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**Margaret Thatcher, Dress and the Politics of Fashion**

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## **Chapter X**

### **'Margaret Thatcher, Dress and the Politics of Fashion'**

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'Who do I dress for? I really dress for the occasion and for the job and it is very important'

Margaret Thatcher, *The Englishwoman's Wardrobe*, BBC TV, 1986.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Through Margaret Thatcher's private and public performances, the micro-politics of dress translated into the macro-politics of power.<sup>1</sup> Thatcher's changing career can be traced through her dress (see Young 1991: 416-417); analysis of her dress leading up to and during her Premiership reveals both her aspirations and increasing power. Understanding of Thatcher's agency in her embodied, dressed performances can be informed and developed through Butler's (1999) conceptualization of performativity. Through adaptation, repetition and divergent dress, Thatcher constructed different identities, some of which became iconic symbols of her self and her politics. Examination of Thatcher's dress refines the understanding of the relationship between constraints and agency experienced by actors in the public realm. Upon becoming party leader, Margaret Thatcher's gender, class and ideological viewpoints were incongruent with her unprecedented

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<sup>1</sup>Dress is defined as 'all the modifications made to the human body and supplements to the body. Dress includes a long list of changes to the body which can be either permanent or temporary' (Johnson and Lennon 1999: 11)

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political status and she faced many challenges in attempting to overcome this. Dress became a potentially destabilising focus for her critics and symbolic of her "outsider" status. Yet in the face of these challenges she recognized and learned from the expectations of others, adapting and changing her dress. However, this was not an instantaneous, complete or permanent transformation. What Thatcher achieved, as she crafted her dressed performances, was agency over a further aspect of her life and her politics. There was also an evolving alignment of her dress with her political ideology and domestic and international roles over time.

Thatcher performed multiple gendered and classed identities using dress, drawing from cultural and socio-economic lessons engendered during her upbringing, but she also broke free from such constraints and her dressed performances demonstrate fluidity and multiplicity. This chapter, through a detailed exploration of Thatcher's changing uses of dress, explores the relationship between dress, identities and agency in the public realm and thus contributes to wider feminist debates about women politicians and the politics of dress and gender. It seeks to refine and develop our understanding of dress and its roles in political life and makes problematic the feminist claim that once women's appearance and dress is made visible, women's agency is automatically restricted and demeaned. Through performance, repetition and variance Thatcher shaped and reshaped her identities to accentuate her political power. Margaret Thatcher remains 'the most famous script of a woman in parliament' (Puwar 2004a: 99) and her cultural status has been continually recuperated in British political and social culture (Nunn: 2002). The international release of the Hollywood film 'The Iron Lady' in 2012 (Lloyd and Morgan 2011) and the considerable media frenzy at the time of her death in 2013 have defined Thatcher as an iconic symbol of female political power. This chapter begins with a discussion of feminist analyses of

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the role of dress and women politicians in the public realm, then discusses the importance of dress to identity and dress as a performative act. It then focuses on how Margaret Thatcher used dress to define her political image, drew from her upbringing to adapt and shape her dress, and then analyzes the different and shifting performances of dress across Margaret Thatcher's life and career.

### **DRESS, WOMEN AND POLITICS**

Much feminist analysis of dress in contemporary British politics argues that media focus on women's dress is always damaging and marginalising. There is considerable evidence to support this claim. However, the analysis of women's agency in relation to dress and the roles of dress in defining and representing politicians' identities (both male and female) can be developed further. Margaret Thatcher was not a passive recipient of hostile media comment, but both challenged media focus on her dress and later sought to encourage and manipulate it. Media focus on dress was potentially, but not inevitably damaging or marginalising to Thatcher and she demonstrated varying levels of agency over dress and its role in representing her as a politician.

Much feminist analysis of politics concludes that the focus on dress is sexist and damaging to women's political agency. For women politicians, 'not being the "natural" occupants of the position means there is a burden of doubt associated with the co-existence of women in these spaces. They are not automatically expected to embody the relevant competencies. Thus their every gesture, movement and utterance is observed since they are viewed rather suspiciously' (Puwar 2004b: 72). There have been many examples where dress has been a key means by which women have been both made visible and judged as unsuitable. Shirley Williams, a Cabinet

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Minister in the 1970s, was often portrayed as a 'bag lady' by the British press because her hair and clothing were deemed to be unkempt (Ross and Sreberny 2000: 87). Margaret Beckett's fashion sense was derided by the tabloid press in the 1995 Labour Party leadership elections, likening her physical appearance to that of a 'gargoyle' (Childs 2008: 144). The Labour Home Secretary Jacqui Smith was criticized for wearing a top in 2007 that revealed 'too much cleavage' for the TV cameras while making a statement in parliament (Slack 2009). In 2012, Conservative MP Louise Mensch was angered by media questions and speculation about whether or not she had undergone facial cosmetic surgery (Lewis 2012). In 2015, the Labour leadership candidate, Liz Kendall, expressed her anger at a newspaper reporter's question about her weight and the description of her by the *Mail on Sunday* as an 'elegant ... slinky brunette' (Perraudin 2015). Ross and Sreberny noted from their interviews with British women MPs that many resented the media's focus on their appearance and dress and believed men as politicians were not subject to such comment (2000: 86-87). The categorization of women MPs using media epithets such as 'Blair's Babes' and 'Cameron's Cuties' provides further evidence for the demeaning and destabilising focus on dress and appearance women in British politics continue to face.

Childs writes 'representations which focus on women politicians appearance, clothing and familial relationships ... represent and reinforce, rather than challenge, widely accepted assumptions about the suitability of women and politics' (2008: 141-142). Such representations perpetuate the "norm" of the male politician and the "pretender" status of women. Puwar defines women politicians as 'space invaders' who occupy 'male' and masculine public/political spaces (2004). This gendered de-legitimization resulted in the first women MPs experiencing considerable hostility and isolation from their peers in parliament (Lovenduski 2005: 49; Nunn 2002: 39). Margaret Thatcher

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experienced sexist attitudes from some Conservative activists when first applying for selection as a parliamentary candidate, misogynist comment from the British media when a Cabinet minister and in her words, was subject to 'male chauvinist hilarity' from Labour MPs when she first became leader of the Conservative Party (Thatcher 1995: 96-97, 182, 284). As evidenced above, contemporary women MPs remain 'highly visible' in relation to their male peers and thus are subject to media comment about their dress on an unequal basis (Puwar 2004a; Childs, 2008: 140-165).

