

Universidade de São Paulo
Faculdade de Arquitetura e Urbanismo
Curso de Graduação em Design

Politecnico di Milano
Scuola del Design
Communication Design MSc.

Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso
Master's Thesis

Social Media as an Alternative Space for Fashion Criticism

Mateus Alan Dal Vesco

São Paulo - Milano
2019

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Trabalho apresentado para obtenção do título de
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Resumo

Historicamente, a moda tem sido considerada frívola e fútil, principalmente devido a sua associação com feminilidade, a qual surgiu no século XIX. Devido a isso a crítica de moda é ainda vista como menos importante do que crítica de outras formas de produção cultural. A crítica de moda séria e propriamente elaborada tem sido limitada a jornais e revistas de interesse geral, visto que a mídia de moda se relaciona com a indústria da moda em uma maneira “simbiótica”, onde a mídia depende da indústria pela renda da publicidade e conteúdo, enquanto a indústria depende da mídia para a produção do valor simbólico da moda. Embora a origem desses problemas possa ser localizada nos tempos de mídia impressa, as mídias de moda digital, principalmente os blogs de moda, herdaram algumas dessas limitações, e não foram capazes de mudar a qualidade e a percepção da crítica de moda. Considerando o conteúdo relacionado à moda e postado em mídias sociais como uma evolução dos blogs de moda, essa tese explora a possibilidade de plataformas de mídia social de se tornarem um espaço alternativo para a publicação da crítica de moda e para seu estabelecimento como uma prática diligente. Após definir a crítica de moda baseada no quadro referencial teórico, essa pesquisa define cinco parâmetros para a crítica de moda contemporânea em mídias sociais, adaptadas com aprendizados de entrevistas com críticos de moda reconhecidos. Duas contas de Instagram e uma de YouTube, selecionadas de publicações online e impressas, baseando-se na sua relevância em relação à crítica de moda, são analisadas, considerando os parâmetros mencionados. Após provar a existência de crítica de moda em mídias sociais, discutem-se os desafios para estabelecer a crítica de moda como uma prática diligente nesses canais, e possíveis soluções para a profissionalização dos críticos de moda em redes sociais são exploradas.

Palavras-chave: crítica de moda, mídias de moda, revistas de moda, blogs de moda, mídias sociais.

Abstract

Historically, fashion has been regarded as frivolous and futile, mainly due to its association with femininity, which emerged in the nineteenth century. As such, fashion criticism is still perceived as less important than criticism about other forms of cultural production. Serious, properly elaborated fashion criticism has been limited to newspapers and general-interest magazines, for fashion media relate to the fashion industry in a “symbiotic” manner, where the media rely on the industry for advertising revenue and content, whereas the industry depends on the media to create the symbolic value of fashion. While the origin of such issues can be traced back to the time of print media, digital fashion media, mainly fashion blogging, inherited some of these limitations and have not been able to change the quality and perception of fashion criticism. By considering fashion-related social media content as an evolution of fashion blogging, this thesis explores the possibility for social media platforms to become an alternative space for fashion criticism to be published and established as an earnest practice. After defining fashion criticism based on the reviewed literature, this research sets out five standards for contemporary fashion criticism on social media, adapted with learnings from interviews with established fashion critics. Two Instagram and one YouTube account, selected from articles in print and internet publications, based on their relevance with regard to fashion criticism, are analyzed considering the above-mentioned standards. After proving the existence of fashion criticism on social media, the challenges to establish fashion criticism as an earnest practice on these channels are discussed, and possible solutions for the professionalization of fashion critics on social media are explored.

Keywords: fashion criticism, fashion media, fashion magazines, fashion blogs, social media.

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1. Introduction

The relevance of fashion critics is in question. Social media has deeply changed the way content is absorbed and produced, and according to Julie Zerbo (2017), fashion criticism did not escape:

“Relying on critics to tell us what garments and accessories are standout pieces in any given collection is a bit outdated when young fashion fans can simply look at photos or videos posted by influencers. [...] But alas, Instagram is not the best place to make points about why a specific collection matters, why the designs are technically impressive and/or why last season’s collection was more appealing, for instance.”

However, fashion criticism was actually not in a better situation before the rise of social media. Investigating the reasons for that has been, heretofore, the effort of Peter McNeil and Sanda Miller (2014), Monica Tilton (2016) and Francesca Granata (2018). While the two first found faults in fashion criticism originating in its emergence as the development of a critical vocabulary borrowed from poetry and based in the subjective notion of taste, Tilton focused on exposing the “economic dependency” between the fashion media and the fashion industry, a sign of the “symbiotic relationship” (Best 2017) they participate in, that has frustrated the quality of fashion writing. Granata, however, mentions the existence of “serious fashion writing” and a tradition of proper fashion criticism in newspapers and general-interest media, as they do not rely on the fashion industry for advertising revenue. For her, the fact that fashion criticism does not occupy the same level as the criticism of other forms of cultural production is thus caused by the demeaning perception of fashion as frivolous and futile, in its relation to femininity. These theories about the problems that fashion criticism faces will be further exposed in chapter 5, after commenting its importance and history in chapters 3 and 4.

The aforementioned reasons, however, come from times when social media, and not even digital media, existed. Chapter 6 will explain some of the developments that fashion media has been through after the digital turn of the late 1990s and early 2000s. The main point is the emergence of fashion blogging, with its initial promise as a space for alternative discourses of fashion, and its later embrace by the fashion system, turning fashion bloggers into digital influencers and gatekeepers of fashion.

As mentioned in the above quote by Julie Zerbo, fashion fans might rather follow influencer’s content than be concerned about the commentary of a fashion critic. But what if, subverting what happened with fashion bloggers, who went from alternative voices to insiders of fashion, social media were an opportunity for other new alternative voices to rise, after its initial status as a channel for established digital influencers? *Can social media platforms be a space for fashion criticism to be published and established as an earnest practice?*

Understanding the possibilities and limitations of social media in relation to fashion criticism might help with attempting to recover the relevance of fashion critics in an age when “many millennial and Gen-Z fashion fans do not give two darns about a fashion critic’s review. Such reports are not posted on Snapchat, after all” (Zerbo 2017). While in chapter 7 the possibility to publish fashion criticism will be looked for in two chosen social media platforms, the last chapter is dedicated to discussing the obstacles that could come up when trying to establish fashion criticism as a profession on social media. Expanding serious fashion criticism out of the limited space it occupies in newspapers and general-interest magazines, making it reach a waiting public of fashion fans in the realm of social media, could help on building a future where fashion is seen as more than a frivolity. For, in the words of fashion critic Angelo Flaccavento, “true fashion criticism goes hand in hand with progress, because it’s only through questioning and debating that new solutions and new scenarios are created, and that movement is ignited” (Flaccavento 2015).

2. Method

To answer if fashion criticism can find a place to develop on social media, it is necessary to understand how fashion media developed since its beginning. It is also important to locate the emergence of fashion criticism and clarify how it evolved through time. The specific topic of fashion criticism has gotten the attention of only a few, notably Peter McNeil and Sanda Miller (2014), who wrote a whole book dedicated to the subject, Reponen (2011) and Svendsen (2017), who wrote on the importance of the practice; Titton (2016) and Granata (2018), who exposed reasons for its delay in recognition as a serious field; and Choi and Lewis (2018), who suggest a methodology adapted from art criticism. The desktop research had to be expanded thus to fashion journalism in general, fashion blogs, and fashion print media, including magazines and newspapers.

As the research on fashion criticism is limited to the evolution of digital media until fashion blogs, interviews with a specialist and three fashion critics were conducted to better understand the contemporary scenario. The first interviewee was Monica Titton, a sociologist and researcher based in Vienna. She has published research on street style blogs (Titton 2013), persona construction on fashion blogs (Titton 2015) and, specially relevant to the development of this research, “a sociological critique of criticism on fashion media” (Titton 2016). The interview was done in person in Vienna, on July 6, 2019. It was an unstructured, in-depth conversation that lasted one hour and ten minutes. As Titton has profound knowledge of the subject, the topics were focused on the possibility of the development of fashion criticism on social media and the problems that could come out of that. Its transcription can be found as Appendix 1 of this thesis.

The second interview was done with Angelo Flaccavento, an Italian fashion critic, known for his honest, erudite writing. He works as a freelancer, regularly contributing with *The Business of Fashion* and *Vogue Italia*. The interview was also in person, and the meeting happened in Milan, on July 19, 2019. It was a semi-structured, in-depth interview, that lasted 43 minutes. The topics were mainly focused on Flaccavento’s career, his perceptions of contemporary fashion and fashion media, and speculations about the future of criticism. The transcription can be found as Appendix 2 of this thesis.

The third interviewee was Alexander Fury, menswear critic at the *Financial Times* and fashion features director at *Another Magazine*. The live meeting happened in London, on August 9, 2019. It was also a semi-structured, in-depth interview that lasted one hour and ten minutes. The topics used for guidance were the same as those used with Flaccavento, to keep a

coherent approach with similar professionals. The transcription of this interview can be found as Appendix 3 of this thesis.

The fourth and last interviewee was Vanessa Friedman, fashion director and chief fashion critic at *The New York Times*. The interview was conducted through a telephone call, on August 28, 2019. It was a semi-structured, in-depth interview that lasted twelve minutes. The topics used for guidance were the same as in the previous interviews with Flaccavento and Fury. The transcription of this interview can be found as Appendix 4 of this thesis.

To answer the first part of the research question, “*can social media be a space for fashion criticism to be published?*”, a search of the current presence of fashion criticism on social media platforms was made. As the research question focus on social media, YouTube and Instagram were chosen for their large audience and potential for discussion on fashion (this is further explained on section 7.1). After delimiting the field to these two platforms, the initial research consisted of searching the web by using the keywords “fashion critic” and “fashion criticism”, combined with “Instagram”, “YouTube” and “social media” (the third term as a trial to expand the field, hoping that fashion criticism could be found in other social media platforms). The phenomenon is in a very early stage, thus not mapped, but some names showed up more often than others: Luke Meagher, as HauteLeMode on YouTube; Pierre A. M’Pelé, as @pam_boy on Instagram; and the ubiquitous Diet Prada, as @diet_prada on Instagram. These three were chosen as the objects of study for analyzing if fashion criticism is already present on social media. There are other accounts who have been mentioned as fashion “critics” or “commentators”, such as Willy Ndatira (@williamcult), SKIP Dinner (@skipdin) and Louis Pisano (@louispisano), and while they have a considerable following, watching these profiles from March to October 2019 showed that their commentary on fashion is sparse, not frequently posted, thus disqualifying them for this research.

The interviews with Titton, Flaccavento, Fury and Friedman were enlightening in knowledge about the current stage of fashion criticism, but lacked in perspective of the possibilities of a future practice on social media. Several trials to contact the three chosen objects of study (@diet_prada, @pam_boy and HauteLeMode) between May and September 2019 were made, but only @pam_boy, or Pierre A. M’Pelé, as the fashion journalist behind the Instagram account is called, answered. After a short exchange of email, he offered to answer to written questions, but stopped responding after five questions, that focused on his career, his view of contemporary fashion criticism and his wishes for his future practice, were sent.

As the objects of study did not answer to the trials to get in touch, another method of research was developed to answer the research question. To look for the presence of fashion criticism

on social media, a definition of fashion criticism was elaborated based on the literature reviewed, and five standards for fashion criticism were built through the adaptation of the original five suggested by Lars Svendsen in his 2017 essay *On Fashion Criticism* (Svendsen 2017). His initial standards were expanded with the help of learnings from the interviews conducted with the three fashion critics. After having defined fashion criticism and its standards, posts from the supposed fashion critics were selected to be analyzed. From @diet_prada, a panorama of their posts was analyzed, as they do not actually publish full essays or videos. From @pam_boy and HauteLeMode, respectively, three posts with long-form text captions from September 28 and 29, 2018 (the text can be found as Appendix 5 of this thesis), and a fourteen-minute video from October 1, 2018 (available at, reviewing the same fashion collection, were analyzed.

However, the analysis of the supposed social media critics was only able to answer if there is fashion criticism on social media, and not if it can flourish and be legitimized as a serious practice. The second part of the research question, “*can social media platforms be a space for fashion criticism to be established as an earnest practice?*” was discussed based on the literature review and the interviews conducted with Titton, Flaccavento, Friedman and Fury.

3. Understanding the need for fashion criticism

“Ok, I see. You think this has nothing to do with you. You go to your closet and you select that lumpy, loose sweater, for instance, because you’re trying to tell the world that you take yourself too seriously to care about what you put on your back, but what you don’t know is that that sweater is not just blue. It’s not turquoise. It’s not lapis. It’s actually cerulean. And you’re also blithely unaware of the fact that in 2002, Oscar de la Renta did a collection of cerulean gowns, and then I think it was Yves Saint Laurent who showed cerulean military jackets, and then cerulean quickly shot up in the collections of eight different designers. And then it filtered down through department stores, and then trickled on down onto some tragic Casual Corner where you no doubt fished it out of some clearance bin. However, that blue represents millions of dollars and countless jobs, and it’s sort of comical how you think you made a choice that exempts you from the fashion industry when, in fact, you’re wearing a sweater that was selected for you by the people in this room from a pile of stuff.”

The quote above is a line by Miranda Priestly, the editor of *Runway*, a fashion magazine in the 2006 American film *The Devil Wears Prada*. Besides the film holding its importance in the democratization of the fashion discourse, exposing (even if in a fictional version) the world of fashion from the inside, which had been closed to the public for decades, the line is a very didactic way to explain why fashion — along with its media and criticism — matters.

3.1 The importance of fashion

Fashion may be simply defined as “styles and articles of dress that are popular within specified time frames, accepted and adopted by the masses as socially desirable articles and expressions of individual taste, as well as accompanying jewelry, shoes, and handbags” (Wolbers 2015). There is no need to cite big numbers related to fashion industry’s worth in the global economy to explain why fashion is so relevant — the reasons are more palpable. Fashion has become the subject with the biggest media coverage (Polan 2006: 154) for a reason: it is present in the life of every human being.

While the meaning of *fashion* in English goes back to the Latin verb *facere*, that is, “to make” or “to do” (Wolbers 2015), the roots of the French term *mode* (fashion) are the same as *modernité* (modernity) (Rocamora 2013: 66). That helps to understand the way fashion is thought of as an industry: modern, transitory, innovative, ephemeral. Fashion is an interminable production of (supposedly) new aesthetics, styles, ways of dressing. *High fashion*, that which is shown on the catwalk, might seem irrelevant to the lives of most of the world’s population, for its prohibitive prices and extravagant aesthetics, being reserved to just a few, as those fashions that a few centuries back were made for aristocracy and copied by the people. However, it is essential to point out that this fashion from the catwalk, with time, quietly ends up in the wardrobes of many, no matter how interested in it they may be.

Fashion can be a whole world of frivolity, pointless novelty, elitism and inaccessibility for those who see it only as an industry disconnected from their reality, opposed to a cultural phenomenon. However, the quote from *The Devil Wears Prada* shows that even these, who make an effort to be unrelated to fashion, are actually somehow affected by it. Merely the decision to ignore fashion is connected to it: “the way we use fashion — therefore both the way we follow or do not follow it — is evidence of how we situate ourselves in the social world that we inhabit” (González 2010: 16). Fashion is also influence, and while one may not feel that in their own clothes, escaping from contemporary fashions by choosing to wear second hand, for example, they will be adopting the fashion of another time. Women wearing pants was unthinkable, then fashionable, then normal. Sweaters were invented for sports, before becoming fashionable in daily life, then omnipresent in chilly weather. Not following the current fashion does not exclude someone from participating in fashion as a phenomenon, as “it implies a deeper dynamic, rooted at the very heart of human life [...] of social assimilation and distinction, which, for want of other references, could be postulated as a guiding criterion that determines our very identity” (ibid.).

Thus fashion is not only the industry of ephemeral clothing, the skinny models and the glossy magazines, filled with advertisements. It is also what we pick to wear, how we choose to be seen. Fashion critic Alexander Fury (2019) argues that, besides being culturally and economically important, fashion “says a lot about who we are as people and where we are in the world, in lots of different ways.” His counterpart Angelo Flaccavento (2019) agrees by explaining that, while fashion is also clothing, it is not just covering up with it: “it is a way that you represent yourself.” Because of its relation to personal identity, fashion critic Vanessa Friedman (2019) believes fashion is “the only arts or art adjacent form that is relevant to everybody.” In accordance, Lars Svendsen (2017: 144) considers that “fashion plays a far more significant role in contemporary culture than the fine arts”, but it struggles with being considered more than a commodity and occupy the same level as the other arts, possibly because of a lack of proper fashion criticism.

3.2 The importance of fashion media

Fashion, holding a symbolic value that differs it from clothing, is not only commodity, but also cultural product (Moeran 2006: 728). For that, as Rocamora (2001) explains, drawing from the work of Bourdieu (1993), “the fabrication of fashion becomes not just the fabrication of the material object known as the fashion dress but the fabrication of ideas about fashion, the creation of beliefs that give it meaning.” This symbolic production is the work of different institutions, but fashion media and fashion journalism, since the invention of fashion

magazines in the eighteenth century, have been at the center of this process. As Kate Nelson Best notes, “Barthes (1967) suggested that fashion journalism has shaped, and possibly even created, the concept of fashion and its symbolic value” (Best 2017: 1). Therefore, fashion and fashion media are symbiotic (ibid.: 6).

In more practical terms, the quote from *The Devil Wears Prada* that opens this chapter shows the importance of fashion media and their journalists in this fabrication of symbolic value: the cerulean blue would not have achieved the racks of a department store if it had not been chosen among the high fashion gowns by a fashion editor.

Garments are born when they are imagined and projected by a designer. Then, they are manufactured and become material products, but remain in their status of *clothing*. Clothing is not fashion while it is not chosen as the “legitimate aesthetic taste” (Kawamura 2005: 73) by specific workers inside the fashion system, and then disseminated to the public with a symbolic value attached to the garments.

The fashion system workers involved in picking what innovations are to become fashion are known as gatekeepers: “an official or informal authority who acts as a conduit for permission to perform certain roles or as a veto point for prohibiting certain behavior; in the case of fashion, a concierge or arbiter of changing modes and regulator of fashion behavior” (Craik 2009: 265). They are responsible for analyzing the products released by the fashion industry, to identify innovations, judging them as relevant or disposable and trivial (McCracken 1986:77), and pass that on to the public in different ways. Fashion editors, for instance, attend hundreds of fashion shows every years, where they choose what they find fitting to be featured in fashion stories or mentioned as new trends.

From the beginning of fashion media, the gatekeepers have been mainly journalists and editors of print magazines, in a power battle with the brands and their public relations (PR) managers, whose influence in what becomes fashionable has been growing intermittently since fashion houses started to become big corporations in the 1990s (Best 2017: 201). Some would argue that, since appearing in the eighteenth century, fashion magazines are still the louder voices in the fashion system, maintaining this traditional model of fashion discourse production. But the role of the fashion press in determining what is and is not fashion has been diminishing exponentially since the rise of digital and online media, particularly after the invention of social networks, where brands and designers can access the public directly, without passing through the criteria of the traditional gatekeepers (Best 2017: 217).

Fashion media have an important role also in helping to maintain the fashion industry alive, by creating fashion's symbolic value and, through propagating it, transform it in financial profit. This shows the dual nature of fashion media that, like fashion itself and other mass media productions as film, music, newspapers or television, are both commodity and cultural product. It is responsible for creating the symbolic value and being a means for advertising and selling of fashion products, while being itself a source of cultural content and a product of the publishing and print industries that has an economic value (Moeran 2006).

Like other specialist fields of journalism related to commercial products, fashion journalism has a close relationship to the industry that it reports, as this industry is the main source of news and revenue (Tunstall 1971, cited on McRobbie 1998: 152). "The tension between commercial and editorial considerations is common to all forms of consumer journalism but, arguably, has been most pronounced in fashion journalism" (Best 2017: 6). In the words of Angela McRobbie (1998: 172):

"The fashion magazines and the fashion press operate within an economy of looking. They also produce distinct cultural values which feed directly into the formation of taste groups for the broader consumer culture. The editors provide the advertisers with an appropriate visual environment within which they can insert their own copy."

The need to serve both readers and advertisers has marked fashion media's history with a constant conflict between the commercial and creative/journalistic side, with the former often overcoming the latter (Titton 2016: 214). Therefore, contrary to other areas, like cinema or fine arts, where specialized magazines have genuine criticism about their fields, fashion has a history of trying to ambush its own criticism (Granata 2018: 3).

3.3 The importance of fashion criticism

As important as the role of a gatekeeper might be, fashion critics have a duty that goes much beyond that. While gatekeepers judge and expose, critics should judge and explain. Criticism is not supposed to tell the reader what to buy, or just propose what is in fashion, but rather clarify what the trends or garments in question mean, how they connect to the lives of real people and what relevance they hold in contemporaneity (Svendsen 2017). It needs to "assess the merits and faults of the object of criticism in a manner to describe, classify, interpret, analyze, contextualize, elucidate and disseminate it with the support of valid reason" (Reponen 2011: 31).

The role of a critic goes further than that of the journalist or editor that selects and bridges the fashion from the offer of the creator to the world of the reader: it is to *translate* that fashion to

reality, interpreting it in relation to both history and present times, identifying it as original or copious, helping the public to comprehend and appreciate newness. There is no point on having fashion gatekeepers to select what is supposed to be appreciated on the pages of a fashion magazine if that does not come with explicit reasoning. Proper criticism enables the reader to have the ability to judge and make distinctions by oneself (Svendsen 2017: 144), making it possible for each person to make their own choices, since “what we choose or what we involuntarily ignore, is an expression of what we are and, as such, is worthy of attention, precisely in relation to our identity” (González 2010: 31).

Besides the importance of fashion criticism for the public, it is essential in its potential to provoke change in the fashion industry. In the words of Italian fashion critic Angelo Flaccavento (2019), “good criticism can ignite some progress because, if you question yourself, you may find new ways to do things, and that can lead to some advancements.” Without progress and creativity, fashion might end up becoming just clothing. Fashion needs criticism to keep changing and moving in the right direction.

Despite the important role for both the public and the industry of fashion, there is no tradition of quality fashion criticism, as one would find in fine arts or literature (Svendsen 2017: 132). Peter McNeil and Sanda Miller explain that an evaluative vocabulary for fashion came later than for the fine arts, partly because of the differences applied and fine arts traditionally had, and it derived from a notion of taste, tying the critical writing of fashion to personal opinion (McNeil & Miller 2014). Regardless of fashion not being considered an art form for not having criticism, as argued by Svendsen (2017: 144), or fashion not having proper criticism for not being an art form, as argued by McNeil and Miller (2014), as Francesca Granata (2018: 3) notes, it is more troubling to see that fashion criticism is held in lower regard than other fields that do not even have a several-centuries criticism tradition as the fine arts, like film, music or food.

The quote opening this chapter shows how necessary it is for fashion to be more frequently dissected and explained. This would enable each of us, who get dressed every day, to understand why we choose a certain blue, or a certain cut, or a certain fabric. Fashion criticism is an essential practice for that to happen.

4. A brief history of fashion print media and fashion criticism

As shown in the previous chapter, fashion has such an important presence in culture and human life that the lack of seriousness with which it is treated seems incoherent. That extends to the underwhelming position that fashion writing (and criticism) have. In the words of Kate Nelson Best, “despite widespread academic and public interest in fashion itself, fashion journalism — with the exception of fashion photography and illustration — has remained somewhat marginalized” (Best 2017: 4).

Research on the causes for the perceived lack of fashion criticism are best represented by Monica Tilton’s “sociological critique of criticism in fashion media” (Tilton 2016), that investigates the history of the economic ties between fashion media, and by Francesca Granata’s “inquiry into fashion criticism and its delay in legitimization” (Granata 2018), that explores the influence of fashion’s connection with femininity on fashion criticism. The next chapter will discuss two suggested main reasons for fashion writing’s lack of criticism, and for fashion criticism’s low status, based on the writings of Tilton and Granata: respectively the influence of fashion industry’s economic capital on fashion media and the demeaning, sexist view of fashion as a frivolity related to femininity. It is necessary, however, to first have a brief review of fashion print media’s history.

Specialized fashion media began, according to Kate Nelson Best (Best 2017: 15), with the creation of the first magazine dedicated to fashion, *Le Cabinet des Modes*, in 1785, in France. For Peter McNeil and Sanda Miller this happened earlier, in the 1760s, with *Le Journal de la Mode et du Goût* (McNeil & Miller 2014: 24). Either way, fashion press emerged in the second half of the eighteenth century to satisfy the needs of a growing urban middle class, who wanted to distinguish itself with an identity different from that of the French court (Best 2017: 15). Initially, fashion magazines were similar to general-interest press and did not feature much advertising (Bradford 2014: 38, cited on Tilton 2016: 212).

Industrialization of the fashion industry in the nineteenth century meant more advertisers, resulting also in the expansion of the press dedicated to fashion (Best 2017: 30-31). With the expansion of fashion journalism increased also the contempt for fashion as a frivolous, wasteful matter, responsible for corrupting women (Best 2017: 42). By the 1830s fashion columns were “a new space of urban consumption for women” (Hahn 2005: 208, cited on Tilton 2016: 212), and advertorials (an advertisement written in a “journalistic”, or “editorial” way) could already be seen in French fashion magazines (Tilton 2016: 212). In the 1850s, fashion media were already an essential part of the lives of women from the middle class and upper middle class, defining femininity as closely tied with clothing, self-image and

consumption (Best 2017: 45-46). By the time *Vogue* was launched in 1892, fashion magazines had already established their commercial model that is present to this day: attracting lots of readers to sell their attention to advertisers, and relying on the advertisement revenue rather than on that coming from subscriptions and sales (Titton 2016: 212).

Meanwhile, fashion criticism, according to Peter McNeil and Sanda Miller, emerged around the middle of the nineteenth century, after the invention of the camera brought up discussions about the separation between fine and applied arts. These discussions made it necessary to create ways of judging (and criticizing) the cultural production besides that of fine arts and literature. The appearance of a critical vocabulary for fashion writing happened when Charles Baudelaire, who McNeil and Miller call the first “professional” art critic, took the term “charm” from his own poetry to judge the way of dressing of his time (2014: 5-6).

According to McNeil and Miller, fashion reporting and journalism adapted a subjective approach to aesthetic evaluation. Such an approach was, in its origins, based on the concept of taste, “a special faculty that enables us to discern aesthetic qualities, especially beauty, regarded during the eighteenth century as the most important quality of works of art.” This, according to the authors, still contributes for fashion writing to be often restrained to mere opinion (2014: 3-4, 46).

McNeil and Miller argue that fashion reporting is not trivial because it comes from “a long tradition of evaluative and critical writing that is historically specific and has both benefits and limitations for the assessment of fashion clothing”, that started with “charm”, which was “the first evaluative term in the history of fashion criticism.” After this moment, the reporting of fashion, that was mainly descriptive commentary of the collections showed by couture houses since the half of the nineteenth century, began to make use of terms borrowed from poetry in an evaluative, judicial manner (2014: 97-100). In the last decades of the nineteenth and first two decades of the twentieth century, in reviews of collections in fashion magazines, “alongside a number of innocuous terms such as ‘*folie*’, ‘elegant’ and ‘*delicieux*’, both ‘charm’ and ‘grace’ were used regularly, signaling an incipient critical vocabulary for fashion writing” (2014: 123).

World War I caused significant change to fashion media. Women had gained economic power and become more relevant as consumers, increasing the advertising revenue for the fashion press (Best 2017: 74), to the point that some magazines created departments to conduct market researches and sell them to advertisers (Breward 1995: 203, cited on Titton 2016: 213). Kate Nelson Best argues that it was at this point that the “Janus-head of fashion publishing was born” (Best 2017: 90), a cause of tension between the editorial and advertising

departments inside fashion magazines. It was also in the interwar period that fashion journalism courses were created, professionalizing the practice (Best 2017: 74).

In the interwar period *Vogue* reasserted itself as an elitist magazine. After World War II, however, new fashion magazines emerged, with a change in the journalistic tone that democratized the fashion market. These new magazines focused on a growing middle class and promoted products as solutions for the readers' problems (Best 2017: 105-108).

The consumer boom in the 1950s, the resurgence of Haute Couture, and Dior's "New Look", according to Kate Nelson Best, helped to establish fashion as "news". Fashion had asserted itself as something to be reported on, and fashion journalism became a more "serious" profession, with the help of "the first serious fashion PR, Eleanor Lambert" (Best 2017: 135). In magazines, the importance of images over text was increasing (Best 2017: 134). Meanwhile, newspapers' coverage of fashion, with its limitations in the use of imagery and less influenced by advertising, elevated the level of fashion criticism and the power of newspaper fashion journalists (Best 2017: 145-146). It was at this point in fashion print media's history, when fashion became news, that Kate Nelson Best locates the definition of the work of fashion journalists that she argues is the same until today: "to distill the message from the couturiers, pronounce on the significant trends, and make judgments on key looks for both readers and buyers" (Best 2017: 148).

