The Second Skin

A study on the relationship between clothes and human bodies

Emmi Flodin
Abstract

Clothes are the second skin on human bodies. By coming in contact with humans, clothes become a part of the body. Through the contact, clothes affect and enable human actions. This thesis investigates the relationship between human bodies and clothes by conducting interviews and wardrobe studies. Together with the informants and clothes, the exhibition “Fashioned from Nature” from The Victoria and Albert Museum is partly analyzed. The material is being interpreted in a critical analysis through theories on material agency and skin. The analysis turns to the culture and nature dualism, in order to highlight the neglected physical agency in clothing. Clothing’s agency is both physical and aesthetical. Neither of the aspects can be subordinate, nor superior, since clothes consist equally of both. Following the theories, clothing’s agency is being acknowledged through the encounters with humans. However, the results in this thesis show that clothing’s agency is ever present.

Keywords

Second Skin, Clothes, Human Bodies, Culture and Nature, Material Agency, New Materialism
Acknowledgements

I would like to pay my respects and give thanks to the people who helped me through the writing process of this thesis. I am deeply grateful to the informants of this study, who took the time and effort to not only meet with me and talk, but also engaged in the topic and shared intimate stories about themselves and their second skin. I would also like to thank my teachers from the Master’s program in Fashion Studies for everything they have thought me, and for all the help and support I have received. I am also thankful for my classmates and the various kinds of support we have given each other. Whether it has been constructive feedback on this thesis, or generally talking about the highs and lows of writing a thesis over a fika, it has been a great support to go through this together.

There are two people I would like to thank in particular. First, my supervisor Philip Nilsson Warkander. I am eternally grateful for the amazing support and feedback I have received, and thankful for the passionate interest you have shown in this topic. Second, my mom Jennie. It is thanks to my mom that I began studying Fashion Studies. Thank you, mom, for always supporting me, and encouraging me to go my own way.

Without the help from these people, this thesis would not be what is presented here. Thanks to these people I have been able to write about this topic that lies close to my heart, and also been able to share a piece of my own story about my second skin.
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Introduction

In the year of 2017, I was working as a sales advisor in a fast fashion retail chain store. After I had unpacked clothes that had been directly transported from the clothing factories, I got itching eczema rashes on my hands and wrists. The rashes were most likely an allergic reaction to the chemicals in the clothes from the store. Due to the dermatological disease, I had to seek medical treatment and resign from my job. After I had experienced the harmful effects that clothes can have on the body, I decided to write this thesis to shed light on the effects clothes can have when they come in contact with bodies, and become a second skin.

Clothes become a second layer on the human body when they are worn, also seen as a second skin. Humans and clothes partake in an intricate relationship. Humans need clothes to cover and adorn themselves, and clothes need a body to fulfill their purpose of covering and adorning. Nevertheless, even though clothes affect humans and their bodies, physically and aesthetically, it is often the aesthetic aspect that is addressed when researching fashion and clothing academically.\(^1\) Clothes, and particularly fashion, have been thought of in terms of cultural signifiers to the point that their materiality becomes neglected. From my own point of view based on my own experiences, neglecting clothes’ material aspect in favor for their aesthetics partly deprive them of what clothes are able to do. In order to change the attitude on how clothing affects the body and skin, a shift in the perception of the human relationship with clothes must happen.

The relationship between humans and clothes can be understood as a philosophical question, which can be linked to the discourse on culture and nature. Culture symbolizes civilization and knowledge, while nature symbolizes the primitive, external environment. In western view, culture and nature are distinguished from each other, and culture is seen as superior to nature.\(^2\) The separate view of culture and nature can also exemplify how non-human objects can be seen either as cultural or natural. Given the aspect of the cultural superiority, clothes are usually perceived as cultural objects that are used to symbolize social

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identities. Clothes as natural objects can therefore be seen as overlooked. The material and physical qualities of clothes are then neglected. Nevertheless, through the view of new materialism, non-human objects have started to be considered as objects with agency. That is, objects that are able to act and cause actions. In researching within Fashion Studies, the material qualities of clothes can be further investigated by turning to theories that acknowledge the agency in objects.

In order to propose a change in the perception of the intricate and intimate relationship between humans and clothing, this thesis is investigating clothing practices amongst humans through interviews and wardrobe studies. This thesis is departing from a critical approach and is therefore using theories and perspectives from different disciplines. Material agency and skin are the key perspectives of this thesis in order to investigate the second skin that is clothing on human bodies. Outside of academia, there is a growing interest for clothes’ materiality in relation to the body. Until early 2019, The Victoria and Albert Museum in London displayed the exhibition “Fashioned from Nature”, which highlights the relationship between humans, nature, and clothes. During the spring of 2019, The Museum at FIT designated an exhibition to the materiality in clothing as well; “Fabric In Fashion”. These exhibitions are a start for bridging the interest for clothing’s materiality in relation to the body from academia to popular culture. By writing this thesis and highlighting material agency within clothing practices, the way clothes are thought of can be addressed and evolved both within and outside of academia.

Aims and Research Questions

The aim of this thesis is to investigate clothing’s agency by addressing the intricate relationship between human bodies and clothing. This study is investigating relationships between bodies and clothes in terms of how clothes can physically affect bodies, for the most part, since clothing is already often considered in terms of creating and transforming identities within Fashion Studies. Nevertheless, the emphasis on clothing’s physical agency does not diminish its agency as identity transformers and markers in this thesis. The second aim of this thesis is therefore to

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challenge the perspective of the different agencies clothing inhabits by combining the physical and aesthetical aspects with each other. By acknowledging the physical and aesthetical aspects in clothing practices simultaneously, this thesis is widening the contemporary perception of clothing’s agency in fashion discourse. There is a preconceived assumption that people refuse to wear clothes and materials that hurt them. However, people hurt themselves and the environment to look a certain way through piercings, tattoos, and chemically infused clothes. Nevertheless, continuous pain and allergic reactions are assumed as deal breakers in wearing, or not wearing, clothes.

The aims of the thesis are achieved by asking the following questions:

1. How do the informants talk about the physical relationship between their clothes and bodies?
2. In what way and during what circumstances do clothes have agency?
3. How can clothes be interpreted in regard to agency when considering both physical and aesthetical aspects?

Theory and Theoretical Framework
The theories and perspectives that are utilized in this thesis are sampled from different disciplines and thinkers. Not all theories and perspectives are named by their respective thinkers and have therefore been combined and divided into three themes: linking culture and nature, the skin, and materiality and agency. These themes represent how the different theories and perspectives create a multidisciplinary framework for this thesis’ analysis. By combining different theories and perspectives from several thinkers, each theory will complement the others and create a wide framework with multiple aspects to consider.

Linking Culture and Nature
The culture and nature dualism dates back to Ancient Greece when the Philosopher Plato developed a philosophy of the body and mind as separate. During the 17th century, Philosopher René Descartes developed, what became known as, the Cartesian dualism, which separated the mind from nature. Nevertheless, simultaneously as Descartes, Philosopher Baruch Spinoza

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6 Elisabeth Grosz, **Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism** (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994) 5-7.
viewed mind and nature as inseparable. In modern day, theorists have started to critique the Cartesian dualism, and are developing Spinoza’s thoughts.

Sociologist Bruno Latour questions the Cartesian dualism by addressing the fact that all cultures derive from nature. In this sense, culture is the representation of civilization and knowledge, as previously defined. He claims that “[…] the very notion of culture is an artifact created by bracketing Nature off.” From Latour’s point of view, culture is a creation of nature, and therefore, they cannot be separated. The Cartesian dualism can be further questioned by Philosopher Elizabeth Grosz and corporeal feminism. Culture’s superiority over nature can be compared to male oppression of women. Grosz points out how men exploit and control the female body through violence and laws. Following Latour’s train of thought, men should not be seen as superior to women since they are derived from the female body through birth. This thesis does not continue to expand on the patriarchal oppression of the female body. However, by referring to corporeal feminism, the culture and nature dualism can be made more comprehensible when compared to the structural gender differences in society.

In this thesis, the culture and nature dualism will contribute to the understanding of the dualism in the relationship between humans and their clothes. Latour rephrases the culture and nature dualism by calling it “the Internal Great Divide” between humans and non-humans. This statement creates further understanding of culture as a representation of humans, and nature of objects, and in this case clothes. By turning to the culture and nature dualism, or the Internal Great Divide, the disconnection between humans and their clothes can be further investigated and understood.

Furthermore, Anthropologist David Howes suggests that “[…] perhaps the tactually unengaging nature of much of the modern material world is a product of our arm’s-length relationship to the nature.” According to Howes, the human body has become separated from nature because of the lack of interaction between the two. Humans place objects between themselves and nature, which causes the disconnection. By wearing shoes, the feet have lost contact with the surface they are walking on. Howes’ thoughts can explain the distinction

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7 Ibid., 11.
9 Grosz, Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism, 9.
10 Latour, We Have Never Been Modern, 104.
12 Ibid.
between humans and the external environment. However, they do not give an explanation to the disconnected relationship between humans and clothes. Nevertheless, they do allow for clothes to be considered as a part of the human body by becoming a second skin that surrounds it.

The Skin

The body forms a relationship with clothes, which can be explained by the understanding of clothes as a second skin. As mentioned earlier, the skin on the human body becomes affected by clothing when the two come in close contact with each other. According to Howes, humans’ tactile experiences with nature are only being visualized by the marks they leave on the skin. Even though nature is experienced through all senses, it is only the skin that harbors permanent evidence of the encounter. The cuts and scrapes that are left on the skin becomes evidence of the tactile experiences.13 While Howes points to the human relationship with nature, the theory is equally applicable to the human relationship with clothes. The use of clothes leaves marks on the skin in the form of lines from tight waistbands to rashes from allergic reactions. The skin can therefore be understood as factual evidence of the encounter between body and clothing. Howes claims that every mark on the skin creates skin knowledge. The cuts and scrapes create memories and knowledge of an encounter between the body and something exterior.14 The notion of skin knowledge can be seen as acknowledging bodies’ agency and intelligence through its capability of collecting experiences and memories in a permanent way. In regard to the human relationship with clothing, the marks that clothes leave on the skin can therefore be seen as knowledge about encounters with clothes. A rash from a piece of clothing can create knowledge about an allergy to a certain textile.

Materiality and Agency

According to Giuliana Bruno, professor of Visual and Environmental Studies, “[…] the skin is our first coating, our first dress, then fashion becomes our second skin. […] And then architecture becomes the third skin.”15 Bruno acknowledges clothes and architecture as additional layers to the human skin. She also sees clothes and architecture as sometimes linked,

13 Ibid, 33.
14 Ibid, 27.
based on how clothes can become objects when they are sculpturally designed. By adopting Bruno’s view, clothes can be considered objects. In the following paragraphs, theories regarding materiality and agency will provide a framework for viewing clothes as objects with agency.

Objects with agency are considered as powerful actors that are able to affect their surroundings. Turning to Latour and his development of Actor-Network Theory, which will be referred to as ANT throughout this thesis, objects can be perceived as having agency. According to Latour and his interpretation of ANT, for an object to become an actor, it has to do more than to only be a bearer of symbolism. Latour claims that objects have not been considered as having agency in the past due to the sociological definition of an actor; that it has to act intentionally. Nevertheless, he also claims that an actor can be defined by asking the following question: “Does it make a difference in the course of some other agent’s action or not?” Latour states that objects do make a difference since they enable other actors’ actions within the network. For instance, a hammer can enable a human to hit a nail, and a knife can enable a human to cut meat. Latour’s definition of what makes an object an actor will be used to analyze the different ways clothes affect and enable humans’ actions.

According to Latour, objects have agency when they can affect other actors’ actions. However, objects’ agency is also dependent on the temporal relationship between the actors within the network. Latour states that objects are not recognized as social until they come in contact with something else that is social, and that the object can only stay social during the brief encounter. By understanding objects’ agency from this point of view, clothes should be considered as having agency when they are in contact with humans. Furthermore, even though objects can have agency within certain networks, they are not always acknowledged as such. Latour claims that objects with agency are noticeable when they are either disrupting the perception of a situation, or if they are being investigated from a distance. Through my own understanding of Latour’s statement, clothes have agency when they are in contact with other

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16 Ibid.
18 Ibid., 71.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid., 65.
21 Ibid., 80-81.
social actors. However, the conventional view of clothes as non-human objects, and therefore not social nor actors, makes it difficult to notice clothes’ agency in everyday life.

Conventionally, clothes are seen as bearers of symbolism. Therefore, it might be argued that clothes should not be seen as actors, according to the qualifications of ANT. However, according to Grosz, clothes can be further understood as objects with agency. Grosz states that:

Anything that comes into contact with the surface of the body and remains there long enough will be incorporated into the body image – clothing, jewelry, other bodies, objects. […] by marking the body image: subjects do not walk the same way or have the same posture when they are naked as when they wear clothing.22

Grosz points to that objects, such as clothes, become a part of the body image when they come in contact with the human body, and thus affecting it. Grosz also believes in the power of objects and ascribes them agency to the point where she claims that they can change structural differences in society. Grosz claims that in order to escape male oppression, women must transform themselves to become more, which can be enabled by interacting with objects.23 Grosz’ theoretical perspective questions the conventional view of objects as lifeless things, which places her thoughts within the realm of new materialism. Nevertheless, her perspective is anchored in corporeal feminism, which is visible in the way she connects female liberty and material agency. Although this thesis will not go further into a feminist perspective, the role of gender within the relationship between clothes and human bodies will be briefly discussed later on in the analysis. Grosz’ theoretical perspective has been chosen because of the view on objects and their agency, rather than for its anchoring in corporeal feminism.

There are multiple theorists that can be mentioned in addition to the names that have been listed in this section. Nevertheless, because of the scope and timeframe of this thesis, important names such as Michel Callon and John Law in relation to ANT, or Jane Bennett and Sara Ahmed in relation to new materialism, will not be referenced to. The theories that have been presented will provide the framework for how clothes’ agency and the relationship between humans and clothes are understood in the thesis. By turning to Latour, Grosz, Bruno, and Howes, the relationship between the human body and clothes can be positioned in relation to how clothes can be considered as actors with agency.

22 Grosz, Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism, 80.
Previous Research
Humans interact with objects all the time, but objects’ agency is still not self-evident, especially when it comes to clothing. Even though clothes are present in most humans’ everyday lives, there seems to be a disconnection between the human skin and the clothes that surround it. However, in Fashion Studies, scholars have started to pay attention to the power of materials by turning to material culture. Since the disconnection has previously been compared to the philosophical discussion about culture and nature, the previous research on the culture and nature dualism within Fashion Studies will be presented. Furthermore, materiality in clothing, and its role as an actor, is presented in this section.

The Culture and Nature Dualism in Fashion Studies
The culture and nature dualism has been discussed since the times of Descartes and Spinoza. Nevertheless, the culture and nature dualism in Fashion Studies is highly associated with philosophers Voltaire and Rousseau from the time of the Enlightenment. Paula von Wachenfeldt, assistant professor in Fashion Studies has encapsulated the philosophers’ debate in relation to her research on luxury. According to von Wachenfeldt, Voltaire advocates for civilization, consumption, and the good life, that is the “culture” aspect of the debate. Meanwhile, Rousseau advocates for a denunciation of materialism and elitism, which represents the “nature” aspect. Von Wachenfeldt states that even though both philosophers made compelling arguments, it is the thoughts of Voltaire that lingers in modern day consumerism.24

Voltaire and Rousseau’s influences on fashion have also been documented by Historian Aileen Ribeiro. Rousseau’s thoughts on nature and the natural body affected the views on morally appropriate fashion in society. Women would often be the scapegoats for immoral fashion, since tightly laced corsets and abnormally wide skirts were considered unnatural.25 The views on fashionable women as immoral continued during the 19th century. Women were

25 Aileen Ribeiro, Dress and Morality (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 115. Through history, men have been criticized for their dress practices, as well as women. However, from the 19th century and onwards, men and women were strongly separated in regard to morality and fashion. Read more in Ribeiro’s Dress and Morality.
considered expensive consumers of luxury, while men’s dress was sober and plain.\textsuperscript{26} Paradoxically, fashion production and consumption expanded and increased during the 19\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{27} Even though the fashion consumers were shamed by moralists for being unnatural, the “culture” aspect of the debate prolonged, as stated by von Wakenfeldt.

Hitherto, the research on the culture and nature dualism in Fashion Studies has only brought up the separation between the two. Culture and nature are illustrated as two polar opposites by both von Wakenfeldt and Ribeiro. However, an interest for linking dualisms in Fashion Studies has been starting to grow. Sociologist Lucia Ruggerone writes about the mind and body in clothing practices, in order to further investigate the human relationship to clothing as sensorial, as well as intellectual.\textsuperscript{28} As mentioned, the mind and body is the forerunner to the culture and nature dualism. Through Ruggerone’s research, the conventional perception of dualisms can change. Even though Ruggerone is not investigating culture and nature, her research is valuable to the field and to this research, since her work paves the way for abandoning dualisms in Fashion Studies.

