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# Creation of Symbolic Value and Aesthetic Authority in a menswear context

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# 1. Summary

This thesis deals with the construction of symbolic value and aesthetic authority in a menswear context. Based on fieldwork conducted in Oslo; in two tailoring shops which are seen as two of the best menswear shops in Oslo. Fieldwork has also been done digitally on online blogs, forums, and social media. I propose that menswear subculture and market is of anthropological interest as an entry to construction of subcultures, material culture and the reproduction of capitalist elite culture. Presenting the intertwining of physical and digital culture, how people from different countries and contexts create a symbolic value of clothing and the distinction of inside and outside. Relevant theoretical insights are based on material culture, digital culture, social media, symbolic value, economic theory, and reproduction of culture. The menswear subculture is studied as a product of capitalist markets and commodities, with luxury and exclusivity a distinction of the commodities involved in the market, discussing the role of commodities in creating a sense of shared symbolic value. Fieldwork in a tailoring shop means involving staff, customers, tailors, warehouse employees and couriers all ensuring the day-to-day function of a shop which relies on local knowledge and transnational connections. Creation of symbolic value and aesthetic authority, all being affected by; menswear industry employees, community members, bloggers, social media influencers, forums all involved in creating a clear idea of what is valuable and respected. I also argue that through commodities, specific political and cultural ideals are reproduced through generations, with kinship being an important process of this reproduction. Kinship as an integral part of capitalist production and value creation is also discussed. Through the mediums of blogs, forums, and social media there has been a democratization of the menswear subculture, but I argue that the democratization has mainly happened in the field of participation, not the formative aspect. This democratization process has shown the importance of exclusivity and restrictiveness is in the culture of “elites”. I suggest that material culture is closely linked to the symbolism in elite culture and the reproduction of it as well, with commodities both a way of ensuring elite status through wealth, but also a way of symbolizing and representing elite culture. Lastly, I argue that the distinction between fashion and style is an important distinction to understanding this specific subculture and its members, with the representations of those terms involving a larger representation of cultural and political ideals.

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### 3. Introduction

The subject of my thesis is data gathered on menswear subculture and the fashion industry, with its empirical source, being from a tailoring shop in Oslo and digitally from the online community of menswear. Menswear subculture is a specific subcategory of the fashion industry, in which mostly men's tailored clothing is the interest and hobby. With the subculture originating in Western Europe and United States, while later being globally spread due to the development of the internet and the nature of transnational capitalism. The Cambridge dictionary defines subculture as; "The way of life, customs, and ideas of a particular group of people within a society that are different from the rest of that society." (Cambridge Dictionary, N.D.) This definition gives a good vantage point to understanding subcultures, however, it has shortcomings which must be further discussed. The defining of a subculture is a difficult task, with subcultures having local definitions and understandings depending on regional and local differences. Symbols are an important factor in understanding subcultures and their organization and innerworkings, symbols are often the only visible defining factors which may separate subcultures from their mainstream culture. Ideas within a subculture will also vary between individuals, so will the definition of a subculture and boundaries for who is a member and who isn't. Fredrik Barth's (1969) book on ethnic groups and boundaries, is also useful to understanding contemporary boundaries and social life within subculture, and the boundaries which are socially created.

"[...] It entails a frequently quite complex organization of behaviour and social relations. The identification of another person as a fellow member of an ethnic group implies sharing a criteria for evaluation and judgement. It thus entails the assumption that the two are fundamentally "playing the same game" [...]" (Barth, 1969, p.15)

An important note on the study of subcultures is the fact that they do not exist or occupy a space isolated from mainstream culture, whether that is in music, fashion, or belief systems. Subcultures happen within an overall mainstream culture which itself is difficult to define and distinct. I view mainstream culture as an amalgamation of subcultures, where participation and membership are fluid aspects and most often up to an individual to decide. Individuals can be present and participate in different subcultures at the same time. Subcultures often come to light in short moments as a mainstream phenomenon, often as trends, however, engaged members and participants continue to participate even after these brief moments of mainstream acclaim. I position myself as studying a subculture which itself is part of a larger mainstream fashion

industry, with specific distinctions separating them, but menswear subculture does not happen in a bubble and does not exist in a bubble. Processes within menswear and the mainstream fashion industry are often similar, but with different points of views or focuses. Subcultures are difficult to understand and almost impossible to define, meaning that participants often may not view themselves as participating in a subculture, the social codes, which in this case is clothing are also difficult to define, unless you are a part of the subculture.

When discussing culture and subcultures in contemporary society I believe that it is inevitable to discuss the role of capitalism and its effects on the global economic system, as well as, societal and cultural systems. Capitalism itself, is a term which can mean many different things, depending on locality and a person's own lived life and thoughts and beliefs. Yanagisako (2002) defines capitalism as "[...] a complex and uneven historical process that entails heterogeneous capitalist practices shaped by diverse meanings, sentiments and representations." (Yanagisako, 2002, p.7) Capitalism must in our contemporary world, be understood not as an overbearing and devastating force which only seeks to dehumanize people, but as processes which has local variations and local meanings, with different effects of capitalism in different places.

## Menswear tailoring

The idea of fashion as a concept is a relatively new concept within human history. "The concept *fashion* has only existed since the 17<sup>th</sup> century" (Meinhold, 2013, p.19) Within the contemporary context of fashion and the fashion industry, there are many niches, with different cultural and societal contexts. I will be focusing on the niche and subculture of menswear tailoring. Menswear tailoring is a subculture which is based on men's clothing, more specifically, suits and tailored jacket and trousers. Tailored clothing in its classical sense is clothing, which is made by a tailor, a tailor is a trained clothing maker who makes and cuts the cloth of each piece of clothing and then sews each stitch of the piece until it is finished. Tailoring was most often made for wealthy and aristocratic citizens, with tailoring being a symbol of importance and wealth. "The development of a fashion industry was of utmost importance for the cohesion of Spain's heterogeneous bourgeoisie, a social group that relied on sartorial signs and symbols in their narratives of self-fashioning. (Wolters, 2020, p. 316) Tailored clothing originated in western Europe, mostly in empires of 17<sup>th</sup> century, where military officers and aristocrats wore uniforms every day. Wolters (2020) explains the close-

knit history between tailoring and uniforms, presenting a 19<sup>th</sup> century men's fashion journal (*The Tailor and Cutter; The London Tailor*), Published between 1871 and 1888.

“For a reasonable price, subscribers received a handsome fashion plate made by Spanish artists and printmakers in consultation with savvy tailors, and a fold-out, paper pattern or template to assist in the confection of various staples of the male wardrobe: from coats, pants and vests to particular articles needed in the crafting of uniforms for hunters, military men, judges, bullfighters and priests.” (Wolters, 2020, p. 318)

Tailoring as I defined it now, is now known as Bespoke tailoring, due to the development of tailoring, the vast majority of tailored clothing is not made by one single tailor who cuts and sews all of the clothing. Tailors most often worked on behalf of aristocratic families or monarchs, creating clothing for military officers. Tailored clothing and suits became what Titmarsh (2020) describes as “[...] from the battlefield to the boardroom, and then all aspects of modern life.” (Titmarsh, 2020, p.438) Over time tailored clothing for civilians became the main clientele. Still in the early years of civilian tailoring, it was still reserved for the wealthy and privileged in society. “The art of dress, from the earliest historical times, seems to have been considered an important study amongst the upper classes of society [...]” (Petrov, 2019, p.93) During the industrial revolution, sewing and weaving were mechanized, allowing for large clothing factories to be built. This made common tailoring cheaper and more accessible for the working classes. In late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe, tailored clothing was the everyday wear for most men, from miners' uniforms to civil servants' suits, even though the quality of the products were nothing near the quality that wealthy people wore, and their wardrobe was sparse compared to the upper class. From the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and the slow creation of a professional middle class, who were not forced to do physical manual labor such as the working class, but that had office jobs and would work in the city, started using tailored clothing as their work uniform. This is from banks to corporations and civil servants; all professional men wore suits and tailored clothing to work. The societal changes which were happening at this time, which meant that there was a class of people, not working-class men in factories nor, aristocrats or the landed gentry, were now earning a fair wage and working jobs which allowed for them to have leisure time. “In terms of leisure time and spending on leisure goods and services, the gains have been widespread. Across the twentieth century, Americans of all income classes have enjoyed better living standards.” (Surdam, 2015, p.6) Surdam (2015, p.68) further discusses the fact the increase of monetary expenditure on participatory leisure activities. These leisure activities, mostly sports such as, rugby, cricket, polo, and several others, became social gatherings were men still wanted to wear tailoring and look professional, but they could wear more casual fabrics and have several suits instead of a couple for work.

This increased demand at the factories and tailoring shops were starting to spring up all around Western Europe and United States. All of these processes created an industry which started to cater to more and more men over the 20<sup>th</sup> century, due to cheaper production methods and a growing middle class, with more and more men being allowed a university education. Boys would aspire to wear what they saw their fathers, film stars and musicians wear, which for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was tailored clothing. During the 1990s, I would argue there was a shift in fashion, to a mainstream casualization of clothing, tailored clothing was seen as too conservative and only used by old men. Casual tailoring disappeared throughout the decade, although most men still wore a suit and tailored clothing to work. Coinciding with this development was the idea and industry of fast fashion. Fast fashion is defined by the Cambridge dictionary as: “clothes that are made and sold cheaply, so that people can buy new clothes often.” (Cambridge dictionary, N.D.) This is a simple definition which needs more context and deeper discussion, but it sums up the most important factors of fast fashion, the price means accessibility and the frequent purchases mean high turnover of clothing and high profits for companies. This development was seen as a stark contrast to classic men’s tailoring, where quality meant more than quantity. This in turn started a sharp decline in menswear interest, many brands and tailoring shops went bankrupt, with tailoring seemingly going back to only being for wealthy old men. In the late 2000s emerged, what was deemed #menswear, the hashtag there due to the fact that people would post their outfits online with that as a caption, this era let tailoring back into the mainstream.

“For those who participated in classic menswear and trad forums, there was disdain for what is known as ‘#menswear’. #menswear is also an Internet phenomenon, but it is distinct from classic menswear, and is located mostly on Twitter, blogs and Instagram. It is characterized by contemporary and dandified interpretations of classic menswear pieces. Where forums were seen by my interview participants as sites of authentic style, #menswear was seen as commercially driven and ephemeral. It was rejected because it was fashion.” (Weiner, 2019, p. 11-12)

However, as Weiner (2019, p.11-12) discusses, it was not classical tailoring shops with focus on heritage and detail. Now, it was the fast fashion companies who started a new trend, to sell even more clothing. This meant that production was still bad quality and focus was on produce and sell cheap clothes that people buy often. This trend lasted for some years, but then diminished and I believe the creation of the menswear subculture was started, with the internet, those who never stopped wearing classical tailoring, could connect and share ideas and tips and knowledge.



“Members of these online menswear communities spend their leisure time engaged in extensive textual discussions of men’s clothing, contributing to online forums by reviewing garments, describing experiences with tailors, recounting visits to specialist boutiques, comparing manufacturers, providing information on garments they have purchased and posting photographs of their daily outfits in ‘What are you wearing today?’ discussion threads.” (Weiner, 2019, p.6)

Weiner (2019) further discusses the way in which specific terminology is used within these online communities, in a sense of rationalizing their participation. “These men used the metaphor of ‘investing’ to describe their fashion buying, describing it as part of a process of developing expert knowledge.” (Weiner, 2019, p.6) This global network was no longer isolated to pockets in society but could rather find a community of likeminded individuals. Since World War 2, tailoring became an international affair, with African and Asian tailoring hubs being developed, all of these regional places with their own local variation of production and tailoring. This has also changed in contemporary menswear, tastes and knowledge is certainly more global, less local.

Briefly explaining the history of tailored clothing and its development to what we now know as contemporary menswear, is important to understanding the context of this paper. I argue that this history and this subculture, is not a natural process which eventually would have happened anywhere in the world at any time, it is a specific cultural system with specific history in the modern western society. Without the development and spread of capitalism, there would have been no spread in tailored clothing and no spread of the concept of having clothing as a hobby and being part of a subculture revolving around tailored clothing. This is also true for fast fashion and the concept of mass consumption, where clothing has become one of the largest industries in the world. According to Statista (Statista, 2022) The worldwide fashion industry in 2021 was worth an astounding 1.5 trillion USD. This is expected to grow to 2 trillion USD by 2026, meaning that it is also an industry which is growing rapidly. I believe that this is due to the spread of capitalism and the creation of an ever-growing middle-class in large countries such as India, China, and Brazil.

“However, since the nineties, consumerism has run rampant in developing countries too. This has particularly been noted with respect to the emerging middle classes in South East Asia. The “will to consume seemed inexhaustible, and appetites insatiable. This rage to consume [...]” (Chua, 2000: xii) (Lange, Meier, 2009, p.v)

As discussed earlier, the growth of the professional wage labor classes, which have emerged especially in eastern Asia, Europe, and North America, have all increased leisure activities. These developments must also be seen with local and cultural context; however, this also means

most likely that subcultures and niches within fashion will also expand. This will be with local and cultural differences which may show themselves in taste or aesthetic. The emerging middle class is where menswear subculture and tailoring come in, due to the fact that this is a growing industry which will continue to grow after a couple of decades in decline.

The suit has been an important staple of a western man's closet for around a century, with it being a symbol of success, hard work and middle-class culture. Tailoring, especially since the 1990's and the "casualization" of society and culture has been connected to the idea and ideal of classical style and being a "gentleman". "[...] it was not just style they sought, it was what they called 'timeless style' or 'classic style'. [...] Whereas fashion was seen as ephemeral, certain forms of style were seen as having the potential to last a lifetime." (Weiner, 2019, p. 13) This has been an important marketing tool for fashion and menswear brands the last decades. The vagueness and ambiguous term of the "gentleman" leaves readers and consumers with an empty sentiment in which they can fill with their own ideas of what a gentleman is, the reoccurring notions are, good manners, wealth, fame, and a certain way of speaking. I don't believe that anybody could define what they mean when they discuss these topics, yet it is still a connection which is important to understanding the idea and place of tailoring in contemporary society. Tailoring still represents a certain capitalist idea of success in which suits are prevalent in prestigious careers such as finance, law, shipping, and civil servants. These connotations I argue, are an important reason for the mainstream interests in tailoring, while within the menswear subculture these sentiments do exist, probably amongst a large part of the community, but much likely less than on a mainstream scale. There is a certain idea of the past and how society used to be according to many menswear enthusiasts, therefore I will later discuss menswear as a means of showing support and reminiscing over both a political, but also cultural way of life which existed in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## Theoretical framework

Anthropology of fashion and clothing in contemporary society has been an overlooked topic regarding material culture and the role of commodities in social relations. Yanagisako (2002) and Rofel, Yanagisako (2018) are two of the most influential works in the 21<sup>st</sup> century within transnational capitalism and the clothing industry. "In proposing a model of culture and

capitalism as mutually constituted processes rather than as distinct structures or institutions [...]” (Yanagisako, 2002, p.6) The study of fashion as an integral role in capitalist processes is an important topic for this thesis. Karen Hansen (2004) argues that consumption should not only be understood as markets and economics, but also as cultural processes that construct identity. These processes are shown in the connection of symbolic value and capitalist value.

Understanding capitalist definitions and processes is important when understanding contemporary material culture and symbolic value creation. Marx (2013) English translation of his classic book *Das Kapital* is useful as a starting point when analyzing capitalist societies and categorizations of topics such as commodities, kinship, economic and symbolic value. Kinship’s role in contemporary capitalist culture is an important part of Yanagisako (2002) and Rofler, Yanagisako (2018) with their empirical studies of the fashion industry in Italy and China. Using Gershon (2005) as a contemporary study on agency within a neoliberal system, allows for a broader and more relevant use of Marx’s (2013) theories in a global and contemporary context.

Commodities is also an important theoretical topic in this thesis. Appadurai (1986), Miller (1987), Bourdieu (1979) and Latour (2005) are my main sources of theoretical background when discussing the roles of commodities in the creation of symbolic value and aesthetic authority. Latour’s (2005) views on objects as agents is useful when studying commodities within a menswear context. Objects being seen as agents of social connections, both inhabiting their own agency, and representing the social connection in its process as a commodity. Appadurai’s (1986) distinction between luxury commodities and other mainstream commodities and the knowledge regarding these commodities is important for their social and symbolic valuation. This concept and process of knowledge and value are important to understanding the restrictiveness and exclusivity which is in menswear.

The theorization of elites is also an important theoretical aspect of this thesis, Marcus (1969) and Yanagisako (2002) are going to be my main influences in those discussions. Study of elites and a culture which could be called culture of elites, is a difficult topic and unusual topic in Anthropology. Marcus (1969) defines elites as; “In the social sciences, elite has remained a flexible cover term that refers to the rich, powerful and privileged in any society, past or present, Western or non-Western.” (Marcus, 1969, p.3) Elites are therefore a loosely defined group. Elites have various degrees of influence and could be elites within different fields or in certain

contexts. Therefore, defining the elites you are studying, and research is important when constructing the field. Traditionally anthropology studied peoples and communities which could be seen as less powerful and lower in the social hierarchy than the anthropologists themselves. The elites who were studied were usually elites in an enclosed local context in small villages or communities.

“In anthropology, a focus on elites has come far more “naturally” to ethnographers in cultures which explicit hierarchical orders (e.g., India and African kingdoms). Historically, a focus on elites is most obvious in literature dealing with societies where state or class formation is weak, leaving elites a clearer factor of agency: [...]” (Marcus, 1969, p.21)

These elites differ from contemporary elites due to the transnational nature of elites who represent a relatively large, yet diverse group of individuals globally. Marcus (1969, p.9) also discusses that earlier anthropological studies of elites have been done by researchers who aren't part of the same socio-economic or class background as their informants, creating a sense of “otherness” amongst the anthropology of elites. A digital and physical fieldwork is important to understanding the processes of elite culture and reproduction of it. “By “reproduction” feminist scholars meant more than the biological processes through which new generations of humans are produced; they also meant the social production of humans with labor capacity.” (Yanagisako, 2002, p. 12) This reproduction may apply to both working class laborers, but also to the reproduction of elites and their class ideal.

