

How can I reflect on my hybrid identity through Lithuania's performative re-branding and emancipation of its national identity?

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1. Introduction

At 11, I moved with my family to live in Belgium. It was not my first long car trip. However, somehow this one did feel very different because it was a one-way trip. There was incomprehensible emotional baggage coming with me. This trip meant leaving behind my grandparents, a tennis coach who evoked a dream of a promising tennis career and primary friends. On a brighter note, at least our cat came with us.

The more time passed from this trip, the stronger the array of national identity questions became. Where do I belong and why. I grew up in an international school bubble in Belgium, and having no nationality was the norm in that environment. However, leaving this bubble arose questions of belonging again. When I introduce myself to new people in university, should I brand myself as an international nomad, a Lithuanian, a Belgian, maybe a European, or a citizen of the internet?

Why do I feel this need to express the urge to belong to some community or subculture? These questions might have laid the foundations for my professional pursuit in fashion design. Garments are an underlying part of someone's identity. One can easily play around with how they look and where they belong by dressing differently. Culture and the expression of self are so strongly linked to this medium.

To gain clarity on this topic, I research the time frame of 1990 to 2004 in Lithuania. A period when the country was trying to re-establish, re-brand, and re-position itself. It is a nostalgic period representing freedom and Lithuania's 'true' independence. With my work, I am trying to recapture the ethos of '90s Lithuania'. In a DIY approach to fashion, I am using only the limited resources available to me to create something cohesive.

2. Lithuania and the political economy of aesthetics

For Lithuania, 1990 to 2004 is a nostalgic period representing freedom and 'true' independence. Then, the country did not belong to any union- be it Soviet or European. When the Act of Restoration was signed, the USSR had no intention of recognising Lithuania's independence. On April 18 1990, it enforced an economic blockade against Lithuania, cutting or grievously restricting the supply of raw materials. While Lithuania's economy was relatively developed, it used little local input as a resource (Ragauskas, 2016). This blockade meant a scarcity of essential resources provided by the Soviet State, which accelerated Lithuania's transition to a market-oriented economy. It helped the country prioritise trade deals with other countries and made the enterprises seek cooperation from other entities than the government, thereby realigning the economy towards the Western model (Samonis, 1995).

This economical re-build led to a unique '90s Lithuania' aesthetic. A loud visual culture with evident roots in early internet developments which might be considered to be in poor taste for many because of the excessive garishness and sentimentality. I personally see it as a beautiful expression of pure joy coming from emancipation. This aesthetic arose from Soviet fundamentals strongly influenced by the urgent will to be Westernised. Since everything was being re-branded from scratch, it had a strong DIY aura. I believe that this is where the countrywide do-it-yourself approach and mindset were formed. As shown in the short documentary film "Gariunu Vyrai" (Tarvydas, 1993), men travelled to west Europe to purchase broken or damaged vehicles. They would then bring them back to Lithuania to repair and sell them. Basketball players would bring aspirin, jeans, shoes, cameras, and computers from their tournaments abroad and sell them three times the original price to add extra cash to their 350 rubles (~100\$)/month salary. A new economic market was being created, and everyone tried to get in on it in whatever way they could.

3. Creating a role for myself in the rigid fashion structure

I want to highlight my ability to make luxurious garments and make my process and knowledge accessible with this graduation project. Luxury and accessibility are usually at the opposite ends of the spectrum. I put a lot of time and effort into the design and making process. Nevertheless, I do not want to hide this knowledge and instead want to create opportunities for people to make their luxurious items.

This way of working can be seen as the modern day Haute-couture. With the help of TikTok to spread the know-how knowledge worldwide rather than a select few, everyone can make unique pieces for themselves. I find the aspect of sharing open-source knowledge necessary because that creates equity. Any person in any country should have the opportunity to access the educational material to sample and remake almost anything they want. Some industry examples of this way of working are Virgil Abloh and Reese Cooper (Figure 1).



Figure 1 Reese Cooper "How to make a chore coat" video



Figure 2 chore coat DIY kit



Figure 3 Virgil Abloh "Free Game" website

Virgil Abloh was a big proponent of providing free resources to uplift more than a few. He always tried to stay transparent and share his knowledge and creative process. In (Figure 3) you can see a website he created with detailed explanations about the basics of launching a fashion brand. One could also buy this Reese Cooper kit (Figure 2) and make an authentic

jacket themselves for way less than buying an actual jacket. One just had to put in the effort to construct it themselves.

4. Developing ways to explore the aesthetics of a time frame

To better understand what was happening in Lithuania in the 1990s, I am analysing the "The Other Dream Team" documentary and the fashion journalism TV show "Stilius". In this, I am looking at what kind of discourse was present, what were people wearing or showing, and how was fashion presented to the general public. Furthermore, I conducted interviews to understand better the overall time frame and what life was like from the first-hand experience rather than a TV show. Shopping in second-hand shops has been a massive part of the clothing industry in Lithuania. I am exploring this cultural aspect by doing garment sourcing and silhouette research in those shops.

I am using the concept of "I am the research instrument" (Pezalla, Pettigrew, & MillerDay, 2012) for this qualitative mini-ethnographic research (Fusch, P. I., Fusch, G. E., & Ness, L. R. 2017). The primary bias I face is assuming that I know the context of something because I have personal experience with Lithuania or have just briefly seen a similar visual. To mitigate the bias of this intimate approach, I am using the methodological triangulation (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012) method. My data collection methods consist of unstructured and semi-structured interviews (Bernard, R. H., 2017) with various people who have first-hand experience with living in Lithuania from the 1990s to 2004, content analysis (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013) of the fashion journalism TV show "Stilius" and of the "The Other Dream Team" documentary and a photo diary from my studio and visits to second-hand shops where I research different garments and silhouettes as an autoethnographic method (Margolis, E., & Pauwels, L., 2011).

5. Data/ Output

It is essential for me to understand what people in 1990s Lithuania were thinking, feeling, and how they were acting. Due to aesthetic images circling the internet, I have a very romantic view of the time frame. Therefore, I want to find out if life was similar to that. Then, when I understood the reality of the 1990s creative and social limitations, I can put myself into a similar mindset of the time and create.

For graduation, I knew I wanted to make a clothing collection combined with moving images and TikToks. I started with many raw materials that I could use for my collection. I had the vintage clothes which I could upcycle, donated and bought textiles from my internship partner and a lot of yarns for knits. Taking things from many different sources and combining them to make something cohesive relates to this exact '90s Lithuania' DIY working attitude.

5.1 Interviews

I had conversations with Lithuanian people who were alive at that time. I interviewed my dad, who was part of the last generation to serve in the USSR army, my grandmother, who was deported by the oppressive regime and a family friend Jurate. The three of them represent three different age groups. They provided me with helpful insight. My main takeaway is that this period was not as romantic as it is now made to be with a glorified Instagram account. There was still poverty, lack of food and racketeering was a social norm. It was not as sweet and romantic as I had first imagined. It is a reality check to not over glamorise it too much in my work.

