

# Momentaufnahmen

Building a feminist method of contemporary fashion analysis through the  
translation of Helen Grund's texts

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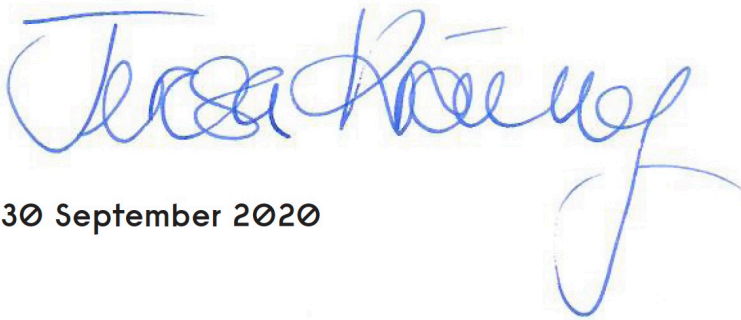
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A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Tessa Rowley', is written in a cursive style.

**Date: 30 September 2020**

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## Abstract

This research centralises the texts produced by the German writer and fashion journalist Helen Grund, aiming to show how their translation can build a feminist method of contemporary fashion analysis.

It is guided by three research questions asking why a voice such as hers has remained barely visible within fashion studies and related discourses, how a critical analysis of diaristic texts authored by women can become a feminist tool within fashion studies, and finally, what this tool could potentially offer for an analysis of overlooked or diminished voices within contemporary fashion.

This is a cross-historical, qualitative study which places Grund and her writing at its core, building a methodology through my reading and feminist translation of her diaristic texts from German into English. Focusing on her diary allows for an autoethnographic analysis of her fashion writing, which is then applied to my approach to, and transcription and analysis of five interviews conducted with contemporary fashion practitioners over the course of one year.

This study reveals the importance of highlighting those who have previously only existed on the margins of fashion studies and related discourses. Placing more value onto the diary as a primary research text brings a voice like Grund to the forefront. By engaging in the contemporary with and through her, this research finds that personal connections matter, and that a reflexive emphasis on personal bias and experiences can unfold a thickness in feminist research that fills previously empty or undervalued spaces.

This thesis makes Grund's texts available for an English speaking audience and opens up opportunity to further engage with them either as historical texts, or as tools within contemporary fashion spaces. It adds to an existing movement in fashion studies which calls for more interdisciplinary and intersectional research in order to make fashion discourse more inclusive and more reflective of those who engage with it. It demonstrates the value of focusing on individuals and the stories they tell, and how

leaning into personal bias can become an advantage when engaging with sources in a meaningful way.

## Momentaufnahme

*noun*

[ feminine ] /mo'mɛnt|aufna:mə/

genitive , singular **Momentaufnahme** | nominative , plural **Momentaufnahmen**

figurative

**Darstellung einer Situation zu einem bestimmten Zeitpunkt**

snapshot

*Der Film stellt eine Momentaufnahme der politischen Lage dar.*

The movie portrays a snapshot of the political situation.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Momentaufnahme". *Dictionary.Cambridge.Org*, 2021, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/de/worterbuch/deutsch-englisch/momentaufnahme?q=Momentaufnahmen>. Accessed 30 Aug 2021.

## Introduction

Feminist sociologist Shulamit Reinharz states that

one shared radical tenet underlying feminist research is that women's lives are important. Feminist researchers do not cynically 'put' women into their scholarship so as to avoid appearing sexist. Rather, for feminist researchers females are worth examining as individuals and as people whose experience is interwoven with other women. In other words, feminists are interested in women as individuals and as a social category.<sup>2</sup>

*This perspective forms the very basis of my research approach, as well as its content – through the act of translating Helen Grund's work our experiences became interwoven in the way Reinharz claims is central to a feminist research philosophy.*

In *Men Explain Things to Me*, the writer and cultural historian Rebecca Solnit writes that history has a habit of erasing women, and making some disappear almost entirely. Women throughout history as well as the contemporary know about forces that have attempted to silence them and continue to do so. Refusing to disappear, refusing to be silent, according to Solnit, is a triumph in and of itself.<sup>3</sup> While Reinharz words encompass the foundation on which my research stands, Solnit's represent its core. While I do not think it should be me who claims victory or who characterises this as a revolt, I want to take the first few sentences of this text to emphasise that this is a story. It starts at a moment that was so impactful that it changed the entirety of my research and revealed a new way of approaching fashion and its study.

It is this exact notion of remembered moments that stand out during day-to-day experiences and conversations that gives this thesis its title – *Momentaufnahmen*: a German term, with no precise translation, that describes the capturing of an exact moment. It implies the capturing of an intimate memory, something one might commemorate in a diary, and is a theme that is present throughout the thesis, first

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<sup>2</sup> Shulamit Reinharz, *Feminist Methods in Social Research*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 241

<sup>3</sup> Rebecca Solnit, *Men Explain Things To Me*. (London: Granata, 2014), p. 78

emerging from the pages of Helen Grund's diary, then manifesting in its analysis and through the development of my methodology. Finally, it rounds off this research in its application to the interviews and their transcriptions, as well as the understanding of the resulting findings.

Helen Grund was a German fashion journalist and writer of the Weimar Republic. And, like the women Solnit writes about, she has been erased little by little, to diminish her impact on, or exclude her from altogether, the stories that she shaped and influenced without granting her due credit. The aim of my research, and this thesis specifically, is to create a space for Grund's writing in order to facilitate a feminist approach to knowledge creation in fashion and a way to approach the analysis of contemporary fashion practice through her. My aim in doing this is to draw on her approach to understand this contemporary moment and the practitioners who inhabit it. I hope that through my translation of Grund's texts, and an analysis of them, it will be possible to foreground voices that are less heard and revisit and re-evaluate historical texts in order to view fashion discourse from a different perspective than may have been possible at the time.

The overarching objectives of this research are to highlight the lesser-known, and even entirely unavailable, texts<sup>4</sup> written by Grund, and to apply my method of analysis derived from Grund's work to contemporary fashion discourse. The main methods used to achieve these objectives are a close reading of Grund's text in the original German, followed by my translation and analysis of these texts, as well as a series of interviews with contemporary practitioners and designers. Through this alignment, I am proposing a bridge across this chronological gap, engaging in a cross-historical study that will infuse the present with the past in order to identify strategies for future research in the field of fashion and possibly beyond.

Supporting these methods, and interrogating the premise of cross-historical research, is a critical review of relevant existing literature in order to contextualise the environment Grund lived and created in, as well as to understand my own position as a fashion researcher conducting this particular study. This review will begin by focusing on texts

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<sup>4</sup> Only a fraction of her writing has been translated from German into French and English, with most of her personal and professional texts only available to German speakers.

that have utilised historical documents to interrogate the present, as well as those that have turned a contemporary lens on the past.

I will present the overarching aims of my research and define the terms and scope that I have established. It will provide the parameters of my research, but also outline the terms it contains and the boundaries I have placed in order to effectively address the focus of my inquiry. I follow these limitations by detailing the background of the research, as well as why it is justified and vital to conduct it, before addressing my objectives and the methodology that has been created in more detail.

I will conclude this chapter by providing a summary of the most important findings and conclusions that can be drawn from these projects, and offering a guide to the structure of this thesis.

### Research Questions & Aims

Grund's texts reveal an alternative way to understand and analyse fashion – by engaging with very personal *Momentaufnahmen* – snapshot moments. My thesis draws on her diaristic texts in order to form an analytical approach which emphasises lesser heard voices. I argue that this acts as a feminist method which strengthens the reader's connection and empathy, in opposition to the more conventional approaches centred on the white male view that are typical in patriarchal society.

My research draws out an autoethnographic engagement with fashion by deliberately focusing on the private and personal, emphasising existing biases and interrogating the potential that lies within them.

The approach that I develop through Grund differs from existing ones, such as those made prominent via the social sciences, because it allows us to view fashion through an autoethnographic and deeply personal lens. Rather than looking at fashion as worn objects, or placing it within the wider conventions of cultural research, the reading and translation of Grund's writing, and an application of the subsequent findings within a contemporary context, suggests the framing of a contemporary fashion analysis through the individual. This stresses the importance of situational and immersive experiences outside of a dominant canon, and arguably enables intersectional and interdisciplinary discussions.



Consequently, the three research questions that guide this thesis, and that support the unfolding of this feminist, discursive approach, are:

1. Why has a voice such as Helen Grund's remained invisible, or barely visible, within fashion studies and related discourses?
2. How can a critical analysis of diaristic texts authored by women become a feminist tool within fashion studies?
3. What could this tool potentially offer for an analysis of the voices within contemporary fashion who continue to be overlooked or diminished?

The first question speaks to a wider narrative that still persists in many areas of scholarship and research, in which female, trans, non-binary or otherwise gender non-conforming voices are either underrepresented or not present at all, and that arose for the first time during a conversation about Walter Benjamin I had with Ulrich Lehmann, from Parsons School of Design (The New School), who referenced Grund in relation to Benjamin. It prompted a brief discussion about why I hadn't heard of Grund (despite the lack of a language barrier).<sup>5</sup> This discussion is touched on in my literature review and the first part of the chapter dedicated to Grund, but was expanded to more thoroughly engage with the landscape of historical, contemporary and cross-historical fashion discourse respectively.

The second question arose when I engaged with the body of work produced by Helen Grund, and seeks to develop a cross-historical approach to an engagement with contemporary practitioners and designers, specifically their voices and experiences. It aims to unlock the relevance of Grund's writing, taking into consideration her professional fashion writing. But it also speaks to the potential of private texts that are often disregarded or undervalued in critical analysis to give a more holistic understanding of how Grund may have been able to create her own knowledge, and the development of her own deeply personal approach to fashion. This question is interrogated in the third and fourth chapter of this thesis, and forms the core of my research and the basis of my methodology.

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<sup>5</sup> Ulrich Lehmann, Interview by Teresa Kroenung, 2019

The third and final question seeks to open up a discussion about why research like this may be undertaken not through the lens of a historical study, but as a contemporary project. Why is Grund relevant now? And what is the usefulness of her texts and anything that can be drawn from them today, almost a hundred years after they were initially written? I have applied her way of interviewing and writing with five interviews conducted over the course of this research. In the final chapter of this thesis, I present the findings from these interviews via a method generated through the reading and translating of Grund's diary. It exemplifies a feminist, autoethnographic and individual path to reframing critical analysis in fashion studies in a way that reveals underrepresented or invisible voices and experiences.

This feminist approach, facilitated and guided by my translation of Grund's work, suggests that fashion and its analysis should be approached in an immersive way, emphasising the personal and leaning into these momentary connections that are facilitated in private spaces.

### Positionality

At the heart of this study is Helen Grund. This research aims to introduce her and her writing to a new audience who may not have had access to her texts before, mainly because of the language barrier. It seeks to explore her writing through my translation, to show her own voice, rather than assuming that I am able or equipped to speak for her, and suggests ways to achieve an empathetic, personal, and feminist approach to the translation and analysis of diaristic texts such as hers. Most of all, I hope to show how much we can learn about the contemporary moment and the fashion that is created in it if we understand how Grund approached fashion and created knowledge accordingly, and that she is relevant not only because of her influence on Walter Benjamin. I want to acknowledge that there are people who came before us who may be hidden in history, but who can allow us to move forward with it.

On that note, I want to set out the following limitations of this research and define the terms that will be used throughout this thesis.

I am a white, queer, cisgender woman who was born in Germany; I spent the majority of my adult life living in London and Berlin, and my understanding of the socio-cultural

and economic reality is based on my own background and experiences. While I speak four languages and have travelled to five continents, my epistemological and ontological positions are influenced by so-called Western society and philosophy. Therefore, when I say 'society' in this thesis, I mean modern Western society as I have experienced it, in Central and Western Europe and North America. I am aware that my standpoint is not universal, and I do not intend to present it as such. This research is thus limited by my own background and knowledge, which coincidentally intersects with Grund's own background in ways that, as I argue in the following section, lends a unique potency to the engagement with her texts.

While I acknowledge that these circumstances contribute to inherent beliefs and biases that may impact my work and the approach I take to it, setting certain limitations, I also want to emphasise that they are precisely what made this study possible. With this research I want to return to the personal, and argue that it is essential not only to recognise bias, but also to reflect on the ways it may be harnessed, and unleash new potential research paths. Bolton and Delderfield classify such reflections as difficult, and describe in their text on reflective practice and writing that such reflexive exercises are often a means to unlock personal beliefs that one may consider to be universally held.<sup>6</sup> On the one hand this results, as stated above, in the understanding of one's own bias and the way it may, unless adequately addressed, negatively impact one's research endeavour. On the other hand, recognising one's unique position, viewpoints and biases may also, as I argue in this thesis, be key in developing unique research projects and unlocking material that is only available because of the amalgamation of certain beliefs and biases against a very specific backdrop.

My introduction to Helen Grund occurred because of very specific choices I made and a conversation with Ulrich Lehmann, which was made easier because of our mutual German heritage as well as having spent time at the University for the Creative Arts in Rochester, me as an undergraduate student and he as a lecturer. Lehmann, an expert on Walter Benjamin, had become aware of Grund through Benjamin's texts, but his focus remained on the Jewish-German writer rather than his female contemporary. My own focus, initially also placed on Benjamin, immediately shifted onto Grund. It was my German heritage that made it possible for me to read Helen Grund's writing, but it was

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<sup>6</sup> Gillie Bolton and Russell Delderfield, *Reflective Practice: Writing and Professional Development*. (London: Sage Publications, 2018)

my own position as a young, queer German women that, following Lehmann's introduction to Grund as a prolific writer who had eventually left her husband to live with a women that made me understand the context of its creation. This speaks to our connected, but also disconnected ancestries and while we are beginning to see the world opening up to its global connectivity and the links between past, present and future voices through increasingly intersectional lenses, it also signals that there is still much to explore and learn in these areas. While this particular research project only marks one route for investigation, this could further be addressed through additional interviews with Lehman and conferences expanding on ancestral voices and continuities.

Similarly important, my education at British fashion universities, and my original training as a fashion designer, contributed to my ability to translate these texts, and a combination of all these facts enabled me to propose an application within a contemporary fashion discourse. It was my place at the Royal College of Art which enabled my first encounters with Bianca Saunders, Yvonne Lim, and Sissel Karneskøg. And it is this shared background, as trained designers as well as Royal College students, that made the interviews with them possible, and the conversations richer.

So while I recognise and understand my biases and the shortcomings that result from these, I want to underline that without them I would simply not have been able to produce this doctoral thesis in the field of fashion. I was only able to read Grund in her original early twentieth-century German and translate her writing into contemporary English, ultimately using my personal analysis of her texts, because of the alignment of our backgrounds.

Fashion, as it is referred to in this thesis, draws its definition from a Westernised frame of reference, which focuses on the fashion system that unites the institutions and organisations who create the fashion 'belief' by producing culture. It separates clothing and fashion, because they are viewed as conceptually different and should be studied as such.<sup>7</sup>

The concept of fashion studies and its various approaches and methods of analysis will be more thoroughly discussed in the literature review in the next chapter, but for now it

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<sup>7</sup> Yuniya Kawamura, *Fashion-ology: An Introduction to Fashion Studies* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), pp. 1-4

is important to stress that fashion describes more than just items of clothing. It is a perpetually changing and shifting structure that produces items of clothing, but also language, ways of speaking, cultural beliefs that are tied to these items of clothing, and the performance that accompanies the wearing of them.<sup>8</sup>

The concept of gender, as well as its origins, implications and consequences, are discussed in my literature review only as they pertain to this research. Throughout this thesis, I spell out the existing gender identities as female, trans, non-binary and otherwise gender non-conforming in order to ensure that I do not misgender those who are not cisgender women or do not identify with any gender identity, but who still face the same or similar oppression in a patriarchal system that places primarily white cisgender men in positions of power. At the same time, as many of the texts discussed in this thesis focus on or refer to *women*, I also use this term throughout the thesis. I want to stress that by doing so I mean not only cisgender women, and that after careful consideration I have decided not to make use of the term *womxn* or *womyn* in order to avoid the trans-exclusionary rhetoric that trans women are not real women.

Similarly, while conventional gender binarism is present and functions as the default in Grund's writing and my subsequent translation and analysis of her writing, this is in no way meant to imply that trans, non-binary or otherwise gender non-conforming people did not exist in her time.<sup>9</sup>

To provide more context for this research and the moment in time in which it sits, the following section will provide background information on recent and current events that have shaped our socio-cultural and economic reality, with a focus on the development of fashion and the study of it. It will be followed by a brief discussion of why this study and its subject matter is relevant, and why it is appropriate to focus on this specific area.

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<sup>8</sup> Kawamura, 2005

<sup>9</sup> While her knowledge of, or position on, gender binarism and heteronormativity cannot be concluded or inferred from the public or personal texts written by Grund that I had access to, she may very well have been familiar with the concept of gender diversity (and certainly aware of non-heterosexuality as a person arguably deeply involved in Weimar-era Berlin's cultural circles, where queer subculture was very much present, subtly and overtly). In 1919, Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld opened the *Institut für Sexualwissenschaft* [Institute of Sexual Research] in Berlin. While unsuccessful in his aim to decriminalise homosexuality and normalise gender diversity, Dr. Hirschfeld actively engaged the media, co-wrote the first film featuring a homosexual love story, and continued to publish and promote the advancement of public awareness and education on gender and sexuality. The *Institut* even rented out rooms to notable writers such as Christopher Isherwood and Walter Benjamin, thus drawing a possible connection to Grund through her friendship with Benjamin.

## Background and rationale of the research

It has been roughly a century since most European countries, as well as North America, initially gave women<sup>10</sup> the right to vote. While there has arguably been much progress since then, most of these equal rights achievements, like the right to vote, were not easy outcomes but hard-won victories. Socio-economic and cultural progress is often met by a backlash, instigated by those who fear the loss of their power, arguably resulting in a society that is highly polarised, perched between twenty-first century feminism and LGBTQIA+ rights and a far-right movement whose imagery and rhetoric is reminiscent of early twentieth-century fascism.<sup>11</sup>

As many industries have begun to implement initiatives that enable a shift away from past practices and towards a more intersectional and inclusive approach, it appears that fashion – despite its image – arguably continues to struggle in regard to socio-economic gender inequality and the perpetuation of a cultural and visual narrative that still portrays women in a way that contextualises them in, and appeals to, the male gaze. A more comprehensive inclusion of practitioners from diverse backgrounds and gender identities still struggles with capitalist-driven pink- and rainbow-washing.<sup>12</sup>

There is a common counter-argument that points to emerging designers, to fashion's increasing support of racial and gender diversity and its more mindful discussions about cultural appropriation. After all, models wearing Simone de Beauvoir quotes on the Chanel Spring 2015 runway and the then newly-appointed (and first female) creative director for Christian Dior, Maria Grazia Chiuri, presenting a T-shirt with the slogan 'We should all be feminists', referencing Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's acclaimed book,<sup>13</sup> should indicate that the fashion industry has embraced the progressive feminist agenda of the twenty-first century. Moreover, the critical and commercial success of

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<sup>10</sup> It is important to note that suffrage was not granted to all women right away, but that it was initially given to white women of a certain class, before slowly being expanded, only through continuous civil rights movements.

<sup>11</sup> Daniele Caramani and Luca Manucci, 'National Past and Populism: the Re-elaboration of Fascism and its Impact on Right-wing Populism in Western Europe', *West European Politics*, 42:6 (2019), 1159-1187, DOI: [10.1080/01402382.2019.1596690](https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2019.1596690). Accessed 29 Oct 2021.

<sup>12</sup> Kate Hardcastle, 'Proud Of Pride Or Rainbow-Washing: How Do Retailers Step Up To The Mark?'. *Forbes*, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/katehardcastle/2021/06/22/proud-of-pride-or-rainbow-washinghow-do-retailers-step-up-to-the-mark/?sh=31b08ddb3b32>. Accessed 31 Aug 2021.

<sup>13</sup> Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *We Should All Be Feminists* (London: Fourth Estate, 2014)

designers such as Molly Goddard, Grace Wales Bonner and Marine Serre arguably counteracts the hypothesis that fashion remains – as argued by feminist writers such as Sheila Jeffreys in the past<sup>14</sup> – an environment that is arguably contentious for women and that continues to frame them and their bodies in a largely sexual context.<sup>15</sup>

However, the first interview I conducted with Michelle Finamore, at the time curator for Fashion Arts at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, supports the arguments of feminist activists and counteracts the notion often put forward in mainstream media that the presence and prominence of emerging female designers such as Goddard and Serre means that gender inequality in fashion has ended. When I enquired about the process of selecting contemporary designers to be featured in her forthcoming exhibition *Gender-Bending Fashion*, opening in March 2019 (Fig. 1), Finamore recalled a startling moment that represented a turning point for her:

I haven't even thought about if there are women designers in here. There are plenty of queer or non-binary designers, people of colour, but not women. And so what is the story there, and why aren't women actually designing more unisex attire? So I consciously looked for that, and still had a hard time finding it.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Sheila Jeffreys, *Beauty and Misogyny: Harmful Cultural Practices in the West* (London: Routledge, 2005)

<sup>15</sup> Ashton Gerding Speno and Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, 'Sexualization, Youthification, and Adultification: A Content Analysis of Images of Girls and Women in Popular Magazines', *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 95:3, (Sept. 2018), 625–646, doi:10.1177/1077699017728918. Accessed 29 Oct 2021. Also see: Tim Edwards, 'Living Dolls? The Role of Clothing and Fashion in "Sexualisation"', *Sexualities*, 23, 5-6 (Sept. 2020), 702–716, doi:[10.1177/1363460718757951](https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460718757951). Accessed 29 Oct 2021.

<sup>16</sup> Michelle Finamore, Interview by Teresa Kroenung, 2019

There are a number of things that can be drawn out from this statement. And while I will pull at the thread and have it unravel the words entirely at a later stage, it is necessary to preface this thesis by discussing this moment and what it implies on a



*Figure 1: Gender-Bending Fashion at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, 2019, © 2019 Caitlin Cunningham*

larger scale, because as much as this moment represented a turning point in Finamore's research, it also represents a major turning point in mine.

What immediately captured my attention was the elaboration of Finamore's research process and journey from the inception of the exhibition to its completion.

Describing the research process she underwent, she used the pivotal moment in which she realised that every person featured in the exhibition was white to make an overall adjustment to 'look back more critically over fashion history and [...] think about who is doing the interpreting and who was writing the textbooks and the histories and what that perspective is',<sup>17</sup> yet somehow she did not use that same method at this point to assess whether there was also a diversity of genders featured in the exhibition. (Her team for this project, it is important to note, included no men.) That moment came later in the process, after being asked about the contemporary designers whose practice was challenging the existing binary in one way or another.

For Finamore, the realisation that she had failed to see the lack of women featured in the exhibition she was curating represents one of a handful of turning points for her that pertain to, as she herself puts it, prevailing histories and perspectives. It is a moment of recognition that comes about in relation to racial diversity. It also comes about in relation to gender diversity; or rather not quite, since Finamore points out that the designers who were going to be featured at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts could be classified as diverse in gender – there were just no women. As a trained and

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.



experienced scholar in the field of fashion and curation, who has been taught by experienced and noteworthy scholars such as Pat Kirkham (who has written extensively about issues pertaining to gender and class)<sup>18</sup> and has teaching experience herself, it seems, at first glance, inconceivable that someone of her calibre and credentials would not have set out with a heightened awareness of gender-related issues within the fashion and museum context. This is not my individual assessment, but is first voiced by Finamore herself, her words and tone implying her shock that this issue had to be brought to her attention, that she did not see this herself. While her puzzlement is connected to her personal experience, and Finamore only speaks for herself in this matter, looking at her statement more broadly makes it clear that the simple act of overlooking women speaks to a larger issue that arguably persists not just within this specific context, but rather within culture and society as a whole.

While studies conducted by *The Business of Fashion* (BoF) have indicated that the number of male designers still outweighs the number of female designers,<sup>19</sup> this only speaks to a fraction of the gender-related issues of an industry in which the overwhelming majority of the workforce are women – numbers that decrease the higher up one climbs on the corporate ladder.<sup>20</sup> An extensive research study, which will be further discussed in the next chapter, titled ‘Feminism and the Politics of Creative Labour’, conducted by Angela McRobbie, Dan Strutt and Carolina Bandinelli from Goldsmiths, University of London, found that ‘working in a female-dominated sector such as fashion does not guarantee gender equality or indeed even female-friendly policies being implemented’.<sup>21</sup> So even though it is possible to grasp the socio-economic reality of women working in the fashion industry, and women’s socio-economic reality in the twenty-first century in general,<sup>22</sup> what may be much harder to grapple with is

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<sup>18</sup> Finamore, 2019, Interview

<sup>19</sup> Helena Pike, ‘How can Fashion Develop More Women Leaders?’ *The Business of Fashion*, 9 Sep 2016, [www.businessoffashion.com/voices/discussions/how-can-fashion-develop-more-women-leaders/less-female-fashion-designers-more-male-designers](http://www.businessoffashion.com/voices/discussions/how-can-fashion-develop-more-women-leaders/less-female-fashion-designers-more-male-designers). Accessed 25 Apr 2019

<sup>20</sup> ‘Executive Committee – LVMH Group Governance’, *LVMH*, [www.lvmh.com/group/about-lvmh/governance/executive-committee](http://www.lvmh.com/group/about-lvmh/governance/executive-committee). Accessed 20 Apr 2019

<sup>21</sup> Angela McRobbie, Dan Strutt and Carolina Bandinelli, ‘Feminism and the Politics of Creative Labour: Fashion Microenterprises in London, Berlin and Milan’, *Australian Feminist Studies*, 34:100 (2019), 131-148, DOI: [10.1080/08164649.2019.1644609](https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2019.1644609)

<sup>22</sup> A recent study by Oxfam titled ‘Time to Care: Unpaid and Underpaid Care Work and the Global Inequality Crisis’ found that the majority of unpaid work – for example household chores, childcare, etc. was done by women for over 70% of the time, leading to a distinct gender inequality within the issue of wealth inequality.

what is arguably our continuing inability to confront prevailing power structures that contribute to a continuing imbalance within both culture and the workforce.

This is a conditioning that is so implicit that even someone like Michelle Finamore would be subject to it. 'I haven't even thought about if there are women designers in here,'<sup>23</sup> she told me. She went on to describe her search for a female designer who was creating non-binary fashion, and the difficulty of finding someone, contrasting this with the ease with which male designers like Rad Hourani and Alessandro Michele had sprung to mind. '[...] I consciously looked for that, and still had a hard time finding it. [...] And so what is the story there?'<sup>24</sup> she asked herself.

Feminist writer and epistemologist Lorraine Code argued over twenty years ago that the practice of knowing and the way knowledge is constructed and produced was persistently male,<sup>25</sup> and reassessed her work very recently in the journal *Australian Feminist Studies*, where she describes how the 'emergence of constructive, revisionary feminist theories began to expose the partiality (in two senses) of beliefs and practices that had passed unchallenged as universally valid; they proffered productive, critical-constructive interventions into a hitherto seamless area of discourse'.<sup>26</sup> However, Code also observes that these progressive feminist revisions are often challenged by the new political right in attempting to reassert 'its power and [...] reclaim the monovocality of 'real' inquiry'.<sup>27</sup> Code also points out that these feminist contributions to various fields, whether philosophy, ethics or aesthetics, found that the continuing exclusion and absence of women in discourse affirmed and promoted a limited range of assumptions about people's existence and experiences. The value in conducting feminist research, Code suggests, is the embracing of feminist epistemologies through which the researcher is able to realise that even the very act of knowing can be a subversive, political activity.<sup>28</sup>

Attempting to approach fashion research from a feminist standpoint could therefore potentially pose a substantial challenge to an industry that, according to Ilya Parkins,

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<sup>23</sup> Finamore, 2019, Interview

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Lorraine Code, *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge*. (New York: Cornell University Press, 1991)

<sup>26</sup> Lorraine Code, 'Ignorance, Injustice and the Politics of Knowledge', *Australian Feminist Studies* 29:80 (2014), 148-160, DOI: 10.1080/08164649.2014.928186, p. 148

<sup>27</sup> Code, 2014, pp. 148-149

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

Associate Professor of Gender and Women's Studies at the University of British Columbia, 'with its embedded relation to global capitalism, its ability to penetrate the psychic lives of consumers and wearers, and its expressive power [...] is an ideal diagnostic tool for the contemporary moment'.<sup>29</sup>

Parkins states that while the fashion writing of today is different from the 'utopian' identity-driven texts of the 1990s, which were typical of the postmodern approach to cultural critique, the industry itself still sits 'uneasily with the wider cultures of conspicuous luxury consumption and white slenderness that frame them.'<sup>30</sup> With this statement, Parkins identifies that while fashion discourse and its cultural critique has moved beyond the rhetoric of 'female empowerment' of the last few decades, fashion still has not quite come to terms with its conspiratorial relationship with capitalism and the beauty ideals dictated by the patriarchy, which it still largely abides by and promotes.

The application of feminist scholarship to the study of fashion, Parkins argues, provides a method to evaluate how and to what extent certain gendered tropes have persisted in our culture and suggests that fashion's unbreakable link to capitalism is not a hindrance in this case, but an opportunity to focus on pressing questions pertaining to materialism, gender, temporality and the consequences of patriarchal capitalist structures and narratives.<sup>31</sup> It is an opportunity, she argues, because fashion lays these persistent narratives and tropes bare, holding a mirror up to society and its cultural undertones and relationships.

Similarly, McRobbie, Strutt and Bandinelli conducted their study to analyse whether fashion's feminist posturing is truly impacting on the industry in a meaningful, socio-economic way, finding that 'the alarm bells need to ring in fashion, not just at those points in time when exploitative internships hit the headlines, but on a more permanent basis'.<sup>32</sup> While their focus is on the economic reality of women working in the fashion industry, McRobbie, Strutt and Bandinelli also suggest that establishing and maintaining industry ties negatively impacts on fashion pedagogy and the development of fashion scholarship, because universities' reputations depend significantly on their status and

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<sup>29</sup> Ilya Parkins, 'Introduction: Fashion and Feminist Politics of the Present', *Australian Feminist Studies* 33:98 (2018), 423-427, DOI: [10.1080/08164649.2019.1567259](https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2019.1567259)

<sup>30</sup> Parkins, 2018

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> McRobbie, Strutt and Bandinelli, 2019

standing within the fashion industry, something they fear will be damaged if they engage in more critical discourse.<sup>33</sup> Another issue McRobbie, Strutt and Bandinelli raise is that for 'the majority of fashion theory academics [...] background training remains overwhelmingly from within art and design history and only rarely from the social sciences'.<sup>34</sup> They add that 'it is hard not to attribute this [lack of critical attention] to its assumed feminine status',<sup>35</sup> even though the role of the fashion designer has traditionally been taken by men, from arguably the founder of haute couture, Charles Frederick Worth, to the most prominent fashion figures of the twentieth century, such as Christian Dior, Cristóbal Balenciaga, Karl Lagerfeld, and Yves Saint Laurent. Women like Coco Chanel and Elsa Schiaparelli present exceptions rather than the rule, and while recent decades have shown a gradual increase in the number of female, non-binary and otherwise gender-non-conforming designers holding creative leadership roles, the majority of womenswear designers, according to surveys by BoF, as mentioned above, are still men: this becomes an overwhelming majority in menswear and non-binary fashion.<sup>36</sup> Fashion continues to be largely communicated as something that is consumed by women. It consists of garments constructed cyclically in response to changing seasons and presented to women on young, thin mannequins on runways, billboards and on the covers of magazines, underscored and emphasised by text encouraging them to consume, before starting the whole process again, as if pulled along by an invisible force.

For a long time men have been the protagonists of women's stories and the purveyors of knowledge, creating narratives that reflected them and their viewpoint. Feminism, and feminist research, seeks to change this by centralising the stories and experiences of women and other minorities and by allowing them to speak for themselves instead of having men speak for them. In *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge*, Lorraine Code stresses that every minority faces oppression and a resulting subordination that is directly linked to their relationship with white men. The white male centre, according to Code, not only dictates these societal relations: this hierarchy of knowledge, stories and experience extends into

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Pike, 2016

academic 'disciplines [such as] biology and most of the social sciences [that] have found women inferior in countless ways, have been unable to accord them a place as historical agents, and have presumed to interpret women's experiences for them, in a version often unrecognisable to the women themselves'.<sup>37</sup>

In her text 'Caring about Clothes', writer and journalist Judith Thurman discusses personal fashion experiences by women collected in the book *Women in Clothes*,<sup>38</sup> not through the postmodern identity-driven lens that Parkins refers to, but rather through empathy, connections and emotional attachment. Very much aware of the difficult relationship between feminism and fashion, Thurman describes needing and wanting to defend her passion for fashion and clothes to people who consider sartorial interest to be frivolous and irrational. Reflecting on this tension, Thurman writes, 'the design world has its mystics and charlatans, its tyrants and liberators. History and emotion are vested in the clothes we wear, and they shape our identities, individual and collected, even if we profess indifference to them'.<sup>39</sup> So while not disregarding the issues inherent in the industry, and not fully subscribing to postmodern practices of analysis, Thurman makes an argument that regardless of this tension, and in spite of fashion's complicated status, the emotional values we place on coveted pieces, or items associated with precious memories of cherished moments, should not be disregarded. Instead, Thurman recalls the community spirit that can be found and felt among women through fashion, saying that 'long before feminism made fashion a guilty pleasure, my first experience of the sisterhood among strangers took place in a communal dressing room'.<sup>40</sup>

Aligning Parkins' approach with that of Thurman, the necessity to tackle fashion discourse, regardless of its form, through a feminist lens is undeniable. A more critical feminist debate on fashion requires an honest and holistic interrogation of its ties with capitalism and the patriarchy, yet at the same time one angle from which that feminist lens may be regarded may be the personal, the communal and irrational, very much because it draws out emotional connections and centralises the experience of women and moments they share with one another through fashion.

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<sup>37</sup> Lorraine Code, *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge*. (New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. x

<sup>38</sup> Sheila Heti, Heidi Julavits and Leanne Shapton (Eds.), *Women in Clothes*. (New York: Riverhead Books, 2014)

<sup>39</sup> Judith Thurman, 'Caring about Clothes', *The New Yorker*, 24 Sep 2014. Available at: <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/communal-dressing-room>. Accessed 19 Oct 2021.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

It is this very approach to fashion and its related discourses that can be explored by engaging with Helen Grund and her writing, and a contemporary application of findings drawn out from my translation of these texts. In the following section, I describe the research design and the way it was constructed around Grund and her diary in order to strengthen the methodology and main aim of my thesis.

### The research design

As described in the previous section, I want to stress that the research questions, as well as the design, structure and methodology of the research, were born out of my in-depth reading and translation of Helen Grund's writing, and are therefore tailored specifically to this study and its content. Because the way this research unfolded, developed and eventually materialised in this thesis differs from a conventional research trajectory, I want to use this section of the introduction to clarify the narrative and design before describing the final outline of this thesis in the next part.

This is a qualitative study, designed to propose a feminist approach to contemporary fashion analysis through the work of Grund, following my translation of her diaristic texts. The research design is therefore highly dependent on the content of the study and evolved alongside it. Traditionally, research design, especially pertaining to quantitative studies, as Joseph A. Maxwell points out, is defined as 'a plan or protocol for carrying out or accomplishing something (esp. a scientific experiment)'<sup>41</sup> and is often sequential, particularly when a study has a definite beginning and end, and every step of the study has been meticulously planned out and structured. Qualitative research design, Maxwell claims, is rarely fixed, but rather should evolve, as 'any component of the design may need to be reconsidered or modified during the study in response to new developments or to changes in some other component',<sup>42</sup> suggesting a seemingly oppositional dynamic between planning and chance. I describe in greater detail the ways in which my research design and methodology evolved from reading and translating Grund's texts in the later chapters, but I want to preface my thesis by once again stressing that Grund's life and work precedes the final design and methodology of this thesis. The positioning

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<sup>41</sup> Joseph A. Maxwell, *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2012), p. 2

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

of Grund at the centre of my study also underscores the overarching philosophy – feminist theory - with which I approach my research.

Data was collected in two stages: the first of these consisted of my reading, translation and analysis of Helen Grund's body of work, generating a new process to inform the conducting and approach of interviews with four fashion designers and one fashion curator. I then used that newly generated process to transcribe the interviews autoethnographically and, following this, conduct a qualitative content analysis of the collected data with tools created in response to Grund's diary entries.

As these diary entries are so central to this research and the content of this thesis, but also its structure, they are elevated by being treated not just as text. For a doctoral thesis in the field of fashion, I am aware that there are comparably few conventional images to accompany the text: but this is a deliberate choice, because the original German texts written by Grund are positioned in this thesis to function not just as the structural aides and methodological tools mentioned above, but also as imagery. They have a structure and cadence that cannot, and should not, be replicated, a rhythm inherent in the original language that deserves to be communicated, just as Grund's thoughts deserve to be read.

The interviews conducted during this research project were all carried out and transcribed over a period of ten months, with one interview quite significantly preceding the other four, as it signalled a change in research focus and the intermittent months were used to adjust to that shift. All except one were conducted remotely, via phone or Skype, and recorded, with a detailed transcription process following immediately afterwards. Only once all interviews were concluded did I proceed with the analysis through a method drawn out from reading and translating Grund, which will outlined in more detail in the following chapters.

### [Outline of the thesis](#)

This thesis has four chapters. The literature review, as the first chapter of this text, serves three purposes and is divided and structured accordingly. In its first section, I interrogate other pieces of writing that have conducted similar cross-historical research, borrowing from the past to analyse the present and vice versa, through the examples of Ilya Parkins' book *Poiret, Dior and Schiaparelli*, as well as two books by Caroline Evans – *Fashion At The Edge* and *The Mechanical Smile*. Through this

discussion, I hope not only to demonstrate the potential of such cross-historical endeavours, but also to identify what is still missing from these discussions, and what my study may contribute to a fuller picture.

The second section serves to interrogate my own context, and outline the fashion industry I am surrounded by and the texts that I read as part of my fashion education, such as *Adorned in Dreams* by Elizabeth Wilson, the seminal *Fashion at the Edge* by Caroline Evans, Tim Edwards' *Fashion in Focus*, and the essays collected in the book *Thinking through Fashion*, edited by Agnès Rocamora and Anneke Smelik.<sup>43</sup>

As the complexities of fashion studies have expanded, I also highlight the voices that challenge and are critical of it, like feminist writer Sheila Jeffreys and Rosalind Gill, but that also pose questions to the discourse itself, discussing the writing of Francesca Granata and also the material turn, led by Anneke Smelik, Joanne Entwistle and Susan B. Kaiser. Fashion's precarious relationship with feminism and femininity is further addressed through texts by Ilya Parkins and Lorraine Code.

The discussion of contemporary fashion also includes the most prominent texts on menswear, a clear departure from the fashion world as Grund would have known it. I discuss Jay McCauley Bowstead's *Menswear Revolution* and Anne Hollander's *Sex and Suits* in order to illustrate a novel aspect of current fashion studies. This section concludes by looking into the socio-economic reality of women such as myself working in the fashion industry through a comprehensive study led by Goldsmiths' Angela McRobbie.

In the third and final section, I describe fashion and its industry at the time of Helen Grund, focusing on Paris not only as the industry's focal point, but also as hers. By reviewing texts such as *Fashioning the City*, by Agnès Rocamora, and revisiting *Poiret, Dior and Schiaparelli* by Parkins and *The Mechanical Smile* by Evans, I outline some of what has been written about this specific era of fashion history, with a focus on the development of Paris as the fashion capital of the world, the designers who shaped it, and the fashion shows that Grund visited in her role as a fashion correspondent. In addition to these texts, I also discuss the predominant fashion discourse during that time – discourse that Grund would have been aware of not only out of professional curiosity, but also due to personal connections with the people leading it. I touch on

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<sup>43</sup> These texts were, successively, written in 1985, 2003, 2010 and 2015.



Thorstein Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, as well as Georg Simmel's sociological discussions on fashion, *Die Mode: Grundzüge der Soziologie*, as they represent the dominant narratives and texts on fashion and related industries during Grund's lifetime. Moreover, I briefly summarise Walter Benjamin's approach to fashion, which he described in various essays, as well as his unfinished *Arkadenprojekt*, for which Grund was a source.<sup>44</sup>

The second chapter, following the literature review, introduces Weimar Republic-era fashion journalist and writer Helen Grund, and positions her work as the core of this thesis. Chapter 2, focused on Grund and her body of work, is divided into five parts: a more comprehensive review of the specific circumstances of women – specifically working women – in Weimar-era Germany. The main texts used for this positioning of Grund and her work as a writer and fashion correspondent are *Women in the Weimar Republic* by Helen Boak and *Women in Weimar Fashion* by Mila Ganeva. Additional context was incorporated, via essays by Cornelia Osborne and Elizabeth Harvey, by discussing the modern concept of *die Neue Frau* – the new woman.

The second part gives a summary of Grund's upbringing and significant life events, for which Marie-Françoise Peteuil's biography *Helen Hessel: Die Frau, die Jules und Jim liebte* [Helen Hessel: The woman who loved Jules and Jim] provided most information, before focusing on Grund's work as a writer, and the impact she had as a writer and correspondent for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and *Die Dame*, including her influence on intellectuals such as Benjamin and Adorno.

The following section explores how Grund established her writing through the travel accounts she noted down on trips to Paris in the early 1920s, discussing her unconventional role as a 'new woman', in contrast with the conventional flâneur. It takes a focused look at the development of Grund's professional body of work to explore the style and content of her practice, which stands out for her unapologetic prose and unabashed focus on the women around her, whom she grants agency in great detail, giving them character and a voice.

The fourth section serves to illustrate the care with which Grund looked at and recalled women in her writing. I use this section to emphasise that while I applied regular coding

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<sup>44</sup> Lehmann, 2019, Interview

techniques to analyse her texts at first, I ultimately decided to approach them differently, through the autoethnographic concept of thick description, and by focusing on the interviews Grund conducted with female designers and practitioners in the industry, such as Renate Green, Madame Agnès and the design trio Tao. It shows that Grund dedicated these texts to their voices, letting them share their unique stories and experiences without attempting to shape them within existing, conventional narratives. This leads to the fifth and final section of this chapter, which seeks to unravel how Grund could have arrived at such a unique way of approaching and writing about these designers, made possible by the existence of her diaries; even though it does not address the topic of interview or writing method explicitly, it illuminates patterns in Grund's texts that I exemplify by discussing three diary entries that display a three-step method, while also exploring the notion that Grund's keeping of a diary was a subversive, feminist practice. I conclude this chapter by describing Grund's own method of fashion writing, which produced female-focused texts that highlight the personal stories and experiences of women that are often overlooked in an industry and a narrative still guided by conventional gendered tropes.

The third chapter, Methodology, serves to illustrate how the methodology developed as a result of reading, understanding, and ultimately translating Grund's writing. The positioning of the methodology after the chapter focused on Grund emphasises that it literally followed my engagement with Grund. So much of what is discussed in this chapter directly relates to her texts and my work with them, meaning that the conventional positioning of the Methodology chapter after the Literature Review would, from my point of view, not only make no sense given the way that the research unfolded; it would also undermine the central role these texts had in the creation and shaping of the methodology applied in this thesis.

I discuss the creation of this methodology through the incorporation of Grund as its core, inspired by Francesca Granata's writing about taking a similar approach to suit her own doctoral thesis on Mikhail Bakhtin. This chapter sets out and interrogates the use of the diary as a primary text, outlining how to apply such texts within research and how to position them by referencing Langford and West's book *Marginal Voices, Marginal Forms*, as well as Julie Rak's discussion of Philippe Lejeune's method and theory of the diary. Equally central in building the foundation of my methodology is the

autoethnographic concept of ‘thick description’, first coined by Gilbert Ryle and Clifford Geertz, and I explain the concept as it pertains to my own work with Grund’s texts.

I continue to describe how I translated Grund from a feminist standpoint, referencing the writing of Shulamit Reinharz and Ellen Stone and the concept of feminist translation as put forward by Sherry Simon, before assembling these parts to position my approach as ‘thick translation’, infused by Geertz’s autoethnographic concept.

This leads into a positioning of the research as a narrative, referencing the discourse on the topic by McAlpine, before focusing on the interviews conducted for this study. I discuss ways in which interviews were used as a method in this research, explaining the interview process and preparation and the selection of interviewees, influenced by Seawright and Gerring’s texts. Especially vital to this study is the transcription of the interviews, which Mary Bucholtz describes in ‘The Politics of Transcription’, and which, as a process of translation, infused with thick description, becomes something I describe as ‘thick transcription’, which ties in with the notion of embodiment in research, referencing Ellingson’s views that call for a more autoethnographic approach, that includes the researcher to a greater extent.

The chapter outlining my methodology concludes with a section on data analysis. Rather than coding the translated texts, I explain my own technique of soft coding and why it is essential to think of Grund’s writing as something other than data. I conclude the account of the methodology with Grund’s work, through an analytical approach drawn out through a close reading and translation of her diary, in which the three key steps of Position, Process and Practice form a guideline that supports a dynamic analysis of interviews as personal connections, prompted by snapshot moments.

The final chapter of this thesis presents the five interviews conducted over the course of this research study following the thick transcription process as discussed in the previous chapter, a method inspired by thick description as pioneered by Geertz.

Following excerpts of the thick transcripts from each interview, I present the respective findings of the interviews I conducted, approached, structured and analysed using the method produced by reading and translating Grund’s work. Following this method, these sections are arranged in three parts, corresponding to the three steps drawn out through analysing Grund’s diary and the three main research questions that they stand for. They describe the interview moments – the *Momentaufnahmen* – as revealing the

personal, rather than the general, putting forward a new narrative of how these practitioners engage with and think about fashion and their own place within it, facilitating a space for them to tell their own stories outside of the system that arguably dictates so many of them.

## 1. Literature Review

This chapter addresses the research question of why a voice such as Helen Grund's has remained invisible, or barely visible, within fashion studies and related discourses. It contextualises the focus of this thesis and presents a review of the literature pertaining to the two periods in time that are of interest in the endeavour to answer this question. Seeking to demonstrate how these two periods interplay, I look for ways that the past can be woven into the present, how the past can be analysed through a contemporary lens, and the usefulness of conducting a cross-historical study such as this that allows two time periods to interact. This review is therefore divided into three sections.

The first section will interrogate how the time periods relevant for this research intertwine; how writers look back on fashion industry as it existed a hundred years ago, and in what way the theories of the past have influenced the discourse of the present. In this section in particular, I aim to illustrate ways in which historical fashion writing has been used in contemporary analyses of fashion, thus revealing the potential that lies in an interplay between past and present in order to understand the current narrative, but also to direct future discourse. It will outline the potential of cross-historical research in fashion, but also address possible gaps that my own research could potentially fill. I want to investigate what the usefulness of such time-spanning research might be, and what has been missing from it until this point, to ask: where does a feminist, autoethnographic and cross-historical examination of Helen Grund's life and work fit? How can such an interrogation of her diary fill this potential gap, and what may we gain from it? It is aimed at establishing the basis for interrogating the premise of how a translation of Helen Grund's texts may be used to support a feminist method of contemporary fashion analysis.

The second section will address my own context as a contemporary fashion researcher who was initially trained as a fashion designer in London, and what texts have shaped my own understanding of the industry. This section will also take into account the socio-economic reality of fashion as it exists today, and some broader discussion about feminism as it relates to fashion.

The final section provides an overview of Helen Grund's Paris; what it looked like, who participated in fashion at the time, and the overarching fashion narrative.

This chapter does not include an exploration of the lives of women of Weimar-era Germany, or a discussion of the particular role fashion played in the creation of the so-called *Neue Frau* [new woman]. This will be discussed in the third chapter, alongside the introduction to Helen Grund, in order to emphasise her significance and her singular status as a fashion journalist in the 1920s and early '30s, and the circumstances of her upbringing and early career.

### 1.1 A Cross-Historical Approach

Before outlining the nature of the fashion industry and its many complexities in the contemporary sphere from my own point of view, as well as that of the practitioners interviewed for this thesis, and the Paris that Helen Grund experienced in the 1920s, I want to use this first part of the literature analysis to interrogate the premise of engaging in cross-historical research, specifically pertaining to the two eras in fashion history mentioned above. While there are certainly other such research endeavours, I would like to focus this discussion on texts that specifically address designers and their work.

I aim to demonstrate ways in which such cross-historical research can be beneficial to contemporary discourse, utilising texts already discussed previously in this chapter, to examine how these texts and their cross-historical nature can enhance discussions pertaining to fashion and why they are useful. At the same time, by shining another light on them, I hope to show what it is these texts are doing, but moreover what they are missing, and to what extent a deeper exploration of Helen Grund's diaristic texts may tap into a previously under-explored or even unexplored aspect of such cross-historical discussions.

I want to draw on Ilya Parkins' *Poiret, Dior and Schiaparelli*, as well as Caroline Evans' *Fashion at the Edge* and *The Mechanical Smile* to illustrate the complex dynamic of weaving the past into the present, and vice versa. These texts will be addressed in this section as cross-historical, and discussed in this context. But they will also feature in more detail in the two subsequent sections, as they respectively describe the fashion world of the 1920s that Grund would have known and the field of fashion studies that shaped my own education and context.

To briefly summarise these three texts, Parkins discusses the life writings of three legendary couturiers – Paul Poiret, Christian Dior and Elsa Schiaparelli – against a contemporary backdrop, also considering the historical context of their life and work and the way they shaped the industry of the time. But Parkins also interrogates more critically the ways in which these designers presented themselves, and how they created and cultivated their own iconic status through considered and deliberate positioning and narrative.<sup>45</sup> She puts forward an interrogation of the designers' life writings and discusses how these texts demonstrate a deliberate act of image-creation on the designers' part; a creating and curating of an image rather than, arguably, an honest reflection of the truth.<sup>46</sup> In her book, Parkins further centralises personal texts authored by Poiret, Dior and Schiaparelli to engage with the way these couturiers reflected on their own practice and their role as couturiers pertaining to femininity, displaying, as Parkins puts it, a surprising ambivalence towards the latter and towards women in general.<sup>47</sup>

In *Fashion at the Edge*, Evans largely utilises the theories of Walter Benjamin and Georg Simmel in order to contextualise the experimental practices of designers such as Alexander McQueen and John Galliano. She does so in a new and innovative way, describing a departure from earlier fashion discourse which had until this point mostly mirrored artistic and art-historical analysis. However, absent from this text is, in contrast to Parkins' work, the direct voice of the designers she is analysing.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, in Evans' book *The Mechanical Smile: Modernism and the First Fashion Shows in France and America, 1900-1929*, in which she discusses the evolution of the fashion show after the turn of the century, she touches on the mannequins as part of these modern spectacles without referencing first-hand accounts of these shows. While Evans' history of the fashion show discusses a still relatively unexplored area of fashion history, and in doing so describes the mannequin as 'a new kind of working woman who embodied the idea of femininity as alterable and perfectible',<sup>49</sup> her focus is intentionally placed on the

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<sup>45</sup> Ilya Parkins, *Poiret, Dior and Schiaparelli: Fashion, Femininity and Modernity*. (London: Berg, 2012)

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., pp.147-152

<sup>48</sup> Caroline Evans, *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity and Deathliness*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003)

<sup>49</sup> Caroline Evans, *The Mechanical Smile: Modernism and the First Fashion Shows in France and America, 1900-1929*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), p.7

shows and their performative qualities. The mannequins are presented as cogs in a complex machine that unites both culture and commerce, all the while operating under patriarchal systems.

The focus of the stories Evans tells, underpinned, as in *Fashion at the Edge*, by the work of theorists such as Benjamin, Simmel and writers like Honoré de Balzac, is on the couturiers and their creations, and how these fit into the larger picture of modernity and the modern avant garde. The mannequins used by designers remain anonymous, as they were intended to be, partly because Evans claims that the history of fashion modelling is 'stupefyingly monotonous',<sup>50</sup> and partly because records that would have fleshed out these mannequins' experiences were either not available or not taken into account. In her book, Parkins argues that Benjamin, Simmel and other male theorists, as well as designers, consistently rely on women without acknowledging their individual experiences.<sup>51</sup> Aligning this claim with the way Evans relies continually on them in both of her books, Parkins arguably reinforces the notion that while they are central to the theory of fashion and modernity, women hold no active part in its discourse –acting only as visual, voiceless symbols of it.

In *The Mechanical Smile*, Evans' consideration of the mannequins pertains mainly to their bodies as tools: an industrial object, as well as a fashioned body 'made modernist by the fashion show',<sup>52</sup> and their aesthetic qualities, their cultural and commercial significance. While Evans never fails to keep theory and object tightly intertwined, the exploration of femininity and the participation of women in modern fashion remains detached. She analyses the fashion show as an orchestrated spectacle performed by mannequins, without delving into the intimacy and immersive feel of these spaces for the people who participate in creating them.

