

Marlie Mul

*Sperms Going to a Fashion Show*

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Aristotle hypothesised that when we conceive, the semen possesses the spirit – the characteristics, the future personality – of the child, and the egg provides only gooey matter to be firmed and shaped. One opposing line of belief in outdated embryology is that within the sperm's head there lies a tiny person ready, waiting to grow inside the womb.

We now know, thanks to the help of modern science, that both the egg and the sperm will be of equal influence on the characteristics of children. Typically the sperm will carry 23 chromosomes which form 50% of these genetic traits, and the egg will usually contribute the other 23.

In the case of Marlie Mul's sperms, their humanity is established on top of, rather than within, the 'body'. Identity is performed through a hairstyle, personality constructed by way of placement. The hair, the 'look' is, bit by bit, assembled as each filament is pricked into the sculpture's milky flesh. The emergence of these anthropomorphised sperms comes from styling – a word we now use most frequently to explain how we put together an outfit but is really just a term for designing something.

We are no longer looking under a microscope at wriggling opaline tadpoles, we are walking around these sperms because they are enlarged and motionless, suspended. The sperm is poised, meaning it is in fact indicating some potential representation of movement, for a sperm will die when it dries up and stops swimming, but this movement has been stopped for us, just for a moment, so that we can observe who these sperms have, or might eventually, become.

We take this form representing a sperm, this milky, silicone being, and it transforms. In these sperms we do not witness the multitude of possible futures which one might hold, but a linear process of becoming someone in particular, character bestowed by way of coiffed hair. Identity shaped by the choices of an individual, rather than destiny. They are full of life – a life lived etc. – but also lifeless, formed of plastic and laboured over.

An object, not a person. Something, not someone.

We talk to each other about appearance and identity and we realise together that style is about comfort and has nothing, really, to do with fashion (this is why so many rich people with expensive clothes look so terrible). "You look like you" I tell you, in your blue jeans and black hoodie. You don't think you're stylish, but I do because despite all the other things you could have worn you chose to wear that and you look better in this because you look so content. The way your body moves when you've had a haircut, or, calm when the shoulder sits just there on the bone.

- Eilidh Nuala Duffy