If women in politics face close and critical scrutiny of their dress, women in executive office are even more subject to such potentially destabilising focus. Margaret Thatcher claimed that 'if you are in an executive position ... your clothes must be the background for you' (Ruth 1986). The roles and representations of dress in the media and the effects this has on women as heads of government remains a key area of debate across national contexts. Yet as Jalalzai notes, unlike women in parliamentary politics, 'women's executive representation is seldom the subject of academic research' (2008: 207). Carroll (2009: 1) believes this lack of analysis left US feminists unprepared for the misogyny directed toward Hillary Clinton in her unsuccessful campaign for Presidential nomination in 2008. Comments on bodily appearance, clothing, hair, cosmetics and voice have been repeatedly cited as destabilizing to women's chances of gaining and holding executive office. For example, Miller, Peake and Boulton's analysis of women running for US Presidential candidate nomination have faced a disproportionate emphasis on their appearance compared to men and less interest in the political and policy aspects of their candidacy than men (2010: 172). Hillary Clinton's campaign to capture the Presidential candidate nomination in 2008 was not helped by the media's interest in her 'pantsuits, and her cleavage, and the famous "cackle"'

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(Carroll 2007: 13). The longevity of Margaret Thatcher's executive office, her iconic, and iconoclastic, place in British history and also the complex gender and class dynamics she represents make her a significant case study of a woman political executive. 'Something about Thatcher's place in the collective imaginary of British culture', notes Rose, 'calls out for an understanding of what it is she releases by dint of being a woman and of the forms of phantasmatic scenario which she brings into play' (1993: 44).

## **THE PERFORMATIVITY OF DRESS**

As Behnke discusses in this volume, dress and its relationship with political culture remains an underdeveloped aspect of political sociology, international relations and history. Fashion's 'feminized' and therefore demeaned cultural status has meant dress's relationship with identity, the body and power has been neglected by historians and social scientists (Entwistle 2000: 9-10). Yet dress is a revealing and important means to analyze the constructions of identity and locate an actor's agency in relation to social, political and historical context. As Entwistle argues, 'human bodies are *dressed* bodies. The social world is a world of "dressed bodies"' (2000: 6). Dress not only traces, but also has defined changing modes of social and individual power across history. Elias's (1994) analysis of the figurational development of 'civilized' manners and habits demonstrates how concern for bodily appearance, 'respectable' and 'shameful' forms of dress, redefined power relations and the individual's role and place in society. Forms of dress traverse personal (micro) and public (macro) boundaries of power, framing power as a performative and symbolic act embodied and performed at an individual level yet interweaving with macro-political processes. Butler develops Foucault's concepts of identity by arguing gender is achieved as the result of repeated *performances* (1997; 1999). This 'performative' construction of identity can

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shift, change and be contradictory and these shifts and changes can be expressed through changes in dress. The transgressive potential of these shifting and multiple performances is visible when someone 'cross-dresses' and challenges accepted gender norms (Butler 1999: xxiv). Thatcher's position could be considered transgressive, as she was a party leader and Prime Minister in an arena that was traditionally male. She was also often perceived to exhibit supposedly masculine characteristic traits of resolve and aggression, yet she dressed in feminine clothing. These gendered tensions were vividly underscored by the satirical television programme *Spitting Image* who portrayed Thatcher literally cross dressing in a man's suit and tie and smoking a Churchillian cigar.

Dress informs all gendered performances, but women undoubtedly have a particular, conscious and intimate relationship with dress. The bodily and sensuous act of "getting dressed" is the moment when women 'have to negotiate their bodies, respectability, style, status, and their self perception' before entering the social world (Woodward 2007: 2). The concept 'enfashioning', developed by Shinko in this volume, encapsulates the fluidity but also the intentionality and constraints on dress as site of performative self-construction. Individuals can choose dress as acts of self-definition and subjectivity, but the reception and interpretation of these performative acts is subject to cultural norms and expectations. Dress therefore plays a multifaceted role in defining and deploying individual identities, but also locates the subject in relation to and part of the wider collective: 'we can use dress to articulate our sense of "uniqueness", to express our difference from others, although as members of particular classes and cultures, we are equally likely to find styles of dress that connect us to others as well' (Entwistle 2000: 158). As Butler also indicates, it is in the repetition of performative acts that subjectivity is generated, such repetition of dressed performative acts can either confirm and include the subject as part of a broader collective, or it



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can subvert cultural norms. It can also indicate the subject's exclusion and marginalization. Individual agency over performative acts of dress, like gender, is not unlimited and is constrained by social expectation, material factors and the ability to deliver such acts (Salih 2002: 50). Dress is therefore a profound expression of forms of identity and situates the individual in relation to, and as part of, wider political and social processes. 'Enfashioning' enables the individual to take an active role in this process of constructing identities using dress, defining their own subjectivity in relation to broader societal, political and historical norms.

Fashion and the ability to choose, adapt and define ones dress is not only an act of self-construction but is also the result and a symbol of social mobility, the growth of the bourgeoisie and the related decline of the aristocracy (who had hitherto had an exclusive ability to adapt dress and define fashion) (Entwistle 2000: 44). Dress can also symbolize, generate and engender collective identities, such as political, social and nationalist identities. Therefore, as Parkins argues, forms of dress 'can become sites of political struggle', contesting or legitimating the state and modes of citizenship (2002a: 2). In the French Revolution, 'dress was a powerful and multifarious index of revolutionary ideas' and the cut, colour and type of dress simultaneously symbolized and allowed individuals to perform political radicalism (Wrigley, 2002: 19). The suffragettes also used dress to symbolize commitment to the suffragette political cause, to define aspects of political activism and to vividly reconfigure and politically radicalize certain types of fashion and the femininities associated with it (Parkins 2002b). Indeed, fashion became a form of women's agency for the suffragettes: 'it enabled and abetted their protest' (Parkins 2002b: 106). The dressed performances of protest enacted by the suffragettes also challenged the cultural intelligibility of a woman's body and the docile and ornamental ways it had hitherto be constructed, creating a 'theatricalized public

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space' where dress was part of the women's performance of political radicalism (Parkins 2002b: 3). In these ways, dress is a means by which identity is performed and affirmed, and creates a symbiotic relationship where it both enacts and reflects aspects of micro and macro socio-political change.