## Method

This thesis is based on findings from physical and online ethnographic fieldwork. I have used qualitative methods, specifically fieldwork and participation observation. To define fieldwork, I am going to use the definition that Robben, Sluka (2012) use,

“[...] Roger Keesing and Andrew Strathern define fieldwork as follows: For most Anthropologists, the immediate problems of understanding and the sources of data come from what has come to be known as *fieldwork*: intimate participation in a community and observation of modes of behavior and the organization of social life. The process of recording and interpreting another people's way of life is call *ethnography*. (Robben, Sluka, 2012, p.8)

Their definition is a classical definition of fieldwork and shows that the key to ethnographic research is interpreting another person's life and their behavior and social organization. This is done in the field, through participant observation. Immersing yourself in their world, their way of life, their thoughts and their ideals is important to understanding them. “[...] participation

observation in its most uncomplicated form is an inimitable method for collecting information about people and matters related to them in some situation.” (Jorgensen, 2020, p.2) This definition helps to understand what I would argue are the two most important aspects in participation observation and fieldwork, these are, collecting information about people in social situations, interacting with informants and immersing yourself in their lives. This is important to understanding ethnographic fieldwork because research, especially in the physical field must be done when you are with your informants. Construction of the field is important to explain when discussing the menswear subculture. That participants that I have spoken to or researched, may also be involved in other subcultures or communities, and only have shown one specific part of their life or personality to me as a researcher. The nuances in research participants are a contemporary aspect of anthropological research. The field I have studied has both been an urban field and a digital field which took place in closed forums and public social media accounts. Dual fieldwork sites have been a challenge and interesting, with the challenges often coming in form of prioritization of time. Deciding when to do physical fieldwork or digital fieldwork was a choice, I had to make almost every day. During the fieldwork I followed NSD guidelines for ethical research.

The physical aspect of my fieldwork has been conducted in an urban context, at a tailoring shop where I am employed, in the city where I have lived all my life. This creates a situation where I am studying a familiar context, I am doing fieldwork at “home”. This produced certain challenges, which I will discuss later. The most important thing about studying a familiar field as a researcher is positioning yourself and understanding that you do come from a certain background with certain ideas and ideals. There are no researchers who are blank pages when entering the field but reflecting over the field and the construction of the field when you are studying at “home” is extremely important. My physical construction of the field was quite clear, if I was at one of the two main shops where I did fieldwork whether as an employee or only for fieldwork purposes, I was in varying degrees in the field with a researcher’s mindset. Social events with the staff I studied or entering similar shops, I would have to have a clear idea and clear distinction between being there participating as a researcher, or in a non-researcher capacity. This was something I was aware of before starting fieldwork, I attempted to find a balance, however, I think that there isn’t an option of being either/or and most often I combined both of my roles at the same time. My fieldwork at the shops was participation observation and involved informal conversations with staff and customers, I anonymized all my informants, only regarding to the staff in notes as their role within the company. I rarely had my notebook

in place when having informal conversations, as to not disturb anybody or make them feel uncomfortable, I wrote down notes once the conversation was finished.

A limitation of this research and method is the fact that I cannot confirm the sentiments and experiences of every single menswear member, being forced to draw a consensus from the forums and ethnographic experiences due to the vague requirement for viewing oneself as being a part of the menswear culture. When doing digital research, the sheer globally diverse membership groups of forums and blogs, meant that even though they all shared an experience in menswear they could have extremely different day-to-day lives and experiences. This entails using different information amongst informants who view themselves as being a part of a constructed menswear subculture.

“Unlike earlier generations of anthropologists who thought of culture as a tangible fact we now realize that culture is a creation on our part. Whether construed in the singular, and denoting a philosophical counterpoint to nature, or in the plural, designating sociological entities, we can no longer claim culture to be an objective fact.” (Hastrup, 1990, p.47)

The reality is that these creations have been a necessary creation on my part, due to the fact that community members don't necessarily view themselves as being part of a subculture, but rather only view their menswear peers as random men who have the same interest and hobby. This has been a challenge, but my role as an “insider” and as an employee in the clothing industry has allowed me to understand where to draw the subcultural boundaries and create an idea of how people are viewed as part of the community or as outsiders. This construction of the field process has in some ways been equally about defining who is not in the community and therefore, not my main informants. I decided to create this distinction because of the knowledge which is needed to be an insider in the community means that those who aren't viewed as “insiders” may not understand my conversational topics or may not be willing to have a prolonged discussion or conversation on menswear topics. I would gather this information mostly through conversations and talking to customers and people at the shop.

Conducting digital ethnography presents many opportunities and challenges. It is similar to anything else on the internet, there are many aspects which are helpful, such as the fact that you can go back in time and see things written or expressed in the past by informants. My research methods in my digital fieldwork were more observational than participatory.

“Research on the Internet is valuable both because it can generate insight into a new and important communication channel and because the Internet provides the opportunity to study known phenomena (e.g. formation of norms, dissemination of information, communication, formation of groups) in new ways.” (Elgesem, 2015, p.14-15)

My main sources were forums, blogs, and social media. On the forums and blogs my methods were observational, meaning I observed the discussions and would follow threads to see what was being written and discussed. All users on the forum and blog are anonymous except for the administrators on the blogs and the writer on the blog. Also, I believe that using these online platforms as a means of viewing general discussions and topics in menswear is useful due to the participatory nature of online forums and blogs. If you are participating and spending your time on these platforms, then you are an engaged member and active in the community. There is also the fact that digital ethnography allows me to broaden my geographical view, allowing me to view further and more people than if I had only done physical fieldwork. In a niche subculture with members spread all across the world, this is useful for research and is one of the main ways the menswear community connects with each other. Digital research has become an important aspect of anthropology and how we view ethnographic research.

“So an anthropology that is tasked with encompassing and understanding the digital world is perhaps also the final repudiation of that initial illusion that there have ever been societies outside of trajectories of change. It may grant us a more balanced or rounded discipline that is equally concerned with the entire gamut of human experience.” (Miller, 2018, p. 1)

Elgesem (2002) discusses ethical issues connected to online research, where the public/private distinction is difficult to draw in online research, in forums and blogs.

“The distinction between the private and the public domain may be difficult to draw with regard to information concerning behaviour which is imparted and stored electronically, for instance on the Internet. When using material drawn from such interaction, researchers must give necessary consideration to the fact that people’s perceptions of what is private and what is public communication in such media may vary.” (Elgesem, 2002, p. 203)

Even though they have created an account on the forum and partaken in discussions in the forums, I doubt that most of them would believe that their direct words would be used in research. Therefore, I did not directly quote anyone from a forum, only used their discussions as an indication on general feelings and opinions within the community. With the forums having tens of thousands of members, receiving consent to use their information directly in research would be almost impossible, this is one of the difficulties with online research. Blogs are a different space which are much more public and could be seen as published works by writers,

therefore, using them as references with their expertise, makes them more available with correct citation.

The other digital field of my fieldwork was social media, more specifically Instagram. The use of social media within my research field has become an increasingly important aspect of the subculture. Social media being a way to connect with other community members and in many cases, an ability to visually show new purchases or outfits. Social media has become an integral part of many people's lives, "This layer of platforms influences human interaction on an individual and community level, as well as on a larger societal level, while the worlds of online and offline are increasingly interpenetrating." (Dijck, 2013, p.2) The increasingly intertwining of the physical and digital world of social media, means that the same ethical and methodological questions must be asked when discussing digital and physical fieldwork. Ensuring anonymity and not using an individual's Instagram or social media post directly, rather as an indication or idea of what is happening in the community. This idea of public/private is distorted on social media with people having different experiences and definitions of what is private. Although, social media is also home to companies which have social media pages for the specific reason of reaching the public, I argue that using these accounts directly is reasonable, due to the openly public space their accounts are.

The problem of private/public considerations could also be said for customers visiting the store, with my fieldwork being in a shop, I kept my researcher role secret, so as to not hurt the business of the shop which allowed me to do fieldwork there. This meant that I did not use any direct citations from customers, but as with the online research, I had informal conversations, trying to discuss topics which I could use for my research and kept a keen ear on conversations being had in the shop. The staff I worked with in the shop, all agreed to me doing fieldwork in the store and I anonymized all of them. Dual fieldwork sites have been both a challenge and interesting, with the challenges often coming in form of prioritization of time. Deciding when to do physical fieldwork and digital fieldwork was a choice I had to make on daily basis. My dual field allowed to generate a general knowledge of my research due to the local and global aspect of the research. However, it could also be that I by researching digital and physical, was not able to have enough time to study either of them deeply enough, but I think it is an important aspect to discuss when doing dual fieldwork.



Methods of studying elites are difficult, the main methodological hinder being access, as I have discussed earlier and will further discuss. My own socioeconomic background allows me access to a specific group of “elites” who are the main customers at the store I worked at. My job as an employee firstly allowed me to be in a physical space where they feel comfortable and at home, my socio-economic background meant that they trusted me and knew that I was an “insider” having and understanding much of their taste and how to interact with them. I was inspired by Karen Ho (2009) “My particular strategy in “studying up”, to break through the barriers of security and public relations, was based on institutional kinship. To enable this research, I leveraged my socioeconomic background and connections with elite universities [...] [Ho, 2009, p. 13) The barriers of security and public relations referred to are often how “elites” are able to deny researchers to study them or their social lives. Often, they don’t have to engage with researcher and are in a position where they can deny the researcher the opportunit. With social events or their places of leisure, shopping etc. being exclusive to their peers and unreachable for certain people. Through their power they are able to create an enclosed environment and culture which is mostly studied from the outside, with mostly external observation, not participant observation. My fieldwork on “elites” was only in form of participant observation, this is where I experienced the enclosed aspect of “elite” culture. I reached out to customers of the shop who I knew fit into the socioeconomic and cultural definition of “elites” and approached them on the idea of allowing me to interview them, which every one of them declined, due to what they said was lack of time and being too busy. This is the main challenge with “studying up”, being viewed as important enough for them to allocate time to your research. This is often due to the power relations between researchers and their informants, in classical anthropology, informants often didn’t have much agency. Contemporary elites have the agency necessary to deny access. Discussing the issue of accessibility amongst elites, Marcus (1969) argues that researchers must be open to anyone seen as an “elite” within their field of research. “Accessibility is a fundamental factor affecting not which elite groups can be studied, but who in any field of elite relationships will serve as subjects and informants for ethnographers.” (Marcus, 1969, p. 38) The enclosed nature of “elite” society is a difficult barrier, however, the research and understanding of our society which can be achieved through the research of elites is important to understanding contemporary society and transnational cultural and economic processes.

For my research, one of the main challenges when doing fieldwork at the tailoring shop, was the fact that I was both there in a capacity as a researcher and an employee. This was especially a difficult situation be in when I started fieldwork, deciding as a researcher which role to take in different situations, whether it was helping a customer buying trousers or being at a bar with my colleagues. I believe that finding a middle-ground was the best solution. This meant that I still analyzed conversations and interactions, however, I had a certain restraint on the analytical questions, which I feared if I didn't have, would have either startled most people or felt that I was interrogating them. An example of this would be that I wouldn't write down conversations while I was having the conversation, rather listen and remember important points and write them down when the conversation was finished. I believe that having an open study of customers, would have meant breaking my responsibility as an employee and affect an informant's trust or willingness to discuss certain topics with me. The dual nature of this research also meant that I was only doing fieldwork as an employee while doing physical fieldwork. I believe that this allowed me to see the research topics both with the focus of an insider and of an outsider. The combining of fieldwork and employee role did become easier to manage later in the fieldwork. Researching as an employee also garnered me access as a researcher which I would not have been afforded if I wasn't an employee at a menswear store.

“Normally anthropologists are empathetic with their subjects and become increasingly so the longer they are involved with them. However, as members of Western liberal society, ethnographers of elites may have difficulty in developing such a natural working empathy, especially if they are studying elites in their home societies.” (Marcus, 1969, p.23)

In my thesis and especially on the aspect of studying elites within the menswear community, I was able to do research in this field without many problems from informants due to my employment in the industry. I think that my study of this field and my easy assimilation with the informants, both shop staff and the customers was partly due to my socio-economic background. My background is closely linked to the socio-economic background of customers at the shop who may be classified as “elites”. I have grown up in the same neighborhoods and in some instances, I know their children or younger family members from childhood. This has offered me an easy way in order to study them and their role in the menswear community. I did not need much time to earn their trust. I went to the same schools and encompassed much of the same taste. This is of course not true for every single customer or informant, but in a general sense, I believe that my background and role in the menswear industry prior to researching the topic, allowed me easier access. There are also challenges applicable to this fact, being an

“insider” means that there most likely are aspects of the community or subculture which I might have overlooked and not noticed. This is an aspect of ethnographic research, the positionality of the researcher in the field. The role of fieldwork in a familiar context is complicated and entails self-reflection over the field. This may have hindered my thesis; however, I believe it may have been a necessary aspect when discussing “elites” and a culture which is closed and confined, an insulate culture which isn’t easily studied as an outsider. This closeness to the field meant that I needed a construction of the field, which was also physical, with the two stores I was at most, being my physical boundaries of the field. My physical fieldwork was also done at “home” in the city and specific neighborhoods where I was born and grew up. This entailed certain difficulties and opportunities similar to those of being an employee and a researcher at the same time. Doing fieldwork in a “home” setting creates the challenges of not going into fieldwork studying a foreign context or setting. This means that the ignorance that is a part of the fieldwork or foreign cultures or countries is replaced by knowledge of the area and certain expectations of the field. There are certain positive aspects of studying “home” as well, the first is that as a researcher I know where I should look and what areas are relevant for my research, this may also lead to overlooking important aspects or new revelations which an “outsider” may see. There also the distinction of being “in the field” and “home” which has earlier been an important aspect of anthropology. I think that the most important part of studying at “home” is positionality and realizing that as a researcher, I am going to overlook certain things and will have biases which will affect my fieldwork. Attempting to go into the field as bias free and objective as possible is an ideal in all of anthropology whether you are studying at “home” or in a foreign country, the same questions are asked, only when in a “home” setting these challenges are heightened. Nordquest (2007) discusses this in the context of U.S. researchers doing fieldwork in the U.S. “[...] arguing that though the balance of alternating identities may be inherent to all anthropological endeavors, it is especially profound and unique for U.S.-based researchers.” (Nordquest, 2007, p.19)

Dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic was my main challenge during my fieldwork. The pandemic was at its worst during my fieldwork, affecting both the research and my opportunities to meet people. Firstly, during the spring of 2021, which was the start of my fieldwork, all non-essential shops were forced to close by the Norwegian government. This meant that only food stores and pharmacies could stay open. This forced me to focus mostly on digital fieldwork at the start of my fieldwork. There was also throughout my fieldwork a recommendation from the Norwegian government to stay away from crowded places and

minimalize contact with other people, especially those who aren't close contacts. Because of this there was a general sense of hesitation both personally but also on behalf of my informants and potential informants to meet physically. Unfortunately, I was not able to have any formal interviews with informants, I tried to ask them to have it digitally, but this was turned down by the informants I contacted. Covid-19 reduced my range of methods and my opportunities to physically meet informants and do fieldwork in the shop. Most of my physical fieldwork was done during the summertime and the short gaps of 2021 where the Covid-19 regulations were loosened. However, the pandemic also allowed me to focus on my digital fieldwork, and I believe that it also in some ways forced those active in menswear to take a digital approach to the subculture, increasing participation on social media, blogs, and forums. This shows how digital fieldwork and digital ethnography is a useful tool for anthropologists in contemporary society. "It also works toward an emergent form of digital fieldwork that unfolds in the context of inaccessible sites, whether due to COVID-19 and travel restrictions, or due to geopolitical conflict, extraction and violence, securitization, territorial restrictions and infectious diseases." (Gabrys, 2022, p. 229) This shows digital fieldwork is a positive aspect of contemporary anthropology, allowing research across national borders, with new methods of fieldwork. Digital fieldwork was a good choice of method during the pandemic due to the fact that I couldn't travel, informants didn't want to meet and the governmental restrictions on human contact. It saw an increase of digital use, meaning that probably, there was more activity on the blogs, forums, and social media than there would have been without the pandemic. Seeing digital fieldwork as an asset and a medium to research and try to understand most people's lives today.

## **4. Field**

My field has been split between two spaces, physical and digital. In this chapter I will first describe and explain the physical field, then discuss the digital field. Lastly, I will discuss the relationship between the physical and digital field and how when studying a global subculture, you must study both fields to fully understand the culture and workings of the community.

## Oslo

The physical field I have studied is in Oslo, more specifically a clothing brand in Oslo which specializes in menswear tailoring. Being one of the only brands and stores which focuses specifically on menswear tailoring meant that the company and their two locations were a perfect match. I also happen to work at the company as part time staff in the stores. The fact that I am also born and mostly raised in Oslo, means that I had a great amount of knowledge of both the field as in the store and the areas in which I did my research. After my description of the stores and description of the area, I will discuss challenges and advantages to studying both your own workplace and an area which you are familiar with.

## My shop

The company I have been studying focuses on menswear tailoring and clothing, with their main inspiration being Neapolitan tailoring, but with a Scandinavian sense of minimalism and altered to Scandinavian tastes. I will be discussing the Neapolitan styling of tailoring compared to others in a later chapter. The company was started in Oslo, meaning they are a locally owned middle-sized business with 11 employees at the time of writing. The staff is comprised of two owners, who used to work for the largest department store in Norway as managers and buyers for their luxury department. According to them, they saw a missing part of the fashion industry in Norway in which most well-made Italian tailoring is only classical Italian brands, whose prices have multiplied over the years. They created the brand in 2010 and started selling wholesale to department store in Norway and Sweden, after a couple of years they opened their first store located nearby the National Theatre. Gradually growing from then until now, with a constant development of the products, the brand stopped selling wholesale and focused on producing their own clothing and selling some curated external brands which seek to fulfill the gaps that the house brand doesn't produce. Also using large well-known brands such as a couple of English Northampton based shoemakers to attract customers and as a sign of product quality in the shop. The company now has two physical stores in Oslo, with one women's store next door to the main men's shop. I did not do any fieldwork on the women's shop; however, they are part of monthly company meetings and social events. I did not research the women's department, only their store manager who also runs the business. This is since they operate in a different section of the fashion industry than the menswear that I have studied, focusing much

more on high fashion and designer clothing. The two owners, who also are brothers, have two different roles within in the company now. One oversees the online store, and the other is a store manager at the main store and head of design, focusing on production and contact with the factories and producers. There are three other full-time staff in the store. The first one being the other store manager at the main shop and a designer. Unlike the other store manager and designer, he is always in store and helps customers on a day-to-day basis while also being the main contact for our more artisanal workshops and external brands. He has been at the shop for around six to seven years now. He is viewed as being the most knowledgeable employee within menswear at the store, being the go-to person to ask questions about history, design, and production, who makes what and how they make it. He is also the person who knows most of the “famous” people in the subculture and is viewed as an expert by other people in the community. Hiring him as the first store manager was a way of purchasing legitimacy within the subculture and gaining knowledge about the industry. Another one of the staff works with the owner who oversees the online store, he is responsible for online orders and returns, also, customer service and communication with our warehouse and shipping partners. His office area is in the main store and therefore, he also functions as a store employee helping customers. The last full-time employee is head of social media and advertising, he is also the brand photographer. He also works with company partnerships, such as events with companies where they might have two hours alone in the store with only their employees. He takes photos for the webstore and photographs for the stores social media which is the only advertising that the brand does. The main social media the store uses is Instagram and Facebook, giving them full autonomy on how they want to create their branding and vision of advertising. This also allows for cheap marketing and being able to reach out to many potential customers. It also allows for more control over the creation of the brands image and how they want their clothing to perceived and they have full agency of “world creation” which is an important aspect of clothing stores. The shop I worked at, viewed social media advertising as less “in your face” and more of a subtle version of marketing, which adds to the exclusivity of the shop as the shop doesn’t seem to be advertising to everybody. All of the full-time employees are in their late 20s and mid-30s, meaning all of the employees are quite young, with all of them having worked in the clothing industry for many years. They are all from Scandinavia, with two Norwegians and two Swedes and one Dane. The rest of the staff are part-time workers (including myself), with varying percentages of employment, all of them except for one are students, studying different degrees from law to business administration. The part-time workers are the main in-store staff, helping customers choosing fabrics, suits, and everything in store. A couple of them help the

full-time employees with their job, such as helping with answering online customer service. One of the part-time workers is also the main model of clothing for social media and the online shop. The last part-time worker oversees social media and does not work in the store, he maintains the social medias and is responsible for updating the stores digital content. Most of the part-time workers have not worked in clothing shops earlier, with them mainly applying for the job due to personal interest of menswear clothing. All 11 of the staff are men, mostly from Norway, three of them from Oslo and the rest from different small towns in Norway. The staff in the shop are employed in different roles, however, due to the size of the company, there is a flexibility in their positions, for example, during the design process the two main designers will show their ideas for the next season to all the staff to hear their opinion and ideas. This creates an environment where even if you are only a part-time worker you can still influence the direction of the brand, both in terms of the collections, but also in improving the company. The staff has a private Facebook messenger chat, where they discuss matters regarding the store and if you have any questions regarding an online order, production or anything related to the store than you can ask everyone at the same time. There are also monthly meetings, discussing what is going to happen the coming month, either if that is upcoming events, new collections, or the financial situation of the company.

