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**MA thesis
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The Closet

*An ethnological inquiry into the daily repetitive activity
of clothing the body*

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Supervisor: Dr. Valdimar Tr. Hafstein
June, 2024

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To my mother who educated me in “clothing my body”

The Closet: An ethnological inquiry into the daily repetitive activity of clothing the body

This thesis counts as 60 credits towards an MA degree in Folkloristics/Ethnology in the Faculty of Sociology, Anthropology and Folkloristic, University of Iceland, School of Social Sciences,

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Reykjavík, Iceland, 2024

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Steinunn Viðar Sigurðardóttir

Abstract

Clothing is more than just fabric and stitches; it reflects our identity, articulates our origin, and serves as a compass for navigating the world with our clothed bodies. Our closets, where we keep our clothing, are uniquely valued, like keys that unlock parts of our personality. The closet, the most private and personal space, guards the most intimate part of our existence, our second skin; it serves as a repository where we store the costumes for the everyday theatre of our lives. The impact of the simple daily habit of clothing one's body is profound and should not be overlooked. It is a routine that begins in early childhood and persists throughout our lives.

This study sheds light on the meaning and value of clothing; it helps to understand how clothing influences and reflects personal identity. The sensory dimension, often neglected yet vital in our engagement with clothing, is a primary focus. Wearing clothing transcends mere visual perception; it involves internal experiences like comfort, tactile sensations, and the overall feel of the garment. The aim is to capture and break down into particles the entire process of clothing one's body, to analyze these elements and discuss the influence that clothing has on the individual; hence, the study's multifaceted results.

This thesis is in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an MA degree in Folkloristics/Ethnology at the University of Iceland and is for 60 ECTS credits. It is based in the qualitative research tradition and builds on in-depth interviews, objective coding, and field notes. The thesis also incorporates sensory ethnography, a method that relates sensory data to emotions and feelings within clothing, providing a unique perspective on the topic.

The data for this study was collected through interviews with a carefully selected group of ten high-profile figures within the high fashion industry in New York City. Their extensive experience and knowledge uniquely position them to provide insight into the cultural and social phenomenon known as the “fashion system”. This system encompasses not just the business aspect of

fashion but also the craft, design, art, production and consumption of fashion. The interviewees' perspectives on everyday dressing and clothes are highly reflexive and have undergone a rigorous editing process as a part of their professional identities, experience, and knowledge. Thus, they offer thoughtful perspectives and highlight that like discipline of Ethnology, the every day is everywhere.

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Introduction

1.0 The closet

The closet, wardrobe, dresser, trunk, cupboard, and set of drawers are all containers that provide an enclosed space where clothing is kept: a freestanding wardrobe on a floor, a built-in closet, a walk-in closet, a tiny space with curtains, an open freestanding clothing rack or just a simple drawer. In the Western world today, a few closets dominate most homes. One is for coats and outerwear and is in the vicinity of the front door of an apartment or house. The others store the rest of the clothes for the individuals that live there, usually conveniently located in or near the bedroom or the bathroom. It is frequently visited by those who sleep in the nearby quarters. The size and layouts, in many cases, are chosen by individuals who spend time and money finding the best closet for their needs. The container that holds the clothing is an important place for the individual; the ostensible purpose is to store his clothing, but on closer look it is also where the actors of daily life create the visual script for their costumes and prepare their gender, age, and class-based roles for the social performance of everyday life. The lifeless pieces of clothing kept behind closed doors hold many things that the individual wants to keep private and away from the viewing world. The space contains our values, exhibits structure and chaos, keeps our laziness and our diligence and it retains the memories of our lives. The space holds our moral compass. It retains the consumption of the keepers, and in many cases, people want to keep that consumption out of view. Most people visit their clothing space at least twice a day in order to get dressed or undressed. They open it up to put on or to take off the costume for the theatre of the quotidian called “daily life”.

The word “wardrobe” has an interesting history within the English language. The word is first recorded during the 17th century and referred to a place where personal items were stored; later, its meaning evolved and it came to be commonly associated with furniture used for clothing. Clothing was divided into items that lay flat and those that hung on a hook. It is not easy to find written records on the wardrobe, or the “closet” as it is called today, since

little was written on this subject between 1600-1900. In the 19th century, mass production of clothing began with the adoption of standard-sizing garments, and the public was able to buy more pieces of clothing. The “closet” became the correct word to designate this space. It was not until the second half of the 20th century, however, that the mystery of this space became a topic of study and caught the attention of those who produced cabinets.

The daily ritual of visiting the closet space is an integral part of everyday life. The closet primarily serves a practical purpose, mainly for storing clothing. Our connection with the closet is often functional, revolving around organisation and storage. As an unwavering fixture in our lives, the closet endures through transitions and relocations, steadfastly accompanying individuals wherever they may roam. It stands as a dependable companion, offering familiarity and stability amidst life's changes. However, there is more to the closet than just the functional part. Closets hold a secret of our true face, a mirror of our self. There are closets that are highly organized and closets that are packed from floor to ceiling. They can replicate modern minimalism, or they can create a river of clothes with overflow, where the stream falls onto the floor or onto nearby furniture. The closet situated in the home may not be available to those who do not reside there. If the closet is shared with another person or individual, conflicts may arise over organization as well as the ownership of a piece of clothing, much as personalities may clash over other parts of the apartment or house. We may develop emotional attachments to items within the closet; some pieces are favoured and others disfavoured. Multi-faceted sensoriality plays an intricate part when individuals find the pieces of clothing within their closet for everyday use. The closet can offer both security and privacy, serving as a metaphor for the hidden identity of individuals – as in the phrase “to come out of the closet”. In essence, the connection between individuals and their closets involves both a practical use and deeper symbolic meaning, interwoven with most other aspects of their everyday lives and selves.

1.1 The background for the research

The background for my research is an ethnological approach to society and daily life, it is combined with travelling theories and concepts from various scholars and different disciplines, informed also by my education and the professional knowledge I gained working within the high fashion world. Clothing plays a big part in shaping people's role in their everyday lives and is therefore, an essential topic of study, with great potential to shed light on the relationship between the individual and the social, the physical, the personal, the cultural, the political, and the economic: on the structures and meanings within which everyday life unfolds.

1.2 The objectives and the research questions

There were numerous research questions to consider and narrowing them down to just a few proved to be a challenging task. The goal of the essay is to shed light on how the seemingly simple act of dressing oneself can unfold into a vast and complex process when examined and broken down into the level of particles. Who would have anticipated such intricacy within this simple everyday activity of clothing one's body? In this thesis, I seek to answer one overarching research question:

- What factors influence the selection of clothing that ultimately finds its way into our closets?

Moreover, I attempt along the way to seek answers to these four subordinated questions:

- What is the daily bodily ritual we repeat every single day?
- Does the closet have additional meaning, other than the functional use of storing clothing?
- Does clothing convey different meanings?
- Can clothing influence the inner sensations and emotions of the wearer?

While these questions may seem straightforward and the answers easily obtainable, they hide numerous complexities and nuances tightly knit in with our daily habits, as will become clear in the following chapters.

1.3 The method

Knowing the culture and etiquette of the city I had lived in for more than a decade, I went on a journey to New York with qualitative research methods as the basis for this study, along with my own professional experience, knowledge, and network, all neatly packed into a suitcase. Being far removed from the real fashion world has provided a reflective distance that has helped me look at fashion and clothing from a different vantage point. I went from being in the middle of the whirlwind working for well-known fashion houses in the most prominent fashion metropolises to being an onlooker from the periphery, living in a country with only a handful of fashion designers. I entered the academic world, which offered an opportunity to hone this reflexive and distant appreciation of fashion while constantly building on my own experience within it.

Qualitative research is a quest for meaning. It seeks to understand the complexity of situations without simplifying them. It is not designed to provide a single or simple answer but rather to bring out nuances, and it can be both critical and experiential. The goals of qualitative research vary, of course, but its principal features may be summarised through simple questions such as “why”, “where”, “when”, and “how”, but also “what”. As Braun and Clarke note in their book on *Successful Qualitative Research* that: “it captures the complexity, mess and, contradiction that characterizes the real world, yet allows us to make sense of *patterns* of meaning” (Braun & Clarke 2014, p. 10).

Through my in-depth interviews and their analysis, I gained a deeper and more systematic understanding of a topic that I already knew a great deal about, thus extending my knowledge on the subject of this thesis. Qualitative research involves not only the interviews for as Hennink, Hutter, Bailey, write in their book on *Qualitative Research Methods*, “Qualitative researchers also study people in their natural setting, to identify how their experience and

behaviour are shaped in the context of their lives” (Hennikan & Hutter & Bailey 2020, p. 10). Interviewing the interviewees in their natural home environment brought a sense of calm, allowing for more genuine and sometimes humorous conversation. As Braun and Clarke write, qualitative research “can be open ended, exploratory, organic, and flexible, it can evolve to suit the needs of the project” (Braun & Clarke 2013, p. 24). After the interviews had been conducted and transcribed, it was time for coding. In qualitative research, coding is the way to analyse, create and develop data interpretation, to highlight specific terms or words in a systematic process. The coding process involved identifying meaningful segments like place, position, and knowledge of the fashion industry. The coding process also provided a deeper understanding of the data by interpreting the meaning behind the codes and themes that emerge from the interviews. The qualitative research method was thus well suited for this study as “it allows us to retain a focus on people’s own framing and around issues, and their own terms of references, rather than having it pre-framed by the researcher” (Braun & Clarke 2013, p. 24). Qualitative research is like a journey, exploring topics with an open mind and flexible approach. It generates deep detailed insights, painting a vivid picture of the subject matter.

I considered the many trips to New York for all the interviews as fieldwork in themselves. Visiting the interviewees’ apartments and looking at their closets, I used my senses to feel and explore while they spoke about their clothing. In our conversation after the formal closure of the interviews, often spanning considerable amount of time, the interviewees disclosed additional information not covered in the formal interviews. This added depth to their answers and provided a richer understanding of their world. I met with other people in the fashion industry, visited bookstores to explore new and additional resources, and roamed endlessly around museum exhibitions.

I noted my thoughts and photographed what I experienced while visiting each interviewee, including photographing some personal closets. In the write-up of all the interviews, I included my field notes for each visit and each interviewee.

Ethnographic research methods are a crucial means to understand the world from the standpoint of people who are already embedded in social and cultural relations. It is a qualitative approach that affirms and embraces the diversity of cultures and perspectives and tries to figure out what the world looks and feels like from different standpoints and perspectives. In Sarah Pink's *Doing Sensory Ethnography* she explains that ethnography is a process that aims to present knowledge about culture and society through the ethnographer's own experience but "should aim to offer a version of ethnographers' experience of reality that is as loyal as possible to the context, negotiations, and intersubjectivities through which the knowledge was produced" (Pink 2009, p. 8). Pink's evaluation of the ethnographic approach inspired me to look to my own professional experience in the fashion industry as a dressed individual with a wardrobe of my own, and incorporate that experience in my research with the interviewees, rather than to discount it as might be encouraged in some other research traditions, where objectivity and neutrality are encouraged.

I have also sought inspiration from Sarah Pink's introduction to ethnography through a multi-sensorial approach. Sensory ethnography is one strand of qualitative research, a particular approach that is part of the qualitative research tradition and examines experience, perception, social skills, knowledge, practice, and culture. Sensory ethnography refers to a research methodology within anthropology and ethnology that emphasizes the use of sensory perception (such as sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste) to understand and interpret cultural practices and experiences. Sarah Pink writes that:

Doing Sensory Ethnography investigates the possibilities afforded by attending to the senses in ethnographic research and representation. An acknowledgement that sensoriality is fundamental to how we learn about, understand and represent other people's lives is increasingly central to academic and applied practice in the social sciences and humanities. (Pink 2009, p. 7)

We can not talk about clothing and not mention the power of sensation or the sensory, which plays a crucial and important role in clothing our body. The

garment is not only on the outside of the body; through sensorial understanding, the garment is situated in between the outside and the inside. Unlike traditional ethnography, which primarily relies on interviews and observations, sensory ethnography places stronger emphasis on engaging the researcher's senses to immerse herself in the lived experiences of the people she is interviewing. This method tries to understand culture and society better by recognising how our senses affect how we behave, feel, and see things. It seeks to gain a deeper understanding of culture and society by recognising how sensory experiences influence human behaviour, emotions, and perceptions. Both qualitative research, in general, and sensory ethnography, in particular, are well suited to shed light on the impact that the closet and clothing have on participants' lives. Thus, most of the interview questions delved into sensory perceptions, childhood experiences, intimate details about caregivers, and related subjects.

1.4 The interviewees

The common thread holding this thesis together is the expertise shared by the professional people I interviewed for this study. With that in mind, the selection of interviewees was determined based on the fact that they all work or have worked within high fashion in New York and the fashion cities in Europe: London, Paris, and Milan. The high fashion world is a tight-knit community on both sides of the Atlantic. The experience and knowledge of the fashion designer who writes this essay, played a big role in the choice of interviewees. All of them except one have been my colleagues during decades of work in New York and Europe. The choice of one additional interviewee came through the snowball method, where another interviewee suggested that I contact him. All the interviewees reside and work in New York City, and the in-depth interviews were conducted in English. All the interviewees lived in their homes, and their wardrobes were in their bedrooms or in the room next to the bedroom, except for one person who kept a private closet in a hallway. All the interviewees gave permission to use their real names. However, some did not allow me to look inside their closets, underlining that closets are, for

many, a more private matter than their personal lives, which they discussed freely.

The total number of interviews I aimed for at the outset of this study was between ten and twelve. However, the number ended at nine due to the COVID-19 situation, which ended international travel early in the year 2020. In addition, I also rely on an interview that I conducted publicly as an interviewer during DesignTalk in Harpa in 2014 with a well-known fashion designer from New York. He is my mentor, who educated me in being a designer. The length of the interviews was, on average, around one hour. All the interviewees have extensive work experience within their field, so most of them ranged from little over forty to sixty five in years in age. Their professional work, as impressive as it is, is not investigated here, instead the study concerns their views on what is in their personal closets. The aim is to understand their wardrobe, their perspective, understanding, and emotions concerning their personal closet and how the characteristics of these individuals may be visible through the enclosed space that keeps their clothing. The individual voices, stories, and analyses of their own wardrobes, the in-depth interviews, offer a rare glimpse of their personal attitudes towards their closets, clothing, sensoriality, aesthetics, craft, and archives. During the interview, the topic of archives came up, revealing that it had a different meaning for individuals. For some it held both their personal clothing and pieces collected for their craftsmanship, while for others it served as a dedicated space for preserving their design legacy.

Limited research exists on the personal significance attached to the clothing found in the closets of key figures within the fashion industry. I wanted to gain insights from individuals deeply entrenched in the fashion industry, actively involved in shaping fashion for the future. Their influence spans decades, with their creations worn by individuals worldwide. As Walter Benjamin wrote between 1927-1940 in the *Arcades Project*: “the most interesting thing about fashion is its extraordinary anticipation“ (Benjamin 1999, p. 63). Moreover, he continues: “yet fashion is in much steadier, much more precise contact with coming things, thanks to the incomparable nose which the feminine collective

has for what lies waiting in the future. Each season brings, in its newest creations, various secret signals of things to come” (Benjamin 1999, p. 64). The expertise of the interviewees surpasses that of the average individual working in the clothing industry; their perspectives are more nuanced and well-developed, earning them utmost respect within fashion circles. They have dedicated their lives to working for renowned fashion houses, driven by inspiration and passion. Their contribution to the thesis was significant as they were not merely consumers of everyday clothing; they were creators operating at the pinnacle of the fashion industry, which is noticeable in their prominent positions within their field. Some personal names are synonymous with top fashion brands, others are former CEOs of exceptionally well-known fashion houses, and others are design directors at major fashion houses. All of them are responsible for making an impact on fashion and clothing. Some work within the “fashion system” and are known for their understanding and knowledge of the system, whereas others are stylists and former employees at *Vogue Magazine*. After decades of involvement in the industry, their mastery of visual aesthetics has been refined through every collection designed, their know-how and understanding of clothing and fashion, their in-depth knowledge of fabrics, draping, silhouettes, crafts, intricate details, and finally, their understanding of how the fashion system works, shines through their answers. Despite their extensive careers within the fashion industry, however, they shared few commonalities. Notably, they did not conform to a homogenous social group that dresses similarly. Instead, they each expressed their unique identities through their clothing choices, further highlighting their individuality. In the order of the interviews, the list of the interviewees is as follows: Calvin Klein, whom I interviewed during DesignTalks in Harpa, Narciso Rodriguez, Michael Berkowitz, Pauline Garris Brown, Tom Mendenhall, James P. Scully, Francisco Costa, Jacky Marshall, Kay Unger Pitman, and Tina Perlmutter.

1.5 The reflection

I have a BFA, Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in fashion design. I graduated with honours from Parsons School of Design in New York City, the first Icelandic

student to do so. For twenty years, I worked in countries on both sides of the Atlantic, working for fashion brands that are considered household names. My involvement in designing and producing the most sought-after outfits in fashion at the time is a testament to my personal knowledge of the field. My private company entered the Icelandic design scene at the turn of the century and is still present. Throughout my career, I have gathered extensive knowledge within the industry, teaching and lecturing for many design schools across the globe. It is this knowledge and interest that led me on the path towards finding a deeper meaning in the realm of clothing, a natural evolution raising more questions about the existence of clothing.

1.6 The interview frame

The interview frame began to take shape as early as the second and third year of my degree work at the University of Iceland. My primary focus was on clothing, and I was mindful of that. A test rehearsal for the questions in the interview frame took place for a student project in a class on qualitative research methods. I relied on my own expertise and knowledge from within the fashion world to shape the framework for the questions, combined with reading material from scholars who gave me a new perspective on the world of clothing. Prior to the interviews, the frame and the questions had gone through countless adjustments and refinements.

As the interview process unfolded, the questions continued to evolve due to the circumstances of each interviewee and the course that conversation took. Through the process, the interview frame naturally organised itself into distinct categories, to which I gave names in order to keep track of which questions I had finished asking the interviewee. When a project offers to organise itself this way, I welcome it with open arms; the thesis structure is therefore based on that organization. Each interview had its own rhythm directed by the interviewees, who had diverse family backgrounds and felt the need to talk about their specific topic. Certain questions had already been answered when they appeared in the interview framework, so the order rearranged itself. That is the beauty and dynamic of interviews since fieldwork

differs from lab work in that the environment is not controlled, and each interview thus has a rhythm to its internal logic. Each interview was distinct, and they all revealed solid personalities and strong opinions. While writing up the interviews, I realised that some questions I had intended to ask were missing; in these cases, I returned to the interviewee. What proved intriguing was that certain inquiries and questions posed during the interviews caught the interviewees off guard, unveiling aspects and dilemmas that they had not previously contemplated.

1.7 The theories

The daily habit of navigating through the clothes in our closets to get ready for the performance of the day seems straightforward enough. However, it becomes a process worth looking at when broken down into components or particles. Putting on clothing is a daily bodily activity starting from childhood and lasting to the end of our days. This practice of everyday life is repetitive and usually done without much thought or effort. Neither groundbreaking nor fit for the Guinness Book of Records, the daily activity of dressing is rather part of the mundane and often overlooked but omnipresent (and therefore potent) activities that together make up the *Practice of Everyday Life* which Michel de Certeau theorised: “Everyday practices depend on a vast ensemble which is difficult to delimit but which we may provisionally designate as an ensemble of procedures” (Certeau 1984, p. 43). In his book, de Certeau investigates the routine practices of everyday life. In the daily habits of walking, talking, and dwelling, he found an element of creativity created by ordinary people. However, he passes in silence over one daily activity in everyone's life, namely dressing the body. To complete my journey successfully, it would thus not be sufficient to pack one or two theories in my suitcase; a few others were needed as listed here below.

One of the important conversations I engage in the following pages is with Joanne Entwistle's book, *The Fashioned Body*. Entwistle rightfully remarks that “dress in everyday life cannot be separated from the living, breathing, moving body it adorns” (Entwistle 2000, p. 9). The moving body within the space that

clothing covers is fundamentally as important as breathing and living. Then she continues and writes that: “Dress in everyday life is always more than a shell; it is an intimate aspect of the experience and presentation of the self and is so closely linked to the identity that these three - dress, the body, and the self - are not perceived separately but simultaneously as a totality” (Entwistle 2000, p. 10). For this thesis, Entwistle’s equation of “totality” is key to understanding who we are, in so far as it includes the crucial component missing from the work and thought of many other scholars like de Certeau, and that is clothing. This totality turned my attention to the existence of the body, which is the living component and entity we dress every single day. Our bodies are in constant motion and move through time and space, between the individual and the social world, and within it, we store knowledge. An individual does not exist without a body, this physical material of organisms we move around the world. Our physical body serves as the cornerstone of our identity; it houses and moulds the “self” and is fundamental to how we see ourselves and how others see us.

In his article “The Black Box of Everyday Life”, Ethnologist Orvar Löfgren introduces the metaphor and miniature version of the enclosed space or the “black box” (Löfgren 2014, p. 77) that we call the closet. Löfgren talks about co-existence and the distribution of things, or “the stuff” that we bring into our home which includes clothing. He cites Doreen Massey’s illuminating concept of “throwntogetherness” and asks: “How do objects, people, feelings, sensibilities or activities co-exist?” (Löfgren 2014, p. 81). The objects we surround ourselves with contribute to the creation of systems, complications, and habits that we develop within our homes; they are all interconnected aspects of our daily lives. Löfgren explains that our “black box” not only contains our things, but it also holds the diverse range of emotions that individuals can experience during life with other individuals who reside there. Emotions play a crucial role in shaping our perceptions, interactions, and overall well-being; they have a range of effects: boredom, longing, nagging, anger, passion, ecstasy, and guilt. Löfgren’s notion of the “black box” promotes a key reference point for the analysis in this thesis.

This study does not offer to peek into the privacy of the interviewee's closets. This view is larger than the closet space itself. As I read the works of scholars on fashion, material culture and everyday life, I also went in search of different views, namely on clothing. It is not uncommon to come across misunderstandings or misinterpretations when it comes to specific concepts like fashion and clothing. Yuniya Kawamura, professor of sociology at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York, writes in her book on *Fashionology* that “in order to understand what fashion means, in a more specific sense, it is essential that we understand the difference between fashion and clothing” (Kawamura 2005, p. 2). She adds: “When fashion is treated as an item of clothing that has added value in a material sense, it confuses the notion of fashion. Fashion does provide extra added values to clothing, but the additional elements exist only in people’s imagination and beliefs” (Kawamura 2005, p. 4). At the core of fashion lies the concept of “change” reflecting evolving tastes, trends, and ideologies within society; “therefore, it seems agreed that fashion is never stationary, never fixed and ever-changing” (Kawamura 2005, p. 4). Clothing on the other hand refers to items worn on the body, typically made of textiles or fabrics, designed to cover, protect, or adorn the human body. Clothing serves various purposes such as protection from environmental elements, modesty, identification of social status, cultural expression, as well as fashion or aesthetic purposes. Clothing can include a wide range of items and can be functional, fashionable, or both, depending on the occasion and personal preference.

As Orvar Löfgren notes, we keep both good and bad feelings in our “black box”, which brings the discussion around to emotions, perception, and the senses. When a garment is put on a body, it is felt on the skin; clothing can be soft but can irritate, restrict our movement, make noise, or it can give us a certain feeling. Clothing may have a history to it that matters to us personally. We may harbor special memories and feelings towards items of clothing; some have been handed down to us by our mothers, fathers, grandmothers, grandfathers or caretakers; clothing from the past. Then there is the history of the garment itself, the more profound significance found in the make and the craft of the garment. That may include aesthetics, details, and technical

developments from the past. The closet also keeps the clothing that we currently wear in the present, as well as garments reserved for the future and the items not yet worn. The reasons these garments end up in our closet or wardrobe can vary; they may be inherited, given, homemade, or purchased. Often, not always, they hang there for aesthetic reasons, appreciated for their beauty and craft, making the owner feel happy. In *Happy Objects*, Philosopher Sara Ahmed writes that: “Objects not only embody good feeling; they come to embody the good life” (Ahmed 2010, p. 33). Moreover she maintains: “Happiness is consistently described as the object of human desire, as being what we aim for, as being what gives purpose, meaning and order to human life” (Ahmed 2010, p. 1).

