inhabit.

Rhetorical Critic with Judgement

Scholars must make decisions about what to look at closely, what to read, and where our attention will be attuned, and it is important to reflect on this process as it impacts research. Scholars, especially of style, bring our own sense of taste and appropriateness that influence and direct judgement. We are responsible for understanding and acknowledging the necessary inclusions and exclusions of our work and the ways our judgements are singular or resonate with others.

Critical rhetoricians Sloop and Ono (1997) argue that the “role of critical rhetoricians is to produce ‘materialist conceptions of judgement’... to disrupt dominant

logics of judgement” using what they term *out-law judgements* (p. 54). The way they define out-law judgements is a logic of judgement outside of dominant systems of judgement that have political consequences that go beyond the ideas of the critic (p. 60). While I do not focus this dissertation on out-law characters, as Sloop and Ono do, there is a sense in my case studies that people find ways to live and function while under threat from dominant systems by disrupting commonsense systems. “[O]ut-law discourses can be disruptive without the aid of the critic” (p. 63), however they point to Biesecker’s (1992) idea that “the critical rhetorician’s task is to ‘make these virtualities visible’” (p. 361). Fashion systems and late capitalist logics of clothing consumption and appearance often assume the guise of commonsense, thus by looking at possible points of meaning running alongside those logics I am making visible different logics. I am looking for ways of being and acting that we may believe we already “know” about but have far different meanings and logics in their performance, which is a way of saying my own judgements are limited and I look to theory and practice to make new connections to change my judgements.

One place where dominant logics of judgements and my own role are particularly connected is in racial imagery. Specifically, I have a job as a white researcher to become informed through theories that aid me to understand how white people “unable to see their own particularity, cannot take account of other people’s” (Dyer, p. 9). The more I can see and name ways of centering whiteness, which is the power to secure dominance by seeming not to be anything in particular (Dyer, 1997), the more I can explore how whiteness moves through the narratives of the rhetorical style of uniforming. Dyer emphasizes how racial imagery is inextricable from practices of politics and being in the world stating:

Racial imagery is central to the organisation of the modern world.... The myriad minute decisions that constitute the practices of the world are at every point informed by judgements about people’s capacities and worth, judgements based on what they look like,

where they come from, how they speak, even what they eat, that is, racial judgements. Race is not the only factor governing these things and people of goodwill everywhere struggle to overcome the prejudices and barriers of race, but it is never not a factor, never not in play. And since race in itself – insofar as it is anything in itself – refers to some intrinsically insignificant geographical/physical differences between people, it is the imagery of race that is in play. (p. 1)

This specification of imagery closely resonates with Brummett’s tenets of rhetoric of style, especially wherein looking and being are functionally inseparable at points, Malafouris’ ontological recommendation pointing me search for forms of connectedness, and Butler’s sense that ways of being are not static (gender and race are never not in play).

One methodological choice informed by this integration of race, particularly whiteness, and theory is to make race central to my analyses. Rather than pretend it is possible to be color-blind, or worse, rather than ignoring race as a factor, I must claim my whiteness and consider it a relevant factor in my analyses (Sullivan, p. 159). Nirmal Puwar reminds me that Whiteness serves to infantilize non-normative bodies (Puwar, 2004) in that whiteness “exists as an unmarked normative position...[entitling] it to take up the unmarked normative locale” (Puwar, 2004). This has implications for how I see myself as a researcher and for my own (in)ability to see how my place (locale, point of view, etc.) of criticism as not unmarked. With this in mind, attuning to race – particularly my own, at times – is part of my method to approaching my case studies.

To further clarify what a study of materiality and practice may create with attention to judgement and commonsense, in his study titled, *The Civilizing Process* (1978), Norbert Elias examines manners and etiquette over time to see how these details “reveal the order underlying historical changes” (p. xv). He is looking to fill-in the connecting lines between changes in the structure of society and changes in the structure of behavior and ways of

thinking (perhaps I could call this connecting the cognitive to culture). For Elias, it is only in the scrutinizing of texts of historical practice that chart “the peculiar transformation of human behavior” (p. xvii) wherein “what is correct and what is incorrect in such theories” can be parceled out. This is an approach still relying upon texts that are legible, but the texts are manners and behaviors that are a kind of ongoing writing of what becomes commonsense.

“Civilization,” perhaps an old-fashioned word for commonsense, is central to his study, and Elias begins by claiming the word itself “describes a process or at least the result of a process.... Something which is constantly in motion, constantly moving ‘forward’” (p. 5). While views on civilization have certainly “progressed” out of this version of thinking, his method of charting a process to reveal how it changes us at various levels of action over time remains powerful. We must put into motion processes; they do not exist apart from practice. Reminiscent of Burke’s emphasis on motivation within a text, Elias first dwells on the changing relationship to the concept of civilization over time in European history by clustering relationships and tensions between different meanings of civilization. For example, he finds that as early as the sixteenth century, a French typeface (similar to what we would call a font now) was given the name *civilité* after it was used to print a work combining Erasmus’ doctrines with another humanist’s principles (Sulpicius). A whole slew of publications influenced by Erasmus’ treatise were printed up to the end of eighteenth century in this typeface under a genre titled *Civilité* or *Civilité puérile* (54). As Erasmus’ book was about, chiefly, “outward bodily propriety” by examining “bodily carriage, gestures, dress, facial expressions” (55), even the reprinting of similar texts took on an entirely distinct name, aesthetic, and uniformity of expression as though to create a *body* of work.

While his guiding curiosity is how and why Western society moved “from one standard to the other” as a process towards increased civilization, the whole of this study is also about how standards and the requisite substandards are communicated and enacted across physical, changing bodies. Similar to sumptuary laws regarding clothing (such as, the king may only wear purple), current laws rarely include the sort-of manners-centered legislation governing interaction in this study. Elias claims this is because, “reading has sharpened seeing, and seeing has enriched reading and writing” (p. 78). He locates even his own work in the on-going process of how standards go from enforced to natural. For example, he presents clothing according to Erasmus who says, “Clothing is in a sense the body of the body” (p. 78), and who goes so far as to give “what manner of dress corresponds to this or that spiritual condition.” Elias claims this is the beginning of a type of seeing, or observation, that later we call “psychological” and that, “the new stage of courtesy and its representation, summed up in the concept of *civilité *, is very closely bound up with this manner of seeing.”

Derrida names this closeness Elias describes when he contests the concept of an in-between that mediates the relationship between subject and object:

That which we, men [sic], claim to accept in culture as model, that is to say discursive texts or calculators and all that we believe to understand familiarly under the name of text, that which we pretend then to accept as model, comparison, analogy with the view of understanding the basic living entity; this itself is a complex product of life, of the living, and the claimed model is exterior neither to the knowing subject nor to the known object . . . The text is not a third term in the relation between the biologist and the living, it is the very structure of the living as shared structure of the biologist – as living – of science as a production of life, and the living itself. (Derrida, 1975, Seminar 4, 5)

As seen in the typeface example, the molding of the visual closely follows the molding of language, and vice versa. Elias also demonstrates that mixed-in this process is the reciprocal shaping between speech and behavior, offering “language is one of the embodiments of social or mental life” (114). The expressions for communicating and motivating “good behavior” (at the table, in this particular study), “are very frequently exactly the same as those used in motivating ‘good speech’” (114). Thus, a sort-of homology between good manners and good speech is charted as eventually becoming so entwined until the two are inseparable. The implications of this come back to the embodied, material aspect of how we live day to day.

Nothing in table manners is self-evident or the product, as it were, of a ‘natural’ feeling of delicacy. The spoon, fork, and napkin are not invented by individuals as technical implements with obvious purposes and clear directions for use. Over centuries, in direct social intercourse and use, their functions are gradually defined, their forms sought and consolidated. Each custom in the changing ritual, however minute, establishes itself infinitely slowly, even forms of behavior that to use seem quite elementary or simply ‘reasonable,’ such as the custom of taking liquid only with the spoon. Every movement of the hand – for example, the way in which one holds and moves knife, spoon, or fork – is standardized only step by step. And the social mechanism of standardization is itself seen in outline if the series of images is surveyed as a whole. (pp. 107-108)

Instead of only seeing this by looking back, as Elias does, what if it is possible to see standards of materiality and physicality in the minutia of now? This is what I hope my methodology informed and guided by theory will bring forth.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has outlined my method for studying uniforms and uniformity in specific work situations. I have described the texts and contexts of the case studies and artifacts I plan to examine, acknowledged the inseparability of theory in rhetorical method as it looks for audiences aligning with texts, and named some of my own roles and alignments brought forth through the methodological and analytical process of this dissertation. The goal is not to seek a replicable method, rather, my aim is to offer a gathering for readers concerning how I see my texts and how that sight is attuned by theory and my own emplacement. This said, I look to my first case study, fast food uniforms.

Chapter Four: Fast Food Uniforms Case Study

In this chapter, I argue that three specific and differing fast food uniforms highlight the ways in which a rhetorical style of uniforming serves to drive and justify managing class and race for both the wearers and those interacting with the wearers. In order to explore this, I examine uniforms at three fast food restaurants that have distinct uniform styles: White Castle, Burger King, and McDonald's. I learn about these through press releases, reactions to the uniforms from various news outlets (especially design-focused outlets), and interviews with the uniform designers. This grouping of texts allows me to understand what each company believes they are offering through these material goods in the workplace. After an initial look at the presentation of these uniforms, I discuss the elements of a rhetoric of style and connect the concept of "realness" with style. What is each company claiming it is managing through the release of newly redesigned uniforms? What beliefs and promises are claimed as being presented in the usage of the uniforms?

In the passages that follow, I attempt to answer the questions above by exploring the intersection of performativity, materiality, and style in fast food uniforms. In this chapter I argue that rhetorics of authenticity and historicity uniquely connect in the style of these uniforms. Second, I argue that rhetoric of style seems to point away from the genre of fast-food service by connecting design with desire through wearing a uniform as an active process of class mobility; I look at wearing uniforms, then, as an active process of becoming I call *uniforming* wherein style is central, desire is performative, and work is a form of managing emplacement. Third, when experienced together the rhetoric of style with these uniforms echoes "realness" in drag performance, giving us insight into ways that class and race is being managed with low-wage uniforms.

TEXT AND CONTEXT: FAST FOOD UNIFORMS AND UNIFORMITY

The experience of fast food – the restaurant or drive through, the packaging, the branding, even the taste – is hardly one requiring much retelling. In North America, fast food is a nearly daily practice. According to the National Center for Health Statics (NCHS), during 2013–2016, 36.6% of adults consumed fast food on a given day (2018). And while the percentage of adults who consumed fast food increased with increasing family income, just over 30% of daily consumers had an income level less than or equal to 130% the federal poverty level, which is \$11,490 for a household of one, and \$23,550 for a household of four (ASPE). All this to say, the experience of fast food is ubiquitous. Even after over twenty years, Eric Schlosser’s (2000) description of this experience in *Fast Food Nation: The Darkside of the All-American Meal* rings familiar:

Pull open the glass door, feel the rush of cool air, walk in, get in line, study the backlit color photographs above the counter, place your order, hand over a few dollars, watch teenagers in uniforms pushing various buttons, and moments later take hold of a plastic tray full of food wrapped in colored paper and cardboard. The whole experience of buying fast food has become so routine, so thoroughly unexceptional and mundane, that it is now taken for granted, like brushing your teeth or stopping for a red light. It has become a social custom as American as a small, rectangular, hand-held, frozen, and reheated apple pie.