In contrast to Parkins, Evans never includes the accounts of the designers whose shows she observes and discusses. Additionally, Evans pays no attention to developments outside France and North America, arguably because the most significant shifts regarding the commercialisation and subsequent modernisation of fashion occurred in these two places on either side of the Atlantic. However, in characterising mannequins

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<sup>50</sup> Evans, 2013, p.2

<sup>51</sup> Parkins, 2012

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p.5



simultaneously as invisible women and as the incarnation of ‘the treacherous and uncanny instability of appearances in a changing world’,<sup>53</sup> and placing them at the centre of the Modern movement by referencing Benjamin and Simmel, a more thorough investigation of these models as working women and the fashion shows as immersive spaces with tactile qualities may have been of value.

Ultimately, writers like Veblen and Benjamin, who were observing and writing about fashion at this time, experience fashion and its practices as artificial spectacles, commercialised by department stores and winding arcades, because that was how fashion was orchestrated and presented. Similarly, contemporary analyses of fashion in modernity often refer to these writers, or simply the imagery capturing these spectacles and very specifically designed scenes that arguably present the way fashion was to be seen and observed. Parkins’ analysis presents a different view, through the eyes of this era’s prominent fashion designers, yet their life writings offer, as Parkins states, a view that fits into their own narrative and presentation, and the cultivation of their public image. It poses the question of how far subjectivity is useful and how far it can be understood as having its own agenda and inherent bias. Texts written by the designers themselves may offer that personal and biased view that is absent in Evans’ work, yet at the same time these texts were always intended to be published, asking, as Parkins points out, to what degree they are true reflections of the people who wrote them.

These interrogations of historical images and texts can, when triangulated within a contemporary context, reveal hidden patterns and narratives, such as the unintentional centralisation of women and female experience as put forward by Parkins. In addition, it signals a space for an application of historical theories in the present, and a re-evaluation of these theories through a feminist lens.

Examining Evans and Parkins’ writing side by side highlights the differences in their research and their approach, but aligning them also allows a small gap to become visible, which I argue fits not just the personal, but the personal as it exists in privacy.

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<sup>53</sup> Evans, 2013

## 1.2 A contemporary London-based context

The focus of this section is the environment of contemporary fashion practitioners, specifically those who were interviewed for this study, and myself. This focus pertains to the overarching characteristics of the industry as it is made up today, the key debates and theories that shape discourse and analysis, and the socio-economic reality for fashion practitioners.

### 1.2.1 Fashion Theory

In *Fashion in Focus: Concepts, Practices and Politics*, Tim Edwards argues that ‘despite the influence of feminist and postmodern analysis of fashion, little, as it were, core theory has truly developed here since the early nineteenth century’.<sup>54</sup> Looking at books like *Thinking Through Fashion: A Guide to Key Theorists*, a collection of essays on Georg Simmel, Sigmund Freud, Walter Benjamin and others, edited by Agnès Rocamora and Anneke Smelik,<sup>55</sup> one might be inclined to agree with Edwards. Fashion’s core theory, as Edwards describes it, may still rely heavily on theories advanced by Benjamin, Simmel, and Freud. However, the application of these theories and our understanding of them have changed, especially, as Edwards acknowledges, as a result of feminist and postmodern influences on discourse.

While different approaches were articulated towards the end of the twentieth century, such as Elizabeth Wilson’s, in *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*, there was a significant shift that occurred with the publication of Evans’ *Fashion at the Edge*, discussed above. It should be noted that since its first publication in 2003 it has been critiqued, especially by feminist writers, for its lack of criticality in relation to fashion’s role in the perpetuation of misogyny and gender stereotypes,<sup>56</sup> and because it did not address the capitalist foundation of fashion. However, within the wider narrative of the development of the field of fashion theory, or fashion studies, *Fashion at the Edge* marks a distinct departure from earlier art history-focused fashion discourse, making it into a

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<sup>54</sup> Tim Edwards, *Fashion in Focus: Concepts, Practices and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2011), p.1

<sup>55</sup> Agnès Rocamora and Anneke Smelik (Eds.), *Thinking through Fashion: A Guide to Key Theorists*, (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2016)

<sup>56</sup> Jeffreys, 2005

field that, while already interdisciplinary,<sup>57</sup> finally became its own. As Alice Cicolini writes in her review of Evans' work:

There is also no doubt that a new language is needed to discuss fashion, particularly the experimental strain with which Evans concerns herself. If *Fashion at the Edge* is a sign that fashion can begin to enjoy its mind and its body, and find its own language to express that, then it is to be welcomed for these reasons alone.<sup>58</sup>

Cicolini suggests that Evans' book provides a foundation for a new way of interrogating and studying contemporary fashion: to think of fashion and its study from the perspective of self-expression through experimental practice. Rather than integrating the study of fashion into another discipline, this was a call to study fashion in its own right, and as its own entity.

Evans argues in the book that fashion should not be studied in the same way as art history, stressing that her descriptions, accompanied by imagery and illustrations usually reserved for fashion publications, 'serve as something more than a hermeneutic tool to interpret the work of a few designers. They unlock the way in which the work of these designers [...] helps us make sense of contemporary culture and its concerns'.<sup>59</sup> The assertion that fashion can be used to interrogate and influence discourse shifts the focus from a more art-historical style of analysis towards something that is positioned between art history and fashion journalism, morphing into its own discipline at the beginning of the twenty-first century and very much a reflection of the fashion that prevailed at the time.

As well as writing by Wilson and Evans, we should also consider the work of Valerie Steele, whose book *Fetish: Fashion, Sex and Power* was published in 1996; Steele is editor of *Fashion Theory: the Journal of Dress, Body & Culture*, an academic journal

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<sup>57</sup> The book was published at a time at a time when designers were branching into more interdisciplinary modes of showcasing fashion, and it was not long before books such as Suzanne Lee's *Fashioning the Future* (2007) were published, which challenged fashion's boundaries and edges

<sup>58</sup> Alice Cicolini, 'Book Review: *Fashion At The Edge – Spectacle, Modernity and Deathliness* by Caroline Evans (Yale University Press, 2003)', *Fashion Theory*, 9:1 (2003), p. 114

<sup>59</sup> Evans, 2003, p. 13

established in 2007 and one of the main sources for fashion discourse. However, in spite of Evans' transformative work and the emergence of a new field of fashion theory and related journals, fashion criticism, Francesca Granata argues, 'is still undergoing the process of legitimization that other realms of popular culture criticism went through in the 1960s and 1970s, when barriers between high and low culture increasingly came under attack'.<sup>60</sup> Granata points to the fact that the Pulitzer Prize in Criticism was not awarded to a fashion journalist until 2006, when it was won by Robin Givhan of *The Washington Post*; Granata cites the committee's statement to claim that Givhan's texts were so witty that they were transforming fashion criticism into cultural criticism (implying that fashion still remains outside of culture) to underscore her argument.<sup>61</sup> Yet regardless of whether the hypotheses still hold true that on the one hand, fashion's core theory has not changed significantly and on the other that fashion criticism is being denied legitimacy, has had its legitimisation delayed, or is at least held in lower regard than art and design criticism, the discipline has contributed in various ways to the contemporary cultural canon.

### 1.2.2 Fashion and Social Identity

Identity, according to Richard Jenkins, 'is the human capacity [...] to know 'who's who', [which] involves knowing who we are, knowing who others are, them knowing who we are, us knowing who they think we are and so so.'<sup>62</sup> It maps, on various levels, our world and the places we hold in it as part of a collective or society, and what group or category we may or may not belong to, which requires constant evaluation of one another. According to Jenkins, as is also discussed by psychologists with social identity theory, hierarchies play a role in this evaluation process, filtered through social interaction, as different contexts may place people in different categories, influenced by factors such as preference, hostility, partnership or ambivalence. Social identity, in this case, cannot be said to be static or consistent, but rather fluctuates depending on situation, interaction and context, additionally shaped by the apparent conflict between

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<sup>60</sup> Francesca Granata, 'Fashioning Cultural Criticism: An Inquiry into Fashion Criticism and its delay in Legitimation', in *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture*, 2019, 23:4-5, 553-570, DOI: 10.1080/1362704X.2018.1433397

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity*. (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 6

internal and external categorisation, as we ourselves may identify differently from how we are identified or perceived by others. Moreover, the way we perform our identity can be influenced by external expectations and shaped accordingly, making social identity not only fluid and situational, but also reactionary – a panoptical interplay.<sup>63</sup>

Exploring fashion along new lines, Diane Crane attempts to ground post-industrial fashion theoretically and empirically in *Fashion and its Social Agendas: Class, Gender and Identity*. Crane outlines ways in which dress can articulate class, occupation, gender and other parts that make up social identity, supported by studies by Frederic Le Play on the nineteenth-century French working class. She examines social identity within the context of fashion, not through a cross-historical but a cross-cultural investigation, Crane compares the dynamics between dress and class, taking into account the increasing complexity and diversification of the fashion system. In particular, women's relationship with fashion, their consumption of fashion-related media and role as active consumers are themes she investigates more closely.<sup>64</sup>

Where Crane's text on fashion and social identity arguably falls short is her analysis of fashion as a straight-forward method to communicate. Her reading of fashion does not allow for complexity, or allow the notion that it can be ambiguous and oftentimes perhaps even an unstable visual reflection of society and its Zeitgeist, just as social identity in itself is unstable and highly dependable on circumstances. While fashion undoubtedly is a tool to communicate one's identity, it remains full of contradictions and any analysis of it and its agendas becomes problematic if these contradictions and complexities are not taken into account.

These complexities have since been explored through various approaches. Along with the call for new ways to interrogate contemporary fashion in *Fashion at the Edge*, a more recent development in the field of fashion studies, apart from discourse on

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<sup>63</sup> Jenkins, 2014

<sup>64</sup> Diane Crane, *Fashion and Its Social Agendas: Class, Gender and Identity*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000)

embodiment,<sup>65</sup> practice<sup>66</sup> and methodology,<sup>67</sup> is the so-called ‘material turn’. Anneke Smelik describes it as the return ‘to the matter and materiality of things and objects, including human bodies and identities’.<sup>68</sup> It is largely inspired by studies of material culture, rooted in anthropology and sociology, and draws on a wide range of schools of thought, ‘from historical materialism – such as (neo-) Marxism – via (post-) phenomenology, actor-network theory and feminism.’<sup>69</sup> Smelik argues that a new materialist approach to fashion studies accounts for the post-human world we live in now, in which technological advances are taken into account and persistent dualisms that position human and non-human, material and immaterial, as opposites are challenged. She claims that ‘a new-materialist approach re-appreciates the material and sensory aspects of fashion in interaction with image, spectacle and representation’<sup>70</sup>. Along with Smelik, Joanne Entwistle, in *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Social Theory*, and Susan B. Kaiser, in *Fashion and Cultural Studies*, have argued for a departure from what Kaiser calls ‘oppositional (either/or), linear (straight) and essentialist (predetermined, fixed, bounded) ways of thinking about and *with* fashion’<sup>71</sup>. Instead, Kaiser suggests that combining different perspectives from cultural studies can challenge the various binaries that persist in fashion and its study, especially those that pertain to gender duality and discourse about masculinity and femininity.

### 1.2.3 New avenues for fashion discourse

Discourse on fashion’s seemingly irreconcilable relationship with feminism<sup>72</sup> and the media<sup>73</sup> has also evolved to include writers such as Ilya Parkins, who argues that it is

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<sup>65</sup> Peter McNeil & Melissa Bellanta, ‘Letter from the Editors: Fashion, Embodiment and the “Making Turn”’, *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture*, 23:3, 2019, 325-328, DOI: [10.1080/1362704X.2019.1603856](https://doi.org/10.1080/1362704X.2019.1603856)

<sup>66</sup> Jessica Bugg, ‘Fashion at the Interface: Designer—Wearer—Viewer’, *Fashion Practice*, 1:1, (2009), 9-31, DOI: [10.2752/175693809X418676](https://doi.org/10.2752/175693809X418676)

<sup>67</sup> Francesca Granata, ‘Fashion Studies In-between: A Methodological Case Study and an Inquiry into the State of Fashion Studies’, *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture*, 16:1, (2012) 67-82, DOI: [10.2752/175174112X13183318404221](https://doi.org/10.2752/175174112X13183318404221)

<sup>68</sup> Anneke Smelik, ‘New Materialism: A Theoretical Framework for Fashion in the Age of Technological Innovation’, *International Journal of Fashion Studies*, 5:1 (2018), 33–54, doi: 10.1386/inf.5.1.33\_1

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Smelik, 2018

<sup>71</sup> Susanne B. Kaiser, *Fashion and Cultural Studies* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), p. 2

<sup>72</sup> Jeffreys, 2005. See also: Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are used against Women* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001)

<sup>73</sup> Rosalind Gill, *Gender and the Media* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007)

precisely fashion's fraught dynamic with gender and the feminine that makes it such a potent source for further investigation.

The limits of this thesis do not allow an in-depth discussion of gender and its construction, but it is critical to stress its importance in relation to the binarism in fashion and the general biases related to its feminine attribution, and recent feminist interrogations of the past. In *The Masque of Femininity: the Presentation of Woman in Everyday Life*, Efrat Tseëlon traces the artificiality of the image of the clothed woman and suggests that it originated in the biblical story of Adam and Eve, in which the condition of being naked, or undressed, symbolises their existence in Paradise. It is only after their fall from grace – through Eve – that their bodies become clothed,<sup>74</sup> something which, Parkins hypothesises, may be a contributing factor<sup>75</sup> to the continuously fraught relationship that feminists have with fashion, both conceptually and practically.<sup>76</sup>

In the introduction to this thesis, I discussed the arguments advanced by Code and Parkins for a feminist interrogation of knowledge production and fashion respectively; Parkins specifically argues that fashion is a particularly potent site for interrogating social and cultural phenomena because of its connection to capitalism and the power structures that are inherent in society.

Expanding on Parkins' argument, Anne Hollander, in her book *Sex and Suits: The Evolution of Modern Dress*, writes that 'everyone knows that clothes are social phenomena; changes in dress are social changes. It is further said that political and social changes are mirrored in dress'.<sup>77</sup> In addition to this, she states:

I have come to believe that male dress was always essentially more advanced than female throughout fashion history, and tended to lead the way, to set the standard, to make the aesthetic propositions to which female fashion responded.

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<sup>74</sup> Efrat Tseëlon, *The Masque of Femininity: The Presentation of Woman in Everyday Life* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd, 1995)

<sup>75</sup> It is important to stress that this is Parkins' hypothesis, with a clear focus on Western and predominantly Christian culture, because not all feminists are Christians, and not all opposition of fashion – practically and conceptually – stems from misogyny rooted in religion or Christianity.

<sup>76</sup> Parkins, 2012

<sup>77</sup> Anne Hollander, *Sex and Suits: The Evolution of Modern Dress* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), p.1

[...] But I also believe that any true account of clothing must consider both sexes together.<sup>78</sup>

She considers the suit to be emblematic of menswear, but also assesses its social and cultural significance and, more importantly, how it relates to gender binarism and sexuality. While Hollander sets out to conduct her enquiry by taking both sides of the conventional binary into account, she acknowledges that menswear has yet to fully enter the same realm that womenswear occupies, existing at fashion's periphery as 'Men's Fashion'.<sup>79</sup>

Another seminal book on menswear and its evolution in recent decades, focusing specifically on the past few years, is *Menswear Revolution: the Transformation of Contemporary Men's Fashion* by Jay McCauley Bowstead. Bowstead attributes this transformation to groundbreaking designers such as Raf Simons and Hedi Slimane, and also credits their rise to the shifting image and construction of masculinity.<sup>80</sup> While he cites 1960s and '70s dandy and hippie styles, Bowstead claims that this new age of menswear was truly launched with Hedi Slimane's founding of Dior Homme, which catapulted menswear into the sphere of experimental and performative fashion that had previously been occupied solely by womenswear. Bowstead links this emergence partly to menswear's profitability as a rapidly growing sector in the market, but the overall focus of his self-proclaimed autoethnographic text is on interviews with journalists, designers and other fashion professionals who work in menswear. Bowstead focuses strongly on fashion shows and presentations from his own experience in the profession, identifying significant collections and assessing them aesthetically.

While the increased diversification of fashion journalism, with the emergence of menswear as one of those new avenues, arguably contributed to a broader readership and therefore farther reach for fashion-related content to reach the masses, fashion journalism, as part of the genre of 'lifestyle journalism', has been very slow to attract scholarly attention. As Francesca Granata has argued, fashion as a whole has had a

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<sup>78</sup> Hollander, 2016, p.3

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p.6

<sup>80</sup> Jay McCauley Bowstead, *Menswear Revolution: The Transformation of Contemporary Men's Fashion* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018)



delayed introduction to academic study.<sup>81</sup> However, fashion journalism and its many faces have been the content of even fewer academic research. That is partially due to the fact that this genre of journalism is generally not held in high regard by scholar and journalists alike.

This is argued by Sanda Miller and Peter McNeil in *Fashion Journalism: History, Theory, and Practice*, in which they describe fashion journalism as part of the so-called *gonzo* journalism with a 'reputation of being frivolous, disengaged from reality and catering for the privileged few'<sup>82</sup> and not a genre that has approval from ideologies such as Marxism and Feminism.

Their notions are echoed in 'Broadening the Focus: The case for lifestyle journalism as field of scholarly inquiry', in which Folker Hanusch proposes that lifestyle journalism is often held in contempt due to it being market oriented. He argues that it is a 'distinct journalistic field that primarily addresses its audiences as consumers, providing them with factual information and advice, often in entertaining ways, about goods and services they can use in their daily lives'.<sup>83</sup> It is this irrefutable link to capitalism, Hanusch claims, that lifestyle journalism, fashion journalism included, is still largely rejected by the academic community as a serious field of study.

Naturally, as he also argues, all journalism, in one way or another, is dependent on consumers and also on generating income. 'Commercialism,' according to Hanusch, 'has always been an integral part of journalism'.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, it is precisely this link to commercialism, this need to generate income through an expansion of the readership, that arguably led to the introduction of the women's pages and, as a result, a rise in the numbers of female journalists. This link between fashion journalism and professional female journalists will be explored more in-depth in the following chapter, but it is important to note that there is a correlation between growing literacy rates among the female population, an expansion of the middle class through industrialisation and the emergence of fashion journalism as a genre.

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<sup>81</sup> Granata, 2019

<sup>82</sup> Sanda Miller and Peter McNeil, *Fashion Journalism: History, Theory, and Practice*. (London: Bloomsbury Academix, 2018), p. 2

<sup>83</sup> Folker Hanusch, 'Broadening the Focus: The case for lifestyle journalism as a field of scholarly inquiry', *Journalism Practice*, 6:1, (2012) 2-11, DOI: 10.1080/17512786.2011.622895

<sup>84</sup> Hanusch, 2012

While industrialisation contributed to democratisation in general, the recent decades have also seen a blurring of the lines 'between high and low culture'<sup>85</sup>, which, in recent years, Agnès Rocamora argues, has also occurred within the genre of fashion journalism itself. The emergence of fashion blogs and an increased online presence of fashion bloggers, she hypothesises, has provided a new platform for news related to fashion, democratised fashion journalism.<sup>86</sup> This notion is also put forward by Rosie Findlay in 'The Short, Passionate, and Close-Knit History of Personal Style Blogs', in which she interrogates the personal fashion blog as an emerging sub-genre of fashion journalism, moving from the periphery towards the very centre of the practice. Fashion Blogs, or Personal Style Blogs, have increasingly been the focus of research due to their apparent identity negotiations and performance.<sup>87</sup>

Additional interrogations of the fashion blog have been conducted by Monica Tilton with a focus on self-identity and fashion narratives<sup>88</sup>, as well as Karen de Perthuis, who examined fashion blogging pertaining to street style photography.<sup>89</sup> Within fashion journalism, personal style blogs are of particular interest, de Perthuis writes, because they present something that goes beyond the existing fashion narrative by producing content that examines 'the psychological implications of its subject matter, or turns a critical eye upon itself and the industry in which it operates.'<sup>90</sup>

Similarly, Tilton explains that this sort of personal blog is centred around 'reflexive identity politics in contention with embodied techniques of self-fashion and dress politics.'<sup>91</sup> In this medium occurs an 'oscillation between individual dress practices and collective fashion narratives.'<sup>92</sup>

Many of these interrogations draw on texts by Michael Foucault and Roland Barthes. Particularly Barthes and his book *The Fashion System* continues to be referenced when fashion journalism is concerned due to his theories pertaining to the visual image, the written image and an interplay of both, which arguably transforms garments into

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<sup>85</sup> Granata, 2019

<sup>86</sup> Hanusch 2012

<sup>87</sup> Rosie Findlay, 'The Short, Passionate, and Close-Knit History of Personal Style Blogs', *Fashion Theory*, 19:2 (2015), 157-178, DOI: 10.2752/175174115X14168357992319

<sup>88</sup> Monica Tilton, 'Fashionable Personae: Self-identity and Enactments of Fashion Narratives in Fashion Blogs', *Fashion Theory*, 19:2 (2015), 201-220, DOI: 10.2752/175174115X14168357992391

<sup>89</sup> Karen de Perthuis, 'People in Fashionable Clothes: Street Style Blogs and the Ontology of the Fashion Photograph', *Fashion Theory*, 20:5 (2016), 523-543, DOI: 10.1080/1362704X.2015.1115656

<sup>90</sup> De Perthuis, 2016

<sup>91</sup> Tilton, 2015

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

*fashion*. In fashion journalism, particularly narratives leaning on ‘What to Wear’ or ‘What Not to Wear’, various ways dress is communicated to a larger audience can be regarded as ‘subjective engagement with surface appearance and the performance of social status.’<sup>93</sup> This personalisation of conversations pertaining to fashion, Arlene Oak and Julia Petrov describe in their text on the cross-over between makeover media and fashion journalism, contributes to a communication of dress to a larger audience. As with many essays discussing fashion journalism, they draw on Roland Barthes and his concept of transforming garments into fashion by giving images meaning through text, drawing a connection to identity. They write that ‘images and objects meet an individual’s psychology and wider society through text’<sup>94</sup>, characterising this particular intersection as ‘self-indulgent’<sup>95</sup> and highly personalised.

Similar interrogations into the supposedly self-expressive more personal and individual relationship people can have with fashion or the clothes they wear have taken place in *Women in Clothes*<sup>96</sup> or *Why Women Wear What They Wear*<sup>97</sup>, which speak to the potential described by Ilya Parkins, as qualitative feminist inquiries overall strive to push the boundaries of existing narratives in various ways.

Discussing feminist methods and new methodological tools, Kate Coddington points to giving voice as an essential element in qualitative feminist research, which speaks to all of these investigations that directly address user experience and perception. ‘The central goal of initial feminist projects [...] was to make women’s experiences, knowledge, and voices heard within academic research,’<sup>98</sup> she writes in ‘Voice under Scrutiny’. Many feminist researchers, even if not explicitly stating as much, give power to the research subject and broaden the scope, importance and relevance of the field. As much as it is about bringing voices from the periphery into the centre of scholarship,

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<sup>93</sup> Arlene Oak and Julia Petrov, ‘Makeover media as fashion journalism: *What Not To Wear*, fashion, authority, and *Gonzo* subjectivity’, *Popular Communication*, 18:4 (2020), 313-326, DOI: 10.1080/15405702.2020.1839079

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Heti, Julavits and Shapton, 2014

<sup>97</sup> Sophie Woodward, *Why Women Wear What They Wear*. (Oxford: Berg, 2007)

<sup>98</sup> Kate Coddington, ‘Voice under Scrutiny: Feminist Methods, Anticolonial Responses, and New Methodological Tools’, *The Professional Geographer*, 69:2 (2017), 314-320, DOI: [10.1080/00330124.2016.1208512](https://doi.org/10.1080/00330124.2016.1208512)

this sort of research engages with participants, considers present power dynamics and views research as a more empathetic engagement between researcher and subject.<sup>99</sup>

Within this increasingly feminist and diversified field, a cross-historical interrogation of a fashion journalist leans into these new qualitative methods that centralise silenced or quietened voices. Quiet in comparison with voices such as Simmel, Benjamin and Barthes, who continue to be referenced in contemporary scholarship in a way Grund is not present. There has arguably been a pattern of not giving the same spotlight to female voices as was traditionally given to men, which contributed to her diminished presence from fashion scholarship. What this review has also revealed is that the unique status of fashion as a subject for academic research, coupled with the persisting reputation of lifestyle journalism in general, may have also played a part in keeping Grund, as a journalist and not a scholar, not entirely but largely quiet in an academic research setting and – perhaps more importantly – untranslated. Therefore the next section of this literature review will examine the fashion world she experienced, before the next chapter will allow a more comprehensive review of fashion journalism in the Weimar era, and what role it played in shaping Grund as a writer.

### 1.3 Helen Grund's Paris

This final part of the second chapter outlines the Paris Helen Grund knew – the Paris she walked through and wrote about in her diary – to contextualise what fashion looked like in the period, and furthermore what the industry and its corresponding discourse were like when she was working in it and observing it. It is positioned here to lead more seamlessly into the third chapter, that focuses solely on Grund.

The focus of this part is on fashion's emergence as a phenomenon of modernity and the central role of Paris as the modern capital of fashion. In addition, I will discuss the most prominent theorists who addressed fashion in their writing at the time, and the key elements that emerged from their texts, as well as the figures who were central to these texts and the fashion of the time. This will not only offer an outline of the narrative of

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

fashion writing in this period, and the people who were defining it, but also demonstrate what was being omitted and who was being excluded at the time.

While there is an argument to be made for the existence of fashion prior to modernity, at the Italian Renaissance courts and the upper echelons of society throughout Europe, fashion, as we arguably know and understand it today, 'is firmly associated with the rise of cities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the Industrial Revolution that enabled its democratisation'.<sup>100</sup> In this era, fashion came to be defined as 'the constant renewal of styles and vestimentary aesthetics'<sup>101</sup>, as Agnès Rocamora describes in *Fashioning the City: Paris, Fashion and the Media*. She links the emergence of France, and in particular Paris, as the focal point for this new cultural phenomenon and global trend to the development of the textile industry in France under Louis XIV in the seventeenth century.<sup>102</sup>

Baron Haussmann's radical redesign of the French capital, and its subsequent spectacularisation under Napoleon III, further consolidated the position of Paris as the centre of modern culture. The fashion industry employed the highest proportion of workers in Paris, and the fashion industry became central to the city. What developed alongside this new kind of fashion industry was the field of fashion theory, which included discourse and study relating to the field – according to Rocamora, 'as in Bourdieuan theory, a semi-autonomous structured space of positions defined by specific rules of functioning, values and principles, and the existence of consecrated institutions involved in the promulgating and legitimating of such rules and values'.<sup>103</sup>

Fashion, along with other luxury goods, brought about the emergence and rise of the department store, and what is today most commonly known as *prêt-à-porter*, ready-to-wear, or off-the-peg clothing, mass-produced, in contrast to the high-end, made-to-measure *haute couture*.<sup>104</sup> While the couturier had existed before this period, they now reached a different kind of status as a modern designer of fashion, directing and influencing taste: the first to do this was Charles Frederick Worth. This kind of couturier

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<sup>100</sup> Agnès Rocamora, *Fashioning the City: Paris, Fashion and the Media*. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), p. 25

<sup>101</sup> Rocamora, 2009

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 28

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

no longer simply made clothes, but created *fashion*. Worth began the tradition of presenting his creations on models and staging presentations for his wealthy clientele, and was instrumental in founding the influential *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture, des Confectionneurs et des Tailleurs pour Dame* in 1868 in order to ‘conduct the business of fashion and defend its interest in France and abroad’.<sup>105</sup>

The self-presentation of the designer as a taste-driving force, an arbiter of good taste and style, evolved from this point. Rather than simply creating clothes and running a business, these couturiers began to consciously position themselves within the narrative as untouchable geniuses, a distinct characteristic of the dominant narrative, as outlined by Parkins in *Poiret, Dior and Schiaparelli*.<sup>106</sup> Fashion, Parkins explains, is not only quintessentially modern, but inherently characterised as female. She writes, in reference to an excerpt from *Vogue* magazine from 1930 describing the way fashion used female pronouns, that ‘the equation of women with fashion, and fashion with inconstancy, was by then long-established. And it rested upon a linking of women, adornment and artifice, only to denigrate each one. Notions of naturalness and artifice have long and gendered histories in Western cultures’.<sup>107</sup>

This complex dynamic is also interrogated through the women who work in and perform fashion in *The Mechanical Smile*, in which Evans discusses the evolution of the fashion show after the turn of the twentieth century, touching upon the role of the mannequin as part of this modern spectacle. While Evans’ history of the fashion show discusses a still relatively unexplored area of fashion history, and in doing so describes the mannequin as ‘a new kind of working woman who embodied the idea of femininity as alterable and perfectible’,<sup>108</sup> her focus, as pointed out in the first section of this chapter, is on the shows and performances. The mannequins are absent, apart from their bodies, as part of the performance.

The business of fashion as part of the patriarchal system, as argued by Parkins, among others, was wholly concerned with dressing women with significant disposable income for leisure activities that increased as a result of industrialisation, the subsequent growth of the bourgeoisie and the influx of people to major cities such as Paris, London

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 29

<sup>106</sup> Parkins, 2014

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., pp.1-24

<sup>108</sup> Evans, 2013, p.7

and Berlin. Simultaneously, the first fashion magazines began to appear,<sup>109</sup> speaking directly to their female clientele and advertising fashion and luxury goods. These magazines played a part in reshaping the public role of women, who were enticed through these new, mostly pictorial, publications to build a new 'feminised consumer culture'.<sup>110</sup> In these magazines, with their increased circulation due to higher literacy rates amongst the lower and middle classes, and their higher print runs due to technological advancements, women were cast as wives and mothers, and also as representatives of their families, illustrated through the way in which they dressed and adorned themselves.

While the way fashion was associated with femininity arguably meant that it was not studied seriously, or by many professional (and thus almost exclusively male) writers and philosophers who seemed to consider themselves above such frivolity, the beginnings of the study of fashion were established as a result of its central role in the urbanisation of society and the expansion of capitalism in Europe and North America.

For example, Thorstein Veblen, one of the most prominent theorists of Grund's time and still referenced in contemporary texts, in *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, first published in 1899, advanced the theory that while the emerging capitalist enterprises provided men of previously limited means with substantial income, they chose to dress modestly, instead displaying their wealth through their lifestyle and the appearance of their wives, daughters, or other female family members. 'The general rule is felt to be right and binding,' Veblen writes, 'that women should consume only for the benefit of their masters',<sup>111</sup> thus ensuring that women retained their role as visual objects and an offering a visual way of showcasing male wealth. While Veblen's interest in fashion stemmed from his study of conspicuous consumption, it was, however, a study of fashion.

German philosopher Georg Simmel, another contemporary of Grund, like Veblen, remains one of the main references in fashion theory. Frequently cited by Evans in both

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<sup>109</sup> The first issue of *Harper's Bazaar* appeared in 1867, while *Vogue* was first published in the United States in 1892

<sup>110</sup> Christopher Breward, 'Femininity and Consumption: The Problem of the Late Nineteenth-Century Fashion Journal', *Journal of Design History*, 7:2, (1994), 71–89.

<sup>111</sup> Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1899), p. 72-73

her books, he put forward a sociological interpretation of fashion, trying to ‘understand the human condition as formed within a modern metropolis’<sup>112</sup> and utilising fashion as one of the tools to do so. Simmel published numerous essays on the sociology of fashion, such as ‘Fashion’ (published as ‘Die Mode: Grundzüge der Soziologie’ in German), published in *The American Journal of Sociology* in 1904, ‘The Philosophy of Fashion and Adornment’ in 1905, as well as the ‘The Problem of Style’ in 1908.

He considered that fashion illustrated larger patterns of behaviour and thus deemed it worthy of study in spite of its feminisation, and despite the fact that the wider cultural canon disregarded fashion as wasteful and frivolous. Simmel suggests that fashion is simply representative of the way in which people simultaneously strive to be individuals but also desire to belong to a group, highlighting ‘the tendency towards social equalization with the desire for individual differentiation and change’.<sup>113</sup>

According to Simmel, fashion is ‘merely a product of social demands’.<sup>114</sup> For Simmel, who studied interpersonal connections and how these connections may be negotiated, fashion is inextricably linked to class, and he identifies that through fashion, certain social groups can signal their interpersonal belonging whilst simultaneously declaring their separation from each other.<sup>115</sup>

While Veblen looked at capitalist consumption through the lens of fashion, and Simmel remained firmly in his field of sociology in his analysis, I suggest that German writer Walter Benjamin engaged with fashion with no specific predetermined ideology that he was attempting to prove or support.<sup>116</sup> Heavily influenced by Charles Baudelaire,<sup>117</sup> Benjamin interrogated fashion as a phenomenon that mirrored modernity in ‘Illuminations’, *‘Das Paris des Second Empire bei Baudelaire’* [The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire] and the unfinished *Passagenwerk* [The Arcades Project], of which first sections were initially published in 1938. Adopting Baudelaire’s notion of flânerie,

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<sup>112</sup> Peter McNeil, ‘Georg Simmel: the “Philosophical Monet”’, in Agnès Rocamora and Anneke Smelik (eds.), *Thinking through Fashion: A Guide to Key Theorists*. (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2016), pp.63-80

<sup>113</sup> Georg Simmel, ‘Fashion’ [1904], in *The American Journal of Sociology*, LXII: 6 (1957), 541-558

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Georg Simmel, ‘The Philosophy of Fashion and Adornment’ [1905], transl. by K.H. Wolff, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, (New York: The Free Press, 1950)

<sup>116</sup> Lehmann, 2019, Interview

<sup>117</sup> Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas, ‘Walter Benjamin: Fashion, Modernity and the City Street’, in Agnès Rocamora and Anneke Smelik (eds.), *Thinking through Fashion: A Guide to Key Theorists*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016)



city-dwelling and generating knowledge through first-hand experience of modern urban life, Benjamin traced the beginning of fashion to the emergence of arcades, personified by female cyclists who took on their alluring form as they filled these halls, their uniform an unknowing predecessor of leisurewear and sportswear and in defiance of conventional dress.<sup>118</sup>

In the essay simply titled 'Mode' [Fashion], he writes:

*...nie war die Mode anderes als die Parodie der bunten Leiche, Provokation des Todes durch das Weib und zwischen geller memorierter Lache bitter geflüsterte Zwiesprach mit der Verwesung.*<sup>119</sup>

[...fashion was never anything but the parody of a colourful corpse, death provoked through the woman and between shrill laughter a bitter, whispered dialogue with decay.]

In a text interspersed with citations from both German and French writers, such as Alphonse Karr, Bertolt Brecht, Georg Simmel, Maxime Du Camp and Eugène Montrue, Benjamin sets out to critically analyse and engage with fashion in order to understand its systems of production. Yet at the same time Benjamin, despite his curiosity, did not, it seems, think very highly of fashion: he used language associated with death to describe it and claimed that 'one cannot say there is anything profound about this'.<sup>120</sup> Yet despite these convictions, and his apparent distrust of fashion, his seeming contempt for women in his description of their 'shrill laughter' (as if these rich women were cackling whilst decaying), Benjamin was able to illustrate 'how fashion was one of the principal means by which modernity manifests itself',<sup>121</sup> a mirror image of the ways the bourgeoisie were consuming it in order to participate in a specular game – a 'false consciousness'.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Geczy and Karaminas, 2016

<sup>119</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften V. 1.* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1991). Edited by Rolf Tiedemann, p. 2853, translated by Teresa Kroenung

<sup>120</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Das Paris des Second Empire bei Baudelaire', in *Charles Baudelaire: Ein Lyriker im Zeitalter des Hochkapitalismus* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1969)

<sup>121</sup> Geczy and Karaminas, 2016, p. 84

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p.83

While other modern philosophers, such as Thomas Carlyle, Herbert Spencer,<sup>123</sup> and Benjamin's contemporary and personal friend Theodor W. Adorno, also explored fashion to some degree,<sup>124</sup> Veblen, Simmel and Benjamin were the main voices in the critical analysis of fashion at this time, and they remain dominant voices in the contemporary canon as well.<sup>125</sup>

A voice such as Grund's, in contrast, has remained barely visible in fashion studies because, as this review has revealed, cross-historical research has, for the most part, focused on dominant voices and narratives that are privileged through conventional tropes and research practices. Discourse is still largely viewed through lenses shaped within other disciplines. At the same time, while contemporary fashion studies has evolved to include more interdisciplinary voices and its boundaries have been extended with a more thorough, critical engagement with fashion, feminism remains at odds with a discipline that is arguably so tightly intertwined with capitalism.

The following chapter will attempt to present an antithesis to this apparent status quo and argue that while texts and theories by male intellectuals are influential, and certainly still dominant, the fashion discourse of the 1920s was not solely conducted and influenced by men. In particular, in the Weimar Republic, and especially for women, fashion represented a unique opportunity to enter the workforce via an industry considered to be too 'feminine' by many working men of the time. Fashion journalism opened the door for many female writers to earn their own living, to shape discourse and to leave a mark through their texts. And, as I will argue in the following chapter, no woman did so more than Helen Grund.

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<sup>123</sup> Michael Carter, *Fashion Classics: From Carlyle to Barthes* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2003)

<sup>124</sup> Theodor W. Adorno's theories on aesthetics were arguably a major influence on Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, and the two were in regular correspondence with one another.

<sup>125</sup> Carter, 2003

## 2. Helen Grund

This chapter focuses on Helen Grund. It will begin to sketch out how a critical analysis of diaristic texts authored by women like her may become a feminist tool within fashion studies, a question that is addressed in both this and the following chapter.

While it was necessary to outline the context of the industry she worked in during her time in Paris in the previous chapter, I believe it is equally important to present the context in which she grew up, namely turn-of-the-century Germany, with a specific focus on the women's rights movement and the particular circumstances of female writers in Germany during the Weimar Republic era. The focus will be on Germany, its feminism and its female writers, rather than an assessment of the state of women in literature or journalism of the time in general, because – as this chapter will outline – there are significant differences between female German writers and the German feminist movement and female writers and feminism in France and the United Kingdom.

Following this overview I will take a closer look at fashion writing in this period and argue that Grund held a singular position within the industry. I aim to demonstrate Grund's unique status at the time, further underscored by a brief discussion of her life, before focusing on her career as a writer and journalist. I will discuss her work as a fashion correspondent for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, and the various interviews she conducted with fashion designers. However, the focal point of this chapter will be her diary, from which I have selected three sections for closer examination. Through my translation and analysis of these diaristic texts, I aim to demonstrate the ways in which these personal notes provide new insights into the fashion of the time, and lay the groundwork for the way that Grund's deeply personal and 'thick' descriptions may contribute to a new methodology for contemporary fashion analysis.

### 2.1 The women of Weimar

The history of the women's rights movement in Germany deviates from the narrative of other Western women's movements, and the scope of this thesis does not allow for a detailed discussion of it, nor a comprehensive overview regarding the reasons for it. Nevertheless, it is necessary to highlight these differences and touch on them in order to

properly contextualise the life and work of Helen Grund as a journalist in the Weimar Republic, and understand the particularities of a German woman working in her position at this time.<sup>126</sup>

In her comprehensive account of women's experiences in Germany during the Weimar Republic era, *Women in the Weimar Republic*, Helen Boak describes in detail how German women lived in the 1920s and early '30s. Boak offers a view of how they participated in society in relation to politics, work, family and sexuality, as well as the public realm. Boak attempts to challenge the notion of this era as simply a precursor to the *Third Reich*, and points to the trouble historians have with the fourteen years between the end of the *Kaiserreich* and Hitler's rise to power. The Weimar Republic, as Boak notes, disrupts Germany's historic continuity, causing historians to claim that the country had taken a *Sonderweg* [special path]. She points to the work of Detlev Peukert and Edward Ross Dickinson, who challenged the view of Germany as a 'politically and

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<sup>126</sup> A closer reading of the German women's rights movement is outlined in Rosemarie Nave-Herz's book *Die Geschichte der Frauenbewegung in Deutschland* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1993), Eda Segarra's *A Social History of Germany, 1648-1914* (London: Routledge, 2017), Gisela Bock's *Geschlechtergeschichten der Neuzeit: Ideen, Politik, Praxis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), Angelika Schaser's *Frauenbewegung in Deutschland 1848-1933* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2020), as well as a more general approach in Andreas Fahrmeir's book on German history, *Deutsche Geschichte* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2017). It wasn't until Louise Otto-Peters founded the *Frauen-Zeitung* [Women's Newspaper] in 1849 that the women's movement truly gained momentum in Germany. The de facto founder of the German women's rights movement, along with other leaders like Auguste Schmidt and Henriette Golschmid, listed the extension of suffrage to women as one of the movement's priorities, but the two main issues that German feminists were fighting for, as Angelika Schaser describes in her book, was the right to work and the right to receive an education. Women's suffrage, unlike in the United Kingdom and in France, was a more controversial issue due to the rise of socialism. Voting rights for women divided the German feminists, because there was serious concern that allowing women to vote might in turn lead to more votes for socialist parties and strengthen the socialist movement in a country that was still led by a monarch and a conservative parliament. German feminists around Otto-Peters were mainly striving for the ability of women to live financially independently from men, and enter the workforce on their own terms. This fact is further explored by Gisela Bock in her paper 'Das politische Denken des Suffragismus: Deutschland um 1900 im internationalen Vergleich' [The political thinking of suffragism: Germany around 1900 in international comparison] in *Geschlechtergeschichten der Neuzeit: Ideen, Politik, Praxis* [Gender Stories of the Modern Age: Ideas, Politics, Practice]. She describes the fragmented nature of the German women's rights movement and ties it to the different laws in the various states, some allowing women to gather for political activities and others – like the arguably most powerful and influential state Prussia – persecuting women for engaging in politics. This law persisted until 1908. It is important to stress this point, as well as the fact that, as Nave-Herz and Schaser describe, women's emancipation in Germany in the late 1800s was far more intrinsically tied to the right to work than the right to vote. There was a significant delay in the women's movement in Germany compared to other European countries, and even though the erstwhile focus of this movement was work and education rather than suffrage, German women were granted the right to vote following the First World War, following labour and education reforms that meant that the Weimar Republic era signalled a departure from the monarchy, from the militarisation of politics and Prussian centrality of the Wilhelmine era that had preceded the First World War.

socially backward country': Dickinson argued that Weimar-era 'Germany appears here not as a nation having trouble modernising, but as a nation of troubling modernity'.<sup>127</sup> Seeking 'to explore the opportunities and possibilities that the Weimar Republic offered women',<sup>128</sup> Boak identifies that the notion of the *Neue Frau*, the 'new woman', has garnered interest from feminist researchers since the second-wave feminism of the 1960s and 70s. She writes that 'for many, during the Republic and subsequently, the 'new woman' was a potent symbol of both Weimar's modernity and crisis. For some, she symbolised the opportunities offered by the Republic, for others its degeneracy, indicative of the contradictions inherent in modernity.'<sup>129</sup>

The notion of the new woman encapsulates this new generation of women who had the ability to venture into all spheres of modern life, be it the workplace, public life or the expanding media landscape of film, theatre and music. This speaks to 'the fundamental differences in the values and behaviour of women of different generations of the Republic'.<sup>130</sup> The visibility of women increased immensely as they took part in society outside the home and, according to Boak, could take part in activities previously unavailable to them and pursue new career paths that were opening up to them because of the less stringent social codes during the Weimar years. They could access birth control and had agency over their own bodies and family planning, and went outside their homes without men accompanying them to take part in a range of activities, from sports to other leisure activities. With this came more sexual freedom, as well as the freedom to talk more openly about sex and politics, and publicly engage with it.<sup>131</sup> These new women therefore set themselves apart from the older generation so significantly that they posed a direct threat to the conventional gender hierarchy, challenging male identity and its dominance.

Cornelie Usborne dedicates an essay to the difference between these generations of women. In 'The New Woman and Generational Conflict: Perceptions of Young Women's Sexual Mores in the Weimar Republic', Usborne explores what differentiated these young women who came of age during the Weimar era from the women who came

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<sup>127</sup> Dickinson, quoted in Helen Boak, *Women in the Weimar Republic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p.1

<sup>128</sup> Helen Boak, *Women in the Weimar Republic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p.2

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

before them. She points specifically to their values and behaviour, especially the way they perceived themselves and consequently presented themselves to the outside world.<sup>132</sup>

How they should be defined or classified varies, but Elizabeth Harvey argues, in her essay 'Culture and Society in Weimar Germany', that it is specifically the multiplicity of this 'new woman' that encapsulates her spirit. The notion of womanhood, what it meant to be a woman, was no longer represented simply by an image of a wife and mother. Instead, Harvey says, this new woman could be engaging in sexual acts or taking part in sports, wearing suits and short hair, working as a typist or studying at university;<sup>133</sup> Harvey, like Boak, stresses that this particular era opened up new opportunities *especially* for German women to exploit.

Yet while Boak clearly points to the Weimar era as one of unprecedented opportunity, she also acknowledges that these opportunities, specifically those of an economic nature, were then also used to further exploit women, contributing to the 'myth of women's economic emancipation',<sup>134</sup> which is belied by the fact that a large number of women 'voted for conservative parties that promoted women's traditional roles within the home'.<sup>135</sup>

Keeping in mind that the idea of the new woman needs to be considered with nuance, and that the apparent progress made by women after the turn of the century did not come without complex issues and surprising setbacks or pitfalls, there are two areas I want to focus on in relation to the experience of women in the Weimar era: one relates to women at work, and the other to women's public lives. While the role of politics and sexuality in the lives of Weimar women is hugely important, multi-faceted and interesting, the scope of this review does not allow for these areas to be addressed. For the Weimar women, work became an increasingly important part of their daily lives, with new career paths opening up beyond traditional roles in agriculture or domestic service. These structural changes that had been set in motion in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century continued to expand: women took up manual

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<sup>132</sup> Cornelia Osborne, 'The New Woman and Generational Conflict: Perceptions of Young Women's Sexual Mores in the Weimar Republic', in M. Roseman (ed.), *Generations in Conflict: Youth Revolt and Generation Formation in Germany 1770-1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995)

<sup>133</sup> Elizabeth Harvey, 'Culture and Society in Weimar Germany: The Impact of Modernism and Mass Culture', in M. Fulbrook (ed.), *German History since 1800* (London: Arnold, 1997)

<sup>134</sup> Boak, 2013, p.4

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

industrial work, but even more entered the white-collar sector, often as typists, secretaries and other administrative roles that were supposedly unskilled or low-skilled. Boak points out that this work was hardly emancipatory and not attractive for young women as viable career options (these roles were more likely to be filled by married women). However,

Throughout the Weimar Republic an increasing number of girls were raising their educational standards, and many were going to university, in order to train as teachers or for careers in a branch of medicine or one of the other professions now opening up for women, in line with the equality of the sexes laid down in the Weimar Constitution. [...] With the secular trends of the diminishing significance of traditional sectors and industries for the female workforce, the increase in women's employment in industry, administration and the service sector, as well as women's increasing educational achievements and entry into a range of professional posts, the Weimar Republic can be seen as the cradle for German women's position in employment to the present day.<sup>136</sup>

The particular role that fashion played in women's employment will be addressed later, but first it needs to be stated that along with a change in employment opportunities came a significant change in the way women could lead their public lives.

Women's public selves, and their lives in the public realm, are addressed by Boak in the last chapter of her book, and she writes that society witnessed these young women pursuing 'a variety of interests',<sup>137</sup> and that changes in the amount of leisure time available to them allowed them to engage in more activities outside work and the home.<sup>138</sup> While there was an upsurge of participation in health and fitness activities, women also suddenly had their own disposable income, as well as disposable time, to

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<sup>136</sup> Boak, 2013, pp.171-172

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., p.279

<sup>138</sup> In 1918 the *Achtstundentag* [Eight-Hour-Day] was introduced in Germany, which established in law that the standard working hours for each employed individual was to be set at a maximum of eight hours per day. Following the November Revolution in 1918, resulting in the abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm II. and the transformation of Germany into a democracy, the Social-Democrat-led Government under Friedrich Ebert negotiated with the various labour unions to pass the law on the 23 November 1918, only days after the government had initially been established.

spend on their physical appearance beyond their physical fitness. This increased visibility in the public realm, not simply through their physical presence but also through their increased representation in mass media, led to the development of three types that these women would aspire to be and look like: Gretchen (named after the tragic female character depicted in Goethe's *Faust*, who falls in love with the titular character and later commits suicide), the American 'girl-next-door', and the 'Garçonne'. Women were encouraged to assimilate to these types, and companies and advertisers would 'encourage women, be they housewives or young women with financial resources of their own, however limited, to purchase their wares, whether films, newspapers, magazines, consumer goods or membership of political parties.'<sup>139</sup> Fashion became an integral part of the goods they were encouraged to purchase in order to participate in society, but moreover – and more importantly – it 'became central to women's experience of modernity'.<sup>140</sup> In her in-depth exploration of fashion as part of women's self-expression during the Weimar era, *Women in Weimar Fashion: Discourses and Displays in German Culture, 1918-1933*, Mila Ganeva provides an overview of the ways in which fashion impacted the lives of women during this time, and also dedicates a chapter to each of the female writers and journalists who shaped the fashion discourse and engaged in critical commentary and analysis of this growing phenomenon. In the introduction to her book, Ganeva claims:

Writing about Weimar Fashion means writing about Weimar women.<sup>141</sup>

She views the two as entirely interconnected, not simply because fashion was transformed into a pervasive presence in women's lives, but also because it allowed women to 'participate in its variegated practices in record numbers, both professionally – as journalists, illustrators, designers, photographers, models, and shop assistants – and for pleasure – as consumers, movie-goers, spectators, or simply window-shoppers'.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Boak, 2013, p.279

<sup>140</sup> Mila Ganeva, *Women in Weimar Fashion: Discourses and Displays in German Culture, 1918-1933* (Rochester: Camden House, 2008), p.1

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.1-2



Fashion, Ganeva argues, presented a way to participate in the usually male-dominated practice of cultural theory and commentary. Writers such as Simmel, Veblen and Werner Sombart would engage with fashion in an abstract way to examine its function within capitalism and consumer culture, yet women had an entirely different and unique approach, 'creating and interpreting their own fashion images'.<sup>143</sup>

They were not only the main consumers of fashion, and its main target, Ganeva suggests, but they also had a unique approach to the interpretation and analysis of fashion, shaped by their direct, personal approach to fashion and the ways they experienced fashion in their everyday lives. This speaks directly to the gap in existing historical, but also cross-historical, fashion research; this un- or *under*-tapped source of female voices who lived fashion on their own terms, existing outside the scope of well-referenced theorists and couturiers like Poiret and Schiaparelli, as discussed by Evans and Parkins.

What these women, Grund among them, produced in their professional, but also private, capacity could suggest ways through which an analysis of these texts could become a feminist tool within fashion studies. Engaging with these texts in new ways may open up new paths to approach not only historical fashion knowledge, but also contemporary fashion knowledge and analysis.

These female writers and journalists arguably carved out their own spaces through revolutionising journalistic practice by inserting self-reflectiveness into their texts, promoting the immersive qualities of fashion rather than remaining distanced and unaffected like their male counterparts. Ganeva goes on to write that through these writing practices, 'Weimar fashion helped shape a public sphere within which the female practitioners were transformed from the objects of male voyeurism into active subjects of the complex, ambivalent, and constantly shifting experience of metropolitan modernity'.<sup>144</sup> This role emerged in Weimar society as an apparent cross-breed between the 'new woman' and the more commonly known *flâneur* – the image of the wandering, detached city dweller made prominent by writer and philosopher Charles Baudelaire that was adopted widely by male intellectuals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p.2

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Geczy and Karaminas, 2016

## 2.2 Teufelsweib

One person, one woman, who encapsulated this notion of the new woman to an arguably unparalleled degree, and who was at the forefront of this new breed of fashion writers, was Helen Grund. A writer, fashion correspondent and resistance fighter, she lived to the age of ninety-six, positioning herself not only as an important contemporary witness, but also as a daring actor of the twentieth century. Having studied art in Paris, and sustained friendships with writers and artists such as Rainer Maria Rilke, Walter Benjamin and Marcel Duchamp, Grund was a force of nature to anyone who encountered her, including her husband Franz Hessel, and his best friend and later Grund's lover Henri-Pierre Roché, whose attempt to turn their relationship into a novel without putting her at the centre failed spectacularly.<sup>146</sup> Marie-Françoise Peteuil, her biographer, asks, pertinently:

*Wer war diese Frau, die alle kannten und die selbst alle kannte? Wer war Helen Hessel wirklich, dieses Teufelsweib, diese Jahrhundertgestalt, die jeden umwarf, der sich in ihre Nähe wagte?*<sup>147</sup>

[Who was this woman, whom everyone knew and who knew everyone? Who really was Helen Hessel, this hell of a woman, this figure of the century, who bowled over anyone who dared to come near her?]

