

Fashion in an Age of Transindividual Disruption:
***Feeling* the fashion milieu through fashion media and mobile phone technology**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D)**

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February 2025

Abstract

In an era where mobile phone ownership among UK young adults (16-24) reaches near-universal penetration (99% as of 2024), this thesis interrogates the complex interrelationship between mobile technology, fashion media consumption, and user affect.

The research originates from observations at the London College of Fashion in 2013, where students' profound digital immersion appeared to compromise their engagement with physical learning environments.

Drawing upon the theoretical frameworks of Bernard Stiegler, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Gilbert Simondon, this study examines fashion media as technological prostheses that mediate affective flows within digital networks, fundamentally shaping users' self-understanding and worldview. Through a postphenomenological methodology incorporating micro-phenomenological interviews and focus groups, the research investigates how technological disruption reconfigures community formation and social bonds.

The study introduces the concept of 'the fashion milieu' to theorize the intricate entanglement between embodied experience and socio-cultural dimensions of fashion media consumption. This framework, coupled with Simondon's notion of transindividuation, illuminates the dynamic tensions between individual and collective identity formation in digital spaces.

The findings reveal a paradoxical phenomenon: while fashion media accessed through mobile devices fosters *philia* (social connection), it simultaneously disrupts transindividual relations, generating patterns of digital dependency characterized by anxiety and addictive behaviours. This research advances scholarly understanding of how mobile-mediated fashion media consumption reconfigures affective experiences and social formations in contemporary culture.

This thesis makes significant contributions to digital media studies, fashion theory, and phenomenological approaches to technology by demonstrating how mobile devices, as mediators of fashion media consumption, fundamentally alter both individual affect and collective social fabric. The findings have implications for understanding digital well-being, social cohesion, and the evolution of fashion communication in an increasingly mobile-first world.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my thanks to my supervisors Agnès Rocamora and Felicity Colman for their intellectual generosity, their encouragement, and their endless support in my writing of this thesis. I am grateful to my colleagues Melanie Davies and Jason Kass for being such supportive critical friends and for their kindness in offering their time to read early drafts of this work. Many thanks also to Graeme Spur for helping me to shape my writing, and Kim Crowder for her diligence in proofreading this thesis. A big thank you to the women who offered to participate in this project and who were so generous in sharing their lived experience of reading fashion media with me.

I would like to offer my sincere thanks to my parents, Pam and Albert Thomas, for their love and care, they are sorely missed. Also to my wonderful extended family: my children and grandchildren, my siblings and their families who have been so encouraging and understanding of my absence at weekend lunches and football practices whilst I worked on this thesis. I would especially like to thank my sister Lindsey Richards who so often picks up the slack in caring for us all.

Special thanks to Mackenzie Dearsley for her shared enthusiasm for the study of feelings, and for listening whilst I expressed my thoughts out loud on so many occasions. Finally, I would like to thank my husband Richard Strange for his continuous love and encouragement and for instilling the belief in me that I could make it to the finish line – you're the best

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Introduction

Mobile phone technology is ubiquitous in everyday life, to the extent that at the time of writing this thesis in 2024, 99% of 16-24 year-olds in the UK owned a mobile phone (Statista 2024). Although connecting via telephone is not a new phenomenon, the evolution of the telephone into first a mobile device, and then a smartphone, has set the user free from the tether of a landline, and extended communication into the space covered by a digital network, easily accessed through social media platforms.¹ A 2024 social media survey reports that Instagram now has 2.3 billion global users (Business of Apps. 2024). Fashion media seeks a perpetually connected user and traverses the globe through digital networks in a flow of information that is continuously updated and available through mobile phone technology.

My interests in committing to this research stem from a behavioural pattern observed in 2013 when teaching undergraduate fashion communication students at the London College of Fashion in London, UK. As a scholar of fashion media and communication I became particularly interested in my students' relationship with fashion media read or watched on a mobile phone. My students were, in the main, women between the ages of 19 and 24 who appeared to struggle with being present and attentive in the classroom and on focusing on the task at hand. They regularly picked up their mobile phones in class to access social media, which seemed to capture their attention, and in so doing they appeared to mentally leave their physical environment. Moreover, it became evident that fashion media encountered through these technologies was intrinsic to the sense they made not only of their self but also of the world. I also noticed that their conversations relating to fashion media accessed through their mobile phones seemed to focus on the feelings they experienced as users of these technologies.

Joff Bradley and David Kennedy (2020: 5) advocate for a philosophy of education to account for 'the crisis-ridden moment we are living through [in order] to think seriously about the loss of attention and loss of interest in learning among young people across the planet'. They deploy and extend the philosophy of Bernard Stiegler (1952-2020) to explore the disruption to individual and collective life that results from the prevalence of mobile phone technology and social media networks, and pose the following questions: 'What kinds of retentional apparatuses are being created for these students seemingly given over to industrial

¹ The smartphone is a mobile device that combines the functionality of a mobile phone along with computing capabilities.

temporal objects? What is the nature of this capturing of attention? More crucially, who does it serve and for what purpose?’ (2020: 98).

This thesis shares very similar concerns around attention and disruption – which have prompted two overarching research aims. First, to investigate fashion and fashion media as technological prostheses integral to human becoming (Stiegler 1998 [1994]) in order to explore the role these structures play in the human-technology-world relation. The focus of this exploration is to interrogate how fashion media, in capturing my participants’ attention disrupts the individual-collective relation, therefore the research asks ‘what are the implications of this disruption on both their sense of self and their social world?’. The second aim of the thesis is to investigate the notion of ‘feelings’ that users experience through their relations with fashion media. To account for such feelings, I develop a theoretical framework that adopts a postphenomenological methodology to investigate both the cognitive/perceptual/bodily and socio-cultural aspects of lived experience.

To address my research aims, I set out to answer the following research questions:

1. How do the bodily aspects of experience influence the sense fashion media users make of fashion media and their world when read or watched on a mobile phone?
2. What role do fashion media, when encountered on a mobile phone, play in the formation of the self?
3. How does fashion, understood as a technology aimed at sociality, inform the fashion media user’s social relations, and shape collective life in an age of mobile phone technology and digital networked media?

Definitions of Key Terms

Technological Prosthesis

Throughout this thesis the term ‘technological prosthesis’ refers to Stiegler’s definition (1998 [1994]), which argues that technical objects are exosomatic organs in which humans store not only their physiological and psychological capabilities, but also their memories. Drawing on the ideas of Jean-Jaques Rousseau (1712- 1778), André Leroi-Gourhan (1911-1986), and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), Stiegler arrives at a theory to explain the origin of human being, drawing on the Aristotelian argument around the myth ‘The Fault of Epimetheus’ to develop an argument on how non-living tools that are external to the human compensate for

a default in human essence (Stiegler 1998 [1994] 188). The Ancient Greek myth tells how the gods gave the job of equipping living creatures with qualities to exist without inter-species domination to the Titans, Prometheus and his twin brother Epimetheus. The name Epimetheus means to forget, and true to his name Epimetheus forgot to save any qualities for man who was left with nothing. Prometheus attempted to rectify this error by taking fire from Mount Olympus and skill in the arts from Hephaestus and Athena, and then gifting both these attributes to humans. Fire, and skill in the arts thus become tools that make up for the lack of human essence which, Stiegler argues, gives rise to hominisation, the invention of the human (Howells and Moore 2013:238). Hence, the interior of the human and the tools exterior to the human are inextricably bound as it is *techne*, artificial supports and the knowledge of how to use them, that enable humans to thrive and prosper. However, importantly for Stiegler, human memory is also externalised in *technics* which are then handed down to future generations through the tools they make and use. As Anne Alombert (2020: 43) explains, memory, which

[...] has traditionally been understood in terms of psychological interiority is in fact constituted through the process of technical externalization. When they begin to produce artificial organs and technical supports, living beings open new possibilities for the conservation of collective memory: through the organization of matter, living beings externalize their experiences and allow them to be transmitted from generation to generation thanks to material supports, which are memory supports.

In this thesis I take the view that clothing and dress are the raw material of fashion. However, fashion is a collective activity as it necessitates adoption by a large group of people in order for the objects of fashion to be deemed fashionable. Furthermore, it is a collective of individuals who each make choices as to what they wear rather than see clothing as a utilitarian necessity. Thus, in my research I understand fashion and fashion media as technological prostheses aimed at sociality. Sociality in this context refers to the tendency of humans to form social groups and communities with others who share similar interests and values. Referring to Alombert's quote above, fashion leaves a material trace that opens possibilities for the conservation of collective memory and experience that is transmitted across generations, leaving in its wake a history of fashion that has a global reach. As Anne Hollander (2016 [1994]: 11) explains 'everybody has to get dressed in the morning'. Moreover, fashion, by its very nature is in constant flux '[r]ooted in the "now", [and] creates its own past through the process of rapid style change. Fast-moving, it is always on the verge of becoming something else.' (Evans and Vaccari 2020: 11). This thesis

investigates fashion as it is experienced through fashion media that is accessed through mobile phone technology. The thesis adopts Stiegler's positionality on technological disruption which it employs as a framework through which to consider how fashion media in the form of social media posts disrupts social relations, and to further investigate the role these technologies play in a feeling of collective becoming.

The Transindividual Relation

Susan Kaiser and Denise Green (2021 [2012]: 1 original emphasis) state that '[f]ashion is not a thing or an essence. Rather, it is a social and embodied process of negotiation and navigation through the murky and yet-hopeful waters of what is to come. Fashion involves becoming collectively with others'. I build on this idea to explore the nature of this 'becoming collectively with others,' engaging the lens of Simondon's transindividuation. Rather than seeing individuality and collectivity as a zero-sum game, where individuality develops through the rejection of collectivity, and collectivity occurs through the suppression of individuality, transindividuation understands both individual and collective as emerging through a continuous process of individuation (Simondon 2020 [1964, 1989]: 327-355). Thus, transindividuation 'gets beyond individualist or wholistic accounts of social processes and relations' (Read and Gilbert 2019: 58). It proposes the unity of internal (psyche) and external (collective) relations through intercorporeal exchange. Here the psyche is understood as a compound, made up of both affect and perception that transcend to emotion and action: both feeling and behaviour. However, feeling has historically been neglected in studies of fashion and fashion media, a gap in knowledge that my research sets out to address.

Feelings

An investigation into the feelings experienced by my participants is fundamental to this thesis. To define the term 'feeling' I deploy the ideas of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) (1967 [1942], 2014 [1945], 1968 [1964]) who argues that mind and body are inextricably linked. Thus, I understand feelings as being felt through the body. To account for the context and operation of emotion in digitally mediated environments I extend my theoretical framework by drawing on the ideas of Gilbert Simondon (1924-1989) (2017 [1958]), 2020 [1964, 1989]). A student of Merleau-Ponty, Simondon takes a different approach to reinterpret scientific theory as a philosophical project. Simondon understands affect as the driving force of the psycho-

social process, through which the living being comes to realise they are more and less than a unity. He explains how affect, through a process of transduction, transcends to an emotional response that emerges through the individual-collective relation which incorporates the individual into collective life. Thus, following Simondon, I understand the feelings my participants describe as emerging through their social relations, which are a phase in the continuous process of becoming of both the fashion media user and their lived environment.