I include this description to iterate the uniformity of this experience, even over time. Built-into the very action of the organization is the smoothness, ease, and unremarkability of the interaction. Each component, including the uniforms of the worker, contributes to a uniformity of experience so reliable, a consumer could expect to have the same exact experience at just about any fast-food chain in the world. Schlosser points out this is a tenet of the business model stating,

The key to a successful franchise... can be expressed in one word: uniformity. Franchises and chain stores strive to offer exactly the same product or service at numerous locations. Customers are drawn to familiar brands by an instinct to avoid the unknown. A brand offers a feeling of reassurance when its products are always and everywhere the same. “We have found out . . . that we cannot trust some people who are nonconformists,” declared Ray Kroc, one of the founders of McDonald’s, angered by some of his franchisees. “We will make conformists out of them in a hurry . . . The organization cannot trust the individual; the individual must trust the organization.”

Thus, fast-food as an everyday experience may be seen not only as a kind of experience with uniformity but also as a beacon or highly polished enactment of uniformity in American life. In this myriad of details creating a style of uniformity, the rhetoric being enacted is a reassurance that the aestheticization is the organizing or the action of the organization.

As discussed in an earlier chapter, Ceccarelli (1998) asked scholars to look for “texts that are experienced by both dominant and marginalized groups in a society and that are interpreted within the structure of intergroup conflict” (p. 400). Clearly, fast-food satisfies the first requirement in its popularity and integration into the capitalist food systems in the United States. The second part of Ceccarelli’s request is more subtle in this text; the uniformity of it all, perhaps even especially the uniforms, makes interpreting this text’s intergroup conflicts (or at least, differences) more trying. The goal of uniformity is a kind of neutrality in its unmarkedness. The emphasis on the organization over the individual is commonsense in this setting (the fast-food franchise); there are no chefs at my local McDonald’s and creation or uniqueness is not a goal in the experience of the fast food delivery system. Yet, I argue this desire for predictability does not stay contained in this setting. By looking at one component of this kind of uniformity closely, the uniforms,

while also acknowledging the web of uniforming materials creating the whole experience, I am exploring the material ways fast food uniforms are, in fact, marking and doing and thinking (which is to say, ways in which uniforms are active and not neutral). This allows me to connect how the naturalness of this case study's logics around uniforms move beyond the doors (or drive through lines) of the restaurants.

THEMES OF STYLE IN WHITE CASTLE, BURGER KING, AND MCDONALDS

The components to a rhetoric of style are primacy of the text, imaginary communities, market contexts, aesthetic rationales, and stylistic homologies. In each of the examples in this chapter, these components are present. The fast-food uniforms here are designed to be read as texts about the restaurants and brands, there are specific audiences in mind for each, these uniforms appear and function in multiple market contexts (as I will explain in more detail), they operate within the context of judgement and reason being aesthetically activated (a core concept for fast food products), and each creates and enacts a stylistic homology of its own that is powerful and far-reaching.

In this section, I explore examples of the text where I consider how the rhetoric of style of fast-food uniforms cohere around themes of style. I also describe the uniforms as aesthetic texts. White Castle's partnership with Telfar centers on a style of loyalty, Burger King's uniforms manages a "truth to materials" rhetoric in the center of a processed food empire, and McDonald's powerfully connects iconicity and modernity to their products. These are large umbrella concepts that interweave with other ideas including Black style and hip hop, class, nostalgia, and the glamour of minimalism.

White Castle’s “Real Ones” and OG Loyalty: Imaginary Communities and Market Contexts

“White Castle supported us before our success and we consider them family,” explained Babak Radboy, Telfar’s creative director, when announcing the collaboration for Telfar Clemmons’ designed White Castle employee uniforms. For each brand, there is a connection to imaginary communities that form around authenticity and a sense of historicity throughout their brand identity, and this is clear in each brand’s style of uniform. For White Castle, the designer collaboration for their uniforms speaks to an “OG” (Original Gangster, or old-school) ethic. Even the partnership between Telfar and White Castle has the myth-building narrative often heard in start-ups or with a favorite band; the narrative is that of the earliest fan, the one who was there before they hit it big. Radboy explains, “Their [White Castle’s] team would serve sliders backstage at all our shows and were basically part of our team. It’s still the only thing open after midnight in Telfar’s hood — seeing our uniforms there means something to us, and so we take it personally.” The authenticity works both ways here - Telfar, a fashion brand founded and led by a queer Black man, in the middle of one of the most important fashion events in the world featured White Castle Sliders which represent late-night food in low-income neighborhoods. This is a way of keepin’ it real for Telfar while also elevating White Castle as specific to a lifestyle that includes high fashion.

Instead of a mere business arrangement, the synecdoche of “seeing our uniforms” includes a sense that the leaders of the brand can see their design work at the restaurants as well as meaning the people wearing those uniforms are their people. When he says this “means something to us, and so we take it personally,” he infers a kind of giving back to the community. The style is creating an imaginary community of workers, customers, designers, neighbors, and so on. The press release for the uniform collaboration often refers

to White Castle not as a business but as a “community member.” And while Telfar is a relative newcomer (the brand is fifteen years old), they were tasked with the goal of designing uniforms with “something special for our 100th birthday that captures the authentic spirit of White Castle.” Each shirt states “Since 1921” indicating a sense of longstanding and history.

Black style and hip hop style are integral to White Castle’s Telfar uniform presentation, and I will explore this more specifically in the next section. However, when talking about historicity and the style of loyalty, the Black style emergent here in language and image lends a sense of authenticity to an imaginary community which calls-forth a market context, such as when the Telfar creative director refers to the designer’s “hood” having a White Castle. The press release for the uniform collaboration features a series of portraits of White Castle employees in the uniforms taken by renowned queer Black artist and photographer, Elliot Jerome Brown Jr. Every portrait is a Black person looking directly at the camera in a confident gaze wearing the uniform. According to the Telfar website, which also sells a few pieces from the collaboration (including the specially designed White Castle durag), “Real ones don’t need an explanation of why there is a Telfar x White Castle collab,” and the look in the portraits is a knowing look of eye contact - one that addresses the viewer with a nod. Even the choice of photographer is part of being a “real one” here as Brown Jr. is an artist who primarily works with Black celebrities like Janelle Monet and primarily features Black bodies in his photography. The idea is that true fans of both brands are already in-the-know as a way of on-going authentic love for being part of this specific part of the Black community. Loyalty (“Real ones”) to the community is a theme throughout both Telfar’s branding and White Castle’s branding of the uniform, and the gravitas of such a term gives weight to the uniform while also placing it firmly in the market context such an imaginary community creates.

Burger King's Heritage and "Truth to Materials": Primacy of the Text

Similarly, Burger King's new uniforms are presented as representing an authenticity that matches a historicity of the restaurant that is meant to be seen as "real" and "true" and grounded in a "heritage." Adopting the rhetoric of local-first food movements, wherein locally grown and produced ingredients are explicitly connected to place-making and cultural heritage connected to the land or terroir and small businesses, Burger King's style of uniformity highlights an aura of food and cultural ingredients that tell a narrative opposite to industrialized food production.

Rather than the gravitas of loyalty as seen in White Castle's uniforms, these uniforms are not so serious featuring dark brown or orange colors with playful, retro font, and oversized cartoon-like renderings of burgers and fries. A key piece is an apron, stating in bold, bubbly font, "Flame Grilling Since 1954," and it looks like the kind of apron often worn by pitmasters at artisanal, local barbeque joints, often owned and operated by Black owners. The uniforms are meant to manage customer desire and focus on the craving for their food and experience of the place (both White Castle and Burger King use "crave" in their branding packages) as desirable and good, and the uniforms explicitly connect this fast-food product to the idea of "chefs" of grilling and a sense of history that is also very of-the-moment. According to the press release, "The result is a new look that indicates confidence in the future, while remaining true to heritage and what guests love about BK." The press release is quick to point out the models are actual "crew members" (Burger King's term for employees).

This playfulness of design is centered around the restaurant's commitment to authentic ingredients and its focus on all rebranding efforts to mimic in presentation its core product. For example, the old logo featured blue and a sort-of sheen to the burger bun. This was done away with in favor of a more brown and yellow logo because, according to

Global Chief Marketing Officer Fernando Machado, “there’s no blue food” and “buns are not shiny.” In a sort-of truth to materials ethic with the burger being their material, all of the Burger King uniform is inseparable from the burgers or a harkening of the way to cook burgers. The emphasis on process speaks to a way of cooking that the restaurant does not, in fact, utilize (the grill does not use charcoal or woodsmoke but a flat hot surface with patties under a broil flame).

Just like White Castle, the role Blackness is playing in the imagery offered and in the promise of authenticity and historicity in Burger King’s presentation of the uniforms is crucial. Here, rather than corresponding to an insider status within a Black community, the image offered here is one of a happy homecoming with Black models (also, all Burger King employees) looking directly at the camera with inviting, warm smiles and laughter. The feeling is closer to a family backyard barbecue with bright colors, cheery faces, and one person in the photo, often the oldest person, wearing the apron. This confers a sense of the one person being the grill master. In cooking imagery, the Black barbecue master is a common character often seen in cook-off shows or competitions, and historically barbecue is a uniquely African American creation. This imagery in the press release gives a sense of family and expertise even in the world of processed fast food.

But the rhetorical style of uniforming in this example goes beyond just a sense of familiarity and expertise; in this case, the rhetorical style of uniforming here is a way of playing with food imagery to visually render the wearer in-service-to the product. I want to attune to the way this rhetorical style exists in the relatedness between in discourse, aesthetics, and material engagement as these pertain to Burger King’s uniforms centering racialized style. As Peggy Phelan argues, “Visibility politics are compatible with capitalism’s relentless appetite for new markets and with the most self-satisfying ideologies of the United States: you are welcome here as long as you are productive. The production

and reproduction of visibility are part of the labor of the reproduction of capitalism.” In following this relationality between visibility and productivity, the rhetorical style of uniforming here is doing the work of welcoming (through the relaxed silliness⁶ and familiarity of style of a barbeque in an African American neighborhood or home) while making the production and reproduction of appearance a natural-seeming part of work. In short, a desire for productivity and efficiency starts to look like consent to uniforming (this is an idea I pick up in the next chapter as well). The presentation of workers as beholden to the “quality” and “process” of the food/menu, is played out in the ways that the clothing (much like the logo) grounds its style in the food, bypassing the worker to bring customers quickly and straight to the product. The polo shirts worn by the workers are very minimalistic layers of colors imitating the layers of a Whopper (burger) with green, red, dark brown, and light tan.

Iconicity in McDonald’s Modernity and the Ur-Burger: Stylistic Homologies and Aesthetic Rationales

For McDonald’s, being the quintessential purveyor of American fast food could be seen as a liability when it comes to authenticity and heritage. After all, this is the restaurant that applied the machinic assembly line concept to food. And looking only at the uniforms at McDonald’s, without the context of its new minimalist identity, it would seem the restaurant has cut ties with its sense of history. The uniforms are color-blocked shades of grey in simple cuts of tee shirts, polos, and an apron. Unremarkable and plain. However, in the context of the brand’s larger reinvention of itself, the uniforms underline McDonald’s powerful iconicity.

⁶ To be clear, these are the most *fun* looking uniforms of the three restaurants in this case study.

In a reverse of Burger King's adoption of rebranding across online/advertising platforms first with uniforms slowly filtering around the restaurant locations, this uniform redesign started McDonald's years-long shift into minimalism as its leading aesthetic. Perhaps the first to kick-off the uniform design upgrades, McDonald's last redesigned their uniforms in 2017. Collaborating with celebrity designer Warware Boswell as well as with UK designer Bindu Rivas, the 2017 release offered two "collections" from which each McDonald's location could choose for their workers. The uniforms offered were not well received by customers who immediately created memes about dystopia and *The Hunger Games*. But the design has proved itself over the long game as over 70% of the 850,000 employees "feel that the new uniforms provide a modern image that they would be proud to wear," (Calfas, 2017).