\textit{Material Aspects in Clothing}

As Ruggerone mentions, clothing is sensorial as well as intellectual. In Consumption Researcher Marie Hebrok and Ethnologist Ingun Grimstad Klepp’s study, consumers’ sensorial reaction to wool coheres with their intellectual knowledge of the material. The research derives from an interest to emphasize the material aspect of clothing, since they claim that clothes are mainly seen as communicating and expressing identities.\textsuperscript{29} The result of the research shows that the sensorial perception of textiles mattered a lot to the informants, since they would discard a wool sample because it felt like a plastic material.\textsuperscript{30} One informant stood out in the study due to a reliance on the intellectual knowledge. The informant discarded a sample of a synthetic material because of the plastic fibers, even though it was pleasant to the touch.\textsuperscript{31} Hebrok and Grimstad Klepp’s study shows how the materiality in clothes affects how consumers perceive a garment.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 119.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 132.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Lucia Ruggerone, ”The Feeling of Being Dressed: Affect Studies and the Clothed Body,” \textit{Fashion Theory} 21, no. 5 (2016), 573-574, December 4, 2018, DOI: 10.1080/1362704X.2016.1253302.
\item \textsuperscript{29} Marie Hebrok and Ingun Grimstad Klepp, “Wool is a knitted fabric that itches, isn’t it?,” \textit{Critical Studies in Fashion & Beauty} 5, no. 1 (2014), 68-69, December 14, 2018, DOI: 10.1386/csfb.5.1.67_1.
\item \textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 89.
\item \textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 87.
\end{itemize}
By addressing consumers’ perception of clothing, Tae-Im Han, assistant professor in Fashion Marketing Studies, and Jae-Eun Chung, associate professor in Consumer and Family Science, investigates Korean consumers’ motivation towards purchasing organic cotton. The result shows that the health and environmental benefits of organic cotton in relation to conventional cotton were a factor of motivation in buying organic. In a similar study, Jiyun Kang, associate professor in Merchandising Studies, and Sang-Hoon Kim, professor in Marketing Studies, investigate the perceived risks in buying environmentally sustainable apparel products amongst South Korean and U.S. consumers. Kang and Kim’s research shows that physical risk, whether the product is harmful to the wearer’s health or not, was not important in the consumers’ decision making. These two studies show that, on one hand, health and environmental benefits and risks are becoming more important in clothing practices. On the other hand, some consumers have yet to make the connection between the clothes they put on their bodies and their internal health and well-being.

The health aspect of consuming clothes is one of the main reasons for why this research is being conducted. However, the environmental aspect of the effects clothes have has been getting a lot of attention globally. Sustainable Fashion Scholar Kate Fletcher has mapped the different effects textile and clothes have on the environment in her research. Besides pointing to the harmful effects clothes have, both through production and consumption, Fletcher also suggest better alternative for more sustainable fashion. Nevertheless, even though the fashion industry and its consumers are becoming more aware of the harmful aspects of clothing, the problems did not start during the 21st century. Alison Matthews David, associate professor in Fashion Studies, has done a historical research on the health risks in clothing during the 19th and 20th century. In Matthews David’s research, fashion is shown to have caused physical harm through centuries by using chemicals in various fashion material. During the industrious revolution, chemicals were being used to speed up production processes to lower costs. Even

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36 Ibid., 53.
though the harm that clothes and materials can cause has been pointed out in previous research, there is still a disconnection between wearer and garment amongst some consumers.

*Clothes as actors*

Through material culture, the potential agency in clothes and other objects can be detected. In Historian Frank Dikötter’s research on Chinese material culture, the usage of objects is not only defined by the cultural significances of a certain item, but also by the different qualities the item can offer. For example, even though sunglasses have been used by people to create a more intelligent look, they are also used to enhance short-sightedness and protect the eyes from harsh sunlight. Dikötter embarks on a crucial point of this thesis; that objects are both of cultural and physical significance. However, since his research is historical and bound to Chinese material culture, contemporary consumer attitudes are not identified.

Furthermore, Sociologist Joanne Entwistle has investigated clothes as actors by applying ANT to the fashion industry. Entwistle’s research utilizes ANT as a method, and looks for links and trances through object. She suggests that ANT in Fashion Studies can be used to untangle the environmental and ethical sustainability issues that the fashion industry is dealing with. Even though Anthropologist Penny Harvey is neither a fashion scholar nor applying ANT to her study, she uses the aspect of objects and agency to tackle sustainability issues. Harvey suggests that raised awareness of sustainability issues can be achieved if people consider waste as having agency. In fact, Harvey points out that after objects are discarded and labeled as waste, they still cause toxic effects on the environment when they end up in landfill. Research on objects and agency is growing in relation to awareness of sustainability issues. However, this thesis will focus on the effects that clothes have on the body, rather than on the environment.

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39 Ibid., 281.


In the section for theory and theoretical framework, Grosz points out that clothes and accessories become part of body images. In Ethnologist Michelle Göransson’s dissertation, objects are investigated as constructing bodies to fit into societal norms. As Grosz, Göransson has a feminist and gender perspective on her research. The previous research shows that objects are considered to have agency. By turning to different disciplines for previous research, as this thesis is doing regarding theory, a broad framework for what has been done has been presented. This thesis will further contribute to viewing the different aspects of clothes’ agency.

Material
Two key categories of material in this thesis are informants and their clothes due the focus of investigating the relationship between the two. By involving clothes in the material, this thesis involves the perspective of objects’ agency throughout the thesis, from theory to choice of material. Furthermore, The Victoria and Albert Museum’s exhibition “Fashioned from Nature” is part of the material as well. The material has been gathered through recordings, pictures, and field notes.

Informants
During the selection process of informants, people have been targeted through acquaintances and personal networks, also called snowballing. Initially, the intended target group of informants were people with eczema rashes or other skin diseases caused by clothing, due to my own experiences of bodily contact with clothing. The hypothetic intention was that people with similar issues and experiences would pay attention to how their bodies reacted to what they put on. However, most people with skin diseases that were approached seemed to care more about what skin products they were using, than what materials their clothes had. Nevertheless, the informants that were chosen for this thesis stated that they are making efforts and compromises in their clothing practices in order to purchase and wear clothes that will not harm their body and skin. For some of the informants, this means avoiding clothes made out of

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43 It would have been interesting to investigate further how people that did not contemplate their clothes in regard to their medical condition experienced clothing. However, there is a focus in this thesis on the relationship between human bodies and clothing, and the physical and material agency of clothing. Therefore, it was seen as more important to interview people that actively considered the material aspects of their clothing, including both people who have, and have not, experienced eczema rashes.
synthetic material, or having to wash the clothes before wearing them. Yet, they all claimed that aesthetics and style are important factors when purchasing clothes. They were therefore chosen because they had experienced moments when clothing’s materiality was significant in their clothing purchases. Furthermore, the selection of informants was not delimited to any specific gender, age, class, or ethnicity. Nevertheless, the six informants that participated in this study are all women, European, between 25 to 42 years old, and the majority of the informants have backgrounds in the fashion and/or textile industry through education and/or occupancy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Occupancy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>British, bias towards India</td>
<td>Textile designer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>Handicraft/textile teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>Criminology student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Swedish/Finnish</td>
<td>Buyer and photographer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lila</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Polish, Danish residency</td>
<td>Sustainable Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carla</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Swedish/Spanish</td>
<td>Textile teacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reason for why there are only female informants might be because of my own identification as a woman, which in my case leads to a majority of females in my contact network. It is therefore difficult to state if women are more aware of clothes’ material and physical qualities than men, since no men were encountered during the selection process.

*Clothing*

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44 The names have been anonymized in order to protect the informants’ privacy.
Selected clothes from the informant’s wardrobes are part of the material in this study. The clothes were chosen by the informants from their wardrobes based on the personal associations they made with the questions that were discussed during the interviews about their clothing practices. The informants’ clothes were documented through pictures and field notes during the interviews and wardrobe studies. By documenting the clothes through pictures and field notes during the fieldwork, the feelings and thoughts that arose during the meeting with the informants are kept within the documentation. However, the pictures are not included in the analysis since this thesis is not visually analyzing the material. The clothes are referred to in regard to their materials and what kinds of garments they are.

**Exhibition “Fashioned from Nature”**

The exhibition “Fashioned from Nature” at *The Victoria and Albert Museum* in London displayed clothes from the 17th century up until present day with a focus on fashion, materiality and nature. The exhibition presented a focus on the use and exploitation of nature in fashion, and a message to visitors to start contemplating the source of their clothes. Pictures and field notes of text were gathered during the observation of the exhibition. Even though clothes are in focus in this thesis, the material from exhibition is centered on the theoretical aspect of the relationship between humans and clothing, and also between humans and nature. Therefore, the clothes on display in the exhibition are not visually analyzed in this thesis. By exhibiting fashion in relation to the exploited nature, *The Victoria and Albert Museum* is educating their visitors on the relationship between human and nature within fashion discourse. “Fashioned from Nature” was chosen as material, instead of “Fabric In Fashion” at *The Museum at FIT*, because of the time frame and option of geographic location of this thesis.

**Methodology**

Interviews, observations and critical analysis have been chosen as methods for this thesis in order to investigate the chose material. The combination of multiple methods is collectively called mixed method and is preferred when working with an interdisciplinary field, such as

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46 The Victoria & Albert Museum, “Fashioned from Nature.”
Fashion Studies. By combining ethnography and critical theory, this thesis departs from interviews and observations in order to investigating the relationship between clothes and human bodies. Critical theory then allows for a critical analysis of the finding, which can challenge and build onto the theories utilized throughout the analysis.

**Interviews**

Interviews derive from an ethnographic methodology, in which the purpose is to “[understand] human beings in their own settings or situations.” It is therefore necessary to involve an ethnographic approach in order to understand the human relationship with clothing. For this thesis, six informants were semi-structurally interviewed. The semi-structured interview will allow the interviewer to ask pre-conceived questions whilst still having the opportunity to modify the questions during the course of the interview. Prior to the each interview, the informants received a set of questions about their clothing practices in relation to materiality, sensorial feeling, and aesthetics. Since the informants were asked to talk about their clothes, skin, and bodies, the topic of sensorial feeling might be experienced as a private matter. The informants were therefore encouraged to prepare and think through the questions prior to the interview. The interviews took part on the dates between January 30th and March 15th, 2019. During the interviews, the questions were used as guidelines to remain on the topic. The interviews departed from the general thoughts of the informants after contemplating the questions, and after that continued with follow-up questions depending on what course the interviews took. The intended setting of the interviews was the informants’ homes in order to make the informant more comfortable, due to the private matter that was discussed. However, some of the informants had difficulties with meeting in person or in their homes. Those interviews were therefore conducted at Stockholm University Campus Frescati and Filmhuset, or via Google Hangouts. Two of the interviews were conducted in English, and four were conducted in Swedish.

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49 Ibid., 120.

50 Ibid., 199-200.

51 The questions are attached in the appendix of the thesis. The Swedish informants received the questions in Swedish and the international informants in English. However, only the English version is presented in the appendix. The questions are constructed and translated by me, the author of this thesis, whom is a native speaking Swede.
conducted in Swedish. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and translated by me, the author. The interviews were transcribed in their original languages. However, the quotes from the Swedish interviews in the thesis were translated into English. Furthermore, the quotes were synthesized to present the informants thoughts and statements. Sounds and stutters were therefore removed from the quotes used in the analysis.

Five of six informants participated in both the interview and wardrobe study. The meeting with Karen proceeded differently from the other interviews. Since Karen felt more comfortable talking about the fashion and textile industry, and her work within it, the pre-prepared questions and wardrobe study were disclosed from the interview. During the interview with Karen, she was asked to talk about her experience from working with fashion and textiles, rather than her own clothing practices. The interview thus became a conversation without any pre-conceived questions, therefore resembling an unstructured interview.\(^{52}\) Due to the changed nature of the interview, the relationship between researcher and informant became more personal. I shared my own experience and how I came to write this thesis with Karen, which softened the lines between me as an interviewer and her as an informant. This is one of the difficult aspects when conducting an ethnographic study, since the researcher interacts personally with the material.\(^{53}\) Nevertheless, it was a way to form a connection with Karen by sharing experiences regarding the mutual interest.

**Observations**

Observing as a method is often implied when conducting ethnographic studies. When interviewing informants, observing their body language and reactions is a form of observation that is often integrated in the interviews.\(^{54}\) For this thesis, observations were made in form of observing the clothes of the informants, and visiting the exhibition “Fashioned from Nature”. The observations made in this thesis were therefore participatory observations, in which I, the author, was immersed in the observed activities.\(^{55}\)

By conducting wardrobe studies, the relationship between humans and their clothes can be practically investigated. The hands-on method, in difference to interviews, makes

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\(^{52}\) Howell, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Methodology*, 199-200.

\(^{53}\) Ibid., 198.

\(^{54}\) Ibid., 206.

\(^{55}\) Ibid., 206-207.
it possible to view clothes as material elements, and not only symbolic elements.\(^\text{56}\) Grimstad Klepp and Business Anthropologist Mari Bjerck propose that wardrobe studies should be conducted in connection to interviews, in order to fill the gaps where clothes are only brought up abstractly in conversations. Mixing interviews with wardrobe studies therefore emphasizes the materiality and agency in clothing.\(^\text{57}\) By investigating the informants’ clothes, the statements made by the informants were materialized through their choice of clothing. Nevertheless, it can also show a discrepancy between speech and action. According to Klepp and Bjerck, their wardrobe studies show that answers from interviews do not always correlate with the physical evidence found through the wardrobe study.\(^\text{58}\) In this thesis, wardrobe studies were used as a complement to the interviews in order to emphasize the focus on the agency of clothes. The informants were asked to choose one or several clothing items from their wardrobes that came to mind when they read the questions prior to the interviews. Wardrobe studies is a fruitful method for gaining practical understanding of a person’s clothing practices. However, in wardrobe studies, there is a boarder of intimacy that has to be penetrated between the researcher and the informant.\(^\text{59}\) Being invited into the informants’ homes and wardrobe must therefore not be seen as a guarantee. Prior to the interviews, the informants were asked if they wanted to participate in both interview and wardrobe study. When the interviews took place outside of the informants’ homes, pictures of clothes taken by the informants were used as substitutes for the actual clothing items.

The observation of the exhibition “Fashioned from Nature” was conducted at The Victoria and Albert Museum in London, in January 2019. Pictures and field notes were taken during the observation. The focus was put on the displayed text and information in the exhibition. The material from the observation of the exhibition are referenced in the analysis through the pictures taken during the observation, and the exhibition catalogue.

Critical analysis

This thesis departs from a critical approach, which derives from a critical theory methodology. Critical theory is a critique to the norms in society with an aim to achieve equality and liberty. The ruling elites and popular ideologies are sought to be challenged and revised through the use

\(^{56}\) Grimstad Klepp and Bjerck, “A methodological approach to the materiality of clothing: Wardrobe studies,” 373.

\(^{57}\) Ibid., 377, 383.

\(^{58}\) Ibid., 378.

\(^{59}\) Ibid., 379.
of the methodology. A critical analysis was made on the material derived from the interviews and observation and is the method of how the material was interpreted. The theories and perspectives from various fields allowed the material to be questioned in terms of material agency and the role of body and skin. Furthermore, through a critical analysis, the conventional view of culture and nature was able to be challenged through the material in terms of how clothes and human bodies are viewed together. Questioning thoughts established from the time of the Enlightenment is trade mark for critical theory. Basing the interpretation method on critical theory is thus reasonable due to the theoretic perspective of linking dualisms, since that discourse has been debated in Fashion Studies with references to Voltaire and Rousseau. By situating fashion and clothing practices together with culture and nature, and material agency, this thesis also continues to establish Fashion Studies as a multidisciplinary field that exists in several discourses.

By using critical theory, theories have been developed to create social justice and a voice for groups treated with injustice, such as Marxist, feminist and ethnic theories, which makes the use of critical theory highly political. Due to the developments in society, that have been made possible by critical theory, the methodology has also been called cultural activism. The methodology does not only interpret the world, but aims to change it as well. Conducting a critical analysis therefore allows for conventional views to be challenged and questioned, which aligns with the second aim of this thesis. However, even if this thesis’ topic grew out of a personal issue, and a motivation to highlight what clothes can do to the physical body, it is still an academic thesis. The theories are therefore used to interpret the material in order to point to as many aspects of clothes and their agency as possible, but also to challenge each other and contribute to theory developments within Fashion Studies.

60 Howell, An Introduction to the Philosophy of Methodology, 77.
61 The term discourse analysis is excluded as a method in this thesis, in favor for critical analysis, because of its close reading and evaluation of an existing discourse. The use of critical theory in this thesis is to propose a change through challenging common beliefs surrounding the agency of clothes, rather than to exclusively look at what has already been discussed.
62 Howell, An Introduction to the Philosophy of Methodology, 76.
63 Kaiser and Green, ”Mixing Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Fashion Studies: Philosophical Underpinnings and Multiple Masculinities,” 165.
Thesis Outline
Following the introduction, the analysis is divided into three parts resonating the research questions. Chapter one, The Informants and Their Clothes, answers the first question “How do the informants talk about the physical relationship between clothes and bodies?” Focus lies on the relationship between the informants and their clothes, and more specifically on how the relationships are articulated by the informants. By establishing the main part of the material in the first chapter, the second question “In what way and during what circumstances do clothes have agency?” is the focus of the second chapter, Clothes and Agency. Even though the material is continuously presented throughout the analysis, the second chapter highlights how clothes’ agency is considered, emphasizing the focus on clothes rather than the wearer. In the two first chapters, the material from “Fashioned from Nature” is also presented and analyzed. The following chapter, Materiality and Style, answers the third question “How can clothes be interpreted in regard to agency when considering both physical and aesthetical aspects?” By considering both the physical and aesthetical aspects of clothes’ agency, the analysis follows through on viewing the multiple aspects in clothing as equal and linked. Following the analysis, the thesis is summarized in a concluding chapter. Besides synthesizing the thesis, the last chapter is also featuring concluding remarks on the discussions made in the analysis, as well as the contributions of this thesis, and suggestions for future research.

