

Bachelor Thesis  
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**LUNDS**  
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Fashioning the political statement:  
A qualitative study into the duality of postfashion  
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This thesis is dedicated to;

My mother, Davorka Petrić 1962-2013

and

My grandmother, Mara Milosavljević 1942-2016

**Abstract:**

The aim of this study is to examine the interrelationship between contemporary French luxury fashion and political struggles by examining the garments with explicit political statements from the ready-to-wear spring/summer 2015 Chanel runway, the ready-to-wear spring/summer 2017 Dior runway and the menswear fall/winter 2017 Balenciaga runway analysis as to discern the possible reasons and effects of the making of these statements. The focus of this thesis is to examine the way political struggles, as immaterial social relationships, can be commodified into garments, as according to the Marxist situationist theories of Guy Debord, and how the commodification in question by *haute couture* houses, rich with the sociological notion of cultural capital as described by Pierre Bourdieu, can have a potential effect on the formation of both fashion discourses and political discourses by using Foucauldian discourse analysis. The results of the study showed that there is an inherent duality to luxury postfashion, the notion of postfashion being the one described by Barbara Vinken, as it is a phenomenon which thrives on the principles of exclusion through its price-points and small target groups, but at the same time strives to deconstruct the notions of exclusivity by incorporating political statements into their products which reference and encourage the togetherness of political struggles such as socialism and feminism.

**Keywords:** cultural capital, *haute couture*, luxury, postfashion, commodification, political struggles, inconspicuous consumption

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## 1.0 Introduction

Man has dressed himself in order to carry out a signifying activity. The wearing of an item of clothing is fundamentally an act of meaning that goes beyond modesty, ornamentation and protection. It is an act of signification and therefore a profoundly social act right at the very heart of the dialectic society.<sup>1</sup>

- Roland Barthes

Fashion, as a system and as a phenomenon, has shaped and been shaped by the ever-changing political notions of its time.<sup>2</sup> Clothes have been used throughout modern history to conform to or to rebel against the set societal standards of its time, and transgressions could even mean life or death in certain instances.<sup>3</sup> Many a philosopher, historian and economist have dismissed the subject of dress and fashion as insignificant for a number of reasons. Fashion has traditionally been viewed as the woman's domain, and thus as something frivolous, decadent and not significant enough to be treated as a scientific subject.<sup>4</sup> In 1899 Thorstein Veblen put forth his theory of conspicuous and inconspicuous consumption in his book *The theory of the leisure class*, as to explain the emergence of these notions regarding fashion amongst other topics. What Veblen calls the "leisure class" was in his time the *bourgeoisie*, or what we refer to as the upper class today. A simplified explanation of Veblen's leisure class theory is that *bourgeoisie* women are perceived as irrational, decadent and extravagant consumers of fashion, while *bourgeoisie* men are perceived as rational, measured and subdued consumers of fashion. Veblen reflects upon the origins of these notions and believes that it stems from the patriarchal idea of the man representing the intellect and the woman representing the irrationality of emotions. Veblen also believes that the *bourgeoisie* men of his time displayed their monetary strength through the excessive way their wives dressed, thus enforcing the idea that dress and its consumption is a part of the perceived female irrationality, frivolity and decadence.

In later years and in our contemporary times, fashion has been given the recognition of a scientific subject worth doing research on by different powerful academic institutions around the world, and has therefore managed to partially wash off its perceived "female irrationality"

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<sup>1</sup> Barthes, Roland, *The language of fashion*, English ed., Berg, Oxford, 2006, p. 97

<sup>2</sup> For further definition of "the fashion system" see: Roland Barthes, *The fashion system*, University of California press, Berkeley, 1983 [1990]

<sup>3</sup> For example: if someone who is perceived as male wears an item of clothing that is perceived as female, such as a dress or a skirt, they would be shunned or in worst cases verbally or physically abused.

<sup>4</sup> For further reading:

- Christopher Breward, "Cultures, Identities, Histories: Fashioning a Cultural Approach to Dress", in *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture*, December 1998, Vol. 2 Issue 4, p301-313
- Lou Taylor, "Doing the laundry? A reassessment object-based dress history", in *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture*, December 1998, Vol. 2 Issue 4, p337-358

and has slowly merged with the traditionally intellectual male arena of academics. Even though this has occurred, I will argue that the discourse surrounding fashion, especially luxury fashion and the consumption of it, as being a frivolous and decadent practice, is something that is still prevalent in society and is still affecting the way we perceive and judge fashion practices.

The luxury segment of fashion is often perceived as the embodiment of the traits mentioned above, such as frivolity, exclusivity, decadence and hyper-visible conspicuous consumption, and its primary customers have traditionally been the bourgeoisie or upper class. Why is it then that brands such as Chanel, Dior and Balenciaga, who are a part of the luxury segment of fashion, in recent years have decided to explicitly take on political struggles, such as feminism and socialism, through clothes with political statements in their runway shows? The feminist and socialist political struggles, or political struggles in general, are perceived by most as being a serious subject, even a matter of life and death for some. When Chanel, Balenciaga and Dior decide to merge the perceived “frivolous” societal phenomenon of fashion with what to some is a life and death political struggle, they create a quizzical paradox of sorts, a paradox whose function and implications I will explore in this thesis.

### 1.1. Aim and research questions

The aim of this thesis is to examine the interrelationship between contemporary French luxury fashion and political struggles by examining the political statements made by Chanel, Dior and Balenciaga through their garments and accessories as presented at their runway shows. The following are the research questions that I will try to answer in this thesis:

- How is the interrelationship between contemporary French luxury fashion and political struggles expressed through the garments with political statements by Chanel, Dior and Balenciaga?
- What reasons can be discerned for Chanel, Dior and Balenciaga to be making political statements in recent years, specifically through garments?
- Do Chanel, Dior and Balenciaga have the required influence to affect discursive formations through their political statements?

## 1.2. Research material and delimitations

As stated in the introduction, fashion has always had a close interrelationship with the politics of its time in numerous ways, but I wanted to analyse the contemporary version of this interrelationship because of the changes I have perceived in the approach towards the subject that the luxury segment had been showcasing in recent years. One of these contemporary examples is the Chanel 2015 spring/summer ready-to-wear collection that was shown at Paris fashion week on the 30<sup>th</sup> of September 2014. The creative director Karl Lagerfeld staged a feminist protest as a closing act for the runway show, where the models held signs with feminist political statements.<sup>5</sup> This runway show is an example of the performativity of fashion, and the way it can be used to stage actual life events that carry a certain significance, such as protests. I soon realised that “fashion as performance” was a subject that has been researched upon before from a lot of different angles, which made me reconsider my approach. Instead, I wanted to look at the way the luxury segment integrated political statements into the physical product, which brings the aspect of the materiality of fashion to the analysis. Even with its mostly immaterial nature, as it only contains one physical product that could be perceived as having an explicitly political message, the Chanel runway show remained as part of my research material because of the many attributes it has in common with the collections and runway shows that my research material initially consisted of. I will specifically use two bags from the collection as my research material: the “Ladies first” bag and the “*Je ne suis pas en solde*” bag. The most relevant attributes that made me keep Chanel as my research material is that it is an over 50-year-old French *haute couture* house situated in Paris, which in recent years has decided to make political statements in favour of a political struggle, in this case feminism. Another reason for keeping it as my research material is because it serves as an example and contributes to the strength of my arguments in the analysis regarding the continuity of the changes happening in the luxury segment and its approach towards making political statements.