The 1960s and 70s brought prêt-à-porter, street style and feminist suspicion on fashion, diminishing the importance of fashion journalists' voice in defining it, while fashion "became a transient and disposable commodity that expressed an unconventional new world order dictated as much by the street as by couture" (Best 2017: 159).

The 1980s were marked by the emergence of a new kind of journalism related to fashion, found in the "style press", represented by British magazines *i-D*, *The Face* and *Blitz*. Unrelated to gender, they had a hybrid coverage of street style, music, pop culture and fashion. Style magazines were the answer to an age when "tribalism became more important in fashion as pop culture, particularly music, continued to play a pivotal role in how young people used dress to define their identity" (Best 2017: 190). Fashion had become ubiquitous in popular culture, and so had the importance and quality of fashion writing. The writing feature in style magazines had an innovative way of discussing fashion, opening it up and relating it to other sides of cultural production and its context. The journalism made inside these new outlets influenced and changed fashion journalism as a whole. "The link between fashion and lifestyle also provided a new focus for fashion journalism generally, as writers began to talk about fashion in sociological and anthropological terms" (Best 2017: 210).

Angela McRobbie (1998: 154), however, argues that style magazines “also draw their own boundaries which exclude any detailed or serious discussion of the social processes or economic relations which underpin fashion as a cultural activity. Instead they construct style and fashion as insider knowledge”.

Writing in 1998, McRobbie explains why the general expansion of media started in the 1980s affected fashion, starting to establish it as an important cultural conversation: “the availability of cheaper full color print technology, the celebrity value of the fashion ‘supermodels’ and the sales appeal of having a glamorous model on the front page of all the newspapers has given fashion a more prominent position as a cultural phenomenon” (McRobbie 1998: 155).

With the rise of neoliberalism and globalization, the 1980s and 90s had fashion brands and fashion media companies turn into international corporations. Fashion houses used licensing of their brands to become large businesses that put more relevance in profit than design. With the need to manage global brands, public relations departments gained more importance and influence on fashion media. Along with the rise in advertising budget from mighty fashion brands, public relations’ growth helped to undermine the power of editors and journalists’ voice in fashion writing. Gatekeeping was developing into a complicated balance between the ideas of journalists and the needs and wishes of fashion companies. As the glossy fashion magazines were also becoming big corporations, however, the power of fashion editors from the most important titles, like Anna Wintour at *Vogue*, was expanded. They were becoming feared for their potential to make or destroy the career of a designer (Best 2017: 189-203).

The crucial changes that the digital turn and the internet brought to every aspect and kind of communication from the beginning of the 2000s, and all the promises that the new possibilities brought by the digital world to fashion media, make it necessary to discuss this new scenario, and how it related to fashion journalism and criticism, in a chapter of its own. The interconnectivity of the new millennium will be further discussed in chapter 6.

5. Obstacles to the production and legitimization of fashion criticism in print media

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Peter McNeil and Sanda Miller argue that the concept of “taste” in the eighteenth century was essential to the emergence and development of an evaluative vocabulary for fashion, a fundamental part of fashion criticism. They explain that, as late as in the turn from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, the first evaluative term for fashion, “charm”, inherited from Baudelaire’s poetry, was still in use. Kate Nelson Best affirms, however, that the change in cultural values through the following decades would bring new terms, and “the new touchstones included ‘smart’ and ‘chic’ in the 1920s, ‘elegant’ in the 1950s, and ‘style’ in the 1980s” (Best 2017: 6). According to Best, the lack of such recognizable touchstones in contemporary fashion writing might indicate a scarcity of evaluation.

As according to McNeil and Miller evaluation is fundamental for criticism, that means contemporary fashion writing suffers from its absence. Analyzing fashion writing on a newspaper in 2013, they noted that it was limited to a “descriptive terminology” (McNeil & Miller 2014: 124). McNeil and Miller consider that “we are accustomed to reading fashion journalism that amounts to no more than excited description and personal opinion, much of it being media-led accolades or ‘badmouthing’” (McNeil & Miller 2014: 3). These perceived problems with fashion writing, though, are not limited to contemporaneity. Francesca Granata notes that, back in 1845, fashion reviews were already seen more as advertisements than “food for thought” (Granata 2018: 3).

In studies of fashion, however, this was only perceived in 1967, when Roland Barthes wrote *The Fashion System*, an early effort in the analysis of fashion writing (Barthes 1967). His approach was semiotic and, examining fashion text, he discusses the “consumerist bias” as “the fashion industry needs the production of writing and images in fashion magazines in order to create the illusion that the newest fashion trend is a natural fact, not only an economic law” (Titton 2016: 211). Barthes “concludes, principally, that the role of the text is to direct the reading of the image” (Best 2017: 10). Writing in 1998, Angela McRobbie argues that fashion reportage maintained the features described by Barthes back in 1967 (McRobbie 1998: 153):

“The rules on fashion reportage, the conventions which define the field of fashion representation, also set the fashion world apart from the rest of the media by virtue of this very conservatism. It seems that the overwhelming emphasis on images, indicating that the magazines are primarily ‘to-be-looked-at’, somehow relegates the role of text to accessory, to banal commentary, to a poetics of mood, to simple information, caption, headline, ‘statement’, or else it conforms to the tradition of superlatives in fashion writing.”

According to McRobbie, fashion has become only a matter of “aesthetic image” because fashion writing does not question value, as it has no criteria for judgment, so it is sufficient that the work and images shown are recognized as important for them to be validated (1998: 165). The author considers that “fashion writing is informative or celebratory, it is never critical, only mildly ironical”. She argues that fashion media helps to keep fashion in a low status of triviality by not dealing with fashion’s own serious issues and how the fashion system affects society (1998: 173).

McRobbie’s analysis of fashion journalism is relevant as it portrays the situation of fashion journalism just before the beginning of the twenty-first century and the digital/online revolution. This demonstrates that, although the problems related to fashion criticism have been researched on only recently (McNeil & Miller 2014, Titton 2016, Granata 2018), they can be identified in fashion writing before the changes brought by the interconnectivity of the 2000s and its consequences on fashion media. Therefore, in this chapter, the problems related to the lack of criticism in fashion writing and their probable origins are connected to print media, as digital online media will be tackled in chapter 6.

One frequent obstacle for the practice of fashion criticism (Svendsen 2017: 132, Granata 2018: 4) is the intolerance of the fashion industry to negative judgment. McRobbie describes, in 1998, a scenario that is still frequent (Titton 2016: 213, Granata 2018: 4) in the coverage of fashion (McRobbie 1998: 170):

“Where a new book or film, or a new record or play can be panned by the critics, it is very different in fashion. It is not unusual for editors who have published even mildly critical reports about a new collection (along the lines of ‘Lacroix was disappointing’) to find themselves barred from entrance and deprived of an invitation the following season. The shows are where the editors do their groundwork and they have to be able to see these one-off events. If filing poor copy means that they won’t be invited back, this at least influences what they say.”

While part of this may be associated by the economic dependency explained in section 5.1, as Monica Titton (2016) notes, even when this restraint is not present, as in the case of journalists writing for newspapers, critics still get banned from attending fashion shows. This issue might involve mysterious psychological and social dynamics of ego and insecurity in the industry of fashion, as mentioned by McRobbie (1998), but their relation to fashion criticism has not yet been well explained in academic literature.

Another considerable reason for fashion criticism to not have the same quality as arts, music or film criticism is the fast, ephemeral pace of fashion (Kawamura 2005: 81). Fashion writers are expected to daily attend dozens of shows during fashion weeks, then file their copy with reviews in a very short time, making it hard to properly elaborate critical writing (Reponen 2011: 32). In the words of Angelo Flaccavento (2019):

“I think that everything is really going too fast even for us. So sometimes I'm always writing the same article because I have no time. Sometimes I just want to stop, take one book from the library and read something that's inspiring for me, even if it's not related to fashion.”

The issue of a fast-paced world, though, is not limited to fashion, and not seen as a problem for every fashion critic. Alexander Fury (2019) feels different about quick reactions:

“I quite like it because I like the pressure, I like the idea that I have to see something and that I have to react to it straight away. It tends to mean that you go with your gut, and that you don't over consider things, and I think that's probably a good thing. You also don't listen to what other people have said, you don't read what other people have written.”

Both Flaccavento and Fury, however, appreciate the possibility to reassess their thoughts on a collection some time after reviewing it. The acceleration of the pace of fashion, as the acceleration of most aspects of life after the rise of digital and online media, does not seem to be going away any time soon.

Although McNeil and Miller explain why fashion criticism has a tradition of subjectivity and opinion, as shown in the previous chapter, along with the two above mentioned reasons, it does not fully clarify the reasons for fashion journalism to often be restrained to “merely mentioning, non-evaluative, but easily discernible, features in an item of dress” (Moeran 2013: 134) and for fashion criticism, when present, to be in a lower status than its counterparts that discuss other forms of cultural production (Granata 2018).

Through reviewing the history of fashion print media since the launch of the first fashion magazines in the eighteenth century, two recurrent issues are identifiable: the economic dependence between the fashion industry and fashion media (Titton 2016), more related to the difficulty in finding a space for the production and dissemination of properly elaborated, genuine fashion criticism; and the historical demeaning perception of fashion as frivolous in its connection to femininity (Granata 2018), which jeopardizes the recognition and consolidation of good fashion criticism as a serious practice. These two kinds of issues, of production and consolidation of genuine fashion criticism are, thus, obstacles to the development of a tradition of genuine fashion criticism.

5.1 The economic influence of the fashion industry on fashion media

Along with fashion criticism, that started to develop in the nineteenth century, it was at this time that “the structural economic dependency between the fashion industry and fashion media was forged, which has had equally crucial consequences for the status and limits of fashion criticism ever since” (Titton 2016: 212). This structural economic dependency has

been present throughout the whole history of fashion media on print, as the reliance of fashion magazines on advertising revenue from the fashion industry can be seen in several moments, such as in the 1920s with internal market research departments or the 1980s with internationalization of fashion houses and rising advertising budgets, as exposed in chapter 4.

The symbiotic relationship between fashion industry and fashion media (Best 2017: 1) goes beyond the responsibility of fashion media to create the symbolic value of fashion. According to some authors, fashion media is successful and crucial for fashion's mere existence because it is also responsible for turning fashion's symbolic value into financial profit (Best 2017: 13, Kawamura 2005: 81). McRobbie argues, though, that this relationship is more complicated than just promoting direct sales, as "fashion on the page is there to be looked at and a whole range of activities intervene before this process of looking leads to the concrete act of purchasing." According to her, the clothes and images of fashion media serve aspirational and symbolic matters, creating "taste groups" for the advertisers (1998: 171-172). "The fashion item itself need hardly exist as an object for sale in the shops because its existence is more concrete, more assured and much more widely seen on the page" (McRobbie 1998: 165).

Either for causing direct sales or only creating aspiration, fashion media dependent of fashion industry's advertising revenue need to make sure to keep their advertisers "happy" by delivering a large enough quantity of the "right" audience to their products (McRobbie 1998: 152). Hence "magazine publishers sell their readerships to (potential) advertisers, while editors sell advertised products to their readers" (Moeran 2006: 728). This duty of addressing two main audiences (advertisers and readers) is due to the fact that, like all mass media productions, fashion print media has a Janus-faced structure, being both cultural product and commodity (Moeran 2008: 269).

Expanding on that, Moeran (2006) argues that fashion magazines do not address only the interests of advertisers and readers, but of other elements of the fashion world as well. He explains how fashion magazines present not only garments and other *objects*, but a full world consisting in people and institutions that rely on it to be recognized and validated. They serve to make the names of people in the "fashion village" known, giving them social relevance and exposing their work to readers that then feel "in the know", as participants of this "village", by merely consuming images and information on its products and people. According to Moeran, fashion magazines are spaces for the translation of an aesthetic discourse (that of fashion) where several different values are taken into account, as it relates to different needs and expectations, expanding from the idea that it is a matter of only converting cultural/symbolic value into economic exchange (Moeran 2006). This goes in line with McRobbie's consideration that fashion magazines are more aesthetic aspiration than cause of direct sales.

For Moeran, thus, fashion media have more than advertisers and readers as audiences. Their audiences are multiple, “some of whom are there to show off clothes, others to buy them, and yet others to create a buzz around them” (Moeran 2006: 728).

Nonetheless, it is the necessity to address the needs of advertisers, as advertising income is more important than subscription revenue, that stands out in fashion media. Researching on the release of international titles by global fashion media companies, Moeran observes that the possibility to deliver a considerably large and qualitatively appropriate group of consumers to potential advertisers is the first requisite to publish new branches of a fashion magazine (Moeran 2008: 271-274). This servitude to advertisers makes it difficult for journalists to be impartial, and causes internal conflicts between advertising and editorial departments (Kawamura 2005: 81, Moeran 2008: 270). Moeran argues, though, that the priorities inside a fashion magazine are not as simple as “financial considerations overrule cultural input”, but rather a negotiation between departments and also outside elements, such as advertising clients or public relations professionals (Moeran 2008: 279).

According to McRobbie (1998), the fashion media is a business with great job mobility, with fashion journalists that work mainly as freelancers and might have been previously working in public relations (or concurrently with journalism), or in an advertising agency and other similar jobs. This networking creates restraints in fashion writing, as fashion workers need to satisfy the wishes and expectations of positions they have been in and understand. Along with that, she argues that the relation of fashion to femininity that is perceived to occupy a lower status by other journalistic practices restrains fashion press to a marginalized small and closed world. Thus “the degree of to-ing and fro-ing between journalism and public relations encourages a kind of professional dialogue which makes it difficult for those involved to draw hard and fast lines around where reporting finishes and advertising begins” (McRobbie 1998: 157). The result of these “blurred boundaries” in labour practices and social structures mentioned by McRobbie are well synthesized by Tilton (2016: 215):

“As a consequence of the distribution of economic power between fashion media and the fashion industry, the lines between advertising and editorial content in fashion media are blurred, a fact that is reflected in intersecting employment structures with many potential conflicts of interest. Rather than thinking of fashion media and the fashion industry as two distinct fields, therefore, it seems more appropriate to imagine them as two interdependent, internally related entities.”

Inside the “small” world of fashion, magazine editors need to balance two “weapons” which they hold: silence and space (Kawamura 2005: 82). As Brian Moeran writes, “the ‘purely’ cultural can only with difficulty be disengaged from the surrounding sales pitch” (Moeran 2006: 727). They are supposed to have the capacity to evaluate how far they can stretch creativity and impartiality while reassuring the advertisers that they will get the space they indirectly pay for. That comes in deciding, for instance, how many times a brand will be

featured in editorial pages. “Rules” of this kind may be related to the Italian Condé Nast, which is said to have agreed in a fifty percent ratio: eighty pages in advertising would mean forty full looks in editorials (Coleridge 1988: 211, cited on Best 2017: 201).

The influence of advertising money does not stop in defining the frequency of its presence on the pages of a fashion magazine. “It is equally expected that the publication will not publish any critical or negative articles or comments about the brands that bought advertising space in the magazine, as brands can retaliate by not buying any more advertising space” (Titton 2016: 214). Thus reading a fashion magazine might lead one to believe that every fashion creation is a masterpiece (Svendsen 2017: 135), as fashion journalism is often restrained to championing designers. Drawing from the works of Bourdieu, Svendsen (2017: 134) and McRobbie (1998: 169) explain that there is a mutual dependence between commentators of cultural production and its creators, as the later give the former a subject to comment on, and the former validates the later, in this case the fashion designers. Synthetically, fashion journalists “create the creators” (Bourdieu 1993: 78, cited on McRobbie 1998: 169).

However, the help that fashion journalists and writers give in validating fashion designers is stained by the specially close relationship between the fashion press and the fashion industry (Svendsen 2017: 134). In fashion, contrary to the fine arts where “writing seriously” is essential in this dynamic, “creating the creator” generally stops at “enthusing about or publicizing certain designers” (McRobbie 1998: 169). As Svendsen affirms, positive judgment is only credible when the negative can also be made, and the fashion media primary loyalty to advertisers, fashion brands and designers jeopardizes the possibility of genuine criticism (2017: 135).

While fashion media that are dependent on advertising revenue, as fashion magazines, historically have not been an open space for fashion criticism to flourish, general-interest magazines and newspapers are noted as outlets where critical writing on fashion has been able to develop. This is due to the fact that these publications are less dependent on fashion brands’ advertising revenue and thus are able to keep editorial and advertising well separated (Titton 2016: 213, Granata 2018: 4). However, as shown in the beginning of this chapter from research by McNeil and Miller, there is writing of fashion which is anodyne and descriptive also in newspapers. The reason for that might be the history of newspaper fashion journalists getting banned from fashion shows (Titton 2016: 213), by the aforementioned intolerance of the fashion industry to negative judgment.

Fashion shows have been an essential part of the fashion system for decades, as it provides the journalists with the possibility of seeing the garments in real life, thus being able to better

analyze and judge them. However, they are private events, where the entry is possible only with invitation from the fashion brands. This decision is often made by the public relations personnel who, by impeding journalists of attending events, ultimately act as gatekeepers. Along with communication and marketing directors, by “making their mission to get positive stories into magazines and newspapers, the need for criticism could be easily undermined” (Reponen 2011: 35), as journalists have to limit their critical writing to not “upset” fashion brands or fashion designers.

This whole scenario was drawn to demonstrate how the absence of fashion criticism in fashion media relying on advertising revenue is deeply related to the symbiotic relationship between fashion media and the fashion industry, originating in the release of the first fashion magazine in the middle of the eighteenth century, and their economic dependency, consolidated through the development of advertising, and present to this day.

5.2 The demeaning perception of fashion as frivolous and its relation to femininity

Studying women fashion journalists in general-interest magazines and newspapers, Francesca Granata (2018) argues that the “common argument” of lack of fashion criticism due to fashion media’s close relationship to fashion industry, and the later’s resistance to negative judgment, is not enough to justify fashion criticism’s “delay in legitimization”, because “evident, genuine, unbiased criticism was produced in the general press in the U.S.A. at least as early as the beginning of the twentieth century”. According to Granata, this delay in legitimization is also product of fashion’s “association with women and the feminine, which have been, in turn, historically associated with consumption” (Granata 2018: 14).

Granata explains that fashion criticism has been related with femininity since the creation of women’s pages in newspapers in the end of the nineteenth century, with the writings on fashion that came in this section. As noted in chapter 4, Best (2017: 45-46) writes that by the 1850s consumption of fashion was already closely tied to ideas of femininity. This was identified by the newspapers as an opportunity to attract advertisers, thus the creation of women’s pages (Granata 2018: 10). According do Dustin Harp (2006), however, in the 1960s and 1970s these pages were transformed into “style” sections, a mere “name change and not an adjustment in how newspaper editors constructed women readers”. These new sections were first meant for a general, non-gender specific audience, but still represented the “four Fs” inherited from women pages — family, food, furnishings and fashion — that is, “soft” news, contrary to serious, “hard” news, those dedicated to the male reader (Harp 2006: 198). Harp hints that this simple name change, whilst the content and the treatment of the workers

in this section remained the same, was a strategy to please women and feminists who were bothered by the previous title. As “style” sections were still seen as women’s pages inside the newsrooms, male workers could “continue marginalizing women’s news rather than integrating it” (Harp 2006: 214).

In accordance with Granata’s view of fashion’s association with femininity as undermining to fashion is Agnès Rocamora. Writing about her conception of fashion magazines, which she defines as magazines devoted to fashion regardless of the gender, she explains that “fashion magazine” is often taken as a synonym of “women’s magazine”, for the historical “large amount of space devoted to fashion in women’s magazines, itself rooted in the importance of appearance and dress in definitions of femininity and the feminine gendering of fashion” (Rocamora 2009: 61). Rocamora suggests that the use of the term “style” to designate the fashion press that mix genders may be a way “to reassure readers by keeping at bay the negative connotation attached to the femininity that the word ‘fashion’ still evokes” (ibid.).

Angela McRobbie (1998) affirms that the “fashion world” is small, self-contained and defensive because of a sense of inferiority and isolation that comes from fashion journalism being seen as “lightweight, trivial, entertainment, domestic and consumer-based” by male journalists. She argues that fashion magazines occupy a lower status than many other forms of journalism because of a tradition, originated in *Vogue* magazine’s “heyday” in the 1920s, of an elitist rhetoric “which simply asserts the overwhelming importance of fashion as an unquestionable truth and, with this, women’s love of luxury as the embodiment of femininity” (McRobbie 1998: 166-167). According to her, fashion editors see fashion as a neglected part of the fine arts but belonging to high culture, and this perspective helps to restrain fashion journalism’s interest in treating fashion as a serious subject (McRobbie 1998: 173):

“Because fashion feels itself to occupy an inferior place in high culture and also in the world of serious journalism, and because it does not really want to be associated with mass culture, (in just the same way as it does it utmost to dissociate itself from mass production), this creates an inward-looking and culturally isolated group of fashion media professionals who seem to belong to a time when politics did not intrude upon the world of fashion and when fashion people had no need to dirty their hands with what went on in the outside world.”

Therefore, McRobbie’s view is that fashion journalism’s “conservatism”, while being product of its “marginal and feminine status” (McRobbie 1998: 162), is also caused by some kind of fashion world’s snobbishness and self-importance derived from a defensive approach to the contempt that it is a subject of. This might be the root of a discourse of loyalty to fashion designers that is purely positive and avoids constructive debate, which would open space for negativity. However, the elitist nature of fashion might be explained by a contradiction between democracy and distinction, of fashion as a group phenomenon (therefore one of

identification) and an aspirational goal of affirming individuality (Best 2017: 7). Balancing this contradiction and ensuring its continuity is an important function of the fashion media.

Although it might be tempting to accept an association to femininity as the cause for the demeaning perception of fashion, it is imperative to mention that the judgment of fashion as frivolous and foolish might go, at times, beyond notions of gender, as mentioned above in McRobbie's view. Historically, Yuniya Kawamura (2005) explains that fashion became feminized and a representation of gender difference only in the nineteenth century. Before that, it was a matter of class distinction for the aristocracy and the upper classes, and until the eighteenth century both men and women were fond of lavish clothing and careful about their outer appearance (Kawamura 2005: 9-10).

The effects of more than a century of belittling fashion by connecting it to femininity are still evident in the twenty-first century. Yet it is important to notice that, contrary to the idea that genuine criticism, as other writings on fashion, is still a woman's role inside newspapers and general-interest press, in 2019 some of the most relevant fashion critics are men: Tim Blanks and Angelo Flaccavento, writing on *The Business of Fashion*, and Alexander Fury, writing on the *Financial Times*. Considering that their writings are examples of properly elaborated criticism, thus not having the issue of being restrained by fashion media's connection to the fashion industry, their presence in fashion journalism still has not changed the low status that fashion criticism has among its counterparts, suggesting that, while being related to femininity is a reason for fashion to still be object of contempt, it does not completely explain its perception as frivolous and futile.

Ana Marta González links the scorn of fashion back to Plato who, reflecting on the relationship between clothing and beauty, applied the term "fraud" and connected fashion to the realm of the shadows, apart from the truth. If Plato gives a metaphysical reason for fashion to be despised, Jean Jacques Rousseau looks down on fashion for political reasons, seeing "the transformation of the republican citizen who had been committed to the good of the republic into either a narcissistic aristocrat or a bourgeois caught up in his own private interests and with copying the whims of the aristocracy" (González 2010: 18). In accordance was Adam Smith (ibid.):

"Rousseau and Smith both refer to social spaces that are governed by the games of seeing and being seen, where human beings vie with one another in an originally corrupt process which must, of necessity, give rise to envy and rivalry. However, this sequence of 'society-vanity-rivalry', which is also very evident in all later social thinking, disturbingly implies that all social dynamics — including fashion — are basically corrupt."

The third philosopher mentioned by González as someone with a scornful view of fashion was Immanuel Kant who, in line with Smith, condemned fashion as a vanity originated in the

wish of men to imitate the great (González 2010: 20). The historical perspective given by González indicates that fashion has been sensed as a vain, superficial matter, of corrupting influence, with no real importance in human life, for longer than it has been related to femininity.

Either way, this contempt for fashion is a pointless approach to a subject of great importance and “the fact that, in postmodern times, fashion has been able to present itself as a factor of identity is a clear sign that, contrary to the common philosophical idea, neither fashion, nor thinking on fashion, imply frivolity” (González 2010: 16). Fashion thus should take itself seriously, as it deserves to be treated, to guarantee that thinking of fashion becomes an assured, respected and normalized practice, opening up and consolidating spaces for an astute, severe, and genuine practice of fashion criticism.

6. Effects of the digital turn on fashion media

The issues related to fashion journalism and criticism that were explained in the previous chapter have their origins in an era when print media was the main form of dissemination of fashion. They can, however, still be found in the second half of the 2010s, as they have been explained by Monica Tilton in 2016 and Francesca Granata in 2018. To understand why, after almost two decades of twenty-first century and all the new possibilities of interconnectivity and changes in the media that have been happening, fashion journalism is in a “crisis point” (Best 2017) and fashion criticism still has difficulties in flourishing and being consolidated as a serious practice, it is necessary to look at how fashion and its media reacted to the newness of digital and online technologies.

The final years of the twentieth century brought new technologies and the proliferation of digital platforms and the internet, while the first years of the twenty-first century saw the emergence of Web 2.0, with promises of openness and democratization of discourse. Modernity entered a new phase of “intensification of speed and the valuing of immediacy and real time” (Rocamora 2013: 62). Meanwhile, the fashion industry became global and hectic (Craik 2009: 267), where the acceleration of the flow of material goods was accompanied by “an increasingly rapid flow of immaterial fashion” (Rocamora 2013: 68), affecting fashion journalism. Kate Nelson Best, in 2017, writes (Best 2017: 4):

“Traditional print journalism has been challenged by cinema, television, blogs, live streaming of catwalk shows, celebrity and designer social media, fashion film, and online retailers as sources of fashion information and inspiration. Commercial pressures and conglomerate power have left some journalists feeling ‘just garnish for PRs and designers’. For some observers, such developments [...] have brought traditional fashion journalism to a crisis point.”

Fashion is, by definition, related to ideas of modernity, newness and the ephemeral. However, when the internet already had a considerable amount of users that used its opportunities for interconnectivity and expression, the fashion world and its media were slow in their acceptance of new digital technologies and in establishing themselves online (Findlay 2015: 165, Best 2017: 219). There were two early exceptions: the first was the website *Style*, created in September 2000. It gave an insider’s perspective to the news of the industry, and published reviews of shows in the major fashion weeks along with pictures of the looks presented on the runway (Findlay 2015: 165). The second was *SHOWstudio*, created in November 2000, to publish fashion films, as its founder, Nick Knight, believed it was important to show clothes as they are in real life, in movement, and to expose the hidden workings of the fashion industry. These two websites, along with the advent of blogging, live catwalk streaming and social media (mainly Instagram) are good examples of what Kate Nelson Best considers “perhaps the most significant impact of the new technologies and platforms” related to fashion media: transforming a very closed, secretive world, only accessible to the few editors,

journalists, public relations workers and celebrities invited to fashion shows, to “something more akin to mass entertainment”, opening fashion to dialogue with outsiders and helping to diminish the “expert paradigm” (Best 2017: 220).

This supposed democratization of the fashion discourse, however, was not well received by everyone. Citing Polan (2006: 169-70), Jennifer Craik lists as reasons for a crisis in fashion journalism the cult of celebrities, the predominance of personal opinion in writing, the pressing influence of public relations workers, and the internet, for its openness to “all forms of fashion reportage, both good and bad” (Craik 2009: 268).

According to Rocamora (2013: 74), “acceleration has become a defining trait of contemporary society, with the related notions of immediacy and real-time as two values institutions are striving for, among them fashion companies and the fashion media.” The speed of digital media, where images of fashion shows are posted online in a short time (or even live) allows for commentary to be elaborated and disseminated instantaneously. Johannes Reponen argues that fashion is reduced to “a momentary experience [...] with no time allowed for reflection, analysis, contextualization or even elucidation” and although everyone is able to publish a personal view on it, this does not mean that they are able to elaborate meaningful judgments (Reponen 2011: 34-35). In the words of Kate Nelson Best, “if the catwalk was instantly globally accessible, the exclusive prerogative and specialist authority of the fashion media were lost” (Best 2017: 226).

Agnès Rocamora explains that in journalism, including fashion journalism, the decay of a traditional understanding of expertise is made up of an absence of official credentials, established educational trajectory and professional boundaries (Rocamora 2012: 100). With the World Wide Web, information that was previously monopolized by the coverage from fashion magazines and respected fashion critics in newspapers became easily accessible by anyone interested in fashion who has an internet connection (Findlay 2015: 166). This accessibility to information, along with the possibility of personal expression on blogging platforms, created what is arguably the most important contributor for the decay of the expert paradigm in fashion media: the rise of fashion blogging.