In 2018, McDonald's replaced the famous Rock 'n Roll McDonald's in Chicago with a steel beamed glass structure by Ross Barney Architects following several other minimalist architectural redesigns in McDonald's in Hong Kong, Paris, and Rotterdam (Howarth, 2018). In 2019, advertising agency TBWA created "soothing and hypnotizing" infinite-looped animations in Memphis-design style of the breakfast sandwich coming together (Ravenscroft, 2019). Most recently, a 2020 advertising campaign for the brand simply lists the ingredients for sandwiches with no actual branding present at all. The billboard simply has Helvetica font (the most modern of all fonts) listing: muffin, egg, sausage, cheese muffin, or bun, beef, gherkin, lettuce, sauce, bun, beef, cheese, lettuce, sauce, bun. "The redacted and graphic nature of this latest campaign exudes the confidence McDonald's and its iconic products deserve," says creative director at Leo Burnett Peter Hayes. Playing with iconicity through design started with the uniforms and has grown out from there. Uniforms have the unique material and physical role to play in that the workers wearing them *move*; nearly everything else in the space of the restaurant stays still, but the

people dressed in uniforms speak, fidget, cook, wipe down tables, and carry things around.⁷ What is more, while there are special McDonald's franchises presenting elevated modern architecture, and there is high-concept looped animation online for those who know to look for it, the average franchise is *not* designed by Frank Gehry (or, seemingly, any architect) and it's easy to look past the Helvetica billboards for the highway signs indicating the presence of a McDonald's on a highway exit. What I mean to say is that the only part of a new aesthetic for the brand that appears before the average American is the uniform. Uniforms have the potential to anchor the overall aesthetics in a way that architecture, signs, logos, or advertisements could never achieve.

FAST FOOD'S RHETORICAL STYLE OF UNIFORMING

The stated function of the uniforms in each example includes multiple interpretations of what the uniform should point someone towards. Desire and design are closely linked. This also means, there is something from which we are looking away. In this section, I explore what each company believes they are pointing people to see with the style employed in the clothing and press releases around the clothing, and I look at this to learn if implicit in this directional vision is the overlooked whole. Another way of understanding this is to say, knowing there are many emergent meanings with the presentation of materials, what meanings are expressly deliberate as desirable and what meanings might be present yet presented as unremarkable? Wearing a uniform can be participating in an ongoing process constantly linking to desire and muting other aspects that I call uniforming. First, I address the ways that style is central to the branding process

⁷ A new phenomenon, primarily seen in North American Asian restaurants in the last 6 months, is robots moving around the restaurant spaces to offer or deliver food or drinks. The conversation around boundaries of human and nonhuman are changing, and perhaps one aspect of our understanding of *human* is the ones wearing the uniforms.

by discussing the emphasis on design connecting to authenticity and the ways race is linked with, seemingly, commonsense ideas about class. Second, I examine some of the branding tools employed by fashion-centric uniforming with attention to newly trending acknowledgement of authenticity and market contexts in which desire can be read as performative. Lastly, I explore the ways in which a style-focused uniforming process enacts work as a form of managing emplacement.

Pit Masters at Burger King: Style as Central to Authenticity

In 2021 Burger King announced a complete overhaul of their designs, from the buildings to the logos to, of course, the uniforms. This uniform change, as part of a whole makeover, highlights the connection between design and uniform as part of a place and experience. "Design is one of the most essential tools we have for communicating who we are and what we value, and it plays a vital role in creating desire for our food and maximizing guests' experience," said Raphael Abreu, head of design at Restaurant Brands International, which owns the Burger King brand. "We wanted to use design to get people to crave our food" (Burger King, 2021). According to the press release announcing the rebrand, the new uniforms will "reflect flame grill masters, mixing contemporary and comfortable style with distinctive colors and graphics. Real crew members are featured in new BK advertising." While digital and marketing images and rebranding are quick to roll out and changed overnight across platforms, materials like uniforms take longer to take effect through the many, many locations of Burger King. Burger King stated it will "flow through" the new look, with the emphasis on heritage and flame-grilled food, the more hodge-podge approach can feed the identity of matching a less uniformed look found at actual barbecue restaurants.

While often rebranding is simply that - a change in dress and logos - this rebranding follows changes in the Burger King products. In early 2020, Burger King announced they were reformulating their foods to remove all preservatives and artificial colorings. They (along with White Castle) feature a meatless burger that is meant to compete with their signature Whopper burger. Their stated goal is that Burger King “strives to ensure guests feel good about its food.” The tool of design, then, is being wielded on all aspects of the Burger King experience with uniforms being a final piece in the puzzle.

This move to feel good about the food from a fast food restaurant, a genre of food often thought of as junk food with high calories and sodium, is a move that is limited by actual changes in the food. This is a kind of aestheticization of every day life in that something as unexceptional as a fast food experience is meant to be an aesthetic experience making life better through that aestheticization. Yes, a plant-based burger can offer a new experience that may be more health conscious or environmentally friendly, but the core Whopper is still “king” and even that plant-based burger is high in calories and sodium. This move, when the spokesperson states “The design principles capture the unique characteristics of the Burger King brand: Mouthwatering, Big & Bold, Playfully Irreverent and Proudly True” is a way through design and through rhetoric about design (meaning, explicitly connecting design to craving and desire) of positing participation with the brand is a way of becoming something good. It is pitching the brand as shifting and changing for the better through remaking themselves through good design.

Authentic to Market Contexts: White Castle and the It-Bag

While Burger King looks to connect the design of their uniforms to desire for their flame-grilled product, another way design and desire are being connected is through the partnerships with fashion industry figures and the design of uniforms. The recent ways

several fast-food chains have handled uniforms for their employees is to partner with designers known for their work in fashion. White Castle, a chain that is often thought of as a touchstone of stoner culture due to the 2004 film *Harold and Kumar Go to Whitecastle*, most recently announced they would partner with Telfar Designs, founded by Telfar Clemons who won the 2020 CFDA Award for American Accessories Designer of the Year, for their uniform designs. Telfar Clemons, a beloved queer, Black designer from Brooklyn who's slogan, "It's not for you, it's for everybody," has come to challenge the fashion industry's exclusiveness and luxury retail. The eponymous Telfar Shopping Bag, also known as the Bushwick Burkin for its popularity and the designer's home neighborhood in New York City, is almost always sold out and carries an It-Bag status usually reserved for high-end luxury bags (the Shopping Bag is made of vegan leather and the price tops-out at about \$257 for the largest size).

The designer's relationship with White Castle began in 2015 when Clemons requested the restaurant's sponsorship for New York Fashion Week; they worked together on a uniform for employees first in 2017 with Telfar designing three more sets of uniforms since then along with White Castle fan merchandise available for purchase (with proceeds donated to the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Liberty and Justice Fund, which provides bail to imprisoned minors). According to Jamie Richardson, Vice President at White Castle, "Telfar has taken our uniform to a new place, creating something that's distinctive, attractive and comfortable, and something our team members will feel great in whether they're at work or hanging out with friends and family" (press release, April 2021). The uniform by Telfar includes a T-shirt, polo shirt, apron, visor, and durag in light blue, royal blue, or black. According to the press release for this partnership, "The durag was added to the uniform collection in response to many White Castle team members who requested it. It's the first time White Castle has offered the hair accessory and might be the first time

any restaurant has done so” (April, 2021). Each piece of clothing has large white letters in a gothic, old-English font reminiscent of the font often used in tattoos. The fabrics are mostly cotton blends and the apron is denim. The durag, tee shirts, and hoodies are all available for purchase for non-employees making the line between uniform for work and clothing chosen for socializing very thin. Thus, the fast-food uniform is meant to be worn in multiple settings, has a piece of clothing specific to Black style that is also pitched as the company being responsive to requests while keeping wearers authentic to the brand.

Having a designer create the employee uniform, for any of these brands, is already a connection between the wearer and a status symbol. This status-symbol has two main functions. First, for the wearers, the “crew members,” it elevates them beyond the status of a low-wage position. Even at a more affordable price by fashion standards, Telfar’s products are aspirational and especially so for a person making minimum wage. Thus, it connects the employees, literally through material, to a perception of material gain or prosperity. Second, for the brand, it gives White Castle a connectedness to all the good things that come with a strong fashion brand: art, culture, music, success. It incorporates the staff into the design of the workplace turning them into aesthetizing participants.

Asking designers to create uniforms goes back to the 1960s, when airlines eagerly sought out high-end designers to uniform their flight staff. Halston and Pucci designed uniforms for Braniff Airlines in the 1960s and 1970s; Air France tapped Dior and Nina Ricci in the 1980s. The trend was popularized among bigger corporations in the 1970s with the help of Stan Herman, who was president of the Council of Fashion Designers of America for 16 years and is a champion of the ready-to-wear category. Herman served as designer behind uniforms for FedEx, JetBlue, United Airlines, TWA and McDonald’s. His uniforms are believed to cover more bodies than those of any other single designer. “The

most important thing is likeability,” Herman said. “If a corporation walks around in a uniform they don’t like, they become a grumpy corporation.”

Emplacing Class Work: Hipster Modernism at McDonald’s

This need for uniforms that are liked by the corporation is seen in the emphasis on designers responding to employees. For White Castle, it’s the creation of a durag. For Burger King, it’s an ambiguous future-oriented optimism grounded in cooking technique. For McDonald’s, it is managing the confidence and flexibility for the workers while also fitting into a workplace that is increasingly design-driven and aesthetically important for the customer. Boswell, the designer of their current uniforms, was at one time an employee at McDonald’s, and he stated, “When I was a crew member, I routinely changed into a different set of clothes before leaving the restaurant: I wanted to design a line of uniforms that people would feel comfortable wearing outside of work” (Ilyashov, 2017). He offered that he thought the uniforms could give the wearers "a greater level of confidence." Rivas, the other designer, gave this insight into the design process: “We challenged ourselves to design a uniform collection that could perform well within the work environment while still promoting versatility, comfort and personality.” Shades of grey are the only colors of the uniforms with the exception of very small golden arches of an M on each piece. The pieces are very simple in grey color-blocking with tee shirts, polos, ball caps, bandanas, and the signature piece of the redesign: a denim apron. All of the pieces look a bit somber but very utilitarian and also not much like a uniform. The apron was described by Refinery 29 as making the wearer look “equally as suited to dispensing artisanal kombucha in a Brooklyn fair-trade coffee shop/bar/vegan bakery/bike shop hybrid.” The overall effect is clean and functional and upwardly mobile.

The emphasis on personality combined with pared-down iconicity of the larger advertising campaign for McDonald's seems to be directing attention away from the details like wages or food sourcing and towards that feeling in an Apple store where employees are called "geniuses" and customers seem to see being there as participating in a deliberate choice rather than just another brand or just another sandwich. While the uniforms may have been seen as bleak at first, they fit into a clean and smooth workplace that is modern, and they do not distract from the food itself (they do not distract from anything as they are quite blank). In the next chapter, I look at the presentation of a self-selected uniform as a class marker of financial achievement. While I expected much of that uniformity to be borrowing style from laborer uniforms, I did not expect to see low-wage laborer uniforms to be borrowing style from self-selected uniforms. Yet, in the case of McDonald's designs, there is a portability, flexibility, and unremarkability that have become the hallmarks of self-selected uniforms.

This is connected to upward mobility or managing class markers in a complex way that is active. I argue that wearing such a uniform as presented by these companies activates more class management than purchasing that It-Bag, the crowning modern achievement of Veblen's conspicuous consumption, itself. This may be because there are more levels of signaling wealth than Veblen's original theory suggests. In their study, 'Signaling Status with Luxury Goods: The Role of Brand Prominence', Han et al. (2010) discuss two new distinctions for wealthy customers of luxury brands. The first group, the 'parvenus,' wants to be visually associated with images of wealth and feel a 'need for status' (16-17). 'Parvenus possess significant wealth but not the connoisseurship necessary to interpret subtle signals' (17) making them more likely to buy items with prominent, or 'loud', branding. The second group, the 'patricians', are more interested in 'inconspicuously branded products that serve as a horizontal signal' to each other (other wealthy people)

rather than to the masses. Han et al. found that Gucci and Louis Vuitton, in fact, charge more for quieter handbags (with little to no branding) than their loudly branded bags (19). What's more, they found that counterfeiters are more likely to copy those louder goods (although that is not always the case with mainstream fast-fashion, like Zara or Forever21), even if those originals cost less.