Through bodily sensation, we feel what is happening when the garment touches the skin. Clothing is not just an external layer, it resides in the space between our exterior and interior selves, bridging sensory experiences. The garment may feel soft, or it can irritate the skin. We can have an emotional attachment to objects, including clothing. In an article on “Collective Feelings” Sara Ahmed writes:

I want to argue that emotions work to create the very distinction between the inside and the outside, and that this separation takes place through the very movement engendered by responding to others and objects. Rather than locating emotion in the individual or the social, we can see that emotionality – as responsiveness to and openness towards world of others – involves an interweaving of the personal with the social, and the affective with the mediated. (Ahmed 2004, p. 28)

We make ourselves acceptable and appropriate for each occasion in the social world where clothing can influence the individual both positively and negatively. Being mindful of the impact of clothing on social interactions and adapting our attire accordingly can help us navigate various social situations with confidence. The visual aspect of clothing plays an important role, just as other things in our sphere. In her interview with Suzi Gablik on the “Aesthetics of Everyday life,” Barbara Kishenblatt-Gimblett remarks that: “the arts of

everyday life are highly utilitarian arts: they give form to value” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett & Gablik 1995, p. 4). As a folklorist, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett finds art and aesthetics in everyday life, in all our activities, including the “stuff” we bring into our home: “it involves everything, it includes domestic interiors, the table foot, food, language. It also includes the arts of sociability, conversation, etiquette, and dress” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett & Gablik 1995, p. 4). Mainly, the aesthetic choices we make in our daily lives contribute to the practical functions of everyday activities and reflect both personal and social values.

Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu famously explored how individuals define themselves through taste, the developed aesthetics that help us make choices in our lives including choices in clothing. Aesthetics is not something we are born with, however, rather, according to Bourdieu, “it is a product of upbringing and education” (Bourdieu 2007, p. 34). The closet is therefore more than just a storage space for clothes; it is a repository of our personal history, identity, and aesthetic preferences, which play a significant role in the manifestation of our identity. Within our closet we safeguard the garments that we use to curate the visual effect, every day. Clothing is often intertwined with memories. A specific dress can evoke memories of a special occasion, a gift may recall the person who gave it, and inherited items can connect us to our family's history. Emotions tied to these pieces can range from joy and nostalgia to sentimentality. The clothes we choose to wear can impact our self-esteem. Wearing items that make us feel confident and comfortable contributes to our sense of identity. The closet becomes a space where we can express and explore different facets of our identity through clothing choices; it is a canvas for self-expression.

It was the semiotic and literary scholar Roland Barthes who introduced me to the “Language of Fashion”. Barthes was inspired by the general science of the signs, under the name of semiology, a systematic study of sign process and communications of meaning. Both fashion and literature use a common technique which is seemingly to transform an object into language: as Barthes asks in his book on *The Fashion System*: “Can clothing signify without recourse

to the speech that describes it, comments upon it, and provides it with signifiers and signifieds abundant enough to constitute a system of meaning” (Barthes 1990, p. XI). In response, Barthes goes on to explain how fashion depends on a disparity of two consciousnesses not related, object and words. Fashion is about the metaphor of a visual text we portray in public and how other individuals read us in public. The system of clothing is based upon three shifters, he claims: the sewing pattern, the sewing and the garment. He breaks the system further down as involving: “species and genera” (Barthes 1990, p. 94). It was also in the writing of Barthes that I found the metaphor of the “endless garment”. Which gives its name to the exhibition that accompanies this thesis, and which I will account for in its final chapter. Barthes explains how we can: “Imagine (if possible) a woman dressed in an endless garment, one that is woven of everything the Fashion says, for this garment without end is proffered through text which itself is unending” (Barthes 1990, p. 42). On one side the garment stretches infinitely woven from endless threads that Fashion creates, changing the clothing that fills our closet over the decades. On the other side it presents itself through an unending stream of consciousness in the form of text.

1.8 The structure, the chapter outline

The thesis begins with a comprehensive exploration of the research background to provide a solid foundation. This first chapter serves as an introduction, outlining the research process from inception to conclusion. It delves into the background that prompted the research, the objectives, and the research questions. A detailed description of the methodology is provided, along with an introduction to the interviewees, whose insights were instrumental in shaping the study. An account of my role as a researcher is also integrated into this section. Finally, key theories and scholars, whose work I engage with and draw from, are introduced, and the thesis structure is outlined.

Chapter two delves into a theoretical discussion about our daily interaction with the body, exploring its role in navigating through space and time. At the core of this discussion is the concept of habitus, which serves as a foundation

for the discussion. It forms the basis for understanding and analyzing the repetitive daily task of dressing the body. This chapter aims to answer the first subordinate question in this thesis: What is the daily bodily ritual we repeat every single day?

In chapter three, the discussion of daily life and the home's structure is analyzed. The location of the closet and the space where our clothing is stored are explored. Additionally, the bodily activity of dressing oneself is investigated, along with the influence of caretakers and the organizational habits instilled in us from childhood. Furthermore, three-generational closets are discussed, and the private and emotional aspects associated with the interviewees' closets are examined. In this chapter, the second subordinate research question is analyzed, regarding the additional meaning of the closet beyond its functional use of storing clothing.

In chapter four, the interviewees' definitions of various terms, such as clothing, costume, uniform, and personal uniform, all distinct variations on clothing, are explored to answer the third subordinate research question: Does clothing convey different meanings? The discussion on the significance of dressing appropriately for different occasions and the preparations involved in getting ready for these special events is evident. Additionally, the chapter offers a reflection on the value of clothing in our lives.

Chapter five delves into the sensoriality aspect of clothing, focusing on how we use our senses to select pieces of clothing for everyday wear. With the assistance of the interviewees we delve into the fourth subordinate research question, examining the emotional attachment and feelings that interviewees associate with their clothing choices, shedding light on how they affect them emotionally.

In chapter six, the closet aesthetic are explored, examining the various factors that shape the individual's choices when selecting clothing items for their wardrobe. Additionally, the process of creating a visually cohesive outfit for daily wear is discussed, providing detailed responses. This seeks to answer the

overarching research question for the thesis on what factors influence the selection of clothing we find in our closet.

In the conclusion chapter, I gather the information and results obtained throughout the study. The main points are summarized and conclusions are drawn based on the findings of this study, thus answering the research questions.

Finally, following the conclusion for the thesis proper is a closing section that presents the exhibition on the “Endless Garment” and sets it in the context of the analysis and conclusion of my ethnological study as presented in the thesis. The exhibition weaves the concepts and ideas presented in the thesis, into diverse art forms, studying the notion of generation, space, history, repetition, craft, sensoriality, archive, and text through artistic research. It presents the results visually and viscerally in a three-dimensional exhibit that draws on my research, professional knowledge, and artistic creativity.

Body

2.0 The body

The body is not an object in the world but our means of the communication with it. It is the horizon latent in all our experiences and itself ever-present and anterior to every determining thought (Merleau-Ponty 1962, pp. 91-92).

The object we dress every single day is the human body, a morning ritual from the moment the twilight enters the horizon for all humans. From royalty to remote ethnic communities, individuals adorn their bodies with attire arranging from clothing, fashion, costumes or uniforms. The human body has a fundamental need in making a protected shield from nature's elements that include cold, wind, rain, sun and from other elements that can harm the skin. The other primary purpose of clothing the body is to cover up, for nudity is forbidden in majority of cultures. As the philosopher Kate Soper writes in the

book *Body Dressing*: “Clothing, then signals a human wearer, and in doing so is tied into our conception of dignity, personhood, and bodily integrity. But the linkage is complex and overdetermined since it reflects both the instrumental interest in clothing as bodily protection, and our sense of our self as seen by others” (Soper 2001, p. 18).

We have a public body that is on visual display to all, and we have a private body we reserve in the privacy of our home and away from the wandering eyes of the world. We get dressed in the sanctuary and the comfort of our home before entering the world stage, where we present ourselves through our daily work performance, as the world looks upon us. The body is its own shelter as philosopher of everyday life Michel de Certeau writes about in his book *Practice of Everyday Life*:

The body has at its disposal here a closed shelter, where, to its liking, it can stretch out, sleep, hide from the noise, looks, and pressure of others, and so ensure its most intimate functions and upkeep. Living by yourself outside of collective places, means having a protective place at one’s disposal where the pressure of the social body on the individual does not prevail. (Gerteau 1984, p. 146)

How do we see our body? What is the entity that we dress every day? In order to understand the body, I went searching for the essence of it.

Body and mind do not exist separately from each other; they are interwoven in the fabric of our being: they cannot be conceived solely as free persons and navigate the world separately. In *The Corporeal Experience of Fashion*, Llewellyn Negrin notes that: “while the body does not exist prior to or independently of its inscription by culture, neither is it simply a product of it. Rather, there is dialectical relationship between the two in which each presupposes the other while at the same time they are irreducible to each other” (Negrin 2016, p. 120). Individuals find themselves situated in a dynamic world that they actively participate in, at the same time it is a world that is making an impact and already shaping them. We use our awareness we have in our body to convey the sense of our inner self, as Joanna Entwistle notes: “In

other words, our bodies are not just the place from which we come to experience the world, but it is through our bodies that we come to be seen in the world” (Entwistle 2000, p. 29). It is from the body we grasp external elements from our sphere, like time, space, and objects. In *The Corporeal Experience of Fashion*, Llewellyn Negrin notes that:

Fashion, by dint of the fact that it is designed to be worn, is inextricably linked with the body. Yet until recently, much analysis of fashion has tended to neglect the experience of dress as tactile and embodied form, treating it primarily as a “text” to be decoded semiotically or as an image to be analysed in terms of its aesthetic form. (Negrin 2016, p. 115)

Scholars of “dress and body” have sharpened the corporeal focus on dress, emphasising how body adornment, clothing and accessories are observed by the individual, not as a visual image “but as a haptic experience” (Negrin 2016, p. 115). i.e. through the sense of touch. Negrin continues and notes that the:

Concern is to demonstrate how the adoption of a particular form of attire is not just about the creation of certain “look” but is a way of being-in-the-world, which transcends the visual. Clothes, in this view, become a prosthetic extension of the body, mediating our practical interaction with the world through incorporation into our bodily schemas. (Negrin 2016, p. 122)

Negrin also writes that the body may sometimes be viewed as a “passive receptor of culture rather than as an active mediator of it” (Negrin 2016, p. 120). The relation clothing has on the body is multifaceted. The clothing we keep in the closet to dress our body, the physical identity we cover for the daily audience every single day, when worn on the body, they are activated, seamlessly melding with the body to become our second skin. We use our body as the medium for our performance which can be likened to a form of communication.

2.1 The space

Through quiet continuous movement, our body glides through the space; our body exists in connection with the space it occupies rather than being disconnected from it. Our body glides through space, at the same time we execute our daily task or function in our lives. Space is both external and internal, there is no correct or incorrect way of being in space, our body moves through time and space with the sense of ourselves. Through the space we engage in, we form a view of our world and at the same time it is the same world that is shaping us. When time is then added into the space we inhabit, the essence of living starts taking place. In *Central Problems in Social Theory*, Anthony Giddens refers to Leibnitz's view: "We cannot treat time and space as receptacles "containing" experience, because it is only possible to understand time and space in relation to objects and events; time and space are the modes in which objects and events "are" or "happen" (Giddens 1979, p. 54). The intertwining of time, body, and space provides the stage upon which objects and events unfold, shaping our experiences. Meanwhile the body's outward manner communicates in a very strong way. Agnes Rocamora and Anneke Smelik, in *Thinking Through Fashion*, underline the action of the surface appearance of the body as:

What has been ignored is that fashion is not just about the creation of a specific "look" but is also about the comportment of the body in space. Particular garments are significant not just for the meanings they communicate or for their aesthetic appearance, but because they produce certain modes of bodily demeanour. (Rocamora & Smelik 2016, p. 18)

Clothing can certainly restrict free movements of the body within space, and yet few fashion designers have investigated the relation between body that inhabits the clothes and how the "embodied being" moves within space. However, the works of Issey Miyake, Yohji Yamamoto and Rei Kawakubo clearly demonstrate such investigations and perhaps the Japanese culture they emerge from allows them to see clothing in different way. Their clothing comes from wrapping the body with fabric whereas in Western traditional clothing emerges

from elaborate fitted tailoring. Negrin cites Richard Martin about wrapping fabric around the body, that it: “allows for a much more fluid and organic relationship between the fabric and the body in which the garment is constantly changing its form in response to the movement of the body” (Negrin 2016, p. 126). Fashion designer Miyake states: “that his clothes are unfinished since the design isn’t completed until someone puts them on” (Calloway 1988, p. 51). Finally, by the time the clothes are inhabited by the wearer, the personality shines through.

2.2 The performance

The notion of inhabiting ones clothes opens for a perspective on dress and dressing as performance. While putting on his costume for the daily activity, the individual is preparing himself for the “performance“ of the day. The definition for the word “performance” can be translated as: “act of performing a ceremony, play, piece of music, etc” or “the execution or accomplishment of work, acts feats, etc” and finally “the act performing” (<https://www.dictionary.com>).

The connection the individual has with the world is through communication of words for as Folklorist Richard Bauman writes in *Verbal Art as Performance*: “Fundamentally, performance as a mode of spoken verbal communication consists in the assumption of responsibility to an audience for display of communicative competence” (Bauman 197, p. 11). He then continues and simplifies it: “performance is a mode of language use, a way of speaking” (Bauman 197, p. 11). He understands performance “in terms of the approach being developed here, performance becomes *constitutive* of the domain of verbal art as spoken communication” (Bauman 197, p. 11). We use our physical body to perform the performance, for it is an embodied action from the vocal cord to the facial muscles to arms, legs and every part of flesh. The physical body is woven into our social body. It constrains us, as Swedish ethnologist Jonas Frykman explains in *Culture Builders*: “right from infancy we learn the importance of distinguishing us from not-us. One way to make such distinctions is to taboo physical functions, excretion, perspiration, and

sensation” (Frykman & Löfgren 2008, p. 170). To prepare the “medium of expression” we dress the body, which then plays an intricate part in how we are perceived. The care that the individual puts into the body by feeding, grooming, sleeping and exercise, demonstrates the ways in which society is connected to it. We perform our daily “act” dressed in clothing which can be seen as our “second skin” when we start moving within the world we live in. The clothed body and the performance become an integral part of our “self”. The private space we call the “closet” keeps the attire we use for this daily performance. It serves as an extension of the body and the “self”. It is the same storage room where individuals keep their clothing not being worn for that day in their life. Within the confines of closed doors, the lifeless clothing softly reveal creases, imperfections, remnants of meals, mended seams, and lingering scents, all traces which the body has recorded while dressed.

2.3 The habitus

Habitus, a concept coined and theorised by Pierre Bourdieu, refers to a system that organises the ways in which individuals perceive the world around them and how they respond to it by way of their long-term dispositions, skills, and habits. People with similar backgrounds are unconsciously connected through similar backgrounds like class, nationality, language, origin, education or profession; the sense of reality within the group reflects their way of being. They share a habitus in the same way as group culture and personal history shape the mind and the body of the individual. The dispositions of the body, postures, walking, talking, and the nuances of gestures reveal specific information about the class and background of the individual, i.e., in ways how society inhabits the body. That is one aspect of the habitus that forms and shapes individuals in society. The habitus of an individual influences also their social action in everyday life, and shows in mannerisms, morality, tastes, and attitudes, which also influences their opportunities in life. Habitus, refers also to the way the individual perceives his world around him, how he reacts to it and the knowledge he takes from it:

In short, the habitus, the product of history, produces individual and collective practices, and hence history, in accordance with the schemes engendered by history. The system of dispositions - a past which survives the present and tends to perpetuate itself into the future by making itself present in practices structured according to its principles. (Bourdieu 197, p. 412)

The world, usually introduced to us by caretakers initially, they teach us the everyday art of clothing the body daily. In *The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity*, philosopher Susan R. Bordo writes how: “what we eat, how we dress, the daily rituals through which we attend to the body - is a medium of culture” (Bordo 1990, p. 165). The continuous habit of getting dressed is not something that changes much throughout an individual's life, the unconscious body knowledge helps to form a role-call in preparation for this act.

The process of getting dressed for the day ahead is a fascinated task the individual performs while putting on clothing. This physical activity is body-movement performed by muscles in our body which we repeat every day. It is with these automated fixed habits and the memory residing within our body that we put our clothing on. By increasing our awareness of these habits, we can potentially gain more control over how they inhabit our body. Personally, when getting dressed in the mornings I found that it was the activity of my body memory that was getting me dressed. I had no recollection of which foot I put into the pant first or which hand went into the sweater first. My body was getting dressed without my consciousness putting any effort into the activity of dressing, I was getting dressed without thought and simultaneously doing few other things at the same time.

I was not so much interested in what kind of clothing the interviewees were putting on but rather in the manner in which their bodies orchestrated the process of getting dressed. The questions I put to all the interviewees about their morning dressing routines proved intriguing to them as well. While some interviewees recalled their body's memory with clarity, others found themselves devoid of such recollections; they had not paid much attention to this activity before. Mendenhall, when asked about which arm went into the

sleeve first, answered after a small pause: “Left... it is so weird, yeah left” (Mendenhall, 2018). When asked which foot went into the pant first he answered: “Left, that is so weird” (Mendenhall, 2018). What struck him as peculiar was his tendency to use his left hand and foot despite being right-handed. This revelation dawned on him unexpectedly after decades of dressing himself. When questioned about his ability to multitask while getting dressed, such as talking on the phone or watching television, his response was: “No, it is a focused thing, I am not doing anything else at the same time, cause it is also on a time limit, time spent with the expectation of being done at a certain moment when I leave for work” (Mendenhall, 2018).

The body memory stored within our body shows us what the body is capable of doing without much conscious effort. For Pitman, when asked which foot she put into the sock first, “Interesting... I am not sure, probably my right foot, I am a right hand” (Pitman, 2019). When asked which foot went into the pants first, she answered: “It is fascinating... I still think my right, I am very right-centred” (Pitman, 2019). When asked which foot went into the sock first, Scully answered: “I think my left... even though I am right-handed everything, I actually think my left” (Scully, 2018). When asked which arm went into the sleeve on a top, he answered, “My right arm” (Scully, 2018). Asked which foot went into his pant first, he said, “Definitely my left.” (Scully, 2018). Asked whether he could do other things simultaneously, he replied, “No, when I get dressed, I really get dressed; I like getting dressed, so I just get dressed” (Scully, 2018). Awareness is a situation when the individual consciously feels a state of being. When asked about which hand he used first while putting on a t-shirt, Rodriques answered, “Both, that is weird... no, I do my head first, so I do not get the deodorant on my t-shirt” (Rodriques, 2018). When asked which foot went into his pants first, he quickly replied: “Right” (Rodriques, 2018). When asked whether he could do other things simultaneously, his reply was: “Not typically, no, with kids, it is like how fast can you get dressed, we have like a routine, I get up at six and then take the kids. It is like a checklist, I do not have to stop to think” (Rodriques, 2018).

While some had a focus on their dress activity, other interviewees kept themselves occupied with other morning routines. When I asked Marshall about her clothing activity and which foot she put into the pants first in the mornings; her replay was “Right” (Marshall, 2019). That was also the same answer she had for the top and her socks, but while getting dressed, she could also do other things simultaneously: “I can talk on the phone... drink coffee... I get dressed really quickly, probably could brush my teeth... if I am going to work, I could also dry my hair” (Marshall, 2019). Perlmutter kept herself completely occupied when asked about the physical activity of getting dressed. Her answer to the question of which leg goes into the pants first, she paused “Probably my... I just assume it is the right because I am a righty” (Perlmutter, 2019). When asked about which arm went in first, her answer was “Probably my right; I have to think about that” (Perlmutter, 2019). But when I asked whether she could do other things simultaneously, her answer was swift, “Eighty-five things at one time” (Perlmutter, 2019). Brown had a very womanly ritual in the morning; the first thing she put on in the morning was her underwear:

I pick them based on that point that I will have decided what I am wearing, so whether they are black or nude and whether it is a racer strap back or not. I have determined what I want to go with the dress... I will actually do my makeup and hair in just bra and underwear. (Brown, 2018)

When putting on her top, her left hand went in first, and the same went for the foot. The only thing she could do simultaneously was listen to music: “I want to be in that moment of putting on my costume” (Brown, 2018).

Habitus refers to the habits that shape the individual through socialisation, formed through interactions. It guides the individual toward social practices and behaviour deeply ingrained in the body. All the interviewees expressed varying degrees of awareness regarding how clothing shapes their bodies, yet some, myself included, were oblivious to the automated, ingrained habits exhibited by the body during the process of getting dressed. Getting dressed is part of everyone’s daily life; clothing cannot be worn without the body, and the

body is not seen in public without clothing. The act of dressing oneself is moulded by each individual through the constant repetition of this daily ritual. This moment can be quite intimate and private. In *The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity*, Bordo in her writings notes that “through the organisation and regulation of the time, space and movements of our daily lives, our bodies are trained, shaped, and impressed with the stamp of prevailing historical forms of selfhood, masculinity and femininity” (Bordo 1990, pp. 165-166).

2.4 The time

What is “time” is not a question asked in everyday life; however “time” is a continued progress of our existence through events that arise in a continuous, irreplaceable path from our past, through our present, and into the future. At the same time, it gives us memories of what we have experienced. In everyday life, we gauge time by the passage of a single day, starting from our morning experiences and extending through to the evening. One day can hold a whole week of activity or it can pass by with little activity.

Time can be viewed in many of our daily activities, from mornings to evenings, from weeks to weeks, from month to month, year to year, and decades through decades. In various corners of the closet, we can find time. The passage of time unfolds as clothing traverses through decades. I am captivated by how time rests within clothing. It is intricately woven into the fabric through choices of materials, silhouettes, and colors, transforming clothing into a tangible representation of temporal essence. There is time in the longevity of clothing; especially when we gaze upon garments belonging to our parents or grandparents nestled in the closet. We look at photographs from our distant past and our mind brings up memories from those specific moments captured on camera and immortalised on paper. The moment of that particular time has long passed, and our bodies and our overall presence have a new moment in time. We look upon our personal taste either with laughter or sheer horror at how we dressed in these photographs. We read the photographs with our eyes, and text is already forming in our minds based on what we see. Each

interviewee discovered “time within their clothing” in their unique ways and their responses came with different meanings attached. Thus, for example Berkowitz claimed:

I can measure time, and I can measure life experience, the sort of vibe, especially when looking back at a lot of my early Calvin (Calvin Klein) pieces. We were also surrounded by really cool people wearing those same clothes, and now, when we look back at the photographs, it was really fun times; it was part of who we were. It was our time in those clothes, and there was definitely a vibe attached to it and great memories. (Berkowitz, 2018)

As Berkowitz recalled an experience captured in a photograph, he referred to “time” within life experience and the atmosphere the photograph conveyed to him of that specific moment.