6.1 A brief history of fashion blogging

When blogs first appeared, they were celebrated as spaces for the democratization of discourses, able to put in question “long-established hierarchies, economic structures and patterns of cultural influence” (Titton 2016: 215). They innovated with an “ability to quickly

report on an event and update readers on its evolution on a frequent basis”, besides having commentary sections that allow the public to participate, promoting debate and communion (Rocamora 2011: 408).

Agnès Rocamora (2012) explains that while magazines have a physical limitation, the wider discursive network in which it participates can only be suggested on its pages, blogs allow readers to easily hop onto another source and kind of information through hyperlinks, spreading the possibilities to explore. Moreover, while magazines remain in a competitive approach, isolating themselves from their counterparts, blogs initially had a tradition of community-building through offering links to similar blogs (Rocamora 2012: 95-96).

Rosie Findlay affirms that the first fashion blog was created in 2001 (Findlay 2015: 160), and the early examples of the genre had a predominance of long-form text, rarely posting pictures. Inspired by online fashion forums where people posted photographs of their outfits to be commented on by their peers, and later by the rise of websites dedicated exclusively for this practice (Findlay 2015: 163-165), fashion blogging evolved into “an alternative, creative means of identity play through fashion” (Findlay 2015: 158).

The “first wave” of fashion blogging, as defined by Findlay, emerged between 2004 and 2006. As an evolution of the early “what I wore” posts spread on several websites, personal blogs concentrated pictures of the outfits worn by the blogger on a single page (Findlay 2015: 166). These photographs were mainly taken in homely environments, and the featured garments were generally previously owned by the blogger, or resulting from ideas of do-it-yourself (DIY) to copy looks from the catwalk. Bloggers rarely owned the luxury items that were shown on fashion shows and they aspired to have. They were “normal” people who had an interest in fashion and liked to share their taste through pictures of themselves, not journalists or fashion insiders. First-wave bloggers were outsiders of the fashion system, and “not necessarily with the desire to be included” (Findlay 2015: 167-169). They would “talk” about their purchases and their wishes, participating in the production of the symbolic value of fashion just as professional fashion writers (Rocamora & Bartlett 2009: 107).

As the traditional fashion media was slow to consolidate their presence on digital platforms, fashion blogs had the time to attract a public that could not find the content they were searching for online. While fashion magazines delivered to a niche public, bloggers translated the news and promoted dialogue (Karhawi 2016). Fashion blogs in this first generation were disruptive for proposing a different tone than the authoritative from traditional fashion media, starting conversations about personal preferences and supporting emergent designers (Best 2017: 230). The traditional fashion magazines were forced to review their act, as free

information online meant a decline in circulation and advertising revenue (Tutton 2016: 215). They responded by either opening their own blogs or seducing fashion bloggers into the fashion system, thus blurring the definition of “establishment” (Rocamora and Bartlett 2009: 110, Best 2017: 232).

Agnès Rocamora and Djurdja Bartlett argue that the rise of fashion blogs suggests a lack of satisfaction with the traditional ways of disseminating fashion (Rocamora & Bartlett 2009: 110). Yet Rocamora affirms that “new and old media, rather than excluding each other, feed into each other. This process forces us to see their relation as one of co-dependence rather than pure rivalry” (Rocamora 2012: 104). This could be seen in the way that fashion industry reacted to blogs: together with launching their own blogs, traditional fashion media adopted the speed and immediacy boosted by the blogosphere by creating, inside their own platforms, “sections that clearly feed into the trend for fast news” (Rocamora 2013: 69).

With fashion media starting to recognize and cover style blogging in the period between 2008 and 2010, Rosie Findlay identifies a new “second wave” of fashion blogging (Findlay 2015: 169). Writing at this turning point, Rocamora and Bartlett affirm that “blogs allowed for the introduction of a new way of consumption of fashion information, at once interactive and instantaneous, favoring a ‘linking strategy’ and the consolidation of fashion virtual communities” (Rocamora & Bartlett 2009: 112).

The year of 2009 was known for the invitation of fashion bloggers to a fashion show by Dolce & Gabbana, who offered seats in the prestigious, much disputed front row, right beside Anna Wintour (Schneier 2019). Besides being invited to events, fashion bloggers began receiving offers to collaborate with traditional fashion media and to work with established fashion brands. Advertorials, part of the fashion media since the beginning of its press, have been the prevalent cooperation between bloggers and brands, the former posting products of the later in return for payment or merchandise (Best 2017: 233). This way, fashion bloggers emulate an original function of the fashion media, acting as intermediaries between readers/consumers and the fashion industry, thus being involved in the process of selling goods (Rocamora 2012: 98). Along with the development of relationships with fashion companies through invitations, gifts and commissions, came the concern about bloggers managing to keep a balance between editorial independence and commercial pressure (Pedroni 2015: 192).

While bloggers had different goals that they expected to achieve through the activity of blogging, either using it as a portfolio to start a career in fashion journalism or to become “an authority on style” (Findlay 2015) (what later would be called a digital influencer), there is a common mindset that characterizes this second-wave fashion blogging. It is “the mentality of

seeing a blog as an opportunity to generate income” and “an awareness of the commercial opportunities and fame blogging could afford”, contrary to the early notion of blogging as an amateur, hobby-related practice (Findlay 2015: 170-171).

According to Rocamora (2012: 97), fashion blogs boost a “culture of speed” of the internet with their constant flow of posts, forcing fashion into a need for an intermittent need for newness, in contrast to its traditional model of twice-yearly fashion months, that presented fall/winter and spring/summer trends. However, the immediacy promised by the Web and seen on blogs goes beyond the fast pace of news, meaning also a seemingly non-mediated dissemination of material, delivered in a “live” manner. In blogging, this translates into a perceived informality and intimacy between bloggers and their audience (Rocamora 2012: 102-103).

As bloggers developed their practice into something more professionalized, Marco Pedroni (2014) argues that fashion blogging could be called a “career” inside the field of fashion. He explains that the reaction from journalists was more than a rejection of unskilled newcomers originated in the fear of losing their own space. The relationship between bloggers and journalists developed, instead, into one of “collaboration and antagonism”. Antagonism comes in the form of bloggers growing their following enough to be independent from the traditional players in the fashion world and condemn their lack of critical capacity. From the side of the journalists, it is the common sense notion that they were further losing their power as gatekeepers, already undermined by personal relations and marketing workers, to “unskilled newcomers”. Collaboration, for bloggers, is the need of traditional media to validate them and build their social (being known and having relations) and symbolic (having a wide and positive visibility) capitals, resources that attract advertisers and open doors in the fashion system. Meanwhile, traditional fashion media such as fashion magazines increase their audience by mentioning bloggers and learn to attract younger readers who are used to the predominantly visual and accelerated language of blogging (Pedroni 2014: 98-99).

If first-wave style blogs were independent, inclusive, collaborative and made to share individuality, second-wave blogs were aspirational, made to show distinction, fashionability and prestige (Findlay 2015: 172), where fashion bloggers became “influential agents within the fashion industry” (Pedroni, Sádaba & SanMiguel 2017: 108).

Pedroni (2015) suggests that blogs should be seen as an “autonomous microcosm”, instead of classified in a dichotomy between “instruments of corporate marketing” and “promoters of a bottom-up revolution in fashion communication”. They might not have editorial independence, but they have adapted rules of traditional fashion media to their own needs

(Pedroni 2015: 194-195). Bloggers should not be compared to journalists and seen as trying to replace them, because they are established enough in the fashion system to be recognized as a fully different practice or profession (Karhawi 2016).

Writing in 2017, Marco Pedroni, Teresa Sádaba and Patricia SanMiguel identify a “third wave” of fashion blogging. They argue that fashion blogging overcame an era of enchantment, with bloggers becoming less naïve, stabilized as professionals accepted within the fashion system, with a “stronger entrepreneurial approach” (Pedroni et al. 2017: 107). Some of the pioneers in fashion blogging accumulated enough different forms of cultural, economic and social resources (what Bordieu calls forms of capital) to become influential, and were responsible to shape and establish the relationship bloggers have with the fashion industry, while saturating the field and making it harder for newcomers to stand out (Pedroni 2015: 191). Blogs evolved into businesses, with attention to audience attraction, content planning and journalistic criteria. The use of blogging for gaining financial capital, which was seen as a corrupting matter in the early days of the activity, is now normalized as a goal of fashion bloggers (Pedroni et al. 2017: 118-120). The idea of blog as a mere daily journal was left behind, as this functionality was replaced by social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram (Karhawi 2016: 3). Fashion blogging matured into a space where outsiders may use their different forms of capital to access the professional field of fashion. The amount of acquired capital and how it is put to use determines who will triumph and distinguishes bloggers in several levels of fame (Pedroni 2015: 105). Bloggers may become “micro-celebrities”, when they have almost no difference in status to their audience, creating communities where “fans are treated as friends”, and bloggers aspire to collaborate with the fashion system. From that, bloggers may increase their capital up to grow into full celebrities that can be recognized internationally, are at the same level as those of other fields, “coexist” with fashion media, and are able to influence large audiences (Pedroni 2016).

Influence is a term central to the fashion media, as it relates to the power of turning readers into consumers. After an initial distrust, bloggers were welcomed by the fashion system for their particular advantage of being seen as both idols and friends, as they opened their own lives to the curiosity of their audience (Pedroni et al. 2017: 110-111). According to Pedroni, bloggers have thus evolved into digital influencers, as the blog itself became only one element in a “social media strategy” where platforms heavily focused on visual assets, above all Instagram, have become central to their work (Pedroni 2016: 109).

According to Marco Pedroni and Maria Paola Pofi, while blogs were becoming whole businesses, with professional preoccupations, curatorial approaches and editorial aspirations, Instagram was initially used as a repository for “daily lifestyle”, intimate and spontaneous

content (Pedroni & Pofi 2018: 14). However, “once a blogger achieves a stable level of popularity with an audience, the follower visits to the blogger itself diminish and the blog-connected social platforms record a higher number of users” (ibid.). As Instagram developed into a platform with more than a billion monthly users, it became the main medium for the work of digital influencers. This is a fitting title, as most profiles that acquire enough capital to conquer their space inside the fashion system do not even own a blog. Instead, they do all the work that was pioneered through blogging, such as reviewing brands or posting their products — working as gatekeepers for fashion — directly on Instagram (Titton 2016: 215).

The professionalization of blogs and the later transfer of blogs’ contents to social media platforms, such as Instagram, according to Pedroni and Pofi, shows how “individual users borrow from consumer brands both the techniques and the attitude to perform their online behaviour in order to increase their popularity”, locating digital influencers inside an “attention economy”, where the audience “pays” for the offered content with their attention (Pedroni & Pofi 2018: 10). The need to attract larger audiences and their attention to attract investment from the fashion industry could be seen as a “commodification” of the followers. However, Pedroni and Pofi argue that bloggers/digital influencers both shape their audience while establishing themselves as “influential authorities”, and are shaped by it, as they need to deliver content that matches the wishes of their followers (Pedroni & Pofi 2018: 18).

Traditional fashion media made efforts to recompose its power as a source of expert views on the fashion system. After following blogs by opening their own and adapting their content, “members of the fashion media themselves have become celebrities” (Best 2017: 236). Editors, stylists, photographers, journalists, and even fashion critics found an opportunity to participate in the imagery of the fashion media by becoming digital influencers, exposing their professional and personal lives on social media. According to Kate Nelson Best, there was a growing interest in the insider aspects of the industry, satisfied by the presence of fashion workers on Instagram (ibid.).

Vanessa Friedman (2019) argues that social media based on pictures, like Instagram, helped people realize that we communicate through clothing and building a “personal brand” passes through how one is photographed and what one is wearing online. This is what Kate Nelson Best calls a “‘camera culture’ in which clothing choices are captured on a continuous, unregulated, and unfiltered basis” (Best 2017: 225). This attitude was pioneered by fashion bloggers who “produce fashion media which are at least partly based on the enactment of their own self-identity in relation to dress practices” (Titton 2015: 203). This generalized use (even if unconscious) of fashion as a “marker of identity” helps to understand, according to Best,

how fashion became, supposedly, the cultural conversation in itself, as we are saturated with images of fashion (Best 2017: 225).

6.2 Fashion blogs and the inherited problems from fashion print media

The emergence of Web 2.0 promised a democratization of discourses, augmented by social media platforms and best illustrated by blogs, that caused an expectation for alternative, subversive narratives. However, the blogosphere quickly exposed its ambivalence, “at once potential springboard for opposition and empowerment and a vector of reproduction of the capitalist order” (Mora and Rocamora 2015: 154).

As fashion bloggers got accepted by the fashion system and established financial ties with the industry, the perceived authenticity of their content production and their capacity to remain impartial started to be questioned. “As happens in fashion magazine based journalism, the relation between blogging and financial support is ambiguous, and recalls the problem of balance between an independent editorial line and the influence of companies that buy (or decide to stop buying) advertising space” (Pedroni 2015: 182). They were reprimanded for accepting gifts and for the lack of critical judgment on their posts, and seen as “selling out” to the fashion brands who feared losing control of their public image. Coming from fashion journalists working in traditional, established media, this criticism, according to Monica Titton (2016: 216), shows a defensive approach of professionals who are fearful of having their space occupied by people they judged incapacitated of performing their job (Pedroni 2014). This view ignores the fact that fashion writing, as exposed in the previous chapter, is also often unable to elaborate criticism, and fashion criticism has not been consolidated as a genuine practice yet. It also ignores that these perceived problems in fashion journalism are caused in part by an economic dependency between the fashion media and the fashion industry, thus the conflict between commercial and editorial material is not exclusive to fashion blogs (Titton 216).

Fashion blogs have indeed adapted their format and content to the historical model of fashion media found in fashion magazines. In the “third wave”, as fashion bloggers acquired symbolic capital and were engulfed by the fashion media, their posts consist primarily of images and descriptive texts, deviating from the original idea of blogs as an alternative to traditional fashion media that represented opportunity for critical debate and progress (Titton 2016: 216). Their commentary sections, once promising open spaces conversations, became safe havens of repetitive flattery and mutual adulation between the blogging community. This allows to build quantitative symbolic capital, by establishing a reciprocity of attention between

bloggers, who become successful through accumulating user traffic (Titton 2016: 218). A large quantity of visitors is essential to attract advertisers, thus blogs function similarly to fashion magazines who “sell their readerships to (potential) advertisers, while editors sell advertised products to their readers” (Moeran 2006: 728).

Alexis Arnold argues that the commercial pressure on editorial independence is not the only problem to be found in what she calls the “illusion of increased democracy” that the digital age brought to fashion journalism. According to Arnold, the influence of traditional media continued through the power they have to select, for instance, which bloggers get their attention and are featured in the “credible” pages of fashion magazines. She affirms that “though tools are certainly available now for readers to join the conversation, the larger democratic significance of such public contribution remains at the mercy of the traditional media gatekeepers” (Arnold 2012).

6.3 The ongoing obstacles to fashion criticism on fashion digital media

What could be seen in almost two decades of fashion digital, online media is that it has inherited problems originated in the era of print. Fashion bloggers and digital influencers did not have the subversive power imagined in the emergence of Web 2.0 and the blogosphere, as “the critical potential rooted in the participatory nature of the platforms was dismissed very early in the development of fashion blogging, together with the myth of bloggers as independent voices from below” (Pedroni & Pofi 2018: 12). Fashion bloggers and digital influencers ended up becoming a part of the “symbiotic relationship” that fashion media has with the fashion industry since its early days.

Meanwhile, other changes to fashion media happened that aggravated the problems surrounding fashion writing and criticism. The fast pace of fashion, demanding rapidity from writers who do not have time to properly elaborate reviews, was increased by the emergence of live streaming. Jennifer Craik argues that the quality of fashion writing deteriorated as fashion internationalized, thus forcing fashion journalists and editors to travel to different cities in a fast pace (Craik 2009: 268).

The possibility to follow brands directly on social media jeopardized the need for the public to look for fashion content in the fashion media, since companies do not need intermediaries. Thus the work of public relations departments was made easier, as fashion houses can choose exactly how they are seen, without going through the filters of journalists or critics.

In reaction to the menace of losing the monopoly of fashion influence, traditional fashion workers embraced the tools used by bloggers beforehand, creating Instagram profiles and becoming digital influencers themselves, reinforcing the idea that established fashion magazines and other media companies still hold the expertise and authority in discourses of fashion. Fashion editors defend their importance by arguing that, among the cacophony that the internet and social media offer, it is essential to have outlets of specialist knowledge (Best 2017: 248).

Nonetheless, traditional fashion media have not reacted to this supposed cacophony of unskilled and irrelevant voices, created and expanded by fashion blogging, with a much needed improvement in the quality of fashion journalism and criticism.

7. Social media as an alternative space for fashion criticism

Up to this point, the fashion system seems to have managed to adapt most emerging spaces of fashion discourse (with the exception of general-interest media and newspapers) according to its own interests, undermining the possibility for diverse views on fashion to thrive and find the same audience as the generally championing, when not anodyne, rhetoric of traditional fashion media. According to McNeil and Miller (2014: 138), “the saturation of imagery in contemporary life does not seem to be matched by a comparable rise in the standard of writing or knowledge of history”. Fashion criticism, thus, is still looking for a space to flourish and be legitimized as a genuine practice, comparable to that of other forms of cultural production.

As “iconographic” channels of social media were chosen as the “evolution” of the blogging age (Pedroni 2016: 109, Pedroni & Pofi 2018: 14), and blogs failed to achieve their initially promised potential of developing and disseminating critical content on fashion, *can social media platforms be a space for fashion criticism to be published and established as an earnest practice?*

To answer this question, it is necessary to first distinguish which social media platforms have a potential for discussions on fashion.

7.1 Instagram and YouTube as the main social media platforms for fashion

As mentioned in the previous chapter, fashion blogs evolved to a point where Instagram became more important to the dissemination of fashion than the blogs that originally gave relevance and fame to digital influencers. By 2019, Instagram has arguably become the biggest social media platform for fashion, as practically every fashion brand, fashion media company or worker has a profile on it (Best 2017: 225). Instagram evolved from being an important component in the “social media strategy” of fashion bloggers (Pedroni 2016: 109), to establishing itself a space for the dissemination of diverse types of content related to fashion. In 2015, it appointed Eva Chen as its director of fashion partnership and responsible for the official Instagram fashion profile, realizing the potential the platform has to be the place where anything related to fashion can happen: brands can stream their live shows, distribute merchandise for influencers to post, and even sell their products through the application. Contrary to the blog era, though, the industry has been quicker to realize the potential social media hold, and live streaming of fashion shows on Instagram, for instance, became the norm. Instagram makes it possible for people to watch fashion in real time, but

also for fashion to be commented and thought of in real time. Following the “fashion crowd” — the people who work in the fashion field, such as editors, photographers, make up artists, stylists and journalists — for the past two years (2018-2019), it was noted that some new voices were frequently mentioned, fashion lovers who use their profiles on Instagram to comment and discuss fashion in various ways.

While Facebook has the biggest number of users among all social media platforms¹, it has not developed a tradition for fashion content. Fashion brands and media companies do have profiles on Facebook, but they serve more as a bridge to other channels. Twitter, for not being a primarily visual platform and having a lesser number of users, does not have the same kind of attraction to establishment fashion companies as Instagram. Fashion discourses on Twitter can be found in the profiles of fashion writers, who use them to comment fashion live, without the restraints of publishing on professional platforms (Friedman 2019).

YouTube was not traditionally seen as a social media platform, but it has evolved into more than a deposit of videos. It is now the second largest social media by number of users². Its content creators pay great attention to the commentary section, where viewers react to the videos and initiate discussions. In addition to that, YouTube has been trying to diversify its offer by opening space for channels to publish long-form text.

YouTube started somewhat late to relate itself to fashion, appointing Derek Blasberg as head of fashion and beauty partnerships only in 2018. The platform created its own fashion channel in 2019, and the title of its opening video is very telling of the potential of digital and social media to revolutionize fashion: “Welcome to Your Front Row Sit to Fashion”. YouTube has a potential that other social media do not: to make people stop and spend longer periods of time consuming the same content, with more probability of the users dedicating their full attention to what they are watching. While on Instagram the feed rolls quickly and “Stories” have mere fifteen seconds, creators on YouTube are able to make long videos (some fashion review videos go up to one hour), as this is a way of monetizing their production (the longer the video, the more opportunities for YouTube to insert advertisement and pay the uploader by number of views). YouTube serves as a repository of fashion shows, peeks into the lives of models and workers in the fashion industry, street style videos and wardrobe explorations that attracts more than one million people to follow its official fashion channel, curious to have an insider view of the fashion world and maybe learn something further than the ephemeral, commercial content offered on Instagram.

¹ Data retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2ODaXXG>

² (ibid.)

As they are large social media channels, that have a potential to generate conversation and have their own sections dedicated to fashion, showing how the fashion system is relevant to their users, Instagram and YouTube were the chosen platforms to look for fashion criticism.

The search for fashion criticism on social media (as explained on chapter 2) resulted in the finding of three main accounts: @diet_prada and @pam_boy on Instagram, and HauteLeMode on YouTube. According to Evan Ross Katz (2018b), the three are a “new guard within fashion” who is “unafraid to call it like they see it in an industry built on carefully crafted relationships that often beget access.” For Murray Healy of *Love* magazine (2019: 364), the influence of “Insta-critics”, as the three previously mentioned, “has grown over the past year to a point where it threatens the status of the traditional catwalk reporter”. For analyzing if these three chosen supposed “fashion critics” on social media produce properly elaborated fashion criticism to deserve the title associated to them, it is first necessary to define the meaning of criticism, and to set standards for delineating its presence in their work.

7.2 Defining fashion criticism

In contemporary culture, “criticizing” generally comes as “calling out” observed problems or even “roasting” what one dislikes. As noted by Reponen (2011: 31), criticism is often perceived as the practice of exposing negative thoughts about the object of judgment. On the Oxford English Dictionary, the first meaning of the word criticism is “the act of expressing disapproval of somebody/something and opinions about their faults or bad qualities; a statement showing disapproval”, while the second meaning is closer to a good definition of the practice: “the work or activity of making fair, careful judgements about the good and bad qualities of somebody/something, especially books, music, etc.”

Svendsen (2017: 140) explains that “criticism” comes from the greek word *krinein*, meaning to judge or decide. For the author, thus, “criticism is a practice aiming at passing judgments about objects, distinguishing between what is good and what is bad. It must be emphasized that criticism can be positive as well as negative.” McNeil and Miller (2014: 104 of 3620) consider that criticism is an evaluative, aesthetic judgment, that emerged from literature and the fine arts, and that does not consist of mere subjective opinion.

Kyung-Hee Choi and Van Dyk Lewis (2018: 15) consider “fashion criticism as the linguistic analysis and interpretation of a variety of discursive networks around fashion and an aesthetic analysis of them”. For McNeil and Miller (2014: 4), criticism involves description, interpretation and evaluation. In the case of fashion specifically, the authors argue that a critic

must be knowledgeable of not only its aesthetic, but also social, cultural, economic and historical aspects (ibid.:179 of 3620).

Having a historical perspective of fashion is often cited as essential for properly elaborated criticism. Colin McDowell (1994: 1388, quoted in Reponen 2011: 31) argues that “a critic must have a perspective of time if what he says is to be of any value”, in line with Diane Pernet (2013), who expects “a certain amount of curiosity and openness toward what is new, combined with a strong understanding of what went on in the past” from fashion critics. Svendsen (2017: 141) considers the historical perspective a base for critics to have the “visual competence” of drawing comparisons to other creations and contextualize the work in its surroundings. This results in his addition of two features, comparison and contextualization, to those previously mentioned by McNeil and Miller (description, interpretation and evaluation). Svendsen writes that evaluation, by itself, is not sufficient for proper criticism, as it needs to be supported by clear reasoning founded upon the other four.

But while McNeil and Miller consider important for fashion writing to leave the current subjective approach (which, they explain, comes from the early days of the practice and its being based on the notion of taste) and achieve an objectivity to be actual criticism (2014: 4), Svendsen accepts the notion that taste is part of the critic’s judgment and makes subjectivity actually an important feature of criticism, which should be “saying as much about the critic as about the object under scrutiny” (2017: 142).

If criticism is inevitably infused with opinion, this helps to distinguish the role of a journalist from the one of a critic, while understanding their close relationship: Vanessa Friedman (2019) considers them “two sides of the same coin”, but explains that criticism goes beyond reporting to communicating her own thoughts (Olsen 2019). In accordance is Robin Givhan (DeShong 2018), while defending the importance of the journalistic roots of her practice: “the best critics are also good reporters because the best criticism is rooted in fact, not just opinion. Facts matter.”

Tying fashion criticism to journalism might also help to avoid the trap of servitude to designers or brands, as journalists have the responsibility to judge the importance of what is to be communicated according to public interest. “When we get into this idea that part of our job is to advocate or champion, then you’re getting into a gray area of what it means to be a journalist” (DeShong 2018). It is crucial to point out who a critic must be writing to. As Svendsen (2017: 143) puts, “genuine criticism should be incorruptible in the sense that it bears no responsibilities towards the designer or fashion house, but only towards aesthetic standards and the reading public”. It is interesting how fashion critics, notably the ones

writing for newspapers, prefer to communicate “to those who may be somewhat estranged from fashion” (Balster 2019), to “actually interest someone who isn’t a passionate, admirer of fashion. Get someone excited about it and try and convince them” (Fury 2019).

Writing for a general public brings some demands in tone and vocabulary. Alexander Fury (2019) argues that it is necessary to try to be entertaining while informative, to bring references to popular culture and hold back the obscure, fashion-specific ones, “trying not to be too insular”, to make sure the critical writing is about sparking interest, not selling products. It is also important to bring other subjects to the writing, so “fashion outsiders” can connect: “whenever I used to write anything about fashion and politics, it would get read by more people, because more people are interested in politics, and certainly it would get more reaction” (Fury 2019).

Even if the first dictionary meaning of criticism might be that of a negative review, fashion writing generally lacks credibility by doing exactly the contrary (Svendsen 2017: 135). Being taken seriously as a critic might make it tricky to publish positive reviews. Fury (2019) thinks that a good review is “more difficult to say, it’s more difficult to convey it and not having it seem kind of overblown or just sort of hyperbolic. Specially when you’re adding to a chorus of people who are saying how great something is.” Delivering both the successes and failures of fashion is a way to keep the readers’ trust, as “praise is meaningful only if there is also a possibility for blame” (Svendsen 2017: 135), and fashion criticism should be about creating debate and guiding readers through the great amount of fashion artifacts that is constantly being produced and shown. In the words of Angelo Flaccavento (2019) “good criticism is about ‘I’m telling you this and I hope that you reply’, and that a dialogue starts. Good criticism is about putting the seeds of doubt in the reader, and hopefully start a new thinking process.”

Fashion criticism, thus, is an essential practice to the development of fashion, that needs to overcome the common sense of the term criticism as the expression of negative judgment, to achieve clarity and deliver meaningful, honest, rigorous, serious content to both the fashion industry and readers.

7.3 Standards for contemporary fashion criticism on social media

To create a framework to search for fashion criticism on social media, in the three chosen Instagram and YouTube profiles, the five features suggested by Svendsen (2017: 141) for

fashion criticism (description, comparison, contextualization, interpretation and evaluation) will now be exposed and adapted with learnings from interviewing established fashion critics.

Arguably, the first standard and need for a fashion review is *description*, even though nowadays it is incredibly easy to find photographs of the pieces in a collection. Svendsen explains description as “telling readers what a creation is like and how the various parts fit together”. I would add that the critic must be able to describe to the reader (which may have zero knowledge of fashion) about the technical and material aspects of the object, considering that fashion is about novelty and there might be new ways of producing garments that could be invisible to the untrained eye. Description must also consider the scenario in which the collection is being shown. The discourse of fashion is built by several elements, and the fashion show is a live event with a specific atmosphere that the critic must present to the reader (Flaccavento 2019).

Comparison, for Svendsen, is “pointing out similarities and differences in relation to other creations”. Here is the first feature where historical knowledge of fashion shows up as essential to criticism. As pointed by Flaccavento (2019), “a good knowledge of the history of fashion is mandatory, because also you need to contextualize where things are.” The proposal of newness is in the very nature of fashion, thus the necessity of remembering previous garments, from the same designer or others, to expose homage, reference, plain copy or state difference and novelty.