Contribution to Knowledge Fashion and Fashion Media

This thesis is specifically concerned with the implications of technological disruption. The originality of this work is that it takes a postphenomenological approach to consider fashion, fashion media and mobile technology as technological prostheses (Stiegler 1998 [1994]) specifically aimed at sociality as discussed above. I make a contribution to knowledge in fashion and fashion media by revealing how the concretisation of these technologies into a singular dynamic system shifts both the affective flows and the transcending emotional bonds felt by fashion media users, which results in a disruption to the transindividual domain. This methodological and theoretical approach offers a view of fashion and fashion media that current studies have not yet identified.

Despite being a body-centred discipline, fashion scholarship has historically neglected the body by understanding the fashioned body only as signifier. Joanne Entwistle (2003 [2000]), a pioneer in the search for the fleshy body in the field of fashion studies, develops a theoretical framework to consider the body as both embodied and socially constituted. Entwistle's work has been instrumental in establishing the importance of the body in studies of fashion. This thesis aims to contribute to this now growing area of research into the bodily aspects of fashion and fashion media by introducing my own concept, 'the fashion milieu'. The fashion milieu brings together the fleshy, affective and socio-cultural aspects of the body to study the collective of bodies that emerge through a shared interest in fashion: *the feeling of fashion*. I build on current research in fashion and fashion media to show how feeling and knowing are inextricably linked, and moreover, that feelings are integral to the sense fashion media users make of the self and the world.

Digital Culture: Mobile Phones and Social Media

It has been established that mobile phones disrupt social relations and enable a specific type of person-to-person communication (Campbell and Park 2008; Goggins 2006, 2013; Hjorth 2012; Katz 2006; Katz and Aakhus 2002; Ling 2010; J.M. Mitchell 2004; Richardson and Hjorth 2017; Richardson and Wilken 2023, 2024; Turkle 2012, 2015; Urry 2007). The introduction of the smartphone has brought with it access to social media which, being a participatory medium – unlike mass media that preceded it (Hinton and Hjorth (2013) – has paved the way for a networked public (boyd 2010), where users go to socialise with others, to see and be seen. Whilst acknowledging that the fashion media user - fashion media relation extends beyond a social transaction to encompass a political and economic aspect, this thesis considers how the feelings experienced by the fashion media user in their encounters with fashion media in the form of social media posts come to inform individual and collective becoming.

Hinton and Hjorth (2013) note how the quality of the connection engendered through social media facilitates a sense of intimacy that exists not only between lovers, family and friends, but also ‘intimacies that can exist at a social or cultural level’ (2013: 44). Yet, whilst acknowledging that social media creates intimate relations (Abidin 2013, 2021; Entwistle and Wissinger 2023; Findlay 2019), which are qualified as a perceived interconnectedness, an impression, or feeling (Abidin 2021), the biological registers of intimacy are absent from inquiry into digital culture, a gap in knowledge I address through my research.² Addressing this gap is important as this thesis reveals how fashion media in the form of social media posts accessed through mobile phone technology engender a paradoxical phenomenon, namely that whilst fostering a feeling of *philia* (a social connection) through an emotional exchange, they simultaneously disrupt the long circuits of intergenerational knowledge necessary for transindividuation and so generate digital dependency in users.

² It is pertinent to note that my research was carried out between 2018-2019. My participants describe their experience of reading and watching fashion media in the form of Instagram posts and YouTube vlogs. As such, this thesis offers a historical understanding of fashion media consumption through social media platforms and does not account for more recent sharing platforms such as Tik Tok (2016 onwards).

Postphenomenology

Pieter Lemmens' (2017:185) contribution to *Postphenomenology and Media*, argues that postphenomenology could 'greatly profit from a dialogue with the philosophy of Bernard Stiegler' in its pursuit to extend postphenomenology into a true philosophy of media. This thesis takes a similar position and expands the field of postphenomenology through a theoretical framework that brings together the ideas of Merleau-Ponty, Simondon, and Stiegler. In so doing it accounts for the bodily, and socio-cultural aspects of experiences and considers the implications of the disruption to the transindividual relation brought about by technology.

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is comprised of two parts. The first part is a review of relevant literature, an outline of my theoretical framework and methodology (Chapters 1-4).

Chapter 1 outlines the methodology I adopt for my research. I discuss the postphenomenological method, which requires analysis of in-depth pre-reflective descriptions of experience as lived by the experiencing subject. I developed a multi-method approach by conducting micro-phenomenological interviews (Petitmengin 1999, 2006, 2009, 2021) with fashion media students who describe their experience of reading and watching fashion media on their mobile phone in the context of their everyday lives. I conducted these interviews alongside focus groups with the same participants to conceptualise their descriptions and to collect more general information around their use of mobile phone technology.

Chapter 2 sets out a review of the literature relating to the search for the body in fashion and fashion media. This review acts as a foundation for my theoretical framework that supports an investigation into the range of feelings integral to my conceptual tool, the fashion milieu. The fashion milieu draws on the work of the phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty (1967 [1942], 2014 [1945], 1968 [1964]), who emphasises the role of the body as the primary site of knowing the world. Merleau-Ponty sets out to develop a radical re-conception of embodiment with primacy given to the study of perception that situates the perceiving subject in a milieu, a lived environment that cannot be disentangled from the perceiving subject

Chapter 3 builds on my discussion of Merleau-Ponty's ideas through a review of the thoughts of Simondon (2017 [1958]), 2020 [1964, 1989]), as a philosopher of technology, to develop my theoretical framework to account for the dephasing (a concept discussed in greater

depth in Chapter 3) of the fashion milieu created by mobile phones and fashion media. I situate my theoretical framework in the context of current literature relating to the mobile phone and social media, with a focus on the personal nature of the relations these technologies engender, and how they capture the attention of users. I develop this discussion to consider the quality of feelings they provoke in users.

Chapter 4 engages with the extensive work of Stiegler [various works from 1994-2016] (1998 [1994], 1998a [1996], 2010 [2008], 2011 [2001], 2011a, 2013 [2010], 2015 [2012], 2016 [2015], 2019 [2016]), which I use to consider the implications of the disruption to the transindividual relation. The chapter encompasses a review of current scholarship concerned with digital natives, namely youth who have grown up with digital networked media, as is the case with my participants. In so doing, I develop my theoretical framework to bring together my interest in exploring the feelings of fashion media users situated in the fashion milieu, and my concerns relating to the technological disruption caused by mobile phone technology and social media in the form of social media posts which capture users' attention and create a dependency on these technologies.

Part Two of this thesis discusses the findings from my research (Chapters 5-8). The postphenomenological approach I adopt to study fashion media aims to describe and analyse the fashion milieu through empirical data of pre-reflective experience. The objective is to reveal what remains stable across the participant descriptions: it defines these constants as the 'research invariants'.

Chapter 5 introduces my concept, the fashion milieu, through a discussion of the first four invariants to emerge from my study: first, hapticity; second, feeling and knowing as inextricably linked; third, motility; and fourth, the intercorporeal evaluation of the self. These invariants define the characteristics of the fashion milieu.

Chapter 6 explores the development of the fashion milieu into an online dimension of being through a discussion of the fifth, sixth, and seventh invariants to emerge from my study. The fifth invariant reveals how ideas – through a process of transduction, and individuation – transcend across both offline and online domains creating a single lived reality. The sixth invariant discloses how the concretisation of fashion, fashion media, and mobile technology, has synthesised with natural life to form a single dynamic system. Simondon's notion of a 'cycle of images' is deployed to discuss the seventh invariant, namely how fashion becomes dematerialised when encountered through social media. My findings disclose a shift in the intention of fashion media to a focus on an emotional connection with fashion media users.

Chapter 7 focuses on the relations engendered between users and fashion media to show how the dephasing of the fashion milieu into an online domain leads to transindividual disruption. The eighth invariant to emerge from my findings reveals how my participants experience an ‘interindividual relation’ with those they encounter through fashion media. I show how my participants feel a sense of being incorporated into the fashion milieu through an affective and emotional exchange with those they encounter through reading or watching fashion media posts. However, the relation does not break free from the utilitarian aspects of the socio-cultural world. Instead it masks the transindividual relation and consequently disrupts the transindividual domain.

Chapter 8 investigates the ninth invariant: that my participants all report feeling anxious when they are without a functioning mobile phone and the access it offers to digital networked media. Simondon (2020 [1964, 1989]: 282-285) explains anxiety as the individual becoming aware of the residue of the pre-individual that they are then unable to exchange without a social dimension. I show how the associated milieu destabilises the individual to the extent that they are no longer able to detach from the technology that structures it. However, Simondon has been criticised for not considering the political aspects of transindividual disruption (Bock 2022; Lotti 2015; Viana 2023; Voss 2019), particularly regarding questions of capital and labour (Hackett 2015; Hughes 2014). To address these criticisms, I turn to the work of Stiegler, who modifies Simondon’s notion of psycho-collective individuation, through which the individual (I) and collective (we) emerge, to include what he defines as ‘tertiary retentions’ (Stiegler 2011 [2001]). I show how fashion media posts are tertiary retentions which are commodified, synchronised and schematised to create a shared past which acts as the foundation for a collective future, disrupting the fabric of the social world. Stiegler’s notion of ‘attention as care’ describes how the individual gains ‘*attentional forms of knowledge: know how, life skills, cognitive and theoretical knowledges*’ through systems of care (2013 [2010]: 2 original emphasis). The disruption of the transindividual relation through tertiary retentions means that the care once provided through relations with previous generations has, in the case of my participants, shifted in part to the fashion milieu. Following Stiegler, I demonstrate how fashion media posts accessed through mobile phone technology short-circuit my participants’ long-term desire to ascend their position in the fashion milieu to the drives, offering them a short-term fix. As such the sense of affirmation my participants describe as being engendered through fashion media is only fleeting; it cannot sustain them, they need to go back for more. They describe feeling addicted to their mobile phone. To analyse their comments on addiction I draw on Stiegler’s thoughts on ‘separation anxiety’. I propose that the mobile phone acts as a

transitional object that stands in for a connection to life in an online domain where users know they can encounter others to restructure the pre-individual. However, the fashion milieu does not offer them the care needed to detach from their mobile phone, the transitional object, thus they experience separation anxiety. It has been noted that anxiety motivates a planned approach to the challenges of the future (Barlow 2004). I propose that the feeling of addiction to their mobile phone that my participants describe is their planned approach to negate a feeling of separation anxiety when they are without it. I close the chapter by focusing on Stiegler's thoughts of 'Technology as Pharmakon', that is, the idea that technology has the potential to be either poison or cure. I show how my participants are aware of their digital dependency, and that it is innately bad for them. However, they seem at odds as to how to address their concerns. I explain how care is required to restore the curative dimension of the pharmakon.