'Dangerous Helen', Peteuil continues, 'radiant, provocative, unpredictable, foolhardy and fun-loving. Helen Hessel, née Grund, like the ground on which she stood so bravely, and in which she left a deep mark.'<sup>148</sup>

Born Helen Katharina Anita Berta Grund, the fifth and last child of a wealthy Berlin family in 1886, she grew up – as she admitted herself – sheltered and spoiled, especially by her father. She was educated, had the opportunity to travel and learn languages (her diary is famously trilingual, written in snippets of German, French and English) and eventually moved to Paris to become a painter, studying art under Käthe Kollwitz. While

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<sup>146</sup> The resulting book, *Jules et Jim*, published in 1953, was then made into a film by François Truffaut, starring Jeanne Moreau.

<sup>147</sup> Marie-Françoise Peteuil, *Helen Hessel: Die Frau, die Jules und Jim liebte*. (Frankfurt a.M.: Schöffling & Co. Verlagsbuchhandlung GmbH, 2013), p. 16. Translated by Teresa Kroenung

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

she eventually abandoned her studies, she met German-Jewish writer Franz Hessel; they were married and moved first to Berlin, then to rural Germany. They had two sons, and while her husband pursued his career, Grund reportedly worked as his editor in the background. She worked in agriculture, leaving her husband for six months to work on a farm in Poland, before returning to him and then to Berlin in the 1920s. Grund spent the following years travelling to Paris, writing about her trips in *Pariser Bilderbogen*, which was eventually published in the *Journal*, marking her first successful foray as a professional writer.<sup>149</sup> It was around that time that she began her work as a correspondent for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and *Das Illustrierte Blatt*, reporting on the fashion shows taking place in Paris and conducting interviews with couturiers and other creatives working in the industry.<sup>150</sup>

One of the journals she wrote for was the prominent women's magazine *Die Dame*, which started out as a magazine for women, created by women, in which female artists, editors, writers and designers contributed to its content, design language and narrative. The magazine began promoting this new kind of female-led journalism that centralised women's experiences, as described by Ganeva above.

Published by Ullstein,<sup>151</sup> the magazine was geared towards the new woman, independent and career-driven, with layouts and illustrations designed by artists such as Erica Mohr, Gerda Bunzel and Hanna Goerke. While male contributors were also given plenty of space – among them costume historian Max von Boehn – these early years were distinctly female-driven and focused, adopting an optimistic approach to modernity.<sup>152</sup>

At *Die Dame*, Grund was – at first – only one of many female contributors, but her unique status was further underlined as the years progressed and the magazine shifted focus under its new editor Ernst Dryden, until she was the only female writer remaining. The pages that had previously been designed and filled with work by female artists and photographers, androgynous and modern,<sup>153</sup> became cluttered with

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<sup>149</sup> Peteuil, 2013

<sup>150</sup> While still married to Franz Hessel, she signed all her articles with her maiden name, a conscious choice and for this reason I also refer to her by her maiden name.

<sup>151</sup> Annelie Ramsbrock, *The Science of Beauty: Culture and Cosmetics in Modern Germany, 1750–1930*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015)

<sup>152</sup> Ganeva, 2008

<sup>153</sup> Patrice Petro, *Joyless Streets: Women and Melodramatic Representation in Weimar Germany*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989)

Dryden's own drawings and essays instead, homogenising the image and language of the modern woman and changing the direction of a previously rather pro-feminist and progressive publication, symbolising the expulsion of women from their own narrative, and a return to the journalistic language and style perpetuated by male writers.

Dryden's work removed fashion from everyday life, arguably contributing to the notion of the 'new woman' as aloof, frivolous and detached.<sup>154</sup>

It can be argued that a similar male-driven fashion narrative still exists today, to some degree, which may be seen in *Thinking Through Fashion: a Guide to Key Theorists*, edited by Anneke Smelik and Agnès Rocamora, a collection of sixteen essays discussing texts by cultural theorists that are relevant to fashion's critical discourse. However, while many of the writers discussing the theorists are women, fifteen of the sixteen theorists represented are men – Jean Baudrillard, Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, Sigmund Freud, and so on, Judith Butler being the only exception.

Among the theorists featured is Walter Benjamin, who is frequently referenced in fashion theory, as already suggested in the previous chapter. His theories were revisited after the English translation of his seminal work *Das Passagen-Werk* by Howard Eiland was published in 1982 as *The Arcades Project*, coinciding with a new interest in critical fashion studies that was exemplified by the publication of Elizabeth Wilson's *Adorned in Dreams*.

Benjamin can arguably be considered the first modern philosopher to attempt a serious analysis of fashion,<sup>155</sup> and has, since the publication of this translation, become one of the key philosophers for many fashion writers and theorists. His theories are widely known and applied; however, the same cannot be said for his main source of information about the everyday practices and mechanics of the fashion industry.

Some of Benjamin's thoughts on fashion derive from his observation of people roaming the Parisian arcades, embodying the Baudelairean flâneur.<sup>156</sup> Yet his account of the details and inner workings of the industry are based on the work of Grund, whom he got to know through his friendship with Grund's husband, Franz Hessel.<sup>157</sup>

Benjamin relies on Grund's work to map out a world he does not have access to, regularly reading her fashion reviews published in the *Frankfurter Zeitung (FZ)*. In

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<sup>154</sup> Ganeva, 2008

<sup>155</sup> Lehmann, 2019, Interview

<sup>156</sup> Geczy and Karaminas, 2016

<sup>157</sup> Ganeva, 2008

response to reading an excerpt from Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk*, German philosopher Adorno even advised his friend to consult Grund on a critical matter:

When I read your passage on fashion – which I think is very important, though your argument should have less to do with the ‘organic’ and more to do with ‘life’ – I found myself thinking about that shimmering French fabric called ‘changeant’ that was so expressive of the nineteenth century and was presumably also a result of new industrial processes. You might pursue that idea. Mrs. Hessel, whose reports in the *FZ* we always read with great interest, will certainly know more about it.<sup>158</sup>

Most of Grund's work – diary entries, articles and lectures – remains untranslated. The only occasion on which Grund's writing features in an English text, on her own merit, is

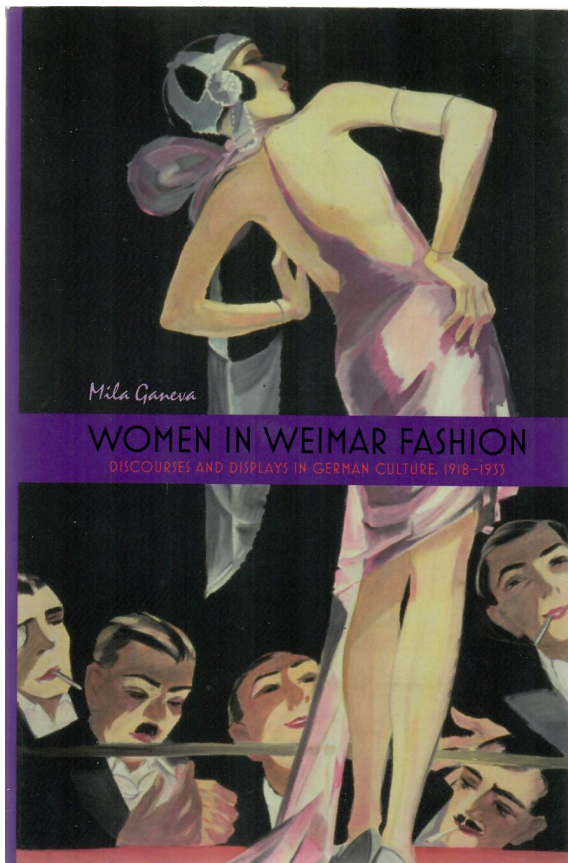


Figure 2: Cover of *Women in Weimar Fashion* by Mila Ganeva, © 2008 Mary K. Rike

in Mila Ganeva's *Women in Weimar Fashion: Discourses and Displays in German Culture 1918-1933* (Fig. 2), in a chapter entitled 'Helen Grund and Fashion and Travel Writing', dedicated to her work as a fashion journalist during the Weimar Republic. For this reason, the core of the research undertaken for this thesis has involved reading Grund's writing in the original German and subsequently translating her work from German into English, including her famous lecture 'Vom Wesen der Mode' [The Nature of Fashion], given at the Trade School for Dressmakers in Munich in 1935. Given the particularity of her original style of writing, a product of the time she lived in but also influenced by her own approach to the

German language, it was important to study the texts in their original language to fully

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<sup>158</sup> Theodore W. Adorno, quoted in Ganeva, 2008, p. 86

grasp their essence, and to ensure that the engagement with these texts is as authentic and truthful to my reading of them as possible.

The lack of attention Grund's writing has suffered is something Ulrich Lehmann, author of *Tigersprung: Fashion in Modernity* and *Fashion and Materialism* and a leading expert on Benjamin, attributes to the fact that fashion was not considered worth studying at the time, and that women were not considered equal to men, which prevented female journalists from participating in critical discourse and scholarship. 'Female scholars had to be working as journalists and so on. So they were not to be taken seriously.'<sup>159</sup>

Yet despite the lack of Grund's inclusion in the critical discourse of fashion, and despite the fact that her contemporaries never regarded her in the way they did Benjamin and other male writers and theorists, Grund's texts represent an apparently untapped source of original and diaristic fashion writing that offers a direct and unapologetic view of a woman's thoughts and experiences within an exciting emerging cultural context. In addition, they are an approach to fashion thinking that is truly original, empathetic and, in case of her private texts, deeply personal and unfiltered.

While there is a temptation to analyse these texts as historic artefacts, and to think of Grund as a historical figure whose work should be analysed within that context, this research argues that the application of her work within a contemporary context, and its alignment with the work of people who – like her – have carved out their own personal spaces in fashion, offers fresh insights for a fuller understanding of contemporary fashion practice and the people creating it.

For Benjamin, who dedicated his entire life's work to Charles Baudelaire, whom he idolised,<sup>160</sup> Grund – this *Teufelsweib*, this hell of a woman – remains a footnote. Within Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk*, her lecture 'Vom Wesen der Mode' is cited as reference number 392, nestled between Henryk Grossmann's essay on socialist ideas and ideals and Alexandre Guérin's 'Le mansardes'.<sup>161</sup>

This lecture, given to the trade school for dressmakers in Munich, follows a series of documented visits by Grund to the school that trained women in the craft, written and published for the German magazine *Für die Frau* [For the Woman], for a series of texts

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<sup>159</sup> Lehmann, 2019, Interview

<sup>160</sup> Geczy and Karaminas, 2016

<sup>161</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften, Vol. I* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1991), p. 1293

with the title *Lehrjahre der Mode* [Apprenticeship Years in Fashion]. In one of these visits, Grund recounts her conversation with the founder and director of the school, a woman called Kornhas-Brandt, whom she asks: *‘Glauben Sie, daß wir uns vom Pariser Einfluss befreien sollen und eine eigene deutsche Mode schaffen können?’* [Do you think that we should free ourselves from Parisian influence and strive to create a unique German fashion?]<sup>162</sup> The conversation that follows is perhaps surprisingly blunt: the director’s reply focused mainly on economic factors, which she also included in a letter sent to the Minister for Culture in May 1934. Kornhas-Brandt suggests that a premature and sudden rupture between Germany and the French fashion industry may seriously endanger the economy and continues by demonstrating the fashion industry’s economic value, which comprised an eighth of national economic wealth, to which Grund responds:

*Welch ein schlagendes Argument gegen alle, die behaupten, die Mode sei eine Angelegenheit einiger nicht ernst zu nehmender Frauen!*

[What an impressive argument against all those who claim that fashion concerns only women who are not to be taken seriously!]<sup>163</sup>

This speaks to the seriousness with which both these women approach fashion, Grund wanting to impart this approach to her readership and Kornhas-Brandt doing the same with her students. Additionally, it provides a useful context for Grund’s lecture and its content. Despite the fact that the audience for this very lecture mostly consisted of young women training to work in the fashion industry, Grund does not speak to them in a condescending tone, but issues a challenge to resist that very claim that fashion and the women interested or working in it should not be taken seriously. Grund asserts the importance of her profession and her role, and urges these young women to do the same.

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<sup>162</sup> Helen Hessel, *Ich schreibe aus Paris: Über die Mode, das Leben und die Liebe.*, ed. by Mila Ganeva (Wädenswil: Nimbus, 2014) [Trans. Teresa Kroenung], p. 245

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246



# Helen Hessel

## Ich schreibe aus Paris

über die Mode,  
das Leben und die Liebe



*Hôtel Matignon*  
6, AVENUE MATHIGNON  
BOULEVARD DES CHAMPS-ÉLYSÉES, PARIS 8<sup>e</sup>



Figure 3: Book Cover, *Ich schreibe aus Paris* by Helen Hessel, edited by Mila Ganeva and first published in 2014. © 2014 Bernhard Echte



For Grund, fashion is – above all – about beauty, which she identifies as an ideal that, although susceptible to variations and change over time, human beings naturally strive for. In her lecture *Vom Wesen der Mode* [The Nature of Fashion], which represents the culmination of her fashion journey, Grund presents her findings from approximately a decade of working as a fashion journalist, and she begins the process of outlining her views by providing her own definition of the term ‘fashion’. She prefaces this discussion by stating that she would not engage in fashion chit-chat, or concern herself with superficialities, but rather ‘approach this topic with all the seriousness it deserves’.<sup>164</sup> Grund asks not only what the term *fashion* means, but also how it can be understood, implying that it is multi-faceted and more complex than it initially seems, emphasising her intention to challenge fashion’s superficial image. The complexity Grund attributes to fashion is illustrated by her definition of it:

*Sie ist das Bildwerden einer zutiefst in der Menschheit wurzelnden Sehnsucht nach der Vollkommenheit. Sie ist der Beweis, daß die Menschheit dem Ideal der Grazie und Anmut verpflichtet ist wie ein Künstler, der das Geleistete wohl eine Zeitlang bewundern kann, bis ihn der Trieb zur Vollkommenheit in neue Unruhe stürzt. An der Mode kann man nachweisen, daß das Gefühl für das Schöne sich nicht festlegen läßt.*<sup>165</sup>

[It is the becoming of an image of a longing for perfection deeply rooted in humanity. It is proof that humanity is indebted to the ideal of beauty and grace – like an artist, who can marvel at their achievement for a spell, until the desire for perfection throws them into restlessness once more. Fashion is evidence that a sense of beauty cannot be defined.]

Grund believed that fashion embodies humanity’s desire for beauty as well as humanity’s dissatisfaction about not being able to achieve it, revealing a tension that would carry over into her personal perception of it. In the original German, Grund describes an artist’s need to create perfection as ‘*Trieb*’, which translates as ‘desire’ or

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<sup>164</sup> Hessel, 2014, p. 252.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

‘drive’. However, what is lost in the translation is that *‘Trieb’* implies an appetite that is carnal, and the term is often used in a more animalistic context to describe baser human instincts. Humanity, according to Grund, cannot help but strive for beauty because it is part of its nature, and fashion is the visual representation of this.

Rather than passively consuming fashion, women started to actively participate in it, as Ganeva notes: ‘Weimar fashion helped shape a public sphere within which the female practitioners were transformed from objects of male voyeurism into active subjects of the complex, ambivalent, and constantly shifting experience of metropolitan modernity’.<sup>166</sup>

Grund took up a newly created role as fashion correspondent for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, gaining access to an industry many men could only view from the outside, if they cared to look at it at all. Ganeva points out that while female fashion journalists were met with a ‘disparaging attitude [...] during the rise of the mass press in the pre-Weimar period’,<sup>167</sup> Grund managed to become a pioneer with her fashion articles for the *FZ* by reversing stereotypical opinions about women’s intellectual capabilities.<sup>168</sup>

However, despite the fact that her work was a commercial success, the newspaper did not allow women to become part of the editorial board, ‘as a matter of principle, [meaning that] the narrated and documented history of that prominent institution of liberal democratic consciousness in Germany almost completely lacks the names of women’.<sup>169</sup> This early bias against fashion reporting by women may be a contributory factor in the arguably still wide disparagement of the topic of fashion as an intellectual subject worth studying. As Grund states at the very beginning of *Vom Wesen der Mode*, one of her main pursuits as a professional was to counteract the notion of fashion as superficial, therefore contradicting the prevailing view at the time, which was that nothing profound could be said about fashion.

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<sup>166</sup> Ganeva, 2008, p. 2

<sup>167</sup> Ibid, p. 91

<sup>168</sup> Ganeva, 2008

<sup>169</sup> Ibid, p. 92

### 2.3 The new woman – Grund in Paris

In the early 1920s, starting her career as the fashion correspondent for the *FZ*, Grund wrote travel accounts of her trips to Paris, like her husband and the poets Heinrich von Kleist, Heinrich Heine and others, noting down her experience of the French capital in *Aufatmen in Paris* and *Pariser Bilderbogen*.<sup>170</sup>

It is important to note that during this period, while women could not officially roam the city streets as part of their personal intellectual pursuits, they still proceeded to capture their uniquely female experiences of Paris. Grund was not entirely like the conventional Baudelairean flâneur, but she was an observer of everyday life and attempted to unravel the aspect of contemporary fashion in particular. This practice of walking through Paris, experiencing the city and then writing about it is a tentative suggestion of Grund's own methodological approach to fashion writing and thinking, which is similar to the notion of the flâneur – the active shaping of the world, combined with an emphasis on individual experience and the subject-object relationship adopted by many Modernist theorists and philosophers to generate new knowledge and meaning.<sup>171</sup>

The flâneur first enters the scene during the First Empire. Priscilla Ferguson, in *Paris as Revolution: Writing the Nineteenth-Century City*, traces the flâneur's emergence through tales of the city by Alain René Le Sage, Louis-Sébastien Mercier and Restif de la Bretonne, as well as the new journalistic endeavours of Richard Steele and Joseph Addison.<sup>172</sup> Charles Baudelaire's interpretation of the concept that sociologist Chris Jenks defines as 'the spectator and depicter of modern life'<sup>173</sup>, is representative of the avant-garde of the time; artists, writers and philosophers, who believed flânerie to be vital to the imagination. Another prominent proponent of the concept was Honoré de Balzac who 'conceived of flânerie as a synthesis of empiricism, creativity, and

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Geczy and Karaminas, 2016

<sup>172</sup> Aimée Boutin, "Rethinking the Flâneur: Flânerie and the Senses", 2012. *Dix-Neuf*, 16:2, 124-132, DOI: 10.1179/dix.2012.16.2.011

<sup>173</sup> Chris Jenks, *Visual Culture*. (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 146

science'<sup>174</sup>, contrasting with Baudelaire's<sup>175</sup> rejection of 'a scientific conception of modernity'<sup>176</sup>.

Regardless of which side of these two opposing positions one finds oneself on, it is important to note that in all renditions, whether they be of popular journalistic or imaginative artistic kind, the flâneur is always irrevocably, decidedly male. While the flâneur is a unique concept, mostly associated with 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century intellectuals and the rise of metropolitan culture, he is also symbolic of a culture of knowledge production in which the source is a white, heterosexual, educated and well-off to wealthy man. These two contrasting perspectives leave between them a space in which not only the 'other' (female, non-binary, otherwise non-conforming) has a place, but it leaves space for a more entwined analysis and description as exemplified through Grund and her unique, female voice.

Both feminist writer Luce Irigaray and Lorraine Code, an expert in feminist epistemology and the politics of knowledge, have extensively written about the imbalance of discourse and knowledge. This, they argue, can be attributed to the fact that most exemplary knowledge is based on 'infinitely replicable 'individuals' [who] are face-to-face with simple objects which they know from direct observation.'<sup>177</sup> In most cases, Code argues, empirical knowledge has been based on a simple "S-knows-that-p" epistemology'<sup>178</sup>, which generally was accepted to be truthful and reliable. It also matches Baudelaire's understanding that his flâneur is able to detach from a crowd to observe and subsequently gain knowledge from that act of direct perception. The Baudelairian flâneur follows a practice that is allegedly replicable, and was replicated by many intellectuals of the time, believing that this process provided a unique opportunity for objective knowledge. This shift towards a seemingly accessible and objective truth that took place as modernity unfolded and society restructured,

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<sup>174</sup> Boutin, 2012, p.128

<sup>175</sup> In *Le Peintre de la vie modern* [The Painter of Modern Life], Baudelaire attributes the strength of this method of producing new knowledge to the flâneur's supposed ability to be at once part of the walking masses without being absorbed by them, because they avoid temptations of the city. According to Baudelaire and his contemporaries, the flâneur can remain detached and can therefore observe and analyse their surroundings.<sup>175</sup> The rise of flâneuring as a practice intellectuals engage in coincides with the dominance of vision regarded as the superior and primary sense of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Jenks asserts that the very practice of quickly moving through crowds not only facilitates vision, but privileges it as well.<sup>175</sup>

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Lorraine Code, "Ignorance, Injustice and the Politics of Knowledge", 2014. *Australian Feminist Studies*, 29:80, 148-160, DOI: 10.1080/08164649.2014.928186, p.149

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

contrasting with the previous process of knowledge being passed down from a 'master' to a student, represents an initially positive change, if not for the assertion that 'S' – as mentioned above – was objective and 'could be anyone or everyone; yet in fact if not by intention, he is presumptively male, white, neither too old nor too young, propertied, able-bodied, reasonably educated and articulate, and well-off, materially, to have a pencil and a table and the other taken-for-granted things with which, as a matter of course, 'ordinary people' in materially replete societies are surrounded.'<sup>179</sup>

Baudelaire's flâneur is able to detach himself from a crowd to observe and subsequently gain knowledge from that act of direct perception. He follows a practice that is allegedly replicable, and was replicated by many intellectuals of the time, believing that this process provided a unique opportunity for objective knowledge. The problem with this assertion is that this flâneur, rather than being truly objective, is 'a masculine subject masquerading as universal.'<sup>180</sup>

The resulting imbalance in discourse and with this particular creation of knowledge has been the subject of much discussion.<sup>181</sup> In their analysis of feminist writer Luce Irigaray's work, Ovidiu Anemtoaicei and Yvette Russell outline the overarching problem as follows:

Western culture is dominated by a certain (male) imaginary and structured according to masculine norms; it does not support an 'equally' valorised presence of the feminine within the symbolic/cultural realm. In other words, there is no sexual difference in the social imaginary of the West because the female body has not yet acceded to the cultural order and because the male phallic imaginary has had the historic privilege of speaking within only one culture for two bodies.<sup>182</sup>

They argue that because the structures around the production of knowledge were built by men, for men, and with men in mind, even if subconsciously, there was no reason for

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid., p.150

<sup>180</sup> Ovidiu Anemtoaicei & Yvette Russell, 'Luce Irigaray: Back to the Beginning', *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 21:5 (2013), 773-786, DOI: 10.1080/09672559.2013.857819

<sup>181</sup> Code, 2014

<sup>182</sup> Anemtoaicei & Russell, 2013, p.774.

men to assume that this kind of knowledge production was anything other than objective and universally applicable.

In 'Rethinking of the Flâneur: Flânerie and the Senses', Aimée Boutin lays out a case to apply the 'sensual turn' to the notion of the flâneur. Pioneered by historian Alain Corbin, anthropologists David Howes and Constance Classen, as well as geographer Paul Rodaway, the 'sensual turn', as it is known in the arts and humanities, trails the reappearance of the body and materiality while post-structuralist views on material culture began to decline. While this hierarchical understanding of the senses has been adopted and perpetuated since Aristotle, Howes argues that an engagement of all senses in this context provides a more full-bodied and therefore more dynamic and interconnected experience.<sup>183</sup> And while critics of the sensual turn may argue that this serves to denigrate the value of visual culture, Boutin argues that instead, the approach to engage the 'sensual turn' serves the understanding of how the gaze is related to other senses. She also acknowledges that while vision evidently dominated during early modern times and much has been gained from it, an expansion of our sensory field would contribute to 'a better, fuller perception of the development of modernity'<sup>184</sup>. In Boutin's essay, she evaluates the status of this arguably more passive sense and argues that while it is believed to be more passive, hearing is 'more relational than seeing, and more frequently associated with feelings of pleasure and pain than with detachment.'<sup>185</sup> What Boutin asserts is a link between the senses and the positioning of the flâneur as either immersed or detached, depending on what senses are actively engaged.

What arguably manifested this engagement with flânerie in critical discourse is the resurgence of Walter Benjamin with the publication and subsequent translation of his *Passagenwerk*, the *Arcades Project*, in the 1980s and late 1990s respectively. Benjamin, who wrote essays dedicated to his admiration of and fascination with Baudelaire, such as 'The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire' and 'Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism', based his definition of the modern city-dweller on the avant-garde, artist flâneur he discovered when studying Baudelaire's work. The notion

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<sup>183</sup> David Howes, *Sensual Relations: Engaging the Senses in Culture and Social Theory*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003)

<sup>184</sup> Boutin, 2012, p.125

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., p.126

of the flâneur was key in the development of Benjamin's *Passagenwerk*, a study of modern life and its effect on human culture and the human psyche, though Benjamin can be criticised for putting too much emphasis on Baudelaire.

Martina Lauster, in 'Walter Benjamin's Myth of the Flâneur', while accepting the relevance of Benjamin's work with regards to phenomena of novelty, points out that Benjamin's idea of the flâneur is limited, and that he misunderstands fundamental modernist aesthetic concepts, such as self-loss, subsequently obscuring his analysis. Additionally, Lauster argues that Benjamin apparently overlooks the way scenic tales of the city have filtered into the concept, effectively weakening how these analyses picked out the method of perception as a central theme.<sup>186</sup>

Boutin adds to the critique of Benjamin as the main reference for this city-stroller by picking up on his counterintuitive interpretation of the 'man of the crowd', centred around his casting of the flâneur as contrary character,<sup>187</sup> who does not get involved with the crowd, but remains at a safe distance in order to observe the passages that gave the name to his most significant piece of work. 'His materialist interpretation of the flâneur', Boutin points out, 'emphasised the significance of the new architectural visual aesthetic in Paris, notably the arcades or passages, built in the first decades of the nineteenth century [...] and boulevards, started under Préfet Rambuteau and pursued aggressively by Baron Haussmann, whose comprehensive design turned the street into an interior.'<sup>188</sup>

While Benjamin's contribution to critical, cultural discourse and material culture is of value, one has to acknowledge the limitations of his analyses and the reality of his background and process. And while it is Benjamin's take on the flâneur that got reintroduced into the contemporary in the nineteen-eighties and -nineties, it was arguably not explicitly recontextualised for a contemporary context.

Jessica Rizk from McMaster University in Ontario, Canada, and Anton Birioukov from the University of Ottawa characterise the historical flâneur as someone who 'would read the public, the streets, buildings, and commodities as signifiers of a new type of

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<sup>186</sup> Martina Lauster, "Walter Benjamin's Myth of the "Flâneur", *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 102, No. 1 (Jan., 2007)

<sup>187</sup> Boutin, 2012, p.128

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

existence.’<sup>189</sup> While not exclusively practiced in Paris, new metropolitan city centres were key in establishing this method of knowledge production. Yet Rizk and Birioukov stress its importance in a contemporary context. They hypothesise that flâneuring-as-methodology ‘provides an unconventional approach to qualitative research [...] and resists hegemonic relations of knowledge production’<sup>190</sup>. The reason they give for this resistance is unusual methods to gather data, especially through the collection of visual imagery, that allow the reader to relate to an unprivileged process that does not claim superiority over other modes of knowledge production. Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, the combination of individual and shared insight means that observations will change depending on the person who takes on the role of flâneur.<sup>191</sup>

Since Baudelaire’s time, the concept of flânerie as practice, as well as methodology, has been re-examined and re-interpreted,<sup>192</sup> and even ‘feminised’ to a degree,<sup>193</sup> but I would argue that any discussions pertaining to the lack of female flânerie or the contradictions surrounding the inhabiting of that conventional male role by women, can be put aside in this case. While these discussions and contradictions may be very valid and true, a continuous attachment to the flâneur arguably results in the persistence of narratives that do not focus on women’s experience, or leave them out entirely.<sup>1</sup> The emergence of the *Neue Frau* in the Weimar Republic presents an antithesis to the flâneur, with women beginning to inhabit spaces previously denied to them. They created and claimed these spaces through the unique socio-cultural and political circumstances in Germany at the time, allowing them to emerge not as female flâneurs, but as the *Neuen Frauen*, without being defined in a masculine context. And it is that role that Helen Grund also claimed for herself, walking up and down streets and forging her own path.

It is not too difficult to imagine Grund walking along the streets, taking deep breaths, as she alludes to in the title of one of her travel essays about Paris: *Aufatmen*, ‘a sigh of

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<sup>189</sup> Jessica Rizk and Anton Birioukov, “Following the Flâneur: The Methodological Possibilities and Applications of Flânerie in New Urban Spaces”, *The Qualitative Report* 2017 Volume 22, Number 12, p. 3270

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3271

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>192</sup> Rizk and Birioukov, 2017

<sup>193</sup> The notion of the female flâneur, or ‘flâneuse’, is discussed by Elizabeth Wilson in ‘The Invisible Flâneur’, Elfriede Dreyer and Estelle McDowall’s text ‘Imagining the Flâneur as a Woman’ *Communicatio: South African Journal for Communication Theory and Research*, 38:1(2012), 30-44, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02500167.2011.634425>, as well as Lauren Elkin’s *Flâneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Vienna and London* (London: Penguin/Random House UK, 2016).



relief, as the crowds she moves through enable her anonymity, allowing her the opportunity to reverse the script and, instead of being observed, do the observing. A moment of getting caught up in a throng allows her to view her surroundings, including a bride in white who she suggests is like a cloud, carrying a bouquet of fake orange blossoms.<sup>194</sup> These diary entries mark a conscious step into a new world and a new role, signalling a clear departure from earlier notes, but also a continuing narrative.

In Paris Grund can breathe, and she is able to use her new-found freedom to meticulously describe and catalogue everything she encounters with vivid language, for example by recalling an evening at a restaurant on the Boulevard de Rochechouart. In the smoke-filled room, she describes music and dancing and sullen girls' faces, almost angry with youth, with short warm hair, *'hurenherrlich'*<sup>195</sup> [whore-splendid]. They have glaring lips and are dressed in green tinsel and dusty chiffon: Grund is surprisingly blunt in her depictions, adding that *'Einzelne sind schön, alle aber sind deutlich. Auf den Stufen zur Galerie steht eine ungeschminkte deutschaussehende Dicke.'* [Some are beautiful, but all are distinctive. On the steps to the gallery stands a bare-faced German-looking fat woman.]<sup>196</sup>

Grund leans into her personal experience, evoking a sense of community and togetherness by continuously using the term 'we' rather than 'I', making clear that she is, on the one hand, not alone, and on the other hand not the focus of this particular moment. It contrasts with the intentionally solitary figure of the flâneur as he wanders the streets. Grund, however, has company. He remains unnamed, but is constantly present, and Grund calls him *'mein Begleiter'*,<sup>197</sup> 'my companion'. Grund initially exists only infrequently in her texts on her own. This is a theme in her work that will be explored later. But it is important to note at this point that Grund uses the first person sparingly, yet pointedly, often in relation to what she herself is wearing, such as colours that are too bright in a dark studio.<sup>198</sup>

While casual and seemingly unintentional observation may have marked the beginning of Grund's interest in, and analysis of, fashion, and her specific role in modern society, Ganeva suggests that '[Grund's] writings revealed some of fashion's hidden implications

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<sup>194</sup> Ganeva, 2008, pp. 33-35

<sup>195</sup> Hessel, 2014, p. 29

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., p. 25

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

for an understanding of modernity and mass culture',<sup>199</sup> calling her texts 'seemingly unpretentious but highly evocative'.<sup>200</sup>

Even though she is regarded as 'simply' a female journalist, her endeavours to understand fashion and what drives people to engage with it reveals a rejection of the attempt to present fashion as something trivial and frivolous, or to use it as a vehicle to make a more general argument. What makes Grund so important is not her apparent influence on her male contemporaries, nor necessarily the numerous articles she published during her successful career as a fashion correspondent in Paris. It is the fact that she managed to create her own means of producing knowledge, embracing her own experiences, that clearly sets her apart from Benjamin, her husband and others. As a woman, her approach needed to differ, and it is that difference that now grants a new approach, that arguably enriches the image of urban life and the fashion within it through a lens moulded by Grund, and shaped by her practice of *flânerie* as a woman in the 1920s. This practice shapes her approach to knowledge production, and I will outline and discuss its application and impact within the context of her work as a fashion correspondent and journalist in the following section.

## 2.4 Für die Frau

Over the course of her professional career as a fashion correspondent, the overall focus of Grund's work needed to be on providing her readership back home in Germany with information on the newest trends, on the clothes the fashion-forward and tasteful women of Paris were purchasing, and the garments the famous couturiers were presenting in their salons for an audience made up of affluent society dames from all over the world.

In a diary entry dated 25<sup>th</sup> April 1925, Grund recalls a presentation at couturier Paul Poiret's atelier, yet while she describes the clothes shown on tall and elegant mannequins, mentioning the couturier as well (*'Paul Poiret, der Meister, ist plötzlich im Raum. Plaudernd geht er von Gruppe zu Gruppe, ein graugrüner Kittel hängt lose um seine imposante Gestalt, gibt der Situation eine Andeutung von Intimität, seinem Auftreten die*

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<sup>199</sup> Ganeva, 2008, pp. 33-35

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

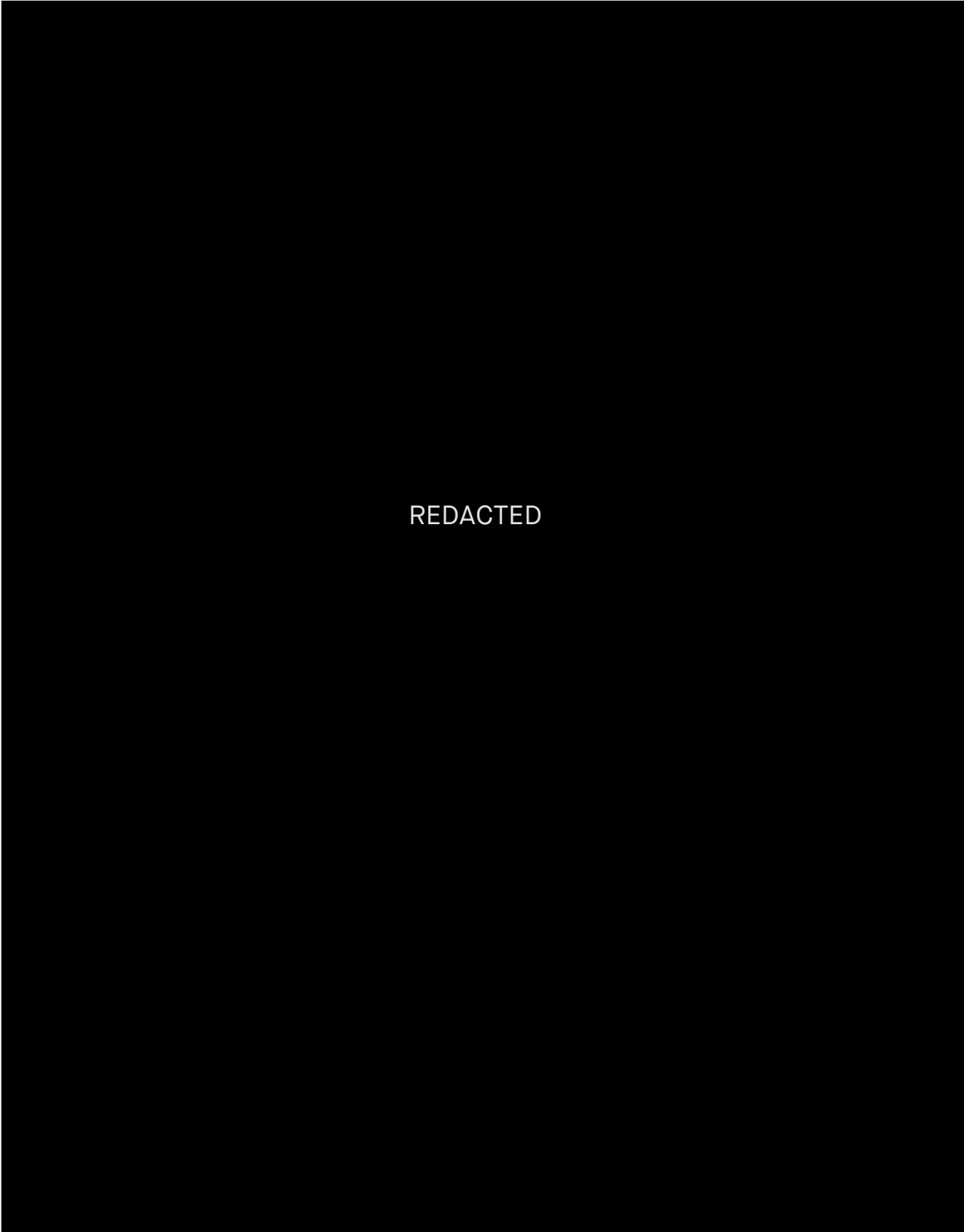
*Liebenswürdigkeit eines Hausherrn, der seine Gäste begrüßt. Seine blauen Augen erfassen schnell, schauen freundlich.* [Paul Poiret, the master, is suddenly in the room. Chatting, he goes from one group to the next, a grey-green work coat hanging loosely around his imposing form, giving the situation a hint of intimacy, his appearance the courteousness of a host who is greeting his guests. His blue eyes register quickly, look friendly.]<sup>201</sup>, she takes the time to meticulously note down the women who surround her – their appearances, their quirks, the cadence of their voices.

Mentioning young secretaries busying themselves with paperwork, Grund writes about the people around her with great attention to detail, giving these women personalities and voices. *„Eine geschwätzige Frau,‘* she writes, *‘sehr “angezogen“, pudert nichts als ihr prangendes Doppelkinn, während sie ihrer Freundin schmeichelhafte Vorwürfe macht: „Sie, die so viele Millionen haben –„. Liebenswert bemüht sich die Empfangsdame. Eine vornehme Engländerin schaut durch ihr Lorgnon die Wände hinauf. [...] Grüngläserne Kronleuchter tragen schlanke Kerzen – nur wenig schlanker als die vollkommenen Beine der zarten Frau gegenüber.*<sup>202</sup> [A talkative woman, very ‘dressed’, powders nothing but her resplendent double chin while she heaps flattering reproaches on her girlfriend: ‘You, who have so many millions –’. The receptionist makes an amicable effort. A noble Englishwoman looks up the walls through her lorgnon. [...] Greenglass chandeliers carry slim candles – only a little slimmer than the perfect legs of the delicate woman opposite her.]

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<sup>201</sup> Hessel, 2014, trans. by Teresa Kroenung, p. 44

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., p. 42



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*Figure 4: Helen Grund in Paris, ca. 1926, © Stephane and Ullrich Hessel*

There is a substantial part of the text that is a detailed description of the garments shown to loyal customers, but surprisingly, and perhaps in startling contrast to the fashion writing of today, Grund never truly separates the clothes from the women wearing them. They garments rarely feature as detached objects, but are brought to life

by descriptions of the mannequins making them move, made real by being attached to an identity, and to the women who might wear them. Grund describes a young woman, *‘etwas verzweifelt und sehr mondän [...] in dem roströten Kleid, dessen Jacke in all ihren Nähten von enggewellten Rüschen durchzittert ist’*<sup>203</sup> [a bit desperate and very mundane [...] in the crimson dress, all the seams of its jacket quivering with tightly curled ruffles.] Grund writes in a lively manner that *‘ein tönliches Staunen liegt in dem Ensemble von Schürzenteilen und weißgepunktetem Foulard, dessen plissierter Rock ein tüftiger Volant begrenzt. Prüde Jugend drückt sich in dem Delftmuster aus, lachende Freude in dem hellgelben Schottisch mit den dünngewebten Fransen und dem doppelseitigen Jäckchen.’*<sup>204</sup> [a frivolous astonishment lies in the ensemble of pinafore and white-dotted foulard, its pleated skirt restricted by a baggy flounce. Prudish youth is expressed in the Delft pattern, laughing joy in the light-yellow tartan with a thinly woven fringe and a double-faced jacket.] Yet in spite of all this wonderful detailing of garments we will never see or wear, or perhaps precisely because of this, what stands out most in this diary entry is not only the poetry of Grund’s descriptions, but also her constant return to the women in her presence. She does not end this diary entry with a review of Poiret’s collection, or even comments about the couturier himself. Instead, Grund gives the last paragraph, the last words, to a woman in the audience.

*‘Was ist der Name von diesem Kleid’, ruft die Dame mit den schmalen Füßchen. Ihr amerikanischer Akzent ist noch akuter durch ihr Entzücken.*

*‘Cléopâtre, Mademoiselle’, antwortet man ihr.*

*Sie macht ein energisches Kreuz neben den Namen in ihrem Katalog, sie wird Cléopâtre erwerben. [...]*

*Draußen fällt ein funkelnder Sonnenregen auf die Knöpfe der blau-blusigen Arbeiter, die trotz Trams und Autos das Straßenpflaster reparieren. Über der Weite des Rond Point spannt sich ein schillernder Regebogen.’*<sup>205</sup>

[‘What is the name of this dress?’ calls the lady with the narrow feet. Her American accent is even stronger through her delight.

‘Cléopâtre, Mademoiselle’, they answer her.

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<sup>203</sup> Hessel, 2014, trans. by Teresa Kroenung, p. 45

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., p. 48

She makes an energetic cross next to the name in her catalogue: she will purchase Cléopâtre. [...]

A glittering sun-rain falls onto the heads of the blue-bloused workers outside, who are repairing the pavement despite the passing of trams and cars. A shimmering rainbow spans the width of the Rond Point.]

These are not objects to be studied in a detached way, nor are they simple threads in the cultural tapestry Grund seeks to unravel. The care she takes to attune to their quirks and individual characteristics hints at a conscious or even implicit desire to capture these women as they are. Grund simply allows them to exist on their own, with no ulterior motive – a privilege not always freely given to the women of this era.

While it is important to note that these are private texts, entries in the diary Grund kept meticulously throughout her entire life, this way of writing about women and this focus on their personal experience is something that carries through into her professional texts. One might argue that of course it would, because of Grund's profession as a fashion correspondent for German newspapers and magazines, whose target audience was female. In fact, one of her regular clients was a magazine called *Für die Frau*<sup>206</sup> [For the Woman]. However, as discussed in the review of the relevant literature pertaining to dominant structures and narratives, and while I am not denying that Grund was a creature of her environment – in fact, many of the things she states in her texts correlate firmly with the general mindset of the early twentieth century – or suggesting that she was a staunch feminist far ahead of her time, there is an undeniable pattern that carries through her entire body of work. In fact, after analysing a sample size of Grund's private and professional texts, I have found that she describes men's actions and appearances only twelve times. By contrast, women are described or referred to over forty times. Ganeva confirms this analysis in her book, stating that 'Grund's collection of sartorial minutiae [...] offer a provocative and rare inside look into fashion as the field of professional fulfilment for many lower- and middle-class women'.<sup>207</sup> It is unusual in texts on fashion – even contemporary ones – to find this keen focus on the behind-the-scenes female fashion house staff, as well as lesser-known female designers and

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<sup>206</sup> Coincidentally, with no connection to the Weimar-era magazine, there is a contemporary publication in Germany called *Alles für die Frau* [Everything for the Woman], published by Bauer Media Group, unironically including everything from sewing tips to gardening suggestions.

<sup>207</sup> Ganeva, 2008, p.94

creatives, supplementing the more straightforward collection and trend reports Grund was providing for her readers. The fashion names of the era such as Patou, Worth and Poiret are not entirely overlooked, but it is notable that Grund does not use the platform her position has afforded her to further promote the men who were designing dresses for women, but instead tended to describe women who were generally focused on making practical and economical clothing for women, rather for than the millionaires flown in from the United States.

Bauhaus alumna Renate Green, for example, was one of Grund's regular interview partners, whose designs followed the Bauhaus credo that form should follow function, rejecting the decorative abundance and display of opulence that was common in many fashion ateliers. Grund describes Green's work as instead 'designed according to completely new social principles':<sup>208</sup> she used an interview with Green to critique the overall state of the fashion industry in comparison to Green's principles, stated thus: 'What I saw was an enormous work effort in which both snobbism and the desire for high profits played a larger role. No one, however, had the goal of giving women of all classes the opportunity to dress well and beautifully at the lowest possible cost.'<sup>209</sup> Grund, whose unfussy, direct and straightforward nature shines through in her writing, agrees with Green's vision for modern fashion, commenting that fashion should be making 'dresses that all women can wear regardless of their social class – the banker's wife as well as the young shop assistant, the aristocrat as well as the maid'.<sup>210</sup> Alongside Green is a group of women who are all attempting to create their own spaces within the fashion industry, all interviewed by Grund in a way that makes one almost forget that the context in which these conversations take place is the fashion world. It seems that while Grund's attention to detail extends to descriptions of garments, fabric and accessories, the interviews she conducts with female designers and creatives rarely veer towards a discussion of the actual items they design and produce. Instead, as is evident in an interview with the three female designers who formed the fashion house Tao, published in *Das Illustrierte Blatt* on 24 July 1926, Grund appears to be more interested in the circumstances within which the designs are created and the experiences of the people who create them.

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<sup>208</sup> Green, quoted in Ganeva, 2008, p. 94

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

The three Tao designers were Russian aristocrats who had fled from the Russian Revolution to Paris; finding themselves stripped of their titles and large parts of their wealth, all three needed to find employment. Grund writes: *„Hinter sich den Zusammenbruch, um sich her die lebendige Konkurrenz der größten Modestadt, machte sich Mademoiselle Annenkow unerschrocken an die Aufgabe, trat in eines der ersten Modehäuser ein und studierte von Grund auf das Metier.“*<sup>211</sup> [Behind her was collapse, surrounding her the living competitors of the biggest fashion city: Mademoiselle Annenkow fearlessly took up the task, entered one of the first fashion houses and studied the craft from the ground up.]

Mademoiselle Annenkow managed the front of house and clients, with Princess Obolensky looking after the commercial side of the business and Princess Troubetzkoy running the atelier: Grund credits these three women with taking matters into their own hands with pragmatism and staunch resilience. According to Mademoiselle Annenkow, the Bolsheviks could not forgive them for their refusal to admit defeat and for not allowing their prophecies to materialise, elaborating that *‘Sie meinten uns alles zu rauben, wenn sie uns Titel, Besitz und Heimat nähmen. Sie vergaßen, daß uns das Wichtigste unverlierbar ist, Kultur und Tradition. Die Grundlagen unserer Erziehung: Disziplin der täglichen Gewohnheiten und die Zartheit im Umgang mit den Menschen – und unsere Freude an Schönheit und Eleganz. Fällt diese uns nun auch nicht mehr mühelos zu, so können wir doch helfen sie zu schaffen.’*<sup>212</sup> [They meant to rob us of everything when they took our titles, possessions and homes. They forgot that the most important thing – culture and tradition – cannot be lost. The foundations of our upbringing: discipline through daily customs and tenderness in contact with people – and our joy in beauty and elegance. While it does not come to us without effort, we can still help to create it.]

The garments these three Russian aristocrats created seem secondary, and while Grund notes that they seemed to stand out amongst those in other Parisian fashion houses due to the difference between French and Russian aesthetics, the discussion of clothing assumes less importance than these women’s stories.

Something similar can be said about Grund’s conversation with a Parisian milliner, in which there is no mention of hats and other fashion goods: their talk focuses purely on

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<sup>211</sup> Hessel, 2014, p. 62

<sup>212</sup> Mademoiselle Annenkow, quoted in Hessel, 2014, p. 64



the milliner's process and sources of inspiration. She has blue hair, Grund notes with delight, and she must have commented on it to the milliner, who tells her that it is her favourite colour, because it calms and excites her equally.<sup>213</sup> The conversation veers towards the milliner's process, and her answer creates a perhaps unexpected link to women who have begun to venture outside on their own and pursue new activities they were denied previously – an underlying understanding and kinship are evident, as the milliner explains:

*Ich arbeite fast nur auf der Straße, das heißt, wenn Sie diesen Ausdruck für eine Tätigkeit gelten lassen wollen, die eigentlich keine ist. An Schaufenstern entlang zu gehen, ist mein größtes Vergnügen. Ich kann es stundenlang tun.*<sup>214</sup>

[I work almost entirely on the street: that means, if you want to accept this expression as an activity, it really isn't one. To walk by shop windows is my greatest pleasure. I can do it for hours.]

The most important aspect of her process, it seems, is the practice of walking and absorbing her surroundings, and she talks about the little trinkets she collects as she peruses collections in shops, purchasing them for details she finds interesting and that she might apply to her creations. Grund does not fill the majority of the pages of the article for the 26 April 1936 issue of *Für die Frau* with her own words, or her interpretation of the milliner's words, but allows the milliner's words to stand on their own, with the kind of long paragraphs and elaborate sentences that most editors might be eager to cut short. Grund's curiosity is displayed in the follow-up questions that turn sharp corners: *'Ach ja, erzählen Sie mir das –'*<sup>215</sup> [Oh yes, tell me about this -], the respect and admiration she has for her interviewee emerging in this professional text, *'Sie sind eine Künstlerin'*<sup>216</sup> [You are an artist], a compliment that the milliner shrugs off, exclaiming that she is neither artist nor businesswoman, nor particularly fond of the exchange with customers.

This unconventional portrait of a successful female creator gives a nuanced and three-dimensional view of a woman who would arguably have been a two-dimensional and

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<sup>213</sup> Hessel, 2014, p. 268

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., p. 288

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., p. 289

uninteresting secondary character or footnote in a conventional flâneur's writing. Grund, however, emphasises this woman's success and importance, her independence and refusal to collaborate with a big fashion house like others in her profession were doing, instead opting to go her own way, and keep to her own schedule. Without judgement, Grund presents this woman's vision of how she wished her life had turned out instead, and her ambivalence over her position – *'diesen merkwürdigen Erfolg'*<sup>217</sup> [this peculiar success] – instead fantasising about having a modest life as a mother with many children, and having a lovely voice to sing songs while doing household chores.<sup>218</sup>

In these interviews, whether with a renowned hat designer or fashion designers such as Madame Agnès and Madame Margot, Grund's approach is in sharp contrast with what Gill describes as polarised gender scripts in contemporary lifestyle and fashion magazines. Instead of casting these women in parts previously created by the prevailing narrative, interpreting their words and portraying their stories to fit an already-written script, Grund minimises her own presence, reducing her own words as far as possible in order to allow her interviewees room to breathe and tell their own stories. They are conversing as equals, Grund even stepping back to give these women the space she created in her capacity as a fashion correspondent and journalist. As if knowing that they would not get this attention otherwise, Grund casts herself in the more passive role of the listener who does not want to speak for them, but wishes them to speak for themselves.

Grund is barely present in the interview with Madame Agnès that was published in *Für die Frau* in November 1930, not even putting her words in quotation marks, and keeping them brief, barely a few words strung together at once, only mentioning the term *wir* [we] twice in her opening sequence to the interview, and not once referring to herself in the first person. While Grund notes, *'Sie ist schön, Madame Agnès, jung mit einem grauen Schimmer im Haar'*<sup>219</sup> [She is beautiful, Madame Agnès, young with a grey gleam to her hair], the initial focus of the interview appears to be on the interior of the atelier and store – the Boudoir – which is on the same street as all the 'greats', opposite Patou. Describing the golden ceilings and walls and the cushions, Grund sees jade green

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., p. 165

and coral red Asian gods and demons dancing behind glass, a vase containing fresh lilies, whose smell she describes as ‘sterbesüß’<sup>220</sup> [deathly sweet], so that the first question reads almost jarringly.

*Was halten Sie von der heutigen Mode? – ‚Sie ist praktisch.‘ – ‚Praktisch? – ‚So sehr, daß sie sich des Abends sogar und trotz der langen Kleider nicht phantastisch gestalten kann. Meine Kundinnen verlangen für alle Tages- und Abendgelegenheiten Hüte, die nichts wiegen, die man in die Tasche stecken kann, die nicht ‚verkleiden‘ –<sup>221</sup>*

[What do you think about contemporary fashion? – ‘It’s practical.’ – Practical? – ‘So much so that it can’t be fashioned into something fantastical, even in the evening, despite the long dresses. My clients are demanding hats that weigh nothing for all day and evening activities, that can be put into bags, that aren’t a “disguise”.’]

The answer Madame Agnès gives pivots interestingly away from her point of view and towards the needs and wishes of her customers. The immediacy with which her clients come to mind suggests that she considers them and their feedback essential to her business, and, like Grund stepping aside to allow Madame Agnès to take the floor, Madame Agnès also seems to adopt this position, using this interview moment to underline what she deems central to fashion.