### **THE 'IRON LADY' AND DRESS**

Margaret Thatcher, like many individuals, had an emotional and sensorial connection with dress, which developed in her adolescence. Margaret King, an executive at *Aquascutum*, who advised the Prime Minister on clothes recalled, 'She was a delight to dress. She loved trying on clothes and would twirl around like a little girl. She loved material and buttons and told me about her mother, Beatrice who was a dressmaker. She was very proud of the fact that her mother knew how to make clothes' (cited in Maddox 2003: 188). Margaret Thatcher's personal interest in dress developed through her childhood and adolescence, and later became a consciously deployed element of her political persona. Thatcher's vivid self-dramatization as the 'Iron Lady' in 1976 used her dress to invoke the most abiding metaphor of her as a leader: 'I stand before you tonight in my Red Star chiffon evening gown, my face softly made up and my fair hair gently waved, the "Iron Lady" of the Western world' (Thatcher 1976). By invoking this imagery at the Finchley constituency dinner Thatcher, in Campbell's words, 'became the lady and a warrior' (1987: 243), but this was not the first or last time that Thatcher performatively constituted her personal and political identity through dress. Thatcher seldom combined verbal and visual metaphors as she did in her 'red star chiffon evening gown' speech, but she repeatedly styled herself to suit the political occasion, sending diplomatic and political signals by her dress (most obviously on the frequent occasions when she was resplendent in the Conservative Party's colour of blue). Such was the power of her dress, one

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element became a universal metaphor for political and diplomatic behaviour: 'to handbag' or to receive a 'handbagging' (Oxford English Dictionary: 1993).<sup>2</sup> This metaphor was particularly defined by the often abrasive and uncompromising stances she deployed at European Community and Commonwealth conferences.

The personal, emotional attachment to dress was connected to the exercise of political power for Thatcher. This was not a spontaneous or chance occurrence as Thatcher was influenced by and drew from cultural influences from her upbringing in Grantham in the 1930s. Thatcher was initially resistant, and occasionally ambivalent, to focusing on dress in her public life, but learned to adapt and master dress to suit certain political ends and help craft a dominant and secure political position. Thatcher was thus extending and reinforcing the role of dress in performing power that she learned from her childhood. The personal, evocative role of dress, tied to the performances of power in Thatcher's political career was underlined by the fact that outfits were named according to where they were worn, such as 'Washington Pink', 'Peking Black' and 'Kremlin Silver' (Thatcher 1993: 576). Thatcher avoided wearing favourite or new outfits to meetings she thought could be difficult or unsuccessful, particularly meetings of the European Council, for fear they would be sullied by bad memories and as a consequence, never worn again (Thatcher 1993: 80). Dress was a tool of the job for Thatcher, but also, as for many women; an emotional and psychological means for her to negotiate and cope with the demands presented by her many roles (see Woodward: 2007). Thatcher's "'power dressing' reflected her political status, but also located

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<sup>2</sup> It was for this reason that in the later 1980s, Margaret King at *Aquascutum*, suggested the Prime Minister wear smaller 'clutch' handbags at diplomatic occasions rather than the more bulky, black "handbagging" *Asprey* handbags (King 2013).

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her in a wider collective of women who dressed to signify and perform their material, social and cultural power.

## **DRESS, HOLLYWOOD AND GLAMOUR**

The micro-politics of dress during the interwar years reflected and provoked broader socioeconomic changes in British society. The ability of women to exercise agency over dress and appearance became considerably democratized in British society by the 1930s. This became part of a broader cultural process in the twentieth century that incorporated women into a 'fashion industry', developing a cultural gaze that valorized certain femininities, demeaned others and could act to empower, constrain or discipline women. Through the popularity of women's magazines, fashion trends were brought to a provincial, middle and working class audience (Buckley and Fawcett 2002: 83). Continuing changes in production and consumption, including the opening of new department stores selling ready-made and reasonably priced fashionable clothes, increased access to fashion and extended beyond the confines of the aristocracy the ability of women to pick and choose their outfits. This new ability allowed dress to symbolize and provoke social mobility and challenge existing social hierarchies: 'fashion provided women with an accessible cultural language to contest oppressive representations and to begin to construct new versions of their identity' (Buckley and Fawcett 2002: 85). Even cosmetic makeup became an acceptable means for women to present different 'masks' to the world, whereas it had hitherto been considered only appropriate for actresses and prostitutes (Woodhead 2005: 8). Above all, the cinema, and especially Hollywood films profoundly affected provincial British women's social lives, aspirational goals and understandings of the multiple performances offered by changes in dress (Gundle 2008: 149). Hollywood stars presented a range of gendered, glamorous and

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transgressive images (Gundle 2008: 188). 'The physicality of the cinema, the visual style of the films, and the star images, although on the one hand reaffirming stereotypical aspects of femininity, provided in a context in which women could "imagine" themselves as female in ways which ultimately challenged patriarchy' (Buckley and Fawcett 2002: 99).

The cinema was one of the few pleasures the young Margaret Thatcher was allowed as an adolescent. 'It was', recalls Thatcher, 'the coming of the cinema to Grantham which really brightened my life', and she became 'entranced with the romantic world of Hollywood' (1995: 14). In her autobiography, Thatcher reflected how 'on my visits to the cinema I roamed to the most fabulous realms of the imagination' and recalled her favourite Hollywood stars (1995: 15). Thatcher, like many British women in the 1930s and 1940s, experienced socioeconomic changes that emphasized the power of the adaptation of dress and appearance, and the performative ability of women to do so. At the same time, these changes subjected wider groups of women to a disciplinary 'gaze' that constituted 'fashionable' dress and judged appropriate appearance and bodily forms. Indeed, exacting attention to appearance, comportment and accent was an important element of lower-middle class Englishness in the 1930s and incorporated 'the fear and anxiety of being watched and uncovered' if one's dress was deemed imperfect or inappropriate (Nunn 2002: 68).

A clear preoccupation with dress was present in Thatcher's regular correspondence with her sister, Muriel, when she was at Oxford and as a recent graduate in Dartford (Moore 2013: 36-68). Thatcher regularly worried about her own appearance and ability to enliven her wardrobe during wartime rationing and then strained financial circumstances upon graduation from university. It is

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also clear that Thatcher often judged, or repeated other women's opinions, of her peers' dress sense, describing friends, teachers, colleagues and rivals as 'elegant', 'dowdy' or even 'tarty'. Thatcher considered Conservative party events as key occasions for her to display her best clothes; she wrote about one Conservative weekend political school held in 1948 '[in] the competition for the best dressed woman ... I think I won the day on both days' (cited in Moore 2013: 68). The interwar period increased women's agency to choose and change dress according to the latest fashion, the Hollywood star one admired, or the social occasion or mood one felt and this created a potentially transformative process for women. The agency women had to 'choose' dress was mediated however, by material ability, class and attendant assumptions about femininity.