Chapter 1

Methodology

This chapter discusses the methodological approach adopted for my research. I bring together in dialogue ideas sourced from digital media studies, fashion theory and phenomenological approaches to technology to investigate the experience of reading or watching fashion media on a mobile phone from the perspective of the experiencing subject. To do this I conducted a postphenomenological study that explores the technology-world-relation. The chapter opens with an introduction to postphenomenology and the methodological implications of this approach in the study of fashion media. I then move on to discuss my research design and explain how I selected and recruited the research participants. The chapter also provides a rationale for the methods I employ. A postphenomenological approach requires an analysis of the pre-reflective descriptions of my participants' experience of reading or watching fashion media. To achieve this, I employed the micro-phenomenological interview technique to elicit in-depth descriptions of the experience. Working with the same participants, I also facilitated focus groups which helped me to clarify my definition of fashion media and to contextualise my postphenomenological findings.

1.1 Postphenomenology

Postphenomenology can be defined as the philosophical study of the relationships that emerge between human beings and technological artefacts (see e.g., Ihde 1990, 2001, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2016; Rosenberger and Verbeek 2015; Selinger 2003, 2012; Verbeek 2005, 2015; Rosenberger 2012, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2018). In such relationships technology is understood not merely as functional objects, but rather as mediating human-world relations. Don Ihde (1990, 2001, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2016), often described as the founder of postphenomenology, initially took a philosophical interest in human-technology relations in the 1970s (Rosenberger and Verbeek 2015:2). He has since played an important role in establishing postphenomenology as a means to understand what he describes as our 'technology textured world' (Ihde 1990). By this, Ihde infers that technology is woven into the fabric of everyday life; it is embedded into the weave of how we live and it shapes the ways we act. Ihde developed postphenomenology by combining the traditions of phenomenology and pragmatism, placing an emphasis on the phenomenological analysis of empirical research. This applied philosophical approach to concrete case studies covers a broad range of interests in human-technology relations including:

ethics of technology (Selinger 2003, 2012; Verbeek 2005, 2015; Rosenberger 2014, 2015, 2016, 2018), media theory and media ecology (Van Den Eede 2017), digital media (Irwin 2015, 2016, 2017), education (Sharff 2006; Hasse 2008, 2015, 2018; Aagaard 2017, 2018), and mobile phone technology (Rosenberger 2012; Wellner 2015, 2016). So far, little attention has been paid to the role fashion plays in the human-technology-world relation. This thesis builds on current scholarship in postphenomenology to investigate fashion as a technological prosthesis integral to human becoming.

Robert Rosenberger and Peter-Paul Verbeek (2015) state that the methodological approach in postphenomenology has as many flavours as the range of human-technology relations studied which span a range of disciplinary fields. This poses a challenge in developing a definitive tool kit for postphenomenology (Aagaard, Friis, Sorenson, Tafdrup, Hass 2018). As such, scholars adopt a range of methods including, for example, interviews, surveys, participant observations and auto-ethnographic descriptions to address the specificity of the research undertaken. Yet despite the variations in the methods used postphenomenological projects have four characteristics in common. First, they focus on how technologies shape human-world relations; second, they include empirical work as a basis for philosophical reflection; third, they consider both the world and the subject[s] that emerge through technological mediation; and finally, they consider the implications of this mediation on human-world relations (Rosenberger and Verbeek 2015). This is the framework that supports the selection and use of the research methods I employ in this thesis.

Drawing on a phenomenological tradition, this thesis sets out to elicit in-depth pre-reflective descriptions of the participants' lived experience of reading or watching fashion media on a mobile phone. To do this I adopt the micro-phenomenological interview technique (discussed later in this chapter) from cognitive science. However, to situate the findings in a *postphenomenological* context I adopt the postphenomenological understanding of intentionality as directed through technologies which have the potential to shape human actions and behaviour. Moreover, humans are considered as being situated in a particular historical and socio-cultural context which influences what technologies can do.

Postphenomenology draws on a phenomenological tradition that aimed to bring philosophy back from abstract metaphysical thinking to consider the implications of concrete lived experiences for philosophy. Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), the founder of phenomenology, famously declared that we should 'go back to the things themselves'; by this he means a return to phenomena as experienced and described by the experiencing subject. Husserl (2001 [1901]) opposed the scientific approach of his day which, he claimed, was a brute interpretation of the

world based on the notion of physical causality. Drawing on the work of Franz Brentano (1838-1917), Husserl states that consciousness is characterised by intentionality, that we are always conscious of something, that consciousness is directed out toward the subjects and objects of the world. He insists that for phenomenological purity the phenomenologist must secure their freedom from prejudice by bracketing their everyday consciousness, which he defines as the natural attitude. Husserl names this process the *epoché*, from the Greek word ἐποχή, romanized: epokhē meaning to ‘suspend’ or ‘cessate’ to reveal ‘reality’ as experienced by the perceiving subject from within. Through this process Husserl claims it is possible to uncover the pre-reflective aspects of experience through which the perceiver makes sense of the world.

Husserl believes it feasible to reduce the description of an experience to reveal a singular ‘essence’ – in other words, a phenomenological investigation reveals the essential characteristics that make it the phenomena it is, its intentional character. The final stage of this process is to employ variational analysis in order to see what elements within the description withstand variation.

Variational analysis requires that the phenomenologist conducts a rigorous analysis of the experience as described by the research participants to reveal the ‘invariants’, namely what remains stable across the descriptions. However, the next generation of phenomenologists challenged and modified Husserl’s phenomenology, and the work conducted by the phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty provides a core theoretical underpinning for my research. Merleau-Ponty contests the disembodied nature of Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology. He takes phenomenology in an existential direction, where the body and bodily gestures are integral to his phenomenological project (2014 [1945]). Merleau-Ponty understands the body not as a simple receptor for sensory stimuli, nor as a mere vessel for mechanical reflexes. He claims it is rather a living, breathing, affective, sensuous, moving and agentic body, which he defines as a locus of sense. For Merleau-Ponty, the body is central to our experience of the world; it is the means through which we come to know both the world and the self.

Although postphenomenology acknowledges the bodily aspects of experience set out by Merleau-Ponty, it also insists on an empirical orientation drawn from the field of Science and Technology Studies (STS). Where phenomenology understands the source of knowledge as residing in the intentional relation between subject and object — as opposed to objective fact or subjective idea — postphenomenology goes further to reconceptualise intentionality as being directed through technologies, which it claims shape perception. Further, postphenomenology argues that it

[...] does away with the idea that there is a pre-given subject in a pre-given world of objects, with a mediating entity between them. Rather, the mediation is the *source* of the specific shape that human subjectivity and the objectivity of the world can take in this specific situation

(Rosenberger and Verbeek 2015: 12 original emphasis)

Thus, postphenomenology understands that the subject and world, rather than being pre-given emerge through their reciprocal encounters. This applies in the case of my research where the fashion media user and the fashion milieu constitute a phase in the continuous process of becoming. But technology shapes the relation since both the individual and the milieu emerge through the users' encounters with fashion media accessed through their mobile phone. Moreover, postphenomenology sees experience as situated in a particular context, whereby technologies mean different things for different people: technologies are thus 'multistable' (Verbeek 2005). Put another way, they have multiple purposes: they are not neutral in the relation, but rather influence human intentions and behaviours whilst simultaneously remaining open to manipulation and interpretation, 'inform[ing] our politics, ethics, and our understandings of the basic features of our everyday experience' (Rosenberger and Verbeek 2015: 1).³ This influence highlights the importance of variational analysis to account for the following factors: materiality of the technology; how it is embodied by the user; the cultural context of its practice; and to reflect on the 'appearance of differently structured lifeworlds relative to historical cultures and environments' (Ihde 2009: 19). As postphenomenologist Stacey O'Neal Irwin (2016), a student of Ihde, states, this interrogation is imperative as it offers an opportunity to untangle and elicit the various uses of technology in a world that is increasingly becoming more technologically textured (Ihde 1990: 2).

Thus, postphenomenology offers a framework to interrogate the fashion media user-fashion media-world relation when fashion media is accessed through mobile phone technology. Postphenomenology sees the subject and world as emerging through their relation, which it claims is, in the main, technologically mediated. Engaging a postphenomenological position, the thesis investigates the implications of technological disruption on the fashion media users' subjectivity, but further considers how collectives are formed. I draw on the work of Merleau-Ponty, Simondon and Stiegler to study both user and fashion media as emerging through their relations in a continuous process of becoming. The micro-phenomenological

³ For a field guide to postphenomenology see R. Rosenberger and P. Verbeek (2015) *Phenomenological Investigations*, Lexington books: London, pp. 1-39.

interview technique was selected and used to facilitate the collection of in-depth pre-reflective descriptions of the experience of fashion media consumption which included the *feelings* of the participants, central to the concerns of my research. The descriptions were then analysed to reveal the invariants: what remained stable across the participant descriptions. The invariants were contextualised with information collected through focus groups with the same participants, which offered an opportunity to define what constitutes fashion media when encountered through a mobile phone, and to gather more general information about the practice of reading or watching fashion media posts.

However, it must be noted that there has been criticism that postphenomenology, in focusing on technology as mediating the human - world relation, misses out on the viewpoint of technologies themselves; that in being phenomenological it looks at individual experience and cannot therefore adequately account for collective experience and behaviour; and finally, that it is insufficient in recognising the political and social dimensions of technological mediation. In what follows I discuss this methodological criticism and describe how I address it in my research.

1.2 The Methodological Implications of Postphenomenology

As outlined above, although postphenomenology sets out to review the human-technology-world relation by drawing on phenomenological traditions, it also employs a pragmatic approach through undertaking the analysis of empirical studies of technology. However, whilst acknowledging technology as being non-neutral, the focus of postphenomenology is on technology as mediating the human-world relation, a feature which breeds criticism that postphenomenology omits consideration of the technological objects themselves. The argument is that whilst acknowledging that there is no clear division between subjects, objects and technologies in postphenomenology, technologies in their mediating capacity are reduced either to a subjective pole (their use-value to human subjects), or an objective pole (where they are part of the world).

Dmytro Mykailov and Nicola Liberati (2023) make a case for looking at technology in a different way, namely to return to the technologies themselves, a concept they define as ‘technological intentionality’. Where postphenomenology sees intentionality as a directedness of the technological object to reality, and mediation as being situated in the ‘human-technology’ relation that transforms the experience according to the intentional direction, technological intentionality instead seeks to address intentionality from the viewpoint of the technological

object. To achieve this Mykailov and Liberati argue for a return to phenomenology drawing particularly on the work of Husserl and his notion of passivity to explain how technology can be active by itself.⁴

Ehsan Arzroomchilar (2022) takes a different approach to the same problem by suggesting that theoretical perspectives drawn from the Social Construction of Technology (SCOT) (to account for the historicity of technology), and Actor Network Theory (ANT) (Callon 1986; Law 1987; Latour 1992, 1999, 2005) (to situate technology in a network of users, technology and world), should both be integrated within postphenomenology.⁵ This approach, according to Arzroomchilar, addresses the idea that technology is merely situated between users and their world, by arguing that they are rather entangled and intertwined in a complex way. However, ANT understands the relation between objects and world as being symmetrical (Latour 2005), a view contrary to a postphenomenological position, and takes a view from ‘outside-in’, suggesting that adoption of a third person rather than a first-person view which is necessary for a phenomenological investigation.⁶ Arzroomchilar, however, argues that postphenomenology would be enriched by this addition and maintains that this integration is necessary in addressing the gap in postphenomenological studies of reviewing collective behaviour (2022: 78). This criticism is also noted by other scholars of technology (Osler and Zahavi 2022; Zahavi 2021).

