My subject is the “queering” of masculinity in post-Soviet fashion. Russia’s President Putin has made heroic, heteronormative masculinity a central pillar, both of his own popularity and of Russian national identity. At the same time, many Russian fashion photographers and designers engage in a critical practice that radically challenges such masculinity.

As I have argued elsewhere, brands such as Gosha Rubchinskiy (Comme des Garçons) are as ideologically charged as any other. At the same time, the images many post-Soviet designers put into circulation can be viewed as aesthetic objects in their own right. As such, they inevitably emerge from within a particular artistic-historical tradition. I suggest that the work of Rubchinskiy, Demna Gvasalia (Vetements, Balenciaga), and the stylist Lotta Volkova in particular looks back to the Constructivist project of designers of the Soviet 1920s. At the heart of their respective projects is a fundamental challenge to conventional notions of gender in fashion, and the fashion industry. In both cases, the “queering” of gender norms, distinctions and hierarchies, both on and off the catwalk, is designed to produce a radical transformation of the relationship between the fashioned object and the fashionable, consuming subject. Far from being the antithesis of the Constructivist project, then, this post-socialist utopian body can be seen as constituting perhaps that project’s most spectacular realisation to date.

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