What is interesting about the McDonald's uniforms, then, is they are functioning as a nod or indicator of patrician style. Consider the inconspicuous branding even as this is a uniform completely there to represent the brand itself. Consider the horizontal signal something like a grey t-shirt may send to a hood-clad, t-shirt wearing creative class type. Even if the wearer is unaware, this is an active process of class signaling they are participating in by uniforming themselves, and perhaps, in the uniform's echoing of the unremarkability of whiteness (to the extent that the McDonald's logo is hardly legible) seen in the next chapter's enactments of placelessness, a-temporality, and disembodiment, there is a logic of race at play. While Burger King's uniforms are playfully bypassing any individuality of the wearers with a focus on food (product), McDonald's blank uniforms create the sense of possibility and potential by putting-on a style of unremarkability. Nirmal Puwar (2004) reminds us that Whiteness serves to infantilize non-normative bodies. Whiteness "exists as an unmarked normative position...[entitling] it to take up the unmarked normative locale." While Black employees' bodies remain non-normative, the uniform *itself* becomes the unmarking, norming garment characterized by employment and control of place-making; rather than allowing the number of Black employees to let the space become a Black-space, centering Whiteness through unmarking enables the uniform to prepare and emplace the Black body with these characteristics, not just independent of Blackness, but *irrespective* of race (the ultimate erasure).

“REALNESS” IN CLASS IDENTIFICATION

In each of the brands examined here, the idea of “real” shows up in direct and indirect ways. For example, Burger King emphasizes that “Real crew members are featured in new BK advertising” (they serve as the models for the new uniforms in the ads), and White Castle reminds us that “Real ones don't need an explanation of why there is a Telfar x White Castle collab.” While McDonald's does not explicitly use the term in their press releases, the brand situates itself as the most iconic, original fast-food restaurant available – in a way, the realest fast food experience. In this section, I will explore the ways these brands invoke a quality of the real and relate this to the concept of “realness” originating from drag balls. I argue that while we can approach the idea of real from many directions, when talking about clothing and uni-form-ing (emphasis on form) as a force, realness may play a strong role in understanding this rhetoric of style that is unique to experiences with clothing.

Realness

The trope of “real” shows up in fashion and branding texts cyclically. For example, the 1990s anti-fashion, grunge editorial fashion shoots rebuffed the glamazon super models of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Most recently, the cycle has included Instagram and blog feeds through the rise of personal branding through influencers. Findlay (2020) explores the newest cycle of “real” in advertising in these arenas through looking at brands like Glossier. She creates a category for this kind of approach with her term *aspirational realness* to describe the ways in which brand images circulate presenting consumers with products promising to transform the consumer's everyday life into an enhanced and beautiful one but without the cost of their individuality (unlike hegemonic ideals of beauty). In the language of this study, this is, perhaps, a way of presenting or dealing desire

for an aestheticized life as authentic. Aspirational realness “seeks to collapse the distance between brand and consumer, constructing a discourse of intimacy and equivalence by drawing the consumer into the world of the brand whilst suggesting that she is the brand and that the brand is her” (p. 553). The more integrated and intimate our daily lives are with a product or brand, the more “real” or authentic that aestheticization becomes. This concept of real opens the possibility that when each fast-food brand points to the realness of their identity, they are talking about more than the product’s integrity; real means far more invasive and intimate things.

Yet, the Findlay’s aspirational realness emerges from brands focused on the beauty and digital savviness of Instagram Influencers⁸. When considering fast food workers wearing their uniforms to flip burgers, take drive-through orders, and clean bathrooms, the work is not even close to the glamour of a Glossier employee or Instagram influencer. What Findlay’s concept offers this discussion, though, is the aspects of how authentic and “real” commercial strategies are grounded in middle-class subjectivity of a normative postfeminist subject, which according to Winch (2013) is also “white, straight, [and] able bodied” (p. 3). I propose that longing and desire expressed in a term like *aspirational* may already be part of “realness” when it comes to understanding how uniforms are an exercise in realness. Realness, then, without the aspirational piece remains a key component of how these brands present themselves through every aspect, but specifically, uniforms play a strong role here as they are worn by the workers who may or may not be white, straight, and able bodied., and most likely are not middle class. In fact, when White Castle refers to “real ones,” this most certainly does *not* signify whiteness, as explored in the above section’s discussion.

⁸ There is an entire other dissertation waiting to be written on uniformity of influencers.

Realness, in drag culture, is a quality of appearance or existence viewers are meant to see as fact. When Brummett discusses style's aesthetic activation as evident in the ways that looking and being become collapsed, this is the logic that allows for realness. This communication of appearance as actual being (rather than imaginary) is generated from drag queens in ball culture:

A dramatic performance that gives the illusion of an ontology or theoretical "beingness" as such. It is based on the judging of a performance of identity as being real in terms of the category aimed at imitating, whether that category is conceptually understood in terms of stereotypes for behavior, replication of identifiable social and cultural visual identities, or recycled and mass produced identities of a postmodern culture. (Caldwell, 2009, p. 79)

This concept is presented and examined in the documentary, *Paris is Burning* (1990), which explores drag ball culture of the late 1980s. "To be able to blend; that's what realness is" comments the narrator over scenes from a ball. The voiceover explains:

If you can pass the untrained eye, or even the trained eye, and not give away the fact that you're gay, that's when it's real. The idea of realness is to look as much as possible like your straight counterpart... It's not a take-off or a satire, no. It's actually being able to be this. It's really a case of going back into the closet. You can walk around confidently blending in with everybody else. You've erased all the mistakes, all the flaws, all the give aways to make your illusion perfect.

Thus, within this concept of realness we already have a foundation of appearance and being created out of desire and aspiration to blend with normative appearances when it comes to class, sexuality, and race.

In her biting critique of the documentary, bell hooks (2015) highlights the importance of ritual in drag performance and ball culture. She offers that the drag balls as

presented in the film are enacting a series of rituals well established in Black communities but are presented for a white audience as spectacle. She specifies, “Ritual is that ceremonial act that carries with it meaning and significance beyond what appears, while spectacle functions primarily as entertaining dramatic display” (p. 150). This attunement to the difference between what it means to a person to dress versus what it means to an audience to consume the act of dressing as presented by an other highlights the importance of realness; if someone can blend well enough, the spectacle is removed. Dressing for realness, then, is not only to serve the confidence of the dresser but to appease possible lookers. Within the commentary of the film’s narrator, the stakes are outlined as such: “When they’re undetectable. When they can walk out of that ballroom into the sunlight and onto the subway and get home and still have all their clothes and no blood running off their bodies, those are the femme realness queens.” The filmmaker is making something clear to her audience (of mostly white, middle class, intellectual types inclined to seek out an art film in the early 1990s): unlike the other categories of a drag ball, the true test of realness is not the audience and judges in the ballroom. The true test of realness is *can it fool the people in the audience for this film?* There are many implications for the imaginary communities gathering around such a text of uniforming, and I see this particular gathering as a site where mark making *mark making* may operate as a force destabilizing straightness and whiteness.

What hooks brings is a focus on the way that drag performance is almost always discussed in terms of spectacle and gender but is clearly, as exemplified the case of *Paris is Burning*, about class and whiteness. The same is true for studies in communication (Gonzalez & Cavazos, 2016; Heller, 2016; Strings & Bui, 2014); the focus remains on gender performance (an important aspect, to be sure) without much attention to the ways that gender is intertwined with race and class performed through drag. Tellingly,

researchers from outside of the US are attuned to this intersectionality as seen in the work of Janion (2020) and Filipovic (2021) who both see ways that drag balls in their communities function as a Westernizing force. I suggest that the rhetoric of style that is circulating around rituals of drag realness radiates out from drag balls or performances of resistance through dress to everyday uniforming in the way that uniforms prepare and emplace people to blend into normative environments.

Uniforming Realness

Uniforms, as emplaced and worn by workers in these fast-food case studies, enact realness in that the uniforms are meant to offer whoever wears one a blending act into the normative setting of the brand. It is not my intention to appropriate drag culture. Simply, in searching for a term that gets-at the material experience of how uniforms think and do, this term opens the field. Realness for drag ball culture is a unique and specific performance that enacts resistance and plays with gender identity in important ways for the people participating (either as queens or viewers). While not specifically focusing on sexuality or transgression, the question here that realness calls-in is, in order to blend, what must be erased? What are the giveaways that interrupt realness's ontological illusion? I am calling this uniforming's realness. For example, the uniformed workers, whether appearing in advertisements, press releases, or in person at a restaurant, are enacting a version of class realness. McDonald's version of uniforming realness functions through emplacing workers in their uniforms by displacing anything that does not match the fantasy of the brand's space.

Unlike high tropes of high fashion magazines or images where fashion objects are presented as just part of everyday life for certain subjects or a "self-evident attribute of a cosmopolitan person" (Titton, 2010), uniforming's realness prepares and presents people

as enfolded within capitalist logics of productivity removing as much spectacle as possible – put simply, the product. While bell hooks’ concept of ritual refers to a deep communal connection and celebration, ritual can also be fear based or at least inflexible. McDonald’s uniforms as basic grey tee shirts and hats with their elasticity of wear emplace people as if they just happened to decide to work behind the counter.

The style outlined in the fast-food uniforms here reflects and serves particular interests. The aesthetic is rooted in an investment in middle class notions of upward mobility and race that does not necessarily articulate itself. My analysis in this chapter allowed me to argue that a) a focus on style offers opportunities to see connections within something mundane and conformist to feelings associated with desire, glamour, cultural authenticity, and a sense of unique, localized history, b) aestheticizing work manages materiality and emplacement, and c) the uniform is a possible force for centering whiteness through *unmarking* while attuning to the possibility that worn-clothing’s *mark making* may open for destabilizing whiteness. From the central investment in authenticity and historicity through style, to the notions of competing desires for junk food and healthy living coexisting in the active process of uniforming, to the erasures and performance of uniforming realness, White Castle, Burger King, and McDonald’s uniforms are a prime example of the rhetorical style of uniforming.

Chapter Five: Chosen Uniforms Case Study

“A rowdy bunch on the whole, they were most of them so violently individualistic as to be practically interchangeable.” – The Dud Avocado, Elaine Dundee

In April of 2015, an art director at one of the top marketing firms the world, Saatchi & Saatchi, wrote a short article for Harper’s Bazaar online edition titled, “Why I Wear the Exact Same Thing to Work Every Day” (Kahl, 2015) in which she documents her process of choosing and wearing what she calls her “work uniform.” For her, the uniform she’s chosen consists of a white silk shirt (of which she bought 15), black trousers (several pairs), and a black leather rosette tied in a bow at her collar. Her concluding sentence states, “Today, I not only feel great about what I wear, I don’t think about what I wear.” She wears this every day to work, and at the time of the article had been practicing this chosen uniform for three years. Seven days after her article was published online, it had been shared over 42,000 times (Rutherford, 2015), and less than a year later the article had over 120,000 shares (and had been rehashed and covered as a story by many outlets) (Mapp, 2016). Of course, she did not invent the concept of a chosen work uniform. Kahl herself mentions that business suits are largely similar to what she is doing, and in her original piece, she links to a Mashable article titled “Why Zuck and other successful men wear the same thing every day” (Abbruzzese, 2014) stating that once this (also very popular) article was released, her coworkers were more accepting of her chosen uniform look. The *Mashable* piece lists powerful men in different arenas of public life who wore chosen uniforms, including President Obama, Albert Einstein, and, of course, Facebook creator Mark Zuckerberg.