I chose the Christian Dior spring/summer 2017 women’s ready-to-wear show and the Balenciaga fall/winter 2017 menswear show as my research material as well because of the material nature of their political statements as a physical garment or product.<sup>6</sup> Maria Grazia Chiuri, the first female creative director in the 70-year long history of Dior, chose to include

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.voque.com/fashion-shows/spring-2015-ready-to-wear/chanel#collection> (retrieved 02/04/2017)

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.dior.com/couture/en\\_us/womens-fashion/ready-to-wear/spring-summer-2017-ready-to-wear-show](http://www.dior.com/couture/en_us/womens-fashion/ready-to-wear/spring-summer-2017-ready-to-wear-show) (retrieved 5/4/2017)

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two identical white t-shirts with the print “*We should all be feminists*” and two identical white t-shirts with the “DIO(R)EVOLUTION” print on them in her first collection for the French *haute couture* fashion house. The creative director for Balenciaga, Demna Gvasalia, made use of the logo from the US senator Bernie Sanders presidential campaign, but wrote “Balenciaga” in place of the original “Bernie”. Gvasalia did this in no less than 6 looks in his collection, ranging from simple t-shirts with the logo printed over the left pectoral to an over-sized duvet-scarf with the logo printed in large text, taking up majority of the look.

There were a lot of designers during the S/S 2017 New York fashion week in February who made political statements through the garments in their shows as well. While most of them are a part of what you could call the luxury segment of fashion, they do not have the same kind of historical background and as the French *haute couture* houses.<sup>7</sup> The historical background I am talking about, and which I will expand upon in the analysis, is that of the *Chambre syndicale* and its more than a century-old tradition of luxury tailoring in Paris. Because of this, I felt that the political statements that were made at New York fashion week were all created in an age where the trickle-down theory of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had become obsolete. Rather, they were created in a time, and a city, where the trickle-up and trickle-across theories have become the rule rather than the exception as a symptom of the postfashion system of contemporary times.<sup>8</sup>

The adaption to these new attitudes towards luxury fashion became especially evident to me in the Chanel, Dior and Balenciaga collections because of their much more contrasting background towards making political statements in favour of political struggles, like feminism or socialism, than the background that the new US luxury brands have. This contrast in societal notions coupled with the amount of influence they carry by being a part of the French *haute couture* tradition is what primarily drew me to the runway shows of Chanel, Dior and Balenciaga as my research material. It enabled me to create a more effective analysis of the phenomenon than what would have been possible with the new luxury brands that lack the same amount of cultural capital. The historically significant background of Chanel, Dior and Balenciaga is what gives them a large amount of cultural capital, which in turn is what gives them the ability to influence not just fashion, but the western culture as a globally spread phenomenon.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://nymag.com/thecut/2017/02/all-the-political-statements-brands-are-making-during-nyfw.html>  
(retrieved 6/4/2017)

<sup>8</sup> See 1.5 for further information about the trickle-theories



### 1.3 Method

When referring to the notions of societal phenomena and discourse formations in this thesis, I will be using the definition of the philosopher Michel Foucault as written in his book *The archaeology of knowledge* from 1969. Foucault turns his own definitions of the term upside down and inside out within the book, and presents its multitude of different uses and meanings within different scientific disciplines. He does arrive at his own conclusion, which is that “the term discourse can be defined as the group of statements that belong to a single system of formation [...]”. What is a “system of formation” then? Foucault describes it as follows:

Whenever one can describe, between a number of statements, such a system of dispersion, whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations), we will say, for the sake of convenience, that we are dealing with a discursive formation [...]<sup>9</sup>

Foucault’s definition and use of the word discourse is that it is a term to be used when describing the manner which a subject is talked or written about, and that the way it is talked or written about contributes to the discursive formation. I used Foucault’s theories on discourse formation as my research method in this thesis as to uncover and define the changes that I had perceived in the approach of the French *haute couture* phenomenon to the subject of political struggles. Foucault’s theories on discourse formation is also what made me choose the press photographs of the garments as they were shown at Paris fashion week as my research material, specifically because of the cultural capital and therefore the authority of Paris fashion week as a platform where to showcase new collections and the media coverage of the collections that follows because of its cultural capital and influence. Thus, Paris fashion week and the garments presented on its runway shows have a significant role in the formation of the fashion discourse and the discourse surrounding fashion in turn.

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<sup>9</sup> Michel Foucault, *The archaeology of knowledge and the discourse on language*, Pantheon books, New York, 1982, originally published in French in 1969. First quote p. 107, second quote p. 38.  
<http://solomon.soth.alexanderstreet.com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/cgi-> (retrieved 05/05/2017)

## 1.4 Previous research

### 1.4.1 Fashion and political statements

As stated in the introduction of this thesis, the interrelationship between fashion and political statements is a long standing one, one that in certain instances is perceived as controversial. The fashion history and theory professor Caroline Evans writes about the merging of fashion, politics and history in the collections of both mainstream and *avant-garde* luxury brands in her 2003 book *Fashion at the edge: spectacle, modernity and deathliness*. Evans gives the Comme de garcon S/S 1995 menswear collection as an example, where designer Rei Kawakubo presented two models with shaved heads who were clad in striped pyjamas with numbers on them on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. Kawakubo later claimed that the instance had been purely coincidental, and she then removed the garments from sale. A similar instance occurred when the Paris-based Belgian designer Martin Margiela staged a runway show inside train cars, which had been decorated with disco balls. Not all the guests were seated inside the train, but there were a lot of who were placed outside the trains, which to the present *Womens wear daily* journalist gave the whole collection a distinct association to Hitler's death trains and the film *Sophie's choice*. Margiela, like Kawakubo, later denied the accusations, and claimed that the placement of the journalists was a way of creating a kind of intimacy that otherwise does not exist between the guests of a runway show and the models showing the garments. Evans argues that these are more *avant-garde* brands, but that occurrences like these also exist in the mainstream segment of luxury fashion, such as the use of Nazi insignia in Jean-Louis Scherrer's 1995 *couture* collection.

Evans states that the aim of her book is to "[...] scrutinise just such an attraction of opposites, between fashion and ideas previously considered inimical to fashion".<sup>10</sup> While the aim of Evans' book is similar to the aim of this thesis, her examples are that of collections which have been interpreted as having ties to the Nazi ideology, a political movement of the past which is also largely frowned upon. The research material of this thesis however does not draw upon historicism, but are integrating political movements such as feminism and socialism into their garments specifically in a way which appeals to the respective contemporary incarnations of these political struggles.

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<sup>10</sup> Caroline Evans, *Fashion at the edge: spectacle, modernity and deathliness*, Yale University Press, New Haven, Conn., 2003 p. 19

The research on fashion and the way it can be used as a conveyor of political statements has also been done within the frames of identity formation, in this case specifically the formation of a political identity. In 1999 Fadwa El Guindi wrote the article *Veiling resistance* for the academic journal *Fashion theory – the journal of body, dress and culture* about the way Islamic dress, such as the headscarf, was used as a feminist tool by women in Egypt during the mid-seventies.<sup>11</sup> In 2010, Janice Cheddie wrote the article *Troubling subcultural theories on race, gender, the street and resistance* for the same journal about the way African-American women were presented in fashion magazines and other media in the 1960s, and how it has affected the view the modern fashion industry has on black femininity. One of the examples Cheddie gives is the aesthetic of The Black panther party, where the uniformity of the black berets, afros and black leather were used as a political statement and as a symbol of resistance against the oppression of African-Americans by the white majority.<sup>12</sup> The studies by El-Guindi and Cheddie, and others similar to these, have all been made about the production of political values outside of the fashion system, on how groups of people take the garments that the fashion system produces and imbue new meanings and values into them rather than conveying the meanings and values that the fashion system intended the garment to have. This study differentiates itself from theirs by analysing a research material which the fashion system already has imbued a political meaning into, that cannot be hijacked as easily as the other garments in question because of their explicit political statements integrated into the garments themselves.