Contextualization, according to Svendsen, would be “about placing the creation within a framework of the designer’s previous work, his or her inspirations, and the wider cultural surroundings”. Although the first aspect is important to understand the role of the creations in the body of work of a designer (or brand), “whether or not a collection propels the designer’s work forward in some way or expands on a sensibility that a designer has begun to establish” (Balster 2019), I believe that contextualizing must be much wider and also involve historical, political, economic and social framings, as noted by Maria José da Mata (Moreira 2019). This means carefully considering the moment and the situation in which something is being shown to the public, but to avoid making facile connections with what is happening in the outside world, being aware that fashion is not as important as war and that many contemporary things might be irrelevant in a short time (Fury 2019), but rather dissecting how it relates to that.

Interpretation, in Svendsen’s view, is basically explaining the “meaning or significance” of a piece. It is necessary both when a garment seems too intellectual, artistic, not too commercial, or seemingly unwearable, like in a collection by Rei Kawakubo, to clarify the relevance of its

production to the reader; or when a collection seems “too commercial” to be on a runway, a situation when connecting interpretation to contextualization might elucidate the need of such kind of creation (for example, bringing back old fashions that seem out of place in contemporaneity) in relation to the *Zeitgeist*.

Evaluation is the final feature of criticism, as it is based on the previous four and “addresses the coherence of the creation and whether it manages to realize the intentions of the designer” (Svendsen 2017: 141). I would add that evaluation should not only consider the wishes of a designer, but also take the considerations of the previous features to judge the value and the relevance of a garment or accessory to be presented as “fashion”. Just calling something good or bad, without exposing reasons, is not criticism. Evaluation does not and should not come easily, as it is supposed to involve several aspects and balance them out to have a final word on the relevance of creations. In times of climate crisis panic and wide awareness of how polluting the fashion industry is, evaluation of fashion collections must go as far as justifying the need of bringing ideas into the material world (or the lack of).

Fashion criticism has the responsibility of helping readers (or consumers) understand the meaning of the incessant changes in fashion, to clarify the important place it has in everyone’s lives, to explain that fashion is more than just clothes, and to justify the basis of its existence. “It is to some extent to teach readers and consumers the art of criticism, enabling them to make their own informed judgments, which can be supported by reasons” (Svendsen 2017: 143). Fashion criticism should, thus, create independent thinkers that are able to judge and discern how they want to relate to and consume (or not) the piles of fashion they see.

7.4 Fashion criticism as opposed to criticism of the fashion system

Fashion criticism should have fashion artifacts as its object of analysis. Just as art critics speak about artworks (or whole art exhibitions), food critics about the dishes of a restaurant, and cinema critics about movies, fashion criticism is criticism that talks about the products of fashion, and not about the fashion system in general. While there certainly is critical thinking on the fashion system — a good example is the work of Vanessa Friedman for *The New York Times*, a mix of fashion reviews, essays on fashion in public life and developments in the industry — and there’s no doubt of the importance it carries in the understanding of fashion, this research aims to understand if social media can be an alternative space for criticizing the creations, the *products* of fashion.

Fashion criticism includes both what has been traditionally called “collection reviews” and the writing about the meaning of choices in fashion more generally, as in the criticism of political figures’ clothing. In the words of Vanessa Friedman (2019), “I spend two months a year reviewing shows, and I spend ten months a year writing about the use of clothing in public life. And to me, those are two things that speak to each other.” In accordance is Svendsen (2017: 144), who argues that, besides reviews, “we also need longer essays in which critics develop ideas in greater depth and can dwell on the role of fashion in our lives”. While both ways of doing fashion criticism are relevant, here the investigation of its existence in social media will focus on the reviews of collections, as this is the most controversial domain, since in this format the words are explicitly tied to brands or designers.

Meanwhile, a critical approach of the fashion system is what Monica Tilton (2019) calls “structural criticism”. It is the criticism that evaluates the industry of fashion, its companies, policies and workings. According to Reponen (2011: 35), because of the restrictions on critics’ writing by fashion companies and public relations professionals (related to the economic dependency between fashion media and the fashion industry, issues discussed on chapter 5), the subjects of criticism of the fashion system, “such as child labour in clothing factories, size zero models or fashion business related subjects are often regarded as fringe matters by the majority of the fashion writers, leaving the reporting to news reporters and other critics.” With social media, though, there seems to be a new guard of people commenting on fashion’s most troubling issues with no fear of consequences. The three examples of accounts dedicated to fashion on social media (@pam_boy, @diet_prada and HauteLeMode) could be in this new guard, as “they’re not being paid to offer their opinions, there are no advertisers wielding any editorial influence that might sway them, and they have little to lose if their blunt honesty ends up offending designers” (Healy 2019: 364).

Having defined what fashion criticism is, five standards to search for it, and after differentiating fashion criticism from criticism of the fashion system, it is now possible to analyze if the work of @diet_prada, @pam_boy and HauteLeMode can be classified as fashion criticism, to answer to the first part of the research question: *can social media platforms be an alternative space for fashion criticism to be published?*

7.5 Looking for fashion criticism on Instagram 1: The case of @diet_prada

Diet Prada (the name comes from Diet Coke and Prada, two favorites of the founders) is an Instagram account created in 2014 by two American friends, Tony Liu and Lindsey Schuyler. With work experience in fashion design and history, Liu and Schuyler have focused, from the

early days of the account, on calling out brands and designers for copying other garments, stylings or looks, in diverse levels of similarities between designs (which causes controversies among its followers, with cases of Diet Prada itself being called out for stretching the notion of plagiarism). The profile has 1.6 million followers (as of November 2019), who often help its managers by suggesting content, and the attention of some of the biggest media companies, including *Vogue*, *The Business of Fashion*, *New York Magazine* and *The Guardian*.

With the growth in the number of followers, the account expanded its original approach to also include social issues. One of the most relevant was the exposure of stories of abuse committed by fashion photographers and brought into light by victims (mainly male models) that messaged Diet Prada directly on Instagram. The one that arguably caused the biggest direct, tangible effect, though, started with calling out an advertisement video by Dolce & Gabbana as racist. The video, which showed bigoted views of Chinese people, quickly turned into a global scandal, that resulted in the cancelling of a whole fashion show, hours before it was supposed to happen. The New York Times has recently called it “an industry watchdog, and also an industry success” (Bromwich, 2019). Diet Prada is the most relevant fashion-related social media profile involved in the creation of the current “call-out” or “watchdog” or “cancel” culture, the phenomenon of public shaming a company or a person who’s shown “problematic” or “toxic” behavior or actions, trying to hold them accountable for that, to the point of the company or person becoming victim of major boycotting, a phenomenon only possible because of the spreading of information facilitated by the internet and social media.

The Dolce & Gabbana crisis (Figures 1, 2, and 3), in November 2018, is a great example of the power that social media have to overturn classic behaviors of traditional fashion media. While mainstream magazines like *Vogue* recognize the existence and importance of Diet Prada, its relationship with fashion companies and advertisers makes it impossible for a similar situation to happen in its own pages. Instead, two people, with the support of thousands of strangers who follow them, by exposing their opinion on the matter, were able to directly influence and affect a major fashion brand, causing financial loss and an unmeasurable harm to its public image. Besides the canceling of its fashion show, the Italian company had to watch several of its stores getting vandalized and hundreds of videos of Chinese consumers destroying their merchandise on social media, irritated by racist messages sent by Stefano Gabbana, one of the heads of the company, that were exposed on the Diet Prada profile. Titton (2019) argues that this capacity of creating buzz and changing the fashion system, by awakening the public to its problems, forcing the “big fashion brands” to “take a stand and be responsible for what they’re doing”, is enough to call the work of Diet Prada “structural criticism”.



Figure 1: post by Diet Prada, part of a video advertisement by Dolce & Gabbana.

Posted on November 19, 2018. Available at <https://bit.ly/2DgnCKM>

The video, showing a Chinese woman eating an Italian dessert with chopsticks, was what sparked the fury of the Dolce & Gabbana debacle. The caption reads: “#DGLovesChina ? More like #DGdesperateforthatChineseRMB lol. In a bid to further appeal to luxury's covetable Chinese consumers, @dolcegabbana released some hellacious “instructional” videos on the usage of chopsticks. Pandering at it's finest, but taken up a notch by painting their target demographic as a tired and false stereotype of a people lacking refinement/culture to understand how to eat foreign foods and an over-the-top embellishment of cliché ambient music, comical pronunciations of foreign names/words, and Chinese subtitles (English added by us), which begs the question—who is this video actually for? It attempts to target China, but instead mocks them with a parodied vision of what modern China is not...a gag for amusement. Dolce & Gabbana have already removed the videos from their Chinese social media channels, but not Instagram. Stefano Gabbana has been on a much-needed social media cleanse (up until November 2nd), so maybe he kept himself busy by meddling with the marketing department for this series. Who wants to bet the XL cannoli “size” innuendos were his idea? Lmao.”



Figure 2: post by Diet Prada, a screenshot of racist messages by Stefano Gabbana.

Posted by on November 21, 2018. Available at <https://bit.ly/2qJ4J0r>

The screenshot is a conversation between one of Diet Prada's followers with Stefano Gabbana. He alter alleged his account had been hacked. The caption reads: “As @dolcegabbana prepares to mount their next runway show in Shanghai this coming evening (7:30PM) and the rest of Instagram fawns over what is sure to be an overly lavish “love letter” to China, we’ll be wondering if we’ll see chopsticks as hair ornaments, take-out boxes as purses, or even kimonos misappropriated as Chinese costume. Time will tell. For now, we’ll let y’all simmer on this DM between Stefano and Dieter @michaelatranova (chronology is reversed in slides). Word has it that they’re still in the process of model casting (over 200 Asian girls scheduled)...wouldn’t let them walk the show if we were their agents lol. Also, curious what the Chinese government will think of their country being called shit basically...especially considering how strict they are on who to allow to enter the country on work visas based on a thorough social media background checks.”

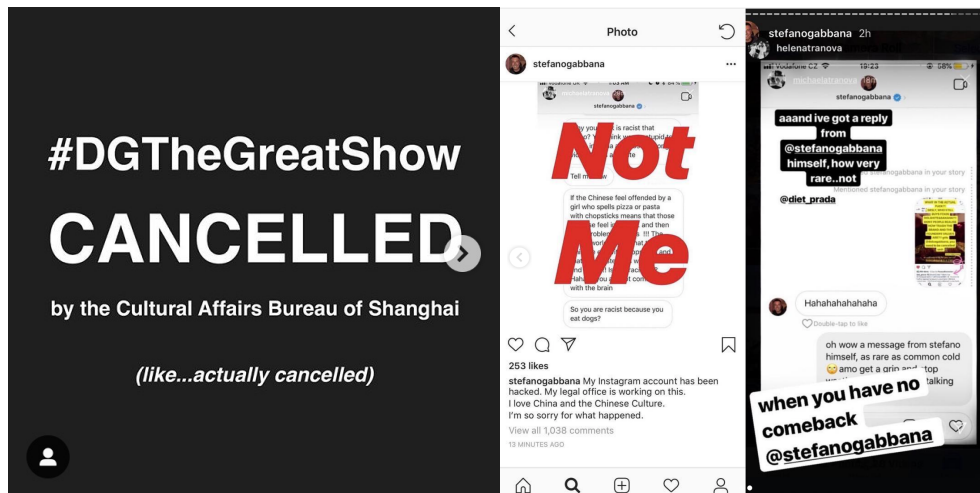


Figure 3: post by Diet Prada, with screenshots of “Stories” by Stefano Gabbana.

Posted by Diet Prada on November 21, 2018. Available at <https://bit.ly/33hrpCm>

After the commotion generated by the exposure on Diet Prada, the Dolce & Gabbana show was cancelled. The post tries to prove that Stefano Gabbana had not been hacked. The caption reads: “You saw it here first! What an interesting few hours spent wreaking havoc on @dolcegabbana’s ill-fated #DGTheGreatShow while sitting on our couch juuling and eating gelato (not with chopsticks) lol. Thank you to @michaelatranova @helenatranova @anthxnyxo for sharing their DMs and to all the Chinese Dieters who furiously updated us with translations by the minute. For anyone that believes their account was actually hacked, see slide #2 of Stefano reposting the same DM on his stories before shit hit the fan. Oh the irony of him loving to cry “fake news” and promptly dishing it out himself via his and the brand IG account. Check our story highlight “#DGTheShitShow” for the full recap.”

Established, traditional fashion critics have different views on the role and work of Diet Prada and similar “call-out” or “watchdog” accounts. Vanessa Friedman (Olsen 2019) considers their work important when there is attention to issues that deal with bigger consequences, as those involving cultural appropriation, or to work and solve the “things that were completely acceptable, that no one blinked at five years ago, [and] are no longer acceptable.” She argues, though, that sometimes the constant calling out might seem gratuitous or unfair. Robin Givhan (Balster 2019) sees a positive side in having several voices discussing fashion, but argues that it is necessary to better define what they are: “there are a lot of sports fans who all have an opinion about their favorite teams, and their favorite athletes and the big game. But that does not make them sports journalists.”

Angelo Flaccavento (2019) has a more radical view on the topic: he affirms that “watchdog culture is making a huge bad impact on the system”, and that Diet Prada is not criticism, since “once you’re up on the Diet Prada shame, you have no right anymore to reply”, while he considers it essential for criticism to promote dialogue. According to him, the kind of issue discussed by “structural criticism”, including topics such as inclusion and diversity, are now used as communication tricks by the fashion industry, and that real change will not come from “call-out” Instagram accounts. He calls Diet Prada dogmatic and with “no real intelligence, a real brain at work in it”, and puts in question their capacity to stay impartial when they’ve worked together with their favorite brands (the founders have collaborated with Gucci and Prada, and are often invited to seat in the front row of shows by various fashion brands).

There is, indeed, considerable controversy surrounding the account, as seen on the words of Bella Webb (2019), writing on 1 Granary:

“Its early anonymity seems to have granted it a free pass to bitch and gossip, and it encourages similar bullying behavior from its audience, who regularly send in tips. The ‘news’ shared on Diet Prada isn’t just office gossip spilt at the water fountain, it often comes with receipts: Instagram comments otherwise buried in a flurry of responses, illicit conversations and direct messages with the names covered up are all screenshotted and shared. The issue is that the accused rarely get a chance to respond to allegations before the damage to their reputation is done and the pair have been known to play favorites.”

To the controversy of taking it easy on brands they like, the founders argued it is “an old-school mentality” (Bromwich 2019) to think that working with brands would bias criticism, and that they cannot be compared to traditional fashion media’s relationship with fashion companies and their advertising money. That is a weak argument, though, in face of the power they had when taking down a whole show of a major fashion company. They affirm that “Diet Prada is modern in that it democratizes the critic role. Not beholden to advertisers, we’re able to say what we really believe and this truth resonates a lot with our following” (Petrarca 2017). While that might be true since magazines depend on the money from advertisers to merely exist, and Diet Prada could say anything and still have their platform, which is free of

cost, one cannot ignore the power of PR and the temptation of participating in an exclusive environment through fashion show invitations. It is exactly their reaction to accusations of blackface and racism in Prada and Gucci products, both companies they have amicable relationships with, that puts in question their ability to remain independent and credible. In the words of Flaccavento (2019), “that’s the way the fashion system takes the enemies: puts them inside, and then they’re not your enemies anymore.”

While the issue of independence of a critic’s voice and not being restrained by the fashion system certainly jeopardizes the existence of proper criticism, as it has done for a long time in fashion media, it is necessary to first define if what Diet Prada do is fashion criticism. Despite traditional media outlets having called them “critics”, and the founders being happy with the title (Petrarca 2017), their work cannot be considered fashion criticism, according to the distinctions showed in the fourth section of this chapter: they expose plagiarism and comment on social issues, but do not review or criticize products of fashion. That is, they do not criticize fashion *per se*. Even if putting designs side by side to show similarities, copies or plagiarism may consist of the “comparison” aspect of fashion criticism, one feature is not enough to make it fashion criticism. Their posts do not contain the other standards for criticism mentioned in section 7.3, and go directly to negative opinions without proper evaluation, arguably the most important aspect for something to be called criticism. More than that, they are generally made to expose other issues of the fashion industry, like ripping off emergent designers (Figure 4) or appropriating foreign cultures (Figure 5).

Is it, then, criticism of the *fashion system*, or “structural criticism”, as proposed by Titton (2019)? Diet Prada certainly has the power to expose issues and influence people online, bringing up relevant topics to discussion and provoking followers to reassess their relationship to brands, besides causing direct results (and damage) in the workings of the fashion system. However, that is not enough to call their work criticism.

As suggested in the beginning of the chapter, the concept of criticism has the problem of carrying a negative perception of itself, being commonly associated with the looking for faults in the object of analysis, and that notion of criticism is not a definition of what proper criticism is. Hence Diet Prada, by only publishing perceived faults and problems in the fashion system, without making a contextualized, extensive analysis of the whole, should not be called criticism. To be called a critic, one needs to go further than pointing out their perceptions of the object they are criticizing. As seen on Figures 1, 2, and 3, Diet Prada is good on calling out issues. While it does give some explanation on why the video is problematic, it fails to offer more contextualization or give further material for the public to



Figure 4: post by Diet Prada, comparing an emergent designer and Virgil Abloh.

Posted by Diet Prada on January 18, 2019. Available at <https://bit.ly/2KQtRJm>

The picture puts in the spotlight a design by Virgil Abloh (right), side by side with another from a young designer (left), who they affirm Abloh had met and talked to before. The Diet Prada approach is well represented here: showing visual evidence of what they judge as copying creative work, and leaving it there for their followers to discuss the coherence of the accusation. The caption reads: “Another men’s fashion week, another @off__white collection with cherry picked references from indie streetwear labels? This time, the designs in question are a yellow graffitied ensemble from Cologne-based @colrsbaby by @punkzec, who showed his AW18 collection at @ariseffashionweek in Lagos in April 2018, and a graphic from Manchester label @gramm. It could be a coincidence, but Virgil has been known to swipe designs from the fans he meets, some of who happen to be young creatives themselves. Interestingly enough, @punkzec met Virgil prior to one of his presentations in Paris in 2017. Think they talked design?”

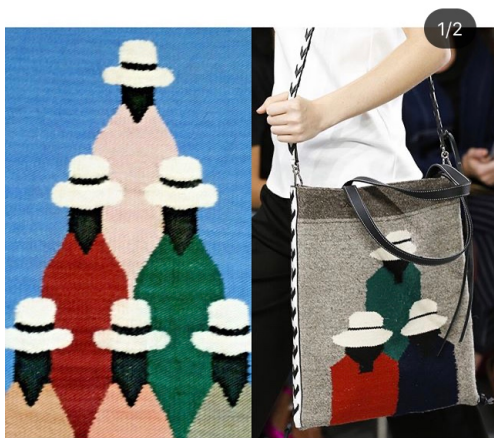


Figure 5: post by Diet Prada, comparing Ecuadorian artisans to Loewe.

Posted by Diet Prada on November 27, 2017. Available at <https://bit.ly/2rsLs3b>

The picture shows a traditional Ecuadorian weaving style and the “appropriation” by fashion brand Loewe. The caption reads: “The world traveler pastiche that is becoming a @loewe signature can sometimes remind you of European fashion’s imperialism problem. Coming from a brand that literally has a foundation to support the art of craft, some of the pieces offered in the SS18 Loewe show prove problematic. The images and weaving style of traditional Ecuadorian textiles have been directly lifted into luxury goods. To come out and put their brand name over the country of origin, well, the joke writes itself.”

reflect and understand what is being exposed. As their posts come as instantaneous reactions to a developing situation, Diet Prada does not clarify or teach about the topic in question. The public is supposed to be in agreement without being educated on the foundations of the judgment. Their posts show disapproval statements, not thoughtful evaluation. It shows the faults and has the merit of opening a place for discussion (the comment section), but it is far from properly elaborated criticism that, in good will, helps the reader understand the faults of what is in analysis.

The fatigue of “reading fashion journalism that amounts to no more than excited description and personal opinion” (McNeil & Miller: 3) might have created room for the excitement in antagonizing the fashion *status quo*, but the simplistic approach of Diet Prada should not be called criticism only for having the courage to expose problems and generate buzz. Internet creates space for everyone with access to it to have a voice and (maybe) be heard, but it is important to distinguish between voices and professionals. The legitimization of fashion criticism also goes through respecting the meaning of the term, and not labeling newcomers something as important as “critic” without considering the significance and relevance of the title, solely for recognizing the fearlessness to combat. Pointing out problems is, at best, criticism in the common sense, the first that shows up on the Oxford Dictionary, of finding faults without elaborating on them. Diet Prada has a very important role in exposing what is rotten in the fashion industry, but they should be called for what they are: social media influencers who run a platform for exposing issues of the fashion system.

7.6 Looking for fashion criticism on Instagram 2: The case of @pam_boy

Pierre A. M’Pelé, a French fashion journalist by education, started his Instagram profile, @pam_boy, as a portfolio for his writing, while he was still a student. Now he has built a cult following of almost 20 thousand (19.7 thousand as of November 5, 2019) and, although the number may be tiny comparing to that of *Diet Prada*, he has gotten the attention of some of fashion’s most important players, like Marc Jacobs, and several media vehicles, such as *i-D*, *Mic*, *Antidote* and *Vogue Portugal*. His writing has been published on *WWD*, *Fucking Young!*, *Dansk* and *Love* magazine, among others.

Before working with *Love*, M’Pelé was featured in its pages as “the most influential writer to emerge from an opinionated new generation of online commentators” (Healy 2019: 364), despite his writing on Instagram being limited to a few occasions. Pam Boy — as he likes to be called, to keep his identity away from his work as journalist and writer — argues that, although the platform is predominantly visual, once you catch people’s attention with the

picture, they will read the captions, no matter if it is an essay divided in four posts (Instagram limits the amount of words in each caption). What made him stand out in the saturated world of fashion on Instagram were his reviews with emojis, the digital ideograms that are so dear to communication on social media, specially to young people who, according to him, are not always willing to read long articles. This “method” was a solution to the overwhelming amount of collections his followers asked him to review.

M’Pelé keeps a list (Figures 6 and 7) on his profile of the meaning for which emoji he uses on the reviews he makes on the “Stories” feature on Instagram, images that auto-delete 24 hours after they have been posted. When fashion month (comprising the four major fashion weeks: New York, London, Milan and Paris) happens, he posts screenshots (taken from the application Vogue Runway) with all the looks of a show that he judges relevant to comment on, with an emoji on top of each look, giving his evaluation of each and every outfit of the collection he chooses (Figure 8). When the fashion week is over, he then fixates the shows of each week, separated by city, on his “Stories highlights”, a feature that lets one recover their chosen “Stories” and keep them on their profile. Among these “emoji reviews”, there are occasional screenshots of tweets and conversations he keeps with followers who message him replying to his posts (Figure 9), as he consider this “method” of reviewing an answer to the quick way in which social media work. In his own words, it is a “straightforward opinion that will lead to more conversations after. That is the most important thing: to create conversations and open dialogues” (Healy 2019: 364). The fast reactions to fashion might mean that a judgment can change later, but while established critics, like Flaccavento (2019) or Fury (2019) appreciate the space they have for going back and writing new perspectives on previous thoughts, M’Pelé prefers to avoid reevaluating, as he believes people will have changed their focus onto other things (Healy 2019: 366).

Knowing that he never intended to become famous on social media, but used it as a portfolio for his writing, it is no wonder that M’Pelé went on to publish his own magazine, as he considers that social media have their limitations and print could be a medium “to go more in-depth” (Salter 2018). “*SCRNSHT*”, the name, is based on screenshot without the vowels, as the content of its pages are images of Instagram conversations with several fashion insiders, like Marc Jacobs and M’Pelé’s friend, “YouTube fashion critic” Luke Meagher. The magazine has no advertisements and is completely funded by the sales, which M’Pelé argues enables him to keep his journalistic integrity (Healy 2019: 366). It was indeed this wish to rebuild trust between the reader and the fashion press, by being unaffected by the influence of brands, that motivated him to publish his own magazine (Katz 2018). Besides launching his own magazine, he has become a regular contributor to *Love* magazine, a niche fashion magazine owned by Condé Nast.



Figures 6 and 7: a list of meanings for each emoji M'Pelé uses on his "reviews".



Figure 8: M'Pelé's "emoji review" of Helmut Lang Spring 2020 collection.
Figure 9: a follower answering to M'Pelé's review of a Helmut Lang collection.

Magazines aside, reviewing collections with emojis on Instagram might work during fashion week, with its fast pace, to keep followers informed and start conversations. It is important as a way to democratize the fashion discourse, bringing in outside voices to one's platform when they have that privilege, as Diet Prada does with tips from their followers. However, while the list of emojis that M'Pelé uses is extensive in meaning, it is judgment with no foundation, resulting, again, in no evaluation, which is an essential aspect of criticism. It might be dynamic, contemporary and even fun, but it is not fashion criticism in the standards defined in this chapter.

To examine whether the "essays" M'Pelé posts as captions on Instagram are fashion criticism, in the sense built in this chapter, it will be used as an example his writing on the first collection of Hedi Slimane for Celine (see Appendix 5). First, a contextualization: Celine is a French brand that had a stable cult following for almost a decade, while Phoebe Philo was its designer. She created a distinctive intellectual approach to femininity, that conquered the love of fashion world, so it was no surprise that the appointment of Slimane, with his very specific and contrasting to Phoebe's aesthetic, created a lot of controversy. A wave of negative judgments washed Instagram as a reaction to Slimane's first Celine collection, while M'Pelé has often confessed that he is one of his favorite designers, thus it is interesting to analyze if his words on this specific situation are proper criticism or pure championing.

As the text comes along with several pictures of the looks in the fashion show, M'Pelé is very frugal in the description aspect. It is limited to some lines telling where the event took place, and some others in the closing paragraph that list some of the outfits in the collection. There is certainly a lot of comparison, as embedded in the piece is a parallel review (surprisingly more complete than the one it is inside) of the Saint Laurent collection presented some days before Celine's, which M'Pelé uses to explain the influence of Slimane and the coherence of his body of work. There is also a lot of contextualization, but mainly connected to economic reasons for justifying the choice of Hedi Slimane to head the house of Celine. And that is what most of the writing is dedicated to: convincing the reader that it was a valid decision. It does not connect the clothes shown to the world outside fashion: the contextualization stops at the threshold of the world of the designer. It fails to compare the work of Slimane in a fashion history larger than the one created by himself, and it fails to contextualize it to the world of clothing beyond fashion.

The author takes the creations of Slimane as something validated by its commercial success, without explaining why they should be relevant as a cultural or social phenomenon: "as long as millions of [women] choose to buy his stuff, he will retain his legitimacy, despite all the noise." Instead, it comments on the weird associations these designs bring: "he makes fashion

for young girls who would often be referred to as ‘sluts,’ ‘junkies,’ and ‘anorexic’”, but does not problematize the fact that Slimane’s designs contribute to an unhealthy image of drug abuse or eating disorder. It brings no interpretation to these clothes, to clarify to the reader why they are made as such. M’Pelé does, though, admit that there is an issue in the lack of diversity in the cast. However, that is not connected to the fashion in itself.

Failing to develop the fashion criticism standards of description, comparison, contextualization and interpretation, M’Pelé’s review lacks in evaluation. In its mantra about the importance of the designer, it ignores the need to pass a clear judgment on the relevance (or lack of) of these clothes. It admits that they are nothing new and seem to be targeted at a standard of beauty that is lightyears away from the political correctness of 2019 — “sharp tailoring cut tiny, tiny for feeble boys and bony girls who people assume have single-digit Body Mass Index”, but does not take a stand to expose the problems in a collection with designs like that. Instead, it goes on to minimize this effect with the merits of such problematic style being a signature of Slimane. The tone of defensiveness to validate the work of the designer makes the review seem biased by the fact that M’Pelé has admitted to be his fan several times before. Besides this, in comparison to the embedded review of Saint Laurent’s fashion show, which is more developed in the discussion of the fashion itself and in contextualizing it to contemporaneity, it is even clearer how the author gives more space to his own taste than to exposing the objects of criticism.

That does not imply, however, that this piece of writing is not criticism. It does have (albeit timid) the standards for proper fashion criticism, but it lets come to light too much of the personal opinion of the author. He does bring facts, as in the financial importance and influence of the designer, and even points out that his designs bring images of surreal beauty standards which are outdated in 2019, but does not expand on them equally. It speaks a lot about the reasons that validate the appointment of Hedi Slimane at Celine, but fails to do what is expected of a critic: to found evaluation in facts that are opened up and exposed, to give the reader the opportunity to think and judge by oneself.

7.7 Looking for fashion criticism on YouTube: the case of HauteLeMode

Luke Meagher is an American fashion marketing student who runs the YouTube channel HauteLeMode, where he has (as of November 5, 2019) 285 thousand followers. He started his channel in 2015, when noticing a lack of fashion-related content on YouTube. He identified the potential of the platform for fashion as the Generation Z audience, who is very active in there, may not have the financial power to buy fashion, but certainly buys into the fashion

imaginary (Chau 2019). What began as a repository for mainly didactic videos on fashion history in four years evolved into a channel with a diverse content in fashion, including “criticism”, that has been recognized by several media outlets, such as *i-D*, *Mic*, *Paper* and *Vogue Portugal*.

