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How Capitalist Fashion Production Creates Ambivalences Regarding The Practices and Valuation Surrounding Clothing Material

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SUMMARY

The study at hand is looking into the matter of capitalist fashion production and its effects on the practices and valuation surrounding the commodities produced. The constant output of commodities is what is said to be the 'life-saver' of capitalism. Hence, this production system also relies on the consumer to buy its products. *Fast fashion* is the ideal catalyst for this undertaking: The nature of ever-changing trends in fashion forces producers as well as consumers to keep up. Trends change quickly, and so do the clothing available at the fast fashion stores. Runway-trends and low prices are what make the industry successful around the globe. While many apparel providers struggle to stay in business, the leaders in the 'game' are recording growing profits. Competition nevertheless is strong, and to appeal to the consumers, the companies need to bring in new trends at a quick pace. The growing inventory within the stores is also leading to a new normality in pricing the items: Already low-priced items are marked down and sold during clearance sales even more frequently than ever before.
The commodity circulation of apparel in a fast fashion model seems to be the ideal portrayal of what Hawkins calls *conspicuous wastefulness*, the urge of being always on trend that entails certain disposability habits (Hawkins & Muecke, 2002, p. 29). Clothing items go a long way, literally, and are the embodiment of a complex supply chain and even more complex economic system behind it. It is a sign of wealth if societies are adapted to norms of imposing short lifecycles onto these products. There is a great body of literature to be found on the more troublesome features of apparel production and distribution. This study, on the other hand, undertakes a qualitative investigation into how this specific economy and culture around clothing affects the practices and valuation. By applying the Actor-Network-Theory, the body of clothing relevant in this study is given a higher stance. The data gathered is based on semi-structured interviews with sales employees in fast fashion retail stores in Switzerland. The results show a pattern of discourse which evolves around the tensions and ambivalences the industry created regarding the work of the employees, and the practices and valuation surrounding the entirety of clothing material in a fast fashion store.

PRIOR ANNOTATIONS

Currency Conversion

The interviewees made price examples in Swiss Francs. The current (as by the 12/09/17) conversion rate is 1 USD = 0.9568 CHF.

Transcript Signs

[...] = irrelevant information which has been left away for the purpose of having shorter quotes

... = talking pauses by the interviewees

TABLE OF CONTENT

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Outline

With the constant lookout for growth and power, capitalism makes use of many tools to reach its goal of profit. Counteracting its frequently stirred up predicted redundancy, capitalism is still present. In modern societies, it lives through the commodities it produces, and relies on the benevolence of a strong consumer culture.
Fast Fashion is a brainchild of capital owners to pursue their goal. The idea of bringing in new clothing in short intervals to the consumer has proved to be successful: The consumer can express his fondness for the creativity of fashion by spending only a small amount of their money. The low prices are also what makes it easy to abandon a trend and hence a previously bought, 'out-of-season' item. The consumer is informed and demands trends, and the producers are keen on keeping these demands alive and keep flooding the market with items to appeal to as many needs as possible. Hennes & Mauritz (also known as H&M), Zara, Primark, Topshop[1] are the most famous brands to be named. Those brands pride themselves with countless stores to be found all over the globe. Fast fashion retailing – as probably the most internationally active branch of retailing – is a textbook example of how globalization acts in today's world. Studies prove them right: Compared to other industries, the fashion industry is, also thanks to fast fashion, expected to grow in the future[2], even though the industry faces uncertainties and is of course sensitive to changes in macroeconomics (the most recent economic crisis) and events in geopolitics[3] (e.g. terrorist attacks in Europe). Also, they are the living proof of how competition is not perfect, and that smaller providers stand no chance against the big names: While many companies struggle with keeping up with the challenges the industry poses, founder of fast fashion role model *Zara*, Amancio Ortega, has recently been named the new wealthiest man on the globe[4].

1.2. Current State of Research

Since the rise of the fast fashion industry, its particular character has been a field of interest for many different scholars. Business analyses (Bruce, Daly, & Towers, 2004) tried to identify the x-factor of the fast fashion system, while behavioral economics studies (Bruce & Daly, 2006) located the appeal of fast fashion to the consumers.

This study also draws on the problematics of the industry and the culture that emerged alongside with it. The effects of quickly available fashion on the environment like the usage of chemicals in production or the overuse of soil to support the growth of fibers are well-known and supported by a body of valuable research (Adamcyk, 2015; Connell & Kozar, 2013; Gwilt & Rissanen, 2012, among others). Labor conditions of the manufacturers in (mainly) the Global South are also subject to many studies. Due to recent events of clothing manufacturing building collapses in countries like Bangladesh, the general awareness of the problematic has grown even more.
Consumer behavior regarding apparel purchasing and sustainability-awareness is also a popular and widely discussed matter (Carrington, Neville, & Whitwell, 2010; Connell & Kozar, 2009). Much work has been done on the stand of alternative products and their stand, but also on how the awareness of sustainability-issues has grown. Yet, it still has not reached the effective consumer behavior of many people.

While the production side, as well as the consumption side, is well-covered, it came to my attention that other links of the supply chain might have been missed out on. Thanks to a 2016-article of D. Feldges talking about the often chaotic sceneries in fast fashion stores, and the "Sisyphean tasks" the employees had to handle, I noticed that this specific part of the supply chain has not received much academic attention yet, even though there might be some valuable insights to the locality where production and consumption comes together. And that is the starting point of this analysis (Feldges, 2016).

1.3. Research Agenda

I am interested in how the spirit of capitalist production affects the perception and valuation of clothing, especially in a fast fashion system. As a business model which relies heavily on consumption, it is crucial to understand how the target group of price- and trend-conscious consumers handles clothing and what value they inhere. Also, I want to find out how the stores of the fast fashion companies deal with clothing material that seems to be 'too much'. There is already plentiful and valuable research on the effects of quickly available fashion and its production mode on the non-human environment, as well as the labor conditions of those who actually manufacture the apparel. My research agenda in turn tries to build on the tenor of analyzing the rather unpleasant effects on humans and nature alike, but tries to do this by taking a step back and elaborating on how we, as consumers, relate to fast fashion clothing in the first place – which is crucial to the understanding of the involvement of the industry in the current ecological crisis.
In this study, the practices and valuation from the side of the consumers and the companies themselves are in the light of the interest. But collecting qualitative data on sensitive issues like the handling of a product – which is said to contribute to the pollution of the environment and the stabilization of rather exploitative labor conditions in mainly the Global South – would probably result in biased answers from the consumers as well as the producers. The companies fear for inconvenient information about the practices

on their side being revealed, and the consumers have an apparent attitude-behavior-gap (see. for example the study of Carrigan & Attalla, 2001). Drawing on my own experience as an employee in fast fashion sales, I realized that the valuation and the practices surrounding clothing become notably overt in an 'intermediate station' between production and consumption. Hence, to bring in a different perspective to this scenario, I wanted to talk to the people who are directly concerned with the clothing after it has been produced and before being sold to the end-consumer. Fast fashion retail sales employees, as the group of interest in this study, are in possession of a great deal of experience with the aforementioned factors due to their status as interlinks between not only producers and consumers, but also between producers and clothing and clothing and consumers. With great interest I sought to find out whether the sales employees are able to unveil perspectives on the handing of clothing about which the rest of us is not aware. This master's thesis is hence bound to contribute to the advancement of fast fashion as a matter of interest from a social-scientific angle.

1.4. Research Question

To contribute to the body of research on capitalist fashion production, this thesis tries to adapt the viewpoint of fast fashion retail sales employees on said matter. Precise information about the actual production mechanisms and the ideology behind them belong to a certain semantic knowledge which may or may not be familiar to the employees. This thesis however does not aim at finding out about this aspect. The extent of the capitalist production logic is implicitly part of what the employees observe and perceive, and shall be unveiled in how the employees talk about certain aspects of their everyday work life. The research question of this master's thesis hence is the following:

How do fast fashion retail employees observe practices and valuation regarding clothing material?

The interpretation of the results is based on *how* the employees talk about certain events of their everyday work life, what extraordinary memories they recall and what they wish would change about the status quo. This is done with the help of qualitative interviews with employees combined with the theory of discourse analysis. A strand of discourse emerging out of the collected data shall depict how the problematics of the current state of fast fashion makes itself felt in another link of the apparel value chain. Eventually, the greater aim of this thesis is to elaborate more on the problematics of overproduction and overconsumption in societies of the Global North.

1.5. Chapter Overview

The remainder of this thesis is structured as follows: *Chapter two* introduces the contextual background by working with ideas on the significance of commodities in capitalist ideologies on the one hand, and, on the other hand, elaborates on the strength of today's consumer culture as a result of it. The second part of chapter two deals with the mechanisms of fast fashion production systems to explain the popularity of said system, and also the difficulties the industry is facing. I finalize the chapter by adding thoughts on the individual and company-specific handling of surplus material.

Chapter three is dedicated to the theoretical framework this study is based on. Tying in with the previous elaborations on excess material, I add some thoughts from the rich body of research on *waste*. It is crucial to comprehend what waste or excess material and objects lead us to do with them. Nevertheless, the concept of waste is not entirely representative for this study, since the material dealt with here does not go into the waste-stream at the point of analysis. That is why the concept of *Actor-Network* is brought into the analysis. It provides the ideal way of including non-human agents, like in this case clothing commodities, into the this study. This is insofar important as the practices and valuation that surround them are the emblems of interests and they embody economy and culture alike.

The methodology of this analysis is expounded in *chapter four*. This specific research agenda suggested for a qualitative approach, since subjective views on and concepts of a matter are in the focus. Chapter four hence explains the method of data collection with semi-structured interviews, with the approach of *discourse analysis* following Michel Foucault as the main tool of analysis, as well as the difficulties that arose during field work, and completes the reflections by deliberating on the constraints of this study.

Chapter five outlines the results of the collected information. By relying on the theories of waste and actor-network, this part of tries to shed light on the practices surrounding clothing material, and the agency clothing can have within a retail store network. With the overarching goal to answer the research question, the second-last chapter is divided into two parts: the first part is dedicated to the discourse surrounding the staggering workload of the employees, while the second part deals with the discourse about the valuation of clothing material. Generally, it focuses on the effects a fast fashion clothing mode can have on the everyday work of its sales employees, and how they discuss those effects.

Eventually, *chapter six* brings together the contextual background and the results by analyzing the emerged discourses surrounding them, and tries to find out whether the results of this study go hand in hand with the elaborations on capitalist fashion production and consumer culture, and where this study brings in new aspects of said thematic complexes. It concludes with an outlook to further aspects of possible research interests.

Annotations

[1] For a detailed list of the most prominent providers in Europe, see. the Annex.

[2] A very informative study about the state of the fashion industry up until the end of the year 2016 was published by consulting firm *McKinsey*. The authors state that even though the industry was mostly described by executives as challenging, uncertain and changing, it is believed to grow more in the future. S Amed,I., A. Berg, L. Brantberg and S. Hedrich (2016): The State of Fashion 2017. London: The Business of Fashion and McKinsey & Company. Available Online.
http://www.mckinsey.com/industries/retail/our-insights/the-state-of-fashion (accessed: 15/09/2017).

[3] See. Annotation 1.

[4] Ortega reached this position at the end of August 2017, but then had to give up the pole position and was shortly after named the third richest person in the world.
https://www.forbes.com/sites/noahkirsch/2017/08/30/this-spanish-retailer-just-became-the-richest-person-in-the-world/#414130ec5f76 (accessed: 15/09/2017).

CHAPTER TWO: CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

2.1. The Relevance of Commodities

Commodities[1] – goods that are traded economically – have become an omnipresent part of everyday life. Thanks to state-of-the-art and diligent machinery, societies in the Global North experience a high fluctuation of goods, an "ever-changing flow of commodities" (Featherstone, 2007, p. 17). While material objects have always been a crucial token of societies around the globe, the relation to these objects has changed profoundly within the past centuries. The commodities we own are most likely the product of someone else's labor, and the commodities we produce are not our own property – a phenomenon Karl Marx calls *estrangement* or *alienation* (for elaborations see. Marx, 1987). But even though we might have a different relation to what our labor produces, the importance of these commodities has not declined – if not the opposite.

Marx again introduced the economic philosophy to the concept of *commodity fetishism* (Hawkins, 2005, p. 28). According to Hawkins, commodity fetishism, in simple words, describes a commodity's capacity to seem animated and alive, and especially, having an intrinsic value. They become "independent things" (Harvey, 2005, p. 110) with an impact on human beings and their actions. Soper (2011, pp. 44 -45) states that the logic of capitalism consists of imposing the logic of commodification onto everything, and that the "buyer-seller-paradigm" (ibid.), which would best count for every social relation, is in this light the only desirable one. Everything will be commodified – "experiences, memories, bodies, identities" (ibid.). According to Jean Baudrillard (1998, p. 25) the "ecology of the human species" has changed: People of the "affluent age" (ibid.) are no longer mainly surrounded by other human beings, but primarily by objects, and that they are a product of human activity. He observes that relationships are built surrounding the objects in our lives. And hence social life becomes more defined now by the logic of exchange. But not only are there plentiful objects, there is a "manifest of surplus, the magical, definitive negation of scarcity" (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 26). Choice, so Jeremy Gilbert, is not a theoretical concept, but a "material and institutional reality" (Gilbert, 2011, pp. 39-40).

2.2. Capitalism and the Logic of Commodification

But why are we suddenly in a – as Baudrillard (1998, p. 26) calls it – a "jungle of objects"? David Harvey explains that the affluence of objects is a logical consequence of productive economic activity. He says: "Marx saw the 'immense accumulation of commodities' to be capitalism's most distinctive surface feature, arguing that only recently have people become so dependent on commodity production that growth, or ever-expanding markets and money-making, is now experienced as an end in itself and purpose of social life" (Harvey, 2005, p. 111; highlight in original). Economic productivity fuels growth, which is always marketed as desired because it is said to be the only way to diminish inequality, since the bigger the whole, the bigger the share of every individual – or so at least the thinking behind its enforcement.
After two devastating World Wars, a great part of Western Europe and later Northern America were left to build up their countries and economies afresh. Living in a post-industrialization epoch, the people of the Global North started pushing their economies on the base of mass production of goods and a significant part of the population had experienced a remarkable rise in income (Whiteley, 1987, p. 3). Thanks to the substantial improvement of productivity through the hands of machinery and new technologies, as well as the rise in income, the population was able to expect a growing amount of goods in their lives. By and offering a broader palette of goods, the economies in the Global North and their wealth started to depend more and more on individual and household consumption (O'Conner, 1970, p. 2). What had arisen throughout the twentieth century was a symbiotic relationship between production and consumption and late capitalism started to experience its heyday (O'Conner, 1970, p. 1).

The ideas of Capitalism were initially meant to be a temporary state to reach the aim of what one could call *a good life*. In his forward-looking essay *The End of Laissez Faire* (published in 1927) John Maynard Keynes, one of the most influential economic theorists of the twentieth century, developed the idea that the status quo of the capitalist upper hand is about to decline in a then near future (Keynes, 1927; Skidelsky & Skidelsky, 2013, p. 17). He described the nature of capitalism as constantly demanding to earn money and the want for money allegedly is inherent to humans. But this constant thrive for economic improvement would end as soon as everyone has reached a state of saturation, meaning that all people would have finally gained material prosperity so that society would experience a general shift towards "a good life"[2] and most of all, far less existential commitment to paid labor would be necessary.
But the shape capitalism has taken until now does not follow the same rules as it was meant to do in the sense of Keynes. According to Harvey (2010, p. 40) capitalism still is a process, where money is invested in "the search of more money"[3]. Capital, thus, needs to be in continuous movement – an interruption would result in profit-losses. That is why, so Harvey (2010, p. 43) a successful capitalist barely ever rests on the success: instead of spending the earned money on consumption themselves, capitalists need to reinvest to be able to keep up with the competition and hold on to their place in the market. Even

more, the capitalist tries to expand his or her market share. The intention is simple: the whole process of capital accumulation and reinvestment serves the purpose of accumulating money, and by that financial, as well as social power (Harvey, 2010, p. 43). And financial wealth potentially knows no limits: like this, one attests to the capital a "motion ad infinitum", a never ending movement. (Mahnkopf, 2012, p. 390). The faster the circulation happens, the quicker one can generate a profit.

New investments are considered to be holding this level up; even if this means that the markets exceed their demand. New products have often said to be the "live-safer[s] for capitalist development" (Harvey, 2010, p. 94). That is why Adam Smith for example demanded that there should be only as few regulations as possible so that the market can act on the principle of competition and self-regulation to release new products; Market institutions and principles although should be ensured by law (Harvey, 2005, p. 93). To Smith, this was the ideal (or the *only* possible) way how true wealth for everybody could be reached. And every individual could contribute and profit by participating in the system (Galbraith, 1963, p. 27). Instead of redistributing emerging wealth and probable inequalities in income, capitalism favors the option of producing more. For many, consequently, the system of capitalism was without any alternative (Mahnkopf, 2012, p. 392) because, as Marcuse (Marcuse, 1967, p. 37) illuminates, this lifestyle is better than what people used to know, and that this "good lifestyle" is immune to change.

The imperative of a high output of goods has remained in many ways. According to Galbraith (1963, p. 127) high productivity is equated with economic security and prosperity. The GNP, as the prevailing measurement of wealth and development, is an indicator that supports this assumption. An economy and its standard of life are measured by its productivity. Capital owners in the Global North even found a way to increase profit by relocating to low-wage countries. This results in a territorial division of labor and a more extended and hence complex circulation of produced goods. According to Harvey, geographically speaking, there is never "an equilibrium of capitalist production, trade, distribution and consumption" (Harvey, 2005, pp. 95-97). Driven by the incentive of more and more profit, and the pressure of competition, capitalist production systems always seek for superior (meaning less cost-intensive) sites of production, so Harvey. Their strategy mainly is to buy the products they distribute at low prices from the manufacturers in low-wage countries, but sell them for much more than that (Harvey, 2005, pp. 95-97). An intensified capital turn of this kind leads to a situation where territorial borders are less restricting to trade. Globalization hence is one of the trends immanent to a capitalist production system.

2.3. Globalized Consumer Culture and Imposed Needs

Through the internationally extended circulation of commodities, different parts of the globe are connected in different spheres of life. Since the many commodities also need to find their way to the consumers, a strong, globalized consumer culture has developed as a result. Goodman (2008) even proposes an account where consumer culture and identity have replaced national identities – thus, what we consume and display seems to shape our social and individual identities (Goodman, 2008, p. 344). Within this notion, the people perceive themselves in society as consumers in the first place, and political structures should mainly enable the capabilities to consume. As Goodman says: "Consumption is one way for people to make sense of the world by wearing objects, displaying them in homes and communicating with them" (ibid.). Benjamin Barber calls the homogenization of cultures around the globe *McWorld*.[4] And while McWorld spreads the idea of anti-isolationism, it also promotes a thinking characterized by "secularism, passivity, consumerism, vicariousness, impulse buying and an accelerated pace of life" (Barber, 1995, as cited in Goodman, 2008, p. 345). It follows a neoliberal, *laisser-faire* ideology where any counteraction by governments against the dissemination of McWorld is labeled as anti-democratic. Despite being hailed for being an envoy of strengthening democratic ideals all around the globe, it is far away from a perfectly democratic world, since McWorld culture considers democracy as relevant only for the purpose of mass consumption. "Capitalism seeks consumers susceptible to the shaping of their needs and the manipulation of their wants, while democracy needs citizens autonomous in their thoughts and independent in their deliberative judgments" (Barber, 1995, as cited in Goodman, 2008, p. 346). According to Harvey (2005, p. 69-70) enough wealth to keep the consumption level stable has longtime been the basis of social freedom. Individuals, so Gilbert, are forced to join the ranks of the consumption imperative, and are distracted by its omnipresent spirit, so that it becomes "impossible to invest emotionally or concentrate intellectually on wider social and political issues" (Gilbert, 2011, pp. 39-40). According to Marcuse (1967) (as elaborated on in Skidelsky & Skidelsky, 2013) the undermining of social change is the most remarkable achievement of advanced industrial societies. Capitalism can force change (be it social or political) to be incorporated into its spirit and can hence make a market-opportunity out of it (Skidelsky & Skidelsky, 2013, p. 68). The problematic aspect about this is that citizen participation has not yet been replaced by a suitable form of consumer participation and that those forms of consumer participation that do exist play mostly into the hands of for-profit corporations (Goodman, 2008, p. 345). By participating in these structures, individuals subconsciously contribute to strengthening existing power-relations and relations of production and reproduction (Gorz, 2011, p. 101; Harvey, 2005, p. 229).

2.3.1. "The Consumer Culture"

As a result of an expanded production of capitalist commodities and the globalization of lifestyles emerged a so-called *consumer culture* (Featherstone, 1990, p. 5). Following a simple notion of consumption, which is also used by Juliet Schor, meaning that when using the term consumption, it will be in the context of market purchasing activities of mostly individuals (Binkley & Littler, 2011, p. 76). But consumption is not only economic demand. It does have a cultural and social aspect to it (Hawkins, 2005, p. 96). To understand this assumption, we must look at how the idea of consumption has profoundly changed during the last decades[5]. Shortly portrayed, a consumer culture approach regards individuals as connected to each other in markets of commodities, in which they use the products to create images (of themselves) and relations to other individuals (Arnould, 2006, p. 605). These notions are complementary to the foregoing descriptions of capitalist commodity production, since this study supports the assumption that the current situation of commodity practices and valuation came to be as a consequence of production logic on the one hand, and consumer culture on the other hand, co-enforcing each other. Or, following Hoskins, who describes it as a "symbiotic relationship between consumer and producer" (Hoskins, 2016, p. 85).

2.3.2. Demand or Supply? – Which Side Enforces the Other?

Nevertheless, one wonders whether capitalism enforces intensive consumption, or if the consumer demand makes capitalist production systems to produce non-stop. The core idea of capitalist ideology is to enforce and stabilize a high level of consumption. Harvey (2010, p. 107) for example observes that capitalism does not only depend on a strong consumer culture, but that consumption is the only thing on which capitalism could survive. Furthermore, he states that individuals are being constructed to perceive themselves as consumers in the first place to be more 'exploitable' by capitalist structures (Harvey, 2015, p. 228). Whiteley observed for the American economy of the 1980's that it has become increasingly dependent on a high level of consumption as a means to create wealth (Whiteley, 1987, p. 4)[6]. Schor, however, does not automatically link the great number of commodity-choices to inherent consumer desires; she says that it could be that the consumer "may merely be doing what is on offer." (Schor (2001) in Skidelsky & Skidelsky, 2013, p. 51). It is more often the case that there is not enough demand for the commodities produced. Galbraith (1963, p. 135) describes the lack of demand as a result of the declining marginal utility or value every good has with increased production. The more units produced, the smaller the willingness of the consumer to pay for an extra unit of said product – a notion well-known to classical economic theory. But this does not mean that the consumer is the passive taker of commodities who is excluded of the production process. The willingness and necessity of the producers to respond to consumers' wishes has given the consumers much power over the actions of the capital. The differentiation of the consumers' tastes is not only meant to secure the incomes of capitalists (Gorz, 2011, p. 101), but also demands a lot of creativity on the producer side. They and their needs are in fact extremely influential on what will be produced next (Lorenz, 2004, p. 64).

It remains open whether "mass production" or "mass selling" is more important for today's economies. Both factors are strongly symbiotic and "for this reason they both developed concurrently" (Hamilton, Petrovic, & Senauer, 2011, p. 34).

2.3.3. Creating the Need to Consume

The meaning of what is 'needed' has changed fundamentally. When back in the days of Keynes, the most urgent needs needing to be covered were clothing, food and shelter for the unfortunate (Galbraith, 1963, p. 128), needs have altered their appearance in today's consumption – a distinctive trait of the aforementioned consumer culture. Consumption has become an end in itself. Within capitalist structures, individuals should in fact see themselves as "working consumers" and "clients of capitalism" (Gorz, 2011, p. 47), who bring the needs to guarantee the turnover for the industries. Juliet Schor explained a crucial aspect on how contemporary consumption works – which also ties in with the previous elaborations on corporate advertising – that deserves quoting in full:

"[…] because a lot of what people want from consumption is symbolism. It's why they care so much about their Nikes, or Coca-Cola, or whatever… there's an intense emotional connection to brands. And, you know, we could sit here and think, oh, how stupid to care about the swoosh, next to another symbol on another pair of shoes that are virtually identical… but the intense emotional connections that people have to brands teaches me how important the symbolic dimension of consumption is. I am writing a paper right now […] about this rising volume of goods that are being consumed, and of the consequences of this is the rising volume of things that are being discarded. People are buying and discarding things at a very rapid rate. […] it's also a fascinating social dynamic. Why is the symbolic value of these things disappearing so rapidly, when their practical ore useful value is still very high? […] but a lot of what people want from their foods is symbolic value, and I think the questions we have to ask of these foods are, what are these products symbolizing? And where are these symbolic meanings coming from? How do we create an authentic consuming culture in which symbolic meanings come from good places – through good, egalitarian processes – which actually give people deep and indirect meaning so they do not throw products away when they are still practically useful?" (Juliet Schor, as quoted in Binkley & Littler, 2011, p. 77).

Commodities are not only judged by their usefulness but also by what surrounds them, namely an idea of uniqueness and indispensability. Gorz mentions a fascinating comparison by aligning contemporary commodities with art pieces. Since there are no objective means to measure the value of art, it is ascribed an inherent worth, nothing which can be estimated by a comprehensible method (Gorz, 2011, p. 22). "Consumers, in this view, purchase not commodities, but commodity-signs" (Applbaum, 1998, p. 328). This does not only count for luxury goods, but also for everyday commodities, like for example clothing, or everyday devices like mobile phones.[7] Whether or not these symbolic needs are inherent to consumers is debatable. According to Lorenz (2004, p. 65) there is even a general "scarcity in basic needs" detectable. Since this can result in a state of de-orientation and a sense of feeling lost in the many options provided for consumption, more and smaller needs are intentionally created, which are even easier met by consuming and purchasing commodities.

According to Gilbert (2011, p. 36) the knowledge about the current status of commodities in social life and in our relations within social life are not new to social analysis. They state that Marx's commodity fetishism, as mentioned above, has always had the thoughts of consumerism embedded, and that it can be understood as an extension to Marx' analysis.