A commitment to include the perspective of objects is a line of inquiry taken by Graham Harman (2018) in his work on object-oriented philosophy (OOP). Harman also draws on Heidegger whose thoughts he turns upside down (Van den Eede 2017: 237) to arrive at the idea that objects are both substance (ready-to-hand) and relational (present-at-hand). This perspective goes against the grain of pragmatism integral to the postphenomenological approach that analyses tools in relation to human praxis and experience: where humans are ‘enveloped within equipment’ (Van den Eede 2017: 240). Harman takes a different view to Heidegger when he states that the ready to hand is always outside of our grasp: we can only relate with the present-at-hand mode of experience. Put another way, ‘Harman is actually trying

⁴ Husserl, in his discussion on passivity, seeks to grasp how objects are active outside of the subject’s use of them: how they can themselves be active. See Biceaga, V. (2010) *The concept of passivity in Husserl’s phenomenology, contributions to phenomenology*, Springer.

⁵ SCOT reviews technology from a social constructionist perspective. Unlike ANT it does not understand a symmetry between humans and non humans. Human agency is privileged in the human-technology relation, however there is acknowledgement that technology is a product of power relations existing in society. See Brey 2004.

⁶ Latour believes that mediation is neither purely social or technical, but rather happens in a collective of both – a network. Providing an overview of ANT is outside the scope of this thesis, but for further review please see Latour 1992, 1993, 1994, 1999.

to convey a very simple, commonsensical insight: “experience” – as the generic interaction of all things with each other – can only be selective’ (Van de Eede 2017: 241). Van den Eede situates Harman’s OOP in a discussion of Diane Michelfelder’s (2015) critique of postphenomenology as largely ignoring the ‘world’ in its investigation into the human-technology-world relation, a view also taken up by Martin Ritter (2021) who asks if postphenomenology is phenomenological enough. Ritter (2021) argues that postphenomenology needs to be less pragmatic and shift focus from the various possible uses of technology to instead investigate the changes in the structure of perception conditioned by culture, by ‘showing the influence of technology, conceived of speculatively – as a background culture, not merely on but rather *in* bodily perception’ (2021: 1514 original emphasis). As he points out, embodiment is always saturated in a social, cultural and historical sense and concentration on pragmatic functions, of technologies in use, avoids consideration of the inert power of technologies: what the technicity of a thing is, and the role it plays in the structural shaping of experience. Dominic Smith (2015) also argues that the postphenomenological focus on the empirical is too narrow as it misses the transcendental aspects of experience. He defines the transcendental as not merely something considered ‘given’ once and for all, but rather the conditions of possibility under which it is given. This argument avoids technological determinism as it suggests that there are conditions, a set of potentialities, that inform experience mediated by technology. Smith claims these potentialities can be accounted for by employing post-structuralist thinking in postphenomenological accounts such as those provided by Derrida, Foucault and Deleuze who bring into focus the political and societal aspects of human being-in-the-world.

Mark Coeckelbergh (2022) makes a similar point that postphenomenology neglects full consideration of the environment and the political in the human-technology-world relation, a notion also discussed by Robert Scharff (2022) who contests Ihde’s idea of there being a division between body one, the fleshy corporeal body central to individual experience, and body two, the social and cultural body when he asks:

[w]hy does it seem insufficient to “contextualize” individuals by simply adding on their socio-historical “background” as quickly as possible after first analyzing them as individuals? Is one ever such an “individual” in the first place? If not, do we get better phenomenology if we start instead (like, e.g., Simondon or Stiegler) by theoretically reversing the agenda and positing a pre-individual or deindividualized condition out of which individualization processes must emerge.

(Scharff 2022: 18)

By this Scharff means that the fleshy, and the cultural bodies in Ihde's discussion are indivisible. He makes a case for postphenomenological studies being better able to incorporate the social and cultural aspects of experience in their analysis of phenomena by proposing that individuals are never individuals in the first place: they are instead a phase in the continuous becoming of both individual and associated milieu, as theorised by Simondon and Stiegler. For Scharff, the socio-cultural dimensions of experience are more than a contextual layer as they are fundamental to both individual and collective becoming. Failure to fully consider the political influence of technology in experience means there is a gap in understanding the human-technology-world relation, and, by extension, gaps also exist in the sense human beings make of their world.

Pieter Lemmens also argues for a review of the work of Stiegler in postphenomenological research. He proposes that postphenomenology

[...] could greatly profit from a dialogue with the philosophy of Bernard Stiegler and most specifically from considering [his] views on the status of media [...] as not just instruments or channels of human communication and information exchange but as retentional devices that shape human thought and rationality *in a most fundamental way*.

(Lemmens 2017:185 original emphasis)

I situate my argument in line with Scharff's discussion above and with Lemmens' call for a Stieglerian view of media. I contribute to scholarship in postphenomenology by proposing an alternative theoretical framework that brings together the work of Merleau-Ponty, Simondon and Stiegler. I employ Merleau-Ponty to demonstrate how fashion media in the form of social media posts has the potential to provoke an intercorporeal exchange between users. I contextualise this notion by mobilising the ideas of Simondon to consider the specificity of technology (fashion, fashion media, and mobile phone) central to the concerns of my research and to account for the role technology plays in the continuous becoming of both the individual and the associated milieu. Further, Simondon's theory of transindividuation offers me an opportunity to investigate how the fashion media user, through affective emotivity, becomes incorporated into the collective. To account for the implications of transindividual disruption I adopt ideas provided by Stiegler who sees technology as a prosthesis integral to human

becoming. Stiegler's notion of tertiary retentions allows me to consider the implications of a disruption to the long circuits of generational knowledge necessary in the formation of the transindividual relations brought about by social media and mobile phone technology.

1.3 The Pivot in a Postphenomenological Inquiry

Postphenomenology requires empirical analysis of the role technology plays in the human-world relation. As explained earlier, postphenomenology understands technologies as being multistable, that is, that they have different functions and uses for different people in different contexts. Stiegler, drawing on the ideas of Simondon, instead employs the term 'metastability', to explain the transductive relation between technology, humanity and technics, a relation constantly in tension that drives psychic, social and technical co-individuation. This is a position I adopt for my research.

When designing a postphenomenological research project the researcher must decide on the phenomenon they intend to investigate and the constant in the research. To give an example, Ihde (2012) considers archery as a phenomenon for investigation whereby the technology of archery, where an arrow is projected by the tensile force of a bow and string, remains stable but is used in different contexts. Ihde's project, through the analysis of historical images/drawings/paintings of archers in the process of practising archery, investigates examples of archery across cultures and historical periods. Through a process of variational analysis Ihde demonstrates how the materiality of the bow, the technique of the user, and the cultural-historical perspective attract multiple interpretations. In Ihde's project it is the *practice* of archery that is the constant in the research design.

In contrast Rosenberger (2009) uses observational methods but to investigate the functions of a glass bottle which he explains can be used for holding liquid, as a vase for flowers, as a weapon if it were broken, or as an instrument in the case of blowing air across the open top of the bottle. This demonstrates the many ways a bottle can be embodied by the user, but it is the materiality of the glass bottle, the *technology*, that remains constant rather than the practice of using it. Kyle Powys Whyte (2015) describes this difference in approach as the 'pivot' in the postphenomenological inquiry: the way the phenomenologist 'frame[s] their subject matter and run[s] meaningful variations' (2015: 76). He explains how

[...] [f]irst it needs to be assumed that there is multistability of practices. Second, the researcher must select a particular case. Third,

the researcher selects and justifies a pivot point. Fourth, the researcher varies the case along the pivot point. Fifth, the variation creates room for discussion of the implications of the different variations.

(Powys Whyte 2015: 79)

To demonstrate how establishing a pivot acts as a foundation to consider the implications of the technology, I draw on the work of Verbeek (2005) who maintains that the materiality of technologies should be understood through *activity*, that is how they co-shape the relation between human beings and their world. Verbeek's research into obstetric ultrasound technology reveals how the technology-human relation can transform moral discourse. He explains how the experience of being pregnant is transformed through access to ultrasound technology. Here technology shifts the human understanding of the foetus from being unseen to having person-like qualities. The 'standards' of the technology: size of screen, size of the foetus in the image, the realism of the image, and the software used to detect risks, have implications not only for understanding what it is to be pregnant, but also for moral intuitions.

This thesis investigates the phenomenon of reading or watching fashion media on a mobile phone. I define fashion media as media that is devoted to the coverage, circulation and consumption of fashion and beauty. I consider a mobile phone as a mobile device that facilitates two-way communication and access to digital networked media, but I differentiate it from laptop computers and tablets. My research is not concerned with the brand or type of mobile phone, or its historical development as is the case with Wellner's (2016) postphenomenological study. The pivot in my project concerns the practice of using a mobile phone to read or watch fashion media. By this I mean my investigation focuses on the activity of using a mobile phone to encounter fashion media in order to reveal how this experience co-shapes the user-fashion media-world relation. The design of a multi-method approach (the analysis of micro-phenomenological interviews, and data collected through focus groups) enabled me to address the aims of this thesis as discussed in the introduction to this work. It was my experience of teaching students that prompted my research. As such, I have designed a research project that works with fashion media students to investigate their experience of reading or watching fashion media on a mobile phone. In the following section, I explain why I selected this group as participants and how I recruited them for my project.

1.4 Selecting and Recruiting My Participants

Bradley and Kennedy (2020) explain how Stiegler's philosophy has been influential in addressing the role of media in discussions of attention. Stiegler claims that media, or mnemotechnologies, have led to the proletarianisation of knowledge, of how to do things (*savoir faire*), and how to live (*savoir vivre*), and even how to think (*savoir théorique*) (Bradley and Kennedy 2020: 5). As stated in the introduction to this thesis, my interest in this project began through my work with students of fashion communication. I was curious about their relations with fashion media: how it seemed to transport them to a place outside of the classroom, how it appeared to affect and move them emotionally, and how it seemed intrinsic to the sense they made of the world in ways that seemed to differ from my own experience. Students in the School of Media and Communication at the London College of Fashion and I share an interest in fashion media. They have committed to study it, and I to research and teach it, but our experiences of reading or watching fashion media seemed at odds, raising a curiosity in me. This left me with the problem of how to investigate the lived experience of students of fashion media to better understand the experience from their perspective. However, it is important to note that my research is designed to investigate my participants' experience of reading or watching fashion media in their everyday lives outside of a classroom setting. As such, I see my participants as fashion media users who also happen to be fashion media students and therefore share my interest in fashion media. Thus, this thesis is not concerned with studentship, but rather with the participants' media use.