5.2 The Other Dream Team

In the movie 'The Other Dream Team', the fight for the right to express yourself and your identity spoke to me. I feel like I am also fighting to belong and fit in somewhere. It is said that basketball runs in every Lithuanian's blood and is nicknamed the "Second Religion". Basketball was one of the main cultural forces of the 1990s Lithuania's freedom movement. During that time, the national basketball team and "Kaunas Zalgiris" club unified the whole country and supporting them meant also supporting Lithuania's freedom. It was not just a shallow, brainless "sports" thing. It was a revolution, and the athletes were vital figures in the political fight against USSR.

The movie mentions the deportation of people to Siberia, which spoke to me since my grandmother was also deported. You could maybe say that my parents deported me to Belgium in an extreme comparison (Figure 4). But, of course, Belgium is the polar opposite of hellish Siberia. Today I am incredibly thankful to my parents for their courage to pursue better lives for themselves and for wanting to give my sister and me brighter futures.



Figure 4 drawings by deported Lithuanian children

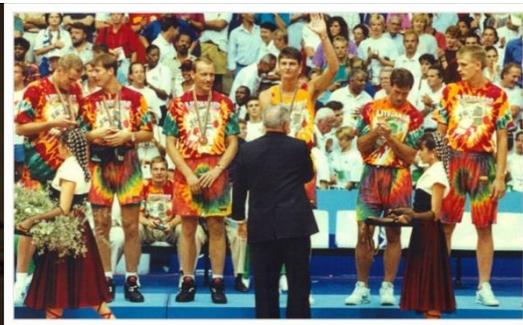


Figure 5 1992 Olympics basketball medal ceremony

With the Perestroika on its way, Lithuanian basketball players were promised to get more freedom and the possibility to play in NBA if they performed well in the 1988 Seoul Olympics. They won gold, and two players were allowed to join NBA teams. Garry Kasparov, who opposed the Soviet regime, heavily consulted both players. Because of his fame and status, the State could not do much to censor him.

Eventually, Lithuania received its independence and was able to participate in the 1992 summer Olympics under the Lithuanian flag. However, Lithuania was in a terrible financial state and could not fund the trip. By that time, Marčiulionis was playing in the NBA, so he organised various fundraising events in the Bay area. A journalist found his story appealing and decided to write about it. The story spread and somehow reached the Grateful Dead members. Who decided to sponsor Lithuania's basketball team. Besides the money, the music band also sent tie-dye shorts and T-shirts to Lithuania. These were the embodiment of free Lithuania. As a thank you gesture towards the Grateful Dead, the team wore these funky suits to the medal ceremony (Figure 5).

The Olympics is a large stage to express and show your national identity to the rest. Countries can exhibit their ideological views and community values. In the 1992 Olympics, stars aligned, and Lithuania's tie dye T-shirts became the perfect symbol to capture the performative moment of Lithuania's independence, American counter culture and Postmodern creativity.

5.3 Stilius

Guessing that there are not that many movies about the topic of '90s Lithuania', I tried to find other media related to that time frame. That is how I stumbled upon the TV show 'Stilius' archive. The TV show "Stilius" (translated to style) was created in the early days of independent Lithuania and is still running today. I have watched and analysed 17 episodes aired from 1994 till 2003 of the "Stilius" TV show.

It is a weird coincidence that the first available episode in the archive immediately talks about the phenomenon, which inspired me to start this research. Violeta Baublienė opens the 1994 episode in a cafe in Riga and talks about how the Coca Cola effect (Figure 6) is also coming to Lithuania. Coca Cola effect is the fast westernisation of everything. This effect is due to Lithuania trying to develop as fast as possible in any direction. It is trying to scramble out of the relics of the past.



Figure 6 The Coca Cola effect

5.4 Vintage garment sourcing

On November 8 2021, I departed for Lithuania to conduct research closer to the source of my inspiration. I planned to visit many second-hand shops in Vilnius and search for eye-catching garments to create new silhouettes with. Before the trip, I purchased a monopod to be able to record my findings uniformly. Van in *Essential Travel Packing Tips* (Neistat, 2022) says that "the manner by which you pack has an impact on how the trip will unfold". Keeping this in mind, I went empty-handed (Figure 7) to put pressure on myself to fulfil my sourcing plans.

When in the shops, I searched for a garment that would stand out from the rest of the clothes. Then from those pieces, I tried on all the garments which were my size. Finally, I bought all the ones which fit me and sparked some creative design ideas in my mind (Figure 8). The initial idea was to style and take pictures in the shop's changing rooms. It worked, but I was not as confident as in my home atelier. I could not throw garments around and let the creative juice flow. So I brought the bought garments back to the Netherlands, where I continued the styling experiments at home.



Figure 7 everything I had on my outbound flight



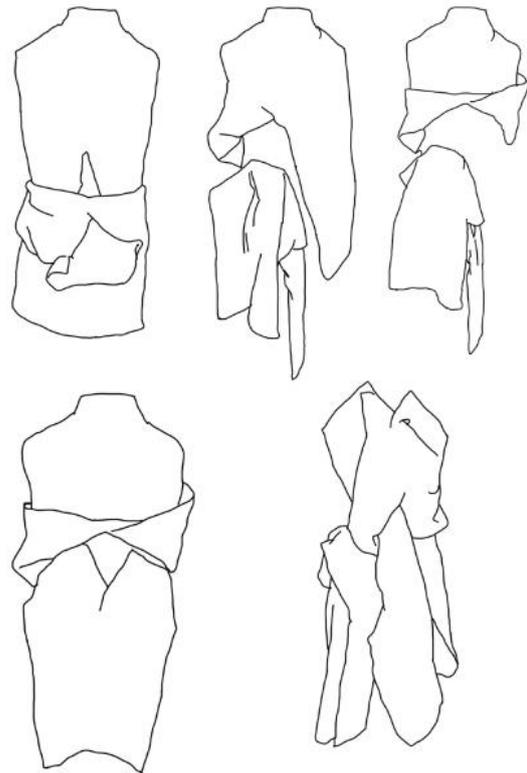
Figure 8 Everything I sourced

During this trip, I realised that vintage shops are different from second-hand shops. Second-hand shops sell everything good enough to be worn, while vintage shops sell curated garments for an audience which can afford to buy clothes because they want to and not because they need to.

5.5 Engaging styling as a methodological process



Figure 9 Drapings from a previous assignment



I took pre-existing garments in a previous university project and draped them onto a mannequin. However, I found all of these design sketches too similar, and I did not enjoy how much drapery they had (Figure 9). I faced a dilemma in finding my preferred way of