Margaret Thatcher's social rise from the provincial lower middle-classes to the metropolitan upper middle classes is charted by her changing dress and aspirations. Lawler writes that such 'getting out and getting away' (1999: 14) across class divides for English women is expressed and enabled by acquiring 'cultural capital' through education, marriage and changing modes of dress. Women who have been socially mobile can often recall their conscious 'desire' for fine clothes, glamour and money and also sometimes their 'envy' for other women who had more than them (Lawler 1999: 11). This sense of social differentiation embodied by dress and other cultural artefacts was evident in Thatcher's narrative of her upbringing. In 1985, Thatcher recalled her frustration at how her mother would reply, 'Well, we're not situated like that!' when the young Margaret would ask why some of her peers in Grantham had more luxurious furnishings and goods and at how her mother would insist that all new fabrics had to be 'serviceable' (1985). 'One kicked against it' remarked Thatcher, 'how I longed for the time when I could buy things that were not serviceable!' (Stoppard 1985). In her autobiography, Thatcher writes 'I used to envy the young Catholic girls,

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making their first communion, dressed in white party dresses with bright ribbons', Methodists were, 'much plainer ... if you wore a ribboned dress, an older chapel goer would shake his head and warn against "the first step to Rome"' (Thatcher 1995: 8). Thatcher was clearly aware how dress and other cultural artefacts denoted socioeconomic status and her lifelong celebration of, and enjoyment in, dress and design formed a key element of her "getting out and getting away" from the status that her class, gender and provincial location would allow her.

Thatcher's background also made her aware of the disciplinary gaze women could be held and judged by *within* class and local community and therefore more so if they rise above and across classes. Lawler, drawing from Bourdieu, writes that women who have risen 'above their station' can never fully occupy or effortlessly embody their new social status (1999: 13). Constant attention to dress and repetition of dressed performances was therefore an important social act. There could be few more bold performances of Thatcher's changing status and her successful social mobility from a provincial town, via Oxford to a solidly upper middle class and metropolitan life than her choice of wedding dress for her marriage to an upper middle class businessman, Denis Thatcher. The "off the peg" dress, of blue velvet and an ostrich feather hat, was based on a Gainsborough painting of the fashionable 18<sup>th</sup> century political hostess Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire (Crawford 2010; Maddox 2003: 55). Thatcher's upward social mobility across class and geographic location was not without effort or risk, nor was it a stable achievement. Challenges to Margaret Thatcher's status and political aspirations came to the fore as her political career developed and representations of her dress was used in an attempt to destabilize her hold on power.

## **MARGARET THATCHER IN THE PUBLIC GAZE**

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Margaret Thatcher had a complex relationship with, and shifting attitudes towards, public and political focus on, and comment about, her dress. She alternately resisted and encouraged such attention and exercised varying levels and modes of agency over her fashion choices. Loach, in reviewing the otherwise hostile responses of feminists to Thatcher noted that for many women in the 1980s, the Prime Minister was 'a woman who can sustain the conflicting qualities of drive and femininity and still be part of the world – not loved or liked as women feel they need to be, but successful, assured and admired' (1987: 26). Campbell concurred,

Margaret Thatcher is one of the most seen women in the world. We all look at her, but in the power of our gaze we have no control over her – she does not protest at this mass observation, because she is not an object. We have seen how there is in her both a flight from femininity and from the world of women, and yet an absolute adherence to its appearances. Perhaps it has been through her consciousness of being watched that she has rearranged her 'feminine persona', putting both her femininity as well as her power on display.

(Campbell 1987: 242).

Thatcher was certainly 'conscious of being watched' and did indeed 'rearrange' her appearance because of it. However, the adaptation of Thatcher's performances of dress belie her deeper unease about being objectified and occasional resistance to the public gaze in which she was intensely held. Speaking on television in 1984 about a forthcoming Downing Street reception for fashion designers, Thatcher confided 'I'm a little bit nervous about it because they're all going to look so glamorous'. 'Why should you be nervous?' asked the interviewer, 'But of course', replied



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Thatcher, 'they're going to be looking at me and I'm going to be looking at them!' (Diamond 1984). Thatcher was concerned by the prospect of being held in this mutual gaze at the reception and the potential for it to affect her self-esteem or destabilize her performance as a powerful woman and representative of the United Kingdom. As shall be discussed below, for Thatcher to be considered by contemporary feminist writers such as Campbell and Loach as 'not an object' subject to the male gaze, is a considerable cultural achievement, yet this was not a permanent achievement. There was continual tension, occasional anxiety and resistance by Thatcher to her potential objectification.

Thatcher initially resisted conflating her personal performances of dress with her public performances of power. Thatcher initially resented, yet later encouraged, the objectification implied by focus on her appearance. In 1975, days before becoming party leader, Thatcher challenged a male TV interviewer asking 'Why is it that all the young men ask me about what I look like?' He replied, 'Well, it may seem to people who work in a factory or a mill that you don't share or even understand their daily concerns'. Thatcher responded 'Yes, all you young men ask me what I look like. I'm forty-eight so I suppose it's flattering that you concentrate on my appearance'. The interviewer replied 'No, we are not asking what you look like as such, but we are asking about your political image'. Margaret Thatcher concluded, 'Yes, why do you always ask what I look like?' (cited in Cockerell 1988: 216). In this exchange, Thatcher expressed the resentments of many contemporary women politicians and challenged the focus and comment on her dress by men. Shortly after becoming Prime Minister, Thatcher's office issued guidance on 'Mrs Thatcher's clothes, hair, eating habits etc.' which stated 'The Prime Minister regards personal matters of this sort as trivial and unconnected with her position as Prime Minister. She is insistent

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that we should never volunteer such details to the media' (Press Office 4/7/1979). Thatcher's reluctance to 'adapt' her dress was initially premised on her unease about being held in the public gaze, the potential for her objectification and her questioning of the link between politics and appearance.

However, Thatcher rapidly accepted the need for adaptation of dress and the opportunities this afforded her to play multiple roles and to appeal to various constituencies by using dress to its full extent. Indeed, openly discussing dress became a conscious strategy of Thatcher's during the 1970s and was designed to appeal to women voters (Cockerell 1988: 235). At the outset of the 1983 election campaign, and in complete contrast to the guidance her office issues in 1979, Thatcher's office released details of her dress and shoe sizes, eating habits, favourite shops for clothes (Marks & Spencer and Peter Jones) so that Conservative Party officials would have such details at hand when fielding media enquiries (Sinclair 1983). By the mid 1980s, Thatcher revelled in and encouraged the media's fascination with her dress and would, on occasion, insist that appearances mattered and were a vital consideration in politics, admonishing male colleagues for their lack of attention to appearance.

