

*Articles of Interest*, hosted

by Avery Trufelman, <https://99percentinvisible.org/aoi/>

*Handcut Radio*, hosted by Aleks Cvetkovic, <https://www.handcutradio.com>

Since their inception in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, podcasts have acted as a portable and easily digestible mode of storytelling; whether documentary or narrative, self-contained or serialised episodes. An already popular format, podcasts took on new value at the onset of COVID when anxiety was high and concentration levels low, and access to in-person research sites (libraries, museums, galleries) was restricted. When access to physical spaces is limited, dress researchers may find that podcasts provide a digital avenue of investigation for the oral histories around clothing which live outside of the public collection.

Oral testimony can illuminate aspects of object biography that may be otherwise impossible to discern. In the case of worn clothing, hearing testimony from the wearer can provide insights into so much more than the textile itself including the wider social context and intimate memories and experiences. The podcasts *Articles of Interest* (first episode premiered September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2018, available via <https://99percentinvisible.org/aoi/>) and *Handcut Radio* (first episode premiered May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019, available via <https://www.handcutradio.com>) are examples of this, exploring the topic of dressing the self from macro and micro lenses, utilising oral testimony from wearers to enrich this exploration. Framed by wider historical narratives and contemporary individual views, the three episodes of each of the two podcasts reviewed here demonstrated an interest in the personal motivations behind dressing the self.

*Articles of Interest* is comprised of 20-30 minute episodes with pre-recorded clips, studio audio recording from host Avery Trufelman, field recordings with

interviewees and the occasional audio effect, resulting in a well-produced programme. The three episodes reviewed (*#3 Pockets*, *#6 Punk Style*, *#10 Suits*) opened with short anecdotes from interviewees. These recollections: of getting locked out of a dorm due to a lack of pockets to hold house keys, being harassed for wearing clothes deviating from the accepted norm, or falling in love with tailored suits, acted as the anchor for the following concise journeys through an aspect of the episode topic. Weaving together elements of social and design history, facets of dress are explored by Trufelman, led by a narrative that seemed to emerge from her own curiosity about the topic. For example, episode *#3 Pockets* began by discussing the often-explored inequity between functional pockets in women's clothing and men's clothing, touching on functions of safekeeping and utility over the centuries and evolving into as she describes it, a "metaphor for privilege".

Trufelman interviewed key figures in the areas the podcast explores: leading pocket history scholar Barbara Burman is included in *#3 Pockets* and Victoria and Albert Museum curator Claire Wilcox discusses Vivienne Westwood in *#6 Punk Style*. Where Trufelman mines her richest narrative seam is through the interviews with people discussing their lived experiences with garments. DJ and filmmaker Don Letts and curator and Westwood collector Michael Costiff describe the *feeling* of wearing punk clothes in 1970s London, providing textual insight that supersedes the audio-only format of the podcast. For men's fashion writer G. Bruce Boyer (*#10 Suits*), the passion verging on obsession in his voice when he highlights the details of tailored suiting is what contextualises the intoxicating potential of clothing.

*Handcut Radio* aims to explore the specific topic of men's fashion through "interviews with industry insiders and leading brands" such as Levi's and Oliver Spencer, though the three interviews selected for this review (*#32 Scott Fraser Simpson*, *#33 André Larnyoh*, *#39 Fred Nieddu*) focused on individual makers and

personalities. Recorded both in studio and in the field, all three episodes emphasised the highly personal nature of clothing for these men, unravelled in a single interview between the subject and host Aleks Cvetkovic. As a well-placed journalist within the tailoring-minded segment of the “menswear” industry, he approached his questioning from a place of expertise, but also as a self-professed fan of his interview subjects. The resulting episodes were wide-ranging and intimate, a casual conversation between peers that taps into the inspirations and passions of men deeply engaged with their dressed selves.

The insider knowledge Cvetkovic has of “menswear” (particularly of notable characters in the industry, of niche brands, and long defunct shops) acted as an encouragement for interviewees to share their own experiences with clothing. There was a shorthand in these exchanges which sidestepped any need for these men to justify their interest in clothing (this interest as it intersects with notions of masculinity is addressed in *Articles of Interest #10 Suits*), instead Cvetkovic allowed them to unspool their memories freely, occasionally following up references with comparable experiences of his own. With atmospheric background noise of children laughing and the occasional car horn, each interviewee recounted the ongoing evolution of their dress habits, highlighting their own perceived past fashion missteps (fedoras, boat shoes) as they moved toward what they saw as a refined personal style.

At an average of 45 minutes focused on one interview subject, Cvetkovic was able to plumb the depths of their personal experience in dressing: all three subjects cite their fathers as a catalyst for early interests in clothing. The conversational and unscripted edit of these discussions allows the telling parts of oral testimony, the pauses, and the exclamations, to speak volumes. The pleasure or distaste the

interviewees feel for certain garments, the excitement about the discovery of a new inspiration is captured in the tenor and content of their telling.

Episodes #32 *Scott Fraser Simpson* and #33 *André Larnyoh* spend time examining the cultural touchpoints they consider stylish (examples include Miles Davis, Jean-Michel Basquiat, the Mod scene in Brighton, and Anthony Minghella's 1999 film *The Talented Mr. Ripley*). In #39 *Fred Nieddu*, his varied prior experience working in multi-brand retail shops and apprenticing in different tailoring houses coheres in his current practice, where he insists on an open mind toward construction techniques drawing from outside of the traditional British methods of Savile Row.

The strength of both podcasts ultimately lay in using oral testimony to highlight how the individual, personal experience of dress can speak to larger societal constructs. Episode #10 *Suits of Articles of Interest* began and ended with Rae Tuturo of custom suit maker Bindle & Keep discussing the sense of self they found in suiting and how they parlayed that into a business that aimed to dress any gender. Episode #3 *Pockets* questioned what tools might be necessary for us to carry if we lived in a more equitable society – would housekeys matter if there were no fear of theft driving us to lock our doors? In episode #33 of *Handcut Radio*, Cvetkovic posits that style inspiration should not just be drawn from the dress habits of an individual, but also their wider ethics and behaviour. Toward the end of that same interview, Larnyoh poses an open question to the audience, formed from his own experience feeling isolated in the world of tailoring and luxury: why are black designers and style personalities not included at the forefront of “menswear”?

While taking different approaches, *Articles of Interest* as a narrative journey through concepts of dress and *Handcut Radio* as the musings and autobiographies of

dressed individuals, both podcasts provide profound insight into the experience and meaning of being dressed.

**Cyana Madsen**

**University of the Arts London and Museum of London**