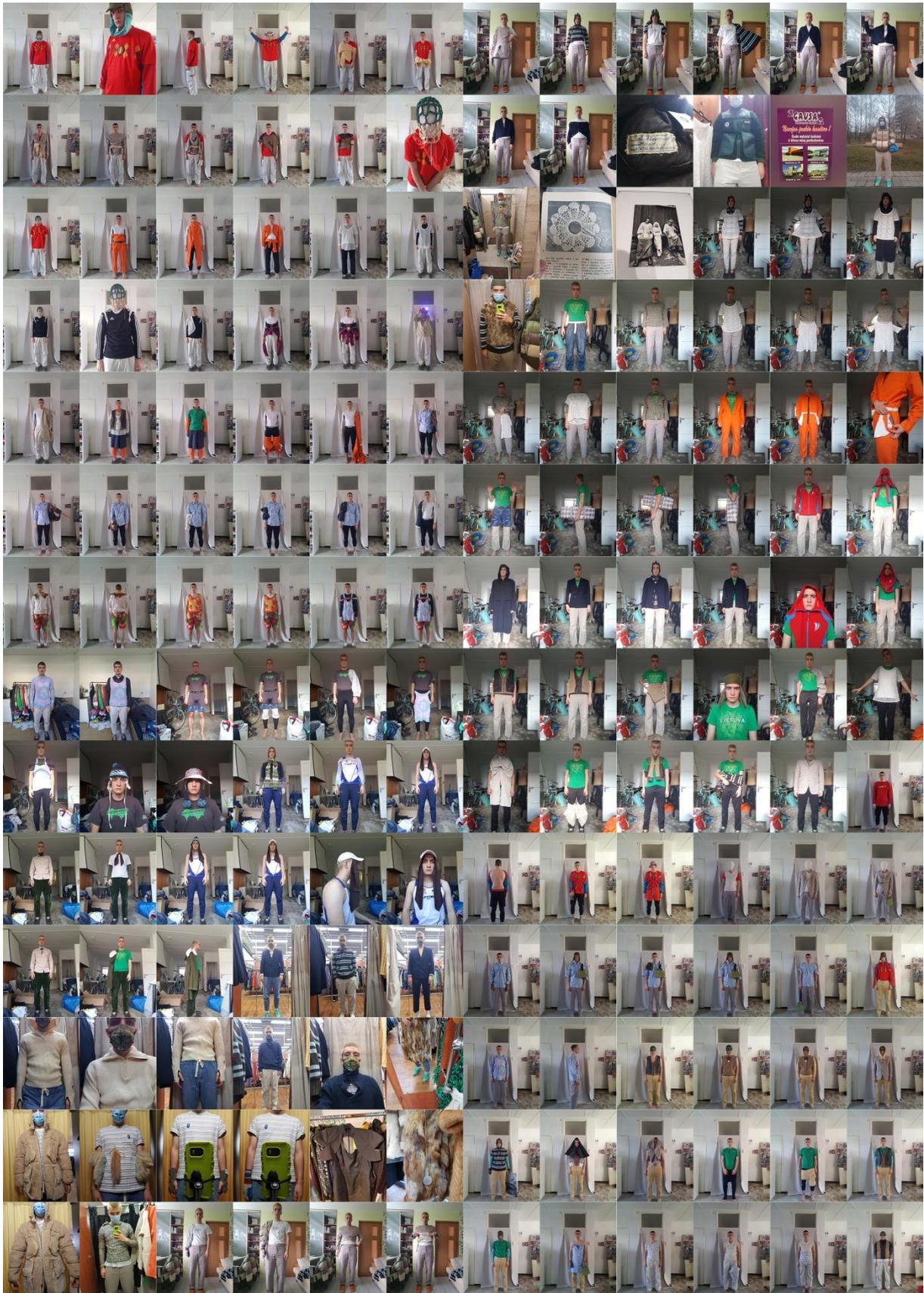


Figure 11 Styling experiments

5.6 From hybrid drawings to crafted garments

The foundation of my making process is hybrid drawings made from various media. I merge photography with textile scans and digital drawing. This method allows me to experiment with different combinations of forms, patterns and colours, which would not be possible if I stuck to just one of these mediums. By combining these, I can go beyond the restrictions and materiality of objects and fabrics (Figure 12).

One could say this creative process mirrors the approach of second-hand shops in certain ways. I bring many garment finishing ideas, fabric experiments, and colour tryouts together, similar to how second-hand or vintage shops collect everything from people and create a cohesive shop layout and display.

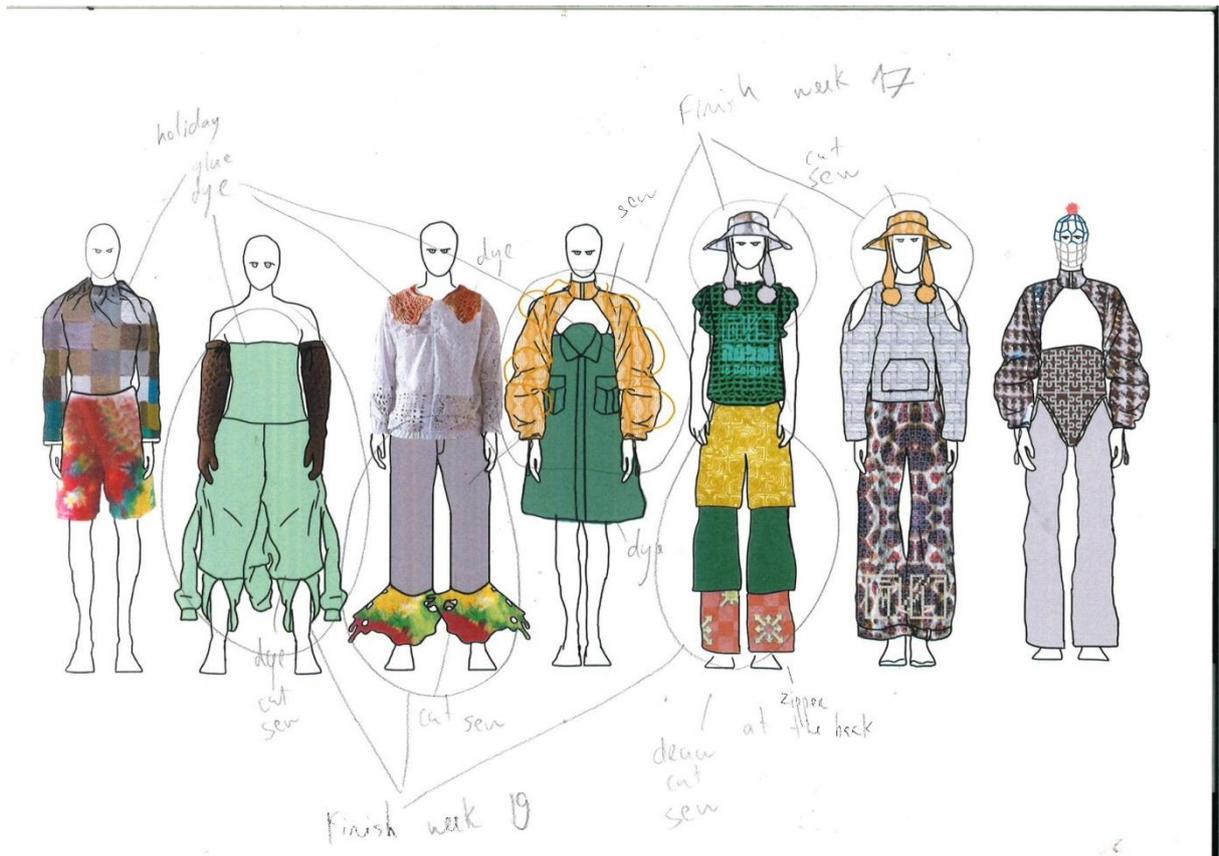


Figure 12 Drawing of the final line-up



Figure 13 Final Line-up

LOOK 1



Figure 14 Look 1 Hybrid drawing



Figure 15 Creative process

I came up with this idea in the Kringloopwinkel in my hometown village Mol, Belgium. I liked the absurdity of wearing three different pairs of pants simultaneously (Figure 15). However, later I realised that the idea of the tricolour might be a bit lost if it is three equal length pants. So I adjusted the design to be three different length garments, so the layering is seen (Figure 14).