#### 1.4.2 Fashion discourse

The research on the discourse surrounding fashion, which has been executed in a similar fashion as my study is the article *High Fashion and Pop Fashion: The Symbolic Production of Fashion in Le Monde and The Guardian* written by Agnès Rocamora for *Fashion theory: the journal of dress, body and culture* in 2001. The article was a predecessor, and in a way a sample of Rocamora's work on her doctoral thesis *The symbolic production of culture in discourses on fashion in Le Monde and the Guardian: a critical application of the work of Bourdieu*, which was published in 2002. It is a comparative study on how the discourse differentiated in the reporting of "high fashion" runway shows in two magazines during the year 1996; the English *The Guardian* and the French *Le monde*. Rocamora argues:

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<sup>11</sup> El Guindi, Fadwa. *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture*, Mar99, Vol. 3 Issue 1, p51-80, 30p

<sup>12</sup> Cheddie, Janice, *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture*; September 2010, Vol. 14 Issue 3, p331-353, 23p

The fabrication of fashion becomes not just the fabrication of the material object known as the fashion dress but the fabrication of ideas about fashion, the creation of beliefs that give it meaning, whether it be as popular culture in *The Guardian*, or as high culture in *Le Monde*.<sup>13</sup>

While I used similar methodology, material and theoretical models of explanation that Rocamora does in her article in my thesis, I differentiate my study and contribute to the fashion studies field of research by examining the physical products being displayed in the context of a runway show and the impact of the garments created, rather than making the context itself the subject of my study.

### 1.4.3 Luxury fashion

The research on the luxury segment of the fashion system is not a research subject that has been exclusive to the field of fashion studies, for it is a subject that has been explored in a multitude of different academic disciplines with a myriad of different results. Jonathan Faiers text *Sartorial connoisseurship, the T-shirt and the interrogation of luxury*, published in the book *Critical luxury studies: art, design, media* in 2016, stood out as especially relevant for this study seeing as the subject of the text is the notion of luxury in general and the t-shirt when being produced by the luxury segment of the fashion system.<sup>14</sup> This study will also explore the notion of luxury in the context of the post-modern fashion system and the products it produces, but it differentiates itself from Faiers study by also analysing the potential effects the political statements made by the luxury brands through their garments discursive formation. The small lapse in time between the publishing of Faiers text (2016) and this thesis (2017), two academic studies, can also be viewed as indicators of the relevancy of the subject to the fashion studies field of research.

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<sup>13</sup> Rocamora, Agnés, *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture*, June 2001, Vol. 5 Issue 2, p. 123-142, quote from p. 140

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Faiers, "Sartorial connoisseurship, the t-shirt and interrogation of luxury", in John Armitage & Joanne Roberts (red.), *Critical luxury studies: art, design, media*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2016, p. 184

## 1.5. Theoretical framework

### 1.5.1 Pierre Bourdieu: Cultural capital

Pierre Bourdieu was a sociologist who explored the subject of fashion in numerous of his works, such as *Distinction, Le Couturier et sa Griffe* and the chapter “Haute couture and Haute culture” in *Sociology in question*.<sup>15</sup> Bourdieu’s theories have thus been a popular source of material for the fashion studies field, and will yet again play an essential role in the explanation and analysis of the subject in this thesis, specifically regarding the aspect of cultural capital. Bourdieu first coined the term in his book *La distinction* (1968), but I used his essay *The forms of capital* from 1984 because of its concise and accessible description of the theory. Bourdieu argues that there are subtypes to material - or economic - capital, such as cultural capital or social capital. These forms of capital are created by the *transubstantiation* of material capital into its immaterial form, which Bourdieu sees as an essential aspect to take into consideration when studying different, in this case cultural, practices and their influence:

[...] the structure of the distribution of the different types and subtypes of capital at a given moment in time represents the immanent structure of the social world, i.e., the set of constraints, inscribed in the very reality of that world, which govern its functioning in a durable way, determining the chances of success for practices.

Bourdieu describes three different states in which cultural capital can exist, such as the embodied state, the objectified state and the institutionalised state. The objectified state is where the otherwise immaterial cultural capital is infused into the material capital; a consumable product such as a painting, an instrument or a sculpture. The object in question can thus inhabit both the material economic capital and the immaterial cultural capital. In this study, it is a garment produced by the luxury segment of the fashion system and thus makes the objectified state of cultural capital the most relevant. In *Le couturier et sa Griffe*, Bourdieu explains a hierarchy of sorts in the *haute couture* or luxury fashion segment that he likens to the division of the right, left and centrist political wings. Bourdieu describes Dior and Balmain, of which Balmain in this case could be replaced by Chanel or Balenciaga, as the right-wing of *haute couture* with their historical ties to the Parisian *bourgeoisie*. Meanwhile, the newcomers such as Paco Rabanne and Emanuel Ungaro are considered the leftists with their *avant-garde*, and designers like Yves Saint Laurent are considered centrist by Bourdieu, as they have established

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<sup>15</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste*, [New ed.], Routledge, London, 1984  
Pierre Bourdieu, Madame Yvette Delsaut, “Le couturier contribution à une théorie de la magie”, in: *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*. Vol. 1, nr. 1 1975, pp. 7-36  
Pierre Bourdieu, *Sociology in question*, Sage, London, 1993

their own labels by using the cultural capital of the right-wing fashion houses that they were apprentices at, in this case Dior. I will also employ the theories of social capital as defined by Bourdieu, which is acquired by being a member of a group where its members back each other with its collectively owned capital and thus gives them their authority and credibility.<sup>16</sup>

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### 1.5.2 Barbara Vinken: Postfashion

[...] postfashion is more than merely an anti-fashion: the rebellion against fashion is just the starting point of something different. The century of fashion is over: the very idea of Paris fashion is at an end – even an anti-fashion could not save it.

These are the somewhat damning words written by the literature professor Barbara Vinken in her 2005 book *Fashion zeitgeist: trends and cycles in the fashion system*, where she first coined the term postfashion. In the first part of the book – which Vinken fittingly calls ‘postfashion’ – Vinken details the historical evolution of the fashion system through earlier research done by quintessential theorists to the fashion studies field, such as Bourdieu, Roland Barthes, Georg Simmel, Honoré de Balzac, Thorstein Veblen among others. Vinken defines her term of postfashion in the following way:

[...] fashion will no longer strictly divide, whether classes, age groups, or genders. Nothing could be more out of date than to clothe oneself as ‘woman,’ as ‘man’ or as ‘lady.’ [...] fashion becomes ‘carnivalistic’: it cancels the divisions of classes and genders, and, more than this, it exposes the function of costume and disguise at work in categories of class and gender.<sup>17</sup>

This is what separates her analysis of the fashion system from the earlier theorists that she mentions in her book, seeing the rebellious potential of fashion as well as the conforming aspect. I will use the term *postfashion* as a way of explaining the absolving of, as Vinken states, almost a hundred years old boundaries for how the fashion system is supposed to work, and how luxury brands such as Chanel, Dior and Balenciaga are adapting to the changes in question.

### 1.5.3 Charles W. King: Trickle-across and trickle-up

The trickle-down theory was first introduced by the sociologist Georg Simmel in his 1904 essay *Fashion*, where he argued that the fashion innovations of the aristocratic upper class were mimicked by the majority lower classes, and thus, fashion innovations ‘trickled-down’ in society.<sup>18</sup> However, Charles W. King argues in his article *Fashion Adoption: A Rebuttal to the Trickle Down Theory* that the trickle-down theory has become obsolete as early as in 1963.

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<sup>16</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, “The forms of capital”, from J. E. Richardson (ed.) *Handbook of theory of research for the sociology of education*, Greenwood press, 1986, p. 46-55; quote from p. 46. Translated by Richard Nice.

<sup>17</sup> Barbara Vinken, *Fashion Zeitgeist: trends and cycles in the fashion system*. Oxford: Berg, 2005. Quotes p. 63ff.

<sup>18</sup> Georg Simmel, *American Journal of Sociology*, “Fashion” 62, 541–558. 1957. Original work published 1904

Instead, he proposes that the introduction of mass-media, which is enjoyed by a broad selection of societal classes, has significantly sped up the rate at which information travels, and has thus helped with the broader and faster spread of fashion ideas and innovations.<sup>19</sup> The trickle-up theory is the current one amongst trend analysts, which argue that fashion from different subcultures and street-cultures have become the main influencers, rather than the street styles being inspired by the upper class.