Margaret Thatcher engaged in multiple performances of dress. These performances sometimes showed she was disciplined by a male gaze, yet on other occasions Thatcher asserted her agency, reworked tropes of gender and sought to include men as an object of judgement about dress. In office, Thatcher adapted her dress to suit the political context. Thatcher wrote in her autobiography 'I took a close interest in clothes, as most women do, but it was also extremely important that the impression I gave was right for the political occasion' (1993: 575). Thatcher also contends that

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refusing to change one's image and dress if you are a politician 'betrays a lack of seriousness about winning power' (Thatcher 1995: 295). Margaret Thatcher's style of dress was not just subject to scrutiny by the popular press, but was also on public display in the chamber of the House of Commons and subject to appraisal by her male (and female) parliamentary colleagues. In this institutional context Thatcher demonstrated the 'awful lot of energy', women parliamentarians expend in 'managing their femininity in a social position constructed in masculine terms' (Puwar 2004a: 93). The visual and embodied masculinity of the House of Commons was underlined by the fact that the Commons has a dress code whereby men must wear a tie and until 1998 MPs of both sexes had to wear a top hat when making a point of order (Lovenduski 2005: 26-27).

The self-narrative in Thatcher's memoirs shows that she responded quickly to critique by peers in parliament, and was willing to change her appearance, in a mode she seldom demonstrated regarding criticisms of her domestic and foreign policies (Thatcher 1993: 516-524). In 1989, after parliament was televised, Margaret Thatcher wore a suit with stripes and checks whilst making a statement. A male MP who had been watching the debate on the television outside the chamber approached her afterwards and remarked 'what you said was all right but you looked awful!' In her memoir, Thatcher wrote simply 'I learned my lesson' (1993: 576). The Prime Minister also received letters if she wore outfits on successive occasions, which she also notes as something to be careful of (1993: 576). Cynthia Crawford (her personal assistant and dresser) kept detailed files on outfits worn, the occasions they were worn and comments about their suitability for future use. In this way, Thatcher could be considered to be subject to the discriminatory gaze of the 'space invader', and thus quick to respond to criticism, because she was eager to conform to stereotypes about women politicians.

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In the 1970s, Thatcher had voice coaching lessons to lower the pitch of her voice, continued to dye her hair blonde (whereas she had naturally brown hair) and followed a strict diet in the weeks before the 1979 election to reduce her weight (Mayo Clinic 1/1/1979). However, Thatcher also sought to extend this gaze to male politicians in both public and private. Asked during a television interview if she minded comment on her dress when people did not notice how male politicians looked, Thatcher replied that 'They [the press] do look at them a little ... if they're not reasonably well tailored or they shamle around. Oh yes they do!' (Diamond 1984). Nigel Lawson recalls when being appointed by Thatcher as Chancellor of the Exchequer that, 'she gave only one piece of advice. This was to get my hair cut' (1992: 249). Thatcher's adaptation of dress for the public's gaze was more complex than conforming to feminine stereotypes and she used dress with growing self-confidence to performatively engender broader political messages. Above all, rather than rejecting focus on dress as illegitimate or unrepresentative she sought to make dress a universal and constitutive element of the public realm and political life.

## **DRESS AND PERFORMANCES OF POWER**

Woodward (2007: 15) argues that Margaret Thatcher's dressed performances allowed her to present multiple 'masks', or perform 'a masquerade' of changing identities (Rose 1993: 66). However, this presupposes that there was an 'authentic' identity behind such masked performances. As Butler contends, there is no authentic identity behind the performance of gender; it is the performative act that constitutes identity (1999). For Thatcher, the fluidity of these performances and the significant impact they had on creating a public persona for her suggests that adaptations of dress both mediated and constituted Thatcher's identity in office. Indeed, as has

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been argued above, in Thatcher's upbringing she was exposed to multiple images of Hollywood femininities and the cultural and material power women could gain by changing their dress. Thatcher was, however, initially unaware of the potential for exercising agency over dress to be propitious or politically damaging. Thatcher's fashion sense came under scrutiny and was contested as her career progressed in the 1970s, and many of the early political challenges she faced were represented, refracted through and reinforced by her dress.

Thatcher gradually learned, adapted and asserted agency to use dress for her political benefit. For example, the wearing of hats befitted Thatcher's class, generational and social aspirations. However, such hats also symbolized Thatcher's 'pretender' and 'outsider' status as Party Leader, because they invoked the narrow, petty-bourgeois prejudices her critics accused her of embodying and appealing to. At the 1970 Conservative Conference, Thatcher wore a much ridiculed 'beehive' hat. Asked in 1985 about the hat, Thatcher recalled 'I wore a rather smart hat. It suited ... The fact was it would have done for an actress, but it was not quite right for a politician. I learned that lesson ever since' (Stoppard 1985). Thatcher's penchant for hats became a political problem when she became Party leader. Thatcher was an 'accidental leader' of the Conservatives and her victory had shocked supporters of the previous incumbent, Edward Heath (King 2002: 452). Ian Gilmour spoke for many in the Conservative establishment when he claimed her leadership would result in a 'retreat behind the privet hedge into a world of narrow class interests and selfish concerns' (cited in Evans 2003: 14). Webster writes that hats can symbolize both respectability but also a suburban, middle class Englishness (1990: 28). The frequent cartoon of images of Thatcher wearing hats signified 'the Tory Lady in a hat' (Webster 1990: 23). Thatcher was also reported to be furious about criticisms of her fondness for wearing pearl necklaces and earrings, which was equally

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considered to symbolize her position as a suburban, middle-class 'Tory Lady' (Junor 1983: 90). Her advisers successfully persuaded her to cease wearing hats for domestic political purposes, although she continued to wear them for State ceremonies and on foreign tours. Adapting her dress helped Thatcher to reach out to new constituencies for support and counter her Conservative critics. However, through dress the tense class politics of the 1970's Conservative Party played out, revealing wide unease at having a class, gender and ideological 'outsider' (King 2002) as party leader.

As Margaret Thatcher consolidated her position as Leader of the Opposition, she styled herself as a housewife and was pictured wearing aprons, washing up gloves and performing the roles of a housewife: brewing tea, shopping, cooking and washing up. While Thatcher, by her own admission, cooked her husband's breakfast and often made political colleagues tea and meals when they visited her (Junor 1983; Parris 2009), there is no doubt that many of the public housewife performances were deliberately stage-managed for the media. Embodying the housewife also reflected and emphasized a key Conservative macro-economic policy: that of responsible management of the nation's 'household budget' and the negative impact of inflation on the amount of goods each family could buy (Blakeway 1993). Thatcher thus combined a gendered dressed performance to shore up her leadership as well as emphasising her ability to manage the national economy as a 'responsible housewife'. Webster argues this was an extraordinary and regressive set of performances and in contradiction to the reality of Thatcher's post-war life as an Oxford trained lawyer and career woman (1990: 49-51). The 'housewife' style has been considered as typical of how women politicians become 'domesticated' by the media (Ross and Sreberny 2000: 95) and did allow Thatcher to perform her feminine authority in accessible terms (Nunn 2002: 47).