To create a context of the day-to-day experiences and workings of the shop, I will explain a breakdown of a typical day. Arrive at around 9:45 AM, turn off the alarm and log into the computer, logging into our staff accounts on the computer, vacuum the floors and if it's in the winter, try to clean the floors and remove the dirt and salt from the outside. The most important areas to make sure are clean are the fittings rooms since that is where customers take off their clothes and you don't want someone to put their clothes on dirty floors. The next task is to check the online shop for online orders. When ordering online, products may either be sent from the external warehouse or if they are not in stock there, then the store staff must pack and send it to the warehouse. On a normal day there may be 10-20 different orders which need to be packed in store, making it an important part of the day. Then, the focus is to double check the clothing that are going to the tailors for alterations or repairs, it is important to make sure that all the right information and instructions has been written on the paper. This relationship between staff and tailor usually works fluidly without misunderstandings. In certain cases, often due to a customer having an unusual request or a different body type. An abnormality could be for example, different length legs or arms, sloping shoulders and these sorts of alterations need a more hands on discussion or conversation between staff and tailor. This conversation happens

physically when the tailor picks the clothing up, where staff can visually show their difficulties with the clothing. The other way of conversation is through phone, either the stores phone or on the staff's private cell phones. This communication can be regarding how quickly an alteration can be done, if an alteration or repair is possible or any other kind of questions staff would have for the tailor. Staff can also send pictures of clothing to the tailor if they are having difficulties explaining the problem over the phone. This communication happens all day long and from my experience with the tailor, they will answer you throughout the day, including outside of work hours. This communication goes both ways as well, with the tailor sending messages to staff if they have a question regarding a product or if they want to make sure that they understood what the staff wants to be altered on the clothing. The tailor picks up and delivers clothing at around 12, at about the same time the warehouse employees deliver stock to the store and pick up online orders. All the practical duties must be done, to ensure a smooth operation for all the staff. Then, DHL's courier arrives with the online returns, which staff process in-store, opening the boxes, making sure the product isn't worn or damaged, packing down the cardboard box and preparing the product to be placed back in the shop, this usually means that the products need to be steamed or ironed, depending on the product. These tasks must be done while also keeping attention to customers, helping them if needed and most often giving them style advice.

Despite casual clothing taking more and more of the sales, the suit is still the backbone of the shop. Therefore, helping customers choose the correct suit for their use and assisting them with the alterations needed to create a well-fitting and comfortable suit is an important aspect of working as in-store staff. In a shop, the first step to creating a suit is to design the house cut suit, most often, this begins with deciding what geographical style of tailoring the shop wishes to base their suit off. At the shop I did fieldwork in, Neapolitan tailoring is the style of choice. The details of the Neapolitan suit are a lower buttonhole, classic 10cm lapels, a soft shoulder with a shirt construction. This differs from the British tradition where the construction of the arm is over the shoulder, in Neapolitan tailoring, the shoulder goes over the shirt and the seam is sewn. The opening gauge of the suit is also often curved and with patch pockets and a slanted breast pocket, a higher skirt on the back and higher armholes are also details of Neapolitan tailoring. When you have the design and style decided then the focus is the construction. The construction of a suit is essential to the price point, the style and the quality of the suit, a shop can have the most expensive and best quality fabric they want, if their construction is cheap and badly made then it is not a well-made suit. The most important aspect of a suit is the jacket.





(Style girlfriend, 2014)

This photo shows the three options of jacket construction. When discussing the three, the important thing to remember is that they all serve different purposes, Half Canvas and Fused are good constructions for reasonably priced suits which are only used on limited occasions. The shop I did fieldwork in have all their suits full canvas, this construction method is both more time consuming but also much more costly to produce, however, it creates the best quality suit, both in terms of longevity and durability, the suit will form itself to the body through use. The armholes, buttonholes and shoulders are hand-stitched, creating suits with individual personality and craftsmanship involved in the production.

There are two different categories of suits, each involving different processes and ways of creating or altering the suit. Firstly, the most accessible and common category is a Ready-to-Wear suit, this means a suit which is already made at the factory, with jacket and trousers, made in standardized sizes in our house cut. House cut means the fit and construction of the certain brand or shop. Their suit may fit differently to one of their competitors, depending on their style and how they have constructed and designed their suit as I explained earlier. When buying a Ready-to-wear suit, the most important aspect of the fit is the shoulders, due to most of the construction and frame of the jacket being in the shoulders, this also means that shoulder alterations are highly discouraged. Quite often when buying a Ready-to-wear suit, the customer will need to have sleeve length and trouser length adjusted, ensuring a good fit. A ready-to-

wear suit is an accessible way of buying a suit without needing a personal tailor and at my shop all the staff are trained in doing the necessary alterations and knowing what to do with a suit to give it the best fit.

The other option at the shop is Made-to-measure. This means that measurements are sent to a tailor and a specific suit is sewn just for the one customer and their measurements. This process involves taking measurements of a customer's body and using a fitting sample, which is a suit in a plain fabric and a basic sizing without any details, to see what must be altered. There are two main differences between MTM (Made-to-measure) and RTW (Ready-to-wear), firstly, MTM (Made-to-measure) allows customers to pick whatever fabric they want from different weavers and fabric shops, everything from linen, silk, cashmere, wool, tweed, or a mix. The other main difference is the possibility of alterations on a factory level. Whether it is having a shorter or longer jacket, wider shoulders, if you have poor posture or uneven legs/arms, all these bodily qualities are able to be accommodated for, meaning the fit will be unique for that person. A customer can also choose from a whole range of details, color of buttonholes, two or three jacket holes, double or single vents in jacket, darts in jacket, pleated or flat-front trouser, belt loops or side adjusters. All these details create a unique suit which the customer can do whatever they wish to do with. This also reflects in the price, which is substantially higher than a ready-to-wear suit and takes 4/5 weeks to make.

Understanding the history and demographics of Oslo is important to understanding the location and history of both men's tailoring and the menswear subculture in Norway. Oslo is Norway's capital, also being its economic and cultural capital, truly Norway's only large city. The Oslo we know today was mostly shaped during the Danish-Norwegian union which lasted until 1814 and the Swedish-Norwegian union which lasted until 1905. Oslo being the largest city in Norway also meant that it was home to most of the aristocracy and the upper class who owned factories and businesses. Oslo's working-class districts were concentrated by Akers River, due to the factories and mills using the river as water supply. These areas were densely inhabited with poor living conditions and pollution. Oslo at the time was not a large city, meaning that the burgeoning upper-class factory and business owners, wanted to live close to their factories, but not in the densely populated and polluted areas. The solution being, moving to the areas where the old aristocracy in Oslo lived, which was by the King's Castle. This area was a bit outside of the city center and meant that there were more trees, less pollution and greater area to build larger homes. From ca. 1840s-1900, The Castle, National Theatre and the University

of Oslo were all built in the same area, close to where the aristocracy was and where the governmental, civic, and cultural power of the country was located. These areas also became the central area for culture and fashion, the upper classes wore the most fashionable clothing. With this concentration of wealth in a specific area, there was a bubble of wealth within this small area, it meant that businesses catering to these inhabitants sprung up in its surrounding areas, between the castle and dock and between the castle and the parliament building, clothing shops with the latest fashions and specifically tailoring for men established themselves as the center of fashion in Oslo. Setting up a business in an area with a large amount of wealth is a clear business strategy. This class difference materialized in clothing, with the respected gentlemen of the upper classes wearing suits every day and having their tailors in the same area where they lived. This conservative mode of dressing has persisted, with children growing up on the west side of Oslo, most often wearing conservative and more formal clothing. Suits were everyday clothing until the 1970s/80s, where there was a general informalizing of clothing trends in Europe. However, this is where you would and will see people wearing designer brands, well-made suits, and delicate cloths. This due to the more professional class of the inhabitants, not needing the thick cloth work clothes that the factory and working-class areas needed. The development of the west side of Oslo, is closely connected to socio-economic and class background, with the businesses located in these areas, catering to the local inhabitants, either being expensive suits, English or Italian shoe shops, but also, the professional areas, law firms, financial institutions, the embassies, and all the top government offices. This meant that a large portion of the people both living and working in the area had professional and formal clothing. This west/east divide is still prominent in contemporary Oslo and has been for a couple of hundred years. The fashion trends nowadays are also set on the west side, even in contemporary Oslo. Even though the casual trends of the 21<sup>st</sup> century dominate, the large amount of professional, white-collar jobs which still enforce the suit as a dress code, are still located in this same area.

With this contextual understanding of Oslo, we can understand why the two stores are placed in their current location. The first store is placed between the national theatre and the affluent area of Aker Brygge. Aker Brygge is an interesting area within this context due to its historical context and development. Aker Brygge was earlier the main dock and shipyard in Oslo, which meant that it was heavily industrial and contained many of the similar aspects of the working-class neighborhoods which I discussed earlier. Aker Brygge had very little residential areas, meaning it created a barrier between the affluent areas around the castle and the waterfront. The

dock and shipyard closed in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, according to the city municipality, the development of the area happened between 1985-1998. The area was the first development of what the city council coined “fjordbyen” (Oslo Kommune, N.D.) which aimed at opening the fjord to the city and moving industry further from the city center. Aker Brygge is now one of most affluent areas of Oslo, with both wealthy residents and financial institutions based on the waterfront. This area between the castle and the fjord creates the context in which the main shop is located, with a placement right between the old, traditionally wealthy areas and the new financial and professional area. It is located on a shopping street with the others store on the street being hairdressers, two cafes, three restaurants, one which is a one-star Michelin restaurant. The rest of the shops are other high-end clothing or department stores. All these businesses aim at the same kind of customer. The important aspect of the physical location of this store is because of the surrounding buildings. In close proximity to the building, the foreign ministry has its offices, it is also right by the castle making it an area in which both affluent residents live, and tourists visit. The location of this store is within walking distance to all the largest law firms in Norway, and close to most of the largest financial firms because of its proximity to Aker Brygge. It is also a major hub for shipping firms and tech companies, making it one of the most expensive areas for office space in all of Oslo. The other shop is not far from the first one, being located near Oslo City Hall, meaning it also is located to some of the most influential government buildings and law firms, real estate developers, financial firms and shipping firms. It is located in a small passage which houses two cafes, a hairdresser and a women’s clothing store. The building is a high rise, meaning that a large portion of the regular, day to day customers are people working in offices in the building. The goal with both of the store’s locations is of course to be situated in an area filled with well-paid and affluent customers. Additionally, the goal is to both be close to their workplace and create a relationship where the store becomes the go to place for clothing for these workers and for these firms. An example of that is that companies who are situated near the shops, receive a 15% discount on everything. Both shop’s layouts, are similar, with one entrance door, a large green marble desk and checkout area straight in from the entrance. Dark green being the unofficial brand color, the walls and the paper bags which customers carry their purchase in. The marble is also dark green, creating a nice atmosphere in combination with the use of hardwood flooring with the casual clothing and dark green carpet in the footwear, suits, and formalwear section. Including leather chairs with cashmere pillows and plenty of mirrors. The layout and presentation of the shop is important for the experience of shopping there, creating a calm and toned-down luxurious experience for customers. With nothing being random, everything in the shop is

planned for a good flow and movement of customers, trying to have enough inventory without being cluttered and overwhelming. The importance of the experience of shopping and the look of the shop is one of the main focuses for staff and the owners. By using the same materials and colors in both shops, the owners and store designer aim at creating a familiar experience regardless of which shop you are in. The use of music, which staff themselves control, is also used to create both a personality to the store and company, but also creating a specific atmosphere in the shop. An example of this is that staff often play either jazz or music from the 60s, 70s and 80s. Jazz because there is a certain idea of tailoring and elegance within in jazz music, creating a specific atmosphere. Playing music from the 1960s,70s,80s is also a way of creating a sense of familiarity for especially the middle-aged customers who enjoy listening to the music and most likely will come more often for conversation and just to listen to music, than if staff played contemporary pop or hip hop. Music also creates a certain personality for both the shop and staff, with music tastes being different, affirming the fact that personal taste and style are individual. All of these factors are a way of creating a world or a wished experience of the brand. The location of both stores is not random, being situated close to the financial district in Oslo and close to the offices of mostly well-paid office workers. There is also a showroom located in London, with much of the interior details being similar, however the store is run completely independently from the Oslo shop. Due to the pandemic, I did not have the chance to travel to London to see the shop for myself and therefore, don't have any experiences from that store.

## Important menswear cities

Within the menswear subculture, there are certain cities and areas which are important for the subculture. Both in terms of its development as a subculture, but also, as contemporary hubs for both shops and members of the subculture. Due to the international nature of contemporary fashion trends, even within niche subcultures, taste and clothing is becoming homogenized and local and cultural varieties are disappearing. However, certain tailoring styles, remain in their origin, regional or national, with further developments of those styles happening elsewhere, but the original style still being produced in specific regions.

The first city I am going to discuss is probably the most important city in contemporary menswear clothing and within the subculture. That city is London, England. London has always been an important city when discussing tailoring, mainly due to its status as a hub for wealthy

upper-class citizens and ancient aristocratic families. It has always been a wealthy city, meaning the market for tailoring and artisanal craft has been large for several centuries. The most important street in men's tailoring is Savile Row, this street has been producing world known tailoring since the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

“Savile Row is a destination street in central London's Royal Borough of the City of Westminster. The street became the epicenter of men's tailoring businesses in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as textile merchants sought to sell tailored clothing to the British gentry. They organized tailoring activities centered on the street and surrounding areas. Savile Row and its adjacent alleys have been associated with outstanding bespoke services for nearly 200 years, as the tailors are the inventors of the suit and the so-called London cut.” (Agrafiotis, Shih, 2017, P.144)

Tailors on Savile Row began their business by producing suits for British military officers. During the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century these tailors gradually moved from producing for the military to producing for wealthy civilians. This development also affected the creation of the English style of tailored suits. Since British military officers were almost completely aristocrats, this also meant that when they were not on military duty, they wished to have a more relaxed, practical, and civilian version of their uniforms. Over time, this meant that English suits were made with much more military uniform features than other European tailoring styles. The shoulders are broader with more padding, a slimmer waist, creating a more masculine V-shape in the upper body. The fabrics are heavier due to the colder climate of the British islands, in thicker wool such as tweed. The main fact of English suits are the similarities to the military uniform, seen as a uniform for civilians. The suits also represent the close connection that tailoring in Britain has with the military and the upper classes and how much influence they had on British society, even fashion sense and clothing taste. In contemporary menswear, London is still the main hub for traditional tailoring and traditional goodyear welted shoes.

“In the City of Westminster, there are a total of 116 tailoring businesses, ranging from the legendary tailor houses to small sole trader tailor workshops in a variety of business sizes. Savile Row and its surrounding areas are protected by the City of Westminster.” (Agrafiotis, Shih, 2017, P.144)

The menswear scene here still contains all the classics such as Gieve&Hawkes, Henry Poole co. and Huntsman, but also contains many of the modern and influential shops such as Drake's and Gaziano&Girling.

The other important city for the menswear culture, which represents a different style than the conservative and strict London is Naples, Italy. This is as earlier noted, the tailoring style the shop I did fieldwork at is based on. The Neapolitan tailoring history is less known than the

English, with less of a military influence and more based on everyday tailoring for Italian aristocrats. Simon Crompton who runs Permanentstyle.com describes Naples as one of the most important menswear cities.

“Naples has the biggest concentration of high-end handmade menswear in the world. Although not so much for shoes, for tailoring and shirtmaking this is the motherlode, with hundreds of tailors in the city and surrounding region, and thousands working in small factories or busily hand-sewing at home.” (Crompton, N.D.)

The weather in Southern Italy is warmer than most of the other cities I mention in this section, this results in of course lighter fabrics and a roomier fit to allow the cloth to breathe. It also means a more relaxed style than for example, the English, with a softer shoulder and less of a V-shape, creating more drape and wider trousers. The colors are also often less conservative, being brighter and a bit more flamboyant. Contemporary Naples is well known for its many tailoring workshops who influence and produce for brands all over the world, the most famous one being Cesare Attolini, seen as the holy grail of Neapolitan suits.

The last region which is renowned for their tailoring style and history and importance for menswear is the country of Japan. Japan has especially in the last 20 years become one of the main areas for menswear culture in the world. The tailoring history in Japan is also closely linked to the military, but rather foreign powers such as Britain and the USA military uniforms. The Japanese tailoring style is an amalgamation of different tailoring styles almost combining English and Neapolitan tailoring styles with a soft should, but a masculine slim waist and V-shape torso. Western influence on Japanese clothing and fashion has created a new distinction within Japan, “The Japanese themselves marked this sartorial transformation with a new lexicon that distinguished two dress strains: *yōfuku* (western clothes) and *wafuku* (Japanese clothes).” (Campbell, 2021, p.2) I would argue that the international influence of Japanese tailoring has allowed it to be creative and not as bound by tailoring traditions as many European tailors are. The Japanese eye for detail and artisanal work is also well known within menswear, with many of the world’s best tailors and shoemakers being in Tokyo or Kyoto. However, up until around 10 years ago, the only place you could get a hold of Japanese brands or tailoring was in Japan, they were secluded from the rest of the menswear industry, but there has been an explosion in interest in Japanese tailoring brands such as Ring Jacket and Beams due to their specific style and attention to detail.