Postphenomenology requires the analysis of in-depth lived experience of the phenomenon under investigation. Mark D. Vagle (2014) explains how the more complex the phenomenon, the bigger the sample needed for the project.⁷ This concept is also discussed by Bekele and Ago (2022) who explain that if the information to be collected is clear and easily understood by the participants then fewer participants are needed. My research looks at the lived experience of reading or watching fashion media on a mobile phone, a phenomenon that fashion media students undertake multiple times in day and is therefore not a complex phenomenon for them as it is something they know well and do regularly. Vagle (2014) states that there is no magic number in term of research participants and urges the researcher to consider how the phenomenon calls to be studied, a notion reiterated by Cresswell (2013) who

⁷ The criteria for complexity used in this thesis concerned the familiarity of the experience to the participants, and therefore related to how intuitive, and multi-layered it appeared to them as an experience.

recommends a sample of between 3-25 participants for a postphenomenological project. Due to the phenomenon being investigated being so well known by the students involved in my study, I decided to aim for between 6-10 participants and focus on collecting in-depth descriptions for analysis. To do this I adopted the micro-phenomenological interview technique, which I introduce when I discuss the data collection methods later in this chapter.

Far (2018) states that students should be allowed enough time to consider the benefits and risks of participation before they are asked to make an informed choice to take part. Comer (2009) reiterates the importance of this and suggests that offering the period of at least one day between briefing and sign up reduces perceived coercion. During my presentations to students [1/2/2018, 14/2/2019, 3/5/2019 & 26/6/2019], I explained that I would forward by email an information sheet detailing my research to those who had expressed an interest in participating, along with a consent form. I asked that they consider the project and email me the signed consent form by return if they were still interested. I would then make arrangements for them to be interviewed. This additional layer in the recruitment of my participants was designed to further mitigate the potential risk of them feeling a sense of coercion to participate.

I received three replies to my email from students in the first and second groups I visited, and two students replied from each of the third and fourth groups. However, one student from the second group emailed on the day we had planned to meet to say they had taken on additional commitments at work and would no longer have time to engage in my research. A student from the third group became unwell and also withdrew from the project. I therefore had the opportunity to conduct one interview each with eight students who each produced an in-depth description of a self-selected experience of receiving fashion media by mobile phone.

Following the recruitment of my participants and attainment of the signed consent form we agreed on a date for the interview process. The information sheet I provided for students explained that I would record the interviews, but that the recording would be used only for the purpose of producing transcriptions which would not be shared other than for the purposes of my thesis. I asked the students to complete a short form that included their age, a pseudonym of their choice to secure anonymity, and their nationality and ethnicity (following Bryman 2008: 485). Students were told that this form was optional, and they need not complete any section if they felt uncomfortable and that the information would be used only to contextualise my research findings. They were informed that the transcriptions and information sheet would be stored in password-protected folder on my UAL laptop and any paper copies would be kept in a locked cupboard at the UAL Lime Grove campus.

1.5 Data Collection

I made a decision to conduct micro-phenomenological interviews (Petitmengin 1999, 2006, 2009, 2021) to elicit in-depth descriptions of reading and watching fashion media on a mobile phone as lived by my participants. I also decided to conduct focus groups with the same participants so as to contextualise my participants' descriptions. In what follows I explain the micro-phenomenological interview technique and how it is a suitable method for a postphenomenological study.

1.5.1 The Micro-Phenomenological Interview Technique

As discussed earlier in this chapter, postphenomenology requires the analysis of in-depth descriptions of pre-reflective experience as lived by the experiencing subject. The micro-phenomenological interview technique developed by Claire Petitmengin in the context of her neuro-phenomenological research (1999, 2006, 2009, 2021) builds on the work of Francisco Varela. Varela (1996) advocates for a study of the human body, mind and psyche that brings a physiological approach into dialogue with work in cognitive neuroscience. As Petitmengin states pre-reflective lived experience, although immediate, personal, and intimate to the experiencing subject, is very difficult to describe. She explains that human beings have only partial awareness of their lived experiences and when asked to describe them are more likely to discuss what they *know* of their experiences, including what they have read or have been told about them, rather than *how* they actually live them (Nisbitt and Wilson 1997). Furthermore, Petitmengin declares that this gap, or deficit in awareness is unknown to the experiencing subject and seems to occur as people are focused on the *what*, the content of experience, to the detriment of the *how*. To demonstrate this idea she uses the example of a blind person using a cane. The blind person uses a cane to explore the world through touch; they focus on the object of experience whilst being largely unaware of the cane in their hand. She describes how the sensorial aspects of the cane become transparent to the user, an idea that concurs with both Merleau-Ponty in phenomenology and, later, Ihde in postphenomenology. Hence, Petitmengin, maintains that humans are absorbed by the object of experience and world and, as such, focus on what is seen. However, she explains that it is possible to shift focus to attend 'to what the activity of seeing is like for me' (2009: 8). In so doing, the experiencing subject can become aware of features of experience that they are usually unaware of, but this requires a particular expertise. This expertise involves carrying out specific acts which trigger an awareness of the

unrecognised part of experience. The micro-phenomenological interview elicits these acts through specific prompts and questions and helps the interviewee to gain access to the *how* of the experience, thus enabling them to articulate precisely how the activity is experienced by them.

The micro-phenomenological interview is an adaptation of the '*entretien d'explicitation*' developed by the psychologist Pierre Vermersch (1994). Vermersch was interested in facilitating professional practitioners to become aware of their mental and/or physical actions. His interview technique was taken up and developed by researchers in neuro and cognitive science involved in collecting in-depth descriptions of first-person experiences in clinical and therapeutic domains, education, and among those with an interest in technology.

In 2017 I attended a micro-phenomenological workshop in Paris led by Petitmengin, where it became evident that although my research does not consider lived experience through a neuro-phenomenological or cognitive science lens, the micro-phenomenological interview technique provides a useful tool for collecting in-depth descriptions of lived experience and for developing a rigorous process to analyse the descriptions collected — both affordances being integral to the design of a postphenomenological investigation.

The first principle of the micro-phenomenological interview is that participants should be asked to select a 'singular' experience in order to avoid drawing on preconceptions, explanations and generalisations and instead focus on how the experience as lived unfolds to the experiencing subject. Petitmengin explains that there are two methods of doing this (Petitmengin et al 2019: 694). If the experience is something that can be easily reproduced, a protocol can be devised whereby the experience is performed in the here and now and is described immediately afterwards. The alternative being that a participant should be asked to describe a past occurrence of the experience. It was my intention to gather details of the experience of fashion media reception as it is lived by my participants in their everyday lives. This included an interest in what prompted them to pick up their mobile phones to read or watch fashion media. I therefore adopted the second approach to the method as the first would not offer access to reading or watching fashion media in the context of everyday life. I asked each of my participants to choose a self-selected specific experience of reading or watching fashion media on their mobile phone. I specified that the experience should span the time from just before they picked up their phone to when they felt the experience to be finished.

The micro-phenomenological interview sets out to bring the interviewee closer to how the experience is for them and to move away from what (Petitmengin et al. 2019: 694) categorise as 'satellite dimensions' of the experience — and by this Petitmengin means

generalisations, explanations, or theoretical knowledge. The micro-phenomenological interview technique relies on three key principles — reformulation, evocation, and temporal unfolding. I outline each of these in the ensuing paragraphs.

The first principle of the micro-phenomenological approach is to reformulate the interviewee's description, to repeat back to them what they had just said, which facilitates a connection to *how* the singular experience is experienced by them. I draw on an example from my own research to demonstrate this. My participants often described feeling bored, therefore I reformulated their description by asking, in the case of Elle's description, "So you are at home, sitting on your bed feeling bored?". Reformulating what the interviewee has just said helps them to reconnect to the experience as it was lived. It is important to note here that there is always a temporal gap between the experience itself and the subsequent discussion of it in an interview: the intention through the micro-phenomenological interview technique is not to re-live the experience, but rather to re-enact, or reclaim it (ibid.). As Petitmengin explains, the micro-phenomenological method starts from 'a surprising and disturbing observation: our lived experience, in other words what is most intimate and closest to us, escapes us' (2021a: 37). Experience, when described, is always a description of the past. The objective of the micro-phenomenological interview is to re-enact the experience in the present to reveal 'with lucidity and precision, what is there' (ibid.). Hereby the research participants are encouraged to recall a *past* experience whilst at the same time connecting through a process of *present* evocation to the sensorial and emotional dimensions which in the main go unnoticed. The evocative aspects of experience are then explored in both the diachronic and synchronic dimensions.

The second principle of the micro-phenomenological interview technique is evocation — a process of coming into sensory-motor contact with a lived experience. To facilitate a state of evocation the interviewer should ask simple questions that help the interviewee to return to the 'how' of the experience. Returning to the example above, I would say, 'So you are there at home, you are feeling bored, how do you know you are bored?'. This draws focus to the parts of the experience that the interviewee is not usually aware of, and in so doing, elicits access to it. Another type of question used for engendering a state of evocation is to ask the interviewee to unpack the context of the experience. Tarana, one of my participants, recalled coming home from work. She described how she first takes off her work clothes and then sits on the couch to read social media. Tarana's first attempt at a description of her experience was very scant. To help her to evoke the experience and bring out a more detailed description of it I posed the questions "So, you've just come home from work, what time is it? Where are you sitting?" I followed this up by asking "You describe how it is summer, is it a warm evening?" This helped

Tarana to provide a more in-depth description of her experience and offered her access to the sensorial aspects of watching fashion media on her mobile phone. Consequently, she was better able to penetrate and recount the detail of what she could see, hear and smell, as well as the tactile and kinaesthetic sensations she experienced at this time, and importantly, to reveal the *feelings* she encountered.

The third principle of micro-phenomenology concerns the unfolding of the experience over time (Petitmengin et al 2019: 695). As discussed above, we are absorbed by the content, the ‘what’ of experience, to the detriment of the ‘how’ it is for us. The micro-phenomenological method aims to focus the interviewee on how the experience unfolds in its diachronic and synchronic dimensions. The diachronic dimension is what Petitmengin (2009) describes as the ‘landscape of the experience’. I asked my participants to describe a self-selected experience of receiving fashion media by mobile phone from the moment before they went online to when they considered the experience to be at an end. Emily, one of my participants, described receiving a text message which prompted her to open social media to, using her words, “stalk” an influencer named Gully Guy Leo. She says that she first looked him up using the search function in Instagram, then ‘stalked’ him and decided to ‘follow’ him. I asked her “So you found his account using the search function, what did you do next?” She went on to say that she looked at his Instagram account. I then asked her what she could see when she looked at his account. She responded by describing one of the posts she encountered. I went on to reformulate her description and asked, “What happened then?”. The description of her experience transpired as unfolding in a number of phases, thus indicating the synchronic dimensions of the experience. I then sought Emily’s permission to return to each of these moments to elicit an in-depth description of each of them, a process I adopted for each of participant interviews. A micro-phenomenological interview is therefore iterative as the interviewer helps the interviewee to describe the experience as it unfolds diachronically and then returns to drill down into each synchronous moment of the experience. The experience that interviewees describe may have lasted only several minutes but will be unpacked throughout the duration of the interview. My participants each described a lived experience of fashion media reception which in real time would have a duration of several minutes, however each interview lasted between an hour and an hour and half, depending on when my participants felt they had reached the capacity of their re-enactment of their experience, the moment when they could not add anything to what they had already described.