For Rodriques, his “time” came with his own body attached to it “only because my weight fluctuates so much. I remember when I used to wear... size three and four and then go back to them two years later” (Rodrigues, 2018). Rodriques discovered that he could gauge “time” through the fluctuating sizes of his clothing, which mirrored his weight changes. For Marshall she discovered that her sense of time and the connection to her old clothing pieces which she kept in her closet, was intertwined to the organisation of her closet:

... time to be purged, I have that as a time. It is time to be purged, it has been too long and it is getting too messy. I mean it is pretty much messy a lot-ish, but I know where everything is, but it is pretty messy. I have got old pieces in there, I can see my old (Vivian) Westwood stuff from when I was fifteen. That is time for me. (Marshall, 2019)

For Scully the answer was simple: “well that is interesting, the way I have edited my clothes now to the way they are in the closet, speaks of who I always was, from the beginning of time until now” (Scully, 2018). We can look at closets and see a time in clothing from decades ago in the fabrication, silhouette, or make. For Brown, her view on time was about location: “I very

clearly associate or I relate to when I bought it and where, so I am thinking of that one grey dress, where I said I wore that to my rehearsal dinner, so that was twenty years ago” (Brown, 2018). Her response made it evident that she had a strong attachment to a specific moment, highlighting the interwoven nature of time and space within our clothing.

For Costa, his time was found in timeless pieces; he could wear them again and again without them presenting any specific time: “I have so many suits and so many pieces of wardrobe that could be any time” (Costa, 2019). Time within clothing for Perlmutter was found in the same concept as Costa, in the word: “timeless” (Perlmutter, 2019). Timeless pieces, like a plain, simple Chanel jacket, have the ability to transcend time. They can endure for years, even decades, without being bound to a specific moment in history. For Mendenhall, his sense of time was rooted within his memories:

Well being in my own clothes, I have an emotional connection to a few things, but in general clothes have become utilitarian for me. They represent time in that, you know, the neckline does change, the shoulder does change, so I am aware of that. I am more aware of time. My own experience with clothes from ninety ninety-two until now, I remember the show, I remember the designer, I remember what he was wearing, what she was wearing, all my moments are marked by clothes, so clothes define. I mark most of my memories with clothes, more than years, I can not tell you what year it was, but I can tell you what I was wearing. (Mendenhall, 2018)

For him, clothing was more than just a stylistic choice; it was a defining element that encapsulated and reflected the passage of time. Discovering the subtle presence of “time” intricately woven into the fabric of clothing details and ornaments, offered a captivating perspective.

Home

3.0 The home - the daily life

The home is not only crammed with stuff, it is also overflowing with affects and emotions, passion, boredom, guilt, longing, nagging, irritation, explosions of home rage, moments of bliss - all try to coexist with and also charge material objects (Löfgren 2014, p. 87).

The closet, a seemingly mundane fixture is always situated within the home of individuals. It harbours a significant, albeit understated, role in everyday life. The closet positioned within the home serves as the place to turn to at the beginning of every morning and the end of the day. Within the closet, we keep the “stuff” that we have acquired by purchase, made ourselves or inherited. A single garment typically does not stand alone inside the closet; the pieces require other pieces to complement and seamlessly fit into a more prominent display of an entire wardrobe. Each piece is just one independent fragment of the “stuff” inside the closet. In this sense, the closet can be seen as a micro version of the larger world within the home. In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the importance of domestic life and in understanding cultural dynamics and social change. The home can be likened to a factory, where various activities and interactions take place daily, contributing to the functioning of the household unit. From the moment we wake up to the time we go to bed, the home is a hub of productivity, socialisation, and emotional support. At the heart of the home are its inhabitants, each playing a unique role within the household ecosystem. The dynamics among these individuals are complex, from its tight-knit daily functions to the intricate dynamics among its inhabitants. Daily routines and rituals further shape life within the home creating a sense of belonging and continuity across generations. Tightly woven routines are established with arrival of each new family member and with onset of every new year adjustments are made. Yet, the essence of the home remains veiled in mystery.

In the article “The Black Box of Everyday Life” by Orvar Löfgren, I found the understanding of our home, the place where the closet is situated. He writes that “everyday life remains something of a black box, our understanding is still piecemeal and fragmented” (Löfgren 2014, p. 77). The black box is where we keep the “stuff” as he calls it. Löfgren examined the structure of the home through the metaphor of building blocks; he divided the blocks into three: the couple, the parenting block, and finally, the main building block, the home itself. The first building block is the loving couple; he considers marriage the foundation for production and reproduction. The family is an entity where “love” is the “emotion” that connects and bonds the individuals together. The couple is united into one identity today: the working couple that provides for the family. While the power belongs to the couple, the woman through her body is bound for reproduction of the species by nature. Parenthood is the second building block. With parenthood come the lessons to be taught to the children. Teaching them how to behave in social situations, helping them with their education, teaching them how to be organized, teaching the spirit of efficiency, teaching them proper manners, explaining the world to them, and teaching them how to dress. The third building block for the couple is the home itself as Orvar Löfgren so gracefully explains in his writings in *Culture Builders*, it is “a world in miniature” (Löfgren & Frykman 2008, p. 136).

Löfgren presents an intriguing perspective of the family home likening it to a theatrical stage. The full view of the stage is presented in the rooms where the family gets together, while the private quarters of the inhabitants are kept behind closed doors, two tight-knit and divided worlds where staged layout and privacy are played out. In his analysis, he “explores cohabitation and circulation of objects, affects and activities in the home—seen as a workshop where raw materials, raw feelings, previously untried movements and new routines are welded into everyday patterns” (Löfgren 2014, p. 77). And in the end, he brings together the analytical:

Concepts of throwntogetherness, assemblage and entanglement to explore such transformations and co-dependencies, often naturalised into invisibility. The home is also discussed a moral

economy with strong ideas about good and bad, duties and rights as well as a space colonised by ideals and consumer dreams, which often can produce guilty feelings of "not good enough". (Löfgren 2014, p. 77)

The connection that interviewees feel toward their homes has been moulded over the course of their lives, influenced by a myriad of factors. Ranging from breathtaking layouts and meticulous organization to museum-worthy artwork adorning the walls, their homes or apartments exuded distinct charm, it was evident in the heartfelt way they spoke about them.

3.1 The learning - the education

The art of dressing the body is not inherent; rather, it is a skill acquired through guidance from caregivers starting from early childhood. How do we put an undershirt on? What is a neckline? What is the front and a back of a garment? How should tiny little legs go into the long part of the pants, and how should an arm slide into the sleeve? The child learns how the button goes through the buttonhole and how to put the zipper components together before it zips up. Learning to put on our shoes properly and tie our shoelaces is a foundational skill that we carry forward into our future dressing routines. Revisiting the interviewees' childhoods in this study was intriguing, especially when considering who played the key role in teaching them about dressing their bodies. Scully's answer as to who taught him and how old he was when he learned to tie his shoelaces, was simple: "my mother taught me. She used to teach me and my siblings, through reading books... called Dapper Dan. And it was about basically, a doll that taught you how to button the buttons and how to tie your shoes, I was probably like... three or four" (Scully, 2018). It was a learning experience to hear about James's upbringing, he grew up with ten brothers and sisters in a four-bedroom house. One brother was born with cancer and two were autistic on the opposite side of the spectrum: one in a wheelchair and the other a high-level autistic genius. The household was in a perpetual state of chaos, tightly knit yet bustling with activity. With all the siblings sleeping in bunk beds and their closet consisting of a set of drawers

where they simply threw things in, it was a scene of constant movement and shared space. For most of his upbringing he wore clothes that were hand-downs from older siblings but:

Even from really really young age, I was very interested in clothes, it was kind of sparked by both my mother and father even though my mother was a forklift operator and my father was a welder. Prior to them getting married, my father was a very, very stylish person, as was his brother. (Scully, 2018)

When I observe Scully's aesthetics today, it is evident that his childhood experiences have left a lasting imprint, particularly in his preference for designer clothing that incorporates utilitarian influences. When I asked him whether he thought we were not born with the knowledge of how to dress up but instead were educated by our parents, he replied: "I would agree one hundred percent on that" (Scully, 2018).

A considerable number of individuals have not put much awareness into where they acquired their dressing habits or who educated them. When I asked Mendenhall about who educated him he responded:

I never really thought about it. Well in so many ways our clothing choices are made by your parents at the beginning of your life. When you are going to school, there is a certain point when you start choosing your own clothes... My mom was always an influence in clothes in my life. (Mendenhall, 2018)

For Pitman the answer for the question who had given her lessons in tying her laces came as a surprise: "I do not think I tied shoes, I wore Mary Jane's... we learned how to button our shoes. There were no sneakers, they may have been for sports only, and we did not have Velcro so I am sure we learned, but it was not a part of our culture" (Pitman, 2019). Marshall grew up in Kent England and when asked about the age at which she learned how to tie her shoes she responded: "no cause I do not think I wore anything that had laces in them, I would have worn shoes that had buckles. I learned how to tie my shoes at the age of seven or eight I imagine" (Marshall, 2019). The education our caretakers

provide has a long-lasting influence on our choices later in life, no matter whether we wore laced up shoes, buckled shoes or Mary Janes shoes.

Our caregivers educate us on the basic necessities of our lives from the moment we are born. We learn the art of clothing our bodies, grooming ourselves, and cultivating manners and culture, all integral aspects of growing up. We learn how to organise our “stuff” and store them in proper places. All the interviewees spoke of their caretakers and reflected upon their first learning experience with clothing, they all spoke with utmost respect about their caretakers. They learned in different ways, influenced by their respective cultural traditions, resulting in enduring effects on their decisions as they progressed through life. The process and education of clothing our bodies is an inherent aspect of our daily existence.

3.2 The generation clothing

I find the concept of three-generation closets particularly intriguing. Within them are cherished items from the past, the present, and the future. They serve as reminders of the enduring connection that binds generations together. Within these closets, one may discover clothing passed down from the elderly and clothing from the owner through a stretch of time reflecting their personal journey. In addition to their own attire, there might also be clothing items belonging to the children, such as christening gowns, hand-knitted garments, or homemade clothing lovingly crafted by dedicated caretakers during their younger years. We may view history, see time, and feel the attachment placed within them. The clothing of previous generations not only embodies familial connections but also stands as a testament to the craftsmanship and materials of past eras. They serve as poignant reminders of the passage of time. The saga continues as the younger generation incorporates clothing from their parents into their own closets, an essential practice for maintaining the continuity of three-generation wardrobes. Conversations with caretakers often reveal how daughters and sons discover clothing much to their liking, which they then take with or without permission and incorporate into their everyday clothing experience. This relationship usually starts with a single piece of

clothing they take or are allowed to wear and can escalate into an extensive exchange of garments. I can personally testify to this: wearing pieces of clothing from my mother and father, which I found in their closets, was a way to get closer to them at the same time as I felt more grown up. My mother's fur coat travelled across the Atlantic back and forth between Paris and New York, making me sense her presence, throughout my travels. My mother's grand dress, a sleeveless simple sheath dress made with pleats, inspired a dress that graced the catwalk for a high-end fashion house in New York. My father's military double-breasted uniform coat, along with his long-sleeve black turtleneck, I wore with pride. All those pieces hung in my closet for extended periods of time, and finally found their way back to their rightful owners.

Within the generational closets, one can find an emotional attachment to the pieces of clothing from the past. They may simultaneously be sad or happy memories, revealing an eclectic mix of aesthetics. Rodrigues' answer was heart-warming when asked if he had clothes from his parents in his closet: "ahh here, I have it here, my mom recently passed away and... I found so many things that I had made for her or bought for her. We restored them as much as possible, they are in great condition and we sealed them and put them here" (Rodrigues, 2018). "Here" meant the archive he had in his office, he was keeping these pieces for his children. Then he spoke of his grandparents:

Well they were in Cuba my grandmother died in the mid-sixties. She did send things, which I have, there were so many restrictions because of communism and what you could send or take and stuff like that. So instead of making me clothes, she like made little embroidered linen fabrics and sent those kind of folded up and those I have. (Rodrigues, 2018)

He mentioned that he had stored away those embroidered linen fabrics, intending for his children to inherit them later in life. Berkowitz's parents had both passed away, and when asked if he had clothing from them in his closet, he replied:

Absolutely I have ahh, they are not in my immediate closet, I do not think, but I do have some of my mom's clothes, and I actually have clothes that my dad bought in 1957 when he was on his honeymoon with my mother in Bermuda from a store called Trimmingham's, of Bermuda... And I covet these pieces and my dad and I were the exact same build, so they actually fit now. I have not tried them on for a while, but for a long time I could wear those pieces and they were great. (Berkowitz, 2018)

When asked if he had any pieces from his grandparents in his closet, his answer was negative.

Brown responded promptly, revealing that she and her mother held differing views on clothing, leading to a lack of items passed down directly from her mother. However, she did possess garments handed down from her grandmother. Mendenhall also lacked pieces of clothing from his parents. Instead, he only possessed jewellery from his father:

I used to have a cardigan from my grandfather. However, at a certain point in my life, I started purging. There was a shift between me..... being this gatherer of beautiful designer clothes....I remember it was in my forties. And at that point I started purging; either giving things to charity or selling things. (Mendenhall, 2018)

Scully was clear on this issue: "No....., ahh I have... it is not like it is clothing, I have my mother's wedding ring. And ahh, I do not have anything of my father's anymore because I got much taller than him" (Scully 2018). He also had no pieces of clothing from his grandparents: "my uncle was the one person, I wore his clothes until they fell apart and there was just nothing left" (Scully 2018). Family clothing for Costa was an interesting discovery; he first spoke about his mother:

I have this ahh burgundy like sweater, that belonged to my mom, ahh and I, always thought that my mom was such a big woman. I always envisioned that she was this kind of gigantic person. She was, was very bony and thin and I look at the sweater today, and it is so

tiny. No, I do not have anything from my father; I have his ahh, ring when he passed away; that is the memory I have from him. (Costa, 2018)

While he did not have any clothing directly inherited from his grandparents, he proceeded to share a story about a particular shirt: “I was recently sent one of my shirts from like two years old, My sister sent me my little shirt, which is pleated like a tuxedo shirt when I was like two or three years old, from my birthday. I have pictures of myself wearing the shirt with a little bowtie, so I mean, why did you send me this, it is creepy” (Costa, 2018). What was interesting was his reaction to seeing a tuxedo shirt from a very young age: “And today what do I wear, I have thirty white shirts, and that is all I wear, and I wear tuxedo shirts for the day, for the morning to the gym, I do not care... that is all I wear” (Costa, 2018). The childhood clothing reappeared in his closet later in life, seamlessly integrating into his daily attire and becoming a staple part of his uniform.

Marshall inherited clothing from her mother, yet she did not possess any items passed down from her father. Clothing from her grandparents was absent also, but when the conversation shifted to her daughter, her voices changed and she replied “yeah... I have I have a little thing of her dresses” (Marshall, 2019). She had kept dresses from her daughter when she was young and then she spoke about how her daughter would often wear her clothes, expressing hesitation in lending certain pieces to her, due to her own personal attachment to them. Her daughter had on several occasions without her knowledge, ventured into her closet, much like other daughters worldwide who had done the same before her, present company included. When I asked Brown about whether her daughter visited her closet for clothes to wear, she responded:

Yes, she comes in here in the morning; she knows that certain sections are kind of off-limits so, and she on occasions, kind of defies me... she will come in, she will look, and I think with each stage, cause she is fourteen, so things that she would have thought were cool two years ago, now she is like, I do not want to look like grandma. (Brown, 2018)

Brown could read into her daughter's age and realise it was all a learning experience. When asked whether she had any pieces of clothing from her daughter in her closet, the answer was "Ohh, that is a good question, so the only thing I would have is like when she retired this t-shirt, and I do not wear t-shirts often" (Brown, 2018). Each interviewee had a story, often heart-warming, about their attachment to pieces from their loved ones, prompting them to think of their caretakers. Three-generation closets also reveal a new routine of everyday ritual when children start to wear clothing from the elderly. Hence, the closet being a micro world within a miniature world.

3.3 The organizing

In modern Western society, we have been educated by the elderly to be organized in our existence. From childhood, we learn organization through tidying our rooms, we continue honing it in our studies while going to school, and finally, as we step into the professional world, we may realise that it is the key to our success. Parents often remind their children of the organization of their space, some grasp it early on while some never learn the term. At a young age, children have already started their enculturation. They acquire the skill of picking up their toys and putting them away in the designated place that has been chosen for each specific object.

The interviewees spoke about organising their closets. Many had been through their closets to minimise the excess clothing. Some spoke of the clothing rotation for the seasons, maintaining different closets for warm and cold weather. It was also interesting to ask the interviewees about their closets from their childhood, considering their diverse geographic backgrounds. It was alluring to learn how every little detail from their upbringing had shaped them. For Rodriques, who was born to Cuban immigrants in the USA:

I had a closet in my room that was you know, quite organized... it was quite sparse... my bedroom was black and white, the furniture was white with black drawers... The wallpaper was psychedelic black and white, there was the one colour royal blue rug, and I mean, I

guess my love of black and white started at a very young age.
(Rodrigues, 2018)

I lifted my hands up and pointed to the room we were in, and we both started laughing; it was as if we had stepped into the room he just described from his childhood. He, like many individuals, had brought his past into the present. For Costa, who grew up in Brazil “my bedroom was a closet... I had a cupboard and... my house was bed-less during the day, completely clean, all the pillows and blankets were put away on the top shelf in the cupboard during the day” (Costa, 2018). His bed was a sitting area during the day; he had to share his closet with his blanket, pillows, and sheets, a paradox to different nuances within the world where people put bedspread over their beds in the morning. For Marshall, who grew up in England:

I had a chest of drawers at one point... when I was a little bit older, probably like ten or eleven, I had one of those MFI closets... it was like all in one; you had like a little mirror, you could sit down with a mirror, and then there would have been drawers on one side, it was made out of Formica, it was really modern, and I loved it, cause it was really funny in this old cottage, it did not fit in you know.
(Marshall, 2019)

For Mendenhall, who grew up in USA, he was very clear about his childhood closet “it was more organized than it is now, it was absolutely organized” then he continued: “I had the ritual of changing it, I lived in Salt Lake, so we had four very distinctive seasons, so I had the ritual of changing it twice a year for the seasons” (Mendenhall, 2018).

Moving into the present, I inquired about the organization of the interviewees' closets in their apartments. Berkowitz, I found, had achieved flawless organization:

So, my closet, my daily closet, is organized in a very specific way. I use Ikea's Billy shelving system, it is basically like a grid system so they are like cubbies, and everything fits in. Everything is folded in the same dimension because I have basically navy blue, black, grey,

indigo and white, it is all organized in those colours and then there are those colourful things, like shorts and swimwear. It has to be organized and I do not mix things up. (Berkowitz, 2018)

Mendenhall's closet organization was influenced by both seasonal changes and the demands from his work: “it is kind of organized that way, I have my slim chinos, and I have my wider chinos, and I have my denim, I have t-shirts, I have sweaters, outerwear on the bottom, shirts on the right, suits and jackets on the left. It is merchandised, it is crazy“ (Mendenhall, 2018). By uttering these words aloud into the open air he quickly realised he was talking about the showrooms he had or was working in. He also mentioned that he made a point to wear every piece of clothing in his closet, a commendable practice that served as a valuable lesson. For Pitman, her closet was not just a storage space but an architectural marvel. Prior to the interview, she graciously invited me into her walk-in closet, revealing a meticulously organized space that spoke volumes about her attention to detail. Then she revealed to me her story about her closet in her first apartment:

I had a little more time then, I was not married and had no kids. I drew everything, I drew the size of the magazines, each one and how big I needed the cubby hole to be. Seventeen was this big (she reflected the size with her hand) or the size of New York Times. I drew the height of the boots, I drew literally everything. Somewhere I may have the drawings, I drew the blouses on hangers and I would measure, I was a nutcase. (Pitman, 2019)

She meticulously arranged her entire closet, carefully considering her belongings and sizing the shelves to ensure her wardrobe and life belongings, fit perfectly within them.

3.4 The privacy

The closet in our home is in most cases is not available to non-resident persons but it offers a good picture of the owner's personality, more than many other things that Löfgren´s “black box” holds (Löfgren 2014, pg. 77). It reflects the

identities, interests, hobbies, taste, aesthetics, and culture of the individual because of how personal it is. Philosopher Michel de Certeau wrote how this:

Private territory must be protected from indiscreet glances, for everyone knows that even the most modest home reveals the personality of its occupant. Even an anonymous hotel room speaks volumes of its transient guest after the night. A place inhabited by the same person for a certain duration draws a portrait that remembers this person based on objects (present and absent) and the habits that they imply. (Certeau 1998, p. 145)

The individual leaves marks on the space he occupies, whether it is a hotel room, his private home, or the closet, which is very private in most cases.

The relation to the closet's privacy can range between extremes, from posting pictures of the closet space on social media to being so private that peeking into the closet is an "act of breaking in". When clothing is not worn on a body, it still seems to bear the mark of that person. When dress is apart from the person, hanging lifeless in a closet, we maintain our sense about it as though it almost still belongs to our body. It feels as if it is our second skin. If the individual is not wearing the clothing the next day, it is kept in the storage space in darkness, hidden from the view of the world. The invisible line of privacy located in front of the closet is an imaginary one that we have put there in order to protect these private quarters in our homes. For some it is difficult to imagine that other people could or would look inside their closet and the invisible line turns into a shield or a titan door, not to be crossed by wandering eyes of family members. A range of perspectives which are shared by thousands of closet owners around the globe, reflecting the individual preferences regarding privacy and personal space.

The interviewees had different views on their privacy. For Berkowitz, his privacy existence on his closet: "It is private, it is... it is private. I guess I'm struggling with that, I guess my whole life is private... I spend a lot of time alone" (Berkowitz, 2018). Then he moves onto the privacy in his childhood:

Well growing up it was always a problem with my middle brother somehow pilfering my closet and never admitting to it, boys hide things, boys like to have secrets, and boys keep things in the closets. It is hard to have your privacy when you are growing up and you are figuring out who you are. (Berkowitz, 2018)

For Mendenhall his closet was very private: “Yes, one hundred percent.... even my partner by the way is not really allowed in there, he has seen in there. He never goes into my closet, he has seen in my closet, but he never goes into my closet” (Mendenhall, 2018). He had never caught a person peeking into his closet without permission. For Rodrigues:

Ahh nobody really looks at my closet except for my husband, so I am fine with if somebody went into my closet, I would not, I mean, it is me, it is like, I would not be ashamed, there is nothing I need to hide in that closet, you know... I mean I am sure people would just open it and say..... it is exactly what I expected, black white, grey, there might be like a coloured t-shirt. (Rodrigues, 2018)

Costa's answer on this issue was concise, when asked if he had ever caught someone peeking into his closet: “I would be furious if I did see that.... I mean yeah, it is probably your most private self. But also just think about it, ahh I am, embarrassed when people show me their closets too, I am not embarrassed, but I am like, a little shy.” (Costa, 2018) For Marshall, her view was very personal, three people did see her closet, her girlfriend, her daughter and the cleaner:

It is just nobody else in my bedroom particularly, if someone was in my bedroom they would see it, but yeah, definitely private. Also, I get embarrassed by it, cause it gets really messy in there, you know... cause I do not just have clothes in it, I have a little section with.... my passport and stuff is in there, you know, it is not that big, it is not. (Marshall, 2019)

For Scully his answer on having someone peeking into his closet was simple “No, I have had people ask to look inside my closet, but I have never... I just

think cause where they are situated in our apartment there would be no access, now sometimes people open up my closet by accident cause they think it is the coat closet” (Scully 2018).