Another important place for menswear is Florence, due to their regional tailoring style and plethora of world-class shoemakers, Florence also hosts Pitti Uomo which is a twice a year

exhibition and fashion show of men's fashion, with a focus on menswear. This exhibition is an enormous event within the menswear community, with shops, brands, producers, and influencers all showing up for the exhibition. It is the place to be seen and to see who is important within the menswear industry. Milan as a general fashion hub is also important in menswear even though high fashion still dominates here.

“The comparison between Paris and Milan was especially true for the clothing and “fashion” sectors. Both cities had large numbers of very small workshops producing clothes and fashion accessories, such as gloves, hats, scarves, umbrellas and walking canes. Like Paris, Milan boasted a well developed, diversified fashion economy [...]” (Błaszczuk, 2008, p.46)

New York is similar to Japan in its representation of a style which is influenced by different regional styles and cultures. Paris is like Milan, an international fashion hub, however, tailoring here has been more closely linked to business professionals with most fashion-oriented citizens more interested in high fashion brands, though they still house famous menswear institutions, such as Charvet. In Scandinavia, Stockholm is seen as the menswear hub, due to its much longer tradition of a center of power, both economically and militarily than Oslo and Copenhagen. There is a longer tradition of tailoring in Stockholm than especially in Oslo. This may also be a cultural factor, due to the fact that Stockholm and Sweden have been a European power and a wealthy nation for centuries, while in the more rural and poorer Norway, being obsessed or having clothing as your passion was seen as something exclusively for the wealthy aristocracy.

The reason I have dedicated a discussion of important regional and national places for menswear, is to show that most menswear clothing is culturally and locally defined, especially before the digitalization process of the internet. The history of why certain areas creates clothing a certain way is important to understanding who wore what and why they wore it. These regional differences are fading in contemporary menswear, however, as menswear is a conservative subculture, understanding its history and background is important knowledge to be seen as part of the subculture, because, if you know the basis of the culture, you are then often allowed to further develop it. Menswear has an ethos of development and progress while still staying true to the basis and the origin of the subculture. It is also interesting to discuss how material culture and clothing taste developed regionally and contemporary how it has developed internationally within the age of the internet. The fact that certain regional differences have survived, shows that the hegemonic nature of capitalist culture is not necessarily overbearing or destructive. I also view the practice of preserving regional traditions



and artisanal work as an act of agency against fast fashion, international fashion taste and hegemonic culture, preserving the local as an act of defiance against the international.

Oslo as a city, and Norway as a nation have specific cultural aspects which of course have affected ways of dressing and fashion. For many years Norway has been seen as a nation which has been lacking in the fashion department, especially when compared to its neighbors Sweden and Denmark. Norway's fashion scene was seen as boring and bland, with menswear also being virtually non-existing. I believe that Norway's seemingly late mainstream entry into the global fashion industry the last 20 years has been due to cultural factors in Norway. Up until Norway found oil in 1969, it was a poor country which presided in Europe's northern periphery, culturally different and either in a union with a neighbor or isolated. One of the distinct cultural features in Norway is the social norm which is called "janteloven", this is based on the idea that nobody, regardless of social class or place in society is better than anybody else and shouldn't view themselves as being better than anybody. This is still to some degree very present in contemporary Norwegian culture, but especially during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the protestant state church would support this norm as it represented piety, frugality, and a break from material affection. This supported the protestant stance on showing devotion to God and not manifesting a distinct personal identity which could be more cherished than God. Caring or obsessing over clothing was seen as vulgar and a break from the social norm, representing selfishness, vanity, and narcissism. The idea was that this would spread to all parts of a person's life. Clothing as a hobby, giving clothing a different meaning than it just being a uniform or a layer of protection from the weather was shunned and frowned upon. I argue that the prevalence of this protestant ideal was seen as a competing factor to being interested in fashion and therefore, it delayed the mainstream interest in fashion amongst people and, made subcultures such as menswear incomprehensible for most people. Understanding local culture and contexts is important to understanding contemporary reality.

## Digital

Doing fieldwork and research on an international subculture, with community participants located in just about everywhere in the world, means that to fully understand the processes of this subculture, a researcher must do digital fieldwork as well as physical. Contemporary menswear has become a highly digitalized community, with members concentrated in large metropolitan areas before, now anyone anywhere with internet access can connect with likeminded individuals and share experiences and knowledge. This makes the study of the

digital aspect and digital experience of menswear a crucial link in understanding the workings of the community. The digitalized aspect of the subculture and contemporary world, also means that cultural aspects of fashion and knowledge sharing has become much easier and a more fluid process than before. This has affected consumers taste, even in subcultures. Digitalization of taste is an aspect within fashion which is important, with regional taste still a certain aspect of course, especially in a subculture context and climatic barriers. However, in general, even within subcultures, there has become a more international taste in clothing. For example, the spread of jeans, which was unthinkable before the internet and mass spread of American culture and fashion sense. There hasn't been an overriding from one culture to another, but rather a process in which two or several cultures may affect each other and affect clothing taste. Being that clothing and fashion online are extremely accessible, this is not a surprising fact, and must be understood to properly understand how the menswear subculture has evolved and continues to constantly change due to digitalization. It has also become increasingly easy for participants of the subculture to share their clothes and thoughts online, allowing for a more casual and relaxed participation in the community. As with the rest of the world, the internet has affected every aspect of menswear, how it is perceived, how the subculture is formed and how participants take part in the culture.

My digital fieldwork has focused on blogs, forums, podcasts, and social media. The blogs I studied were: Permanent Style, Put This On, Ivy-style and Die workwear. These blogs are either run by a single person who writes much of the content or by a collective of authors writing on different topics. Ivy-style is one of the only blogs which specifically writes about a specific topic within the menswear subculture, only focusing on ivy style, which was popular in American Ivy colleges during the 1960s-70s. The other blogs write about varying topics from production of artisanal shoes in Florence, broader trends within mainstream fashion or politics within the clothing industry. The blogs are highly influential within the community and often set up face to face meet ups in their respective places at menswear clothing shops. They are seen as a useful way of understanding and learning knowledge from experts on the field, a very democratic way of becoming a part of the community which doesn't necessarily demand much action or participation from the reader. Blogs work with brands and clothing stores, either with brands as sponsors or with the blogs as independent reviewers of the brand or shop. They also have the valuable role of introducing new brands to a large customer base and widening the horizon of the customer base to either foreign or local shops. An example of this is Permanentstyle.com which according to themselves have around 500,000 monthly readers. He

regularly reviews brands and recommends how to build a menswear wardrobe. Permanentstyle focuses on formal tailoring and is closely rooted in the English Savile row tailoring tradition. The author of Permanentstyle also discusses more philosophical questions regarding clothing and taste, with articles such as *Should you dress for yourself, or for others?* (Crompton, 2021) These articles do the job creating a discussion between community members, with a comment section at the bottom of the webpage after the article, encouraging discussion. These articles help solidify the forums role as references of what is seen as topical and trending within the subculture. Putthison is an online blog which has several authors who write for them. They are based in the USA and often focuses on casual clothing rather than formal tailoring. The last blog I frequently read was Dieworkwear, run by Derek Guy, who is seen as an influential person within menswear due to his blog and knowledge of menswear history. He doesn't write articles as often as the other blogs; however, his articles are often more in depth and lengthier. Putthison and Dieworkwear often write on political questions within menswear, such as workers conditions and ethical dilemmas within the community.

The forum which I read most often was Styleforum this is a forum based on clothing style and participants are individuals who are interested in clothing. The forum is split into different categories and therefore, contains everything from vintage, Victorian period clothing to women's Italian designer brand threads. Threads are theme based and can be categorized by subculture or subtheme or by brand. These threads and forums are probably the most engaging of all the digital spaces within menswear and are reserved for a small very engaged and active group, discussing all sorts of small details within the industry or on specific aspects of the clothing. My fieldwork shop has its own thread, which I read as a way of analyzing the engagement of the community in the shop's products and business. The interaction between the shop account and the customers is quite intriguing, due to the fact that it takes traditional customer service and gives it a personal touch, since it is a relatively small group, consisting of a very specific type of customer, speaking directly to the staff. The thread started in November 2017 and consists of 261 pages of discussions with 1,191 members. Styleforum as a whole has 473,476 threads and 213,033 members, showing that interacting directly with engaged customers, may spread the reach of the clothing shop.

Social media and especially Instagram, have become an extremely important arena within menswear. The spread of social media allows for easy participation with a global audience of engaged members. The threshold of participation is much easier, and members can discuss and

connect with each other across national boundaries. Instagram is probably the most actively used social media in the industry, due to the visual nature and how simple it is to post photos of outfits and other things relating to menswear. Social media has therefore, allowed what I view as simple participation, allowing for individuals who don't live in London, Milan, or New York, to post their clothing and share their views with their menswear peers. Instagram has also created a class of users who often work in the industry and who possess what I will later discuss as aesthetic authority. Giving them a platform to show their expertise and reach out to a greater audience. Influencers have also become a well-known phenomenon, with most of them not being in the industry to begin with and rather gaining a following due to their clothing and outfits. One influencer I have followed is James Jules, who often post photos of his outfits, but who also has become an author, discussing race in menswear and more specifically in the Ivy tradition. His Instagram account allows him to reach out to people who don't necessarily view these races issues as relevant to menswear. In a way, Instagram creates an enclosed environment, where active users in menswear could think that they are much more influential to society than they are. At the same time, becoming part of that enclosed environment has become much easier for the general public, democratization of menswear is mainly through globalized processes happening on social media. These influencers have become influential in the sense that brands are eager to sponsor them if they fit the brands image and will therefore, be seen as an ambassador for the brand, showing it to people who follow them. This sense of brands utilizing Instagram and social media is also an important aspect. Instagram has not only made it easier for individuals to participate in the community, but also for brands and shops who are active on Instagram. These shops can advertise their products for free and can take much more control of their own image and platform than traditional advertising. Instagram, through its function of analyzing what individuals like and follow, means that when brands are recommended on Instagram, their advertising is more precise than traditional advertising. Advertising to the correct audience is better value than general advertising meant to try and capture the few interested individuals. The last Instagram account I am going to discuss is "theSustainablefashionforum" this is a page which focuses on social and environmental issues in the fashion industry. The page writes articles and Instagram posts with a mainly critical view, an example of this is a post about "How can collaborative, *goal-oriented* legislation move the needle on sustainability and *transform* the fashion industry?" (TheSustainablefashionforum, 2022) Their Instagram page has approximately 212 thousand followers, meaning they have a large outreach, and many people within the menswear industry follow them. They also have a podcast where they invite industry people to discuss these issues. I think they are an important

source of understanding what the contemporary issues in the fashion industry are, and which problems are being discussed amongst younger people, due to their social media presence, I believe they have a better outreach to young people than classical linear journalism. Podcasts are becoming a cultural staple amongst young people; this is also the case in the menswear community. I mainly listened to three podcasts, Blamo, Handcut Radio and Throwing Fits. They all focus on fashion industry as a whole, but with differing views, Blamo and Handcut are more involved in niche menswear shops and bespoke or artisanal producers. They often invite tailors from the traditional tailoring shops, but also invite young newcomers and give them a platform to express their vision and goal for their company. Throwing Fits, focuses more on streetwear which is a more urban and American phenomenon. They are still relevant to the menswear community and fashion industry as a whole due to their guests being from different places within the industry, from high street creative directors to small neo-ivy companies and influencers.

The relationship through the digital and physical field is a tightly intertwined one, which constantly affect each other. The physical and empirical reality is based in certain contexts, geographically, cultural, and social, doing physical fieldwork in Oslo, gives a specific Oslo experience. Immersing with the local field and speaking to local shop owners and customers allows for a more personal connection to the field, however, in the digital globalized world we all live in, digital fieldwork must be done. Digital fieldwork allows us to see a global context and perspective. Studying the digital field allows us to see the global trends and subjects which are being discussed in the menswear community. Seeing how these local contexts are changing due to the globalization of menswear and symbolic taste and value. To fully understand these processes, studying the physical and digital and their effect on each other is essential.

Lastly, one of the main proponents of digital fieldwork during my fieldwork has of course been the COVID-19 pandemic, and how this has affected the field and how I study the field. Firstly, it enhanced the digital presence of the menswear community, with covid restrictions removing physical meeting places such as shops and events, the only way of discussing and meeting was online. This I believe accelerated digitalization processes which were happening before covid but happened almost overnight in 2020. This also forced brands and shops to change their focus on digital marketing and online shopping. Brick and mortar shops who were dependent on in-store customers with physical sales, were left without a backup option and a large amount of them went bankrupt or changed owners during the pandemic. The urban context of menswear,

which is most prevalent in cities also affected the overall impact of covid, due to the fact that it was urban centers who were hardest hit with restrictions and covid cases. The change to online shopping, showed shops that they couldn't place all eggs in one basket and rely on loyal, local physical customers. The world and the fashion industry are changing at a rapid speed and the reality is that no one is going to help these shops if they don't keep up. This has unfortunately seen a loss of local knowledge and expertise within the fashion industry, with people being forced to change careers. As earlier noted, all of these aspects and processes were in motion before the pandemic hit, however, the pandemic accelerated these processes to an imaginable speed, which shows how vulnerable shops and local clothing brands are, if they are without a digital presence. The shop where I did fieldwork, argued that during the pandemic they went from having three shops with a small digital lookbook, to becoming an online shop with two physical stores.

## **5. Aesthetic authority**

Aesthetic authority is a term I have borrowed from Bandlien (2004, p.143), who cites Appadurai (1986)

“points out that in complex, capitalistic societies, knowledge is not only segmented between producers, distributors, speculators and consumers, but commodity knowledge in itself has been commoditized. Buying and selling expertise regarding technical, social or aesthetic appropriateness of commodities has become widespread.” (Appadurai, 1986, p.54)

Aesthetic authority may therefore be understood as a certain group of influential individuals within in this context, the menswear community, who hold influence over trends and regarding what is appropriate and what is seen as good taste. This authority may be a very top-down process, in which a creative director or a designer at a shop, lectures and helps new staff or customers. It can also be a passive process which I would argue is what Instagram influencers are, posting photos of their outfits and what clothes they are wearing, is a passive way of expressing and spreading knowledge. Aesthetic authority is interesting to study, because it shows that even in these large, seemingly democratic spaces of fashion, there are still hierarchies and social classes, and social processes which affect the people who participate both in the industry and in this instance, the menswear subculture.

Discussing aesthetic authority in relation to menswear is interesting, this chapter will be divided into two parts. Firstly, I will be discussing the role of brands, stores, and their employees. Secondly, I will be discussing the role of magazines, blogs, forums, and social media on both aesthetic and how knowledge within menswear is spread and shown. Both parts are going to discuss the construction of value within menswear and how there is a creation of “within” and “outside” of the menswear sphere.

As Appadurai (1986) notes that Commodities represent very complex social forms and distributions of knowledge. In the first place, and crudely, such knowledge can be of two sorts: the knowledge (technical, social, aesthetic, and so forth) that goes into the production of the commodity; and the knowledge that goes into appropriately consuming the commodity” (Appadurai, 1986, p.41)

The authority employees in menswear stores are created through their knowledge and position both within the company and their position within the wider community. Knowledge which is obtained through years of working within the industry or through active research and interest. Employees often yield a certain symbolic power within the community, which Bourdieu (1996) defines as, “symbolic systems owe their distinctive power to the fact that the relations of power expressed through them are manifested only in the misrecognizable form of relations of meaning” (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 343) Knowledge is then often exhumed through this symbolic power. Those with symbolic power, encompass it as a representation of their taste and authority within a certain space. However, before discussing this, first, we must understand what knowledge implies within the space of menswear subculture, starting with history, knowing the history of both the garments and history of the subculture creates an authority over newcomers who have no idea of the history. Understanding the history will also give you greater knowledge of the historical contexts in which menswear was created, and lets you understand what the difference between a suit from Naples or London is, and why there are historical differences. That is where knowledge creation begins, understanding history and context, then you may begin to understand the larger trends within menswear, and what differentiates a 60s American ivy sack suit from an 80s Miami suit, both prominent trends which lasted for a long time. All these understandings of certain types of knowledge create a certain worker and citizen within a subculture, being viewed as a person who knows their history gives you an authority which is hard to match both within and outside of the industry. Speaking with my store manager K, he noted ways in which knowledge and expertise is respected amongst his upper-class friends who often have more glamorous jobs such as bankers and lawyers than employees in menswear.

“Every man wants a watch guy, a car guy, a go to person for when you need help with something specific, having that knowledge even in something as banal as clothing creates a respect and authority within those circumstances.” (Store C, Store manager K) These ideas of knowing the classics, is intrinsically tied to social media as well, seeing as there are an extensive number of accounts on especially Instagram, which are dedicated to these old images of menswear which depict the classics and show for example the intended use of an oxford cloth button down shirt in the 60s on an Ivy league campus. These images serve as representations to new and old members of what dictates knowledge of the classics. As the store manager discussed earlier, the same way men want “a guy” for their different interests, these interests are also keenly intertwined. Possessing and understanding the general taste in other arenas than clothing and fashion is a way of legitimizing aesthetic authority. This includes, wine, cars, furniture, restaurants and may also include other more niche commodities.

“Taste is the practical operator of the transmutation of things into distinct and distinctive signs, of continuous distributions into discontinuous oppositions; [...] Taste is thus the source of the system of distinctive features which cannot fail to be perceived as a systematic expression of a particular class of conditions of existence, i.e., as a distinctive lifestyle, by anyone who possesses practical knowledge of the relationships between distinctive signs and positions in the distributions [...]” (Bourdieu, 1979, p.174-175)

Other forms of knowledge are more focused on the products themselves, understanding the production process. If you are selling a suit, knowing the weaver and which factory is a form of knowledge, knowing what sort of fabric it is, is it linen, cotton, wool, or a blend. All of these steps in the process are united to create a single product, therefore knowing the details of this entails knowledge and expertise within this field. This knowledge can manifest itself in for example a discussion of a cashmere sweater. If a customer who does not have the historical or fabric knowledge of cashmere, would most likely think that cashmere produced in European factories are the absolute best and their abstain from buying cashmere from for example, China. China, more specifically Inner Mongolia is where my shops cashmere comes from. The importance of understanding where cashmere comes from will also affect a consumer’s behavior, instead of hearing Chinese (Mongolian) cashmere and thinking that it is cheap fabric produced in weavers with poor conditions and other stereotypes of east Asian clothing factories. They would understand that cashmere goats are indigenous to the coldest areas in east Asia, this being where the best cashmere comes from. This shows how knowledge can directly influence how a consumer will behave in a marketplace. Knowledge of products is a way in which employees and stores show their expertise and justify their authority within the creation of taste and value. Aesthetic can, therefore, be understood not only as a matter of taste or



appearance, but as a form of embodied knowledge, a form of knowing and reproducing knowledge. This knowledge is often used to create a specific experience within the shop, with the music and furniture and the aesthetics of shop all working to create an experience for customers. Menswear subculture may also be seen as clan, which uses knowledge and experiences to create an idea of superiority over those who aren't involved in the community. Knowledge as a way to restrict access to the community and creating an identity of superiority within the community.