If consumption is the main driver of economic growth, producers must continuously come up with creative new ways to make their products be heard and seen, since competition is not only based on price. According to Galbraith (1963, p. 141), producers nowadays take on a dual functioning: Not only are they responsible for producing commodities, but also are they obliged to ensure that they will be sold. Consequently, a producer nowadays also has to make sure that there is enough demand for their product. The amount of purchasable goods has become immensely larger, and differences between the goods might not be evident at first sight. Although the actual material differences could be small, they are real and could eventually make a difference in the purchase-decision. According to Gilbert, consumption nowadays is strongly based on the "hegemony of neo-liberalism and its institutional promotion of choice" (2011, pp. 36-37). Consumption in late capitalist societies needs to be led by other incentives and motives which make it harder to reach a point of satisfaction. Hungry people do not need to be convinced that they are hungry, as Galbraith (1963, p. 142) states. This is where advertising has experienced its upsurge. When originally it mainly promoted the specifics of an object, nowadays, advertising has taken up a wholly different appearance.

Advertisements have to be creative and appeal to a certain sense of their consumers: They portray an impression of belonging to a whole, or a movement. Certain products are being associated with outstanding events or a certain lifestyle, which increase the demand (Choi, 2014, p. 70). Advertisements nowadays hardly set the focus on portraying facts about the product they promote; they mainly create an atmosphere of exclusivity paired with individuality (Skidelsky & Skidelsky, 2013, p. 282). The companies generate profit from the consumer's readiness to follow trends, since those kinds of needs can be regenerated at a very quick pace. Marcuse (1967, pp. 27-28, 32) for example sees it in a manner, in which those wants are being imposed onto human beings: Advertisements serve as mediators to manipulate people and influence their agency in capitalist consumer cultures. As Gorz observes, these created needs are being addressed with the highest commodity load possible (Gorz, 2011, p. 46). He says that the want to maximize the output of capital goes hand in hand with the maximal inefficiency in trying to cover the demand, and thus cannot be anything but wasteful (ibid.). And with these goods being consumed, the capital multiplies. *Creative destruction* – the process of forming new innovations to replace old ones to make them redundant and useless – assumes form in how modern advertising acts and influences culture and consumption (Hamilton, et al., 2011, p. 42).

2.3.4. Living and Working to Consume

The tendencies of capitalist systems to monetarize almost every aspect of social life makes it easier to compare different lifestyles. Lifestyles evolve around competition and comparison, there are more and more things which are obtainable with monetary power (Skidelsky & Skidelsky, 2013, pp. 60-63). Linked to this, the idea that there will be never such a thing as enough (like enough wealth, enough objects to purchase) renders every person sooner or later dissatisfied what they already have. It only leads them to want even more (O'Conner, 1970, p. 3). The conditioning of individuals as consumers has effects on the way one works and spends leisure time. Artificially generated desires fuel our willingness to accept given power structures in terms of employment and leisure time organization (Skidelsky & Skidelsky, 2013, pp. 60-63).

With consumption as the imperative, paid work revolves around it. Generally, long working periods are often interrupted by shorter periods of "pure consumption" (Gorz, 2011, p. 69) – spare time is filled with the purchase of objects and vacation – the ability to consume serves as a compensation for long working hours. 'Retail therapy'[8] as it is so often called euphemistically, is a welcome fill-in for unmet needs in terms of life quality. Schor (2001) calls it a "cycle of work and spend", where people of certain professional branches (meaning the better-waged ones) in the Global North are able to choose how many hours to work and thus how much financial resources are at their disposal, to then spend. Waged work then becomes primarily a means to obtain the power to consume, and working long hours will be endured for the purpose of consumption.

2.3.5. Theories of Fashion Consumption in Society[9]

Combining the basic need of clothing and the symbolic need to display one's individual appreciation of aesthetics and one's financial wealth, *fashion* is the ideal way for capitalist production to address original and create new needs. To explain this, we might need to understand, what kind of stand fashion has in society and how people relate to it. This is again explicitly done from a social (or cultural), rather than psychological or economic point of view, simply to be able to understand a certain behavior of the consumer in a marketplace in a culturally complex, post-modern ontology.

German sociologist Georg Simmel in his elaborations about the role of fashion (Simmel, 1957) in society already mentions the ambiguity of the significance clothing can have: clothing as a social device is more than just its mere functional character; it serves, on the one hand, to help the ones wearing certain items to recognize each other as belonging to the same group, with the same taste and the same appreciation of the same goods. As the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu introduced the concept of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), he stated that this form of capital can manifest itself in the choice of our clothing. To be 'fashionable' hence means to have certain knowledge about the field of fashion, and therefore to be able to be detected as a member of a certain group that possess said knowledge. This knowledge about cultural ideas and standards can thus be capitalized on by individuals, resulting in the form of newly built social relations and hence a higher status. The choice of apparel becomes a purposeful one insofar as it also functions as a display of someone's access to certain information that others do not have (Gabrielli, Baghi, & Codeluppi, 2013, p. 238; Yoganarasimhan, 2012, p. 76). Even though the concept of being well-dressed remains a matter of taste, wearing exclusive (meaning expensive and non-basic) goods asks for special equipment: Being able to afford a certain way of dressing up also reflects wealth, rendering apparel to be an often conspicuously consumed good (Jin, 2016, p. 6). And by belonging to a certain social group, one also distinguishes oneself from other groups. Thus, fashion becomes a tool of social distinction.

Scholars tend to divide the status-oriented consumers into three different groups (Skidelsky & Skidelsky, 2013, pp. 57-58): One group explicitly acting after the allure of being in fashion is led by the so-called *snob-effect*. A good becomes desirable thanks to its sense of exclusivity as only a few people seem to appreciate its benefits. It is purchased with the intention of standing out by demonstrating a distinguished taste and does not have to be particularly expensive. Especially when it comes to art and fashion, it is often observable that a snob-good will eventually turn into a bandwagon-good, meaning that the 'snobs', or the pioneers of the trend, abandon the prior good for the sake of finding a novel, undiscovered one. The people that imitate the "snobs" in their fashion choices follow the said *bandwagon-principle*: This consumer group feels attracted to items which are ascribed to certain panache, but are already owned by many others in their social environment. These consumers attach some sort of successfulness to the choice of the majority, and try to belong to this perceived advantageous majority by imitating their purchase decision. This trait is often controlled by a weaker form of social desirability, and the need to belong to a group. Then there are goods which are primarily in the attention of consumers because of their high price: The third group of consumers (which is only listed for the sake of completeness and will not be of further importance in this study) refers to the so-called *Veblen-effect*, a term named after Thorstein Veblen, an American theorist who analyzed the phenomenon of conspicuous consumption. It is mainly the high price that turns a good into a Veblen-good. By obtaining a pricey alternative to common goods or services, one displays the monetary ability to do so.

All of these consumption incentives are relational to other consumers, and find an inherent desirability to the object itself and do not only serve the purpose of addressing basic needs. As Hemphill and Suk (2009) define the trend-cycle hyperbolically: the economic and cultural upper classes adapt a new trend to distinguish themselves as a group form other social groups, which then will trigger a so-called trickle-down effect, meaning that their style will be copied by the remaining groups of society to eradicate superficial markers of class-belonging, which on the other hand will make the culturally dominant class adapt a wholly new trend on their side. Changes in fashion trends are often fueled by the need for "social stratification on the one hand, and social mobility on the other hand" (Hemphill & Suk, 2009, p. 1156). Hence, consumed commodities seem to weaken social barriers, and are consumed to enforce a hoped social mobility (Featherstone, 1990, p. 9; Whiteley, 1987, p. 6) As Harvey (2005) sees it, the "ever-changing flow of commodities [makes] the problem of reading the status or rank of the bearer of the commodities more complex".

A less status-oriented theory revolves around the mere need to be "in fashion" and holds that not imitation of a high society lifestyle and hence deceptive social mobility is the fore. The theory of *collective selection* coined by sociologist Herbert Blumer stands as a counterpart to the before mentioned notions of Simmel and Bourdieu on fashion and the elites to which Blumer himself refers to as well. He sees the social elite's taste not as a controlling, but merely as an influential instance on the definition of what is fashionable and what is not (Blumer, 1969, p. 280). It might seem that a broad range of people imitate the elites or their taste for high fashion, but no to assimilate with them, but simply to be *en vogue*, to be among the most innovative group of people when it comes to fashion. This applies – as Blumer says (1969, pp. 281 – 281) – to anyone, regardless of their social origins. Thus, not the status is being emulated, but that group's apparent flair for being in fashion.

Summarizing, it can be said that "consumption in a consumer culture is not just the satisfaction of individual need, but rather participation in a complex socio-cultural interaction that apportions resources and produces relations of solidarity and distinction" (Goodman 2008, p. 345). So, on the one hand, fashion consumers mainly try to navigate between following trends and belonging to peers and living and displaying individuality. An equipment of certain goods is necessary to be able to take part in consumption culture, but to be perceived as truly 'individual', there is even more time, money, and information about trends needed. As Lorenz (2004 p. 67) sees it, "even people with the same status do not want to be seen in the same t-shirt". But fashion consumption is often an imitation of or at least inspired by others; It shows perfectly that "one individual's consumption becomes another one's need" (Galbraith, 1963. p. 139).

2.3.6. Excursus: Brand Strategies

Like any other commodity, fashion items need to be advertised as well. Several brands faced a "coolness-crisis", as Haig (2011) puts it, and hence had to come up with creative means to get back in the game. Haig mentions the US-American brand *The Gap*, which hired famous music artists to refresh their brand image, while still offering the same range of products (Haig, 2011, p. 229). Brands do not only rely on classic consumer-behavioral incentives (like the price), but also try to be part of a bigger culture and promote certain lifestyles. Exemplary of this strategy of promotion of symbols and feelings is a recent ad from the US-American sportswear producer Nike[10], which promoted its traditional *Air Max* sneaker with the slogan "Not Just a Show – a Revolution"[11].
Lorenz (2004) has mentioned the t-shirt as the typical bearer of zeitgeist and trend – albeit it being the simplest modern garment. Nevertheless, it can have a great impact to purchasing behaviors and trends. In recent years, simple t-shirts with imprints of brand names have enjoyed a great success[12]. Many 'traditional' brands of the 1990's have regained a stand in the fashion industry, like Nike with their distinctive sneaker style, or Calvin Klein releasing undergarments with their brand name all over the products. Representative for this phenomenon is the basic white tee of American Levi Strauss, usually known for their denim styles. It is a classically shaped white tee with the red and white logo of the brand, and is in addition designed as a unisex item. Jumping on the rise of popularity and demand in 90's style vintage fashion, the brand actively promoted their t-

shirts to lifestyle-bloggers and influencers[13]. An initiative which proved to be successful in the end: the shirts are sold out of stock almost everywhere and even forced the different providers to keep a waiting list[14]. An ironic twist in the story of how the mere display of well-known names of brands can sting sales is given by the French fashion collective *Vetements* which does not play with (or even possess) any own logos, but used the logo of logistics giant *DHL* on one of their t-shirts which was sold for about 250 US-Dollars.[15] While Bourdieu sees the previously mentioned cultural capital simply belonging to an individual's equipment, Harvey (2015, p. 218) disagrees by saying that brand image is the true form of cultural capital, since only this form of capital can be monetarized in the sense that it does have a direct an exchange value – an assumption which is supported by the acclamation of said simple t-shirt. The brands know how to help themselves to stay within the focus of the consumers, even with unorthodox methods. Branding and re-branding has thus become a constant in the commerce of fashion.

Displaying the ins and outs of fashion and what is considered fashionable by the "high society" has a long-standing tradition. Back when a fashion magazine named *Vogue* was founded in the year 1892, it established itself to be one of the dominant players in the sphere of magazines devoted to fashion. The editorial came to be in a context where apparently New York's high society felt invaded by so-called "parvenus who, with little lineage but plenty of money attempted to join in its aristocratic activities" (Angeletti and Olivia (2006) in Hemphill & Suk, 2009, p. 1156). Little has agitated the influence of Vogue Magazine on today's consumers and fashion industry. It is easily available to a broad public, while still focusing on issues portraying the wealthy lifestyles of a few. In fact, most of the magazine's numerous readers rather clearly belong to an economic middle-class, reading its issues as a lifestyle barometer indicating their paths to social upward mobility (ibid.). Many of the trends featured are illustrated by items which are almost exclusively found in the upmost price-range – unobtainable by most of the readers. Numerous fashion media outlets have adapted a segment called "Splurge v. Steal", in which a pricy designer item is presented as the current must-have, followed by more affordable alternatives to 'steal the look' – an initiative to endorse the broad public to imitate a wealthier lifestyle in terms of buying the cheaper alternative of clothing (Hemphill & Suk, 2009, p. 1157).

The previous elaborations on the stand of fashion in society and the advertising surrounding it shall help to understand how an industry which plays with the quick pace of fashion trends like no other: The following chapters shall enlighten how the business model of *fast fashion* came to be one of the biggest successes of the fashion industry as a whole.

2.4. Clothing as a Disposable Good?

Disposable goods refer to consumer goods that are used up a short time after purchase. After its use, a disposable item will go into the solid waste stream or will be recycled. This sort of items (paper towels, shopping bags, cutlery, and so on) has led to a signifi-

cant increase in the amount of waste around the world. They became emblematic for an increase in wealth in the Global North since the 1960s and could not be thought away in the years coming. People already got used to throwing things away regularly.
During the same decade, Spanish Haute Couturier Paco Rabanne was hired by Scott Paper Company (one of the biggest manufacturers and distributers of sanitary tissue products in the United States until 1995) for a marketing stunt to design a dress entirely made out of paper. These dresses came in two different designs, were available at the almost negligible price of 1 US-Dollar and were thought to be worn once before being disposed. Rabanne said of them: "The dress is very cheap and can only be worn once or twice. To me, this is the future" (Hoskins, 2016, p. 40). They perfectly embodied the consumerism arising back in the Sixties and were even hailed to be the future of fashion. Their disposable nature was modern and had majority appeal.
While clothing consisting of cellulose was abandoned not long afterwards due to its impractical character, by now, the disposability of clothing has assumed a different shape. Under the hypernym *fast fashion*, the production of clothing and its consumption have taken on a different stand in society. Breaking down an industry to a few numbers and facts can be a difficult undertaking, especially when talking about an industry with a globalized character as they come. The following sub-chapter nevertheless aims at creating a clearer picture on how the idea of a certain type of fashion production has become a strong name with a status of setting the tone for other actors in the industry.

2.4.1. The Rise of the Fast Fashion Industry

The general fashion industry has gone through profound changes during the last three decades, which altered the rules of the whole commerce. Bhardwaj and Fairhust (2009) deliver an appropriate characterization on how the fashion industry has adapted to these changes. The turning point was reached at nearly the end of the 1980s, when the question was posed to big names in apparel retail how to 'survive' the pressure of competition and the changes of lifestyles of the people. The fast fashion industry acts with a highly profit-oriented, neoliberal market spirit with strong competitive forces, so new ideas had to emerge to ensure the companies could distinguish themselves from their competition to assert a claim for the buyer's approval.
The traditional fashion industry of the late 20th century used to rely on its products serving basic needs. This means that while it had to be pleasing in its looks, and the different decades nevertheless were marked by particular trends and styles, it most of all had to fulfill its primary purpose to clothe people. Back then, apparel retailers followed a rather slow and unagitated way of production. Until the late 1980s, a traditional apparel provider usually would analyze trends and estimate the development over the seasons and commission an order of clothing which would be placed long before the actual arrival at the store. They already were labelled as so-called "ready-to-wear" apparel, bringing runway designs to the store – with a relatively long delay in time. But fashion trends have always been volatile, and the brands saw themselves in a position that meant if one had been unable to keep up with such volatility it could have led to a potential downfall

in popularity, and thus profit. But this volatility also made room for action: As Hoskins (2016) observes is the ever-changing nature of fashion trends the ideal way to compete and grow for a firm in a capitalist system (Hoskins, 2016, p. 88).

2.4.1.1. The Core Mechanism of Fast Fashion Production

Therefore, by the end of the 21st century, a new system of fashion production was adapted by the actors in the industry: quick fashion, or more popularly, *fast fashion*. The basic spirit of fast fashion revolves around the idea to bring in new clothing items at a very high pace. However, there are even more features to it which make it stand out compared to its alternatives, as Cachon and Swinney (2011) identified the following main drivers of a fast fashion production system: The concept of a fast fashion supply chain management relies widely on the so-called *quick-response-mechanism*. To be able to meet the very specific demands of its customers, retailers rely on short production and distribution lead times to provide new items instore as quickly as possible. Quick response demands a high flow of information between the producer, the distributor, and the receiver of the commodities, to show instantaneous reactions to changes in the market.

When formerly relying on about two seasons (usually spring and fall), more and more 'seasons' (e. g. a 'pre-fall' collection) were added to the calendar, sometimes on a monthly basis. The batches arriving at the stores these days are hence smaller, but more frequently delivered. Therefore, time cycles between the point of production and the point of consumptions are reduced to the possible minimum. Spain-based multinational clothing company *Inditex*[16], mother of *Zara*, the posterchild for trendy yet affordable fashion, prefers to place the majority of its orders (60% in figures) in the rather cost-intensive manufacturing spots of Europe (Spain, Portugal) and Northern Africa (Morocco), to be able to keep production close to the headquarters and main sales market in Spain. This allows the retailer to offer up to 11'000 items per given season, through twelve to sixteen collections (Bruce & Daly, 2006, p. 330; Caro & Gallien, 2010, p. 257; Divita & Yoo, 2013, p. 24)[17]. Even though this system currently represents a rather underused one (presumably due to the cost factor[18]), it optimizes the quick-response-mechanism. It allows the retailer to have as short a circle as down to fifteen days from the placement of the order until the point of delivery to the selected stores (Divita & Yoo, 2013, p. 24), since the longer the effective lead-time, the lower the probability of having an accurate forecast of what is demanded at a specific time (Choi, 2014, p. 52). A system which is slowly being adapted (even though not in its full extent) by some high-end fashion companies as well, mainly to live up to the pressure imposed upon them by their fast fashion competition (ibid.). However, even though production still mainly takes place in markets where the costs for labor are as low as possible[19], many try to follow Inditex's footsteps by relocating to nearer sites (Bruce & Daly, 2006, p. 331; Ghemawat & Nueno, 2003). Zara sees itself as a fashion follower, and not a fashion trendsetter, meaning that they have clear guidelines on what to produce (Ghemawat & Nueno, 2003, p. 10) and can thus concentrate on delivering the awaited designs in the shortest time possible, since trend-driven, ever-changing designs are already very costly to manufacture. Careful monitoring processes of sales numbers implemented by the retailer require store managers to regularly give feedback on which styles were preferred within a specified amount of time, so restocking or rearrangement in-store can be undertaken (Zhelyazkov, 2011, p. 19). Bhardwaj and Fairhust (2010) call it a *sense and respond* strategy, which obliges the retailer to perform with a higher responsiveness to current purchase behaviors (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010, p. 165; Gabrielli, et al., 2013, p. 207). One desirable consequence of adapting a quick response strategy is to minimize superfluous stock by giving small orders and replenishing only when the initial stock cannot live up to the demand. As Guiltinan (2009, p. 21) sees it: "[…] Firms have reduced both the length of the production process and the time required to adapt production to demand and competitive actions. The result is rapid execution of orders and delivery, faster implementation of new product concepts, and reduced capital, inventory, and unit costs". Following such an approach, the commissioned manufacturers are expected to provide the retailer with ready-to-sell merchandise, meaning that labels and price tags are already attached (Bruce & Daly, 2006, p. 330) so that upon arrival at the store, the employees responsible would merely have to unpack the merchandise and prepare it for the store.

2.4.1.2. Quick Changes in Trends

The quick-response-mechanism however does not suffice to explain the popularity of the system; a fast fashion model needs to have more aspects to it since said model is heavily built on consumer demand. The difficult task to create and manage a flexible supply chain of this extent was no longer avoidable; mass production of standardized, season-independent items did no longer correspond to the zeitgeist. This is why a quick-response method must be combined with a careful *trend monitoring*, to establish a successful fast fashion mechanism. Fast fashion retailers give production orders following the current, most noticeable trends. Even though a part of the inventory almost everywhere consists of a stock of basic items, the greater part of the clothing items are very fashionable and up-to-date. Through careful and constant trend-monitoring[20] the companies are hoping to be able to forego false predictions regarding consumer demands (Cachon & Swinney, 2011, pp. 778-779).

Fast Fashion retailers often seek inspiration at the runway shows of truly high-end, luxurious designer brands. This is a phenomenon, and also accusation, which many retail brands strongly deny but has often come to appear when said brands need to handle lawsuits regarding intellectual property theft (Eytan, 2017; Hemphill & Suk, 2009; Klün, 2013).[21] But even though managing these accusations can prove to be tricky at times, they are inevitable: the heart of fast fashion is to provide luxuriously appearing and seemingly exclusive designs within a non-exclusive price-range to a broad target group (Zhelyazkov, 2011). Zara for example employs 200 people alone who form the creative team which decides about the trends being adapted (Duss, 2015). But not only do fast fashion designers seek inspiration from high-end designers, they also often "inspire" one another. This is even easier, since retail stores are open to anyone – the more customer traffic, the better. Adapting someone's ideas for their store layout, mannequin exhibition or window design hence is an easy thing to tackle (Jin, 2016, p. 9). When differentiation in fashion formerly started as an art to express a designer's vision, nowadays, the seemingly infinite designs follow a different logic: creative expression is a rather less important point of fast fashion production; trendy items are put out because the industry feels that there is a need for them.

A combination of all of these factors leads to a regularly changing product assortment within the stores: twice-a-week-deliveries are often more the rule than the exception (Duss, 2015), with varying amounts of merchandise contained in the deliveries. The actual time of display for a single product is hence rendered to be – at least within the stores where they first arrive – rather short (Choi, 2013, p. 3). Due to the limited amount of space within a store and a stockroom, a high fluctuation of items is a fact around which many tasks need to be organized.
Fast fashion promotes an exclusivity through mass production available that is available to anyone – a strategy which is also referred to as "massclusivity", a term with an immense inherent contradiction (Joy, Sherry, Venkatesh, Wang, & Chan, 2012, pp. 275-276). By making new trends available within very short intervals, customers are prone to visit shops on a regular basis with only short timeslots in between. Combined with low prices and a new strategy of only limited stock, giving the impression that if an immediate purchase does not take place, the item might be no longer available to them, it makes customers more likely to make on-the-spot purchases.

2.4.1.3. Inexpensive Materials and Extended Product Range

In order to be able to offer *en vogue* designs in high quantity and at very low prices, costs need to be saved with regard to quality and fabrics – another crucial point of fast fashion production: Technological progress made it possible for mankind to detach itself from its dependence on natural fibers to produce clothing. Natural fibers, like cotton or viscose, are now complemented by the use of synthetic fibers, like polyester or acrylic – fibers for which there is no crop shortfall due to weather conditions, like the growth and harvest of cotton for example. Polyester for clothing items of any sort is now the industry's favorite, for it can be produced at a high pace and at low costs. This is a felt necessity, when thinking back to the fact that the industry is used to always deliver new collections, whereas cotton and other naturally grown fibers are bound to follow their environmental cycle. As the industry grows, the use of synthetic fibers will too (Claudio, 2007).
But not only has the range of styles, cuts and, fabrics a single retailer offers expanded, but also the variety of products that circulate under a single brand-name. More and more, fast fashion brands place their bets on expanding their offer. When a fast fashion name was originally known for producing women's and men's everyday wear, one would nowadays find different sections for women, men and children, and often also business clothing, maternity fashion, sports attire, or even accessories like phone cases

and such. Hennes and Mauritz (H&M) and Zara even run specific departments or entire stores which offer home furnishing (Choi, Liu, Liu, Mak, & To, 2010, p. 473). The big names use their widespread recognition to enter new product categories. Nevertheless, the ability to enter a new market is reserved for only a small amount of companies. Big names, like the two aforementioned companies, have made a clear stand within the 're-tailing-game' and have established themselves as two of the biggest players by making masses of items available at low prices. Whoever cannot keep up with the burden that is put upon them by the pricing-pressure, sees themselves forced out of business. Thus, smaller fashion suppliers face many obstacles when trying to enter the market and challenge the bigger names (Fletcher, 2010, p. 261).

2.4.1.4. "Amazing Fashion, Amazing Prices"

Lowering prices gives more people access to a broader range of clothing, and thus is inclusive and more democratic, so the claim of the fast fashion industry (Fletcher, 2010, p. 264). As fast fashion clothing items tend to cost a mere fraction of what ones pays for branded goods, it leads to more spontaneous purchases[22]. The non-exclusivity of the stores enforces high customer traffic, which makes it easy to browse through items autonomously and seek for inspiration, and increases the chance of people buying something on-the-spot. Due to the shop's low prices for clothes, the so-called 'buyers' remorse' effect is relatively low and makes superfluously/unnecessarily bought clothing items something not worth regretting for too long. Ireland-based fast fashion Flagship brand *Primark* intentionally follows this strategy and therefore serves as a showcase model. The company prides itself with the (probably) lowest prices[23] for trendy garment in the European market. Its business model pays off so well, that the brand's management still refuses to enter the online market. The title of this sub-chapter is adapted from the slogan of the brand[24].

Since a customer nowadays can choose from an unprecedentedly big palette of stores to shop at, the customer strategy of any fast fashion company heavily relies on the factor 'price'. When buying a fast fashion item, low prices and a high variety of offered items are expected, whereas the quality and the lasting factor are also accepted if low – the first two aspects apparently compensate for the latter two aspects (Gabrielli, et al., 2013, p. 213). As Gabrielli et al. (2013, p. 207) precisely point out: the fast fashion model succeeds to fulfil the needs of mature consumers, who do not only buy things only when they need it. It is an epitome of the free choice of goods and services neoliberal markets promise to its players: fast fashion consumers can move along with volatile and instable trends of ways of living without economically having to cut back. The low prices and constant change of available items enables them to go with the trend as they please. This trend apparently appeals to younger consumers, as well as older ones, as some consumer-based studies indicate (see. Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010; Gabrielli, et al., 2013).

According to Bruce and Daly (2006) or Cachon and Swinney (2009, pp. 500-501), there are three price-related groups of consumers definable in academic literature: the "myopic consumers", the "strategic consumers" and the "bargain-hunting consumers". The first group of consumers is characterized by their price-insensitive buying behavior, always purchasing items at full price. This can either be traced back to the fact that a reduction in price is perceived as a reduction in value for this group, or that they just do not make the effort to purchase strategically. An advantage of this type of behavior would be that this group is, trend-wise speaking, ahead of the rest (Allenby, Jen, & Leone, 1996, p. 109). Assuming a profit-maximizing strategy of the retailers, this is the most favored group. The second category of consumers acts to maximize the utility value of clothes by strategically choosing when to buy. The third group forms somewhat the counterpart to the first, meaning that the so-called bargain-hunters only buy when the price has reached a sufficiently low figure for them. The latter two also face the risk of the item not being available anymore at the point they decide to carry out the purchase, since markdown phases are not declared in advance by stores.