Analysis
The order of the chapters is structured to start with the focus on the informants and their stories. Then, in chapter two and three, going deeper into analyzing the different aspects and ways clothing’s agency can be interpreted. The structure of each chapter is formed on the base of departing from the informants and the interviews, and then continuing on to debating the role of clothing in relationship to bodies through the theoretical perspectives, similar to structure of the order of the chapters. Nevertheless, the material is presented in all three chapters. The three analytical chapters are each summarized in smaller conclusions.

The Informants and Their Clothes
I never shop polyester or acrylic, it’s not optional at all and it’s always like that. I want a material that breathes, that I feel good in that is comfortable on my skin. A garment needs to be comfortable, it’s very important to me. Well, partly because it gets, what’s the word, electric and that is uhea
[shrugs]. That it smears onto the body, that the body can’t breathe properly, and then of sustainability reasons, simple as that, it’s not optional.

When Carla is asked about her favorable choice of clothing materials, she makes a point in choosing natural fibers over synthetic fibers. To her, synthetic materials, like polyester and acrylic, are uncomfortable when they come in contact with the skin. Carla is not the only informant who chooses natural fibers over synthetic ones. Emma and Lila also express that they do not like synthetic fibers because of how warm and sweaty they can get when wearing clothes made of those materials. Carla, Emma and Lila all use the term “breathe” when they are talking about the difference between clothes made of natural or synthetic fibers. Seeing clothes as a second skin, as Bruno suggests, the informants’ statements can be interpreted as feelings of being trapped and enclosed in the garments. As Carla states, her body cannot breathe properly in synthetic clothes, indicating that the clothes are in some way suffocating her body. Being dressed in uncomfortable clothes can create a feeling of being trapped in an uncomfortable second skin. Furthermore, Carla, Emma and Lila are not alone in thinking negatively of synthetic materials. In Hebrok and Grimstad Klepp’s study, informants were cautious about wearing synthetic fibers because they felt “plastic-like” and “crackling”.

The favorable materials of most of the informants are natural fibers, such as cotton, wool, silk and linen. However, cotton is critically questioned even though it is used by the informants. Some of the informants talk about how conventional, or non-organic, cotton is something they do not want to wear. Victoria, Lila and Carla do not want to wear conventional cotton because of the effects it has on the environment. In fact, conventional cotton is often grown while using fertilizers, pesticides and large amounts of water, which leads to the pollution of both soil and groundwater. Instead of wearing conventional cotton, the informants choose to wear organic cotton. Even though the informants want to wear cotton rather than synthetic fibers, their knowledge about the production processes prohibits them from wearing conventional cotton. The conscious consumer, in this sense thinking before she acts, is present in Hebrok and Grimstad Klepp’s study as well. Although the material might feel pleasant on the skin, the conscious consumer chooses not to wear it due to ideological or political reasons.

In fact, turning to Grosz, even though the body image is to a large extent derived from sensation,

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65 Hebrok and Grimstad Klepp, “Wool is a knitted fabric that itches, isn’t it?,” 87.
66 Fletcher, Sustainable Fashion and Textiles: Design Journeys, 13.
67 Hebrok and Grimstad Klepp, “Wool is a knitted fabric that itches, isn’t it?,” 87.
it cannot be explained in full without accounting for psychical dimensions.\textsuperscript{68} Reading the informants’ refusal of organic cotton from Grosz and Bruno’s point of view combined, being aware of the use of fertilizers and pesticides in conventional cotton can create a negative attitude towards the material. Having a negative attitude can thereby affect the sensation of the clothes, the second skin. Knowing that something has a negative effect of the lived surroundings, such as clothes and architecture as the second and third skin, can affect how people want to situate themselves within the multiple layers of skin.

However, the informants of this study show that they are not always critical towards materials. Carla and Emma express how linen is a favorable material because of its qualities, Carla finds that linen age very well, while Emma finds it “[…] great, even though it gets wrinkly.” Even though Karen did not talk about her own clothing practices, nor participated in the wardrobe study, she expresses a fondness for linen. According to Karen, flax, which is the seed that is grown and spun into linen, is rejuvenating for the soil it grows in. She also states that the entire flax plant is used during the production of linen. However, according to Fletcher, the flax plant is not entirely perfect. For instance, it is common to use fertilizers when growing the flax. Water retting, which is “[…] degumming flax fibres from the stalk”, is also polluting the water used in the process, which can sometimes be running river water.\textsuperscript{69} Linen, depending on the production process, is therefore not necessarily an unproblematic textile when it comes to environmental impact. Nevertheless, the informants seem to view linen as unproblematic in relation to conventional cotton or synthetic fibers. In fact, when cotton and flax/linen are compared, even Fletcher sees flax and linen as the better option for the environment.\textsuperscript{70} The fondness of linen might depend on the degree of knowledge about the production of linen, as well as the sensorial feeling that the material feels comfortable on the skin. The informants thereby show that their choice of material is dependent on a mixture of knowledge and sensorial feeling. Their attitude aligns with Grosz and Ruggerone’s motion to account for both mind and body in clothing practices. Clothing practices are not only dependent on knowledge and intellect, it is also dependent on how clothes feel on the body.\textsuperscript{71} For instance, Carla does not want to wear synthetic fibers because of how they feel against her body, she rather wants to wear natural fibers, like linen. However, she avoids conventional cotton because of its

\textsuperscript{68} Grosz, \textit{Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism}, 74.

\textsuperscript{69} Fletcher, \textit{Sustainable Fashion and Textiles: Design Journeys}, 16.

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 14.

\textsuperscript{71} Ruggerone, "The Feeling of Being Dressed: Affect Studies and the Clothed Body," 574, 582.

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environmental impact, even though linen can have a negative impact on the environment as well.

Furthermore, applying Howes’ theory, while the refusal of conventional cotton can seem like an ideological or political standpoint, the refusal of synthetic fibers can be interpreted as skin knowledge. Carla and the other informants learn from their bodily experiences that they do not want to wear synthetic fibers because of the effects they have on their bodies. Their bodies and skin learn how they react to different materials. From that knowledge, the informants can decide on what they want to wear based on the sensorial feeling. Accounting for Grosz’ thoughts as well, while the decision in Howes’ case might be based on the sensorial feeling, physical and psychical experiences simultaneously decide whether the clothes are comfortable to wear, from both a political and sensorial reasons.

Carla, Emma, Lila and Victoria all show concerns about wearing certain materials. Their concerns are mainly based on the sensorial feeling the clothes left on their bodies, and the environmental impact from the production processes of the different materials. However, Sara has a different attitude towards the materials she chooses to wear. Her first statement during the interview is that “I care more about how clothes look rather than how they feel.” Sara has a lifelong experience of eczema rashes, and instead of limiting herself to certain materials, she chooses to wash all her clothes before she wears them instead. She claims that she will get rashes on her body if she does not wash her clothes before wearing them. Nevertheless, because of her need to wash the clothes before she wears them, she is indeed limited to certain materials that are durable and washable. As an example, she mentions a silk shirt that was only suitable for dry cleaning. After she washed it, she claims that it “[…] wasn’t at all as nice.” Even though Sara is in fact limited to certain materials, she bases her decisions on aesthetics and durability, rather than environmental impact or sensorial feeling. However, although Sara cares more about how clothes look, rather than how they feel, she is still aware of the physical affects that clothes have on her skin. She mentions that some of her clothes, even though she has washed them, still give her rashes. To avoid the physical marks on her body, Sara uses hosiery and undershirts between her skin and her clothes. Instead of avoiding certain materials, Sara finds other alternatives in order to be able to wear what she finds aesthetically appealing to her. In fact, although clothes are commonly known for protecting bodies from exterior nature, Sara uses clothes to protect her from a further layer of clothes. As

Bruno suggests, clothes are the second skin on the body. Paradoxically, Sara has not only one second skin made up by clothes, but two.

The informants show that they utilize their skin knowledge in their clothing practices, even though it is not clearly outspoken since they might not be aware of the concept. As Howes notes, the marks on the body create memories and knowledge of how the outer exterior has touched the body. In Sara’s case, the marks appeared as eczema rashes, while for Carla, Emma and Lila, sweat became a reaction from encountering with synthetic materials. On one hand, it is interesting that Sara, who has experienced itching rashes caused by clothes, does not consider herself to be limited to her choice of materials. On the other hand, Victoria has experienced marks in the form of itching, red dots after wearing clothes from Zara and H&M. This led her to avoid certain materials, such as conventional cotton, and she prefers to purchase clothes from second hand stores. Concluding, the refusal of wearing certain materials and experiencing rashes from wearing certain clothes do not always cohere with each other. In preparations for this thesis, there was a hypothesis that consumers would refuse to wear clothes and materials that could hurt them. This does not seem to be the case. However, education and/or occupation seem to correlate with a refusal of certain materials. Carla, Emma, Karen, Lila and Victoria have been educated and/or work with fashion, textile and/or sustainability. Victoria even says that “[…] when your read more and more, and learn more, it doesn’t feel like that much work” when she was asked if she finds it difficult to find alternatives to clothes that does not hurt her. Since Sara is a criminology student, she might not be as educated in textile materials as the other informants. Nevertheless, understanding the awareness of the material qualities of textile and clothes from Latour’s perspective, the findings of the interviews might seem ambiguous. According to Latour, the agency in objects, in this case understood as the qualities of textile material, becomes perceptible when it disrupts the perception of a situation, or if it is investigated from a distance. With this understanding in mind, all the informants have a prerequisite for knowing what kind of materials that are not harmful to the skin. Furthermore, by adding Howes’ theory to Latour’s thoughts, the informants realize that clothes can impose harm on the body through sin knowledge, which might disrupt their perception of their everyday lives. With that said, although Sara does not avoid materials that might hurt her skin, she is not unaware of the harm her clothes impose on her body. Her

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75 Latour, Reassembling the Social, 80-81.
standpoint, unlike the other informants, is not based on education. To use her own words, she considers herself to be “lazy” and cares more about the aesthetics of her clothes, than the environmental impact or how they feel against the skin.

It can be concluded that experiences of being hurt from a garment is necessarily not motivating consumers to stop purchasing clothes that are not good for the skin. Amongst the informants, education and knowledge of the production of clothing seems to be the main factor for caring about what is placed on the body. However, the aspect of passionate interest appears to be the crucial factor. In fact, in Kang and Kim’s study, although the informants had concerns about quality, durability and design, they did not contemplate physical risks when purchasing environmentally sustainable clothes. Nevertheless, Han and Chung’s study, which compared itself to Kang and Kim’s study, Korean consumers’ concern for health issues caused by environmental contamination increased the willingness to purchase organic cotton apparel.

By focusing on the attitudes and relations towards clothing materials in this section, the informants’ statement regarding the materiality of their clothes have been analyzed. This section has showed that the information retrieved from the physical marks on the body, the skin knowledge, might not be enough to refuse to wear materials and clothes that might harm the body. The intellectual knowledge, and an interest in the topic, is what makes consumers consider clothes that do not harm the body, nor the environment. In the following section, focus is placed on the relationship between clothing and wearer in terms of valuing and cherishing clothes.

Caring about the Clothes

My absolute favorite blouse, it got a little hole, and I have mended that one as well, it’s not something anyone can see. Naturally, I’m upset when it happens because it is, it really is one of my favorites.

Carla states that when she purchases clothes, she wants them to last for a long time. When Carla was asked what she does if a garment gets torn, she claims that she mends it herself to make it last longer. The aspect of taking care of clothes speaks to considering clothes as valuable and objects to cherish. When Emma is purchasing new clothes she considers if she can take proper care of the new garment she is bringing in to her closet. Emma gives the example of her purchasing a silk blouse. “I have to have the knowledge of how to take care of silk” and “[…]


will I have enough [silk] at home to be able to wash this garment” are two thoughts that she has before buying new clothes. Emma also states that when she considers the environmental and ethical impact of the garment, and if she can afford and take proper care of it, she cares more about the clothes she purchases. It is known that the usage of clothes is having an environmental impact. In fact, Fletcher states that the environmental impact of clothes when it comes to energy usage and waste arises when the clothes are being used. Consumers are therefore encouraged to wash clothes more seldom or at low temperatures, in order to make them last longer and save energy. Carla and Emma’s attitude towards taking care of their clothes might be because they want to be conscious consumers. Although Lila and Victoria also show that they act consciously in choosing materials, they do not mention mending torn clothes or certain washing restrictions in order to make them last longer. Nevertheless, Sara expresses that she washes all her clothes before using them for the sake of her sensitive skin. Sara claims that “[...] since I wash everything right away, everything will always get semi-ruined.” With that in mind, Carla and Emma’s knowledge and skills regarding clothing materials and sewing can be explained by their occupations as teachers in textiles and textile handicraft.

Caring for clothes can be a conscious consumer trait. However, it can also stand for a profound relationship. Carla claims “[...] that I choose garments that I can live with for a long time and not get tired of.” Victoria states as well that she wants her clothes to last for a long time. “I think at least ten years, or preferably my entire life of course.” Carla and Victoria describe their relationships with clothes as long time investments, similar to conventional beliefs of marriage. The informants form relationships with clothes that last for several years and stay with them through different periods of their lives. Carla gives as example her Vivienne Westwood dress that she has had for 15 years. “It has been with me during all these years and I will most likely have it for another ten years.” When the clothes are kept for a long period of time, they can be considered as life companions of the informants. In fact, as Latour and ANT point out, through the encounter between a human and an object, the object becomes social. When human and object become a part of the same network, through the encounter with each other, they both become actors. When the informants encounter with the clothes and use them, relationships are formed and the clothes become social actors within the network between the two. Clothes’ role goes from a non-human object, to a social actor with the agency to affect the informants in different ways. Carla and Victoria describe their relationships with clothes to the

78 Fletcher, Sustainable Fashion and Textiles: Design Journeys, 91-95.
79 Latour, Reassembling the Social, 65.
point that the clothes’ social role is similar to a life companion’s with the same status as a family member’s, since they intend to spend a lifetime with the clothes.

Furthermore, even if Carla and Victoria aspire to have their clothes for a long period of time, they can physically grow out of their clothes, or the clothes can get worn out. The relationship between the informants and their clothes can end previous to what is expected. As for relationships with family members or spouses, the intention might be to spend a long period of time together. However, external factors as betrayal or death can cause the relationship to end earlier than foreseen. As a spouse can be betrayed by her partner, a wearer can also be betrayed by clothing. As Latour states, objects can enable humans to act.80 Continuing on his thoughts, if objects can enable humans to act, humans would possibly be disappointed if an object did not live up to its expected qualities. It can thus be compared to a betrayal if clothes do not last as long as the wearer hoped that it would. Adding on with Grosz’ theory, clothing practices are both physical and psychical. The mental attitude of hopes and assumptions can further build onto what is expected from the garment. When Carla is asked what she would do if her clothes got torn, she states that she mends her clothes if there is a small rip or hole, but when it comes to completely worn out clothes she has to purchase new garments. Similarly to a relationship, if the betrayal or disappointment can be fixed, it is worth keeping the garment. However, if the clothes are torn to the point where they cannot be mended, there is no other solution than to discard the item.

When they have to purchase new clothes, Carla, Victoria, Emma and Lila state that they purchase second hand clothing, instead of purchasing newly produced clothes. Instead of contributing to increasing the amount of clothes in circulation, the informants choose to reuse other people’s clothes. Carla and Victoria both emphasize that they prefer to purchase cotton and jeans from second hand because of the large amounts of water that are used in the production processes. While most of the informants choose to purchase second hand clothing, Sara chooses to purchase newly produced clothes. “I think it’s because I’m really lazy, it is so much easier to go into ‘what’s new’ in any other store.” However, instead of discarding her old clothes into waste, she gives them to friends and family. She states that a friend of hers usually comes over to go through the clothes she does not want anymore, or cannot wear because they give her rashes and she cannot fit anything between her skin and the garment. “It’s the easiest way, then you’ll know that it’ll go to something good.” By claiming that her friend “usually”

80 Ibid., 71.
comes over, Sara is indicating that she gives away clothes somewhat regularly. It can also indicate that it is usually this particularly friend that receives Sara’s old clothes, forming a special relationship between the two. Anthropologist Marcel Mauss states that, in the relationship of gift giving, the distance between the two parties involved can on one hand decrease, and on the other hand increase. The gift can bring the two parties together, while it can also create a feeling of being indebted. Independently from what path Sara and her friend’s relationship takes after she has given her friend her clothes, the core of that relationship is the gift. Understanding this from Latour’s perspective, clothes become links between Sara and her friend. As Latour states, the agency of an object is dependent on the ability to affect someone else’s actions. Being the gift that determines the future relationship between Sara and her friend, clothes become actors within the network that is Sara, her friend and Sara’s old clothes.

The network between humans and clothes is a way to illustrate the relationship they have with each other. As mentioned, in Sara’s relationship with her clothes, she has to wash them before she can wear them. Fletcher points out that if clothes are being washed less and worn for a longer time, the environmental impact will decrease over the period of a garments lifetime. However, even though clothes are more incline to deteriorate if they are washed more, they also become more wearable to sensitive wearers. In Sara’s case, she always washes her clothes to get rid of any potential chemical that can harm her skin before she wears them. In the sense of clothes’ agency, by washing her clothes, their agency to harm the body is weakened. Simultaneously, when clothes made of synthetic fibers are washed, they release micro plastics into the water. The agency to harm humans might decrease with every wash, but meanwhile the washing water is harmed. To follow Latour and ANT’s thoughts on networks, the network between humans and clothes is preliminary broken up during the time they are apart when the clothes are in the washing machine. During this time, the clothes engage in a new network with the washing machine and the water. In both of the networks, clothes can exert their power either to harm humans or water. To go even further, the second network can also be seen as include humans. Humans operate the washing machine, which enables them to wash their clothes. Humans, washing machines, and clothes are acting together in the brief encounter that creates this network. Adding Bruno’s perspective to this thought,

82 Latour, Reassembling the Social, 71.
83 Fletcher, Sustainable Fashion and Textiles: Design Journeys, 91-95.
85 Latour, Reassembling the Social, 65.
Latour’s network can be further understood as composed by the three layers of skin. As Bruno points out that skin, clothes, and architecture create three layers of skin, the previously mentioned network can as well be seen as made up by the three layers. Instead of skin, clothes and architecture, the network is made up by a human, clothes, and a washing machine.