#### 1.5.4 Guy Debord: social relationships as commodities

In the *The society of the spectacle*, the French philosopher Guy Debord writes about “the spectacle”; his concept of how the modern economy and its conditions of production has turned the social relations between people into commodities, and thus our lives into mere representations of actual social relations as represented by the commodities we consume. Debord continues his reasoning regarding the spectacle by arguing that it is the degradation of human life from being into having, and thus having into merely appearing, and that this is where “[...] the commodity completes its colonization of social life” as an effect of the dominion over our social lives by the economy. The way we live our lives through inauthentic, constructed, social relations as represented by commodities is what Debord argues contributes to a degradation of knowledge and dissolvment of critical thought, which therefore also is a kind of pacification of the masses according to Debord.<sup>20</sup> The merging of political struggles into commodities such as garments by printing political statements on them is, according to Debord, an expression of the spectacle, which is why I will be using his theories as a tool of analysis in this thesis.

#### 1.5.5 Patrizia Calefato: Luxury

Luxury is a term that is used throughout this thesis, so it is only fair that I define what notion of the term I employed in this thesis. My use of the term luxury is largely based on the book *Luxury: fashion, lifestyle and excess* written by the professor Patricia Calefato in 2014, where she describes the contemporary notion of luxury in the following way;

Today luxury is an aesthetic, economic, and cultural model that seeks to repair the gaps in a Western rationality that lacks the words to explain and justify degrees of possession, forms of

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<sup>19</sup> Charles W. King, *Toward Scientific Marketing*, "Fashion Adoption: A Rebuttal to the 'Trickle Down' Theory." Edited by S. Greyser. Chicago: American Marketing Association, 1963.

<sup>20</sup> <http://library.brown.edu/pdfs/1124975246668078.pdf> (retrieved 14/05/2017). Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, translation by Fredy Perlman and Jon Supak, Black & Red, New York, 1970; rev. ed. 1977 p. 9f, 25f, 16f. quote p. 13

consumption, and features of taste. Thus luxury turns to spheres of exceptionality, uniqueness, rarity, and hyper-visible opulence.

Calefato continues her reasoning by stating that luxury does not have an added value for being luxurious, rather, it has such an exorbitant value that it becomes immeasurable and without value. Calefato, as well as Vinken, employ the theories of Thorstein Veblen from his book *Theory of the leisure class*, and Calefato uses his theory of *conspicuous consumption* to explain the “preciousness and obscurity” of luxury goods.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Patrizia Calefato, *Luxury: fashion, lifestyle and excess*, Bloomsbury, London, 2014. Quote p. 4



## 2.0 Analysis

### 2.1.1 The political statement as presented by Chanel

On the 30<sup>th</sup> of September 2014, Chanel showed its 2015 spring/summer ready-to-wear collection at Paris fashion week. Its creative director since 1983, Karl Lagerfeld, chose to incorporate themes of the second-wave feminism from the sixties and seventies into his collection for Chanel. The references were included into the handbags of the collection, one having peace-signs printed on the strap with the statements “Make fashion not war!” and “*Je ne suis pas en soldes*” (I am not for sale) scribbled with what appears to be a permanent marker on the bag itself. The other bags with printed text on them were small, plexiglass clutches with statements like “Ladies first” and “*Feministe mais feminine*” on them, but with the typically present Chanel logo being absent. These are the only examples of physical products, or commodities, in the collection that have printed political statements, of which only the last two could be perceived as having an explicitly political statement. The main political statement does not occur in the garments themselves, but in the staged feminist protest which closed the show. The protest consisted of the models who had participated in the runway show, and who were now carrying a multitude of different placards with feminist statements such as “Ladies first!”, “Feminism not machoism”, “*Divorce pour tout!*”.



Figure 1: Details look 73, Chanel RTW S/S 2015.  
Photo: Gianni Pucci / Indigitalimages.com

Figure 2: Protest on Chanel runway, Chanel RTW S/S 2015  
Photo: Gianni Pucci / Indigitalimages.com

### 2.1.2 The political statement as presented by Dior

On the 30<sup>th</sup> of September 2016, Maria Grazia Chiuri made her debut as the first female designer to become the creative director of Christian Dior in its 70-year long history at its ready-to-wear S/S 2017 runway show during Paris fashion week. Chiuri chose to not let the significance of the occasion go by unnoticed, as she designed a white t-shirt with the statement “WE SHOULD ALL BE FEMINISTS” printed in black letters on the front of the garment. The origin of the statement is that of author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s 2013 TED-talk speech of the same name, which has since been used by Beyoncé on the song Flawless from her self-titled album and by Chiuri on the Dior t-shirts and in the soundtrack of the runway show.<sup>22</sup>



Figure 3: Look 18, Dior ready-to-wear S/S 2017.  
Photo: Yannis Vlamos / Indigital.tv



Figure 4: Look 31, Dior ready-to-wear S/S 2017.  
Photo: Yannis Vlamos / Indigital.tv

The shirt appears in two separate looks in the show, which is a form of presentation that Chiuri employs later in the show as well with the similar white-with-black-text “DIO(R)EVOLUTION” t-shirts.

<sup>22</sup> [https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_ngozi\\_adichie\\_we\\_should\\_all\\_be\\_feminists](https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_we_should_all_be_feminists) (retrieved 10/05/2017)



Figure 5: Look 43, Dior ready-to-wear S/S 2017  
Photo: Yannis Vlamos / Indigital.tv



Figure 6: Look 47, Dior ready-to-wear S/S 2017  
Photo: Yannis Vlamos / Indigital.tv

These t-shirts, which all have feminist political statements on them, are the only pieces who are used multiple times during the show, which suggests that Chiuri felt that the implicit political statements in the cut of the clothes and their presentation needed to be made explicit. These implicit kinds of political statements, specifically in regards to feminism, is something that most *couture*, luxury, fashion houses are known for, for example the “removal” of the corset by Coco Chanel and Paul Poiret in the 1920s, which was claimed freed the woman of its discomfort and was thus empowering.<sup>23</sup> The explicit kind of feminism that Chiuri introduces to the brand of Dior with her “WE SHOULD ALL BE FEMINISTS” t-shirts combined with the radical notion of revolution on the “DIO(R)EVOLUTION” t-shirts shows a radical, explicit brand of feminism that the brand of Dior has not seen before.

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<sup>23</sup> I put “removal” in citation because of it not being quite true. The corset and the desired s-shape silhouette, as it was known before WWI, did go out of fashion after the war, but it was only replaced with other kinds of corsets and shaping wear as to achieve the desired flat silhouette of the 1920s.

See page 65 in Mendes, Valerie D. & De La Haye, Amy, *Fashion since 1900*, New ed., Thames & Hudson, London, 2010

### 2.1.3 The political statement as presented by Balenciaga

The newly appointed creative director Demna Gvasalia showed his Balenciaga ready-to-wear menswear F/W 2017 show at Paris fashion week on the 18<sup>th</sup> of January 2017. Gvasalia also did not shy away from taking on politics, as he used the logo from US senator Bernie Sanders presidential campaign. The “Balenciaga” logo, which originally said “Bernie”, was used by Gvasalia in no less than 6 out of 40 looks, and as a manicure on some of the models as well.



Figure 7: Look 39, Balenciaga menswear F/W 2017  
Photo: Monica Feudi / Indigital.tv

Figure 8: Look 20, Balenciaga menswear F/W 2017.  
Photo: Monica Feudi / Indigital.tv



Figure 9: Bernie Sanders presidential campaign logo.  
Made by: Wide eye creative, lead by Ben Ostrower.



Figure 10: Look 20, Balenciaga menswear F/W 2017.  
Photo: Gamma-Rapho via Getty images

Commented [S5]: Får man "croppa" bilder?  
Commented [S6]: Ja, ha med länk till originalbilden bara.