The interviewer using the micro-phenomenological interview method helps to stabilise the attention of the interviewee on the inner acts of experience and how these are carried out.

The iterative structure of the interview helps to focus the interviewee's attention onto the implicit unrecognised dynamics of the experience which initially seemed out of reach.

1.5.2 Analysing the Interview Data

Camilla Valenzuela-Moguillansky and Aleiandra Vásquez-Rosati (2019) explain how a micro-phenomenological interview technique offers not only a method for collecting in-depth data of lived experience, but also a method of analysis that 'allows for the identification of their *invariants* or regularities among a group of experiences.' (2019: 124 original emphasis). The analytical process offers a means to identify structures of experience, the structures being 'a network of descriptive categories, independent of the experiential content' (Delatre 1971)' (ibid.). In the case of my research, the structures under investigation were identified from accounts provided by my participants, who describe their experience of the same phenomenon, namely reading or watching fashion media on a mobile phone.

During the first stage of analysis the researcher must not only transcribe the participant's description, but also listen carefully to the recorded interview to get a sense of the subtleties in the description which are helpful in the analysis of the transcript. I transcribed the descriptions myself which allowed me to spend a significant amount of time with the recorded interviews offering me space to identify subtleties in the participant descriptions. The micro-phenomenological interview technique as set out by Petitmengin requires that any reference to the satellite dimensions of the experience, namely generalisations, explanations, or theoretical knowledge should be discarded (Vermersch 1994) although these features can be used to qualify the intensity and quality of the evocation. It is at this point that my method of analysis as a postphenomenological study departs from that proposed by neuro-phenomenological and cognitive scientists, such as Petitmengin. Neuro or cognitive scientists set out to reveal generic structures of experience, but research in these fields is specifically concerned with the study of the mind and its processes. As a postphenomenologist I am interested in the human-technology-world relation and aim to analyse in-depth descriptions of lived experience to reveal the invariants of my research, namely what remains stable across my participants' descriptions to establish a foundation for a discussion of the implications of technology. The satellite dimensions of experience are therefore helpful to my study and were analysed accordingly. To summarise, the micro-phenomenological interview technique offers a way to collect in-depth pre-reflective descriptions relevant for a postphenomenological study. The interview technique also offers a framework to analyse the diachronic and synchronic aspects of experience.

However, it differs from the approach of cognitive science in that it also considers the satellite dimensions as they support a postphenomenological inquiry by offering aspects of experience from a socio-cultural perspective.

The second stage of the analysis seeks to understand the temporal evolution of the experience. The chronology of the description is not the same as the chronology of the experience as the interviewer takes the interviewee back over the experience several times, drilling down into the synchronic phases. The researcher should restructure sections of the interview transcripts overlapping them where necessary to form a diachronic structure of the experience itself. From this structure, phases or synchronic moments are identified. The creation of a map of the diachronic structure of the experience acts as the landscape or architecture of the experience under investigation. The diachronic landscape of each of the participants descriptions are then analysed and a process of evaluation is undertaken to ascertain similarities in the unfolding of the experience under investigation.

My participant descriptions revealed a three-phase diachronic structure: firstly, *a feeling of void* when offline, whereby my participants picked up their mobile phone without thinking about it to access social media. This led into the second phase during which a *feeling of excitement or anticipation* was evoked. They then describe, using their words, “scrolling” through social media until they came across a post that captured their attention, which after reading or watching brought about a third phase involving a *feeling of affirmation*.

The diachronic structure is then further analysed to identify synchronic units in the experience. Once identified, the synchronic units are grouped according to themes. After grouping the researcher begins ‘a process of interrogation that results in the identification of the synchronic units and in the explication of the criteria that define them’ (Valenzuela-Moguillansky and Vásquez-Rosati 2019: 132). The synchronic units are then named, which facilitates a process of comparison across multiple descriptions. The naming of the synchronic units of the participant’s descriptions in the case of my research was conducted manually.

As discussed above, the pivot for my research is the practice of reading or watching fashion media on a mobile phone. I understand that technology has different uses for different people in different contexts. What I set out to understand is what remained stable in the lived experience of my participants. As such the synchronic units of my eight participant descriptions were themed and named and then compared so as to identify the invariants for my research. The invariants of my research will be elaborated on in the findings chapters of this thesis as detailed in the introduction to this work. But to summarise here, they are:

1. *Hapticity*: The participants' encounters with fashion media are haptic, thus perception occurs through the incorporation of the senses.
2. *Feeling and knowing are inextricably linked*: Fashion media affects my participants and moves them emotionally. Moreover, feeling and knowing are inextricably linked.
3. *Motility*: My participants move themselves to optimise their position in the milieu suggesting a meaningful environment to which they adjust and orient themselves to gain maximal grip of their experience.
4. *Intercorporeal evaluation of the self*: My participants measure themselves against those they encounter through fashion media, but it is a measurement that occurs through an intercorporeal exchange.
5. *A single lived reality*: My research reveals how, through a process of transduction and individuation, ideas transcend across both offline and online dimensions of being revealing a single lived reality.
6. *Concretisation*: The bringing together of fashion, fashion media, and mobile phone amplify a sense of personal communication between users which disrupts the social world.
7. *Shift in intention when fashion media is read or watched on a mobile phone*: My findings demonstrate that there is a shift in emphasis from the fashion object itself to an emotional encounter with another embodied individual who shares an interest in fashion.
8. *Fashion media evokes an interindividual exchange with those my participants encounter through social media*. Encounters with fashion media provoke an interindividual relation that offers my participants a sense of an emotional connection to collective life that transcends to a feeling of affirmation. But the interindividual relation masks the transindividual domain by short circuiting long circuits of intergenerational knowledge gained through relations with friends, family, and circuits of knowledge based on tradition.
9. *Anxiety*: My participants all report feeling anxious when they are without their mobile phone or access to social media.

1.5.3 Focus Groups

I designed my research so that, prior to providing their descriptions, my participants would join in a group discussion to clarify the definition of fashion media I employ in my

research and to explore my participants' mobile phone use in more general terms. As discussed above my participants were asked to self-select a particular experience of reading or watching fashion media on a mobile phone, therefore the clarification of my definition of fashion media would facilitate participants' confidence in their selection of a particular experience to discuss. Morgan (1996) explains that in multimethod approaches, focus groups provide opportunities to gather data in addition to other qualitative methods, and that each method offers a unique contribution to the research project. He joins the debate (Frey and Fontana, 1991; Khan and Manderson, 1992) as to what constitutes a focus group and lands on a definition that considers it as a group discussion on a topic determined by the researcher, as is the case with my research.

Sim and Waterfield (2019) explain how focus groups generate 'distinct ethical challenges that do not correspond fully to those raised by one-to-one interviews' (2019:3003). These include consent and anonymity, as participants may disclose intimate views not only in the presence of a facilitator, but also with others who participate. Consent is primarily centred in the notion of autonomy. It was therefore important that the participants were given adequate information, not only about the purpose of the research being undertaken, but also in understanding how the data would be collected and disseminated. An information sheet was provided and a copy given to the participants (see appendix). In addition, I conducted a briefing just prior to the focus group where I explained the process and offered an outline of what would be discussed. During the briefing I clarified expectations relating to confidentiality. The participants in each of the focus groups were known to each other as they were students studying on the same course. As such I acknowledged the challenge of achieving complete anonymity but explained that I would avoid using identifiable details when reporting my results. The briefing offered the participants an opportunity 'to reflect on his or her decision to take part in a situation that is closer than the formal consent process to the context of such participation' (Sim and Waterfield 2019: 3016). I explained how the group discussion would focus on the co-production of perspectives in a group context, but that they should not feel obliged to contribute to a particular line of discussion if they felt uncomfortable. The participants each provided a pseudonym prior to participating in the research, choosing a name that was unknown to the other participants. The pseudonyms are used in the transcriptions that are discussed in this thesis.

The focus groups were recorded, and the recordings transcribed. As with the individual interviews discussed above, my participants were informed that the recording would not be used after transcriptions had been conducted and that transcriptions would only be used for the purpose of my research. The information sheet I provided offered information as to how the

transcriptions would be stored. The focus group transcriptions were used to contextualise the findings from my individual micro-phenomenological interviews and to offer insights into my participants' use of their mobile phones more generally. The information collected helped to build a picture of the user-mobile phone-world relation central to my research questions as stated in the introduction to this thesis.

As outlined above, I made four visits to four different groups of fashion media students. These groups spanned three different undergraduate courses: fashion photography, fashion illustration, and fashion styling and production, and were conducted over an eighteen-month period. Research with the different student groups was undertaken within a month of my visit to their taught sessions and the group discussions were conducted in these same four groups. Morgan (1996) outlines how focus groups can act as a starting point for the research process offering a space to explore or clarify the informant's thoughts prior to individual interviews. This notion was intrinsic to my research design. I used the group discussion to clarify what constitutes fashion media when received by mobile phone. I also encouraged more general discussion around my participant's use of their mobile phones and subsequently used some of the discussion content to contextualise their descriptions within my research. In order for there to be parity across the four discussions, I devised a focus group guide that consisted of a set of five questions which would offer a loose structure for the focus group, but at the same time leave space for my participants to explore the topic in question. The questions were as follows:

1. What social media platforms do you engage with?
2. What social media accounts do you consider to be fashion media?
3. Are there times when you aren't online and/or without your phone?
4. How often do you check social media?
5. Which social media functions do you use

The first group discussion comprised of me and three participants, Emily, Hannah and Liberty. The second was with two students, Wiktoria and Lucy. The third was a discussion between me and Veronika. I had initially arranged to meet Veronika and a peer from her class, but I received an email just before the session from the other student explaining that they were unwell and as a result would be leaving London and would not, therefore, be in a position to participate. They explained that it was unlikely that they would return soon and so requested to withdraw from

the project. Veronika, by this time had arrived to participate in the group discussion and interview. We discussed the possibility of Veronika joining another group at a later date or going ahead with her interview that day. Veronika expressed an interest to participate and stated that she would prefer to offer her contribution then and there. We therefore proceeded with me exploring the questions proposed for the group discussion with her. The final group was with two participants, Elle and Tarana. The group discussions each lasted approximately an hour and a half. My participants were all women aged between 19 and 24 years old. They were all European, but from different ethnic backgrounds, and were all undergraduate fashion media students studying at the London College of Fashion.