Information about the different prices and the comparison between them is an easy matter nowadays, which makes the group of the strategic consumer grow bigger and more influential[25]. The delay of the purchase situation on the side of many consumers lead to the situation where the stores need to make their superfluous stock more attractive by marking down the prices and offering clearance sales.

2.4.1.5. Even Lower Prices: Markdowns

While biannual markdown or clearance sales were a common aspect of fashion sales already back in the 1960's, today's fast fashion retail economic year is marked by often more than two markdown phases per year and customers get more and more used to seeing red signs indicating price reductions all year round. If the stock is high due to misperceptions of the demand for a specific item and will not be sold in time, strong price reductions cannot be ruled out. Ideally, the products would be sold at the original price and there would be as few unsold stock as possible. However, this is not the case. Due to the short trend cycles of a product, retail stores need to make room for new incoming clothing rapidly. To make older styles more attractive for purchase, prices will be reduced. But not only are there price reductions, there are often other offers and discounts as well, even during the markdown phases. Only recently, H&M started offering a '4 for the price of 3' on sales items. Bruce and Daly (2006) also estimate that about 33% of the sold merchandise was marked down in price before the sale.

Having heavy markdowns in price would cost the retailer much of his profit, but not providing the potential customers with any price reduction after the season ends is an even worse strategy, since many then choose the option not to buy at all, as Cachon and Swinney (2009) point out. Retailers are fully aware of the fact that consumers nowadays are sensitive to price and know the techniques to compare price and products. They nowadays are "willing to go extraordinary lengths to purchase goods at the lowest possible price"[26] (Cachon and Swinney, 2009). Hence, price reductions seem to be a strong incentive for the targeted consumers. Non-moving stock has barely any possibility to be sold outside of seasonal markdowns or other special discounts[27].

The heavy markdowns and the behavior the bargain hunters show do not go unnoticed and regularly find space as topics in daily newspapers (Baumann, 2013; Chapman, 2012; Erni, 2015; Feldges, 2016; Hoskins, 2015; Kasperski, 2015): A 'vicious cycle' is what it is called repeatedly in the media, because customers apparently seem to get used to and start expecting price reductions on a regular basis[28]. But they merely present a rather near-term solution to the whole problem of declining sales numbers and quickly changing inventory. Important seems to be who will 'cast the first stone' – as no one wants to be the last when it comes to markdowns or you might lose customers to the competition. Predictable markdown periods for every season have given many consumers enough reason to refuse buying items at the full price.

2.4.1.6. Global Retailing Power

Even though the industry has already reached a widespread presence in many countries around the globe, the brands place their bets on creating a universal appearance despite the different cultures surrounding them. The stores are designed and decorated everywhere in the same manner (Haig, 2011). The brand identity is thus not only created by the products but also the stores, which are supposed to create a feeling as if one was "at home". According to Joy, et al. (2012), fast fashion is often referred to as *McFashion*, eyeing the frequently used term McWorld (as elaborated in Chapter 2.3.). Fashion, in this sense, becomes globally omnipresent, served with the same styles and within uniformly designed stores all over the world (Fletcher, 2010, p. 260). The brands thus hope to appeal to a 'globalized consumer sphere'.
The system of globally synchronized fashion provision has proved to be an acclaimed one, as numerous retailers in a variety of markets and countries have managed to establish themselves. The fast fashion industry itself has grown more rapidly than the whole textile segment, also indicating that the market share of clothing production and distribution had to suffer losses for the benefit of the fast fashion sector (Choi, et al., 2010, p. 473; Divita & Yoo, 2013, p. 24).
The industry has a strong stand in many countries of the Global North. But in countries with rapid economic growth of the Global South, like the BRIC countries new opportunities have been provided to expand the industry's influence. These markets provide an immense potential due to the mere number of potential customers within their large populations, the growing middle class and its purchasing power (Jin, 2016, p. 15). This means that many new markets grow and open up for the brands (Remy, Speelman, & Swartz, 2016). The H&M group for example operates in 66 different markets in all continents. The company (has) plans to open another 500 new stores – 70 to 80 of which will be daughter brands of H&M – around the globe. As they state on their website: "The H&M group continues to grow. Expansion is long-term and is taking place through several brands".[29]
The appeal of fast fashion stores to many consumers around the globe does not go unnoticed by various economies: the overall turnover of clothing has almost doubled between the years 2002 and 2015, since it has grown from a billion-dollar industry to an

industry worth 1.8 billion US-dollars by 2015 (ibid.)[30]. On top of that, it is expected to gain in financial value even more. Growing in its worth in this case means that the industry also increased its output: Greenpeace marks the year 2014 when more than a hundred million clothing items were produced for the first time within one year.

Clearly, the fast fashion industry has adapted to changing parameters in the whole apparel industry in a fruitful manner. The actors understand how to act successfully within the industry, and to internalize the complexity of trends and lifestyles, as well as the difficulties of a quick response production style. Even though the variety of different products has increased, the production of apparel for global brands is not an easy site for competition. Predominant remain those brands which have managed to succeed despite the challenges of the system, and there is no sign of their decline in popularity. Their careful mediation of the demanding tasks the industry poses makes them outdo their competition. And as fast fashion giant H&M explicitly declares in their report for the second quarter of the year 2017, “continued profitable growth for many years to come” and “further strengthening of the H&M group’s position in a growing and rapidly changing market”[31] are vicarious for the spirit of the whole industry and explanatory of its actions.

2.5. Capitalist Clothing Production and Effects on Environment

Growth can no longer be expected at all means, especially since capitalist production systems are reaching their limits set by nature – a prediction which has been expressed countless times by many. Harvey (2015, p. 71-72) draws attention to the fact that capitalism has always depended on the “beneficence of nature”, thus its extreme interference with natural resources does not make sense since they are one of the sources of capitalist wealth. Nature has provided capitalist production with what appeared to be “free services”, which have lately shown more often that they do come at a price (Mahnkopf, 2012, p. 395). But, as Harvey says, the short-term thinking of capitalist production does not consider the long running consequences of its action. It follows the logic of “*après moi, le déluge*” (ibid.). This is the point where the ascribed self-healing capacities of capitalism are no longer active (Mahnkopf, 2012, p. 406). Nature’s depletion is a clear sign of the boundaries towards which capitalism moves. The current multinational corporation is not sustainable, as Schor says (Binkley & Littler, 2011, p. 79), and neither is it compatible with pure democracy and an egalitarian society. As Gilbert states, the “global ecological crisis” is a proof of the “capital’s power of creative destruction” (Binkley & Littler, 2011, pp. 36-37). Re-thinking economic expansion nevertheless means re-thinking economic traditions and current lifestyles and cultures.
The enforcement of high consumption in the Global North can be traced back to the fact that one does not have to account for the full range of costs that emerge due to that specific way of living. If each consumer had to bear the real – meaning: including the ecolog-

ical – costs for their purchases, we would probably consume far less. The call for more sustainable clothing has become stronger within the last years. As Joy et al. (2012, p. 277) state: "Consumers are also aware that individual consumption fosters organizational production, creating an ongoing cycle of appetite, simultaneously voracious and insatiable".

Nevertheless, it is important to state that there is a growing sphere of 'aware consumers' which demands fundamental changes in production, and also consumption, of many commodities. Most of them ask for a change in pace, and prefer so-called *slow fashion* to the common fast fashion. Even though their influence might still be limited, they are among the groups to be named which are said to change our culture towards the way we produce and consume commodities. These movements are inherently anti-capitalist, and ask for a shift from a global supply chain to a local one.

Awareness for a sustainable lifestyle has grown within many consumer-groups, but there is not an overall sustainable attitude towards consumption, meaning that an energy-saving behavior does not automatically imply a sustainable clothing-purchase behavior (Guiltinan, 2009, p. 27). Even though changes in producer's and consumer's attitudes are visible, studies show that a sustainable narrative – meaning the effort to at least reduce these impacts – has not yet had a major impact on consumer behavior (Carrington, Neville, & Whitwell, 2010; Joy, et al., 2012; Kozar & Connell, 2013) identify an attitude-behavior-gap in consumers. Their wish to buy fair trade and environmentally friendly products does in fact exist whereas the actual results of their purchasing behavior differs a lot from what the interviewees of the respective studies stated was – in their opinion – actually desirable. Internalizing these externalities seems to be a challenging task since it can be traced back to the fact that the willingness to cover the additional costs of fair and ecologically friendly products is low. In other words: people are often not ready to pay the higher prices (Kozar & Connell, 2013, p. 322).

According to Joy et al. (2012, p. 288) ecological alternatives do not (yet) meet the needs of fast fashion consumers, even though the product and hence design range have been largely expanded. Studies show that the factor 'trust' is the one hindering consumers from buying sustainable fashion, so-called *eco fashion* or *slow fashion*[32] alongside with the fact that the perception of this new type of fashion production is still marked by assumptions. Ecologically sensitive fashion is still being perceived as unfashionable, or not trendy enough. While even fast fashion firms advertise their sustainable and more forward supply chain, their potential customers do not always trust these assumptions, and do not see a reason to pay the higher price. As Divita and Yoo (2013) say: "Although marketing is used as a means of informing and communicating with consumers, some perceive these campaigns as a stunt to sell more products, increase profits, and improve brand image" (Divita & Yoo, 2013, p. 13). Especially young consumers tend to question the claims and the integrity of the brands, alleging them of *greenwashing*, meaning that a company is accused of using the idea of sustainability to polish their reputation.

Fast fashion, as a good example of a consumption-based model for economic growth, is by now notorious for its impact on humans and nature. Numerous studies have drawn attention to the negative social and ecological impact on a global scale of current fast fashion production. Much critique has already been exercised on some of the consequences of clothing manufacture, namely low-wage labor, the use of critical chemicals, the production of fabrics (be it natural or synthetic) and eventually the clothing waste that happens to grow in size (see. for example Crewe, 2008). Thus, with these issues being covered by science and media outlets alike, the public has great and comprehensive access to various information about how the fast fashion industry which this interferes with the social and natural sphere of the globe. After being held accountable for surfacing scandals regarding various aspects of their supply chain management, before the eyes of the public, many (fast) fashion retail brands have undertaken the effort to publish a sustainability report on a regular basis.[33] The problem nevertheless is to be found in a different place: The industry brings changing trends and items to the stores, which leaves the consumer, as well as the companies amassing the apparel. The following subchapters make evident how on the one side the companies and their stores who are left with a number of unsold items deal with the situation, and how individuals on the other side handle the amounts of clothing they bought and do not want any-more.

2.5.1. Handling the Excess: The Companies

Even though many fast fashion firms try to minimize the miscalculations of orders, they still happen regularly. Intuitively, not every single item within a store will be sold directly to the end-consumer, but a shop still needs to make space for new arrivals due to limited stock capacities. Within scientific literature, there are different ways how retail stores handle the superfluous material. What distinguishes fashion-goods from other retailed goods is the fact that in the case of apparel, “one size does not fit all” (Jin, 2016, p. 5). Fashion consumers come in different sizes, and so must the goods they consume. A style (meaning one specific design of clothing) needs to come in at least three sizes to fit a sufficient number of people, whereas food or electronic devices do not vary so strongly in their shapes. This usually results in a higher stock since there are no safe ways (except for last year’s sales numbers) to predict which size-group will prefer which design. But as many numbers indicate, a high a stock as possible will not provide a solution for the dilemma of a customer leaving the store because they did not happen to find their size. Increased stock often results in unsold stock (Ghemawat & Nueno, 2003, p. 13; Jin, 2016). And unlike other goods, fashion goods “suffer” a loss in value when their season is over, meaning that sometimes not even a strongly reduced price can make it more attractive to the end-consumer.

In order to try and make sure that the correct/most sought-after sizes are available in store, different store-locations of a brand might be intensely connected to one-another. Ghemawat and Nueno (2003), who collaborated with Zara to analyze their business-model, found that the Spanish company moves superfluous stock at one location to an-

other store, therefore managing issues with over- or miscalculated goods efficiently. If this does not result in higher sales either, an item will be relocated to the distribution centers and then sometimes moved further to so-called outlet-stores, be it brand-owned or otherwise (Ghemawat & Nueno, 2003, pp. 13-14).
Outlet stores are mostly the last station the items travel to before they must be sold, at least within the same country. The question of what happens afterwards cannot be answered without doubt. There is not much information the firms will hand out about an alleged overproduction-situation, but several journalists (Bentsche, 2012; Busse, 2016; Markert, 2013; Schmutz, 2016; Vogel, 2016; Weber, 2012) have investigated the path that merchandise can take. The responsibility regarding this matter apparently can be transferred to independent intermediaries specifically handling clothing (and also other goods) 'no one wanted to buy' in the stores. A lucrative business considering that most times, only around 70% (85% maximum) of the ordered stock will be sold within the stores (Weber, 2012). Those distributors on the other hand must guarantee that the traded merchandise will only be sold in certain countries where the firms usually do not operate, and with no traces of the brand, meaning that all the labels must be removed.
Exporting is a commonly used strategy, but can prove difficult since the receiving countries often require only a certain type of clothing, also depending on the climate and the cultural context. Since sometimes even trades between intermediaries can take place, merchandise can go a long way and it is no longer traceable who is responsible for it. Generally, it is not always the case that the companies gain their production costs back – so they have no strong regulations on what happens with the goods.[34] But the market for exported clothing in the Global South seems to be saturated, as Claudio (2007) among others observes.
"Sometimes, it is even better to burn the goods before it can land in the wrong distribution channels", says Sandra Volz, a German management consultant for textile firms (Weber, 2012). H&M has faced strong backlash when shredded clothing was found outside their stores (Divita & Yoo, 2013, p. 17). Making profit out of excess material is not really a priority, and sometimes not even an option. And sometimes the brands have the feeling of facing no other option other than burning the goods, for no one is willing to take them for an adequate price. But in all of the cases, the intermediaries are bound to keep the names of their partners in the dark – apparently no firm is willing to admit the actual amount of their unsold products (Busse, 2016) C. Gärtner, Head of the Swiss Textile College, personal communication, 24.03.2017; C. G. Schmutz, journalist of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, personal communication, 28.03.2017). To find a socially and ecologically acceptable way to handle the misfit-production, the companies fear taking immense prestige losses. Therefore, if there are non-profit-oriented practices, then in forms of donations to social welfare places or similar – a well-acclaimed solution, even if it can only make up for a small amount of the material (ibid.).

2.5.2. Handling the Excess: Individuals

Even though the biggest names in fast fashion retailing try to reach importance on a global scale, consumers of the Global North make up for the vast part of fast fashion consumption: According to a 2017 Greenpeace Report[35], consumers in the United States buy a total of 16 kilograms of clothing per year and German consumers purchase 10 kilograms of the like. Consumers on the African continent or the Middle East on the other hand only use a comparably low 2 kilograms.
Just like the consumers keep buying clothes diligently, they keep throwing them away in shrinking intervals. It is evident that quicker upgrades in fashion items will lead to an increased amount in discarded 'old' items. But what does this do to the practices surrounding clothing material within a private household? As it is shown, fast fashion consumers do not make a connection between an item bought in a fast fashion store and long–lasting quality (see. for example Gabrielli et al. 2013). By buying such an item, many people apparently do not do so with the intent of keeping the item for more than a couple of wears. A fast fashion system hence does affect how consumers value and perceive clothing. And the convenient way to dispose clothing items may save time and money for the individual, but has greater, well-known social and environmental consequences.
Greenpeace (same report) estimates that about 1.3 Mio textiles are being discarded each year. While one part is being reused in a different way, the other part is being traded as second-hand ware. According to Greenpeace, if there will be no change the current systems of production and patterns in shopping behavior in the years to come, there will be no capacity to allocate the growing body of (apparel) textiles waste. This, eventually, implies that the clothing will enter the solid waste stream. As Claudio aptly remarks: "So the path that a T-Shirt travels from the sales floor to the landfill has become shorter" (Claudio, 2007, p. 451).

2.5.2.1. Why Recycling Is Not Always an Option

Acknowledging their immense influence, mainly due to extrinsic pressure from consumers, NGO's and the media as well, many fast fashion retail firms have undertaken the effort to come across cleaner and also "greener" (Joy, et al., 2012, p. 291; Shephard, Pookulangara, Kinley, & Josiam, 2016). To counteract the immensity certain clothing-landfills can take, some retailers initiated campaigns where customers can return unused textiles (not only clothing in certain cases) to the store of their choosing, which then will transport these textiles to a location where they will be recycled in masses. Even though it is a highly requested and welcomed initiative to unsettle the long prevalent status quo of simply not engaging in recycling practices at all, it seems to be more efficient than it can be, due to its very nature. To understand this, one needs to understand what a fast fashion item usually consists of.

Most clothing contains a mix of both, natural and synthetic fibers, which after reaching a state of obsolescence as a clothing item renders them to be an obstacle for reuse. To produce new clothing out of old ones highly advanced technology and hence a great deal of energy is required. Separating the fibers is critical to the redesign and reuse of old clothing, but is not always possible. Even recycled items consist mainly of new fibers, since extracted, old fibers are of too poor a quality to use them on their own. On top of that, they also would cost a lot more than regularly produced clothing (see. Claudio, 2007, also taken up in recent online articles, such as in Werkman (2017). Consequently, many of the discarded items cannot be recycled and do end up as fueling material or otherwise, but not as what they intended to be in the first place. Fast fashion giant H&M does sell recycled fashion under their Conscious label, but they only make up for one percent of the whole offer. They promise to close the fashion cycle (Divita & Yoo, 2013, p. 16), but not in a way where clothing can still serve as clothing, and not being 'degraded' to burning material.

Capitalism's main idea to bring wealth through persisting production of commodities is still prevalent. The consumers welcome it, and if not, the many brands and companies that need their products to be bought will invest much capital into creating those needs. With profit-oriented production and consumer cultures co-enforcing one another, fast fashion is an ideal example of how strong capitalist ideas prevail in economies. "Unlimited wants, given succor by rapidly changing trends, are treated with unlimited production." (Fletcher, 2010, p. 262). The fast fashion consumer is left with an uncountable number of options to choose from, with a never-static production-mechanism behind it. As Lorenz (2004, p. 66) puts it: "The more we can buy, the more is left unused". A great number of choices usually comes with a high number of unchosen options.
True sustainability in a clothing industry would entail abandoning a system of mere profit, and perceiving the fashion supply chain in a holistic manner and hence improving the social and ecological aspect of each item produced. Clothing would need to be produced differently, in a way that it offers longer usability, but also would result in higher prices. Most effectively however would be the abandonment of an ideology to bring in new clothing at a very quick pace, whose demand is not fully clear. "Overaccumulation", as Harvey (2005, pp. 110-111) for example calls it, is symptomatic for economies where mass production and mass consumption have the upper hand. According to Harvey, if there is an over-accumulated amount of capital in a territory, it means that markets have "flooded" the people with commodities (ibid.), which find no takers. Thus, the ongoing production of a plethora of clothing is the main factor to be named when addressing the issues the industry, and the paradigms behind it, pose to its environment. Even though sustainability has become a keyword in many regards, fast fashion still seems to be the exception to a strengthening rule. Most likely because the concept of quickly available fashion items and sustainability do not go well together.

Not only as individuals, but also as collectives, we need to take care of the goods which find no place in a long-lived consumption stream, which are produced too much. Just like the body of clothing-/textile waste grows, many fast fashion stores fight with the situation of too much clothing themselves. The following chapter will introduce the theoretical framework to this study, which is crucial to the understanding of how fast fashion stores handle excess material, and how the general valuation of clothing in today's capitalist fashion culture can look like.

Annotations

1 Short definition taken from the Oxford Reference Vocabulary. Available Online. http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095627361 (accessed: 16/08/2017).

2 Robert Skidelsky, an economic historian famous for his biography on Keynes, and his son Edward Skidelsky, a sociologist and philosopher, dedicate their work *How Much is Enough? Money and the Good Life* (2013) to find out what having "a good life" – as it was intentioned to reach eventually by the enforcement of capitalism – means almost a century after Keynes published his essay on the ultimately redundant existence of capitalism. The appeal to modern economics to step back as a controlling social instance and take the role of a mean to negotiate a moral co-existence between human beings, to eventually reach a state of what they call "a good life".

3 In this case the capitalist starts the day with a certain amount of money, and, having selected a technology and organizational form, goes into the market place and buys the requisite amounts of labor power and means of production (raw materials, machinery, and the like). The labor power is combined with the means of productions through an active labor process conducted under the supervision of the capitalist. The result is a commodity that is sold by its owner, the capitalist, in the market place for a profit. The next day, the capitalist,[…], takes a portion of yesterday's profit, converts it into fresh capital and begins the process anew on an expanded scale (Harvey, 2010, p. 40-41).

4 In his elaborations of 1992, political scientist Benjamin Barber created a theoretical distinction between a homogenized culture of consumption (*McWorld*) and a heterogenized strand for global culture (*Jihad*). McWorld stands for a global consumer culture whereas Jihad stands for a reactionary movement against globalization with strong autocratic tendencies.

5 Consumer behavior is not the focus of this thesis that is why with this chapter I do not want to depict specific behavior regarding consumption, but put more a focus on the cultural and sociological explanation of it, which have gained importance lately.

6 A striking example supporting this assumption is the speech George W. Bush held after the attacks of 9/11: The then-president of the United States encouraged every American to spend and travel in order to stabilize the economy which has suffered after the attack. Thus, spending money on goods and services was elevated to something more than just consumption; it became a patriotic act. Or as Juliet Schor (as quoted in Binkley and Littler, 2011, p. 50) commented on this event: "What struck me as more unusual on this occasion was the deliberate staging of the event as a piece of political PR: one whose aim was to persuade us that the newly launched 'war on terror' was to be fought not only by military means, but also in the malls and supermarkets, and we all therefore have? a duty of 'patriotic' shopping"

7 For André Gorz, information technologies are the main driver for change leading out of the "incarceration of the capitalist mega-machinery". Following his approach, information technologies provide the world with (at least the possibility of having) access to all kind of information, like ideas, designs, connections, and other resources. What used to be in the hands of capital owners solely is now available for a broad public. This is where Gorz claims lies the path to reverse the separation of the producing subject and the consuming subject (Gorz, 2011, pp. 27-29)

8 A 2011 study by Selin Atalay and Maraget Meloy with the title *Retail therapy: a Strategic Effort to Improve Mood* has found out that shopping does have a positive effect on mood and proves to be an effective mechanism to cope with negative emotions.

9 The term consumer refers in this paper to the average consumer in the Global North, with higher developed economies, if not otherwise stated. This is due to the fact that this study relies on qualitative data all gathered in Switzerland, a European country which is a profitable location to the biggest names in fast fashion retail, which are also specifically mentioned. Also, there is a great discrepancy between the

consumption patterns between the consumers in the Global North compared to the consumers in the Global South. A growing middle-class and its high standards of living are what make consumption a phenomenon outside of the range of mere sustenance. As Juliet Schor states it, excessive consumption is limited to a one third of the global population. To stay within the frame of the thesis, big players from other lucrative markets other than the European and Northern American were intentionally left out. Also, if not specified, "the consumer" here simply stands for someone who regularly purchases goods, or specifically apparel (Schor, 2001, pp. 1-3)

[10] Their German competitor, Puma, almost seemed to have disappeared from the scene being one of those brands facing such a coolness-crisis. But in 2014, they were able to win different celebrities to give their products a new lease of life. Their sneaker- and sandals collaboration with Caribbean Pop superstar Rihanna proved to be a marketing masterstroke: By collaborating with the singer, the brand re-invented old classics and sold them for a higher price with limited stock. The clue was that they also launched their own sneakers which were optically very close to the limited-edition products resulting from the collaboration, but higher in stock and lower priced. The company could even record higher selling numbers with those 'imitations'. Even though celebrity collaborations are not a guaranteed profit-maker for companies, they embody the efforts brands nowadays need to undertake to promote their goods. For this matter, see for example a recent article of *Billboard*:
http://www.billboard.com/articles/news/lifestyle/7809628/rihannas-fenty-puma-success-proves-musicians-are-the-best-influencers (accessed: 02/08/2017).

[11] 2017 Nike, Inc. Official Website
http://news.nike.com/news/air-max-it-s-not-just-a-shoe-it-s-a-revolution (accessed: 02/08/2017).

[12] Also see a press handout by consulting firm McKinsey on the topic of how brands have become more influential on the purchase decision since the purchase power of customers (in Germany) has increased. McKinsey press release of the 6th of October 2016: *Comeback der Marke als Statussymbol*. Available Online.
https://www.mckinsey.de/files/161006_pm_markenrelevanz.pdf (accessed: 22/08/2017).

[13] The more up-to-date version to lifestyle magazines is provided by internet blogs. In a digitalized sphere of commerce, as Hoskins (2016) in the following explains, they have become more crucial in corporate advertising than ever. On different channels of social media, mostly young individuals create their sphere where they display their way of living. Anyone with an internet access does have the possibility to join the world of bloggers. Having reached a great number of users, a small group of people have amounted to being a part of the lifestyle-promotion seen that cannot be thought away. They are then elevated to the status of the influencer. Many of these periodic blog entries involve or even put certain goods in the focus. And these blogs mostly do pay off by tying advertisement relations. When having started as a creative mean to display individual lifestyles, blogs have more and more become a tool for companies' interests. Bloggers get paid to promote or at least use their products in their entries. They provide the ideal mode for companies and brands to reach the public: younger generations are most likely to respond to the content of the blogs, and apparently consider those influencers to be more role-model-like than any other kind of public figures. So, whatever they decide to advertise on their platforms, there will be a number of people who will see it. It is one of the easiest ways to reach an audience, and nowadays a must for businesses that rely on advertising. Blogs on lifestyles and fashion are, in light of corporate interests, supposed to turn the 'followers' into 'buyers'.