The top is made in collaboration with my mom. I wanted to learn from her expertise of working in the fashion industry for over 20 years and create a reason to contact her more often. The top says "POViS Rubai is Belgijos" which means POViS clothes from Belgium. (Figure 16) It references Lithuanian second-hand shops that usually advertise by saying "cheap clothes from a western European country".



Figure 16 Creative process

LOOK 2



Figure 17 Look 2 Hybrid drawing



Figure 18 Creative process.

I moulaged the top piece by putting the waist of a pair of pants around my neck (Figure 17). It was an exciting way of creating a neckline which I had not seen much. Yet again, as if it was not made for a human but for someone with a way thicker neck. The knitted shorts are tie-dyed in yellow, green, and red and directly reference the 1992 Lithuania's basketball attire. Moreover, the TV show Stilius logo (Figure 19) is very organically laser cuttable (Figure 20). I laser cut nine swatches and glued them on contrasting pieces to create a hidden Lithuanian flag in the patchwork of outerwear fabric samples (Figure 13).



Figure 19 TV show Stilius logo



Figure 20 Stilius logo laser cut

LOOK 3

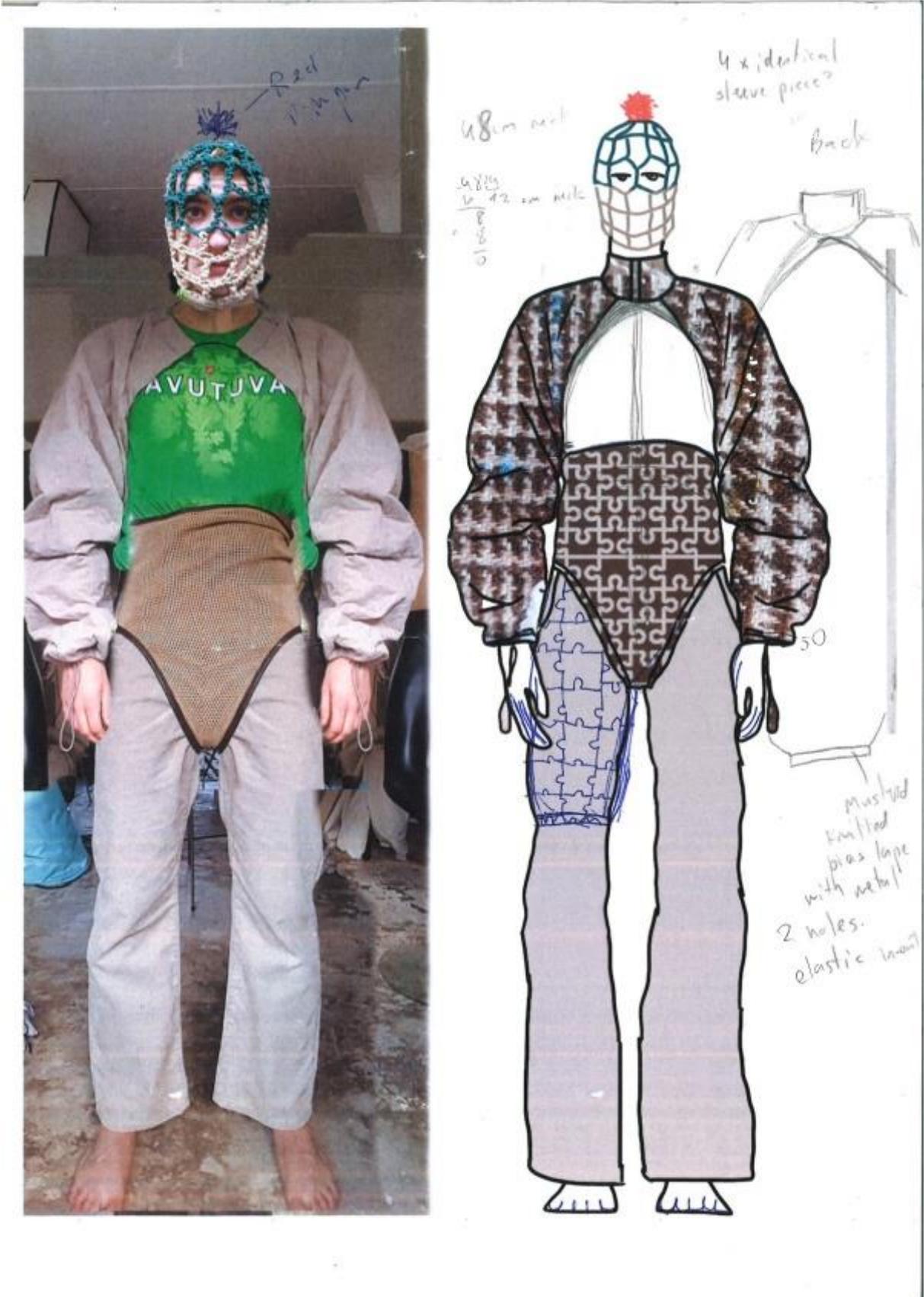


Figure 21 Look 3 Hybrid drawing



Figure 22 Creative process of balaklava and jacket. Knitting of the over-pants.

I used pants (Figure 22) to create baggy, ill-fitting sleeves for a jacket made from a padded fabric I received from my internship company. It is an upcycled fabric since the company would have thrown it out otherwise. Sleeves not fitting correctly could be a metaphor for not properly fitting in a community or nation. This oversized element is contrasted with very restricting components of the over pants and balaclava (Figure 21), almost as to communicate that you are being held tightly by one national identity, which does not allow you to fit into a new one properly. Nevertheless, as a whole, the outfit goes well together, proving that this is not the case and that the Creolization philosophical thinking should be the desired approach (Glissant and Obrist, 2021).