On the other hand, Pitman did not have a privacy issue with her large walk-in closet; she even invited her grandkids to have a Thanksgiving party in her closet:

Ohh I will show you some pictures, I mean and that closet, when the kids are all here, they will be here for Thanksgiving, what we do is that we turn on the tv and we turn down the lights and we give them all pillows and they make us close the door and it is like a movie theatre... I have a television in there so that I can listen to the news and get dressed in the morning. (Pitman, 2019)

Her closet transformed into a playroom where the grandkids discovered treasures; she embraced the playfulness the grandkids experienced in the room and found value in that. For Perlmutter the answer was easy: “No one... no it is not private, people do not come up for ahh... if you came over I opened it up, I'm not hiding anything” (Perlmutter, 2019). There was never a situation where she needed to open her closet, as it was situated in her bedroom, a space she did not typically invite others into. For Brown the closet was not private either: “No, ahh no, I mean I posted it online from here, I enjoy the space, I am generally proud. I mean, it did, it bother me when you walked in that I had all this accumulated that needed... to me it was like an unmade bed, I know you did not mind” (Brown, 2018). She was more concerned about her personal clutter during the interview. The contents of the interviewees' closets, along with their perspectives on others examining them, unveiled numerous intricate details and complexities, shared by many.

Clothing

4.0 The clothing

Dress is a basic fact of social life and this, according to anthropologists, is true of all known human culture: all people “dress” the body in some way, be it through clothing, tattooing, cosmetic or other form of body painting. To put it another way, no culture leaves the body unadorned but adds to embellishes, enhances or decorates the body. (Entwistle 2000, p. 6)

We live in a world of dressed bodies. Everyday clothing serves a functional purpose, not only do they provide warmth and protection from the elements, but they are also articles worn on the body for adornment, social positioning, as well as cultural and aesthetic purposes, reflecting on personal style and individual identity. These items can include categories of styles such as shirts, pants, dresses, skirts, jackets, and accessories like hats, shoes, and jewellery. It can be clothing worn by the individual in his private quarters of the home, worn to work, or to other occasions. Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas, in *Thinking through Fashion*, write that “clothing is what is worn for the sake of protection and warmth. It also applies to basic ritual modesty of covering one’s naked body” (Geczy & Karaminas 2016, p. 91). Most individuals do not like to wear the same pieces of clothing to all functions, different situations impose different way of dressing, like exercises, outdoor activities and for social situations like weddings and funerals. The human act of adorning the body tries to adapt its own individual dress for each particular social occasion. In her book *Fashion-ology*, Yuniya Kawamura, a professor of sociology, writes about the different meanings behind fashion and clothing: “The term “fashion and clothing” tend to be used synonymously, but while fashion conveys a number of different social meanings, clothing is the generic raw material of what a person wears” (Kawamura 2005, p. 3). Clothing forms the outer shell, the raw material of what an individual wears on his body, representing everyday wear, worn by people every day, and is not considered fashion, costume or uniform.

4.1 The costume

Costume is a set of clothing used by an actor or performer in order to enrich his role and identity for his performance, while clothing establishes everyday identity. An individual that puts on a dress every morning puts on clothing while a performer puts on a costume for the effect it will create. Folklorist Pravina Shukla writes in her book *Costume* about the difference between clothing and costume: she explains that clothing is a visual picture of who we are, affected by style, taste, class, personality, economics, age, gender, and body. “Costume” on the other hand, often describes who we are not” (Shukla 2015, p. 4). Costumes require creators, individuals who, through their personal interpretation of heritage and tradition, design and make up these garments. Their knowledge and representation of history is visualised through the garments. “Costumes are usually set apart from dress in rarity, elaborate materials, trims, and embellishment and pronounced silhouettes” (Shukla 2015, p. 4). Every individual carries with him a tapestry of multiple identities, and certain aspects of these identities may only find true expression through the medium of costume. The costume, as Shukla continues in her writings, can be the only outlet for deep feelings; it can be a way to interact in the social world, it can show creativity and help with the release of emotions:

A person who gets up in the morning and gets dressed without giving it much thought is putting on clothing. However, a person who gets dressed for the effect it will create is putting on a costume. Some people who carefully compose their daily ensembles become icons; in effect, they wear a costume every day. (Shukla 2015, p. 4)

She was clearly describing fashion icons, an individuals that composes his clothing to create an effect, is wearing costume. Another scholar from over a century ago wrote about how costumes served as inspiration across various cultures. *In The Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin writes: “Beyond the theatre, the question of costumes reached deep into the life of art and poetry, where fashion is at once preserved and overcome” (Benjamin 1999, p. 65). Brown was the only one among the interviewees who spoke about wearing a costume instead of clothing or uniform. In our lengthy conversation it was apparent that

her costume made her “feel visible, I feel seen, I feel ahh... whether you like that look or not, you got to respect the forcefulness of it and the deliberation of it. I feel fearless” (Brown, 2018). She put together her outfits to create an effect. She strongly felt her own presence, recognised by others for her courage and thoughtful fashion choices. Unaffected by differing opinions, she radiated inner strength, empowered by the acknowledgment of her true self.

4.2 The uniform - personal uniform

The term “uniform” is generally used to refer to standardised set of garments that form a collective identity through same pieces of clothing. Uniforms are often used in various contexts such as schools, the military and for sports teams. It is designed to create a sense of cohesion, identity, and equality among its wearers. It may be used visually to promote a sense of unity through the same dress code. The uniform creates a social identity at the same time it offers social interaction. Thus, for example a sports team comprised of a small number of individuals with well-trained body types, dressed in comfort for the sake of body movements show that they are a part of unified group by wearing the same piece of clothing. In her book *The Language of Clothing*, Alison Lurie points out that: “unlike most civil clothing, the uniform is often consciously and deliberately symbolic. It identifies its wearer as a member of some group and often locates him or her within hierarchy” (Lurie 1983, p. 18). Then she speaks of the affect uniform has on the individual: “No matter what sort of uniform it is - military, civil, religious; the outfit of a general, a postman, a nun, a butler, a football player or a waitress - to put on such livery is to give up one's right act to as an individual - in terms of speech, to be partially wholly censored” (Lurie 1983, pp. 17-18). Her statement reflects an interesting perspective on people wearing uniforms.

There is an alternative interpretation to the term uniform, referring not to a group but to an individual who wears similar clothes every day. In many cases such uniforms offer expedience and provide convenience as they streamline the process of getting dressed by eliminating the need to make daily clothing choices. This practice ultimately saves time. As a mother of a disabled child, I

cherish every moment in the morning. Dressing becomes a quick task, completed in just a few minutes, as I focus on the numerous tasks that await me in the day ahead. The uniform developed, was based on clothing for the environment and the daily activity of manoeuvring a wheelchair in and out of a car, hence the dark colour. Gradually, the entire white wardrobe slowly disappeared from the closet since wheelchairs and white clothing do not go particularly well together. My personal uniform has stayed simple and continues to be so, even now. Thus, this kind of uniform is not formed through collective identity and does not fit under Alison Lurie's definition of "uniform". It is the result of an individual making necessary alterations to his personal dress code, simplifying his needs for the sake of time and comfort with the environment and the tasks presented.

Dressing in a personal uniform requires consistency but also requires, in most cases, multiples of many identical or similar items being next to each other in the closet. The use of personal clothing, in this case, is steady and consistent, making it an effortless task to dress every day. The conversation with Mendenhall provided more information than the questions asked, delving into the origins of personal uniform, rooted in the practicalities of everyday existence. Nevertheless, despite the simplicity and repeatability, he noted that the finer details and qualities were still part of the daily uniform:

Is it not funny, whether it is a child or a dog or some other messy life circumstance, how we are able though to still wear the beautifully made clothes and therefore really expensive t-shirts. That the dog is allowed to drool on you, and you can crawl around on your hands and knees, but it is important for you to have those beautiful pieces.
(Mendenhall, 2018)

He assessed the situation flawlessly, recognizing that despite life's changing circumstances, consistency in the quality and craftsmanship of daily attire remained paramount. There was also a sentimental attachment to the exquisite pieces. Then, he continued:

I have friends now, multi-generational friends, so the ones that grew up with me understand my uniform. Still, it is interesting I have friends, that are in their twenties now. They are people who appreciate clothes. But... the friends... who are younger, they do not get the uniform... they want to change me... Can you just give me a chance to style you, can you get out of that f... navy sweater (laughing hard) and I am like, no, you do not understand the importance of this, (we both laughed) this is like armour to me. This is like, my security blanket. (Mendenhall, 2018)

We both laughed as he spoke, finding humour in the situation, yet the truth behind his words was not far off. Maintaining consistency in his wardrobe became a part of his practice of everyday life and gave him a sense of security for his hectic schedule.

4.3 The travelling uniform

In my quest to understand the personal uniform, I kept returning to the word “travels” as the word “uniform” began to appear in many of the interviews. As an extensive traveler myself for many decades, for whom hotel rooms run in the number hundreds if not thousands, a personal uniform became a way of life. During the packing process, I learned quite a few variations of throwing things into the “micro box” called the “suitcase” within minutes. In the article “Containing the Past, the Present and the Future: Packing the Suitcase” Orvar Löfgren writes about the suitcase:

It is a very special kind of container and assemblage. First of all, it is a container on the move between different contexts. Secondly, it is a micro-universe, a condensed version of a home or a life; the suitcase is turned into a very personal and private space, my own (sometimes secret) universe. Finally, its contents are constantly handled and rearranged. (Löfgren 2016, p. 71)

The suitcase transferred all the necessary components of my permanent life into my temporary work life for the days or weeks ahead. As the suitcase, on

hundreds of occasions, arrived a day later than I did to my destination, a carry-on bag became an interesting alternative. My carry-on travel bag was always black, and I deliberately made an effort to have it look old and worn in the hope that no one would want to steal it. Scully had a similar story:

I have very bad bag karma, so for all the years that I have traveled, I would say nine times out of ten, my bags would get lost. I never had a bag get lost and never get it back... So I pack light because there was just... no reason to just have tons and tons, it is too much, I do not like carrying it around. I really love the speed of throwing your bag on top of your seat and leaving the airport, it saves two hours in both directions for me. (Scully, 2018)

Most of the interviewees are or have been more than a re-occurring travellers. There is, however, one person who excelled in every aspect of traveling, and that is Mendenhall: “Since 1996, I have travelled in between fifty to eighty percent of every year, until two years ago, now I travel about six weeks a year, which is mind-boggling actually... six weeks is nothing, it is a gift” (Mendenhall, 2018). This kind of traveling needs careful organisation, thought and understanding of what one person, needs on a trip. All that is extra is left at home; every essential has been scraped down to the bare minimum. The first trip indeed had some additional pieces, but as the trips re-occurred, the idea became clear that only a few pieces of clothing would make the trip. From the constant travels, a simple uniform was gradually born. In the continuous moving between cities and hotels, this kind of uniform created a comfort zone for the wearer. To wear the same type of clothes while the world around them was constantly changing. His hectic schedule required clothing that suited every trip. “Ahh... hm, a navy suit, white shirt, navy tie, and black pair of shoes... a navy V-neck, a navy crewneck, two more white shirts, a pair of jeans, a Chelsea boot, (a low boot) a denim jacket... socks, and underwear. That is kind of my uniform” (Mendenhall, 2018). Costa and Rodriques are also world travellers and highlighted the strength of their travel uniform:

My travel gear is just so great now, because I have a uniform, you know, and I do not veer from that uniform. When I travel it is usually

for press and things like that, so I have my favourite black wool gaberdine blazer, which travels very well, two ties, an evening tie and a day tie, three white shirts, two navy shirts, two pairs of black jeans, my black shoes, my sneakers and then black t-shirts. (Rodriquez, 2018)

For Costa, his uniform was undoubtedly simple “perhaps ten pairs of underwear, you know, three to five socks, two pairs of pants, plus one that I will be wearing, that is three, it is plenty... white shirts which I roll, with the hangers, I put them together, I roll them, and t-shirts... and everything is black and white” (Costa, 2018). The traveller fills the suitcase with continuation of his personality, storing things from his home into the travels. After years of living out of my suitcase, it became evident that it contained more than my clothing. It carried aesthetic pieces that I used to adorn hotel rooms with, it served as a case for my culture as I travelled from one city to another. The suitcase is a container where emotions and physical things connect, packed and unpacked, and they sometimes come with a surprise after visiting stores in foreign countries. For Pitman, her travelling story came up in an answer to a different question; her artistic way of packing her suitcase was inspirational and creative to say the least. She packed her suitcase by outfits with necessary clothing to wear for any occasion, through her drawings which she sketched up in a sketchbook before her trip.

Writing about the categories of clothing made it evident that there are distinct differences in their meanings and purposes. Clothing, costume, uniform, or personal uniform are all categories we dress ourselves in for the daily life ahead. Clothing is worn to cover the body, ranging from everyday clothing to formal attire. Uniform is standardised items of clothing worn by members of a group, organisation, or institution, signifying unity and identity. Costumes are essential in performances, enabling actors to inhabit specific roles or characters effectively. Finally a personal uniform that refers to an individual's consistent choice of clothing or style, typically characterised by a limited range of outfits or a distinctive signature look. The interviewees spoke freely

about their uniforms they had established on their travels, enjoying the effortless task that came with it.

4.4 The occasions

We are not born cultured and organized, we are educated by our caretakers. We acquire the skill of dressing appropriately for both daily activities and social events, a fundamental knowledge that accompanies us into our future endeavors. Are we at ease with the dress we are wearing during the circumstances we are in? Do we feel awkward when wearing an outfit that is not suitable for the occasion? Do we attract attention, or do we blend in? When getting dressed, one requires an awareness of the occasion being dressed for. We learn to don raincoats when it rains during outdoor play and to bundle up in warm outerwear in cold weather. We comprehend that jeans and a t-shirt are inappropriate for a black-tie event, just as we would not don lavish evening gowns for grocery shopping or going to the gym. We refrain from wearing a white dress to a wedding, as it might overshadow the bride, and we dress formally for meetings with dignitaries like presidents, queens, or kings. We dress informally going to the movies, the gym, shopping for food or going to the swimming pool. As Joanna Entwistle notes: “wearing the right clothes and looking our best, we feel at ease with our bodies, and the opposite is equally true: turning up for a situation inappropriately dressed, we feel awkward, out of place and vulnerable” (Entwistle 2000, p. 7). When we fail to dress correctly we risk the disapproval by those who look upon us when they notice spots, wrinkles, missing buttons, tears, holes, transparent and wrinkled clothes. We can be read by others with disapproval. At an early age we are educated by our caretakers or parents about appropriate dress, what to wear for the right occasion. How does an individual dress the body when the “self” is in charge of “preparing the body for the social world” (Entwistle 2000, p. 7). At home, our focus on dressing tends to be minimal, as comfort usually takes precedence. However, when it comes to formal events, varying levels of awareness or consciousness come into play. We tend to dress more thoughtfully, considering how we present ourselves to the outside world. At home, there's a sense of

security in dressing for our own comfort without concern for external judgment. This approach to dressing is often a learned behavior that evolves over time, possibly extending well into adulthood. Marshall remembered the first time when she had to dress up for an occasion:

I tried to dress up to go to school every day when I was about five, but it was over the top and I got sent home. I was very little, I loved to dress up. It is funny that I wear such a uniform now, because I was obsessed with dressing up. I wanted to dress up like a princess, be very feminine, I wanted tutu skirts and everything. I loved dressing up... My grandma bought me some dress that my mother hated, it was literally a nylon dress in some neon bright colours. It was disgusting, probably I loved it because it was so different and I wore it to school and I got sent home, and I thought that was wrong. (Marshall, 2019)

The school mandated uniforms for the children, but Marshall was not initially keen on embracing this aspect of school life. However, as she grew older, she came to appreciate the simplicity of having a personal uniform.

Different cultures have distinct holidays, often accompanied by specific dress codes or traditions. For Pitman, her answer as to who taught her how to dress up right for the occasion “that was probably my mom” (Pitman, 2019). Her voice got softer when she spoke about her mother:

I am Jewish, and there is the high Holiday season; this is how fashion came into my life. The holidays are usually in September and October so to me it was not a religious event, it was a fashion event. I got a new wool coat, I got a pair of boots, and it was Chicago, so often it was hot, but you wore wool... It was the turn of the season, and everybody dressed beautifully, they went to synagogue and that was just the highlight by the time I was little. My parents, even though we were Jewish, brought me to New York for Easter. (Pitman, 2019)

For Pitman, religious holidays evolved from solely religious observances into fashion events, with everyone donning stunning garments that emphasized the significance of the occasion. The answer for Mendenhall on who educated him was simple: Hmm... I mean, it was definitely my parents: I did not have really any influences outside of the home; I was growing up in Salt Lake City, Utah, in the sixties and seventies..... you know that Salt Lake is the home of the Mormon church” (Mendenhall, 2018). Growing up within a culture like the Mormon Church does not allow the individual to dress in an extreme way; it, however, may have been the driving force that made him incredibly successful within the fashion world.

4.5 The black-tie event

Getting dressed for a social event requires more awareness or attention than one might otherwise give to dressing. The physical body is presented with dress and adornments in social situations, but formal situations have more rules than other social situations. They are also even more gendered; for instance, when attending a black-tie evening event, an evening gown is required for women, while for men, it is a black tuxedo. When asked how much time and attention was put into getting the interviewees dressed for a black-tie event, the answers were different. Rodrigues found that the fuss over dressing up for a single black-tie social event was no hassle at all, and his response was quite straightforward: “I have edited my black tie down to a science... black tie for me means, my favourite black gaberdine jacket, a black satin tie, or could be ivory or could be stone and could be twill, it could be a silk tie, a white shirt and my black jeans and my black shoes. I do not really do another kind of black tie” (Rodrigues, 2018). He had mastered his uniform of black-tie attire to the point where getting dressed required minimal thought or effort. I found it intriguing that he incorporated a pair of jeans into his black-tie ensemble, opting to forgo tailored pants for these occasions. For Costa, it was as if he was born into black-tie events: “That is very easy for me, it is just fifteen minutes. I mean basically I think being in my previous job for so long, much of what I did was to go out. I was in an event every week, that is why I have so

many tuxedos, excuse me, I have so many tuxedos” (Costa 2018). And then he continued: “I have this relationship with black-tie, which is very strange” (Costa 2018). He spoke again about his sister sending him a photo of himself wearing a white shirt with a bowtie. The dressing habits he experienced at a young age helped him for the role later in his life. Mendenhall did put awareness and time into preparations:

There is usually an hour of like the ritual of grooming cause usually it is a special event, you want to be in a perfect state of mind I guess, cause I do not wear tuxedo very often... It is like an hour to get the shirt perfect, it takes forever to get the shirts on with the studs and I also usually find that it is at that moment when I realise. I get why everyone had servants because it is actually, with suspenders and garters on your socks and studs on your tuxedo shirt and cufflinks, it is a lot of work. And then getting the right watch that will go under the cuff. And then I forget the most important thing, I still cannot tie a bowtie, I am proud to say, I have to have either James tie it or someone in the office do it for me. (Mendenhall, 2018)

When asked about the amount of time and attention he devoted to getting dressed for a black-tie event, Scully had his own perspective on the matter: “More than I am getting dressed regularly, I would say about an hour just because you know... I groom before I put on a tuxedo, and then usually, I have to dedicate about twenty minutes to tying the tie, cause even though I know how to tie one, it is always an issue for black tie” (Scully, 2018). Brown appeared remarkably comfortable while preparing for a black-tie event: “Not much more than on a regular day, the only difference... the makeup is probably an extra five minutes because I go a little bit deeper. If I have the time I am more prone to put in rollers, but in terms of clothing, sometimes it is faster, because there are fewer difference elements. It is like one dress” (Brown, 2018). Both Brown, Costa and Rodrigues spoke about the effortless moments they had with this elegant occasion, they had educated themselves in the simplicity of this situation, they were so used to going to black tie events that

the effort and attention for them had become an easy task. The constant learning process had been stored within their body. Pitman on the other hand had a negative thought about it:

I hate black tie quite honestly and there are different kinds, so very often if it is a special event that require dress up... I will either have glam squad come to the house even if it is early in the morning and the event is not till that night, and have them do my make up and maybe blow up my hair. So that takes away a lot of the pressure... I always lay out the clothes way before. (Pitman, 2019)

She had been through so many black ties and special events and wanted to save time by organising the activity of dressing ahead of time. The interviewees, who were required by their work to attend formal events, effortlessly and seamlessly put their formal clothing on, with minimal thought or awareness. Repetition, like everything else in life, serves as an educator, making the tasks easier for the individual over time.

4.6 The value

When shopping for clothing, there is a lesson to be learned on the value of the purchase. For people working in the fashion industry, one of the perks is having easy access to clothing through sample sales and other in-house outlets; some have a clothing allowance written in their contracts. The consumption of clothing that comes from this form of payment for work, can be overwhelming. Scully explained this very well:

We were talking about it the other day because we worked in fashion, I had so much access to clothes, not because I did not want them, but you know, a lot of the designers that I worked for, part of my payment was clothing allowance. This downsizing that Tom (his partner) and I have just done on our closet... I would not say I have a uniform, but I definitely have a core of the same six things I wear all the time, different versions of them. (Scully 2018)

For him it was necessary at this point in his life to wear everything in his closet and therefore created a dynamic value for himself, he referred to Mary Condo the clothing organiser:

I am not a fan of Mary Condo even though everyone is, I like the concept the only thing she said and really stuck with me, was when all these people that are editing out their clothes because they have bought too much, they wanted to save all these old t-shirts and wear them to bed. She was saying to them, you spend more of your time in bed than anywhere else, why would you wear a shitty piece of clothing to bed that is a non-acceptable idea for me, I am never buying a shitty t-shirt again. (Scully, 2018)

Scully was talking about the intrinsic theory of value, the logical decision an individual makes about what holds value for them personally. It is often based on a combination of factors such as their beliefs, experiences, needs, preferences, and goals. It requires thinking about themselves and their values, and deciding what matches their beliefs, what they want, and what makes them feel good overall. This decision can vary greatly from person to person and may change over time as individuals grow and evolve.

Sensoriality

5.0 The sensoriality

For these articles of clothing are more than garments, more than fashion wear; they are closer to being a lyrical text made up of textiles with textures - all words whose origins lie in the same Latin root, *textus*. (Pálsson 2008, p. 19)

I use these beautiful words written by the late Icelandic playwright and poet Sigurður Pálsson to start what I consider essential to this study: the chapter on “sensoriality”. He is describing clothing surfaces within fabrics and knitted cloths. His words have an ethereal feeling woven into them; simultaneously,

they are stitched into the beginning of a new collection for the designer who writes these words. Each collection's choice of material and texture is essential, as the sensation and feelings we have for our clothing are felt through our bodily senses. We rely on our physical senses to transmit or perceive the sensations individuals experience when the texture of cloth touches their skin, which may vary from one individual to another individual. We may feel the softness, or we may feel the hard, scratchy texture of the fabric. Academic studies have frequently overlooked the sensorial dimensions of clothing, yet these aspects significantly influence how individuals choose their outfit as they stand before their closet, preparing for their daily performance.

The sensorial qualities that define our experiences such as the enchantment of a magical sunset, the aroma of perfume, the sound of a train, the savour of food, and the sensation of touch on skin. They play a pivotal role in how we perceive and interact with the world around us in every day life. As sensory input reaches us, we process the information, forming judgments and decisions through our conscious awareness. Our five primary senses; touch, vision, smell, hearing, and taste, are constantly at work, with some suggesting the inclusion of additional senses like awareness, equilibrium, and touch through skin, heat, cold and pain. The body organ we stimulate and use the most is our eyes. They navigate us throughout the day, with them we educate ourselves with what we see, with them we perceive colour, light, darkness, depth, and space. Our nose allows us to detect and remember smell in the environment; one familiar smell can bring back memory long forgotten. Our ears enable us to listen to and appreciate language and music; while the inner ear helps us maintain our balance and sinus pressure. Our tongue has the ability to taste food, distinguish between good and bad food, and sense temperature variations in food and beverages. Last but not least is the skin which is responsible for a number of functions: protection from outside elements of weather, the wind, the cold and the heat, for perspiration to cool the body down and for storing water and making vitamin D from the sunlight. Through the skin, we feel touch. Sensorial perception provides us with the necessary information required to understand what we feel and experience. We are aware of the

feelings inside the body, the warmth, the intimacy, the pain, and the experience. Our senses can be in a heightened stage, or they can be in a rather muted or subdued stage.