In the relationship between wearer and clothes, the informants show a sense for caring about their clothes. The care for their clothes manifest in how they take care of them, for how long period of time they keep their clothes, or where they dispose their clothes. As in Sara’s case, even if she prefers newly produced clothes and does not mind disposing of her old ones, she still wants her old clothes to go to something good. Clothes have been acknowledged as links between humans in relationships in this section, and they have also been compared to life partners and family members. Clothes are not only seen as pieces of textile material, but as objects with a lifetime as well. The informant’s clothes are both physical and social. By addressing clothes’ multiplicity, the aspect of culture and nature can be revisited. As Latour states, since culture is a product of nature, they cannot be separated from each other.\(^{86}\) Clothes cannot only be seen as either cultural signifiers or physical products. They have to be simultaneously considered as both cultural and natural. Carla, Victoria and Emma’s attitudes towards their clothes emphasize the view of clothes as physical and at the same time social. When Emma addresses her concern for the proper way to take care of clothes by using the right detergent, she treats the clothes as bodies and their material as skin. Clothes are further made into living creatures by Carla and Victoria, who treat their clothes as life companions who they want to share their lives with.

When the informants were asked how they began to think about their clothes as both physical and social, most of them mention a combination of upbringing and education. As mentioned earlier, Latour states that people can notice the agency in objects either when it disrupts the perception of a situation or when it is investigated from a distance.\(^{87}\) Education can be seen as a form of investigating something from a distance. However, upbringing creates a prerequisite for the informants to form their lives around a worldview that links the surrounding’s multiple aspects with each other. Since they do not have to get an epiphany to view objects from a linked perspective, Latour’s suggestions are not applicable. However, the informants show that it was not necessarily clothing that was the first object they became aware of in terms of linking it to themselves or their surroundings. Victoria mentions how her

\(^{86}\) Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 104.

\(^{87}\) Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 80-81.
upbringing affected her attitude towards clothes. “I was grounded if I didn’t separate at source and we have always bought locally produced meat at home.” Carla is outspoken with the fact that her approach to viewing the multiple aspects of the world as linked did not start with her clothes. “I think it started with the food rather than, and then it went further on to crèmes and further and further.” Connecting to Latour and Bruno once again, humans live within networks where different aspects and objects create surroundings that become several layers on the body. As clothes have been pointed to as having agency, food that feeds humans, or crèmes that protect or moisturize the skin, have agency too. However, even though it is possible to view clothes as linked with oneself and the surrounding, it does not seem like it is the first aspect consumers think about. In that case, if a consumer links clothing to herself and the surrounding, it does not seem like clothing is the only life aspect that is considered in that way. As Lila mentions:

I think now I have a much more like holistic kind of approach so it’s not only about the clothing but it’s also about the food and, I don’t know, the air quality of the room I’m in.

This poses to speculate about why clothes cannot be thought of on their own in a holistic matter. According to Karen, the connection between people and the materiality in their clothes is depending on the consumer’s interest.

It’s a bit like, if it’s not your interest, if it’s not your … although we wear them, people think “it’s just a shirt”. You know what I mean? But actually, it can come from a plant, therefore it’s a farmer and that whole story I think is magical.

Besides pointing to the weight of consumer’s interest for clothing, Karen’s statement also speaks to the multiple aspects of the world that are linked within their networks. A shirt made of a natural fiber can originally be made from a plant, and at the same time it is the craftsmanship of a human being. Similar to Latour’s thoughts, a shirt cannot be said to be either material or a cultural signifier, it is both. As he states, culture and nature cannot be separated since culture derives from nature.88 The shirt that is made by a human derives from nature in the form of a plant. By viewing a shirt as both a plant and a farmer, as Karen states, the relationship to clothes might strengthen. Emma’s appreciation for clothes and their multiple aspects grew when she understood the entire process of how it was made. In her interview, Emma shares the experience of when she sewed her own dress. She used an old duvet cover and cut a pattern according to her measurements. When she had sewn it herself, she knew how much time, effort and money it takes to make a garment. “If you know how much time it takes to knit a sweater, then it’s not

88 Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 104.
okay to pay 249 [Swedish] crowns for a sweater.” When Emma had understood and taken part in the production process, she had a more profound knowledge of how a garment is made. Her new understanding made her appreciate her clothes more and consider how, and in what way, they had been made. As Howes points out, it is the physical distance that makes people disconnect themselves to nature. When there was not a physical distance between Emma and the production of her dress, the understanding of crop to garment became clearer. “I knew how much time that was behind, and you don’t know that if you go to a regular store.”

A lack of interest and understanding make it difficult for consumers to imagine that a t-shirt in their closets started out as a cotton crop. In the exhibition “Fashioned from Nature” at The Victoria and Albert Museum, visitors are made observant on the journey from crop to garment. An image of a world map is showcased, pointing out the different locations of each stage in the production process of two t-shirts from the same brand; one women’s and one men’s. While the cotton for both t-shirts is grown in the United States, the cotton for men’s t-shirt is spun in Indonesia, and then dyed, woven and sewn in Bangladesh. After that, the t-shirt is shipped to New York to be printed on. Meanwhile, the cotton for women’s t-shirt is spun, dyed, woven and sewn in Colombia, and then shipped to New York to be printed on. The world map is supposed to illustrate the journey from crop to garment and promote traceability and responsibility in order to lower the environmental impact of clothes. However, the map also visualizes how geographically distanced consumers can be in relation to their clothes. Viewing the map from Howes’ perspective, the physical distance from where the cotton is grown, and the yarn is spun, dyed, woven and sewn, makes the consumer detached from the fact that their t-shirt is made from yarn, which was once a plant growing in the soil. The distance affects the relationship between the wearer and the clothes, and ultimately affects how well the clothes are taken care of. By respecting the time, effort, and resources it takes to create a garment, clothes are themselves being treated with more respect.

Fitting the Body

I don’t care about sizes and this is a men’s shirt, for example, so I don’t even care if it’s like women’s or men’s wear. I just want it to fit me nicely and be comfortable, if it’s an x-small or a large, it doesn’t matter to me.

91 Ibid, 175.
Victoria finds the sizes of her clothes irrelevant, as long as they fit comfortably. Victoria mentions how her style has changed since she stopped purchasing clothes from fast fashion retail chains and bought more clothes from second hand stores. Her choice of clothes was more trend based and she considers herself to not having a certain style back then. She used to have a tight fitting silhouette made up by tight dresses. “It wasn’t always comfortable, but at that time it was because of the outside, wanted to look good and didn’t care.” It appears that Victoria’s former attitude towards her clothes aligns with Sara’s current attitude. The aesthetic was more important for Victoria back then and she let that affect her physical comfort. She mentions that she used control leggings in order to make her body even slimmer underneath her tight dresses. She claims that she probably did not need to use control leggings back then, and adds that “[…] no one needs to wear those, it is just scary”. When Victoria’s interview takes place, she states that her style is more dependent on what is comfortable and aesthetically timeless. She claims that when she stopped wearing tightly fitting clothes all the time, she felt liberated. Victoria’s liberation from constraining dress reminds of the dress reform of the 19th century. The loose fitting pants, Bloomers, became an alternative fashion to the constraining crinolines and skirts.92 As Grosz points out, clothes become part of the body when the two are in contact long enough, and that bodies do not move the same way with clothes as they do when they are naked.93 When Victoria freed herself from tightly fitting clothes, she freed her body from constrained movements and discomfort. Clothes’ agency has been mentioned as harming the body through the material. Nevertheless, the shape of a garment can also hurt the body if it is too tight. As well as the informants can feel trapped and enclosed in synthetic clothing material, being dressed in too tight clothes can also cause a feeling of being enclosed. Furthermore, understanding the relationship between humans and clothes as one between family members or life companions, Victoria’s liberation from constraining clothes can be seen as a liberation from a destructive relationship. Relationships might not only end because they become torn apart or lack feelings for each other, the relationship can be destructive in which harmful behavior is involved. In a person-to-person relationship it can be physical or verbal violence. In a person-to-clothing relationship it can be physical discomfort.

Victoria states that she consider herself to be normatively thin, yet tall. Because of her tall and thin body, Victoria’s clothes vary in sizes depending on the design. She claims that her thinness allows her to fit into x-small sizes, while her length sometimes creates a need

92 Ribeiro, Dress and Morality, 132.
93 Grosz, Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism, 80.
for larger sizes instead. “Or else it might become a crop top instead and that’s not what I’m looking for.” For Victoria, it is more important to be comfortable than to fit into the smallest sizes. However, even though other informants care about being comfortable, the sizes become problematic in the clothing practices. Emma states that she has difficulties in finding pants that fits her properly, and at the same time have been sustainably made. She expresses that pants are not sewn to fit her body and that the sizes are not big enough. “Clothes are sewn for how you’re supposed to look, not for how people actually look.” In a previous study on fat fashion by Lauren Downing Peters, Assistant Professor in Fashion Studies, fatness is a stigma that limits consumers into identifying themselves as “plus-size, ‘outsize’ or ‘other’”.

By not being able to fit into clothes, or feeling enclosed by too tight clothing, clothing can create a feeling of not being normatively sized. From Latour’s point of view, clothes have agency when they enable humans to act. Through that understanding, clothes are enabling the wearer to feel outsized when the clothes do not fit properly on the body. Nevertheless, in ANT, focus of enablement lies on physical acts. However, the arena of clothing’s agency can be expanded by turning to the aspect of the physical and psychical dimension of clothing practices mentioned by Grosz. If clothing practices are experienced both physically and psychically, then clothes are able to affect the wearer’s body and mind. Therefore, clothing can enable physical actions, as well as emotional feelings.

Furthermore, Emma states that her body figure affects her choice of colors in her clothing practices. “If you are fat then you’re not supposed to wear stripes, you know, it’s a lot of that, things you hear.” Emma feels that her clothing practices are being restricted because of the ideal image of a thin body in fashion. Reading this from Grosz’ perspective on clothes becoming a part of the body, and adding to her statement, as much as clothes become extensions of the body, they can also limit and minimize the body. A black shirt can make a body look visually thinner, and a pair of slim jeans can tighten the body into becoming thinner. Physically and psychically, clothes affect their wearers. By departing from Grosz’ statement this time, Latour’s focus on physical acts can further add to the understanding of clothes’ agency. While clothes, as cultural signifiers, can place people in different compartments depending on style, they can also act as physical compartments for people to be placed, or pushed, into. Nonetheless, even if clothes can limit bodies by placing them into compartments, clothes can


95 Latour, Reassembling the Social, 71.
also free bodies, as Grosz points out.96 Virginia’s clothes set her body free from discomfort. Her body is liberate from uncomfortable and tightly fitting clothes when she is not restricting herself to small or large sizes. However, because of Virginia’s normative body figure, she has the luxury to vary between x-small and large. Emma does not have the same prerequisites since even the largest sizes do not fit her sometimes.

Emma expresses that she has to compromise her ethical values with style because she is sometimes restrained when it comes to sizes. During the wardrobe study, Emma shows a sample of dresses in her closet. Most of them are made of synthetic material, even though she prefers to wear clothes made of natural fibers. “When I dress up to look nice, and have to have something for an event […] there isn’t anything for me, there are only the plastics”. By investigating the informants’ clothes as a complement to the interviews, a discrepancy between Emma’s attitude and her actual clothes is found. As it has been pointed out by Grimstad Klepp and Bjerck, clothes can reveal discrepancies between what an informant says and does.97 Based on Latour’s thoughts, clothes exert their power and agency by being informants in this study. Within the research, clothes can be seen as enabling true answers of what the informants actually wear.

Furthermore, Emma mentions that because of her endometriosis, she has to compromise between aesthetics and comfort. Endometriosis is a disorder where the tissue lining on the inside of the uterus instead grows on the outside. The disorder can cause severe pain, especially during menstruation periods.98 Emma can sometimes experience severe pain and states that she does not want something to put pressure on her stomach, in order to ease the pain. She says that she would like to wear sweatpants all the time because they are the most comfortable pants, but she does not think their aesthetics align with her personal style. Lila expresses similar concerns, in which she states that she would not want to wear a hoodie to work because “[…] even though I would feel very comfy in it, maybe because I don’t feel confident enough to wear it.” Lila claims that some of her clothes might not be comfortable or convenient when she rides her bicycle to work. However, she says that she feels confident when she wears those kinds of clothes because they represent her style and make her look good. As a conclusion from Emma and Lila’s statements, clothes cannot only be comfortable to be

96 Grosz, “Feminism, materialism, and freedom,” 148.
wearable, they have to look good as well. Sara expresses a similar concern, in which she claims that her clothes must look good, yet they cannot be too uncomfortable. Additionally, Carla states that she is “[…] still an esthete so that, absolutely, for me it’s important how the garments look.” As Howes points out, humans can experience outer nature through all senses but it can only become permanent through the marks it leaves on the skin. The tactile experience of clothes can therefore be understood as important since it is the only way to provide concrete evidence of any harm or allergies that the body has suffered. A feeling of being properly dressed, on the other hand, is a subjective experience that after time becomes a distorted memory. Nevertheless, as Grosz points out clothing practices cannot be explained in full without accounting for both the physical and psychical aspects of a body. By accounting for both tactile and intellectual experience, Ruggerone’s motion of seeing to both body and mind is being acknowledged. Furthermore, through this way of thinking, clothes are seen as both cultural signifiers and material objects. Since the body experiences both through sensation and the intellect, clothes are being experienced as both materially and culturally. In the discourse of culture and nature, clothes have to be accounted for as a product of both culture and nature.

In clothing practices, people are restricted to in what ways clothes can enable freedom. For instance, Emma mentions that when she sewed her own dress, it fit her perfectly compared to ready-to-wear-clothes. She claims that her upper body is six centimeters shorter than the standard sizes, and that ready-to-wear-clothes do not fit her properly. When she had sewn her dress, she felt that “[…] having a dress that I put on and doesn’t bulge in the back, that doesn’t cling on the wrong places, that’s great.” At the time of the interview, she did not still have the dress in her closet. She states that she had made the neckline too tight, which she did not find comfortable. As a result, she disposed of the garment because she did not want to wear it when it had become uncomfortable. Furthermore, Emma’s homemade dress speaks to the aspect of clothes as a second skin. Clothing becomes a second layer of skin, therefore it needs to fit the curves and bumps on the body. If clothes do not fit as a second skin, they become uncomfortable to wear. Clothes can therefore be seen as personal in the sense that they are supposed to conform to a specific body. Emma expresses concern regarding the personal relationship with shoes and how that prohibits her from purchasing shoes from second hand. “[It is] difficult to buy shoes from second hand since they are broken in by another foot, then you can get foot problems.” Howes’ theory allows an understanding for clothes to leave marks

100 Grosz, Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism, 74.
on bodies. However, adding on to Howes’ theory, it can also be further interpreted and suggested that bodies can leave marks on clothes. Howes suggests that the earth has a skin and as humans exploit it with science and technology the earth will eventually get a new skin, made up by technology. As the wearer uses a shoe, or a pair of jeans, the skin of the shoe/garment will wear out until it fits the wearer perfectly. The shape of the garment will not look the same after it has been worn since it will then be shaped accordingly to the curves and bumps of the body. This argument opens up for the multiplicity in the relationship between wearer and clothes. While clothes affect the body of their wearers, they can also be affected by the body that wears them. Going back to the network between humans, clothes, and washing machines, the clothes cause harm to bodies while humans diminishes their agency imposed on the body by washing them.

Through the understanding of bodies affecting clothes, the notion of clothes as a second skin can incline that they are not made for a second wearer, since they will never fit the second wearer perfectly. After all, clothes on bodies eventually morph together and become part of the body. Nonetheless, as clothes become marked by the wearer, the wearer becomes marked by the clothes as well. As it has been previously mentioned, clothes and humans exist together within a network where they affect each other. While humans can get harmed from wearing chemically infused clothes, they can also minimize the harm by washing the clothes. In the same sense, clothes can shape the form of a human body through a tight or loose fit. However, clothes can also become expanded by the curves and bumps of the body that wears them. Through that way of thinking, when clothes and bodies are in contact and morph together, they are engaging in the same network. By adding the aspect of worn clothes to network constellations, Latour’s thoughts can be further challenged. He states that objects become social, or actors who are a part of a network, in the brief encounter with humans. After the encounter, the objects resume to not being social. However, the clothes are forever marked by the encounter and will therefore have a connection to the human that wore them. By wearing and tearing each other’s shapes, clothes and body have become mirror images of each other. They might not be in physical contact with each other anymore, but they will forever be linked to each other. Thus, networks are not resolved only due to physical distance.