Grund uses the first person once in her conversation with lingerie designer Madame Margot, but otherwise repeats the pattern of asking short, pointed questions and giving most of the words and space to her interview partner. This method is taken to its extreme when Grund speaks to Renate Green for *Für die Frau*, for a section called *Deutsche Mode in Paris – Ein zweites Gespräch mit Renate Green* [German Fashion in Paris – A second conversation with Renate Green], published in the magazine on 19 February 1933. While the first third of the article follows the usual pattern of introducing the setting, providing background and scenery, what follows is three questions posed by Grund, and a response by Renate Green that takes up the remaining two-thirds of the text, without Grund interrupting her even once, either to throw in

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., p. 167

another question or to add to the narrative. They are certainly having a difficult conversation, and Grund is unwilling to embellish or edit any of Green's thoughts and experiences that speak of confusion and failure. *'Ich habe mich geirrt,'*<sup>222</sup> [I have been mistaken] confesses Green to Grund. *'Das Problem, das ich gelöst glaubte, der hart arbeitenden, um ihre Existenz kämpfenden Frau die Sorge um ihre Kleidung in eine Freude an ihrer Kleidung zu verwandeln, war so verwirrend wie zuvor.'* [The problem I believed I had solved, to transform the worries about clothing experienced by hard-working women, who struggle for their existence, into joy in clothing, was as confusing as before.]

Green, hailed by Grund for her desire to make practical garments for working women, reveals her struggle to find the right market for her vision. Given fashion's contextual background, with its underlying structure that, it can be argued, objectifies women, embellishing their bodies for male viewing pleasure, this recognition on Green's behalf is not surprising. The effort she made to give her clients more agency by focusing on the practicality of the clothes they'd be wearing day in and day out is not rewarded, and even though this interview reveals many things about consumer habits and the fashion industry in the 1920s and 1930s, which could certainly be discussed at length, the relevance of this interview and others conducted by Grund and discussed in this chapter lies less in their content and more in the pattern they expose. A female fashion journalist choosing female practitioners to interview may not appear to be groundbreaking at first glance. But I would argue that these women with whom Grund chooses to converse are not just women working in the fashion industry, but a group of people who have positioned themselves in a way that allows them to subvert an existing narrative. They exist within the system, yet they have managed to create a space for themselves from which they are able to create fissures in the existing structures that – while not changing their course – disrupt the canon enough to be noticeable by Grund, whether this is Renate Green refusing to take part in casting women as objects to be decorated, a milliner wandering the streets to find inspiration or the Madame Agnès declining the call of capitalism by refusing to collaborate with other fashion houses and secretly wishing for a simpler life. In addition, what these women share beyond their disruptive gestures seems to be a process of creation that emphasises a synergistic

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<sup>222</sup> Green, quoted in Hessel, 2014, p. 213

relationship with their clients. Operating their business with a focus on the needs and wishes of others implies a receptiveness, and the willingness to take a step back, rather than be the centre of attention.

Therefore I would suggest that in this context, and revealed by a close reading and translating of Grund's texts it is not the garments and goods that are produced by these designers that are important, but the process that allowed these disruptive moments to exist and be witnessed by Grund, and – by extension – what needed to happen to initiate these ruptures. The content these interview moments reveal is important, but for an analysis of contemporary fashion it is more critical and vital to understand how they were generated.

As discussed previously, fashion theory relies heavily on theoretical frameworks and structures developed in other disciplines that have well-established systems of deduction and interpretation. In many cases, as discussed in the literature review, theories that have been adopted and adapted for critical fashion discourse were developed by men who studied and analysed fashion in order to underline a previously determined ideology. They have used fashion as a tool to make an argument for something else, in many cases to support a critique of capitalism and consumption. In other cases, such as those of Judith Butler or Mikhail Bakhtin – both featured in *Thinking Through Fashion* – theories revolve around the identity of the body, and can therefore be expanded into a discussion of fashion as it relates to this.<sup>223</sup>

The potency of Grund's body of work, I argue, is twofold. On the one hand, as a woman working in the early twentieth century, despite clearly moving in the same circles as writers such as Adorno and Benjamin and her own husband, she did not have the opportunity to pursue similar intellectual endeavours.<sup>224</sup> However, because Grund's texts were written and developed outside the realm of conventional scholarship, arguably they involve no apparent ideological orientation. They serve no other purpose than to communicate the ins and outs of the fashion industry, from the people working

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<sup>223</sup> Rocamora and Smelik, 2016

<sup>224</sup> As Ganeva describes in her chapter on Grund in *Women in Weimar Fashion*, at that time it was the policy of newspapers and magazines not to allow women to serve on editorial boards. Despite the commercial success of Grund's articles and the acclaim she received for them, she was categorically excluded from gaining a position from which she could have actually directed and influenced the content these papers and magazines published.

in it to the mechanics of textile production. As she states herself in her lecture 'Vom Wesen der Mode', discussed earlier, Grund believes that fashion should be taken seriously, not discussed in a way that is merely simplistic 'Modeplauderei'<sup>225</sup> [fashion chit-chat]. If we look at the body of work Grund produced during her years as a professional fashion correspondent, we see evidence of a desire to understand and appreciate fashion in all its aspects, and to tell stories about the people working in this industry, which she outlines very clearly in this lecture, She tells the Trade School trainees:

*Hier, als Deutsche unter Deutschen möchte ich zur Klärung der Fragen beitragen, die so lauten müssen: Erstens: Welch einen Grad der Beachtung verdient die Mode? Zweitens: Welches sind die Vorbedingungen, die Mode zu schaffen?*<sup>226</sup>  
[Here, as a German among Germans, I want to contribute a response to the following questions. First: What degree of attention does fashion deserve? Second: What are the preconditions for creating fashion?]

Grund then proceeds to argue for the importance of fashion within culture, and offers a precise analysis of the various factors that make fashion into something beyond the simple production of clothing. She writes about the designer's instincts when it comes to creating fashion; a reaction, according to her, to the same things regular people experience, channelled into an uncanny ability to make these fissures in time visible, echoing Wilson's sentiment that fashion and time are intrinsically linked. *Ihre Gabe ist die feine Witterung für den Zeitablauf und der Sinn für die Folgerichtigkeit einer Entwicklung. Insofern brauch sie sich nicht mit Worten untereinander zu verständigen. Im übrigen, was die Ausgestaltung einer im Fluß begriffenen Mode anbelangt, lassen sie sich von den gleichen Geschehnissen und Ereignissen beeinflussen, sie verkehren in der Gesellschaft und gewinnen aus ihrem Bild einen Gesamteindruck.*<sup>227</sup> [Their talent is the feeling for the passage of time and a sense for the coherence of a development. In this respect they do not have to communicate with each other with words. Furthermore, concerning the design of fashion in flux, they let themselves be influenced by the same

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<sup>225</sup> Hessel, 2014, p. 251

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., p. 259

events and incidents, they rub shoulders with the same crowds and gain an overall impression from this image.]

This is precisely why, on the other hand, a close reading and translation of Grund's texts offers more than information on fashion practices of an earlier era. While we can argue for the malleability of Benjamin's theories and their apparently comparatively straightforward application to fashion discourse and scholarship, it makes much more sense to go to the original source: a woman who was genuinely interested in, and appreciative of, fashion and who – most importantly – left behind a collection of professional and personal texts. These two kinds of texts can be observed together, because they differ so minimally in tone, speaking to the way the private and professional blend: Grund made no attempt to censor herself or adjust her own writing voice when switching between her diary and journalistic articles.

The former demonstrates her abilities as a fashion writer and interviewer; the latter provide a rare insight into the tentative first steps towards and into her profession, and a decipherable process that gives way to her very own standpoint and methodology that enabled her to produce such vivid and emotionally charged content. It is this process that can effectively integrate historical content into contemporary discourse, and which sits at the core of this research.

## 2.5 Position, Process and Practice

I have selected three entries from Grund's diary as examples to draw out the value of a close reading, translation and analysis of these personal texts. The first one is a brief excerpt from a trip to London just after the turn of the century, which establishes Grund's understanding of global power dynamics and how it prompts the way she learns to position herself from that point on. The second describes a dinner scene at a restaurant on 9 March 1924, which serves to outline the process her conscious positioning allows before addressing the content she is able to generate through this process with the third and final entry that documents an event that takes place in the bathroom of a restaurant, Persephoné, on July 5 1924.

The selection of these three diary entries and the decision to then focus on them was done intuitively. More on intuition as a method is outlined in the following chapter, based on utilising it within research as suggested by Bergson<sup>228</sup> and Coleman<sup>229</sup>. They propose that intuition provides intimacy in research, which is arguably appropriate for working with private, personal texts.

It is important to note at this stage that decisions were made consciously as well as sub-consciously while working with the raw texts authored by Grund. Consciously, because it became clear quite early on in my study of these texts that a selection and limitation would have to be made, as Grund's writings span almost two decades and are arguably so rich that one thesis would not be enough to contain them all. Sub-consciously, because I initially set no criteria for the texts I wanted to focus on.

The texts were selected not from the better known, published writings, such as *Vom Wesen der Mode* [The Nature of Fashion], as these were written for a particular audience and most likely under editorial control. The three texts emerged from my reading and translation as three that enabled me to entwine content and analysis. Jason Seawright and John Gerring outline 'that case selection and case analysis are intertwined to a much greater extent in case study research than in large-N cross-case analysis. Indeed, the method of choosing cases and analyzing those cases can scarcely be separated when the focus of a work is on one or a few instances of some broader phenomenon.'<sup>230</sup> While this research is not a case study as such, what Seawright and Gerring stress and which I find important to underscore is the fact that the selection of a case is intertwined with its analysis. Analysis of Grund's texts, as I will outline in the next chapter, is dependent on my intuition and own position as a feminist in the context of this research.

Much of this research is centred around my own positionality in correspondence with Grund's, and how my own experience contributes to my engagement with her work. Personal texts, rather than professional, published articles, seemed like a more intuitive and logical choice, with no editors or editorial and commercial agendas obscuring

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<sup>228</sup> Henri Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1999)

<sup>229</sup> Rebecca Coleman, 'A method of intuition: Becoming, relationality, ethics', *History of the Human Sciences*, Vol. 21, No. 4, Nov. 2008, pp. 104–123, doi:[10.1177/0952695108095514](https://doi.org/10.1177/0952695108095514).

<sup>230</sup> Jason Seawright and John Gerring, 'Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options', *Political Research Quarterly*, vol. 61, no. 2, June 2008, pp. 294–308, doi:[10.1177/1065912907313077](https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912907313077).



Grund's truth. At the same time, there is a case to be made for the diary as a specifically feminist method as a medium that very much occupies an ambiguous space in research, representing stories that oftentimes comes from marginal spaces and are authored by people excluded from the canon, which is discussed in detail in the following chapter. But furthermore, as the title of this thesis suggests, the focus is very much not on skilfully written essays reporting on equally skilfully presented fashion collections by established designers. This is not to take away from these texts, but to stress that Grund's diary entries – vivid, sharp and intimate – kept drawing me in. As much as she noted down these experiences to commemorate them, to remember these moments, I intuitively kept remembering these three specific texts.

László Munteán, Liedeke Plate and Anneke Smelik draw on the notion of memory in their book *Materializing Memory in Art and Popular Culture*. Prompted by Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, in which Proust describes having a flashback to a treasured childhood memory after eating a Madeleine cake, they explore the interplay between material and memory, finding that 'it is the encounter between the embodied human being and the inanimate thing that occasions the act of remembrance.'<sup>231</sup> The inanimate thing, in this case, is Grund's writing, and it is my encounter with it that prompted memories that continued to draw me to these three specific texts. According to Munteán, Liedeke and Smelik, it is

the mundane things we accidentally find while clearing out drawers [that] easily lend themselves as vehicles of time travel. They make us relive, in a fraction of a second, memories of places and events, of feelings, and of people we have met but long forgotten.<sup>232</sup>

I argue that through thickness in descriptions – a notion that will also be further addressed in the next chapter – these memories can be triggered just as much as through a sensory experience such as scent or taste. Through Grund's descriptions of her own experiences in such detail as a vehicle, I was momentarily transported back to a train carriage in London, watching people sitting across or beside me, and being

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<sup>231</sup> László Munteán, Liedeke Plate and Anneke Smelik, *Materializing Memory in Art and Popular Culture*, (New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 1

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2

watched in return. Through Grund describing these snapshot moments, I found myself back in Paris as a young fashion student with my friend Suzanne, walking into a crowded restaurant in the twelfth arrondissement, and in a damp, otherworldly women's bathroom staring at my reflection and the reflection of young women who had also found momentary refuge in such a strange, in-between space.

In the first text, Grund, aged sixteen, is in London and finds herself in an underground train carriage in the company of a man. She writes:

*Ein reizender junger Mann schaut mich an. Ich wende den Blick ab, damit er mich in aller Ruhe ansehen kann. Wie gern würde ich dasselbe mit ihm machen, aber er hat angefangen, er hat gewonnen.*<sup>233</sup>

[A lovely young man is looking at me. I avert my eyes so that he can look at me without hurry. How much I would like to do the same to him, but he's started it – he's won.]

This short diary entry not only reveals her awareness of the power of the gaze, even at the age of sixteen. It also shows that she is aware of the difference between him and her, and the power that lies within that seemingly simple moment that was still so significant that Grund would recall and write about it. While she may perhaps be only subconsciously aware of the implications of this man looking at her, and the power he asserts through this act,<sup>234</sup> she still realises instinctively that he has a different position from her in this scenario. It is evident in the way she articulates this exchange, describing him as winning, and thus having the upper hand – the one who is in power, and the other who has to accept or succumb to it.

Yet she consciously repositions herself because she understands the dynamic, subverting the power he has over her as the subject, the active observer, by allowing it. The young man sharing the train carriage with Grund in London is gazing at her, casting her as the object in this very ordinary and fairly typical daily scenario, and the male

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<sup>233</sup> Cosima Lutz, 'Erregt euch!', *Die Welt*, 4 Mar 2013, available at: [https://www.welt.de/print/die\\_welt/literatur/article115869102/Erregt-euch.html](https://www.welt.de/print/die_welt/literatur/article115869102/Erregt-euch.html). Accessed 01 Jun 2019.

<sup>234</sup> Diane Ponterotto, 'Resisting the Male Gaze: Feminist Responses to the "Normatization" of the Female Body in Western Culture', *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 17:1 (2016). 133-151. Available at: <http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol17/iss1/10>. Accessed 20 Oct 2021.

gaze as the arguable default and accepted practice prevailing in society and culture<sup>235</sup> means that Grund does not do the same to him, because he, as the active male, could arguably not have his dominance openly challenged in in this way. However, despite not openly displaying it, Grund does two things by writing a diary entry in response to this moment on the train.

She casts this man as the object, looking at him and deriving pleasure, if only briefly, but long enough to call him *reizend* [lovely]. Noting down '*wie gern würde ich dasselbe mit ihm machen*' [how much I would like to do the same to him], she is aware of her desire and articulates the need to express it by both describing it in such a decisive manner and writing it in her diary.

In addition, Grund, in putting this wordless exchange on paper and articulating it in this way, consciously repositions herself outside the two narrative roles in which women are conventionally cast. She asserts herself as active rather than passive, while also maintaining the outward propriety required of her, creating an act of subversion in a situation that perfectly illustrates the prevailing structures that guide everyday behaviour.

She is not in a position of power, and she is not given it freely either, but instead of succumbing to this imbalance she experiences, Grund creates her own narrative and space through the act of writing a diary, disrupting the male-dominated narrative she has to move in. She creates this rupture through writing, through detaching this moment from the timeline and freezing it in ink on paper, casting the young man as the passive object and herself as the active subject who has taken control of the story, conclusively validating her experience and her response to it.

This articulation of a situation that reveals an awareness of the prevailing power dynamics and how they played out and affected the way people acted and interacted in public, followed by a deliberate rejection that results in a conscious positioning as an active storyteller, marks the first step in Grund's process and method. It marks her first foray into a role in which she uses writing and storytelling as a means to create her own narrative, whether this is as a private person or as a professional journalist working in the fashion industry.

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<sup>235</sup> Ponterotto, 2017

This moment, followed by the simple gesture of recalling it in a diary entry, may seem trivial and of no particular importance, but I would argue that it marks a departure for Grund, not only within the context of her work, but also for the way she – as a young woman – can counteract the position in which she is put in order to assert her own experience as a woman. In this regard, Code writes, ‘feminist epistemology brings about a recognition of how knowing is a political activity’.<sup>236</sup> It would not be accurate to describe Grund as a feminist in the contemporary understanding of the term, but the recognition she describes in this diary entry asserts a subversive gesture, and the simple practice of keeping a diary for a woman is arguably a subversive act in itself. As she presents her understanding of the imbalance of power exemplified by this moment in the train carriage, illustrated by the gaze, and her reaction to it, she demonstrates the ability to deduce the underlying subtext from the situation and construct knowledge as a result of it, effectively challenging the status quo. This is underscored by its documentation in a diary, an object whose ‘inherent generic qualities are subversive to the literary establishment and to the patriarchal social order that it perpetuates in its privileging of texts and genres, each ranked according to unquestioned standards’.<sup>237</sup> Cynthia Huff elaborates on the notion that women’s diaries constitute an inherently subversive, feminist practice in her essay ‘“That Profoundly Female, and Feminist Genre”: the Diary as Feminist Practice’, countering a still lingering prejudice against the diary and feminist criticism that is founded on the argument that both practices lack rigour and structure. Huff insists that

the keeping of a journal, like feminist criticism, knows no boundaries; it is precisely the subversiveness of this trying-on and living-through of various modes of experience, professional as well as personal, mental as well as physical, that feminist critics have celebrated and that diaries have epitomized. Contemporary feminist critics hint that alleged ‘lesser’ genres such as the diary, because of their multiplicity of modes and views, contain

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<sup>236</sup> Code, 2014, p. 149.

<sup>237</sup> Cynthia Huff, ‘“That Profoundly Female, and Feminist Genre”: The Diary as Feminist Practice’, *Women’s Studies Quarterly*, 17: 3/4, Women’s Nontraditional Literature (Fall - Winter, 1989), 6-14.

the key to our revision of the canon, to a female aesthetic manifesting ‘an emotional texture, a structural expression of mutuality’.<sup>238 239</sup>

What Huff is implying in this case is that while traditional scholarship may scorn non-academic texts as sources of knowledge, and does not value the personal as essential, it is precisely the containment of personal experience and emotions that gives diaristic texts the potential to challenge the existing discourse and canon in a way that is not achievable if we operate within the same structures we are attempting to critique. In addition, this also speaks to the need for fashion theory to consciously step, or at least turn, away from approaches used in the social sciences in order to identify and apply more suitable research strategies and methodologies.

Grund’s diary in itself represents a challenge to the existing canon, and the experiences she deems important enough to capture with her writing contain are not only, to use Huff’s metaphor, the key to a revisionist history, but can arguably be applied within a contemporary context to disrupt the narratives currently shaping our present canon. This approach to knowledge and knowledge production stands in contrast to the approach that has been taken not only by scholars for millennia (a unilateral passing of knowledge from master to student), but also by modern epistemology and research practices adopted from the social sciences. According to Code, it requires control of the surroundings that are directly observed and perceived, because in order to make new knowledge valid it needs to be replicable. This process is at the core of the activity of the flâneur, who wanders and directly observes controlled environments, assuming a position that can potentially be filled by someone else – as long as that someone is a relatively affluent, educated, white heterosexual man. The conventional flâneur needs to be detached in order to keep these observations replicable, a detachment which is directly challenged by Grund not only through her existence as a woman, as a *new woman*, but because she does so in environments positively contaminated with singular elements that mark the scenes she is observing as vivid and immersive.

While she does not assert herself or the position she takes in the way her male contemporaries have done, throughout her diary entries she remains active and

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<sup>238</sup> DuPlessis, quoted in Huff, 1989, p. 7

<sup>239</sup> Huff, 1989, p. 7.

immersive, tapping into her personal perception and momentary experience of the scene unfolding in front of her, and that she is always part of. Grund engages all her senses, which becomes central to the way in which she takes in and processes the world. In *Bürgerliches Diner*, dated 9 March 1924, she describes a busy dinner scene in a restaurant, writing:

*Man ißt ,en famille‘; diese Männer mit Schatten unter den Augen und engen Stirnen sind Ehemänner, Verwandte und Verlobte. Gierig verlangt ein junges Mädchen: ‚encore, encore‘ – als der Kellner die Platte serviert. Sie trägt ein herrliches Perlencollier, vielleicht ist es echt. Einer blasierten Hemdbrust gegenüber sitzt eine Reife, die schwarze Einzellocke zickzackt über ihre Stirnmitte, lateinische Nasenflügel beben. Der gute Wille zur Wollust ist wie eine Kraft über ihr. Im Eck wiegt eine Mimi das Köpfchen, daß die weichen Locken an die lackrot schwindsüchtigen Wangen wehen, der Bogen des Mundes so zart, ein Strich nur des Lippenstifts. Sie zwitschert über ihrer Languste den Refrain des Tanzes, der sich keine Mühe gibt, anders als Bächlein zu sein monotone Wiederholung des Gewußten. [...] Wie voll von Frauen ist diese Stadt, wie natürlich scheint es diesen Schwestern, verführerisch zu sein. Ich sehe keinen kritisch abschätzenden Blick von einer zur andern, keine Geste, keine Haltung, die anderes bezweckte, als zu gefallen und zu genießen. Lust und Mitlust.<sup>240</sup>*

[People are dining *en famille*; these men with shadows under their eyes and tight foreheads are husbands, relatives and fiancés. A young girl greedily demands ‘encore, encore’ when the waiter serves the platter. She wears a glorious pearl necklace: maybe it is real. Opposite a smug shirt-front sits a mature woman, a single black curl criss-crossing the centre of her forehead, Latin nostrils trembling. The desire for voluptuousness is like an energy around her. In the corner a Mimi rests her little head, making the soft curls waft against red-painted consumptive cheeks, the bow of the mouth so delicate, with just a touch of lipstick. Over her langoustines she chirps the refrain of the dance, which does not aspire to be anything but a stream of monotonous repetition of something all too familiar. [...] How full of women this city is, how natural it seems for these sisters

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<sup>240</sup> Hessel, 2014, pp. 26-27

to be alluring. I can't see a critically assessing gaze from one to the other, no gesture, no stance that aims to achieve anything but to appeal and to enjoy. Delight and shared delight.]

The description of the scene is vivid, so detailed and inclusive, that we can almost hear the music and the crowd and smell the food, and it features patterns that can be found more generally in her writing.

Following her conscious positioning, Grund focuses on the female presence in this restaurant. Men are mentioned, but only fleetingly, and never sympathetically. As mentioned previously, a quantitative analysis of references to men and women in her texts reveal a definitive balance towards women, in terms of both their appearance and their voices and unique characteristics. By contrast, the man in this account is referred to as a *blasierte Hemdbrust*<sup>241</sup> [smug shirt-front]: Grund effectively reduces him to what he is wearing in a clever role-reversal that follows a tendency in her writing to cast the majority of men in a critical light.

Again, I do not want to imply here that she hated men and only thought highly of women, but there is a distinct, noticeable shift in tone between Grund's descriptions of men and those of women. Ganeva points out that Grund's arrival in modern city life and her observation of women engaging in fashion and openly enjoying themselves marks a joyous turn in her life, one which enabled her to marry her love of writing with her 'sincere admiration for the "modern" personified by Paris women – by their sense of fashion, elegance, and playfulness'.<sup>242</sup> Through Grund's immersive experiences in Paris, as exemplified in this diary entry, she manages to transform the young girl who was not willing to look back at a young man in a train carriage into a confident professional who offers this open riposte to a man in a 1931 essay about female writers:

Yesterday as I was driving on the Hohenzollerndamm, I met a middle-aged gentleman. He was a dreamer, looking at the sky, and I almost ran him over. He expostulated, 'Damn women, why don't you stay in the kitchen!' This essay is dedicated to this gentleman.<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid., pp. 26

<sup>242</sup> Ganeva, 2008, p. 90

<sup>243</sup> Hessel, quoted in Ganeva, 2008, p. 100

Grund does not insult the man outright, but it is impossible to miss the delight she takes in politely telling this man who told her to stay in the kitchen that she has absolutely no interest in his opinion. Her defiance is communicated not in the form of unpleasant words, but as a well-placed snub in a text she has written in her capacity as a professional writer, through which she makes it clear that she does not belong in the kitchen, and neither do the women who are subjects of this essay. It demonstrates Grund's power as a writer to dedicate her text to whoever she chooses, thus imposing her opinions on this person. Additionally, it demonstrates the way she captures snapshots moments via text, allowing them to guide her work.

While Grund is similarly very blunt in her observations, she is never unkind towards women the way she is to men, instead relishing the fact that women of all ages and sizes fill the streets and restaurants of Paris. '*Wie voll von Frauen ist diese Stadt*'<sup>244</sup> [How full of women this city is], she writes, taking great pleasure in describing them and their individuality, with no detail missed, noting the colours, their jewellery and the meaning of their expressions. Admiring them, empathising with them, Grund calls them 'sisters', and notes that there is no animosity between any of them. She is attuned to them, actively picks up their frequencies and listens, using that allegedly inferior feminine sense, which instantly creates a more lively retelling of a night out that contrasts with the usual objectifying viewing practices. Compared to accounts of turn-of-the-century flâneurs, Grund's Paris is alive: loud, full of music and full of women who cry 'encore', contrasting with the many depictions of flânerie, historical and contemporary, that show 'a monocultural, nostalgic, and romanticised dreamscape',<sup>245</sup> such as Woody Allen's *Midnight in Paris*.

Grund's diary entries have a clear female focus, and a very clear structure and process. While she does rely on sight, the necessity of immersing herself means that she notes even the smallest details, registering sounds, expressions, movement, viscosity. She is part of the world she is describing, and never allows herself to think that she has the ability to remain detached or is in any position to judge, and her descriptions are much richer for it. But more importantly, what she manages to generate with this process, in a striking contrast to monocular masculine viewing structures, is a collection of deeply

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<sup>244</sup> Hessel, 2014, p. 27

<sup>245</sup> Boutin, 2012, p.130



personal moments, set within ordinary scenes from everyday life, that manage to capture a profound affection and empathy for the people she shares these moments with.

Where this becomes most evident is in the third and last diary entry I discuss here, which describes an evening at the Persephoné restaurant on 5 July 1924.

The scene begins in the dining room. Grund waits for her companion to finish chatting with the waiter over the order from the menu '*wie Komplizen*'<sup>246</sup> [like accomplices], taking a look around, and notes, with apparent surprise, men that seem '*einzel, deutlich, lebendig unterschieden*'<sup>247</sup> [...single, significant, lively, different]. The women, she realises, '*in all ihrer lebhaften, warmen Sorgfalt sind hier nur wie das schmückende Beiwort*'<sup>248</sup> [...with all their vivacious, warm care are only the decorative epithet here] After spending some time amongst an illustrious group of men and their female companions, Grund goes to the bathroom, and it is her attention to detail, her keen eye for fashion, but most importantly her empathy as a woman, and the personal connection she feels with the people she meets in these moments, that causes her to linger in a place that most people try to leave swiftly, and certainly not a place that would be expected to produce anything worth writing about. In what is arguably one of the most memorable paragraphs in her vast body of work, Grund writes the following:

*Während man die Hände wäscht und das Gesicht neu pudert, kann man durch den Spiegel das junge Wesen betrachten, das hier wacht. Sie sieht unsagbar kostbar aus. Der zarte Kopf ist auf zarte Handflächen gestützt, die sorgsam lose Welle des Haars liegt wie Schlaf über der Stirn. Eine Perlenkette schimmert auf der matten Helle des Halses, graurosa wie die seidenen Strümpfe über den glimmernden Schuhschnallen. Aus halbgeschlossenen Augen blinzelt sie müde und verträumt. Es ist heiß hier, sage ich, indem ich mein Geldstück zu den andern lege auf den Teller. Ja, antwortet sie, ohne sich zu rühren, man gewöhnt sich daran. Sind Sie immer hier, frage ich verwundert. Seit vier Jahren, täglich, bis Mitternacht.<sup>249</sup>*

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<sup>246</sup> Hessel, 2014, p.40

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> Hessel, 2014, p.39

[While you wash your hands and apply fresh powder to your face, you can look at the young creature that is keeping watch through the mirror. She looks unutterably precious. Her delicate head is leaning on her delicate palms, the carefully loose wave of her hair lies on her forehead like sleep. A pearl necklace shimmers on the matt lightness of her neck, grey-pink like the silk stockings above the glimmering shoe buckles. She blinks sleepily and dreamily out of half-lidded eyes. It is hot here, I say, as I put my coin on the plate next to the others. Yes, she answers without moving, you get used to it. Are you always here? I ask, puzzled. For four years, every day, until midnight.]

It is an extraordinary piece of writing that only exists because Grund is not only a journalist, but also a fashion journalist, and the information we gain from it is only made available to us because Grund is a woman.

Even if Grund's male contemporaries<sup>250</sup> had shown any interest in the exploration of female experience, none of them would have had access to a women's bathroom, though I would argue that they would not have considered this moment to have the same importance I am arguing for it here. The implication in this case is, however, is that there are innumerable spaces that are inaccessible to these men – spaces for women, occupied by women. In relation to fashion, in particular, there were many places that only women could go, private spaces where their experiences were met and shared, meaning that Grund was in a unique position to look behind the curtain, to enter changing rooms in department stores, behind-the-scenes areas of fashion presentations, and *haute couture* ateliers filled with models and seamstresses.

This is not an *haute couture* atelier, yet Grund dedicates as much attention to the description of this bathroom attendant's appearance as she would if she were a mannequin dressed by Paul Poiret himself. Grund notices the buckles on her shoes, the colour of her stockings, the weight on her eyelids. This bathroom represents not only a physical space that is inaccessible to men, it also stands for a reprieve from the eyes of men, this damp space that is not special, but that is theirs. While the bathroom isn't specifically referred to by Luce Irigaray in her writing, she does note the importance of

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<sup>250</sup> There are a number of notable female writers who published texts during the Weimar years, such as Else Lasker-Schüler, Ricarda Huch and Johanna Birnbaum. However, cultural and philosophical interrogation was dominated by men such as, besides Adorno and Benjamin, Carl Hempel and Martin Heidegger.

a 'different conceptual space, where the feminine and female bodies cannot be consumed, devalued or defined in masculine terms'.<sup>251</sup>

This scene is a moment of unfiltered personal experience, brought about by Grund and generated by her process. While these diary entries are meant for no-one's eyes but her own, Grund deems this scene important enough to personally document it, not for anyone else, or any particular purpose, but arguably because this moment is a memory she wanted to keep, because it burned just a little brighter than other seemingly non-trivial encounters.

The importance of these texts lies not only in their content, but also in the underlying implications of the circumstances that needed to be in place in order to facilitate them. As well as entering the space and pausing in it long enough to notice this young woman, fulfilling Grund's need to observe, she decides to engage with and extend empathy towards her. She not only gives her space and validates her existence by writing about her, she also validates her experience by asking her about it, ultimately giving her a voice.

It is an ostensibly simple exchange. Grund comments on the warm temperature of the room, sketching a more complete recreation of the scene, and waits for a response. Instead of agreeing or disagreeing, the girl says, '*man gewöhnt sich dran*'.<sup>252</sup> [you get used to it.] The young woman's statement reeks of resignation, a general sense of boredom and fatigue that comes with such a monotonous and menial task, highlighted by the lack of any visible reaction or movement, her sleepy gaze, head propped up by her hand.

Grund has two choices in this instance – either to engage or to step away. It is a fine line between a brief, polite exchange and a genuine conversation – an interaction between two people that generates knowledge. Grund asks, '*sind Sie immer hier?*'<sup>253</sup> [are you always here?], describing her own state of mind as *puzzled*, though she does not elaborate on why. However, the scene in general suggests that Grund's confusion stems not only from finding someone so *unutterably precious* in a women's bathroom, but also from the implication that this young woman in pearls and silk stockings works there as

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<sup>251</sup> Anemtoaicei & Russell, 2013, p.777

<sup>252</sup> Hessel, 2014, p.39

<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

a bathroom attendant, her appearance contrasting quite harshly with her environment and profession.

*'Seit vier Jahren, täglich, bis Mitternacht'*<sup>254</sup> [For four years, every day, until midnight.] she says, making sense of her apathy, explaining why the heat is not something she notices any more.

There is the obvious possibility of interrogating this scene from a historical standpoint; what kind of life would this woman lead in 1920s Paris? What could she be up to apart from sitting in Persephoné's overheated ladies' bathroom? Where else could she have found spaces similar to this one? Where else was she, and so many others like her, able to simply exist, apart from in the pages of Grund's diary?

What we can draw from Grund's diary entries in relation to a contemporary context may be the beginnings of a methodology that could potentially challenge fashion theory's approach as it is commonly practised within contemporary scholarship. Her process requires an involved, balanced and personal conversation between people who are positioned on the same level, with a focus on experience, rather than a remote analysis of objects employing methods and theories that were shaped within the existing academic system. This approach can be divided into three distinct steps, as laid out in this last section of this chapter, and focus on Grund – Position, Process, and Practice – differing from the way fashion is written about in a contemporary context, where it is often placed within the sphere of cultural studies, in which prevailing models of analysis influenced by the social sciences have existed for decades. Fashion as it exists in Grund's texts goes beyond a simple analysis of garments, and while she does not exist within a circle that actively debates the true meaning of the term 'fashion' and what it encompasses, as people engaging with fashion theory do today, Grund almost instinctively understands fashion to be immersive and deeply personal, requiring observation beyond the objects embodying the concept. Grund understands, and explains in these scenes that she captures in her diary, that the practice of fashion cannot be restricted to ateliers and couturiers' workshops, and that it cannot be understood in separation from the people who breathe life into these garments and live in and experience the world through them. Grund demonstrates in her writing, and

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

especially in her diaries, that fashion only exists because of the personal; because of hot and tightly packed changing rooms and bustling department stores, through anaemic toilet attendants and stressed shop assistants and all the other people she encounters as she walks through Paris. Her approach emphasises that these chance encounters and momentary, deeply personal experiences matter, and how much we may gain from elevating them.

In this chapter I have set out a way in which a diaristic text authored by a woman like Grund can become a feminist tool within fashion studies. The following chapter will demonstrate how Grund's body of work and methods may be used to inform an unique, individualised methodology that reflects the nature of her diaristic texts and that can generate a new discursive approach to knowledge creation within contemporary fashion. It outlines ways in which adopting her outlook as a *Neue Frau* can account for situational and personal elements that influence the experience and analysis of fashion.

### 3. Methodology

This chapter will continue to address in more detail how a critical analysis of diaristic texts authored by women may become a feminist tool within fashion studies, exemplified through the way such an analysis has become the foundation for a specifically tailored research methodology in this research. It shows how Grund's diary is central not only to the content of this thesis, but also to the way the study was shaped, conducted and ultimately laid out.

Before explaining how I have applied my work with, and analysis of, Grund to my methodology, I feel it is important to first and foremost stress that while I have long identified as a feminist and believed this personal philosophy to be present in my research, it was the conscious and deliberate insertion of feminism as the research paradigm and the unapologetic assertion through a changed research focus that truly unlocked the potential of this study and opened up the opportunity for Grund's texts to enter contemporary discourse in a new and profound way. With many historical documents, the circumstances under which they were written are not always evident, and it is even rarer to have access to material that describes exactly how women such as Grund experienced fashion and the world beyond it, and developed their own unique ways of looking at and writing about society and culture.

#### 3.1 Building on Grund

The central inclusion of Grund's diary serves not only as a data source, but simultaneously as a functional and structural tool that actively shapes the methodology beyond its contribution to the study's content. Through the active and continuing translation of Grund's texts, combined with a narrative approach which presupposes an inclusion of the narrator or researcher, in this case myself, the act of reading and translating Grund's writing needs to be assessed as the connective tissue between the historical texts and the contemporary oral data provided by interviews: it is I who actively facilitate this connection and bridge the gap between two eras. These interviews, as well as the decision to approach them from a narrative standpoint, will be discussed later in this chapter, but in order to understand the decisions that were made

in relation to them, the significance of Grund's writing needs to be outlined and established.

As Francesca Granata points out in 'Fashion Studies In-between: A Methodological Case Study and an Inquiry into the State of Fashion Studies', there is a 'need for the inclusion of theories and methods from a wide variety of disciplines and fields of studies'<sup>255</sup> when it comes to the comparatively new and emerging field of fashion studies. She emphasises that while methodological writings and texts in publications such as *Fashion Theory* were helpful, she also 'needed [...] a range of methodological approaches, poached from a variety of fields and disciplines, including material culture, visual culture, as well as performance and film studies'.<sup>256</sup>

What Granata's text highlights is an understanding that there is no common model that works within such a highly complex, evolving and variable field as fashion, in which definitions are not set in stone and seemingly every area of exploration is multi-layered and multi-faceted. The result of this reassessment led me to understand that the key to developing a methodology that would be uniquely suited to my study lay with Helen Grund's approach, and that, like her, I would have to be bold and deliberate about asserting my own personal and individual approach, regardless of existing conventions. As Finamore notes, it is all too easy to omit female designers from the discourse, even when the themes being addressed focus on gender and its performativity. This realisation prompted me to redirect the focus of this research project, both in terms of the designers and theories I draw upon and in relation to the methodologies being deployed.

Consequently, I immersed myself in Grund's writing, needing to know more about her life and her work, as outlined in the previous chapter, and began to tease out her approach and her personal methods and patterns through an intuitive, repeated reading and careful translation of her texts. This is the reason why this chapter is positioned at this point in the thesis, rather than prefacing the discussion of Grund and her body of work. The methodology applied to this research was born out of Grund's texts, and did not precede my reading of them.

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<sup>255</sup> Francesca Granata, 'Fashion Studies In-between: A Methodological Case Study and an Inquiry into the State of Fashion Studies', *Fashion Theory*, 16: 1, (2012) 67–82 DOI: 10.2752/175174112X13183318404221.

<sup>256</sup> Granata, 2012

There is a common principle that forms the basis of methodology and acts not only on a functional level – meaning that it aids the finding of proper tools and methods for any given study – but also, on a structural level, supports the construction, design and execution of the research by being rigorously and cohesively applied.<sup>257</sup> It is not enough to utilise a methodology and its corresponding methods and tools for convenience or convention, and justify its application by common practice. For a methodology to be truly effective it needs to be reflected in the research, and vice versa. Methodology is central to this research, and the way it has evolved over the course of the research is integral to its content and structure.

While there are many fields of study that have longstanding methodological traditions that guide the approach to data and its analysis and evaluation, both qualitative and quantitative, a comparatively young research area, such as fashion theory or fashion studies, that encompasses a multitude of definitions and interpretations, all valid and robustly argued for, can present a methodological challenge.

Grund, as presented in the previous chapter, had her own methods and approach; I have not adopted these precisely, but have taken an approach that reflects hers from certain angles and viewpoints, if not in every detail then certainly in the narrative it presents and the story it follows. In Grund's case, she enters a scene and immerses herself in it, registering details such as noises and smells and sensations, capturing her experience of very specific moments in her diary. She returns to these snapshot moments and has the opportunity to relive these experiences as she puts them on paper, documenting them and giving them importance and value. In my case, I have approached her text, immersing myself in her remembered moments, in her *Momentaufnahmen*, and while I also expanded my research beyond her work, I have returned to her again and again, putting her onto these pages as the core of my study to relive the experience of discovering these moments through her.

As a consequence, with regard to the methodology of this research, everything begins and ends with Grund. The structure of this chapter and the outlining of my methodology follows the way it unfolded as a consequence of immersing myself in Grund's body of

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<sup>257</sup> Charles S. Herrman, 'Fundamentals of Methodology - Part I: Definitions and First Principles', *SSRN* (April 6, 2009). Available at: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1373976> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1373976> (accessed 18 Apr 2020)



work, reading, re-reading and eventually translating it. The key was working with the text, and embracing the conclusions and direction that could be extracted by doing that. This is why an in-depth discussion of my translation of these texts will be first followed by a review of the subsequent approach, methods and tools that emerge. Ultimately, however, this unravelled web of components will be gathered up once more and return to its point of origin, Grund's work bookending this methodology in the same way that her approach bookends this research project.

### 3.2 The Diary as Primary Text

Grund's diary sits at the core of this research and the use of a diary as a primary text for any research study needs to be assessed, first by acknowledging that the diary represents a form of subjectivity. In *Marginal Voices, Marginal Forms: Diaries in European Literature and History*, Rachael Langford and Russell West describe the diary as a text that is both historical document and fictional form, and is therefore a marginal phenomenon. Because the diary, as a personal account, is a biased text, it is arguably often belittled as a historical record. At the same time, it is also viewed as a lesser form of fictional production.<sup>258</sup>

However, this precarious position between the fictional and the historical and the subsequent impossibility of containing the diary within the marginal disciplinary, as well as the institutional, place that history and fiction find themselves in opens up new ways of enquiry. Various practices overlap within the diary, making it an intersectional tool that is positioned at the cultural crossroads and signifies the cultural climate of the contemporary moment. This margin in which the diary sits, Langford and West suggest, is where similarities and differences are continuously renegotiated.<sup>259</sup>

The diary, between the private and the public, reflects marginality in its form, often by also occupying political or gender marginality, thus lending itself to the kind of feminist approach taken with this research. For women, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color), non-binary people and other marginal groups, the diary was often the only way to write, due to the limited publishing opportunities.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> Rachel Langford and Russell West (eds.), *Marginal Voices, Marginal Forms: Diaries in European Literature and History* (Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V., 1999)

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

As outlined in the previous chapter, many of Grund's contemporaries, as well as Grund herself, were denied prominent roles and opportunities, and had to either resort to creating their own publications (they were eventually even forced out of these, as described in the example of the German journal *Die Dame*) or remain limited to areas men themselves were not willing to engage with, such as fashion journalism. For women such as Grund, writing a diary was everyday practice, functioning as a form of subversion in existing social spaces. Therefore diaries written by these women and other marginalised people should not be seen as a record of historical events, but 'momentary insights'<sup>261</sup> – *Momentaufnahmen*. They offer a 'glimpse of history as it is experienced by those caught in its midst'.<sup>262</sup> As a third category of writing, diaristic writings are the

writings of the self, which take place in the margins of history and are quite invisible to the linear grand narratives of that history, as forming history's vital underside; for these autobiographical texts bear the psychological and cultural structure of lives for whom history remains largely on the margins in the construction of a narrative of the self.<sup>263</sup>

Diaristic writing, autobiographical texts that are also sometimes referred to as life writings, reveal a very specific time, place and viewpoint, not necessarily true or historically accurate, but no less valid and no less truthful. And, as argued and outlined in this thesis, if this specific viewpoint is approached without the attempt to generalise it, there is great potential in exploring and harnessing it. In 'Dialogue with the Future: Philippe Lejeune's Method and Theory of Diary', Julie Rak writes that 'diaries are not [...] literary documents, even though they can have aesthetic merit. They are records of a life process rather than finished narratives about a life, and as such they are only part of the practice of narrating and understanding what a life means.'<sup>264</sup>

Just like fashion, as discussed in the second chapter of this thesis, diaries catch a very specific moment in time and freeze it forever: a snapshot both intimate and personal,

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<sup>261</sup> Ibid., p.12

<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., p.18

<sup>264</sup> Julie Rak, 'Dialogue with the Future: Philippe Lejeune's Method and Theory of Diary', in Jeremy D. Popkin and Julie Rak (eds.), *Philippe Lejeune: on Diary*. (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2009), p.19

but subsequently laid bare for another's gaze. I argue that this makes the use of diaries as primary texts particularly potent in fashion research, as fashion equally can arguably be considered an interdisciplinary but also marginal form, not-quite-art and not-quite-design, but very indicative of the contemporary cultural moment.

Using diaries in fashion research requires an understanding of the particularity of these texts, but also opportunity that lies in them, oscillating between the personal and the private, intimacy and empathy. Diaristic writing captures personal experience and cultural process – not necessarily the truth, but also a deeper cultural meaning that still remains highly personal.

### 3.3 Autoethnography and Thick Description

Diaries are personal texts capturing personal experience, and are often used as tools in autoethnographic research. Autoethnography, according to Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams and Arthur P. Bochner,

is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*). [It] challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others and treats research as a political, socially just and socially conscious act. A researcher uses tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography. Thus, as a method, autoethnography is both process and product.<sup>265</sup>

It is autobiography informing research, making sense of phenomena and data as they relate to one's personal experiences and then analysing it; however, while my approach in this study employs autoethnographic tools, this research does not fall into the category of autoethnographic research. But I want to stress that the autoethnographic tools I employed, mainly the practice of keeping a snapshot diary in which I noted down thoughts produced through the practice of walking in response to Grund's words,

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<sup>265</sup> Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams and Arthur P. Bochner, 'Autoethnography: an Overview', *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 12:1 (2010), Art. 10, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs1101108>.

contribute to the way I approached this research and, more importantly, to the way it impacted on me and how I processed that impact. There is no narrative to these snapshots, put down either on paper or in the Notes app on my phone. Diaries, or journals, as outlined in the *SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, are

one of the most effective research tools to mine the rich personal experiences and emotions of participants' inner lives [and] often allow participants to feel comfortable with their degrees of self-disclosure. Likewise, introverts or those who have been marginalized may feel particularly comfortable when voicing their ideas in private writing.<sup>266</sup>

Reflecting on one's own 'behaviours, attitudes, feelings, and thought processes'<sup>267</sup> through keeping a diary or journal can help to add more layers to an academic study, especially when the resulting texts consist of epiphanies and moments that are mirrored in the phenomenon that is being studied. Ellis, Adams and Bochner describe this very key element in their article on autoethnography:

Most often, autobiographers write about 'epiphanies' – remembered moments perceived to have significantly impacted the trajectory of a person's life, times of existential crises that forced a person to attend to and analyze lived experience, and events after which life does not seem quite the same. While epiphanies are self-claimed phenomena in which one person may consider an experience transformative while another may not, these epiphanies reveal ways a person could negotiate 'intense situations' and 'effects that linger – recollections, memories, images, feelings – long after a crucial incident is supposedly finished'.<sup>268</sup>

These captured moments represent a way to process collected data and consequently produce new data, or a new context in which this data can be analysed to reveal a deeper cultural meaning.

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<sup>266</sup> Lisa M. Given (ed.), *The SAGE Encyclopaedia of Qualitative Research Methods* (London: Sage, 2008), p. 214.

<sup>267</sup> Given, 2008, p.214

<sup>268</sup> Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2010.

This deeper cultural meaning is something that Clifford Geertz addresses in his essays on his anthropological research where he calls for an ethnographic approach to cultural analysis. The analysis of culture, Geertz argues, is not an exact science but a purely interpretive interrogation of meaning. According to Geertz, doing ethnographic research encompasses text transcription and the development of empathy, and also the writing and keeping of diaries, which is defined by the intellectual effort it takes to create it.<sup>269</sup>

The concept of ‘thick description’ originates with Gilbert Ryle, a metaphysical philosopher who uses golf to explain the concept.<sup>270</sup> A little too esoteric, it would perhaps be more suitable to explain it using a passage of writing by Grund in order to explain the difference between thin and thick description. If we take the example of one of her diary entries translated and analysed in the previous chapter, *Bürgerliches Diner*, in which Grund describes a busy dinner scene at a Parisian restaurant, a thin description of the scenes she finds may look as follows:

*Männer und Frauen sitzen zum Abendessen im vollen Restaurant. Kellner servieren das Menü auf Tablett. Es ist laut. Eine junge Frau singt den Refrain der spielenden Musik mit. Sie steht in der Ecke, hat Locken und trägt Lippenstift.*  
[Men and women are sitting down for dinner in the busy restaurant. Waiters serve the food on platters. It is noisy. One young woman sings along to the refrain of the music that’s playing. She stands in a corner, has curly hair and is wearing lipstick.]

In this example, the ‘thin’ description would be the simple relaying of the scene Grund finds in front of her upon setting foot in the restaurant. It is a truthful and accurate recalling of a normal scene, providing enough detail to paint a picture, but stopping short of anything more. By contrast, the ‘thick’ description would be an interpretation of the scene, as in the following – if abridged – diary entry by Grund.

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<sup>269</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1973)

<sup>270</sup> Joseph G. Ponterotto, ‘Brief Note on the Origins, Evolution, and Meaning of the Qualitative Research Concept “Thick Description”’, *The Qualitative Report*, 11: 3 (Sep 2006), 538-549. Available at: <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR11-3/ponterotto.pdf>. Accessed 15 Jun 2021.

*Im Eck wiegt eine Mimi das Köpfchen, daß die weichen Locken an die lackrot schwindsüchtigen Wangen wehen, der Bogen des Mundes so zart, ein Strich nur des Lippenstifts. Sie zwitschert über ihrer Languste den Refrain des Tanzes, der sich keine Mühe gibt, anders als Bächlein zu sein monotone Wiederholung des Gewußten.*<sup>271</sup>

[In the corner a Mimi rests her little head, making the soft curls waft against red-painted consumptive cheeks, the bow of the mouth so delicate, with just a touch of lipstick. Over her langoustines she chirps the refrain of the dance, which does not aspire to be anything but a stream of monotonous repetition of what's known.]

Through her thick description of the scene in front of her, Grund assesses the dinner attendees' behaviour in the context of the situation they are in, and the surroundings that colour their experience. A busy restaurant in the evening, families and couples dining together amidst music and singing and conversation. Grund focuses on one specific person, in most cases a woman, and looks even closer, while also attributing thinking and intentionality to her. What makes a description thick rather than thin is therefore not the amount of detail used to describe a situation, or a moment, but rather an 'interpretive characteristic of description'.<sup>272</sup>

This concept was expanded by Geertz when he applied it to ethnography and anthropological writing. According to Geertz, 'for a reader of anthropological work to gauge for herself or himself the credibility of the author's interpretation, the context under which these interpretations were made must be richly and thickly described'.<sup>273</sup> This concept was further developed by Denzin when he introduced it to the fields of sociology and the humanities, opening it up for wider use in qualitative research, but also contributing to the slightly confusing status obtained by the concept, as its use and intention is often misunderstood when it is taken out of its ethnographic context. With Denzin's introduction of eleven variations of the concept in 1989, the status of thick description remains ambiguous in the qualitative research community.<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> Hessel, 2014, pp. 26-27

<sup>272</sup> Thomas A. Schwandt, *Dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2001), p. 255

<sup>273</sup> Joseph G. Ponterotto, 2006, p. 538-549

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

For this research, I apply this concept to both Grund's writing and my own, in which details are not only presented, but also evaluated for their context, and interpreted in the wider contemporary cultural moment. A description of a Parisian bathroom attendant's outfit in all its details as a thin description might reveal valid information for a costume historian, but reading this section from Grund's diary as thick description would be to understand the extraordinariness of this moment and understand its significance as outlined in the previous chapter.

Grund's texts are, therefore, according to Geertz, thick descriptions via autoethnographic writing, and it is thus through autoethnographic exercises and writing that the emotional, but also the methodological, impact of Grund's work is best illustrated and adapted. Searching for meaning within these thick descriptions and creating one's own autoethnographic texts give an interpretation of the contemporary cultural moment, a momentary insight into the circumstances under which these texts, both by Grund and by myself, were processed and produced.

The data that was collected via the thick descriptions in Grund's writing and via the semi-structured interviews with five participants was therefore funnelled through me and my own thick descriptive writing, entering into a conversation and becoming connected through these moments.

### 3.4 Translating Grund

A feminist approach to the translation of a text composed by a woman presupposes a different kind of relationship to that of a writer and translator, where one person creates a text and the second person transforms it from one language into another.

Translation is mostly classified as language and literary research, or in other disciplines where researchers deal with translated texts and their corresponding advantages and disadvantages. Most research that discusses translations, or the act of translating texts into other languages, focuses on translation strategy, but not much attention has been paid to translation as a tool. Generally, as described in Krishna Regmi, Jennie Naidoo and Paul Pilkington's article 'Understanding the Processes of Translation and Transliteration in Qualitative Research',

In the qualitative research method, interviews and discussion are the key approaches for information-gathering, mostly in the form of audiotaped recordings, observations, documentary analysis and/or field notes. The process of transformation of such texts from one language to another is embedded within the sociocultural context.<sup>275</sup>

They further suggest that the act of translation goes beyond the changing of words from one language to another, and that on the one hand translating text is enhanced by a translator who shares similar cultural knowledge and references to those of the original writer, and on the other hand 'a theory-laden process and the decisions or choices made in the process are influenced by the analysis and interpretation of findings'.<sup>276</sup>

In other words, translating text is no straightforward task, and the interpretation of the text before it is translated is dependent on the translator's background and their potential connection to the person who wrote the original.