5.1 The touch

Touch is one of the most intimate and sophisticated senses in our body, enabling us to experience physical intimacy in profound ways. In the introduction to the book *Thinking Through the Skin*, the words of philosophers Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey speak of how the “skin opens our bodies to other bodies; through touch, the separation of self and other is undermined in the very intimacy or proximity of the encounter” (Ahmed & Stacey 2004, p. 6). Touch encompasses the act of making contact between fingers and an object, enabling individuals to perceive the surface of that object through their skin. For instance, when someone puts on a sweater, the sensory receptors on their upper body automatically detect the texture of the fabric. The touch on the skin of a piece of clothing can feel soft, light, sensitive, delicate, calm, and gentle, all words used to describe the soothing touch of gentle clothing. Paradox to this, is the feeling of painful touch on the skin; clothing, for example, has the potential to irritate the skin, leading to discomfort and sometimes physical pain. Some individuals may experience hypersensitivity or oversensitivity to certain materials, exacerbating this discomfort. When fabric is stiff and rigid, it can limit the body's natural movements, causing discomfort and hindering flexibility. Additionally, friction from such fabric can overly sensitize the skin, increasing the likelihood of irritation and potentially leading to blistering. This underscores the complex relationship between clothing and the sensations it elicits on the skin. A high armhole, ill-fitted neckline, or improperly designed crotch can cause discomfort and make the wearer acutely aware of the nuances and sensations of wearing this kind of clothing. In some cases, the fabric in some garments of clothing can create noise formed by the bodily movements of the individual; it may distract the “self” when the wearer becomes utterly aware of the noise. Personally, fabrics that make noise created by my body's movement are not found in my closet. When an individual

wears a well-fitted piece of clothing made out of quality fabric that does not overshadow or intimidate the presence of the personal “self”, it is worth pursuing.

I was intrigued to explore whether the interviewees possessed the ability to locate a particular piece of clothing in their closet without visual assistance, relying solely on their sense of touch. It was not surprising that most of the interviewees exuded confidence in their capacity to locate a garment using only their sense of touch. Their immersion in the fashion industry had undoubtedly honed this skill, giving them a distinct advantage in this regard. It was easy for Berkowitz:

Yes, I could go into my closet with my eyes closed and yeah, I could probably pick it out by touch... My grandmother was blind, by the way, and it was something that I learned from a very early age about touch; it was a very big thing... so touches, yes, are important, especially what we do with fabrics. (Berkowitz, 2018).

As a designer, his choice of fabrics for each collection was guided by the tactile sensations they evoked when touched. Costa answered this question with one word: “Yeah” (Costa, 2018). There was no need for further explanation; it was evident that he employed touch as a fundamental technique in his work with fabrics, understanding its intricacies and nuances perfectly. There was no hesitation in Mendenhall’s voice either when he answered the same question “One hundred percent... yeah, I would put my hand on it; I would know every single thing” (Mendenhall, 2018).

Marshall worked through the question and in the end she was confident that she could locate what she sought, using only her sense of touch:

I have not tried it, ahh depends what it was, like I have a Cos cashmere sweater, between that and the Acne one, I probably could know, yeah, I probably could. I will be going home testing it... Yeah I would know between cashmere and between cotton. (Marshall, 2019)

The decades of working experience the interviewees had accumulated were indeed the cornerstone of their success. Their extensive tenure and expertise in the fashion industry granted them a distinct advantage in decision-making, honing their senses through years of dedicated practice and training. With the launch of each new collection, they had encountered a fresh array of fabrics to touch, feel, and handle. This prompted them to form judgments based on their preferences and dislikes, shaping the direction of their designs. Scully's response flowed effortlessly: "yeah, I would say ninety percent of the things in my closet I can find by... a), because I know where they are but b), I would be able to find them by touching" (Scully, 2018). Pitman's answer also came without hesitations "Ohh yes for sure" (Pitman, 2019). Perlmutter did not think this was that difficult to answer "ahh, yeah I am very tactile so I can... I could type in the dark with my eyes closed, I could figure it out" (Perlmutter, 2019). Rodrigues described his personal uniform inside his closet at the same time as he answered the question "Ahh probably... because it is so edited it down now, you know, I only have one white shirt and many versions of it, but I only have one and the same thing in navy, same thing in jackets, same thing in jeans so..." (Rodrigues, 2018). He modestly downplayed his abilities in his response, but knowing his strong work ethic, I could sense that this task came effortlessly to him.

Brown, however, approached the question from a different perspective. For her, clothing began with the visual impact of color: "If I knew what I wanted, and I had to be blindfolded, I will find it. But I am very much led by the eye, often because it starts with colour... and shape and then, touch would be, I do not typically have things... that are uncomfortable to touch" (Brown, 2018). She spoke fondly of a dress from the label Mendel, (American apparel company) she admired the color and "generally liked things that have flow and... that have movement and this dress, which I almost never wear, why... because it does not feel good. It feels like... it looked good in the digital" (Brown, 2018). She was referencing the digital picture when she made the purchase online; she liked the colour but found the fabric's texture lacking. When someone enters a store, they typically scan the racks of clothing and are drawn to the rack where the visual display has captivated their

attention. The “habitus” of the body takes control, guided by the stored bodily knowledge, as the individual touches the surface of the garment without conscious awareness. If the touch is scruffy and not to his liking, he walks away and finds another piece of garment where the touch better suits his preference. I have observed this phenomenon countless times as customers step into my store. Each one seems to be on a quest for a particular tactile sensation they seek to experience on their skin. How they interpret and perceive this touch is deeply personal, varying from person to person. Disappointment in online shopping can arise because the sense of touch can not be experienced through the screen prior to making a purchase.

5.2 The softest piece of clothing in the closet

“Cashmere, I love cashmere” (Marshall, 2019). The cashmere sweater can evoke a gentle caress against the skin, imparting a feeling of comfort and joy, as Marshall fondly described her collection of cashmere garments. Certain clothing items possess the ability to elicit happiness based on the emotions they evoke when worn. This happiness is deeply rooted in the wearer’s personal connection with the attire as Sara Ahmed articulates, “consider happiness as a happening, as an involving affect (to be happy is to be affected by something), intentionality (to be happy is to be happy about something)” (Ahmed 2010, p. 29). To uncover the interviewees’ most cherished and gentlest garment tucked away in their wardrobes, the interview structure incorporated a series of seemingly contradictory inquiries. These questions caught some interviewees off guard, prompting them to contemplate deeply. It was essential to go through these questions since they portrayed their sense of touch, and at the same time, it made them highly aware of what was in their closet and what was not found in their closet. What one interviewee dismissed, another embraced fervently. Nevertheless, the consensus among the interviewees regarding the softest attire was not unexpected. Rodrigues made it humorous “hmm, I think asking you, who is your favourite kid, you know” (Rodrigues, 2018). We both shared a laugh, as he had so many favourites in this category. Berkowitz’s answer on this point was short and simple “ahh... I

mean, ahh, I guess it would be a cashmere sweater or something” (Berkowitz, 2018). Perlmutter had a similar answer “well... I have, cashmere what do you call them when they are just... They do not really have a shape, they are like... cape” (Perlmutter 2019). Initially, she struggled to recall the term “shawl” when I inquired, but it eventually came to her later on. For Rodrigues he replied “I used to love cashmere ahhh, and I still do, and I have cashmere blankets and throws and things like that... I find it so fragile and so expensive that it does not really suit my lifestyle” (Rodrigues, 2018). For Costa his answer was simple “I am quite comfortable with cotton and I am quite comfortable with cashmere” (Costa, 2018). All these interviewees found cashmere pieces in their closets to be the softest ones, and indeed, the fibres of cashmere feel light as a feather, and they trap the body heat without any extra weight of a thick garment on the body.

Brown had a different view on the question of softness “ahh... well relatively to other people... ahh... it is a good question... I love feathers; as you can see, I have a whole drawer of feather earrings. I love feathers” (Brown, 2018). For Pitman, her answer was also different “believe it or not, the softest is probably, you know, I have this one plaid flannel shirt that I love, and I wear it even to sleep in” (Pitman, 2019). For Mendenhall the answer was right to the point “I have an amazing ahh, grey, kind of crepe-based suit, from Ralph (Ralph Lauren) actually that is made like a shirt, it has no shoulder pads, no construction inside and it is just soft, it is just beautiful” (Mendenhall, 2018). All the responses reflected the interviewees' preferences for items in their closet that they deemed soft to the touch. Interestingly, all the interviewees selected the softest, most favored, and highest-quality materials in their closet. However, they shared a commonality: their favorite fabrics were made of natural fibers. Understanding fabrics is paramount in high fashion. Every collection revolves around in-depth discussions on fabrics and materials. With time, this accumulated knowledge makes quality fabrics indispensable in one's wardrobe. I experienced this firsthand, realizing the luxury of pure natural fibers on the skin, leading me to question why settle for blends when such exquisite comfort is available.

5.3 The scratchy and scruffy pieces of clothing in the closet

On the opposite end of soft garments are pieces of clothing that feel rigid and scratchy when they touch the skin but have still found a place within the closet. Rough and scratchy fabrics in clothing have the potential to irritate the skin, causing discomfort and making the individual acutely aware of their presence. Such pieces can lead to annoyance, irritation, and can even be harmful to the skin. The interviewees' responses to the question about scratchy pieces of clothing within the closet encompassed a variety of garments. Berkowitz said:

Uff... I am trying to think if I really have something unwearable, oh yeah, I have got a very, like, tweedy kind of very rough salt and peppery kind of, it is called a CPO shirt, it is kind of classic Naval shirt, part of a uniform, and it is out of a very rough kind of a tweed, and... you have to wear it on a day where it is below a certain temperature, if it gets to hot it is unbearable. (Berkowitz, 2018)

For Rodrigues the “roughest, you know some funky knitwear which I would never part with but some older Rogen sweatshirts... beautiful heavy cotton knits” (Rodrigues, 2018). Scully was very true to his wardrobe; his Shetland wool sweater was indeed a point of reference throughout the interview: “I would say the scruffiest would be the Shetland sweater and the piece of outwear, it is the Carhartt” (American apparel company) (Scully, 2018). Mendenhall’s answer related to “a pair of unwashed jeans and raw denim, which I should really throw away because I can not wear them. James wears them and it is funny... in the morning I will pick them up and I am like... these are like armour that you can cut yourself on” (Mendenhall, 2018). I found his answer humorous and we both started laughing. For Costa, he had an issue with one sweater “it is a mohair grey sweater, I do not know why it is just sitting there, I look at it, it looks like... it shouts at me every time, and it is one piece of grey sweater I have, you know, it is just sitting there” (Costa, 2018). His answer resonated with me, as it reminded me of a similar issue I have encountered with some pieces in my own closet. Sometimes, the presence of

negative aspects serves as a reminder to appreciate the positives. Marshall had a different meaning to the word scruffy; it symbolised the longevity of clothing to her and how frequently she used them: “most of my things can be really scruffy, ahh... probably my t-shirts... these ones that I have worn the most, those are the scruffiest” (Marshall, 2019). Pitman had a different view: “I can not wear anything itchy, you know, I can wear a cashmere hat and gloves, but I can not wear cashmere sweater” (Pitman, 2019). Her answer highlighted differences in preferences; while most people consider cashmere to be soft, she deemed it scratchy. Personally, there is no Icelandic wool sweater found in my closets, I find the surface of the wool distinctly scratchy and scruffy, despite seeing hundreds of people wearing them, both in real life and in photographs. Perlmutter had one word in response to this question: “metallic” (Perlmutter, 2019). She refrained from wearing any metallic clothing, accessories, beads, or anything with a glittery appearance. Brown did not mind clothing that felt scratchy or rough to touch, for she started her choice of clothing with colour, rather than material, favouring the sense of sight over that of touch, the visual over the tactile.

5.4 The favourite piece of clothing in the closet

By exercising their choice, a person might discover a particular garment in their wardrobe that surpasses all others, becoming their favored piece—one that brings them joy. As Ahmed notes “happiness also turns us toward objects” (Ahmed 2010, p. 29). The reasons may vary. It may give the individual comfort through touch, or it may be his latest purchase. The individual's attachment to the garment may stem from fond memories associated with it or from the deep care they feel for someone who gifted it to them. Through our choices regarding clothing, we acquire our most favored piece, while at the other extreme, there exists the least cherished garment. Through the polar opposites of favourites and least popular, I asked the interviewees about their choices for their favourite clothing in their closets. Rodrigues gave himself a moment to think about the question:

Efffff... my favourite piece of clothing in my closet, hmmm... I have a very old, very, very old black, I need to say that, black Jill Sander coat from the nineties, maybe later, later nineties, that I just, it is perfect and when I wear it... it is funny when you buy clothes like that, people always say what a beautiful coat where did you buy that, but it is a unique piece. (Rodrigues, 2018)

Some individuals hold onto specific clothing items for decades due to their perceived perfection in various aspects such as fabric quality, proportion, or craftsmanship. I exemplify this sentiment myself; I continue to retrieve and wear the coat I purchased three decades ago. Some pieces of clothing are just timeless and can withstand the changing fashion brought to us with every decade. Moreover, they grow on us, and we become particularly attached to them. The bond between a person and an object can be remarkably profound, imbued with emotions and memories that endure over time. As Ahmed reminds us: “Certain objects become imbued with positive affect as good objects. After all, objects not only embody good feeling, but are perceived as necessary for a good life” (Ahmed 2010, p. 34).

The one piece of garment contemplated or regarded as the favourite can be quite intriguing, for Scully he was very clear on this issue:

I have this... I have a navy Shetland sweater, which happens to be a particularly great shape, and it is very loosely knitted, you know... it is a Shetland sweater, but every time I wear it, people are like “wow” and it is funny cause Tom (his boyfriend) either notices me or he does not... I consider it successful when he actually goes “where did you get this sweater?” (Scully, 2018)

Most people do not consider Shetland wool soft but Scully continued: “It is Shetland, and it is soft..... when I wear it, I can wear it without anything under it, and it does not itch” (Scully, 2018). Scully had a taste for utilitarian inspirational looking clothes, his choices were eminent to that kind of aesthetics. For Berkowitz, his favourite piece came down to a single scarf:

There is this scarf that I have that I can not get rid of it is an old navy blue Lora Piana cashmere scarf (Italian cashmere company) I just can not get rid of it, and now I can not afford to buy a new one I have a lot of scarfs but there are certain things that when I put it on, I am just like, yeah that is me, here I am, but it is getting a little tattered. (Berkowitz, 2018)

There was no hesitation in Mendenhall's answer:

Ohhh... ahh... that would have to be a navy crewneck cashmere, fine gauge cashmere sweater... but then the other extreme is my white dinner jacket which I wore on my fiftieth birthday... it was one of the most magical nights of my life... I am attached to it because of that night. I bought it for that night, and that night was magical, and I felt like a million dollars. I had never owned a white dinner jacket before, so it was also my first one. (Mendenhall, 2018)

The joyous memories and the emotions evoked by wearing the jacket that night sealed its status as his favourite garment. Brown loved everything with feathers on it; her eye immediately pulled her towards pieces of the garment with feathers, while Costa's answer was straightforward "my Comp pants" (for comfort and form fit) (Costa, 2019). His pants were his favourite piece of clothing. Both Marshall and Pitman cherished their favourite pieces and over time their preference evolved. This highlights a valuable point; not everyone will maintain enduring affection for the same garment over many decades.

5.5 The disliked pieces of clothing in the closet

Understanding the emotional connection between individuals and their clothing is the essence of this study. It is intriguing to note that closets around the world house garments that are not favoured by their owners. It may not have a touch that is to the liking of the owner, it may bring a sad memory, or the pieces may irritate the skin. While a favourite clothing item may form a bond with the owner, the disliked piece of clothing does not. To better comprehend the affective relation between people and their clothes, it was considered

important to this study to find out what the main cause for the dislike pieces of clothing was in the closet for the interviewees.

Berkowitz's response to this question turned out to revolve around a certain category of clothing "I would say... that it is more around like gym clothes that I ahh, I wish they felt different, but they work so I still wear them... They are not my favourite pieces but they work" (Berkowitz, 2018). Mendenhall had a similar answer: "it is very practical but I do not like gym clothes, I do not like any of those synthetic things" (Mendenhall, 2018). He kept on talking about how the younger generation did not have the natural fibre clothing "feel" in their wardrobe:

To them, synthetic is amazing because it keeps them cool and it is lightweight, they never have to iron it and this whole like easy care, it is interesting finding out about millennials and especially Generation Z, because they were raised on "Under Armor" (a large clothing brand for sportswear) so they wore track shorts and nylon or polyester t-shirts their whole lives... They do not have the natural fibre, good training... Every man in America wants a dress shirt that he does not have to iron; I do not get that, I absolutely do not understand that. (Mendenhall, 2018)

Mendenhall had a keen awareness when it came to natural fibers and the contents of his closet. He possessed a remarkable memory for each garment and held distinct sentiments about them. Other interviewees made a point to part ways with pieces that did not resonate with them. Rodrigues had a simple answer "ahh, no I do not have anything that I hate in my closet..." (Rodrigues, 2018). For Marshall the pieces of clothing that could not be found in her closet was a pair of tailored pants, she only wore jeans. Perlmutter gave a straight and simple answer "no, because I would get rid of it" (Perlmutter, 2019). Costa's answer was similar to that of Rodrigues: "Ahh, no, if I really hate them, they are not there. No, there is nothing that I hate. There are things I do not wear" (Costa, 2018). Some interviewees found the question interesting, and the male interviewee, Costa, had an interesting point and added to his answer: "I wish I would say a dress... I have three vintage dresses from the Oscar, Oscar

de la Renta time” (Costa, 2018). His answer made us both laugh uncontrollably. He avoided wearing this particular type of clothing himself, but he possessed a few remarkable pieces that he had designed himself for this well known fashion designer. Scully answered straight to the point:

Not anymore. I had a lot of things I hated, I did not wear them, so I felt like it was wasteful. I have one shirt now that I am sorry I bought, but I have convinced myself I am going to eventually find a way to wear it because it is beautiful. It is almost more an object rather than it is a shirt. (Scully, 2018)

Costa and Scully both mentioned a simple and important fact that many people are aware of in their closet, the garments they do not wear and hang lifeless in the closet.

As imperative as it is for this study to emphasise the interviewee's preferred clothing pieces, it is equally crucial to uncover what is lacking in their wardrobe. The absence of certain clothing items varied among the interviewees, ranging from sneakers to tailored pants, wool sweaters to plunging necklines, and suits to patterned clothing. It was stitched into their consciousness the knowledge they had gained from working within the fashion industry. It was not only draped into their fabric choices but they understood which categories of clothing did not fit their body type. They all could highlight their favourite and non-favourite. They all clearly emphasized what suited their personality in terms of feelings, affect, favourites, non-favourites and materials relating to the clothing in their closet. The way they emphasized their dislikes regarding exercise clothing was notable, and they all exhibited strong preferences and dislikes in other areas as well. One thing they all had in common, they had all formed a strong sensory preference for natural fibres. There is an ongoing debate surrounding the consumption of clothing in the world today, as has been highlighted by the United Nations: “The dominant business model in the sector is that of “fast fashion”, whereby consumers are offered constantly changing collections at low prices, and encouraged to frequently buy and discard clothes” (<https://news.un.org>). Indeed the fashion industry is a large consumer of water, which is needed in textile production,

and discarded clothing made of non-biodegradable fabrics is making mountains in landfills across the world. Pieces of clothing that hang lifeless in the closet and are never worn are a moral issue that the owner needs to resolve.

5.6 the awareness, the affect, the attachment

“I feel aware when I am wearing clothes; what I like about my favourite things is that I like the way they feel while I wear them” (Scully, 2018). We use awareness or perception in order to explore surroundings or facts in our lives. In the context of the thesis “to be aware” means to explore the realm the individual visits; he may take much knowledge with him each time he visits a new one. “Being aware” entails comprehending and acknowledging what transpires in our lives. It involves being conscious of our surroundings and the events transpiring nearby. We possess direct awareness of our bodies in every moment of our ongoing existence through the input provided by our senses. These sensations provide us with the information needed to understand what we feel and experience. We are aware of the feelings inside the body, the warmth, the intimacy, the pain, and the experience. Our senses can be totally aware in a heightened stage, or they can be in a rather muted stage. We become aware of our clothing and the affect they have on our body. Clothing as an object can affect us personally. As Ahmed writes “We judge something to be good or bad according to how it affects us, whether it gives us pleasure or pain” (Ahmed 2010, p. 31). We may judge it according to how it makes us feel, and clothes can affect us either by giving us pleasure or pain. The cashmere sweater can have a soothing effect, offering a soft sensation against the skin and provide a sense of comfort. To the contrary, wearing a glittery or scratchy top, might lead to irritation for the individual. We can be visibly affected by clothing, it may enhance our self-confidence and it may affect the individual when he feels that his clothing is not up to his standard. Clothing can make us joyful or it can create sadness or as Ethnologist Jonas Frykman writes in *Sensitive Objects*, about music:

Music may fill us with joy or sadness. Regardless of which it is almost always a mix of bodily motion, affect and emotion. The moment we

engage in the scholarly practice of analysing such experiences and try to understand their history, symbolic signifiers and what they represent, their complexities are too easily reduced and the beat of the music – that “something in the air” that *affects* us but is so hard to put into words - too easily lost. (Frykman 2016, p. 11)

Affect can be an extensive amount of biological strong feelings that does exist within each of us, an internalised manifestation.

Clothing possesses the unique power to evoke emotions ranging from happiness to sadness. The possibility of what we may learn to love or hate within our clothing has no limits for the individual. It is the individual who ultimately determines whether a garment is perceived as good or bad and whether it brings positive or negative feelings. As Sara Ahmed writes in *Collection Feelings* how “Emotions are also about attachments, about what connects us this or that. The relationship between movement and attachment is instructive. What moves us, what makes us feel, is also that which holds us in place, or gives us a dwelling place” (Ahmed 2004, p. 27). These words written by Ahmed tell us how emotions involve connections, what binds us to this or that. The garments that grace our closet may have history linked to them that matters to us personally, we may hold special memories and feelings towards them. As Ahmed notes: “To experience an object as being affective or sensational is to be directed not only toward an object but to what is around that object, which includes what is behind the object, the conditions of its arrival” (Ahmed 2010, p. 25). At one point, the interviewees had all developed attachments to items housed within their closets, be it their favorite garments, clothing passed down from family members, or simply attire that evoked a sense of comfort. Marshall, in conversation with her daughter, went through the pieces she had an attachment to:

I definitely have attachment because even like this morning when I was trying to find something for Minky (the nickname of her daughter) to wear, I was like, well, you can not take that, no that is my favourite, well that is my favourite, even Cos is my favourite, that is my favourite cashmere sweater at the moment, you know,

you can not wear that, then she took the Acne, and I was like yeah, but that is my favourite Acne, and I was trying to find something I did not care about, that she could wear, you know and there is loads of stuff in there that I do not care about but nothing that she could wear. (Marshall, 2019)

Their interaction between mother and daughter exposed Marshall's deep attachment to her favourite pieces of clothing, echoed in the words of philosopher Sara Ahmed: "moved by something, in such a way that when I think of happiness I think of that thing" (Ahmed 2010, p. 29).