During our email exchange my participants were offered the choice of being interviewed and participating in the group discussion on the same day or on different days. The students all expressed a preference to do both at the same time, even though this would necessitate some of them waiting their turn to be interviewed. I therefore booked an additional space adjacent to the room I would be using for the interviews to accommodate the students who were waiting.

1.6 Summary

I now offer a summary of the methodology employed for my research. The micro-phenomenological technique offered an opportunity to collect in-depth descriptions of my participants' experiences of reading or watching fashion media on a mobile phone, drawing on particular self-selected experiences from their everyday practice of using a mobile phone. This method of data collection enabled me to access aspects of the participants lived experience which normally go unnoticed and to generate the in-depth prereflective descriptions integral to a postphenomenological inquiry.

The focus groups enabled a conversation that helped to clarify my definition of fashion media through which the participants were able to gain confidence in selecting an experience to describe. They also gave me insight into the participants' use of their mobile phone which helped in contextualising my research.

This thesis investigates the everyday experience of reading or watching fashion media from the perspective of a group of fashion media users who happen to be students. As discussed above, as fashion media students my participants have committed to study the discipline, therefore their experience was particularly interesting to me. However, it is important to note that they participated in this study as fashion media users and my research did not consider

their experience of fashion media in the classroom context. Yet as Bradley and Kennedy explain, in a time saturated with social media accessed through mobile phone technology it is imperative to find ways that ‘technology can be used to reconstruct splintered social relations’ (2021: 103) and address the loss of attention I had also noticed, and which was a driver for this research.

Chapter 2

Fashion and the Search for the Body

This thesis investigates the feelings experienced by fashion media users in their encounters with fashion media accessed through their mobile phone. However, feelings have historically been neglected in the study of fashion and fashion media. This chapter sets out to review the search for the body. I begin with an overview of Roland Barthes' concept, the fashion system, and the paradigm known as body studies which aims to include the absent body in social and cultural inquiry. I then move on to review current literature concerned with the body in fashion studies and fashion media, before offering an overview of the work of Merleau-Ponty to foreground my concept, the fashion milieu.

2.1 The Fashion System

Roland Barthes' (1915-1980) often overlooked text, *The Fashion System*, written in the mid twentieth century (2010 [1967]), has been instrumental in establishing the body as a signifying surface in fashion scholarship, yet it omits the importance of the feeling, sensual aspects of bodily experience. Barthes' semiological approach understands clothing and dress as signs: coded units of meaning, which are distributed across the cultural landscape and decoded by the viewer according to the written and unwritten rules of the collective. Barthes set out his theory of representation by drawing heavily on structural linguistics, particularly the work of Ferdinand Saussure (1857-1913), and declared there to be three codes that define fashion. The first of these being the code attached to the material artefact; the second relates to the code of spoken language; and thirdly the rhetorical code, where the artefact is translated into fashion through fashion media, in what he defines as 'written clothing' or 'image clothing'. Thus, Barthes concludes that clothing becomes a speech act; a discursive process and sign system detached from the living, breathing, agentic and moving body. This view of the body, as a mere signifying surface, is one taken up by a number of scholars interested in fashion (see for example Lehman 2000; Jobling 1999; Calefato 1997). Patricia Calefato makes this position clear when she says, 'fashion has turned the body into discourse, a sign, a thing' (1997: 72). However, as Joanne Entwistle explains 'Fashion is about bodies: it is produced, promoted and worn by bodies. It is the body that fashion speaks to and it is the body that must be dressed in almost all social encounters' (2023 [2000]: 1).

This thesis understands the fashioned body as a *feeling* body that is inextricably entangled and intertwined with a lived environment structured by technological prostheses and underpinned by the shared symbolic structures associated with fashion. Fashion is an embodied process of becoming collectively with others. Since the 1980s the prevalence of mobile phones has shifted the ways that fashion is disseminated. My research makes an important contribution to the field of body studies – which shares an interest in studying the relationships between bodies, technologies and collective life – to investigate how fashion brings individuals together to form collectives in the digitally mediated age.

2.2 Body Studies

Academics from across humanities and social science disciplines acknowledge the historical delineation between the socialised body and the biological body in academic discourse (Csordas 1994; Crossley 2102; Featherstone 2010; Mol 2012; Shilling 2005, 2016; Shusterman 2012; Turner 2012). This interest in the body was recognised with the launch of the international journal, *The Body & Society*, in 1995, and the instigation of a research field known as body studies which aims to include the absent body in social and cultural inquiry. Bryan Turner (2012: 1) discusses this relatively recent concern with the body as ‘an intellectual response to fundamental changes in the contemporary relationship between bodies, technology and society’. Turner’s statement makes evident the significance of technology in the human-world relation and draws attention to the importance of considering the relation between the body, technology and collective life. He notes how the discipline of body studies considers the body in two different ways: firstly, as a site of manipulation, where the body is not a natural given, but rather a site of options and choices and secondly, as a biological affective body, through which embodied lived experience is practised. This is the *feeling* body that is central to the concerns of my research, and it is also a dressed body, as the fashion object and subject are constituents of the fashion milieu.

In the second edition of *The Body* published in 2021, Lisa Blackman notes how new ground has been covered since the first edition was published in 2008. She explains how this new approach to scholarship,

[...] starts from the position that bodies are never singular distinct entities bounded by the skin, but rather bodies always extend and connect to other bodies, human and non-human, to practices, techniques, technologies, objects, processes, histories (human and non human, molar and molecular) which

produce different kinds of bodies and different ways, arguably, of enacting what it means to be human.

(Blackman 2021[2008]: 2)

The idea of the body as being more than a unity, a constituent of a metastable system constantly seeking equilibrium, is central to the concerns of this thesis and lays the foundation for my concept, the fashion milieu. Blackman's comment is useful to my research as I concur with her position that the coming together of body and world through technological prostheses not only shapes the individual's subjectivity, but also influences collective life.

Body studies cross the boundaries of philosophy, psychology, sociology, cultural theory, and anthropology. In body studies these theoretical disciplines are brought together through a shared interest in bodily matters, an approach which shifts the notion of the body as an object, as something we *have*, or *are*, to a focus on embodiment: what bodies *can do* or *become* – put another way, 'a way of living or inhabiting the world through one's acculturated body' (Weiss and Haber 1999: xiv original emphasis). This shift from the idea of the body as a thing to a site of potentiality calls for an interrogation of bodily practices and habits acquired over time which are integral to human relations with their lived environment. Such a reformulation offers a conceptual framing to reconsider dualisms predominant in Western-centric thinking, such as the division between mind and body, nature and culture, reason and emotion, and individual and collective.⁸

However, the anthropologist Thomas Csordas (1999) discusses the importance of a methodological distinction between studies of 'the body' and 'embodiment'. Drawing on the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, and Bourdieu's 'theory of practice' (1977 [1972]), Csordas argues for a move away from a concern with text to consideration of bodily experience. He explains how in the 1970s and 1980s the notion of experience was omitted from theorising about culture. This epistemological shift led to the idea that representation, rather than 'just' denoting experience, also constitutes it. This approach, he claims

⁸ The notion of Cartesian dualism derives from the work of the 17th century philosopher René Descartes (1596-1650). In drawing on the principles of mathematics, Descartes developed a rule base for deductive reasoning. He maintains that reality is divided into two separate parts, that of the mind and body, where the mind is controlled by the subject, usually described as the 'will', whilst the body is involuntarily regulated by unconscious forces. Hereby a distinction is drawn between the two, positioning the mind and body as two separate entities, where the mind has the capacity for rational thought (cognition), whilst the carnal body merely responds to regulatory bodily processes. For Descartes, rationality is the key determinant of what it is to be human. This concept, despite being refuted, has become embedded in Western thinking and paved the way for the separation of intellectual investigations into the mind and the body.

[...] closes the gap between language and experience, and thereby eliminates a dualism, but does so not by transcending the dualism but by *reducing* experience to language, or discourse, or representation. It allows for a very powerful critique of specific representations, but does so by insulating representation as a mode of knowledge from epistemological critique.

(Csordas 1999: 148 original emphasis)

Csordas instead proposes a paradigm of embodiment concerned with bodily experience and social practice. Drawing on the thoughts of Merleau-Ponty, he argues that the body is not merely an object in the world, but rather the locus of sense: it is the body ‘that give[s] our expression in the world, the visible form of our intentions’ (Merleau-Ponty 1976: 5). For Merleau-Ponty the world is experienced through the position of the body in time and space. He maintains that we come to make sense of the world through bodily movement and the objects and subjects we perceive in our lived environment but, reminds us that perception occurs through the body. As such, we experience the world through and with the body and our experiences shape our subjectivity, hence, Csordas puts forward the idea that language should be considered to explore experience through a representational lens along with a phenomenological reading to review embodiment, to reveal our being-in-the-world. He explains however, that in applying this logic, embodiment does not mean studying something new or different, but rather offers another perspective to representation that acts as ‘a dialogical partner that keeps it intellectually in check’ (ibid.).

This thesis offers an alternative approach to consider both the feelings of fashion media users and the social structures that influence their experience by bringing together the ideas of the philosophers Merleau-Ponty, Simondon and Stiegler. It is particularly concerned with the potential of fashion to bring individuals together to form collectives and the role technology plays in this process. To achieve this I develop Merleau-Ponty’s notion of a milieu to introduce my concept, the fashion milieu, an idea I define later in this chapter when I foreground the work of Merleau-Ponty as a theoretical framework for my research.

2.3 The Body in Fashion Studies

Joanne Entwistle (2023 [2000]) is a pioneer in the search for the body in the field of fashion studies. Her work has been instrumental in declaring an embodied approach to the

practice of dressing for the workplace, which she describes as ‘a situated bodily practice’. She argues that ‘the body constitutes the environment of the self, to be inseparable from the self’ (2023: 6) and goes further to point out that human bodies are nearly always dressed bodies.

Entwistle develops a theoretical framework to consider the body as both embodied and socially constituted. Through this theoretical underpinning Entwistle argues that dress permeates the body with social and cultural meanings and makes visible an indication of the wearer’s identity. She argues that fashion and dress go further than merely reflecting the micro social order: instead, they are crucial constituents of this order.

Since Entwistle first published her ideas in 2000 there has been a notable interest in the bodily aspects of dress in fashion studies. Kaiser and Green (2021[2012]: 191) explain how fashion studies has taken an ‘embodied turn’ which has ‘created possibilities for rethinking the more material focus in the field to consider bodily experience in clothes’. This shift marks a move away from consideration of the ‘dressed body’ to one of ‘dressed embodiment’ (Hesselbein 2021) which integrates dress with a review of bodily practice and experience, of how it *feels* to be dressed.