The second part of knowledge creation is through blogs, magazines, books, forums, and social media. Beginning with the traditional authorities within taste making which is magazines, such as GQ and Esquire are two of the largest style magazines in the world for men. They have been around for generations and have constantly been an authority within men's fashion and within the creation of trends and taste. They still have an immense power within the industry, however, if you view yourself as part of the menswear subculture then you most definitely do not read either of them, but rather praise their issues from the past. This has to do with the shift in men's clothing becoming much more casual and a move from the everyday suit to everyday shorts, they have pushed the mainstream to becoming more and more streetwear and casual. This means that openly discussing these magazines within the very specific space of menswear subculture will most definitely brand you as an outsider without any knowledge. The contemporary way of exchanging and showing knowledge is through blogs, forums, and social media. Blogs may be run professionally as a means of employment or as a hobby, I will mostly be focusing on those who blog as their only job, even though you could argue that the ones who have it as a hobby may be more influential for those who aren't engrained in the closed space of a subculture. Blogs have in the last 10-15 years become immensely popular within menswear, one of the most read and followed blogs is by a man named Simon Crompton, through the website "Permanentstyle.com". Simon formerly worked as a financial journalist for one of the UK's largest papers, meaning he fits very well into the demographics of menswear. Simon does a wide variety of things from reviews, to discussing ethics within the fashion industry, focusing on men's tailoring. His means of authority is represented through the sheer number of monthly readers he has. "Permanent style is a global authority on classic and luxurious menswear. One of the biggest such sites in the world, it receives up to 600,000 page views every month, and is read by over 1 million unique users every year." (Crompton, N.D.) Reaching out to this number of readers monthly within a subculture is impressive and gives a large amount of authority of taste making and value creation. Simon also has an

authority of knowledge and an authority of exposure of brands and clothing companies. This gives him a unique position of taste creation and new trends within the world of menswear. In many ways there has been a “democratization” of aesthetic authority with the emergences of the internet, rather than now having to go to the often expensive and excluding shops in major cities to either show or gain knowledge, most information is readily available online. This means that the boundaries of within and outside of menswear have been blurred with many people having some information, but not traditionally enough to be included in the group. However, even though there has been a democratization of the subculture, the definition of taste and what is appropriate and what is seen as looking the part is still a contentious issue. These agents who hold power over taste, still uphold social hierarchy, by using their own language and codes within a framework of menswear. Bourdieu (1979) thoughts on natural taste are still relevant even in a digital era.

“The ideology of natural taste owes its efficacy to the fact that, like all the ideological strategies generated in the everyday class struggle, it naturalizes real differences, converting differences in the mode of acquisition of culture into differences of nature; it only recognizes as legitimate the relation to culture (language) which least bears the visible marks of its genesis, which has nothing “academic”, “scholastic”, “bookish”, “affected” or “studied” about it, but manifests by its ease and naturalness that true culture is nature – a new mystery of immaculate conception.” (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 68)

These ideas and creations of taste as natural have created an environment where those who possess these tastes through cultural and socio-economic background have been given authority despite not necessarily having any perceived knowledge. They are more a poster and example of the ideal of menswear agents. The view of taste as natural, may also be viewed as a view of culture as natural since much of one’s taste is created through childhood. Therefore, the culture of your upbringing and fellow peers will affect your taste and will also create a sense of naturalness through taste. What you wear, how you act, what food you like, and your hobbies will be influenced by the culture your brought up in. This corresponds with the menswear community and creation of taste within the community due to the fact that it is often people who are brought up in specific socio-economic situations who are active in the community. This process of naturalization also shows itself in the marketing of menswear shops, instead of using models from an external firm, they often use their own staff, with them wearing their favorite clothing from that season. This creates a setting of naturalness and shows that the shop has staff who naturally have good taste.

The democratization process which has happened through these blogs and forums have created an interesting dynamic of both customers in my shop and customers internationally, with them often having entry level knowledge, but not the expertise or specialization which was the standard in earlier years. This shift to online experts and authorities has also meant that they reach out to many more consumers than they used to, even specific subgroups within menswear have their own websites and blogs dedicated to them. One being, Ivy-Style.com which only discusses issues regarding the traditional ivy style of WASP (white Anglo-Saxon protestants) young men in the 1950s till the 1970s when tastes changed. These variations of blogs and forums create a world in which it is much easier to absorb a small bit of information, but also, makes it possible to go even deeper into small specifics within a subculture, whether Ivy or Parisian Ivy or Japanese workwear. The spread of these subcultures internationally has been an important aspect for several years, with Japanese denim tradition and menswear americana first being introduced post WW2 when American soldiers were based in Korea and Japan. This shows the spread of culture across borders and how globalization works in form of subcultures. This reach and development have evolved on an unprecedented level due to digitalization of society. All these small subcultures within a subculture are magnified and created much more accessible. For businesses this also creates a business opportunity, immensely increasing their possibilities as a business, taking for example one of the original Ivy clothiers, J. Press who only were based in New York and Ivy league towns, now being able to ship to globally.

Forums are also a new area in which people are being involved and have become a popular place for fellow people within the menswear community can discuss topics within the subculture. The largest being Style-forum.net, which according to their own statistics has 471,000 threads, 10,000,00 messages and 212,000 members. This being an arena for over 200 thousand people with similar interests to discuss and discover new topics of discussion and changing tastes within the community. My shop has its own thread which functions as a way for engaged customers to discuss our products with each other and with staff, creating a relationship between consumer and producer and an availability which is extremely important in contemporary menswear. With the distance between consumer and producer digitally being shortened, it creates a new way to “communicate” style. Charlotte Bik Bandlien (2004) shows how style communication and codes are important to understanding tastes and trends. “Style communication might be aimed at a more specific audience, the symbols may be read by just a few; the ones who are initiated in the codes.” (Bandlien 2004

p.84) These style codes and style communication are extremely important to understanding who is part of the community, identifying peers. These style codes may also be seen as actions of agency and a creation of a specific identity. These codes are an important aspect of creating the “other” as much as it is about creating an identity, having a common definition of what statutes someone who isn’t necessarily part of the community, helps form the boundaries of the community. The creation of the “other”, is integral to creating a concept of the “self”. Fredrik Barth (1969) discussion on social contact between ethnic groups is again a useful theoretical basis for understanding what happens during this contact.

“[...] boundary maintenance where by cultural units and boundaries persist. Entailed in ethnic boundary maintenance are also situations of social contact between persons of different culture: ethnic groups only persist as significant units if they imply marked difference in behaviour, i.e. persisting cultural differences.” (Barth, 1969, p.15)

These processes also add to the exclusivity and restrictiveness of menswear, with only people being viewed as encompassing or having the correct knowledge allowed into the community, this gatekeeping is both a means of not allowing the community to become too mainstream. The gatekeeping also restricts the number of members, however, there is no membership card or a small group of people who decide, who is in the community and who isn’t. Membership of the community is mainly based off of self-identification and participating with other people who view themselves as within the community. This ambivalent nature of membership means that many people won’t define themselves as within the community and many people who participate in forums, discussions and in conversations will not know that they are part of a community. Menswear subculture is a fluid identity, with it being up to every individual what they wish to identify and in which contexts they wish to identify.

The staff at the shop I work at have a way of categorizing customers into groups of familiarity. I would say that customers as groups can be divided into four categories, naturally these are categorizations based of my experiences and how I perceived people, and through discussions with staff. There will of course be many things that I do not know about customers, and I can only assume their socio-economic background and more than likely, most of them may fit into or between several categorize. I would still argue that these categorizations are interesting when discussing in a consumer setting and may help to understand what is needed and what is portrayed as being part of a specific group of people

in a specific environment. Firstly, a random customer who has never shopped in the store before and most likely has no aesthetic authority or cultural knowledge of menswear. Secondly, the young professional who just started working a corporate job and wears suits and business casual clothing, not because they are interested or enjoy it, but rather, because they are required to at work. They usually come in and try to emulate the looks and outfits of their bosses and higher ups in the industry. The last two categories are seen as “friends” or within the inner circle of the store, meaning they usually get a 10-15% discount on everything and are invited to view new clothing before if it posted online or in the store. The first of these two groups are men, mostly middle aged, who work in traditionally upper class and prominent industries such as law, banking, finance, shipping, or oil. They are most likely in the upper echelon of society and their work positions mean that they are often wealthy, they are the big spenders and come by several times a week and use large amounts of money. Therefore, they are seen as “friends” of the company and staff, because they come often and they use a lot of money, most of the time they engage in small talk during their visits and over time they may begin to obtain knowledge regarding the product, but often they have basic knowledge of the industry. Many of them have worked in the large menswear cities of New York, London, and Paris. This means that they often have an international knowledge and a more continental taste which affects their purchases. They have just enough knowledge to fit in and enough money to gain authority because they can afford the most expensive menswear which is often the most respected due to the artisan nature of the product. They have what Bourdieu (1979, p.177) would call “Economic Capital” this means that they are wealthy and most likely are upper-middle- or upper-class individuals, where price is not a restrictive aspect. Then there is “cultural capital”, this entails that you are a well-connected person, meaning you are culturally able to adapt and fit into the communities of so called “elites” you aren’t necessarily wealthy, but you have connection and know many important people.

“[...] Those who distinguish the major classes of conditions of existence, derive from the overall volume of capital, understood as the set of actually usable resources and powers - economic capital, cultural capital and also social capital. The distribution of the different classes (and class fractions) thus runs from those who are best provided with both economic and cultural capital to those who are most deprived in both respects.” (Bourdieu 1979, p.114)

These two forms of capital are closely linked and individuals who have one, often have the other. The last category of customer categorization involves the customers who are not necessarily wealthy, most likely a bit younger than the third category. These are the

customers who are genuinely interested in menswear and who have this as both an identity and a hobby. They do research before they buy a product, and they are most likely the ones who read all the blogs and books and discuss on forums. They are seen as part of the store community due to their knowledge and engagement with staff, they will often stop by and discuss new brands, trends, or new products in store. These are the customers who may talk with staff for 45 minutes yet, rarely purchase large amounts of clothing. They are respected for their knowledge; however, they may also be ridiculed and made fun of by store staff behind their back due to their “nerdiness” and their obscene passion for clothing. They are the antithesis of the natural taste which is respected in menswear, and they are interesting to study due to their total embrace of all things within the subculture, no matter how niche. As noted earlier, these customers are often mocked by staff, who view themselves as authorities within the subculture and see themselves as fit to define what is good and correct taste and what is just a “costume” as they would put it. A known saying is that it is the man who should wear the clothing, not the other way around, meaning that even if you have a generous amount of knowledge of production, fabrics, factories and so forth, if you don’t wear the clothing in a “correct” manner and with a specific kind of bravado, then you are deemed as not having good taste. The distinction between natural and unnatural taste is quite interesting, due to the socio-economic backgrounds of customers. When discussing what is perceived good and bad, or natural and unnatural taste within menswear, you can’t help but to follow history and see where these tastes and trends started. As noted in the earlier chapter about tailoring and menswear history, suits and suit trends were defined by upper middle- or upper-class white men, most likely privately educated and born into a certain amount of wealth and in an extremely specific environment which focused on male dominance and heterosexuality.

When discussing which customers are seen as the correct sort of customer and friends of the shop, the easiest way of seeing this is at the events which the store hosts. These events can differ in size and purpose, but most often the people invited are good customers and friends of the staff and shop. These events also serve the purpose of a brand creation, the creation of a world as staff would put it, giving the shop and staff a personal relation with customers. An important event within the menswear subculture is a trunk show. Which is when a menswear clothing brand or artisan visits a country or city, often large cities with retailers which sell their product, to take personal orders from customers. These orders are often custom orders, where a customer can either change the fit of a piece of clothing or

shoes to their own wishes. A trunk show allows for artisans and brands to visit customers who aren't based in their city and show both costumers and retailers new products and show how their production works. Trunk shows are often hosted by menswear stores which sell products from external brands, these brands are often more expensive than the house brands products, meaning the exclusivity of these items is often extreme. The shop I did fieldwork in had one to two external Italian tailoring brands, two sunglass brands, a tie brand, a company which only produces trousers and four shoe brands. These products are expensive and are only made in small quantities. The latest trunk show was with the company which produces trousers for the shop. The owner of the brand had a two-day trunk show in Oslo, where he took custom orders from clients and showed staff the new product ideas. This event is used to socialize with people in the industry and the shop hosting the trunk show, also host the people from the company visiting, taking them out for dinner and showing them around town. Connecting with people from the industry. Trunk shows are often advertised on social media platforms of the host shop, where it invites anybody who wants to, can stop by for a chat or to place an order. However, if you are known as a good customer, a friend of the shop, then you most often will get a personalized message and can set up a private appointment. The customers deemed to be in the inner circle of the shop will also often be invited to join staff to go out to eat, go to a bar or sneak peek the new collection.

## Sexuality and gender roles

Sexuality and gender roles, I would argue, are an important aspect and understanding of the menswear industry and subculture. Especially in comparison to the perceived and generalized reality in fast and high street designer fashion. The stereotypical view of people working in fashion, is that it is a feminine business, with mostly women and often homosexual men. This is of course a stereotype, and while there are of course many men and many heterosexual masculine men who work in fashion and using arbitrary words to define a person is difficult. I do believe that there is an interesting diversion from the perceived norm of fashion when discussing the menswear industry.

“At first glance, the existence of online forums where thousands of avowedly hetero- sexual men go to discuss clothing seems to bear out the notion that there has been a blurring of the lines between gay and straight male dressing. But my contention is that men's fashion remains so strongly associated with femininity that many participants in online menswear communities reject it altogether” (Weiner, 2019, p.4)

Beginning with gender roles, every single shop and brand I know of, that is large and influential with a dedicated following are all run by men. Men's tailoring is viewed as a world for men, by men. Using my shop as an example, up until December 2021, every member of staff connected to the men's store were men except for one, that was a woman who was head of customer service for the online shop. However, she does not have a role in running the shop or developing products. In December 2021, a new female accountant was hired and later that same month a new CEO was appointed, with her being the first female in the management team. Both are still entirely separated from the design, production and sales processes and have more corporate positions. As earlier noted, all the largest, most influential menswear stores are all run by and staffed by men. Speaking to some customers, the fact that all the staff are men is seen as a way of creating a certain environment in which they feel comfortable and create a sort of "club", knowing that there will be very few women there. This also applies to the customers, with the largest percent of female customers in the men's store being around Christmas, looking for gifts. Discussing this topic with the staff, one of the part time sales employees explained that; "Tailoring is not seen as feminine as other fashion, due to the technicality involved in production, with men caring more about quality and production, than the design and feminine qualities of products" The rest of the staff agreed and also noted how this can also be seen in other areas of life, with men being more interested in cars and more practical, and perceived masculine interests. Yanagisako (2002) shows the problematic nature of an exclusively male view in capitalist firms, "The exclusive concern with male productive force and its dissipation over time reflects a monogenetic theory of procreation, in which males alone supply the creative force that produces succeeding generations and, in this case, capitalist firms." (Yanagisako, 2002, p.2) These ideas are all based off gender normative tropes which for most people, especially in Oslo, seem old-fashioned. This idea of masculinity is also seen in the role of sexuality, while this is a much more difficult topic to discuss on a general scale, due to the sheer number of participants in menswear and with every one of them having their own sexual preferences, and sexuality being a fluid term with much individual differences. However, I would propose that from my experiences and from my knowledge of the men I know who work in the industry, there is an overwhelmingly majority of heterosexual men. In the shop I did fieldwork in, there are often jokes being made about customers who may according to them act in a homosexual way and they often engage in inside jokes belittling customers. This is an environment I would compare to that of many sports and a sense of heightened heterosexuality, constantly



reproducing stereotypical and in some instances harmful rhetoric which creates a specific culture of social conservatism within the shop and in general in the community. These ideas of gender and sexuality, I view as inherently due to the political background of menswear with an old-fashion conservatism which is often idolized amongst members in the community. These are also issues which are often overlooked and not discussed in menswear, the lack of diversity, not only cultural diversity, but also, gender and sexuality, works as a process of agent creation. Creating and forming very specific types of agents which engage in the community. The contrast from stereotypical views on the fashion industry as a whole and the reality in the menswear industry may also help explain why the subculture has certain boundaries for participation, and boundaries for expansion and exclusivity of the community. Socio-economic background and knowledge possession isn't necessarily sufficient to being perceived as an authentic member of the community. The role of sexuality and gender is regional and locally decided, with there being many different contexts of their role within menswear in different places, the political and societal contexts of the places affect the importance of sexuality and gender. Interestingly, sexuality and gender are similar to menswear membership in the way that it is self-identification, therefore, there will be individual differences between every participant within the subculture.

These conservative values show themselves through their clothing and the hegemony of fashion amongst the originators of menswear. The most striking example of this is of course Ivy leagues in the north-eastern United States. Their style of clothing which has become iconic and important in contemporary menswear discussions, are all based on this selection of privileged males from a specific place with specific socio-economic backgrounds. The legendary Japanese photobook on Ivy Style, called *Take Ivy (1965)* is a good example of seeing how publications show the people within this subculture what is perceived as the natural and correct way to dress. The photos are as the name insists on Ivy league school campuses in the 50s and 60s, showing how the students dressed conservatively, yet with a natural ease which in most circumstances can only come if you are born and bred within this specific culture. They aren't perceived as wearing costumes because this is how they were brought up; they wear what their like-minded peers wore and acted as them too. While writing a piece on ivy clothing on [Ivy-style.com](http://Ivy-style.com) the author discusses the use of the phrase

“Its’s just clothes” which firstly degrades the symbolic power of clothing within society. Secondly as the author notes “[...] while at the same time insisting that the clothing objects themselves are merely the physical manifestations of platonic concepts that exist independent of the milieu from which they sprung and flourished.” (Burton, 2021, N.D.)

I note this socio-economic point, due to the emergence of online blogs, forums, and books, which have done a great deal to increase the amount of people within the subculture and democratize it, still display taste and trend as something which is mostly controlled and developed by specific people in specific positions in society. The accessibility to view the products has been democratized, but the means of affecting, changing, and developing is still a glass ceiling controlled by influential blogs and companies. Yanagisako (2002) shows how culture, especially upper-class culture is passed through generations with the help of fashion and the symbolism connected to the fashion industry. Taste and traditions within menswear can all be traced back to wealthy upper-class men who look natural in their clothing, because it was how they were raised, and this was the clothing everybody in their social circle wore.