[14] Several newspapers and online portals have noticed the sudden omnipresence of certain brands and logos which long have been 'presumed dead'. See for example the article by Piatschek, 2017: *Man zeigt wieder Logo*. Available Online (in German).
http://www.zeit.de/2017/22/modemarken-logos-trends-neunziger-jahre (accessed: 22/08/2017)

[15] Maier, J. (2016): *Warum dieses DHL-Shirt 245 Euro kostet*. Available Online.
http://www.stern.de/lifestyle/mode/dhl--warum-dieses-shirt-245-euro-kostet-6693696.html (accessed: 22/08/2017).

[16] Industria de Diseño Textil, S.A., short: *Inditex,* operates around 7'300 stores in 93 markets in all five continents. Eight different brands (Zara, Pull&Bear, Massimo Dutti, Bershka, Stradivarius, Oysho, Zara Home, Uterqüe) follow the same the same sales and management principle.

Industria de Diseno Textil, S.A. Website,
http://www.inditex.com/en/our_group/business_model (accessed: 19/04/2017).

[17] To be prepared to hold overproduction and the consequential markdowns to a minimum, Zara has the liberty (thanks to its nearby productions sites) to make short-term changes in orders, e.g. giving them the opportunity to adapt to unforeseen weather conditions (Divita & Yoo, 2013, p. 24). Many other retailers do not have the same degree of choice since usually clothing manufacturing is the main aspect which has been outsourced to further away countries, mostly to the Asian continent.

[18] According to Bruce and Daly (2006), in 2004, 75% of all clothing imports into the Global North originated in countries in the Global South.

[19] In general, there is a remarkably great distance between the headquarters of a fashion retail company and the manufacturing locations. This results in the fact that communication and logistics can be characterized through complications, which then again can result in misplaced or obsolete stock, high costs of inventory, and complex import and export procedures, and following that, unwanted reductions in price (markdowns) to lighten the stock. (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010, p. 168). The quick-response-mechanism tries to avoid these consequences as much as possible, despite the long distances the batches would have to travel, but is a matter of priority (cost v. efficiency) in the end.

[20] Generally, one can observe four re-occurring phases when trying to determine the life cycle of a fashionable item: "[...] introduction and adoption by fashion leaders; growth and increase in public acceptance; mass conformity (maturation); and finally the decline and obsolescence of fashion" (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010, p. 167).

[21] A 2009 published study by Hemphill and Suk called *The Law, Culture and Economics of Fashion* deals with the question whether fashion designs can be protected under patent law and be marked as intellectual property. Intellectual property rights mostly aim at creating consistent incentives for artists and technicians to come up with new creations. The authors nevertheless (also see. Klün, 2013) come to the conclusion that luxurious brands might have more pull when it comes to lawfully protecting their designs. But certain styles simply fall under the label of "everyday items", which simply cannot stand for itself without being similar to formerly designed items and therefore do not belong to anyone in particular. As Blumer (1969) puts it: "They pick up ideas of the past, but always through the filter of the present" (Blumer, 1969, p. 280). Thus, many brands rely on their signature marks to claim intellectual property, for example sports brand Adidas, which officially branded its well-known three stripes as a protected design.

[22] Impulsive Purchasing Behavior is identified through its unplanned character, which leads the consumer to buy on-the-spot with no previous intention of purchasing that exact item beforehand. This might be led back to an ad-hoc stimulus – time and location thus play an important role in the buying-decision. Apparently, an impulsive buy is accompanied by a strong emotional reaction, whereas a regular purchase has no or only little such character (see. (Piron, 1991)).

[23] A wool-coat for example is already available at twenty-five pounds. Retrieved from the official website of Primark, section 'Products', in July 2017.
https://www.primark.com/en/products (accessed: 25/07/2017).

[24] See. Official website of Primark Stores Ltd.
https://www.primark.com/en/homepage (accessed: 20/09/2017).

[25] According to the recent study of McKinsey, consumers primarily buy marked down clothing items. Amed,I., A. Berg, L. Brantberg and S. Hedrich (2016): The State of Fashion 2017. London: The Business of Fashion and McKinsey & Company. Available Online.
http://www.mckinsey.com/industries/retail/our-insights/the-state-of-fashion
(accessed: 15/09/2017).

[26] A fact which posed big problems to the retailing scene in Switzerland due to the strong stand of the Swiss currency, which boosted the 'shopping tourism' abroad, where partly the same merchandise was sold at a significantly lower price. For example: While a classic women's trench coat of the pre-fall

collection from 2017 at *Zara* costs 199.- Swiss Francs (206 USD), the same model goes for 159 Euros (189 USD) in German Stores. Considering an exchange rate of 1 € = 1.14 CHF (as of 04.09.2017), the consumer would pay 182.- CHF for the same model on the other side of the border, instead of a 199.- in Swiss stores. The price gets even lower when the Swiss shoppers get the value added taxes back, which is 19% in Germany. So while a Swiss consumer would pay 199.- CHF in Switzerland for the coat, they would pay about 147.- CHF for the same model across the Swiss-German border.
Example taken from the women's pre-fall collection of the official website of *Zara*:
https://www.zara.com/ch/en/woman/trench-coats-c749003.html (accessed: 04/09/2017).

[27] As a reaction to low sales numbers, many retailers see themselves forced to hand out vouchers which provide strong discount on selected items. The American tradition of strongly reduced prices on Black Friday sales were taken up in other countries as well. Other specially planned events to get to the customers are shopping events, usually after the normal closing hours, decorated with music and food, and of course, discounts. Such discounts apart from the usual markdowns have become a regular aspect of (fashion) sales.

[28] Another unpleasant aspect of low prices in the fashion stores was mentioned as well: Customers seem to react to the price reductions in rather unpleasing ways, from time to time. Apparently, the employees were handling disproportionally often, what the author of the article calls, "Sisyphean tasks" cleaning up after the chaos many customers leave behind. The author of the article observed these scenarios right before the large summer sale, where many items were already marked down.

[29] Section *Market and Expansion* on the H&M official Website.
http://about.hm.com/en/about-us/markets-and-expansion.html (accessed: 18/07/2017).

[30] The ultimate embodiment of the global character of the fashion industry is the online commerce. Thanks to the World Wide Web which has only improved in quality to connect faraway placed of the globe, fast fashion companies, like many other industries, have a strong online presence. The actuality of the constant battle between the so-called bricks-and-mortar (Moore, 2017) stores versus the online commerce (sometimes even internally) is unmissable.

[31] Quarterly report of the year 2017. H&M Official Website.
http://about.hm.com/content/dam/hmgroup/groupsite/documents/en/Presentations/2017/Press%20conference%20presentation%20%28pdf%29.pdf (accessed: 18/07/2017).

[32] The claims of the brands are also regularly counterchecked by NGO's like Greenpeace, who, among other things, publishes reports on the toxics contained by clothing items of a number of brands.
http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en/campaigns/detox/fashion/detox-catwalk/
(accessed: 23/08/2017).

[33] „The heritage and values of Esprit are about doing things right. This is why we are committed to moving towards sustainability." Quote by Esprit Retail AG CEO José Manuel Martinez Gutierrez in their sustainability report from the financial year of 2014/15, showing exemplarily how many big players within the industry see themselves obligated (due to a presumably mixed set of motivations) to at least show an effort to improve their practices regarding ecological, economic and social sustainability.
Retrieved from Esprit Holdings Limited: *Sustainability Report 2014/15*
http://www.esprit.com/press/sustainabilityreport/GRI201415.pdf (accessed: 20/04/2017).

[34] Fashion Retailer *Esprit* experienced a case where the unsold merchandise appeared again in German discounters at an extremely lower price, which must not happen, as it is arranged by contract. The brand feared an immense image loss and tried to counteract it by offering a payback, as well as vouchers to anyone returning Esprit-items bought in a discounter to the original Esprit stores (Weber, 2012).

[35] Greenpeace e.V. report *Konsumkollaps durch Fast Fashion*. January 2017.
https://www.greenpeace.de/sites/www.greenpeace.de/files/publications/s01951_greenpeace_report_konsumkollaps_fast_fashion.pdf (accessed: 04/09/2017).

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The specifics of the fast fashion industry and the consequences entailed by it were illuminated in the previous chapter. The following chapter tries to combine the foregoing analysis with the relevant theoretical notions on which my final analysis will rely on. This chapter is divided into two main parts: the first part is a crucial link between the context of capitalist commodity production and the chosen theoretical approach, in other terms trying to explain why the concept of *waste* is relevant for this approach. And the second part introduces the reader to a theoretical approach called Actor-Network-Theory.

3.1. Conceptualizing Waste

We, not only as individuals but also as collectives, are left with the self-inflicted responsibility to handle objects in unprecedented ways. Scholars like Featherstone (see. the previous chapter) even noted that we shape our lives around them. Consumption has become a lifestyle, or precisely, a culture. However, what exactly do we do as soon as we no longer connect joy to these objects, but they start to make us feel that they are out of place? When do we feel the need (wherever it may come from) to get rid of these objects? I continue my analysis from the point where we face an immense amount of things in our lives. Helpful in understanding why many have a rather peculiar relationship with objects made redundant are the works of waste scholars. *Waste* is, by its simplest definition, discarded or excess matter (Hawkins, 2005). It can either be reused, or needs to be disposed once and for all, but in any case, needs to be dealt with. Most of all, it is always a by-product: Actions are not carried out to produce waste in the first place (Bennett, 2004, p. 350).

Analyses on waste grow in number[1]; and become more and more crucial in the understanding of the challenging side-effects of advanced capitalist societies[2]. The remainder of the chapter gives an introduction to a number of them. These elaborations are bound to make clear how we move in a sphere where we are torn between taking responsibility of the consequences of our lifestyle and the wish to create a distance to our previous actions. While on the one hand these objects bring some sort of fulfilment, over time, they most often turn into a burden; we need to take care of them. The following segments shall illuminate more how the process of devaluation can look like.

By looking at waste I do not follow the intention to explain how every kind of waste emerges, since it is a topic of many facets. Neither is the concept of waste fully representative for this study, for the material objects in the focus of this thesis do not face the same destiny as waste does by definition. Although it will do so eventually, this thesis zooms in on the steps after the production and before the fate of being labelled as waste in the end. But it will still draw on some of the thoughts provided by waste-scholars, since they follow a similar direction to what this study ambitions to show.

3.1.1. The Devaluation of Objects

Waste represents the embodiment of subjective devaluation of goods. Even though the concept of waste alone has vastly negative connotations, the lifestyles of the Global North indirectly encourage or at least tolerate the excessive yet unintended production of waste. The freedom to purchase any good also comes with the implication of a certain freedom to discard the things that are too much, regardless of the state of these "superfluous" objects (Hawkins, 2005). Although a remarkably great part of the emergence of waste often is a result of a choice of private individual and household consumption, it is, as Gille (2010) interposes, often not the end-consumer who can be held accountable for making waste exist in the first place. The act of consuming, like any other action, barely ever comes with the intention to produce waste, since in most cases there is not much choice of what other material (e.g. packaging) one must take to be able to purchase the actual product. While this is one aspect of commodity consumption the end-consumer does not have much saying on, another source of waste-emergence lies mostly in the hands of the consumer.

The foregoing chapter (Chapter Two: Contextual Background) has illuminated how a powerful strand of commodity production and circulation in the Global North looks like, and that there are certain incentives to intentionally shorten the life-cycle, or even more aptly formulated, the usage-cycle of an object of everyday use. But the complex co-enforcement of demand of new products and their supply make it easier than ever to replace and dispose older purchases. As Bennett formulates it: "In other words, the sheer volume of products, and the necessity of junking them to make room for new ones, devalues the thing" (Bennett, 2004, p. 350). Producing more and more in shorter time cycles leaves 'the thing' to fall victim to being labeled as redundant in no time. Hence, the concept of waste can be seen as a "derivative of the concept of value" (Gille, 2010, p. 1049). Its devaluation happens relationally: nothing is waste in its nature; it will be waste if it loses other purposes or has served its time. As Gille elaborates on this matter: "The question remains how waste becomes waste, materially, socially and spatially, and how it is eventually transformed regarding use and value. Waste is always a result of social and economic relations, but with his specific characteristics always constitutes society, through its production, consumption, circulation and metamorphosis" (Gille, 2010, p. 1050). In its very nature, waste is thus not only produced by society but also co-producing society. Waste has the ability to guide many of our actions to move around it, particularly with the rising amounts of goods we are surrounded by. Waste can appear in different forms, shapes, sizes and amounts. It can be risky, hazardous or simply too much. But it can also take a specific role for and within society, depending on its definition. Things are classified as waste when someone decides that they have lost a use value, meaning that they want to get rid of a connection to it. The decision making process of labeling something as waste is complex and also individual. Another way how objects display human interests and strategies becomes visible when deciding that an object's value is exhausted (Hawkins, 2005, p. 79)[3]. Apparently, something is not only considered useless only as soon it is damaged – shifts in value can already happen before that. In the sense of Bourdieu, Gregson sees a connection between a person's identity and their decision to throw certain things away, if said things do not correspond to the perceived self anymore (Gregson, Metcalfe, & Crewe, 2007, pp. 4-5). The demise of an object does not automatically lead to its futility, but it does lead to its devaluation. Consequently, objects do not have an intrinsic value in this sense – their valuation is being imposed upon them.

3.1.2. The Circulation of Waste

Waste is not something one wants – it is most often the bothering, unwanted outgrowth of a pleasant act. Despite a sense of inevitability surrounding it, waste, especially in countries of the Global North, can be made disappear easier than ever before. Clapp (2002) locates the apparent distant relationship of the waste-producers and the waste itself in the global economic inequality. Byproducts are in the way and always need to be taken care of, which is bothering capitalist relations to reproduce (Moore, 2012, p. 790). Waste disposal nowadays takes place on a global scale, which implies that certain consumers and producers lose track of their waste-products – geographically and mentally (Clapp, 2002, p. 3). Waste, just like traded commodities, circulates around the globe. The Global South often serves as a 'sink' for what is too much in the North – the result of a disproportionate share of produced goods of the two spheres (Claudio, 2007, p. 453). Or as Hawkins states it: "waste habits [are] informed by relations marked by distance, disposability and denial" (Hawkins, 2005, p. 16).[4] Even though we might have an idea about how the items we use in our everyday life are produced, we do not feel emotionally tied to the labor behind the production, and consequently to the item itself and its destiny as waste. This is why Clapp sees the non-ceasing consumption, but also production and thus the rise in the amount of waste as a logical consequence (Clapp, 2002, p. 21) – something Hawkins goes as far as to call it a "global waste crisis" (Hawkins, 2005, p. 5). The undesirable byproduct becomes someone else's task to handle. But no matter which party is responsible for the management of the disposal of waste, the capacity to allocate the amounts of waste (of nature and society alike) is limited. Growing landfills are the consequence of an economic system which not only relies heavily on consumption, but also on disposability (Hawkins, 2005, p. 2).

3.1.3. The Strategy of Built-in- or Style-Obsolescence

And this is where the producers' role comes in. When goods which are meant to last for longer time periods[5] are 'used up' in a very short time, one could discern the phenomenon of so-called *built-in-obsolescence* (Gorz, 2011; Gregson & Crang, 2010; Whiteley, 1987) the intentionally fueled short usability of a product.[6] Through the introduction of small, but decisive new features, the old-generation-items are no longer able to meet the needs of the consumer. They lose their appeal by not being new and forward anymore. The main purpose of releasing a good with a short life-cycle is to generate quicker demand for new products. To remain competitive, many companies invest in shorter product durability but higher frequencies of new products launched, with the newest product always being slightly more innovative than the ones before (Whiteley, 1987, p. 3). The appeal of the new products is usually strong enough to replace the older model. "Consumer goods, then, can become unwanted things, as well as troublesome or ambivalent presences in our homes. Examples include unworn clothing, or 'old' but still functioning technologies such as video recorders and first generation mobile phones" (N. Gregson et al., 2007, p. 5). Fashion trends for example are adapted and abandoned in a much higher pace, as elaborated in *Chapter Two: Contextual Background*, which leads the firms to only be humbly innovative within the short timeframe given, but those innovations being efficient in terms of sales numbers (Joy, et al., 2012, p. 276).[7] In fashion, design combined with low prices is often more influential on a purchase-decision than quality. As Whiteley (1987) says: "By giving a product a fashionable appearance, the designer was virtually guaranteeing it would look old fashioned in two or three years' time […]". The justification from the part of the producer, so Whiteley (1987, pp. 3, 7), is that "the public demands it". Apparently, fast fashion suppliers even "advertise" their products with the benchmark of ten washes, after which the item will no longer be of original quality (which could be led back to the quality of the fabric used and the way the item was assembled) (Divita & Yoo, 2013, p. 11; Fletcher, 2010, p. 262; Joy, Sherry, Venkatesh, Wang, & Chan, 2012, p. 283). André Gorz (2011, p. 23) sees here the main medium for "capital owners" to gain profit: a perceived accelerated obsolescence combined with little possibility to repair the product. According to Whiteley (1987, p. 8), obsolescence is a part of consumerism, originating in the "American way of design", which by now has found place in other societies as well.

3.1.4. Theories of Waste Embedded in Social Theories

The greater thought and importance behind waste-analysis, especially in this case, is to close the circle of consumption-analysis by including the disposal of items: As Hawkins puts it, in all the discourses that surround consumption there is "a cavalier disregard for all the wasted things that form an enormous part of this way of living. […] it is crucial

[…] to acknowledge that how we eliminate things is just as important as how we acquire them." (Hawkins, 2005, p. 15). He adds that consumer culture or consumer capitalism is not solely the root behind our waste habits, but that it shapes a significant part of our understanding of what is waste and what not. Gregson et al. name it a "charged act" which displays like no other the "ethics of care" and the "moralities of practice" of an individual, but also a whole culture, namely what the authors call the culture of the *throwaway society* (Gregson, et al., 2007, p. 4), (also *throwaway culture* in Whiteley 1987), which in their words is "a society ceaselessly discarding and abandoning its surplus as excess, as part of an endless desire for the new" (Gregson, et al., 2007, p. 18). To use the term in the author's sense means to be cautious not to equate it with a wasting society: throwing away in this sense – but also for the purpose of this specific study – means that things are being get rid of, which then again means that they equal waste in the sense how we defined it in the beginning of the chapter, but not that said objects will end up in the dumpster. Many consumption goods historically do not inhere a short usability (like e.g. packaging or hygiene-goods do) "they include some of the most iconic instances of the connections between contemporary consumption and imperatives to waste" (Gregson, et al., 2007, p. 3). She adds that the "unbecoming", the act of being considered waste or that this unbecoming world is the world on which our comfortable lives depend" (Gregson & Crang, 2010, pp. 1030-1031). Disposing essentially represents a way to clean, array and make room for new things, more useful and pleasant things, which bring new value to the whole. In the beginning of an industrialized epoch, it was even considered to be "progressive" and productive, or the secondary outcome of a creative process (Hawkins & Muecke, 2002, pp. x, 28). But in the meantime, it has merely become an unpleasant truth. "It is fundamental to the logic of economy. Loss, waste and the unproductive are anti-economic. They disturb the logic of general positivity that […] is what defines an economy. The production of positive value, gain or benefit." (Hawkins & Muecke, 2002, p. xii). Waste, thus, sticks in the craw of capitalist economies albeit it being one of the most natural outcomes of its logic. Clapp (2002) although sees a chance here where the capitalist system can make profit again out of the opportunity: The industry of waste-disposal is also indulging economic activity by cleaning up after others (Clapp, 2002, p. 15), and can hence capitalize of the rather unpleasant aspect of waste-disposal.

3.1.5. Defining Surplus Material[8]

The term waste cannot be applied offhand to this analysis. This type of study demanded a term for a group of items which needs to be sorted out, but not yet annihilated from the surface. That is where I use the term *surplus material* (Gille, 2010). Surplus material can be interpreted as neither purely social, nor fully material – it does not fit into the dichotomy of social and material. It only has the status of being "surplus" when a human being decides that it is abundant or not of use anymore. It thus reflects a more complex ontology (Castree, 2002, p. 118). Surplus material in form of abundant material can hence be seen as having its own saying in a very much human-created state, but partly constituted by other physical but inanimate actors. This is what Gille (2010) also calls *sociomaterial assemblages* (Gille, 2010, p. 1149). "A [...] reason to use such a broad definition is to leave open the opportunity to demonstrate the material and social consequences of one type of waste material metamorphosing into another as it traverses the circuits of production, distribution, consumption, reclamation, and `annihilation'" (Gille, 2010, p. 1150). Surplus material follows certain cultural narratives of value and usability which determine its status as such. It is not yet a useless output when still moving within the frames of being just surplus. For the sake of a capitalist production mode, surplus material (just like waste) is considered a "necessary evil", an aspect which, in some form or another, comes hand in hand with the imperative of growth. But just like waste, surplus material provokes a reaction, it is one sort of materiality which cannot do anything else but to make us deal with it, form attitudes towards it and then act accordingly. Waste and surplus material management, as well as reduction, have become a global mission (Hawkins, 2005). Excess material can restrict us or force us to make an extra effort to handle it. "They are, in short, transitional goods, on the way to becoming of rubbish value (Thompson 1979 in N. Gregson, et al., 2007, p. 4).

There is barely any research to be found evolving specifically around the term surplus material. And the few studies, or rather descriptions within studies, do not provide us with much guidance when it comes to point out what surplus material exactly consists of. But again, this can be taken as an advantage in the sense that the researcher making use of the term is freer to rely on their own specification. The definition of surplus material as applied in this study is very brief: the body of material objects which are "too much", need to be moved or dealt with in specific ways, but in all cases have to leave the place they are at a specific point in time. Crucial is the point that they – at the point of analysis – are not (yet) labeled as waste and hence will not (yet) be introduced to the waste-stream. Deployed onto my object of interest, *surplus material is everything that needs to be sorted out 'pre-consumption': all the apparel within a store which is damaged, unusable, or simply cannot be sold to the end-consumer and will be sent away to a defined destination, like another store, a stockroom, an outlet store or a charity organization*.

3.2. Introducing: Actor-Network-Theory

3.2.1. Introduction

For a long time, material artefacts and other non-human objects were not an object of focus in social sciences. They were only considered as tokens or results of social relations – Marx, for example, considered them in terms of commodities only valuable in economic exchange, and for Bourdieu, objects were embodiments of the different sorts of capital (Dolwick, 2009, p. 35). Meanwhile the presence of artificial objects rose, and certain scholars thus felt a need to re-address the relationship between the material and the social world. Here is where the scholars of the Science and Technology Studies come in: While Technology Studies as well as Social Sciences are characterized by a more or less deterministic notion of how their object of research is shaped, the Science and Technology Studies were keen on tying both theories together (Kneer, 2009, p. 19). For example, technological studies identified changes in technology as a result of mere technological processes themselves, without paying much attention to the impact of the social surrounding in which these changes were bound to happen. Social sciences, on the other hand, argued that technological changes must be traced back to social factors as their drivers. French sociologist Bruno Latour was among the first attempting to bring the two together[9]. He analyses how networks are built between society and technology, and argues that there is no longer a clearly separable sphere of action of the two. Material and generally non-human things are being integrated as active participants in the social and not only as bystanders who only inhere meaning but no agency (Müller, 2015b, p. 66). That is where the *Actor-Network-Theory* – or short: ANT – comes in. The ANT proposes a connection between both, the social and the material, and dismisses therefore a purely social or technological determinism. But the effects of this theory reach far further than within the rather limited frames of the Science and Technology Studies. The Actor-Network-Theory has taken hold in various disciplines of social science thanks to its rather radical position of how the social is constituted (ibid.). It is popular also in studies related to geography since it often tackles questions about the relation between the social and the natural, the role of technology, topics concerning distances and scales and the emergence of power (Müller, 2015a, p. 30). Traded commodities and their effects of other 'beings', like in the example of this study, are of great interest for the field of economic geography (Müller, 2015b, p. 81).

3.2.2. About Actors…

Through the eyes of ANT, social networks are not only formed between human agents – called *actors* – but are also built and maintained by different kinds of non-human agents, like natural and artificial objects, the so-called *actants*. And the idea behind introducing a distinction in language between actors and actants is to make evident that agents come in different shapes and that the idea of introducing products of culture and nature is rather new and should gain attention as a (or even *the*) distinctive trait of ANT.

Within the connections they will build over time, both groups of agents can be equally influential, higher and more influential positions and hence structures of power develop over time (Gille, 2010, p. 1053). Unlike the common notion that human actors are the only ones capable of executing actions, this particular perspective regards actions more as a result of complex, non-transparent processes involving parties which are previously undefined.
One single actor never acts completely on his own: Actors are driven into action by other actors, and are not capable of leading the direction of an action completely by themselves (Kneer, 2009, p. 22). Every action will be influenced by certain actors acting together. Nevertheless, this theoretical approach does not operate with the dichotomies of subject-object or action-structure as it is common within other social sciences (Kneer, 2009, p. 20).

Within ANT, everyday objects have gained an important stance in the how the world is composed. Latour, for example, was wondering himself, why the inclusion of objects and their actions should be of interest to a social scientist. This concern arises, according to Latour, when one pays attention to the fact how up until that point the term "social" was constructed and defined, as well as the features of agents, and how agency can be obtained in the first place. Actions have defined as a phenomenon that can only be executed by 'intentional' humans with meaningful purposes. Thus it is not surprising that the mere idea of objects having agency probably never crossed a social scientist's mind. ANT stood by its – what was back then – radical notion that "*any thing* (sic!) that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference is an actor or, if it has no figuration yet, an actant" (Latour, 2005, p. 71; highlight in original). The answer to whether a thing or a person is an actor can be detected easily by reflecting on the following question: "Does it make a difference in the course of some other actor or not?" (Latour, 2005, p. 71). Latour then asks the reader to imagine certain tasks like zapping TV without a remote or walking on the streets without clothing with the absence of the respective objects, and thereby sees his point proven by pointing out that said objects participate in the daily actions of human beings.[10] But an actor is never exclusively material or human – a humanly created object always bears the imprints of his maker, and is a product of their relations. Within these networks, all actors are somewhat hybrids in their existence (Couldry, 2006, pp. 103, 110).