102 Grosz, Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism, 80.
103 Latour, Reassembling the Social, 65.
Nevertheless, the aspect of wearing someone else’s second skin does not seem to dissuade the informants from purchasing clothes from second hand. Carla says that she used to find second hand clothing seamy because someone had worn it before her. Later on in her clothing practices she started to contemplate how she could sleep in pre-used sheets at hotels. Since everything is washed in between uses, she came to the conclusion that it must be the same with clothing. “You can wear a garment that someone else has worn, you wash it in between anyways.” Sara expresses a similar attitude, even though she does not purchase second hand clothing. “I’m also completely convinced that I would wash the clothes from second hand as well before I use them.” Sara’s approach to washing even second hand clothes lies behind the fact that she cannot know if the previous user has washed the garment with a perfumed detergent or not. Sara’s approach can incline that the garment has had a previous life that might bring unforeseen consequences to their new relationship. When Victoria is asked if she considers the clothes’ previous lives, she says that “[…] no, I don’t care that much about that someone has had it before me.” Going back to the challenging of Latour’s thoughts, the network between clothing and its wearer is not resolved by physical distance. However, erasing the traces of bodies on clothes can be a way of breaking up the network. As long as the informants can wash away the traces of the previous wearers, they are not opposed the fact that clothes have been previously worn.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has answered the question “How do the informants talk about their relationship between clothes and bodies?” The interviews have been analyzed with the aid of the theoretical framework of Bruno, Howes, Latour and Grosz. Through the analysis, the relationship between the informants and their clothes have been interpreted as material and cultural, which aligns with the results from Hebrok and Grimstad Klepp’s study. However, Hebrok and Grimstad Klepp emphasizes the visual as the most prominent sense.\(^\text{104}\) This study shows that the visual is important but that materiality has a large significance in clothing practices as well. Nevertheless, Sara states that aesthetics are the most important, which makes the visual trump the material in her case. However, in her clothing practices, she makes an effort by wearing several layers of clothing, in order to not get eczema rashes. Furthermore, the informants talk about their awareness of the environmental impact that clothes have. It seems that the more

\(^{104}\) Hebrok and Grimstad Klepp, “Wool is a knitted fabric that itches, isn’t it?,” 89.
educated and interested the informants are, the more they have concerns about what they put on their bodies.

The informants speak dearly about their clothes. Through interpretation, the informants’ clothes are viewed as life companions and family members that they cherish. The informants’ express that they want to have their clothes for as long as possible and that they take care of the clothes in order to make them last longer. The informants’ take care of their clothes in the same sense as they would take care of another human being they valued. Interestingly, the relationship between informant and clothing has been similar to a human-to-human relationship, even though they did not seem to care about the clothes’ past when purchasing second hand. If clothes are interpreted as life companions, then previous wearers can be considered as previous lovers. On one hand, this point of view could stir feelings of jealousy, given that the previous wearer is forever etched into the clothes. On the other hand, the informants might not be “the jealous kind”.

Lastly, the informants’ clothes revealed what they actually wear. The informants might talk about how they do not want to wear synthetic clothing material. However, due to limited clothing options, their clothes show that some informants actually do wear synthetic clothing material. This chapter has, through the theories, started to analyze the agency in clothing. The agency has shown to span from limitation and liberation through the contact with wearers, through enabling this analysis to find aspects of clothing practices that the informant’s might not have been aware of. In what terms and during what circumstances clothes have agency is further analyzed in the following chapter.

Clothes and Agency

Food is a primary life stock product, so is a textile, and so is a ceramic. So those three are kind of core to our way of life. You cannot leave the house without a textile without getting arrested, you know, you can’t. It’s intrinsic to everything we do.

Karen’s statement synthesizes her holistic attitude towards the objects in her life. The statement also actualizes Bruno’s theory on the three layers of skin. As Bruno points out, humans have their actual skin, the first skin, then clothes become the second skin and architecture becomes the third. Furthermore, the aspect of clothing as something that allows or prohibits a person who is wearing the clothes supports clothing’s status as actors in the human-to-clothes network.

As Latour states, objects are actors with agency when they affect another actor’s course of action. In Karen’s quote, clothes free or limit naked bodies from their houses, since a person cannot leave her house without putting clothes on her body. Nonetheless, Grosz states that objects enable freedom. However, to challenge Grosz’ theory, objects can limit freedom, as well as enable it. Shackles can detain a body, but a key can unleash it. Clothes can enable freedom for naked bodies, as stated by Karen, but they can also prohibit freedom. Most informants highlight how they can feel enclosed by clothes that are too tight or made of synthetic materials. Victoria states that she got allergic reactions from wearing clothes from fast fashion retail chains. Besides getting red marks on her body she also experienced a difficulty to breathe. “It felt like I almost couldn’t breathe, you have to get rid of the garment you’re wearing.” Victoria says that she has felt a significant change when she has removed the garment from her body. She assumes that the allergy reaction manifested in her lungs and ability to breathe. Victoria’s clothes prohibited her from breathing and she had to resume to nakedness to feel a difference. In this sense, clothes have the agency to hurt bodies as well as to free them. Clothes’ agency to hurt humans has been a prerequisite for this study, which has shown accuracy throughout the material. This has been further investigated in Matthews David’s historical study on harmful clothing, in which she points out that clothing is meant to protect fragile bodies but “[…] often fails spectacularly in this important task, killing its wearers.”

Even though there have not been any signs of death by wearing clothes in this study, Victoria’s difficulty to breathe could be compared to a near death experience.

Continuing on the aspect of freedom, Victoria uses the word “liberation” to explain how she felt when she stopped wearing tightly fitting clothes. In Victoria’s clothing practice, clothes have both enslaved and freed her. At the time of the interview, Victoria states that she uses clothes from all sizes and clothing departments, depending on what kind of clothes fit her properly. She mentions that she has a men’s buttoned-down shirt and supporting socks in her closet. When she shows her supporting socks, she says that “[…] maybe they recommend it to elderly or maybe pregnant women, don’t care about that either. I want to be comfortable, too.” Clothes are made for specific kinds of bodies, even though Victoria does not let that limit her clothing practices. As Grosz states, clothes become part of the body and changes how it

107 Grosz, “Feminism, materialism, and freedom,” 148.
moves compared to when it is naked.\textsuperscript{109} Clothes for women, men, elderly or pregnant people look different depending on how their bodies look. Even though clothes are for the most part made in standard sizes, they are still made differently from each other. Emma’s pregnancy pants are another example. Although they are made for pregnant women, Emma finds them more comfortable than ordinary women’s pants. Wearing clothes made for a type of body that is not necessarily the body type a consumer identifies with can impose a negative feeling. In the case with plus-size fashion, Downing Peters states that the informants of her study felt positioned as being fat when they had to wear clothes marked as plus-size.\textsuperscript{110} Victoria states that she does not care about if she is wearing something made for a man, woman or pregnant person. However, Victoria also states that her body is shaped according to the norm, which means that she often can fit into women’s clothes but chooses not to. Emma, on the other hand, cannot wear regular pants for women and is forced to wear pregnancy pants if she does not want to be in severe pain. Emma states that she finds it frustrating that clothes are not made for her body. Since Emma’s body is not, in her opinion, norm-sized, she can experience her body as similar to a pregnant body type. Returning back to clothes, agency and freedom, the physical and material aspect in clothing enables comfortability for all bodies. However, the cultural aspect of labelling clothes according to body types limits bodies own creation of body identity. By labelling a pair of pants “pregnancy pants”, a feeling of having a pregnant body is created when earing the pants. Nevertheless, labelling clothes is not necessarily a cultural act. Latour mentions that the tags and labels on store goods illustrates the network between non-humans and humans.\textsuperscript{111} By reading the tags and labels on clothes, consumers are enabled to understand what type of body that specific garment is intended for.

Since clothes are made of textile material, clothing’s agency can be further understood by looking at the qualities of textiles. Karen, Emma and Carla mention how they like linen because of its good qualities. Cashmere is also being appreciated for its good qualities. Lila states that she finds it “[...] absorbent, [it’s] kind of like self-cleaning in a way, you don’t have to wash [it] that much.” The Swedish fashion brand Soft Goat specializes in the textile material. They state that their cashmere wool is soft and warm in order to keep the goats warm during the long winters.\textsuperscript{112} Clothes made from cashmere wool inherit the qualities of the wool,

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\textsuperscript{109} Grosz, Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism, 80.
\textsuperscript{111} Latour, Reassembling the Social, 71.
\end{flushleft}
making cashmere sweaters soft and warm. Therefore, a cashmere sweater has the ability to enable the wearer to not freeze while wearing it. Further on, while the informants talk about the positive qualities of natural fibers, they also mention the negative qualities of synthetic fibers. Lila states that “[acrylic] feels unpleasant compared to the other, you know, more natural material, in this case like when you need a close sweater for example.” Both Lila and Carla also state that they do not feel that their own skin can breathe properly when they are wearing synthetic fibers, such as acrylic or polyester. Through the statements from the informants, clothing materials are emphasized since they are the building blocks of clothes, and thereby an important aspect when experiencing clothes physically. Understanding clothes and materials from Latour’s point of view, clothes’ qualities and abilities become known when they come in contact with human bodies.\textsuperscript{113} It is when the clothes are worn that the clothing materials’ qualities are being acknowledged. This can be further understood by turning to Howes. Through his perspective, clothes’ abilities become known when the clothes meet the skin.\textsuperscript{114} By leaving marks on the skin, the clothes leave traces of themselves and their qualities and abilities. Through both Latour and Howes’ perspectives, it is through the meeting that the abilities of the clothes and their materials become noticeable for the wearer.

Even though most informants express an aversion towards synthetic fibers and their qualities, Sara does not contemplate the negative consequences she faces when she wears clothes made of synthetic materials.

No but it doesn’t, I would still say that when it itches or prickles or something I still come up with a solution to be able to wear the garment. Even if it doesn’t feel that nice and maybe you’re super warm that day instead, but God, what a nice cardigan I’m wearing.

Sara says that she uses undershirts and hosiery in order to be able to wear garments that itch or will give her eczema rashes. By turning to Latour and Howes, Sara’s experiences of itchiness or rashes can be interpreted as not becoming noticeable for her since she does not come in close contact with the clothes. Since she uses undershirts and hosiery, she places a layer of clothes between her skin and the itching material. Nevertheless, Sara is experiencing discomfort in form of hot flashes when wearing several layers, pointing to that the clothes still affect her. Even though she is not in close contact with the itching clothes, she is still encountering with them. Through the semi-close encounter, only some of Sara’s cardigan’s qualities become known.

\textsuperscript{113} Latour, Reassembling the Social, 65.
\textsuperscript{114} Howes, “Skinscapes: Embodiment, Culture and Environment,” 33.
The material of the thesis has shown how clothes are sometimes valued similar to human-to-human relationships. To connect to Latour, comparing clothes to other humans strengthen their status as social objects. Furthermore, Grosz claims that the living gives potential for the inorganic to become more. To synthesize, Latour and Grosz claim that objects can enable humans’ actions, but only after humans have given objects life. However, even though Latour and Grosz can be interpreted to consider clothes as having life, they can also be considered to be organic beings. Nevertheless, the informants refer to clothes as organic when clothes are produced without the use of fertilizers and pesticides. Furthermore, several of the informants mention that clothes made of synthetic fibers do not breathe. They are referring to that they sweat more when they wear clothes made of synthetic fibers, than they do when they wear natural fibers. Nevertheless, the use of the word “breathe” speaks to clothes as being organic objects with lives, lungs and air circulation. This poses an aspect of clothes made of natural fibers as more organic than synthetic fibers. Returning to Latour and Grosz, clothes and textile materials become organic dependent on if humans want to make them into organic actors. Since the informants do not consider clothes made of synthetic fibers to breathe, they can be interpreted as less organic than clothes made of natural fibers. However, by reading Grosz thoughts on the organic and inorganic, objects are not made into living things through the encounter with humans. Grosz claims that the organic is indeterminate, whilst the inorganic is determinate. When these two meet, actions of freedom are being conducted. Even though clothes made of natural fibers are spoken of in terms of living organisms that breathe, they are still objects in the minds of Latour and Grosz. Clothes are inorganic objects that become social through the encounters with the organic. Clothes do not become organic themselves, in terms of being indeterminate. Although clothes can affect bodies, they do not have a free will. Only the indeterminacy of humans can change the outcomes of clothes actions, which has been illustrated with Sara’s efforts to distancing herself from her clothes. By placing something between her first and second skin, Sara changes the effects clothes have on her body. Instead of getting itching, red marks from her clothes, Sara begins to sweat when wearing several layers of clothing.

Social but Inorganic Clothing

115 Grosz, “Feminism, materialism, and freedom,” 150.
116 Ibid.
NATURE AS A TOOL OF TRADE: The British Empire spanned the globe in the 19th century, providing Britain with a vast reservoir of natural resources to convert into manufactured goods. The emphasis was on utility. What could nature provide that could be turned to profit?

The quote comes from the “Fashioned from Nature” exhibition at The Victoria and Albert Museum. An important key aspect in this quote is the culture and nature dualism. As it has earlier been pointed out, culture has been seen as superior to nature. In this quote, nature is put in the position of being utilized by humans. Nature is thereby supposed to serve humans. However, according to Latour, viewing nature as subordinate to culture is problematic since culture is in itself a product of nature. Earlier in the thesis, the culture and nature dualism was compared to how women have been seen as subordinate to men, even though men cannot exist without being born by a woman. Similarly, the nature and culture dualism can be compared to the relationship between a child and a parent. The parent takes care of and nurtures the young child. In return, when the parent becomes old and the child has grown up, the child takes care of its parent. To put this simile in relation to the culture and nature dualism, culture has to take care of nature after being created by nature itself. Instead of asking what nature can provide for humans, society should ask what humans can do for nature. This reasoning is further supported by Latour’s point of view since he mentions that social scientists have to remember that society is constructed of non-social resources, before analyzing societies. In fact, without soil, water and cotton seeds, humans cannot make cotton textiles. Without textiles, humans cannot make clothes to wear in order to leave their homes, as Karen points out. Furthermore, Fletcher states that instead of taking care of nature, which provides the materials for making clothes, humans exploit nature by using harmful chemicals in order to make textile agriculture more efficient. Examples of how clothes, that have been provided by nature and made by humans, can be taken care of have been illustrated throughout the first chapter of the analysis. By purchasing organic cotton or clothes from second hand, mending clothes or giving them to friends in order to extend the lifetime of garments, the informants show an attitude of considering nature as something that humans and consumers must take care of. Victoria says that when she learns more about the fashion industry and the impact it has on the environment, she feels that she has to do something to take care of the Earth.

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117 Image 1, see appendix.
118 Latour, We Have Never Been Modern, 104.
119 Ibid., 54.
120 Fletcher, Sustainable Fashion and Textiles: Design Journeys, 11.
The view of culture and nature as two separate aspects belongs to a “hard” point of view. A softer way to view culture and nature is to acknowledge the quasi-objects, as Latour points out. Quasi-objects are part of both culture and nature. They are more social than “[…] the ‘hard’ parts of nature”, but they are still non-humans.121 As it has been discussed, clothes are both part culture and part nature. Interpreting Latour, clothes can be seen as quasi-objects. Throughout the previous chapter, clothes have been illustrated as cultural, due to their quality of signifying styles and being recipients of loving affection from their wearers. Clothes have also been illustrated as natural because they are made of textile materials with physical abilities. Clothes are inorganic objects, even though they might be made of organic material and have the ability to “breathe”. Clothes are non-living, yet when it comes to environmental impact, clothing is often spoken of as having a lifetime. Clothes are non-humans that become part of humans’ bodies, therefore becoming quasi-objects. The arguments for viewing clothes as quasi-objects are compelling. However, clothes are often seen as material objects that can be disposed of when they go out of fashion.122 The aspect of disposable clothes poses a question of why humans are detached from clothes to the point that clothes are easily replaced and discarded. Howes claims that humans are detached mentally from nature because they have detached themselves physically.123 Nevertheless, it is difficult to explain why humans are detached from their clothes through Howes theory since humans have physical contact with clothing. After all, clothes are the second skin on bodies and they might even be what separates humans from exterior nature. Shoes separate feet from grass, and a jacket separates skin from wind. Due to how physically attached clothes are to humans, they should not be considered as replaceable and disposable. This is also discussed by Ruggerone, who states that clothes are more than mere possessions. In difference to other possessions, such as cars for example, clothes “[…] will morph into my body and into which my body will change when I go out into the world”.124 Ruggerone’s argument is further supported by Grosz’ statement on clothes becoming part of bodies. Throughout the material, the informants show how they value their clothes. For most of the informants, clothes are not only possessions, but life companions. Their attitude towards clothes supports the correlation between mental and physical detachment. The informants care

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121 Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 55.
122 Fletcher, *Sustainable Fashion and Textiles: Design Journeys*, 139-140.
about their clothes because they know the background story of the garments, they know what their clothes are made of, and how they were made.