Discussing which customers are valuable and how on a business level, a menswear shop must balance the “right” customers with those who are seen as “outside” due to financial reasons. The head of the online store told me that they don’t focus on trying to market to the public, “We don’t have many customers, but the customers we have are very good”. He emphasized the importance of gaining notoriety in the right circles and specific corporate environments, letting those customers “naturally” discover us through colleagues or friends instead of large marketing campaigns which wastes money on advertising to the public. During a monthly work meeting with all the staff, the store manager and product manager discussed how store staff must learn who the correct customers are and “Don’t waste your time on bad customers who don’t shop”. This shows how the idea and categorization of customers is openly discussed within the company. Showing how they as a business have a goal to only sell to the customer who according to them are the correct targeted customers. Having the right network and connections is seen as more important than having a large portion of diverse customers. This also reflects in the choice of staff, creating the company and especially in store experience, into a place where the targeted middle- and upper-class men feel comfortable and at home. This can also be seen in the hiring process, staffs background and interest are import, creating a feeling of similarity between the customers and staff. Most of the staff were costumers at the shop before they applied for a job, especially the part-time staff who are often students, reflect this process. Hiring staff that in the future can become customers and work and live in an

environment which attracts their future network to the company. From the part-time staff, all of them are studying at universities and aim to work at large corporations when they have graduated. The interests of staff are also important when hiring and creating a certain atmosphere, conversations between staff, and between staff and customers often discuss topics such as, cars, wine, clothing, sports, and watches. All these subjects and topics, social class, are important when hiring and creating a space in which certain targeted customers feel comfortable and a place where they can relax. Staff are also encouraged to use their work clothing in their free time, and to use the networking opportunities they may have at work to their advantage.

This shows as I have earlier argued that contemporary menswear still caters to the tastes and trends of people from a specific socio-economic background and the industry in many ways isn't interested in diverging or expanding into the public, due to the restrictiveness of their environment and products is one of the main qualities they have.

The distinction of natural taste and being seen as trying too hard can also be seen amongst the stores which are part of the menswear community. The stores which are seen as the best and most authentic are those who have a classic style and where both staff and the company are viewed as engaging in the community due to their passion and dedication to the style and subculture. If you are seen as too commercial and corporate, then you are viewed as less of an authority and too readily available to the public. These stores are often regarded as having products with worse quality and less knowledgeable staff. As Bandlien (2004) shows this is the same in most industries where luxury and restrictive accessibility to products is a business model. "Being "just in it for the money" is presented as an approach that is not respected within the segment of retro that I have been investigating." (Bandlien 2004, p.100) The stores that are seen as authentic to the culture are also viewed as selling items that can be categorized as art and working in a creative industry instead of a retail category. This distinction between being authentic and being commercial, may also affect the business practices within the industry, with quality and production often being prioritized over affordability. Moving into the economic and social processes within the industry, it is important to remember that menswear and the fashion industry in general are results of local contexts and specific cultural processes, which have allowed these industries to become what they are today.

## Neoliberal subjectivation

Discussing earlier the way in which stores, and shops use staff to create a certain experience for customers, and how staff is selected with emphasis on their socio-economic background and interest. This isn't necessarily a one-way process, the staff as individuals aren't passive recipients being formed only by the shops and their managers wishes. I argue that this is a two-way process in which shops create a certain staff member, and that the individual staff members use the shop to create a certain subject of themselves, the neoliberal self. The idea of a neoliberal self may also be understood as neoliberal subjectivation, a process which takes an individual and creates them into a market commodity, through this process, the individual often, forms their identity, their agency, and their subjectivity by adapting to a capitalist market. Gerhson (2016) describes this as "The entrepreneurial self is taken to be a bundle of skills, qualities, assets, experiences, and relationships, and it is this compilation that must be enhanced, with the sole exception of one's qualities." (Gerhson, 2016, p.225) Creating themselves into a commodity which can be sold and bought, a subject which can be developed and formed into an entrepreneurial subject which takes economical rational decisions based on market value. Handling yourself as a business, regarding and commoditizing your knowledge and experience as assets which can be valued, instead of personality traits, is an example of neoliberal process. This also effects the relationship staff creates with both customers and fellow staff members, constant networking, creating a network of people who can further your market interests and increases your market value, social relations become market relations with a certain rationality. This process has real life affects such as, one of the part time workers at the shop I did fieldwork at, studies law at the university of Oslo. He chose that part time job over another one which was better paid and more hours, since the shop's main customers are partners and lawyers from the largest law firms in Norway. Seeing this as an opportunity to network and create a relationship with them, this is also a reoccurring thing, where young people entering the work force are often focusing on what they view as development opportunities for themselves.

This process also shows itself in the work/private relationship of the staff, where staff are constantly representing the shop, by wearing its clothes. Work/private lines have been blurred, there is constantly talking between staff on social media, even though only a handful of them are at work. The work sphere in contemporary capitalism has been larger, with the private and familial spheres all combining to create a certain neoliberal subject. This process of blurring the distinctions between different spheres doesn't happen without any form of reluctance and

resistance. Staff constantly distance themselves from the company, in a way in which separates themselves as humans and as employees. Staff remind themselves that at the end of the day, it is the owners who make the important decisions and have the main responsibility of the survival and development of the shop. This is a way of resisting the subjectivation process and using oneself agency to form an identity. These processes happen on a global level, but with local contexts and variations, depending on culture and societal relations.

## 6. Kinship

Kinship within the fashion industry and kinship as a role in contemporary capitalism is central to most aspects of my fieldwork. Kinship's role within contemporary economics may be seen as an outdated, irrational feature in contemporary economics, however, in this chapter I am going to be arguing that kinship is intrinsically tied to both the fashion industry on different levels and contemporary neoliberal capitalism. My goal is similar to Yanagisako (2002) stated goal on her studies of family firms in the fashion industry in Como, Italy. "[...] "An analysis of the sentiments, desires, and meanings of kinship, gender, and capital that are crucial to the production of the industry at a particular historical conjuncture." (Yanagisako, 2002, p.4) Kinship firstly, plays an important role in reproducing the capitalist culture, with children being brought up with neoliberal sentiments which are dominant especially in western Europe and United States.

Kinship as a social system relies on social rules and obligations between kin, the idea and construct of kin must be mutually understood. This creates a mutual dependency between kin which I would argue is important to the capitalist system, however, the theoretical point of early neoliberal theorists was that humans were isolated individuals who were not dependent on other people, with individuals' goal and motivation in decision making were rational economic choices. I disagree with that and would say that I believe that neoliberal subjects are more dependent on close contacts and trustworthy connections than these theorists believe. This is where the importance of kin and family businesses becomes apparent, many of these businesses thrive due to the close relation between kin and the social obligations which are shared between those who share kinship. One of the largest companies within the menswear community is a

shoemaker called Crockett&Jones, their managing director Jonathan Jones discussed family business being a basis for their longevity, having been run by the same family since 1879.

“I think we’re lucky that being a family business has strengthened Crockett & Jones. It depends on who is running it, of course, but if you’re in the business then you’ll have more of a long-term view of it, you’re building it for future generations rather than short-term profit.” (Cvetkovic, 2017)

This shows how in the fashion industry, and especially menswear industry, despite the volatile speed of trends and sped up capitalist processes due to the internet and globalization, knowledge and competence, keeping knowledge within closed circles is still a value. Knowledge passed down within a family firm, where the family can control everything is simple. Hiring a person from a different social class, with different ideas and thoughts on how to run a business is risky. As discussed earlier, clothing and menswear are built on imagery, senses, and the creation of a world through a shop or company. This whole vision and large-scale objective are easier to achieve if the people who are running it are raised in that vision and world. I would argue that the same neoliberal subjectivation processes as earlier discusses are relevant within family businesses, the boundaries between work and private is obscured and business becomes intertwined with kin relations. “Family and kinship processes, relations, and sentiments are crucial for the production and reproduction of all forms of capitalism, whether family capitalism or nonfamily capitalism. Family capitalism, however, brings more clearly into view these processes, relations, and sentiments.” (Yanagisako, 2002, p. 13)

Capitalist and neoliberal relations have the overall goal of increasing profits and business interests is according to Marxist theorists based on the exploitation of the working class and its conflict with the upper class. I agree with this sentiment, however, it isn’t sufficient to understanding contemporary kin relations within capitalism. The entrepreneurial ideal which I discussed earlier is prevalent in these companies due to the connection between kinship and business relations. The kin sphere and business sphere merge and are constantly affecting each other, the exploitation which before mostly happened in a factory from the up down. This exploitation is also happening amongst owners and kin of business owners. Working overtime, not taking vacation, low salary and long work hours are several ways in which kin relations and social responsibilities between kin are used to further business interest. It is viewed as sacrificing for the family business, but it is exploitation, nevertheless. Yanagisako (2002) and her research shows how processes which are thought to be separate from capitalism and in a separate social sphere, are crucial to the capitalist system and capitalist culture. Rofel,

Yanagisako (2018) presents statistics to disprove the point that kinship and familial ties are not crucial to contemporary capitalism.

“In Italy, at the turn of the twentieth century, family firms constituted 75–95 percent of all registered firms. Italy is by no means an outlier in Europe. The comparable percentages were 70–80 percent in Spain, 75 percent in the United Kingdom, more than 90 percent in Sweden, 85 percent in Switzerland, and 80 percent in Germany” (Rofel, Yanagisako, 2018, p. 219)

At the shop I did fieldwork in, kinship was very much an important aspect of the creation and continuation of the business. The company was started by two brothers, they had earlier worked together within in the business, one of the brothers’ wives later became the manager of the women’s department. The other brothers’ wife later joined as head of customer service for the online shop. Later, the two brothers’ sister joined the company as CEO, head of the corporate division. This shows how their kinship and familial connections are vital to starting and sustaining a business in contemporary capitalism. Further in the shop, there are two couples within the whole company including the women’s shop. These relations create a certain environment which allow a company to take more advantage of their workforce who are connected to the company. In the same way where part time staff who aren’t involved in kin relations, continually try to dissociate themselves from the company, these kin relations continually reproduce the interconnected nature of kin relations and business relations. Kinship is also important in the construction of class and class identity which is reproduced through class. This reflects in the ideals of menswear and the notion of natural taste which I spoke of earlier, reproduction of these power dynamics has political and societal consequences and help symbolize and construct the idea of an upper-class identity. All the different aspects of menswear culture are affected by kin relations, amongst others, exclusivity, restrictiveness, identity creation, taste, symbolic value and the distinction of inside or outside are all intertwined in these processes to create what is known as the menswear subculture.

There are obvious problems with kinship in the fashion industry, one is the glass ceiling which exists within companies. This glass ceiling is described as the max part of the hierarchy within a company which a non-kin staff member may achieves. The glass ceiling is also prevalent in the transnational nature of transnational capitalism. Showing how the spread and contemporary transnational state of capitalism, instead of creating a meritocracy based on rational economic decision, enhances the prevalence and importance within this system.

“Although there have been increasing opportunities for nonfamily managers in these firms, this has not brought about a “managerial revolution” in which professionally trained, nonfamily managers have taken control of the firm. To the contrary, increased profits and capital accumulation have enabled these firms to incorporate more generations and branches of the family and, consequently, to postpone division of the patrimony.” (Rofel, Yanagisako, 2018, p. 220-221)

Patrimony being anything inherited from parents, the upkeep of the patrimony is a way of keeping the business within the family and ensuring familial control.

Studying these firms which rely on these relations and familial processes, widens the view of researchers to understanding the complex economic and social system prevalent in contemporary society, whether digital or physical. Family firms with kinship relations are also shown to be flexible, and able to change and adapt well to market changes, instead of being archaic ideas from the past. These firms show the embeddedness of our economy, with all spheres of life being intertwined with economic systems.

“The study of family capitalism- a form of capitalism that has been marginalized in both Marxist and Weberian theories- enables us to see that its marginalization is itself part of the hegemonic process through which capitalism is made to appear as an economic system is autonomous from family and kinship processes.” (Yanagisako 2002, p. 13)

## 7. Commodities

This chapter is going to be about commodities and their role in the menswear subculture. Commodities is a term which is often used without definition and can differ in meaning depending on the user. In a classical sense, commodities are everything which can be bought and sold through an economic transaction. This is a definition which I believe, needs some more depth and precision, to be able to understand the categories of commodities and how something becomes a commodity.

“A commodity is, in the first place, an object outside us, a thing that by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another. The nature of such wants, whether for instance, they spring from the stomach or from fancy, makes no difference” (Marx, 2013, p.17)

Commodities are at the end of the day, the most important aspect of menswear subculture with them being a physical manifestation of the community and a real-life display of knowledge. As Appadurai (1986) showed, commodities are a representation and physical aspect of knowledge and creation of a culture. The commodities within menswear, should be regarded as luxury commodities with certain social aspects differing from other mainstream commodities. Appadurai presents certain attributes to define luxury goods,



“[...] (1) restriction, either by price or by law, to elites; (2) complexity of acquisition, which may or may not be a function of real “scarcity”; (3) semiotic virtuosity, that is, the capacity to signal fairly complex social messages (as do pepper in cuisine, silk in dress, jewels in adornment, and relics in worship); (4) specialized knowledge as a prerequisite for their “appropriate” consumption, that is, regulated by fashion; and (5) a high degree of linkage of their consumption to body, person and personality.” (Appadurai, 1986, p.38)

Appadurai (1986) proposes; [...] that we regard luxury goods not so much in contrast to necessities, but as commodities whose principal use is rhetorical and social.” (Appadurai, 2013, p.38) Distinguishing between certain forms of commodities may help us understand their social power and their importance in creating a subculture. I don’t believe many people would argue that men’s tailored clothing is a life-or-death necessity such as water or food. However, these commodities which are defined as luxury are as Appadurai (1986) noted, a necessity for social and rhetorical purposes. These commodities are the ones which define if you are a part of the group or if you are an outsider. Essential facts of contemporary western society are defined and shown through your choice of attire. What you wear, creates both your own personal identity, but may also serve to distinguish to other people, your group identity, who you view as your peers and where you in some cases “belong” in society. This is definitively a monumental understatement of an individual’s identity. However, on a large scale I would argue that understanding these subcultural or mainstream luxury commodities with a specific social purpose is important to understanding how contemporary citizens and people use clothing as a form of agency and identity construction.

The agency creation in a menswear context is one through commodities and mostly clothing. I view this identity creation and most of the subculture as a subtle reaction to the increasingly fast paced and unsustainable business practices of contemporary high street fashion brands. The menswear community places much pride on that fact that their outfits and their clothing could just as well have been worn (some even made), many decades ago, without much significant changes other than subtle production and stylistic choices. The fact that you could look at a picture from 1965 and 2020 with two entirely different people and their clothing style could be mostly similar, almost identical, is a reaction to the over usage, overproduction and relentlessly fast paced idea of fashion in a modern context. As earlier noted, the focus on the “classics” in the menswear community, means that most clothing items don’t go “out of style”. There is also the importance of supporting, small, local, artisanal makers, and shops. There is a pride in wearing an Alden full strap cordovan loafer still produced by craftsmen in Massachusetts, rather than wearing a faux leather shoe from a fast fashion store like Zara which has been made in a

cramped factory in Vietnam without proper working conditions or worker compensation. Many of the members in the menswear community, wish to return to a distant past of local shops and tailors where fathers and sons would get their suits and clothing made. However, all these commodities come at a certain price. They are expensive and costly to maintain, for most people in the world the entrance into this subculture and its communal identity isn't economically obtainable. The menswear community at large, avoid using terms such as fashion and focus more on terms such as style and exclusivity. "The term fashion, suggest high velocity, rapid turnover, the illusion of total access and high convertibility, the assumption of a democracy of consumers and of objects of consumption." (Appadurai, 1986, P.47)

There is an active approach from most menswear enthusiasts to detach and distance themselves from the average consumer and from mainstream fashion. There is a sense of reaction towards contemporary fast fashion, but it is also a reaction to the democratization and affordability of contemporary clothing and with it the contemporary style of clothing. "Fashion was seen as something to do with trends and branding, rather than the innate quality of clothes." (Weiner, 2019, p.10) The fact that exclusivity may not only come from knowledge and socio-economic background anymore, is seen by some as a "threat" to the subculture. Exclusivity and the restrictiveness of the subculture is what helps to define who is within and who is on the outside. Exclusivity is mostly maintained through the sheer price of the clothing; these prices do the job excluding many potential members or enthusiasts of the menswear clothing scene. Both the consumers and clothing shops, producers, factories, and weavers will defend the price as a definition of quality and thorough quality control, there is still the fact that these shops have margins which would allow them to lower costs. This would make them attractive to many more customers, yet they would also lower their standards of what they view as their perfect and ideal customer. This is a process of agency being used by most people in the industry and the traditional consumers of these products to ensure that their idea of menswear and the tailoring industry remains the same as they wish it to be. This trend and reaction to globalized fast fashion, shows a commodification of knowledge and tradition, with price points of products, not necessarily only due to the production and quality, but due to the company itself and the knowledge within the company. However, even if the industry as a whole can function as a backlash of globalized fast fashion. The mainstream trend of fast fashion still affects and may in the longer change the menswear industry, with the main designer at my fieldwork shop saying; "I don't have time to care about this season's collection, I cared about it six months ago, now I care about fall/winter 2021 and spring/summer 2022." The global fashion industry

is moving faster, even luxury and traditional artisanal products are affected. Factories and designers are constantly in a state of mind of moving forward and looking ahead to the next season. This also shows the difficulties of running a menswear shop, where the focus is quality and there are only 2 seasonal changes in the shop, compared to multiple seasons in fast fashion. I would argue that online shopping too, has had an impact on all different levels of fast fashion, waiting for several days for a package isn't necessarily what a customer wants, this also forces small, locally owned brick and mortar shops to constantly catch up to the large stores and brands who dictate even the niche markets. Globalized capitalism, neoliberal policies and online customer expectations are affecting menswear in a profound way which will change the industry and, in many ways, already has, changed the industry.