A crucial addition to the elaborations of ANT is that one cannot place the cause of an action within an object – they still do not have the capacity of having intentions. Objects hence never cause actions, but might encourage them by simply being there, or facilitate, influence or block them. It is often mentioned that one should not assume that there is an absolute symmetry and equality between human and non-human actors. Even though a non-hierarchical structure is proposed, Latour often emphasizes the incommensurability of the engaged actors and actants (Latour, 2005, p. 77). One instructive example to clarify this claim could be that objects are never held accountable for their "actions". The concept of ANT therefore accredits interests to an object, which is one of the more controversial aspects of the theory, but can be easily dissolved when simply regarding the interest which is inscribed to the non-human actant by human actors (Sarker, Sarker, & Sidorova, 2006, p. 53). Or as David Harvey puts it: "If things seem to have a life of their own, then it is only because they internalize political economic power" (Harvey, 1996, in Castree, 2002, p. 131). But it is still not rendered a passive entity: as Bennett (2004) explains it: "A thing has by virtue of its operating in conjunction with other things" (Bennett, 2004, p. 354). A crucial extension to our theoretical approach, which enables us not only to talk about the (non-inherent) interest of an actant, but also how it at most counteracts the interests that were ascribed to it originally.

3.2.3. …and Networks

But how do these different actors decide to align their interests in order to collaborate? The main tool at this point is the result of numerous interactions in which actors engage. Those *Networks*, they eventually will be embedded in, emerge through interactions and navigations through different agents whereby each agent eventually is placed in a role, even though this role can change over time (Müller, 2015a, p. 31). Networks hence are, in simple words, the connections between the different actors in question (Kneer, 2009, p. 24). This again means that outside of networks there are no actors – they only come to life by being involved in a network, and their role will be defined through the unique characterization of each network. „It is an association between entities which are in no way recognizable as being social in the ordinary manner, *except* during the brief moment when they are reshuffled together" (Latour, 2005). Hence, from the perspective of ANT, actors alone do not possess intrinsic qualities or interests, but networks do. This process of network-building, network-renegotiation and network-dissolution is summarized under the term *translation* (Carroll, Richardson, & Whelan, 2012, p. 55; Kneer, 2009, p. 25).[11] After a successful translation a stable network emerges, where every involved party's role is defined and is also binding, at least for a certain period of time. Networks are not subject to a terminology where one could speak of a geographic or spatial shaping – networks do not show signs of an inside or an outside, they come to life through mere connections. An often utilized differentiation in social sciences between the micro- and the macro sphere only serves in the light of ANT as to show how stable a network is (Fine, 2005, p. 95; Kneer, 2009, p. 26), and does not give any information about the 'size' of a network.

3.2.4. Applying Actor-Network-Theory

ANT is insofar interesting for research purposes as it offers a method for analysis which relies on very little prerequisites or assumptions. It foregoes to offer a fully developed tool to analyze empirical phenomena. Instead in its merely descriptive nature, there is plenty of room for the researcher to study and interpret every object of research individually (Kneer, 2009, p. 21). It is the ANT's main advantage and disadvantage alike. The independence and, also to some extent, creativity of the researcher is demanded when applying the ANT as a tool to perform an analysis. That is why ANT demands you to observe and describe repeatedly, simply to be able to point out as many actors and interactions as possible. This is why it is also sometimes called a *Follow the Actor* approach (Carroll, et al., 2012, p. 62). In general, the concept of the word *theory* is not fully applicable to ANT in the traditional sense: Since ANT is more a method of looking at a specific issue, the distinction between theory and methodology is more or less redundant in this context, which makes it a highly empirical approach. To gain an inside perspective to a certain phenomenon, ANT relies on ethnomethodological approaches which pursue to create accounts on how agents deal with everyday situations. Hence there is a consent on that the involved actors mainly are aware of what they are doing and that they are doing it, with their own perspectives and explanations – the researcher then needs to understand why they are doing what they are doing (Kneer, 2009, p. 27). Even though the few existing restrictions in general are not that strict, following Kneer (2009), there are three conceptual specifications which need to be followed when doing research with ANT. The first criterion, *agnosticism*, wants the researcher of a network not only to remain independent in a scientific sense of truth claims, but also in a sense where the researcher does not predetermine who is involved in a network and which actors are relevant. Second, with the norm of *free association*, ANT requires not to make assumptions about who or what interacts with whom or what, but to perceive the shape of all the actors involved as they are. Third, a *generalized symmetry* needs to be assured, meaning that the researcher should make use of a single terminology no matter of which nature the phenomenon they want to describe actually *is*. In other terms, there should be no different conceptualizations to describe cultural, natural or technical processes, entailing that a new taxonomy is created or old ones are newly interpreted (Kneer, 2009, p. 21). All of these elaborations mandate the researcher to use a very simplistic terminology and to abandon previous categorizations. This is why the results of an ANT analysis are supposed to be nothing more than descriptions of how networks come to exist and how the interactions within a network look like at a given moment in time. Clearly the logical conclusion that anything can have an impact on anything else leads us to an immensely complex network consisting of markedly heterogeneous actors. Intuitively, there is no possibility of portraying them all in equal proportions in a network-analysis, so there comes the liberty of the researcher to pin down the main drivers and most influential actors of a network (Dolwick, 2009, p. 42).

Latour finds that a good Actor-Network-Analysis is one where all the involved actors don’t just exist, but where they actually act in a certain ways and “do something”, (Latour, 2005, p. 128) which has the aim to make clear in what ways they can be named as relevant actors to one network. This of course should be handled with the awareness that a network is never something static. It is, as Latour mentions, not a tangible thing, but merely a concept of something that first needs to be made visible to appear in this shape (Latour, 2005, p. 131). Neither is it possible to depict the relationships or the full network graphically or visually, since such a figure would be drastically simplifying and eventually could make no valuable claims about the true characteristics of a network.

Latour uses this somewhat peculiar, but illuminating metaphor to explain this thought: "A network is not made of nylon thread, words or any durable substance […]. You can hang your fishnets to dry, but can't hang an actor-network" (Latour, 2005, p. 132). The actual dynamics of a network are usually extensively complex, but nevertheless reducible to the main drivers. And what counts is to make those main drivers evident, by using the ANT as a tool to describe them meticulously and pay respect to the agency of certain actors which otherwise could be overseen.

Specific examples of studies making use of ANT often look into the matter of success, or failure as a result of network-building, or examine power-relations within networks, where certain orders are given to follow a specific set of interests (Carroll, et al., 2012, p. 56). The matter of power however is one of the ANT's main fields of interest. Power-structures can be established or grow more stable over time through interactions, or through so-called *inscriptions*. Carroll et al. list examples like user regulations, employee contracts, policies or other types of standards as specific forms of inscriptions. They often are a form of regulation which limit certain actors' access to power (Carroll, et al., 2012, p. 59). Inscriptions provide the actors with specified and detailed content about the role they are expected to take on, but which also make clear what the aim of the respective relationship appears to be and by whom the rules are imposed. The essence of inscriptions is that they are often not contestable after being agreed on.

3.2.5. Critique

As one can see, the terms *Actor*, *Network* and also even *Theory* are dissembled and stitched back together in a new sense for the purpose of this perspective. This immediately makes room for critique, especially due to ANT's claim to be able to replace existing social theories by not relying on broader social premises at all. The openness of the ANT could perhaps also be pointed out through negatively assessed terms like that the theory lacks substance, is deliberately vague or that it is incoherent (Couldry, 2006, p. 102). While its anti-essentialist notion is its absolute strength, its object of research is nevertheless only to be found at a level where interactions take place; the individual, especially the human individual with their ability to act intentionally, does not enjoy great attention within this theoretical framework (Fine, 2005, p. 95). Humans are "leveled down", while objects and things in nature are "leveled up" (Castree, 2002, p. 121). Eschewing the ability of human actors to have greater intentions as well as disparate prerequisites, ANT neglects other influences of mainly humanly nature, like race, class, gender, etc. (Müller, 2015a, p. 30). There is no sole micro or macro, there is not just the actor or the network, there is only the actor-network (Fine, 2005, p. 95). And neither is there a place for the uniqueness of human relationships and consciousness, leaving out the material for once. Describing a network is the main tool to have access to this reality proposed by ANT. It is proposed that it shall be described until a point of saturation is reached. Nevertheless, it is unclear to tell when this saturated point is reached. Even though ANT-theorists provide us with a useful vocabulary to assess the task, there is no clear instruction on how to interpret or categorize the visible aspects of a network (Carroll, et al., 2012, p. 65). Which actants should be included or excluded is not predefined, since any actants are considered equally important at the point of starting the research (Dolwick, 2009, p. 39). This renders ANT objects of analysis often to a matter of randomness and choice by whomever the research is performed (Fine, 2005, p. 96). Notwithstanding the critique, for this study, the explanatory value of the ANT shall be considered as given for the purpose of this study.

With these elaborations of Actor-Networks and Waste theories in mind, I would like to understand how fashion items can have agency, how they affect people in their actions and how they are dealt with. With a steady production of always newly introduced objects in the economic circulation in mind, clothing items need to be handled non-stop. Leaning on the previously defined research questions, I am for one interested in the practices surrounding clothing material in general and surplus material in particular. Also, I want to see whether the multitude of clothing options have an impact on their valuation. The body of clothing is hence given agency and an important stance in this matter.
The results of this analysis, and the character of surplus material in this light, are to be specified in 'Chapter Six: Results' But to be able to do so, a suitable research concept has to be applied. The following chapter shall illuminate how this idea will be implemented.

Annotations

[1] See for example Jennifer Clapp's article *Distancing of Waste: Overconsumption in a Global Economy* (2002), *the Culture of Waste: Creation and Destruction of Value* by Gay Hawkins & Stephen Muecke (2003), Gay Hawkins 2005 book *The Ethics of Waste – How we relate to Rubbish*, or articles by Zsuzsa Gille (*Actor Networks, Waste Regimes and Modes of Production*, 2010) or Gregson et al. (*Identity, Mobility and the Throwaway Society*, 2007).

[2] *Advanced capitalist societies* is a broad term, originated in the Frankfurt School, describing societies where capitalism has been established profoundly and has been the imperative for a very long time. Often synonymously used to "developed" or "industrialized" nations, or nations of the "Global North" (O'Conner, 1970, p. 3).

[3] Like that, if an object transcends its primary use, and will be sorted out, not for disposal purposes, but to be recycled, the, what originally was a used object, regains value in being given a new purpose. It is an emblem of the morality of humans in their interactions with waste. While the object faces a new destiny as a potential resource, the waste-producer receives the opportunity to construct a new identity for themselves, not as a waster anymore, but as a recycler, a moral compass for his environment. "Recycling, then, is a good example of the fact of *multiple* economies – monetary, personal, and moral – and the complex transactions between them" (Hawkins, 2005, p. 95; emphasis in the original).

[4] Put in a very simplistic manner, this phenomenon can be led back to the long-known and well-explained shift from use value to exchange value. People as consumers do not produce the things they use, and need to acquire them in exchange of something else. Karl Marx has called this change in order *estrangement* (Hawkins, 2005, p. 28).

[5] The German term *Gebrauchsgegenstand* fits here perfectly: describing everyday objects which are meant to last for a long time before being replaced (e.g. furniture). They stand opposite to the so-called *Verbrauchsgegenstand*, which are meant to be worn off in significantly shorter time periods (e.g. cosmetics).

[6] Whiteley (1987) on the emergence and acceptance of quick obsolescence: Obsolescence was not only accepted by the fashion-conscious young, often it was positively celebrated. An awareness of the role, meaning and significance of expendability is, therefore, crucial to a full understanding of 1960s' culture. But 'style obsolescence' was not a 1960s' invention: it can be traced directly back to the 'high mass-consumption' stage of post-Second World War consumerist America, and has its origins even earlier in the century (Whiteley, 1987, p. 3).

[7] This might appear in merely slight differences: a regular blue jean will be replaced with the almost same model but a different hemline – the old one thus is not at the fashion forefront anymore and the new design will be added to the individual's closet. "The feature could be as simple as the introduction of a loose fit in jeans after a period when skinny jeans were everywhere. But among the looser jeans available there can be a nearly infinite variety of combinations of cuts and colors, and so on" (Hemphill & Suk, 2009, p. 1167).

[8] Note that the here defined concept of surplus material is not the same as *Surplus Product*, a concept often used by Karl Marx describing goods that are produced that exceed the minimum of sustenance. Surplus Material as well describes overproduction, but only in the perspective of one store.

[9] See for example his introductory work *Reassembling the Social* (2005).

[10] For this instance, Latour comes up with a widely discussed issue, namely the ambiguous relationship between a person and a weapon. In the ongoing discussion about whether it is people who kill other people or the weapon, Latour states that none of the actors alone could cause another living being's death – the responsibility is one that must be shared among all of the actors. Neither the person nor the weapon is capable of acting in a certain way on their own – one encourages the other in one way or another. "A good citizen becomes a criminal, a bad guy becomes a worse guy; a silent gun becomes a fired gun, a new gun becomes a used gun, a sporting gun becomes a weapon" (Latour (2000) in Kneer, 2009, p. 30). The gun-toting person hence represents an Actor-Network (Dolwick, 2009, p. 39).

[11] The act of translation is assembled through four singular but intertwining steps: the *problematization*-phase serves to identify the initial situation and all the agents which could be involved. Within the phase of the so-called *interessement*, the main aim is to mobilize the actors to renegotiate their interests to solve a newly emerged issue which was defined in the foregoing phase. During the third phase, which is the *enrolment*-phase, it will be evident whether or not the agents are all willing to cooperate, and possible difficulties or conflicts should be put aside. The final phase, called *mobilization*, is where the agents decide to turn their agreement with the issue into active participation (Carroll, et al., 2012, p. 55; Kneer, 2009, p. 25).

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The following chapter introduces the reader to the methods applied to gather and analyze the resulting data on how fast fashion sales employees evaluate the practices and valuation surrounding surplus material. After an introduction to the process of finding an appropriate topic and the methodology, the different stages of the fieldwork shall be highlighted.

4.1. Defining the Research Agenda

To able to gain a different perspective on the current mode of apparel circulation, this thesis is bound to take on a non-prominent approach by putting the spotlight on a link of the supply chain which has not received much attention yet. The idea emerged from myself being an insider having worked in the analyzed field for several years which led her attention to rather unknown phenomena to outsiders to this work-field. Since the focus lies on fashion retail stores and how they are affected by current fashion retail modes, the aim is to make visible how these phenomena are remembered and discussed by the people directly involved in the material-store-employee-relationship.

This intent calls for a qualitative approach, which is the most adequate way to undertake such a project, as it shall be explained in the following. To be precise, I will rely on a constructivist method, simply to make evident how certain, well-known phenomena are experienced through a particular point of view and become naturalized (Waitt, 2010, p. 218). As Gabrielli et al (2010, p. 210) see it: "[qualitative methods are] more effective in focusing on the experiential and socio-cultural dimensions of consumption, [which are] not fully accessible through experiments, surveys or database modelling." A researcher adapts a qualitative method mainly to be able to gain a perspective on how subjective realities are constructed (Helfferich, 2009, p. 21), and to see how a personal logic and "sense" draws through one's perception. Unlike quantitative methods which steady themselves on numbers and with the aim to *measure* results to create a picture of the general, a qualitative approach comes in handy when the goal is to *understand* the characteristics of the particular. This form of data-collection hence focuses much on how individually differing perceptions are verbally brought to life. How a person sees and interprets reality is never objective in this sense – it is always already formed and constructed. Even though the statements are usually dependent on the specific situation of interaction, also an interaction within an interview, the results are never arbitrary (Helfferich, 2009, p. 22). People understand the world around them individually, marked by their past and present, and qualitative studies want to "understand how they understand" (Helfferich, 2009, p. 22). Thus there is a special form of data required to work with, namely transcripts of recorded interviews as a display of a narrative. The quality of the collected data hence is shaped by the precision and careful conduct of the interview.

4.2. Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

Discourse Analysis is an appropriate method in order to focus on a relationship which has not been the center of attention many times. Especially the actors involved have rather gone "unnoticed" despite their being the closest to the actual items in question. Therefore it seems appropriate to give those individuals a voice to point out their reality about a phenomenon that science and public has taken up on with many perspectives other than said actors' point of view.
The work of mainly Waitt (2010) will lead my way through the analysis of the material at hand.

Waitt defines discourse analysis as a mean to "identify the sets of ideas, or discourses, to make sense of the world within particular social and temporal contexts" (Waitt, 2010, p. 217). Waitt relies his description of discourse analysis on the ideas of French philosopher Michel Foucault, who himself used a very idiosyncratic notion of the term 'discourse', which makes itself felt through the fact that there is no consistent definition of the term, at least not by him. He noted that his work was "incomplete, preliminary and containing plenty of unanswered questions and unsolved problems" (Foucault, 1974, as cited in Keller, 2013, p. 29). Nevertheless, a discourse in the Foucauldian sense is, broadly put, something that indicates the "production and circulation of knowledge" (Waitt, 2010, p. 218). The understanding of the way an idea about reality has emerged and has been naturalized over time is what thrives so-called constructionist scholars like Foucault. Wodak and Meyer (2009, p. 5) handle the term discourse as a social practice. "Describing discourse as social practice implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s), which frame it […]", meaning that discourse is not only built through social circumstances, but also that itself constitutes the social. By providing this bipartite characteristic, it causes the status quo to be sustained and held up, but also helps analyzing and rebuilding it. One main key feature of doing discourse analysis is to make existing power-relations evident, for it reveals relationships between different groups of people and individual identities alike. As Waitt puts it: "[Foucault] saw discourse as subtle forms of social control and power" (Waitt, 2010, p. 225). Certain methods of discourse analysis emphasize on how discourse serves as a mean to form power-relations in the first place and how these are abided by the ruling, as well as the ruled. Discourse is often dominated by those who possess power or are given the benefit of having more authority over "the truth"[1], implying that certain voices are favored over others. It is thus important to give certain actors the power to talk about how they perceive the same events, also for the sake of making certain inconsistencies, namely contradictions within the analyzed material or within the general discourse, evident. Although they will follow a tenor, the content of the texts are never one-dimensional: Every individual has the ability to uncover meanings and power relations by unveiling their personal experiences. Ergo, society, the way it appears in its current shape, is a result of how it is conversed about. The social and the discourse about it are not identical. Discourse analysis simply provides one limited point of view to a phenomenon or to reality per se (Keller, 2013, p. 32). It merely, especially in this case, describes how certain groups of people handle and perceive certain events and circumstances. According to Müller (2005) the connection between Foucault and our previously discussed theoretical framework, the Actor-Network-Theory, is an obvious one. Citing one of the ANT pioneers John Law, apparently, actor-networks display in some ways Foucault's discourse (Müller, 2015, p. 36). With both works engaging in reflections about power-relations, this tie is not farfetched. Discourse-analytical explanations extend the meaning of language in ANT-based studies.

Discourse Analysis does not offer a set of tools on how to gather data for one's project, it mainly collects different ideas from which different, but in the core similar research questions can be extracted (Waitt, 2010, p. 219; Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 27). Though it leaves room for the author to elaborate their own set of linguistic codes to base the analysis on, it also is vague to some degree. Thus, it is highly stressed that the analysis must follow a strictly logical strand. Foucault himself refused to offer a predefined set of methods arguing that a pre-given template could be too reductionist (Waitt, 2010, p. 219), which renders discourse analysis a matter of intuition and practice.

Discourse analysis was chosen for the purpose to make it evident how the selected group of people perceives reality and how their manner of talking about it reveals how it affects them in their everyday lives. It is ideal to make subjective perceptions of reality visible, without being tied to a strict interpretation mechanism. "Unlike hermeneutic methods, discourse analysis tries to point out patterns and strands about practices and experiences which emerge within different sources of text or talk" (Müller, 2015, p. 36). Interview transcripts are thus a common and valid source of information to perform a discourse analysis. Therefore, interviews were planned and organized.

The author must always acknowledge that they do not stand outside of their research. Discourse Analysis recognizes that the researcher is always part of the research. As an insider, I am privileged to have a broad knowledge about the mechanisms in a fashion as a prerequisite. Nevertheless, each author has to make up their mind about the shape their work will eventually assume, and therefore is an integral part of the analysis. Crucial is to keep in mind that the duty of a researcher applying discourse analysis is not to seek a single truth; to analyze discourse means to understand how one particular discourse came to be the narrative. Therefore, by making use of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis I want to answer a specific question, namely *how do sales people talk about the valuation and practices surrounding surplus material?* A conversation around this topic shall also make clear how certain practices came to be naturalized, and hence reveal orders of power and submissiveness. In order to be able to answer this question, I then had to develop an adequate method of data-collection.

4.3. Interviews & Field Work

Discourse Analysis has the unique ability to analyze how singular notions came to solidify into a strand of meaning that came to be the narrative. For this purpose, one needs to look into all the statements made at one specific point of time. For the frame of this study, I have decided to focus on the source of interview transcripts as the main tool for analysis.

4.3.1. Semi-structured Narrative Interviews

Narrative interviews are one of the most commonly used methods for a research agenda of qualitative nature. While quantitative methods could be used for a basal analysis of the course of a person's life, narrative interviews fill in where there is a need to elaborate more about the individual percipience of that person. This leaves plenty of space for the interviewed to set the priorities where they feel that there is the need to do so. This is crucial, in the sense that an interview in this manner only happens at one point of the time, and the interviewer and the interviewee will most likely not make contact again within the frame of the research (Brüsemeister, 2008, p. 105).
The choice for a semi-structured narrative interview as the main tool for gaining information about the respective object of interest seemed adequate since the aim was to get answers which are more or less defined, and also to hear more about a person's experience and memories about the same situations and practices as people in similar circumstances. A row of inputs were given on the author's part, all of which evolved around the same topic: the everyday work-life of these employees (see. Annex II: Interview Guide) (Flick, 2007, p. 274). While one focus lies on the everyday experiences, the other lies on irregular, unusual, extraordinary occurrences, which are easily traceable with a semi-structured interview guide. Information about perception, wanted changes, as well as wishes and "phantasies" about future scenarios form another part of the added value of the chosen interview form. The overall aim is thus to find about the interviewee's episodic knowledge regarding a very specific topic. It is mostly about subjectively constructed theories of the quotidian, individual conceptions of everyday events. Even though every day, objective practices, for which a participant observation would be the best method, are one of the main foci, participating in a working day was not an option. Given that I do have made the experience of working in fashion sales myself, there are many aspects of a working day with which I was already familiar before the field work.

The most crucial criterion to conduct interviews in this form is the concept of openness. The focus of the interview has to be placed by the interviewee, which means that inputs from the side of the interviewer need to be as little suggestive as possible. The questions of a semi-structured interview are only helpful in leading the direction slightly towards what the research questions aim to find out (Helfferich, 2009, p. 24).

4.3.2. Developing an Interview Guide

An interview guide, which was designed and pre-tested in advance, facilitated the process of interviewing and ensured that all major subtopics were touched upon. With Helfferichs (2009) and Flick's (20017) elaborations in mind, an adequate interview guide was developed. Again, the aim is to collect information about everyday events; which may seem ordinary to the people involved, which means that they might not come as quickly to their minds. An interview guide specifically asks for those memories. The interviewees are asked to recall memories regarding particular, in several cases extraordinary, events and situations within their everyday practices and observations at their work place. I followed a rough structure regarding the particularity of the inputs: At first, general information about how the person's everyday life at work is shaped was sought. Then I proceeded to very detail-evoking questions about the above mentioned specific events. Eventually I finalized the guide with inputs about topics which need general knowledge about the fashion industry to a certain extent, but also intent to seek to find about the interviewee's opinion and expectations about present and future scenarios regarding the overall issue. At the end of the interview, the participant was always given the opportunity to add what in their opinion the interviewer forgot to ask about, which in most cases was not made use of, which in these terms is a sign of quality of the extensiveness the elaborated interview guide provides. The full interview guide (in German) is to be found in the Annex of this thesis.

4.3.3. Access to Field

Since this thesis wants to put the practices within fashion retailing stores in the center of the discussion, the relevant group of persons to consider was fashion retail employees with direct retail-customer contact. As a matter of fact, this prerequisite was the only one the potential interviewees needed to fulfil, which left room for a great number of possible interview-partners. Every sales person was given the chance to talk about their individual experiences working with customers and clothing items.
The number of interviews and individuals were chosen following a random sampling method (Helfferich, 2009, pp. 174-175). Random samples include people who fulfill the criteria (in this case: being employed in a fast fashion store) to be able to possess certain knowledge, but other than that are chosen randomly. There are no selections based on age, position, years of experience, whatsoever. The individuals were chosen according to their helpfulness to the study. Interviews were held until a point of saturation was reached, which again means that there could be no additional information gathered nor value created by conducting further interviews. The particularity of qualitative research lies within its sampling method: even a single case (e.g. a sample size consisting of a sin-

gle person) is a valid size of a sample, if it is, as Patton (1990) formulated it, purposeful and rich in information (Patton, 1990, p. 169).

Also the fact that a snowball-method of recruitment (recruiting informants through former informants)[2] did not turn out to be very successful (see. also Chapter 4.3.4.) played into this result. Many helpful contacts have been established through a so-called *gatekeeper-method*, which denotes people holding access to other people – in other words: those who are of interest for a study purpose. (Helfferich, 2009, p. 175). This kind of people usually work in institutions or organization which themselves have great access to a variety of individuals, which share certain features. One example which I could make use of was the *Swiss Textile College* ("Schweizerische Textilfachschule", a college for students who have completed vocational training in various fields concerning the fashion industry), whose dean was able to promote my undertaking among his students and could help me meet several students of different backgrounds, but all of them being trained or having worked in fashion sales. A significant part of the rest of the interviews were organized through announces on different websites or direct contact with "strangers", whom I have approached directly at work. Luckily, many of them were spontaneous enough to fix a date later in the week. Eventually, a set of interviews consisting of 27 (which equals a medium-sized sample, according to Helfferich 2009) recordings resulted from the fieldwork, consisting of interviews with sales people (with or without leading positions) from 17 different fashion brand stores residing in Switzerland. All of the interviews were held in Swiss German. The actual group of people interviewed eventually consisted in mainly women, which reflects the Swiss total ratio of women and men employed within retail branches.[3] A vast majority of the interviews were held in a café selected by the interviewees; a plus for the overall interview situation, since Helfferich (2009) also points out that the interviews are best held where the counterpart to the interviewer is familiar with and feels comfortable (Helfferich, 2009, p. 179). All of the interviewees were initially asked to invest one hour in the interview, which during the interview-phase turned out to be a little scarce, and therefore was prolonged to two hours. The individual recordings lasted between thirty minutes to an hour and forty minutes, tending to the latter. The longest, most informative interviews were transcribed in completion, using a smoothed method, meaning that non-lexical expressions like "uhm" and so on were left away, to make the written texts easier accessible (Dresing, 2013, p. 20). The shorter, or sparser ones (ten interviews) did also contain several valuable information, even though few in content, and were thus only transcribed in a, what one could call, "summarized" way. Some of the interviews I had to dismiss from the analysis (see. Chapter 4.3.4.). As already mentioned, the interviews were held in Swiss German, which had to be translated to High German while transcribing and eventually to English to be able to use direct quotes in the thesis. Discursive structures and recurring topics are best made visible by coding – in other words: reducing – the textual material to its core messages. With the help of these codes the researched should be at the point where they are able to organize the information to striking patterns and then explain and analyze them (Waitt, 2010, p. 231). Those coded interview transcripts served as the main source to perform a discourse analysis following Foucault.