The collection was shown a few months after the outspoken socialist Bernie Sanders dropped out of the presidential race and the more liberal Hillary Clinton became the presidential candidate of the democratic party, but only two days before the presidential inauguration of Donald Trump, which took place on the 20<sup>th</sup> of January 2017.

During the following Paris fashion week on March 5<sup>th</sup>, Gvasalia showed his Balenciaga ready-to-wear womenswear F/W 2017 collection, where stilettos draped in the “Balenciaga” Bernie Sanders t-shirts from his previous menswear collection were featured in two looks.



Figure 11: Balenciaga ready-to-wear F/W 2017.  
Photo: Monica Feudi / Indigital.tv

Figure 12: Balenciaga ready-to-wear F/W 2017.  
Photo: Monica Feudi / Indigital.tv

Before helping the French couture house, Demna and his brother Guram Gvasalia created the fashion brand Vestments, which is known for its ironic approach to fashion and the notions of high and low culture. They successfully mixed the two together through their use of company logotypes, such as the postal service DHL, and presenting it as a t-shirt on a Paris runway with the price-tag of 330\$.<sup>24</sup> While the *maison* of Balenciaga was out of business for almost two decades, from the retirement of Cristóbal Balenciaga in 1968, it has undergone a change in

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2016/apr/19/dhl-t-shirt-vestments-fashion-paris-catwalk> (retrieved 09/05/2017)

brand-identity since its reopening in 1986, while still retaining its luxury status as an exclusive French *haute couture* house. It comes as no surprise then that Gvasalia chose to use the presidential campaign logo of Bernie Sanders throughout the Balenciaga collection. The collection also implicitly references the perceived poor fashion sense of politicians and bureaucrats through looks that use oversized and ill-fitting suits paired with briefcases and sneakers. This dishevelled look has become quite iconic for Bernie Sanders, with his ill-fitting suits and Einstein-like hairdo, which could be the reference that Gvasalia is making by using the Bernie logo. Gvasalia has since re-used the t-shirts with the Bernie-inspired logo from the F/W 2017 menswear collection for the following Balenciaga ready-to-wear F/W 2017 womenswear collection, which could be argued has none of the characteristics of its predecessor in the menswear segment, and it can thus be interpreted as Balenciaga making a political standpoint in favour of the socialist political ideology as well as making a comment on the outcome of the US elections.

## 2.2 The cultural capital of Chanel, Dior and Balenciaga

Economic capital has been poured into the French textile industry ever since the state sponsorship of the industry by the 17<sup>th</sup> century *roi soleil* Ludvig XIV of France. The scale and significance of the sponsorship, and Ludvig XIV's enthusiasm for the textile arts, was illustrated by the following quote of the economic advisor Jean-Baptiste Colbert; 'fashion is to France what the gold mines of Peru are to Spain'.<sup>25</sup> The French tradition of luxury tailoring in its *haute couture* state as we know it today started in Paris in 1868 when the *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne* was founded with the sole purpose of protecting the reputation of France as the epicentre of fashion innovation, tailoring and design. After the second world war, the *Chambre syndicale* created strict rules for its members, which you had to abide by as a designer if you wanted to call yourself a *couturier*. The following is a selection of the criteria you had to fulfil in order to call your designs *haute couture* according to the *Chambre syndicale*: the location of your fashion house had to be in Paris, you needed to have at least 20 full-time employees and you or your assistants had to produce 75 original designs twice a year, in the spring and autumn.<sup>26</sup> The designs needed to be made-to-measure and shown 45 times a year on at least three models on your premises.<sup>27</sup> The rules and criteria mentioned gives the reader a

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<sup>25</sup> Christopher Breward, *Fashion*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003 p. 24

<sup>26</sup> The origin of the notion "fashion house" comes from the rules set by the *Chambre syndicale*: that you needed to have a physical house or *maison* in Paris.

<sup>27</sup> Claire Wilcox (ed.), *The golden age of couture: Paris and London 1947-57*, V&A Publications, London, 2008, p. 64ff

slight overview as to why *couture* was, and still is, an important part of the French cultural heritage. Being the *couturier* or *couturière* of an *haute couture maison* in Paris thus makes you a part of a larger historically and economically important context which gives you as a *couturier* or *couturière* the prestige and authority of the collectively owned capital of the entire *Chambre syndicale* and the French luxury tailoring tradition, as according to the principles of social capital as described by Bourdieu.<sup>28</sup> In the following segment, I will describe the history of the *haute couture* houses of Chanel, Dior and Balenciaga, as to illustrate the amount of the accumulated cultural and social capital that the contemporary incarnations of the brands employ today as lead by Karl Lagerfeld, Maria Grazia Chiuri and Demna Gvasalia respectively.

Gabrielle Chanel started out as a milliner in Paris, but soon opened her first dress shop in Deauville in 1913. When the first world war broke out in 1915, she decided to open a *maison de couture* in the town of Biarritz where she showed her first collection. Biarritz is located close to the Spanish border, and was a neutral area during the war, which proved to be a lucrative location with rich refugees as her customers. Chanel became known for her comfortable, simplistic sportswear in which she incorporated elements from the military uniforms of men into women's clothes, such as the comfortable cotton fabric jersey and practical pockets.<sup>29</sup> With the success of these shops, Chanel purchased the entire building at 31 Rue Cambon in Paris in 1918 and became a licenced *couturière* in 1919, and thus, the *haute couture maison* of Chanel as we know it today was established.<sup>30</sup> After the establishment of her *couture* house, Chanel notably garnered great success in the latter half of the 1920s with her continuing adaption of articles of menswear, such as trousers, into women's wardrobes and the debut of her "little black dress" in 1926 which cemented her role as one of the most influential designers of modern times.<sup>31</sup>

On the 12<sup>th</sup> of February in 1947 at 10.30 a.m., a 42-year-old Christian Dior showed his first ever collection at 30 Avenue Montaigne in Paris, which the editor-in-chief of *Harper's bazaar*, Carmel Snow, was present to witness. Snow is said to have exclaimed "It's quite a revolution, dear Christian! Your dresses have such a new look!" which was quickly written on a piece of paper by a Reuters reporter which was then thrown out the window to a courier posted on the street, who then spread the news about the "new look" in the United states and therefore the

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<sup>28</sup> Bourdieu, 1986 p. 51

<sup>29</sup> Valerie Mendes & Amy De La Haye, *Fashion since 1900*, New ed., Thames & Hudson, London, 2010 p. 52

<sup>30</sup> Alice Mackrell, *Art and fashion*, Sterling Publishing, 2005 p. 133

<sup>31</sup> Mendes & De La Haye, 2010 p. 72

world. This quite romantic depiction of the success story that is Dior is as told by the official Dior website, but it is nonetheless true.<sup>32</sup> The “new look”, with its wasp-like waist and long, fabric-rich voluminous skirt, stood in stark contrast to the somewhat masculine female silhouette of the second world war, as Dior wanted to create a hyper feminine look, the pleasure of which he felt that women had been denied during the war years with its fabric rations.<sup>33</sup> The hyper-feminine luxurious fantasy of Dior’s “new look” allowed women to dream again after living in a war-torn France and it became immensely popular. The financial success of the highly visual creative products of Dior lead it to become a part of the cultural heritage of France, of which comes a considerable amount of social and cultural capital. Agnès Rocamora further elaborates on Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital in her article “Fields of Fashion: Critical insights into Bourdieu’s sociology of culture”, published in the *Journal of consumer culture* in 2002, by writing that “[...] established couture houses such as that of Dior, whose capital is both symbolic and economic; it is a capital of prestige, legitimacy and high turnover.”<sup>34</sup> The success of the “The new look” helped create the cultural capital that Dior inhabits today, which is a part of the French cultural heritage with its exclusive luxury tailoring, or *couture*, and is celebrating its 70-year long history this year (1947-2017).