The popularity of the idea to create a chosen uniform (aside from a typical suit) has blossomed into many forms following the reasoning outlined in these two articles. Articles

about capsule wardrobes¹ connect to the idea of not participating in the environmental wastefulness of fast fashion (see Caldwell, 2019 and Anzia, 2018). Interviews with people in creative jobs often include a series of questions about their “uniforms” in which they talk about the ease of taking a decision out of their day (see Lewis, 2012, and Harpers Bazaar series “24 Hours With...” such as “Karl Lagerfeld in 24 Hours” by Kristina O’Neill, 2012). What begins as a pool of uniformity of style seems to crystalize—for some—into a self-appointed uniform. But without the organization’s power and sanctioning, does it, in fact, function as a uniform?

The aspects of uniformity I am examining in this chapter as compared to the previous case study are more to do with the ways uniform dressing as a rhetorical style proliferates beyond proscribed, enforced uniforms in an organization. These are ensembles of clothing that a person has named as their uniform or an approach to autonomous dressing that is described as uniform-dressing. Choosing a uniform for everyday wear is a practice that is not new, as I will demonstrate but naming this practice to dressing in a “uniform” is relatively recent. In this portion of the study, I ask why this term for dressing now? How is associating this style of dress with a word that indicates lack of agency a desirable (and repeated) action? In this chapter I will argue that performativity, materialism, and style are interconnected in rhetorical style of uniforming to legitimize and naturalize an approach to productivity of the wearers. The purpose here is to examine the role rhetoric has played in this process to illustrate how a rhetorical style of uniforming has emerged as a means to this end and an ongoing way of thinking by doing. I set up this case study by describing examples of uniformity where we understand the clothing as a “uniform” that someone has chosen and describes the reasons given for this approach to clothing. This includes a look at sorority style of clothing and a community of “moms” in Park Slope, a look at the rise of Normcore and Basic dressing, and lastly, the emergence of jumpsuits and other so-called

workwear clothing adopted into mainstream options. From there, the chapter will move into analysis, which explore how the rhetorical style of uniforming is enacted for people who are not obligated to wear a uniform by an employer, and in this section I explore concepts of emplacement, a-temporality, and mark-making.

STYLING WORK: UNIFORMING

When discussing a chosen uniform, I mean the deliberate and intentional decision by a wearer to practice or abide by a standard aesthetic or look that relies on either the exact same clothing everyday (such as, buying 7 of the same shirts to wear over and over) or a similar outfit that is repeated. This concept or approach to dressing as a “uniform” has proliferated in mentions throughout various media. This is a unique text to study since it is different from the uniforms of low-wage workers as discussed in the previous chapter. While fast food generally employs people without education credentials or other means of class mobility (apart from the job itself), the workers who are called “white collar” or “creative class” (Florida, 2002) are often working remotely, seemingly appear disembodied, etc. There are several places a chosen uniform crystalizes as a concept in popular culture, and I will explore some of those in this section and how these intersect with aspects of rhetorical style to create a form of uniforming that is distinct in function from the uniforms of the previous chapter.

One important difference between the two case studies presented in this project is that while the previous chapter’s focus on uniforms connects to larger stories being told by the brand and/or organization, the focus on a self-selected uniform is directed by the wearer. While there may be workplace dress codes or guidelines, the choice by the wearer to adopt what they call a uniform begins from a place of choice, not coercion or in connection to a position (e.g., the difference in uniform between a fryer and a manager at

Burger King). While this is a key difference in the decision-making process around a uniform, I also want to note that with the rise of social-media style entrepreneurs, there is a sense of creating a brand around the autonomous worker that is reflected in a chosen uniform. In short, the clothing chosen by the wearer may very well be meant to represent a brand still, but that brand's aesthetic by all practical purposes would be directed by the wearer to a certain extent and still meant to be seen and recognized as a coherent story about the wearer rather than an organization. The difference here is the self-styled uniform is the wearer's appropriation of a system that is available to her, whereas a formalized uniform is the wearer's conformity to a compulsory system.

A second important difference to understand at the outset is how much of the work in the previous chapter relies upon physical labor. The supposed genius of fast-food preparation is the machinic, Ford assembly line operation wherein each detail of preparation is broken down into individual jobs with minimal range in movement. The workers (and customers) are meant to fit into the machine of the restaurant rather than the other way around. In the case of this chapter's uniformity of dress, the person adopting this is meant to be doing less physical labor and more decision making, creative work, and, often, virtual work. This distinction has classically used language of clothing to designate who belongs where: blue-collar workers for physical labor (metonymy for coveralls), white-collar workers for office work (metonymy for oxford button-up dress shirts). I will explore how this designation is emerging with stronger than ever fault-lines reinforcing class in ever increasing circles (outside of the "office") and how uniformity of clothing functions as an emplacing and legitimizing force for productivity. In the following discussion, I will elaborate on what this type of uniforming is doing by exploring who wears chosen uniforms. First, I look at places where a sense of legacy and group membership is primarily indicated and supported through uniformity of dress. Next, I look

at the emergence of two specific styles of uniformity known as Normcore and Basic, including the people who become icons with their uniform as integral to their iconicity. Lastly, I look at the ways uniformity is pitched as a “hack” to make life easier and how this is connected with the desire to cultivate a worker-aesthetic in a chosen uniform (note, a code of uniformity can also be a kind of “hack” or short-hand version of organizational hierarchy, such as at IMB where the color of a suit a male employee could wear was specified and linked to position in the organization).

Legacy, Imaginary Communities, and Group Identity: Sororities and Park Slope Moms

In the article titled, “The Sisterhood of the Exact Same Pants” Stephanie Talmadge (2017) described the detailed and intense form of uniformity sorority pledges take-on to establish their identity within the sisterhood by describing the event of a “door stack”. Talmadge states, “It’s easy to understand why the clips become internet sensations, with their eerie, Stepford-like quality that comes courtesy of the matching outfits, the plastered-on smiles, and the fact that most, if not all, of the girls are white. They probably have the same hairstyle, too — long and straight or tamely curled.” This physical performance is a feat accomplished only after hours of meticulous practice and planning and it is rooted in a message often explicitly stated: “When they tell you, ‘We’ve been waiting for you all summer,’ they aren’t exaggerating.” While often decried as creepy or likened to the “gates of hell” (Krishna, & Henry, 2016), the pull to find a community is strong and an important part of young adulthood, and this offers itself as a tidy solution. The rhetoric of uniformity underlines a feeling of “fate” (as Talmadge describes her own feelings of finding her sorority at a young age).

Group identity is often established aesthetically, specifically through clothing, and this is a form of the imaginary communities in the five components of style. Sororities are an extreme example wherein practices such as “dress checks” (“making sure that each individual’s clothes and makeup reflect the group’s collective attractiveness and stylishness” according to Talmadge) are officially employed with committees of young women overseeing the process of approval along with the continuous task of ordering tee shirts for various events (with a panoptic attention to “correct” – oversized - sizing for each member). In addition to official group monitoring of uniformity of dress, the unspoken rules are also strictly enforced “[The ‘rules’ are] not written down anywhere, not officially codified, and in many cases, not necessarily things that the national leadership would support. They’re conceived and enforced by each chapter’s sisterhood, supposedly for the house’s present and future legacy” (Talmadge). Thus, the primary text (the clothing) calls into appearance, and therefore being, this community; the clothing produces the audience, and it is a consequence of the rhetorical style of uniforming. This attention to legacy requires the close guarding, passing-on, and identification of established and nameable codes of uniformity and distinguishes a specific group, like a sorority, from a looser but still definable group, like eleventh graders (“on Wednesdays we wear pink,” to quote the movie *Mean Girls*, is certainly a version of an unwritten rule, but not one that has much of a coherence after a short period of time).

Importantly, this way of dressing in uniformity is quite purposeful. In fact, this form of dressing in uniformity requires ongoing attention and intentionality to the ever-changing details of tiny differences. To be part of the group requires adherence to the aesthetic while also maintaining and naturalizing minute discrepancies that individuate and establish status and differences. This is an ever-moving target making belonging in the group performative in that it is ever-emerging and rooted in a *doing* that is not static. Wearing a Lilly Pulitzer

dress, a brand typically beloved by sororities, is not sufficient; instead, knowing the correct print aligned with a given sorority and wearing this print at the right time in the specific approved silhouette that is not exactly the same as a sister begins the process of reasserting and becoming that is performative action. This is an example of Hebdige's definition of subcultures rooted and recognizable in style that is meant to be seen by insiders as "dressing against" the "straight world" (mainstream culture). Hebdige positions style in subculture as "pregnant with significance. Its transformations go 'against nature' interrupting the process of 'normalization'." (p. 18). This is the strangeness of rhetorical style of uniforming – it is constantly active in transformations that are meant to be seen as difference but for the uninitiated or outsider, it looks like more normalization. Lilly Pulitzer is certainly not Hebdige's punks wearing safety pins or Mods dancing at underground clubs in sharp-lined clothes. However, the ability to communicate difference and interruption *and* mainstream sameness, to appear as culture and subculture, in all of those examples is a powerful illustration of the complexity of a rhetorical style of uniforming.

While practicing such a strict rhetorical style of uniforming is magnified in a university setting's Greek system, group identity through uniformity of dress occurs across many instances in culture and over time, meaning, this is not a new phenomenon. However, I argue what is emerging as important to a conversation to better understand the current rhetorical style of uniformity and uniforms is 1) the specifics of the texts (the elements of style/clothing that are chosen to constitute a uniform) and 2) the specific claims to belonging that these elements are meant to establish or create. The specific elements of the claimed uniforms combine complex and competing motivations.

An example of this is how *New York Times* writer Hayley Krisher (2019) named the crystallization of two very specific elements of what she calls "The New Mom Uniform of Park Slope": No. 6 clogs and a thick, colorfully woven strap by the brand Salt attached

to a luxury bag. These elements are ubiquitous to a certain neighborhood (although I would argue the look itself has expanded far beyond the locale by this point) and that location comes with a high level of income; this is differentiation that meant to be horizontal signals other patricians (see Han et al., 2010). This horizontal nod to peers helps explain the nonthreatened affect many of the wearers take when discussing this uniform; “It’s like we’re matching,” stated one of the women interviewed for the Krisher article who went on to note that “the strap reminded her of the woven friendship bracelets she used to make in camp. ‘It’s a unique way of styling yourself. When I see someone in a strap or a clog I don’t have, I think, ‘That looks good. I want that.’”

Beyond claims to identifying with other women as friends, the specific elements of this uniform also connect to feelings of discomfort with unfettered displays of wealth. This initially seems ironic as No. 6 clogs cost about \$450 and the Salt strap at \$140 not only costs more than many women can spend on a bag, but it’s worn attached to bags affordable to a very select few (for example, a Ms. Ginsberg in the article “rotates multiple straps between her Balenciaga, Fendi and Proenza Schouler PS1 bags”). However, the strap brand has a partnership with artisans from the La Guajira region of Colombia, according to its website, donating a portion of its proceeds to a Colombian nonprofit foundation. And the clogs are founded in an aesthetic associated with hippie-commune anti-materialism as well as performance and comfort footwear worn by working-class laborers (nurses, cooks, gardeners, etc.). In combination, even with the high cost, the uniform’s elements give an air of interest in comfort and lack of preciousness about luxury and fashion often associated with lower classes and younger people.