4.3.3.1. An Applied Discourse Analysis Step by Step

Waitt adapted a seven-step procedure to perform the analysis, which I this analysis also relies on: The first step is to choose the relevant source of information, which is given in this case by the interview transcripts. Since this study deals with subjective perceptions of certain phenomena, interview transcripts provide plenty of information without needing any additional material. Second any "pre-existing categories have to be suspended" (Waitt, 2010, p. 225). Being an insider to the field of research, with several years of experience in the same employment-structures as my interviewees, this is not an easy undertaking. It is however crucial to let the material 'talk for itself', and forget about any concepts when extracting the different fields of discourse from the material. The researcher also needs to reflect on the social context in which the material emerged, as a third step. By creating a private and trustworthy atmosphere, without anyone else present, the interviewees were open to talk about the relevant issues. Nevertheless, some of the potential interviewees feared that it may have consequences on their employment, and hence refused to give an interview at all. Once the interview transcripts are done, they need to be coded in the fourth step, first for organization, and second for interpretation. Discourses are often full with contradiction and instability, but they nevertheless show patterns of truth and power-relations. These are to be reflected upon in a fifth step. The sixth step reminds the researcher to pay attention to inconsistencies of statements which add new information to the full picture. By focusing on the discourse of certain groups of people, others will be "silenced" (Waitt, 2010, p. 236). It is crucial to state that the resulting discourse analysis emerges from the perspective of a specific group of people. By being given the opportunity to contribute to the discourse, certain people are given a position of authority as well.
With these specific and encompassing steps in mind, a discourse analysis for the material at hand was conducted.

4.3.4. Challenges in the Field

The field work was planned to be conducted within the months of December and January 2016 and 2017 respectively. As awaited, the fieldwork had to be postponed due to the rather stressful time for sales staff during Christmas / winter sales. The end of January and the whole month of February 2017 were therefore ideal since customer flow usually reduces drastically compared to the weeks before.[4]
The group of eligible people is – in this case – a comparably big one, luckily, meaning that a person who bailed on short notice could be replaced within a short time. Fairly interesting was the finding that the snowball system proved to be rather ineffective as a recruitment method, for the fact that on the one hand the people acquainted to me did not know many sales people, if at all, and that on the other hand the interviewees could

not provide more contacts themselves. Most of the interviewees were 'complete strangers', who ended up being the first and last 'link in a chain'. But that fact did not have an effect on the quality of the findings. Finding time to conduct the interviews posed a rather big obstacle: Some of the interviewees were only ready to participate during actual work, or during their breaks. This is why another small part of the recorded material is only about fifteen to twenty minutes long. Due to the inherent lack of information of these short conversations for a discourse-analytical procedure, that part of the conducted interviews had to be partly dismissed for analysis.
Favorable was the fact that I myself have worked as a sales person for several years, in the sense that it seemed like the interviewees opened up more and also went more into depth when talking about the respective matter. Even though I wanted to assess the issue from the perspective of a stranger, after having mentioned my own experience in fashion sale, the interviews then turned to be livelier and heavier on informative content.

Another rather expectable finding was the fact that the higher an interviewees position within the hierarchy of a store was, the more likely said interviewee was to "promote" their means of handling the challenges that arise within their store. Given my personal experience, it was not difficult to deduct aspects within a store (e.g. very few employees paired with a rather big sales-area where the clothing is displayed, etc.) which might cause some sort of friction or another. Nevertheless, some of the store managers (which was the highest leading position assumed by the members of the group of the interviewed) insisted that there were absolutely no problems in any respective aspect. So some of the interviews turned out to be more what reminds one of a press conference-like atmosphere. With the method of Discourse Analysis these interviews can be assessed critically as well in further research. In certain instances however I was denied the possibility of an interview since some potential interviewees feared that it might have effects on their employment. In other cases, it was the managers themselves who claimed that they were not allowed to talk about these matters with an outsider.

4.4. Limitations of This Study

The reader needs to keep in mind that the phenomenon discussed in this thesis is a result of globalized production systems, which renders the analyzed events a matter of an almost global scale. The chosen field in this study however remains restricted within the frame of a single country.
The chosen methods aimed towards a more or less clear pattern of answers, which eventually resulted from the field work, but nevertheless left some questions open. The predefined sample was intentionally built as such that it was merely open to sales people in fast fashion stores with direct customer service experience. Given the employment relationship, it suggested from the beginning that the precise knowledge about certain operational customs within the store were not transparent for the people chosen to be interviewed, which eventually proved to be true. So as to the actual "destiny" and espe-

cially number of clothing material when leaving the store unbought, the chosen source of data acquisition turned out to provide only incomplete or vague information about this one aspect. Primarily regarding the actual amount of surplus material sorted out is where further research could build on.

Annotations

[1] According to Foucault, the truth is unattainable; there are only versions of and perspectives on truth. And some of them will be handled as the imperative due to powerful nature of their agents (Waitt, 2010, p. 233).

[2] For a short introduction see Patton (1990).

[3] According to Swiss labor union, *UNIA*, in 2011, 66.4 % of the people employed in retail stores (all types of different retailing groups summarized) were female. See: Official Webiste of UNIA, brochure about the retail commerce in Switzerland. Available Online. http://www.unia.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/Arbeitswelt-A-Z/Detailhandel/Detailhandel-Broschuere-Branche-Detailhandel.pdf (accessed : 13/09/2017).

[4] As also mentioned by most of the interviewees.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS I

The following two sections are dedicated to the two main fields of discourse which were prevalent during the interviews. While the first part focuses on the common practices within the stores of the employees, the second part deals with the valuation of clothing and its display in the everyday work life of the employees.
Following the notions of the Actor-Network-Theory, the metaphorical shape of the networks rearranges for both of the discourses led by the employees. In the first strand of discourse that emerged, the body of clothing is proactive and demanding, and hence asks to be better included within the network. Within the second field of discourse, the clothing as an actant is much more passive, and what seems to be the catalyst for the interactions of other actors. Both narratives are marked by signs of ambivalence and tension, which are kept stable through the different actors involved. These sub-chapters also provide the background for the discussion in the final chapter.

5.1. The Tension between Tedious and Overwhelming

The employees face different tasks regarding the clothing they receive and already have in store. What are mostly easy and routinely done tasks can often be irritating in the sense that they can take up too much time and be burdening. Especially paired with other actors, like customers or financial restrictions, the clothing is often a burden on top. But the body of clothing is still active in the sense that it wants to be prepared for the store or to leave the store. It asks for the attention of the employees in many ways.

5.1.1. Clothing and its Varying Demands

5.1.1.1. Upon Arrival at the Store

Handling the clothing is part of each day of the sales employees. Apart from selling them to their customers, the employees state that most days of the week are filled with tasks surrounding the clothing which have nothing to do with sales. During the interviews, it has become evident that there are many ways in which clothing demands to be handled. As a key actant in the retail-store-network, the body of clothing apparently can be influential in several instances. For example at the moment it arrives to the stores. Fast fashion retail stores receive new items in regular intervals, as elaborated in chapter two. This becomes also apparent in the interviews held. Most of the interviewees receive new arrivals of clothing twice a week, or "we get new deliveries each day except on Thursdays" (Employee 21), or a few even every day (Employee 7, Employee 21). I asked the employees how this task is usually handled from their side. The following quote is representative to the answers of the other employees, which looked almost exactly the same.

„Usually before midday the first arrivals comes instore. But it has to be here before twelve o'clock. We get about two or three hours to unpack the delivery. [...] And we have to integrate it into the store ourselves. But before that, we have to check with a list whether the delivery is complete or so. Also, we have to secure the items, against theft. And then we can start integrating it, discard the rubbish that usually emerges, and after that, we just have to consult and sell." (Employee 20)

Time restrictions seem to be usual, and it is expected that the new deliveries are prepared within this given time. The employees have internalized this aspect as well: "I mean it is important that everything is prepared as quickly as possible" (Employee 24). Even though the sales employees do it routinely and several times a week, it can leave a stressful sensation behind: "It is such a time pressure, especially with the new merchandise!" (Employee 23).
One Store Manager also reports in the same manner, but adds a crucial aspect to why there sometimes can be something like a sensation of stress and tension: "The aim is of course that the new delivery is done as quickly as possible. We have these time restrictions, so that after two hours, we just need to secure them with checkpoints and then integrate them into the store. About midday, all of the delivery-related tasks need to be done. But these are always ideals, and you will always have to consider the *warendruck* [meaning something like 'product pressure; loosely translated] [...]" (Store Manager 1). That the delivery also "depends on how much it is" (Employee 20) is a clause which often came up during the interviews. The amount of merchandise hence varies from time to time: "We get deliveries twice a week; it is not always the same amount [...] sometimes we will get 25 to 30 boxes, other times there will be only two. We do not know that much in advance" (Employee 25). The number of boxes does not only seem to vary from week to week, but also depending on the time of the year: "Of course, around the peak times of the season [meteorologically speaking; author's note] it is extreme, the *warendruck* you have. And it is going to be the same every year" (Store Manager 1). Another employee responded in a similar manner: "The hardest thing about the new merchandise is when the season starts, for example in summer, when the winter season starts" (Employee 21). It becomes evident that the given time frames do not always suffice to fulfil the delivery-concerning tasks sufficiently. The varying amount of merchandise leads to unforeseeable workloads each week and season. Many stated that no matter what, the delivery cannot wait too long to be done. "We have to make sure that the delivery is taken care of the same or at least the next day. Because the customers want that, you have to show them the new things. Because if it just lies around in

boxes, you cannot sell it“ (Employee 24). The clothing wants to be sold, and it hence wants to be done in time. The sooner the clothing is visible to the customers, the more attention it will receive from their part. No matter in what quantities it arrives, it puts a pressure on the employees to handle it on time. So sometimes it is handled sooner, sometimes it takes up to two days. The inconsistency renders the well-known routines of these employees to be challenging at times.

The clothing nevertheless does not just want to be unpacked. It wants to be presented accordingly. That there is a conflict between the newer and older clothing becomes apparent when the employees described a scenario within the store where the apparel seems to be in constant movement. “The older styles move to the back, into the wall where the older arrivals usually are. And like this, the whole store will be rearranged.” (Employee 2). The so-called ‘best-places’ (meaning the most frequented ones by the customers) within the stores are reserved for the newer and more popular item, as one Store Manager explains:

„Wherever possible, we try to move things around. This means, that the so-called ‘best places’ within the store are for those items which also sell best. The items which are not really popular will not be presented in the front, right where the customer enters the store. If there is a situation when we do not seem to have enough space for all the things, those are also of course the ones which will be the first to disappear in the stock room. In our case, where we have two floors, where the ground-level floor sells better than the first floor, we also sometimes take those items to the first floor.” (Store Manager 1)

Or in a similar fashion:

„[…] the new apparel has to be in the front of the store, you have to see it, the new clothing has to be presented particularly, you cannot just hide it in the back. There are rules on how to present them. The arrangement [of the store, author’s note] also needs to be adapted. Some of the things in the store can stay where they are right now, but with the new clothing incoming, we will have to see where we can move around a little and make some space. Otherwise it would not fit into the topic of the new season anymore […].“ (Employee 1)

The employees use guidelines, “we have these pictures” (Employee 3), where “everything which belongs together goes into the same wall” (Employee 1), and that the clothing is grouped “following different colors and styles” (Employee 2). There is a rotation of the clothing items, regularly, as the interviewees stated. An item could lose the ‘best place’ very quickly, considering the fact that there are weekly to daily new deliveries. But their removal from those ‘best places’ shows that the stores explicitly focus on the newest items: “And that is why it gets to the background more and more. Or put them in the stock rooms. Because the new merchandise has priority“ (Employee 22). This is a navigational task required from the sales employees, where the clothing demands much attention, and wants to be put in the best space possible, since “it is not allowed that the new items are stored in the back of the store” (Employee 25). Depending on the amount of clothing, it can be challenging, so the employees, since not all of it fits in perfectly after the rearrangement.

Not only is the store itself affected by the varying amount of clothing, it also plays a role when it is not visible to the 'outside', and can also be difficult to handle at times. Since the different clothing styles come in different sizes, the stock room is also occupied with them. All of the interviewees' stores operate their own stock rooms. „It depends. Of course, during the peak times of the seasons the stock room can be extremely full. […] After that it gets emptier. Right now, it is very empty, relatively speaking, […] It is also in our interest that the stock rooms get emptied quite quickly through sales, to get a better overview to work within it. Otherwise it is difficult to work there, when there are piles and piles of clothing. It is demanding. You need to focus to handle it correctly" (Store Manager 1). These stock rooms are sometimes too full, and sometimes almost empty: "Sometimes there are so many clothes, and it is often chaotic, because we never really get to deal with it. And right now, it is not being used fully. Right now, we have more clothing instore. We try to take as many things as possible out of the stock room" (Employee 3). Even though placing full styles within the stockroom "is the least favorite thing to do" (Store Manager 1), it sometimes needs to be done. The clothing hence not only comes in, but also moves within the store, and to the stock room. Here again, the tasks are perceived to me more demanding in certain periods because of the plentiful clothing.

5.1.1.2. By Being Surplus

The surplus character of the clothing shows especially during the scenarios which where depicted by the employees when the clothing moves out of the store. The previously elaborated notions on waste are helpful in understanding what material provokes in us while we cannot but to 'get rid' of it, since there is not much use by keeping it with us.
If moving within the frames of one single store itself does not help the item to find its way to the customer, there are ways to move it across stores. The numerous stores in proximity interchange or transfer their items regularly – which adds a little more complexity to the circulation of clothing. „If we [the employee's store; author's note] do not sell very well, we can send it to another store, one in the bigger cities maybe. Maybe the customers here might be a little more 'down-to-earth', the customers in the city might look for more unique styles. This again is customer-oriented thinking" (Employee 4). The easy interconnectedness between the stores helps to move the surplus material from one store to another, since they "are spread everywhere" (Employee 10). Transferring items is also a method „to support each other" (Employee 19). The clothing wants to be sold; hence it also demands to 'travel' across the country to reach this aim, and this hence, is a "win-win for the company" (Store Manager 1).

In other cases, the clothing remains static within the stores. Some styles or items just do not meet the customer's tastes. "There are always these ‚bad sellers'. And that depends on several factors, for example a price that is initially set too high. The people think it looks amazing, but it is just too expensive for what they get. […] You will always find these bad sellers. I mean you only see what you have in your hands. […]" (Employee 24). While on the one hand, offering as many different products as possible is meant to satisfy the customer's needs on a broad range, it often leads to items being surplus on the other hand, if the demand for those products does not exist at that time or place. A phenomenon perfectly known to the employees I asked; since they have no possibility in co-deciding what delivery they will get, the only question that remains is often "why would one buy that?" (Employee 6). Feedback from the employees is hardly ever required, and except for one employee, they feel or even know that they have no saying in this: "You cannot change anything. Even though we tell the purchasers to get certain things, because we actually know what they [=the customers; author's note] want, it does not change. It takes seasons sometimes until we get it" (Store Manager 2).

And when their stock is high, and they just 'sit around' in the store going unnoticed so far, they also bring no profit-opportunity to the company. This body of clothing as surplus material wants attention in a specific way. Unsold clothing from the different retail stores the employees work in will be gathered by the company and moved to an outside station, "we move it to the outlet stores" (Employee 10). They will be given the chance for only a limited amount of time, and this timeframe is often no longer than a couple of months. "Things that arrive in March could leave the store in August" (Employee 24) explains. The more seasons and styles the industry knows, the more surplus is created and has to be dealt with, since they are already marked as old styles, as surplus material, in the operating systems. But the task surrounding the sorting out for "outlet" – as they commonly call it, even though the next station is probably a bigger stock room – is not something the employees like doing. If there is a lot of clothing, it demands a lot of concentration and attention.

"Outlet is usually a relatively demanding matter. First of all, all of the items are spread throughout the store. But we are only allowed to send one or two seasons together. And then we need to separate by product classes [like T-Shirts, Jeans, and so on; author's note] and not just put them randomly into boxes. So we need to sort them and also fill every box to its maximum capacity, because it is as usual a matter of how much money we are allowed to spend on sending the boxes. But other than that, there is not many restrictions on how to handle the task. Whenever we prepare those consignments… well, the people receiving it need to unpack it again and it would not be so nice for the people who have to do it. It would make it so much harder. We have to check and scan and package and send them as precisely as possible. In our store, we usually do not have any problems with the deadline until when to have the task finished, because they give us plenty of time. […] Basically, we book two seasons out every other month, which makes for four to six times outlet a year". (Store Manager 1)

Another employee responds in the same fashion, emphasizing the difference between the new deliveries and the sorting-out-process. To this employee as well, it is exhausting, and rather unpleasant, since often it is quite a lot, but again "it often depends on how much merchandise we have, and how much we have to send away" (Employee 1).

„Yes, unpacking is especially fun because it is new merchandise. It can be a lot sometimes as well, but it is at least something new. You can work creatively with it. […] with the new delivery you somehow can estimate when you will be done. And with the outlet, there is never this feeling of being done. And the optics of the store does not change. But a lot of things go away just for them to be gone. […] And whenever I see how much it is, it can be exhausting. You ask yourself 'does it have to be this much?'. And you have to just search the store for these items. It is good that it can go, but it definitely is boring" (Employee 25).

Generally, the tasks to sort the surplus material out is considered less joyful by the interviewees, and is unpopular compared to the unpacking, because they state that "[i]t makes so much more joy to work with the new arrivals" (Employee 1). Even though the deliveries or transfers happen regularly, and vary in numbers, they can often be burdening. For example when these tasks take more time than it originally was planned because they are a lot: "there are at least 30 boxes of merchandise for the outlet" (Employee 1). Or when they take up a lot of space and create a disorder, since they all "have to do it in the store" (Employee 3) "right in front of the customer" (Store Manager 3).

The incoming our outgoing apparel rearranges its surroundings in remarkable ways: Not only is it the clothes that lie around, but also what they come with, namely the packaging, the rubbish, which needs to be disposed simultaneously: "We used to get these in carton boxes, and you had to unpack these, tear them apart and then also throw them away, but until you were able to this, there was a lot of trash standing around, and all of it in the way" (Employee 25) and similarly: "[…] you cannot really avoid it, because you have to be constantly doing something with it, and the floors are blocked, and another rack stands there, and box here" (Store Manager 1). The employees say that they also need apparatuses to organize the process of (un-)packing, like bars, racks and boxes, which are also on the floor, and sometimes in the way.
This aspect might not even be as problematic, if there were no other actors who claim at least as much attention of the sales people. The customers want attention as well, and if they unpack where everyone sees it, then "the customer will notice it of course" (Store Manager 1). „On other days, we can deal with the customer way more intensively. And they realize that. Let alone the chaos that emerges when there is a big delivery or any other urgent task. And the hectic atmosphere when you need to finish this kind of work in time" (Employee 2). The routinely done tasks of moving the clothing around can hence lead to conflicts with the customers. The clothing wants to be prepared in time while the customers need assistance. "I mean if you do not have anything else to do, you can focus on the customer, and they notice that. And unpacking sometimes needs a lot of focus, and if you get interrupted… you need to be on both things at the same time" (Employee 8). Doing both at the same time is a difficult matter, entailing that at least one of the actors needs to wait until the other 'is served'.

„There are these days, where you have a ton of new deliveries and on top there is a run from customers, and you cannot do anything about it. It is clear that you cannot just keep unpacking things while a customer wants something from you. You just have to leave it and continue the next day. But actually you should have it done within half a day. But you cannot always manage to do that" (Employee 25). There are apparently customers who complain about that the lack of attention on the side of the employees, like not being greeted or served, even though there is no other choice for the employees to do both at the same time. The people in the stores are demanding, not all the time, but if they call, one must stand tall, since "their expectations have not really declined" (Employee 22). Whatever the employees are doing, they must stop until the customer is served, since they "eventually depend on every customer" (Employee 22). Interacting with the customer and interacting with the clothing needs to be done simultaneously: "But actually, we have to do it all at once: provide service to the customers, give them advice and unpacking. No customer can be left without us paying attention to them." (Employee 20). Another employee describes the scenario similarly, even though their store actually leaves the customer look for his or her own:

„It can be difficult, but I think it depends on the system you use, if you have a self-service system, or a full customer service. We, we do not have a full-service system; the customer is usually on his own. We give our best and try to greet everyone, but – and I know this from other brands I worked for as well – you have something else to do, like handling new arrivals, it can be impossible to pay much attention to the customer as well, or to even see them, even though this is actually our main job. Making the new arrivals ready, or something else, and then being there for the customer." (Employee 3)

In conclusion, this employee aptly remarks: You cannot 'split yourself up'" (Employee 3).

5.1.2. Budget Restrictions by "Those in the Offices"

A powerful actor in the employment-structures of the sales staff is the financial mean they – or more accurately, their employers – have at their disposal. This is insofar crucial since alleged budget restrictions decide how many employees will work on one particular day. To what the statements of the employees show, this specific actor has the most influential saying of them all in the entire network. The employees say that much of their everyday work life depends on the state of the finances of their company.
What is crucial is the fact that those decisions are imposed upon them. All relevant decisions, like how many people are able to work on one day, and also what will leave the store and what remains, are made by the "people in the office" (Store Manager 3), as the store-employees call them. The people responsible for these actions are not employed within the stores: "The regional managers, they have a lot to say. They sit together once a week, and look at it. They decide what happens to what. We do not have any saying in this" (Employee 10; similarly Store Manager 2). These cryptic people have a lot of power of these employees work life. If there are too few employees working one day, it can result in stressful situations and conflicts.

"When observing the situation, I have been working for five years now in this profession […] clearly, an important topic and a big problem are the cuts in expenses. This means that they will be saving wherever possible, unfortunately also in the wrong areas, namely the staff. You have to do it all yourself, and then they will say 'well, she won't be able to keep up with the work', and then that is that. […] And this has been showing immensely during the last five years. In the past, you came to the store and were able to work with someone else for the whole day. And then they started reducing more and more. Up to the point when they said that we won't do it at all." (Employee 15)

This previous scenario was mentioned by almost every single interviewee. One co-actor must come short, even though both, the clothing and the customers, demand a lot of attention: "And that is just really bad, because you cannot even help the customers, which is something that I think is the essence of being a sales person. […] You cannot really cater to the customers' needs, and that is the biggest problem. (Employee 24)
Employers in general rather expect the already existing staff to work longer hours and take on more responsibility instead of increasing the staff, as Skidelsky and Skidelsky (2013, p. 50) point out. "Right now, we are working on the minimum" (Employee 1) because "it always depends on how much financial means you have at your disposal" (Employee 2). This can be explained by the fact that an extra employee not only demands for wage, but also costs time and money for training, administration and social security. For a company, as Skidelsky and Skidelsky (ibid.) say, it pays off better to have a handful of employees who work many hours instead of distributing the total of hours onto a higher number of people.
This is a dilemma which shows also effects on other aspects of the service-quality, "everyone feels it, you cannot say that you do not feel it. Also, when you talk to other employees from other stores. they are cutting my shifts more and more" (Employee 24). The expectations towards them are not lower, however: "I have to work really quickly, and leave at twelve. Otherwise they will yell 'overtime', but my co-workers wait for the merchandise. The co-workers say, 'why is this so messy?' and the boss says 'go home on time!' (Employee 23). The on-the-minimum staff is not equipped for unusual situations, as many employees state from their experience, which makes it trickier to handle all the upcoming tasks at once and unavoidably creates friction with many co-actors, be it the customers who are not being served or clothing which is left unnoticed, and hence leaves the store looking messy. "[…] the customers do not feel like looking for something when everything is lying on the floor" (Employee 8). Neither can a careful service be provided, even though in certain cases the customers might rely on it: „[…] If the personnel are missing, the customers are annoyed as well, they aren't in the mood. And here, you should be able to expect a proper service. Even though we let them look for themselves, like with the clothes and so on. But when it comes to things like cashmere for example, wouldn't it be nice to know for them how to take care of it?" (Employee 23).

An aspect which is perfectly known and criticized by the employees I talked to are the untrained and thus cheaper personnel as opposed to a great part of the Swiss retail employees who still took vocational training. It is the small things that make the difference, as Employee 23 explains: "We are trained not only to say 'hi!' but already to ask 'how can I help you?'. They do not learn it like we did. There is a big lack of training". And the differences are visible. There are still customers who await precise information about certain high-end items. If there is no trained staff around, that service cannot be provided, and the customers turn away:

“What I would wish for, generally, when I go shopping myself, is that… the employees are not as polite as they used to be [*laughs*]. You definitely notice that they only work because they have to, or at least that is what it looks like. We get a lot of compliments here. Even from the shopping mall [operators; author’s note]. But in other stores… the customers, they do not even need to buy anything, but they appreciate being greeted, for example. Otherwise they will say that ‘this store, no I will not go there anymore, it is so bad there’. I don’t know but either you like the job or you don’t. It’s the staff. Many are stressed out or unmotivated, because many companies had to reduce the personnel. This definitely makes the employees’ motivations decline. It is not their fault, but you still have to smile when a customer walks in. I mean sure, you cannot be in a good mood every day, but you know… a lot has to do with the staff […].” (Store manager 3)

The sales people I talked to share the view that the strategy of hiring only based on low salary-expectations is a strategy which does not add up, as aptly pointed out by Store Manager 3.