However, Sara is not showing as much concern for mending and taking care of her clothes. In fact, she states that she washes clothes to the extent that they look distressed. Channeling Howes, Sara’s attitude can be interpreted through her multiple layers of clothes. Sara is the one informant that detach herself from her clothes, speaking to why she does not express the same concern for caring about her clothes as the rest of the informants. In regard to clothes’ status as actors, clothes seem to only be understood as social objects if they are acknowledged as both cultural and natural, or with other words quasi-objects. When consumers do not consider the multiple aspects of clothing, they do not have the same concern and attitude towards their clothing practices. Even if clothes’ agency is not outspokenly mentioned by the informants, it has been interpreted throughout the analysis. This can be explained by the position of being a researcher and that clothes’ agency has been investigated from a distance. As Latour points out, being distanced from a situation makes objects’ agency more apparent.\(^\text{125}\)

Continuing on disposable fashion, the conventional view disposing clothes as soon as they go out of fashion is not detected to a large extent throughout the interviews. The informants show that they care about their clothes in various aspects from how they are made, to how they are taken care of after being purchased. Nevertheless, the informants indicate that clothes are not the first aspect in their life that they became “aware” of. Furthermore, when they discuss their clothing practices, the informants highlight their environmental awareness. Although materiality and aesthetics are the center of the interviews, the informants are more than willing to share their concerns for ethical and environmental issues within the production of clothes. When Lila talks about the materiality of clothing and what it does to her body, she adds that “[…] that’s about the personal health and then there’s the whole issue of the environment, now I’m just being selfish.” Lila considers herself to be selfish because she cares about what clothing does to her body, rather than focusing on what clothing does to the environment. In fact, the environmental aspect seems more obvious and urgent to the informants, than how their own bodies react to what they are wearing. When Emma is asked what she thinks of the physical closeness, and mental detachment, to clothes she first states that “[…] yes, but why not, it is an interesting thought.” Her train of thought then goes further into financial and ethical aspects of clothing production, rather than into the materiality aspect. To

\(^{125}\) Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 80.
problematize the informants’ statements, Bruno’s theory can questions their prioritization. As Bruno points out, the body is the first skin, clothes are the second, and architecture is the third. Speculating with Bruno’s thoughts in mind, people would perhaps be more concerned with what is closest to their bodies, than what is detached from their bodies. From this aspect, the first skin would be prioritized more than the third one, architecture, or alternatively the exterior nature. In this sense, the first skin should also be more prioritized than the second skin, clothes. By turning to Bruno, the informants’ obsession with aesthetics and style can be seen as problematic since they are caring more about the outer layers of their bodies, than their actual bodies. On one hand, connecting Bruno to Howes, the detachment of having nature as a third layer on the body further supports Howes’ claim of humans being physically detached from exterior nature. On the other hand, nature is still one of the three layers, connecting it to the body. Nature is not as close to the body as clothes are, nor even as close as the first skin is. However, it is still the third skin of the body, making it a part of the body. In fact, Karen points out in her interview that “[…] the earth is seventy percent water and so is a human being.” Going back to Latour, since culture derive from nature, although it might be unreasonable to care more about the environment than their own wellbeing, it is understandable. If humans do not care for nature and the environment, humans themselves cannot exist.

Nonetheless, during Sara’s interview, she is asked if she sacrifices her body in order to be beautiful. “I had never even thought of that, but I actually do that.” Later on in the interview, Sara explains that she prohibits herself from shopping at times because “[…] I buy and throw away, or no I give away but it still affects our Earth massively.” The environmental and sustainability issues surrounding clothes and the fashion industry seem to be obvious to the point that Sara, who is not educated in textile or fashion, and is not considering purchasing organic, ecologically produced, or second hand clothes, is aware of them. Yet the material relationship between clothes and body is only apparent when it is pointed out and made visible amongst the informants. Nevertheless, according to Latour, this is not unusual. Objects’ agency is easily overlooked and is only acknowledged when it is being made visible. However, it can be considered strange that clothes’ agency can be overlooked, since they are kept close to the body. Perhaps the physical effects clothes have on bodies are overlooked or taken for granted. Since clothing is such an intricate part of life, its agency does not usually disrupt the perception of everyday life.

127 Latour, Reassembling the Social, 79-80.
Clothing’s agency might not be visible to humans because they do not acknowledge it. Through Latour and Grosz’ theories, objects are understood as becoming social when the inorganic meets the organic. Concluding, it is in the contact with humans that clothes’ agency can be detected. However, as Harvey points out, objects that are discarded as waste decompose and generate greenhouse gas emissions. Through Latour and Grosz’ theories, objects are understood as becoming social when the inorganic meets the organic. Concluding, it is in the contact with humans that clothes’ agency can be detected. However, as Harvey points out, objects that are discarded as waste decompose and generate greenhouse gas emissions.128 Objects can therefore act on their own without the aid of humans. Nevertheless, through Latour and ANT, the focus of agency is on networks and the exchanges that are made between actors. As Latour points out, the qualifications for objects to become actors is if the objects affect another actor’s course of action.129 Since waste decomposes when it is no longer in contact with humans, it can be interpreted that Latour does not consider that waste qualifies as an actor. However, it could be argued that objects have agency on their own, especially clothes. Going back to the example of the network between humans, clothes and washing machines. When the clothes made of synthetic fibers are in the washing machine, they emit micro plastics that pollute the water. As Harvey mentions the agency of waste, clothes are also able to act on their own. Nevertheless, in both cases, humans place clothes or waste either in the washing machine or in landfill, which brings the argument back to Grosz’ point of view. Objects actions are dependent on human indeterminacy.

However, clothes in closet take up space only by existing, even though they are not in contact with humans. Emma has an old sweater in her closet that a relative knitted in the 1970’s or 1980’s. “I thought I [was] going to get rid of this because I don’t use it that much, then just no, I can’t.” Even though Emma does not use her sweater, it still takes up space in her closet. The mere existence of the sweater limits the space in her closet that could be taken up by another piece of clothing. Furthermore, Latour states that

[…] objects, no matter how important, efficient, central, or necessary they may be, tend to recede into the background very fast, interrupting the stream of data – and the greater their importance, the faster they disappear. It does not mean they stop acting, but that their mode of action is no longer visibly connected to the usual social ties since they rely on types of forces chosen precisely for their differences with the normal social ties.130

According to this statement, objects’ agency prolongs even when clothes are not in contact with humans. Although their agency might not be visible, it is still present. Therefore, clothes’ abilities to shape, protect or harm the body is still a fact, even though they might not be

129 Latour, Reassembling the Social, 71.
130 Ibid., 79-80.
noticeable at all times. The idea that objects’ agency is only visible when humans interact with object can be seen as a bias towards human superiority over objects. After all, there are humans that have elaborated these theories on objects’ agency. Therefore, it can be difficult as a human to completely detach oneself from what has been a structural norm throughout centuries. This point of view is apparent in Grosz’ statements on the organic and the inorganic. According to Grosz, it is only in the contact with humans that objects can enable acts for humans. After all, if Emma had not kept her knitted sweater, it would not take up space in her closet. The sweater can exert its power and agency because Emma does not dispose of it. Nevertheless, this section has argued for that clothes’ agency is present whether they are in contact with humans or not. However, since the material derives from interviews to the most part, it is difficult to exemplify clothing’s agency when clothes are separated from humans beyond mere speculations. This section has furthermore discussed clothes’ agency in relation to culture and nature. In the following section, a gender perspective is utilized to view the terms and circumstances under which clothes have agency.

**Female Wearers**

But then there’s also, I have tried with shoes because that’s where I go crazy. If you go to a random shoe store today, there is not one single shoe you can have for ten years. You can’t heel the shoes, you can’t fix them, it won’t work because they are shoes made for the season. And then you must buy hand sewn shoes or something from those kinds of brands. Then you’re left with men’s shoes for four, five thousand.

Emma’s frustration regarding purchasing shoes that do not break after a few wears hints about an inequality between men and women. Emma claims that the supply for lasting shoes is not very big for women. For Emma to have a pair of durable shoes, she feels that she has to purchase expensive shoes from the men’s department in shoe stores. “I’m lucky I like this type of style, you know these kinds of shoes.” Emma is referring to a pair of plain leather shoes, similar to a man’s dress shoes. Historically, women have been situated as fickle consumers of fast changing fashion. Ribeiro points out that during the 19th century, women became known as expensive consumers of luxury, while men dressed for work and not to adorn themselves. However, since the informants of this study are all women, it cannot be established through the material if men find the supply of quality shoes to be more extensive than women’s. Nonetheless, turning to Latour’s view of culture and nature, there should not be any differences between men and

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131 Grosz, “Feminism, materialism, and freedom,” 150.
women. Although Latour’s views do not necessarily have a gender perspective, he mentions the distinction between culture and nature as “The Internal Great Divide”. Similarly, Ribeiro refers to the historical distinction between men and women as “The Great Divide”. Thinking in the sense of linking culture and nature, men and women should be linked as well. In fact, even though Ribeiro states that women have historically been situated as fickle consumers, in comparison to men, certain groups of men have also been ridiculed for expressing themselves through extravagant fashion through history. Emma continues by saying “[…] I think that we should go back to making garments that last, more timeless.” What Emma is pointing to is the fast changes in fashion. She seems to consider women’s clothes as less durable than men’s in order to exchange unfashionable items to fashionable ones. Nevertheless, Emma is the only informant that mentions any indication on gender inequality when it came to purchasing clothes. As it has been mentioned, most informants view the world holistically which creates an attitude of thinking of the multiple aspects of the world as linked. By thinking of people as people, and not separated into men and women, most informants continues the philosophy of a linked world view that is suggested by Latour.

Without mentioning her role as a woman and therefore a traditionally “fickle” consumer, Sara expresses a desire for new clothes. In relation to purchasing second hand clothes, she mentions how she finds it easier to walk into a conventional retail chain store and look at “what’s new”, than to search for clothes in second hand stores. Technically, if women are fickle consumers that easily dispose of old clothes, it should be difficult for them to form a relationship with their clothes. As Grosz points out, clothes that are in contact with the body for “long enough” become part of the body. Although it is difficult to stipulate the time period of “long enough”, it might indicate that clothes have to be placed on the body for an extensive amount of time in order to affect the body. Nevertheless, as Sophia states, she felt an immediate relief when she could breathe properly after she had removed her clothes from her body. The effect clothes have on bodies can be experienced immediately when they come in contact with, or remove themselves from, each other. Furthermore, as Howes points out, the skin is the only part of the body that can harbor physical proof of what it has experienced. The physical effect clothes have on bodies is not limited through time, but the marks they leave on the body. It is

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133 Latour, We Have Never Been Modern, 104.
134 Ribeiro, Dress and Morality, 119.
135 Ibid., 111.
136 Grosz, Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism, 80.
only through the marks that the contact between clothing and body can be proven. As soon as the skin is marked by a piece of clothing, the body and the garment have formed a relationship. According to Howes, the relationship is etched in the skin, and remembered through the skin knowledge. Thus, the relationship between clothing and its wearer is not defined whether she preserves or disposes of her clothes. It is through the physical contact when she wears them that the relationship is founded. As it has been pointed out, it is difficult to determine what “long enough” entails. However, reading Grosz’ statement with Howes’ perspective in mind, “long enough” is not necessarily an extensive amount of time, but as long as it takes for clothes to leave marks on the skin. Given the idea that time determines the connection between clothes and wearer, traditional perceptions of women and men’s attitude towards fashion can indicate that women do not form relationships with clothes because they replace them with the latest fashion. Nonetheless, in Latour’s interpretation of ANT, networks are referred to as the encounter between humans and objects, rather than women, men, and objects. The relationship between wearer and clothes is thus not based on gender specific attitudes, but on physical connections between clothes and bodies.

Even though relationships between clothes and wearers can seem genderless, according to previous research, women are usually more affected by fashion than men in contemporary society. As Ruggerone points out, men are not as concerned as women about wearing the “right” or “wrong” clothes. This statement indicates that women are slaves to fashion. However, as Matthews David states, fashion victimizes everyone. In her study, both women and men have been victims of the physical harm that clothes can impose on their wearers. Furthermore, both Emma and Victoria mention that they rather have a personal style than to follow the latest fashion. Emma states that “[…] I don’t think I’m a fashion person in that way, I just want to have garments that last forever.” Emma is more concerned about finding and wearing clothes that last, rather than if she is in or out of style. Victoria expresses a similar opinion. “I never feel that my style is like out of fashion”, even though she considers herself to wear mostly basic wear. However, it has been stated throughout the thesis that the informants care about the aesthetics of their clothing. Nevertheless, they do not seem to be bothered of wearing the right or wrong fashion. Connecting this back to Latour, people should be seen as people, and not separated into different genders. Thus, the informants do not show any

138 Ibid., 28.
139 Ruggerone, ”The Feeling of Being Dressed: Affect Studies and the Clothed Body,” 583.
indication of women being more affected by fashion than men. With that said, since all informants are women, it is not possible to compare how males and females are affected by fashion within the bounds of this study.

Furthermore, it is worth noting Grosz’ statement on freedom through objects. Grosz states that freedom for women lies in the usage of objects. Through the use objects, bodies are able to do more, and thus become more.\textsuperscript{141} Even though the relationship between clothes and bodies is genderless, and clothing’s agency is always present, Grosz’ statement provides an argument that clothing’s agency can enable women significantly in society. Emma points out that she finds clothes to be made for how bodies are supposed to look, not for how they actually look. When Emma wears pregnancy pants, or when Victoria wears different sizes on clothes, the informants use clothes to fit into the ideals of how a women is supposed to look. Emma claims that “[…] you can’t go to a party wearing active wear, I can’t really go to work in active wear.” Emma seems to have a preconception of what is appropriate to wear, which in a way speaks to her being affected by what is right or wrong to wear. However, in order to look proper, yet still be comfortable, she wears pregnancy pants. Nevertheless, Sara is also indicating that she uses clothes to fit into the ideal of being a woman. “Even if I don’t really find my eczema difficult as they are, maybe I’m not ‘oh hello, I’m eczema-Sara’.” Sara wears hosiery and undershirts in order to wear clothes from conventional retail chain stores. In her mind, conventional retail chain stores might provide clothing that, in her perception, is the ideal for a woman in her age is supposed to wear. Through the use of clothes, the informants can change their bodies into becoming something more or something else. This way of using clothes has been previously investigated by looking at queer communities in Stockholm by Göransson. By using clothes and prosthetics, the informants become the type of body they associated most with.\textsuperscript{142} In this Göransson’s study, there are not only women participating, but people with various gender identification. Connecting Göransson’s study to Latour, relationships to objects do not necessarily look different between men and women. Furthermore, Grosz’ statement on women and freedom can also be interpreted as people and freedom, since she mentions that all suppressed groups can use objects to enable freedom.\textsuperscript{143} Thus, clothes do not enable women per se. Clothes enable humans, regardless of gender. The different perceptions of the relationship between clothes and bodies regarding men and women cannot be investigated due to the limited

\textsuperscript{141} Grosz, “Feminism, materiality, and freedom,” 151-152.
\textsuperscript{142} Göransson, \textit{Materialiserade sexualiteter. Om hur normer framträder, förhandlas och ges hållbarhet}, 49-50.
\textsuperscript{143} Grosz, “Feminism, materiality, and freedom,” 151.
selection of informants in this study. However, from what the findings show, relationships between clothes and bodies are rather personal than gendered. Every person has her own body that forms different relationships with different clothes. Even though the informants in this study are all women of similar backgrounds, they still differ to some extents in their perceptions and attitudes, showing that people who have the same genital parts in common do not necessarily feel and act the same.

Conclusion

The focus of this chapter has been to answer the question “In what way and during what circumstances does clothing have agency?” Through the investigation of clothing’s agency, it has been shown that while theories claim that objects enable humans to do things, they can both enable and limit their wearers. The analysis shows that while different clothes fit different bodies, the labelling of clothes can affect how consumers view their bodies. Nevertheless, it is only if the consumer is forced to identify with a certain body type that it might affect her view of her body. The difference between Victoria and Emma points to that Victoria is willingly choosing to wear men’s wear or pregnancy clothes, in difference to Emma. Emma states that she cannot fit into regular pants and is therefore forced to wear pregnancy pants. Victoria’s body is not affected by the different labels on clothes because she knows that while she sometimes has to purchase a garment in a size large, she can sometimes wear size x-small as well. Being forced into a category can affect the way the body is view and thought of, which has been pointed out in the previous study on plus-size fashion by Downing Peters. Given Grosz’ theory on how clothing becomes a part of the body, the labelling of clothes becomes a part of the body as well. The physical relationship between clothes and bodies does not only affect the way people move, it also affects how bodies are viewed and thought of.

Furthermore, the analysis has shown that clothes have agency at all times, whether they are in contact with humans. This has been based on how Emma’s sweater takes up space in her closet, even though she does not use it. Together with Harvey’s previous research on waste, and Latour and ANT’s view on agency, it has been argued that clothes’ agency is not limited to the contact between human and clothes. Nevertheless it has also been argued that clothes’ agency is more visible through the contact with humans. By turning to Howes and his theory on the skin, the necessity of the human contact with clothes has been pointed out in order

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to make clothes’ agency more visible. Since the marks on the skin are proof of what the body physically experiences, clothing’s agency becomes visible by looking at the human body. Howes’ theory has further strengthened Latour and Grosz’ key point of the inorganic turning social when it comes in contact with the organic; humans. However, it has been pointed out that the necessity in the human contact can speak to a bias towards the cultural superiority over nature. Drawing on the text from the “Fashioned from Nature” exhibition, humans have treated nature as a tool with a focus on what nature can do for humans, instead of the other way around.

By conducting interviews with human informants in order to understand the clothes’ agency, and interpreting the material through the selected theories, this thesis has indirectly applied a perspective that is bias towards the superiority of humans. Nevertheless, by addressing this issue, an important point is being made about the perspectives of previous research, and the contributions that can be made through future research.

By answering the second research question, this chapter has also addressed whether clothes’ agency is more visible amongst women, than for example men. Through a gender perspective, the choice of informants has been critically discussed. History and previous research has pointed out women as more affected by and concerned with fashion than men. However, through the analysis, the relationship between wearer and clothes has been argued to be personal, rather than gendered. As Matthews David points out, the harm that clothing can impose does not spare people depending on their ethnicity, age or gender. Clothes’ agency affects the wearer, which can be seen as an ungendered body. Regardless of gender, clothes enable and limit bodies. In the following chapter, clothes’ agency is being investigated from multiple views where both materiality and style are accounted for.

Materiality and Style

I guess it depends on kind of like context, and just how I feel on that day as well, if I really wanna, you know, look sharp and even though it’s not that comfy but it’s still gonna make me feel better or, do I just need to cuddle in my clothes that day and that’s gonna make me feel better as well. So I think that really kind of depends. But of course then it’s nice to have those pieces that kind of combine both, I guess that is what the cashmere sweater kind of represents here. So, there aren’t that many pieces of clothing like that, or if you find them you should really cherish them.