These systems of globalized capitalism and neoliberal free trade policies which have become the basis of online shopping and transnational trade within the fashion industry, were heavily affected during the pandemic. Firstly, shops had to close, and if your brand or shop did not have a well-functioning online shop then your company was in a vulnerable position. Shops were forced to rely on a supply chain which was totally incapacitated due to the pandemic, international shipping was almost impossible due to either national regulations or delivery companies having to furlough workers due to a drop in demand in other sectors. The pandemic visualized and showed the reality in which fashion companies must cut margins and further split up production to be able to have products at competitive market prices. The system was vulnerable, I would argue, due to the reasons I have discussed earlier as to the size and importance of fast fashion companies. The problems caused by the pandemic, were devastating for subcultures and smaller shops, who suddenly found themselves in a position where they couldn't sell products due to closed stores, or even able to order products to sell online due to the supply chain collapsing. The shop I worked in was lucky to have made a good decision in 2019 to focus on expanding their online store. This saved the company and meant that they were able to grow and increase profits during the pandemic. Retail in many countries is already a vulnerable workplace, due to technology and the digital nature of online shopping. With factories cutting workers to increase profits and having small margins to operate, this meant an uncertain fate for people working in the clothing industry. Local context and variations are of course important here as well. A country such as Sweden, which had almost no restrictions did not see their national clothing industry affected, when I spoke to menswear shop owners in Stockholm 2021, they didn't have a bad year, but they had to focus on Swedish customers more than before. Countries who had heavy restrictions, such as Japan, England, and Italy were much

harder hit, and it affected all aspects of the industry. The shop I did fieldwork at still has delivery issues due to the pandemic, with their spring/summer 2021 season being a difficult summer even though there were few restrictions in Norway. The international reality of menswear and factories and consumers meant that firstly, they received their products several months late, which especially in Norway during the summer months can be devastating. An example of this was that they received their shorts in August, which is at the end of summer in Norway. Covid sped up processes in transnational capitalism and showed both how online shopping can reach out to people, even when they are forced to stay at home, but it also exposed the vulnerability and uncertainty many shops and companies within menswear and fashion industry find themselves in.

The concept of constant growth in contemporary capitalist economics is prevailing in brick-and-mortar shops, in small niche stores. Capitalism as a system is based on perpetual growth, with infinite resources. Running a business, in this case a clothing shop, there is an expectation and a constant need to increase profits and avoid stagnation. Growth entails an opening to the digital world and the transnational nature of online shopping. This means that delivery and packaging must be sorted, either outsourced to a warehouse, to a courier such as DHL, or the company itself must be vertically integrated and handle everything from start to finish. These increases number of staff, and in the case of outsourcing, it increases local and international dependency on other companies. If you sell an item in an online store, then you are dependent on firstly, a warehouse which can handle the order and prepare it to be sent, then you are dependent on a courier to deliver it either to the country of destination and the address of the customer or for it to switch to a domestic postal service. This chain of dependency does create a mutual dependency which can result in faster service for the customer or other related improvements in the system, but it also creates a fragile system, where if there is one thing wrong during the chain, then the whole process collapses. These issues of dependency will not only affect online businesses, but also local shops which only allow for physical shopping experiences. This is because, in most cases, the shop does not own a factory or the producer, in many cases as well, the factory is in a foreign country, if there are supply chain issues, such as the COVID outbreak in 2020. Then it creates a supply chain issue where a store could be in a situation of growth and increased profits, but with supply chain issues, they wouldn't have any inventory to sell, thereby, growth can only be achieved on a large scale all along the supply chain, if there is stagnation anywhere on the chain, then the rest of the process collapses. You can see this happening in many large factories who have traditionally produced for both large

and small shops, if the large shops don't do well, then it doesn't necessarily matter how well the small shops are doing, if the factory doesn't receive the big orders it needs, then it can't fulfill any of its obligations. An example of this is a producer of silk for neckties, which according to an article from Dieworkwear (Guy, 2020) stood for 80-90 percent of the companies production. The fact that their biggest buyer of silk was now bankrupted, Brooks Brothers, meant that everyone from the corporate conglomerates of Burberry to the high street fashion of Prada, to the small artisanal menswear necktie shops were affected, they couldn't automatically replace the numbers Brooks Brothers were ordering. This shows just how tightly intertwined, and vulnerable the international fashion industry is. Even though the internet and globalization of taste has made fashion and niche subcultures such as menswear more approachable and easier to access, these same processes and neoliberal trade policies have allowed for the industry and supply chain to be extremely vulnerable to any problems.

Fast fashion has had a major impact on all segments of the fashion industry, from the high-end luxury brands to the small one-person jewelry shops. Fast fashion has created a system of production and a supply chain which has a goal, and which achieves in its goal, to attract people to the simpleness and cheapness of their products. A consumer doesn't need to wait several weeks for a product to be developed and produced, they can have it instantly, an international online order doesn't need to take two weeks, it can be done overnight. This has ripple effects to all consumers and even the most loyal subculture and niche consumers, still shop at a fast fashion shop during their lives. This ripple effect has pressured other shops and parts of fashion to follow their way of business, which is about fast production and fast profits, everything needs to be as quick as possible. This creates an environment where it is difficult for small shops to survive, in a menswear perspective, this can be seen in the fall of custom orders such as bespoke, made to measure and made to order. With these operations taking several weeks or months, with the average customer, it is difficult to argue that this is a better system for the product and environment. Another effect has been on the infrastructure surrounding the fashion industry, the money, which is connected to the fast fashion industry, this means that factories are choosing big contracts from H&M, ZARA, etc. Instead of taking orders from smaller shops, who find it increasingly difficult to compete in the market for factories. With tedious, artisanal, and knowledge-based operations being found in less factories due to the cost of educated labor and the reality of quick profits factory owners can make by only sewing t shirts. The menswear industry does of course still have access to artisans and many workers with great knowledge and expertise, these workers and factories are becoming fewer and fewer, with trained labor not

being prioritized in contemporary western European or American society. Factories are forced to battle each other for the big contracts and do this by lowering wages and security measures, they must win these contracts to survive, even if they earn less than they use to earn. The large fast fashion conglomerates, almost single handedly control the factories and producers in all the fashion industry, due to their size and influence. The affect at menswear shops is that clothing is more expensive to produce, it is more difficult and expensive to find factories who are competent enough to create the desired product, international cargo has become much more competitive with every single clothing store having an online website. All these different factors, increase prices all along the supply chain, which then again increases the in-store clothing prices and adds to the restrictiveness and exclusivity of menswear shops. The yearly production of clothing should create a saturated market which overproduces tons of clothing, however, due to ever-growing demand of clothing and fast fashion creating a pattern of use and throw away. This has created a market which is almost impossible to satiate and satisfy. This process is heightened with poorer countries having a growing middle class. As a manager in the shop discussed how clothing infrastructure is not keeping up with the growing fashion industry. "In Oslo, there are only two experienced and well-trained cobblers and very few, trained tailors, and dry cleaners. The infrastructure surrounding upkeep and necessary reparations of well-made clothing is disappearing. These workplaces within the industry are not attractive to younger people, the people who find these jobs attractive, go almost directly into bespoke, high-end clothing, not clothing repairs and a small local cobbler." This is also due to the fact that fast fashion clothing is often either, not repairable or the repairs costs twice what a new piece of clothing costs. All of the points above, show and explain how even the luxury, conservative, product based, and niche subculture and industry of menswear is greatly affected by the rapid growth of fast fashion in the fashion industry, but also in consumer behavior. This I argue is another point which highlights the effect of neoliberal policies which as I have said earlier, don't only aim to shape the economy, but shape the consumer on a personal level. As I have discussed in this chapter, the paradox of this growth of fast fashion which may be perceived as a democratization of fashion and a response to expensive clothing from high end luxury brands. This process ends up increasing the prices of luxury products, for both the shops and the consumer and further narrowing the amount of people able to afford this clothing, which also affects the symbolic value and cultural within the social class who can afford these clothes. An expanding wealthy social class with an ever-growing self-assurance and symbolic hierarchy through commodities such as clothing.

The fact that large factories have over the last years created a market in which smaller producers and factories can't compete has also impacted where the factories are located. Whether willingly or forced, most brands within the fashion industry are expanded and moving operations to factories in low-wage countries who have the work force to be able to handle the demands of the fast fashion giants. The country which is most thought of when discussing factories within fashion is China. China has become a leader within international fashion, with a growing home economy and a large export of garments. Where garments are made, may also affect their symbolic value and how they are perceived by customers. The shop I did my fieldwork in, announced that they were moving their tailoring production to China from Italy (while keeping casual clothing in Italy). This was due to a rise in production and difficulties which were had with the Italian factories. The main buyer for the company said that "the Italian factories are inconsistent, they can't handle much volume and are not reliable in delivery, which is a huge problem when you're expanding a business and increasing production numbers, whatever advantages they had before in terms of machines or expertise within tailoring production, China has developed." This point of view is shared with empirical research from Rofel, Yanagisako (2018).

"China is a crucial site in which to study the conflicts and uneven experiences in fashion's new world order. The reasons for this are multiple. First, it is the country in which the majority of global fashion is manufactured. Second, its vast domestic market is of enormous commercial interest to global brands. [...] Italy is of considerable importance in sectors such as design, fashion, and style, because of the international reputation of "Made in Italy." (Rofel, Yanagisako, 2018, p.193)

This two-way relationship between China and Italy shows an important process of the production side of clothing and the symbolic, cultural aspect. An interesting point when discussing symbolic value is the fact that staff were discussing the way in which Italian factories and brands are able to increase their prices and heighten their reputation through the sole fact that they are Italian or producing in Italy. This Italian dominant sentiment, which also could be said about English and other European countries, is believed by many in menswear. The truth is that these sentiments are cultural ideas which have been passed down from generation to generation, relics which were true several decades ago, but are not true in the transnational and globalized fashion industry today. The specific knowledges of factories in these countries have been taught and learned by factory workers and artisans in other countries as well, with these countries out competing European countries on production prices. One of the store managers at the store I was working at said during a discussion amongst staff regarding the switch from

Italy to China; “Some of the world’s best shoemakers and tailors are in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, Japan, especially regarding China, there is an idea that all of the factories that are there are run as sweatshops which isn’t true, it is just a xenophobic view on the world and ignorant way of seeing how things work” This fear or skepticism which is seen in the menswear subculture, especially amongst European and northern American members, is an overlooking of all local expertise and an ignorant way of viewing contemporary transnational capitalism. When my shop posted on their Styleforum page that their tailoring from spring/summer 2022 was going to be made in China, there was an intense reaction from many of the members, with some of them accusing the shop of going commercial and not reverting from menswear and tailoring tradition. Most of the members were mostly curious about the switch and wanted to know how the innerworkings of the industry works. There were a small minority who understood and backed the switch, noting that for them, it doesn’t matter what it says on a label as long as the product used good fabrics and quality workmanship. I vividly remember a discussion I had with a customer one day working at the shop, the customer was interested in buying a cashmere sweater, which staff in the shop are open about is made in China. I told the customer this and further specified that it was made in the region of Inner Mongolia, which he thought was odd and bad since we marketed ourselves as a luxury store which cared about quality and our products. Being in the retail situation I was in, I found it difficult to lecture the customer on the origin of cashmere fabric being from the cashmere goat which is indigenous to the Himalayas and Mongolian plateau. The fact is that Italian firms must get most of their cashmere from China or India, and with this fabric also comes local knowledge on how the fabric has been used for hundreds of years. The spread of local knowledge across national borders, is shown through these examples, not only a western led hegemony, but rather is a process which is constantly being affected by knowledge and culture from all across the world and with local variants.

I would argue the distinction between menswear clothing and mainstream/fast fashion, could be seen as a separation of certain categorizes of commodities. The first point is that clothing in menswear and menswear itself is not viewed or regarded as fashion, due to the slower nature of trends and production and the communities’ ideals. Perception of time and what is viewed as slow or fast paced fashion will be experienced differently by people, depending on their cultural ideals, everyday experiences. With mainstream fashion being viewed as cheap and disposable commodities, while much of the commodities within in the sphere of menswear,



could be labelled as luxury. Using Appudarai's (2013) earlier noted definition of luxury, we see a process of deliberately reducing access and enhancing the restrictiveness of these commodities, just in the way in which they are categorized and defined. This distinction helps to keep the community enclosed and commodities and knowledge unobtainable for most consumers. Meaning, even if they were interested in the subculture of menswear, a consumer would still need specific knowledge and a certain amount of money to participate. Regarding Bandlien (2004) discussion on style communication and style codes, where in some instances, to even understand that there is a code or something being communicated, you must already be in a certain group of people and see the codes.

“[...] If cultural products are regarded as a code which must be interpreted, this code has become increasingly difficult to decipher without access to some key. Education, on the other hand has become increasingly important as a discriminating variable, that is, in terms of level of education achieved. It also provides the key to translation of high culture by emphasizing the importance of attaining knowledge about abstract and esoteric subjects. Thus, the difficulty of deciphering the cultural code has been compounded by the difficulty of gaining access to the devices for its decoding” (Daniel Miller, 1987, p.152)

These social codes, therefore, may be seen as reproducing certain social processes, on a level which you may often only understand if you can see the codes. The reproduction of social hierarchy and the status quo in contemporary capitalism happens through subtle codes, which are shown in amongst other places in style communication and the menswear subculture. These social codes also ensure that the exclusivity of this subculture is maintained, not letting the subculture become too mainstream fashion, despite the democratization of participation.

## Classics in menswear

As earlier discussed, knowledge within the space of menswear is a mode of symbolic power and possessing knowledge brings respect and authority. Understanding history is also a means of understanding the classics and icons within menswear, what is seen as the ideal and important historical and fashion trends help create and understanding of menswear symbols and taste. Recognizing a classic is seen as show of competence and authority, understanding the context and reasoning as to why pieces of clothing are regarded as classics or certain people are as icons is a representation of knowledge.

“It seems as though some of the design “classics”, the ones that are even referred to as “icons”, are embedded in myth: The “classics” are sacred objects in a Durkheimian sense, and they are talked about with reference to origin of the pieces.” (Bandlien, 2004, p.58)

A commodities context is essential in the production of symbolic value, as the context may in fact transform it. This symbolic value and the origin of “classics” could be attributed to several things, the wearer, if the person wearing the item or clothing is seen as an icon within menswear. This is the most common origin of “icons” and “classics” If the product is representative of the era in which it was used, showing a specific cultural aspect or context. To be defined as a “classic” there must also be an agreement amongst and consensus amongst members of the menswear subculture, at least amongst those who encompass aesthetic authority and industry insiders. Kopytoff (1986) discusses how agency and power is attributed to commodities after they are produced, with the commodities contexts being vital to the creation of its symbolic value and later creation of a “classic”. Especially in contemporary capitalism, symbolic value, often end up increasing economic value, meaning that products or brands or shops who are seen as “classics” are able to charge higher prices and are viewed as a menswear’s enthusiast goal to visit or shop at. If a shop is viewed as selling authentic classical menswear, with staff who are part of the community and a company which has value within the subculture, then they are able to attract more customers.

Classics and icons in menswear are also locally defined with different groups within menswear having different icons, whether you are an enthusiast of workwear or vintage period pieces. Nationality and regions are also important when discussing locally defined icons, with different regions and menswear cities having different icons. English menswear enthusiasts and shops, often have 20<sup>th</sup> century aristocratic figures as icons. The most prominent being the Duke of Windsor, King Edward VIII, with his suits which often included flamboyant details and colors being praised as an example of understanding the rules of menswear without losing personal taste or personal touch. For those adhering to Italian tailoring, the business mogul Gianni Agnelli is seen as an icon due to his very typical Italian suit styling, but again with personalized details such as wearing his watches over his shirt sleeve. Americans will often praise either Ivy classics or mid 20<sup>th</sup> century film stars as icons, with John F. Kennedy and Steve McQueen as classics, with their more relaxed and workwear clothing closer to US fashion trends. These icons represent both classical men’s tailoring with person flair, but also regional and local differences between regions.

The reproduction of these “icons” in contemporary settings happen through social media and menswear blogs and forums. There are numerous Instagram accounts dedicated to showing pictures of clothing and icons from specific places and eras, further confirming their place as

classics. Accounts such as “Themetaphysicsofivystyle” (Themetaphysicsofivystyle) post pictures of men from the 60s wearing ivy style, both anonymous strangers and well-known celebrities. Social media works almost as an archive of the classics and inspiration for contemporary menswear enthusiasts. Forums and online blogs are also important in solidifying the idea of classics and icons, writing articles either on trends or tastes of decade from the 1900s or writing a style biography of icons. Mr. Porter a luxury online shop, which also has an editorial section, has a good example of how the idea and perception of icons and classics is perpetuated and reproduces through media. *Style Lessons From The (real) Duke Of Windsor* (Tong, 2016) The article gives contemporary men advice on how to dress, while using an English king and Duke who died 40 years ago as an icon of menswear. This creation of icons does not only rely on clothing and commodities, but the commodification of their image and a representation of specific people in specific contexts in history. As I discussed earlier with the notion of natural taste, this idea is closely connected to the focus on icons. These icons represent a version of society, culture, and sexuality, which many menswear enthusiasts romanticize and fondly remember. A specific mid-century world where men were in a dominant position in western Europe and the United States, a society which was making great social achievements and a time where capitalism as a system was spreading across the world. The ever-continuing growth and optimism is shown through these icons, a different dress for a different era. This idea of reminiscing, either on a political level or a cultural level is relevant into understanding the symbolic value of these figures in contemporary menswear. As I will discuss later, this idea of looking up to icons and their cultural contexts isn't always a positive thing and entails overlooking much of the negative cultural contexts,

Brands and companies also use this idea of classics and icons to develop their brand and develop their world and vision. They use these classics to show their aesthetic to customers, showing how they envision the context of their clothing. An example of this is a brand which is called Atempo Rubato, their Instagram page is filled with pictures of everyone from David Bowie, to 1940's lookbooks and to pictures of tennis players from the 50s. This functions as a social media lookbook and a way to see how the designers are inspired to create their products. It also creates a context in which the clothes exist, a world where these clothes are subjects of agency, and fit the purpose of the designers. Having old pictures of men playing tennis in all white or playing cricket or smoking a cigar on a yacht are also ideals for how the designers and menswear enthusiasts view their overall ideal life. “In mass liberal societies, characterized by a large, affluent middle class and mobile status hierarchies, elite life-styles, with caried and

largely illusory degrees of authenticity may themselves be commodities eagerly sought for mass consumption” (Marcus, 1983, p.44) It fits very much into the tale and creation of what I discussed earlier as the idea of the gentleman. Permanentstyle (2021) wrote an article with one of the two designers and owners of Rubato, where they discuss the inspiration of imagery and how this works in the space of menswear, “All of these pictures give me feelings of joy and inspiration, practical advice for combinations in clothing, ideas for how I want to live and ways to furnish my apartment.” (Falk, 2021) The shop I did fieldwork at uses a similar process when designing new seasons and developing the vision of the store. The store is greatly inspired by classical Italian tailoring, but also the lives of upper-class Italian “gentlemen”. The main designer told me his goal in life was to be a nonchalant wealthy Italian, who can sit all day and drink wine while wearing colorful tailoring and overlooking the Capri coast. This world creation is a way of letting customers into the minds and thoughts of designers and entering a world without necessarily having to enter the shop. It also allows shops to create their own narrative, they create their own imagery instead of letting an independent fashion magazine show people how their products should be used. Lastly, I believe that general art and music have become important ways of creating a menswear sphere. Artists and musicians have themselves become menswear icons, Miles Davis, Pablo Picasso, and others have become icons of dressing formal in an otherwise informal job and setting, relaxed tailoring which is important for a contemporary context. Film as well, due to its visual aspect has become a main inspiration for menswear designers and for a creation of their ideals and vision. Films such as *The Graduate* (Nichols, 1967) by Mike Nichols and especially Dustin Hoffmans character are used as ideals and icons within menswear. Similar films which are seen as encompassing a certain stylistic quality and a menswear quality are used to create a world and a connection in the menswear community, having knowledge regarding these classical films also help solidify aesthetic authority. Music has also become an important aspect of identity creation within menswear, with especially jazz being framed as a particular menswear genre of music, with Miles Davis and especially *Milestones* (Miles Davis, 1958) and *Kind of blue* (Miles Davis, 1959) being almost compulsory listening for anyone interested in menswear. These albums have become icons in menswear, even though figures such as Miles Davis are viewed as important counterculture and anti-status quo figures as well. In 2022, there was a book *Black Ivy* (Davis, 2022) which discusses and explains minorities roles in menswear, with an emphasis on figures such as Miles Davis. I argue that the almost appropriation of this music is a process of showing a love of niche culture and sophisticated forms of art, while

still highly accessible. Discussing and showing that you know these albums is a way of signaling your participation in niche culture and menswear. The music can also be used to understand the idea which I discussed earlier, regarding natural taste. Jazz is seen as an impromptu music form, just as in menswear, there are a set of rules which are the basis, however, once you understand the rules then it is easier to create your own style and your own structure. This is an interesting point in menswear, where breaking the rules is more accepted if you understand the rules, you are breaking and why you are breaking them. The difference between breaking a rule purposefully and accidentally is important amongst menswear enthusiasts. The main designer at the shop I work at, wrote a forum thread discussing the use of film and music in designing and creating an identity. Stating that *La Grande Bellezza* (Sorrentino, 2013) by Paolo Sorrentino, adding “A must watch for anyone who enjoys good style.” Other Italian films are also a main discussion point within menswear, especially those who are interested in Italian tailoring, with the cultural aspects of Italy as being idolized. The food, the attitude of the people and how men handle themselves are all aspects which enhance the world creation and make a deeper connection than only focusing on clothing, it is the context which the clothing presides in.