They say that even though they are fewer people who are actually employed, they opening hours tend to only get longer. And long opening hours stand for a way to compete with the online commerce and other stores, which is something that the customers can benefit from. Nonetheless, the employees do not think that there is a true necessity for that:

“I myself would wish for that they just abandoned the opening hours until eight in the evening. Because, in general, I think that people should adjust their plans. I mean if you go to the post office or the communal office, you need to make time for it as well. Shorter working days, fewer openings on Sundays during holiday season… that is it.” (Employee 16)

And similarly:

“First of all, the long opening hours. I do not think that the employees need to work until 7 or 8 in the evenings.” (Store Manager 2)

These conditions have estranged the employees to a job that could actually bring them joy. Being as stressful as it is under these circumstances, the employees do no longer feel appreciated, as they state. The factor ‘respect’ is what they lack the most, in terms of financial compensation or the general treatment of the workers. “Sales people need to be appreciated!” (Store Manager 2) and “I understand that the market is the market, and competition is competition. And that is not a bad thing” as Store Manager 1 elaborates, “but I wished that the profit would be distributed to all the people involved, not only amassed for the board of directors. That it would reach “the ‘simple employee’ who is actually in the front of everything” (Store Manager 1). As one employee sees it, the job contains of more than “folding clothes and standing around” (Employee 3) but that is what they think is perceived from the outside, and makes the work they do for a living

neither prestigious nor respected – and this is what she thinks makes people leave the job (Store Manager 3). “And they think that we are stupid. All of us!” (Employee 24).
All of the employees actually describe a certain fondness for their job: “I actually like doing it” (Employee 8), as long as they can embed themselves as an active help for the customers and as long as they can live the creativity which is core to the fashion business. Altering the labor situation, which comes hand in hand with the fast fashion spirit, would contribute to employees perceiving their work as more satisfactory in itself, which is crucial when it comes to delivering good work and making the employment within a fashion store purposeful again:

> “It is hard to say. I generally think that it is a fun job, fashion has so much… how can I put this… room for creativity. It is a fascinating branch, you can learn so much. And that is why I think we should honor it more. Pay the employees more, and give them better working conditions […] so that they enjoy working again. So that the people are happier, work more happily and I think that will be noticeable.” (Employee 2)

5.1.3. Reflection

The practices surrounding clothing material are part of the everyday work life of a fast fashion retail sales employee. While talking to them, they did not give much meaning to the tasks or the general practices themselves: Deliveries will be unpacked, transfers will be prepared and merchandise for the outlets will be sent away. They are done routinely, and without any questioning.
What poses the biggest uncertainties and hence tension are the amounts of clothing that need to be handled. These amounts are barely foreseeable, be it in the form of deliveries or sorted out material. They can hence take up more time than planned, and can create a rather hectic working situation. This is especially the case whenever there are customers around who ask for as much attention from the employees as the clothing does. This can cause conflicts and neglect. Often times, there is no way around that: due to the strong influence of the financial aspect of the companies, there are many budget restrictions, which leads to an on the minimum planned staff. So it is often the case that regular tasks can challenge the most experienced employee, just because there are too few people to handle too many tasks.

5.2. The Faltering Presence of Customers

The customers are an integral part of every physical store. Actually, the so-called customer traffic is what makes a store or breaks it. The store employees I interviewed portrayed two different scenarios which seemed contradictory to one another at first: they speak of situations when they were overwhelmed with work and customer traffic; in the same manner they speak about the fact that there are no customers at all. When looking at it more closely, it becomes clear that the fast fashion system actually did create both through its logic. The new normality of many clearance sales with high markdowns bring more and different customers than usual, while during the regular sale phases the employees even complain about the lack of interaction with the customers. The two different scenarios shall be depicted in the following.

5.2.1. When They Are Here…

A general finding of the interviews is that the customer presence is staggering. The customers mainly visit the stores when they expect to do one thing: a bargain, meaning that a store-visit is especially attractive during clearance sales. During this time of sales, there are usually more customers; a lot more customers, since "the customers come in masses" (Employee 1). The new normality of constant markdowns has apparently divided the whole group of customers into two sub-groups. The dynamic of constant low prices and discounts has made a group of consumers emerge which is particularly visible during the clearance sales: All employees used a term, or rather a concept which is related to the bargain-hunter – a person whose purchase decision almost exclusively is based on the low price. But the concept my informants used contains more information about the actual behavior of these customers. The term of the *sale-customer* was used by almost all of the interviewees. The loud and striking sale signs seem to be the dividing trait. Both customer-groups are not often 'sighted' together due to their different attitudes towards apparel-shopping, and "you will see people you usually do not see during regular phases" (Employee 24).

„Generally, we have two kinds of customers: we have the regular customer who always appears after the clearance sales are done; they are always happy when the red signs are gone. Then we have the other customer who only shows up when they see the red signs. We barely have customers that do both. And you notice that. We do not really get to see our regulars during the clearance sales. And vice versa". (Store Manager 1)

They "only see the clearance sale" (Employee 1) and "they only look within the clearance sale" (Employee 6), but they also buy more, because "they see that it is cheap." (Employee 7)

During clearance sales, the employees find themselves in a different position than what they are used to. When normally they help their customers find an appropriate outfit and the customers ask for their sincere opinion, during clearance sales, the employees serve more as a source of information. The customers continue to count on a good service, but in a different way: "they usually ask only about whether we have size or not" (Employee 24). The customers mostly ask for different sizes, or colors, or what other store they can get an item from. The questions they get asked are different, less complex, but the amount of work is nevertheless higher.

„You mainly work with the marked down things. The customers keep asking all the time, which size is this, do you have this or that in stock. And yes, it is a total different service we have to provide during this time. Due to the constant chaos, it is difficult to consult them normally, because the presentation or the look of the store in general is not so nice. And there is the pressure to sell more. When normally you only have to sell one item, during that time you need to sell three to get the same turnover." (Employee 11)

It is demanding in a different way, but if the customers need anything, the sales people need to be at their disposal as usually: "They still have the same expectations. When it comes to the customers, the expectations have not declined. They still expect service at the highest level" (Employee 24). The customers do not hesitate to speak out on their displeasing about anything, be it the missing attention or the messiness of a store. The workload is higher, split up on usually almost the same number of sales people. Due to perceptibly higher customer traffic, the sales employees often cannot keep up with the duties that arise:

„The day usually goes by so quickly. I have been helping out in bigger stores as well. It is stressful, there are so many people. There also more people who keep someone company, and just have to wait until the partner, the mother or the son has looked through it. There is high customer traffic. Many come and just look at things, try them on like that, there are way more people trying things on at all. They mainly rout through the clothes. It is exhausting; your legs start to hurt, because I feel like you have to run around all the time. You have to coordinate more, and would definitely need more people. Suddenly there are queues, which we never have in our store. You are under pressure, and have to check everything twice" (Employee 25).

Interacting with the customers, and the clothing as well becomes so overwhelming at times, so "that you sometimes just try to not do it at all" (Employee 22). They feel that the customers as well as their employer looks even more over their shoulders during that time.

But generally, the workload is not only higher, but differs from what they usually have to do primarily as sales employees. Compared to the usual sales periods, the interactions with the customers and the clothing become rather unpleasant: "It makes so much more joy to work during regular season" (Employee 1). While working during regular sales periods claims the creative abilities of the sales employees, the work during the clearance sales has become more of what reminds one of "factory work, a processing of things" (Employee 25). Going back to a position where they have less passive role and are required for their expertise and not only to conclude transactions is a wish many stated:

„In my team, we share that view. We wish for less processing tasks, and for more cooperation, with the customers, anyone. You look for something, consult, and look for a solution. More a consultant than a cashier" (Employee 25)

5.2.1.1. Between Providing a Service and Being a Servant

Many of the employees observe that the people who visit their stores have become harsher, and more impolite. Whenever they notice something that is not according to their view, they will complain (Choi et al., 2014, p. 70). The valuation does not only show in terms of handling the clothing, but also when interacting with the sales people.

“About ten years ago… I would say that there was definitely more courtesy. The people have become clearly more impolite. Because, well, the customers even used to put their clothes back themselves after trying them on. And if it said on the sign ‘up to three items’ they would only take three items in. Or they used to be more careful with the beverages they brought into the store. I feel like the rules do not really matter to them anymore, they do not give anything about it”. (Employee 16)

„The people are clearly way less polite. I started ten years ago, and if there was a request for a return, I mean they knew, the receipt always said ‘marked down items will not be taken back’ or so… and nowadays they bring anything back, even if they have bought it a year ago or so, and clearly have worn them”. (Employee 10)

In the same manner goes the following quote of an employee who even wished that there were more ways for the sales employees to intervene.

„They try on those clothes, and just throw it on the floor. Do you know what I mean? And depending on the employee, and their personality… I mean we had someone who was really strict. And one customer just threw a trouser out of their fitting room. They just threw it on the floor. And my colleague said: ‘You better pick this up!’. I think there should be more of that. Sure, you cannot be too bold, or you will lose the customer, but I mean these things…” (Employee 23)

Not only regarding the service provided but also concerning the actual items on offer, the customers, in the perception of the employees, have become more demanding. The frequency of store-visits has increased, and hence the kinds of people that come to the stores have also become more diverse. When it comes to the cut and the style, the customers often seem to be dissatisfied with what is on offer, even though the number of clothing for sale is higher than ever.

„It is getting more and more demanding. The customers… everyone wants to be in fashion. That is why we need to make sure we are up to date. They will say things like ‘But I saw something like this somewhere else, why do you not have this?’. And then I think that we are still in a small city in Switzerland, and not in a metropolis like New York or so” (Employee 7).

„The consumers *(sic!)* for example have immense expectations nowadays. From the design, to the cut, to the fit… they see it all on the internet, they see a picture, but these pictures do not reflect reality, meaning that sometimes the clothing is made fit, through needles and such, that it looks really flattering. And then the customers think that they can buy that in our stores, ready-made. And you will have to tell them that you cannot just buy these things, that some of them you need to get tailored. But do they want to spend that money? And you cannot offer everything. There are so many different types of bodies […] you cannot get it all from mass ware. But many do not really understand that. And that is a problem. You should actually be able to offer so many things, but there is just no room for that”. (Employee 22).

High customer-orientation is not per se a negative aspect; in fact it is quite emblematic for the spirit of capitalist industries. Fast fashion, like many other industries, lives and dies with its consumer's preferences. Hence, they do what is needed to be done in order to keep the customers and hence the profit close: "you want the customer to have a pleasant memory when they leave the store" (Store Manager 1). The employees sense that the consumers know about the principle of that 'they are the king' and that everything must eventually follow their orders. It is not uncommon that they would express unordinary wishes to the employees, or behave rudely in order to get what they want. The employees I asked are trained to know how to de-escalate such a situation and hence give in to the customer's demands or complaints, even though this might put the employees in unpleasant situations where they feel like a trigger for the dissatisfaction of the customers. "They often lack respect. They think that you are here to cash out and just be quiet". (Employee 10)

„I tell you, I like assisting and consulting the customers, but I think that there is a fine line between providing a service and being a servant. I think there is a small but important difference between these expressions [...]". (Employee 24)

5.2.2. ...And When They Stay Away

The situation looks different when there are no clearance sales. Many of my informants created a picture of a rather autonomous customer who primarily contacts the sales people for simple types of information, namely whether an item is available in their size or what the exact price of said item is. They perceive clothing shopping behavior to have changed in general. Fast fashion stores come with a sort of 'freedom' a boutique does not: Many of the bigger names in fast fashion do follow a self-service approach which leaves their customers on their own. Apparently, some perceive the sales personal as "vultures", following them around in unnecessary ways (Gabrielli, et al., 2013, p. 216). "If you have asked once, you will leave them. You cannot make them angry. If you keep asking them, they will get angry, and feel watched. And then they will leave" (Employee 6). These sales people are only talked to when a customer has a very specific request and/or at the checkout. What the employees defined as 'real customer service' – meaning full attention and consulting so that the customer leaves with several complete outfits – is no longer asked in the same extent as it used to be in earlier days. Nevertheless, most of the employees I talked to wished to provide more active customer assistance:

"Back in the days, you could say that people valued having a complete outfit way more than just comparing the prices. You went to a store, no matter which one, and you knew that you were going to spend a certain amount of money, but you did not check the price tags all the time or started adding up the prices. You took your pile of clothes, cashed out and left the store. About eight years ago, let's say, people were bigger spenders. About four to five years ago, the customers became more price-conscious, they started comparing them way more. Online-shopping is a huge topic right now and the transparency of the prices as well, much more than ten years ago.

You had to run from store to store, but nowadays you just go on the internet and look at the prices. And we definitely notice that in terms of sales numbers" (Store Manager 1)

The fashion consumers have 'emancipated' themselves from their dependence of the expertise of the sales staff and are autonomously capable of knowing, comparing and purchasing their own products, "and have a lot of knowledge themselves" (Employee 19). What distinguishes the purpose of the fashion retail employees from the online-shops with no sales employees at all is no longer required by their clientele.

The customers generally stay away. Especially during regular sales phases without any special offers, the days seem to be long and the actual workload and especially customer-traffic is unclear and inconsistent. One reason behind this are the aforementioned longer opening hours. „Yes it has changed, for sure. It also depends on the opening hours. For the fact that we are opened from nine to eight. You reach a point when you are just fed up with it. It is exhausting. I would love if there was more customer traffic, or more Saturdays which are more fun, but the people usually just stay away" (Employee 6). They give the customers the comfort of delaying the shopping to late in the day. This could lead to days when there are barely any customers at all:

„Even if you work in a big city like Zurich, Lucerne or Basel, you will have these days sometimes when there are just no customers. So that you will stand around for the whole day and wait for someone to come in, and then you are happy if you even have a thousand Swiss Francs in the register. Your store can be opened from nine in the morning, and you sometimes stand around and wait until eleven o'clock before customer-traffic starts. And maybe there are some customers in the afternoon and then, it is quiet again. If the store is open until the evening, it can feel so boring because nothing happens. It is heavy, really heavy. That is why we need to jump on the online-bandwagon. By now, we sell more and more online as well" (Employee 22)

Instead of stopping by a physical clothing store, the consumers tend to make use of the comfort of online shopping, which can be done at any time and on any day. "Online shopping is a huge problem for us" (Store Manager 2) and similarly: "the competition of the online shops" (Employee 22). On top, it demands less time and energy, since the offers of products are more easily available and comparable, as opposed to having to visit different stores, since "one click and you get all of the prices to compare them" (Store Manager 1). Also, due to the availability of foreign-based online shops, there are more exclusive troves than what one could find within the stores. Browsing through the stores without really needing anything has become normality: „I feel like, over the last years, the people come inside, look at the things, but do not buy anything. They just come inside and look at it and think to themselves 'no, I am not going to buy it'. […] Back in the days, the came in, knew exactly what they were looking for, bought it, and left" (Employee 4). The stores have become somewhat like a source of inspiration, a show-room. As Store Manager 1 elaborates in the quote above, extreme price-consciousness is a characteristic that has developed over time as a result of the changing industry. Back in the days, there were only a handful of retailers for the customers to shop at, nowadays, the options are numerous. Customers are not tied to a store anymore and can assemble their wardrobe from many different retailers.

5.2.3. Reflection

There are either too many customers to handle or too few. Keeping the elaborations in mind that there are usually too few employees at work, certain days can result in too much work. During the clearance sales, the customers stay longer, need more information and buy more. Since the markdowns are more unpredictable and items can easily be sold out in no time, the customers then decide to go to the stores. Because there are only so many bargains available. As soon as the clearance sales are over, the 'sale-customer' disappears. The regular customers come back, but they do not need assistance if they not decide to stay away completely. This explains the contradicting scenario the current mode of fast fashion retailing has created: the sales employees are either overwhelmed by the work or stand around waiting for the work to come. These networks are stabilized by many actors: the entirety of clothing material (surplus or not), the customers, whose presence either on the one side of the extremes or the other, and the financial restrictions, which have the most 'power' on how the network shows its shape. This snippet of this fast fashion network is a result of these actors aligning their interests in order to get the maximum out of it, which is mainly profitability. The employees have almost no saying in this dynamic even though they are affected by it all.

CHAPTER SIX: RESULTS II

6.1. The Display of Ambivalence of the Valuation of Clothing

There is one step of the sales-process before the items will be relocated to the outlet stores, namely the *markdowns* and the *clearance sales*: An aspect which has become more dominant in fast fashion retailing, which also provokes a lot of mixed feelings on the side of my interviewees. The low prices of the items lead to a complex situation within the store. The lower the prices, normally or during markdowns, the lower the actual profit for the company will be, which makes savings necessary in staff and otherwise. Unlike in the earlier days, clearance sales happen often more than twice a year nowadays, which has – as it becomes evident in the interview material – remarkably led to a changed dynamic in the relationship between the customers and the clothing items and the valuation thereof.
The multitude of clothing becomes especially noticeable when they rearrange for clearance sales. The ambivalence of the valuation of clothing becomes specifically obvious, since they, according to my interviewees, vary depending on the sale-phase their store has at one particular moment. During this time in particular, but also in general, clothing can, due to a lack of careful treatment, experience even damages.

6.1.1. Markdowns and Clearance Sales: "Quality and service, and everything, but preferably cheap, or even for free!"

The employees did not often explicitly state how the customers interact with clothing items on regular days. What they emphasized however was that there is a big variance between regularly priced items and marked down items in how the customers treat the items. This is insofar important, since intervals between the clearance sales periods have become shorter than certain years ago, or so at least the perception of the employees. This can be traced back to the fact that there is a lot of apparel already, which is being replaced iteratively by the newly incoming clothing. Selling them to the customer is the preferred option, thus, to create a higher incentive, the prices will be reduced. Regular sale phases are being interrupted by several phases of clearance sales: "Clearance sales take up a long period now. Not like they used to be" (Employee 22). Even though bigger clearance sales are only limited in time, items will be marked down or put on discount more regularly. As some employees remark, they have marked down items year-round: „I feel like we have markdowns throughout the whole year. We always have one section dedicated to marked down items. We did not used to have this back then [not specified; author's note]. And when the sale was done, we had completely new items. But nowadays, you have these markdowns throughout the year. That has changed a lot" (Employee 2).

But it is not for a long time until the items get the chance to 'prove' themselves as popular: "And the sad thing is – I mean I can only talk for our store – we have new arrivals all the time. […] We have new things every season. And as soon as they are about two months old they will be reduced about thirty to forty percent" (Employee 24) or "we actually have markdowns every week, not always the same amount, but still, every week" (Employee 25). A reduction in price after only two months is not uncommon where the employees I talked to work. One needs to remember that these items are already marked as 'old' in the operating systems, as there are constantly new deliveries. Some items, mostly due to a delay in delivery, are being reduced even sooner: „And then there are other items, which are two or three weeks ‚old', like for example the jean my colleague has, and one week later the jean was marked down" (Employee 25).
As elaborated in the first part of this chapter, most customers generally browse through the stores on their own, without needing much help from the employees. Like this, the anonymity has increased as well. There are also more people browsing through the stores, especially during the clearance sales, which makes it harder for the sales people to track the movements of each person. The feeling of not being watched also leads to a behavior under which the clothing no longer gets the respect a commodity deserves.
It starts with the number of items they try on. Apparently, the inconvenient activity of changing clothes becomes more bearable when there might be potential bargains among the piles of clothes, so the employees. "They come and take ten or more items into the fitting rooms" (Employee 1) and "they try on so many things" (Employee 8) – the reason why many stores know a limit which is also controlled by an employee.
When unwatched, the customers tend to leave the tried-on clothing behind in a rather careless manner. "During this time, the employees are very busy, and the customer does not check twice when dropping an item on the floor or how careful they take it off" (Employee 2) and "if the sales people are busy, the customer will not check twice whether he dropped something on the floor or not" (Store Manager 1). What, if not 'looking after' the customers, are the employees doing in that time? Tidying up and getting refill for sold merchandise takes up most of the time during clearance sales, especially when there are too few employees at work, so one of the overall findings of the data. "During the clearance sales, it is just more annoying, because you have to tidy up much more, especially in the fitting rooms, since the people take like a thousand items into them" (Employee 16). As most employees stated before, the working personnel does often not suffice; a fact, which also counts for the clearance sales apparently: "We would actually need to be more people, so that one of us can only tidy up so that the store looks more or less clean" (Employee 19). Others work at the cash-desk or refill the empty spots in the shelves and carts. Actual customer service in the original sense is barely possible, and

hardly ever requested “the service we provide is actually totally different” (Employee 1). The main duty is to keep an order during the messy situations.

„The store is clearly less tidied up, because, well, people come inside and like to rummage. And they are always the same people, which means that we have customers who come by every day and check if an item is marked down even more. You have different customers when there is no clearance sale. And you notice that. During the clearance sales people tear on the clothes. They are not really careful with the things. They do not put it back properly; it is just a mess lying around somewhere. Or they drop it on the floor. And they do not pick it up again, but only during that specific time”. (Employee 15).

The clothing nevertheless ‘wants’ to be treated adequately. It is not in its intentions to lie on the floor and get messy. There is not much appeal in an untidy retail store. It does not happen by itself, “the customers put things back when they are regularly priced, but not when they are marked down” (Employee 16). Keeping an order is not something the customers do themselves to their best possibilities, so it takes up a lot of time of the employees.

Customers show a significantly “aggressive behavior” (Employee 16), towards the clothing, but also towards other people engaging in the same situation, especially the employees, as they report: “they used to be friendlier” (Employee 16). The interviewees have their theory about why this might be. While the new merchandise, meaning the ones with the original prices, is treated much more carefully, the marked down clothes are not worth the effort, apparently: “Newer things are put back properly more often. As soon as something is marked down, they look at it differently. And then they do not even care about if it damages”. (Employee 15). The clothing experiences hence insensitive interactions: “You see that they do not really care about and think that it is a poor quality behind the clothing… even though it is still the same, there is a quality behind it” (Employee 4). Lower prices make the customers identify the value of the clothing differently, as the interviewees discern. The employees observe that the valuation of the item is primarily based on its price, and not so much on its other traits. When originally, to a regular price, the customers are interested in finding an item they need, or updating their wardrobe, this changes during clearance sales: “you primarily have these bargain-hunters” (Employee 7). Unobtrusively browsing through the store, the customers pay less attention to the effects of their actions on the clothing, and the entire store, if there is a potential bargain at sight. By not needing extensive assistance – “they do not need our full consulting” (Store Manager 2) – they will make the actual expertise of the sales staff redundant, and reduce them to tidying up and cashiering.

As elaborated before, due to the lack of additional personnel, the employees say that they often cannot keep up with the work, and that there is so much to do, that “the day goes by too quickly” (Employee 25). If one actor’s need is attended by the employees, the other is left behind. The overall situation is chaotic and unclear.

“It is just that, during regular sale phases, you have more time to do things more carefully. The store looks more welcoming, everything is ordered according to size, you have more time in the stock rooms, and it hence looks better there as well. During clearance sales however, everything must happen so fast, and you would need three instead of two hands. That is the big difference" (Store Manager 1)

According to one employee, this condition is a vicious cycle, and a result of the producers offering too many options and too much merchandise at once. They, as she says, make the customers develop a habit of waiting for clearance sales. According to my informants, many of the customers have learned that it does not take long until the next clearance sale phase begins.

„[…] the companies, or the industry itself, they do that, they advertise it to the people, like, 'hey, we have markdowns', and they know it works. That is why they [=the customers; author's note] are so aggressive. If we did not have these clearance sales, I think, there would not be such a hype about it. That they would not want markdowns throughout the year. I really do not think so. There is another way. And the value of the clothing would last longer, especially for those who bought in the beginning, you know? I have to say, well, they have so much joy having these things, and they spent quite some money on it. Those people start to think "well, I could have waited in this case!". So many people say that, I hear that a lot. Why buy it now when it will be marked down in two months? I think it is a shame that they ram it to the customers, the people know it. The more clearance sales you have… and there are a lot, combined with other discounts, VIP-weeks, and so on. There is something every month. And I say it is too much, the people are being spoilt with it. They expect it. Not for long, and the thrill is gone. And the next time they expect even more. It is just not interesting anymore". (Employee 24)

This leads to a strategic buying behavior, with planned delays in purchases, as elaborated in chapter two. The customers expect the prices to be reduced sooner or later, "they come and ask for markdowns or special offers" (Employee 25) "[…] They just see the clearance sale. Then they will take some other item, which is still on the original price, come to us and say 'but isn't it marked down?' They just see the sale-signs. Even if it is only for a certain part of the store. You could have the most beautiful items, and all they ever see are the sale-signs. Everything else is not important" (Employee 24).
During the regular season, the customers seem to get inspiration or a first look of what there is in the stores. And during the clearance sales, they will eventually buy more than usual. „We luckily sell almost everything during clearance sales. Because we reduce it for about seventy percent. [...]. If that does not work, we would have another big clearance sale, to empty all the stocks, where the prices are even lower" (Store Manager 2).

Reductions in price serve as an incentive for the customer to buy the item, whereas higher prices usually let the customer think twice about a purchase decision, as the employees detect it: "They think it is cheap, so they have to scarf up on it" (Employee 7) and "they search the whole store because they want to have something real quick; they do not think about it much, they try it on and take it" (Store Manager 2). What the sales people have acknowledged is that the extremely low prices seduce the customer into buying them without much hesitation. The need to 'get rid of them' is seemingly so high,

that the prices are being reduced to a minimum: „I mean, well… we reduce the prices immensely. Basic tees for example, they will be reduced to 5 francs. And I mean for five francs, let's be honest, everyone thinks, well it is only five francs, I just buy it" (Employee 6) and "because you think, oh it is cheap, and they also buy much more. I mean if you think that you get four items for twenty francs, when you usually only get one for the same price. Yes, during clearance sales, the people buy way more" (Employee 16).
If the customer does not buy it, the retailer needs to come up with another strategy to handle the masses of clothing – the less preferred option. Bringing the item to the customer is the main target, even though the prices, and hence the profit, will be much lower. The customers in fact buy more than usual, even if they pay generally much less. „There are more transactions, and more items bought, but not more turnover[…]" (Employee 4).

Some are not even happy with the markdowns they are provided with, according to what other sales employees state. When the customers try to manipulate the prices in different ways, even unlawfully, it is a striking example of how the bargain-hunt takes the upper hand. The stores are not some sorts of flea-markets where one could debate about a set price, but the customers do not always seem to see that the same way.

„There are times which I think are so painful, because some think that only because it is already marked down, they can come and discuss the price, they try to get it even cheaper. And then I just have to tell them that we are not on a flea-market, this is the price, and either you take it or not. But those are that kind of people that always come around and observe it." (Employee 19)

„Once there was this customer, and she took an item with the original price and tore the price tag out. The whole thing! And then she put one on from the marked down items, with 50% discount. Can you imagine how well she did that? And then she tried to check out, and I mean our cashier is not stupid. She realized what was going on, and told her that 'someone' exchanged the tags. And the customer just said: 'Okay then I won't take it'. "(Employee 23)

There is apparently no way around the markdown sales, even though it has rather unpleasant effects on the work life of the employees: "And if you do not follow the trend, you will lose. I mean they [= the different companies; author's note] harm themselves, they ruin the business. It is quite sad. The thing with 'competition is good for business', well a little bit maybe, but it you see how much of a fight it is" (Employee 24). Having a clearance sale hence seems to be a trend that 'must' be followed by the companies. Otherwise, they will lose price-conscious customers.