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However, it also enabled her to visually counter the 'Tory lady in a hat' image: emphasising Thatcher's 'ordinariness' and present a traditional image of femininity making the reality of a woman leader less threatening to men (Nunn 2002: 40).

This domesticated version of femininity, which Thatcher adorned and performed to suit, was not a passive or subordinated gender construct. Indeed, Warner argues it embodied the 'right of prohibition' akin to that of a strict mother, nanny or governess (2000: 53). Thatcher would often remark that women were more suited to assume responsibility and were more decisive than men because it fell to them to manage the home and it was women alone who would be left 'carrying the can' (cited in Blakeway 1993; Campbell 1987: 234-237; Webster 1990: 49-70). Dressing as the housewife enabled Thatcher to dominate, force and bully while drawing on wider cultural norms of 'acceptable' femininities. Indeed, this particular trope of feminine dress and performance connected Thatcher to other women and invoked British cultural sensibilities about the hidden but wryly acknowledged power of the wife and mother: 'part of many women's pleasure in Thatcher's power is everything to do with her gender. Thatcher is more powerful than the men around her, she bosses them around' (Campbell 1987: 233). Thatcher dressed as "housewife" made her power intelligible and less threatening in gendered (and class) terms, but also enabled her to project power in starkly different terms to her Conservative predecessors and colleagues. By performing the housewife, Thatcher personalized the Conservative economic and political critique of the Labour government's policies in her image as leader and emboldened her claim to be the only individual capable of addressing and solving Britain's economic problems.

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At the height of her Premiership, Thatcher evolved her performance to accentuate her power as a national politician and as a statesperson using dress. Setting aside previous concerns about media focus on dress, she began to revel in such attention. In 1986, she invited BBC cameras into Downing Street to film and personally discuss her favourite clothes, even revealing she bought her underwear from Marks and Spencer (Ruth 1986). Cabinet colleague Nigel Lawson wrote 'she was convinced that her authority ... would be diminished if she were not impeccably turned out at all times. She was probably right' (1992: 127). Furthermore, Thatcher insisted that dress was a legitimate aspect of the exercise of political power and insisted her male colleagues should pay attention to their dress. Dress and politics were intertwined in Thatcher's daily life. In her memoirs, Thatcher recalled her 'horror' at discovering at a late stage that a suit to be worn for the State Opening of Parliament neither fitted nor suited her. It was a mistake she was determined not to repeat (1993: 164). For Thatcher, clothes were integral to her job and successive and rapid outfit changes were a normal routine in the Prime Ministerial day. Margaret King, the fashion executive at *Aquascutum*, recalled that:

Every suit had skirts in two lengths – one for day, longer for evening. And the jackets had a variety of “bibs”, pleated or embroidered, which could be popped into place to create the illusion of a different top underneath, if she needed a quick change.

(cited in Alexander 2013)

Even Thatcher's *Asprey* handbags became important in performing the various tasks she faced as Prime Minister: quotations, statistics and thoughts were stored in them and Cynthia Crawford ensured that a constant supply of handbags, ready packed with cosmetics and mirror were



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permanently stocked and stationed at Thatcher's Downing Street apartment (Parris 2009). Writing about the 1987 election campaign, Thatcher recalled: 'preparation for the election involved more than politics. I also had to be dressed for the occasion', and Thatcher's *Aquascutum* houndstooth suit was named 'election 87' (1993: 575). Thatcher's transformation from 'a middle class mimsy' (Polen in Campbell 2003: 475) in the 1970s to a fashionable 'power dressing' international stateswoman was complete by the mid 1980s (Webster 1990: 91).

### **EMBODYING DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL POWER**

Nicola Thomas, writing about Lady Curzon, Vicereine of India, argues that her clothes 'constituted power' in her role as the public symbol of British imperial power and in Curzon's public duties dress was 'a form of discipline and control' (2007: 394) and 'part of her (Curzon's) armour against critique' (2007: 387). Thatcher's dress on the world stage can also be considered as part of her desire to represent both her own and her nation's power and as a means to create and maintain acknowledgement of her legitimacy as a national leader. Margaret Thatcher's dress reflected and embodied her growing power in both domestic and international terms and defined a particular form of 'executive style' for women. As discussed above, Thatcher named outfits after successful diplomatic visits and avoided wearing new outfits for meetings she thought would be unpleasant or unsuccessful. Thatcher explained that she 'always felt safe' in her combination of business suits and assorted blouses (Diamond 1984) and these dominated her wardrobe on most official diplomatic visits. For example, Thatcher recalled in an interview, 'when I had the great honour of addressing the United States Congress', she decided, 'go in a classic [outfit] that you are comfortable with and so I did. So I did not have to think about that at all' (Stoppard 1985).

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However, for evening wear, Thatcher would commission bespoke clothing from British designers such as *Aquascutum*, Jean Muir and Ian Thomas.

Dress was occasionally adapted for local custom, such as in the Middle East where women's calves and arms were expected to be covered. However, Margaret King emphasized how Thatcher considered it to be important to also 'look British' and she would never have adapted dress to the extent of wearing a sari in India (cited in Armstrong 2013). Over time, Thatcher's international dress moved beyond performing party political power, to embodying the nation and tropes of Britishness. Thatcher told *Vogue* in 1985 'The essence of the well-dressed woman should never be exaggerated. Appearance is the first impression people get of you. And it does matter. It matters tremendously when you represent your country abroad' (Bleichroeder 1985: 274). In a television interview, the Prime Minister said: 'if anyone represents Britain, with our reputation for tailoring...they ought to turn out looking quite good' (Frost 7/6/1985). When in 1988 it was suggested that national leaders "dress down" in casual attire for the Group of 7 (G7) meeting at Ottawa Thatcher was concerned and decided to make 'almost no concessions to informal dress' explaining that she believed the public 'really likes its leaders to look businesslike and well turned out' (Thatcher 1993: 164). The Prime Minister was relieved that the request to 'dress down' was not repeated at future meetings.