Meagher knows the tricks of gaining attention on YouTube: his videos have titles in capitalized letters, with keywords like “roast” or “reaction”, classic genres of content on the platform, often featured on them. Besides reviews of fashion shows, his channel has commentary on red carpet looks, history of fashion and explanatory videos on several issues of the fashion system, ranging from sustainability to cultural appropriation. His main qualities are to be very informative and use a language that speaks directly to the younger public.

Luke Meagher, as Pierre A. M’Pelé, uses the Vogue Runway app to follow the collections shown during the four main fashion weeks — showing how revolutionary the instantaneous availability of images of fashion shows is to the democratization of the fashion discourse: it does not matter if one gets invited to the fashion shows or not, when the whole collection can be found online some minutes after the event happens. He also uses Instagram to comment on the looks, but points out a distinction between this content, quick and reactive, and the “much more sit-down, process, write it all out, this is what I’m thinking” videos that he publishes on YouTube (Katz 2018b).

The choice of YouTube is due to the convenience to self-publish and the opportunity to create original content, and he underlines the importance of the platform on maintaining his independence: “I have my audience, and it allows me to be this independent person that does not need to rely on any brand to make me something or anyone” (Chau 2019). Feeling like he is standing on the fringes of the fashion system does not upset him, as he does not think it is relevant to have the support of fashion companies or even get invited to fashion shows, since everything is available online. It is a different approach from more traditional critics, like Flaccavento (2019) and Fury (2019), who consider the live experience of fashion essential to their work.

To investigate the presence of criticism in Meagher’s work, HauteLeMode’s video³ “céline was everything wrong with fashion (Céline Spring 2019 Review)” on the debut of Hedi Slimane at Celine will be analyzed, this being the same collection whose @pam_boy’s review that was discussed in the previous section of this chapter.

³ Posted on October 1, 2018. Available at <https://bit.ly/2QQAgIq>

Meagher spends the majority of the video contextualizing the collection in the current social and political scenario, going as far as comparing Slimane to Brett Kavanaugh (an American judge absolved from allegations of sexual assault). This is a problematic approach for a critic, according to Fury (2019), since one needs to consider that collections are developed much earlier than the moment in which they are presented, and what goes on outside the fashion sphere might be coincidental. It is essential to contextualize fashion in the time when it is happening, but with taking care not to connect it to such specific moments. The merit of the review is explaining why it was so important for the brand to keep its legacy in present times, as it represented social issues which are in development and was an alternative for women in a fashion industry that often neglects their needs and wishes.

Luke Meagher speaks extensively to base his opinion that Slimane overturned Celine, from feminist under Phoebe Philo, to misogynist under Hedi's direction. While the review does a good job in explaining the history of Celine as a brand with the importance it had in changing women's fashion, and clarifying the situation that made its owners completely change its path, it is clearly biased by his despise of Hedi Slimane's design and vision.

Clothes are described quickly, in gratuitous negative judgment, as Meagher relates every kind of evaluation throughout his review to the idea of Hedi Slimane being a misogynist. He gives some interpretation when describing the kind of public that those clothes might be designed for, mentioning the troubling choice of cast and problematizing it. Comparison is present to justify why the appointment of a new designer after Philo was so catastrophic to the brand, thus aesthetic confrontation stays inside the realm of the history of the brand and the designer himself, as it only deviates to show that Slimane had been previously doing the same work.

The review puts more emphasis in explaining why it was such a bad idea to name Hedi Slimane as the creative director of Celine than to actually dissecting the presented fashion. However, evaluation is perceivable as the video touches every standard for proper fashion criticism, even if barely. Ignoring the specific situation in which the clothes were created (the change of realm at a fashion house), the review would not help the public understand why Meagher found them so despicable. The review falls into the trap of connecting fashion to things that, at first, seem unrelated. The video exposes facts and links history and contemporary issues to the fashion show, bringing necessary information to understand the context in which it happened, but fails to offer different perspectives, what would make it impartial and more critical. Nonetheless, the imbalance of description, comparison, contextualization, interpretation and evaluation does not disqualify the review for being proper fashion criticism.

7.8 Confirming the possibility of publishing fashion criticism on social media

After defining fashion criticism as the practice of composing thoughtful aesthetic judgments, consisting of description, comparison, contextualization and interpretation, resulting in evaluation, and being applied to the products of fashion, an investigation of its presence on social media resulted in the confirmation that there is fashion criticism on Instagram and YouTube.

Pierre A. M'Pelé, as @pam_boy on Instagram, and Luke Meagher, as HauteLeMode on YouTube, are examples of an effort in elaborating reviews of fashion that, albeit imperfect, go deeper than the restrained, descriptive, generally positive in tone, reporting on fashion magazines and other fashion-specific media. Thus fashion criticism, in the terms described in this chapter, *can* be published on social media platforms.

8. Challenges to fashion criticism on social media

Although social media can (and already is) a space for fashion criticism (considering Instagram and YouTube as the main social media platforms for fashion) as concluded in the previous chapter, there is still another question to be answered: *can social media be a space for fashion criticism to be established as an earnest practice?* This depends on how fashion critics on social media will respond to the historical challenges that fashion criticism faces in the symbiotic relationship between fashion industry and fashion media.

As shown in sections 5.1 and 5.2, the main reasons for the perceived lower status that fashion criticism has in relation to the criticism of other forms of cultural productions are the economic dependency between the fashion industry and the fashion media, and the demeaning perception of fashion as frivolous, mainly in its historical association with femininity. While the first issue seems to depend on restructuring an industry to be solved, the second is a historical bias that involves society in a much larger scope than the fashion industry could be able to control. Answering the above question, then, is not about finding solutions to the two issues exposed in sections 5.1 and 5.2. The establishment of fashion criticism as an earnest practice on social media will be treated here in simpler terms: establishing itself as a practice means becoming a profession, while an earnest practice means maintaining the standards for fashion criticism presented in the previous chapter.

8.1 The difficulty for fashion critics on social media to remain objective and independent while professionalizing their work

Fashion blogging has become a profession by developing into a subfield of fashion and creating its own laws of functioning, as exposed on chapter 6. This professionalization happened gradually, as bloggers accumulated economic, social and symbolic resources that were recognized by the established fashion system. Fashion bloggers, starting as unknown fashion amateurs, evolved into digital influencers who use social media to publish content related to fashion and have become gatekeepers of the industry. A parallel can be drawn between fashion bloggers and fashion critics on social media: they are initially unknown to the establishment, they are the promise of alternative voices with potential of subverting the traditional fashion discourse, and they intend to become relevant in the field of fashion. Hence, the developments for the establishment of fashion blogging as a profession will be used as an example for the professionalization of fashion critics.

The first requirement for bloggers' activity to be perceived as their profession is having an income (Karhawi 2016, Tilton 2016: 216). Successful fashion bloggers monetized their work

by emulating the economic model inherited from fashion magazines (creating financial ties with the fashion industry, through advertising or sponsored content), or by finding jobs inside traditional fashion media. They took this model of monetization to Instagram, where sponsored posts have become the norm for digital influencers.

However, building economic ties to fashion brands, in the case of fashion critics, would jeopardize their capacity to elaborate meaningful, rigorous and honest criticism, giving continuation to the structural economic dependency between fashion media and fashion industry that is one of the causes for the lack of critical writing in the fashion press. An option for fashion critics on social media to monetize their work could be to create sponsored posts with brands unrelated to fashion, but it seems unrealistic that, for instance, a company selling household appliances would consider a fashion critic's Instagram profile as a good display for its merchandise. YouTube, though, is a platform embedded with tools for monetization. Besides allowing for channels to offer subscription-based content, it provides the possibility for content creators to offer their videos as displays for advertising goods without having to directly contact the advertisers. The platform inserts advertisements that are not necessarily related to the subject of the video they are showed in, and fashion critics publishing on YouTube do not need to establish a commercial relationship with fashion brands. Besides, as the advertisements are not sponsored posts with the direct participation of the content creator, the critics do not relate their image to the brands that use their videos to advertise their products.

Even if fashion critics on social media find a solution to avoid falling into the economic dependency between fashion media and fashion industry, as fashion bloggers did, being recognized and accepted by the fashion system was an essential mark in the designation of fashion blogging as a career, as it enables bloggers to have credibility (essential for professionalization) and access the inside of the fashion industry, including fashion shows. Despite these events being live streamed on social media and their pictures made available online few minutes after the models show up on the runway, respected fashion critics consider it essential to attend them, as Angelo Flaccavento (2019) explains:

“Me, as a critic, I need to have access to shows in order to do my job. I always say that as a critic you cannot judge a show from pictures, because a show is a mix of the presentation of clothing, theatrics, performance, everything makes sense and everything comes together. And also clothing is not something static, you have to see that on a moving body. So you cannot judge a show from a live streaming, because the digital video is the worst, you cannot judge it from pictures. So you need to have access. But, if you're not granted access because of your criticism, that makes your work hard and you cannot do your job properly. And also you start self-censoring in order to be sure you get admitted to the next show. So it's a mortal coil, in a way.”

Representing *Love* magazine, Pierre A. M'Pelé (@pam_boy) has access to fashion shows that would not be open to someone without press credentials. Meanwhile, Luke Meagher

(HauteLeMode), who has ten times the number of followers of M’Pelé, but does not work for an established fashion media company, does not have the same access to fashion shows. For a fashion critic who may publish both positive and negative commentary about a collection, it seems that attracting hundreds of thousands of followers is not enough symbolic capital to be accepted by the fashion system.

The fashion system might be repeating the same mistake it made in the emergence of fashion blogging, when it was late to recognize the importance of a new way of disseminating and discussing about fashion. The acceptance of fashion blogging came when the fashion industry noticed the economic potential in the audience that the bloggers were attracting, and the way the fashion system found to try to neutralize the menace of losing their monopoly to fashion bloggers was to bring them into the traditional economic dependency between fashion industry and fashion media. However, fashion critics on social media need to abstain from collaborating financially with the fashion industry for an earnest practice of fashion criticism to be possible. Fashion critics on newspapers and general-interest media are immune to advertiser’s revenue influence on their writing, thus they could be seen as a model for fashion critics on social media. They have, however, the advantage of working for established, respected institutions, that open the fashion system’s doors for them to get in and watch fashion shows (although these doors are often closed when designers get offended by negative reviews and ban critics from attending future shows).

As mentioned above, M’Pelé has become a regular contributor for *Love* magazine. Working to an established fashion media company while maintaining a practice of fashion criticism on social media could seem like an answer for having both an income and access to the inside of the fashion system. Nonetheless, it is interesting to notice that, after starting to work with *Love*, M’Pelé skipped the reviews of the fashion weeks happening in Milan and Paris on his Instagram profile, but wrote pieces about collections presented in these cities for the magazine’s website. His writing for *Love* is visibly milder than his previous reviews posted directly on Instagram, approaching controversial collections in a defensive tone, justifying the choices and merits of the designers, keeping away from explicitly exposing faults. This can be perceived on the titles of his articles for *Love*: “In Defense of Balmain’s Olivier Rousteing”, “The Exciting Anomaly That Is Riccardo Tisci’s Burberry”, “Clare Waight Keller Is The New Haute Couture Authority.” Working for an established fashion magazine visibly undermined M’Pelé’s potential to exert critical writing inside the definition and standards from chapter 7.

Monetizing their work and finding a way to be accepted into the fashion system, while maintaining the integrity of their critical expression, thus, are the two biggest challenges for fashion critics to establish fashion criticism as an earnest practice on social media.

8.2 Possible ways of addressing the challenges to fashion criticism on social media

Fashion criticism on social media risks being affected by the economic dependency that fashion media has had on the fashion industry for at least a century. A way around it may be found in the YouTube example, as its monetization tools make it possible for fashion critics to have an income without relying on the fashion industry. This allows for fashion criticism on social media to be seen as a profession, thus a established practice.

Establishing fashion criticism on social media as an *earnest* practice, thus maintaining the standards defined in chapter 7, however, depends on bigger changes. As mentioned in the previous section, even acquiring a considerable following (in the case of Luke Meagher, who has around 250 thousand followers on YouTube) does not qualify a fashion critic to be welcomed into the fashion system and, for instance, be invited to fashion shows. The fashion system should be more open to admit the symbolic capital of voices in the fashion discourse that will not necessarily come with financial advantages. Fashion critics on social media should not need to become as commercialized as fashion bloggers to be perceived as worthy of attention by the fashion system.

9. Conclusion

“I think that the way the fashion system is working now, and going now, they’re trying to silence criticism. Today is all about consensus, not just in fashion, you cannot express a different opinion. It’s very hard for you to express a different opinion” (Flaccavento 2019).

Fashion criticism is in trouble, as writing about fashion has been since its emergence. As McNeil and Miller (2014) argue, a critical vocabulary for fashion developed from subjective notions of the taste, and that might still affect the way that fashion is written about in 2019. Adding to that, intermittent restraints to the production of impartial, meaningful fashion criticism and to its legitimization as a practice comparable to its counterparts have been defined and identified in crucial dynamics that date back to the origins of fashion media.

As fashion is the creation of symbolic value of clothing, and this creation depends heavily on the fashion media to occur, the fates of the fashion industry and the fashion media have been tied since the appearance of fashion magazines in the eighteenth century. This symbiotic relationship, where the fashion media depends on the fashion industry to have content to write about and on its advertising revenue to merely exist, while the fashion industry relies on the fashion media to basically create the idea of fashion, has established an economic dependency between the two that has deeply affected the fashion discourse.

Therefore, channels of fashion media who depend primarily on fashion industry’s advertising revenue have been historically ambushing fashion criticism. Meanwhile, newspapers and general-interest magazines, not dependent on this source of revenue, were able to develop earnest, impartial fashion criticism for at least a century. It is intriguing how, even with this tradition of serious fashion writing in these outlets, fashion criticism yet has not been recognized as a practice in the same level as the criticism of art, literature or film.

A reason for that is that fashion has been seen as frivolous and not worthy of serious thinking for centuries, resulting from the contempt of several philosophers who treated it as a lesser matter. Its association with notions of femininity since the nineteenth century have only aggravated its perception in society. However, its central position in cultural conversation is being affirmed, and serious writings on fashion have been gaining momentum.

The digital turn in the last decade of the twentieth century and the rise of the internet and Web 2.0 brought many promises of democratization of discourses and progressiveness in debate. For fashion, this meant that fashion bloggers, who initially were fashion outsiders writing from their bedrooms, became relevant enough to be considered new gatekeepers of fashion. However, with their acceptance inside the fashion system, also came the almost extinction of

the critical capacity of blogging when applied to fashion. Fashion blogging evolved into digital influencing, and most fashion-related online content is now found on iconographic social media platforms, mainly Instagram.

If blogs were initially seen as a space for alternative discourses on fashion, and social media platforms are where most fashion content has moved to, thus being an “evolution” of the fashion blogging era, *can social media platforms be a space for fashion criticism to be published and established as an earnest practice?* Social media can, and already is, as in the example of @pam_boy on Instagram and HauteLeMode on YouTube, a space for fashion criticism to be published. The establishment of fashion criticism as an earnest practice, though, is a bigger challenge. Becoming an earnest practice means professionalizing the work of fashion critics on social media, through finding a source of income and being recognized by the fashion system as legitimate players, while maintaining their capacity to be critical.

Fashion criticism can become an established practice, as there are at least two realistic ways for it to be monetized, using the example of YouTube, consisting in offering advertising space to companies unrelated to fashion and launching subscription-based channels. Monetizing their content would thus allow fashion critics who publish their work on social media to make it their profession.

Establishing an *earnest* practice, based on the standards defined on chapter 7, however, depends on bigger changes in the fashion system. As fashion critics working outside of established media companies need access to the inside of the fashion system without promising any direct economic advantage in return, the economic dependency between fashion media and fashion industry would need to be overcome.

In a practical example, maybe some of the seats in the front row of fashion shows that are currently offered to digital influencers with millions of followers (and potential consumers) should, instead, be taken by fashion critics. But as the words of a critic appear to have no effect in the decision-making process of fashion consumption (Fury 2019), it is hard to imagine that, in the stage of capitalism in 2019, billionaire fashion companies would prefer to jeopardize economic gains to give opportunity for critical thinking, which is essential for the development of creativity and progress, to flourish.

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Annexes

Appendix 1: interview with Monica Tilton

Author: Could social media be an option of platform/channel for the future development of fashion criticism? How could people actually work on social media?

Tilton: I think what is really important to understand is that, at the moment, there seems to be a change in the economic model that underlies the relationship between fashion, journalism and social media. Therefore, I'm not sure if it's too early to tell whether there'll be jobs in it or not, but I think that, for now, the way that people would be paid, if they were active in fashion journalism, and the way that fashion journalism in its modern form, in the sense of fashion magazines was born, as you know and as I write in my article, is that it's intrinsically, completely interconnected with the business side. So that means that there needs to be new business models for an economic opening, for these people to get paid, who are doing this criticism. And I think an interesting example at the moment is with Diet Prada, because there you can see that they somehow were able to first create this buzz, and to become famous, and then I think they are also getting invited to shows, and they have a bit more acceptance in the fashion world. You know what I mean? So, I think there's several processes that you need to take into account: one is just how can these people make money out of it? The second is also how professional are they or how can they professionalize themselves? And is that immediate way of criticizing things necessarily the way that they will still work once they're a bit more professional? And I'm not saying that they won't be able to speak up, and to denounce people, but maybe there also needs to be a way for them to understand how to give criticism in a way that's more contextualized, and it's not just saying "you're racist" or... You know what I mean?

Yeah, I didn't include Diet Prada in my research because they are very "at the moment" and, to not make the research about "what is criticism?", I decided not to put them, because I was not sure if I could consider that criticism, in the sense of "true, actual, with credibility", someone that's stopping to analyze and stuff. I'm trying to focus more on these people that take some time to do it. Pierre, @pam_boy (on Instagram) does this thing of reacting live with emojis, but also he writes. But now he's starting to write articles for magazines, so that kind of makes you think if these people are not just taking social media to build an image for themselves. And also Haute Le Mode, the guy from YouTube, he built a following, so I think that makes it look exciting also because I think YouTube gives you the opportunity to have a job without having the support from brands.

Yeah and you can get advertising revenue from other sources, maybe more like the beauty industry that are not so, you know...

Which is kind of more like more similar to newspapers, because you can have the advertising from other stuff.

I just wonder how you would define then, this kind of criticism that you're interested in?

I would define as criticism that is trying to come, first, from people that studied somehow fashion, because it comes from... It doesn't need to be journalism, because in the case of Pierre he's a journalist, but there's a stylist that does it also on Instagram, but he kind of does it more in the sense of, if he gets mad at the collection, he does a big text about it. He's not like Luke or Pierre that are doing it in every collection because it's what they want for their lives. So I would take these people that actually want to criticize fashion as a job, and don't intend to start from a magazine, or start from mainstream media, but do criticism with some distance to be more thoughtful, not just react. Not just accusation.

So you mean something like art criticism, in the sense that it kind of contextualizes but also gives, adds knowledge...

The funny thing is: if you think of criticism in art, or cinema, or in music, the most prestigious of doing it is on print.

Yes, definitely.

If you think of fashion, no. Because print could not give credibility to it.

But I have to say I wouldn't agree completely because I think that one of the best voices at the moment, in critics of fashion is Robin Givhan, and she writes for The Washington Post. And I have to say the way that she, that's in my opinion, and from a sort of sociological perspective, I think she's using the limits that are given to her, within which she can write, but then she really does a good job in contextualizing what designers are doing. And she frequently writes about, for example, what Melania Trump is wearing, why she's wearing it, what it means... She was also banned from fashion shows for a long time, and also, journalists from The Guardian... They really, and of course, it's not something that we maybe perceive that well, because if you don't have The Washington Post subscribed, or if you're not a subscriber of The Guardian you won't see it, but it's really something that, where there's space for it.

Yeah, I think I didn't express myself well. I mean, like, specialized print.

Yes.

Because if you went to read cinema criticism, you get a cinema magazine and you're gonna trust what's written there. I mean for fashion, if you're actually into fashion, you're gonna understand that in Vogue you're not gonna get a good review.

Yeah, that I understand.

And my idea is like, do you think that we could, "we"—

The system?

People in general, could create this prestige in social media? Do you think it could be a valid platform, or it's not serious enough, or... Because also the thing that I get from these guys that are doing criticism is that they're very, they bring a lot of security in themselves on their platforms. This is the good thing about social media: you don't need to really care if there's someone "big" looking at you if you have 250 thousand followers, like Luke, he doesn't get invited for shows but he still has his following. Do you think this could go somewhere, if we could not do it in specialized fashion print media, social media could be a platform?

Definitely. I think it can definitely be and I think it already is a platform. And the thing is that, the interesting question is, because I, when I did my PhD research, I was in the exact same stage from the development of the situation as you are right now, looking at fashion criticism. So I started doing my research on bloggers in 2010 with the idea that, back then, there were few people that were actually trying to change fashion media from within. And I was wondering "ok, so now there's this space, they're using it" and I'm telling you, within the span of, let's say, four years, it had completely changed. So what I had seen at the beginning was that, four years after, I realized that they use it as an entry way, to get into the system, and then to build a career from there. And they didn't necessarily want to get into Vogue, but what they did is that they just made their blogs into, you know, a viable job. So it's really of question of, maybe some of them will get jobs, let's say, at Vogue, or maybe some more critical publications, but I don't think that they will get into journalism in newspapers, because that is really a professional field where you have to have gone to a journalism school, etc. I think the fashion media, they bring in a lot of people, also from from the fashion system, from the fringes of the system. So I think that really, for people like, let's say, Edward Enninful, or other more progressive thinking editors of magazines, I think he would be open to bring in people, like that.

To embrace this people.

To embrace them, but the question is – that will necessarily mean that they will have to, somehow, answer to the tricks of the trade, that then happen?

So do you think this maybe could also be a symptom of a bigger change?

I think so, yeah.

That, even if it's luxury, it might become more democratic, and how people – not even people that buy it, but people that are interested – influence more the industry than the industry is dictating?

I would say that there are two things in fashion. In one hand, there's the business, and in the other hand there's the discourse of fashion media. And with blogs and Instagram and social media, there's a lot more buzz and interconnection and participation in the discourse, but I don't think that this leads to a democratization of the fashion system *per se*. Yes, there's more people partaking in creating media, in having a say in the representation of people, being more inclusive, etc. But for example, the "We should all be feminists" t-shirt from Dior still costs 950 pounds. You can share it, and that's cost zero, you can buy a fake one on Ali Baba, but you still won't – and maybe that's the point, maybe you don't even have to buy it in order to partake, but what you're doing, even if you're buying the fake or even just partaking in the communication, is that you are ultimately giving Dior more buzz and more attention, and giving it a younger audience. Which is what they need to rejuvenate the brand. So I think in a way, there's a system for and a space for this kind of criticism, but I don't think it's necessarily going to change the workings of the fashion system as a production system, the economic system.

So how do you think the fashion system could make up the space for this, because if you're looking at a new way of sponsoring these people that need to work in it, if we separate them from the field of fashion criticism that doesn't need the revenue from fashion to work, if we consider that they don't end up at Vogue, they keep their work at social media, how could these relations within the industry happen to open the space for them, without jeopardizing their capacity of criticism? Because I, for example, this menswear season now, that I saw that Pierre started getting invited to all the shows, for me it was like "ok, that was a little bit weird". Like, "why is he going everywhere", and "why is he adoring Givenchy so much" and then I start looking for malicious connections. He adores Givenchy on Instagram then, all of a sudden, he has a Love article (on Love magazine) about Givenchy being the future of couture. Do you believe that people can keep their honesty while they try to get into a system? Or do you think they need to be absolutely away from it? If you research the life from fashion critics at newspapers, they generally don't come from fashion. They get there from another general interest – and maybe that's why their criticism is so good, because they come from culture and they have a more general view of fashion. But people that actually love fashion as that thing, do you believe these people can keep themselves away from being

biased when they start getting into the system? Do you think the system can open a space for these people to not get biased? Because we know that fashion is known as being an industry of big egos and insecurity, also, and people that need other people glorifying them.

My answer to that is that I think as long as... I think that the step from writing the review for his Instagram and then writing it for Love, there was something more in between that we didn't see. So I think that probably he must have been invited by Givenchy PR people. And if you get invited you often get your flights booked... I used to work as a fashion journalist myself and I, for example, I went to review a Vuitton show in Paris, so you get a first class flight, you get picked up from the airport, you have a really luxurious hotel. In the hotel there are flowers, there's a massage booked for you the day after, there's massive dinners, champagne all the time, there's a *pochette* from Louis Vuitton, there's invitations, handwritten notes... So, even if nobody says "don't give us a negative review", you'd have to be really strict in not being influenced by this. And I remember on the press trips I went, there was an Indian journalist and he worked for a magazine that forbade him to take part in the dinners, he was not allowed even to use the drivers that Vuitton gave us, so he just went to the show and he reviewed it. But that's extremely unusual. There might not be a rule where somebody says "we want you to write like this", but there's an understanding that you have to somehow comply to it. At least be favorable enough to just mention the things you liked and not the ones you didn't like. So, to answer the question of how, if it's possible within this, I think the big question is: there will be, at the moment we know that also in American Vogue they had to close down several departments and magazines, and they're restructuring in a massive way, so they are themselves seeing that the massive amount of money that they used to spend for advertising is somehow not making the impact that they used to get, because they're selling less and less print magazines, and everybody is just looking at the magazines online. So, they know themselves that they have to change something. And I think that in this change, I suppose that probably, this link between fashion media as a business and fashion industry as a business, that there will be a disruption, and somehow a new combination. And maybe in that moment there might be, at least that's what I've been observing in the past years, what I have seen is that there is a lot of new print magazines actually coming up, with very low print runs, but they have alternative models of financing. For example, some are the result of crowdfunding, some are creative agencies that make magazines as a showcase product, so they're acting as publishers as well, there are magazines that are only published once per year, twice per year, that somehow can cover costs like that. So there is, I think, a new, slowly, a new thing that's coming up and new spaces for criticism. And online, the threshold is, as your gut feeling told you, once you get invited to the shows, you're in the loop. And then I think it's very difficult to remain objective, very very difficult.

Yesterday on the flight I was reading your previous article about the fashionable personas, and I was wondering how far can these guys keep themselves from becoming this persona also, because how much of this will to be so honest and so credible, isn't also just a persona?

Definitely.

Like, where does that come from?

I think that's definitely part of their persona, and that the moments when the persona performance is disrupted is often when something happens that just really changes your appearance or your life. Sometimes there's a lot of bloggers or influencers, however you wanna call it, that couldn't deal with motherhood, for example. For some it was just, they had to stop because somehow they just didn't want to expose themselves when enduring a pregnancy, others had completely exploited that, and have taken even that into their persona production, so even a newborn or unborn is already part of that. So even before the baby is born, this person is already publicizing it, the achievements and the little things that the baby does are part of a performance. And for the critics, I think they'll be in a situation, if they want to be that honest, I think some of them will just trade the credibility with money. But for some of them there'll be a sense of "ok, can I still be that really arbiter of taste that I used to be, now that I'm sitting first row, and now that I'm in the crowd?"

Do you think that from the point that bloggers got a lot of power inside the fashion industry, magazines had to change their tone to a less critical one, and try to be more "stupid"?

There's two ways to look at it: either you look at it this way, or you.... I think they were always stupid, to be honest. They were always stupid. They were always just, not all of them, but so many of them, were just incredibly dull. There are very few exceptions to this, and you have to think that bloggers, their writing was modeled after something, and it was modeled after fashion journalism. So yes, to a certain extent it has become even more dumbed down, but I think there's a certain type of fashion magazine that is really just fashion, let's say, Vogue Italia under Franca Sozzani, was really the classic fashion magazine, it was just about that. There were no recipes, there was no self help bullshit, there was no diet, it was just, *moda*. And then there were these magazines in between, maybe Vogue UK, it's always been, specially under Alexandra Schuman, very women's magazine more than a fashion magazine. There was a lot of articles about lifestyle, sex, relationships, dieting, traveling. It was already kind of washed out. And then there's the celebrity gossip fashion magazines, like Grazia, which used to be, actually, a quite good fashion magazine in Italy, but then after it was bought by, I think, Hearst magazines, somehow the direction changed massively. I remember because I had a subscription, because my mother read it for years and years, and I remember it was

quite a good magazine. It wasn't at all celebrity driven as it is now. So I think that, in this space, the bloggers have somehow taken on the discourse that they knew from magazines already. And what the magazines are now understanding is that, if they want to keep their readers, they have to somehow get them on social media and online. So they have to lure them back in, and that means that they have to work with bloggers, or that their tone is kind of reflecting... But I would say not so much the tone, but the format.