6.1.1.1. Low Prices = Low Quality?

When trading commodities, we set a price which we think reflects the value of the commodity. A low price displays our readiness to exchange the good, even if there might be a loss in benefit. Neither does a low price does stand for exclusivity; it signals the high availability of a good. These are some principles in basic economics.

Prices in fast fashion are already set very low, and marked down fast fashion items cost only a fraction of the original price in the end. The connection between low price and low value emerges also in the perceptions of the customers, as the sales employees observe:

„The people start thinking it is cheap, even though they are the exact same products. I mean it is in this case the fall season, which was not sold so well, and then they mark down what is left, but it is still the same merchandise. The quality is still the same. It is not clothing which is fabricated especially for the clearance sales. […]" (Employee 3)

In the eyes of the employees, a changed attitude towards the value of the clothing does not make much sense, especially not when merely the factor 'price' is decisive. But all of them notice that the exact same items are treated differently depending on whether they bear a white (=original) or a red price tag, but they think that "they just should treat it in the same manner" (Employee 7). They see the same quality perceived lower as soon as the price goes lower, and there is apparently barely ever the same 'chaos' when there are only, or mainly new season styles presented. This might also be a consequence of how the stores present their clearance-sale-merchandise. Many interviewees reported that the greater part of the store is clearly marked with sale signs, and that older styles being brought back from the stock rooms to be sold. With items taking up every possible inch of retail area, a store appears much fuller than usual. „It is those things that we receive in masses, and it is just true mass ware. And the people are sooner or later fed up with it" (Employee 15). The shopping during the clearance sales is not something the employees experience to be a joyful thing for the customer. There is a bigger reluctance on the side of the customers: "You notice that… the attitude of the customers towards the apparel, it is just a thinking of pure consumption, and there is not a positive thought behind it. All they want is to get as many things as cheap as possible, and not really with the aim of having a cool outfit, or so" (Store Manager 1).

Low prices can only be offered if other aspects of the supply chain are kept low-cost. In this case, the 'poorer' quality is what strikes the most to the employees who have an expertise in textiles. „The quality, I think, used to be better. Much better. But the prices are lower as well this year, and we still do not sell it, because they purchase cheaper materials for us. And that makes the difference. When back in the days we easily sold a jean for about 150 Francs, we nowadays offer them for 39.90. Things have become cheaper. They are okay, but it is not like it used to be" (Store Manager 3). Certain items are priced only based on their optics – the quality is missing.

"There are flaws in quality where you could adjust the price maybe. And sometimes we will get items which are labeled as cashmere but only contain about two percent or so if you look at it more precisely. But the customer would have to pay a higher price. I think that is a pity. And the quality of the t-shirts has declined compared to back then, they have holes way quicker, or we get customers' complaints about them shrinking after washing them." (Employee 1)

And similarly:

„What has changed regarding the quality is… it is produced ever so quickly, and shorter-lived. And I would say, that they do this on purpose, so that it will not last forever and you will have to replace it." (Employee 25)

6.1.1.2. The Ethics of Lower and Lower Prices

When dealing with clothing almost every day, with them being omnipresent, and their presentation also a testimony of their work and service quality, the sales people do not understand the clothing as something that is 'just there'. What most wished for was that all the other involved actors would change their attitude towards the clothing material: There was often a wish for fewer items, in general, and no longer mass production. The sales employees see that there is no real need for this amassed apparel, and that it is necessarily becoming surplus. They also talk about the joylessness when working with the surplus material, and the fact that they are reduced too cheap merchandise that just needs to be sold by any means. Low prices and even higher markdowns stabilize a network of constantly high apparel output and a hierarchy of neglect and mistreatment.

„[…] The prices have become extremely low, that is what I noticed, compared to earlier years. […] if put a price of CHF 1.95 on something… I am shocked by that. I do not even dare to buy it then, and also with other things, when I just think 'hey, this is just too cheap'. I would be ashamed to buy it…" (Employee 3)

If setting a low price – so the observations of the sales people – the companies make their customers believe that there is no quality or hard labor behind the product. It is a mechanism which leads the consumer to throw things away much easier, as elaborated in chapter two. The low prices seem to make the employees think about whether or not these practices are ethically supportable, and feel there should be more awareness of certain issues that arise when promoting a mass-producing and bargain-hunting philosophy:

„Yes, sure, you buy it. It is marked down and you need to capitalize from that. But somehow, I just think… how much did that person earn who manufactured it? Ten cents? Not even that? It is crazy. But well, you have to get rid of it somehow, because throwing it in the trash would be worse, right?" (Employee 23)

6.1.2. When Clothing is Damaged

Divita and Yoo remark that there are a notable percentage of defective products in fashion retailing: Mass production makes it almost impossible to analyze every single article, which means that during manufacturing or distribution, defects start to show up (2013, p. 23). Mold, seems to be one of the biggest issues:

„Are you talking about damages or so? Usually, we rarely get ware which we have to sort out beforehand. In most cases, the delivery arrives in a flawless state, but it can happen. We had a delivery of shoes recently, and the heel was full of mold. They were brand new, but we had to take them out of sales. But generally, this does not happen so often. At least when I unpacked the new arrivals." (Employee 10)

„We once received, I do not recall exactly anymore when, these two or three boxes full of items which all had mold on it. Those were things which were not stored properly. Apparently, later they have found out that there has been some sort of pipe burst, water damage, or so, which made the whole environment stay humid for a while. And the shoes had been stored there for a while, and we received them like this. That was not a nice thing to look at." (Employee 7)

„Well, you do have those things. They have become rare by now since the controlling instances have been extremely improved. But it can happen that there is a whole series which contains a production flaw or which is packaged in countries with a humid climate, and then those series will get to us and contain mold." (Store Manager 1)

"We usually do not have those kinds of things, but it has happened that something smelled really bad. Like a real heavy smell. But later we got a notification from the employer that there was mold in it. We were then asked to sort that item out and then send it away." (Employee 2)

Generally, one can discern that within the store, issues with mold and the like do not happen frequently, but most of my interviewees were able to state something in that direction. So apparently, on a bigger scale, clothing does often feature disturbing and unwanted aspects, which render them useless for human use and make them superfluous. "Those items clearly cannot be sold, and will be sorted out and liquidated" (Employee 3), and similarly: „There was this item which was not in a good state at all. But these items, we can give them back, send them back to that place. Several stores had to send that item back at once. It does not happen that often, but it happens. Then there are these four or five articles where we have to send the full shipment back" (Employee 6). This makes these items be labeled as surplus material, and hence need to be sent away. Since there are so many products at once which are shipped, "they produce it *en masse*" (Employee 15), it is not surprising that not every single item can be controlled and hence be treated as careful as it might be necessary.

6.1.2.1. "Can You Not Be More Careful?"

Damages are not merely a consequence of neglect in production. A lot more damages occur as a result of careless handling by customers, as my interviewees told me. Since in fast fashion stores, unlike in luxury boutiques, the customers are encouraged to take their preferred items to the fitting rooms themselves, without any assistance of the sales people, certain malfunctions can happen. „Well… yes. It is understandable when the customers try on clothes, there will be make-up stains and such. Also, if you underestimate your size, and take an item too small for you, it happens that it can tear. You cannot really avoid that" (Employee 3). The customers apparently do not notify the sales personnel in every instance, since it might me more convenient to put the item back, since there is no proof of who could have done that. "Yes, I mean there are clothes which you find in the fitting rooms, which are really damaged, and I just think "can you not be more careful?". Because it still… I mean we still lose something. And if I go to another store I pay a lot of attention not to damage things or leave them behind like this" (Employee 6). The sensation of being unwatched might encourage a slight neglect towards the clothing.

Holding the customer accountable for the damage they inflict on the clothing nevertheless is not possible, mainly because it usually cannot be traced back to who exactly 'did it'. „The customers wear make-up. Or there are mothers with strollers, with children and their sweets or snacks. But I cannot do anything, because even if I see that a child just made an item dirty, I cannot ask the mother to pay for it. You cannot do that" (Store Manager 3). That would be counterproductive to the common customer-strategy that the main aim is that they "leave the store happy" (Store Manager 1). To go further than that, they will be provided with a discount as an incentive to still decide in favor of buying the item. "Getting the item cleaned professionally would cost too much, so the customer can decide if they still want the item for a small discount" (ibid.) This can be decided by the employees themselves, but only if the damage is as small as possible. The customer is not supposed to take home an item which is barely wearable. That does not only count for the in-store items, but also for those that were already bought and returned for any reason. "If they bring an item back we will give them a voucher with which they will get a 10% discount for their next purchase" (Employee 16). Damages seem to be common during especially the clearance sales, so that the employees' stores had to adapt a strategy to relocate this group of surplus material, as they say. "If an item shows flaws or gets damaged, we have to take it out of sales. That item will then be marked as damaged. Most times, we just donate those items. This will be marked in the system as well. We, for example, donate it to a women's shelter. But if something is just dirty, we see whether we can get it out or not. If not, it will be donated as well. If it has a hole, or is torn, it will be donated. Our employer says that generally, items with flaws or damages are not supposed to be sold" (Store Manager 1). But apparently there can be clothing which is concurringly damaged in a way, that no one can use them for their original purpose: "if it is really exaggerated, we will have to throw it away" (Employee 3).

6.2. Reflection

As elaborated in the first part of this chapter, there is a constant availability of new clothing. But since the stores are clearly not empty at the arrival of the new deliveries, there is navigation demanded on how to make room for the newer and more current clothing, since they are in the focus of the stores' strategies. A common mechanism to make space are clearance sales. They are not a new phenomenon, but have taken on a shape which are remarkable: due to the competition markdowns have become a must for the stores, and the customers even start expecting them. The sales employees in the fast fashion retail stores I interviewed saw mainly one problematic behind this trend: depending on the pricing of the items, the customers show only little respect towards the clothing. As many interviewees correctly stated, there is no difference in quality after a markdown. But it nevertheless will be perceived as such. The thoughtless handling of the clothing from the part of the customers even shows in damages, so that the merchandise cannot be sold, and has to be donated. Some emerging flaws are even as strong that the items cannot face any other destiny than being discarded.

CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION

7.1. Concluding Remarks

The fast fashion industry strongly appears to be a sign of the often proclaimed self-destructive trait of the capitalist spirit. Instead of using all of its information channels, such as the sales employees with their close regular interaction with the customers who could easily find out more about customer preferences, they only base their future actions on sales numbers. Sales numbers, however, are a liability when it comes to estimating trends for future periods. When avoiding wrong investments by wrongly estimated trends and wrongly ordered items, the companies just seem to go after the strategy of 'the more, the better'. Unsold merchandise will be treated like collateral damage, a necessary evil if one wants to profit despite the uncertainties that the fashion industry entails.

Through the eyes of fast fashion, every single item of clothing is reduced to an object with only temporary appeal: What used to be an investment into one's wardrobe has reached the state of being a disposable good. The fact that there are always new trends available at the stores makes the consumers expect exactly that to happen. The easy availability of new clothing gives them little reason to hang on to older styles. Also the redundancy of older fashion – what often will actively be promoted as no longer 'in' – leaves them to be nothing other than superfluous in one's closet. Household textile disposal has reached unprecedented extensions by now (see. Chapter Two). Yet, the plethora of clothing which is released cannot be made disappear so easily. Landfills full of textile wastes keep growing, and no longer capable to absorb the amounts of discarded clothing if we continue to produce in the same manner.

But even before the clothing enters the solid waste-stream, it has clear effects on its environment by being there in masses. The study at hand showed that there were new situations created by the growing body of clothing traded within the fast fashion industry. Based on narrative interviews held with fast fashion store employees, the most prevalent discourses were extracted and analyzed. Relying on the Actor-Network-Theory (ANT), the clothing, as a material actant, has received a greater part of the attention of this analysis. Thankfully, the ANT is not strict with prerequisites and guidelines, which made it possible to depict the stand clothing has within this network. It has helped giving the body of clothing agency, which showed in situations where it 'competed' with other actors, like customers, for the attention of the employees. Since there is a multitude of clothing waiting to be prepared for the store – a process which introduced the term of the *warendruck* – get back in order or to leave the store, there is much attention from the employees needed. This is, paired with short-handed staff due to strict budget restriction, a task which takes up a greater part of a day. The customers on the other hand tend to either stay away, or come in masses: during clearance sales, they often even overstay their welcome. Otherwise, during regular sale phases, they often stay away for hours. This is due to the fact that the consumers in the meantime have become aware of the fact that there will be frequent clearance sales, and hence decide to delay their purchasing to then, arousing the feeling that the item is never worth the full price. The providers are partly to be blamed, since, as the employees reported, markdowns in price happen very quickly. The first field of discourse hence dealt with the growing tension between the lack of work and too much thereof.

The second field of discourse reflected on the ambivalent valuation of clothing. While during regular sales seasons – meaning with prices of items not reduced (no matter how low originally) – the customers are generally careful and responsible in their treatment of the clothing, during the by now frequent clearance sales, the situation will look completely different: while the clothing still demands to be taken care of in a respectful manner, the customers do not perceive the items the same way they do otherwise. Piles of clothing on the floor and even damaged clothing are not an uncommon sight during the hectic times of the clearance sales. The employees detect the reason behind this in the partly very low prices at which these items will be handled.

The lack of appreciation from the side of the companies towards their employees and the combined with the customers' missing respect towards the clothing renders working within a fast fashion retail store a challenge. The logic of profitability, with the missing staff, the constant output of clothing and hence the competitive markdowns, has initiated the downfall of the profession and the stores. The system simply does not pay off – and this shows especially within the frames of their retail stores. The employees I interviewed lamented many of said aspects.

Thus, the high outputs of the fashion industry do not only have far-reaching impacts on the non-human environment, but also alter our cultural perspectives on clothing. The symbolic need of clothing is easier to fulfil than ever, and makes the quick changes in trends even be applauded. Even though many alternatives to the current fashion production mode like slow fashion and others have been discussed widely, the appeal of the fast fashion system is hard to beat. The problem lies within the structures of the capitalist production system which has become dependent on a high level of consumption, and thus invests much in creating the need to consume. But constant growth cannot be the aim forever, for the way of reaching this aim has impacts on the entire globe. An ongoing output of commodities for which there might not even be a real demand contributes to an alteration of our natural environment, which has only limited capacities to absorb our waste. If there is a sincere interest in counteracting the current ecological crisis, the stand of the (clothing) commodity within economy and culture needs to change profoundly.

7.2. Outlook

In many ways, the changes of fashion retailing have been discussed in public. Warehouses, shopping malls and the simple retail stores complain about shrinking profit due the emerging online competition. Exploring the reasons of the unpopularity of said shopping facilities would be an interesting undertaking, also within a scientific frame. Retail stores in general offer an insight into fascinating dynamics, from the hierarchies to the working conditions and offer much room for more research.

There are many possible scenarios which have all been hailed to replace the current mode of fashion retailing. During the summer months of 2017, H&M announced the implementation of a new daughter-line named *Arket*[1], a store-concept which is based on a business model based on a more elevated lifestyle of the consumers, who are supposed to be shopping slowly and consciously, instead of fast and impulsively. The official website of the store offers its customers not only to search for different styles or colors, but also to set a filter according to preferred material, or even the location of production. On top of that, the visitor even finds recipe suggestions. The new brand has only recently opened a few stores, but is mostly present online. Since the onus of this study lies within the stores, I am interested in what future-scenarios one could expect when visiting a store. Thus I wanted to know what changes apart from the supply chain management the employees want or expect to happen. One employee could depict a format which could have the potential to be the concept of the future for fashion stores:

„[…] For example, when someone really wants to spend some money on an outfit, let us say a suit or several outfits, and so on, and that is not little money, you ask them if they would like a coffee or something else to drink, offering them those kind of things. You make appointments with good customers, you organize something, and then you'd say, well I can also offer a glass of champagne, or a snack, or so. […] these are shopping-experiences, because customers also want experiences. That is what it is from now on; you have to bet on that". (Employee 22, date of interview: 10.02.2017)

A slow but emerging trend are shopping experiences, which make buying clothes not a matter which one undertakes on the side – less fashion trend-driven and more decelerated. As my informants stated, the offering of countless numbers of items could soon be outdated, and might not work out in the future. Even though it follows the same principles of a stable consumption and profit, and is mainly adapted because consumer's attitudes have changed, it could be seen as a chance to re-think old structures, or at least to produce less. Less surplus material (a part of which will end up in the solid waste stream) would imply a less burdened environment and are also a chance to introduce better working conditions and chances for people on the other end of the supply chain. Hence in this case, the means could justify the end.

Annotations

[1] See the official website of H&M daughter *Arket*, as well as recent online articles. Arket: Official Website https://www.arket.com/en_eur/index.html (accessed: 29/08/2017).

News portals have noticed the launch of the new brand and made them a topic of their articles. See for example: Wiesinger, M. 2017: „Mit diesem Label versucht der H&M-Konzern einen Neuanfang“. In: *WELT*. Available Online.
https://www.welt.de/icon/mode/article167988054/Mit-diesem-Label-versucht-der-H-M-Konzern-einen-Neuanfang.html (accessed: 29/08/2017).

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ANNEX ONE:

LIST OF PROVIDERS

A non-finite list of fast fashion providers in Europe. The description is taken from the RepRisk Company Report Lite of 2017 for the respective companies.

COMPANY	DESCRIPTION	COUNTRY
ASOS PLC	ASOS through its subsidiaries, operates as an online fashion and beauty retailer primarily in the United Kingdom, the United States, and rest of European Union. The company was founded in 2000 and is based in London, the United Kingdom.	Great Britain (GB)
Bershka (Groupo Inditex)	Inditex Group is engaged in textile design, manufacturing, and distribution.	Spain
C&A Group	C&A is a European fashion retail company. The company has two head offices, in Brussels and in Duesseldorf. It operates as a subsidiary of Cofra Holding AG.	Belgium
Esprit Holdings Ltd	Esprit Holdings Limited is an investment holding company. The company is principally engaged in wholesale and retail distribution and licensing of fashion and life-style products designed under its own Esprit brand name, together with Red Earth cosmetics, skin and body care products.	Hong Kong
Forever21 Inc	Forever 21 operates stores under the Forever 21, XXI Forever, ForLove 21, and Heritage 1981 banners in the US, Canada, and a dozen Asian countries, as well as an e-commerce site.	United States
The Gap Inc	The Gap Inc. is a global specialty retailer offering clothing, accessories, and personal care products for men, women, children, and babies under the Gap, Old Navy, Banana Republic, Piperlime, and Athleta brands. It operates stores in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, France, Ireland, and Japan. It also has franchise agreements with unaffiliated franchisees to operate Gap and Banana Republic stores in many other countries worldwide.	United States
Hennes & Mauritz AB (H&M)	H&M Hennes & Mauritz is a Sweden-based company that is active within the clothing retail industry. The company is engaged in the design, production, and retail of clothing items and related accessories.	Sweden
Jack & Jones (Bestseller Group)	Bestseller is a family-owned clothing company founded in Ringkøbing, Denmark. It produces brands such as Vero Moda, VILA, ONLY and others	Denmark

Punto Fa SL (Mango)	Punto Fa SL engages in the design and sale of fashion apparel and accessories for women through its subsidiaries. The company is based in Palau-Solità i Plegamans, Spain and sells under the brand name, Mango.	Spain
Massimo Dutti (Grupo Inditex)	Inditex Group is engaged in textile design, manufacturing, and distribution.	Spain
NewYorker Group Services International	NewYorker, legally NewYorker Group Services International GmbH & Co.KG, is a German clothing retailer headquartered in Braunschweig that primarily addresses the target group of 12- to 39-year-olds.	Germany
Only (Bestseller Group)	Bestseller is a family-owned clothing company founded in Ringkøbing, Denmark. It produces brands such as Vero Moda, VILA, ONLY and others.	Denmark
Oysho (Grupo Inditex)	Inditex Group is engaged in textile design, manufacturing, and distribution.	Spain
Peacocks	Peacocks is a fashion retail chain based in Cardiff, Wales.	GB
Primark Stores Ltd	Primark operates discount department stores throughout Britain and in Ireland as Penneys. The company's departments include womenswear, lingerie, childrenswear, menswear, footwear, accessories, and household textiles. It operates as a subsidiary of Associated British Foods PLC.	GB
Pull&Bear (Grupo Inditex)	Inditex Group is engaged in textile design, manufacturing, and distribution.	Spain
Stradivarius (Grupo Inditex)	Inditex Group is engaged in textile design, manufacturing, and distribution.	Spain
Tally Weijl	Tally WEiJL is an international company designing, manufacturing and selling clothes for women.	Switzerland
Topshop/Topman Ltd	Top Shop/Top Man Limited, doing business as TopShop, owns and operates a chain of clothing retail stores in the United Kingdom and internationally. It operates as a subsidiary of Arcadia Group.	GB
Uniqlo Co Ltd	Uniqlo Co designs, manufactures, markets, and sells casual wear. It also operates casual wear retail stores. The company is owned by Fast Retailing Co Ltd.	Japan
Benetton Group SpA (United Colors of Benetton)	Benetton Group SpA, through its subsidiaries, primarily manufactures and markets fashion apparel in wool, cotton, and woven fabrics, as well as leisurewear.	Italy
Uterqüe (Grupo Inditex)	Inditex Group is engaged in textile design, manufacturing, and distribution.	Spain
Vero Moda (Bestseller Group)	Bestseller is a family-owned clothing company founded in Ringkøbing, Denmark. It produces brands such as Vero Moda, VILA, ONLY and others.	Denmark
Zara (Grupo Inditex)	Inditex Group is engaged in textile design, manufacturing, and distribution.	Spain
Zara Home (Grupo Inditex)	Inditex Group is engaged in textile design, manufacturing, and distribution.	Spain

ANNEX TWO: INTERVIEW GUIDE

In German

Intervieweinleitung

Zu Beginn möchte ich mich herzlich für deine Teilnahme an diesem Interview bedanken. Ich führe dieses Interview im Rahmen meiner Masterarbeit an der Universität Zürich durch. Wie bereits besprochen, möchte ich das Interview gerne mit diesem Smartphone aufnehmen. Die Aufnahme wird jedoch nur von mir für die Analyse verwendet und für die Arbeit komplett anonymisiert. Es werden also in der Arbeit keine Namen oder Orte genannt, welche Rückschlüsse auf dich ermöglichen könnten. Geht das in Ordnung so? *(Falls die Person die Frage mit «nein» beantworten sollte, erklären weshalb eine Aufnahme für meine Arbeit wichtig ist und dass ich ein Transkript allenfalls zusenden kann)*. Wie du bereits erfahren hast, geht es in meiner Studie um den Umgang mit Kleidung in den Modegeschäften.

[Beginn der Aufnahme]

Interviewfragen

[Themenblock 1: Eingang und Aussortierung der Kleidung]

1. Du arbeitest ja in einer Modefiliale. Erzähl mir davon, wie ein Arbeitstag bei dir in der Filiale aussieht.

2. Wie gestaltet sich so ein Arbeitstag, wenn neue Ware für den Laden eintrifft?
   Mögliche Nachfragen:
   a. Was habt ihr für Regeln bezüglich neuer Ware?
   b. Was wird dann wegen der Neuware auf der Fläche geändert?
   c. Inwiefern ändert ihr euren Personalbestand, wenn neue Ware eintrifft?

3. Um wie viel Ware handelt es sich dabei?
4. Was muss alles erledigt sein, bis ihr wirklich mit der neuen Ware abgeschlossen habt?

5. In welchen Fällen wird hier schon Ware aussortiert?
6. Wie oft kommt so etwas vor?

7. Wie gestaltet sich an einem solchen Tag das Bedienen der Kundschaft?
8. Wie reagiert die Kundschaft darauf, wenn sie euch mit der Neuware beschäftigt sehen?

9. Wie geht die Kundschaft bei euch im Geschäft mit der Kleidung um?
10. Was geschieht, wenn innerhalb des Ladens ein Teil kaputtgeht?
11. Was geschieht, wenn innerhalb des Ladens ein Teil dreckig wird?
12. In welchen Fällen ist ein Teil nicht mehr verkäuflich?
    a. Was geschieht dann damit?
    b. Wie oft kommt so etwas vor?
13. Was geschieht mit der übrigen Ware, die nach längerer Zeit nicht verkauft wird?
    a. Wie viel ist das, nach deiner Einschätzung?
    b. Wie gestaltet sich diese Aussortierungsarbeit?
    c. Was geschieht mit der aussortierten Ware?

14. Wie sieht es in eurem Lager aus? (Ware-zu-Lagerplatz-Verhältnis)
    a. Wie gestalten sich die Arbeiten im Lager?

[Themenblock 2: Ausverkauf]

1. Erzähl mir davon, wie ein Arbeitstag während des Ausverkaufs aussieht.
    a. Was ist anders als sonst?

2. Wie geht die Kundschaft während des Ausverkaufs mit der Kleidung um?
3. Wie verhält sich die Kundschaft während des Ausverkaufs?

4. Wie wird die Ware anders gehandhabt während des Ausverkaufs?

[Themenblock 3: Veränderung über Zeit]

1. Was hat sich im Verkauf in der Modebranche über die letzten Jahre verändert?
    a. Was hat man im Verkauf früher anders gemacht?

2. Wo siehst du den grössten Unterschied zu früher in Bezug auf Kleidung?

[Themenblock 4: erwünschte Veränderung]

1. Was stört dich im Umgang mit der Kleidung innerhalb des Geschäfts?
2. Was könnte man deiner Meinung nach anders handhaben in Bezug auf Kleidung?

3. Wo siehst du allgemein die grösste Baustelle innerhalb der weltweiten Modebranche?

[Themenblock 5: Warenzuständigkeit]

1. Wer hat bei euch im Geschäft schlussendlich das Sagen, wenn es um die Ware geht? *(→ nachfragen, wer als Interviewpartnerin/Interviewpartner noch infrage käme)*

Von meiner Seite wäre das bereits alles. Was möchtest du gerne noch anfügen, was ich allenfalls vergessen habe?

Nochmals Herzlichen Dank für deine Teilnahme.

PERSONAL DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the submitted thesis is the result of my own, independent work. All external sources are explicitly acknowledged in the thesis.

Zurich, __ / __ / 2017

Aranya Sritharan