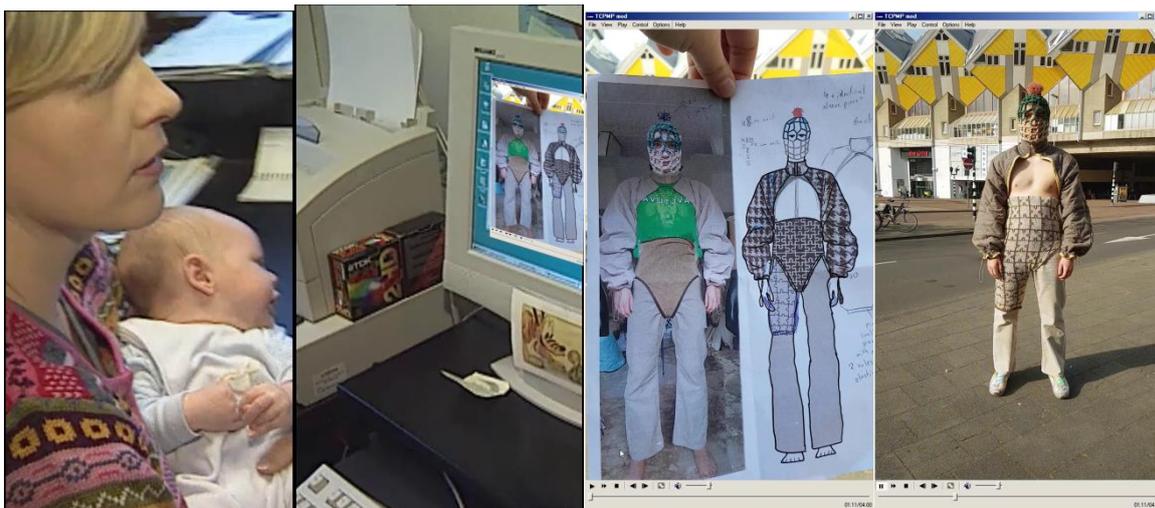


Figure 23 Look 1 presentation Tik Tok stills

LOOK 4



Figure 24 Look 4 Hybrid drawing

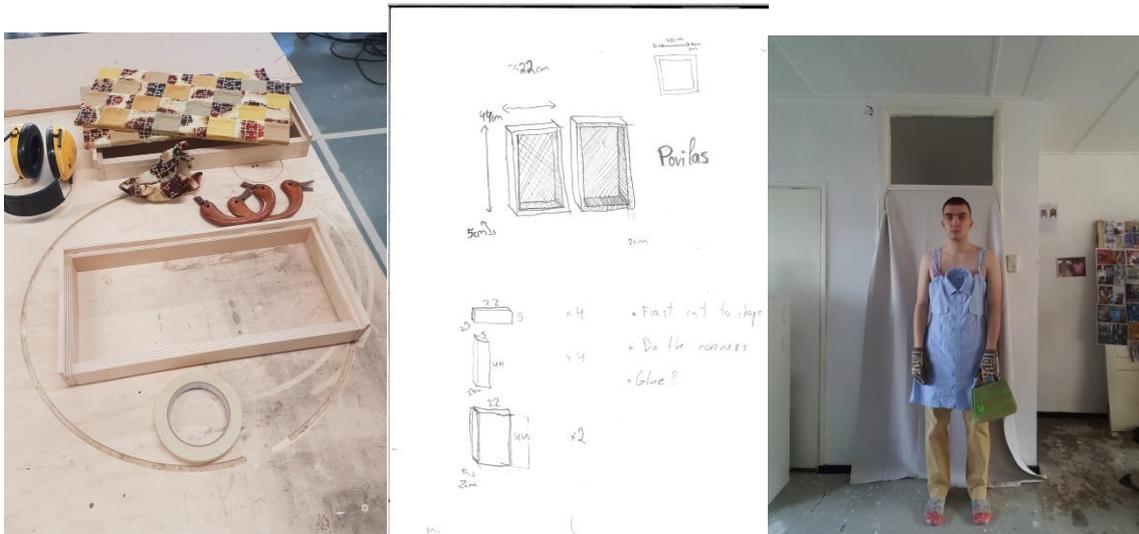


Figure 25 Creative process

This outfit consists of a jacket with a shirt used as a dress. The shirt is upcycled and re-dyed. It is the same jacket as look 3 but in a different fabric. I changed the shirt buttons to buttons which resemble beer bottle caps—trying to make light of the ongoing alcoholism problem in Lithuania.

I also made a chess table from wood and fabric patchwork (Figure 26). My granddad made the chess game pieces as a gift to my dad, who re-gifted them to me. So this look is an ode to my grandfather, who taught me how to play chess at a young age and Garry Kasparov for guiding Lithuanian basketball players through the USSR trap.



Figure 26 Creative process

LOOK 5

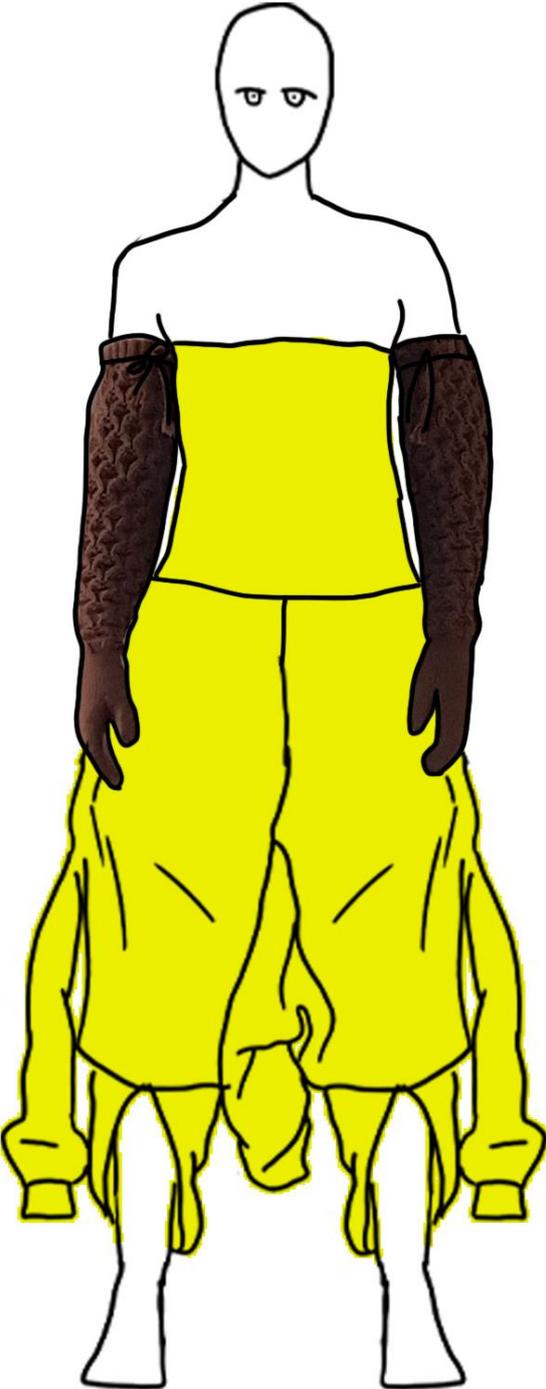


Figure 27 Look 5 Hybrid drawing



Figure 28 Creative process.

This look consists of long mittens and hoodie trousers that extend into overalls (Figure 27). This look adds to the concept of seemingly misfitting clothes. Hoodies are "meant" to be worn on the torso and not on the legs. This garment is almost not made for homo sapiens but still fits them. The gloves were hand knitted by my grandmother. Just as previously with my mother I started this collaboration with her not just to learn from her expertise in knitting. But also to create a reason to call and communicate with her more often.