Cristóbal Balenciaga was not, in contrast to Coco Chanel and Christian Dior, French. He was born in Guetaria, a town on the Basque coast in Spain where his mother was a seamstress, and thus his interest in fashion started at an early age. Balenciaga opened his fashion house on Avenue George V in Paris in 1937, and was therefore already a household *couturier* by the time Dior founded his house in 1946. Balenciaga kept strictly to his profession as a *couturier*, refusing to produce ready-to-wear garments even if other *couturiers* like Dior showed that it was very lucrative by dividing his house into the *haute couture* branch in Paris and ready-to-wear branch in New York. Balenciaga rose to success in Paris by being known for his complete mastery of the art of tailoring, for which he employed difficult and innovative techniques to create unusual silhouettes. Thus, Balenciaga created silhouettes that were appealing to the vastly varying bodies of women, rather than exaggerating or emphasizing certain traits of the

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<sup>32</sup> [http://www.dior.com/couture/en\\_int/the-house-of-dior/the-story-of-dior/the-new-look-revolution](http://www.dior.com/couture/en_int/the-house-of-dior/the-story-of-dior/the-new-look-revolution)  
(retrieved 07/05/2017)

<sup>33</sup> Claire Wilcox (ed.), *The golden age of couture: Paris and London 1947-57*, V&A Publications, London, 2008, p. 39

<sup>34</sup> Agnès Rocamora, “Fields of Fashion: Critical insights into Bourdieu’s sociology of culture”, *Journal of Consumer Culture*. November 2002, Vol. 2 Issue 3, p.341-362 (343)



female silhouette. He also refused to add padding in his garments, as he believed it straitjacketed the woman.<sup>35</sup>

Coco Chanel, Christian Dior and Cristóbal Balenciaga were all designers who contributed immensely to the myths of French *haute couture* and the designer as a genius. Their importance to the French tradition of *haute couture* and the fashion system in general is one of the reasons behind the significance of the contemporary incarnations of Chanel, Dior and Balenciaga making political statements stemming from political struggles such as feminism and socialism a part of their branding strategy in 2017.

### 2.3 The materiality of fashion

Fashion as material artefact and idea is clearly the directed result of a creative and industrial process, a system of 'innovation' engineered to meet and encourage seasonal consumer demands and fulfilling a cultural requirement to define ever-shifting social identities and relationships.<sup>36</sup>

- Christopher Breward

The political statements made by Chanel, Dior and Balenciaga cannot be examined as if they only exist as metaphysical objects within the press pictures, the text or the other coverage of the runway shows at which they were presented, but they must also be examined as the material objects that they are, and the fact that they are commodities to be sold on a market. The common perception of the role of the creative director, or designer, is that they make their creative choices - such as incorporating political statements into the designs of garments - completely independently of any other interests, which in part is a result of the romanticised myth of the designer as a creative genius. To the detriment of this fantasy, the final decision of including political statements does not lie solely with the creative directors and designers of Chanel, Dior and Balenciaga, which currently are Lagerfeld, Chiuri and Gvasalia respectively, but with the owners and board members of the company.

Fact is that Dior and Balenciaga are owned by large luxury conglomerates, whose main shareholders they need to placate in board meetings several times a year. Dior is the main shareholder of luxury goods conglomerate LVMH, both of which Bernard Arnault is the chairman. Arnault currently owns 74% of Dior's shares, and thus has the final say in what the direction of the brand-identity of Dior is going to take.<sup>37</sup> The entirety of the Balenciaga shares is a part of a similar conglomerate called Kering, of which François-Henri Pinault is the chairman and CEO.

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<sup>35</sup> Wilcox (ed.), 2008, p. 142 and 150

<sup>36</sup> Breward, 2003 p. 63

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-04-25/arnault-to-buy-dior-for-13-billion-add-couture-brand-to-lvmh> (retrieved 10/05/2017)

The newly appointed CEO of Balenciaga, however, is Cedric Charbit, who is going to be responsible for the commercialization of the designs of Gvasalia, according to Reuters.<sup>38</sup> In the midst of the Bernie-inspired logos of the Balenciaga menswear F/W 2017 show, Gvasalia decided to include a white hoodie with the logo of Kering printed across the chest as, according to himself, a sign of gratitude to the company for letting him helm Balenciaga and for giving him the creative freedom that he wanted.<sup>39</sup> Chanel however is privately owned by Alain and Gerard Wertheimer, the grandsons of Chanel's original business partner Pierre Wertheimer. Chanel is therefore one of the few remaining luxury fashion brands that is not owned by a conglomerate, and thus retains its independence by having only a handful of shareholders outside of the Wertheimer family.<sup>40</sup> Nonetheless, the head of design at Chanel, Karl Lagerfeld, still answers to Bruno Pavlovsky, the president of the fashion division responsible for the ready-to-wear and *haute couture* collections at Chanel, and Pavlovsky answers to the Wertheimer brothers in turn.<sup>41</sup>

The Chanel "Ladies first" and "*Feministe mais feminine*" plexiglass clutches from the ready-to-wear S/S 2015 collection were presented online as having a "price upon request" and was thus not specified. The other bags from the collection ranged from everything between 3800-5900\$.<sup>42</sup> The Dior "WE SHOULD ALL BE FEMINISTS" cotton/linen blend t-shirt is being sold in physical Dior stores as well as the Saks Fifth avenue store and on their website for 710\$, of which they state that "Dior will donate a percentage of proceeds from each sale of the "We Should All Be Feminists" T-shirts to the Clara Lionel Foundation, a nonprofit organization founded by singer and songwriter Rihanna. The Clara Lionel Foundation supports and funds groundbreaking and effective education, health and emergency response programs around the world".<sup>43</sup> The "DIO(R)EVOLUTION" t-shirt is also being sold in the same places and at the same price point, but without any statement that a percentage of the proceeds will be going to charity, which makes it safe to assume that the price of 710\$ is not dependent on the fact that a

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-kering-ceo-idUSKCN12O24L> (retrieved 10/05/2017)

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/fashion-show-review/why-did-demna-gvasalia-create-a-kering-branded-hoodie> (retrieved 10/05/2017)

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2013-09-23/chanel-s-wertheimer-family-seen-with-19-billion-fortune> (retrieved 15/05/2017)

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.businessoffashion.com/community/people/bruno-pavlovsky> (retrieved 15/05/2017)

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.purseblog.com/chanel/channels-spring-2015-bags-have-arrived-in-stores-including-the-new-girl-bag/> (retrieved 15/05/2017)

<sup>43</sup> [http://www.saksfifthavenue.com/main/ProductDetail.jsp?PRODUCT%3C%3Eprd\\_id=845524447095169](http://www.saksfifthavenue.com/main/ProductDetail.jsp?PRODUCT%3C%3Eprd_id=845524447095169) (retrieved 09/05/2017)

percentage of the proceeds are going to go to charity.<sup>44</sup> The garments from the Balenciaga collections that my material consist of are, at the point in time that this thesis is written, not for sale, and the price of the garments and accessories is also unknown. I have therefore used the pre-fall collection as an indicator of what the prices might look like for the garments in my research material. The plain t-shirts, or as the Balenciaga website calls them; “Classic T-shirt”, from the Balenciaga pre-fall menswear collection cost 255\$, and the scarves cost 375\$.<sup>45</sup> A pointed, spandex-clad pump from the womenswear pre-fall 2017 ready-to-wear collection costs 695\$.<sup>46</sup> The official Bernie Sanders campaign t-shirt with his logo printed across its chest costs 25\$ in comparison to the potential 255\$ for the Balenciaga shirt.