The political and social aspect of classics and icons is also well known within menswear, as said earlier, giving homage to a by gone era where men were masculine and on top of hierarchy, especially, conservative white men. This class perspective should not be overlooked, because it also adds to the creation of the community and community ideas. Reminiscing for the past is a way of signaling a political and cultural desire for the past as well as clothing taste. Conservative politics and sentiments are an important part of the menswear community and there is a political sentiment regarding it as a space exclusively for men. This sentiment is not regarding every single member of menswear subculture and as noted earlier, there are a large amount of local and regional differences, with highly urbanized menswear enthusiasts fitting less into this description. The individuals operate in local contexts as well with their existing knowledge and political ideas not being created by menswear, but it is prominent enough in menswear to conclude that this is a key factor in the creation of and reproduction of an identity which fits into specific frameworks, politically and culturally.

Romanticization of these eras, cultures and political ideas are prominent. There is a fact of fetishizing the idea of “the gentleman”, this romanticization involves a cherry picking of

personal favorites from a culture, ignoring or overlooking the aspects which are viewed as uncomfortable or unwished. Racial, sexual, and socio-economic issues are overlooked within the community, discussing why it is mostly wealthy white men from privileged backgrounds who are idolized, is not a normal thing to do within the community. If these things are discussed by somebody, then it is often dismissed as a minor detail within the context. This is especially telling when it comes to menswear's obsession with mid-century Italy. The ideal and tale of mid-century Italy which the menswear community and industry look back to for inspiration is from an extremely specific setting and cultural context. The music, the films and the art all depict and create a world which is heterogeneous and excludes anybody who doesn't fit into their ideal world. I perceive as a way of creating a world in which the members encompass all the agency and, in some ways, a utopian world where everyone can afford buying and afford caring for handmade Italian clothing. Understanding the classics and icons of menswear is also understanding the tale and world which is created through menswear, a very specific world regarding sexuality, gender, and class roles, in which clothing represents specific political contexts.

The social lives of commodities are shown through the users and wearers of the commodities, the commodities have a social function, as well as a function of creating the subject and forming them to a specific ideal. Clothing and commodities construct and reflects identity. In the embedded market which entails social lives of commodities, the way in which these lives and worlds are realized is through the market and in light of market transactions. Appadurai (1986) notes that focusing on the aspect of commodities which are exchanged, allows us to see the link between exchange and value as a political question with commodities encompassing social lives. All exchanges encompass social relations and understanding what is being exchanged and why it is exactly those commodities is a process of social affair.

## Sustainability

Sustainability is one of most important subjects when discussing both menswear and the fashion industry in contemporary society, this is also one of the most highly discussed outside of the industry. According to the BBC "The fashion industry accounts for about 8-10% of global carbon emissions, and nearly 20% of wastewater. And while the environmental impact of flying

now well known, fashion sucks up more energy than both aviation and shipping combined.” (BBC, 2020 11. March) This report shows just how devastating fashion is for the planet, sustainability has been a subject of discussion for several years now, however, consumption is growing, and the fashion industry is growing. The complexity of the supply chain and process from where a fabric is grown or produced to the customer buying the product, means that fashion and clothing industry is one of the most complex systems to understand and to study. Before discussing these issues, it is important to identify what the discussion is about, a discussion on sustainability requires a definition. The United Nations defines sustainability as; “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” (United Nations, N.D.) This definition helps create a vantage point from where a discussion can be made, where difficult questions can be asked. Questions such as, is sustainability possible? Is it possible to have a sustainable fashion industry within an economic system which is based on continual and annual growth? The fashion industry, politicians and environmental agencies have been discussing these questions for several years.

Before discussing sustainability in menswear subculture, understanding the role of sustainability in mainstream fashion is important due to its control over the clothing industry. Fast fashion is one of the most polluting industries in the world, the clothing themselves are made from unsustainable fabrics, using environmentally harmful materials such as polyester and nylon. Polyester being a chemical material which releases micro plastics when washed and has an extremely short lifetime. Nylon is a petroleum-based material which is often used in fast fashion and is terrible for the environment. These materials are harmful, but they are cheap and due to their cheapness, they are often mixed with wool and cotton to make a clothing item cheaper to produce for the fast fashion companies.

Fast fashion has had sustainability on the agenda for several years now, with companies and consumers discussing the issue on a wide variety of platforms. This has however, not changed the effect of fast fashion production on the environment. The easy accessibility of fast fashion products is tightly connected to online shopping and digitalization of the fashion industry. Fast fashion has perfected the easiness of online shopping, allowing consumers to order cheap clothing online and have it delivered in an astounding speed. Companies have taken pledges and marketed that they are becoming more sustainable and caring more for the environment, such as H&M, who according to their own website “Our target is to reduce emissions across our value chain by 56% by 2030” (H&M group, N.D.) While Reuters writes that the company

simultaneously aim to double their sales by 2030. This is just one example which can be relevant for many other companies who have similar goals. This shows that the role of innovation and change of the industry that companies have achieved in the fashion industry is closely connected to the idea of continual growth within a capitalist system. Within this system, companies will profit off of commodity relations and social, cultural and political relations which I have discussed in this thesis. Further, there is a discussion going on about the age of a new variant of capitalism, especially amongst large companies. This is the idea of connected capitalism, capitalism which is connected to societal problems and issues, and the notion that the companies who cause these issues, should also be the one who resolve them. Milton Friedman (Friedman,1970.) in his 1970 New York times essay, first theorized the social responsibility by noting that their responsibility was to increase profits. “In connected capitalism, businesses, nonprofits, and governments work together as partners to satisfy their own interests. Profit and progress, need not conflict.” (Forester, p. 248) Forester (2014) explains that this can be seen as a natural continuation of neoliberal policies, aimed at increasing corporate power and influence over societal issues. With capitalism and neoliberalism always claiming profits and growth in the name of social progress. With corporation’s nongovernmental role and being non-state actors, viewing them as independent sources within the economy. I would argue that the process of depoliticizing social issues such as sustainability and environmental damage, is a political act, which is only possible through specific power and societal structures, which enable those with influence and power to discard political discussion and policies which could negatively affected their business without much resistance. The fact is that fast fashion is profiting and benefiting from the current system, “The first step toward resisting the seduction of ideas like connected capitalism, therefore, is to recognize them for what they are: instruments of control and power the effects of which are hardly benign” (Forester, 2014, p.255)

The greenwashing of the fashion industry is a product of this idea of connected capitalism, where companies can market that they are taking these issues seriously, while not changing their practices. Greenwashing in the name of marketing and attracting customers can be seen as a byproduct of the globalized economy in which societal and cultural processes connected to the production of fast fashion are overbearing and complex enough to allow politicians and consumers to either be ignorant of the problem or trust the fast fashion companies to fix a problem they have helped create.



Sustainability within the menswear subculture is a topic which is seldomly discussed. This is a diversion from the mainstream fashion industry, as that is an important topic as I have discussed earlier. The absence of these discussions within menswear is for some people in the industry a deliberate ignorance and overlooking due to the affects it could have for either their jobs or their businesses. Even though it isn't often discussed, I think that many people within the industry, are ignoring this due to the thought that menswear is such a small subculture within the fashion industry that they can't make a difference. There is also a perception regarding the production and the menswear industry that removes the feeling of responsibility from both the industry and the consumer. Firstly, since some parts of the production are located in small workshops and by artisans, there is an idea that this is a sustainable practice for the earth and therefore, they do not see a problem with it. The problem with this is that the earth and the environment don't necessarily care if your clothing or commodities are handmade or machine made in a sweat shop, consumption is still consumption, just on different scales, the difference in scales is of course an extremely important point. However, the reality is that most of the 7 billion people on earth are not able to afford or have a culture of wearing clothing which is handmade by trained artisans. Therefore, it does not meet the needs of the present, it meets the needs of the few. Production may be more sustainable on an environmental level for menswear, but the shipping and costs of land for the various fabrics used in tailoring is not a sustainable practice. The chain of production in the shop I did fieldwork at displays the amount of time and travelling designs and product do when they are produced and later sold. Attempting to trace a cashmere sweater from the shop I did fieldwork at shows the transnational nature of their products. Design in Oslo, fabric from China, factory in China, shipped to Italy for the labels to be sewn on, shipped to England, and then shipped to Norway, first to the warehouse and then driven from the warehouse to the store. That is the just the first travel of the products, because if they then are sold online then they can be shipped anywhere on the planet. I do think that the luxury aspect affects the discussion on sustainability, with a certain connotation that luxury products are excused from the sustainability debate due to their restrictive and exclusive qualities. These qualities are social relations and symbolic value which are added to products and clothing after they are made. The last point that is important to discuss and understand when speaking about sustainability in menswear, is social class and political thoughts. Social class and class relations play an important role in menswear as was discussed earlier. This is one of the reasons sustainability is overlooked in the industry, due to the fact that the members of the community, the consumers and the people within the industry are not affected by the consequences of environmental change and ignoring sustainability measures. Understanding

their view on the world and their political views are important to understanding the role of sustainability in their lives. There are of course challenges in discussing every single individual political and socio-economic background in menswear, but through my fieldwork I argue that I have seen general tendencies which show how a large amount of people think about the topic of sustainability. The attitude is that it's not their responsibility, most of these consumers, especially in Norway and other European countries already think that they do enough for the environment. They recycle, they maybe drive electric cars, etc. The self-realization that consumption is itself unsustainable, leaves an apathy to do nothing. An oil-executive making millions of kroners will not be the person who will discuss sustainability regarding their tailored clothing. The people earning their wealth and profiting off the idea of mass consumption, benefiting from the current system and from these transnational relations which increase shipping pollution are not going to be the ones challenging these issues. This is a cultural and systemic issue, which if views are challenged and these social and economic processes are discussed and challenged, will not see any change regarding sustainability in menswear. Again, this shows the transnational and embedded nature of clothing and the industry, changing production practices or how you dispose of clothing is not enough. The social relations and cultural contexts must be discussed and challenged to fully be able to understand the processes behind consumption and over-consumption.

Having a discussion with a customer regarding sustainability I noted the infrastructure surrounding clothing and commodities is just as important as the commodities themselves. The disappearance of formally trained cobblers, tailors, and other crafts, which the industry rely on. How do you make sustainable clothing if you don't have tailors to fix them, how do you create long lasting shoes if you don't have cobblers? The infrastructure around clothing is crumbling and has not been cared for by the industry or by consumers. This is also a question of cultural change and creating a culture where clothes are to be looked after and repaired instead of thrown away and replaced.

The only individuals who are discussing and highlighting the topic of sustainability in menswear appear in the forums and blogs I discussed earlier in the thesis. A few clothing companies are focused on the notion of sustainability within menswear. A clothing brand named Livid, which is based in Trondheim, Norway have taken an initiative on their website, where customers can track where the fabric used in their jeans is made, being able to track it to the farm and see in what conditions their products are produced. They also offer every first

repair on jeans for free, trying to make a cultural change regarding the aspect of clothing repairs, having in house tailors who work only on repairs and alterations. Permanentstyle.com wrote a series of articles discussing sustainability, *A Sustainability Framework*. (Crompton,2021) With its goal of helping both the industry and consumers, understand what sustainability means and what is being done, and what can be done about the issue. “Overall, the aim is to create consistency through reference to shared, informed criteria, and then promote an open discussion around them.” (Crompton, 2021, 15. September) This is an example of someone with aesthetic authority and a large amount of symbolic power, using it to further discussion about environmental issues. In his first article, he breaks down what is meant by sustainability and categorizes different areas of impact. Packaging, raw materials, production, after sales and transportation. These are all useful categories to breaking down a seemingly overwhelming issue within the industry. The other online authority who promotes discussion regarding sustainability is the already mentioned *Thesustainablefashionforum*, (Thesustainablefashionforum) an Instagram account which discusses and highlights issues in the fashion industry. They ask more challenging and critical questions than most other blogs and online authorities, such as, “What does Gen Z’s addiction to fast fashion mean for sustainability?” (Thesustainablefashionforum, 2022) and “What would the fashion industry look like if we made less stuff?” (Thesustainablefashionforum, 2021) These are questions which show the relations which are intertwined with clothing and how this affects the discussion regarding sustainability.

Sustainability and environmental effects of the clothing industry and menswear subculture are enormous issues with complicated answers, understanding the social fabric and cultural, political relations intertwined in these processes are crucial to understanding the issue and taking steps to resolve it. These issues are not only connected to the physical commodities, but the social relations which create value and create culture regarding the view of these commodities, viewing commodities as easily replaceable is a cultural and social issue, just as it is an environmental issue. Class and socio-economic background are also integral to these issues, different classes and people with different backgrounds have various lived realities and differing ideas of what is sustainable and what their role in these issues are.

## 8. Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to answer and describe the process of symbolic creation and aesthetic authority within menswear, as well as attempting to define the importance of kinship, gender, sexuality, and global processes in reproducing contemporary capitalist culture. Using menswear as an empirical description of processes which affect larger parts of society than a niche subculture. Studying both global processes, and local urban contexts means that this thesis could expand and focus on different topics. This could mean solely digital research on online blogs, forums, and social media and symbolic creation across national borders. Urban ethnography and a focus on the urban and local context are also possible, studying the development of areas such as Aker Brygge and how material culture develops with changing demographics. Looking back to chapter 4 Aesthetic Authority, creation of authority and power in menswear has been studied through the lens of Appadurai (1986) assertion on commodities as social actors rooted in knowledge creation and knowledge representation. In the same chapter Bourdieu (1979) “[...] Taste is thus the source of the system of distinctive features which cannot fail to be perceived as a systematic expression of a particular class of conditions of existence” (Bourdieu, 1979, p.174) theories of taste, especially amongst “elites” has been an important factor to understanding the creation of aesthetic authority and symbolic value, especially when discussing the creation of icons and classics in chapter 6. At the end of chapter 4, I discussed the process of neoliberal subjectivation and through Gershon (2016) and her study of neoliberal agency in contemporary society. Chapter 5 has attempted to show the importance of kinship within the menswear industry, but also in capitalist economies in general. Through Yanagisako (2002) and her empirical studies of Italian family structure and capitalism I have been inspired to attempt to find similar systems and kinship relations in my fieldwork. Kinship relations also plays an important role in the creation of aesthetic authority in chapter 4 and commodification processes in chapter 6. I have attempted to show the importance of kinship in all aspects of this thesis, from the taste, symbolic value, and reproduction of capitalist culture. Chapter 6 attempted to break down the concept of commodities and how classification in commodities occurs in menswear. Through classical Marxist (2013) theory on commodities and commodification processes in a capitalist society, where commodities are seen as having inherent value. To Appadurai (1986) and his distinction of commodities with luxury commodities and their social and rhetorical aspects being useful to understand the restrictiveness and exclusivity in menswear. Commodities as a representation of neoliberal and capitalist processes, both economic but also, social, and cultural. Chapter 6 also attempted to

show the relevance of icons and classics in creation of identity, through music, film, and art. How the knowledge and understanding of these classics are used to create a sense of community and common affiliation in menswear. At the end of Chapter 6 I attempted to show through Forester (2014) the immergence and importance of connected capitalism and corporations in contemporary capitalism and the changing view of corporations as an integral part of resolving contemporary issues such as climate change and sustainability. Throughout this thesis the importance of digital processes and digital culture has been attempted. Describing the intertwined nature of digital in every aspect of symbolic value, taste, aesthetic authority, and commodification processes. The growing digital subculture of menswear and its visual aspect has been a good empirical study of processes which can be used to study larger concepts and contexts. Through the use of forums, blogs, and social media accounts I have attempted to empirically show the digital nature and digital culture within menswear, how authority and knowledge is produced in a digital space.

This thesis has attempted to answer and describe how symbolic value, taste, and material culture, aren't things which appear out of thin air, but rather, appear within a relevant context with important factors playing in such as class, socio-economic background, geography, and race. Regarding this, there are certain topics which have been overlooked or could have had more focus in this thesis if I had chosen to. These could be the importance of sexuality and gender roles; this is a topic which deserves more anthropological research within a fashion context. The role of immigration and demographic changes in an urban setting in for example, Oslo could also be researched, how the intertwining of different cultures affect symbolic value creation and taste. Menswear as a subculture could be researched in other ways than my thesis has attempted. The importance of greenwashing and connected capitalism in menswear and the fashion industry is a topic which could be further researched and theorized. The menswear community is not easily defined or categorized, with fluid participation an important aspect and as I have tried to show, requires a construction of the field to research and study. The themes I have discussed could use further anthropological research in contemporary societies where personal identification and symbolism is an ongoing process and becoming a complex web of self-identification and societal expectation of the self. Through this thesis I have attempted to present the importance of local context and material culture in understanding the fluidity of physical and digital social relations with menswear as an empirical site.

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