Because what I thought of was, there is this thing of bloggers wanting to get into the industry only because of the glamour and going to places and stuff, and it became a thing of the editors, and editors are like celebrities now, because of Instagram and stuff. Does this, in your opinion, makes it more evident that, hypothetically, fashion is a field that cannot be serious? And maybe that's why you can get good fashion criticism at The New York Times, or The Washington Post, which are not fashion publications? In this flow of thought that magazines influence bloggers and bloggers influence magazines back, and editors become influencers, and inside the fashion industry everybody wants to have the nice life, and show the nice life, and then the independent critics start getting invited... Do you think this might be a symptom just that the fashion system is lost, there's no saving it, in the sense of seriousness? Or in your personal opinion these guys that are coming now could actually make a change?

I do still think that there is space and interest and a willingness to do this, but I really think that it's depending on how this structural relationship is going to change.

Inside fashion, I feel like you have to get this superficial acclaim, right away, to be something. Because, even when I think of Pierre and Luke, the ones that I think are the most relevant right now, they started getting some attention when Antidote magazine, or Love magazine or Loïc Prigent talked about them. So it's like you hate the system, but you have to get love from it to be someone.

I think that's a bit simple because, as a sociologist, I would call that symbolic capital. I think there's an important distinction here, because what you call "love", I would call "recognition", and that recognition then is a form of legitimization of the work. Because, no matter what he says, if Loïc Prigent knows that you exist, even if he just posts one thing about you, that already gives you a lot of visibility. But also you are deemed to be credible by other members of the fashion industry, and then maybe the PR from Givenchy is like "oh, ok, we should invite him", because I can tell you the people who work for these fashion houses, specially the Parisian fashion houses, this is a very closed system. These are people that went to the right universities, are all French, they live really in a bubble of luxury. And they come from good families.. It's a very elitist system. There is no way they would know about @pam_boy without this intermediary. To answer your question, I would be more

analytical in looking at this, and not asking if you need to be superficially loved, but asking who can give that love, and what does it actually entail?

But isn't that the point that if you want to have serious fashion criticism, maybe that love should come from the general public, as it comes from cinema criticism, or sports criticism? Where it doesn't come from inside the industry, that recognition. If we want to do a new way of fashion criticism, shouldn't it come from other places, then?

But I think it already comes from other places for people like @pam_boy, because he has 250 thousand followers and that's a lot more than, for example, Robin Givhan.

Yes, because these people don't even buy Louis Vuitton.

They don't buy, because they want to partake in fashion as a discourse. They won't buy anything, they're just interested in it. The appointment of Virgil Abloh as the creative director of Louis Vuitton menswear shows you already that these brands understand that you need someone who creates this discourse and this culture around it. And with Virgil Abloh, he has millions of followers, and it's more about maybe that people buy... Even if they just go into a store and they buy a lighter, it makes the brand more desirable and it creates publicity and modernizes it, and I think that's what people are after. So I think there's really – and this is what Barthes says – *onirique* consumption, like the consumption of dreaming, and by that you're already being part of the fashion dream. You don't have to buy, you can just consume the media, which is a product in itself. And the people like @pam_boy and others, who are opening up these spaces of criticism, of course sooner or later they should also be rewarded, they should get paid. The question is by whom, and what is that economic transfer going to mean?

One interesting thing that for me was shocking, because I started following @pam_boy around February last year, and he really gained a lot of followers since then, is that in March this year he posted that he was tired of Instagram, and thought Instagram was dead, and he was moving to YouTube, because he thinks that Generation X is more active on YouTube, and you can be more serious and more thoughtful on YouTube. For me this is what makes the thing so interesting: this guy made his fame on Instagram and he's already going for the next place. I'm feeling old not being Generation X, because who are these people that consume true, well thought-of content on youtube?

I know, it's puzzling. And how old are they? And when do they consume it? What is it like? How?

The other thing that he commented is – because he doesn't want to make video – he said that, now that YouTube allows you to post long text format, he thinks it's going to

become the biggest social media platform. I think this might be the answer for the question of who are they going to get paid from, because Instagram is not going to pay you, so if they start posting on YouTube, you might get paid from advertising revenue. Maybe that's also why Luke grew so much, but the funny thing is that, another thing that I find is worth investigating, is how come that Luke has, on YouTube, 250 thousand followers, and he doesn't get the recognition that @pam_boy gets, having 15 thousand followers on Instagram? Because he was born in Paris, as you said, he worked for Loïc Prigent, he has the inside connections – how is this still more meaningful to this industry than the person that has 250 thousand followers? How does this person, who has a bigger following, have a harder time getting inside the industry and recognition?

And that speaks completely to the argument of Pierre Bourdieu, and of this idea of social capital, economic and symbolic capital. And symbolic capital is the kind of capital that can be converted in other forms of capital. It still counts, and it's just very hard to imagine how. It's a lot of weight that is put on the shoulder of these people that they have to renew a system, individually, that has been built at least 150 years ago. It's almost as if you'd have to completely bomb the whole structure to make it new. And then how do you do it? And even with small fashion designers, I know that they are – because I have a lot of friends who are designers, and they live with this contradiction all the time, they tell me “oh no, I want to make fashion that is liberating”, but then, in the end, they have to suck up to influencers.

And at the same time they want to get in the pages of Vogue, so they can be recognized.

Yes, and then their clients... It's not maybe me, who – I'm a very progressive person, but I can't afford it, and I don't want to buy something that costs so much money.

But I think this is the most fascinating thing, and what I think brings the hope that is this gonna change stuff, because these people actually just want to talk about it. They don't even need to buy that stuff. I think there are more and more people realizing that fashion is also culture, and that's what makes Luke so important. And maybe that's where YouTube's importance comes from, because YouTube makes people feel integrated, like that's also part of their lives.

And then it's a domestic setting, there's a very good identification moment there. And you are like, ok, this is a person like me, it's not somebody in a newsroom. But that also means that there is a consequence. Having worked as a journalist myself, I had to write copy and submit it to my editor, and my editor checked it, and there was just an understanding that there was fact-checking, there was objectivity, etc. It was just clear that I had to follow certain rules. I don't know exactly where people like him get their information, I assume that they all look it up on Pinterest, on Instagram, on the internet and various sites, but the information that you get from there is not always super legit. So that means that the criticism that, in my opinion,

this type of young social media critics perform, is a criticism that looks at what has been quoted from fashion history in the collections. There's often saying like "ok, this looks like Dior under Galliano" or "this is Comme des Garçons", or this is like that... This is at least what Haute Le Mode does, he is always looking thirty years back, and he has that frame of reference, and then he compares things to each other.

And, in your opinion, that's criticism or not?

It's like art history criticism. It's saying it's derivative, it's already been done. It's a very specific comparative form of looking at things, in my opinion, but I have a skewed perspective of this, probably because of my political views. I think it's not enough. I think you need to look at things and say, I honestly don't care, and I don't think it's a problem if something is quoting Comme des Garçons, I don't care about that, to be honest. What I'm interested is, can we look at something and figure out what does it say about the type of femininity or masculinity or whatever that's being conveyed through these clothes? What is the actual message of this? What does it mean if you make a transparent Rimowa suitcase? What do you wanna say with this?

Luke does a lot of shallow criticism, but I feel like he's trying to learn when things are problematic, also because in his place of an American white man, he's not gonna have all the knowledge to do everything from birth. But I feel like, even if he makes a 25 minutes of "spilling the tea" about something, for thirty seconds he's gonna say something very relevant, and he's gonna stop to analyze stuff. Maybe that's the problem of YouTube, that at the same time you have to do this kind of shocking content.

Yes, exactly, because you have to be attention grabbing.

So that might be a reason for social media to not work.

And also you have to think, what happens to the content of the criticism if it's not only written? Or if the proof of what you say is one image and the text, like Instagram, or even just an article, but there's the video where you have to perform your own criticism. So that means that it has to be entertaining, and it has to be click-baiting, so that from the thumbnail there's gonna be something shocking.

And the titles have to be like "destroying Maria Grazia Chiuri".

Yes, exactly.

So you think that, still, the best format would be text, for criticism, because if you put the critic in front of the camera, it's already a performance?

I think the format of a video criticism, and specially the self-made video, where you're alone with yourself, and you have your thoughts, and you want to look, you know... He's a pretty boy, he sees his mirror image, he wants to... He enjoys looking at himself, also, because he looks at the camera reflecting his image. He is concerned with that, and that will change the form of his criticism. So I don't say that text has to be the one-for-all solution, but I think, maybe, just an intermediary form. Maybe doing a voiceover and showing images. Because when I look at Haute Le Mode, sometimes I do it for fun, because it's funny, because he's entertaining, and it's really funny. But, sometimes, I would love to see more details of the video, of the pictures of the garments.

I think that the point of Haute Le Mode is that you feel very connected, if you don't work in fashion, because you feel that people that are outside still have a voice on it, and that's what I think that distances, for example, me from Pierre, after he started going to shows. Because before he was someone that stayed at home, looking at the collections and criticizing. From the point that he starts to get the privilege you're like "yeah, he can speak because he's at the show, but what am I in fashion if I cannot have an opinion?". So, maybe, if they get too far from the social media format, then they become too much for the regular people.

I think that then it becomes even less intelligible and less understandable, because Haute Le Mode has a very conventional taste, to be honest. For me, teaching, where we do fashion design and we work with fashion design students, and it's an artistic approach to teaching fashion, he would just hate most of the things we do, although they're good. So it's a very conventional form of criticism, and everybody right now criticizes Maria Grazia, and I'm the first to criticize her, because I think it's really conservative and hideous what she does, but he, the way he does it, is just so flat.. And he prefers certain familiar silhouettes, he prefers a certain type of already established "good taste", edgy. I know exactly what kind of things he will like, and what kind of things he won't like, and sometimes I think, if you have a bit more knowledge and if you look at things in a broader spectrum, then sometimes you can say ok, this thing, maybe, that Simone Rocha is doing, it looks weird and it's not something you would want to see people wearing, but this brings something into the world that is relevant, and it speaks to something that women might want to experiment for themselves through clothes, or men. So I think that there's something that is definitely a great value in it, and maybe these people being a bit more... It's really tough to say, but maybe they would need a little bit more culture and knowledge in order to really be able to have a conversation.

You think that about Pierre also, @pam_boy, or not?

No. With him I think it's better, because he's trying to contextualize a bit more, but still I think what would be good is for them to just think about... These are images that circulate,

and they say something about what is going on in our world, and fashion designers react to that. At least some of them, many of them don't, but maybe some of them do. And then I think it's worth sometimes going beyond the question of taste, and just look at what is being done. Raf Simons, for example, was always hated by the fashion press, but I think he is one of the most relevant and interesting designers there are still, and he was fired from Calvin Klein although I think it's brilliant what he did.

I should have started with this very simple question, now that I found your view on this guys: do you think there is fashion criticism of social media now? Do you think it exists?

Yes, it does. Definitely.

Where?

Well, I think it's the people you mentioned, this is fashion criticism. There is no doubt about that.

Even if it's not the best.

Yes, this is fashion criticism. And I have to say that, for me, Diet Prada is not the most relevant but, because it's so famous, and it creates so much buzz, I think it would be incomplete if you didn't include them with other contemporary social media critics.

Even if I include them as an example of imperfect fashion criticism. Also because these guys are not perfect.

They're not perfect either, and they might not be going to the details like @pam_boy or Luke, because frankly they don't really care about them, and they don't know much also about it, but what they do is that they look at these structural things and, in that, they are really important, and that's really this sort of criticism that I think, to be honest, the big brands have much more trouble with accepting.

Because probably that's the kind of criticism that brings brands to the judgement of general people, no? And that's what connects brands that people cannot access to their real world.

Because if Diet Prada says, I mean, look at the things that they did with Dolce & Gabbana and the chopstick. They created this, they started it, and it caused loss, economical loss for Dolce & Gabbana. And these are two people in Brooklyn, or I don't know where they are, doing this. They managed to connect with these Chinese audiences, they were like an intermediary, and they forced this brand, which is notoriously homophobic, nationalistic, supportive of fascist politicians all over the world, they forced them to take a stand and be responsible for what they're doing, and that's very powerful. So even just for that, you'd have to include

them as being a form of structural criticism. I think the harder it is for fashion people to accept it, the better the criticism is. Because, maybe, @pam_boy might say “ok, this is not a good collection because in itself there were formal things that were not so good, the styling was not cool” or “the materials, the cuts, etc.”, but this is something that the fashion people are fine with, because it doesn’t really change anything for them.

And it’s the Robin Givhan thing of coming to Hedi Slimane and saying “you’re sexist”.

Yes, because that means that you take fashion seriously, and you don’t look at it like an art historian who looks at a painting and says “formally speaking, this painting has been executed well and the perspective is blah blah blah”. This is the sort of art historian who says “this painting is an expression of the domesticity of nature, etc.”. It’s really the kind of more inclusive and more critical form of criticism. But as you know and as I have written in my article, which took me forever to write, because it’s such a difficult topic, what I understood was that, first I had to come clear and understand criticism is for me, and then I understood that it can mean so many things.

Even if I love reading Robin Givhan, I don’t think I found the one critic that brings all of it in the same review, and I think that’s what lacks in fashion criticism. Also, if these guys are doing it are someone who doesn’t come only from culture and can contextualize the collection, or doesn’t only come from the very technical aspects and can tell me if it’s well-made, because also me, as an outsider, I want to know if that’s well-made, because I cannot tell that. But I want to have all of it.

As an art critic, for example, you have more time to write and you can look at the career of an artist. They can develop, there is a constraint of the market, but somehow they get by. But for fashion brands, you have, like, 20 presentations every year, that means that at least once per month you have to be somewhere, and you have to review it. You have 50 brands that you have to review, so the kind of criticism that you would like, I think...

It’s kind of impossible.

I think it’s not impossible, but I think it’s more something that you have to expect, maybe, from... To be quite frank, that’s the thing you can do as an academic, you can take the time to sit down, reflect on a designer, check your sources, write, publish it...

Publish, like, a review of a year.

Or even more. There’s Nick Rees-Robert who’s written about Hedi Slimane and his idea of masculinity that he performed at Dior Homme. He goes into it and he has the time to do it, but for a fashion journalist or blogger or an instagrammer, I think it’s just unrealistic to demand that, because you need a lot of knowledge, to give you that.

So a long format fashion criticism is not impossible, but unrealistic, even for the way that the fashion system works right now, the restraints also come from how the fashion system works. There is so much to change in the system.

Yes and, for example, Harper's Magazine, or The New Yorker, these are magazines that feature long-form journalism, and you can see that for some of the dossiers and reportages in these magazines, I think the journalist works for... The research, at least, I would say for 2 or 3 months, and then they write for probably equal time, maybe 2 months or 3 months. These are people that all went to Ivy League universities, almost all of them. And they did an MFA in art arts and writing, so they studied literature, and these are writers. But for a fashion magazine, and I have a similar background, because I'm a sociologist, and even as a journalist, I already had a PhD in fashion sociology, so I was really knowledgeable, and it was such a challenge to... I got three pages in one week, so that meant for me two-and-a-half days of research, which is already long, I think because trained journalists they do, like, one day research, but I will take more. And then 2 days to write, and I would get, for an article of 5000 signs, I would get €190.

And it's the work of a week.

It's a week's work and I had to cut it down because, for example, for some press trips where I would have a lot to say, so I was invited to this other thing for Vuitton where I had to review an exhibition they did about traveling and the art of traveling, I was really interested in it and I did a lot of it reading on 19th century Grand Tour traveling, the cultural history of all that, but still I just got 6000 signs. It was the same money and it was just, it was so... But if I had Harper's, who would syndicate an article, I could have written 10 pages about it. I didn't want to write an academic paper about it, because that would be sucking up to Vuitton, but still there was something in it that I thought was interesting. The thing is that, with these big brands, also you have to think that they have this huge publicity departments, so they create already a whole set of story for you and, as a journalist, you go there and impressed by this, and there are archives, and there is so much material that you can, honestly, just use and write about. Whereas with smaller brands, you get press notes and you're like, ok, so there's the story behind the clothes, that has nothing to do with the clothes.

That you need to go and interview the designer's mother to understand a little bit better.

And then there are the clothes, that are just something completely different than the inspiration notes say. and then it's on me to figure out how can I give a spin on this. I think if @pam_boy, if they worked with younger designers, that could be something. It could be maybe also a field of work for them, to be invited to universities, talk to students, and

understand what it means and how much hard work it is for the designers, and under which constraints they are.

A speculation: why do you think Luke doesn't review menswear?

I think because womenswear has a lot more variety. I think it comes down to the form. In the past few years, menswear has grown, and it has become more varied. But still, as you probably know, as a man yourself, in your choices in your wardrobe, you will have a lot of similar garments, even if the color and the cut changes. Review womenswear is just interesting because you have dresses, pants jumpsuits, etc. It's so much more.

But something that made me intrigued once that I saw a review from him, was the first Virgil Abloh show for Louis Vuitton. Something that stuck to my mind was that menswear might be very symptomatic of the times, as Luke mentioned, Virgil is making rappers wear rosé. So it's a sign of this thing of menswear becoming big. I was shocked when I saw another rapper wearing Loewe in a video, and how crazy that is? It's so evident of how fashion is becoming this gigantic culture thing. That's why I think we need actual criticism for this, if it's becoming such a big cultural thing, people have to have opinions.

Maybe you can ask yourself why you need that, and what in you wants that. You have to be aware that you are writing on water, because this is changing, this can be different next season, literally. This can be over quickly, but that doesn't mean that it's not extremely relevant.

Appendix 2: interview with Angelo Flaccavento

Author: I would like to start by asking how and why you became a fashion critic?

Flaccavento: Why? Because I have a point of view. How? It's longer. I am an art historian by schooling and I've always been interested in fashion so I started... The first proper essay that I wrote was my doctoral dissertation on Roberto Capucci, who is an Italian haute couture designer, and then in 2001 I started working for Dutch magazine, which back then was one of the edgiest publications around. And then I jumped from one publication to another, but it's really when I arrived at the newspaper in Italy (Il Sole 24 Ore) and then at the Business of Fashion that the critical side of my writing could really find an outlet of expression.

So it was always important, the expression of your opinion, in your career decisions?

Absolutely. Probably because of my schooling, I've been always used to read artifacts, so I've always been interested in analyzing images and clothing and other stuff. So, that is the work that a critic does anyway. It can be art, or cinema, or fashion... And I also think that criticism can be a way to be creative too, because you can influence change within the industry, even more so now that change is a little bit outside of the main interest.

Why fashion specifically, since you studied art history? When did this come up as the thing that you wanted to do?

That was very early because I had relatives that worked in fashion, so it was very instinctual in a way. But also as I grew up I could see why I am so interested in fashion: it's basically because it changes constantly, so you have one point of view, but as a critic you are almost forced to adapt your point of view to the changes in time otherwise you'll be "old" very soon. And I like this kind of mutual exchange of change that keeps me fresh and alive. It's like you're always observing something that is constantly moving, so you have to move along, otherwise you will be behind.

Is the state of fashion criticism going along with the state of the fashion system? Do you think they are going together? Or maybe one is going faster than the other?

I think that the way the fashion system is working now, and going now, they're trying to silence criticism. Today is all about consensus, not just in fashion, you cannot express a different opinion, it's very hard for you to express a different opinion. I'm being banned from shows because I express a very mild critique of the previous ones. It's like now designers cannot deal with something that is not approval of what they do, which I think is very dangerous because when people tell you that everything is fine, everything is fantastic and you start to believe in it, you start to become complacent and complacency is what leads to stagnation and to creative death, for me.

And how does the fact of not going to the fashion shows change, for you, does it make it impossible to do your job?

That's very complicated and that's a way for me, that's the danger of how the system controls us as critics. Me, as a critic, I need to have access to shows in order to do my job. I always say that as a critic you cannot judge a show from pictures, because a show is a mix of the presentation of clothing, theatrics, performance, everything makes sense and everything comes together. And also clothing is not something static, you have to see that on a moving body. So you cannot judge a show from a live streaming, because the digital video is the worst, you cannot judge it from pictures. So you need to have access. But, if you're not granted access because of your criticism, that makes your work hard and you cannot do your job properly. And also you start self-censoring in order to be sure you get admitted to the next show. So it's a mortal coil, in a way. It's like the snake eating its own tail. But still there's the possibility to write something. Through the years I've managed to express my point of view, saying the same things in a language that is a little bit milder. In the *Business of Fashion* I'm very upfront, I know. But in other publications I can be very... I can express the same opinions with words that sound less like a blow in the face.

So there's a difference between the outlets that you're putting your text on?

Absolutely. There is no reason for me to write a proper fashion criticism article in *Italian Vogue*, because that's not the outlet for this kind of writing, because it's a commercial magazine in the sense that *Italian Vogue* lives on the advertising that they sell. And also they are not reporting on the fashion show the day after, so it's another thing. I can write a critical essay on the state of society, or how people are using fashion, but I wouldn't write a story in a publication like that to slash a designer, because there is no need to do that. While the daily publications, the printed newspaper, or the daily website, they need that kind of writing that is very... And also because that kind of writing is addressed mainly towards the professional people that are very interested in fashion, because that's a business-to-business channel. While other publications are aimed at a different public.

Who you, as a critic, or as a journalist, write to?

It depends. I don't know what kind of article of mine you're used to, because when I write something that is very critical at *Italian Vogue*, the public is the reader that can be you, it can be a woman in her forties, someone who's interested on what's going inside today. When I'm writing in the *Business of Fashion* I'm writing to professionals, and hopefully to the same designers that I'm reviewing. Because I would like to have a dialogue with them about that. When I'm writing to *Il Sole 24 Ore* my reader is not a fashion person, because that's not a fashion publication. It's a person who has a higher level of culture, because that's a very

specific newspaper, but doesn't know fashion that well. So I want to show that fashion is not just about the new color or the new hemline, it's a little bit more.

Do you feel a need, as a writer, to maybe someday put all of these sides together to write a complete fashion criticism?

Like a handbook or a compendium of my writings?

No, I mean more... As you're talking about how, in every outlet, there's a different language or a different way of your writing. Do you feel like it's incomplete, when you have to write for different platforms?

Absolutely not. I've been freelancing all of my life and I love to have this kind of different outlets. Because sometimes you just say the same things to different readers, and for me it's always a challenge to do it. My aim is to plant a little seed in the mind of the reader, and hopefully it will bloom somehow.

So instead of trying to go against the way the system works, it's better to find different ways to go around it?

Yes, my criticism can sound something a bit against the system, but it's not against the system for the sake of being against the system. My biggest belief, maybe I'm wrong, is in progress. So I strongly believe that good criticism can ignite some progress because, if you question yourself, you may find new ways to do things, and that can lead to some advancements. I don't like when things are so static and, to me, at the moment, the system is very static.

But you feel like something is changing or not?

We feel something is changing but for me it's something like Winklemann used to say about the sea, the sea is very wavy on the top, but in depth it's always calm.

So the fashion system itself doesn't have the capacity to change and to subvert itself?

It changes but it takes a lot of time. It's not the things that we are seeing thrown on our faces, to me, that are the main changes. All the topics that we are discussing right now, inclusion, diversity, I think that most of them right now are just communication tricks. And watchdog culture is making a huge bad impact on the system.

Watchdog culture, like call out culture, and what would be called criticism by people nowadays?

Like Diet Prada: this is not criticism. That's a very different thing.

But is there space for criticism on social media in general?

Not the way that it's being done now, because to tell you the difference: call out culture is to say "You're wrong. I discovered that you're wrong so I'm making you look wrong in front of the whole internet. And you're in the corner." Because once you're up on the Diet Prada shame, you have no right anymore to reply. You can see that people that are shamed there get a ton of very bad comments. Good criticism is about "I'm telling you this and I hope that you reply", and that a dialogue starts. Good criticism is about putting the seeds of doubt in the reader and hopefully start a new thinking process. It's something that needs time, it's not about the guts, call out culture is just about "that's bad" and that's it. Criticism is about "That thing is not good for this reason, and we can do this, maybe. Let's talk."

But even if this kind of non-criticism but watchdog or call out culture is not perfect, it has the capacity of being heard by thousands, millions of people...

Yes, it can be heard by millions of people but there's no real intelligence, a real brain at work in it. It's very dogmatic in a way, and very dangerous because the watchdogs who are calling out the others, at one point, they become the shrine of the truth. In the 70s they used to say that the police is protecting us, but who's protecting us from the police? And that's what the watchdogs are doing. I mean, I think you've seen it that Diet Prada, now, they are making good deals with fashion houses not to call them out. I was with them at the Valentino, they were hosts of Valentino in Tokyo. I was wearing an Issey Miyake suit from my collection, a pleated one. And there was a pleated one in the show. So basically it was not a copy, but something like that. It was very "in your face" because people with me said "oh there's your suit in the show", but I didn't know they were doing pleats in the show, of course. And there was no mention of it. But the watchdogs, they are there, some designers they really can't stand them. JW Anderson, they always call him out. Valentino, they don't call him out, because there's something like a deal. They've been invited to Dior, they don't call her out. You know? Maybe they just say something about diversity of the casting and bla bla bla, but very little things. So, the fashion system has always a way to seduce its prospective new enemies. When bloggers started to come to fame, ten years ago or a bit more, they were the "free" voice, before call out culture, they were able to write in their blogs whatever they wanted. Then they started being seduced. When you start getting bags of clothing at your place, with things that are very costly, basically you're being bought. That's the way the fashion system takes the enemies, puts them inside and then they're not your enemies anymore.

So it's impossible to escape?

It's almost impossible. You have to be very stubborn to escape, you have to have a high sense of morals to escape. But, basically, fashion is an industry that really tries to seduce you at every possible step.

And how would you react if you lost the platforms that you have at the moment? Because you have the privilege of still being able to put your voice out there.

That's a good question, I've never thought of this. I would try to find another one, but of course I know that I can express my opinion because I have platforms that allow me to express my opinion. I think of that, but I have never thought of the plan B, because I would think about it when the thing happened. It might happen.

Would you ever consider self-publishing?

No. Self-publishing could be the only way, but I think that the platform pushes things a little bit better. When you self-publish things you don't even discuss with an editor. I need discussion with an editor. I always exchange opinions with my editor when I'm writing pieces.

But even at the point that you're now, that you already have the recognition...

Just look at Suzy Menkes, when she was at the International Herald Tribune and now that she's at Vogue, but basically it's like she's self-publishing.

Most would say that she became much more...

Pop, let's say. I don't know, if by self-publishing you mean creating my own publication, maybe yes.

I don't mean your publication, but maybe looking for other channels.

Yes.

Or do you think that criticism has a specific format that you should follow?

No, absolutely not. I think that the formats, the platforms that I use are very useful because they can reach a very wide audience. I mean, if my story is in the newsletter in the morning of the Business of Fashion it's literally pitched to millions of people.

But people that are inside the system.

Yes. For other people I would like to write a book. I mean, I would consider writing a book.

You don't consider doing it online?

Maybe yes. I'm 47, so I'm quite old school. And still I think that online writing is something... How can we say? Not fully authoritative. While printed... Words printed on paper last a bit longer. Online it's like, ok, you read three lines and then you can hop to another thing.

Even if nowadays there's a general feeling that fashion magazines, even printed ones, don't have the openness to do real criticism? They're printed but they're not prestigious as criticism.

Absolutely. But The New York Times or The Financial Times still have...

Those are newspapers.

Those are newspapers. I don't believe in a fashion magazine like Vogue going fully online. I mean, you need to have the print.

And about other formats or platforms? Instead of just writing?

Like what? Doing exhibitions or something?

No, for expressing yourself in criticism. Like video...

I love the written word because the written word is an exercise. If you write, you have to think, to put thoughts in words, and then on paper. I've done videos, I did a series for Sky Arte, but it's completely different, and video journalism is not really my thing.

Being a critic, it might be good to have some distance from your own image?

Absolutely. Of course, in the moment that we live in fashion now, people know how I look because of the way I dress and everything. I love fashion also for myself, I love getting dressed. I always enjoyed this part of fashion. But for me the way I dress up has never been a vehicle for my career. So I really like that once you file the story and once it's published it's there. People don't need to know where I am from, how old I am, how do I look, who I hang out with... It's nothing, I mean... My work speaks by itself.

So that's also a reason for not self publishing?

Yes, absolutely. I'd rather put the article in a bottle in the sea.

How do you think you would get in the fashion journalism world if you were getting out of school now?

That's a very hard question. I started in 2000, and the scene was really smaller. I think that a good experience in an office, would be a very good thing, trying to have a point of view. But now there's so many people trying to do the same thing, so I think that competition is very hard. And today competition is hard but it can be won, I mean, it's not always the best writer or the best designer that wins. Sometimes it's the one that has better social skills, who's better at selling themselves. The formula is the old one: hard work. But I know that hard work not always wins today. Not to be a pessimist, but you have to know what happens today. No?

