The man’s suit, as it is generally thought of today, carries with it an unsolved conflict. On one hand, it has become an iconographical structure; it is one of the reference points for men’s fashion in general – on the other hand, the shift from normative dress to personal dress in society in general has made the suit an exception in menswear, a choice of dress that places the wearer in an alternative position vis-à-vis most men.

This shift is especially interesting to contemplate in relation to the English bespoke suit. In its normative appearance, this model of a suit represents the idea of dressing as to provoke as little emotion as possible – dressing to fit in with one’s peers. In its promotion, ideals of dignity, reliability, professionalism come to mind. Broadly speaking, a deconstruction also of these values has taken place. It is harder to define professionalism today than 50 years ago – and wearing a suit is certainly not all one has to do in order to become a professional, if this was ever the case.

However, when acceptance among one’s peers is more about the capacity for successful navigation among cultural symbols, than ability to convey acceptance of an iconography, mastery of fashion becomes an attractive trait. The shift towards this has placed the bespoke suit in unfamiliar territory, it is no longer part of a static uniform. Rather it is fashion like all other fashion. Or is it? Can the bespoke suit be thought of as a radical critique of fashion? An alternative route for those fed up with normative nihilism?
Below follows a description of one of the projects in my forthcoming Ph.D. dissertation, a bespoke suit devised to embody a critique of the contemporary suit’s structure and appearance. I argue that the conventional suit, both in ready-made and bespoke versions, is ill-suited for introducing poetic beauty in the often speculative realm of fashion, in which eternal teenager-ism, and tiresome fake-rebellion prevail.

One of the traits of conventional tailoring is the modelling of the garments onto the wearer’s body, using darts, interlinings, padding and other methods of manipulating the shape of the garment. Ultimately, this is an exercise in dressing the wearer’s body in a flattering way – adhering to a given, and general, set of aesthetic principles. Sloping shoulders are to be straightened out with padding, a flat chest is to be padded.

The bespoke suit presented here is an investigation in another attitude towards the construction of the suit. By reducing the number of materials in the construction, the emphasis is placed on draping the fabric, rather than moulding its shape. This, in itself, is nothing new. The firm responsible for this suit’s production is Anderson & Sheppard on Old Burlington Street in London, who are well known for favouring a drape cut over a more constructed look. However, with this suit, the assignment was to 1) “drape to the max”, 2) to do so in a fabric that is open in its structure, and 3) to carry this out in a three-piece model that can become a system of garments, rather than be perceived as only one garment.

The last part of this brief to Anderson & Sheppard is interesting in its own right. As the coat is the only one garment of a three-piece suit that normally takes interlinings and padding, questions on to relate and un-lined, un-padded garment to the other parts were raised. Would the coat simply look like a shirt in relation to the trousers? Would the waistcoat appear like a coat?

These questions resulted in an exercise in cutting and draping – i.e. precisely the points where bespoke tailoring differs from mass-production, where cutting is done by “blocks” and draping cannot be introduced (as the client is an anonymous figure.)

The process of tailoring, in this case, can be compared to cooking – it is a trying, thinking, exploring process in which the material is absolutely central. Thinking design, just as cooking, brings gestalt to the theory, and also leaves track of the process in the gestalt. The aim, thus, cannot be perfection, but a type of good-ness that exists on the palate. The proof, so to speak, is in the pudding.
This is a normative thought – it indicates that good-ness ought to occur through a process done, in some way, right. But this is also an accessible thought, as it indicates a direction towards balance in design. This balance does not exist in ready-made suits; as the aspect of drape does not exist, the design becomes representative of a fictio-
nalised character built on an advanced game of expecta-
tions, conveyed through sophisticated (sort of) marketing. 
The material becomes a carrier of message that stems from somewhere else than from the material itself. This is where the Freudian itch comes from; the realisation for the wearer that the fabric does not contain anything, as the memories of advertisements fades away, replaced by a reality that cannot become anything but stark. “No garment has ever lived up to its expectations”, Oscar Wilde supposedly claimed.

In my dream state, reality suddenly enters in the form of the dreaming of live. I want to walk these streets with You. Within this thought, all demonstrative prerequisites give way. My suit, formerly my amour, crumbles, and I want it to. I want to tear it apart.

The suit presented here is called “A Walk in the Park”. It is meant to envision a tearing apart and a putting together – a nostalgic reconstruction. This reconstruc-
tion is communicated through stitches, which are to be obvious and loved, through the carrying out of craft, not the blind perfection of it. In order for the material to complement this thought, the suit is made out of a simple cotton fabric in khaki colour. “A Walk in the Park” is not a suit to wrap around one-
self, it is rather an open system that does not place any demands on the wearer as to how it is to be used. Its reconstructive ideal lets it become fully usable; any part of it can be worn as a single garment, and it can be combined with other garments. A few wrinkles, even holes and tears, will only add character. Strolls through Positano or Cairo are not unthinkable.