When Lila was asked if she ever needs to compromise on comfort and aesthetics when purchasing clothes, she states that she sometimes compromises on the two aspects in her

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clothing practices. However, she mentions that her cashmere sweaters are both comfortable and aesthetically appealing to her at the same time. In the previous chapter, Lila’s fondness of cashmere was mentioned, in which she points out the positive qualities in cashmere wool. Lila also states that she likes cashmere sweaters “[…] because they just look really classy.” She also mentions that she finds cashmere sweaters to have a good second hand value. “[…] cashmere sweater that’s second hand, and it’s still cheap and it’s still super nice so it’s of really great quality”. According to Lila, cashmere sweaters can be signifiers of a classy look, while at the same time having qualities of being absorbent and feeling soft to the skin. Applying Latour’s theory on Lila’s cashmere sweaters, they can be seen as quasi-objects. As Latour points out, quasi objects are non-human, yet still in some way social.\textsuperscript{146} The aspect of social can be understood in several ways. It has earlier been argued through the theories that clothes’ physical qualities make them social when they interact with humans. However, clothes have also been turned into social, or cultural, objects when they have been compared to life companions or family members. Nevertheless, I propose a third way of viewing objects as both cultural and natural. Lila’s sweaters are seen as cultural in the sense that they symbolize an identity of being classy, and natural because they are solid, physical objects.

Even if physical agency in clothes has been emphasized in this thesis, clothes can exert their agency visually as well. As Grosz mentions, objects can make humans become something more than they already are.\textsuperscript{147} Even though Grosz is pointing to the body, and thus physically becoming something more, her theory can be further interpreted in order for it to evolve. As Lila states, her cashmere sweaters have a classy look and she considers them to make her look sharp and feel confident. In that sense, Lila becomes something more than when she is not wearing her cashmere sweaters because of how they make her look. It has been pointed out throughout this thesis that fashion has been thought of as visual and cultural, rather than physical and material. However, even though the main focus of this thesis lies on materiality and physical agency of clothing, the visual and cultural qualities must be considered and analyzed in order to capture the entire garment. Latour states in his interpretation of ANT that a social scientist cannot account for some links, and neglect other links when they physical.\textsuperscript{148} In the same sense that this thesis has argued for not neglecting the materiality and physical agency in clothes, their aesthetics and role as cultural signifiers cannot be neglected.

\textsuperscript{146} Latour, \textit{We Have Never Been Modern}, 55.
\textsuperscript{147} Grosz, “Feminism, materiality, and freedom,” 152.
\textsuperscript{148} Latour, \textit{Reassembling the Social}, 78.
either. In fact, Lila’s cashmere sweaters do not only illustrate the physical qualities, but also how agency includes transforming identities and personalities. As Karen states that clothes can free the naked body from its home by covering it, Lila becomes something more when she covers her naked body with a cashmere sweater. Nevertheless, Lila’s clothes might affect her mind more than her body when they make her feel more confident. Nonetheless, Ruggerone states that clothing practices are not about the mind or the body, but both.\textsuperscript{149} If Lila is feeling confident, her mind might affect her body. This can be further analyzed by turning to Grosz. As she points out, clothes change the shape of the body when the two come in contact.\textsuperscript{150} By applying this reasoning to the case with Lila’s cashmere sweater, although her sweater affects the physical shape of her body, her mind can affect her posture by feeling more confident. By visually affecting Lila, her sweater can indirectly change how her body moves. Clothes’ agency accounts for multiple aspects and integrates with the body through most senses. Since this thesis emphasizes the previously neglected aspect of materiality and tactility, it is also important to feature how the visual and material work together in clothing practices in order to not continue on the path of establishing dualisms.

During her interview, Lila mentions her balance walk between being comfortable and looking good. She mentions the dress she is wearing at the time of the interview. “I’m wearing this huge like very impractical dress today just because I wanted to look nice in the office.” She follows up with mentioning that she would not wear a hoodie to work because “[…] even though I would feel very comfy in it, […] I don’t feel confident enough to wear it.” Lila knows what she feels comfortable in, but she tends to neglect that in favor for her aesthetic preferences. Nevertheless, there seems to be different perspectives of comfortability, according to Lila. While she finds her hoodie to be physically comfortable, she does not feel mentally comfortably wearing it. In difference to Lila’s cashmere sweaters, her dress and hoodie are not thought of as combing both material and aesthetic comfort. Lila’s hoodie is physically comfortable, but it is not visually comfortable. Her dress illustrates the opposite. As it was discussed in the previous paragraph, the cultural aspect can also be understood as clothes as cultural signifiers and expressions of cultural identities. The alternative understanding of what objects are both cultural and natural can suggest that since the two garments are not both physically and mentally comfortable, they should not be considered to be quasi-objects. Since quasi-objects are determined by their ability to be inorganic, yet social, Lila’s hoodie can for

\textsuperscript{149} Ruggerone, ”The Feeling of Being Dressed: Affect Studies and the Clothed Body,” 584-585.

\textsuperscript{150} Grosz, \textit{Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism}, 80.
example be seen as only inorganic, due to how Lila only sees it for its material qualities. Nevertheless, according to Latour,\(^{151}\) Lila’s clothes become social when she interacts with them and they cover her body. In that sense, both her hoodie and dress can be considered quasi-objects. Lila might not see her hoodie as an appropriate cultural signifier of her style. However, all clothes are cultural signifiers in one way or another. As Entwistle states, “all clothing […] expresses two opposing desires: garments cover the body and also enhance and display it.”\(^{152}\) Whether Lila considers the way her dress covers her body to be comfortable, or the way her hoodie enhances and displays her body as visually appealing, they do indeed cover, enhance and display her body.

Clothes’ ability to become social is not dependent on them being visually appealing. In fact, even though Lila does not wear her hoodie to work, since it makes her feel less mentally comfortable, it does make her comfortable if she is “cuddling at home”. As Grosz points out, objects can make humans become more.\(^{153}\) As it has been discussed earlier, Grosz’ statement can further be interpreted as affecting humans’ minds, as well as their bodies. Even though Lila’s hoodie is not suitable for the office, it still transform her body and identity. By wearing her comfortable hoodie Lila might slouch more with her back than when she wears her dress. As she points out herself, she will communicate a different style when she is wearing the different garments. Similarly, she states that her dress looks nice even though it is impractical, yet she says that “[…] I still biked to the office so it’s gonna be a little inconvenient.” Even though her dress is impractical, it is wearable enough to bike in. At first, it might seem that clothes are not always both cultural and natural object. However, a physical piece of textile will always cover a surface, and that piece of textile will always communicate a message of cultural identity. These joint aspects are what makes clothes into quasi-objects.

Furthermore, Lila pointed out in the opening quote that there are not a lot of garments like her cashmere sweaters, in terms of being both comfortable and aesthetically appealing. From Lila’s perspective, clothes are seen as made up by separate components. Only a few garments have all components, which can turn them into complete clothing that are both comfortable and aesthetically appealing. However, as this section has pointed out, when a piece of textile is turned into clothing, all components are manifested in the garment. It resembles

\(^{151}\) Latour, Reassembling the Social, 65.


\(^{153}\) Grosz, “Feminism, materiality, and freedom,” 152.
back to the argument on culture being a part of nature.\textsuperscript{154} Although clothing is a cultural signifier, the meaning of a garment is channeled and manifested through the materiality in clothing. Thus, besides the physical qualities of clothes that have been mentioned in this thesis, clothing’s materiality also creates the prerequisite for clothes to even become cultural signifiers. To go back to Latour’s quote “\textit{culture is [...] an artifact created by bracketing Nature off.”\textsuperscript{155} Clothes’ cultural signification exists on similar conditions as culture in itself. If there is no physical material to apply the cultural signification, it cannot exist.

\textit{Tactile and Visual Senses}

Yes I think that I’ve compromised on both ends. For example, I did buy this sweater knowing that I always have to wear a long-sleeved shirt underneath, and yet I’ve still put my looks before the sweater. I can’t wash this and it itches.

Sara emphasizes the importance of aesthetics in her clothing practices. On several occasions, she states that she chooses to look visually good over being physically comfortable. In Hebrok and Grimstad Klepp’s study, they argue that even though materiality and physical experiences are important, it is the visual sense that dominates humans’ experiences of textile and clothing.\textsuperscript{156} In Sara’s case, she is aware of the effects clothes can have on her body, but she lets her visual senses and aesthetic preferences guide her in her clothing practices. Furthermore, even though Carla expresses a more profound interest for environmental and bodily friendly clothing than Sara, she emphasizes her identification as an esthete as important, and thereby the importance of aesthetics, in her clothing practices. Reading the results from Hebrok and Grimstad Klepp’s study, and the statements from the informants, from the perspective of Howes’, the emphasis on the visual can be seen as diminishing the important role of the skin. Even though the visual sense is important to the informants of this study, the physical experiences that have left marks on their bodies and skin cannot be denied. As Howes states, in difference to the visual sense, the physical experiences of the body can be capture by the skin in a way that other senses cannot.\textsuperscript{157} Howes’ argument would suggest that it is only possible to detect if something is uncomfortable by showing the marks and lines that a piece of clothing has left on the skin. However, as quasi-objects, clothing can be physically and mentally uncomfortable. In that sense, Sara is experiencing discomfort through her physical senses, even

\textsuperscript{154} Latour, \textit{We Have Never Been Modern}, 104.

\textsuperscript{155} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{156} Hebrok and Grimstad Klepp, “Wool is a knitted fabric that itches, isn’t it?,” 89.

\textsuperscript{157} Howes, “\textit{Skinscapes: Embodiment, Culture and Environment},” 33.
though she experiences visual pleasure when she sees her clothes. Further on, when Victoria talks about her experience of itching red dots on her body, she says that she had difficulties in breathing when wearing certain clothes. “I don’t know, it’s nothing I can prove besides that, well, a feeling. It’s mostly allergy rashes.” Accordingly to what Howes points out, Victoria can only be completely sure about the marks on her body, not the feeling of having difficulties to breathe. The marks on her body can show where the clothes have been on her body, while a feeling of breathing difficulties is subjective. As Victoria points out herself, it is only a feeling and therefore difficult to prove. Nevertheless, as Grosz mentions, the body is indeed experienced as physical, but also as psychical.\textsuperscript{158} Although, the skin can provide factual proof of a physical encounter, the psychical state of mind can affect the way clothes are experienced. If Victoria experiences a garment as psychically uncomfortable, she would not want to wear it again.

If a garment is not physically or aesthetically suitable to the wearer’s preferences, it might not be worn again. During Emma’s interview, she talks about the homemade dress she sewed. She sewed it accordingly to her measurements in order to get a perfect fit. Emma says that she made the neckline too tight, which resulted in an uncomfortable fit around the throat. She says that she tried to fix it, but “[…] it didn’t look as nice, and then I just felt that it wasn’t as fun.” In summation, when Emma first sew dress it had almost a perfect fit, yet it was slightly uncomfortable. When she corrected the fit to make it more comfortable, it did not look aesthetically appealing to her anymore, even though it fitted her better. The reasoning of Grosz allows Emma’s relationship with her dress to be interpreted as both physical and psychical. In order for her to wear the dress, it has to be both physically and mentally comfortable in it. Continuing on Grosz’ thoughts of physical and psychical dimensions, Latour’s thoughts on the visibility of object’s agency. According to Latour, it is through the interaction with humans that objects become social. When humans and objects are separated, the objects’ agency is no longer visible.\textsuperscript{159} Even though Emma’s dress fitted her perfectly around the waist, and did not bulge in the back, the uncomfortable neckline was enough reason for Emma to discard it. The physical qualities of the dress that Emma was fond of eventually become hidden when the she decides to stop wearing it. Even though a garment is not aesthetically appealing, as it was discussed in the previous section, it can still make a garment unwearable due to the psychical dimension of clothing practices. Thus, Emma’s opinion on how her dress looks after she resewed it does not

\textsuperscript{158} Grosz, \textit{Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism}, 74.

\textsuperscript{159} Latour, \textit{Reassembling the Social}, 79.
affect the dress’ agency and abilities to affect her body. However, Emma’s opinion does decide if the dress will stay in her closet and be a part of her clothing practices. If she decides to discard her dress, its agency will be forgotten.

In that sense, Howes’ theory on the skin can be developed by considering forgotten objects and hidden agency. Even though the skin harbors physical experiences, the skin will eventually heal from marks, lines and scrapes. If a garment has imposed any marks on the body and is therefore disposed of, the skin will heal from not wearing the same garment again. The physical proof of harm or discomfort that the skin provided will eventually fade and be forgotten. This is palpable in Sara’s clothing practices, in which she repeats similar purchases even though her clothes have previously hurt her. “I’ve bought so many pants that I have to wear thin hosiery underneath because like, but I end up giving them away in the end.” Sara cannot wear certain kinds of pants because they irritate her skin. Even though she finds solutions for how to wear the pants, they still end up hurting her and she has to discard them. However, she continues to purchase similar pants that she eventually has to dispose of again.

Understanding the patterns in Sara’s clothing practices from the evolved perspective of Howes’ theory, Sara forgets what her pants do to her body and skin when she gives them away, and ends up purchasing similar ones again because she finds them aesthetically appealing. As soon as the marks and rashes disappear from Sara’s body and skin, the pants’ agency and qualities become hidden and forgotten. Furthermore, this train of thought can be added on to Grosz’ theory. Clothes might become a part of the body when the two are in physical contact. However, as soon as they become separate, and the traces of the clothes disappear from the skin, the body resumes to its original state as a naked body. This perspective becomes further evident when turning to Bruno’s theory on clothes as a second skin. A human lives in the surrounding of layers, which manifests in skin, clothes, and architecture. In Sara’s clothing practices, her body has several layers of skin in order to separate herself from her clothes. By putting hydrocortisone, or undershirts and hosiery, between her biological skin and her clothes, it is emphasized how little, or much, clothes can be incorporated in the body. Considering Grosz and Bruno’s theories in relation to Howes’, clothes can be incorporated with the body, yet easily removed from it.

161 Grosz, Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism, 80.
Nevertheless, it can be difficult for wearers to form relationships with clothes if they are not worn. On one hand, a faded relationship makes clothes’ agency become forgotten. On the other hand, clothes that are not worn can still make their agency visible in other ways. Emma mentions that she tries to clear out her closet in order to wear the clothes she has. However, Emma also mentions how she still keeps her knitted sweater in her closet, even though “[…] it isn’t really my style”, because she cannot withstand to dispose of it. She rarely wears her knitted sweater but it still takes up space in her wardrobe. Emma’s reason to keep her knitted sweater is not because of the physical relationship she has with it, nor that she finds it aesthetically appealing. She keeps it because of sentimentiality. It is a link to history and her relatives. As Latour points out, objects’ agency never disappears, it is merely forgotten. Building on to Latour’s statement, perhaps clothes’ agency becomes visible in different ways. When clothes are not used, their physical agency can be temporarily forgotten. Nevertheless, when the clothes are being used in a different way, as being materialized links to the past, for example, another kind of agency appears. Clothes’ agency is always visible in some sense, unlike what Latour claims. Instead of being hidden, the agency shifts to a different outlet where it can be visible. Clothes’ agency has in this section been illustrated as complex with multifaceted aspects to consider. Again, clothes are not only pieces of textile, nor symbolic signifiers. They are both physical and aesthetical, and they are being experienced tactiley and visually. Clothes should not be seen as only one or the other, but as a unity of multiple aspects.

Physical Body Changes and Aesthetic Preferences

I do buy these classics mostly, it has to last for a long time, it can’t be anything that’s only supposed to be for one single party. I don’t even have that in my closet, it’s mostly a lot of black, a lot of beige and blue, but also, even if this skirt is a little bit more fun, it is still very classic, you can have it for a long time. And that’s the demands I have, I think, and style does matter, you get a style that is more towards basic wear, I would say.

Victoria’s demands when purchasing new clothes are that they have to last, physically and aesthetically, for a long time. Victoria mentions how her style is mostly the same, no matter the occasion. She claims that her everyday style does not differ that much from her more festive style. “[It] usually doesn’t change it that much, even if I’m going to a party, maybe I wear something more like this skirt.” She matches different items from her closet with each other to create different outfits that set the tone for the occasion. Therefore, Victoria’s clothes have to be long lasting in both materiality and aesthetics. Thinking of materiality and aesthetics through

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163 Latour, Reassembling the Social, 80.
the perspective of the culture and nature dualism, the different aspects of the clothing practices can be thought of as separate or linked. According to Latour’s view on culture and nature, materiality and aesthetics in the clothing practices should be seen as linked. As he points out, culture and nature cannot be viewed as separate, or superior and subordinate, since they are dependent on each other. In the same sense, materiality and aesthetics are dependent on each other in order to compose an appealing garment in regard to sensation, shape, and style. In Victoria’s clothing practices, she emphasizes her belief in that her clothes will last for years, both physically and aesthetically. She states that she purchases clothes with the intention of keeping them for at least ten years. “It feels like basic wear stays [in fashion]” and that they will always look good aesthetically. Further on, clothes that look “good” can on one hand refer to being trendy, on the other hand it can refer to clothes looking neat and not torn. Again, looking at the multiple interpretations of clothing practices emphasizes the dual aspects of a single piece of clothing.