The garments that are produced and shown by Chanel, Dior and Balenciaga on the runway of Paris fashion week are not meant for the majority consumer. This is signalled by the 710\$ and 255\$ price tags of the seemingly ordinary t-shirts from Dior and Balenciaga, and the 3400-5900\$ price tags of the Chanel bags. They neither want, nor are interested in, reaching a broader target group, as to preserve the prestige of the cultural capital of Chanel, Dior and Balenciaga. According to Bourdieu, these brands are able to charge their customers with the above-mentioned prices because of the legitimacy and prestige they inherit by being a part of, and thus being able to take part of, the accumulated social and cultural capital of all the fashion houses who have the legitimacy of being a French *haute couture* fashion house.<sup>47</sup> Or in the words of Bourdieu himself:

[...] the specifically symbolic logic of distinction additionally secures material and symbolic profits for the possessors of a large cultural capital: any given cultural competence [...] derives a scarcity value from its position in the distribution of cultural capital.<sup>48</sup>

The creation of this kind of exclusion through price is a conscious exclusion of the majority fashion consumer as to retain the exclusivity principle of luxury. Or as the researcher Otto von Busch writes in his thesis:

Fashion is always some form of difference; “to look like everyone else, but before everyone else” as phrased by fashion journalist Suzanne Pagold. (Pagold 2000: 8) Thus, “democratic” fashion, in

<sup>44</sup>[http://www.saksfifthavenue.com/main/ProductDetail.jsp?PRODUCT%3C%3Eprd\\_id=845524447095140&bmUID=ILISANE](http://www.saksfifthavenue.com/main/ProductDetail.jsp?PRODUCT%3C%3Eprd_id=845524447095140&bmUID=ILISANE) (retrieved 09/05/2017)

<sup>45</sup> T-shirt: [https://www.balenciaga.com/us/top\\_cod37963132lw.html#/us/men/tops](https://www.balenciaga.com/us/top_cod37963132lw.html#/us/men/tops) (retrieved 09/05/2017)  
Scarf: [https://www.balenciaga.com/us/scarves-foulards\\_cod46490259qw.html#/us/men/other-accessories](https://www.balenciaga.com/us/scarves-foulards_cod46490259qw.html#/us/men/other-accessories) (retrieved 09/05/2017)

<sup>46</sup> [https://www.balenciaga.com/us/looks-shoes\\_cod11200732wr.html#/us/women/pumps](https://www.balenciaga.com/us/looks-shoes_cod11200732wr.html#/us/women/pumps) (retrieved 09/05/2017)

<sup>47</sup> Bourdieu, 1986 p. 51

<sup>48</sup> Bourdieu, 1986 p. 49

Commented [S7]: Förtydliga hans bakgrund

the meaning of equally accessible and egalitarian, is an oxymoron, neither possible nor desired, just as smooth mundane fashion would be that of sameness.<sup>49</sup>

When Chanel, Dior and Balenciaga take these political struggles and turn them into statements printed on commodities, they are creating the spectacle which has become the order of society according to Debord. The commodification of the otherwise immaterial notions of feminism and socialism into material objects such as garments is a way of transforming the actual political movement and struggle of the respective theories into commodities as well, which according to Debord, effectively neutralises them.

The creation of a spectacle by making commodities out of social relationships, which in this study are political struggles, is what Debord deems as being dishonest because of its effect on the social relationships themselves through the commodification. The dishonesty which Debord notes in the use of social relationships as commodities is the disguise of the seeking of profit which the transmission of economic capital through the objectified state of cultural capital creates according to Bourdieu. The disguise of the transmission of economic capital through the garments of Chanel, Dior and Balenciaga becomes evident in their use of political statements that explicitly refer to the social relationships which the feminist and socialist political struggles are.<sup>50</sup>

#### 2.4 Luxury postfashion and its adaption to the postfashion luxury consumer

Vinken argues in *Fashion zeitgeist* that the fashion system has managed to accomplish what art always has strived to accomplish; to produce the visible form of the *zeitgeist*, or the 'spirit of the times'.<sup>51</sup> If fashion is an interpreter that captures the *zeitgeist* of our times, then the occurrence of the Chanel, Dior and Balenciaga collections, so soon one after the other, is the language that speaks of the global political unrest of our times, such as the economic crisis of 2008, the war in Syria, the restriction of women's rights and the success of fascism in recent elections around the world. The occurrence of the explicit political statements from the old cultural institutions such as Chanel, Dior and Balenciaga could therefore be interpreted as successful attempts at capturing the *zeitgeist* of our times through the fashion medium.

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<sup>49</sup> Busch, Otto von, *Becoming fashion-able: hacktivism and engaged fashion design*, Edited pocket version, Camino, Gothenburg, 2009

<http://hdl.handle.net/2077/17941> (retrieved 24/04/2017)

<sup>50</sup> Bourdieu, 1986 p. 50

<sup>51</sup> Vinken, 2005 p. 41f

Vinken argues that most sociologists, such as Barthes and Bourdieu, have claimed that the primary function of the fashion system is to divide the societal classes and genders, which she agrees with to a certain extent. But where they differ is that Vinken on the other hand argues in her theory of postfashion, that the contemporary fashion system has garnered an additional function as well. The postfashion system reveals that it constructs these boundaries by subverting and deconstructing them, and by doing so it shows that it is self-aware of its role in the creation and deconstruction of different societal constructs, such as notions about gender and class. The postfashion system thus reveals that the constructs regarding gender and class are just that: constructs, and that said constructs can be torn down and rebuilt to their liking.<sup>52</sup> This postfashion self-awareness is evident in the use of the Bernie logo at Balenciaga, where Gvasalia plays with the paradox of merging the values of *haute couture* luxury which Balenciaga represents, and the equal redistribution of wealth that the socialist ideology stands for. Chiuri however could be argued does not display the same level of self-awareness or intentional irony with her “We should all be feminists” or “DIO(R)EVOLUTION” t-shirts for Dior, as the self-awareness in the merging of opposing values such as feminism and radical leftism with the conservatism and luxury of Dior is not evident. Lagerfeld has been known to make controversial statements in the past, such as the ones commenting on the weight and bodies of women, but the one that truly testifies to the general approach he has towards his work is: “Everything I say is a joke. I myself am a joke”.<sup>53</sup> One of the plexiglass clutches in the ready-to-wear S/S 2015 collection says “*Je ne suis pas en solde*”, which directly translates to “I am not on sale”, but is marketed as “I am not for sale” by Chanel, could thus be viewed as a typical item of the postfashion system, as it displays a self-awareness through the clear irony of being an exclusive Chanel handbag, that is in fact made to be sold, while stating that it is not for sale. As it is presented in the feminist-protest collection, it could also be interpreted as a comment on the importance of the autonomy of the female body that is carrying it.



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<sup>52</sup> Vinken, 2005 p. 16-19

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2014/sep/30/karl-lagerfeld-chanel-show-paris-fashion-week>

These examples could also be viewed as indicators of the change in consumer behaviour towards the inconspicuous consumption of luxury rather than the typically associated conspicuous consumption of luxury. According to the 2015 article *Luxury branding below the radar* published by the Harvard business journal, this change in consumer behaviour has been going on for almost a decade now, where the tastemakers of contemporary times have been shown to have an irreverent attitude towards the conspicuous consumption of luxury. The postfashion luxury consumer would rather buy inconspicuous luxury goods where the brand name is not the main feature, and thus only those who are initiated into the “fashionable” luxury consumer lifestyle knows of its high cultural value. Calefato argues, as seen under title 1.5.1 in this thesis, that contemporary luxury is an aesthetic, economic and cultural model whose function is to relay an exorbitant amount of monetary capital, and thus exceptionality and uniqueness, by relaying the concept of taste. You can acquire the level of tastefulness and uniqueness as described by Calefato, by being one of the few with such and exorbitant amount of monetary capital that you do not feel the need to consume conspicuous items from brands such as Chanel, Dior and Balenciaga where the logo and/or brand name is printed all over it to signal said monetary capital. Instead, you show your monetary capital by buying inconspicuous products from said brands mainly because of their cultural capital which signals that you have taste and are thus initiated into the fashionable luxury consumer lifestyle. Furthermore, the 2015 Harvard business article states that this is a result of the diffusion of luxury products to the middle class, who consume luxury products conspicuously and have thus made the conspicuous consumption of luxury *passé*.<sup>54</sup> An item that could be viewed as tasteful is thus the above-mentioned Chanel clutch, where the main feature is the “*Je ne suis pas en soldes*” statement instead of the double-C Chanel logo which usually is the main feature on Chanel bags, but which is only visible as the clasp of said clutch.