The elements of anti-materialism and anti-fashion – often uniforms themselves – are important factors in the choosing of an adopted uniform, as I will explore more in the next section. First, it is important to understand (in brief) the context of what these elements

are contrasting. With the example of the strap, there is a clear juxtaposition with the luxury designer bag; like adding a bumper-sticker to a Porsche, the idea of spending thousands of dollars on a status symbol and then adding a completely outside element made of cheap materials is bold in a way handbag-worshippers of the past would not imagine. The element of the clogs, in turn, is better understood by connecting to the *place* where this trend emerged: New York City. The same city of *Sex and the City* in which Carrie Bradshaw introduced the rest of the world to towering yet dainty Manolo Blahniks and \$900 heels made of materials like silk, velvet, or suede. Choosing to wear a uniform including elements of comfort, then, in the context of the high fashion and high consumption capital of the US is a form of rhetoric around the requirements of being a mother. There is a reason this is a “mom uniform”; this uniform announces a role often associated with suburbia and lack of taste (or at least, sloppy presentation of taste) with an intentional lifestyle shift. These women are carving out an aesthetic for a different kind of stage in life, even as their income level remains the same. Thus, the market context for this style conflates consumers and community members.

Belonging and Connection: Normcore and Basic Bitches

In April, 2014, Alex Williams of the *New York Times* defined the emergent term of normcore as follows:

Normcore (noun) 1. A fashion movement, c. 2014, in which scruffy young urbanites swear off the tired street-style clichés of the last decade — skinny jeans, wallet chains, flannel shirts — in favor of a less-ironic (but still pretty ironic) embrace of bland, suburban anti-fashion attire. (See Jeans, mom. Sneakers, white.)

2. A sociocultural concept, c. 2013, having nothing to do with fashion, that concerns hipster types learning to get over themselves, sometimes even enough to enjoy mainstream pleasures like football along with the rest of the crowd.

3. An Internet meme that turned into a massive in-joke that the news media keeps falling for.

The article goes on to develop and defend each of the possible definitions given by tracing the origin of the term, and by juxtaposing true normcore items (\$64.99 New Balance sneakers) with “fauxcore” items (\$160 New Balance sneakers made for J. Crew). Whether meant as a huge inside joke or not, the term, which narrowly lost out on Oxford’s word of the year in 2014 to “vape”, and the style of normcore has been taken-up as a fashion trend. It has shown up at every level of clothing, from the most exclusive runway shows such as Chanel, Celine, and Marc Jacobs, to Target and H&M. Normcore can be read as a markedly-unmarked, gender reifying “ideological drag.” This way of dressing paved the road for a rhetoric of uniforming in its obsession with “sameness.” I will connect the technological fluency in normcore to its gendering force, and I will problematize the “placeless” and passive body it presents as both foundational to uniforming as a practice of dressing that has far extended beyond normcore.

There seems to be two actual origin stories for this term. First, editor and stylist Alice Goddard was named as the lead creator/adopter of this style in *New York Magazine*’s “The Cut”. In 2011, the London-based Goddard created a project in reaction to the increasingly normalizing power of the “street” style of fashion blogs, such as Scott Schuman’s *The Sartorialist* and Yvan Rodic’s *Facehunter*, comparing their images with what most of us, encounter as street style. For Goddard, the fashion blogs are full of “people who have made a huge effort with their clothing,” so she compared those images with screenshots of Google Map’s street view app of people in American towns. The images

from the blogs “often feel a bit over fussed and over precious—the subject is completely aware of the outcome.” Goddard contrasts these to the people she was finding on Google Maps who “obviously had no idea they were being photographed, and yet their outfits were, to me, more interesting.” This esoteric beginning, as a look that a select few stylists gravitated towards did not yet have a name, but it served as the foundation for normcore’s unmarked, unremarkable style. Similar to Hebdige’s observation that key subcultures, like 1970s punks, are marked by their pointed refusal to engage more empowered styles, normcore here sounds like enactments of punk style:

In punk, alienation assumed an almost tangible quality. It could almost be grasped. It gave itself up to the cameras in ‘blankness’, the removal of expression (see any photograph of any punk group), the refusal to speak and be positioned. (p. 28)

In the language of this study, Goddard was catching glimpses of a fairly mainstream uniformity of dress often featuring sneakers made for comfort and flexibility of task as well as unbranded and outdated tees, sweatpants, or jeans purchased from big-box stores. These became the building blocks of “removal of expression” and tangible blankness in normcore.

The second origin story happens two years later when K-Hole, a New York based group of supposed brand consultants/trend forecasters (who later claimed to be performance artists), coined the term “normcore” for a report (manifesto) entitled “Youth Mode: A report on freedom”. The term immediately was take-up as a hashtag and defined that style of dress bubbling up from professional stylists of “self-aware, stylized blandness” (Duncan, 2014) featuring non-ironic sweatshirts, sneakers, and early-90s “dad jeans” (Williams, 2014). But the earliest form of the term normcore, according to K-Hole, was specifically:

[N]ot to describe a particular look but a general attitude: embracing sameness deliberately as a new way of being cool, rather than striving for ‘difference’ or ‘authenticity.’ In fashion, though, this manifests itself in ardently ordinary clothes. Mall clothes. Blank clothes. The kind of dad-brand non-style you might have once associated with Jerry Seinfeld. (Duncan, 2014)

The appeal of Normcore is the erasure of individuality in order to get it out of clothing-as-identity; “Normcore annihilated the idea of personal style and its emphasis on individuality. A kind of radical purism affected this worldview: These generic garments are the only ones untouched by the hands of capital-F-fashion, and thus okay to wear” (Hyland, p. 226). However, K-Hole’s Emily Segal specified this trend is not “about being simple or forfeiting individuality to become a bland, uniform mass,” and instead opens the possibility of “being recognizable, of looking like other people... seeing that as an opportunity for connection instead of as evidence that your identity has dissolved” (quoted by Hyland, p. 227). The appeal to this sameness is not a new appeal; it is a repackaged appeal predicated upon clothing’s unique ability to place and do the thinking for us as a marker of group identity. The report narrates: “Once upon a time, people were born into communities and had to find their individuality. Today people are born individuals and have to find their communities. In Normcore, one does not pretend to be above the indignity of belonging.” Has uncoupling identity and belonging from fashion come to mean a necessary anti-fashion stance, then?

Compare the description of leaving behind the striving for authenticity from Duncan to Hebdige’s description and explanation of why subcultural style is important and worthy of study:

The meaning of subculture is, then, always in dispute, and style is the area in which the opposing definitions clash with most dramatic force. Much of the available

space in this book will therefore be taken up with a description of the process whereby objects are made to mean and mean again as ‘style’ in subculture.... this process begins with a crime against the natural order, though in this case the deviation may seem slight indeed – the cultivation of a quiff, the acquisition of a scooter or a record or a certain type of suit. But it ends in the construction of a style, in a gesture of defiance or contempt, in a smile or a sneer. It signals a Refusal. I would like to think that this Refusal is worth making, that these gestures have a meaning, that the smiles and the sneers have some subversive value, even if, in the final analysis, they are... just the darker side of sets of regulations. (p. 3)

This sense of belonging, a longing for being known and part of a whole, is that from which the stylistic elements emerge. However, a dual proposition common in marketing fashion remains: (1) belonging *looks* a certain way, and (2) that look is available for purchase. What is more, to whom is the dignity of belonging extended? Repositioning uniformity of dress as *less* oppressive than individuality of style says much more about the audience for Normcore – it is for those for whom Hyland notices “niche-ness and specialization have become a tyranny of their own” (p. 230).

Seemingly, this theory of clothing performing as *equalizer* is playing with Butler’s (1990) sense that, “‘coherence’ and ‘continuity’ of ‘the person’ are not logical or analytic features of personhood, but, rather, socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility” (23). Yet, Butler problematizes when gender appears as “natural” asking, “Does being female constitute a ‘natural fact’ or a cultural performance, or is ‘naturalness’ constituted through discursively constrained performative acts that produce the body through and within the categories of sex?” (xxxix). What could seem more natural and yet, simultaneously, produced than a body in clothing? Everyone must dress; we encounter others (usually) in their clothing. We choose our clothing based on what we like while also

using it to describe how and who we see ourselves to be. Butler offers that, “performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration” (xv). In the context of clothing, repetition and ritual become strong indicators of gender but also in-and out-groups, power dynamics, and subjectivity. While, “it is clear that coherence is desired, wished for, idealized, and that this idealization is an effect of a corporeal signification” (Butler, p. 185), can corporeal signification through style undo itself? Is there an identity before dress?

Butler’s (1993) work in *Bodies That Matter* looks at examples of abjected beings who do not appear properly gendered, and she finds that it is their very humanness that comes into question. “Indeed, the construction of gender operates through *exclusionary* means, such that the human is not only produced over and against the inhuman, but through a set of foreclosures, radical erasures” (8). What are the radical erasures of Normcore? The gender of Normcore is, in its material components, cultural references, and utilitarian ethic, decidedly masculine and white; even (perhaps, especially) on female and Black bodies. While wearers of both sexes claim it is “gender neutral”, Jerry Seinfeld and Steve Jobs are consistently cited as the style icons. The people in Goddard’s Google streetview photos were living in mostly rural or small towns and are very white. Could we actually declare a style is rendered non-masculine through women simply adopting it? Insisting this look is not masculine but *neutral* reinforces that masculine is always the new black when it comes to androgynous clothing. The erasure of the aesthetic is the return to masculinity and whiteness as default. In this respect Butler warns us that “[j]uridical power inevitably ‘produces’ what it claims merely to represent” (3). Thus, as Normcore claims to represent non-identitarian subjectivity, without the trappings of gender, race, or class, it produces

and reinforces the white, male, wealthy subject as the most “normal” without undoing or challenging the normative function of such a style.

Specifically, in the context of examining masculinity and race, Richard Dyer finds that Western ideals of whiteness have resulted in a quest for a “luminescent” glow of purity, where “the idea of whiteness as transcendence, dissolution into pure spirit and no-thing-ness” allows for “being nothing at all” (p. 48). This “no-thing-ness”, then, “may readily be felt as being nothing in particular, the representative human, the subject without properties” (p. 80). This is why it is important to bring materiality to the forefront of the discussion because there *are always already things* that are interpolated within a network of such ideas. Put another way, the idea of whiteness as no-thing-ness exists in a world of things. For the Normcore philosophy/trend, K-Hole offers that their audience “seek[s] the freedom that comes with non-exclusivity. It finds liberation in being nothing special, and realizes that adaptability leads to belonging” (K-Hole, 36), all while adopting the clothing practices of the whitest, richest men in our culture.

Calling wealth and whiteness “nothing special” is not a move towards inclusivity; rather, such downplaying rhetoric works to write those who do not conform to this standard as *un-adaptable*. The white-wealthy-male body is reified as infinitely adaptable and always belonging, while *anybody* that deviates is just trying too hard. Implicit in this purposeful blankness in dress is the belief that subjectivity, activity, productivity, and meaning lies *outside* of the body, the clothing, and the person. K-Hole states clearly, “[o]nce upon a time people were born into communities and had to find their individuality. Today people are born individuals and have to find their communities” (27). The appeal is to stop thinking about what you’re wearing so you can get on with what you really have to offer the world. It’s also a very passive picture of those individuals: communities just exist for their

discovery and need not be made, protected, or changed. Put another, with this kind of uniformity, community becomes the consumer object.

If Normcore is a stand-in for masculine white style, there is a feminine white style that emerged in mainstream usage at the same time. The term “basic” began showing up as an adjective to describe a certain kind of white-girl middle class style in 2014, but it had already been long deployed in Black culture to refer to a kind of performing of something a person is not (Petersen, 2014). Petersen (2014) explored the gendered connotations of the term by arguing, “just as “basic bitch” was primarily used by black people, toward black people; the deracinated “basic” is primarily used by middle-class white people toward middle-class white people” (para. 10), and she makes sure to note that it means a woman who is “laughable because she consumes *boringly*” (para. 1). For a full definition, she offered a basic is:

a millennial who is inescapably predictable. She (and it is always a she) cherishes uninspired brands — a mix of Target products, Ugg boots over leggings, and Starbucks Pumpkin Spice Lattes (the ultimate signifier of basicness) — and lives a banal existence, obsessed with Instagramming photos of things that themselves betray their basicness (other basic friends, pumpkin patches, falling leaves), tagging them #blessed and #thankful, and then reposting them to the basic breeding grounds of Facebook and Pinterest (Peterson, para. 2).