As Thatcher combined gendered and political performances on the world stage, her intention to 'represent' Britain in her dress blurred with embodying Britain: 'As the Queen grew older and less glamorous ... Margaret Thatcher became more powerful and wreathed in myth, the very embodiment of Britannia' (Campbell 2003: 466). This monarchical tendency became a source of

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public fascination, particularly after victory in the Falklands War. As Behnke discusses in this volume, sovereignty depends on, and is generated in bodily form through, the dress and symbolism of the head of state, government or 'First Lady'. Thatcher appeared to adopt similar dressed performances to the Queen: carefully planning outfits for diplomatic occasions, incorporating national symbols in her dress, insisting on dressing and "looking" British and choosing ever more elaborate and glamorous evening wear for state banquets.<sup>3</sup> Marina Warner noted that in Thatcher 'Britannia has been brought to life. But she has achieved this singular hypostasis not because she is a battle-axe like Boadicea, but because she is so womanly, combining Britannia's resoluteness, Boadicea's courage with a proper housewifely demeanour' (Warner, 2000, p. 51). Thatcher, as a defiant leader surrounded by men in her Cabinet and as a successful war leader, became frequently compared to a previous executive ruler of England, '*Gloriana*' Queen Elizabeth I, and thus 'the very personification and embodiment of Britishness' (Campbell 2003: 155). This association gave Thatcher an easily identified femininity, bestowing her with a 'dignity, an aura of benevolence, even perhaps, for some, magic and mystery' (Webster 1990: 110).

As the 1980s progressed Thatcher undertook what appeared to be "State Visits" of her own and took almost as much care in the diplomatic design of her wardrobe as Queen Elizabeth II (Conway and Weldes 2009). Thatcher used the same couturier as the Queen, Ian Thomas, to design evening wear for her diplomatic visits to the Middle East and France in the early 1980s, was fond of the same handbag manufacturer to the Queen, *Aspreys*, and also frequently used the Royal milliner,

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<sup>3</sup> There was also media speculation about tensions and rivalries between the Queen and Margaret Thatcher. In the early 1980s Margaret Thatcher had requested for Buckingham Palace to coordinate with Downing Street so that the two women would never attend a state event in the same, or similar outfits. The request was met with a simple reply of 'Her Majesty does not notice what other people are wearing' (Madgwick 1991: 410)

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Philip Somerville (Armstrong 2013). A journalist accompanying the Prime Minister's progress through Asia noted 'Mrs Thatcher acted throughout the trip less as Britain's representative than as its embodiment' (Patrick Bishop cited in Webster 1990: 106). In 1988, Robert Harris wrote in the *Observer* 'on her housewife/superstar progress around the world, Margaret Thatcher has steadily become more like the Queen of England than the real thing' (cited in Campbell 2003: 466). Campbell added 'increasingly the Queen appeared to be the housewife, Mrs Thatcher the superstar' (2003: 466). Thatcher was very aware of the implications of dress and representing Britain to foreign publics, writing in her autobiography that she liked to include the colour of the national flag of the country she was visiting in her outfit (Thatcher 1993: 575).

Particularly significant, in media and public perception, were Thatcher's outfits for two of her most famous foreign visits. In 1987, weeks before the election campaign, Thatcher accepted an invitation to visit the Soviet Union and discuss with President Gorbachev improving East/West relations. In 1988, Thatcher visited Poland and publicly met with the leaders of the Solidarity movement. The outfits served domestic and international purposes by projecting a powerful and accomplished leader, while symbolising cultural sympathy and understanding. Margaret Thatcher wrote choosing the clothes for the visit to Moscow was her 'biggest challenge' (Thatcher 1993: 575). Cynthia Crawford had warned Thatcher that President Gorbachev's wife was fond of wearing high fashion clothes by European designers such as Yves Saint Laurent and upon the advice of Cynthia Crawford and Margaret King, Thatcher chose an entire range of outfits from *Aquascutum*. Thatcher dressed specifically to make a dramatic impact on Soviet political leaders, and the public both in the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom. Thatcher planned carefully the outfit to be worn upon her arrival, stepping from the aircraft in a Philip Somerville Russian style

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black fur hat, black coat with wide shoulder pads and a 'statement' diamond broach. Thatcher had even repeatedly practised her descent from the aircraft wearing the outfit on the staircase at Downing Street in order that her arrival would make maximum impact (King 2013). This conscious rehearsal underscores the importance of repetition to the success, or failure, of performative acts (Butler 1999). Maddox writes the pictures of Thatcher in her clothes in Moscow turned her into 'a superstar' (2003: 191). Thatcher's dress dominated UK and Russian media reports of the Prime Minister's visit, and also attracted considerable attention from the US and European media.<sup>4</sup> Yet far from belittling her status or power by focus on her appearance, press reports emphasized Thatcher's international status and political acumen (Cockerell 1988: 319-320). 'Moscow Maggie', ran a headline in the *The Sun*, 'Super Mag' was coined by the *Daily Express*, 'Mrs Thatcher looked marvellous in those fur hats' *The Times* editorialized (cited in Cockerell 1988: 319). Thatcher's aides credited the Moscow visit and the imagery generated by Thatcher's dress as significant in increasing popular support for the Conservatives in the subsequent general election (Blakeway 1993; Cockerell 1988: 320).

Thatcher specifically wore green *Aquascutum* outfits when meeting the leaders of Solidarity during her visit to Poland in 1988, as she had been told by a Polish sales assistant at *Aquascutum* that this colour symbolized hope in Polish culture (Thatcher 1993: 779). Thatcher met not only with the Polish government but arrived by boat to the Gdansk shipyards adorned in a green coat and black fur hat to meet with the anti-Communist leaders of Solidarity and representatives of the Catholic Church. By the choice of colour Thatcher performatively created a symbol for her anti-Communist political stance, magnifying her status and political impact on these occasions. In both visits,

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<sup>4</sup> Margaret King commented about the impact of images from the Moscow visit: 'The Americans were mad about her, saying how she truly looked the part of a Prime Minister' (2013).

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Thatcher's use of fashion, glamour and specific fabrics and colours, which resonated with cultural and political reference points, was not unlike the Hollywood stars of her youth and it generated exceptional focus and fascination with her personality and abilities as leader.