Nevertheless, Emma actually expresses that she does not always have the ability to fulfill her demands on both materiality and aesthetics when purchasing clothes. She explains it by mentioning her dresses for festive occasions. “The garments I have that are made of materials I don’t like are garments I’ve bought for specific events when it had to go fast.” In difference to Victoria, Emma opens up for the possibility of purchasing things for specific occasions. In order to look aesthetically appealing, Emma has to sacrifice the physical comfort when she dresses in synthetic clothing. The informants show throughout the analysis that even though they value materiality and physical comfort, they do emphasize the importance of style, and the lengths they would go to in order to maintain an aesthetically appealing look. By turning to Bruno, the physical and aesthetical aspects of clothes can be seen as layers on the skin. Bruno considers clothes and architecture as sometimes linked. As it was concluded in the section on theory and theoretical framework, Bruno’s statement supports the view on clothes as objects. Her statement can further be interpreted as viewing the materiality aspect as the object, the third skin. The aesthetic aspect then becomes the second skin. In fact, Latour states that cultures provide different viewpoints of nature. By putting this statement in context of clothing, aesthetics provide different ways of viewing materials. Humans might wear their aspired identity as a second skin, and materialize it through the third skin, which is clothing. However,

164 Latour, We Have Never Been Modern, 104.
166 Latour, We Have Never Been Modern, 104.
this reasoning further builds on the superiority of culture. Instead, clothing can be seen as an intricate compilation between aesthetics, style, shape and materiality.

Purchasing a garment with the intention for it to fit aesthetically, physically, and for a long amount of time demands that it is designed to withstand changing fashion trends, but also changing body types. Victoria points out that she believes that her clothes can survive changing trends, and that when she wears them she does not feel that she is out of style. However, in order for her to keep her clothes for a long time, they have to be able to survive her changing body. Victoria mentions that “[…] of course I hope that I can keep some garments, maybe I can use this kind of shirt when I get pregnant.” Carla also mentions how she accounts for potential body changes in her clothing practices. Her Vivienne Westwood dress is a wrap-around model, which she points to is a preferable design for long term use. “It doesn’t matter if one gains weight or loses weight, like you can always have it”. Since clothes becomes a part of the body, as Grosz points out, making clothes physically changeable is important in order for them to adapt to the different stages of a changing body. Clothes have to be able to physically change in order to be worn by a changing body. A garment that is physically versatile can enable a person to wear the garment through all stages and body types during her life. Viewing this from Latour and ANT, by expanding or shrinking when coming in contact with a body, the clothes become social and act during the encounter with a human body. Viewing this in regard to Howes’ perspective of marks on the skin, wearing clothes that do not fit during pregnancy or weight gain can result in lines and marks on the skin from wearing clothes that are too tight. The skin thereby becomes an indicator whether clothes fit properly or not.

Further on, connecting Latour’s statement with the thoughts based off of Grosz and Howes’ theories, clothes can be aesthetically and physically designed in order to fit multiple body types. It has been argued in previous chapters that even though clothes might fit bodies, their labels position consumers into identifying themselves as certain body types. Nevertheless, even if a consumer identifies with a less than desirable body type, they can always wear some type of clothing. As the example with Emma and her pregnancy pants. Even if she does not identify herself with having a pregnant body type, she can still use pants that she finds aesthetically appealing, and that have a comfortable fit. However, to put the previous discussion of Emma’s pants in the context of the current one, in order for a consumer to wear the same garment when going through different body changes, the clothing in itself has to be able to adapt to multiple body types. Instead of designing and positioning clothes accordingly to certain body types, clothes have to be able to expand or shrink to fit the multiple body types a human
goes through during a lifetime. In this sense, one-sized clothing provides an option for clothes to be designed to fit multiple body types. However, one-sized clothing is never mentioned by the informants. Instead, as the examples from Victoria and Emma’s clothing practices illustrate, they wear clothes from different categories of body types depending on what part of the body they want to clothe. Nonetheless, turning to Bruno, clothes are the body’s second skin. It can be suggested that clothes should in that case mirror the shape of the first skin. Continuing on that thought, one-sized clothing might be seen as a problematic solution to everlasting clothing due to the saying that if something is supposed to fit everyone, it does not fit anyone properly. Clothing will in that case become a generalization and compilation of every single body type. Although it will still be able to cover the body, it will not be able to display and enhance the individual body type, to follow Entwistle’s reasoning on clothing.

Continuing on that thought, but going back to the compilation between the physical and aesthetical. Clothes must not only survive changing trends and body types, but also the changes in the aesthetic preferences of the wearer. Carla mentions that she has had her wrap-around dress for more than 15 years, and intends to keep it longer than that. The aesthetic design must therefore be appealing to Carla for several years, just like the physical design must be able to fit her body over a long amount of time. Carla’s dress is physically design to expand or shrink, which makes it suitable for long time wear. In order for the aesthetic design to suit the wearer for a long time, it has to be changeable as well. The aspect of changeable clothes are not mentioned by the informants, instead they claim that they will have the same style and aesthetic preferences in the future as they have today. However, reusing textiles clothes is mentioned by Emma, who states that she used an old duvet cover to make her homemade dress. “It was a really nice duvet cover and I didn’t want to throw it away.” By reusing textile that she already has, Emma makes something new out of it in order to make it fit her aesthetical preferences. Grosz states that humans can become more through objects. In that sense, objects can also become more in the encounter with humans. Emma’s duvet cover has the opportunity to become something else when Emma encounters with it. Furthermore, by putting this in relation to Latour and ANT, clothes can once again be seen as actors within the human-object-network. When the duvet cover cannot function as proper bedding, its agency can change into covering and displaying the body in the shape of a dress. Clothing is thus a compilation of multiple

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168 Grosz, “Feminism, materiality, and freedom,” 152.
aspects, such as physical and aesthetical aspects. Clothing’s agency is ever present, even though it is sometimes hidden from different perspectives.

**Conclusion**

Through this chapter, the question “How can clothes be interpreted in regard to agency when considering both physical and aesthetical aspects?” has been answered. By considering both physical and aesthetical aspects of clothing, the culture and nature dualism becomes an object of interpretation. Clothes are made up by different components that together create a garment. Removing one of these components is to remove what makes textile into clothing, and what makes clothing into fashion. By addressing the multiple aspects that together form a garment that is physically wearable and aesthetically appealing to the wearer, this chapter also continues on the philosophy of seeing things as linked rather than separated. As it has been mentioned since the introduction of this thesis, clothes are objects that are both cultural signifiers and natural objects. Since the thesis departs from the perspective of viewing all aspects in clothing as linked, this chapter focused on bringing the two key aspects of clothing together, in order for them to be analyzed simultaneously.

Even though the informants care about the materiality of their clothes, the aesthetic aspect weighs heavily in the balance walk between being physically and mentally comfortable in their clothing practices. The theories that have been utilized depart from physical matters, such as the skin and material agency. This might incline that the analysis of the aesthetic aspect of clothing would have been more generous if theories on clothing’s aesthetics would have been utilized instead. Nevertheless, the focus of this chapter has been to view the physical and aesthetical aspects together, which has been feasible through Latour’s and Grosz’ theories on culture and nature, and clothing as physical and psychical.

Furthermore, by utilizing ANT and Howes’ theory on the skin on the combined aspects, the more physically focused theories have been able to become further evolved. In regard to the findings, although the skin can provide physical proof of how humans and clothes come in contact, it contributes to Latour’s perception that clothes’ agency must be visible to be acknowledged. Nevertheless, clothes’ agency never becomes hidden, it merely shifts and is being expressed through different forms. Latour’s interpretation of ANT inclines that objects’ agency never disappears, but becomes hidden when they come out of contact with humans.169 Thus, the thought of a shifting agency can be seen as an evolvement of his theory. This way of

seeing objects’ agency is even more floating than what Latour suggests, but resonates to his reasoning on thinking of culture and nature as linked.

Concluding from this chapter, the informants show that while they can consider both the physical and aesthetical aspects of clothing, they are often viewed as separate. The analysis shows that clothes are always both physical and aesthetical, and that accounting for both these aspects can strengthen and prolong the relationship between human and clothing. By purchasing and wearing clothes that fit both physically and aesthetically, the chosen clothes will be continuously worn. The agency of clothes thereby stays visible, and their roles as actors within the human-object-network will not be forgotten. Following this last analytic chapter, the concluding chapter is summarizing the findings of this analysis, presenting the contribution of this thesis, and providing suggestions for future research.

Conclusion

This thesis has been written based on the personal experiences from working in fast fashion. By academically investigating the physical effects clothes can impose on bodies, it has been possible to view what clothes are able to do.

The aims of this thesis have been twofold. The first aim has been to investigate clothing’s agency by addressing the intricate relationship between human bodies and clothing. This aim has been achieved by interviewing people about their clothing practices. In order to follow through on the reasoning that clothes are able to act, the informants’ clothes have been objects for the analysis as well. By combining wardrobe studies with the interviews, the relationship between humans and clothes has been illustrated from two sides. The relationship between the two is a complex negotiation of being comfortable, and looking good. The exhibition “Fashioned from Nature” at The Victoria and Albert Museum in London has been partly analyzed from the perspective of humans’ relationship with clothes. The analysis of the material show that human bodies and clothes have a mutual relationship, in which they affect each other through changing the shape of each other’s forms. The second aim has been to challenge the perspective of the different agencies clothing inhabits by combining the physical and aesthetical aspects with each other. Even though the material from the interviews has been utilized when achieving this aim, the focus has been on the clothes and their agency. By conducting a critical analysis of the material in this thesis, the physical and aesthetical agency
has been questioned separate and combined. Clothing’s agency is neither limited to physical, nor aesthetical agency. Clothes physically extend the surface on the body, and enable bodies to go outside of the private sphere of their homes by clothing them. Simultaneously, clothes make humans feel things, both physically and mentally. Clothes’ aesthetics make humans feel comfort or discomfort depending on the style of the design. Furthermore, by addressing and highlighting the situations in which clothes’ physical agency is visible, this thesis has challenged clothes’ agency beyond being bearers of cultural signification.

When discussing clothes’ agency in terms of physical and aesthetical aspects, clothes’ complexity has been compared to the culture and nature dualism. Culture and nature can be interpreted in many different ways when applied to clothes. When trying to position humans and clothes in the relationship of culture and nature, it becomes problematic since although humans might be compared to culture, clothes are not necessarily compared to nature. Clothes are quasi-objects and therefore both cultural and natural products. With that said, if clothes are seen as quasi-objects, maybe humans should to. After all, humans are social yet still made of flesh and blood that derives from nature, according to evolution. Nevertheless, the perspective of viewing culture and nature as combined, instead of something separate, can be applied to the relationship between humans and clothes. Instead of seeing humans and clothes as two separate units, they might be thought of as one united body. To grasp the complexity of what clothes do to their wearers, and what the wearers do to their clothes, they must be thought of as a single unit, instead of separate. This aligns with what Grosz advocates for when she states that clothes become a part of the body and changes how it moves.\textsuperscript{170} Clothes have also been argued to affect the mind, and not only the body. Clothes become a physical and mental extension of the body. Together, clothes and body create a new shape that is a hybrid between the two. Thereby, clothes become a part of the human body and create a second skin.\textsuperscript{171} However, Bruno’s idea of several layers of skin can be seen as repeating the dualism. Since bodies have three layers of skin, each skin is seen as separate. Therefore, the skin made of flesh, the body, is seen as separate from the second skin, the clothes. Nevertheless, in Bruno’s theory, the body, clothes, and architecture are all viewed as different skins. By categorizing all of them as a type of skin, they are all seen as objects of the same category. When clothes and bodies interact with each other, they temporarily become one.

\textsuperscript{170} Grosz, \textit{Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism}, 80.

\textsuperscript{171} Bruno, “Cultural Cartography, Materiality and the Fashioning of Emotion,” 147.
Clothes and bodies interact and affect each other. Clothes’ agency has previously been claimed to only being visible when clothes are in contact with humans.\textsuperscript{172} However, clothes always have agency. When they are not in contact with humans, clothes exert their agency by taking up space, or being a representation of a memory. The heavy focus on the importance of humans in the human-object-network speaks to continued human superiority. Latour and ANT’s point of view can be seen as progressive at first, since they are acknowledging previously neglected aspects in the world. However, combining ANT with Latour’s view on culture and nature, the necessity of human contact within networks are seen as contradicting. If clothing is instead seen as acting on its own, the human superiority can truly be shattered. In fact, in the meeting with clothes, humans are enabled to clothe their bodies and go out into the world. Clothing can be seen as having that power over humans because clothing has been made into an important part of human life. Nevertheless, fashion and clothing has long been seen as an important aspect of life, especially as cultural signifiers. However, through this thesis, clothing has been shown to be more than aesthetics, even if that aspect is undeniably important in clothing practices. Without the physical aspect of clothes, there would not be a garment to charge with cultural signification. Further on, while clothes cover and protect bodies, they also expand, shrink, and harm bodies through their physical agency. Neither aspects of clothing’s agency can therefore be neglected or seen as subordinate. Together, they form the complete garment.

Through investigating of the relationship between human bodies and clothing, and challenging the perspective of the different agencies clothing, this thesis has highlighted the physical agency that clothing inhabits. By emphasizing the physical agency, the physical and aesthetical aspects in clothing have rather been seen as equals, than viewing one as more important than the other. Clothes affect and enable human bodies physically and mentally. This thesis has combined theories from different disciplines in order to challenge the view of clothing’s agency that has been established in Fashion Studies. By utilizing several theories from different disciplines, the theories have been able to become further developed. Latour’s perspective on the visibility in objects’ agency has been challenged through this thesis since the material showed that clothing’s agency is always visible. Even though the physical agency might not be felt when humans and clothes are physically detached, the agency in clothing shifts and becomes visible in another way. This was particularly prominent in the case with Emma and her knitted sweater that became a materialization of a memory, and thereby a link to history.

\textsuperscript{172} Latour, \textit{Reassembling the Social}, 79-80.
This development of Latour’s theoretical perspective points to the importance of not letting the human bias stand in the way when thinking in terms of new materialism. Although, the idea of the theoretical perspective is to acknowledge the agency in objects, the human bias is still prominent when reading Latour and his thoughts. Furthermore, Grosz’ perspective of objects liberating humans was also challenged. The material showed that clothes can make humans become more, yet it also showed that clothes can limit the human body. Karen pointed out that clothes can allow humans to leave their homes by dressing their bodies. Even though Grosz is correct in that clothes can free humans, Karen’s statement also illustrated how clothes can detain a human as well. If a garment cannot cover the body, then it cannot allow a human to leave the home, thereby limiting the human. Clothes’ agency to limit, as well as to free, points to the wide range of agency that objects possess. In the theories that have been utilized in this thesis, objects are positioned as made for humans. Objects, and with that clothes, are not for humans to possess and utilize. They are actors within the network and have to be respected as such. If clothes are not being acknowledge for their capacity to act on their own then clothes can never be seen as actual actors. These developments have been made possible by combining the theories of Latour and Grosz with the theories of Howes and Bruno. By combining theories focused on material agency with theories on body and skin, the relationship between the two has been further unpacked in this thesis. The developments show that even in theories that highlight material agency, the human bias is still present. By turning away from the human bias, the perspective of viewing clothes, clothes’ agency, and human bodies with each other can make humans aware of what happens when they put on their clothes. From a larger perspective, clothing design and production can be reconsidered when the agency in clothes is being acknowledged. In the future, this thesis can be viewed as ground work for continued research on clothing and agency within Fashion Studies.

For future research, I propose to look further into why clothing’s cultural significance has been seen as more important than its physical agency. Clothing rarely seems to be the aspect of a lifestyle that is thought of first, in terms of how bodies are affected. Facial crèmes and food are aspects in life that spark an awareness before clothing. By investigating a larger selection of informants, the relationship with different aspects can be further mapped. For this study, only people who actively consider the materiality in their clothes were chosen to participate. Investigating people who are not outspoken about their awareness can reveal the more hidden aspect of clothing’s agency. On that note, revisiting people who have experienced rashes and eczema can provide further examples of how clothes affect the body. However, the
difference between facial crèmes and food, and clothing, might be how they are consumed. They are absorbed or ingested, and can be experienced as entering the body underneath the skin. Therefore, investigating piercings the same way as clothes might show different results than this study. Since piercings impale the body, they are merged with the body instead of only being layered on top of it. In the same sense, tattoos are put on, and simultaneously in, the body. Tattoos become a part of the first skin, yet it is added adornment, which could be interpreted as a second skin. Future research should therefore investigate what happens when adornment is merged into the body, and the first and second skin are inseparable.
References

Printed and Electronic Academic Sources


**Websites**


Photographs

Cover photo. Owned by the author.

Appendix

Questions for informants

Dear Informant!
When we meet, we will talk about your thoughts on clothing practices in relation to both aesthetics and sensorial feeling. In preparations for our talk, I would like you to reflect on this topic by thinking about the following questions. These questions are meant as a chance for you to contemplate where you stand and what you want to say during our talk.

What do you think about materials in clothing?
- Are there certain materials you would choose over others? *In that case;* what kind of materials would you/would you not choose?
- Why do you choose certain materials over others?

How do you feel about the sensorial feeling imposed by clothing?
- How does it feel when you have clothes on your skin?
- Would you base your choice of clothes and materials on the sensorial feeling you get when you wear your clothes? *In that case;* what sensorial feeling would be a deal breaker for not wearing certain clothes?

How much do you think of aesthetics and sensorial feeling when you purchase your clothes?
- Have you ever had to compromise on a purchase based on aesthetics and sensorial feeling?
- Have you experienced that a piece of clothing has been appealing to your taste but not to your standards of comfort (for example itchy or the material does not breathe)?
- Do you think aesthetics and sensorial feeling are equally important in your decision of purchasing and wearing clothes? *In that case;* why are they equally important to you?
- How does their equal importance manifest in your clothing practices?

Thank you so much for your participation. I am looking forward to meeting you!
Best Regards, Emmi Flodin