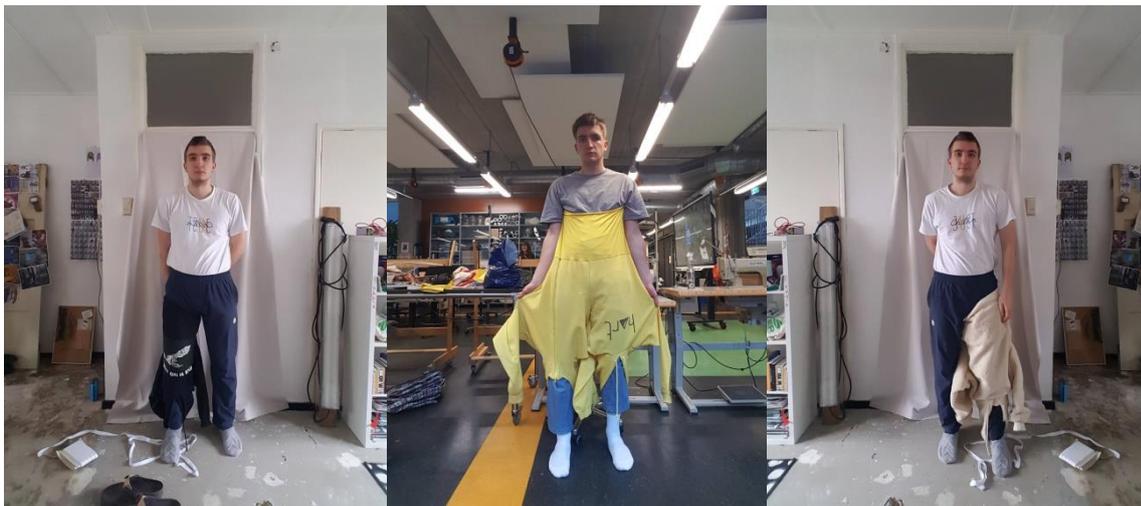


Figure 29 Creative process.

LOOK 6



Figure 30 Look 6 Hybrid drawing



Figure 31 Kevlar vest commercial from Stilius TV show

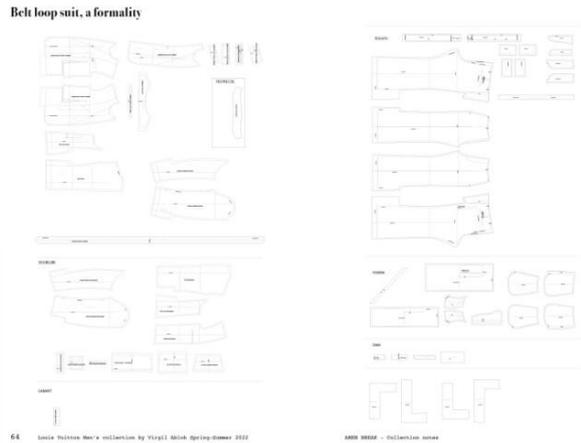


Figure 32 Suit patterns from LV show notes

I got inspired to make this woven top vest with long sleeves (Figure 30) after seeing this obscure Kevlar vest commercial on the TV show Stilius (Figure 31).

The Virgil Abloh Louis Vuitton Spring 2022 is named "Amen Break"- the most sampled piece of music. It talks about the ideas of sampling in culture, fashion and music. He included full patterns for pants and a blazer in the show notes (Figure 32). First, I printed the patens of the pants and made a toile out of them. Then I adjusted them to fit my design (Figure 33).

Virgil was a big proponent of sampling and using the ready-made. As a designer, he had a significant influence on me. So I find it poetic to continue his ethos and use and resample something he made.

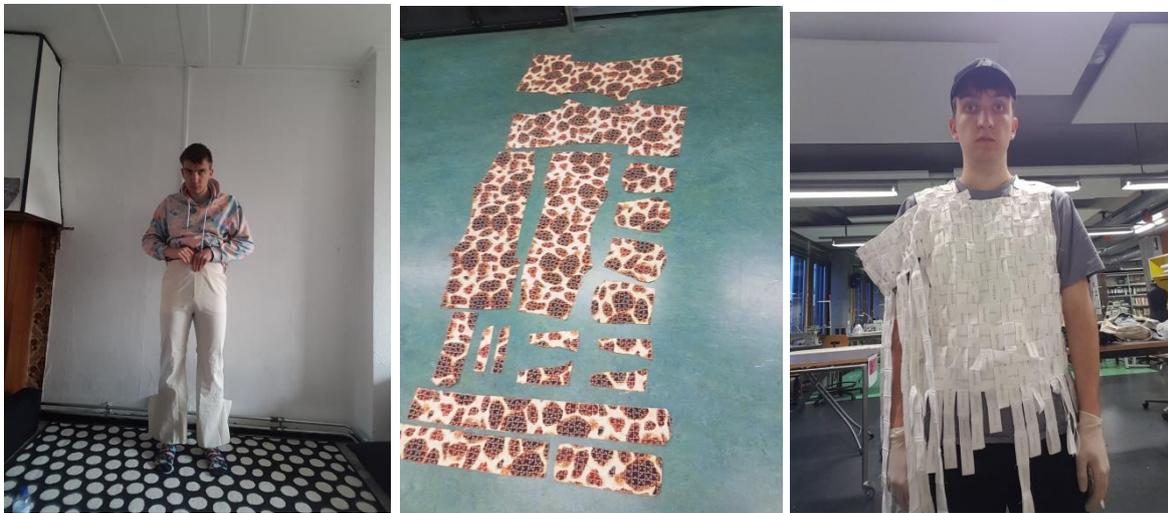


Figure 33 Creative process. LV pants, cut patterns of my pants and label vest.

LOOK 7



Figure 34 Look 7 Hybrid drawing



Figure 35 Styling experiments

The basis of this look was the tie-dye knitted tank top and shorts combination (Figure 35). These pieces are the only things I created, not having mouldaged beforehand. The tie dye directly references the 1992 Lithuania Basketball jerseys. Unfortunately, I could not buy them, so I made them myself.

Colour wise, this is the soberest look of the collection (Figure 13). One mainly sees only the white top and off-white pants contrasted with the colourful neck and pants' flair details. (Figure 34) One can barely see a tie-dyed, knitted tank top underneath the white patchwork top. This look tries to express the feeling of creating a new blank identity with which you hide your past. However, from the outside, it is noticeable that it is just a façade, not because you can see through the long sleeve but also because the inner identity is leaking through the neck hole and leg hole openings.



Figure 36 Creative process of the neckline.

5. Analysis

Confrontation with national identity is an ongoing thing in my life. I constantly have to think about how I introduce myself to new people. I am faced with the question, "do I say this or do I say that? Do I leave this out?". I realised that I might be introducing myself different to different people. Sometimes hiding my Lithuanian past in Belgium and sometimes hiding Belgian heritage in Lithuania or Netherlands.

I can conceptualise this selection of what I say as a library of performances. I adapt to the environment in a performative way—each time, I perform the part of my identity that is the most suited for the situation/environment. For example, I sometimes begin by introducing myself as Povi, sometimes as Povilas. When acquiring Belgian nationality, I decided to eliminate the accent on the 'č' in my last name. This change of characters in my last name is an excellent portrayal of the literal character change I undergo when I either perform as Gegevičius or as Gegevicus.

Branding is strongly related to national identity. Each person's name is a brand. Moreover, each brand can almost be seen as a person. When a brand is adjusting to new markets, it usually makes adjustments in its branding to fit that area's codes. Sometimes the brand adjusts so much to the market that it almost becomes unrecognisable to the original consumer (Figure 37). In (Figure 38) you see two logos in two different scripts. If not the specific corporate colour combination, it would be tough to say it is the logo of the same company. This transformation is very similar to how people adapt their national identities over time to fit into new environments.