Rodrigues explained this in his own way:

Like you have that kind of commitment, like personal attachment and relationship with clothes. Because I am... not that person I used to be, I used to love to look at everything in stores and what came in new and all that stuff. Now I love to go to a store and find something that is extraordinary and beautifully made, whether it is in Spain or Russia or France or here or at Target or whatever... and make it part of my life... There is an attachment, I guess, a respect for... a very simple and personal commitment you are making to it. (Rodrigues, 2018)

He was in search of craftsmanship within the pieces he sought to purchase, seeking out the garment that showcased meticulously thought-out details. Details within clothing do not appear overnight; there is a more profound history within garments, which may include technical development, details, and aesthetics from the past. Some pieces of clothing can give a feeling of happiness that makes our world a better and more beautiful place to be in, an emotional state in the form of consciousness that assesses our living conditions over time.

5.7 The good and sad memories

Clothing can carry with it both joyful or sad memories; a happy encounter that enriches our lives or a moment of sadness. Mendenhall had a good memory

associated with his favourite item “That white dinner jacket is the number one, that is number one” (Mendenhall, 2018). It was the same piece of clothing that carried a sad memory for him:

It is funny, the same dinner jacket, because my mom passed away in December. That was such a magical night... it was my fiftieth birthday, and my mom, my brother, and my mom's girlfriends, whom I call the Golden Girls... all came for my fiftieth birthday. So, it was a magical night... and it was black tie. It holds a very fond memory, but when I look at it..... it makes me a little sad because she passed away, and she was so amazing. (Mendenhall, 2018)

He could relate a good and sad memory to a single piece of garment. Rodrigues had this to say about a good memory related to clothing: “these t-shirts which I wear all the time now, I found them at Target, and they are really great quality t-shirts... but I will always remember... the summer that I wore these t-shirts, my children were born, you know” (Rodrigues, 2018). When asked about a sad memory related to clothing:

Ahhh, yeah, I mean, you know, gosh, like going through my mom's closet and seeing all those little things or the things my grandmother made for me... I was sad and I was aware of them as a child, they were a mystical and magical cause they were made by this women who passed away and I never met... And yeah, Carolyn's (Bessette-Kennedy) wedding dress is such an emotional... piece of clothing, yeah it is like looking at her photograph... (Rodrigues, 2018)

Rodrigues had to cease discussing about his friend Carolyn; he became profoundly emotional. I had witnessed their friendship up close. They were exceptionally close friends; she had tragically lost her life in an airplane crash, early in her life.

When I asked Costa about a piece of clothing that carried a good memory, he responded: “Ahh, you are making me like think of so many things... I have some shoes, sandals, my Birkenstocks, I have my first pair of Birkenstocks I ever had. I still have them, I do not wear them, I have a new ones, but the first one, I

really remember it, I treasured it” (Costa, 2018). For his sad memory: “Ahh, I think my mom's cardigan sweater, it is not a sad, but you know..... it is, like it makes me think of something I wish I could have” (Costa, 2018). Berkowitz favoured piece of clothing was a cashmere scarf, when asked about a piece of clothing that carried a good memory, he had this to say: “Yes, I have certain handkerchiefs, I have a collection of handkerchiefs. Some were my dad's that I love, and there is a red tartan handkerchief that I just can not seem to throw out, even though it has holes in it... that is shredding, and it is just beautiful, and I just can not throw it out” (Berkowitz, 2018). For the sad memory he paused for a moment before he answered, he was thinking: “ahh... maybe it is the Hermes top coat that I bought, that I have worn to a few funerals” (Berkowitz, 2018). For Scully, fond memories associated with clothing were more about the places they were worn than any specific garment.

Ahh I would say more, I do not... hm... I am definitely not sentimental in that way. I love all my clothes that are out in Fire Island because I just love Fire Island so much, so when I wear those things and literally when I bring them back to store them for the winter, they smell like the beach physically. (Scully, 2018)

He had a realistic answer related to a sad memory: “No, if something made me sad I would not keep it” (Scully, 2018). He possessed exceptional editing skills, which are crucial for the task of processing and removing elements that may trigger sadness.

The individual may be deeply associated with a single piece of clothing accumulated through years of wear and tear, rather than just the garment itself. Thus, Marshall had this to say on good and sad memory: “ahh... I have a big T-shirt that I wear to print in when I am printing when screen printing and working, and it has paint all over it, and you can not go out in it. I always think of when I put that on, of all the times I have been printing” (Marshall 2019). In the interview she had to talk herself through finding a piece of clothing that carried a sad memory for her, it was in connection with her friend who had passed away: “I do not know (she whispered) I guess... you know, probably if I really thought about it, some of my Margiela (French Fashion label) stuff

because I would have... gotten that when I spent time with Louise Wilson” (Marshall, 2019). For Perlmutter, a good memory came in the attachment to her father’s pajamas: “I admit, I do not wear these anymore, but I have them. My father had World War II, silk ahh pajamas, classic pajamas, and I still have them, and I would wear them; I mean, I do like things that remind me of someone; it is just very important to me; I hold everything dear“ (Perlmutter, 2019). She did not have anything in her closet that had a sad memory, like Scully, she did not keep pieces that made her sad. Brown had a different view on memories than the other interviewees:

So I like never, almost never wear the same thing the same way... I never recreate a look, never. The interaction with the day ahead of me, in fact, it kind of bothers me when I recreate something, even if it is as simple as you know, it is a different purse that goes with it. I feel like each day is sort of a little bit of a new experiment. (Brown, 2018)

She never associated any particular piece of clothing with a specific emotion, neither happiness nor sadness. Every time she wore an item, she transformed its appearance, ensuring it felt unique each time. For her, each day brought a fresh start, marked by a fresh new look.

5.8 The feeling of comfort or not

Are we at ease and feeling comfortable, or do we sense discomfort while wearing our clothing? The word comfort is defined as a state of physical ease; within it, there is freedom from pain or constraint of the body. Comfort in clothing can make us feel happy, as Ahmed explains: “Objects that give us pleasure take up residence within our bodily horizon. We come to have our likes, which might even establish what we are like. The bodily horizon could be redescribed as horizon of likes. To have our likes means certain things are gathered around us” (Ahmed, 2010; p. 32). The clothing we tend to wear at home has the word “comfort” linked to or associated with them. The global Covid situation enhanced this since millions stayed at home working in

comfortable clothing: “I always feel comfortable, comfort is very important for me, more than looking, I mean, whatever I wear has to be comfortable, as supposed to most fashion people, it is their look, the look...if I am not comfortable, I can not buy it” (Perlmutter, 2019). It was a clear statement, she looked for comfort in the clothing above anything else. Berkowitz’s answer relates to his character as well:

I want them to be comfortable, I want them to be simple, ahh I do not want to really overthink it, and I want them to be dependable and very easy care, so that I can send them out to the laundry and they can boil the hell out of them, and they will be just fine. They are not fuzzy. I have a lot of fuzzy clothes, but I do not wear them. (Berkowitz, 2018)

He was quite certain how he should feel in his clothes. On the other hand, Mendenhall had his uniform down to science “because it is such a highly curated uniform, I feel pretty great every time I leave the house” (Mendenhall, 2018). He went on to explain that if he had chosen the wrong shoes, he might not have feel as composed. The connection he had with his clothing was deeply intertwined with his personal uniform: “well to me they define me at this point in my life. What I wear really defines who I am, so my uniform is not by accident... a lot of my uniform is chosen because I think I look best when I wear those pieces” (Mendenhall, 2018). Then he wanted to add:

I will add one thing on that... as I get older, I also have less; I have no patience for things that do not feel good... I remember when I was young I used to wear things that tortured me. I was not really comfortable in them; either they were too tight, or the armhole was too high, and the shoulder was too big, or they were hot when you were inside. So now I am much more aware of things that I am comfortable in, even if it is a suit; I want to be comfortable in a suit”. (Mendenhall, 2018)

He then proceeded to assess his attire overall. At this stage in his life, comfort took presence over following any fashion trend. Despite having played a role in

shaping some of the most iconic fashion moments of the past decades, he now valued ease and practicality above all else. Brown expressed that she had grown out of feeling uneasy and uncomfortable: “not anymore, none of the things that would make me uncomfortable would....probably the only thing I could think of is, when I on a hot day if you have a sweat stain. That is mortifying for me, that would be enough for me to go into a store and actually buy another shirt” (Brown, 2018). Like Mendenhall, she too had come to the realisation that it was time to prioritise comfort in her clothing. Rodrigues was very clear in his answer:

My wardrobe is ergonomic, so it kind of glides in and out of different situations easily, you know. In that uniform, I can be at... fashion event, any black-tie fashion event, or I have worn that black tie to the White House, too, so it just works for me, and it works in my situations... I think for me there is like a pureness factor that I like when it comes to my own personal wardrobe like, you know. I need comfort and I need ease and I need draping, I am running, I am doing, so there are those factor. (Rodrigues, 2018)

The interviewees effortlessly articulated their appreciation for comfort, delving into the wisdom that came with experience and age. They had independently educated themselves on clothing that suited their individual styles, consciously opting for comfort over fashion trends.

Aesthetics

6.0 The closet aesthetics

The mechanic in his thick smeared overalls, over a leather coat and a checkered shirt with a tight knitted hat. His hands covered in machine grease, is a much more elegant figure and has a more robust style for his work clothes, rather than on Sundays when he has dressed himself in an ill-fitted suit with a poorly knotted

necktie, wearing Sunday shoes he bought on sale - a bad styling of the working-class citizen. (Laxness 1929, p. 80; my translation)¹

These words written by the Nobel laureate Halldór Laxness in *The People's Book*, (*Alþýðubókin*) about the dressing of the Icelandic working man in the 1920s. For him the mechanic's everyday attire seemed to suit him far better than the ill-fitting Sunday suit he opted for church. How do we choose what is in our wardrobe? What shapes our choice of certain garments that end up in the closet? The closet space stores the clothes we have chosen to be there, choices we have made using our aesthetics. The reasons that these objects of clothing end up in our closet have various means; they may have been purchased, gifted, inherited, or made by the owner. These pieces of clothing are aesthetically pleasing to the owner, and the individual's assessment or judgment of the pieces he chooses is personal.

What is the flavour of the “aesthetic” that determines things in our life; is it a childhood experience, playing in the sun with a ball or growing up in Falling Waters, an exotic house by architect Frank Lloyd Wright? In the Merriam-Webster dictionary the word “aesthetics” means: “a branch of philosophy dealing with the nature of beauty, art, and taste and with the creation and appreciation of beauty.” (<https://www.merriam-webster.com>) It covers both natural and artificial sources of experience and decision. Aesthetics examines value through expression and judgment of taste. It means being interested in how something feels and looks. It is in writings of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu in *Public Opinions Does Not Exist* is where I found the explanation of what aesthetics actually means: “Contrary to the ideology of personality magic, which considers a taste for accepted culture to be a natural gift, scientific observation shows that cultural needs are a product of upbringing and education” (Bourdieu 2007, p. 34). We are not born with perfect aesthetics; It is through the sphere we live in that we grasp the knowledge. The breakdown of the cultural phenomenon “aesthetics and taste” as Bourdieu

¹ „Vélsmiðurinn í þykkum útmökuðum samfesting utanyfir leðurúlpu og köflótttri skyrtu, með þraunga kollhúfu og hendurnar kámaðar í vélarfeiti, er miklu glæsilegri mynd og sterkara stílfyrirbrigði að starfi sínu en á sunnudögum þegar hann hefur duppað sig upp í sniðlaus spariföt, með hálstau sem fer illa, og sunnudagaskó keypta á útsölu, – slæm stæling af borgara.”

continuous to write showed that the „cultural behaviour (visits to museums and exhibitions, concerts, reading, etc.) and fondness for literature, art and music are closely related to the level of education (measured by degrees or length of formal education) and social origin. (Bourdieu 2007, p. 34)

It is in the space around the closet that the individual prepares for his role and entrance into the stages of daily life. It is also where the preparation for the “visual effect” takes place, where the individual becomes the costume designer for his theatre. Visual aesthetics play a significant role in the realm of clothing, they can be viewed as a core of artistic expression. The visual aesthetics within clothing and fashion can be enhanced and read as text through colours, patterns, textures, symmetry, perception, silhouette, cut, comfort and emotions in the way the physical body moves through space, which indicates the cultural effects which have been used in the composition. In the clothes, we preserve not only our aesthetics but also memories, emotions, perceptions of textiles, and self-esteem. As Pauline Brown, the author of *Aesthetic Intelligence* writes: “aesthetics is the pleasure we – i.e., all humans – derive from perceiving an object or experience through our senses” (Brown 2019, p. 4).

Individuals define themselves according to their “taste”. It is a source of self-reflection about what is good or bad. Bourdieu gently describes “taste” as the reason for specific choices of material objects and “how people’s taste takes shape; it appears to them in the activities (sports, leisure, etc.) and possessions (furniture, neckties, hats, books, paintings, spouses, etc.) where taste is at work as a reason for a particular choice” (Bourdieu 2007, p. 45). The individual is the one who classifies the product he needs, wants, or finds aesthetically beautiful. At the moment, when he decides on an object, his taste and the taste of the product maker meet up. My taste and aesthetics are both bad and good because sometimes the person has to go through the ugliness to experience visions of beauty. Aesthetics and taste are what determines the choice for the individual in deciding what kind of garment he will purchase according to the individual's taste. A decision that the person makes in selecting and classifying is formulated by social origin and the

economics of culture. It is important to recall the words of Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: “the arts of everyday life are highly utilitarian arts: they give form to value” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett & Gablik 1995 p. 4). “Form to value” describes the process of adding worth or significance to something through its form or appearance. She discovered beauty and artistic elements in the mundane aspects of daily life, even the seemingly ordinary objects we bring into our homes and that includes clothing: “it involves everything, it includes domestic interiors, the table foot, food, language. It also includes the arts of sociability, conversation, etiquette and dress” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett & Gablik 1995 p. 4). Everyday clothing hold within them beauty and aesthetics.

When an individual is facing the decision to choose clothing he wants to use from his closet, he uses many factors for his consideration: culture, class, knowledge, appearance, texture, appearance, colour, fabric choice, memories, emotions, economy, and finally, product classification. Throughout our life, we are still redefining the visual affect our appearance has. As Laxness so gracefully noted: “Each person’s style is forever an aesthetic symbol, a form that explains the harmonious wealth - or poverty - of the soul” (Laxness 1929, pg. 80; my translation).² The individual has usually searched through many different identities at an early age, trying to find what suits the individual as a person. Young individuals are driven by curiosity and like to explore different ways to dress, the writer of this thesis thoroughly enjoyed this task. Engaging with visual elements in clothing was a way to be educated in the field of fashion design.

6.1 The text

“All Icelanders may know how to read books, but how many people know how to read a house? Knowing how to read houses is more of a sport than being able to read books. A house is a thought that has height, length, and width. The book is a lack of thought that only has one length. The house portrays the truth

² „Stíll hvers manns er ævinlega fagurfræðilegt tákni, form sem skýrir frá samræmisauði – eða örbirgð – sálarinnar.”

about the lives of the generations. The book is the lie about their lives” (Pórðarson 1964, p. 58; my translation).³

In his book “Ofvitinn” (It may translate into English as “The Over-Informed”) the Icelandic writer Þórbergur Þórðarson writes about the art of reading “a house”. We learn how to read when we are children, we read books, and they enhance our imagination, and through them, we are educated. To be able to read an object like “a house” is to read through proportions, height, width, building material, windows, colour, texture, and facade. The final text for a building is about the interaction between people who walk by and the surrounding environment; it can have various effects on pedestrians who pass by. A house can impact the lives of generations that have lived there or do live there at the present moment. We are taught how to read, but we are not educated in the art of how to read “a house”.

In the same way we grace our bodies with clothing that can be read, we are not educated on how to read them. Alison Lurie, in her book *The Language of Clothes*, writes about how we can hear a dialect by a speaking individual in a conversation; we assess and make a judgment over the dialect: “In the same way, some aspects of the language of clothes can be read by anyone” (Lurie 1983, p. 182). The text written in the clothing can be found in many aspects, in the silhouette, the material, the texture of the fabrics, the proportion, the colour, accessories and the footwear. Clothing speaks for us; we look upon a person, and in our minds, we generate a thought on what we see. We look at and read a fashion magazine, either physically or in cyberspace. Looking at photographs in fashion magazines can create an imaginary world that many women would like to be a part of. The world within the editorial pages are unique and sometimes have no relationship with reality. The clothes portrayed in those high gloss magazines are an eclectic selection from the editors. The onlookers can create an imaginary fantasy world of their own, wishing that these clothes would be in their own closets. To the side of the photograph is

³ „Allir Íslendingar kunna að lesa bækur. En hversu margir kunna að lesa hús? Það er meiri íþrótt að kunna að lesa hús en að geta lesið bækur. Húsið er hugsun, sem hefur hæð, lengd og breidd. Bókin er vöntun á hugsun, sem aðeins hefur lengd. Húsið er sannleikurinn um líf kynslóðanna. Bókin er lygin um líf þeirra.”

the description of what is in the photograph; this is where the image is turned into written text. The text tells you the designer's name as the world looks upon this eclectic style and fantasy; he speaks of two garments: "we are dealing with two original structures, albeit derived from more general systems, in the one case language and the other is image" (Barthes 1990, p. 4). Written clothing do not portray any aesthetic, texture or any practical function, their function is only available in our imagination: "In principle these garments refer to the same reality... and yet they do not have the same structure because they are not made of the same substance" (Barthes 1990, p. 3). Barthes discusses how, in fashion, it is not the physical object but rather the name that creates the desire for fashion; it is not a dream but a specific meaning that it sells. We see people in uniform, police, a health care worker, a priest, a judge, a fireman, a captain, a flight attendant, royalty and so on, as Barthes notes "real clothing is burdened with practical consideration (protection, modesty, adornment)" (Barthes 1990, pg. 8). We see people walking on the streets but cannot tell their profession by looking at their clothing. However when wearing a company uniform, the reading becomes an easy task. I asked one of the interviewees, Mendenhall whether he thought people could read his clothes or his personal uniform. He was quite sure in his answer: "One hundred percent because the focus is so narrow, that... if you ask everybody who knows me... I am defined by this uniform; it is a part of me" (Mendenhall, 2018).

I do concur with many of Barthes's writings; I, however, think about whether words always have to be used when looking at an image. Is there another way, like observing the poetry of clothing through materials, proportion, styling, effect and emotions? Is there a feeling connected to your aesthetics? Can fashion influence things to come? In the fragmented work, *The Arcades Project* written between 1927 and 1940, the philosopher Walter Benjamin observes how:

Each season brings, in its newest creations various secrets signals of things to come. Whoever understands how to read these semaphores would know in advance not only about the new currents in the arts but also about new legal codes, wars, and revolutions. — Here,

surely, lies the greatest charm of fashion but also the difficulty of making the charm fruitful. (Benjamin 1999, p. 64)

He read into how every season's new fashion creations were presented along with contemporary artwork, these objects held clues about things to come in the future.

6.2 The onlooker's view

Throughout our lives, we continuously redefine our visual appearance, which undergoes transformation from an early age and continues to evolve as time passes. While the individuals meticulously plan and prepare their visual script for the day ahead, they consciously differentiate between what qualifies as good clothing and what is considered inappropriate. Categorising and classifying his choices accordingly. As the individual prepares his script, the onlooker's view may vary significantly when the individual steps into the stage of daily life. Several interviewees expressed surprise when they had to consider how others viewed or read them, yet their answers were heartwarming and honest. I asked the interviewees how they would describe their own style, Berkowitz described the clothing he bought for himself as “dependable” (Berkowitz, 2018). When I asked him how other people saw him in his clothes, his answer was: “I hope they don't see me in my clothes, I hope they just see me, I really do not want them to notice my clothes” (Berkowitz, 2018). His answer was deeply personal and described his personality. The question seemed to surprise Mendenhall, he had not paid any attention to this before, he felt that his clothing is “practical” and:

Because I wear a uniform I think they are aware of the importance of the singular look that my clothes represent. They see, I do not know, it is very interesting, it is a very interesting question. Yeah I think they would see it as armour and as what it is, it is really a uniform. (Mendenhall, 2019)

His onlookers, would perceive his personalised uniform as a form of protective armour. The conversation continued and we spoke of the clothing worn for the

performance of the day: “Yeah, I guess in that case, I am the guy that is in the chorus. I am not the one wearing the frilly one on Tuesday and the polka dots on Wednesday” (Mendenhall, 2019). Our laughter filled the room after his comment. Perlmutter felt a little shy in her answer: “This is embarrassing but everyone always tells me I am elegant, I am stylish, people that have not met me who are on Facebook....labelled me elegant and stylish, just from what I post or whatever“ (Perlmutter, 2019). She made an effort to be elegant, she had trained her aesthetics when it came to beautiful things in her sphere. Scully replied that he considered his clothing to be “sporty” and when asked how other people see him in his clothes, he replied:

I will buy a plaid shirt.... but it is not “just” a plaid shirt. It may have something different in the lining or maybe it is patched together, I wouldn't really buy an Oxford at Brooks Brothers, but I would a Comme de Garçon shirt because there is always a detail about it, whether it is a triple stitch or its something that just makes it stand out a tiny bit more then just a conventional shirt. (Scully, 2018)

Conventional clothing did not appeal to him; instead, he was drawn to garments with unconventional designs and construction methods. He had found an aesthetic that aligned with his personal style. The interviewees held a firm perspective on how observers would perceive their appearance, informed by their expertise in assessing how different pieces of clothing would harmonize in a showroom setting.

6.3 The clothing - how they sit together

For individuals working on a fashion show for a high-end fashion brand, the visual affect comes from weeks and months of preparation for each show. The pieces from the entire collection are worked into a consistent line up where all the pieces seem to belong together and create a coherent line of visuals. One of the reasons behind a flawless outfit is how the seamless coordination of each clothing piece works with one another. To make up a coherent visual outfit requires considerable effort. When an individual buys clothing from

different brands, the art of weaving these pieces together, in order to create a perfect outfit, becomes a personal task. Not all pieces of clothing naturally complement each other, but certain individuals can create incredible outfits while mixing odd pieces that provide an eclectic mix. Others struggle with that process or may find a calm way of mixing their clothing together. The individuals interviewed for this study all knew that clothing pieces had to speak to each other, there was a relationship between them, they all had worked behind the scenes on fashion shows and attended numerous ones. They knew and understood the visual text and the language behind the performance of a fashion show. They all understood the components that were needed to make a visual script, colours, silhouettes, proportions, fabrics, and categories of clothing were all part of that text. When asking the interviewees if their clothing had a relationship between them, their answer did not come as a surprise. Scully's answer was simple "They all have to sit well together you know like mixed together, all my things, I do not buy, I do not ever buy something that I can not incorporate into... everything otherwise... that just, that becomes a mistake" (Scully, 2018). For Costa he found a relationship between his clothing:

Well, my clothing is very practical, they are very basic, you know, the highs are my cashmere sweaters and cashmere coats, again very classic, the lows are you know, my t-shirts, which I can not live without. I mean t-shirts are my second skin. They really are, because you know, there is something about my body, the t-shirts controls my body's temperature and then I sweat less and I do not perspire and you know. (Costa, 2018)

For Pitman, the relationship between pieces of clothing was in the "proportion, I think that is one of the hardest things in separates, now being into separates, is the blouse too long, is it too short, you know, and which is why I have a need for tops or need to make them" (Pitman, 2019). The interviewees carefully considered how their personal pieces of clothing would complement each other, as if they were preparing a meal where all the ingredients had to harmonise.