In *Translation and Gender: Translating in the 'Era of Feminism'*, Luise von Flotow suggests that gender and language are two very interdisciplinary entities that are tightly intertwined. Whether the original text is a feminist piece of writing, a machismo text or a recovered 'lost' work, however the translator identifies can potentially become an issue with regards to the translation of these texts.<sup>277</sup> Von Flotow points out that regardless of the type of text that is being translated, 'no act of writing or translation is neutral'<sup>278</sup>. It is especially crucial to note this, she argues, since women were for so long shut out of the canon that they would conduct their writing in private and develop their own private language in 'specifically female forms of discourse'<sup>279</sup>. In this so-called gender awareness, von Flotow describes, a female translator translating a 'lost' text expands traditional parameters by having to explain, annotate and occasionally even criticise an original text. The *Routledge Handbook of Translation, Feminism and Gender* stresses the importance of author/translator connection, as context often needs

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<sup>275</sup> Krishna Regmi, Jennie Naido and Paul Pilkington, 'Understanding the Processes of Translation and Transliteration in Qualitative Research', *International Journal of Qualitative Research*, 9:1 (2010), 16-26.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

<sup>277</sup> Luise von Flotow, *Translation and Gender: Translating in the 'Era of Feminism'*. (London: Routledge, 2004)

<sup>278</sup> Ibid., p. 27

<sup>279</sup> Ibid., p. 12



explanation and choices have to be made.<sup>280</sup> In her essay 'Recognition, risk, and relationships: Feminism and translation as modes of embodied engagement' published in said handbook, Beverley Curran writes

Collaboration among translator and writer, as well as collaborative translation has been a way to make translation and ongoing and extended dialogue.<sup>281</sup>

Therefore, what feminism in translation highlights is not an outright collaboration between the two parties involved in the process of translation, but rather the need for a *thick*, gender aware approach. This kind of awareness is heightened, arguably, when there is a connection between the original writer and the translator, a shared cultural background or affiliation, and a common knowledge of this particular female form of discourse so that the text may expand beyond the page. The translation of Grund, and specifically my feminist translation of Grund, is therefore built on this established connection and the empathy that grows with it. In this context, empathy, which generally refers to our ability to feel and concern ourselves with people and their feelings and thoughts beyond our own<sup>282</sup>, is based on my ability to step into Grund's perspective and imaginative space.

What this empathic approach results in is a *thickness* of translation, akin to the autoethnographic concept put forward by Geertz, as outlined previously. By leaning into the notion of feminist translation, by sitting with the text for so long and drawing out emotion, the translation itself becomes thicker. This opens the translation and its analysis up to critique pertaining to the researcher's and translator's bias, and while it certainly presents a potential weakness, it arguably also marks this method's particular strengths.

A feminist approaching a piece of writing that has, in some shape or form, been omitted from a canon that has traditionally favoured work compliant with predominant aesthetics and literature, undoubtedly has a biased position, but it is that very bias that

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<sup>280</sup> Luise von Flotow and Hala Kamal (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Translation, Feminism and Gender*. (London: Routledge, 2020)

<sup>281</sup> Beverley Curran, 'Recognition, risk, and relationships: Feminism and translation as modes of embodied engagement' in Luise von Flotow and Hala Kamal (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Translation, Feminism and Gender*. (London: Routledge, 2020), p. 546

<sup>282</sup> Karsten R. Stueber, 'Empathy and the imagination' in Amy Kind, *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Imagination*. (London: Routledge, 2016)

allows for these 'lost' works by women to be recovered. Drawing on the feminist concept of *écriture au féminin*, von Flotow calls a translation of these texts *réécriture au féminin* – a re-writing in the feminine<sup>283</sup>, once more suggesting that the utilisation of translation as a feminist tool expands on the traditional notion of translation to create a significant piece of dialogue that springs from an arguably collaborative process. Translation as a feminist tool plays a crucial part by 'making available the knowledge, experiences and creative work of many of these earlier women writers'<sup>284</sup>.

The specific challenge in translating Grund's writing, as has already been touched on in the previous chapter, lies mostly, on the one hand, in its old-fashioned style and vernacular terminology, and on the other in the complexity of Grund's thoughts. As someone who has grown up in a bilingual household, reading literary works in both English and German from a young age, the language itself was never going to be a challenge. However, approaching Grund's original German texts, I found words and expressions that were unique to her time, as well as to her own personal style, whose meanings are not particularly easy to decipher.

Even a seemingly unimportant and simple sentence in Grund's diary can present a linguistic challenge: for example, there is a diary entry for 5 July 1924 in her journal titled *Schnelle Mittagspause* [Quick Lunch break]. In this, she describes meeting one of the models she knows from various fashion shows and presentations.

*Ich erkenne unter einem spiegelnden Hutrand das kecke Gesicht eines Mannequins, sie grüßt mich vertraulich, wie ein Kind, das sich freut.*<sup>285</sup>

The diary entry is short, and is not one of the typically German run-on sentences Grund frequently employs in her longer texts, but there is one word that presents what we, in German, call *Stolperfalle* – a trip hazard. And just like the situation in which the translation does not manage to capture the charming undertone, slightly humorous in a way only a native speaker is likely to recognise, the adjective 'kecke' is one that has no precise English counterpart. When translated into English, the sentence reads: 'I

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<sup>283</sup> Von Flotow, 2020, p. 27

<sup>284</sup> Ibid., p. 30

<sup>285</sup> Hessel, 2014, p. 36

recognise the brash face of a mannequin beneath the mirroring brim of a hat; she greets me intimately, like a child that is pleased.'<sup>286</sup>

The word '*keck*' implies an attitude coloured with mischief and humour, and can be found translated as 'brash', as above, but also 'bold', 'saucy', 'perky' and 'pert'.

Americans would add 'sassy' to this group, which I believe would perhaps be closest in meaning, but still slightly removed. Of course, one does have to settle on one of these eventually. The spirit of the description, however, is something I have to carry within me, and carry over into the interpretation and handling of Grund's texts. While the translations may not align completely, Grund's original choice of words and their particularity help to paint a clearer picture of her own character, and how she perceived other people and her surroundings.

With regard to translation as a tool as part of a feminist study the background of the translator and the original author of the text, as suggested by von Flotow as well as Regmi, Naidoo and Pilkington – in this case, Grund and myself – overlap to an extent that could be seen as advantageous in the endeavour to transform her body of work from our shared mother tongue into English. As pointed out in the introduction to this thesis with regard to my own positionality, my own background and identity, this awareness is key in engaging with the potential that Grund's texts hold in relation to their contemporary application.

Although we are a hundred and four years apart in age (Grund died in her home in Paris before I was even born), there are still a number of parallels and similarities that position me in a way von Flotow and Regmi, Naidoo and Pilkington describe in their texts. My great-grandmother on my father's side and Grund were both born in Berlin just before the turn of the century, into middle-class families who had access to education and lived comfortably. Grund pursued higher education, travelled and had a successful career, even after marrying and having children. My great-grandmother followed the conventions of the time, married my great-grandfather and had two daughters. But while Grund left Berlin for Paris to escape the Nazis, my great-grandmother perished in the Berlin bombings of 1945, along with her younger daughter. My great-grandfather and grandmother left for Bonn and never returned.

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<sup>286</sup> Ibid.

I made my way back to Berlin eventually, the first member of my family to return to live in the German capital, continuing my creative education after a lifetime of deep-seated fascination with all things fashion. It's easy, perhaps from force of habit, to dismiss these coincidences as sentimental and irrelevant, but taking into account the very nature of the texts that form the core of this thesis, sentimentality should not merely be disregarded. Diaries are, by definition of the word, and deemed so by people who privilege facts, a practice of writing for the self and – by extension – translating for the self where shared experiences and the shared self leads to a blurring of the object and the subject and facilitates a position from which I am not speaking on behalf of Grund, but with her, alongside her, for the purpose of an agenda for which we are both essential. As a native German-speaking woman with an educational background in fashion, not a translator, it is important to note that this is a notion that is especially relevant for women who translate texts by women, as outlined above.

Within feminist translation theory, feminist researchers have long aimed to make texts written by women in lesser-known languages available to a wider audience. In 'A Study of Translation Strategy in Eileen Chang's *The Golden Cangue* from the Perspective of Feminist Translation Theory', Cao Shou and Cong Min, both working in the School of Foreign Languages at the Dalian University of Technology in China, suggest that 'Rather than being merely attached to the study of the form of text, language translation or techniques began to attach importance to the ideological and global outlook as well as many other issues.'<sup>287</sup> What feminist translation therefore adds to the discourse around literature and translation is a new and fresh perspective. They argue that these translations 'challenged the traditional knowledge and scholarship by rewriting history, literary history, sociology and psychology from women's point of view'.<sup>288</sup> Similarly, in *Gender in Translation: Cultural Identity and the Politics of Transmission*, Sherry Simon argues that within feminist translation, the author and the reader are secondary to the primary focus that is the text, which is produced through a

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<sup>287</sup> Cao Shou and Cong Min, 'A Study of Translation Strategy in Eileen Chang's *The Golden Cangue* from the Perspective of Feminist Translation Theory', *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 13:8 (2017), 32-39, DOI:10.3968/9865.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

collaborative, participatory process.<sup>289</sup> Within the context of this research, the implication is that the translated text of Grund's diary is the product of a synergetic process between Grund and myself. This process, guided by empathy, sits at the core of my research methods and is key to explaining how these historical texts written by a female fashion journalist working and writing a century ago can become a critical tool for the discussion and analysis of contemporary fashion.

Simon, one of the most prominent researchers in the field of feminist translation, theorises that feminist translation builds a bridge between linguistic and cultural studies to understand the ways in which women, and the subsequent translation of their work, have been silenced or rendered invisible. Through a number of strategies that have developed, feminist translators argue, 'this theory is intended to overturn masculine discourse in translation so as to eliminate discrimination against women and attain gender equality'.<sup>290</sup> Translation, these researchers claim, is irrevocably tied to ideology, meaning that there needs to be a conscious acknowledgment of the power dynamics inherent in the construction of linguistics. It challenges the argument that translation is unbiased and loyal to the original writer, and feeds into Code's critique of traditional epistemology, which asserts an unobstructed view of the truth. In the same way, even translation is to an extent circumstantial, as well as a reinterpretation of the text that aligns with the translator's own beliefs and experiences: hence the importance of the translator and original author having similar backgrounds and viewpoints.<sup>291</sup> Fidelity to the text is, as feminist translation researchers argue, as much fiction as fidelity to data, and there have been numerous studies in recent years that support this argument.<sup>292</sup>

However, inasmuch as fidelity fades into the background, honesty in translation, meaning honesty about shared beliefs or disagreements, should be at the forefront of feminist translation. Feminist research that, as noted earlier, deliberately centralises forgotten people and their stories can therefore assert these deliberate decisions and

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<sup>289</sup> Sherry Simon, *Gender in Translation: Cultural Identity and the Politics of Transmission* (London: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>290</sup> Cao and Cong, 2017

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>292</sup> Most prominent among these is the book *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men*, by Caroline Criado Perez (New York: Abrams Books, 2019), which is based on her research for the study 'Confronting Gender Inequality: Findings from the LSE Commission on Gender, Inequality and Power' (London: London School of Economics and Political Science, Gender Institute, 2016).

argue against the claim that there is no attempt at impartiality, because ‘different interpretations resulting from different genders could lead to the richness of connotations carried in the original texts’.<sup>293</sup> An awareness of gender distinctions and an honesty about the impact that they can probably have on the translation and interpretation of texts is important, as Cao and Cong argue, ‘but at the same time, gender, language and translation have constituted an inspirational intersection on which there are new research results’.<sup>294</sup>

In Grund’s case, a hypothetical translation created with a non-feminist approach might have unintentionally overlooked the female focus of her texts, or put too much weight on the male figures she encounters and describes. Similarly, a male translator might have not picked up on the nuances in language when she describes women, nor understood the significance of some of the diary entries, as I outlined in the previous chapter, such as Grund’s diary entry recounting her encounter with a bathroom attendant. Cao and Cong point out that ‘male translators may ignore the female characters in the books, paying less attention in translating some specific phrases or sentences’.<sup>295</sup> Someone else, not as aligned with Grund and without my background and biases, may have been able to translate the words perfectly well, but may have not understood the implications of this meeting in a restaurant bathroom. Would they have been able to realise Grund’s subtle inversion of the conventional objectification of women by describing men through the clothes they wear? Similarly, if someone else had approached the texts without asserting a feminist philosophy, a potentially subversive context challenging existing norms might have been swallowed up by those very norms Grund challenges in her writing. And finally, this being an example that can be confirmed, thus moving beyond the status of hypothesis, Grund’s texts could be approached by a woman who does not have a similar background in fashion, such as Mila Ganeva in her book *Women in Weimar Fashion*. Ganeva can be credited with rehabilitating Grund’s body of work, and translating parts of it, but as a professor of German literature and film she looks at Grund’s writing from a historical standpoint, which is a valid interrogation. However, the contemporary relevance of this body of

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<sup>293</sup> Cao and Cong, 2017

<sup>294</sup> Ibid.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

work is marginalised, apart from a soft nudge that reframes the history of this period as less male-dominated than previously suggested.

I would argue that translation by a researcher such as myself, who views the act of translating Grund's text as a process guided by empathy for a person who shares similar passions reveals ways in which these texts may become critical tools rather than simple historical objects.

Translation, in any case, is highly personal, and the continuous return to the text in its original language resembles a conversation one might have in person. Additionally, translating text from one's mother tongue into another language taps into something very primal, creating an inescapable sense of home and memory and turning a process that may be portrayed as sterile and exact into one that is highly emotional and personal.

It heightens the insertion of the self and personal experience as required by narrative research, but it furthermore facilitates an intrinsic connection to the data that is collected through the act of feminist translation. As pointed out previously, while this insertion of the self, and leaning into the researcher's bias, may be viewed as a disadvantage, or a potential weakness, I would argue that what others could describe as a weakness is this method's actual strength. The use of the self, the addition of autoethnographic thick descriptions that enrich the text, creates space for fabrication beyond the collected data. These spaces in which the thick personal impressions and experiences sit are what sets this kind of research apart from other, non-feminist, thin translations and accounts. But this is where it gets interesting. These spaces reveal unique perspectives that may add new insights and understandings to an existing narrative. And that is exactly where this method's greatest potential lies.

As I have described in this chapter already, this is a feminist study with a deliberately female focus, and I approach it not simply from my own feminist viewpoint and conviction, but through my feminist translation of Grund's work. Hence I subscribe to the understanding that feminism is a perspective that can be used 'on an existing method in a given field of inquiry or a perspective that can be used to develop an innovative methodology'.<sup>296</sup> Sociologist Ellen Stone hypothesises that feminists

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<sup>296</sup> Reinharz, 1992, p. 241.

approach research either with a belief in or a mistrust of something, but suggests that regardless of whether the feminist researcher is beginning their study with the intention of supporting or critiquing a subject or area, it is that dialogue between belief and distrust, this knowledge that something wrong can be fixed, that creates a very important tension that is present in all feminist research. Within Grund's body of work, this tension is present in every way she articulates the complexity of her thoughts about fashion: the beauty of the creations is juxtaposed with the stress of the presentations, the treatment of mannequins.

Similarly, the feminist researcher creates the intersection of the feminist perspective they bring to the study with the methods that belong to whichever discipline their study is located in.<sup>297</sup>

The resulting phenomenon that is to be studied and researched, therefore, which usually ranges from events to concepts or certain time periods, is a natural consequence of my philosophical approach. Within a feminist approach that centralises the translation of a text through that very lens, which presupposes a forming of an investigative, empathetic research unit in a sense, there is no other option but that. As outlined in the previous section and also in previous chapters, feminist research focuses on people with whom such a connection can form. What takes centre stage, in feminist research and in this study specifically, is a group of fashion practitioners in the contemporary fashion industry whose selection I will elaborate on in the following chapter, but whose stories and experiences are what truly matters.

### 3.5 Narrative

Arguably the most common research method within fashion scholarship is Case Study Strategy. Case studies are normally associated with qualitative rather than quantitative research, an approach that is particularly potent, it has been suggested, when there is no precedent and the researcher lets events unfold without attempting to impose control or direct the outcome. But while the case studies themselves do not need to be tightly controlled, there needs to be a rigorous strategy in place when it comes to

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<sup>297</sup> Ibid.



collecting and analysing the data generated through these case studies. The case study itself can be less controlled, but there should be clearly outlined hypotheses in place beforehand so that the collection and analysis of the data can have a specific direction and can actually be applied and generalised for further study.

It should be pointed out that this is that very same approach that also offers the potential for criticism, namely the argument that this type of research is not representative and does not contain a generalisable approach or statistical generalisability.<sup>298</sup> It is suggested that generalisability should be achieved in qualitative research in order to validate the findings, since a common argument is that a study is only valid if the results can be applied and replicated, a characteristic incorporated from quantitative studies. It is a frequent objection to many qualitative studies that their unique nature apparently counteracts their validity; however, in Glyn Winter's 'A Comparative Discussion of the Notion of "Validity" in Qualitative and Quantitative Research', he argues that

generalisation in itself is neither 'valid' nor accurate. It is likely that a 'generalisable' statement, whilst relating to all those to whom it is applied, may not actually describe the phenomena of any single case with any accuracy, in the same way that a mean average score need not be the same value as any of the numbers of which it is an average.<sup>299</sup>

While Case Study Strategy could have been a feasible and reasonable method with which to approach this study, it is both structurally and thematically more appropriate for narrative research. Narrative in research is characterised by a focus on the continuing development of people's experiences. It is sequential in nature, meaning that there is special attention paid to the unfolding of a story. In 'Why Might you use Narrative Methodology? A Story about Narrative', Lynn McAlpine suggests that narrative research

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<sup>298</sup> Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (London: Sage Publications, 1994).

<sup>299</sup> Glyn Winter, 'A Comparative Discussion of the Notion of "Validity" in Qualitative and Quantitative Research', *The Qualitative Report*, 4:3 (2000), 1-14. Available at: <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol4/iss3/4>

creates a construction of the 'self', me the narrator or protagonist, as an active agent. My story has a narrative arc; it demonstrates my goals and intentions, the ways in which I carried the action forward by making connections between events, shows the influence of the passage of time, and recounts the personal meaning of the experience.<sup>300</sup>

She continues by suggesting that 'narratives incorporate temporality, a social context, complicating events, and an evaluative conclusion that together make a coherent story'<sup>301</sup> in which the narrator, in this case the researcher, has an active role. The value of narrative, according to McAlpine, even though it is less known and used than other qualitative approaches such as Case Study Strategy and Grounded Theory, lies in the telling of stories and individual sensemaking, thus lending itself to studies concerning – among others – sociology and gender, where human experience is at the core and people reflect on their lives. The 'story' in this case often functions as the basis for human experience, and while narrative is most commonly used in educational and sociological research, especially in investigating the experiences of teachers and students, McAlpine's claim that 'this form of inquiry was seen as a means to develop and value knowledge that had not always been valued'<sup>302</sup> is arguably equally applicable to fashion. It might even be considered counterproductive to ignore an approach that has been used to uncover previously invisible or 'lesser' stories when this very issue sits at the core of my inquiry into female and non-male experience in the contemporary fashion industry.

Of the three methodological stances in narrative research McAlpine outlines – sociocultural, naturalist and literary – it is the naturalist stance that describes mine best, and suggested questions range from enquiring about a person's experiences to the meaning these experiences have for them. Nevertheless, adopting a narrative research approach does not mean that I am entirely subscribing to its execution with regard to data collection and analysis. Drawing on Granata's writing again, it is important to stress that while various methodological methods and practices can be collected and assembled, in order to create one's own methodology in accordance with one's own

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<sup>300</sup> Lynn McAlpine, 'Why Might you Use Narrative Methodology? A Story about Narrative', *Eesti Haridusteaduste Ajakiri*, 4:1 (2016), 32-57. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12697/eha.2016.4.1.02b>

<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

<sup>302</sup> McAlpine, 2016

research I would argue that it is necessary and advisable to adjust these ‘ready-made’ methods and practices in a way that makes sense within the context of the research.

### 3.6 Interviews

The second major component of this thesis, along with the reading and and translating of Grund’s body of work, consists of the semi-structured interviews I conducted with a small selection of female and gender non-conforming fashion practitioners.

Apart from focus groups, interviews are arguably one of the most common methods for data collection in qualitative research. In ‘Methods of Data Collection in Qualitative Research: Interviews and Focus Groups’, Gill, Stewart, Treasure and Chadwick describe the qualitative interview as a means to gain a deeper understanding of a specific issue or question, rather than a statistical overview that would result from questionnaires or other quantitative data collection methods. Semi-structured interviews, as they put it, serve to steer the interview into a specific direction with a number of key questions that set some parameters for the conversation to be had with the interviewee. While they write that follow-up questions or requests to interviewees to clarify one of their answers is encouraged with this method, the interviewer should not engage in ‘leading’ or ‘loaded’ questions that, as they put it, ‘may unduly influence responses’.<sup>303</sup>

As can be seen in the interview questions set up for each interview (Appendix I.), I divided the questions into three sections: warm-up questions to get the interview off the ground and also to make the interview partner more comfortable; questions pertaining to their experience in the fashion industry, and finally, questions concerning their practice and how they perceive it.<sup>304</sup>

In L. Earle Reybold, Jill D. Lammert and Stacia M. Stribling’s ‘Participant Selection as a Conscious Research Method: Thinking Forward and the Deliberation of “Emergent” Findings’, the authors write that within qualitative research, ‘some research choices are deliberate and designed into the research process; others are spontaneous and

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<sup>303</sup> P. Gill, K. Stewart, and E. Treasure, et al., ‘Methods of Data Collection in Qualitative Research: Interviews and Focus Groups’. *Br Dent J* 204 (2008), 291–295. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1038/bdj.2008.192>

<sup>304</sup> Complying with Ethics Standards and Guidelines set by the Royal College of Art, I provided each interviewee with an Ethics Committee-approved consent form (Appendix IV.) and informed them that any information gained from the interview would not be used in any context other than my thesis.

provoked by circumstance'.<sup>305</sup> In particular, in the case of selecting participants for research studies, they argue, this tension between planning and intuition, prediction and spontaneity, is especially visible. The researcher is caught between wanting to anticipate what the study might bring and the value that lies in reacting to the moment. Reybold, Lammert and Stribling argue that it is that willingness to react, adapt and ultimately reposition one's enquiry that holds enormous potential for positive impact on a qualitative researcher's study.

With regard to the selection process within qualitative research, they hypothesise that 'purposeful selection [...] is more than a technique to access data; our selection choices frame *who and what matters* [...]. These choices interface the other methods in a study to ultimately become the stories that are told'.<sup>306</sup> Like the importance of drawing on the subject matter of a study to guide its methodology, they claim that there should be equal attention paid to making a cohesive selection of participants and the subsequent analysis of data generated by them that integrates itself into the evolving research structure.

[...] The participant's story is embedded in a matrix of researcher choices: research questions, selection criteria, interview style, analysis technique, and countless other choices. Thus, purposeful selection is a mechanism for making meaning, not just uncovering it. From this perspective, purposeful selection is epistemological; researchers construct versions of reality grounded in their selection choices.<sup>307</sup>

This statement echoes the theories of feminist translation strategy and further underscores the importance of viewing participants, in the case of my study interview partners, not simply as people to be studied and data to be analysed, but as collaborators who will contribute to the creation of a narrative by infusing it with their own stories that are rooted in a shared reality. There were similarities I could reference to view Grund not as a study object but as a partner in this research endeavour, so any

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<sup>305</sup> L. Earle Reybold, Jill D. Lammert and Stacia M. Stribling, 'Participant Selection as a Conscious Research Method: Thinking Forward and the Deliberation of "Emergent" Findings', *Qualitative Research*, 13: 6 (Dec 2013), 699-716, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794112465634>

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., pp. 699-716

<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

participant selected for the series of interviews would have to be viewed and approached in the same manner, and would have to be viewed and approached in a way that mirrored Grund's own selection of collaborators and interview partners, which is coloured by her practice of travel writing and *flânerie* in Paris and Berlin. She writes about people she sees as she wanders around the city, in department stores, fashion ateliers, or the bathrooms of crowded restaurants.

While the notion of *flânerie* takes on a different scope in a contemporary context, and especially in the context of fashion research with a historical, diaristic text at its core, my participant selection, much like my encounter with Grund, is thus characterised by the notion of an encounter by chance. The deliberation that takes place therefore does not lie in the explicit and conscious selection of specific persons, but in the engagement of walking in the field – both physically and metaphorically – to seek out these encounters, whatever and with whomever they may be. This approach could be critiqued as being random, and it is. However, I would argue that characterising the selection of participants as random is not necessarily a negative thing, depending on the context, character and scope of the study.

The argument against such a supposed 'random' participant selection approach is mainly rooted in the idea that a study needs to be generalisable and replicable in order to be valid. In 'Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: a Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options', Jason Seawright and John Gerring argue that 'serious problems are likely to develop if one chooses a very small sample in a completely random fashion, [because] randomized case selection procedures will often produce a sample that is substantially unrepresentative of the population'.<sup>308</sup> Often underdeveloped and underrepresented, strategies for participant selection should, they argue, be in place in order to ensure that the selection is representative so that they can provide answers to whatever research questions sit at the centre of any study. The key difference between a more traditional qualitative study and my own, however, which also counters the argument that random selection damages the validity of the research, is that the conducting of interviews in this project does not serve to answer any questions. The participants, in my case interview partners, are not meant to be representative of their group, because their individual stories are what pose the

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<sup>308</sup> Jason Seawright and John Gerring, 'Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: a Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options', *Political Research Quarterly*, 61:2 (June 2008), 294-308.

questions. They colour the tapestry with their own experiences, and raise the issues that need to be addressed, which Grund's work may offer a way of unpacking. As pointed out in the first chapter of this thesis, this research does not seek to answer a specific set of questions, but rather outlines a new discursive approach to knowledge creation via the translation of Grund's writing. On the same note, the interviews do not serve the single purpose of answering my research questions – they raise them. They interrogate the premise set for them.

In the same way that my analysis of Grund may offer paths towards a new approach to the analysis of non-male fashion practice, my reading and translating of her diaries, as outlined in the previous chapter, also suggests how interview partners and informants may be chosen and collaborated with.

As discussed in relation to Grund's diaries of her travels to Paris and experiences of the city and its people, but specifically its women, these moments of connection between her and the people she encounters happen in an immersive setting rather than an isolated set-up. It positions Grund opposite the person she is describing or interviewing, but in a setting that encompasses them and puts them into the same situation and context. Grund does not approach these moments from the standpoint of an active subject who exerts her power by interrogating a passive object that is to be studied. Instead, for instance in the scene she observes in the restaurant on the Boulevard Rouchechouart,<sup>309</sup> they are all performing on the same stage, equally part of the same scene, listening to the same sounds and feeling the same things. Grund's style of immersive selection reflects her practice of walking as a new woman, and goes further in underlining the difference between the conventional flâneur and someone like Grund, who deals in chance encounters and personal experiences, rather than deliberate inquiries in controlled settings.

Grund is immersed in and fully experiences a situation, and when something piques her interest, she focuses on it; she zooms in, moves the dial to tune in and eliminate the static, without ever interrupting the dynamics and creating an imbalance that would impact these performances. She does not isolate the performance, thus detaching it from its context and consequences, but rather seeks to understand this exact *moment* in time as it occurs. The goal of capturing these unified performances is evident in the

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<sup>309</sup> Hessel, 2014, p.29

approach that requires a blurring of lines between subject and object, and between people and their surroundings.

While I did not precisely replicate the circumstances of Grund's approach, the selection of interview partners for this research nevertheless channels the core principles laid out above. Apart from the decision that I did not want to interview men, there were no guidelines set to direct the selection process. I will discuss the notion of intuition later in this chapter, but at this point it is important to note that my selection of interview partners occurred randomly, which does not diminish their presence in this research, but rather speaks to the practice of *flânerie* to create knowledge as demonstrated by Grund, in which chance encounters colour in a situation for a fuller, more vivid picture of reality.

What Grund's texts outline is her unique ethnographic approach that is driven by serendipity as she observes the city and its inhabitants, guided by her intuition and curiosity. This serendipity has also coloured my research, but in particular the decision to conduct interviews halfway through the study, the selection of the interviewees, the conducting of my conversations with them, the reflection of them within the context of my research, and the relation to Grund. Within ethnographic research, serendipity is an established method, 'the essence of fieldwork research'<sup>310</sup>, and characterised as not only a by-product of the research process, but also as key in shaping it. It is part of what ethnographic researchers refer to as the 'Geertzian moment' in which a researcher is suddenly struck with clarity in previously unsettled moments.<sup>311</sup> Within my research on Grund, this notion of clarity is captured in serendipitous *Momentaufnahmen* – sudden snapshots during which ambiguity becomes distinct and sharp.

As outlined previously, Finamore had an exhibition just opening at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts when I was considering which designers to interview and I had heard her speak previously as part of her MA at the RCA. I recalled particularly the way in which she articulated her process and the ways in which her own personal values become vital elements to the way in which she works both as a designer and, here, as a curator.

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<sup>310</sup> Frank Pieke, 'Serendipity: reflections on fieldwork in China' in Paul Dresch, Wendy James and David Parkin (eds.), *Anthropologists in a Wider World: Essays on Field Research*, (New York City: Berghahn Books, 2000), p. 138

<sup>311</sup> Geertz, 1973

The RCA quickly evolved into my own turn-of-the-century-Paris, like meeting like-minded creatives in a salon, as I had sat in on Bianca Saunders' final year MA critique. Her unique take as a young woman of colour on the misconceptions with regards to the masculinities or her own community presented a particularly poignant and subversive argument against the demonisation of young men of colour as knife-crime in London skyrocketed during this time. Her work touched on insecurities and vulnerability, giving voice to a marginalised group of men who were arguably being made the scapegoat for larger, systemic issues.

Yvonne Lim and Sissel Karneskøg are RCA alumni as well. Karneskøg, as a gender non-conforming designer, not only intrigued me because of my own MA thesis centred around non-binary fashion and the theoretical connotations of it, but also because they were questioning the concept of binarism and fashion entirely, challenging definitions and preconceptions through experimental, eclectic but also deeply personal work. In some ways, Lim and Caves Collect, Sarah Russell and Johanna Howe's brand, were added into the fold initially because of their aesthetic and the non-plussed, unfussy and honest nature of their imagery. Lim was once again introduced to me via the RCA, while Caves Collect was introduced to me by my friend Rachel, who had bought one of their designs. Having spent so much time reading Grund and specifically her interview with Renate Green, who spoke so passionately about wanted women to have practical and comfortable clothing, Lim and Caves Collect very much revealed themselves to be a contemporary counterpart to Green, sitting perhaps more easily within the current Zeitgeist than Green had.

Similarly to the way Helen Grund was drawn to creatives going against the mainstream, as evidenced by her writing, was so interested in talking to, I also find myself intrigued by those offering up new perspectives and challenges.

Ultimately, I decided to approach all of these people because I was personally interested in talking to them, as well as professionally curious about how their work intersected and grappled with the same concerns I was trying to address in my research. Contact was made via email, in all cases, and the interviews were eventually conducted via phone, Skype, and What's App.

The interviews range from thirty-two to fifty-eight minutes and were transcribed in full, with no editing or shortening. As previously discussed with the interview partners, they received the full transcript and were able to amend, add or retract any of the words they



had said. Notably, none of them did, opting to leave the transcript as is. Blake D. Poland, in *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method*, states that ‘transcription of audiotaped interviews as a method for making data available in textual form for subsequent coding and analysis is widespread in qualitative research’.<sup>312</sup> However, I want to point out that despite taking care to transcribe the interviews as accurately and truthfully as possible, as with most methods of data collection or processing, transcripts cannot and should not generally be considered neutral.

In ‘The Politics of Transcription’, Mary Bucholtz claims that

all transcripts take sides, enabling certain interpretations, advancing particular interests, favoring specific speakers [...]. The choices made in transcription link the transcript to the context in which it is intended to be read. Embedded in the details of transcription are indications of purpose, audience, and the position of the transcriber toward the text. Transcripts thus testify to the circumstances of their creation and intended use. As long as we seek a transcription practice that is independent of its own history rather than looking closely at how transcripts operate politically, we will perpetuate the erroneous belief that an objective transcription is possible.<sup>313</sup>

While this thesis does not have the breadth to accommodate a discussion of the bias or accuracy of transcripts, I do want to note that I am aware that there may also be an inherent bias in my own transcriptions of the interviews, which is why I took great care to transcribe these interviews myself, without the use of a software programme, and why I believe it was very important that the interview partners could have the last word with regard to the final transcript. Similarly, as with the translation of Grund’s work, I believe the physicality of the task, the reliving of the interview along with the listening and typing of the words, supported the ultimate decision about what to extract from these texts.

Drawn from the autoethnographic concept of thick description, and the application of this concept in working with Grund’s texts and my translation of them, this similarly

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<sup>312</sup> Blake D. Poland, *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method*, ed. by Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein (New York: Sage, 2001), p. 628.

<sup>313</sup> Mary Bucholtz, ‘The Politics of Transcription’, *Journal of Pragmatics* 32 (2000), 1439-1465. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166\(99\)00094-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166(99)00094-6)

autoethnographic and personal, intuitive transcription process is something I would argue could be described as *thick transcription*, in which the transcription of these interviews goes beyond a word-for-word relaying of the sentences exchanged between myself and the interviewees. Like the difference between thin and thick description described earlier in this chapter, allowing thickness to seep into my transcription process meant I adopted a more diaristic, narrative approach to typing these conversations. Instead of, as I noted above, taking down these exchanges word for word and adding nothing more, the transcripts were novelised, in a way, painting a fuller picture of the circumstances leading up to the interviews and the so-called background noise as they were conducted, taking note of distractions, sounds and other factors to give a thicker account of these moments as they occurred. Following through with these thick transcripts enabled a better understanding of the interviewees and arguably added a personal layer to texts that would otherwise perhaps more sterile.

The need for this autoethnographic concept to be applied to the transcription of interviews and fashion research more broadly, including the researcher and the potential that lies in their bias to a greater extent, directly ties in with the notion of personal experience and intuition, which is more eloquently described by Laura Ellingson in her book *Embodiment in Qualitative Research*. In it, Ellingson points out that 'typically, social science researchers conduct and represent research as though knowledge were produced without unruly bodies involved',<sup>314</sup> and although this research was not conducted with a focus on embodiment and/or bodies as creators and vessels of knowledge, I do not want to ignore the physical, emotional and mental absorption with Grund's body of work through thinking about and writing her words, that facilitated a visceral connection that propelled my research forward. In fact, Ellingson argues that the complete exclusion of the body as a site for knowledge feeds into a phallogocentric narrative in which 'the performance of "the disembodied researcher"' has been repeated for so long that it functions as a set of naturalised norms that privilege a masculinist rationality as the only legitimate form of knowledge, accorded only to those with sufficient social privilege to deny their feminine unruliness.'<sup>315</sup> Ellingson goes a step further and suggests that the insistence on leaving

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<sup>314</sup> Laura L. Ellingson, *Embodiment in Qualitative Research* (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 7.

<sup>315</sup> Ellingson, 2017.

bodies out of knowledge and research altogether speaks to the privilege of the person conducting the research. The body, and senses that are arguably more carnal than sight, have commonly been rejected as irrelevant or even damaging in knowledge production. However, drawing on Barnacle and Wacquant's writing, Ellingson insists 'that qualitative and critical researchers can do embodiment in all aspects of research, and that [...] such embrace of embodiment or carnality does not require a rejection of attention to discourse.'<sup>316</sup>

### 3.7 Data Analysis

The analytical approach I took that seemed fitting and appropriate for the kind of study I conducted and its related data is most like a qualitative content analysis, which preserves 'the advantages of quantitative content analysis for a more qualitative text interpretation.'<sup>317</sup> To qualitatively analyse the generated content in this thesis, Grund is once again central, leading in to the analysis as well as forming its final step, as outlined in the discussion of her diary entries, which demonstrate the three stages of her own analytical approach: Positioning, Process and Practice. This approach, tailored to this specific research project, can be compared to the analysis outlined by sociologist Philipp Mayring. He describes the basic approach to this analysis as having four steps, the first of which consists of determining the model of communication, meaning that it is necessary to decide whether inferences need to be made from, for example, the text, the text's message or the situation in which the text was produced. Secondly, there needs to be a predetermined set of rules that the analysis should follow, a step-by-step guide that involves a clear procedure that, in a third step, sorts the collected and generated data into units of categories that develop and are revised throughout the study. Finally, Mayring suggests a reliability and validity check of the analysis in which the results are triangulated with other studies.<sup>318</sup>

That final step can be taken once the study is completed, and may fall on other members within the discipline, but I would argue that while I agree with the first three basic steps Mayring presents, this fourth step implies that a study is only valid when it can be

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<sup>316</sup> Ibid., p. 7

<sup>317</sup> Philipp Mayring, 'Qualitative Content Analysis', *Forum: Qualitative Social Research (Sozialforschung)*, 1:2, Art. 20 (June 2000).

<sup>318</sup> Mayring, 2000

triangulated or replicated, which – as addressed previously in this chapter – arguably falls into common preconceptions of scholarship in which experiences are only legitimate if they can be checked against existing evidence.

Where Mayring sets out a fourth stage in the analysis, a triangulation with other studies, which could be said to carry an implication that the experiences and stories and their entwined analyses are not sufficiently valid on their own. What I am proposing here is that the meaning and interpretation of these texts resides within the text.

Meaning is inferred from the text's message, and the procedure to procure that meaning, is what I describe as a manual soft coding. While I initially attempted to employ a qualitative data analysis software programme and implement a stringent coding procedure with predetermined codes, after conducting a few test runs of coding the data generated from the interviews I realised that even though the coding was giving me an idea of the frequency with which the interviewees mentioned one topic or another, it felt very detached from the way I had engaged with Grund's texts, and it was difficult to apply to the thickness of the steps of translating, transcribing and describing. Coding often presents a valid strategy in turning qualitative research into quantifiable data – such as drawing out the number of male voices or appearances that emerge in the texts. This coding, also called category application, exists in two forms: inductive and deductive. Categories are either determined ahead of the study or developed as a result of the generated data. Inductive category application derives

from theoretical background and research question, which determines the aspects of the textual material taken into account. Following this criterion the material is worked through and categories are tentative and step by step deduced. Within a feedback loop those categories are revised, eventually reduced to main categories and checked in respect to their reliability.<sup>319</sup>

Deductive category application, however, 'works with prior formulated, theoretical derived aspects of analysis, bringing them in connection with the text'.<sup>320</sup>

What is fitting, in the case of this study and a qualitative content analysis of the interviews that, alongside Grund's writing, serve as the main source of data, is an

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<sup>319</sup> Mayring, 2000

<sup>320</sup> Ibid.

approach to the analysis that ties Grund and the interviews together not through established codes, but by using the methods Grund utilised to produce knowledge. Instead of simply adopting her methods to conduct the interviews, there is far greater potential in a subsequent categorising and analysing of the generated data through the layered application of the three key steps in Grund's method to create a closed loop. The three key steps in Grund's method, Positioning, Process and Practice are drawn out from her diary entries. In this approach, the semi-structured interviews were conducted after having internalised Grund's methods, and after their conclusion and subsequent transcription the interviews were first evaluated for key moments or epiphanies pertaining to that three-step approach and eventually categorised according to these three steps.

This was done manually – a continuous, physical writing and rewriting of the filtered-out moments from the interviews which allowed for an immersion into them that I felt was missing in the more sterile, software-driven coding and analysis.

I now want to use an example to demonstrate the analytical process, starting from the manual soft coding of Grund's writing, following a rigorous process of translation as laid out earlier in this chapter and ending with the manual soft coding of the interviews that draws on the information gained from Grund's work. There is a more detailed discussion of Grund's texts, as well as the three categories that were established from reading her diary in the previous chapter, so this serves as an illustration of how to approach Grund's texts after the development of these three categories, and how to recognise them even in one short text segment. The example I would like to use to demonstrate this manual soft coding is a diary entry dated 9 March, 1924, titled *Amélie Rue Castiglione*. It describes a fashion presentation, fifty models showing the newest garments to a stifling crowd of wealthy customers. This is the abridged, already translated segment:

5 o'clock in the afternoon. A hundred women, hot, breathing, fragrant, international. [...] But also Estelle, the bold one, whose beautiful bosom stands beneath the rot of her casque, throws her short-curved full face with vigour behind the black fresh bow that's fastening the cape to her right shoulder, and shrugs, making the white of her arms gleam: Everything is occupied – Madame will have to occupy herself watching our new models?

A slim, ageing widow stands sonorously; her classic head is wearing a crêpe helmet; she stares into the mirror. Her left side is being handled by a bent-forward figure, a blond youngling with pins on a silver plate. Ladies and lovely creatures hurry around and past the immobile woman. The models for Madame once again, please, Léontine... Mademoiselle Léontine – tall, stretched, with a pout, dances the jackets through the tight space she has to cleave over and over between the pesterers, slips into silk pleats again, silk lining – out, in – out, in – steely feathering hollows of the knees – swiftly – precise.

She has spectators. Not just the mother who has this young child spin for her dull-looking daughter. A slim lady leans against the column, her mouth gleaming in cool-garish pearly red. She struggles with the lorgnon, she lifts the large ring pearl on a skinny finger, flutters winged eyelashes and stands on the softness of her silken feet.<sup>321</sup>

The marking is intuitive; sentences and descriptions that stand out or catch the eye, or are particularly amusing or unexpected. This intuitive and manual soft coding in its first stage catches brief moments in the texts, without too much thought about what they mean or stand for. It was carried out for the entirety of the translated texts by Grund. What follows this initial marking of stand-out moments is a closer reading of them and an understanding of the underlying current they speak to. 'A hundred women, hot, breathing, fragrant, international,'<sup>322</sup> Grund writes right at the beginning of the entry, setting the scene, instantly outlining her position as part of this large female crowd by speaking to the sensations she is registering. Counteracting the detachment pioneered by her contemporaries, she describes how she feels in this exclusively female space, what she smells, quick and to the point, capturing the flurry of activity around her. 'Estelle, the bold one,'<sup>323</sup> Grund continues, beginning her process of describing her surroundings in layers, noting down a woman she clearly knows, or is at least familiar enough with to know her name. Grund demonstrates her familiarity with the scene, and while she takes in and notes down visuals, such as the paleness of Estelle's arms, she intertwines characterisations with these descriptions. This is especially vivid in the

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<sup>321</sup> Hessel, 2014, p. 30.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid.

description of Mademoiselle Léontine, a mannequin. Grund writes, ‘Mademoiselle Léontine – tall, stretched, with a pout, dances the jackets through the tight space she has to cleave over and over between the pesterers, slips into silk pleats again’,<sup>324</sup> and instead of simply laying out the facts – how does Léontine look and what is she wearing or doing? – Grund chooses very specific terms that add more nuance to this segment. Léontine wears a pout, implying that she is perhaps in a less than good mood, which is understandable when we continue reading and see that Grund recalls how the mannequin has to squeeze through tight spaces between customers milling about, changing into one outfit after the other, being bothered by these customers to the degree that Grund refers to them as ‘pesterers’.

This is what we gain. This is what Grund’s position and her specific process allows us to see and discover. Colourful and lively scenes that pull the curtain back and reveal not a romantic, dreamy landscape filled with silks and beautiful people, but a tight, bustling space where mothers attempt to adorn their daughters and models are expecting to work hard, and always with a smile on their faces, spinning on the spot for diamond-covered customers who glare at them.

As discussed in the analysis of Grund’s texts, the initial intention to analyse the qualitative data generated from her texts and the interviews was to establish codes and analyse the texts using coding to take what I at that time believed to be a necessary step to ensure that my analysis would be taken seriously. However, after several attempts to code the data, I didn’t feel as if I was gaining anything from it apart from a rough overview pertaining to the regularity with which my interview partners talked about things or mentioned certain terms.

In ‘Feminist qualitative methods and methodologies in psychology: A review and reflection’, Victoria Clarke and Virginia Brown discuss coding in feminist or female-driven research and argue for more incorporation of reflexivity and its corresponding values and bemoan a continued ‘absence of a fully realised feminist methodological vision’<sup>325</sup> that can expel existing canons within a discipline. Clarke and Brown call for

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<sup>324</sup> Ibid.

<sup>325</sup> Victoria Clarke and Virginia Brown, ‘Feminist qualitative methods and methodologies in psychology: A review and reflection’, *Psychology of Women and Equalities Section Review*, Vol. 2 No. 1, 2019, pp. 13-28

more methodological innovation, but also more sensibility towards qualitative research, because

(post-)positivist conceptions of coding accuracy and reliability sat alongside notions of 'giving voice' and capturing the rich detail of women's lived experiences and perspectives in their own words. A lack of prior engagement with the topic and relevant literature was sometimes framed as a virtue that maintained the 'objectivity' of coding.<sup>326</sup>

They argue that it is rare for reflexivity to be present in method and that feminist researchers, who should prioritise 'feminist political goals over procedural epistemological and disciplinary orthodoxy'<sup>327</sup>, are trying too hard to pose as 'neutral conduits' who retain an objective position. Clarke and Brown promote this post-positivist dominance where coding occurs without reflexivity and lacking a feminist perspective. Coding, Clarke and Brown argue, 'places consistency above situation-interpretation of data'<sup>328</sup>, losing richness that feminist researchers so desperately search for in these individual stories and voices they worked so hard to uncover. Assessing coding within a feminist qualitative context, it is to the detriment of those who rely on the interpretation or translation of their stories and experiences. It restricts nuance and diversity by placing canon and coding consensus above it. With their paper, Clarke and Brown call on feminist researchers to move on from the notion that more codes are better, that objectivity is necessary and instead trust their own intuition and voice.

While it is arguably useful to employ coding in social sciences, with regard to my own research, as well as feminist research that makes experiences and stories central, a more personalised approach, tailored towards the source material, was something I deemed more appropriate, resulting in my own system of analysis that focused on the collection of these remembered moments.

Eugene Sadler-Smith defines intuition as 'an involuntary, difficult-to-articulate, affect-laden recognition or judgment, based upon prior learning and experiences, which is

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<sup>326</sup> Clarke and Brown, 2019

<sup>327</sup> Ibid.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid.



arrived at rapidly, through holistic associations and without deliberative or conscious rational thought',<sup>329</sup> which seems to suggest that intuitive selection is an appropriate rationale within a study that largely concerns itself with ways to illuminate and highlight personal experience. In *Intuition: Its Powers and Perils*, David G. Myers references feminist historian Evelyn Keller bemoaning the fact that 'for whatever reason, western tradition has a history of viewing rational thinking as masculine and intuition as feminine'.<sup>330</sup> He additionally refers to Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger and Jill Mattuck Tarule's seminal work *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind*, in which they argue that, disregarding these stereotypical characterisations of knowledge and whether they are accurate or not, feminist methods 'give greater latitude to personal knowledge, to subjective knowledge, to intuition's inner voice'.<sup>331</sup> This intuition is vital at every stage of the process, but in particular with regard to the infusion of thickness into the various processes.

Utilising intuition was originally discussed by Henri Bergson as a philosophical method in *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, in which he describes that there are two ways we can know something, 'the first implies that we move round the object; the second that we enter into it.'<sup>332</sup> This entering into the object, according to Bergson, occurs through intuition, which does not exist from the very beginning, but is created and built via a growing intimacy between researcher and research objects.

By intuition is meant a kind of intellectual sympathy by which one places oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressible. Analysis, on the contrary, is the operation which reduces the object to elements already known, that is to elements common both to it and to other objects. To analyse, therefore, is to express a thing as a function of something other than itself. All analysis is thus a translation, a development into symbols, a representation taken from successive points of view from which we

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<sup>329</sup> Eugene Sadler-Smith, *Inside Intuition* (Oxford: Routledge, 2008), p. 31.

<sup>330</sup> David G. Myers, *Intuition: Its Powers and Perils* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 48.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid.

<sup>332</sup> Bergson, 1999, p.21

note as many resemblances as possible between the new object which we are studying and others which we believe we already know.<sup>333</sup>

Intuition, as it is framed by Bergson within a methodological context, represents an intimate research method which, I argue, is not only appropriate for working with intimate material such as diaries and personal texts, but, in a sense, a necessity to translate an object or text beyond its immediate meaning.

In 'A method of intuition: Becoming, relationality, ethics', Rebecca Coleman proposes not a direct application of Bergson's method, but an expansion of existing methodological canon, which is fundamental to feminist research. In her paper, Coleman argues for a 'relation of intimacy'<sup>334</sup> which, according to her, is not only a side-effect, but '*produces* the researcher(s) and researched.'<sup>335</sup> Intuition does therefore not reveal existing intimacy. It 'invents ways of becoming intimate with research objects.'<sup>336</sup> Through intuition, an intimate relationship with the researched can be developed, and according to Bergson and Coleman, rather than 'reducing the object to what we believe to be its resemblance with other objects'<sup>337</sup>, we are able to see it for its uniqueness and inexpressibility, which lends itself to feminist research that calls for individualisation rather than generalisation. This directly applies to my work in terms of not wishing to use a reductive method such as coding, but instead asserting my own position via a feminist method of intuition through my selection process as well as a feminist form of intuitive soft-coding.

Additionally, intuition calls for a minimising or blurring of the object-subject dichotomy, which has been part of the development of feminist methods in recent years. And while arguably not yet wholly achieved, approaching intuition as a method of analysis reframes the notion of research objects as static, complete things that can be known and understood fully, instead offering an alternate ontology in which research object, researcher, and the world they exist in, are 'always *becoming*.'<sup>338</sup>

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<sup>333</sup> Ibid., pp.23-24

<sup>334</sup> Coleman, 2008

<sup>335</sup> Ibid.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

Through this approach, which not only echoes Simone de Beauvoir's famous quote<sup>339</sup>, but also, in a way, fashion's perpetual motion, analysis becomes more dynamic, shifting just like fashion is transient and just like women are always becoming. Objects and texts 'can only be conceived through this unique becoming and not through a pre-existent system of symbols and translation.'<sup>340</sup>

Through this constant evolving and renegotiation between the two sides that make a research project, this 'relationship with objects is invigorated rather than lost.'<sup>341</sup>

Before I discuss the research findings generated by the interviews and their subsequent analysis, I would like to briefly recap on the final methodology inspired by the reading and translation of Helen Grund's body of work.

Within a still emerging and ever-changing academic discipline such as fashion studies, it is important to realise that while adopting methodologies from other disciplines which are more established and tested in a scholarly context is a necessary first step in developing one's research, these adopted methods should not remain fixed and unaltered without rigorous checking against the nature of the study. Even a tried and tested approach with well-documented methods and practically foolproof data collection and analysis procedures can damage the progression of the study if it is not critically examined for its suitability. As Granata elaborates in her essay on the progression of her own methodology within her doctoral thesis, there is great opportunity in fashion research to experiment with new and innovative approaches, the interdisciplinary nature of the field lending itself to the creation of methodologies as varied and agile as itself.

Essential to this approach is the focus on chance encounters, epiphanies and remembered moments rather than codes or fixed timelines, accepting the validity of these regardless of narrative structures imposed on them by a male interpretation of how stories should be told. Allowing these moments to simply exist in this thesis, alongside Grund's work, with the aim of illustrating how an intimate engagement with non-male stories can further and feed a research approach, is in itself a disruptive practice, aimed at echoing Grund and the practitioners who have managed to create

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<sup>339</sup> 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.' Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 1949

<sup>340</sup> Coleman, 2008

<sup>341</sup> Ibid.

their own spaces from which they can effectively recognise and circumvent a system that was not created with them in mind. I want to present these moments with only Grund and myself for company, just as they have existed throughout this research, and demonstrate what happens when you allow people to tell their own stories. It shows the ways in which a hunch can create intuitive thoughts and influence decision-making, a step-by-step *learning* about someone's inner life through diaristic texts that may progress towards *knowing*. What begins as intuition can therefore evolve into an approach that can be understood, explained and eventually generalised – not in an exact manner, but mirroring essential characteristics. And while this intuitive soft coding, based on not much more than hunches and instinct, can be critiqued for its ambiguity, I would argue that it is precisely its unpredictable nature that truly reflects life and the immersive situations we find ourselves in. The various positions a researcher has to take during the progression of a study can therefore easily roll into one. Translator, interviewer, and analyser: a layered existence in which no single role is isolated from the other, just as this methodology only exists through the dynamic relationships between its components.

The following and final chapter lays out the findings that resulted from the application of my analysis of Grund's texts and the methods I have subsequently drawn out of them. I first present part of the thick transcripts of two interviews conducted over the course of my research to highlight the results of applying a thick descriptive transcription process. The second section will then present an analysis of the interviews with the newly generated feminist method of fashion analysis derived from Grund's approach in order to give an example of how they may be applicable within contemporary fashion discourse.

## 4. Findings

This chapter addresses the third and final research question, asking what this approach, drawn out through a translation and analysis of Grund's diaristic texts, could bring to a feminist analysis of contemporary fashion. It demonstrates the purpose of conducting these interviews and how their process and transcription, as well as the subsequent analysis, differ from conventional approaches that are based neither on Grund's texts nor on texts like hers. The following chapter outlines what may be gained from the application of the methodology gained from Grund, and the thick transcriptions of these interviews and their subsequent analysis .

It follows questions discussed in the previous chapters, which identified the gap in the analysis of fashion and asked why it is possible that a voice like that of Helen Grund has remained barely visible within fashion studies and related discourse. These previous chapters interrogated how a translation and critical analysis of diaristic texts authored by Grund may become a feminist tool within fashion studies. The review of the literature revealed that cross-historical research can be an effective tool in order to gain a more holistic understanding of a phenomenon, and also challenge the contemporary canon when appropriately applied. However, it also showed that there still remains a hesitancy among academic texts to lean into supposed bias, to interrogate personal experiences through personal texts, and consider accounts that are unapologetically intimate.