Between the two terms, where Normcore is masculine, digitally savvy, adaptable, serious, and natural in its blankness, Basicness is feminine, digitally unsophisticated, entrenched, unserious, and frilly. From an academic point of view, the idea of a “norm” would seem like the more aggressive or at least active of the two terms (as a healthy suspicion of norming is a part of academic work). Norming is a process of reshaping and molding whereas basic may simply delineate a low level of achievement or challenge. Yet

outside of academia, the word normal would mean something that just *is*, meaning it functions as more descriptive in action. Basic, then, is a way of describing something as foundational. Both are *seeking uniformity in being unremarkable*, but Normcore is construed as smart, stylish consumption of boring but tried-and-true products while Basic is construed as boring, repetitive consumption of ready-made, slick products. The difference goes back to Hebdige's observation that *refusal* is at the center of a style's construction or the outcome of a style.

The move towards uniformity in both styles is evident, and Petersen (2014) as well as Malone (2014) argue that it is precisely because Basic style is feminine, suburban consumerism that it is pilloried. "Unique taste — and the capacity to avoid the basic — is a privilege. A privilege of location (usually urban), of education (exposure to other cultures and locales), and of parentage (who would introduce and exalt other tastes)" (Petersen, para. 13). Adherents of Normcore would likely counter the lack of uniqueness in the style, but of course, Normcore is full of rules of what does and does not count, and, as discussed earlier, emerged as a new direction away from the context of over-saturation of personal fashion. Thus, in a sea of difference, uniformity looks unique. And in a sea of uniformity, differences simply move to smaller levels. Butler offers, "performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration" (xv).

An understanding of both Normcore and Basic must include the online elements and the hashtag (#) culture that emerged as these styles developed and crystalized. For both, the sense that a person can name their style or their actions with a #, as in, "It's PSL season #basic #blessed" or "Just got Nike Monarchs – does this mean I have to listen to Drake? #normcore", implies being in on the joke of self-styling an aestheticized life. The digital aspect allows both style practitioners to indicate a knowingness to their stylistic

doingness. In the next section I explore the ways uniformity of dress intersects with technology within work culture.

Productivity and Worker Aesthetic: “Life Hacks”, Tech Bros, and Athleisure

While the above examples name particular styles that coalesce as uniforming rhetorical texts, it is important to note that a call to uniform, by name, emerges alongside these ways of dressing alike for likeness’ sake. This call takes several forms including the language of “life hacks”, wherein we are called to understand how to achieve higher efficiency or productivity, and in the language of worker-wear aesthetic, wherein attention is focused on performance fabrics or uniform-like clothing that was once created for specific tasks from which the clothing has been untethered.

Life hacks are ideas presented as smart short-cuts to every day problems. There is an aura of creativity mixed with irreverence with life hacks, and the goal is often productivity. The examples in the opening chapter of this project including the young woman who chose one outfit and only wears that is an example of this kind of practice. Research (Vohs et al., 2008) around decision-fatigue may be a source from which this kind of practice emerges. Social psychologist Tice et al. (2001) coined the term *ego depletion* as the continuation of Freud’s hypothesis that mental activities deplete the ego (or sense of self). Decision fatigue comes out of this idea to explore how people have a finite amount of energy for decisions that gets depleted as decisions are considered and made. In a study examining self-presentation and possible links to self-regulation, Vohs et al. (2005) found self-presentation and self-regulatory resources are intrinsically linked wherein increased demands on one have adverse effects on the latter. “Self-presentation... consumes self-regulatory resources, thereby impairing subsequent self-regulation” and at the same time,

“when self-control is weakened by depletion of resources, impression management deteriorates” (p.653).

Take, for example, a clothing-related short-cut that could be called a life hack: in order to meet a very fast deadline for *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, Victor Hugo, wore only “a huge grey knitted shawl, which swathed him from head to foot, locked his formal clothes away so that he would not be tempted to go out and entered his novel as if it were a prison” according to his wife’s memoirs (Hunt, 2018; Wallace, 1977). He finished the book faster than planned⁹. Thus, as he limited his self-presentation (in multiple ways), his ability to enact the self-control needed to write a book maximized. A more recent example of the life-hack approach comes from film director Christopher Nolan who found it was “a waste of energy to choose anew what to wear each day”, so he chose a uniform that, according to the *New York Times Magazine*, “accords with his strict regimen of optimal resource allocation and flexibility”: dark jacket over fraying blue collared shirt, periwinkle cufflinks, black trousers, sensible shoes, bright, whimsical socks. Both examples here intertwine the choice of dress with optimized productivity and efficiency. The clothing does not offer a foundation for performance or sense of readiness, rather, it stays out of the way – literally with Hugo, energy-wise with Nolan.

The majority of the research, both academic and popular press, on decision fatigue focuses on the practices of high-level decision makers including Barack Obama, Mark Zuckerberg, various CEOs, and creative management types. However, Spears (2011) studied the number of everyday decisions required for people living in poverty and argued considering the huge number of decisions required, the kind of decision fatigue experienced by people in poverty is a type of trap that keeps the cognitive resources

⁹ Oh, had I used this hack when writing this project!

depleted. This is important to include when talking about optimizing clothing choices for efficiency in that it is not an economically neutral or contained practice. Which is to say, the materiality of cognitive resources is an integral thread of behavior and meaningful life for everyone, not only the wealthy.

A quite democratized version of uniformity is what I call worker-wear aesthetic. Worker-wear aesthetic also seeks to optimize productivity but it includes optic-izing that productivity as well. What I mean is that worker-wear style incorporates a functional item or fabric originally created with a more narrowed intended usage for every day wear. Fleece vests, as seen widely on Wall Street, were intended as mountain climbing gear. Jumpsuits, once primarily worn by house painters, mechanics, factory workers, and prisoners, are considered fashionable items and show up in Target and J. Crew as well as high fashion brands. Clogs, as discussed earlier, are a staple for many women, in particular, outside of the gardens, hospitals, or restaurant kitchens where clogs have long been the functional footwear of choice and necessity. Worker-wear seems to offer increased plasticity of *who* can enter and inhabit certain spaces. However, there are still ever more nuanced rules.

One category so large it almost defies categorization (and functions as a default dress in the United States) is active wear or athleisure. Active wear is not associated with a particular job, unlike the other examples of worker-wear, however, it is a type of clothing with many examples of items once intended for particular tasks/sports/movement that has expanded far beyond those boundaries.

THE RHETORICAL STYLE OF UNIFORMING AND HOW CLOTHING THINKS

A key difference between the types of uniforms from the previous chapter and this kind of uniformity is the experience of time and emplacement for the wearers. For the wearers of a work uniform, the putting-on of that uniform is a signal that the time is now

work time. While a person may wear their uniform outside of work – in fact, this may be a way to feel more upwardly mobile in a socio-economic sense – the uniform and wearer belong to a larger organization in a very detailed sense that includes time and place (i.e.: worked this many hours). For the rhetorical style of uniforming in this chapter, I argue the experience of time is meant to be a-temporal and the experience of emplacement is meant to be displacement. I will explore this by examining the different aspects of style, specifically imaginary communities, primacy of the text, and stylistic homologies. I argue that the a-temporality and dis-placement of uniforming style heightens and perhaps even thinks the desire to experience being part of a community (belonging).

A-temporality of uniforming

In chapter 2 I list eight ways that a rhetorical style of uniforming is enacted, and while all of those are present in this case study, I want to closely examine the fourth attunement in which a style appears effortless and relies on a sense of utility as commonsense knowledge. The effortlessness of a chosen uniform is reliant upon a sense of a-temporality. This is evident in descriptions using words like *timeless*. It's also evident in the near endless potential for flexibility of the uniform – both in time and place (and I explore place more in the next section). Juxtaposed to punching a clock, the beauty of many higher level, creative class jobs is the flexibility and freedom over one's time. However, this often simply means work spills outside of main hours and overlaps (nearly constantly) with nonwork hours.

There is a kind of stylistic homology between the touted a-temporality of the chosen uniform that I see in other aesthetic places of uniformity in popular culture. The normalized seeking of an “experience” as worthy of our time (e.g. Instagram worthy moments where everyone poses for pictures) culminated in creating recognizable images that consolidate

or maintain a kind of status in digital spaces. This is seen across the spectrum of “experiences” from vacations at national parks (where key photo-worthy spots are full of self-taking visitor to absurd levels of activity and even destruction) to filming TikTok dances at Target. The example I am comparing this a-temporal aspect to here is the installation of pop-up “experiences” (museums, factories, and mansions). One particularly famous pop-up experience is Candytopia featuring rooms with oversized candy, pools of marshmallows or rainbow sprinkles, and famous artworks done in jelly beans and licorice. In writing about these kinds of installations, Amanda Hess asked, “By classifying these places as experiences, their creators seem to imply that something happens there. But what?” A key feature of such an experience is that all identifiers locating the pop-up in a particular place or time of day are absent. This gives an aura of suspension of time (an aura also manufactured in shopping centers and grocery stores) that allows the experience to move all over the country, especially to uncool locations or neighborhoods, while staying relevant and desirable. The a-temporality of the images proliferated from these experiences makes it feel somehow glamorous and attainable. “The central disappointment of these spaces is not that they are so narcissistic, but rather that they seem to have such a low view of the people who visit them. Observing a work of art or climbing a mountain actually invites us to create meaning in our lives. But in these spaces, the idea of ‘interacting’ with the world is made so slickly transactional that our role is hugely diminished” (Hess, 2018).

Perhaps, the a-temporality of rhetorical style of uniforming is meant to also elevate the transactional aspects of work. This may lead to a low view of the people in that work. It may also have larger implications for the materiality and emplacement of work itself.

Emplacement for non-places and disembodied workers

The workplace in this case study – namely, white collar jobs that are often remote or autonomous - increasingly removes any acknowledgement of bodies or place. In fact, that is the benefit of remote work sometimes; people with disabilities will champion a more remote workforce as a way to curtail the biases and discrimination of the built environments in many buildings and office cultures. Anyone who has been able to leave on an early flight on a Friday to travel for nonwork reasons and still attend a key meeting that day or turn-in work knows the benefit of less emphasis on people in the same room in order for work to be happening. At the level of visuals, working on Zoom or Teams creates images of floating heads and shoulders with flattened or blurred backgrounds. I argue adopted uniformity functions as an extension of this kind of emplacement and is both resistant and folded-into the logics of utility and productivity.

Just as with a-temporality, there is a kind of stylistic homology between the rise of key market contexts called “airspace” for flexible spaces and the rhetorical style of uniforming. Kyle Chayka (2016) argues that “AirSpace is now less theory than reality. The interchangeability, ceaseless movement, and symbolic blankness that was once the hallmark of hotels and airports, qualities that led the French anthropologist Marc Augé to define them in 1992 as "non-places," has leaked into the rest of life.” The need for flexibility in workspace and living space has “leaked” into clothing: it has a level of blankness and predictability allowing the wearer to move from place to place without changing clothing. In this case, a desire for productivity and efficiency seems to function as consent to uniforming.

