

Retail Androgyny

By Esmerelda Flanaghandi

I like to be seduced as much as anybody. And its that time of month again. The seductive little brochures from Truworths and American Swiss. I can resist anything except temptation. And I love advertising.

I trust advertising. You know, it's the only part of the media where the agenda is obvious. I love the way the context around the product is carefully chosen to be acceptable to as many potential customers as possible. Well no, ja, maybe, yes, you're right. It's not "The Truth". There is usually a product, there is usually a stereotype.

Now we do spend a lot of time fighting stereotypes, but they can't all be bad. Can they? Imagine that possibly somewhere, someone is using a chainsaw without the mandatory check shirt. Maybe wearing electric blue satin? No you're laughing at me now. If the idea of someone in electric blue satin using a chainsaw is not enough to dispel chainsaw stereotypes in your mind, how about this? Chainsa Art! Yes, out there in the depths of the Internet, sensitive people do Chainsaw Art in the form of ice and wood carving. Then there is the artistic influence of the chainsaw on American cinema. But maybe that's getting back to stereotypes again.

Ha! You're thinking I'm a rich bitch. Yes? No-o! Just because I go shopping doesn't necessarily mean I spend money. Eye-shopping is just as much fun as the real thing. So the little seductive brochures just prompt me to go look. Yes? OK, ja, well no let's start with a bit about me. I still work as a male.

But when I talk about shopping, I am talking InWear, Red Square, and Stutties. Long ago it used to be that I just went and bought nervously, and hastily and wasted a lot of money. Then I grew up a bit and relaxed. No one cares, actually. That was the one side of it. Then I changed, and my outside became a little more like my inside. [It's surprisingly easy to develop boobs. And fun too!] And my face changed a little. But most of all, Esmeralda did more of the driving, and the Old Me took a back seat more often. Especially when shopping. But what with summer, bad company, and the store card, not only have I been doing more shopping, but also I have been thinking more about how I shop. Or maybe thinking more about who I am when I shop? Scary huh?

I went shopping for a chainsaw recently. Ja, ja cackle like a jackal, another stereotype. My beloved wife and I shop together, not as often as we would like. Let's call her Gardenia. Gardenia is amused and horrified by my sudden conversion to shopping. I want a card for Milady's and DonnaClaire just as soon as they have a good sign-up offer! I am already addicted to stretch denim. And there is a dear little silver jeweler in Bedford centre. But, Alas! Life goes on, teenage children's endless consumption of cellphones; major services for the cars; a new pool pump.

Last weekend it was fun to go shopping again, just the two of us. We dropped my charm bracelet to get the new charms welded on, we trawled Truworths shoes, and had breakfast at Stutties. Lovely. Two girls out shopping, chatting, feasting, shopping.

Even though I was in drab; after all, it's what's inside that counts, yes? Having quite a few EBucks, we thought to via Makro, maybe find a ladder so that Cyprian can clean the gutters. I wasn't feeling too nervous; Makro is fun, their professional kitchen and entertaining section is divine! Unfortunately, since Gardenia took up professional horticulture as a course of study, she has become very interested in the gardening equipment section. I was led gently by the hand. Suddenly I had a panic attack. I was losing my grip. I was suffocating. Yes, the Old Me had taken over.

So she buys a chainsaw. She is fully herself buying a chainsaw. But when she asked my advice, I had real problems. It's hard to explain, it was as if I switched violently to, well let's give Old Me a name, how about Rocky? I switch into Rocky mode. It's eerie, as if Esmeralda got lost in the car park, and I am looking around for her, and see Rocky, but it's a mirror in the décor section of Makro. And I sound like Rocky, and Gardenia lets me carry the chainsaw. Ouch! I feel like a stereotype, when all I had been trying to do was walk a middle path.

Strangely, Gardenia doesn't experience anything like this. To Gardenia, gender is binary, and a chainsaw is just a differently configured lawnmower. As a farmer's daughter, she always knew she was perfectly capable of supervising the labourers. As a farmer's daughter, she has always resented the fact that she never had a chance to put these abilities into practice. Her parents persuaded her that she would rather be a lawyer. Nice job for a lady. Either the times have changed, or she has, so she can now cast aside those old stereotypes.

So, boys and girls. The grave perils of androgyny. Am I becoming schizophrenic? Do I switch backwards and forwards between genders depending on the situation? Or is it that the world has become more ambiguous? Since I got my Truworths card, things have gotten even interestinger. Did you notice that Truworths, Truworths Man and Daniel Hechter usually share a chunk of space at the mall, and are interlinked? So I can use the boy changing rooms or the girl changing

rooms whatever way I'm dressed. And if I happen to spot a dear little top on the way home from wek, I can just take it into the changing rooms and try it on, and if I'm not sure, I just put the size 14, 16 and, yes doll, the 18 all on the card and return what doesnt fit the next day. No one gives a damn, Scarlett!