While it can be argued that contributing to this is a persistent gender binarism that has directed the narrative, theory and ultimately the nature of the discourse, defining not only how knowledge is structured but also how it is gained, the subversive nature of diaristic writing, which actively asserts the author's narrative and personal point of view, challenges this hierarchy of storytelling. Such texts, as unfolded in the previous two chapters, can form the basis for a new way to create knowledge and approach discourse, and enrich the existing canon through previously disregarded characterisations, experiences and intimate snapshot moments.

I now want to focus on the interviews, that offer a clearer picture of the contemporary moment that is being probed and investigated and the analysis of which, facilitated by

my examination of Grund and her work, may point to new ways of understanding and analysing contemporary fashion practice.

In her book *Women in Weimar Fashion*, Ganeva writes that Grund 'retrieved microscopic pieces of the present in order to read them as symptomatic of various sociological trends.'<sup>342</sup> And while I did not want to entirely copy Grund and her approach, but rather adapt it for the contemporary, this is a way it echoes Grund's in this cross-historical context. On the one hand, the stories shared by these practitioners illustrate the contemporary moment we find ourselves in. They add more detail to the current status quo and point to the nuances and difficulties encountered in shifting to different narratives through their individual standpoint. Through my own interviews, I am attempting to do what Grund did, but shifting it forward into a contemporary context, facilitating conversations with this generation of new voices that is challenging the system.

At the same time, I want to stress that their experiences are not meant to be representative of women, non-binary or otherwise gender non-conforming people who work in and develop their practice in the fashion industry.

On the other hand, these interviews counteract the idea of fashion design as a singular practice and experience. Instead, what I want to emphasise through the way the findings unfold in this chapter is the potential that lies in viewing them as emotional and deeply personal. They set an example of how we may engage with a more interdisciplinary and intersectional discipline by placing value and agency on individual stories that have not been heard, or not been heard loud enough. In Grund's essays, for example, rather than commenting on well-known protagonists and participants of fashion, she presented 'a provocative and rare inside look into fashion as the field of professional fulfilment for many lower-and middle-class women,'<sup>343</sup> inquiring about those who professionally engaged with fashion, but did not have visibility, and did not receive attention from other journalists, or other media outlets.

The contemporary media landscape, as outlined in the literature review, is vastly different from Weimar era journalism and representation. However, I would argue that while representation has certainly improved and diversified greatly, there is still progress to be made. As touched on in the previous chapter, interviewee selection was

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<sup>342</sup> Ganeva, 2008, p. 94

<sup>343</sup> Ibid.

driven by chance and intuition, but also by leaning into opportunities and encounters facilitated by the unique circumstances and positions of both parties. For Grund, as a woman establishing herself in an industry among male peers who neither took fashion nor female journalists seriously, it was important to question dominant narratives and existing systems by dedicating her efforts as a writer 'to the work of less famous self-made female fashion designers.'<sup>344</sup> Similarly, with her methodical approach, Grund arguably dispersed with many romantic notions surrounding the fashion industry and its connected professions.<sup>345</sup>

Echoing this notion in a contemporary setting, the people interviewed for this thesis are all self-made practitioners who have established, or are – at the time of the interview – in the process of establishing themselves amongst rigid competition.

In her interview stressing the importance of elevating the next generation of female designers with Head of Fashion at Royal College of Art, Zowie Broach, for *Women's Wear Daily*, Tianwei Zhang outlines how 'Broach is pushing beyond traditional systematic views of fashion by challenging students [...] to discover their own values.'<sup>346</sup> Nurtured within a culture that encourages rather than stifles creatives to move beyond existing narratives, students are encouraged to ask difficult questions and push back against perceived industry authority. About her past and current students, Broach says

They are this amazing generation of young women who have distinct voices. They care about the excellence of our bodies, our gaze, our values, offering ways to dress and express the body.<sup>347</sup>

Bianca Saunders, one of the interviewees for this thesis, is also quoted in the piece, crediting Broach with encouraging her 'to think differently about my work.'<sup>348</sup> Many of Grund's interviewees were less visible or entirely invisible women who, in their own ways and as discussed in the second chapter, pushed beyond conventions and whose views did not reflect the presiding system. Along those very lines, my own

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<sup>344</sup> Ibid.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid., p. 97

<sup>346</sup> Tianwei Zhang, 'Zowie Broach, In Other Words', *WWD*, Fairchild Media, 30 Mar. 2022, <https://wwd.com/fashion-news/fashion-features/zowie-broach-ma-fashion-london-royal-college-arts-1235145317/>

<sup>347</sup> Broach, quoted in Zhang, 2022

<sup>348</sup> Saunders, quoted in Zhang, 2022

interviewees challenge the existing system through their practice, three of which were nurtured in the environment provided by the Royal College of Art<sup>349</sup>. And while neither Finamore nor Russell and Howe from *Caves Collect* were educated at the Royal College of Art, they did go through a fashion or fashion-adjacent education in similar environments. As much as the Paris of the early twentieth century that Grund walked through and practiced in provided a space for creatives to push boundaries and engage with other like-minded people, art universities of the twenty-first century have, on the one hand, arguably become a similar safe space for creative exploration and resistance. On the other hand, as much as the fashion industry has always been closely entangled with capitalism, in academic institutions students are also arguably commodities and hold monetary value but little power and universities still sit and operate within a capitalist system.

Capitalism and power structures aside, within Grund's world, she and her companions were a new generation, *die Neuen Frauen* [new women] who sought to move beyond convention. My interviewees aren't just new women who are practitioners and designers but new *women, non-binary and otherwise gender non-conforming people*, who demonstrate this departure from the status quo through their practice and reflection of their own position.

Expanding upon Geertz's notion of thick description by infusing it with feminist translation, these interviews demonstrate the application of the three-step process drawn out from such an analysis of Grund's texts – Position, Process and Practice. These conversations do not set out to solely focus on the clothes the designers create, nor on who wears them and why (or in Finamore's case, what her exhibition looks like and who her audience might be). Grund establishes the position of herself as the research subject as well as her research object, before investigating their process. Only if these two steps are set does she engage with the actual practice, if at all.

Therefore the findings in this chapter focus on the words of the people I interviewed, but through a new lens that has been shaped by the approach developed after reading, translating and intuitively soft-coding a selection of Helen Grund's diary entries. The length of all the interview transcripts extends beyond the word limit for the thesis, as

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<sup>349</sup> I do want to point out the prestige and privilege of the Royal College of Art – not everyone can get in, not everyone can afford to pursue such a degree, and not everyone can afford a fashion education at this leading institution in Central London, where fees are high as well as the average cost of living.



well as its appendices, but the abridged transcripts, written as included in the previous chapter, precede the sections dedicated to each interviewee, prior to discussing the moments that were filtered out through soft coding these transcripts following the method developed via Grund. These filtered-out quotes and moments following the Position, Process and Practice structure drawn from Grund are attached in full as Appendix II.

While the segments of thick transcripts that are presented in this chapter are shortened, due to the limits of this thesis, they nevertheless show the application of the autoethnographic concept in the interview and transcription process. They are, it is important to stress, not a replication of Grund's writing but a modern adaptation and application of the core of her work, as raw and unabridged as her diary entries – the new women of the twenty-first century, roaming not the streets but digital spheres, connecting across the globe through shared experiences and interests.

Following each of these segmentary thick transcripts is a discussion of the respective findings I have drawn from them, which were gained through the tools generated through Grund's work, an in-depth re-reading of the interview transcripts followed by soft coding into moments. These snapshot moments, instants remembered, that stand out after repeated reading and engaging with the texts, are organised into the three categories, Position, Process and Practice, which were then also applied to intuitively, but also critically analyse the texts produced by the interviews.

The interviews I conducted were initially semi-structured, with a set of questions determined before the interview (Appendix I.). As the conversations unfolded, questions pertaining to the content of these conversations and the direction they were taking or, in some cases, not taking, were added or omitted. Taking a similar approach to Grund's conversations with Renate Green, Madame Agnès and others, I was eager for them to share their stories and their experiences: I did not think it appropriate to press them on topics they did not mention or talk about in depth. Instead, I engaged with the interviewee beyond the pre-determined interview outline in order to enrich the conversation.

As can be seen in the interview questions devised for each interview (Appendix I), I divided the questions into three sections. Complying with Ethics Standards and Guidelines set by the Royal College of Art, I provided each interviewee with an Ethics

Committee-approved consent form (Appendix IV) and informed them that any information gained from the interview would only be featured in my thesis.

#### 4.1 Position, Process and Practice

Before focusing on the interview transcripts and their subsequent analysis, I want to briefly reiterate the three-step system of analysis generated through my reading and translating of Grund's diary as discussed in depth through three examples of her personal writing in the second chapter of this thesis. This method of transcription and subsequent analysis demonstrates one way in which this feminist tool can be applied to an analysis of voices who continue to be overlooked or diminished within contemporary fashion discourse. These three steps, as mentioned above, are Position, Process and Practice.

The first step, Position, refers to a recognition of the existing system and the subsequent creation of a unique, personal space in response to an epiphany, as illustrated in the first of Grund's diary entries that describe Grund's encounter with a young man in an London Underground carriage. It stands for the assertion of Grund as an active subject. The diary entry written by Grund, described earlier, recalls her experience as a teenage girl travelling on her own on the London Underground and finding herself exchanging looks with a man she describes as 'charming'. There is no mention of any other people who were present in their train carriage. During this wordless exchange, as recounted by Grund, she expresses her desire to look at him and explains why she doesn't – claiming that because he looked at her before she looked at him, he was thus the winner – lowering her eyes again so as to not dissuade him from continuing to look at her.<sup>350</sup> As I established in the second chapter of this thesis, this very short and seemingly insignificant teenage diary entry demonstrates a couple of things with surprising clarity. With it, Grund shows her understanding of the gaze as a tool that carries power. She recognises the implications of these power dynamics, as well as her role in them. This man exercises the power that is granted to him as a man and as the dominant subject, and while there is no way of knowing his thoughts on this interaction, while Grund

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<sup>350</sup> Lutz, 2013

averts her gaze he does not do so, seemingly never questioning whether or not he is permitted to, or whether it is appropriate for him to look at this young woman travelling alone on public transport. Grund, while acknowledging the reality of her role as a young woman and his position as a man, disregards the prevailing narrative and instead chooses to commemorate this moment herself, thus asserting a position not as a passive girl who is part of someone else's story, but as someone who wants to tell her own story and gives meaning to her own experience, and she chooses the means of writing a diary to do so. She subverts his power by making him an object in her story, and asserts it by articulating it on the page.

The key point to draw from this analysis of Grund's writing is that self-awareness is fundamental to this first step. This realisation of one's own place within the dominant structures and dynamics of power can then prompt the rejection of these structures and dynamics, which occurs on two levels. It is the assertion as an active subject, rather than a passive object, that then leads to a challenge to this system. This challenge can take numerous forms – in case of Grund it is her writing of a diary – and will be explored in more detail when discussing the second and third step, but it can only occur when this first step is taken, and an active position is assumed. And just as this act of subversion takes place in various ways, the taking up of a new position that counteracts the role predetermined by the existing power structures is also not a homogeneous experience. What Grund describes is not a scene that can be found in other texts, or specifically asked about in an interview. Rather, what my analysis of Grund's texts reveal is a way to approach experience through the interviewee's own sense of self.

The second step in Grund's method, which is thus also the second step in my analysis of the interviews, marks her and their process. The process is evaluated in relation to conscious positioning, as outlined in the first section of this chapter, and examines the impact it has on the way these practitioners approach their process, and how it may have been impacted by the epiphanies outlined.

To briefly reiterate the main elements of Grund's process that I drew from her interviews and diaristic texts, as discussed in the second chapter of this thesis, the central theme evident in both is the deliberate female focus. In her profession as a female fashion correspondent, Grund holds a somewhat privileged position that gives her a platform, and she utilises that platform in a professional capacity to attract

attention to lesser-known female designers and fashion practitioners who are arguably overshadowed by their more prominent and revered male contemporaries. Turning the prevailing narrative on its head, Grund makes a point of reducing many of the men that appear in her texts to their clothing. Rather than dedicating the same level of attention and description to men and women, her private texts reveal that she is often dismissive of the male figures she encounters, such as the man she calls a 'shirtfront' in *Bürgerliches Diner*,<sup>351</sup> while she pays close attention to their female companions and other women who cross her path, fleshing out their characters in a way that demonstrates her preference. It is her position as a writer and fashion correspondent that allows that element of her process to evolve, but it is her unique perspective as a female writer and fashion correspondent that imparts an immersive and intimate quality to her texts.

Grund's private texts live through their immersive, emotional and deeply personal quality: Grund is very much a part of her vivid environment wherever she goes and emphasises what she experiences and encounters without centralising her own self. Grund deliberately remains on the periphery, even when a change in dynamics – for example when interviewing female designers or observing other women – permit her to inhabit the centre. Instead, she leaves this space vacant for women who do not share her privilege, giving them a voice and allowing them to speak, encouraging them to share their stories and appreciating their unique input.

With Grund remaining at the core, the interviews with Finamore, Saunders, Lim, Karneskøg, and Russell and Howe were analysed for moments pertaining to Process, highlighting the key themes that feature in all of their individual approaches. Apart from focusing on stories of people who do not represent the central white male position, these practitioners all approach their work from a position of self-awareness and have an awareness of systems; they are determined to make a change and they need to do it differently. Key for all of them, echoing the motivation behind feminist translation strategy, is a holistic, collaborative approach that naturally differs from person to person, but that prioritises listening, emotional connections and shared experience. To achieve this, these practitioners all share the spaces they have created in the first step discussed above, and assume this assertive and active position, but with the very

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<sup>351</sup> Hessel, 2014

important recognition that they should be allowing others to tell their story, not attempting to tell their story for them.

This section attempts to flesh out a process that is undeniably influenced by reflection on the status quo and subsequent conscious positioning. It lays out what may be revealed if tools drawn from diaristic texts by authors such as Grund are applied to critical analysis.

The third and final step – Practice – contrasts where, in most instances, the analysis of fashion, whether of a critical, academic or journalistic nature, is placed.

The analysis of the practice, or product, of fashion has a comparably long and established history. It is the intricacies of the industry, its societal and cultural impact or its relationship with our bodies and the world they inhabit, that first spring to mind when talking about fashion, as well as the garments that entice us from catwalks, window displays and – in more recent years – a wide variety of online and social media platforms.

When it comes to the analysis of fashion via journalism, this is undeniably marked by the increasing intensity and speed of the fashion calendar, but also the by establishment of relationships that depend on financial compensation and access.<sup>352</sup> Within the confines of fashion studies, the analysis of contemporary clothing can, on the one hand, be considered in a similar way to the analysis of historical dress, and employs tools that are similar to those employed by costume and dress historians. On the other hand, as pointed out in the introduction, supported by the study conducted by McRobbie, Strutt and Bandinelli, many analytical tools embedded within conventional cultural studies that have been dominated by men have been appropriated to analyse fashion in a similar way to other disciplines such as film, theatre and design.<sup>353</sup> This cultural studies approach arguably privileges an analysis that positions the products of this fashion practice as objects, much as one would analyse artworks and examples of industrial design. While more recent analyses acknowledge fashion's link to capitalism and its associated ideologies, the overarching tendency within fashion journalism, and even within some areas of fashion's more critical discourse, is to continue to focus on

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<sup>352</sup> Anja Aronowsky Cronberg and Laura Gardner, 'What's Wrong with the Fashion Industry?' *Vestoj*, 22 Dec. 2015,. Available at: [www.vestoj.com/whats-wrong-with-the-fashion-industry/](http://www.vestoj.com/whats-wrong-with-the-fashion-industry/) (accessed 16 Jan. 2019)

<sup>353</sup> McRobbie, Strutt and Bandinelli, 2019

garments as detached objects, not necessarily disregarding the prerequisite of the objectification of women, but certainly maintaining a pronounced distance between the clothes and the people who breathe life into them.

As much as fashion journalism and fashion studies differ, what both of these approaches have in common, and what the strategy of deploying Grund's methods seeks to dismantle in this specific instance, is this clear separation between subject and object, between fashion and the emotional connections we forge in private spaces, outside of any preconceived notions of analysis and tropes. Where Grund's approach to this practice differs, and what is key in this last section of this thesis, is that for her, observing clothes and the people who wear them is not about societal implications or systems, but snapshot moments of unfiltered experiences by people arguably existing on the margins of society, and not in spotlight of fame or privilege.

One of the major purposes of contemporary fashion journalism is to judge fashion: how well it is made, how it fits into the zeitgeist, how successfully the storytelling has been constructed and displayed.<sup>354</sup> To outline an approach that fundamentally rejects this notion already presents a departure from common practice and speaks to what the methods and tools drawn from Grund's diaristic texts could enable.

While I have taken soft coding as a tool to interrogate Grund's writing and applied this in the previous two sections of this chapter to emphasise the importance of discussing practitioners' backgrounds, their process and what it can unlock, this final section, focused on the practice that the practitioners create as a result of their own unique processes, requires a different approach.

The tone of fashion journalism, of collection reviews and magazine reports of various designers' work, is so familiar that to disentangle oneself becomes an arduous task. What a feminist approach guided by Grund, requires, in this particular case, is to not regard the practice as separate from the designer, nor to even position oneself as detached from either. A clinical, critical approach masks the true nature of personal experiences and stories, and using a diary through which to think means, in this case, to embrace the messiness of these private texts. The implication of this is to focus on the designers and their individual experience and perception of their work as it enters the world and becomes something more than an object – a way to connect.

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<sup>354</sup> Cronberg and Gardner, 2015

Grund's work, and an approach created through her, enables these designers to speak to their own experience, erasing the separation between studying subjects and objects of study and embracing the immersive quality inherent in both diaristic texts and the spaces where fashion comes alive. I have immersed myself in Grund's texts and methods, but I am still learning from her, so while this thesis deals less with doing what Grund did and much more with understanding her approach, presenting it and what it can reveal, I want to use this final section, this third step of analysis, to attempt the creation of a contemporary space in which neither these practitioners nor their practice are subject to consumption, devaluation or definitions that are not their own.

The pages that follow are for the people I have encountered and been fortunate enough to listen to, in the same way that Grund dedicates her diary to the women she meets on her travels. While I did not encounter them in changing rooms or crowded restaurants by chance, I still think it is important to put their unfiltered experiences onto paper. In the following chapter, I want to create this space and imagine its metaphysical manifestation.

## 4.2 Michelle Finamore

In the introduction to this thesis I provide a brief introduction to the first practitioner I interviewed over the course of my research, so this second introduction will be brief. Michelle Finamore was the Penny Vinik Curator of Fashion Arts at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts at the time of my interview with her. The exhibition *Gender-Bending Fashion* that originally led me to her had just had its opening week. Previously, Finamore has published books on Brioni and the timeless glamour of Hollywood fashion. Finamore holds a PhD from Bard College in the history of decorative arts, and has taught design, fashion and film history at the Rhode Island School of Design.<sup>355</sup> This interview was conducted via Skype, and recorded on my phone via the Voice Recorder app (Fig. 6).

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<sup>355</sup> Vicki-Ann Downing, 'The Art – and Science, and History, and Sociology, and Philosophy – of Fashion', *Providence College News*, 21 Apr 2016. Available at: <https://news.providence.edu/dr-michelle-tolini-finamore-91-the-art-and-science-and-history-and-sociology-and-philosophy-of-fashion>. Accessed 21 Oct 2021

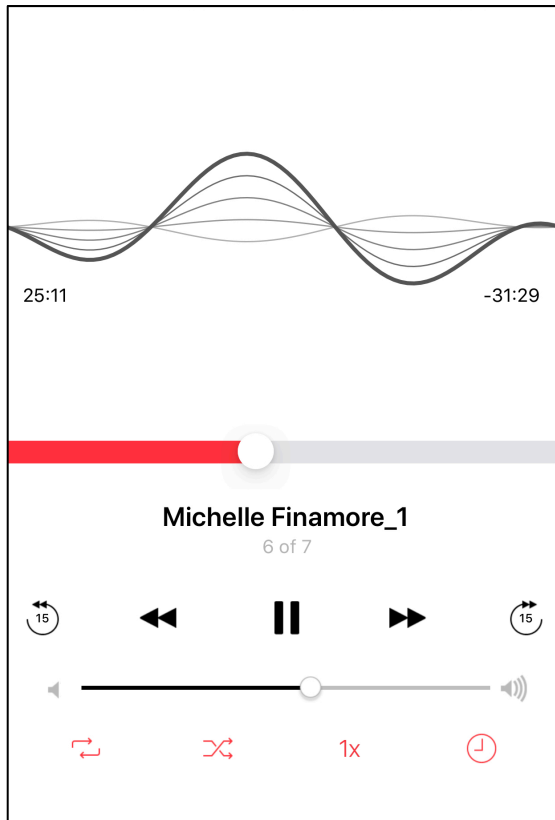


Figure 5: Screenshot of the recording of the interview with Michelle Finamore, 03.04.2019, © 2019 Teresa Krönung

#### 4.2.1 Transcript

**MICHELLE FINAMORE, CURATOR OF FASHION ARTS AT THE BOSTON MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS,  
CURATOR OF "GENDER-BENDING FASHION"  
3<sup>RD</sup> APRIL 2019, 8PM  
55 MINUTES**

It takes a surprisingly short amount of time for the interview to be set up – at least, surprising to me, given that Finamore is clearly incredibly busy. The entire process started with a text from a friend saying ‘have you seen this?’ a few weeks earlier, accompanied by a link leading to an article in the *Boston Globe* on a new exhibition on gender-bending fashion opening at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. The contact with Michelle Finamore, curator for Fashion Arts at the museum and head curator of the exhibition, happened via LinkedIn, simply because I had trouble finding her email address on the museum’s website. Her reply was fast, and we moved to email, and then almost immediately settled on a time and date to talk about her work.



The cup of coffee that is sitting on the desk has long gone cold. We have agreed to talk via phone, since Finamore pointed out that she doesn't have Skype on her work laptop, and, dreading the costs of an international call on a student budget, I worked out a way to call someone via Skype on their phone using a Skype Business trial period. A call to my friend Shilo, who lives in Los Angeles, served as a test run just thirty minutes ago, to test whether the transatlantic Skype call actually works.

It's April, but in the basement office the tiles are ice cold. Finamore picks up only three rings in, and we introduce ourselves. There is some background noise, and Finamore excuses herself, saying 'let me just step into my office', before returning the greeting. [...]

#### 4.2.2 Position

As outlined earlier in the chapter, following the analysis generated from Grund's writing, self-awareness emerges first. For Grund, it is evident in her desire to look at a man the same way he looks at her, and it is followed by an awareness of the system in recognising that the man looked first, and that it would be inappropriate for her to mirror his gaze unabashedly. Her description of this event in her diary and taking ownership of this moment represents the systemic negation that takes place, and her challenge to the status quo.

Finamore describes a similar experience that echoes her self-awareness and the subsequent awareness of how she is still part of a system that continuously imposes a narrative upon her. It marks an epiphany for practitioners such as herself, and this prompted a necessary shift in Finamore's work. While this epiphany and subsequent recollection of her own experience is not generalisable as such, there is the potential for this experience to connect more widely and that lies in the *effect* these moments have on the continuing narrative set forward.

For Finamore, this epiphany comes in two waves: once in her personal life and thereafter in her professional life. It makes these moments even more profound, and

speaks to an internalisation of prevailing patterns and narratives – the fact that once was not enough – that one has to become aware of the self before one has the ability to become aware of the system which imposes a narrative upon the self. The first moment, Finamore recalls, occurs when she looks back on her adolescence and her stylistic choices with regard to fashion and lifestyle, commenting, ‘I embraced this idea of femininity. And it really didn’t strike me as even being an issue until I started becoming a scholar’.<sup>356</sup> It underscores the naturalisation of gendered behaviour discussed above – in this case, Finamore’s self-described embrace of feminine appearance and behaviour seemed unproblematic to herself until she entered academia and came in contact with other scholars who had devoted their careers to questioning gendered behaviours, which prompted her to look back at her own behaviour and what may have caused her to behave in a certain way without a second thought.

In relation to her own work, she describes that she tries to instil a similar retrospective critical lens, saying that ‘when I look back more critically over fashion history and you think about who is doing the interpreting and who was writing the textbooks and the histories and what that perspective is, you realise that you’re really missing out communities’.<sup>357</sup> Finamore describes theory and narrative and the corresponding issues associated with the way men assert their perspectives and stories as unbiased truth and pure knowledge. However, despite her awareness of these issues, she still experienced two more moments that shifted her perspective in a way that considerably disturbed her, given her experience as a scholar and her deliberate critical assessment of fashion and its history and theory. The first one followed a discussion with a diverse focus group, after which, she recalls, ‘I realised, oh my gosh, every single person I have in this exhibition is white’.<sup>358</sup> It shows that dominant narratives hold and persist, despite good intentions to change them. The whitewashing of history and narrative is still common – even if it is done unintentionally – contributing to Finamore’s initial overlooking of her exhibition’s whiteness as well as its female blind spot towards female practitioners.

‘I haven’t even thought about if there are women designers in here’<sup>359</sup> she recalls, and while I discussed her epiphany at the start of this thesis, as well as the possible reasons why Finamore perceived the absence of women in her exhibition only belatedly, I find it

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<sup>356</sup> Finamore, 2019, Interview

<sup>357</sup> Ibid.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid.

important to stress again that this speaks to a naturalisation of stories in which people who are not white men take up no significant space. It remains a pattern that is so pronounced that even during the research process for an exhibition in which gender diversity is the central theme, the absence of female designers went unnoticed for a considerable amount of time.

It is the persistence of this pattern that evokes the frustration evident in Finamore's words, and it echoes the feminist motivations that provide a crucial tension in feminist philosophy, as discussed in Chapter 2: the dissatisfaction with the status quo that comes from an awareness of the system and of the self within this system.

As established in the beginning of this chapter, what follows self-awareness and the recognition of one's position in the existing system is the understanding of the kind of system these contemporary practitioners find themselves in, and how this system shapes the way we think about and approach fashion. This recognition comes in various layers, depending on the experience of the individual. It should be noted that someone like Finamore will have a different vantage point as an experienced scholar who is not in fact a designer, but a curator, who looks at fashion from a different perspective. Finamore, in the interview, recognises that 'there are so many wrong patriarchal ideas of women's places in society. [...] It's all very much related to patriarchal modes of thinking'.<sup>360</sup> It reflects very accurately what Code suggests in her essay on feminist epistemology discussed earlier. Finamore is evidently familiar with the concept of gendering of knowledge, as well as the power that lies in that imbalance of knowledge production and a persisting hierarchy of sources. She states that women are wrongly put in places by the patriarchal system, meaning they are not allowed to choose these places themselves, or create them.<sup>361</sup>

As Finamore describes, the men at this top level not only dictate the narrative and the roles others should fill in it: they actively benefit from it, and position others in order to capitalise on them, as a capitalist system is prone to do.

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<sup>360</sup> Ibid.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid.

#### 4.2.3 Process

Recalling her process in putting together a fashion exhibition, Finamore comments on the need to step out and approach her research from beyond the boundaries of her own ideas, saying that ‘the more you talk to people and the bigger the perspective, the more you realise that there are certain things that people would be looking for in an exhibition’.<sup>362</sup> From the beginning, Finamore is very clear in her intentions when preparing for an exhibition, which not only include conversations with other people to expand her own knowledge and gain different perspectives; she also incorporates the knowledge gained from these conversations when it comes to the content and direction of her exhibits. Rather than starting out with the aim of imposing new knowledge onto the people visiting the museum and her exhibitions, she expresses an explicit desire to include her audience in the conception of her work,<sup>363</sup> similar to the way Grund refrained from using her position and privilege to simply express her own vision, in Finamore’s case deliberately seeking out input from others who may not otherwise have seen themselves reflected in a museum context. Finamore does not intend to be detached, and does not intend her practice to simply be a singular act in which she is the active subject and her audience are passive recipients. Instead, Finamore’s aspiration in relation to her practice as a fashion curator is very much based on a reciprocal dynamic between herself as the curator and the people who will eventually be visiting her exhibition, almost as a collaborative exercise. By doing this, she is allowing these people to utilise her space and privilege to make their own voices heard and further their narrative, rather than assuming that they should simply comply with hers.

This theme of collaboration, between Finamore and her team and with the panels she convened, as well as with the visitors who will eventually view the exhibition, is central to the way Finamore conducts herself and her work process.

In ‘Collaboration as a Feminist Strategy’, Geraldine Pratt recounts her research with Susan Hanson and the writing of their book *Gender, Work and Space*, and describes her own and her collaborator’s thoughts on the ways feminist research can challenge conventional research approaches and methods: ‘One way women have done this [...] is

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<sup>362</sup> Ibid.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid.

simply by being female in a male-dominated environment'.<sup>364</sup> But Pratt, like Hanson, admits that 'there is nothing simple about being female in such an environment'.<sup>365</sup> Pratt suggests that the collaboration with Hanson 'offered tremendous support to live some of what we studied, that is to insist on the importance and pleasures of the ordinary and every day, and the connectedness of home and work'.<sup>366</sup> It is a helpful tool, as Finamore points out in our interview, to 'get real lived experience of contemporary people'.<sup>367</sup> Her statement echoes Grund's writing about encounters she has with people while walking around Paris, in which she captures the real lived experiences of people she encounters by chance, which is key when it comes to Grund's process, but also my own, as well as those of the other interviewees. Despite my previous comments on the ways in which conversations tap into some of these collaborative characteristics, and while conversing with another person generally includes a reciprocal dynamic, conversations can take place while imbalanced power dynamics still remain in place. Moreover, while conversations are to some degree collaborations, not every kind of collaboration needs to include conversations. Collaboration, as Pratt suggests, should be regarded as 'one means of achieving the kind of reflexivity necessary to recognize the limits of the knowledge that we produce so as to enable the localizing and situating of knowledge claims'.<sup>368</sup> And while reflexivity and recognising the limits of one's own knowledge can successfully be negotiated through the process of collaboration, Pratt also notes that 'collaborating with a friend is a great source of support'.<sup>369</sup>

#### 4.2.4 Practice

Grund speaks to the tension she experiences in many ways. There is a juxtaposition evident in her writing, discussed in more depth in Chapter 2, that positions fashion as something wondrous and endlessly fascinating, but exploitative and exhausting at the same time. Grund's contribution to fashion discourse is an uncanny honesty that is

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<sup>364</sup> Susan Hanson, quoted in Geraldine Pratt, 'Collaboration as a Feminist Strategy', *Gender, Place & Culture* 17:1 (2010), 43-48, DOI: 10.1080/09663690903522214

<sup>365</sup> Ibid.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid.

<sup>367</sup> Finamore, 2019, Interview

<sup>368</sup> Pratt, 2010

<sup>369</sup> Ibid.

missing in many texts that have risen to prominence and are considered key texts in fashion studies. She presents the unfiltered voices of designers and gives them the space to talk about their own practice and what they think about it – and even more than this, she manages to simultaneously paint a picture of the beauty of the craft as it is manifested in ateliers, department stores and on the streets of Paris, but also present the socio-economic reality of the people who are employed in this growing industry. Her acknowledgement of her appreciation for the industry does not impair her ability to understand its complexities and its reality.

For Finamore, as a fashion curator, this tension sits firmly between the past and the present and contextualises both in a way that speaks to the contemporary moment; her aim is to capture the essence and importance of both without diminishing either. Her exhibition on non-binary fashion as it is created and lived today, supplemented by the long journey we made to get there, is symbolic of that overall ambition. She speaks about the ‘contemporary story running down the middle’<sup>370</sup> with something she names ‘[...] satellite histories’,<sup>371</sup> putting it all in an appropriate context. This strategy mirrors my research: it is located in the contemporary, but Grund accompanies it every step of the way and supplies the tools to enable it all to make sense.

Ultimately, what Finamore, through her own position and process, is able to produce through her exhibitions is an opportunity for people to create their own experiences.

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<sup>370</sup> Finamore, 2019, Interview

<sup>371</sup> Ibid.

## 4.2 Bianca Saunders

Bianca Saunders is a menswear designer who was born and raised in London; her label (Fig. 6) has garnered praise and critical attention since she launched it after graduating from the Royal College of Art in 2017 with a final collection focused on her heritage and on Black masculinity. At the time of the interview in late 2019, she has been part of Dazed Digital's Dazed 100,<sup>372</sup> has won the British Fashion Council's NewGen Award and was named one of Forbes' '30 under 30'.<sup>373</sup> Her work has been featured in publications such as British *Vogue*, *Vogue Italia* and the *Guardian*.

This interview was conducted via What's App and recorded via the Voice Memos app on my laptop (Fig. 7).



Figure 6: Bianca Saunders, Spring/Summer 2020, © 2020 Bianca Saunders

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<sup>372</sup> Dominic Cadogan, 'Dazed100', *DazedDigital*, available at: <https://www.dazeddigital.com/projects/article/44056/1/bianca-saunders-designer-biography-dazed-100-2019-profile>. Accessed 13 Sep 2019

<sup>373</sup> '30 under 30', *Forbes*, 17 Mar 2020, available at: <https://www.forbes.com/profile/bianca-saunders/#5d583d5c445c>. Accessed 18 Mar 2020

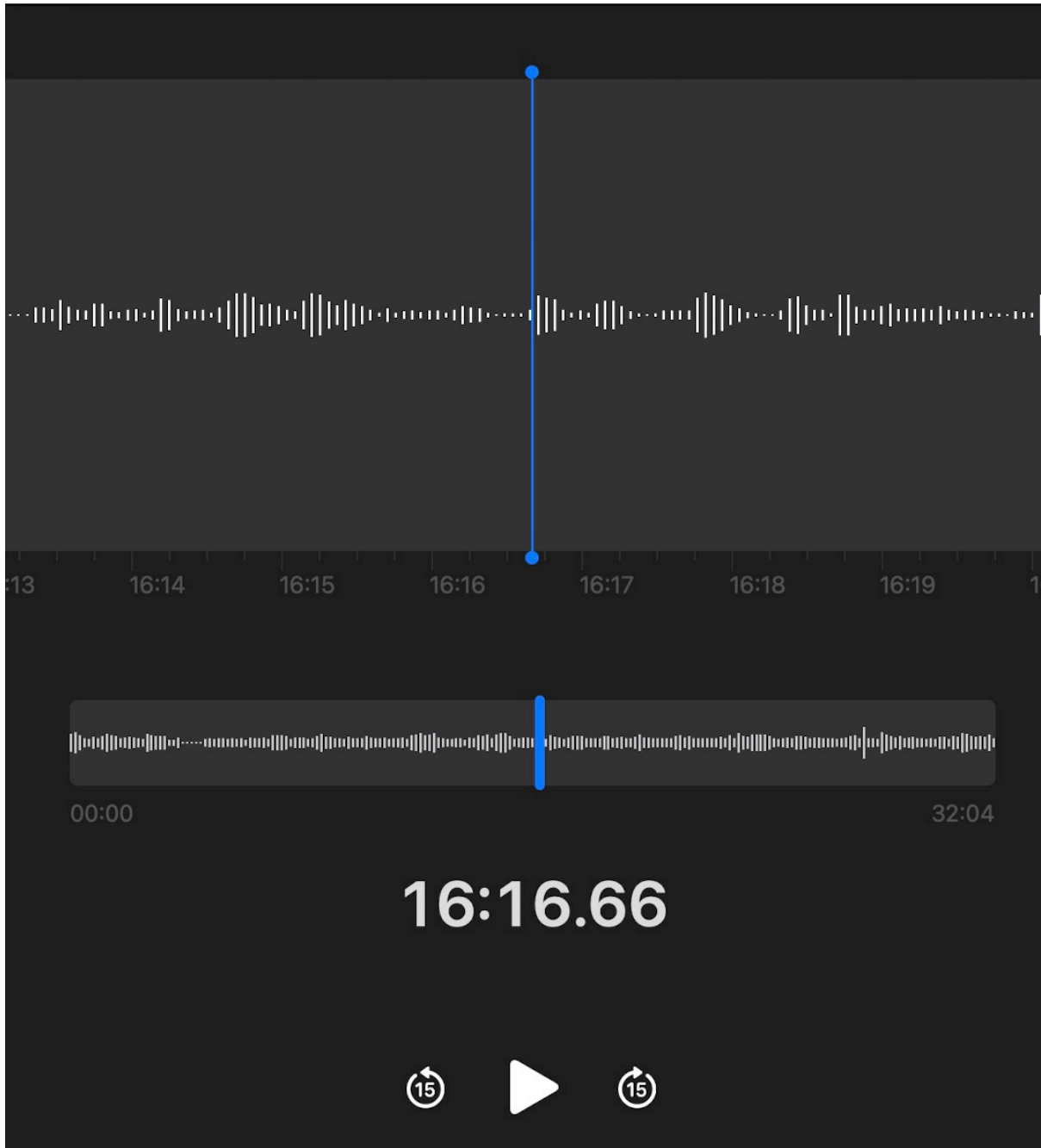


Figure 7: Screenshot of the recording of the interview with Bianca Saunders, 04.10.2019, © 2019 Teresa Krönung



#### 4.2.1 Thick Transcript

**BIANCA SAUNDERS, OWNER AND CREATIVE DIRECTOR OF MENSWEAR BRAND BIANCA SAUNDERS  
ROYAL COLLEGE OF ART GRADUATE  
4<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2019, 10AM  
32 MINUTES**

The first time I saw Bianca's work was at her final MA presentation at the Royal College of Art. Then, she spoke quietly but self-assuredly about how the representation of Black male stereotypes, and the conversations she had with her own friends about their experiences, had inspired her collection. Five outfits, modelled by her friends. Created by her, *for* them.

Initial contact was easy, as every Royal College student and graduate has a college email address, and Bianca and I exchanged phone numbers, discussed dates via What's App, before agreeing on a day and time that would work for her, since her workload has increased so much since launching her own brand.

She sounds distracted when she answers, as if her mind is elsewhere, her voice as quiet as on the day of her presentation. I say a few words about my research and express my gratitude for her taking the time to speak with me, then ask the first question, to break the ice a bit.

'The one thing I ask everyone, because I think it's one of the most important things... Some people paint, others go running, everybody has their thing. And I was wondering why it's fashion for you? What was it that initially drew you to that discipline?'

Bianca waits a few seconds before answering. When she talks, her voice is uneven, perhaps nerves seeping into it. She says *like* a lot as a filler, as a bridge between one thought and the next. [...]

We talk for a while, but she remains distracted. She pauses for a solid handful of seconds before confirming, 'I started with womenswear. And I just -' and then

she cuts herself off again and a few beats pass, before Bianca excuses herself, explaining, 'my intern is just messaging me.'

The silence on the other end of the line stretches on as Bianca, I assume, replies to her intern. After a minute or two, she is back on the line. 'Sorry about that,' she says again, but then jumps right back to where she left off, sentences still interspersed with *like*, but sounding more assured again. [...] Her voice drifts a bit when she answers, she's presumably on speakerphone while she does other tasks and sometimes she drifts a bit closer, her voice growing a bit louder, and sometimes she moves a bit farther away, causing me to lean forward, ear closer to my phone. [...]

'I think in order to be vulnerable, in that case, is you trying something different and not knowing exactly what it is. And that's usually the case with people trying my clothes. I remember one time,' Bianca speeds up again, as she seems to do when she remembers a relevant or interesting anecdote. 'I guess that's also going back to your last question, about you asking about a reaction to my clothes that wasn't exactly what I was hoping for. Basically, we were casting for, I think it was Autumn/Winter '19, and one model came in, and he was more of a street guy, I'd say, let's say that,' and she begins painting a very precise picture describing him. 'So, styled with Prada shoes and Armani jeans and like, I don't know, I guess a Fendi belt, that sort of stuff. So very basic, sort of, easy-to-wear fashion. And we tried to get him to wear these shorts, and he was just like, "Nah, I can't wear that. I can't be seen wearing that. It makes me feel really uncomfortable". And he was just like "No", and being really stubborn about it too. It was quite interesting. But it just reminded me that some people really have a problem with trying something different in menswear, that may not be the most "masculine" thing. And it was weird because he was actually a model, and he was really stubborn about what he wanted to wear, instead of like, wearing what we wanted him to wear.' [...]

#### 4.2.2 Position

Fashion remains an industry that arguably still perpetuates white, Western standards of beauty, and in contrast positions BIPOC as exotic or *other*. Bianca Saunders, a menswear designer who grew up in London with West Indian heritage, describes her frustration as a fashion student, recalling '[...] it was constantly having to explain myself to these people [...]. I didn't see myself as important in fashion'.<sup>374</sup>

The first part of her statement speaks to 'otherness', meaning that she was neither white nor male, and her different experiences as a woman of colour, when she was required to relate to mostly white and mostly male tutors – 'having to'. Being made to feel as though her relevance in fashion was tied to how well she could align her experiences with conventional references in fashion, in addition to very limited representation – led Saunders to question her place in the fashion industry, as well as the validity of her voice and work. As a woman of colour, the epiphany Saunders undergoes has less to do with having to look back critically at history, and more with realising the way in which the issues that women and many minorities face in society continue to exist in, and be perpetuated by, fashion and fashion education negatively impacted on her experience, and in particular that not only has the industry she wants to work in made little or no effort to accommodate people who challenge predominant narratives – the existing structure arguably does not allow someone like Saunders to challenge it, thus requiring her to adapt, in spite of fashion's reputation for being radical and avant garde. It prompts the understanding and awareness that '[...] the people I'm trying to explain in my work were being marginalised'.<sup>375</sup>

Interestingly, Saunders mentions something in her interview that offers evidence that the patriarchal modes of thinking described in the previous section prevail in the fashion industry and fashion education. Saunders, now a successful menswear designer, says: 'I started with womenswear. I think it's almost a natural thing. As soon as you start in fashion, you make womenswear'.<sup>376</sup>

While it is undeniable that society has progressed since Veblen's argument that women are essentially a canvas on which the men in their lives display their wealth, fashion

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<sup>374</sup> Bianca Saunders, 2019, Interview by Teresa Kroenung

<sup>375</sup> Ibid.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid.

being one of the main tools to do so,<sup>377</sup> Saunders' comment suggests that the automatic assumption for most people who pursue fashion as a career is that they will be designing clothes for *women*. Shifting to menswear, Saunders recalls, caused a significant amount of anxiety and uncertainty, because she had to ask, 'would men wear clothes that have the name 'Bianca Saunders' on them?'<sup>378</sup>

The underlying question here is not whether it was the name specifically that would mean that men would not wear her designs, but rather whether men – whether they are aware of the power dynamics in play in the fashion industry and society at large or simply benefit from them – would be willing to be dressed by a woman. Saunders points to the distinct discomfort that men arguably experience when women encroach upon territory that is not usually their preserve. An interest in fashion, as Tim Edwards argues in *Fashion in Focus*, and as Rosalind Gill points out in her study of fashion and men's lifestyle magazines in *Gender and the Media*, is still largely gendered as feminine, and requires countermeasures such as 'laddish' tones or hyper-masculine posturing<sup>379</sup> to avert any suggestions of homosexual or effeminate behaviour.<sup>380</sup> Being dressed by a woman, I suggest, may imply a subordinate and passive position that most men are arguably still uncomfortable inhabiting.

For Saunders, what follows that initial anxiety and uncertainty is not a retreat to a place which men are more comfortable for her to inhabit, but rather a more determined desire to inhabit that very place that causes these men to feel discomfort, saying 'it's just made me understand my role in it,'<sup>381</sup> having overcome doubts about the validity of her choices, as she recalls in the interview.

#### 4.2.3 Process

Saunders' graduate collection marks a distinct departure from previous work, with a focus on marginalised young men in her own community. She approaches her process

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<sup>377</sup> Purdy, 2004

<sup>378</sup> Saunders, 2019, Interview

<sup>379</sup> Gill, 2007

<sup>380</sup> Edwards, 2011

<sup>381</sup> Saunders, 2019, Interview

by having conversations with her own friends and ‘asking about their experience’.<sup>382</sup> With the intention of putting into focus a marginalised group that is not often represented in fashion, she understands that she cannot assume to speak for these young men, nor does she feel it would be justified to base her work on them without genuinely intending to learn about their stories and experiences, even if it proves difficult, as she recalls. ‘I guess sexuality just comes into it’,<sup>383</sup> she says about these intimate and personal conversations with her friends, describing that she sought out those who were more openly playing with their masculinity and could therefore be assumed to have been asked about their sexuality previously, in the context – as Saunders points out – of stereotypical Black masculinity.

Something that Saunders mentions in relation to these conversations she was having with her friends stands out in particular. When talking about the challenge of finding people willing to engage in these types of conversations with her, Saunders notes that, during these initial steps in her process, ‘women are having these conversations with men, but not a lot of men are actually having this conversation amongst themselves.’<sup>384</sup> Saunders recalls that especially in terms of engaging with Black masculinity, the leading voices are often female,<sup>385</sup> which makes her intentions and process so important, because what Saunders indicates is that she is in a particularly unique position in which she, as a Black woman, has access to this marginalised group of young Black men, but moreover is willing to have conversations that they wouldn’t be having either with each other or with other men. The fact that she is a woman facilitates a process that would be more difficult for a man in her position, or that could prove entirely impossible. Saunders demonstrates a willingness to listen, and shares the space she created as a result of the epiphanies she described with men who would not have moved into this space if it had not been for her.

About the conversations Saunders has as part of her research process with friends, which implies an existing level of collaborative spirit from the outset, she says, ‘I want it to be a balanced conversation’.<sup>386</sup> This moment demonstrates her deliberate aim for

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<sup>382</sup> Ibid.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid.

<sup>385</sup> Saunders refers specifically to bell hooks in our interview.

<sup>386</sup> Saunders, 2019, Interview

these talks to be harmonious, and that she views the people she engages in conversations with as her equals.

Conversations can be a collaboration, as evident in Saunders' process and her cautious approach to these conversations, positioning her friends as collaborators with agency and feelings as she recalls wanting to make the process as comfortable as possible for them. 'I picked men that would get questioned about it more, so it would be easier to talk about it,'<sup>387</sup> she says, and interestingly uses the term 'talking about it', which implies a more even, balanced conversation that is not simply limited to asking a question and receiving an answer. As Pratt describes, collaboration can be supportive, and this support can be evident in someone's choice of who to collaborate with. For Saunders, that means men in her community who don't fit the conventional mould of Black masculinity.

#### 4.2.4 Practice

For a woman of colour designing menswear, the experience of trespassing on a space that is not conventionally occupied by women, especially not women of colour, results in many moments that amuse her as she recalls them, but which also unlock a number of tensions and prejudices that speak to issues still inherent in fashion and its performance. Saunders' designs challenge conventional menswear tropes, as she is determined 'to show that in-between',<sup>388</sup> that rather precarious middle ground between the feminine and masculine aesthetics that still prevail and are perpetuated in fashion. Her work itself represents a tension that would conventionally be overlooked or ignored, and that comes to the forefront as soon as others are confronted with her practice. It reveals that the clothes are practically secondary in this case, because it is less about the physical garments than the subtextual implications of what they represent.

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<sup>387</sup> Saunders, 2019, Interview

<sup>388</sup> Ibid.

This notion is particularly striking, and Saunders experienced it as especially absurd when a woman tells her outright: 'My husband would never buy clothes designed by a woman',<sup>389</sup>

Saunders recalls a similar scenario that occurred during the casting process for one of her first collections since launching her own brand, when one of the male models, whom she describes as conventionally masculine, wearing conventionally masculine clothes and accessories, absolutely refuses to wear the outfit selected for him. She remembers: 'We were trying to get him to wear these shorts and he was just like, "nah, I can't wear that. I can't be seen wearing that. It makes me feel really uncomfortable".'<sup>390</sup> In this instance, the in-between that Saunders wants to emphasise in her designs meets the resistance of someone who, despite being a model, refuses, even in a professional capacity, to put on garments that – in his view – tarnish the heteronormative masculine image he has cultivated for himself. His objection, as he himself points out, is both internal and external: he is wary of other people seeing him in clothes that subvert stereotypical masculine aesthetics and his discomfort in wearing something he is not used to, although there is undoubtedly a symbiotic relationship between the two: his discomfort is clearly informed by the way he assumes other people would react to seeing him dressed in this way.

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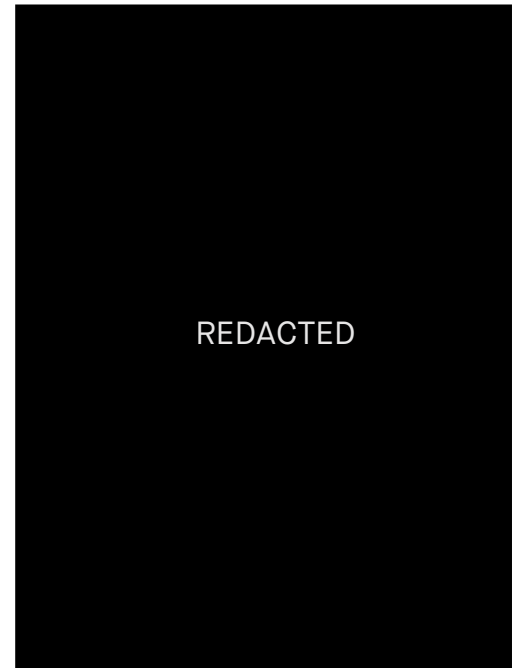
<sup>389</sup> Ibid.

<sup>390</sup> Saunders, 2019, Interview

### 4.3 Yvonne Lim

Yvonne Lim has a background in economics, but she changed course to study fashion at Parsons School of Design (The New School) in New York before returning to London for a postgraduate degree. She is a recent Royal College of Art graduate, working as a womenswear designer in London while simultaneously launching her own label in collaboration with a friend. Her graduate collection 'Soft Power – the modern woman's work wardrobe'<sup>391</sup> – stood out for its practicality, the mature models she used to show it, who were tutors and staff working at the College, and its holistic vision, which included perfumes and accessories.<sup>392</sup>

This interview was conducted via What's App video chat and recorded via the Voice Memos app on my laptop (Fig. 9).



*Figure 8: Look from 'Soft Power' Graduate Collection by Yvonne Lim, © 2019 Yvonne Lim*

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<sup>391</sup> Wen Lim, 'Soft Power' (2019), *Wen Lim*, available at: <https://www.wen-lim.com/> (accessed 27.09.2019)

<sup>392</sup> Yvonne Lim, 2019, Interview by Teresa Kroenung



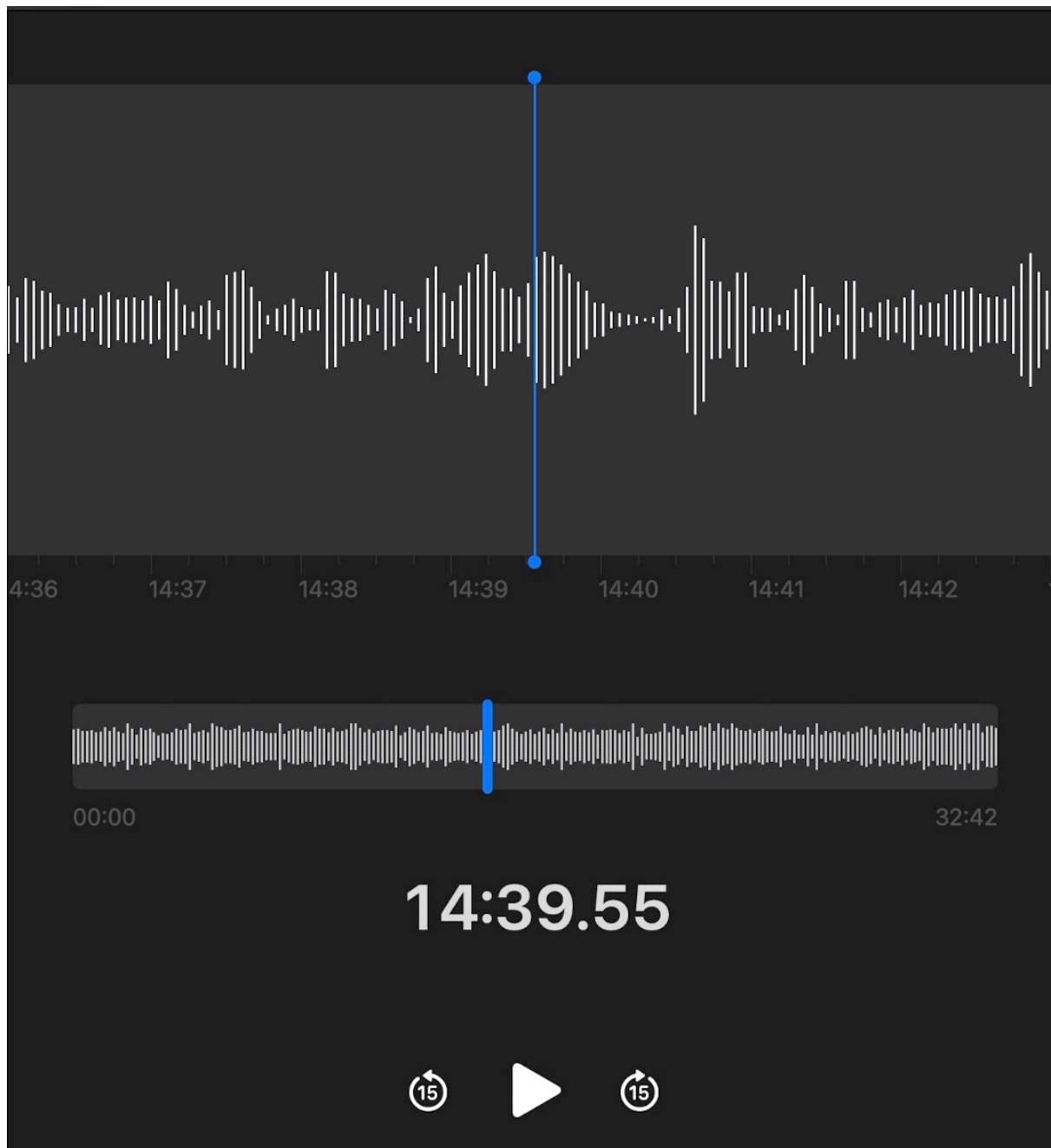


Figure 9: Screenshot of the recording of the interview with Yvonne Lim, 29.10.2019, © 2019 Teresa Krönung

#### 4.3.1 Thick Transcript

**YVONNE LIM, WOMENSWEAR DESIGNER**  
**ROYAL COLLEGE OF ART GRADUATE**  
**29<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2019, 6PM**  
**32 MINUTES**

We send a few emails back and forth, but the time and day is agreed upon quite quickly. I call Yvonne via What's App, after she has come home from work, and while the video on my phone screen is small and a little grainy, I can see her well. She's propped up her phone somewhere, because she sits back, hands free. The living room of her flat in the background is bright and tidy, wooden floors and white walls, a sofa in the corner.