Figure 37 McDonald's in different countries



Figure 38 Latin logos and their Arabic translations. Copyright of Burger King, FedEx (Pater, 2017).

The Translitterative Tease lecture is about the conversion of scripts (Slavs and Tatars, 2016) and the effect changing scripts can have on identity. Turkey changed its script three times in the last 70 years. Even if the language fundamentally did not change, it had to make certain adjustments to fit the script. For example, certain sounds changed or disappeared.

My identity is similar to this global behemoth or the Turkish language. It does not change or convert from one thing to another. Instead, the two identities form a collective global identity where one strengthens the other. One affects the other.

I do not think there is one answer to life or my national identity struggles. However, I am not necessarily searching for answers. I am just reconnecting with and exploring my origin roots. I want to deepen my understanding of Lithuania's culture, design, and art. I believe that I can never truly run away from Lithuanian origin. Even if I have not lived there for over 11 years now, I still feel a strong link to that country's language and culture. Small details such as my parents speaking Lithuanian in our household reinforced and kept that link alive.

Furthermore, simply by keeping my birth given name, I already choose to float in a specific narrative bubble of "Lithuanian decent". Hence in my further professional path, I will naturally be adding to the narrative of Lithuanian design. Having done this project, I have a greater understanding of the history of Lithuanian culture and believe I can more meaningfully add to what has already been done.

6. Epilogue

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8. Appendix

8.1 Summary of the interviews

Media outlets are usually a good source for archival data and footage. But at times it can give only a specific narrative or point of view. To avoid that I interviewed Lithuanians who were alive in 1990 in hopes to also receive the grounds on perspective.

I started by interviewing my father, Vaidotas Gegevcicius. He was born in 1969 in Lithuania, and by 1990 he was 21 years old. During the 1990s independence movement, he was in the middle of university studies. He started his studies in 1987, and after the first year, he had to serve in the USSR military. He served 14 months in Estonia. (Figure 39) He was released just before the iconic Baltic Way, where a human chain was made spanning 675.5 kilometres across the three Baltic countries. Coincidentally he travelled the whole distance of the Way on his own, days prior to the real thing. Vaidotas mentioned that when he returned after 14 months of being away, Lithuania was already making swift changes and was almost unrecognisable. The most significant difference was in the change of music and the start of the democratic election. In general, there was less Russian culture, and things were becoming more westernised.



Figure 39 Vaidotas in the military



Figure 40 Shortage of meat

However, just because it was getting better politically, it did not necessarily mean life was also improving. After the independence, Lithuania decided to cut most ties with the previous oppressor. The lack of pacts with Russia meant that many of Lithuania's supply chains were cut. There were shortages of petrol, sugar, soap and meat, among other products. (Figure 40) From this came a colloquial joke "Will you drink coffee with sugar? If so, then wash your hands without soap!".

A newly independent country's lack of treaties and chaos created a certain power vacuum, leading to gangs' creation and thriving. Racketeering was common and a known part of society.

When it comes to clothes, he mainly remembers the school uniforms, which were relatively hard to get in time. He also distinctly remembers one trip with his dad to a universal clothing store where Vaidotas convinced his dad that he would wear this net T-shirt. So they bought it, but my dad does not remember wearing it a lot. Vaidotas met my mother, Violeta, in 1992. Soon after they met, Violeta started to sew

clothes for Vaidotas. For it, she used various Burda magazines' patterns, which she kept a few to this day. I plan to use some of those same Burda patterns as a basis in the production state of my research/collection.

The second person whom I interviewed was Jurate Aleknaviciute. She is a family friend born in Šilute, Lithuania, in 1979. It is a rural part of the country. She does not remember having many clothes but three different outfits: a uniform for school, clothes for the fields and clothes for home. She mentioned that in the village, it was hard to acquire clothes that fit her right. Some sellers imported unisex clothes from Turkey, but they were always too baggy. So second-hand shops (Figure 41) were the only source of attractive garments which fit well.



Figure 41 "Cheap clothes from Belgium" shop logo

Between the ages of 13 and 18, she knitted a lot herself. She would buy various sweaters and either make slight customisation or take them apart and knit new sweaters from them. Blouses with wide sleeves from the elbow were one of Jurate's favourites. Even more difficult than buying the right size clothes was getting good shoes. The supply was not big, and she would wear them up fast.

After high school, she could not get into the university course she wanted, so for a year, Jurate went to Panevezys, where she worked in a sewing factory. She began with sewing labels to handkerchiefs and got paid in mother of pearl buttons. In Panevezys, during her driving lessons, she encountered gang culture for the first time. After the character-building year, she started studying in Vilnius. Jurate liked the gothic dress style but never really related to their feelings, making it difficult to fit in with them. With a couple of her friends during summers, she would hire a car with a driver and go to Holland to earn money. This opened her view, eventually leading to her pursuing further studies there. Even after acquiring a PhD degree, she still encounters stereotypical comments like "which floor do you mop?". Nevertheless, she does not mind them since she knows her worth.

The third person I interviewed was my grandmother Gražina Smirnova. She was born in 1948 in Lithuania. At an infant age, she was exiled to Siberia with her family. She stayed there till 1959. She returned to her everyday rural life in Vosiškiai and finished high school in Kaunas in 1965. Soon after, she met her future husband; a Russian soldier deployed in Lithuania. In 1971 Gražina moved to Russia to live with her husband. Between then and 1990, due to the Soviet occupation of Lithuania, it was never difficult for her to travel back to her parents. She does not remember having too much information about the Lithuanian independence movements while living in Russia. After 1990 you needed a visa to enter Lithuania. She recalled a funny story

about how she managed to quickly receive a visa by charming the guard of the embassy. However, these struggles did not last long since soon after she received double citizenship from Lithuania for her "exiled" status. (To this day, double citizenship is illegal in Lithuania. Exceptions are only made to very select people who comply with specific criteria). While talking about basketball, she mentioned that my mom Violeta used to have a poster of Arvydas Sabonis on her bedroom wall.

8.2 Synopsis of "The Other Dream Team" documentary

It's said that love for basketball is something every Lithuanian is born with. Basketball runs in Lithuania's blood as is nicknamed the "Second Religion". Basketball was the main cultural force of the 1990s Lithuania's freedom movement. During that time the national basketball team and "Kaunas Zalgiris" club unified the whole country and supporting them meant also supporting Lithuania's freedom. It wasn't just a shallow, brainless "sports" thing. It was a revolution and the athletes were key figures in the political fight against USSR. This cultural bond was so strong and inspiring that it even influenced the famous USA band The Grateful Dead and still inspires kids like me to this day.



Figure 42 Šarūnas Marčiulionis, Rimas Kurtinaitis, Arvydas Sabonis and Valdemaras Chomičius

The documentary shadows 4 Lithuanian basketball players telling everything that happening in their lives leading up to the 1992 summer Olympics in Barcelona. Šarūnas Marčiulionis, Rimas Kurtinaitis, Arvydas Sabonis and Valdemaras Chomičius (Figure 42) are the four Lithuanians who won gold for USSR in the 1988 Olympics in Seoul and bronze for Lithuania in 1992 Olympics. It's crazy to think that one-third of the USSR's team was made out of Lithuanians. The 5th person who the movie focused on was Jonas Valančiūnas. He is a current-generation player who was born in 1992 and at the time of filming was getting ready for the NBA draft.