6.4 The colours

During their initial year in design school, students commonly learn the fundamental concept of the colour wheel, exploring the framework as well as discovering how they harmonise and interact with each other. Colours play a crucial role in visual effects. Designers and artist have long believed that they can affect feelings, mood, and emotions, that certain colours may strain the eyes and some can have a calming effect. Colour psychology is a study of hues that undeniably can affect a human being. According to Alison Lurie the foremost element in language of clothing is colour:

The first and the most important of these signs, and the one that makes the greatest and most immediate impact, is colour. Merely looking at different colours, psychologists have discovered, alters our blood pressure, heartbeat, and rate of respiration, just as hearing a harsh noise or a harmonious musical chord does. (Lurie 1983, pg. 182)

When someone approaches from a distance, the first aspect that captures our attention is the colour of their clothing. If it is vivid or intense and “the more space this hue occupies in our visual field and the greater its effect on our nervous system. Loud, clashing colours, like loud noises or loud voices, may actually hurt our eyes or give us a headache; soft, harmonious hues, like music and soft voices, thrill or soothe us” (Lurie 1983, pg. 182). Vibrant and loud colours in clothing can create what some might call “visual noise”. When encountering a bold and brightly coloured pattern, our eyes tend to be drawn towards the pattern or the intensity of the colours, causing them to wander and focus on those elements. This perspective was woven into Rodriques’ view while he was working: “I do not want a lot of noise, while I am working on clothes, I do not want it in my office, audio but visual as well” (Rodriquez, 2018).

Colour may influence the taste of food; it can enhance emotions and colour psychology is widely known in marketing and branding for companies. In the political arena, dressing in same or similar colours has become a symbol of

unity in recent times. It caught my attention to watch on TV when The House Democratic Women's Working Group appeared, all wearing the colour white, to the States of The Union address by the former president of United State of America. Their choice served as a powerful symbol of solidarity and a sign of protest. The white colour, quite visible among the hundreds of black suits in the chambers became a visual togetherness, a symbol of "unity". For the swearing in of the current President of United States of America, the women attendees once again wore similar mix of blue and red, the two colours of the political parties. Their choice of clothing conveyed a message of "working together".

It was important to the study to find out how colour affected the interviewees and if it was available in their closets. When I asked the interviewees where their colour sense came from, Berkowitz's answer was interesting; his mood was affected by it:

Colour, I know that I had a very emotional connection to colour as a child. I used to have like extreme emotional responses to colour, certain colours made me feel different things. And I remember very specifically noting that certain colours ahh... made me sad or they made me frightened... I thought they were beautiful, and they were something that I really aspired to have in my life. Colour can flip my mood, I am very sensitive, I can go through colour palette of whites, and I can blindly pick out a white that I know is the white of my last apartment walls or something like that, so you know I have very good eye for colour, very sensitive to the vibration that colours give off. (Berkowitz, 2018)

Costa's response was enlightening and educational, as it provided a different perspective on colours in Brazil, challenging and correcting my personal viewpoint:

If you had asked me this ahh, thirty years ago, I would say, well I think it is definitely from Brazil.... I grew up in the mountains and I never saw my mom, my sisters or any of my brothers wear colours,

ever. It was never that.... it was all monotone, it was all very simple, it was all very clean, all very Hockney, (artist David Hockney) you know. So, this concept of, of this Brazil that everybody thinks of colour, we lived with colour, we lived in colour. (Costa, 2018)

He did not wear colour growing up, however, his surroundings were all about colour. Different cultures around the world have different colours in their environment. Perlmutter spoke of favourite non colours:

That is very funny, there is no colour,.....black white grey... navy, brown sometimes if I have to wear a colour as an accent. I can not wear it on my body, but I will wear like ahh.... like an Hermes orange scarf around my neck, like just, you know, just to bring some colour to my face, but it will not be on my body. (Perlmutter, 2019)

Wearing vibrant colours can pose challenges for some individuals, myself included. The paleness of my skin tone exacerbates this issue. Vibrant colours may clash or overwhelm the complexion, making it difficult to achieve a balanced look. Opting for complementary or softer hues can be a more suitable approach, enhancing one's appearance without creating overwhelming contrasts.

When choosing her outfit Brown started with colour, she was the sole interviewee to do so:

Clothes should be fun, and so even if it is going to be something simple, I am trying consciously to stay away from black, although it does often create a good anchor for dressing, but if I'm going to wear black, as I yesterday with by the way, then... it will have drama. But for the most part, I am trying to incorporate colour, and I want to. (Brown, 2018)

Colour in clothing and the visual appearance that comes with colour, can have an emotional effect on an individual. Colour affected the interviewee in different ways and they were all aware of the importance and impact of colour, both professionally and in their closets.

6.5 The craft

Women have historically been associated and linked with various form of craft, such as making, mending, knitting, crocheting, lacemaking, and weaving. This expertise served as practical purpose and helped enhance their reputation at the time when they had limited independence. Joanna Entwistle explains that: “by the seventeenth century needlework was thought to be “feminine” work, unfit for men to do” (Entwistle 2000, p. 146). Then she continues writing that “stitching was thought be morally good for women, thought to promote devotion and discipline” (Entwistle 2000, p. 146). Craft was highly gendered in the past, therefore it is important to acknowledge that today, that craft in fashion is not limited to any one gender. People of all genders have played a significant contribution to this field and their perspectives are equally valuable. Learning old customs and crafts is essential for fashion designers in modern society today; learning the old is what we build the future with. When caretakers educate their children on how to sew, knit, spin, embroider, crochet, bake, draw, carve wood, and so on and so forth, they weave together the crafts of generations. I am aliving example of this phenomenon, until the age of thirteen, my mother and grandmother meticulously crafted nearly all of my clothing. By the age of nine, they had exposed me to and educated me in the craft of knitting. This early exposure and skill development eventually blossomed into a thriving career in fashion design that has spanned a lifetime.

The exceptional craftsmanship and superior quality of woven fabrics are key factors contributing to the well-shaped nature and longevity of clothing pieces. Hence, it was imperative to inquire about craftsmanship during the interviews, as the interviewees' insights were invaluable, given their expertize acquired through their careers. Berkowitz spoke of touch when it came to fabrics:

I think we are losing a lot of the craft because the process itself is so, is so fast, and the people that are doing it are not, ahh, really that hands-on. For instance, in big corporations and design studios, designers rarely ever touch a fabric; a lot of times, it is decided on, by a committee. I was trained in a world where that meant everything for clothing. (Berkowitz, 2018)

He was referring to a different world, whereas in modern times, written text plays a pivotal role in selling clothing online, reminiscent of Roland Barthes's concept of clothing as written text. And Berkowitz added:

The words that are being used online to sell products, where people have no physical contact are mostly words around comfort and softness; those are the two words that are used the most on the internet. Buttery soft, silky soft, like butter, you know, smooth as silk, comfort, the most comfortable, these are words that are adjectives that are being used to describe garments today for [...] commodity items. That is the selling feature for most brands now, which are selling comfort. You can tell in the picture whether it is going to be loose or tight or stretchy, but you do not know whether it is going to be comfortable; it is an adjective; it describes something you will not know until you receive it in your box from Amazon. (An online e-commerce company) (Berkowitz, 2018)

The moral significance he attributed to the product was evident in his response; he purchased a garment primarily for the craftsmanship it embodied. His statement struck a chord with me as well; I also hesitate to buy clothing online, preferring to physically touch the fabric before considering it for my wardrobe. When I asked Mendenhall if he believed we were losing touch with fashion and craftsmanship, his response shed light on the evolving landscape of the industry:

One hundred percent, I think, there are very few who care anymore. I watched the Dries (Van Noten, a Dutch fashion designer) documentary, and it was so emotional for me to see somebody who actually starts with fabric and pattern, how he puts the collection together, and where his inspiration starts. I think fast fashion is very, very rapidly killing the craft of making clothes. I also think, you know, statistically true, I saw it in Tom Ford's business, I see it in the business of Ralph Lauren, and we see it in general. There is still a waiting list for private jets. There are still waiting lists for luxury spas, you know, the East Village restaurant that charges fifteen

hundred dollars for sushi, you can not get in. But people are no longer obsessed with designer clothes, so I think it has something to do with lifestyle also because as soon as you tell a man that he does not have to wear a suit, shirt, and a tie anymore; he is not ever going back. I think a lot of it is the casualization of the world. It is really a lifestyle thing, I think people want to be comfortable and I think they have less tolerance for the clothes, so I think craft matters less. (Mendenhall, 2018)

Like Mendenhall, Scully had a similar view:

We have lost so much already, fashion is not a speed business and fashion shows have gone from being informative tools to form of entertainment. The magazines can not publish the information fast enough, so they become obsolete. People do not know what a beautiful image is, and they have totally lost their sense of what quality is. Now, they would rather have the name or the item. They want it now, and they want more; they do not really understand why a bag is beautiful, why that jean is well made, or why that jacket shoulder took twenty hours to construct. There is just too much cheap clothing around; I really think the thing that has been lost is the real mantra of “buy the best you can afford” because now, if you can afford thirty T-shirts, you buy thirty T-shirts; I rather buy two t-shirts. (Scully, 2018)

Pitman's answer to this question was straight to the point: “I just do not know if the craftsmen that are genuinely talented and knowledgable are coming up in the world” (Pitman, 2019). The art of garment-making appeared to be fading as the younger generation displayed minimal interest in learning about craftsmanship; such knowledge held little significance for them. The prevalence of online shopping further contributed to this detachment from touch and craftsmanship, as detailed photographs of garments and fabrics were not always readily available. As the conversation shifted towards the topic of craft, the interviewees' concerns became apparent. They all expressed a deep sense of seriousness regarding the dwindling presence of craftsmanship in

clothing, emphasizing the importance of integrating craft into their personal wardrobes. Many noted that elements of craft could be found at various levels within their closets, underscoring its enduring significance.

6.6 The archive

An archive of clothing generally refers to a meticulously curated collection of garments and accessories. These clothing archives are often curated by fashion designers, fashion houses, museums, or institutions dedicated to preserving and documenting the evolution of fashion trends, styles, and designs over time. They encompass a wide array of items, including vintage garments, prototypes, sketches, photographs, and other artifacts that offer valuable insights into the creative process and cultural influences shaping the fashion industry.

These archives serve as invaluable resources for studying and comprehending fashion history, enabling designers and researchers to delve into the evolution of styles and craftsmanship. For fashion companies, the archive typically comprises a comprehensive collection of garments archived from each season that the designer has designed and produced. In the realm of Haute Couture Fashion Houses, it is especially crucial to archive the exquisite fashion pieces that adorned the catwalk, capturing the essence of their artistry and innovation. Each piece is meticulously crafted by hand and only when a discerning customer is ready to select that particular ensemble, another one is made, marking the final stage of the production journey. This singular approach ensures that each garment becomes a part of the Fashion House's remarkable legacy, preserved within its archives. These archives serve as invaluable repositories of information, offering insights into the development, design process, and narrative behind a fashion label. In the contemporary landscape, major fashion houses meticulously maintain archives dating back to the inception of their companies. Some of these prestigious fashion houses have even showcased their archives in renowned art museums worldwide. Today, these archives stand as reservoirs of design inspiration for emerging

designers poised to take on leadership roles in these fashion houses. Rodriques, a prominent fashion designer in the USA, shared his perspective on this matter:

I do not know how important it is for everybody else. Still, you know... I work a great deal on the clothes that I make, like I personally work with my team and not just the conceptual part of it. Still, the making of these clothes and they are all made in my work room here in the back, which is a rare thing today and it does not exist especially here in the United States. I do not need to hold on to every commercial colour way that a factory made, but every original piece is stored, dated, and bagged with a look photo and the shoes. A complete look is warehoused from the beginning; my first four years were stolen, and those are missing, which is really painful, but I have managed to find one or two odd pieces in re-sell shops and or other people's archives they have been kind enough to either give them to me or sell them to me. I have like a smattering of things from the four years but not a lot. (Rodriques, 2018)

He preserved his design legacy in the archive, serving as a testament to his strong work ethic and a deep understanding of his design history.

Then there is the personal archive meticulously curated by individuals, housing clothing items they find hard to part with. These pieces may hold emotional significance, having been made by the individuals themselves, inherited, or retained for the sake of their craftsmanship. All of my interviewees resonated with this concept of personal archives. Costa's archive, in particular, transcends the professional realm, intertwining with his personal life:

I have a little bit of an archive. It is in a storage know, ahh... I wish I could be more kind to it cause I do not know the state of, you know, sometimes it is the fabric, sometimes it is the, the cut itself, you know. They have become personal... they have become things I have touched, and I did not want to get rid of. (Costa, 2018)

For Berkowitz, his archive was personal and he connected it to his memories:

My archive is a place, it is kind of my memory bank, so it is part of, you know, what... I, acquired because it inspired me, and then I wanted to hold onto that memory or go back to and reference it. I do not acquire physical things like I used to, I am actually much more digital that way, it was just that it was a source of inspiration that I could capture and hold on to. Now, physically, you do not really have to do that anymore, which is liberating, and as I get older and as I have for the last four years been selling off parts of my collection. It is very easy for me to let go, it is very freeing [...] if I could, I would get rid of a lot, I do not need it, I know it is embedded in my memory and in my point of view. (Berkowitz, 2018)

Mendenhall archive was related to his space, he had this to say:

My archive was an inability to, it was not collecting, it was not a, it was not categorising or, or preserving. It was an inability to get rid of things that I loved and so it was more of a cumulation than an archive, it was not intentional and then I ran out of room so I did not have a storage space. I have never had a storage space for my clothes. My collection of clothing was just pieces that I could never get rid of. (Mendenhall, 2018)

Around the world, archives in various shapes and forms exist, exhibiting the owner's personal or professional admiration of clothing.

The individual who offered the most insightful perspective on the significance of an archive was a designer I had the privilege to interview during a DesignTalk session for the DesignMarch Festival at Harpa Music Hall in Reykjavík. This designer is none other than Calvin Klein, a highly esteemed figure in the fashion industry and a household name across the Western Hemisphere. Having been a part of his company for numerous years, I attribute much of my knowledge and understanding of the trade to him, particularly regarding the importance of maintaining an archive. During our conversation, I specifically inquired about his practice of collecting seasonal collections in an archive. I believed that his insights would not only benefit the audience of

fellow fashion designers but also shed light on the purpose and significance of such archival practices in the fashion world:

I never thought of it as collecting, I thought of... for one thing, I knew I was trying to build a global business. I mean, I set out from the very beginning, knowing that I wanted to build a business that would go on long after I was interested in running it. And that, and I always thought globally for some reason. And I thought it would be a great advantage to keep a sample of everything we did all of those years, ahh, as well as every photograph we ever took and every photograph we did not run. Because for every picture that you see, there are hundreds that we shoot. I, then edited with the photographer to narrow it down, to see what was the best and or what was possible to run, because some of it was so far out that the magazines would not take them. So, I have had an archive for twenty years, of keeping, you know all this work, and the studio still uses it. They still go back constantly to use the clothes and the photographs as reference and inspiration, and so it is a great value. And now I am thinking finally, I am thinking of doing a book or series of books. It is Anna Wintour, who is the editor-in-chief of American Vogue and a really close friend of mine, she is pushing it like crazy. I have a thing about looking backward, even though I have held on to all the work, I do not really lo..., (he stopped himself going further with the sentence) It is, it is a very emotional experience walking into a room filled with years of the work that we did... and it is like seeing my life in front of me. I want to live in the moment, I want to plan for tomorrow and the future, I do not really love looking back so I have resisted doing that. (Klein, 2014)

Having witnessed firsthand the profound impact of an archive of this caliber and its significance for a company and its future designers, it was truly rewarding to hear him articulate what the archive represented to him. He fully understood the importance of maintaining such an archive, recognizing that it safeguarded his design legacy and stood as a testament to the passage of time.

His designs have reshaped our visual culture, his written discourse on fashion has enriched our perception of clothing, and his archive stands as a testament to the history of fashion and the enduring legacy of a prominent fashion house.

Conclusion

The individual and very personal act of getting dressed is an act of preparing the body for the social world, making it appropriate, acceptable, indeed respectable and possibly even desirable also. Getting dressed is an ongoing practice, requiring knowledge, techniques and skills, from learning how to tie our shoelaces and do up our buttons as children, to understanding about colours, textures and fabrics and how to weave them together to suit our bodies and our lives. Dress is the way in which individuals learn to live in their bodies and feel at home in them. (Entwistle 2000, p. 7)

The objective of this study was to break down the process of the seemingly straightforward act of dressing one's body into small components or particles. What appeared to be a mundane, everyday bodily ritual actually unveiled vast intricate layers and complexity. The overarching research question is:

What factors influence the selection of clothing that ultimately finds its way into our closets?

In addition, I sought to answer these four subordinate questions:

- What is the daily bodily ritual we repeat every single day?
- Does the closet have additional meaning, other than just storing clothing?
- Do clothing convey different meanings?
- Can clothing influence the inner sensations and emotions of the wearer?

To address these questions, nine in-depth interviews were conducted with professionals in the high fashion industry in New York City. The findings from this study indicate that the relationship an individual has with their wardrobe is at once multifaceted and essential.

The study revealed that the repetitive activity of clothing our body holds a pivotal role in our daily lives. It is an everyday recurring habit that is both created and personified by the individual. Through this activity, we educate our body, which stores the knowledge over time. It is our guide in navigating our existence and educates us to be at ease with our bodies. Joanne Entwistle's equation of totality is worth recalling here, that, "dress, the body, and the self - are not perceived separately but simultaneously as a totality" (Entwistle 2000, p. 10). Dress, or clothing, is a fundamental key to the understanding of who we are, it is an intimate and inseparable part of the "self" for the individual. Within the act of dressing, a part of our personality is formed. Clothing becomes our second skin and often serves as a means of self-expression and can reflect an individual's values, beliefs, and social status. We store clothing in a place we call the closet and in this case the relationship is functional and is centred around organization and storage. As the study progressed it became evident that the closet kept more than just clothing; it became clear that it plays a significant role throughout the life of the individual. It is an infrastructure where part of the individual's "self" is stored while clothing is not in use. It is also a place where we store our second skin, the extensions of the individual's character. At the same time, it shows many parts of the individual's character through his handling and treatment of the closet. It reflects taste, aesthetics, organisation, it contains elements of wickedness, laziness, dreams and the imperfections of its creator. The space of the closet defines the value we assign to our clothing, how much sentiment, importance, and usefulness we may feel for them as single objects. It holds one's judgment of what is important in one's life, and in the same way, it defines our moral attachment and the value we attach to ourselves. These affects represent our past, the present, and the future. The space around the closet provides the individual with more than just clothing. There, in the privacy of the most secure place, the home, the individual finds comfort for

the naked or the half-naked body while getting dressed. It is a place where the individual may take a moment to contemplate his next activity of putting on pants or socks or decide which top may give him comfort for the performance in the day ahead.

Clothing conveys various meanings related to culture, personal taste, and societal rules. It reflects identity, status, personality, and emotions. For instance, a suit often indicates professionalism or authority, while casual wear suggests ease or informality. Moreover, clothing can express cultural, religious, or political affiliations. In sum, clothing is a silent language, conveying signals and social cues to others. Beneath our understanding of clothing lies a wealth of lessons from the past. Who taught you how to dress? A simple question put out to the interviewees during their interviews, but it came as a surprise to some of them. They had not given it much thought before. Individuals do not naturally possess the ability to dress themselves, they are educated by their caretakers. Clothing is complicated if you do not know how to use it; shoes can easily be put on the wrong foot and may feel uncomfortable after a while. An individual does not remember that his caretaker told him to put on a raincoat before going out in the rain at the age of four or five, or what he should wear to his sixth birthday party, a seemingly normal way to be educated in how to dress correctly for an occasion. As the interviewees revisited their childhood memories, they invoked a sense of innocence, their voices transforming as they recounted that time. Moreover, they revealed a profound connection with their wardrobes, highlighting its complexity and significance. They acknowledged that clothing communicates various facets of identity, status, personality, and mood, emphasizing how attire functions as a subtle form of nonverbal communication. This insight shed light on the complex ways in which clothing shapes personal expression and social interaction. The findings underscored the intricate interplay between individuals and their clothing, revealing how garments serve as more than just functional items, that they are also powerful symbols with multifaceted meanings.

While clothing may be visually observed on the outside of the body, it is also crucial to consider the internal sensations experienced by the wearer. The

findings in this study revealed that clothing impacts not just the outward appearance but also the inner feelings and comfort of the individual. In the intimate relationship that participants have with their closet, there is an abundance of influences from senses, awareness, attachments, affect, emotions, and memories, both personal and social. Clothing can have an emotional impact on individuals. Wearing clothing that makes them feel comfortable, confident, stylish and it can boost mood and self-esteem. On the other hand, wearing clothing that feels uncomfortable, unfashionable, or out of place may lead to feelings of self-consciousness or dissatisfaction the individual has within himself. In general, the influence of clothing on individuals is multifaceted; from touching on elements of beauty, evaluating the value, shaping the identity, and nurturing the emotional well-being. By acknowledging the diverse ways in which clothing influences our lives, we can gain a deeper understanding of the significance and the power it holds in shaping individual experience. Every day, we rely on our five senses to navigate our experience. These senses are touch, vision, smell, hearing, and taste, and collectively they shape our interaction with the world around us. These senses make us feel the touch on our skin, the scent from a flower, taste the flavour of food, hear music, see colour, light, perceive darkness, depth, and space. The effect of the body, of sensory experience and aesthetics varied from one interviewee to another. The effect they experienced when dressing their body gave an understanding of their personal aesthetics, upbringing, past, value assessment, attitude, how their clothing had changed, and knowledge of the fashion industry. The impact of clothing on the body turns into a sensory experience when the pieces touch the skin; our sense is heightened when we experience a good or bad feeling towards the clothing or how the fabric feels. The interviewees were open to answers on their own sensory experience. They could all, find pieces of clothing with their eyes closed, using the sense of touch only. There was also an emotional attachment to certain pieces of clothing; they experienced happiness and sadness attached to certain pieces of clothing. They made a conscious decision not to keep pieces that made them feel sad. All the interviewees effortlessly identified their fabric and clothing preferences using their senses, seamlessly differentiating between their

favourite and least favourite garments and fabrics. Their preference for natural fibres in their clothing choices was not unexpected. Their expertise gained from years of working with natural fibres in the industry was a testament to their knowledge on fabrics. Some interviewees did not wear certain material, it made them feel uncomfortable. Some colours can also give some people a headache, thus showing that our sensoriality plays a key part in our choice of clothing.

Sometimes individuals develop emotional connections with clothing because they feel comfortable and familiar when wearing them. Marshall's response regarding which garment her daughter could borrow for work was palpable. Each item her daughter wished to wear held a cherished status as one of Marshall's favourites, making it challenging for her to decide which one to part with. Attachment to clothing can be deeply intertwined with memories of loved ones, as exemplified by Rodriques. He became emotional while speaking of his friend who departed from this world too soon. The garment he specially designed for her wedding day held a profound attachment, serving as a tangible reminder of their bond. Clothing can enhance security for the individual in the same way as children can develop an attachment to their blankets early in their lives. Clothing serves as a shield for the intimate parts of the human body and also conceals what the individual wears underneath, offering privacy beyond what is visible to others. The interviewees' responses made it clear that when a garment resonates with one's personality or style, it has the ability to evoke positive emotions and foster a sense of authenticity. Clothing emerges as a powerful medium of self-expression, whether through fashion, clothing, costume, or uniform.