Like, influencers are basically people that are very good at selling themselves, even if they have not one single talent.

In an article that you wrote for Vestoj in 2017, you mentioned you're waiting for a revolution inside the system so that you could have more space for criticism. Do you feel that, since then, something has changed?

Backwards. Not forwards. I think that now fashion is polarized, there are these very big conglomerates, LVMH, Kering and other groups, and their power is very big and you can really feel it.

And social media democratizing fashion is making it even worse, in this?

Absolutely, and it's a strange form of democracy. They made fashion accessible to everyone and designers are very accessible, you can send a private message to Nicolas Ghesquière, or whoever it is, if they have a personal account. But all this democratic stuff is just being used to target the viewers as new market entities. They basically just want to sell you stuff. And also today it's a very bad thing to say elitism, but one of the main reasons of fashion's fascination is an elite thing, because you aspire to have things. If everything is accessible to everyone, there's no magic, there's no charm.

And how could you keep that in the age of social media and the fashion discourse being so open to everyone?

I think we went a bit too far. I wouldn't say let's go backwards, but I think we should try to adjust things a little bit. Also I think that one of the worst things that happened to fashion is that the fast fashion mentality, which is to have new products on the shelves with a very heavy rotation, was adopted by luxury houses. So basically the shelf life of a product is very short. When I started there were collections and maybe pre-collections, but pre-collections were considered to be very commercial offerings, just to have a solid stock in the shop all year long. Now, if you miss the one month and a half that something is in the shop, you'll never find it. When you enter a shop you already know that in one month and a half it will be discounted somewhere, why should you spend the whole amount?

How can you keep the pace with these collections, as a writer, to have the time to stop and analyze, and do a good work about it?

You tell me, because I'm very tired. One of the biggest misconceptions now is that, I mean, basically I write all my stories on the phone, because it's the easiest and fastest way. Critical essays for BoF or Il Sole 24 Ore, so writing on the go. But sometimes I would just love to have like even 2 or 3 days to write. We're squeezed to have the opinion right away. And getting back to what I was saying before, I'm also happy that I'm using different outlets,

because I have the right to change my opinion along the season. Because sometimes you see something that you really don't like, and it happens a lot to me, but when I don't like things they make me think a lot of why I didn't like them. So maybe over the course of the season you discover that something that you didn't like at the start, at the end of the season you end up liking it. So maybe you're writing again about the topic in another publication and you change completely your opinion. So for me it's good because I have the whole cycle of life of the idea. But basically I think that everything is really going too fast even for us. So sometimes I'm always writing the same article because I have no time. Sometimes I just want to stop, take one book from the library and read something that's inspiring for me, even if it's not related to fashion.

So delayed writing, instead of publishing every moment while it's happening, could be an answer, for you?

Yes. Thinking and writing takes time. Now we think that everything needs to be immediate, live. Almost one has now to write live. I think what's dangerous is this culture of everything super fast, everything right away. Which also makes the clothing very obsolete, no? I don't want to go back to the time when you needed to wait like, three months to see pictures from the show in magazines that were publishing them, but having them one hour after...

With a review.

With a review, it's crazy.

Have you ever been asked to do live reviews?

Live reviews no, but the time I have to write my reviews for BoF is seven hours after the show.

And how would you react if your outlets asked you to do something live?

I would say it's impossible and inhuman. I mean, I can tweet. If it's a tweet, ok. A very sarcastic or sardonic one, ok. But a full review, no. Meanwhile for the newspaper the deadline has always been there, it's like 7.30pm. Whether you like it or not, you have to file it because the newspaper needs to go to print.

So in the end the outlet of the criticism totally defines how it's gonna be?

Absolutely. But I also like to have a tight deadline sometimes. The long stories for BoF, the wrap-ups of each season, are both painful and very enjoyable for me, because I never start writing them early in the week, because, as they say, when we die, the last events put all of your life into perspective. So for me the last show puts the whole season into perspective, even more so if it's an important show.

It would be more comfortable and more relevant to write after all the shows.

Yes, absolutely. But they want it earlier and earlier. So it's like fighting all the time.

We talked about the scenario of how things are going, now I would ask you where do you think it's going and where would you like it to go?

I think that right now everything is going towards the direction of total communication. It's not even about the clothing anymore, but about how brands talk about themselves. How brands create entertainment, events in which it's all about the box that seduces you. Then, inside this box there's nothing. Because the clothing is very generic. As for me, I would like design, real design, to be again at the center of what fashion is about. I think that fashion can be very innovative, it can suggest new ways of being, new ways of behaving. Styling is easy. You put a boy in girl's clothing, ok. That's a nice idea or a bad idea, it depends on the photographer, and everything. But it's more interesting if a designer wants to bring the kind of delicacy or ease of feminine clothing into menswear. That's a different process altogether. It's about putting the concept into the dressmaking. That, for me, is what would create real progress.

Why do you think fashion is in this point where designers don't need to design anymore, and do you think critics could have some influence on that, if they had more space to speak out?

Absolutely. That's what I'm trying to do. Nobody has ever called me to the studio to discuss. Because they all get super upset. Which is the worst thing, because being a critic is not about me. It's not about being at the center of the attention and trying to have the spotlight on you. It's not about "look how intelligent I am, I'm exposing this problem". It's about creating a dialogue, putting some doubt in the system in order to get a new perspective.

But even if you don't believe it's about you, you ended up becoming a person that is very recognized inside the fashion system.

Absolutely, because of this. But I don't want to be the protagonist. I know that in the end it's me writing and signing the articles. I know that.

Paradoxically, you being one of the most critical in the sense of speaking out "gently", but speaking out about the collections and the designers, made you one of the most appreciated critics. Is this a permanent relation of self-love and self-hate of the fashion system?

I think so, yes. It's love-hate. People always say "oh, I like your writing", and I always reply "yes, unless I bite you". When I bite you, you don't like me anymore. And then they shut up.

Where does this come from? Everybody knows that fashion has this problem of people that cannot deal with being...

Everywhere, I think. Every creative industry is like this. Maybe in the movie industry still there are people that slash movies or directors... Fashion has always had a very hard relationship with critics. Historically, the British or American critics had a wider room for expression of their criticism. Because also it's important that when you're a critic the publication that you work for stands by your side. Otherwise, it's a problem. In Italy, newspapers don't stand by your side.

Have you ever felt that you wanted to escape from this, so you could write "better"?

Sometimes I thought "please, someone, rescue me and put me in another position like this in a place where I can do what I want." But I feel very safe in the Business of Fashion because sometimes my wrap-ups are very different from Tim's reviews of the same show, he loves Dior Homme and I can't stand what Kim Jones is doing there, but they publish it anyway. It's very good. While the Italians are a bit more... I had problems with Dolce and Gabbana, they are the kind of designers that get very upset with criticism. And the newspaper never stayed on my side. I get very bad phone-calls from my editors because of what I wrote. And they publish it anyway, because they published. They didn't call me and said "Angelo maybe this is too much, let's do something." They printed it, and then when the fire came back, they addressed the fire towards me but they didn't help me, which I didn't like at all.

Do you see any way of breaking this tie between the financial pressure of fashion on the fashion media?

No, honestly, no. Print magazines, print media, rely basically not on the circulation, because it makes very little income. Print media relies on the advertising that they sell, so that basically creates the power of the fashion houses on the print.

There's the problem that is having the public, which is really important for a critic, but what if people that already have a name in the field, began working for themselves, as in... Like, a very stupid example, but Naomi Campbell opened a YouTube channel to show her stuff, do you think it could become more prestigious to create a tradition of fashion criticism outside of newspapers or outside of magazines?

Honestly, maybe I sound very old school, but no. I still see that within that frame. I like that maybe you're writing a frivolous article and then you find a very heavy article. I like that variety. Maybe you choose the newspaper that you like more, that's more in line with what you think, and also with the way you write. But I would never open a YouTube channel. I would feel like a YouTuber that's too old to do that.

Different platforms always begin with a lack of respect or a lack of credibility.

Absolutely, but I would prefer then to try to make fashion criticism with one minute videos on Instagram, maybe. I don't know. With just words. Or maybe a podcast. Podcasts are very interesting as a platform. There you can do something very rich, because people can just put their earphones and listen for a long time.

In the way that the fashion discourse is headed to a “total” democratization of sorts, because of social media, wouldn't podcasts still be a very closed, traditional way of not hearing feedback? And how important is feedback for a critic?

Feedback is important, but feedback for me is not a comment at the bottom of a story. Some comments are very interesting, but it's not a real dialogue. I would prefer to meet people in person, or to exchange messages. A comment at the bottom of a story? It's just like, I've been there, I've read it. Sometimes it's just about showing off. It's interesting. Sometimes I just get emails or private messages when people read my articles, and sometimes I find very interesting points of view, so I reply to those people. But I almost never read the comments at the bottom of my stories. Also because commenting on a story on the internet is very easy, nobody sees your face, you don't have to look at anyone in the eyes. People can be very harsh and very aggressive, and the tone of voice can degenerate very quickly.

Again from your article from Vestoj: I was very surprised to read, coming from you, kind of a confession of the humanity of being seduced by the fashion system, in the way of maybe getting a bit biased, and I would like to know how you try to keep yourself from being biased when you do a review.

I think it's my sense of morals, my constant evaluation of what things are, and also a sense of respect for the readers. Because the readers don't know which kind of liaison there is between you and the house, and that cannot get into the way of your writing. Because of the way I write, not what I write, the kind of style that I use, which is very specific, I get hired a lot by fashion houses to write their press releases and stuff. And I always tell them, I mean... It's work that is always obviously very well paid, anonymous, but what I always tell them is that when I write a press release, I just put your thoughts on the collection in nice words. When I see the show, I do it with my eyes. So the two things can be not-matching. So I've given bad reviews to shows that I wrote the press release for. Some designers would get very upset about that and never ask me again, some are intelligent enough to know that the two things cannot overlap. They're not buying me with the money they pay for... Because the readers don't know that and it's really unfair and unethical to do that.

Finally, talking about your eyes and your perspective on things, what are the important things to bring in a critique? I imagine that, from your education, they don't only come from the fashion world.

I always try not to read fashion with fashion. When I write from *Il Sole 24 Ore*, it's people who don't really care about the color of the season. I would like to give them the perspective that fashion is a little bit more than just clothing, because fashion is a lot more. It's clothing, but clothing is a lot more than just covering up. Covering up is one thing, dressing up is another thing. Because it's a way that you represent yourself. As I always tell people when they don't understand, I mean, what you choose to wear to go... I decided to be dressed down today to meet you because I don't want to intimidate... I wouldn't want to wear a blue suit because then you see me coming in and you think "ok, he's very stern and he's very academic" and you don't feel at ease. A few days ago I did an interview with Miuccia Prada and I wanted to be thought of as very professional and cold and I dressed completely in blue. And she perceived me like that. So I'm aware of this. And I want people to get this. Of course, also, a good knowledge of the history of fashion is mandatory, because also you need to contextualize where things are. And also a sense of the atmosphere, basically you're reviewing a live event, and it's always nice for me, I would like to take my readers by the hand with me, like they're sitting with me and I'm describing them what they didn't see because they were not there, but they're seeing it through my eyes and through my words.

Appendix 3: Interview with Alexander Fury

Author: To start with I would like for you to tell me something about your background, like how and why you became a fashion critic.

Fury: I grew up in the north of England, so quite out in the countryside, in a very small place. I think now 160 people live there, so a tiny, tiny... not even a village. When I first got interested in fashion, it was before the internet. So the primary way that I saw fashion, in kind of real time, was in newspapers. And I actually used to say that I connected more to fashion through newspapers than fashion in magazines, I was more interested in fashion in newspapers. The way newspapers write about fashion is very different from the way magazines write about fashion, it is that kind of critical way of writing. And so I think from when I first became interested in fashion, I was actually interested in that critical aspect of it. Or at least the tone of voice, I don't even know if I recognized that it was critical, and also I think, to go back a little bit, on what I just said, magazines then actually wrote about fashion slightly differently. You got a little bit more of a critical voice writing about fashion in magazines as well. Not all of the time, but some of the time. And I read some things that I remember reading in the late 90's now, and I'm just like oh wow, you know, no one would ever write that now, no one would ever get away with writing that in British Vogue. I think I was drawn to it very early on, I actually originally wanted to be a fashion designer. That was what I thought I wanted to do at the start. But, and this is kind of a weird admission, but when I was doing that, I would actually write, I used to write instead of draw. I would write kind of what I was going to make, and then make it, and sometimes I would write criticism, like reviews of my own fictional fashion shows. And a lot of the time I would write very nasty reviews of the clothes that I was gonna make, which in retrospect is quite interesting but it was because I looked at Galliano and Galliano didn't always get good reviews, so I would write similar bad reviews for me that he got. From the very start I liked the idea of thinking about fashion and considering it something that's more than just "oh, I want to buy this" or "oh, a woman will want to buy this", there's more meaning to that and I think I was related to that, with fashion.

So since the beginning fashion for you was something connected to words?

Yes, absolutely. And when I say I was writing what I was gonna make, it was like, they don't do it so much now, but you know like in the 80's, specially with couture stories, when they would say where the fabric was from, and you got a lot of details about the garment. I would write this big, long explanation of what it was, and then would make it. And when I went to actually study fashion, that was obviously a big problem, because they were like, "you've just written what you're gonna make and you've made it", there was no sketch in between, there was no working out of anything.

So you went to school to be a fashion designer?

I did a foundation course, the thing that you do before you go to specialize in design. I think it was like, your first time you did everything and then you decided what you were gonna specialize in. And as I did that, I kind of realized I didn't want to work in the way they wanted me to work, and that I was never gonna be able to work in that way. It was weird, because I was and am a massive overachiever and I'm very competitive, and absolutely wanna be the best in whatever I'm doing. And that was the first time that I wasn't, it was the first that I actually kind of failed in anything, and it was probably a good thing to happen in that point, but it was very difficult, and I ended up a little bit kind of "oh, I don't really know what I want to do now", because I certainly didn't want to go and study journalism, because I wasn't interested in journalism, I was interested in fashion. And also I looked at fashion journalism courses and I didn't wanna go and do fashion journalism courses, because you have to make a magazine and I wasn't interested... I make a magazine now and I'm slightly more interested in making a magazine but in that point I was like, I don't wanna do photoshoots, I'm not interested in photoshoots. And then the course that I ended up doing at Saint Martins was super new, it started in 2000 and I applied in 2003 to go and do that, which was Fashion History and Theory, which was entirely written. You didn't have to do any photoshoots, there was no artistic component to it. It was all writing, which is what I wanted to do and it fitted with this interest that I always had in fashion history, and kind of the heritage of fashion, and its past. So that was really what... So I think the other thing that I applied for getting into was History of Art, and that was more, you had to apply to more than one course. I applied for Fashion History and Theory, History of Art and I applied for Fashion Journalism at LCF and I got turned down for that, which I subsequently got told is because you can't apply to Saint Martins and LCF, they turn you down for one. If you apply to both, it's the same that you can't apply to Oxford and Cambridge, if you try, one of them will turn you down. I think it's kind of, you have to prioritize, if I remember this and it may have totally changed now, you have to say who's your number one choice and who's your number two choice. And if Oxford is your number one and Cambridge is your number two, Cambridge will reject you. I think it might be the same in America as well. So with that I got rejected and got into to do the Fashion History course, which is the one that I wanted to do.

Earlier you mentioned the way of writing in the 90's, when you used to read stuff that inspired you, and the difference until now. What are the biggest changes since you started being interested in it and since you started working in fashion criticism until now, what changed in this scene?

I think people are a lot more reticent to have opinions. I don't really know why, but certainly... I mean, you know, to be very sort of candid about it, I think there are lots of

people who don't really care an enormous amount about fashion and writing about fashion. Specially in newspapers, because the thing that happens a lot in newspapers is... And I'm talking more here about British newspapers, because those are the ones that I know. The thing that happens more in British newspapers is people without a fashion background will go and work in a newspaper, in general features, and then a vacancy will come up in the fashion section, and then the person will move across to the fashion section, and that's how they end up writing about fashion. And I think sometimes that can work, and there are really good critics, like Vanessa, Cathy... They don't come from fashion backgrounds, and they have kind of a detachment and an objectivity which I think is really great. But I think what's happening a lot here is people with no knowledge or particular interest of it, except as what they wear, can get involved in it. And so they write very much from the perspective of "this is good because I would like to wear this jacket, and this is bad because I don't understand this". And I don't think that's the way you should write about fashion.

Where are these people are working?

In different British newspapers. The big difference I feel now is, there used to be very sharp fashion criticism in the 90's, in newspapers specially, and there also used to be a lot of disagreement, which I find interesting. Different people would say that they loved collections and hated collections, whereas now it feels very muted, and people will say what the collection was, as opposed to say whether they thought it was good or bad.

Very descriptive.

Yeah, exactly. Very descriptive, what celebrities were there watching, what models were in the show. You know, maybe something about the business, and that's kind of viewed as enough.

And in magazines, do you think it's always been like this, since when you started reading them? Because you mentioned you were more interested in newspapers.

I think it depends on the magazines. The thing that I always remember is, I started to buy Vogue in 1996, and in the winter couture of 96 they sent the American comedian Ruby Wax to the couture, and she reviewed it, as in "this is all shit, why is everything the color of mushrooms?". And I read it and I was like, this is fantastic, it's one of the best pieces of fashion writing I've ever read. No one would ever write this now. British Vogue followed Alexander McQueen's first Givenchy collection, and I rowed that everybody hates it and everyone punned it, and I'm like, God, even if that happened now, no one would write it, no one would say "oh the collection was really bad", it's just not what a fashion magazine would do. Which I don't necessarily think is a bad thing, because I always view newspapers' relationship to fashion and magazines' relationship to fashion as different things. I feel like newspapers are there to report on it, and criticize it, in the same way they criticize art, or

theater, or film. Whereas I think fashion magazines are about fandom, championing things. And I think, specially in the way that I write, that's the way that I kind of detach myself is. When I'm writing for a magazine, it's not about dissecting whether this is good or bad. We've decided it's good, and then it's about championing it, trying to explore it in an interesting way, but it's not about criticizing. And I don't think that fashion magazines really have ever been about that.

You mentioned the other areas of criticism in newspapers, but also these other areas have their own specialized magazines for that. Why is it the case that it's ok for fashion magazines to not have the space for it? Or why does that happen?

Realistically, it's because there's this relationship with advertising. I think as that relationship become more... as the way people advertise has changed, and the amount people advertise has changed, I think that has changed that people are very weary of possibly offending anybody. And I think in the past there was always an awareness, there's a thing in Diana Vreeland's autobiography, when she was working in Harper's Bazaar, they did an issue with no bags, an issue all about pockets, and someone in the magazine was like, "do you know how many millions of dollars a year we get from handbag advertisers? We can't do this." And so even then it's like, great idea but we can't do this. And what I think has happened now it's become people are more and more weary of possibly causing people any kind of offense. And so that means that magazines are scaling back anything that don't sell. The interesting thing in working in different magazines, because working for the New York Times Magazine, which has an advertising consideration in it, because it is a fashion magazine with advertising, but at the same time, it has that New York Times point of view, which is that there's a divide between advertising and editorial. And I wrote a story for them where a fashion house didn't want me to say the age of somebody, and I was like "I wanna confirm that she's 74", and they were like "oh, we don't wanna discuss her age". And I went to my editor and I was like "oh, what do we do?", and my editor was like "if we know her age, we say her age. We're The New York Times, we have a duty". It sounds very kind of petty to say "we have a duty", but I know a lot of magazines that won't say things if the advertisers don't want them to say them. There's also that which is very interesting. With another fashion house, I don't know how much I can say about this, but essentially the designer there had been headhunted by somebody. An agency in Paris had kind of connected this fashion house with who's now the creative director there, and he told me that. I said "how did you get the job?" And he said "I was headhunted". I wrote it in the piece, and when we checked with the fashion house, they said it was not true. But he told me in a lot of detail, when he had the meeting and everything, but the fashion house said it was not part of the narrative they were communicating. And that we actually took it out of the story because even if he told me it was right, they were saying it was wrong, and that is very weird. You're not normally put in that situation, but American

publications are very weary that they could get sued if they published anything incorrect, and so we ended up taking it out of the story, because they wouldn't confirm what he told me was a fact. So it's interesting a lot of fashion houses that try to... I think magazines are reticent to publish things that might take offense and fashion houses are getting kind of crazy about what kind of information they want to communicate to people and so I understand magazines' points of view.

Has this deeply influenced the way that you work?

No, I don't think so.

You haven't felt held back from actually expressing everything you wanted to?

I feel like for a long time I've been in a very privileged position that I don't say yes to everything that people ask me to do, and I've been asked to write things about Dolce & Gabbana, and this will never happen. They will never talk to me, I will never interview them. Or I'd like to interview them, but they would never let me interview them in the way that I'd like to interview them. I don't know that they would let me interview them anyway. That's not gonna happen, someone else is gonna have to write this. I also think I have a certain sort of reputation, people kind of know what they're getting from me, so if I don't fit what they want the piece to be then they are not gonna ask me to write it. I kind of know when they ask me that they want a point of view, they definitely want some kind of historical thing in it, they want some kind of references to the past, hopefully something in-depth. In a lot of cases I get along with fashion designers, we kind of understand each other, I think coming sort of from a design background helps. Fashion designers have asked me "what do you do?" Or "what did you do before you did this, because you know how clothes are made. I can understand by the way that you write you understand that this is difficult to make, and this is easy to make, you can kind of comprehend..." even if I can't do it, I can understand pattern cutting and things like that. It's why I got along with Azzedine, we ended up talking about pattern cutting and he was like, "you know what you're talking about, we can get along, I can talk to you, you understand what I do". Which is nice, which is what I like about it. And I tend to get along with designers who are really passionate about it in the same way that I am. I guess to answer your question, it's not really changed the way my way of writing, but if I know I can't write about something in the way that I would want to write about it, for a particular magazine, I just won't do it.

I know that you've been banned from shows before. Does the impossibility of attending a show change the way you write? Is it essential to attend the show?

It depends on lots of things. Going back to working for The New York Times, they demand absolute transparency. If you write about something and imply you were there when you

weren't, they'll fire you for it. It's a fireable effect. If you interview somebody and it's on the phone, you have to say it's on the phone. If you've done it by email, you have to say it's by email. You can't imply you did something face to face, you need to be very transparent. Sometimes Vanessa writes about cruise shows and she'll say "I spoke with them on the phone and I watched it online", she doesn't imply that she was attending it. I think sometimes you can write from pictures, and I have done that, but I have said "I'm writing from pictures". I think it makes you relate to it very differently than if you're watching a live event. It's like going to a concert or listening to an album, it's two very different experiences. If I don't attend something, I tend not to write about it. Specially if someone has banned me, if they don't like my opinion, why would I write about it? Unless I find it interesting. For instance, the big ones I got banned from when I was at The Independent were Moschino, Dolce & Gabbana and Saint Laurent, when Hedi was there. And I did continue to write about Saint Laurent because I found it interesting. And a little bit about Moschino because I found the figures interesting. Not so much Dolce because you don't have the figures, you don't know how much it's selling or anything. But with Saint Laurent I continued to find that very interesting, specially when talking about fashion criticism, because in a way, and this is a difficult thing to say, it proved how unimportant fashion criticism is. Everybody used to say that they hated Saint Laurent, all the critics. I can't think of a critic, really, who championed it, and the sales went through the roof. It's different from the past when a critic would write a bad review and then buyers would cancel their orders... Now it's a different time, I think people buy clothes in a different way. Buyers buy clothes in a different way, and customers definitely. They're not as dictated to.

Why do you think there's this difference? In another interview you said that if you write badly about a movie people are not gonna watch it...

I think that's actually changed as well. I read something where a film delayed its screening for reviewers until after its opening weekend, because the critics might hate the film, it might have been like the Emoji movie or something, it was like, "the critics are gonna hate this, and we don't want a bad Rotten Tomatoes rating before its opening weekend". But at the same time there's this whole thing where, if a film has a bad rating, if it's something like the Emoji movie, people are still gonna go and watch that. If they wanna see a trashy film, they're gonna go and watch a trashy film, it's still gonna be successful, regardless of what critics say. Maybe art is different, because I feel like art is less "mass". There's this whole thing now that fashion is "mass", and I remember once when I interview Raf Simons when he was at Dior, and we were talking about various things, and at one point he said "a lot of people that buy Dior don't know I'm the designer, and they don't care. It's like, Dior it's just a name on a garment for them. It represents something in terms of the quality and its position in fashion, but they don't care I'm designing them." There are people who love it and are embedded in it, and give a

shit about where designers are going and what it means the movement of designers, and there are lots of people who just buy it because they wanna buy a leather skirt, and this is the leather skirt they like. There's something very democratic about that they go buy it and it doesn't matter if the leather skirt is Gucci or Chanel or Balenciaga, they just want a leather skirt and they buy the best leather skirt. I feel like it's actually a very new way of buying fashion. In the golden days you would buy your clothes made by Balenciaga or Dior, and if you were a Dior customer and you decided you wanted to buy them from Balenciaga, Balenciaga might not make your clothes for you. It's like you were being disloyal, somehow. I think there's still slightly that sense of tribalism to the way some people buy fashion and observe fashion, but I think we're in the minority. The fact that I would religiously wear Prada and not Berluti, I don't know if there are other people... Specially in menswear, there are lots of guys who are just like "I'm buying this suit, it's a good suit, this is a great black suit", and those can be people spending five thousand euros on a suit, and they just buy the one that they think is the best.

Do you think then that this democratization of the fashion discourse is simplifying everything to a point that is also affecting fashion criticism?

I don't know, because there's always this thing that I find quite interesting with fashion criticism that's something other people have said, something that I'm very conscious of and don't want to do, which is this idea that you write the stuff, it's published on a newspaper and the other people in the industry read, and the fashion houses read, and nobody else reads that. My counterpoint to that was that when I was a kid I just started reading it, I was interested in clothes and I was interested in fashion, I just read it because of that interest. And the thing that I actually love about writing for newspapers is the idea of writing for people that aren't interested in fashion, that you could actually interest someone who isn't a passionate, admirer of fashion. Get someone excited about it and try and convince them... Because I think it's important, and I think it's culturally important, it's certainly economically important. I think sociologically it says a lot about who we are as people and where we are in the world, in lots of different ways. And the thing that I find interesting is try to convince someone who doesn't believe any of that. Or at least to show someone who doesn't believe any of that and doesn't feel any of that a different point of view. It's not just about a jacket for you to wear, it can mean something else. I think the way that I write in newspapers, a lot of the time I try to be funny, you gotta entertain somebody. You don't wanna read a big, heavy essay on why something is important. You can try and convince someone by writing something that is entertaining, and interesting, and informative. And that's why I like working in newspapers, it's the idea that this could be someone who has no connection to this whatsoever, and maybe I could tell them why I think Prada is so great, and maybe they'll go and buy a Prada handbag. Or at least just look at it, and be interested in the work. It's not necessarily about

selling something, but it is about sparking some kind of interest in someone. And that's the thing I really enjoy being able to do. When I get feedback from people, specially people who I used to go to school with, who tell me their mom likes what I write, or something... that's the thing that's really informative, it's not knowing if people in the industry read it. Because we all read it, you know.

In the process of writing, what are your references, what do you bring into your critique, to be sure that you're gonna write to who you want to write to? You mentioned you studied fashion, so it could be very unpleasant to outsiders, so what do you bring from outside of fashion?

It's difficult because it has to be that balance between... A lot of the time, I will write things, and I kind of assume everyone knows my reference. And I've rapidly understood very few people do, even in fashion, because I'll have incredibly specific references. I wrote some kind of... even just some really weird quotes. There's a really great Mussolini quote... During the Second World War they tried to move Haute Couture from Paris to Berlin and to Vienna, and there was this big whole thing, and the Chambre Syndicale said they couldn't move couture, ideologically. The response from Mussolini was something like "all powers are destined to fail before fashion, if fashion says skirts are to be short you will not succeed in lengthening them, even with the guillotine". And I think I wrote that and people had no idea who said that, and it was a quote I've known since I was fourteen. I think it's trying not to be too insular, I know I can't really dissect all the obscure references. So it's trying to tie it to popular culture as well as to fashion references, trying to unpack it in that way. When I was a kid I remember reading reviews where they would talk about Charles James, I didn't know who he was so I went to look for Charles James, and now it's so much easier to do that. I had to go to the library, and find a book about Charles James, and now you can google it and you see his catalogue. So it's unpacking your references a little bit, but also trying to make people interested enough to go and look for things, and trying to tie them to popular culture when it's things that everyone's aware of, or things everyone's heard of, or at least people you can recognize. I hate it when it's fashion talking to itself, in fashion magazines as well, when you assume that the person buying it knows everything about fashion. Working for newspapers, with people who know nothing about fashion, you become very aware of the need to explain things. I think sometimes my writing has some kind of coldness to it. Specially writing for AnOther Magazine, where I just, I've interviewed Raf Simons, and my editor told me "you don't have to write the Belgian fashion designer Raf Simons, we know who he is". But I'm used to it, because in The New York Times I would have to write "the Belgian fashion designer Raf Simons", and I quite like that as a phrase... but it's like, we can dial it down a little bit, we're a little bit more aware of who he is, we might not know where he was born or his exact age, but we know what he does.