In contrast to Hebdige’s refusal, this style of clothing and style of place are missing any refusal to create slight difference. Yet, I see an attempted refusal of *materiality* itself by resisting temporality, emplacement, and changes. This means there is the potential for

connection, as refusal is the basis for connection in Hebdige's systems of style. Another way to say this is, even in the refusal of materiality, we are seeking connection and belonging, and for this are of the economic spectrum, perhaps the desire for belonging is *most* felt in the refusal of embodiment and emplacement.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

When I tell people that I'm studying uniforms and uniformity of dress, nearly every person who responds offers a different example. Ironically enough, despite the fact that it may look different neighborhood to neighborhood, campus to campus, workplace to workplace, uniformity of dress is a ubiquitous, well-used form of relating to clothing and going about life in North America. The visual, discursive, and performative elements of uniforming style are recognizable even if they are unremarkable and have come to be an active way of cloth-ing and being in the world.

As the conclusion of this dissertation, this chapter will offer a summary of the work and some key takeaways from my research. Then, I'll look at broader implications and end by discussing some of the limitations of my research as well as future possibilities for exploration.

SUMMARY

At the start of this dissertation, I posed several research questions: what do we manage with uniformity of dress? And how does uniformity of clothing (including actual uniforms) manage the relationship among our sensing, feeling bodies, our sense of self (subjectivity), and social interaction (intersubjectivity)? With clothing not only being self-expression or a stand-in for language, but a material system of differences, how does regulation and limitation through uniformity in clothing also regulate other aspects of that system (language, embodiment, interaction)? To what extent is class distinction endemic to uniforms and uniformity's operations within interaction and messages about work and clothing? How can rhetoricians best describe and account for the effects of uniformity in clothing? The simple answer to these questions is style. Style has been put to use to help uniforming achieve such powerful, everyday life status. Style is the rhetoric that maintains

this form of material engagement both as limit and as potentiality. And style is employed to justify and legitimize class differences.

To address these research questions, in chapter two I named a theoretical lens for exploring uniforms and uniformity through a connecting plane of theories of performativity, materialism, and style. This theoretical approach invited me to think about style's connection to uniforming in two ways. First, it invited me to examine how style (in the material and performative sense) is employed in uniform and uniformity discourses in order to make a certain way of *doing things* (especially in a workplace) seem normal and natural. Second, this approach opened a place for me to explore uniforms and uniformity as a rhetorical style itself, wherein elements of performativity, materiality, and class and whiteness are expressed through style to amplify particular perspectives and silence others. Which is to say, this theoretical approach allowed me to examine how style, style-at-work (acting in the world), and styled discourses are materially activated with particular ends. As previously stated, much of the research focusing on clothing and uniforms looks at the causes or results of uniforms, but there has been little research on discourses of uniforming and how they move beyond formal recognition or organizational legitimization. This work sought to fill that gap and has demonstrated the ways in which communication (and more specifically the rhetorical style of uniforming) and clothing play significant roles in the understanding of place, embodiment, and being.

To follow the theoretical sight attuned through this work, in chapter three I developed a method for exploring a rhetorical style of uniforming and presented what to look for and what questions to ask when examining this phenomenon. When approaching my case studies and artifacts, I looked for the elements of rhetorical style (aesthetic rationales, market contexts, primacy of texts, imaginary communities, and stylistic homologies) and explored ways in which discourses involved struggle over style or seemed

to be dominated by style. This methodological approach also asked me to consider how class and race, specifically the unremarkability of whiteness, appeals to and addresses multiple groups through style, and “common sense” understandings of uniformity are experienced materially. In this chapter, I learned that a focus on race was such an important factor in this research that I also needed to examine the ways in which whiteness is centered, race is ignored, or made invisible, and how race is sometimes aestheticized via a rhetorical style of uniforming. To apply this method, I looked at a range of artifacts and texts from branding press releases, to uniform designs, media covering uniforms, articles and interviews in national publications, and cycles of commentary surrounding designed uniforms as well as chosen/adopted uniforms.

Fast-food uniforms and self-adopted uniformity served as the case studies in chapters four and five. Throughout this dissertation I argued that a rhetorical style of uniforming is a materializing cognitive process made visible through clothing and which features the power of style in shaping discourses, senses, the articulation of problems and solutions, and the feelings/affects around being seen or in public. In the fast-food uniforms case study, I argued that uniforms offered a materialized class mobility through performative *realness* (a kind of passing), and I questioned the “common sense” style of uniform’s integration with the organizing forces of fast food. My analysis in this chapter allowed me to argue that a) a focus on style offers opportunities to see connections within something mundane and conformist to feelings associated with desire, glamour, cultural authenticity, and a sense of unique, localized history, b) aestheticizing work manages materiality and emplacement, and c) the uniform is a possible force for centering whiteness through *unmarking* while attuning to the possibility that worn-clothing’s *mark making* may open for destabilizing whiteness. In the chosen uniforms case study, I focused on desire for belonging and how performativity, materialism, and style are interconnected in a rhetorical

style of uniforming to legitimize and naturalize an approach to productivity of the wearers. The analyses in that chapter gave us a closer look at how the rhetorical style of uniforming shows-up in high level socio-economic contexts, allowing us to identify the ways in which individuality and group identity are inseparable and argue that race, gender, and class is simultaneously indivisible from and made invisible by uniformity. This chapter illuminated the ways in which the rhetorical style of uniforming helps construct a) a rejection of fashion as an equalizing *and* destabilizing force, b) a desire for productivity and efficiency as consent to uniforming, and c) refusal (of materiality by resisting temporality, emplacement, changes) as connection.

Though the two kinds of uniforms in these case studies are quite different, they both speak to the power of the rhetorical style of uniforming. Both case studies point to the fact that much of our sense of being who we desire to be (identity) and going where we want to go (progress) is marked through uniforming. The case studies teach us that the centrality of style in discourses of the work place diverts our attention from other issues and functions to depoliticize the otherwise serious issues that accompany rebranding or organizational life. Style, in both case studies, is the mechanism through which being at work is problematized and serves as the solution to problems workers (and customers) face. The supremacy of style sets up a particular way of looking, assessing, and understanding productivity and ultimately reenacts and naturalizes existing systems of inequality. All of these elements speak to uniforming as a rhetorical style, and importantly spotlight the fact that uniforming is a material force that can serve and ultimately privilege whiteness and incorporate nonconformity or refusal into that privilege.

IMPLICATIONS, CONTRIBUTIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

At the beginning of this dissertation, I took an analytical and exploratory stance. I hoped my analysis would provide some connections into the ways in which uniforms and uniformity have come to achieve increasingly standardized, performative status as well as to discover how do we come to desire uniformity and what we get out of it when we clothe ourselves (and others) this way. Thinking about uniforming as a rhetorical style was a useful practice for analyzing the power of uniforming discourses, style, performance, and whiteness. This manuscript has demonstrated why it is productive to think of uniforming as a rhetorical style as style is so often dissociated from meaningful and influential elements of discourse. I was particularly drawn to explore what boundaries are at stake in practices of uniforming, and how rethinking boundaries and dichotomies shifts the analysis. Barad writes of the “importance of constructed boundaries and also the necessity of interrogating them... Boundaries are not our enemies; they are necessary for making meanings, but this does not make them innocent (1996, p. 187). If drawing or maintaining boundaries is political, challenging those boundaries is then wading far beyond any chance of neutrality. I hope this work has presented some of the ways in which interrogating boundaries of style is already in relationship to power and sense making. The rhetorical style of uniforming is worthy of our attention as it lets us interrogate the rhetoric of individual identity and class mobility, lets us see ways in which uniformity privileges particular identities, and contributes to a critical perspective to interdisciplinary conversation around subject and object, material and cultural. I hope this study works upon the foundation that “our material lives are always culturally mediated, but they are not only cultural” (Coole and Frost, 2010, p. 3).

This work contributes to the gaps in the literature on clothing as a larger text of study in a number of ways. The call to examine clothing starting from a materialist

commitment was answered in the research conducted for this dissertation and moves from the theoretical to a discursive focus that has proven influential in the workplace – style. Another issue highlighted in the literature suggests contemporary mainstream fashion and clothing scholarship has focused on linguistic systems and similarities with little attention to the material and theoretical aspects. This has resulted in bias towards the more critical parts of clothing studies and a lack in the theoretical robustness found in other texts. My work in this manuscript is bound-up in theory from the beginning and seeks to bring the uniqueness of rhetorical methodology’s blend of theory and analysis to this important area of research. One problem evident in much of the uniform and clothing research is that class and gender is prioritized and the link between uniformity and race are too often unnoticed. The approach I present in this project allowed me to highlight how the very unnoticeability of a uniform way of dressing is a form of materializing and naturalizing whiteness’ logics of race.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Uniformity of clothing is an accepted and largely unquestioned way of dressing affecting people in workplaces, homes, and public spaces around the world. From chain restaurants to Zoom meetings, uniforming of clothing follows a globalized circulation of aestheticized living. Despite the variations with which uniforming takes form, this dissertation argues that the rhetorical style of uniforming is a powerful and influential force that can be identified across multiple aestheticized contexts. A challenging site for rhetorical analysis, I’ve done my best to capture some of the more prevalent elements that connect uniforming with performativity, materiality, and style, but some limitations remain.

One limitation of this study has to do with the fact that much of the analysis was situated in the timeframe of the COVID pandemic in the Dallas-Forth Worth metro aread

of Texas. While this afforded unique chances to attune to the discourses around remote work and how uniformity of clothing changed over this time period, it also meant that I was physically distant from people to observe. This included fast food workers who could only be seen from a drive-through line. Bold resistance to mask-wearing measures made spending time in contexts with people in uniforms – enforced or adopted – difficult and even risky (for all involved). My own position in a remote workplace meant that the gap between the kind of work and kind of uniforming I was doing and the kind of work and kind of uniforming fast-food employees were doing felt especially immense with little to no recourse for closing that gap. While the gap began to feel materialized in ways that I’ve not recognized before (such as, I was not being potentially exposed to a deadly virus in order to hand someone a milkshake), I was unable to observe some of the more emplaced elements around uniforms for this study. As this pandemic was unexpected, I also did not consider that I would be a worker who had an adopted uniform. Teaching in person prior to the shutdown often meant I would wear a variety of outfits, mostly thrift store finds, that played against the uniformity of college students’ clothing. Recording lectures and presentations, teaching over Zoom with cameras turned-off or screen sharing pushing all the squares out of visibility, all while breastfeeding my son out of sight of the tiny camera on my laptop, meant I mostly rotated the same handful of button-down shirts thrown over a tank top. Future researchers might employ the rhetorical style of uniforming in their own lived practices more intentionally and with more awareness and account for this in their analysis. An emphasis on the researcher’s sensing body, emplacement, and uniforming could bring new insights to how we are living with pandemics how this context is shaping the materiality and performativity of uniforming. Looking at the power of style in this context would help build a case for being more observant and even critical of discourses focused on style during an emergency or high-stress situation.

A second limitation is that the insights this research produces come from one perspective. As was mentioned in chapter three, my role as critic and *choros* and a person with judgements impact the ways in which I perform rhetorical research. My standpoint as a white woman using new materialist theory in her research offers different results than a Lantinx immigrant studying uniforms in a fast food restaurant or an Asian American studying the adopted uniforms of tech and creative workers, which would both provide invaluable and unique perspectives on the question of uniforming in the workplace. Though I tried to incorporate multiple perspectives through various texts, future research might incorporate interviews or creative work, such as portrait photography, selfies, or storytelling, to get a different look at how style influences the way we view uniforming.

FINAL ADDRESS

Throughout this dissertation I have argued that uniforming is a rhetorical style made up of texts that are simultaneously visual, material, and performative discursive. When it comes to uniforming, style is a political force with the power to organize our social world. It can perpetuate inequalities, and has a lasting impact. It can also address inequalities at the material, performative, and discursive level. Style is far more meaningful and powerful than we give it credit for. And because it seems that any form of work life takes place in the register of style (e.g. form based dress codes, rebranding plans, etc.), then it is towards style we must turn to see how power and advantage are acquired by and stripped from particular identities via the rhetorical style of uniforming.

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