I thank her profusely for taking the time, especially after a long day at work, but she waves me off and mentions the interviews she had to do for her MA thesis, recalling the struggle it was setting them up, finding people who were willing to be interviewed and recorded.

'I just thought: I have to help her!', she tells me, and we both laugh.

[...]

I tell her, 'It was the same for me, a design by Karl Lagerfeld for Chanel that I saw in *Vogue* when I was about seven.'

'And these ten-page editorials by Grace Coddington,' Yvonne agrees right away, excitement colouring her voice and her eyes widen. 'I think for most people our age that was the starting point of our experience.' [...]

'Zowie mentioned your collection to me when we talked earlier this summer when I mentioned how I wanted to talk to designers who had a different take from most mainstream fashion,' I explain to her, moving on to the next set of

questions. 'How did you arrive at the concept of your graduate collection at RCA? What made you realise that this was what you needed or wanted to do?'

Yvonne pauses for a moment, perhaps searching for the best way to explain it. Then she says, 'In my first year at the RCA I was kind of lost. I wrote my dissertation about hyperfemininity, because at the time I was really into Simone Rocha and this ultra-femininity, but then I was thinking, is it really empowering women or is it doing the opposite? So basically I was basing my research on working women, because she's the one with purpose and ambition, and how – as a designer – I can empower her. And from there I just starting interviewing people. Basically,' she explains with emphasis, 'all my friends are working in the corporate world, so there were lots of different occupations, like a doctor and a lawyer and an architect. I was trying to find out what they wear to work and how they feel the way they dress affects their work experience, their work culture.'

[...]

#### 4.3.2 Position

Yvonne Lim questions whether there is a place in the fashion industry for someone like her, and simultaneously whether pursuing a career in fashion would even be a legitimate option for her. '[Fashion] seemed like something out of my reach. I didn't think I could do it,'<sup>393</sup> she recalls during our conversation, citing her environment when she was growing up, where the most creative career choice would have been to study architecture, prompting her to study economics, before ultimately changing gear and setting her sights on pursuing fashion design after all. Declaring fashion to be potentially out of her reach can be presented in two ways. On the one hand, as outlined in the first and second chapter, despite not being created *by* women, today fashion arguably still holds a 'feminine' status, and is often considered to be either a less than worthy career path or a frivolous and non-essential interest. Given Lim's background in a school with, as she describes, a more scientific outlook, it is not difficult to see why Lim may have felt that choosing to seriously pursue fashion as a career would have been

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<sup>393</sup> Yvonne Lim, 2019, Interview by Teresa Kroenung

discouraged. On the other hand, representation matters, and seeing people like oneself achieving critical acclaim in the industry provides a stimulating incentive to believe that one can do so, too. Coincidentally, talking about her first memories and awareness of fashion, Lim recalls the famous designers of the '90s, mainly John Galliano, as well as the work of Grace Coddington for *Vogue*, perpetuating the image of the genius male designer and fashion as a removed-from-reality dreamscape respectively.<sup>394</sup>

Pursuing fashion meant for Lim that she eventually came face to face with the reality of what it meant to work in fashion, and she describes two epiphanies pertaining to the industry and her own role in it, the first describing a conventional approach to designing fashion that often disregards the wearer and instead focuses on the artistic and creative vision of the designer. Lim puts it this way: '[...] even as a designer, I'm just making things to satisfy myself, and I'm not thinking about the woman that's wearing it.'<sup>395</sup> She recognises a common egocentrism in the creation of fashion that involves a detachment of the garments from their wearer, a phallogocentric prioritisation of the visual over other senses, perpetuated by designers such as John Galliano, referenced by Lim herself, and – as previously addressed – others such as Tom Ford and Alexander McQueen. Lim recalls her early days at the Royal College, remembering the second epiphany that would prompt her to reassess her role as a designer, as well as her outlook on fashion and its common tropes:

I was really into Simone Rocha and this ultra-femininity, but then I was thinking, is it really empowering women or is it doing the opposite?<sup>396</sup>

It echoes a notion that is often articulated in the fashion industry: Jeffrey addresses the common practice of 'reclaiming' previously repressive items such as heels and corsets in *Beauty and Misogyny*,<sup>397</sup> arguing against the claims made by Lee Wright in her essay on the stiletto in Malcolm Barnard's *Fashion Theory: a Reader*.<sup>398</sup> In it, Wright hypothesises that the over-exaggeration of items used to oppress women was turning this oppression on its head, and consequently empowering women who decided to

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<sup>394</sup> Lim, 2019, Interview

<sup>395</sup> Ibid.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid.

<sup>397</sup> Jeffrey, 2005

<sup>398</sup> Malcolm Barnard (ed.), *Fashion Theory: a Reader*. (London: Routledge, 2007)

wear these items, such as stiletto heels or the hyper-feminine and hyper-sexualised fashion of the 1980s. Jeffreys, on the other hand, argues that the exaggeration of an item does not automatically negate its original purpose or imagery. She speculates that the acceptance of these items validates their existence, and that changing their form does nothing to detach them from the masculine context in which they were created. Jeffreys hypothesises that reclaiming these items under the guise of empowerment actually legitimises their use and original intent of suppression and objectification, asserting gender hierarchies rather than challenging them.<sup>399</sup> Lim rightfully questions the legitimacy of Wright's argument and decides she is no longer comfortable with the idea of hyper-femininity, making a conscious decision to step away from this approach.

For Lim, as a womenswear designer, there is no similar or obvious conflict with her wearers, because women, arguably, are used to being dressed by other people, and they are used to inhabiting this role in a way that men aren't. 'I think it's from our exposure to fashion. It's so women-focused,'<sup>400</sup> Lim states, which suggests that as a womenswear designer she does not encounter the same resistance that Saunders does. It still, however, supports the argument that the patriarchy continues to inform the way fashion is structured and employed. This focus on women is not accidental.

#### 4.3.3 Process

For Lim, the inception is similar in the sense that conversations are what prompt her process. Following the epiphany that hyper-femininity, often suggested as empowering women, may not empower women at all, instead playing into an existing narrative that continues to objectify women, Lim recalls her graduate collection and its inception, saying:

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<sup>399</sup> Jeffreys, 2005

<sup>400</sup> Lim, 2019, Interview

I just started interviewing people. Basically all my friends are working in the corporate world. [...] I was trying to find out what they wear to work and how they feel the way they dress affects their work experience.<sup>401</sup>

Instead of starting her creative endeavour by exploring her personal vision, with the wearer's needs and comfort as an afterthought, Lim starts her process by listening to her friends and wanting to learn about their personal experiences. Like Grund, Lim uses the space she has created for herself to draw other people to it and highlight what they think and feel, rather than attempting to assume responses, or trying to speak for them. It presents a striking contrast to conventional design methods articulated by prominent male designers – both straight and gay – who often seem to outline their artistic visions first. Lim prioritises the genuine empowerment of working women like herself and her friends and community, and while aesthetics, as I will discuss later on, certainly also plays a role in her practice, it is not her first priority. Lim's process, that begins with interviewing her friends, also puts her in a position in which she, at the start, takes on what could arguably be considered a passive role as she listens to her friends' experiences, which ultimately forms the foundation of her process.

The moments that stand out are those that demonstrate the collaboration present in the practitioner's process, evident in the care they take to include others in it and thoughts that occur while they work, which speaks to the understanding that everyone has agency, and that everyone is an active being and should be treated equally as such. Among the moments that stand out is a comment made by Lim when she talks about her design approach.

[...] taking traditional tailoring and putting it into a woman's context. The pockets are in the chest. And when women have boobs it just doesn't work. [...] I really wanted to think about all these minor details.<sup>402</sup>

This statement echoes an understanding of someone else's experience and a considered response to it. In this case, it is Lim understanding that women struggle with

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<sup>401</sup> Lim, 2019, Interview

<sup>402</sup> Ibid.

conventional shirts that have not been designed with them in mind, that they are not objects to be dressed in shirts with pockets in inaccessible or inconvenient places, and then deciding to remedy that error. What she describes as a minor detail in fact turns out to be a major consideration on her part.

For Lim, it means considering working women in arguably hostile working environments: 'I looked at women in the tech industry [...], it's very male-dominated. So women working in this industry can get quite confused about what they should wear.'<sup>403</sup> Naturally, the collecting of this kind of information begins with a conversation with these women, drawn out by sharing experience (as Lim began her higher education in economics and presumably has experienced similar things). But the subsequent step, the actual tackling of this dilemma, of women working in male-dominated environments where there are strict dress codes that aren't tailored to their needs, but are male-centred and male-focused, needs to be collaborative, involving a collecting of knowledge and expressions and gestures of support. Lim is very clear when she says that 'the typical model does not really represent the woman I want to dress'.<sup>404</sup> While I do not intend to speak for any of the people I have interviewed, nor do I want to interpret what they are saying and attach meaning to something if they haven't attached it themselves, I would still argue that it is clear that what can be inferred from that statement is not only a rejection of the image of beauty still generally promoted by the fashion industry (young, white and skinny), but also a rejection of the positioning of women without agency. Lim describes that she wanted to focus on working women, and particularly women in male-dominated disciplines, 'because she's the one with purpose and ambition, and how – as a designer – I can empower her.'<sup>405</sup> Lim deliberately designs to support working women. She deliberately chooses mature models who are working women to empower and support them through a thoroughly balanced and collaborative process that focuses on individual experience.

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<sup>403</sup> Lim, 2019, Interview

<sup>404</sup> Ibid.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid.

#### 4.3.4 Practice

Reflecting on her own experience, Lim is not overtly critical in regard to her own experience as a fashion designer, but her existence as a female womenswear designer still creates difficulties: as she notes, there is an imbalance between the number of women working in the fashion industry and those who actually receive critical acclaim and attention. 'Where I work there are plenty of women,' she says. 'But it is true that somehow the men get a lot of the spotlight.'<sup>406</sup> This speaks to the continuing male-dominated narratives deliberately but also involuntarily promoted within the fashion industry. Lim bemoans this aspect of the industry, since she prefers the work of her female contemporaries, who are role models to younger designers such as herself. 'A lot of fashion designers I admire happen to be women. I think male designers want women to look sexy, whereas women designers want garments to be functional and something women feel comfortable in',<sup>407</sup> she points out..

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<sup>406</sup> Lim, 2019, Interview

<sup>407</sup> Ibid.



#### 4.4 Sissel Karneskøg

Sissel Karneskøg (Fig. 10), at the time of the interview, was a fashion student at the Royal College of Art; they are from Sweden, where they graduated from Beckmans College of Design. They are a gender non-conforming designer, creating what they call 'humanwear', with a focus on challenging the conventions of gender binarism, fashion and society as it exists today.

This interview was conducted via Skype and, in addition to the video call being captured, recorded on the Voice Recorder app on my phone (Fig. 11).



Figure 10: Screenshot of Skype call between Sissel Karneskøg (left) and myself, 30.11.2019, © 2019 Teresa Krönung

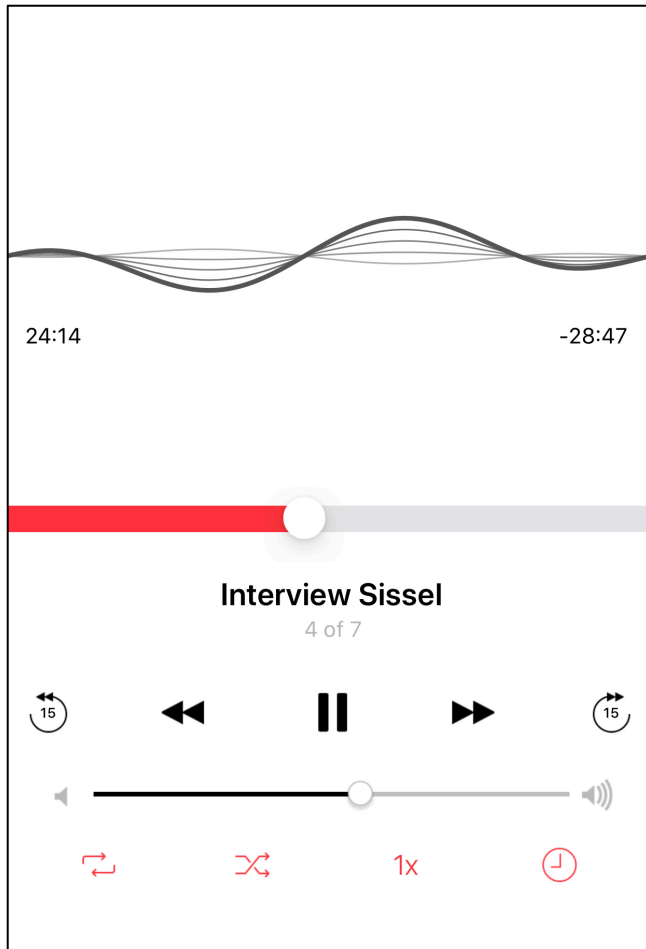


Figure 11: Screenshot of the recording of the interview with Sissel Karneskøg, 30.11.2019, © 2019 Teresa Krönung

#### 4.4.1 Thick Transcript

**SISSEL KARNESKØG, HUMANWEAR DESIGNER**  
**ROYAL COLLEGE OF ART GRADUATE**  
**30<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2019, 12PM**  
**53 MINUTES**

They're at their desk at the Royal College of Art studio: black, chunky headphones precariously balanced on top of their shaved head, covering one ear, cord looping down around their neck along with a set of thin necklaces mostly hidden beneath a white t-shirt.

Behind them, the wall of the little makeshift cubicle is covered in images, text, post-its. One larger photograph shows a self-portrait. On the left, almost out of

frame, is a mannequin wearing a black outfit that, at first glance, looks like latex. A black, spiky wig sits atop its head. [...]

They speak slowly and clearly, every word very considered, and take some time, eyes going up towards the top left corner of the frame before replying to my question on how they avoid conventional tropes of masculine and feminine clothes.

'How I see it is that all types of garments already exist, if you're not working in a digital sphere or creating shapes on a body. Great garments exist. It's more what language we are using about these garments. Unisex is a word that I absolutely hate, because it's like, "Oh, ok, so we're making – exactly like you're saying – menswear for a woman's body", and I'm like, "what?". Unisex for me is a uniform.' [...]

Continuing with my questions, I ask them, 'What have been some of the most memorable reactions to your work? Perhaps positive but also negative, over the last couple of years? Are there any memories that stand out, maybe things you didn't expect, or surprised you?

'Yeah. My work was really different from my BA than what it is here, in a sense. My previous work tended to be very theatrical. Which I love to make, to show that side and be able to express myself in the weirdest way possible. And you can do that in fashion. So I think memorable things were really that I was able to create my own context within a context. And here we had a project in the beginning of the first year that was called 'Mirror, mirror' and I dressed up as an old version of myself that was wearing very feminine, beautiful makeup and a long blonde wig. The reactions I got from that were amazing.'

They smile, remembering it, eyes widening a little as their expression shifts from thoughtful to animated, reliving the experience. 'That kind of triggered my work now. And I was wearing my normal clothes, but they didn't recognise me, just because of my face and that shifted my work a bit. Because I think when it comes

to queer fashion, it has a tendency to be loud, and be very theatrical and costume-y, which is lovely, but is there something else I can do? And I felt like that bit kind of changed my view on my work and I started to analyse how I actually dress and what I dress myself in. It's like t-shirt and jeans. It started to become more about the internal body than the external, which is garments. But memorable moments,' They trail off and pause, weighing their head slightly from one side to another as if physically turning over ideas and thoughts in their mind. 'For me, when I started to fight for my community that was a very positive thing, and a courage thing, I'd say. It was valuable.' [...]

#### 4.4.2 Position

For Sissel Karneskøg, who identifies as non-binary and whose very existence arguably already poses a challenge to the status quo and the prevailing socio-economic and cultural system, self-awareness has less to do with becoming conscious of this system. They have had to create their own space simply to exist as they are, meaning that the conscious positioning that occurs is not prompted by a realisation, or a critical look back at personal behaviour or the behaviour of others. It is more an assertion of the space they have had to create and maintain throughout their life as a gender non-conforming individual. They say that 'now I am experiencing this moment in this time, and trying to utilise this time as much as possible'.<sup>408</sup> This speaks to a heightened sense of self-awareness, but also an awareness of their role in the current zeitgeist that underscores the necessary first step in a designer's conscious positioning. Karneskøg says, 'I worked hard to get here, so I'm going to be a bit self-absorbed and use this time for myself',<sup>409</sup> which illustrates their refusal to conform and assimilate, and marks the confidence that was needed to see the existing narrative that fashion perpetuates, overcome the frustration and assert their own, individual and nevertheless valid space. Karneskøg's assertion here has the confidence seen in Grund's work as a well-established fashion correspondent: she prefaces an article about female authors by challenging a man who told her that women belong in the kitchen. Both of these acts speak to the underlying

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<sup>408</sup> Sissel Karneskøg, 2019, Interview by Teresa Kroenung

<sup>409</sup> Karneskøg, 2019, Interview

feminist approach that is taken throughout this research, where non-male persons are active in telling and shaping their own stories, and where these stories are also valid and important.

In general, a gender non-conforming person such as Karneskøg will have had different and more pronounced encounters with the male-dominated system and the way it dictates thinking and narratives, and the effect it has on fashion. These patriarchal modes of thinking are still present and very palpable in the fashion industry. For Karneskøg, as mentioned above, the culprit is rather obvious in this case:

Like you said earlier, with the patriarchy, it's the same in fashion when it comes to capitalising on queer bodies. That happens all the time. And oftentimes it is the male top of the hierarchy who are capitalising on queer bodies.<sup>410</sup>

The notion of capitalising on queer bodies, as Karneskøg states, actually enfolds back on itself and becomes convoluted, because queer bodies are coded as *other* or considered to be non-existent in a system constructed with patriarchy as its core. Gender binarism is essential to the patriarchy, and by extension capitalism, yet this system is so self-serving that queer bodies, which arguably inherently sit outside this binary system and challenge it through their existence, are still absorbed into it and made to fit an existing narrative. Queer bodies, just like female bodies, are objectified and it is their otherness to the straight, white male body that renders them a threat, like women's 'lack' in Freudian theory.<sup>411</sup> They expose the arbitrary nature of gender binarism while also affirming that it is not about gender after all, but rather about power. Gender binarism therefore centres not on the existence of men and women, but treats men as the superior gender, and everyone who is not male as inferior bodies that are defined within this male-focused context.

Along these lines, Karneskøg describes gender as having a hierarchy, and identifies that the 'inferior' genders, meaning that everyone who is not male exists to benefit men, at the top level of this hierarchy. As they point out with the statement above, the men on this top level not only dictate the narrative and the roles that others should fill in it: they

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<sup>410</sup> Karneskøg, 2019, Interview

<sup>411</sup> Rosemary H. Balsam, 'The War on Women in Psychoanalytic Theory Building', *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, 69:1 (2015), 83-107, DOI: [10.1080/00797308.2016.11785524](https://doi.org/10.1080/00797308.2016.11785524) Accessed 12 Oct 2021.

actively benefit from it, and position others in order to capitalise on them, as a patriarchal capitalist system is prone to do,.

In Karneskøg's case, they use clothing to express their non-conformity, which, they acknowledge, can be difficult due to the deeply gendered associations that people make with clothes. This is why I find their choice of their favourite item of clothing quite profound. They mention a T-shirt given to them by a friend, recalling, 'She picked it out and thought of me. I just loved that. That she could find something so randomly and be like, 'This is for Sissel'. It's the T-shirt I wear every day, completely falling apart, but it's this thing like picking someone flowers, it's very thoughtful'.<sup>412</sup>

This resonates with Grund's account of standing in the busy changing room of a luxury department store, and regarding the clothes presented by mannequins not as items detached from their temporary wearer, but rather as objects that come alive through the person wearing them,<sup>413</sup> directly tied to a personal experience and perception of fashion, to a snapshot of a moment. Her descriptions of the clothes are intrinsically linked to her descriptions of the people wearing them, and it is through people that she watches fashion. The seemingly nondescript T-shirt gifted to Karneskøg by a friend speaks to that notion, to recognising a person, a living, active subject, in a passive object, linking these two together and viewing them through a very personal connection. It infers an attitude towards clothing and the act of designing clothes and how they may be a reflection of the designer's personal position, something Karneskøg elaborates on in the interview:

I think when it comes to queer fashion, it has a tendency to be loud, and be very theatrical and costume-y, which is lovely, but is there something else I can do? And I felt like that bit kind of changed my view on my work and I started to analyse how I actually dress and what I dress myself in. It's like T-shirt and jeans. It started to become more about the internal body than the external, which is garments.<sup>414</sup>

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<sup>412</sup> Karneskøg, 2019, Interview

<sup>413</sup> Hessel, 2014

<sup>414</sup> Karneskøg, 2019, Interview

Karneskøg describes how their personal relationship with clothing impacts on their conscious positioning and subsequently how it changes their approach to their work, which will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

#### 4.4.3 Process

Karneskøg, as a gender non-conforming designer, is arguably more attuned to the nuances of power dynamics and the conversations that are happening around it, and has a heightened sense of self-awareness. Living as a gender non-conforming person and as part of a marginalised community, they involve their own community in the research process. They say: 'the first step is react. I use social media a lot as a research method. Since I am following a lot of people who come from the same community as myself, I look what discussions are going on about specific topics'.<sup>415</sup> This echoes the feminist strategy of seeking input from one's own community and group of friends, though I would argue that Karneskøg is particularly intentional in their approach, specifying the need to react to something first before taking action. Karneskøg allows their community to define the conversation without knowing what that conversation might be or where it would take them. The react to conversations before, as they describe, taking the core of these discussions and internalising them to understand what they mean to them. 'But for me,' they describe, 'I react to something, I reflect, then I tend to do a lot of illustration and for me that is to get into my mindset, that geeky side of myself, to kind of create my own narrative, my own world.'<sup>416</sup> They mention narrative, which, as stated before, speaks to a heightened sense of awareness in terms of both power structures and dynamics and their own place in them, leading to a subsequent understanding that while conversations with others and discourse and listening to this discourse is important, it is also of vital importance to create their own narrative that disrupts the one that exists. For Karneskøg, I would argue, it has always been a necessity to create their own narrative, as, through conventional binarism and gender politics, they do not exist in male-dominated stories. Disruption takes place on both counts, but I would argue that Karneskøg has a heightened sense of awareness of

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<sup>415</sup> Karneskøg, 2019, Interview

<sup>416</sup> Ibid.

exactly how this disruption takes place, which will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

Returning to the notion that people who wear the garments, either customers or the models, are blank canvases is something Karneskøg mentions in our conversation, and points to as something that truly bothers them, and which they would like to see changed. 'I think one could be to show real identities that are objectified, not just using models but asking 'Who are these people?' Because fashion is moving so fast and time is an absolute luxury for us.'<sup>417</sup> They criticise the fashion industry's casting practices, which mostly put very young, very skinny and very white woman on catwalks, in magazines and advertisements, continuously homogenising women and the notion of beauty for male viewing pleasure. That is why it is so important, Karneskøg explains, that they are visible and refuse to be marginalised, stressing that 'that is also one of the reasons why I feel it is really important to display all of myself, and that I feel the actual power I have being here.'<sup>418</sup>

Like the motivation to engage in feminist research, which draws on the tension between the problematising of existing narratives and the wish to change them, Karneskøg talks about the status quo they want to reject, and the most impactful way to change it, and while – again – these things are not articulated explicitly, the underlying reason that these motivations exist is arguably due to the understanding or living of shared experience. In Karneskøg's case, there is a unique tension between a deep connection with their community and the goal to improve their experience, and the understanding that people outside that community may simply lack exposure and genuine engagement and need guidance in order to challenge their preconceived notions of gender binarism and hierarchies. 'I think it's important how I communicate the topics in order to include listeners, even those who are not part of my community,'<sup>419</sup> Karneskøg explains about their approach of people who do not share or understand their experience, adding, 'it's a matter of how we speak about these things.'<sup>420</sup>

This speaks to Karneskøg's self-awareness, but also their awareness of existing structures that usually outline how we speak about things, and in what setting and

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<sup>417</sup> Karneskøg, 2019, Interview

<sup>418</sup> Ibid.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid.



context these conversations take place, and how they are conducted: what words are being used to conduct them. Karneskørg realises that all of these layers need to be challenged in order for the conversation and narrative to change, but that none of that is possible unless they, on the one hand, collaborate with their own community and listen to their experiences and, on the other hand, extend the same collaborative spirit – not equally but deliberately – towards those outside of their community. Karneskørg puts it this way:

We need to find a way to reach further out, because if you find someone outside of the fashion context and they see the stuff we're making here, they will not understand it. [...] Some people even refuse to call me by my own pronouns, because they don't agree with it, so it's those things: how we use language and how we respect others and how we communicate with others. It's that that needs to change.<sup>421</sup>

For them, representation and collaboration takes on a new form, as increased visibility that is important for their community. Additionally, the collaborative nature of their work, as well as the deeply complex and personal themes they discuss in it, requires a relationship that goes beyond the conventional dynamic of the designer and model.

When it comes to models, for me, I work with people from my community that will understand. There was one time, because of a panicky moment when I had a cisgender straight male model, and he was wearing a jumpsuit. Just a normal jumpsuit, nothing to it, but he was weirded out by it. I think that was also connected to me and what my work said. It became a whole thing.<sup>422</sup>

The conventional dynamic between a designer and their model does not work in these particular circumstances, with the absence of any shared experience between Karneskørg and the model led to a situation where the potential conflict over a garment the model does not understand or feel comfortable with could lead to an overshadowing of the actual work, attention being focused on the model's reaction rather than the

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<sup>421</sup> Karneskørg, 2019, Interview

<sup>422</sup> Ibid.

designer's intention and story. For Karneskøg, collaboration is vital, as it leads to an emphasis of their narrative, rather than a distraction from it. And it is especially important to collaborate with someone who shares their experience, at least to some degree, emerging from the same community that exists outside of the narrative and power dynamic that usually guides the interaction between designer and model.

#### 4.4.4 Practice

For Karneskøg, the stakes are arguably a lot higher than for the average designer. 'But I think also with fashion, and actually for me it is important that I use this platform that I am on in order to tell my story. [...] For me it is important to tell my story and show myself. Not just stay behind the curtain and make a cool collection,'<sup>423</sup> they stress, once more managing to articulate their position in a way that is unique to their experience and unique to their heightened self-awareness and -perception. They have analysed the power structures and prevailing narratives to a degree that enables them to understand them and see what needs to change, and how it can change, to create a more balanced, inclusive system in which nobody is objectified, silenced or subordinated. 'When it comes to the language around masculinity and femininity,' they explain, 'that needs to evolve and move away from genitalia. Because I feel that it should be fine for everyone to wear a dress, for everyone to wear something that is more connected to their masculine body now. So it's our social connections to these garments that need to evolve. And in all contexts.'<sup>424</sup>

Karneskøg's outline of what they want to see changed, not only in the fashion industry but in society and culture in general, is something that echoes the approach drawn from Grund's diaries, in which the focus is not on the objects, but almost entirely on people's experiences and stories and how they engage and interact with others, to what extent these exchanges influence their practice and how it ultimately benefits their process. It advocates for more a personal approach, to lived experience as central within practice

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<sup>423</sup> Karneskøg, 2019, Interview

<sup>424</sup> Ibid.

and performance, just as Karneskøgg describes the ultimate aim of their work: 'If I can create a smile on someone's face, that's amazing. And also create an 'aha' moment.'<sup>425</sup>

#### 4.5 Caves Collect – Johanna Howe & Sarah Russell

Caves Collect is an Australian label based in Melbourne, founded by friends Sarah Russell and Johanna Howe (see Fig. 13), who were both born and raised in Adelaide. Focused on creating a perfect capsule wardrobe, they do not produce collections or sell wholesale, producing the garments locally with a focus on sustainable lifestyle and production. Since launching their brand, they have been featured in *i-D* and *Grazia* UK and have accumulated an international following, with eighty per cent of their customers based overseas.<sup>426</sup>

This interview was conducted in person, a rare opportunity enabled by my participation in the Critical Fashion Studies Conference facilitated by the University of Melbourne. It was recorded via the Voice Recorder app on my phone (Fig. 12).

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<sup>425</sup> Karneskøgg, 2019, Interview

<sup>426</sup> Johanna Howe & Sarah Russell (Caves Collect), 2020, Interview by Teresa Kroenung

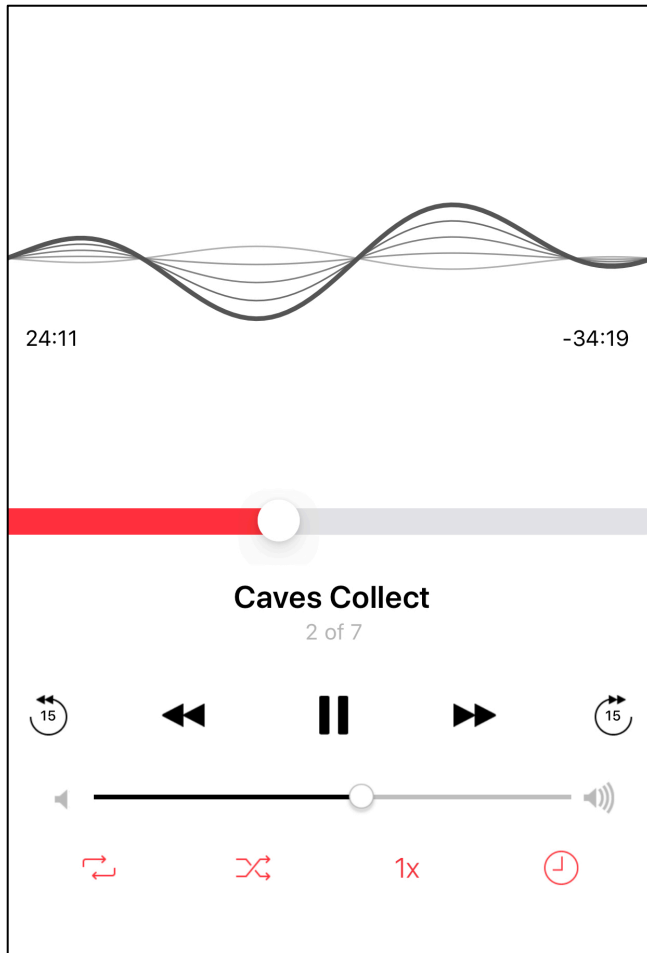


Figure 12: Screenshot of the recording of the interview with Jo and Sarah from Caves Collect, 26.02.2020, © 2020 Teresa Krönung

#### 4.5.1 Thick Transcript

**CAVES COLLECT, SARAH RUSSELL & JOHANNA HOWE  
MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA  
26<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2020, 10AM  
58 MINUTES**

The sky in Melbourne is overcast; a soft grey, not particularly dark, but just dark enough to leave the possibility of more rain. This area of the city is a surprising blend of suburban and industrial, cafés as well as dry cleaners and fabric stores lining the street. It's still relatively early, so there aren't that many people about.

Converted warehouses line the street, and the address I need to get to is just a few yards ahead on the left. Jo opens the front door to the multi-studio complex

and leads me up the stairs, through the front door and immediately to the right where Sarah, her co-founder, is already waiting. They are both wearing their own designs, head to toe – the signature well-tailored trousers from Caves Collect and knitted jumpers. Jo's is a vibrant tomato red, while Sarah's is grey.

Their studio is small, but it doesn't feel cramped. Instead, it feels homely and lived-in, radiating comfort. A row of work tables face the milky window front to the right, the remaining clouds still covering the sky outside the studio, painting it grey, dim the light that falls in through them. A dressmaker's mannequin is in the corner, next to a makeshift changing room for fittings. The middle of the room is taken up almost entirely with two long garment rails holding the designers' collection; mainly tailored trousers in neutral colours, a few tops and pieces of light knitwear here and there.

It smells familiar. Familiar in a way that's ingrained in every fibre of your body; an immediate sense of comfort setting in because this is something you know intimately. It's muslin, wool, old wood, with a hint of dampness underlining it all, from the rain that's fallen over night.

Jo suggests going to a café to talk, as she had earlier via email. The studio is wonderful, perfect for two people, but for three it might quickly go from being cosy to being cramped.

Australia is much colder than anticipated, and the skies open up in the roughly two-minute window it takes to hurry across the street and through a brick archway into a semi-enclosed yard.

The café itself is a large and airy space tucked away in a side alley in the industrial area of Collingwood. The interior is sleek and minimal, a modern warehouse style that reminds me of cafés in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. I can smell rain and freshly ground coffee beans, and we order flat whites and tea, find a small table to the side. There are a handful of people scattered about, some sitting alone with a book or laptop and a steaming mug for company, some in pairs, quietly chatting, a steady hum mingling with the sounds coming from the

bar. I worry a little bit about the quality of the recording when we sit down, but I decide that it is probably going to be fine and pull out my phone and notebook, depositing my bag and coat on the empty chair to my right. [...]

I pull out my own film camera. It's an old Canon, not very good, bought on eBay for next to nothing. It makes no sense to splurge on something like that, especially since I'm not the best photographer.

'Oh yay, can I have a look?' Jo asks, holding out her hand.

'Sure, sure,' I say and hand it for her to look at. 'Because I've got old cameras as well and I think I got it on eBay for €10, using Kodak 4x4 that I buy on Amazon.'

Jo flips it around in her hand, then hands it back. 'Nice.' [...]

'For us seeing people wear it is still – I remember this time, we were working a lot and we'd had a really rough week and we were sitting on the step outside the studio, and like, ugh – is it meant to be this hard?' Sarah recalls. 'And then this woman walked by and she's wearing one of our backpacks. Which is always really nice.'

'It's the best thing,' Jo says, and they both light up, 'seeing someone wear our stuff.'

'Especially because we were like, it's a lot of work, but then seeing women out in the world wearing it is – it's really good.'

'Yeah,' Jo agrees.

'I love that comment you got from that customer on the weekend as well, we were really surprised, about the attention to detail,' Sarah says.

‘Oh yeah, she’d bought some of our pants and she came by on the weekend to try some more on, and she said, oh I’ve got those pants and when I put them on, I just love the button, it’s just like a little piece of artwork. She was like, I love it every time I put those pants on.’

‘We’d never really noticed it before,’ Sarah admits, sounding surprised. [...]

Eventually, coffee and tea cups drained, we wrap up and head back outside. The rain has ceased and the air smells clean and fresh. I take a deep breath and follow Jo and Sarah back to their studio to have another quick look around before I need to dash. They show me the toile for a blazer they’re working on, and we talk briefly about their plans for forthcoming products before I take out my old ‘thank-you-eBay’ Canon film camera and snap a photograph of them posing with their mannequin (Fig. 14).

‘Her name is Berta,’ Jo says with a laugh.



Figure 13: Sarah (left) and Jo from Caves Collect in their studio in Melbourne's Collingwood district, February 2020, © 2020 Teresa Krönung

#### 4.5.2 Position

Johanna Howe and Sarah Russell, from the Australian womenswear brand Caves Collect, voice their frustration as a motivating factor in the creation of their own brand, prompted by, in the case of Howe, her education in fashion at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), one of the most renowned universities in Australia, as well as her attempt to find work as a designer that fulfilled her creatively. She recalls:

Sarah and I would just chat about design and what we were excited about because I found RMIT really frustrating. [...] nothing really aligned with what I wanted to do creatively either. I was just feeling really disheartened.<sup>427</sup>

It is this dissatisfaction with the existing status quo of the industry that, in the case of Howe and Russell, and also more generally, provides the necessary motivation to shift from being part of that system and assimilating to it to become active subjects who then move on to create their own space and narrative instead of attempting to fit into one that already exists. Howe describes this shift from frustration to motivation that she shared with Russell due to her similar experience, and describes that moment they made a decision to collaborate and create something themselves: 'I just love how functional [fashion] is [...]. I wanted to make something that had more purpose'.<sup>428</sup> Russell and Howe, with a womenswear brand, do not experience resistance from wearers, but Howe recalls her time as a fashion student at RMIT and recognises the emphasis on working conceptually rather than practically – coincidentally inspired by menswear – as an implicit pressure. 'It felt like we were post-rationalising,' she remembers, of her time as a student. 'I'm quite inspired by menswear, tailoring, things like that, and at RMIT I felt like I was really pushed to be conceptual and avant garde in a way. It was almost frowned upon, in a way, to make wearable clothes'.<sup>429</sup> She adds, 'I ended up doing a really conceptual project in my final year, in my fourth year, just because I had to, to get good marks. Like, in all honesty, that's why I did it. [...] I felt forced to do that to get a good mark'.<sup>430</sup>

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<sup>427</sup> Howe and Russell, 2020, Interview

<sup>428</sup> Ibid.

<sup>429</sup> Ibid.

<sup>430</sup> Ibid.



The pressure to work in a more conceptual and avant-garde style, I would argue, suggests the removal of the wearer from the garments and a refusal to classify that wearer as an active person, instead encouraging the production of a malleable object to bear these designs. It goes against the personal, and how an individual might experience fashion, which is something both Russell and Howe describe as central when they both recall interacting with fashion during their youth and adolescence. Russell says, 'Naturally, becoming a teenager, I was looking for things to wear and to express myself [...]. I remember thinking, oh this is a way I can show people my personality and experiment with it, and that was just so much fun',<sup>431</sup> and Howe adds that 'I'd always chop things up and adapt them'.<sup>432</sup>

There are three points to draw out here. The first is the assertion that fashion underlines and expresses one's personality, and the inherent joy that comes with the process of dressing, especially, as Russell mentions, as she was quite shy and quiet as a child.<sup>433</sup> Fashion provided a level of comfort that arguably carried through into Russell's professional life. The second point, I would argue, is that Howe asserts a certain agency, an active interference with an existing thing to make it fit her, rather than fitting herself into something that was not intended for her. While one might argue that the simple act of chopping up and adapting clothing doesn't necessarily carry more meaning, I am suggesting that the early exposure to things that do not fit and need to be adapted may have instilled a sense of self-assertion that Howe was able to internalise and that may have informed her approach to fashion design later in her life, causing her to prioritise practicality and the wearer's agency over artistic vision.

And finally, it once more speaks to Grund's way of looking at fashion and the way that in her analysis of it she never separates the garments from their wearers, understanding that fashion is something deeply personal, and that one should understand it as immersive rather than detached, the approach mirroring the analysis at its core. We should approach fashion immersed in the environment it is experienced in, and we can understand fashion in a different way if we acknowledge that the act of dressing and wearing clothes is equally immersive and personal, hinging on remembered moments.

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<sup>431</sup> Ibid.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid.

<sup>433</sup> Ibid.

#### 4.5.3 Process

Howe and Russell have a very simple initial approach to their process, which they are 'probably still finessing',<sup>434</sup> very much following the learning-by-doing method, but with a very specific aim right from the very start. 'Functional, that was very important,'<sup>435</sup> they state when asked about the design philosophy around which they have built their business. Aesthetics are pared back, but not disregarded, and there is a very clear focus on making garments that work for the people who wear them. About their process, they say that 'it evolved pretty organically, actually [...]. I think just starting with one thing and then just seeing what worked, what feedback we were getting'.<sup>436</sup> It describes a reciprocal relationship with customers and people who would be, or are, wearing their clothes, listening to their experience with the developed designs and, while the initial stage is different from the others, in terms of not starting with conversations, I argue that Howe and Russell, as a design duo, have these conversations embedded in their process. Howe states that 'Sarah and I – Caves is very much where we meet in the middle of our aesthetics',<sup>437</sup> a recognition which requires a previous deliberation and conversation about these aesthetics but also, as they describe, an ever-evolving process that is made up of feedback loops between one another – but also with their customers. As Caves Collect is a partnership, I would argue that the very premise of the brand, and therefore the process and the resulting practice, is based on the understanding between Russell and Howe that they are equal partners working together and contributing equally while also sharing their experiences with one another.

It is evident when Howe and Russell talk about their work with Caves Collect that the initial intention is based on functionality. Apart from it being a practicality (even if it turned out to be the opposite), the fact that Howe and Russell launched their label wanting to create one-size-fits-all garments speaks to an intention to be inclusive and to invite people to essentially create their own story, making this item of clothing fit them. and not the other way around. They both recall:

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<sup>434</sup> Ibid.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid.

We really loved the idea – because everyone is so nuanced in their own body but there are no standards, so we realised – we wanted to create a garment that you could customise to your own body, especially as it fluctuates. Even if you get an item customised for your own body, your body doesn't stay the same, it changes over time. So I think we were excited about the idea of that – it'll always fit you perfectly.<sup>438</sup>

The translation of this idea into actual garments that they could actually produce, as they still made everything themselves to order, eventually proved more difficult than anticipated, resulting in the abandonment of a complicated jumpsuit that was hard to make and also very hard to put on. However, the idea and actual product resonated so much with customers that Howe and Russell still get emails asking about this jumpsuit, evidence that their aim to make a garment that would be made to fit a person's body, instead of the other way round, was appreciated by the wearers.<sup>439</sup>

Utilising my own methods internalised from Grund's work, mirroring the process in my own work, the shared experience of going to fashion school and clashing with the teachers over basic ideas of design processes and development brought about an epiphany in real time. When I recalled that I had actively been discouraged to design for myself or with myself in mind during my undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, Howe realised that the highly conceptual approach she had been taught at RMIT probably had a similar ethos, which led to her saying: 'You're probably right, I've never thought about it so specifically, but yeah, it probably was frowned upon, now that you say it, to design for yourself. But that's a hundred per cent what we're doing now. [...] you have to try it on. [...] if you are not going to feel good wearing it, then chances are, other people won't either.'<sup>440</sup>

Her statement underlines the importance of shared experience, but Howe also stresses that now they do not remove themselves from the process of making clothes, making themselves a very essential part of their research and design method, keeping at the forefront of their mind that they are making functional garments that they want to feel

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<sup>438</sup> Ibid.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid.

good in, and that they want their customers to feel good in, as well. Howe adds, 'I think designing for yourself is instinctual as well, like it's so easy and it feels so natural to design like that. It's hard, I think, when you're trying to imagine what it would feel like, not having experienced it, to have a proper opinion on it'.<sup>441</sup>

With that statement, Howe questions the very premise of fashion design as it has conventionally existed throughout most of the twentieth and twenty-first century, in which male designers are arguably seen as better at their job because they are not swayed by their feelings, instead claiming to be objective about what looked good,<sup>442</sup> emphasising the visual aesthetics and heterosexual viewing pleasure. It is a practice that Russell finds confusing, stating that 'as a designer I always find it good to be aware of things and think about the change in designs, and I think it must be hard for men to know the experience of that. There would be none of that, so it would just be like, from feedback I guess, but not from feeling it. I've not really experienced that process or worn any clothes designed by men. I don't really know, but I think it would be hard to do it. I don't know what the process would be.'<sup>443</sup>

Put bluntly like that, it does seem baffling to think of the process of designing something as intimate and personal as clothing without being able to share experience between designer and wearer. However, this apparent dilemma, this concept Russell finds hard to grasp, because it is how she has always approached design, is non-existent when the wearer of the clothes is simply considered, and the personal perception or experience the wearer may have is an afterthought rather than a priority.

Collaboration is particularly integral to Russell and Howe, whose entire creative practice is founded on it. Without their collaborative approach, Caves Collect would not exist in its current form, or at all. Having been friends and roommates before embarking on their joint business venture, Howe and Russell had a certain familiarity with one another on a personal level, and running their business together for the past few years has also increased their familiarity on a professional level; they have fine-tuned their

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<sup>441</sup> Ibid.

<sup>442</sup> Jeffreys, 2004

<sup>443</sup> Howe and Russell, 2020, Interview

collaboration and learned how their symbiotic relationship can be enhanced by sharing experiences and feelings.<sup>444</sup> Howe offers her reflection on their partnership:

We're trying to give each other more freedom. [...] Because we can sometimes feel a bit suffocated by each other [...] I'll be working on something that would be flattering to my body type but not flattering to her body type, because it's a bit different to mine. [...] different things actually suit us, so we're trying to give each other a bit more freedom to own a design.<sup>445</sup>

The freedom Howe mentions stems from trust and familiarity, but also – as should be the case in collaboration – the willingness to learn from each other and each other's unique experiences, as Howe exemplifies by discussing different body types and how different styles are suitable or more comfortable to them. It implies an acknowledgement that their individual knowledge is limited to their own experience, and also the need to reach out in order to understand more about another person, ultimately merging these two perspectives in order to create a more holistic practice.

#### 4.5.4 Practice

In terms of the way in which their designs are perceived or experienced by their customers, Howe and Russell are very concerned about the narrative that could be put forward about them if it wasn't directed by them. 'We were also quite worried about having our products marketed for us,'<sup>446</sup> they say when I question them about the reason why they sell their clothes exclusively through their own website, setting them apart from many small, emerging brands that rely on wholesalers and online shops to reach a wider audience. 'We wanted to control that, in a way, instead of giving that to someone else.'<sup>447</sup> Russell and Howe display a pronounced sense of self-awareness, in addition to a very clear understanding of narratives and how they are able to take

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<sup>444</sup> Ibid.

<sup>445</sup> Ibid.

<sup>446</sup> Ibid.

<sup>447</sup> Ibid.

ownership of their own, as they are worried about external actors 'articulating it in a way that wasn't in sync with what we were trying to do.'<sup>448</sup>

They are very clear in their intentions and very focused on their philosophy, creating limited ranges of garments, not following the fashion cycle and rejecting the notion of collections for every season and in-between season. Focusing on a manageable scope, they want to retain the trust of their customers, and continue to collaborate on garments that empower people by valuing their individual experiences. By doing this, they actively reject the notion of success as defined by exponential growth, and they do it very consciously, musing that 'maybe we just want to stay really small and humble and live this simple life'.<sup>449</sup>

It is staunchly feminist to reject phallogocentric models of success that are defined by growth and size and economic gain, and to reject the prevailing narrative that a successful business needs to continually expand. For Howe and Russell, success isn't measured by conventional capitalist ideals, and they are actively and consciously departing from preconceived notions of accomplishment as defined by the fashion business, prioritising their customers' and their own well-being over arbitrary ideals perpetuated by the patriarchy. 'I mean you can try and build it with more money,' they say, 'but I think we just realised we don't need it, and we don't really want the stress, we're happy'.<sup>450</sup>

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<sup>448</sup> Ibid.

<sup>449</sup> Ibid.

<sup>450</sup> Ibid.

## 4.6 Discussion

The first step, Position, as outlined, marks the importance of self-awareness, but also that this self-awareness is followed by a growing awareness of a system of power and how this existing system impacts on personal experience. It leads these practitioners to take a conscious step away from a predetermined course of action and causes them to consciously subvert these dominant narratives by asserting themselves and the people they interact with as individuals, whose personal experience matters.

The key elements of the process, that result from these practitioners creating spaces that do not comply with prevailing narratives and structure, are conversations in which they make sure they listen rather than dictate: they view these conversations not as transactional but as collaborative, and focus on individual experiences and personal stories. This echoes Grund's actions as a *Neue Frau* as a contrast to the conventional male practice of *flânerie*, in which a man's singular, monocultural experience is central and regarded as universally applicable and similarly replicable. It signals a rupture in a dominant narrative that presents all those considered to be other as passive objects who do not possess, or are not granted, their own agency, whose experiences are not valued or even registered, and insists that there is so much more to be gained when these encounters are not viewed as generalisable or detached. Rather, drawn out from Grund's diaristic texts and applied to the analysis of these interviews, evidence points to a more immersive process in which all the participants are active and in possession of valuable experience that is theirs to share. Key to this is the understanding that any relationship is built on shared experience and the elevation of the voices of people who have not been given this kind of space before.

I like to imagine Grund's reaction to all of these stories, but I would especially like to hear her thoughts on the man who is bothered by a woman's name on a garment label. Whatever her thoughts would be, I have an inkling that she would not be particularly kind about it, and perhaps call him '*eine blasierte Hemdbrust*' [a smug shirt-front], writing it down in her diary with a flourish. But regardless of what she would say, and even regardless of what my thoughts on this are, what is important to note, to stress

once again, is that Grund would have listened, and she would have created a space for others to share their experiences and tell their stories.

When Finamore asks what the story is – why she overlooked the absence of women and didn't realise it until someone pointed it out to her – then the answer is that there is a need for spaces for them to exist in, and be seen and heard in. The prevailing system that still constructs our reality and directs our cultural reality is being challenged, but it is still dominant, and these spaces do not simply open up. They need to be fought for, and the people fighting for these spaces need to be elevated, alongside their experiences. What the introduction of Helen Grund and her work, particularly her diaries, demonstrates in relation to an interrogation of contemporary practitioners' work is that there are tools out there, if only we take the time and patience to look for them, to facilitate new approaches to knowledge creation that can enrich our existing discourse in fashion studies. But we need to value these sources and understand that we also need to listen to them and immerse ourselves in them.

As I pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, its purpose is to address the third and final research question. It outlines what the tools generated from an analysis and translation of Grund's diaristic texts can offer for the analysis of contemporary fashion practice, and what is gained when my attempt to speak to these practitioners is informed by Grund's work.

Placing the translation of Grund's writing and the implementation of an analysis of her work at the centre of my methodology has offered the potential for a new discursive approach to knowledge creation in contemporary fashion that subverts the prevailing narratives and focuses on personal experiences, captured in snapshot moments. Drawn out through the application of three steps, Position, Process and Practice, there are strategies she deploys that make her approach invaluable for understanding this contemporary moment. Grund positions herself in a conscious way, aware of the power dynamics that shape the situations she enters and that colour the scene she steps into. Only rarely does she pay attention to men, and if she does it is only superficially. Instead, she focuses on the women who are present, and notes down not only how they are dressed, but also how they become alive through their clothes, and vice versa. She colours their characters through fashion, and understands it as an immersive experience to which she is not simply a spectator – all are participants. The inherently collaborative and generous nature of Grund's process is key in this, because even if she



is merely observing women, and not interviewing them, she manages to capture their individuality and personal nuance, describing them in minute detail without ever judging them, or attempting to impose her own thoughts and ideas on them. These women do not need to represent anything, or be representative of something more general in order for Grund to deem them valid enough to write about them – they are captured and elevated because they are unique individuals who capture her in the moment, and they never need to be anything else.

She is endlessly fascinated by the people she encounters, which becomes even more apparent through her refusal to assert a dominant presence in her texts, in which she only occasionally exists in the first person, instead choosing to allow others to fill the space she has created through her position as a fashion journalist and correspondent. What this implies for a contemporary context is the interrogation of practitioners through a lens that does not focus on what they have created, but rather seeks to understand what moments shape their experience and how these moments have impacted on the way they work. This specific approach through Grund's life and work is particularly relevant in enabling us to step away from the analysis of fashion as objects that are created and then worn, and instead understand contemporary fashion as an immersive and deeply personal experience that accounts for a practitioner's personal story and individual process, and the life that is breathed into their creations by the people who experience them in the moment.