*Fashion zeitgeist* was published in 2005, which means that Vinken in her theory missed out on the impact that social media would come to have on the fashion industry. The trickle-across theory of Charles W. King was written in 1963, where he argued that the phenomenon of mass-media had effected the rate at which information travels to such a degree that it completely changed the way fashion innovations were relayed and to whom. If mass-media was the spark which changed the fashion system in the 1960’s and introduced the trickle-across theory according to W. King, then the rate at which the sheer amount of information is spread through the internet and social media has made us more aware than ever of what is going on in the

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<sup>54</sup> <https://hbr.org/2015/09/luxury-branding-below-the-radar> (retrieved 16/05/2017)

world, as well as what the latest changes in fashion are and are going to be, which I believe is an essential part of the postfashion system of our time.

### 3.0 Conclusion

Through the theories of Vinken and Debord, I have been able to discern possible reasons for the occurrence of the phenomenon where the contemporary incarnations of the *haute couture* brands Chanel, Dior and Balenciaga make political statements. Vinken and her theory of postfashion has allowed me to discern the dualism of the fashion system, both past and present, and the paradoxical use of political statements by its luxury segment as a symptom of the postfashion system. Maria Grazia Chiuri's use of the notion of revolution in her "DIO(R)EVOLUTION" shirt creates a duality by combining the notion of revolution with what is typically associated with the rather violent class struggle between the working class and the class which most of Dior's customers represent: the *bourgeoisie* or upper class. Demna Gvasalia creates a duality and conflict of interest at Balenciaga with his appropriation of the Bernie Sanders logotype, seeing as socialism is a political ideology where the redistribution of wealth and the equality of every member of society is its cornerstones, while luxury fashion is a phenomenon which thrives on the principles of exclusion and the decadence of opulence. The same goes for Chanel and its Karl Lagerfeld designed "*Feministe mais feminine*" clutch, where the price tag and statement implies that femininity is inherently connected to being able to afford being dressed as the Chanel woman, which effectively excludes most feminists.

The theories of Debord have also been a useful tool of analysis as to explain the interrelationship between the fashion system and the capitalist economic system, and how their causal interrelationship could have a potential effect on the occurrence of the political statements of Chanel, Dior and Balenciaga. While I do agree with Debord to a certain extent, I also believe that he underestimates the influence of cultural capital on the formation of discourse and opinions as explained by Bourdieu and Foucault respectively, and thus the qualities of deconstruction and resistance as well, which Vinken argues postfashion has. As according to Foucault and W. King respectively, the spread of the discursive formations which the garments of Chanel, Dior and Balenciaga have a part in creating trickles-across social media platforms that are open to everyone, and thus give a voice to the people who are not typically the customers of said brands. Balenciaga encourages their *bourgeoisie* customers to identify themselves with the socialist struggle by using the Bernie logo, Dior and Chanel encourage their upper-class customers to identify themselves with the feminist struggle through garments

with statements such as “WE SHOULD ALL BE FEMINISTS” and “Ladies first”. The Dior t-shirt also donates a percentage of its proceeds to a non-profit organization which de facto is going to help impoverished people around the world, however small the actual percentage is. The brands in this study are therefore helping to bring attention to the political struggles in question through the legitimacy and authority of the cultural capital they inhabit, while they simultaneously commodify them and trivialise them by turning them into commodities to be sold on a market. Debord argues that this diffuses the political struggles that they help bring attention to, while Vinken argues that it shows the deconstructive qualities of postfashion as well as its conforming qualities. It is also worth mentioning that the theories of Debord were written in the 60’s, while the theories of Vinken were written in the 00’s, but their differing views have nonetheless helped me to discern the inherent duality of the fashion system, as it is a medium which allows the relative freedom of creative expression, but which at the same time is closely knit to the capitalist economic system and its production of commodities and thus the exploitation of said creative freedom.

Seeing as the research material used in this thesis was very new at the time the study was made, there was not an opportunity to research the effects that the political statements made by Chanel, Dior and Balenciaga have had on the formation of political discourses in any kind of long term perspective. However, the research results of this study do indicate that the making of political statements through garments in the *haute couture* luxury segment of the fashion industry has become a trend, as it is three examples of the phenomenon who have all occurred within the last three years. Thus, the probability of the luxury segment producing more collections like these is relatively high, which means that there is a possibility of making a more detailed study on the impact of these statements as more data on the subject is created as time passes. The research results of this study have hopefully enabled the reader to view the phenomenon of the contemporary incarnations of luxury *haute couture* brands making political statements as the nuanced issue it is.



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## Pictures

Figure 1: Details look 73, Chanel RTW S/S 2015

Photo: Gianni Pucci / Indigitalimages.com

Source: <http://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/spring-2015-ready-to-wear/chanel/slideshow/details#73> (retrieved 01/06/2017)

Figure 2: Protest on Chanel runway, Chanel RTW S/S 2015

Photo: Gianni Pucci / Indigitalimages.com

Source: <http://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/spring-2015-ready-to-wear/chanel/slideshow/details#94> (retrieved 01/06/2017)

Figure 3: Look 18, Dior ready-to-wear S/S 2017

Photo: Yannis Vlamos / Indigital.tv

Source:

Figure 4: Look 31, Dior ready-to-wear S/S 2017

Photo: Yannis Vlamos / Indigital.tv

Source: <http://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/spring-2017-ready-to-wear/christian-dior/slideshow/collection#31> (retrieved 01/06/2017)

Figure 5: Look 43, Dior ready-to-wear S/S 2017

Photo: Yannis Vlamos / Indigital.tv

Source: <http://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/spring-2017-ready-to-wear/christian-dior/slideshow/collection#43> (retrieved 01/06/2017)

Figure 6: Look 47, Dior ready-to-wear S/S 2017

Photo: Yannis Vlamos / Indigital.tv

Source: <http://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/spring-2017-ready-to-wear/christian-dior/slideshow/collection#47> (retrieved 01/06/2017)

Figure 7: Look 39, Balenciaga menswear F/W 2017

Photo: Monica Feudi / Indigital.tv

Source: <http://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/fall-2017-menswear/balenciaga/slideshow/collection#39> (retrieved 01/06/2017)

Figure 8: Look 20, Balenciaga menswear F/W 2017

Photo: Monica Feudi / Indigital.tv

Source: <http://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/fall-2017-menswear/balenciaga/slideshow/collection#20> (Retrieved 01/06/2017)

Figure 9: Bernie Sanders presidential campaign logo

Made by: Wide eye creative, lead by Ben Ostrower.

Source: <https://ru.pinterest.com/pin/66428163230908037/> (Retrieved 01/06/2017)

Figure 10: Balenciaga enamel pin

Photo: ericaewright / Instagram

Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/BPafYtCDWI7/?taken-by=ericaewright> (Retrieved 01/06/2017)

Figure 11: Look 30, Balenciaga ready-to-wear F/W 2017

Photo: Monica Feudi / Indigital.tv

Source: <http://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/fall-2017-ready-to-wear/balenciaga/slideshow/collection#30> (Retrieved 01/06/2017)

Figure 12: Look 31, Balenciaga ready-to-wear F/W 2017

Photo: Monica Feudi / Indigital.tv

Source: <http://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/fall-2017-ready-to-wear/balenciaga/slideshow/collection#31> (Retrieved 01/06/2017)

Figure 13: Chanel I Am Not On Sale Plexiglass Minaudiere

Photo: Chanel ready-to-wear S/S 2015 lookbook

Source: <http://www.purseblog.com/chanel/channels-spring-2015-bags-have-arrived-in-stores-including-the-new-girl-bag/> (Retrieved 01/06/2017)