We are not born with our aesthetics; rather, the culture we inhabit plays a significant role in shaping them. Findings from the study reveal that the environment we inhabit leaves a mark on our tastes and preferences, influencing our perception of beauty and style. Through their aesthetics and taste, individuals make personal choices for objects and clothing that ends up in their homes and closets. Clothing must serve practical purposes and provide comfort for the activities and environments in which we engage. They may also

have an emotional attachment to them at the same time. Individuals define themselves through their taste in choices between what is considered good and what is perceived as bad. Items that meet our functional needs, such as work attire, workout clothes, or formal wear, are also likely to find a place in our closets. Our perception of our bodies and levels of confidence can influence the types of clothing we feel comfortable wearing and keeping in our closets. Items that make us feel confident and attractive are more likely to be retained, while those that evoke a negative body image may be discarded. The selection of clothing we choose to be in our closet is a multifaceted process influenced by a combination of personal preferences, practical considerations, societal influences, and ethical concerns. The interviewees have worked tirelessly on their aesthetics throughout their lives, and they redefined their visual appearance during their work experience in fashion over and over again. Like any other individuals they produced their daily role of their entry for the day in the space around their closets. This is where the individual becomes his own costume designer, the visual effect takes place, and the text is prepared for the theatre of everyday life.

Choosing to collaborate with former colleagues for the interviews in this thesis highlights a strong connection within the tight-knitted community of fashion professionals. The goal was to capture the impact of what dressing the body with clothing entails for them, thus gaining an insight into their childhood, personal wardrobe and their most personal space, their closet in order to shed a light on its meaning and their minds. With their own words, they brought to life the activity of clothing their body. The influence clothing has on interviewees is complex, affecting various aspects of their lives in multifaceted ways. Some questions came as a surprise to them, and some of the answers they knew altogether too well. Experience, hope and expectations for their way of living was clear for them; most of them had settled into feeling comfort as a way of life. They all participated in bringing this study to life and together we crafted an intricate web of questions and answers, where the strength of the interview frame varied like woven threads. I relied on their expert knowledge of fashion and clothing, recognising their involvement in the field in

which they participate in almost every single day. Their drawn-out quotations brought their work experiences and beliefs to life in their own words.

The closet is a dynamic phenomenon; it is never finished. It evolves, expands, and gets smaller, and the aesthetic transformation has been visible throughout the decades. It materializes a lifelong, continuous path of change, a metaphor for an “endless garment” through our lives.

The Exhibition

“Endless Garment”

8.0 The “Endless Garment”

Imagine (if possible) a woman dressed in an endless garment, one that is woven of everything the Fashion says, for this garment without end is proffered through text which itself is unending. (Barthes 1990, p. 42)

In his book *The Fashion System*, Roland Barthes explains the double measurable dimension of the “endless garment”: on the one hand, the garment stretches endlessly woven from threads created by fashion, evolving the pieces of clothing we store in our closet over a lifetime; on the other hand, it manifests through an eternal flow of consciousness expressed in the form of text. Or, as Barthes writes:

The total garment must be organized, i.e., cut up and divided into significant units, so that they can be compared with one another and in this way reconstitute the general signification of Fashion. This endless garment has a double dimension; on the one hand, it grows deeper through the system which make up its utterance; on the other hand, it extends itself, like all discourse, along the chain of words; here it is made of superimposed blocs (these are the systems or codes), and there it is made of juxtaposed segments. (these are the signifiers, the signifieds and their union, i.e., the signs). (Barthes 1983 p. 42)

The woman dressed in the “endless garment” is a beautiful metaphor for breaking down the “system of clothing” into species and genera. The endless garments that the closet stores for the individual are profound. Clothing is a fascinating subject that intersects with numerous aspects of human life. Beyond protection and warmth, clothing is a canvas for expression,

communication, and identity. The entire wardrobe within a closet stands as a treasure trove of both personal style and practicality. It harbors a multitude of garments, each with its own story and purpose, reflecting the individual's taste, preferences, and identity. It echoes the era of birth, the locales of residence, cherished relationships, professional endeavors, status in life and the communities that shape one's existence. From the practical to the extravagant, the entire wardrobe is a testament to the diversity of human attire and the endless possibilities of self-presentation. From a social perspective, clothing can indicate membership in certain groups or subcultures, conveying messages about status, occupation, or beliefs. At a personal level, clothing choices can reflect an individual's personality, mood, and self-image. Culturally, clothing plays a significant role in traditions, rituals, and ceremonies. The global fashion industry has far-reaching economic implications, shaping production, consumption, and labor practices worldwide. Studying clothing and its role in everyday life, researchers can gain insights into the complexities of human behaviour, social interactions, and cultural dynamics.

In this chapter, I introduce and contemplate the design of an exhibition focused on an original work of art, which, drawing inspiration from the ideas of Roland Barthes, I have termed the "Endless Garment". The exhibition has yet to be realized physically in a gallery or exhibition space, but its concept, structure, and details are presented graphically – through sketches, diagrams and, other visuals – as well as in the text of the plan. In this chapter, I reflect theoretically on the artwork, relating the artistic to the ethnological. The "Endless Garment" exhibition encapsulates and extends the thesis named "The Closet" and it reflects on many chapters from the thesis; it expresses and investigates key concepts such as generations, space, repetition, craft, sensoriality, history, colours, archives, text and aesthetics.

The floor-to-ceiling art installation is a purposeful placement of three-dimensional objects that create unified work. At the same time, it focuses on my mother's writings, craftsmanship, aesthetics, and her enduring legacy. It showcases several dresses she crafted; they were repurposed and transformed

into the artwork; they offer a poignant commentary on the passage of time and the evolution of identity. Indeed, the utilization of clothing pieces in art is a time-honoured practice, but here it takes on new meaning as it intersects with personal history and artistic expression. The clothing I once cherished from her underwent a transformation over some time, shifting from treasures to burdensome reminders as they took up considerable space in my archive. Eventually, I have severed the cord of attachment to these pieces, liberating them to become the medium for my artistic expression, accompanying and enriching my thesis. The afterlife of objects often leads them to discover new meanings in their existence. By incorporating my mother's pieces of clothing into my work, I am not only honouring our physical connection through blood but also celebrating the enduring bonds of family, symbolized by the red strings that weave through our relationship.

As presented in the thesis, the ethnological examination of clothing stems from the same impulse and curiosity, forming a dialogue between the realms of academia and artistic expression. The thesis and the artwork are likened to non-identical twins, each stemming from the same seed of inquiry. Here, the ethnologist and the artist collaborate to delve into the multifaceted nature of clothing, exploring its aesthetics, impact, individual trajectories, social significance, and cultural imaginaries. In this, they inherit my disposition and interest as a fashion designer, an artist, and, now, an ethnologist.

8.1 The generations

I'm captivated by the notion of three-generation closets. They keep treasures from the past, the present, and the future, embodying a timeless link that unites generations. The three stages outlined in Barthes' writings, the pattern, the sewing, and the garment itself, became a journey I embarked upon at a young age. My mother profoundly influenced my wardrobe, as she skillfully crafted nearly all of my clothing until my teenage years. The time we spent together in front of her sewing machine, often creating matching ensembles, became cherished moments frozen in time. It was through these experiences that I learned the artistry of clothing construction. My mother's influence not

only shaped my wardrobe but also deeply influenced my personal style and approach to dressing.

Then, there was a reversal of the influence in our relationship; the dynamic shifted, with the daughter influencing the mother. In my career and as my mother aged, the conventional clothing path, the daughter taking clothing from the mother, reversed itself. I found myself shaping her fashion choices. Gradually, my designs and selections from renowned labels worldwide found a place in her closet. Then she started wearing clothing from the fashion brand bearing my name. To my surprise there were also garments from my past, tucked away in her basement; she had asked to have them, knowing I was letting go of them. She had preserved my former clothing life, safeguarding it from destruction. I also found photographs of her wearing some of those pieces from my past life. Unintentionally, she imparted a profound lesson in “reversal of time within clothing”. In my mind, vivid visuals of objects connected by red strings began to form, encapsulating the intricate bond between past, present, and future woven through our wardrobes. The exhibition will have fabrics from my mother's dresses gracing the clothing lines in the floor-to-ceiling art installation.

8.2 The space

The enclosed space where the exhibition takes place can be related to Orvar Löfgren's article, "The Black Box of Everyday Life" and his "black box theory". (Löfgren 2014, p. 77). The "black box" describes the mundane aspects of everyday life that often go unnoticed or unexamined, much like clothing the body. Löfgren suggests that these ordinary, taken-for-granted elements of daily existence can be considered as enclosed spaces, the closet being one of these. The enclosed exhibition space keeps the line of endless garments from an individual, presented in one continuous line exhibiting the statistics of one's clothing life. It is a metaphoric rendering of the closet. At the same time, the exhibition encourages viewer to explore the complexities and significance of seemingly trivial aspects of their lives, inviting them to consider how the "black box" of the closet shapes their experiences and perceptions.

8.3 The history

In the enclosed space of the exhibition, an extra delicate web of threads is woven intricately into the ceiling. The web represents the “threads of life”: the history retained in clothing from the past. In his magnum opus, *The Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin writes that: “this spectacle, the unique self-construction of the newest in the medium of what has been, make for the true dialectical theatre of fashion” (Benjamin 1999, p. 64). The difference that kept fashion going forward represented for him the conjunction of the past, the present, and the future. The clothing contains the past in some form, either in the making, the technical development, the detailing, each with its history, or the aesthetic component, which looks to the past for stylistic inspiration. Pieces of clothing hold within them a rich tapestry of history, encompassing the craft of their creation and the stories embedded in their fabric. Developing of new fabrics and textiles has often paralleled advancements in science and technology. Clothing carries deep cultural significance; it can also be a powerful tool for social change, as seen in feminism and the LBGTO movements. Every piece of clothing is a product of its time and place, embodying its creation’s craftsmanship, cultural heritage, and societal dynamics. Fashion resembled, for Benjamin, a room filled with mirrors where one can view history in so many ways in the rearview mirror, and at the same time it represents the “new.” In developing the metaphor of mirrors, he reminded that “the art of dazzling illusion is here developed to perfection” (Benjamin 1999, p. 537). Fashion serves as a reflective mirror; if you look closely through the reflections, you might notice the aesthetics. The exhibition space described here resembles Benjamin's room, filled with mirrors that reflect history from every angle, revealing the intricate components of each art piece.

8.4 The repetition

The daily activity of clothing one's body is repeated throughout an individual's life. It is a rather mundane personal bodily activity. Speaking of repetition, often comes an implication of redundancy: the repetition is monstrous,

tedious, wearisome, and even soul-destroying. However, think here instead of the meaning of the verb “répéter” in French: to repeat is also to rehearse, to practice. Alternatively, consider repetition as a stylistic device that creates rhythm, emphasis, and meaning, as in poetry or in folk tales’ trebling. Repetition can enhance clarity, make a point more memorable, or evoke certain emotions. In the exhibition, the rhythm of repetition is seen in the particles that create the floor-to-ceiling art installation part of the exhibition. The repetition of pieces reflects the daily activity of clothing one’s body simultaneously, reflecting the number of times one wears his pieces from the closet.

8.5 The craft

At the National Museum of Iceland, there is an exhibition on display, at the time of writing this thesis, named “Creative Hands”. It features historical embroideries, the oldest examples dating from the late 14th century to the most recent one from around 1677. These extraordinary pieces come from around Europe and have two things in common: they were all handcrafted in Iceland and their creators were artistically creative and gifted women who had gained expertise in the remarkable form of embroidery named “Refilsaumur” or the laid-and-couched embroidery tradition. Every piece took years and years to embroider. The colours came from natural dye. In 1963, Elsa E. Guðjónsson, a specialist in Icelandic women’s craft, published an article in *The Bulletin of the Needle and Bobbin Club* about how Icelandic women have since the Middle Ages exhibited extraordinary treasures of craft in embroidery: “to describe the most typical work wrought during the past centuries by Icelandic needlewomen, who are taking great delight in their craft, produced embroideries intended to enhance not only churches but also their homes and dress as well” (Gudjonsson 1963, p. 5).

Skipping over centuries, home economics as a field of study and practice emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as a response to society’s growing industrialization and urbanization. Initially, it focused on teaching women practical skills in managing household resources, cooking, sewing, and

childcare. Home economics presented a way to improve the efficiency and well-being of families and communities. Women's involvement in crafts and home economics has a rich history that spans diverse periods and cultures. Crafts, including textile work, ceramics, and other forms of artistic creation, have historically been associated with women due to traditional divisions of labor along gender lines. Women often engaged in these activities within the home, where they played a central role in producing goods for domestic use and sale. In contemporary times, while the term “home economics” may have fallen out of favour in some places, the principles and skills it encompassed remain relevant. Women and men alike engage in crafts and domestic activities as hobbies, forms of self-expression, and even as sources of income through entrepreneurship or artisanal production. The art of craft in clothing, such as tailoring, sewing, and garment-making, has yet to disappear entirely, but it has certainly evolved. However, how the women in the Middle Ages drew on fabric for the initial artwork and then started to embroidery, has not been entirely realized into modern times.

This exhibition, “Endless Garment” showcases six art pieces in various mediums, exploring the essence of craftsmanship. The embroidery drawings I came across in my mother's house after her passing serve as a testament to her domestic skills and craft. Titled “Endless Garment” the exhibition weaves numerous aspects of my mother's art and craft across various media, featuring her dresses and reflecting her aesthetic sensibilities, which, at same time, are unique and particular to her and speak of the time and the place she was born, her relationship with other people and the society in which she lived.

8.6 The sensory

Sensoriality is vital to one's daily wardrobe when it comes to clothing. Clothing is not only what we put on our bodies; it also touches the skin. You might feel discomfort without thinking about it when you touch something rough. This reaction isn't just in your head; it's influenced by what your skin tells you. Touch is significant on multiple levels, affecting physical health, emotional well-being, social relationships, and cultural interactions. It's a powerful form

of communication that connects us to others and shapes our experiences of the world. Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey write in *Thinking Through the Skin*: “We seek to think *about* the skin, but also to think *with* or *through* the skin” (Ahmed & Stacey, 2004, p. 1). That observation begs the question; they add: “Thinking through the skin poses the question of how skin becomes, rather than simply is, meaningful. To ask such a question is to suggest that the skin is always open to being read.” (Ahmed & Stacey, 2004, p. 1). In essence, “thinking through the skin” suggests that our physical interactions with the environment, through touch, temperature, pressure, and movement, contribute to our cognitive processes and shape our understanding of the world. This concept highlights the interconnectedness of mind and body, suggesting that bodily sensations are integral to how we think, feel, and perceive. “Thinking through the skin” means using our bodily sensations and experiences to understand things instead of just thinking with our minds. It’s like saying our physical feelings affect how we see and understand the world. Some philosophers argue that bodily experiences shape our understanding of the world and that our senses are pivotal in moulding our thoughts and perceptions. “Thinking through the skin” highlights how our bodily sensations and experiences shape our understanding. Instead of only using our cognition and analytic faculties, this line of argument maintains that our bodies are essential for seeing and making sense of the world. It may refer to how writers and artists convey emotions, experiences, and ideas through sensory descriptions and physical sensations, creating a visual connection with the audience. The present thesis highlights sensoriality in multifaceted ways, as does the exhibition, with the pieces of fabric visible in the particles that make up the art installation reminiscent of my mother’s closet. I have cut up and used my mother’s homemade clothing, including many pieces from her wardrobe that derive from my own work in high fashion. The repetition of some particles displays how many times she may have worn those clothing pieces.

8.7 The archive

An archive of clothing typically refers to a curated collection of garments and accessories. Such clothing archives may be curated by fashion designers, fashion houses, museums, or institutions focusing on preserving and documenting the evolution of fashion trends, styles, and designs. They may include vintage garments, prototypes, sketches, photographs, and other clothes that provide insights into the creative process and cultural influences. These archives play a crucial role in studying and understanding fashion history, allowing designers and researchers to explore the evolution of styles and craftsmanship.

However, archives may also exist in individual's households. At some point in her late life, my mother began to sort through her clothing. She created an archive with written notes as if she were a collector creating an archive. To quote Walter Benjamin: "Collecting is a form of practical memory, and of all the profane manifestations of "nearness" is the most binding" (Benjamin 1999, p. 205). As Benjamin notes, the relation of "kinds" controls the collector: "What is decisive in the collection is that the object is detached from all its original functions in order to enter into the closest conceivable relation to things of the same kind" (Benjamin 1999, p. 204). In my mother's collection, the specifics of the "same kind" could include the type of the garment, its colour, the material what it is made of, and any unique characteristics it possesses. Sometimes she wrote the details down from memory. This was neither a museum archive of clothing nor an archive to maintain a design legacy, nor was it strictly scaling of a personal archive for an individual. Instead it was a personal archive with one purpose, to keep her life together; to refer once more to Benjamin, "and for the true collector, every single thing in this system becomes an encyclopedia of all knowledge of the epoch, the landscape, the industry, and the owner from which it comes" (Benjamin 1999, p. 205). I found my mother's notes were found in all corners of her house, a testament to her dementia. They demonstrate the potential for creating archives within a fading mind. Her written notes offer an insight into her mind and exhibit her attempt to put order to her thoughts and life. The number of

notes is visible in the echoing of the words are displayed in the exhibition “Endless Garment” a collection that symbolizes the continuous narrative of her life and the memories she sought to preserve.

The archive she meticulously curated overflowed with memories and craftsmanship. Among its treasures were numerous pieces of clothing spanning decades, each a testament to her skill as a seamstress and to pivotal moments in her life. The distinct fabric choices stood out prominently, each echoing the unique spirit of its respective era. The memories of the “good” times found their sanctuary within these clothes. Her most cherished pieces were organised and meticulously housed in boxes atop her closet's highest shelf. These were not just garments; they were fragments of a life richly lived, carefully archived, and imbued with meaning. She understood that her daughter would find value in these pieces, connecting them to their shared past and the legacy they continued to weave together.

8.8 The text - written clothing

The text of her hand-written notes on archiving her garments, is clearly visible in the graphic art work on the walls of the exhibition. My mother transcribed her clothing archive into hand-written notes using text. The text involves more than just counting garments, it carries with it the form and structure of an archive.

Roland Barthes writes in *The Fashion System*:

We have seen that the units of image-clothing are located at the level of forms, those of written clothing at the level of words; as for the units of real clothing, they cannot exist at the level of language, for, as we know, language is not a tracing of reality; nor can we locate them, although here the temptation is great, at the level of forms, for “seeing a real garment, even under the privileged condition of presentation, cannot exhaust its reality, still less its structure. (Barthes 1990, pp. 4-5)

Barthes' writings on text and clothing is one of the main sources of inspiration for the thesis and the exhibition. More specifically, his analysis of species and genre is clearly visible in the particles in the floor-to-ceiling art installation, with knowledge taken from my work experience. However, neither Barthes nor my experience inspired my mother to write her handwritten notes on her clothing. She was no longer the person who lived parallel to my life and the one I knew. She started her fight against her mind; she created and wrote countless written notes through which she archived her belongings and, together with them, her life. Not written on beautiful or elegant paper, they were written on any piece of paper she could find within the household at the time when she needed one: envelopes, scraps of paper that had been torn apart, hangtags, napkins, and old books that carried the names of her children. She counted her objects repeatedly: clothing, accessories, books, jewellery, and home decors; she needed to remind herself of her surroundings with a written record, paper with text. My mother's extremely organised home transformed into a not-so-organised world. These notes and her embroidery are the basis of the graphics in the exhibition.

8.9 The aesthetics

The aesthetic preferences we embrace in our daily routines serve practical purposes; they mirror our choices based on personal taste formed in a social context. We are not born with our aesthetics; we develop them through the world we live in. The exhibition mirrors my mother's wardrobe, which embodies her aesthetics, evident in the recurrence of her writings, clothing preferences, and craftsmanship. In an interview with her a few years back as part of a Qualitative Research project at the University of Iceland, she spoke of the "fine shop" (Jónsdóttir, 2017) where she worked when she was young, referring to the only fashion store in Reykjavík. She also spoke of how she had dressed up for the "fine shop" (Jónsdóttir, 2017) and used Saturdays and Sundays to dress her and her children in the "fine" clothes. Her memories of the "good" times were stored in these clothes. She used the "finer" things in life to remind herself that her social status was no longer the one she had

grown up with; she grew up in extreme poverty in a remote farm within the steep rural fjords of Arnarfjörður on the West Coast of Iceland. She was a unique homemaker; her embroidery, laundry, and homemade clothing looked otherworldly. Intricate embroidered patterns, christening gowns, and other gowns, along with endless clothing for her and her children, crystallized out of an old Pfaff sewing machine straight from another world. Embroidered art on walls, pillows for the entire home, embroidered chairs, and tablecloths graced her home all her life. She knitted cable sweaters and socks in abundance for children and grandchildren. The exhibition clearly demonstrates her aesthetics across all the pieces the exhibit displays.

8.10 Final words

Every exhibition aspect has been meticulously crafted, intertwining it seamlessly with the thesis. The integration is evident through the lens of clothing. The daily repetition of wearing clothing highlights its importance in our lives, prompting reflections on themes such as routine, ritual, and memory. Craftsmanship is vital in crafting and maintaining clothing, highlighting the skill, creativity, and cultural heritage woven into each garment throughout our lives. Clothing embodies histories of craftsmanship, cultural exchange, and societal norms, reflecting the evolution of fashion and identity over time. Clothing engages the senses through touch and sight, evoking emotional responses and connections to the past, present, and future. Clothing is practical and expressive, holding cultural, historical, and social value across generations. Successive generations are connected through shared experiences, traditions, and the sharing of garments and stories. Together, these aspects explore clothing's importance in sharing personal and collective stories, displaying craft traditions, sensory experiences, and historical perspectives within the exhibition. The exhibition space acts as both a physical and conceptual stage where these elements merge, allowing for exploring and displaying their interconnected stories.

This exhibition is not just a reflection of my thesis, “The Closet”; upon closer inspection, it reveals the intricate weaving of my mother's clothing and craft into the exhibition. Objects often find new significance in their afterlife, and in the “Endless Garment” her clothing has found a new meaning. By integrating my mother's clothing into my work, I honour our familial bond and the enduring connection symbolized by the red blood string that binds us. My journey into high fashion was profoundly influenced by my upbringing immersed in craft and home economics. From the tender age of nine onwards, my grandmother and mother were pivotal figures in shaping my path. At the age of nine, I first delved into the art of knitting under the patient guidance of my grandmother. Following her passing, my mother seamlessly assumed the mentor role, ensuring that the legacy of skill and knowledge continued. The foundation laid by my early experiences with knitting paved the way for my pursuit of education in New York and eventual entry into the realm of high fashion. Witnessing my intricately knitted designer creations, gracing the covers of prestigious fashion magazines was a testament to the craftsmanship instilled in me. Today, the label bearing my name still echoes the influence of those early lessons learned, serving as a constant reminder of the rich heritage that continues to inspire my creative endeavours.

Sorting through my mother's belongings after her passing, I realized that she had left a legacy of her world, a testament to her homemaking, her craft, and the narrative woven through the garments she meticulously crafted over many decades. Her wardrobe echoed the stories shared by the interviewees in the qualitative study on which the thesis is based. It was not solely about how she had handcrafted her clothing; each piece served as a poignant testament to significant events in her life. She meticulously organised her pieces in boxes, carefully tucked away on the top shelves of her closet. These items transcended mere clothing; they embodied fragments of a life already lived, each tightly knit with memories, emotions, and stories untold. Her archive was a treasure trove of memory and craftsmanship. The fabric choices reflected the eras in which she had crafted the garments: the vibrant hues of the sixties, the earthy tones of the seventies, and the bold patterns of the eighties. Each fabric carried a piece of history, weaving together the tapestry of her life's

journey. Over the passing decades, she developed a deep emotional attachment to these pieces of clothing. She preserved them meticulously, knowing they held a special significance in her life's narrative. As time passed, and she felt her faculties degraded she archived every garment, understanding that her daughter would cherish and appreciate their value and the narratives they held. This exhibition pays tribute to and is dedicated to my mother, who departed from this world a few years ago, her influence is woven throughout its entirety.

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