Earlier you used the word “privilege” to talk about your position in the fashion journalism world. How would you react if you lost the privilege to say what you want? Would you keep trying to do it on other platforms?

I don't know. I think you can always find a way to... I worked within restrictions, you have different restrictions on magazines than you have in newspapers, by its nature, as I was saying, writing in a different way. So you just gotta figure out ways to say what you want to say. I think that's also part of the challenge, it's the same way of when I look at a fashion shoot, I'm much less impressed when someone has pulled a load of archive looks. Because if I had the entire Galliano Dior archive, and Kate Moss, and Tim Walker, I could make a pretty good shoot. I'm more impressed when someone has worked with what's happening in the season, and it's not a particularly good season, and the model isn't great. I like when people work within those rules and restrictions and create something really wonderful. I think that's clever. And I think it's the same with writing, you can read really great criticism. Sarah Mower wrote an amazing Balenciaga review when Alexander Wang was there, and I emailed her and I went in with a sledgehammer and I said I thought it was awful, and she really got across exactly what she thought about it without completely ripping it apart. But you were left in no doubt that she hated it, and didn't believe that he should be at the house. And it was such a deft piece of journalism, there's a lot of pieces like that where you can kind of dance around what you really wanna say. I quite like that challenge of getting across with what I wanna say without saying that I don't like it... It's much easier to write a bad review than a good review. Sometimes you're there thinking that it's just great, whereas when it's bad you can think of so many ways to tell it. And also, specially in terms of entertaining, it's much funnier to say that something is bad. A lot of time people will say they couldn't tell if I liked it or not, and in fact I liked it, but I can still be funny about it.

Is it harder to feel credible when you write good things about the collection?

No. I find it very easy to be sarcastic and pick something and be entertaining, but the thing that I find very difficult is to convey when something is very good, specially when you think it's kind of important. Also I think it's difficult when you're living in a time to be like “oh, this feels like it's gonna matter”, something that we're gonna look in 10 years time and think it was amazing. I think it's very difficult within your time to find something important, because, what if it's not? What if you look back and think it's not as significant as you thought it was? Also you're so used to so many people fluffing things up in fashion, there's such a heavy artillery to talk about things that it can sometimes feel very fluffy to champion something too much. But what I actually like and people have said to me is that it means a lot when someone like me or Jo at the FT, or Vanessa, Angelo, Tim, it means a lot when, Cathy certainly, it means a lot when you write something good about it, because you really do like it.

You really do think it's important. If you didn't like it, you would say you didn't, and you have said you haven't. Some people react differently to negative criticism, some people are like "be gone, never come back", and some people are more like "you said you hated it last season, you said you loved it this time", so the fact that you loved it means more because you have hated it. They know that you're being honest. Honesty is an important thing. But I think it's more difficult to say, it's more difficult to convey it and not having it seem kind of overblown or just sort of hyperbolic. Specially when you're adding to a chorus of people who are saying how great something is. A lot of the time there's lots of ways collections can be bad, but in terms of collections I like, they tend to be sort of focused and they're saying something that's a new point of view, and they're showing something you haven't seen before... If I think something's good, it's normally for the same reasons, whereas collections can be bad in so many different ways. It's then trying to find a new language to say why you think something is good.

About the timing: you said it's hard to see if something's good when it happens, so how comfortable do you feel at the place that you have to do your writing right now? You have four months of fashion shows every year, you need to write your reviews super quickly...

I've always worked that way. When I went to newspapers people thought it was a slower pace, but it's actually more difficult because you have to write by a certain deadline to hit the print, so I had to write everything by 5 o'clock. Also those deadlines were weirdly elastic, sometimes they would let me write until 8 and sometimes they would want it by 4. So you're always working towards a deadline. I quite like it because I like the pressure, I like the idea that I have to see something and that I have to react to it straight away. It tends to mean that you go with your gut, and that you don't over consider things, and I think that's probably a good thing. You also don't listen to what other people have said, you don't read what other people have written. When I was at The Independent I would have real luxury, I would sort of just do whatever I wanted. I would have to write for the newspaper, then I would write a lot for online and I could write whatever I wanted. I used to go back and write about a show three days later, like "I've been thinking a bit more about this and here are some more thoughts I had". I quite liked that kind of flexibility. And also because I would write about a day of shows, the idea of playing them off each other. Specially when you can find a thread that connect them all, whether it was a day in Paris where it was female designers, there's always the Monday of Paris where it still tends to be Stella McCartney, Sacai, Sarah Burton, so that kind of strings together as a narrative. So it's finding that narrative as well as writing about individuals. When I did Vogue Runway that was different, because it's single designer reviews. I've never had kind of real hideous writer's block, which I get with some things, but with reviews I never have it. I guess it's because it's just like, I have to do this, it has to be

done now. And sometimes the luxury of time means you think about something, you over consider it, whereas when you're like, I need to write it now, you just start it. When I did AnOther I was still going to menswear shows even though I wasn't covering menswear shows... I do like going to fashion shows. It's one of the things I love the most about my job, it's getting to go and do this and see extraordinary things. I feel like this is the arena that fashion should be seen in, this kind of controlled environment where designers can put forward these very specific ideas of a world. It's a massive privilege to go and get to see that. So I like that there are more fashion shows, you get to see more of that, I find it very exciting, to engage with fashion in that kind of way. I think it's one of the massive privileges of my job that I get to go and see this stuff. (this part could be both about the current issue of being blocked from fashion shows and the issue of the acceleration)

Reacting to all this excitement of going to a fashion show, have you ever felt that you needed to express more to the followers, or readers, than you could in your official channels?

If I get really excited I put things on my Instagram, I don't tend to do fashion show stuff, because I feel like there's such a mountain of things that happen in fashion week, and occasionally I'll post something that I feel is amazing, and it's amazing thing to be able to communicate to people. Specially when working in a magazine, we'll be in a show and feel that we should do something with it. A lot of stuff is born out of the shows, specially with AnOther, which is incredibly fashion-lead. The theme for the forthcoming issue actually came out of the winter Prada men's show, because I was there for the Financial Times and we were kind of putting the spring-summer issue together and I thought the Prada menswear show was about this, and I think the next show will about it as well, and it feels like something that's happening and something that was in the couture... So it was all actually born out of the shows, certainly what we do with AnOther, it's very rare that things aren't born directly out of those shows. Certainly in terms of designers we wanna feature, or profiles we wanna do, that's all born out of whether they had a strong season, or they've been strong for a few seasons and this feels like a moment to do something. I do feel like it's a way, a very specific way of experiencing fashion. And I also feel like it's fashion, it's not clothes. It's still this kind of fantasy, before they become this reality. And it's still got this magic to it, it hasn't been debased like a lot of things have been debased. There's still something kind of really special about fashion shows.

You have a considerable following on Instagram. Do you think it could be a platform for your thoughts?

I don't really think... it's slightly a platform.

Do you think criticism has a format that you should follow, in newspapers, magazines, or would you consider doing it on Instagram at some point, or another social media?

I don't see Instagram as a place for that, basically because I write a lot of words. I wrote the longest reviews on Vogue Runway, God bless them that they let me go on and on. I don't see Instagram as the kind of place where someone would want to read 2000 words about something. But also I think, on Instagram, I remember once I posted something and somebody left a comment basically like "this is boring content, keep it to your personal life". And I just thought that that was my personal Instagram, if I wanna post a picture of a dog I'm gonna post a picture of a dog. I did two things I was paid for, because I was part of a thing supporting young designers, and it was part of the agreement that I was gonna promote it on Instagram. It was the only time I ever did anything connected with commercial things. People have asked me to but I don't wanna do it, I don't wanna get a jacket and say that I like it. If I say I like something it's because I liked it. I don't see it as a business thing. I see it as very idiosyncratic and off the cuff. Sometimes I do things that are slightly more considered, but a lot of the time it's "I've seen this and it's interesting". A lot of times now is "I bought this, and this is great". The thing that I actually really like about it, specially with mine, is that I feel like it's me getting excited about things and lots of other people responding to it. It's a real nice sense of community, I don't like the idea of monetizing that or making it more kind of official, or becoming an Instagram magazine or anything. People can use Instagram in that way, magazines can use it like that, but for me it's just, I genuinely communicate with people through that.

You use it personally but you have thousands of followers, how do you feel about you becoming almost an influencer?

At one point my profile on it was, because I went for lunch the PR for Gucci in London, and we were talking about it, and I was like "I don't really understand it", and she was like "we work with people that don't necessarily have hundreds of thousands of followers, and you're probably an influencer". So I changed my biography to "probably an influencer". I think it's very interesting now that people are asking all kinds of questions about how much does it actually influence anything. And also that very concrete thing of how many people are clicking from this to this website and buying something? I think it can now be very measurable and it's interesting to think if it will carry on. I find it weird how much Black Mirror focuses on Twitter, as if it's gonna be around in 20 years. I don't even think it's gonna be around in 5 years. As a social media platform, it's dying. At the moment Instagram is very big, but maybe it'll die and something else will take over. There was a time when no one could imagine a world without MySpace. These things kind of evolve and change and date very quickly. The thing with Instagram is that it's very visual, and that's what a lot of people react to.

It works so well for the fashion industry, that it's very visual.

Yeah, and I like it because I can write something underneath and people do tend to read it, although people will comment things unrelated to the post.

How do you think the fashion discourse would adapt to a world without Instagram? Because everything happens there now, and this is also why everyone is interested in fashion now. Do you think it would have any impact on the way you work, or how you write, or if more people would be reading you?

I don't know. When I was in *The Independent*, which is a newspaper, so very focused on "hits" and that kind of thing, I would find it interesting that if you mentioned certain thing, the engagement would spike. If I put the word "Kardashian" in the headline, if someone put the word "Kardashian" in the headline, suddenly this has 10 times more hits. Sometimes you don't really figure out why certain things have more reaction from people. With that, it's very obvious, other times it will be much harder to understand why everyone's interested in reading something at that particular point in time. But I never take popularity as a measure of quality, which is why I think sometimes, with the fashion discourse, we have now a lot of people talking about sales figures, and turnovers... I work with the *Financial Times*, so we obviously talk a lot about that, because that is a hook to get people to read it. The most read thing I've written for the *Financial Times* was about the possibility of Angela Ahrendts going to Ralph Lauren when she left Apple, that was the most read fashion thing on the *Financial Times* in the last six months. Which I understand, because that's what interests the *Financial Times* audience, they are interested in business moves. But I think if you're talking about kind of, a lot of people now talk about like "oh this place has high turnover", and somehow that makes it more worthy, or better clothes, and if we're talking about that then Zara is the best fashion designer in the world, it sells more clothes than anybody else. I don't think that's a measure of success or of quality, certainly. I like it when people read what I've written, I like when they engage with it, but I always understand that for all of its perceived popularity, fashion is still quite niche. Specially people can look at fashionable images and relate with those, and relate with clothes. But people that actually wanna read a lot about it, I think you're kind of self-selecting down to a smaller and smaller group of people. Which is why I've always been shocked that whenever you write about something that intersects with another area... If I write something about Dior, so many people read it. If I write about Chanel, so many people read it. But if I write about Victoria Beckham, more people read it than the other two put together. Whenever I used to write anything about fashion and politics, it would get read by more people, because more people are interested in politics, and certainly it would get more reaction. People would get very angry about it, which I don't think is a bad thing. I think definitely in terms of people that wanna read about fashion, there are people that do, but it's

never gonna be a huge group of people. Not that many people are interested in the meaning behind clothes, which I think is true of lots of things. People like to look at pretty pictures of art, but they don't necessarily wanna read a lot about the ideas behind it. It's a group of connoisseurs, and I don't mind writing for that group. I like writing wider than it, but I understand that writing the way that I like to write, I'm not particularly populist or democratic. I don't write about Kardashians, and Love Island, it's not my thing. And that's fine. There are people who love writing about fashion in that kind of area.

As a critic, as now you said you don't bother to write about the Kardashians, is there a journalistic responsibility of writing about the Kardashians even if you don't feel personally comfortable with it? Only because they're trendsetters.

I've written about it when it's felt interesting, when it's felt pertinent to the conversation that I was having. The other thing that I'm always aware of whenever I'm writing is that if I'm at a fashion and the Kardashians are at a fashion show, everyone else is gonna write about them, so it would be nice if someone didn't. It's the same way that, and I'm not always successful, but I try and avoid kind of cliché, like in descriptions of colors, or shapes. Everyone knows that this is the way you talk about the "new look", and this is the way you talk about Chanel in the 20's, wouldn't it be nice to talk about it in a different way? Wouldn't it be nice if I'm writing something that I haven't read a million times and you haven't read a million times? I think that's what the big duty is, let's try and do something that you're not so familiar with, that just isn't so kind of cliché and obvious. And there's a lot of obvious writing in fashion, because a lot of people don't come from a fashion background, so maybe they haven't read the million articles or the million books that describe it all in a certain way. Or maybe they have, and they feel that's the only way you can describe it. I'm always shocked by the number of people that... sometimes I find it weird that I will say the same thing as somebody else. Like Vanessa and I have very different tastes, and I'm like, "God, we've literally written the same thing about this, and completely independently of each other". And I find that very interesting, when you're on the same wavelength of somebody. I think that there is kind of a duty. But then also the other thing that I don't wanna do is to live too much in my time, I don't really write very much about Instagram, because I don't like that in ten years' time no one will know what's Instagram. Certainly hooking an entire fashion review around it, if something is not gonna have some kind of longevity, I try to remove it a little bit from that. At least from that kind of immediacy of only living in its moment. It's very, very difficult. It's difficult to dissect it, but as I'm writing it I know what feels right in terms of "ok, you gotta try and capture what's going on now", but at the same time I don't want it to feel completely irrelevant. And also something I'm very weary of is tying things that are happening in fashion too much to things that are happening in the outside world, because I think sometimes it's... For instance, if a fashion show happens in the same day as the Berlin Wall falls down,

connecting those together I think is really facile. And also there's this whole thing that a fashion collection has been in gestation for a long period of time. I do remember the Chanel show with the protest. That happened during a time when there were massive protests in Hong Kong, and that is one time when I said that it didn't feel right and they shouldn't have done it, and some people answered that the collection had been in preparation for a long time, and I was like "yes, but sending down the models with placards?". If you read about the Hong Kong the day before, I would say that it seems like a bad idea to do this now, we cannot do that. I understand not completely ditching a collection and changing it, but it's possible to be like "you know what? We won't do this". I think this is that kind of thing when it was not the moment to do it. Like the Valentino African collection, I felt it was really not the moment to do it. I think tying things too much to exactly what's happening in a particular moment, sometimes it can seem very... Ok, it's fashion and then there's a war, and the war is more important than the fashion. Sometimes there's a connection, sometimes it's very interesting looking at the fashion leading up to the Second World War, because it was happening around Paris, it was happening around that world. But I think trying to connect fashion to a war in Chechnya is a bit... It seems silly. A lot of people do it, but it seems very facile and a little bit that thing that people criticize fashion for a lot, which is thinking that fashion is so important that it matters as much as the war. It doesn't.

To wrap it up: we created this scenario of how criticism is now, but what are your wishes in relation to fashion criticism and journalism for the future?

I hope it carries on. I think there's a lot of debate about if it should carry on, about where its place is in the world now. In the same way that there's people questioning stuff about film criticism: does it matter, do people really care about it, it doesn't have the impact it used to have, should it be changed... Even at The New York Times there's a lot of things where they want people to... they call them storytellers, which from what I gather meant captioning pictures, because picture galleries perform very well, and people like to click through pictures, and you can't have too much writing with the pictures. There's a lot of that kind of stuff, which I understand, I consume information like that, I think a lot of people do. But I feel like there's space for a plurality. And that's what's the great thing of online, it's not limiting space, it's opening up and giving you the opportunity to write more, in longer form. It doesn't have to be driven by thousands of people clicking on it, necessarily. I guess I just hope that it can continue in a format that there's still people that are passionate about it, and still believe that there's kind of a deeper meaning, and that it's worthy of discussion. And I think there are. What's kind of amazing about the internet, when I was a kid, if I had had this way of connecting with people that cared about this, and it wasn't just me and a load of middle aged fashion designers. I kind of assumed there was no one else that cared about it, I didn't know anyone that cared about it. To be able to talk to other people that are passionate about it, and

care and love it as much, it's quite amazing to have that capacity. I think there will always be people that love and care about it in that kind of way. But I hope that people in the mainstream still value it, still think it has a place alongside art criticism and film criticism, a place in that discourse. I don't know if that will carry on, honestly. I hope there are still bastions that will uphold that. I don't know, it's a very weird time, I think.

Appendix 4: interview with Vanessa Friedman

Author: To start with I would like to ask you how you ended up working with fashion criticism and why?

Friedman: That's kind of a long story. I told it a lot, you can probably find it in an article. I studied history at Princeton and creative writing, and also European cultural studies. I worked in a law firm for a year and a half in France, then I came back and started working in magazines. And I did art, I started my career doing arts and culture in New York, in magazines, then I moved to London in 1996 and was freelancing a lot. One of the places I had worked writing about art, and by art I mean like TV, books, you know, theater, movies, was Vogue. So, a woman in the Financial Times saw that I worked at Vogue and thought that it meant that I was a fashion person, although I had never actually really done anything about fashion. In fact, I wasn't interested in fashion at all. And she assigned me a freelance piece about boots, and that's how I started writing about fashion. And then I worked in InStyle, when it launched in the UK, as their fashion features and features editor, so that was largely celebrity-related. And then I had my second child, and I discovered the Financial Times decided to have a fashion editor, which they had never had before, and I ended up getting that job. So that was my first all fashion job, and that was in 2003. When I was there, I thought it was kind of crazy that we weren't reviewing shows, and I started reviewing shows. So I kind of fell into it, partly by mistake, because of that woman who assigned me a fashion story, by mistake, and discovered that I really liked it, because the way I think about it and the role I think it plays in newspapers, as opposed to magazines, I look at it as kind of a way to talk about identity, and identity politics, and sociology and how those questions are expressed by people, and how they present themselves.

So from the beginning it was – you were not interested mainly in fashion, or firstly in fashion, or not at all – but it was your job to introduce criticism in your work at the Financial Times. Did you have, like-

That was not my job, it was my choice. It was not my job, I could do whatever I wanted.

Yeah, that's what I wanted to hear more about – why it came from you, this desire to express your opinion, or your view on fashion on reviewing shows...

Well, because I think it's a part of covering fashion, it's covering shows. I spend two months a year reviewing shows, and I spend ten months a year writing about the use of clothing in public life. And to me, those are two things that speak to each other. Right?

Ok. And since then until now, while you've been reviewing shows and doing criticism, how do you feel the scenario has changed, since the beginning? In the need of criticism, if it has improved...

I'm sorry, I don't understand the question.

In the sense of, when you started you felt that you needed to do that, has it changed in mo-

I didn't feel like I needed to do that, I felt like it was sort of part of, you know... When you're a journalist, you report on your subject. That is part of reporting on a subject. Right?

Ok, but doing criticism is not the same as doing journalism. Is it?

I think they're two sides of the same coin.

You mentioned a difference between magazines and newspapers. What do you think this would be, exactly?

I think magazines see their role as being supporter of fashion and the fashion industry, and I think newspapers' job is to be a sort of a watchdog on it.

And why is that that magazines have this role? Of supporting.

I think historically that's how they have seen their role.

This might come from advertising, right? How it has an influence, and in newspapers it's not that big?

In my newspaper it has no influence over my coverage.

Ok, as I imagined. Do you feel there's a difference in the way that fashion criticism is seen by the society in relation to other kinds of criticism? Arts, or sports...

I don't know any sports' critics. I only know sports columnists, I've never heard of a sports critic. I think in terms of other arts criticisms, I think that the issue is not how criticism is seen, I think it's how the art form is perceived. And I think historically the kind of high arts, or fine arts, like painting, or sculpture, or dance or opera, have been seen as serious, and therefore worthy of serious criticism. Where like, fashion has not been seen as a particularly serious subject and therefore fashion criticism has not been taken particularly seriously. And I think that attitude in the outside world has changed.

It's changing now, you mean?

I think it has changed.

It's becoming bigger, inside culture, fashion is becoming more relevant?

I think people understand that it is serious, and it is, I would argue, the only arts or art adjacent form, that is relevant to everybody.

And this has been changing since you started working also, do you feel there's a particular thing that made it change? Like the democratization might have come from the internet, social media or something?

No, I think the fact that we live in an increasingly visual world, which is down to social media, has made people understand something that has always been true, which is that we communicate in part through our clothes. When you are inundated with pictures, every minute of your life, you understand that they are a form of communication and therefore what you choose to wear, in those pictures, or at any time in your life, when a picture could be taken, becomes an opportunity to communicate and something that will be read as communication. I also think that, as that has gotten, as people have become aware of that, they have become aware of the power of the brand, and the personal brand, and the ability fashion has, and the role fashion has to play in that area. And that has made people from all different kinds of sectors, from sports to TV to movies to tech, interested in fashion.

Is there a growing "reader sample", do you think, after social media, for fashion issues? Before you worked in a financial paper, which has a more specific public, but now that you've been in The New York Times, do you think this democratization of the visual world has improved the readership also for the newspaper? Or these people don't get there?

I don't understand.

Because newspapers are outside of the social media, which is mainly the reason why people are becoming more visual, and peo-

I don't think newspapers are outside of social media, we're all over social media.

Yes, but there's a need of, the person needs to have a willingness to get out of the social media to go and read a newspaper. Do you think-

Why? You click through the Facebook page, you click through the Twitter feed to read a story and then you go back, you don't have to get out.

Sure, I mean, I do that, but in general it's something that you have to do more effort, like reading a long format. Do you feel like you might be attracting more people inside fashion or outside fashion that might be interested in fashion, lately, with social media? Or should it be done more on social med-

I mean, I don't really see the separation, I'm sorry.

So if there's no difference between the platforms, do you think there's a specific way or format that fashion criticism should be put on? Like on writing, or video? Or it can be fluid, between different formats.

No, I think it's fluid. I think it's completely fluid.

You would be open, as a professional, to do other formats besides writing?

Yeah, I do.

Have you tried?

I've done videos.

You're not active on social me-

I've done Snapchat. I'm not active on social media? Really?

I'm asking.

I'm very active on Twitter.

I was thinking more of Instagram, and visual social media, I'm sorry.

Well, I post pictures on Twitter, I'm not really on Instagram. I do Snapchat sometimes, for the paper.

Do you think there's a specific social media right now that has more place for fashion, in discussion of fashion, not in publicizing fashion?

You know, people think that fashion likes Instagram, because they like pictures.

Appendix 6: @pam_boy's review of Celine Spring-Summer 2019

The following text was extracted from Pierre A. M'Pelé's Instagram profile, serving as the caption to 4 pictures posted on September 28 and 29, 2018:

1/4 First caption from September 28, 2018, available at <https://bit.ly/2Dh0wnu>

AUT NECA AUT NECARE: HEDI SLIMANE IS AT WAR.

Can you hear them? The sobbings, the screams, the lamentations. Can you hear the mourners? Don't blame their feelings, Phoebe Philo is nowhere to be found, she's abandoned her troops — although the word on the street is that the Wertheimer brothers are courting her.

It's been an incessant pandemonium from the moment news broke announcing Slimane's return. Has a fashion designer ever been that polarising? Uproar and disappointment. Indignation and incertitude. History repeating itself. It was time to wave goodbye to the chic, sophisticated Céline. Slimane, the man whose name raises suspicion, terror, admiration, jubilation, all kinds of emotions, was now boss.

Slimane staged his first Celine show at the magnificent Hôtel des Invalides, a late 17th century building home to the Army Museum. The message was clear and the target is obvious. He is ready to take back what has been taken away from him, his most precious offspring, Saint Laurent Paris. It's all very novelistic, mythological even.

It is fashion's greatest showdown since Gabrielle Chanel VS Elsa Schiaparelli. Hedi Slimane is back to hit his former employer, Kering, where it will hurt the most: the pockets. Needless to say the man has an impressive track record when it comes to doubling, tripling sales, and making it rain.

2/4 Second caption, from September 29, 2018, available at <https://bit.ly/2XKL0cN>

But Saint Laurent is operating like a nuclear reactor, and Anthony Vaccarello's job is not to minimise the damages, rather to go head-to-head with Slimane. His spring summer 2019 show was an unbelievable display of power. Under the majesty of the Eiffel tower were white Californian palm trees (fake, thank God) and the water-drenched runway, which saw 95 model's exits —Slimane's debut, three nights later, had 96. Vaccarello can do sexy, it's always been at the core of his creative DNA. The skimpy dress that will leave your grandparents outré: that is what he does best. However the designer opened his show with a black suit, which is common sense. But unlike Yves Saint Laurent, tailoring has never been his strongest point. It just doesn't look quite right and his attempt at modernising it fell flat. Followed, almost 40 looks directly inspired by Hedi Slimane's own Saint Laurent. Why not? The brand

has never sold as many dresses since its rebranding in 2012. Though it is when he references Monsieur Saint Laurent that Vaccarello is at his strongest. Some pieces were inspired by the 1972 stage costumes the house made for French singer Sylvie Vartan. Saint Laurent proves that way, way before Slimane, they were dressing rock chicks. Elsewhere, see-through numbers ending the show brought to mind the autumn winter 1968 collection. Revealing dresses were a tool for the emancipation of women during the sexual revolution, when women started to claim back their libido and bodies, just as they are today post-[#MeToo](#). Still, Vaccarello most of the time imagines a fantasised idea of sexiness, seen through a gay man's eyes. But there is always something chic about it, so it's up to women to get into it, or not.

3/4 Third caption, from September 29, 2018, available at <https://bit.ly/2qA3XTA>

So, if Vaccarello can deliver both the chic and the subversive, why has Slimane got the upper hand? Simply because he created the look, two decades ago, when his rival was in high school. Whoever asserts that his work resembles The Kooples, Sandro, or Zadig & Voltaire, demonstrates a generous amount of bad faith. Hedi Slimane is the genesis, not the aftermath, and Anthony Vaccarello could become his next casualty. Why should he be sorry for his influence? For the incredible attraction towards his work? What Hedi Slimane was tasked to do with Celine is to bring it to new heights, but first to destroy and rebuild it in his image — which is respectful of Philo's legacy. Can you imagine Chanel without a tweed skirt suit? Nope. The same way, Hedi Slimane does what Hedi Slimane does best, that is sticking to his look, perpetuating his vision. Exactly what Phoebe Philo did during her 10-year tenure.

There is some sort of snobbery regarding Slimane. He is an intellectual, but his clothes aren't for the so-called intellectual women. He makes fashion for young girls who would often be referred to as "sluts," "junkies," and "anorexic." There is a general disdain towards them, amplified by social media. Truth is there isn't one type of strong and independent woman out there. And surely, some women feel empowered wrapped in Slimane's vision.

4/4 Fourth caption, from September 29, 2018, available at <https://bit.ly/2sbhUYh>

But does Hedi Slimane truly know what women want or need today? As long as millions of them choose to buy his stuff, he will retain his legitimacy, despite all the noise. Because, while social media is disgruntled, Slimane's army shops until they drop, swiping those black cards left, right, and centre for leather jackets, I have to admit, they could find in charity shops for a fraction of the price tag. Indeed, we have seen those clothes before. As a matter of fact, for too long we have seen them. It's the short embellished party dresses and bomber jackets, the big shoulders, the colour black, and traces of couture. It's also the sharp tailoring cut tiny, tiny for feeble boys and bony girls who people assume have single-digit Body Mass Index. The menswear was impeccable though, but that was expected as it is his signature. Slimane

refuses to dress boys in overpriced tracksuits. No, here, they are dressed up, so Slimane is actually swimming against the current. “I would rather be somebody’s shot of whiskey than everybody’s cup of tea,” Hedi Slimane once declared. Okay, he never said that, but this maxim fits him perfectly. Nevertheless, Hedi Slimane’s first collection unveiled a troubling paradox. As much as one should stand for what they believe in, one shouldn’t ignore today’s social conversations. In this regard, Hedi Slimane’s Celine poses a problem, that of representation on the catwalk. Having a style is acceptable, lacking diversity creates an unhealthy and secluded environment. And, if that’s not addressed in the next collection, Hedi will eventually lose his war.