The Documentary first talks about the occupation of Lithuania and the four older basketball players talk about what it was like growing up in that environment. They mention the deportation of people to Siberia which spoke to me since my grandmother was also deported. In an extreme comparison, you could maybe say that my parents deported me to Belgium. Of course, Belgium being the polar opposite of the hellish Siberia. Today I'm extremely thankful to my parents for their courage to pursue



Figure 43 drawings by deported children

better lives for themselves and for wanting to give me and my sister brighter futures. I'm grateful for their support and all the opportunities I was able to receive because of their previously endured struggles. But this comes with 11 years of hindsight, I'm sure those first days in Mol as an 11-year-old could have felt similar to what exiled children in Siberia were feeling. (Figure 43) The movie then further elaborates on the cultural differences between the USA and the Soviet Union.

Then it takes a more political turn and they talk about how the Lithuanian basketball club Kaunas Žalgiris would beat CSKA (*Central Sports Club of the Army*) in the national championship. CSKA being the central club in Moscow everybody knew it was more than just sports. Žalgiris gave hope to the people and was the initial spark in the basketball freedom movement.

With USSR withdrawing from the 1984 Olympics the four start were desperate to go to the 1988 Olympics since that seemed like the last chance to ever go to Olympics. With the Perestroika on its way, the basketball players were promised to get more freedom and the possibility to play in NBA if they performed well in the Seoul Olympics. They won gold and Marčiulionis and Sabonis were finally allowed to play in the NBA. Sabonis joined Portland Trail Blazers only in 1995 after initially being drafted already in 1986. Marčiulionis had more luck and joined Golden State Warriors in 1989 after being drafted in 1987. Both were heavily consulted by Garry Kasparov who opposed the Soviet regime. Because of his fame and status, the state couldn't do much to censor him. By this point, Lithuanians were very actively fighting for independence on and off the court with sweat, blood and literal lives. On January 13th of 1991 Soviets surrounded the TV tower with tanks to stop the Lithuanian radio and television broadcasts. (Figure 44)



Figure 44 January 13th events

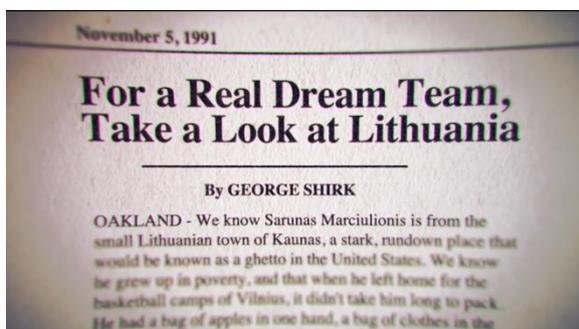


Figure 45 Newspaper article about Lithuania's basketball team



Figure 46 Marčiulionis meeting the Grateful Dead for the first time

Eventually, things calmed down and Lithuania received its independence and was able to participate in the 1992 summer Olympics under the Lithuanian flag. But Lithuania was in an extremely bad financial state and couldn't fund the trip. By that time Marčiulionis was playing in the NBA, so he started to organise various fundraising events in the Bay area. A journalist found his story appealing and decided to write about it in a newspaper. (Figure 45) This story spread and somehow reached the Grateful Dead members. Who decided to sponsor the Lithuanians basketball team since they related to their ethos so much. Besides the money the music band also sent these tie-dye shorts and T-shirts to Lithuania. These were the embodiment of free Lithuania. As a thank you gesture towards the Grateful Dead, the team wore these funky suits to the medal ceremony. (Figure 47)



Figure 47 1992 Olympics basketball medal ceremony

8.3 "Stilius" Analysis

The TV show "Stilius" (translated to Style) was created in the early days of independent Lithuania and is still running to this day. In the early days, it focused on fashion trends, industry and various Lithuanian artists. Now it's more of a lifestyle journal while still trying to keep a small touch of art in its narratives. Analysing the archival footage will help me better understand what was happening in the fashion scene in 1990s Lithuania.



Figure 48 The Coca Cola effect

I've watched and analysed 17 episodes of the "Stilius" TV show. I watched the first 3 episodes which are available on the LRT digital archive. It's the 1994/05/14, 1995/04/21 and the 1995/05/05 episodes. Then I followed this scheme and watched 2 random shows per year from 1995 till 2003 except for 2002. This accumulated to around 8 hours of video content.

It's a weird coincidence that the first available episode in the archive immediately talks about the phenomenon which inspired me to start this research. Violeta Baublienė opens the 1994 episode in a cafe in Riga and talks about how the Coca Cola effect (Figure 48) is also coming to Lithuania. Coca Cola effect being the fast westernisation of everything. This is so since Lithuania is trying to develop in any direction as fast as possible. It's trying to scramble out of the relics of the past. Then there was a report about how French filmmakers are fighting the fact that Hollywood movies are taking over French cinemas followed by a summary of current fashion trends and student fashion shows from London and Riga (Figure 49). The episode ended with a peculiar Kevlar vest and car commercials (Figure 50).



Figure 49 Student fashion show



Figure 50 Kevlar vest commercial for general public

I noticed that most of the episodes follow this 3-part structure. Where one part consists of an interview with an artist, doctor or some other professional related to



Figure 51 Snieguolė Michelkevičiūtė

Lithuanian fashion, art or lifestyle scene. Second part consisting of an investigative reportage or a summary of a Lithuanian fashion event. While the last part, usually being coverage of a fashion event by a foreign journalist. I assume these last segments were bought and not produced by LRT.

People like model Svetlana Griaznova, cook Daniel Common, artists Marius Kavaliauskas, artist Albertas Krajinskas, Publisher Eva Tombak, fashion designer Martynas Sirius, dance teacher Juan Eduardo Gimenez, photographer Snieguolė Michelkevičiūtė (Figure 51), boss of the national hygiene inspection centre Zenonas Stanevicius and plastic surgeon Ruta Rageliene were interviewed as extended profiles.

Second parts consisted of an informative/promotional segment about various fashion shows, fairs or events in Lithuania. Shows such as "the Big Fashion Week", "Golden Dunes '99" were covered as well as fairs such as "Baltic textile and leather fair" (Figure 52) and "Pelene'97- international make-up, perfume and hairdressing equipment fair". The international hairdressing championship was also covered at least two years in a row. If there isn't an event to cover the host usually does an explorative commentary on a social phenomenon. It can be anything from less serious things such as what people do or wear in rural parts of the country or the publication of the first Lithuanian fashion editorial and what impact this might have. To way more serious topics such as rape culture and the destruction of Lithuanian clothing industry due to the popularity of second-hand shops.



Figure 5239 Baltic textile and leather fair

Some part of the show generally has some generic bought content from Paris, New York or Milan. Dolce and Gabbana, Sonya Rykiel, Mark Jacobs and Dries van Noten were a few among many names who were included in the summaries of what is happening around the world.