Thatcher's agency over dress was not limitless. Not least, it was contingent on how her performances were received by audiences, and in relation to other political factors. Although Thatcher's regal, 'embodiment' of Britain may have excited the press on the visit to Moscow in 1987, it could appear inappropriate and hubristic for a democratically elected head of government on other occasions. Ultimately, Thatcher was not head of state, or the legal embodiment of British sovereignty, and the dramatization of her power to foreign and domestic audiences could evoke contrasting and sometimes hostile responses. Thatcher's 'embodiment' of Britain and her seemingly unassailable position in office was accompanied by what was perceived to be increasingly regal behaviour.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Thatcher's increasing isolation, indifference to criticism and paranoia about threats to her leadership, were likened to that of a 'medieval monarch' by one of her colleagues (Blakeway 1993). By 1990, the style of her fashion seemed to goad her critics, symbolising her imperious and detached style of leadership and heralding her imminent political demise.

Margaret Thatcher wrote that she reserved her 'most exciting outfits' for the annual Lord Mayor's banquet in the City of London (Thatcher 1993: 575). The banquet in 1990 took place after a summer of protest and rioting against her flagship policy, the Community Charge (or 'Poll Tax')

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<sup>5</sup> In 1989, Thatcher used the Royal pronoun when announcing to the media 'we have become a grandmother'. Although a possible slip of the tongue and because she had initially planned for her husband to be at her side, the comments were widely interpreted as inappropriately regal and hubristic.

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as it was dubbed) and the day after the resignation of her long-serving Cabinet colleague, Geoffrey Howe, over disputes about Thatcher's European policy. According to Campbell 'she turned up dressed like Queen Elizabeth I at Tilbury in a black velvet gown with a high collar, cloak and pearls. Never in all her years of power dressing had she worn anything so ostentatiously regal: at the very moment when she needed to show some humility her dress positively screamed hubris' (2003: 718). Whereas in Moscow the Prime Minister's dress had symbolized and accentuated her power, and excited media and popular opinion, Thatcher's televised grand entrance was a dressed performance that took place in less favourable political circumstances, and reflected and reinforced the perception that she had lost touch and become politically careless: ignoring public opinion and disregarding her cabinet colleagues advice. Thatcher's carefully crafted performances of fashion were now perceived as inappropriately regal and reckless in a changed domestic political context. The 'failure' of this performance was not the result of carelessness about dress on Thatcher's part, or in a significant shift in style from previous clothing worn at the Lord Mayor's Banquets, but rather a change in political circumstance and Thatcher's lack of adaptation to these circumstances. As Butler argues, identity is constituted through repetition, but its political and social impact is mediated by its social reception and context. Thatcher had apparently not recognized this shift and had not adapted her dress accordingly.

The day after the Lord Mayor's banquet, Geoffrey Howe delivered an eloquent, and for many a surprisingly hostile resignation speech in the House of Commons that sharply criticised Thatcher's European policy and her style of leadership. This triggered a leadership challenge and, although Thatcher won enough votes from her parliamentary colleagues to survive the first round, it was not enough to stave off a second round. On the evening of November 21<sup>st</sup>, the majority of Margaret

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Thatcher's cabinet colleagues withdrew their support for her Premiership and she resigned the following morning. Thatcher's emotional attachment to clothes and the significance of dress to political events and experiences across her career was reflected in her recollection of the high drama of her political downfall. In her memoirs, Thatcher writes of the moment after she heard by telephone that she had not secured enough votes in the first leadership ballot:

I changed out of the black wool suit with its tan and black collar which I was wearing when the bad news came through. Although somewhat stunned, I was perhaps less distressed than I might have expected. The evidence is that whereas other outfits which evoke sad memories never see the light of day again, I still wear that black wool suit with the tan and black collar (1993: 845).

It is apt that Thatcher uses clothing to express her mental state at the moment her Premiership was fatally weakened, dress had been integral to her personal and professional self her entire life. Just as Margaret Thatcher's political rise can be traced through her wardrobe, her own recollections of her political fortunes are embodied and conveyed using her dress.

## **CONCLUSION**

Margaret Thatcher's personal assistant and dresser, Cynthia Crawford, claimed that Thatcher 'made her own style decisions at all times' (Crawford 2010). Yet Thatcher's agency as a woman and a politician was both enabled and constrained by dress and constructions of dress. Thatcher faced a political struggle to 'get out and get away' from her lower middle class, provincial background and even more so when she became the ultimate 'space invader' (Puwar 2004a) in the British political elite. In this struggle, Thatcher's dress threatened to become a destabilising classed and gendered symbol of her outsider status and of her inappropriateness for office. Thatcher's



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initial responses to these threats were to ignore and dismiss dress as a public political concern. However, she self-consciously learned from 'mistakes, asserted agency and adapted her dressed political performances to consolidate her power, craft her identity and project images to multiple audiences at home and abroad. This adaptation drew from the socioeconomic milieu she grew up in, but it is noteworthy that it crossed from a private enjoyment and interest in dress to a very public and self-confident one. Indeed, Thatcher became insistent that dress was a legitimate and important political concern for all actors in political life. Thatcher's use of dress can therefore be interpreted as part of her background and emotional self, but not entirely defined by this. Thatcher's 'enfashioning' was not totally constrained by her context, or the dominant cultural and political attitude that privileged masculinity and men in British politics. Her performances of class and femininity, such as that of the housewife, were themselves shifting fabrications to suit political ends.

Dress, as Buckley and Fawcett argue, 'is highly effective in endlessly constituting but never fixing identities, and it is performative, in that it ceaseless rehearses and exacts the "lines" of femininity' (1999: 9). Thatcher's crafting of dressed performances, particularly the repetition of aspects of dress created recognizable and long lasting images of her identity and her politics in the popular culture and can be situated alongside other politically transgressive and transformational uses of dress, such as those invoked by the Suffragettes. Whereas Thatcher's politics may not have been socially and politically radical in the same terms as the Suffragettes, and indeed she frequently repudiated feminism, she occupied and dominated the public sphere appropriating and repeating particular dress styles, colours (such as blue) and even accessories (such as handbags) as powerful symbols of both herself and her politics. The importance of this dressed symbolism has been

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demonstrated by the repeated references to Thatcher's 'style' in the years following her departure from office and in the extensive media commentary on her dress and politics following her death in 2013. Thatcher's shifting and mutable performances: dressing as a housewife, a stateswoman, a monarch and a fashionable "power-dressing" 1980s woman, demonstrate how dress performatively constituted identity and had political significance. Thatcher was not bound by an essential identity in these performances and she exercised agency, but she had less agency over the reception and popular perception of these performances. The reception depended on changing political circumstances and the area in which the performance was made, Thatcher's skill in discerning and adapting to these contexts was variable and faltered at the end of her Premiership. Thatcher's use of dress and its roles in defining, enabling and constraining her political career is significant, not least, because contemporary women in British public life have yet to reach her high office, or resolve the tensions around agency and the destabilising representation of women politicians.

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