## Conclusion

This thesis outlines how a feminist method of contemporary fashion analysis can be built through the translation of Helen Grund's texts. Prompted by an interview with Michelle Finamore, a fashion curator, about her exhibition on non-binary fashion, I began looking into quiet or completely absent voices in fashion, and found not only Helen Grund and her texts, but others like her. I translated her words and analysed them so that the past could be infused into the present to facilitate a new method of analysis for fashion that allows for more inclusive and intersectional discourse. In order to address the main research query, I devised three research questions to guide my study, generated through an initial inquiry of relevant literature and the interviews I conducted. These same questions were then addressed through a repeated engagement with these sources, and via the lens created by my reading and translating of Grund's professional and private texts, which applies to the entirety of this research. Grund and her work sit at its core.

Why has a voice such as Helen Grund's remained invisible, or barely visible, within fashion studies and related discourses?

The first research question generated was addressed through a review of relevant literature in three steps, and an additional section in a chapter focused on Grund. As this is a cross-historical study that attempts to bridge a gap between the past and the present, the initial focus was to identify the reasons that might explain the absence of Grund's work in studies that have engaged in a similar bridging process. Highlighting three texts that conduct cross-historical research in different ways revealed that on the one hand, historic sources are still largely limited by and framed within narratives that emphasise voices of privilege, and, on the other hand, analyses occur in carefully curated and constructed spaces, either through official imagery of fashion shows and performances, or the texts of designers who are engaging in the cultivation of their own image and aura. Missing from these research endeavours are the stories and experiences of people outside of the spotlight.

Following this section of the literary inquiry was, therefore, a closer inspection of the fashion discourse and environment of the contemporary era I and my interview partners find ourselves in, as well as an interrogation of the fashion industry Helen Grund would have known and experienced as a fashion correspondent in Paris. In relation to the contemporary, and more specifically my own experience and education in fashion, this review included the seminal texts that have shaped fashion studies as a discipline, as well as a discussion of the socio-economic reality of people working in the industry. It revealed that the study of fashion continues to hold a precarious position in relation to feminist enquiry, and that, even though it has evolved and begun to include more varied approaches, there continues to be a reliance on research practices and methods adopted from other disciplines to claim legitimacy. There arguably continues to be a feminist blind spot that means it is harder for those outside of dominant narratives and structures to receive the same attention, and also the same level of recognition and value.

The same can arguably be said for the fashion industry experienced by Grund, which, at a time of fraught political and philosophical discourse, was not regarded as a discipline worth studying. While fashion's feminine status opened up work opportunities for women such as Grund, their writing was not granted the same status as the texts produced by male contemporaries, who were often only engaging with fashion in order to underline or emphasise their existing theories. The engagement in cultural criticism, largely pursued by an intellectual male elite, did not grant women, or those outside of this small privileged group, equal agency or attention, resulting in an imbalanced discourse that was nevertheless promoted as generalisable and truthful. The answer to this first research question is the sum of these three parts, but it can be summarised by pointing to the underlying tension between feminism and fashion, which has persisted throughout the decades and continues to persist despite significant changes. This tension has yet to be resolved, because while we have come to recognise inherent power structures and privileged narratives, fashion studies largely keeps returning to these narratives and dominant texts and voices, looking outwards to seek legitimacy, rather than inwards to find personal and individual stories that have not yet been told.

How can a critical analysis of diaristic texts authored by women become a feminist tool within fashion studies?

The second research question was addressed by reading and translating Grund's body of work in order to figure out how the critical analysis of diaristic texts authored by her could become a tool within fashion studies. Essential in finding the answer to this question was the reading and re-reading of her texts in the original German, and the subsequent approach to these texts via a feminist translation strategy as pioneered by Sherry Simon. This strategy required a collaborative approach to the translation of Grund's word, facilitated and made easier by shared experience between the original author and the translator. This translation and the approach to it became a focal point for this study, because it revealed aspects of the texts that would have remained hidden otherwise. By approaching the translation as a collaborative rather than singular process, positioning the original author, Grund, as an equal and placing value on her personal experience and diaries, not just the work she produced as a journalist, I was able to uncover the female focus of these texts, Grund's immersive, vivid and lively descriptions of women she encounters as a *Neue Frau* on her travels to Paris, speaking to the way she viewed and wrote about how they lived and experienced fashion. What this feminist approach also revealed was how Grund developed her own method and subsequently created her knowledge of fashion without depending on existing theory, and without the need to have her knowledge validated by male contemporaries or through generalisation and replicability. Instead, Grund's focus on women and their stories, and allowing these women to speak for themselves, shows empathy and willingness to listen rather than imposing an existing narrative or preconceived notion onto the stories these people were willing to share with her.

What could this tool potentially offer for an analysis of voices within contemporary fashion who continue to be overlooked or diminished?

Her collaborative, empathetic and immersive spirit then inspired my methodology, which allowed me to answer the third and final research question, asking what this tool could potentially offer for an analysis of voices within contemporary fashion who continue to be overlooked or diminished. This method generated through the reading and translation of Helen Grund's diary, which revealed her three-step approach as

Position, Process and Practice, elevates empathy with the individual and personal experience to the forefront of contemporary fashion interrogation and analysis. Rather than prioritising objects, their look or visual impact, this new lens allows the prioritisation of personal stories and experiences, interdisciplinary and intersectional, of those who are usually drowned out or diminished through an overt focus on generalisation and the argument that in order for fashion studies to gain more legitimacy, it needs to align itself with the social sciences or other more established fields of study. It diminished the separation conventionally present in fashion analysis, where objects are visually studied and assessed by subjects. These objects are not always entirely severed from their creators, but more often than not detached from the circumstances that were in place and that facilitated this practice – the practitioner’s position and their process – as well as from the people who would eventually bring these objects to life.

What the approach with and through Grund made possible was the disregarding of detached viewing practices and a focus instead on people and their personal stories and experiences in order to understand their practice *because* of who they are, and through the way they work. Integrating the principles revealed and adhered to during the translation process into this analysis revealed a way to engage with interview partners as equals, never trying to speak for them, but creating a space for them to speak for themselves and have their voices heard outside of existing spaces that do not fit their agency and could potentially distort or diminish them.

What this enquiry, guided by these three questions, has revealed is that Grund, as a female fashion journalist, exists outside of scholarship; however, she represents a unique intersection of fashion writing and feminist knowledge production. Her position granted her a certain level of independence and access that was not available to most women of her time, while also differentiating her from male intellectuals, and she used both to effectively engage in the conventionally masculine practice of *flânerie* – not as a female *flâneur*, but as the *Neue Frau* – the new woman – of the Weimar era. While the starting point for this new mode of knowledge production may have been similar to those of her male contemporaries, her position as a woman is deeply reflected in these accounts of her time in Paris and the encounters she had with other women who roamed the city in similar fashion. While her work was not deliberately positioned as a

feminist approach, the fact that Grund was a woman, combined with her desire to engage with fashion on both a personal and a critical level, means that the texts she produced reveal the stories and experiences of others who would have otherwise remained overlooked, or been misrepresented. Grund inadvertently brings a viscerality to fashion writing and its subsequent discourse because she immerses herself in fashion through her own personal experiences. She is not separate from what she is observing, and she does not separate the people she encounters from the fashion they embrace to live their identities and stories. Grund's approach, as a result, is coloured by the infusion of autoethnography through the capturing of snapshot moments and creates a more holistic path towards knowledge creation in fashion that exists outside of the controlled environment of couture ateliers and presentations.

#### [Building a feminist method of contemporary fashion analysis through the translation of Helen Grund's texts](#)

In Grund's texts, fashion exists in undefined and unexpected spaces; she finds it on the cobbled streets of Paris and in busy bistros filled with women, in bursting changing rooms of various department stores and in the dark, damp bathrooms of restaurants. Fashion, as written about by Grund, comes alive through the experience of people usually rendered invisible by the men who build reality in their image and do not assign importance to those outside of conventional and generalisable tropes. Fashion is also embodied by these people in spaces that Grund creates specifically for them to tell their own stories and share their own experiences, because she does not want to speak for them, nor does she offer interpretations of their words, instead allowing them to colour her reality.

It is vital to ensure that these stories told by Grund and the people she listens to and shares her platform with are not distorted. For example, imposing conventional qualitative methodologies onto the existing texts and their voice could counteract Grund's own strategies and findings. To make sure that this would not happen, it was necessary to build a methodology around Grund, informed by Grund's work, and supportive of Grund and her voice: to implement a research strategy that would position her as a collaborator rather than a research object. The creation of an individualised methodology that draws on Grund's texts and makes her central reveals

how important it is to not be guided by preconceived notions of scholarship or research strategies, but to allow change to occur, and to emphasise intuition, individuality and personal moments that stay in our minds, regardless of whether there is an existing tool or method that justifies these decisions. It embodies a feminist approach that eschews the hierarchies inherent in traditional knowledge creation and values non-traditional voices and sources of knowledge.

If we allow diaristic texts authored by people outside the canon, and new forms of personal texts and interrogations such as podcasts, to become research methods that work outside of autoethnography, we can not only diversify the voices heard in fashion discourse and contribute to a feminist revision of fashion history, but also demonstrate ways with which to approach knowledge creation in the here and now. Tailoring methodologies to these new and personal forms of communication and media and what they reveal gives us new methods and tools that are uniquely suited to analysing fashion critically, ones that are not appropriated from other disciplines that, although they may be similar to fashion, are not like fashion.

In the specific case of Grund, her texts, and the approach to a critical analysis of contemporary fashion practice, can provide new insights into the creation, perception and meaning of fashion. By implementing this approach as researchers, but also as a translators and interviewers, and extending the same empathy towards the interview partners as Grund extended to hers, we can unearth stories that speak to the tension between hope and despair that sits at the core of all feminist enquiry – this is what happened to them and it is also how they forged their own spaces.

These findings could be useful for those in fashion discourse engaging with misrepresented or underrepresented people or communities, to further interdisciplinary and intersectional practice and research, not only in terms of an approach that asks for empathy and the prioritisation of listening to their personal stories and experiences. Knowledge can be drawn from these personal texts and methods can be generated from them that effectively disrupt conventional frameworks and narratives. The creation of these texts is arguably a subversive act, and by centralising them in research that seeks to address potentially subversive content, these gestures challenging the status quo might amplify one another, instead of being diminished by being absorbed by the very system they seek to undermine.

## Reappearing Grund

I have always believed that we only need to look to the past in order to understand the present, and perhaps even anticipate the future. But what Grund has demonstrated to me, and what I have learned through the application of what I was able to draw out from her texts, is that if we truly understand the past, we can unfold and learn about it when we intertwine it with the present, creating something that is not limited by the historical or the contemporary, but is timeless enough to be relevant for the future. Grund died before I was born, and yet I found a way to speak with her and through her to contemporary practitioners who are looking ahead, not backwards. As much as I believe in emphasising personal relationships and experiences in relation to fashion analysis, as we cannot separate ourselves from our environment or practice, I also think that a blurring of lines between the historical and contemporary could be useful for other studies such as mine that interrogate historical texts or artifacts and recontextualise them for the contemporary context.

Additionally, given the inevitable change in the fashion landscape triggered largely but certainly not only by COVID-19 and its consequences, there is an urgent need to rethink prevailing habits and practices on many levels, but also when it comes to the spaces in which fashion is observed and written about. Questions of sustainability and consumption aside, the traditional fashion shows that take place two to four times a year, with garments presented on models in curated spaces, not always visibly separated from the viewers but always decidedly detached, will arguably have to change in the future and many designers have already begun to rethink the presentation of their creations. I would argue that my research may also be relevant to those who want to find new ways to approach these still intangible and uncertain spaces. While Grund's method does not represent definite guidelines on what to do and how to proceed in every case, it does speak to an individualised approach that is tailored to fit its content and intention.

And finally, a characteristic of fashion discourse was revealed through this research and it applies to historical discourse, contemporary studies or a marriage of both. It is the omnipresence of Walter Benjamin. He is not only one of the leading voices of cultural interrogation of his own era, but continues to be cited and referenced in today's fashion



studies, as evidenced through the texts discussed in this thesis. I argue that beyond the gaps already pointed out, that Benjamin's presence presents another gap, namely the contrasting absence of Grund. Fashion studies' persisting reliance on Benjamin, and Benjamin's reliance on Grund, pull Grund and her work through the historical and into the contemporary sphere. Benjamin's presence should not be the only justification of or argument for revisiting Grund as a historical text, or inserting her into the contemporary discourse. As I argue throughout this thesis, her writing stands on its own, irrespective of Benjamin, Adorno and others she had influence on. However, through her influence on Benjamin, and the knowledge that he was able to gain through her, there is no excuse for continuing to leave her out of a space she has already shaped. Through this research, as Rebecca Solnit so aptly puts it, I am reappearing Helen Grund. I am introducing her to the Anglo-American fashion discourse, and through my feminist translation of her texts I make them available for those who do not speak German to actively engage with them. Through the construction of a new methodology based on her diaristic texts and the methods drawn out from them, I outline how her texts can be used to introduce a new discursive approach to knowledge production in contemporary fashion discourse: one that sits outside of conventional scholarship, one that has not been shaped by an existing narrative. I outline feminist methods that can be applied to inform a critical analysis that centralises the personal, private stories and experiences of those who have been rendered quiet, or entirely silent, by conventional discourse, and demonstrate what tools can be used to bring them into the spotlight. Throughout this research I have maintained the position and conviction that I do not want to speak for anyone, but let Michelle Finamore, Bianca Saunders, Yvonne Lim, Sissel Karneskøg, and Sarah Russell and Johanna Howe speak for themselves, just as I want Helen Grund to speak for herself. So I want the last words on this page to be not mine, but Grund's. They are the final words she imparts to the young women training to be dressmakers in Munich in 1935, and I cannot think of a better way to end.

*Und allmählich, indem die Jahreszeit fortschreitet, verändert sich das Strassenbild. Die Frauen sehen aus als wären sie gewachsen [...]. Sie scheinen jünger geworden [...] angriffslustiger durch die Stehkragen [...] reservierter durch*

*die Knopfreiher. - Die Lust ist geweckt, sich mit diesen Verwandelten neu auseinanderzusetzen, sie kennenzulernen.*<sup>451</sup>

[And gradually, as the season progresses, the streetscape changes. The women look as if they've grown taller. [...] They appear younger [...] feistier through their stand-up collars [...] more reserved through their rows of buttons. – The desire is awakened to look anew at these transformed women, to get to know them.]

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<sup>451</sup> Hessel, 2014, trans. Teresa Kroenung pp. 271-272

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## Appendix

### I. Interview Questions

Interview Michelle Finamore – Fashion Arts Curator at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts

- PhD from the Bard Graduate Center in New York
- Gaetano Savini: The Man who was Brioni (2015)
- Hollywood before Glamour: Fashion in American Silent Film (2013)
- “Think Pink” exhibition at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (2013)
- Taught at RISD and Massachusetts College of Art
- “clothing is the most accessible form of art. Telling the story through fashion reaches a broader audience.” Boston Globe

### Warm-Up Questions

1. How do you personally define fashion?
2. How do you view fashion in comparison with other ‘objects’ exhibited in, for example, a museum for fine arts?
3. What is your view on the increasing popularity of exhibiting fashion? What are the advantages of this increase of interest in fashion exhibitions and what could possible downsides be?
4. What do you view as the biggest challenges that are facing your particular discipline today?
5. Gender-Bending Fashion Questions
6. You mention in an interview with National Geographic that you were looking at contemporary menswear initially, and that you shifted your focus when you “realised that something revolutionary was happening”. Could you elaborate on that? What were specific moments that changed the concept?

7. What were the first steps you took when the idea became a reality? How much research was involved and how interdisciplinary/collaborative was that process?
8. What was your knowledge of gender-bending fashion before this exhibition? What is your opinion on, for example, unisex clothing?
9. Could you speak a bit about your approach to exhibition design in general, but also your approach of the design of this specific exhibition?
10. Is there an overarching question you want the exhibition to answer or is it rather a presentation of “the state of affairs” with regards to non-conforming fashion?
11. What was your selection process/criteria? How did you decide who to feature in the exhibition and also to what extent?
12. One of the designers you feature in the exhibition is Rad Hourani, who says that he doesn’t see gender? In your opinion, is that the right approach when it comes to gender?
13. One of the biggest challenges I have observed with regards to exhibiting fashion is that fashion generally lives through the people who wear it. Fashion, much more than simply clothing, is a system that works because it interacts with people. Was it difficult to design an exhibition where the subject matter practically requires human interaction to exist? (people that wear these objects give them meaning/gender the garments)
  - a. → Is there perhaps opportunity in this apparent paradox?
14. How is exhibiting these garments in a museum different from showing them on a runway or in a store? Or perhaps put this way: what do you think happens to fashion when it is removed from the street and put in a museum?
15. What has the overall response been to this exhibition so far? After an exhibition is wrapped up, what is your process regarding evaluation? What do you take away from this exhibition?

Gender:

16. Stepping away from fashion for a moment – for most of us, gender happens on a more implicit level and we naturally do it day in and day out without questioning

- why. Have there been moments in your life where gender moved into focus?  
What were those moments and what makes them stand out?
17. How would you define gender?
  18. What do you consider to be the main characteristics of conventional male-female gender representation in fashion?
  19. What is your personal experiences with the construction and representation of the male-female gender binary in fashion?
  20. Is there something, in your opinion, that fashion fundamentally gets wrong about gender?
  21. Do you think that – to take the title of the exhibition literally – bending gender is the solution/right approach to challenging the status quo and dismantling the binary?
  22. Gender-bending fashion isn't a new concept, be it Marlene Dietrich in the 1930s, Teddy Girls in the 60s or Calvin Klein's androgyny in the 1990s. Do you think this time it's different? If yes, why?
  23. Billy Porter wore a stunning Christian Siriano tuxedo gown to the Oscars and otherwise isn't known for wearing conventional menswear on the red carpet. He says he likes challenging stereotypical masculinity and you've said in an interview with National Geographic that it's strange something like that is still newsworthy. A female star wearing a suit or trousers would not get reported in the same way. I was wondering if you could share your thoughts on that? (as a female practitioner – gut reaction)
  24. Many feminist theorists like Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray or Andrea Dworkin have concluded that, simply put, this is a man's world, and all women – as well as people who identify as non-binary – are being defined in relation to men. Do you think this is a fair assessment? Does it still apply today?
  25. Do you think we still lead a male-oriented discourse in fashion and has that affected what we would describe as non-binary or gender-bending fashion?
  26. How would you assess the general state of the fashion system? → are we stuck in one place?
  27. Do you think fashion has the capacity to instigate true socio-economic change?



28. If you could create a scenario of what fashion should be like in the future, what would it look like?

29. To end on a less serious note, I just have to ask: did you get your husband to wear a skirt to the opening?

Interview Bianca Saunders – Menswear Designer

Warm-Up Questions:

1. Why fashion? What was it that initially drew you in?
2. How did you first consciously think about it and how did you decide to pursue it as a career?
3. Were you interested in menswear from the start or did you only specialise in it when you went to RCA?
4. Why pursue menswear instead of womenswear?

Practice:

5. Your graduate collection and your work since then has been centred around black masculinity and you've spoken about the inspiration being your community, esp. your male friends. Did that inspiration seep into your work organically?
6. How would you describe the process of your personal life informing your practice?
7. How important is it to your practice to express your vision in more than just clothing? Why make short films, for example? Could you talk a little bit about other elements complementing your collections?
8. You mentioned in an interview that your male friends are almost afraid to talk about sexuality and masculinity in the wrong way. How do you approach these conversations? Is it something you actively talk about or would you consider yourself more of an observer?
9. What did you find most difficult about these conversations?

10. Another thing you said is that a lot of your friends don't feel like they're even making a fashion statement. Why do you think they don't perceive themselves that way?
11. How do you think your own identity influences your practice? Do you think you can offer a unique perspective especially because you are a women?
12. Have you dressed your male friends or suggested what they should wear? And if so, what did you perceive to be their reaction to that?

Experience:

13. When you first started to menswear, what were the overall reactions from both teachers and your community?
14. There's still a smaller number of female designers designing womenswear than male designers, and even fewer female designers designing menswear. What are your thoughts on that?
15. What have been the most memorable reactions to your work? Both positive and perhaps also negative?
16. Have you found that there are demands associated with your commercial and critical success so far that have in any way influenced your process or practice?
17. The act of a male designer putting women in suits is mostly described as empowering. Contrasting that, there is a pattern of unconventional menswear being described as vulnerable. You have also described your models as looking vulnerable in your designs. Could you speak to why that is your perception, and maybe speculate as to why that seems to be the case across the board?

## Interview Yvonne Lim – Womenswear Designer

### Warm-Up Questions:

1. Why fashion? What was it that initially drew you in?
2. How did you personally experience fashion growing up and in early adolescence? Did you have any favourite designers?
3. What are your favourite items of clothing that you own? Why are they your favourite?
4. From what I understand, you first completed a Bachelor's degree in Maths and Economics from the London School of Economics, and then made the professional shift towards fashion. How and why did you decide to pursue fashion as a career instead of economics?

### Practice:

5. You did your Associate's degree at Parsons and completed internships at Suno and Marc by Marc Jacobs. How did these experiences influence you as a designer and how did they contribute to the decision to pursue a MA degree at RCA?
6. How did you arrive at the concept of your graduate collection at RCA? What made you realise that this was what you needed/wanted to do?
7. You named your graduate collection "Soft Power", and mention that it essentially means power and femininity. What was your thought process behind that?
8. Why use the word "soft" to describe your concept/collection?
9. The focus is very much on women at work and you state that there is nothing more powerful than women at work. Why do you think that? What's your reasoning behind that?

10. We can see it a bit more often in mainstream fashion now, but it's still a rarity, to use what is called 'mature models'. Why was it important to you and to your concept to use mature models and go against the norm with the casting?
11. Part of that "women at work" concept was the option to customise some of the items. Why was that important to you, why did you feature that in the collection?
12. You also added a "smart scent", as well as functional jewellery. Why was this holistic approach important to you? Why did you want to "cover all bases"?

Experience:

13. What have been the most memorable reactions to your work so far? Both positive and perhaps also negative?
14. How do you respond to your own designs? Do you feel connected to the collection or is it something that you feel does not directly relate to you?
15. When you first got into fashion, what were the overall reactions from your community, friends and family, with regards to this career choice?
16. Generally speaking, what is your favourite thing about fashion? What is your least favourite thing?
17. How do you feel about the state of the industry? Is it an industry you feel comfortable in, and why/why not?
18. If there is one thing you could change about the industry, what would it be?
19. Have you found that there are demands associated with gaining recognition in the industry that have in any way influenced your process or practice?
20. There's still a smaller number of female designers designing womenswear than male designers, and the spotlight remains mostly on male designers. For example, 4 out of 5 nominees for womenswear designer of the year are men. What are your thoughts on that?
21. There are a lot of rules in menswear, but an "everything goes" mentality in womenswear that I feel you are trying to counteract with your designs. What do you think of that contrast between mens- and womenswear?
22. And perhaps an odd question, by why do you design for women?

## Interview Sissel Karneskög – Non-Binary Designer

### Warm-Up Questions:

1. Why fashion? What was it that initially drew you in?
2. How did you first consciously think about it and how did you decide to pursue it as a career?
3. How did you personally experience fashion growing up and in early adolescence?
4. How and why did you decide to pursue it as a career?

### Practice:

5. When you're at the start of a new project or collection, how do you start? What are the first couple of steps of your process?
6. You mention in an interview that you believe in a future of collaboration. How is that manifested in your process right now? How would you like collaboration to evolve in the future with regards to your own practice and fashion in general?
7. You've described your designs as humanwear. With most of fashion and culture still operating in a binary way, how do you navigate that and what are your methods of subverting that system?
8. How do you avoid stereotypes or common tropes? For example, there is the typical 'unisex' look that is essentially athleisure or streetwear. Another prominent trope that is hailed as nonbinary is women in suits or men in skirts.
9. What is important to you with regards to your work and process? What do you value most when it comes to your research?
10. What are immediate reactions you look for and what are some long term goals of yours?
11. What are important elements of your practice besides clothes?
12. Have you noticed any differences between who reacts how to your designs?

13. In an ideal world, how would you like your clothes to be modelled and displayed?

Experience:

14. I interviewed the curator of an exhibition called “Gender-Bending Fashion” who showed historical fashion but also contemporary designers, and she mentioned that she had trouble finding female designers, or rather non-male designers that were designing unisex/non-binary fashion. Is that something you have noticed as well? What are your thoughts on that?

15. Have you ever felt pressure from tutors/teachers or industry to ‘pick one side’?

16. What have been the most memorable reactions to your work? Both positive and perhaps also negative?

17. Have you found that there are demands associated with recognition and success that could in any way influenced your process or practice?

18. You mentioned in your interview with Coeval that you don’t like to think in terms of trends. So what do you make of the industry oftentimes treating real substantive issues – such as sexuality, gender, race etc. – as trends? What do you think could be done to change that mentality?

19. In the same interview you say that you view fashion as a network. Could you elaborate on that? Is that how you would define fashion?

20. Some people would argue that fashion is inherently capitalist, and therefore patriarchal. Do you agree with that view? If yes/no, why?

21. Why do you think people find it still hard to think of clothes as something that can be ungendered?

22. What are things that you would like to see happen in fashion overall? Both as a designer and also as a consumer?

Warm-Up Questions:

1. Why fashion? What was it that initially drew you in?
2. What is your favourite thing about fashion? What is your least favourite thing about it?
3. How did you personally experience fashion growing up and in early adolescence?
4. How and why did you decide to pursue it as a career?
5. How did you two meet and how did your professional partnership develop?

Practice:

6. What made you decide to create your own brand? Was it more gradual or is there a moment that you remember responding to “that’s it, we’re going to do our own thing”?
7. When you first started out, how did you settle on the look of the brand? What was the main inspiration behind your brand language?
8. How would you describe your design process? What feeds into the inspiration for new collections?
9. On your brand Instagram, photographs of your designs are interspersed with pictures of mostly modern and surrealist art and architecture. Can you speak to how they 1) provide inspiration and 2) contribute to the design language of Caves Collect?
10. One might say the overall aesthetic of your brand is more French than Australian. What’s your interpretation of that assessment? Why do you think some people may see it that way?

Experience:

11. When you first started your brand, what were the overall reactions from friends/family and your community/first consumers?
12. There's still a smaller number of female designers designing womenswear than male designers, according to a recent Business of Fashion survey an average of 40-45%. What are your thoughts on that?
13. As females designers, how important do you think it is for women to design clothes for women, and how important do you think it is for women to be creative leaders in general?
14. Apart from sustainability, what are some other reasons why you have designed to stay local in terms of production?
15. Even though you have been around for a few years now, you seem to have resisted the urge to expand on your core products. Was that a conscious decision and if yes, what is the reasoning behind it?
16. Caves Collect is – as of now – only available to purchase via your own website, while other small brands often rely on bigger fashion retailers to gain more exposure. Is there a particular reason why you choose to do it that way?
17. Have you found that there are demands associated with your commercial and critical success so far that have in any way influenced your process or practice?
18. How do you feel about the general state of the fashion industry and moreover, how do you feel about the way women are represented in it?
19. Speaking to your overall creative process and output, how important is it to retain a certain degree of control over the image of your brand and the way your designs are marketed to a wider audience?
20. What have been the most memorable reactions to your work? Both positive and perhaps also negative?



## II. Interview Moments

Interviewee		Position	Process	Content	Chapter/Category
Michelle Finamore	“there are so many wrong patriarchal ideas of women’s places in society.”	x			1/2
	“it’s all very much related to patriarchal modes of thinking”	x			1/2
	“Addressing the history as well as the contemporary moment.”		x		2/5
	“I embraced this idea of femininity. And it really didn’t strike me as even being an issue until I started becoming a scholar.”	x			1/1
	“I haven’t even thought about if there are women designers in here.”	x			1/1
	“contemporary story running down the middle (...) satellite histories...”			x	3/1
	“disruption section”			x	3/1
	“...get real lived experience of contemporary people”		x		2/3
“when I look back more critically over fashion history and you think about who is doing the interpreting and who was writing the textbooks and the histories and what that perspective is, you realise that you’re really missing out communities.”	x				1/1

	“I realised, oh my gosh, every single person I have in this exhibition is white.”	x			1/1
	“the more you talk to people and the bigger the perspective, the more you realise that there are certain things that people would be looking for in an exhibition”		x		2/1
	“...thinking about a men’s tailoring exhibition and one of the reasons I wanted to do (it) is because there hadn’t really been that many exhibitions on that in fashion. There is this standard idea that it doesn’t change much.”	x			1/4
	“When I think about what fashion is, I think of it as garments, as clothing that responds to cyclical or seasonal change [...], it reflect so broadly what is happening culturally, philosophically and economically.”	x			1/5
Bianca Saunders	“We were trying to get him to wear these shorts and he was just like, ‘nah, I can’t wear that. I can’t be seen wearing that. It makes me feel really uncomfortable’.”			x	3/2
	“...it’s just made me understand my role in it.”	x			1/2
	“...women are having these conversations with men, but not a lot of men are actually having this		x		2/1

conversation amongst themselves.”				
“...I picked men that would get questioned about it more, so it would be easier to talk about it.”		x		2/3
“I want it to be a balanced conversation.”		x		2/2
“...men who are designing women’s clothes, it’s not questioned as much, nobody really focuses on what kind of content they’re trying to portray. [...] everyone is sort of used to seeing men designing womenswear.”	x			
“...asking about their experience, I guess sexuality just comes into it.”		x		2/1
“I really wanted to show that in-between.”			x	3/2
“Would men wear clothes that have the name Bianca Saunders on them?”	x			1/2
“My husband would never buy clothes designed by a woman’.”			x	3/2
“...it was constantly having to explain myself to these people [...]. I didn’t see myself as important in fashion.”	x			1/1
“...the people I’m trying to explain in my work were being marginalised.”	x			1/1
“Menswear is all about accessibility.”	x			1/4

	“With womenswear [...] anything goes.”	x			1/4
	“...there are a lot more rules in menswear. [...] These are things you don’t really think about as much in womenswear.”	x			1/4
	“Well, I don’t really wear men’s clothing.”	x			1/3
	“I started with womenswear. I think it’s almost a natural thing. As soon as you start in fashion, you make womenswear.”	x			1/2
	“...I guess just looking through fashion magazines.”		x		2/4
Yvonne Lim	“...I never even considered menswear. [...] It’s very basic and things can’t really be too different. Whereas womenswear, you can be really creative.”	x			1/4
	“I think it’s from our exposure to fashion. It’s so women-focused.”	x			1/2
	“...’there’s rules about where things go, about colours’, whereas with womenswear [...], they can be so different. [...] menswear [...] – it’s about someone who wants to be fuss-free. [...] women are much more used to it.”	x			1/4
	“Where I work there are plenty of women. [...] But it is true that somehow the men get a lot of the spotlight.”	x			1/6
	“A lot of fashion designers I admire happen to be women. I	x			1/6

think male designers want women to look sexy, whereas women designers want garments to be functional and something women feel comfortable in.”				
“...this is one of the first collections I Made that I really feel I would wear myself.”			x	3/3
“...aesthetically beautiful but still functional.”			x	3/3
“...the clothes can look kind of commercial but the way I styled them, for example the coat comes with a strap so you sling it across and you don’t have to carry it.”			x	3/3
“...taking traditional tailoring and putting it into a woman’s context. The pockets are in the chest. And when women have boobs it just doesn’t work. [...] I really wanted to think about all these minor details.”		x		2/2
“I looked at women in the tech industry [...], it’s very male-dominated. So women working in this industry can get quite confused about what they should wear.”		x		2/3
“The typical model does not really represent the woman I want to dress.”		x		2/3
“‘Soft Power’ is a term [...] associated with feminine			x	3/3

	attributes, [...] less aggressive and [...] more caring and emotional. [...] A woman's wardrobe can be more feminine and softer than a man's but still emulate power."				
	"...even as a designer, I'm just making things to satisfy myself, and I'm not thinking about the woman that's wearing it."	x			1/1
	"...I just started interviewing people. Basically all my friends are working in the corporate world. [...] I was trying to find out what they wear to work and how they feel the way they dress affects their work experience."		x		2/1
	"...I was basing my research on working women, because she's the one with purpose and ambition, and how – as a designer – I can empower her."		x		2/3
	"...I was really into Simone Rocha and this ultra-femininity, but then I was thinking, is it really empowering women or is it doing the opposite?"	x			1/1
	"[Fashion] seemed like something out of my reach. I didn't think I could do it."	x			1/1
	"I have a lot of shoes. [...] Somehow it makes more sense to me. [...] I guess it's practical."	x			1/3

	<p>“...these ten-page editorials by Grace Coddington. [...] for most people our age that was the starting point of our experience.”</p>			x		2/4
	<p>“...looking at Vogue magazines. [...] Galliano and other ‘classic’ Vogue designers. [...] I even remember Teen Vogue.”</p>			x		2/4
	<p>“[Fashion] becomes part of a person’s personality, it just becomes part of them.”</p>		x			1/5
Sissel Karneskøg	<p>“I feel that clothing and fashion is the most effective tool in order to express ourselves. I have always played around with how I dress, and also when it comes to gender identity, it’s a very binary platform. So even with me playing around with my identity, with femininity and masculinity, all of that stuff, it is easily broken down within fashion.”</p>		x			1/5
	<p>“[...]it’s for everyone to use to express themselves and for others to interact with, in a sense. And it is all something we really take for granted. Everyone wears clothes.”</p>		x			1/5
	<p>“It can be a social tool, it can be a</p>		x			1/5

	costume within different contexts, because we are sorted into groups of people, into boxes, and how you can customise yourself in order to play in these boxes.”				
	“Some designers still have great storytelling to them, but mainly fashion has become fast-fashion, this over-consumerist thing.”	x			1/5
	“She picked it out and thought of me. I just loved that. That she could find something so randomly and be like “This is for Sissel”. It’s the t-shirt I wear every day, completely falling apart, but it’s this thing like picking someone flowers, it’s very thoughtful.”	x			1/3
	“I would say the first step is react. I use social media a lot as a research method. Since I am following a lot of people who come from the same community as myself, I look what discussions are going on about specific topics”		x		2/1
	“But for me, I react to something, I reflect, then I tend to do a lot of illustration and me that is to get into my mindset, that geeky side of myself, to		x		2/1



	kind of create my own narrative, my own world.”				
	“Like you said earlier, with the patriarchy, it’s the same in fashion when it comes to capitalising on queer bodies. That happens all the time. And oftentimes it is the male top of the hierarchy who are capitalising on queer bodies.”	x			1/2
	“I think one could be to show real identities that are objectified, not just using models but asking “Who are these people?” Because fashion is moving so fast and time is an absolute luxury for us.”		x		2/2
	“But I think also with fashion, and actually for me it is important that I use this platform that I am on in order to tell my story. [...]For me it is important to tell my story and show myself. Not just stay behind the curtain and make a cool collection.”			x	3/4
	“[...]when it comes to the language around masculinity and femininity, that needs to evolve and move away from genitalia. Because I feel that it should be fine for everyone to			x	3/4

	wear a dress, for everyone to wear something that is more connected to their masculine body now. So it's our social connections to these garments that need to evolve. And in all contexts."				
	"[...]I think it's important how I communicate the topics in order to include listeners, even those who are not part of my community."		x		2/2
	"If I can create a smile on someone's face, that's amazing. And also create an 'aha' moment."			x	3/4
	"Now I am experiencing this moment in this time, and trying to utilise this time as much as possible."	x			1/1
	"[...]I worked hard to get here, so I'm going to be a bit self-absorbed and use this time for myself."	x			1/1
	"When it comes to models, for me, I work with people from my community that will understand. There was one time, because of a panicky moment when I had a cisgender straight male model, and he was wearing a jumpsuit. Just a normal jumpsuit, nothing to it, but he was weirded out by		x		2/3

	it. I think that was also connected to me and what my work said. It became a whole thing.”				
	“When it comes to the queer community, the gay man has been socially accepted for a very long time. He has been the comical relief in movies, for example as the funny hairdresser. Especially in fashion he has been accepted, he was the first queer that was able to step into that world. I don’t even know any lesbian designers.”	x			1/6
	“That is also one of the reasons why I feel it is really important to display all of myself, and that I feel the actual power I have being here.”		x		2/2
	“It’s kind of funny that the cisgender straight male is celebrated when they are doing fashion, they have been doing it for such a long time.”	x			1/6
	“So it’s a matter of how we speak about these things.”		x		2/2
	“I think when it comes to queer fashion, it has a tendency to be loud, and be very theatrical and costume-y, which is	x			1/3

	<p>lovely, but is there something else I can do? And I felt like that bit kind of changed my view on my work and I started to analyse how I actually dress and what I dress myself in. It's like t-shirt and jeans. It started to become more about the internal body than the external, which is garments."</p>				
	<p>"We need to find a way to reach further out, because if you find someone outside of the fashion context and they see the stuff we're making here, they will not understand it."</p>		x		2/2
	<p>"For the moment fashion is something that can't be defined. It is something that is being redefined."</p>			x	3/4
	<p>"Now there are so many designers and so many designers that aren't telling stories, that aren't reflecting on what's going on in the world. They're just making stuff."</p>		x		2/5
	<p><del>"So it would be more of a place to express yourself and your identity, just things you are attracted to and feel attractive in."</del></p>			✕	3/4
	<p><del>"I'd like people to get why I don't enjoy the binary and the rules</del></p>			✕	3/4

	<p><del>around the binary. That needs to disappear, not the gender binary concept in itself, but binary being a ruling part of the world.</del></p>				
	<p>“Some people even refuse to call me by my own pronouns, because they don’t agree with it, so it’s those things: how we use language and how we respect others and how we communicate with others. It’s that that needs to change.”</p>		x		2/2
Caves Collect	<p>I just love how functional it is [...] I wanted to make something that had more purpose.</p>	x			1/1
	<p>Sarah and I would just chat about design and what we were excited about because I found RMIT really frustrating.</p>	x			1/1
	<p>[...] it felt like we were post-rationalising [...] I’m quite inspired by menswear, tailoring, things like that, and at RMIT I felt like I was really pushed to be conceptual and avant-garde in a way. It was almost frowned upon, in a way, to make wearable clothes.</p>	x			1/1
	<p>I ended up doing a really conceptual project in my final year, in my fourth</p>	x			1/1

year, just because I had to, to get good marks. Like, in all honesty, that's why I did it. [...] I felt forced to do that to get a good mark.				
[...] that's what it felt like at RMIT. I found that quite frustrating [...]. So I'd sit on the porch with Sarah and talk about what I was excited about and passionate about.	x			1/1
[...] nothing really aligned with what I wanted to do creatively either. I was just feeling really disheartened.	x			1/1
Naturally, becoming a teenager, I was looking for things to wear and to express myself [...] I remember thinking, oh this is a way I can show people my personality and experiment with it, and that was just so much fun.	x			1/3
I'd always chop things up and adapt them.		x		1/3
I think I was always a bit worried about not being able to disassociate and taking everyone's hardships on me, because I'm a pretty empathetic person.		x		2/2
It evolved pretty organically, actually [...] I think just starting with one thing and		x		2/1

	then just seeing what worked, what feedback we were getting				
	Functional, that was very important.		x		2/1
	we really loved the idea – because everyone is so nuanced in their own body but there are no standards, so we realised – we wanted to create a garment that you could customise to your own body, especially as it fluctuates. Even if you get an item customised for your own body, your body doesn't stay the same, it changes over time. So I think we were excited about the idea of that – it'll always fit you perfectly	x			2/2
	Sarah and I – Caves is very much where we meet in the middle of our aesthetics.	x			2/1
	We're probably still finessing our process		x		2/1
	We're trying to give each other more freedom. [...] Because we can sometimes feel a bit suffocated by each other [...] I'll be working on something that would be flattering to my body type but not flattering to her body type, because it's a bit different to mine. [...] different things actually suit us, so		x		2/3

	we're trying to give each other a bit more freedom to own a design				
	I think designing for yourself is instinctual as well, like it's so easy and it feels so natural to design like that. It's hard I think when you're trying to imagine what it would feel like, not having experienced it, to have a proper opinion on it.		x		2/2
	you're probably right, I've never thought about it so specifically, but yeah, it probably was frowned upon, now that you say it, to design for yourself. But that's a hundred percent what we're doing now. [...]you have to try it on. [...] if you are not going to feel good wearing it, then chances are, other people won't either.		x		2/2
	Her and our style. And I guess we're trying to create classic, timeless pieces that will stand the test of time [...] Similar to us designing for ourselves, we also just post things that we like, instead of it maybe being so intentional.		x		2/5
	that's been a huge process and my husband, he's been		x		2/3



	<p>developing his own personal style in conjunction with Caves. It's really been a very collaborative project that we've been finessing a lot,</p>				
	<p>I think it's so interesting as well that we're so cluttered with pictures of perfect people, especially in the fashion industry, that it's maybe refreshing for people to see that? [...] we use some agencies who've got people who wouldn't necessarily get into these classic agencies. It's more like real people casting. But we do get emails from customers wanting to see the garments on even realer – not necessarily real – but more diverse body shapes.</p>			x	3/1
	<p>we also love the attitude of our models not being too posed, which is maybe also a European, French thing [...] Non-chalante. [...] She has a very masculine but elegant beauty, very poised and non-chalante, doesn't take herself too seriously, had that gentlewoman kinda vibe.</p>			x	3/1

	<p>I think my husband Pete is very aware of the male gaze and he feels like he really has a feminine side. So he really tries to bring that out, if that makes sense.</p>			x	3/1
	<p>SR: I think as a designer I always find it good to be aware of things and think about the change in designs, and I think it must be hard for men to know the experience of that? There would be none of that, so it would just be like, from feedback I guess, but not from feeling it. I've not really experienced that process or worn any clothes designed by men. I don't really know, but I think it would be hard to do it. I don't know what the process would be.</p> <p>JH: We're really passionate about designing clothes that women feel empowered in and feel confident wearing, and feel comfortable. [...] You can rely on those things and they adhere to your personal style that you've developed and that articulate who you are and how you want to be represented.</p>	x			<p>2/2</p> <p>3/1</p>

	<p>We were also quite worried about having our products marketed for us. [...]  We wanted to control that, in a way, instead of giving that to someone else. [...]  And articulating it in a way that wasn't in sync with what we were trying to do. We're very controlling people, basically.  [...] Garmentory did actually photograph the stuff that we sent them in a totally different way and it wasn't in sync with the brand and it was a bit, I don't know, damaging in a way, I guess, of this message we're trying to put out.</p>			x	3/2
	<p>we kind of would have to figure that out if we'd keep expanding. And I guess, make the brand go in a bit of a different direction than we'd ideally want it [...]  maybe we just want to stay really small and humble and live this simple life. [...]  I mean you can try and build it with more money, but I think we just realised we don't need it, and we don't really want the stress, we're happy.</p>			x	3/3

	<p>we don't want to be super wealthy people. We don't actually want that from life.</p> <p>SR: We've been getting pretty deep on our personal life philosophies lately, I think, and we want to be minimal in our lives as well and not necessarily buy into the whole bigger is better idea. I think we're trying to refrain from buying into that.</p> <p>JH: That's very much the message of the brand, to counter this whole, get the biggest house and the highest paying job, and we're trying to push against that a bit.</p>			x	3/3
	<p>But we've pretty much been able to remain true to our ethos and beliefs, I'd say.</p>			x	3/3
	<p>I think just the general reaction of women feeling really good in our clothes [...] they've never been able to find pants that fit them, that's been really rewarding. So yeah, just women feeling good in our clothes or people saying, oh I wish I could just live in Caves [...]</p> <p>For us seeing people wear it [...]</p>			x	3/3

	<p>then this woman walked by and she's wearing one of our backpacks. Which is always really nice [...] It's the best thing, seeing someone wear our stuff.</p>				
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### III. Consent Forms



### Participant Project Information & Consent Form

(One signed copy of this form should be retained by the Participant and one copy by the Project Researcher)

*How does contemporary Fashion contribute to the (dis)Illusion of Gender?*

For further information  
Supervisor:  
*Dr. Catherine Dormor*  
*catherine.dormor@rca.ac.uk*

18.03.2019

Dear Potential Participant,

I am Teresa Kroenung, a research student in the Fashion & Textiles department at the Royal College of Art. As part of my studies, I am conducting a research project entitled "How does contemporary Fashion contribute to the (dis)Illusion of Gender?". You are invited to take part in this research project which seeks to investigate the ways contemporary fashion continues to shape how the portrayal of masculine-feminine gender binary is constructed, displayed and perceived in society.

If you consent to participate, this will involve:

- An audio-recorded interview, of which you will receive the transcript for your approval
- You being named as an interviewee in my PhD thesis
- The information gained/exchanged in the interview will exclusively be used in my PhD thesis and any use beyond that will only occur if you give explicit consent to do so

Participation is entirely voluntary. You can withdraw at any time up to the point of publication and there will be no disadvantage if you decide not to complete the study. All information collected will be confidential. All information gathered will be stored securely and once the information has been analysed all individual information will be destroyed.


Research Office: Royal College of Art, Kensington Gore, London SW7 2EU  
t +44 (0)20 7590 4126 f +44 (0)20 7590 4542 [research@rca.ac.uk](mailto:research@rca.ac.uk) [www.rca.ac.uk/research](http://www.rca.ac.uk/research)

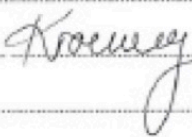
If you have any concerns or would like to know the outcome of this project, please contact my supervisor Dr. Catherine Dormor at the above address.

Thank you for your interest.

I (please print) Michelle Finamore have read the information above and all queries have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to voluntarily participate in this research and give my consent freely. I understand that I can withdraw my participation from the project up to the point of publication, without penalty, and do not have to give any reason for withdrawing.

I understand that all information gathered will be stored securely, and my opinions will be accurately represented. Any data in which I can be clearly identified will be used in the public domain only with my consent.

Participant Signature: 

Researcher Signature: 

Date: 18.03.2019

**Complaints Procedure:**

This project follows the guidelines laid out by the Royal College of Art Research Ethics Policy.

If you have any questions, please speak with the researcher. If you have any concerns or a complaint about the manner in which this research is conducted, please contact the RCA Research Ethics Committee by emailing [ethics@rca.ac.uk](mailto:ethics@rca.ac.uk) or by sending a letter addressed to:

The Research Ethics Committee  
Royal College of Art  
Kensington Gore  
London  
SW7 2EU





### Participant Project Information & Consent Form

(One signed copy of this form should be retained by the Participant and one copy by the Project Researcher)

For further information

Supervisors:

Dr. Catherine Dornor

[catherine.dornor@rca.ac.uk](mailto:catherine.dornor@rca.ac.uk)

Zowie Broach

[zowie.broach@rca.ac.uk](mailto:zowie.broach@rca.ac.uk)

24.09.2019

Dear Potential Participant,

I am Teresa Kroening, a research student in the Fashion & Textiles department at the Royal College of Art. As part of my studies, I am conducting a research project entitled "In Her Clothes - Interpreting and Recontextualising Helen Grund's Methods in Order to Analyse The Role of Contemporary Female Fashion Designer". You are invited to take part in this research project which seeks to investigate the role and experience of contemporary female fashion designers in the fashion industry.

If you consent to participate, this will involve:

- An audio-recorded interview, of which you will receive the transcript for your approval
- You being named as an interviewee in my PhD thesis
- The information gained/exchanged in the interview will exclusively be used in my PhD thesis and any use beyond that will only occur if you give explicit consent to do so

Participation is entirely voluntary. You can withdraw at any time up to the point of publication and there will be no disadvantage if you decide not to complete the study. All information collected will be confidential. All information gathered will be stored securely and once the information has been analysed all individual information will be destroyed.

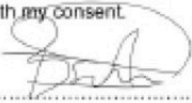
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If you have any concerns or would like to know the outcome of this project, please contact my supervisors Dr. Catherine Dormor or Zowie Broach at the above address.

Thank you for your interest.

I (please print) ..... Bianca Saunders..... have read the information above and all queries have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to voluntarily participate in this research and give my consent freely. I understand that I can withdraw my participation from the project up to the point of publication, without penalty, and do not have to give any reason for withdrawing.

I understand that all information gathered will be stored securely, and my opinions will be accurately represented. Any data in which I can be clearly identified will be used in the public domain only with my consent.

Participant Signature.....  .....

Researcher  Signature.....

.....

Date: ...24.09.2019.....

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Royal College of Art

**RESEARCH &  
INNOVATION**

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For further information

Supervisors:

Dr. Catherine Dornor

[catherine.dornor@rca.ac.uk](mailto:catherine.dornor@rca.ac.uk)

Zowie Broach

[zowie.broach@rca.ac.uk](mailto:zowie.broach@rca.ac.uk)

10.10.2019

Dear Potential Participant,

I am Teresa Kroening, a research student in the Fashion & Textiles department at the Royal College of Art. As part of my studies, I am conducting a research project entitled "In Her Clothes - Interpreting and Recontextualising Helen Grund's Methods in Order to Analyse The Role of Contemporary Female Fashion Designer". You are invited to take part in this research project which seeks to investigate the role and experience of contemporary female fashion designers in the fashion industry.

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Thank you for your interest.

<p>I (please print) <u>YI WEN LIM</u>..... have read the information above and all queries have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to voluntarily participate in this research and give my consent freely. I understand that I can withdraw my participation from the project up to the point of publication, without penalty, and do not have to give any reason for withdrawing.</p> <p>I understand that all information gathered will be stored securely, and my opinions will be accurately represented. Any data in which I can be clearly identified will be used in the public domain only with my consent.</p>	
Participant Signature.....	
Researcher	 Signature.....
Date: ...10.10.2019.....	

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#### Participant Project Information & Consent Form

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For further information

Supervisors:

Dr. Catherine Dormor

[catherine.dormor@rca.ac.uk](mailto:catherine.dormor@rca.ac.uk)

Zowie Broach

[zowie.broach@rca.ac.uk](mailto:zowie.broach@rca.ac.uk)

06.12.2019

Dear Potential Participant,

I am Teresa Kroening, a research student in the Fashion & Textiles department at the Royal College of Art. As part of my studies, I am conducting a research project entitled "In Her Clothes - Interpreting and Recontextualising Helen Grund's Methods in Order to Analyse The Role of Contemporary Female Fashion Designer". You are invited to take part in this research project which seeks to investigate the role and experience of contemporary female fashion designers in the fashion industry.

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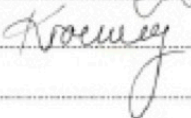
supervisors Dr. Catherine Dormor or Zowie Broach at the above address.

Thank you for your interest.

I (please print) Sissel Kameskeg have read the information above and all queries have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to voluntarily participate in this research and give my consent freely. I understand that I can withdraw my participation from the project up to the point of publication, without penalty, and do not have to give any reason for withdrawing.

I understand that all information gathered will be stored securely, and my opinions will be accurately represented. Any data in which I can be clearly identified will be used in the public domain only with my consent.

Participant Signature: 

Researcher Signature: 

Date: 06.12.2019

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SW7 2EU



Royal College of Art

# RESEARCH & INNOVATION

## Participant Project Information & Consent Form

(One signed copy of this form should be retained by the Participant and one copy by the Project Researcher)

For further information

Supervisor:

Dr. Catherine Dornier

Zoeve Brauch

[catherine.dornier@rca.ac.uk](mailto:catherine.dornier@rca.ac.uk)

[zoeve.brauch@rca.ac.uk](mailto:zoeve.brauch@rca.ac.uk)

20.10.2019

Dear Potential Participant,

I am Tereza Kozmang, a research student in the Fashion & Textiles department at the Royal College of Art. As part of my studies, I am conducting a research project entitled "In Her Clothes - Incorporating and Recontextualising Helen Grand's Methods in Order to Analyse The Role of Contemporary Female Fashion Designer". You are invited to take part in this research project which seeks to investigate the role and experience of contemporary female fashion designers in the fashion industry.

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If you have any concerns or would like to know the outcome of this project, please contact my supervisors Dr. Catherine Dornier or Zoeve Brauch at the above address.

Thank you for your interest.

I (please print) SARAH J. QUINN have read the information above and all queries have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to voluntarily participate in this research and give my consent freely. I understand that I can withdraw my participation from the project up to the point of publication, without penalty, and do not have to give any reason for withdrawing.

I understand that all information gathered will be stored securely, and my opinions will be accurately



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Participant Signature: *[Handwritten Signature]*

Researcher Signature: *[Handwritten Signature]*

Date: 30.10.2019

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Supervisors:

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*Zowie Broach*  
[zowie.broach@rca.ac.uk](mailto:zowie.broach@rca.ac.uk)

10.10.2019

Dear Potential Participant,

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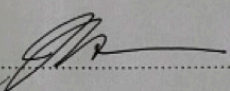
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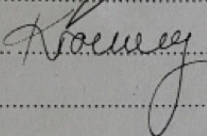
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Participant Signature..... 

Researcher Signature..... 

Date: ...10.10.2019.....

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