Roberto Filippello and Ilya Parkins’ *Fashion and Feeling* (2023) makes evident the importance of studying the affective and emotional aspects of dress and notes how phenomenological approaches concerning the fashioned body have varied in focus. They explain how Rosie Findlay (2016) employs a feminist phenomenology influenced by Iris Marion Young (2005). Sara Chong Kwan (2020) proposes the sensory, atmospheric nature of clothes, whilst Todd Robinson (2019, 2023) and Llewellyn Negrin (2012) consider not only the sensory but also the haptic, kinaesthetic capacities of the dressed body. These studies are important in disclosing how dress has an inherent capacity to speak to the wearer, transmitting messages between clothes and the fashioned body that have transformative powers. This thesis, as a postphenomenological study, builds on this notion to investigate fashion and fashion media as technological prostheses imbued with the potential to disrupt the affective flow of energy that transcends across the fashion milieu. Drawing on phenomenology, I set out to analyse my participants’ pre-reflective descriptions in order to consider the feelings they experience when reading or watching fashion media on a mobile phone, feelings which occur below their conscious awareness. Through an analysis of these descriptions, I show how fashion, fashion media and mobile phone technology have the potential to shape my participants’ feelings and incorporate them into a collective by evoking an emotional connection between the fashion media user and fashion media. Thus, fashion involves the process of collectively becoming with others.

The idea of the feeling body has been taken up by a number of scholars in relation to fashion. Otto Von Busch (2021) considers the feeling body by employing an interactionist method that sees clothing as a social skin that mediates bodily gestures and behaviours through feeling. He states, ‘we don’t know fashion as much as we *feel* fashion’ (2021: 151 original emphasis). However, as an interactionist study the focus of Von Busche’s approach is on the social aspects of experience, not the fleshy, corporeal body which is the focus of my research.

Ellen Sampson (2018, 2020) on the other hand locates her study of the ‘cleaved garment’ within a psychoanalytic and phenomenological framework that explores how ‘people and the garments they wear are entangled’ (2018: 3). As she states, ‘attachment to clothes derives not simply from acts of consumption as mediators of status or desire, but from a sustained tactile relationship that develops through wear’ (2018: 342). Whilst acknowledging the tactile aspects of the garment-wearer relation, the focus of Sampson’s work does not examine fashion as a collective endeavour, a notion central to the concerns of this thesis.

Elizabeth Wissinger’s (2015) work sets out to investigate the affective labour of fashion models. Wissinger establishes affect as a flow of energy that resonates between bodies and transcends to an emotional response [p. 269]. She explains how she ‘engages with questions of how bodies are conceived to examine how those conceptions shape social action and affective systems of power and regulation’ (2015: 267). I build on this idea by considering the flow of affect and transcending emotional response through the lens of Simondon’s transindividuation (Simondon 2020 [1989, 1964]: 327-355). I show how my participants experience a feeling of being incorporated into a collective through their encounters with fashion media posts which offer them a sense of affirmation. However, the transindividual relation is an idea that is also central to research in fashion studies that employ Deleuzian methods which I now move on to discuss.

2.3.1 A Deleuzian Approach to the Study of Fashion

A Deleuzian approach in fashion studies draws attention to the affective and emotional aspects of experience integral to the continuous becoming of both the individual and the collective. Further, Deleuze and Guattari (2001 [1991]: 162-199) critique the theoretical dualism that separates mind and body in order to explain how multiple social, institutional, and familial forces affect collective and individual subjectivity. Rather than understanding ‘being’ as a fixed essence of being, they use the term ‘becoming’ whereby bodies (animate and

inanimate) contain forces, or intensities, that drive a process of continuous becoming which shifts the categorisation of what objects are, to a questioning of what they can do.

Andrea Eckersley and Cameron Duff (2020) also investigate fashion beyond a semiotic analysis, focusing instead on how the materiality of fashion modulates subjectivity through affect, habit and memory, three concepts integral to my project. They explain how they bring scholarship in fashion studies concerning the fleshy, felt encounter with fashion (see Entwistle 2023 [2000]; Findlay 2016; Granata 2017; Hanson 2007; Parkins 2008; Ruggerone 2017; Smelik 2015; Young 2005) into relationship with contemporary thinking in body studies, which they claim has rarely considered clothing and dress (Blackman and Featherstone 2010: 1-3). To do this they devise a theoretical framework that draws on the work of Gilles Deleuze (1994) arguing that fashion is a collective achievement of encounters between bodies, human, and nonhuman; hence, they argue, analysis should move from what fashion *is*, to what fashion *does* in its encounters with bodies (Eckersley and Duff 2020: 38).

Anneke Smelik (2013, 2015) similarly argues that a Deleuzian approach can be useful in studies of fashion. Engaging with a new materialist methodology, Smelik shows how fashion designers such as Viktor and Rolf create designs that literally embed the notion of multiple becomings in the folds of the garments they create. This is an idea discussed by Stephen Seeley (2013), who maintains that designers such as Alexander McQueen, Gareth Pugh, Hussein Chalayan and Rei Kawakubo create fashions that provoke the body into a process of transformation: to become something other than it is.

Deleuzian methods are also applied by Lucia Ruggerone to review the feeling of being dressed. As a sociologist interested in the culture of emotions, she explains how she struggled with the sociological perspective that ‘inner feelings’ were not a sociological concern because ‘the way we feel *about* and *in* our clothes is a relevant phenomenon with a definite impact on our social behavior and ultimately on our social life’ (2017: 574 original emphasis). Through a review of the non-representational aspects of dress, Ruggerone contests the dominant view that clothing represents the identity of the wearer, where the relation between people and their clothes is understood as an intellectual endeavour, the work of the mind. Instead, in shifting the focus onto the practice of wearing clothes, which she states is an embodied experience, Ruggerone pays particular attention to the emotional and affective dimensions of dress by employing the idea of the body-clothes relation as an ‘assemblage’.⁹ This Deleuzian approach

⁹Ruggerone uses the term assemblage as defined by Deleuze and Parnet (1987:101) and later discussed by Buchanan (1997). ‘Assemblage’ is the English translation of the French *agencement* which refers to both the

to dress offers access to living corporeality, of what it is to feel like to be dressed, which Ruggerone maintains forms a stage in the perpetual becoming of both the individual and their lived environment. This argument claims the body should be thought of not as a subject, but rather as a force, a site of becoming activated through the wearing of clothes.

While Deleuze expands upon Simondon's theory of individuation in his concept of human becoming, it is pertinent to note that his interpretation is primarily based on Simondon's early works (2012 [1958], 2020 [1964]). This Deleuzian approach does not fully encompass Simondon's later theoretical developments, which emphasise the systematic unity of psychic (individual interior) and collective (individual exterior) individuation—a concept Simondon terms the transindividual relation (2020 [1989]). This latter aspect of Simondon's work forms the central focus of this thesis and allows for an exploration of how affect, through a process of transduction, transcends into emotions that are collectively shared. A more comprehensive discussion of this process is presented in the subsequent chapter.

This section has focused on a review of the literature concerned with the search for the body in fashion studies, a topic presented as a foundation for my concept, the fashion milieu, which I develop through my empirical work in Chapter 5. However, my research also investigates fashion as a technology, and pays specific attention to when fashion is experienced through fashion media encountered on a mobile phone. I therefore turn now to review current scholarship that seeks to address the absent body in studies of fashion media.

2.4 The Body in Studies of Fashion Media

Studies of fashion media have historically employed Hall's (1973) reception studies to review the meaning fashion media has for readers of magazines (Hermes 1995; Winship 1987; Lewis 1997; Laing 2018, 2021). Stuart Hall (1973) set out his theory for reception as rooted in a framework of cultural theory, which sees communication as discursive, a continuous circuit of related practices described as 'moments': for example, production, circulation, distribution/consumption, and reproduction. Hall's theory considers each of these moments as distinct but linked through messages and meanings derived from a system of signs. Thus, the focus of reception studies has historically rested with the politics of power relations – what is

action of assembling as well as the 'resulting arrangement' (Buchanan 1997:8). Both meanings are integral to the appropriation of the term.

done to the body rather than experienced *by* and *through* it.¹⁰ Hall's encoding/decoding model of communication maintains that decoded meanings have 'an effect, influence, entertain, instruct, or persuade, with very complex perceptual, cognitive, emotional, ideological or behavioral consequences' which he describes as 'meaningful discourse' (Hall 1997: 131). Yet, whilst acknowledging that reception pertains to 'complex perceptions' and has 'emotional' consequences, Hall's reception theory does not consider the role of the bodily aspects of experience integral to my study: to date, these have been absent from inquiry.

Anna Gibbs (2015) calls for an approach to audience research that responds to the affective turn in social and cultural theory. This approach prioritises 'the analysis of communication and flow over the subjects and objects produced within it [...] [which is important as] the distinction between things of a technological kind and human beings has become extremely problematic, as the technology we incorporate into our lives begins to modify us – our capacity for attention, our desires, and the way we remember' (2015: 252). She explains how the sensory appeal of media, particularly the focus on human emotion, produces complex feedback loops between media and audience that become interchangeable. Gibbs proposes a Spinozian-Deleuzian approach to audience research. She advocates an engagement with the work of Silvan Tomkins (1962) to think about the emergent flow of affect that spreads as a contagion across audiences and yet fails to bring the collective together as an aggregated force. Gibbs' work is useful in foregrounding my interest in the emotional dynamics of the user-fashion media relation. However, as discussed above, I deploy, Simondon's notion of transindividuation, particularly his later work that emphasises the systematic unity of psychic and collective becoming, to consider the flow of energy that traverses the space of social media. This flow of energy has the potential to affect my participants and capture their attention.

Eugenie Shinkle (2013, 2013a, 2017), a visual theorist and scholar of fashion photography, explains how she became frustrated by the limitations of photographic criticism, particularly the predominance of a semiotic reading, where images are considered as signs: a form of representation as discussed above. Here the biological registers, significant in the meaning audiences make of fashion images, are omitted from analysis. Shinkle addresses this omission by positioning herself alongside Mark B. Hanson (2004), Brian Massumi (2002), and Vittorio Gallese (2003) to examine the role of the body in perception, arriving at a study of affect that addresses the visceral response of the viewer, through the ideas of Merleau-Ponty.

¹⁰ For a full review of Hall's theory of reception studies see *Hall, Stuart. "Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse"* (PDF). University of Birmingham. Accessed 29 September, 2021.

She suggests her intention is not to oppose the notion of a semiotic reading of fashion photographs, but to offer an additional reading that encompasses the corporeal dimensions of experience that occur below the conscious awareness of the receiver. These two readings, the semiotic and affective, when considered together offer an approach that extends a post-structuralist critique to include the biological aspects of image perception. This line of inquiry has established the significance of the bodily, visceral aspects of perception in the study of fashion media, but it does not explore how affect transcends to an emotional response which is key to my understanding of how collectives are formed and is central to the concerns of this thesis.

Roberto Filippello investigates collective feeling (2018, 2018a, 2020, 2020a; Filippello and Zhang 2024) by setting out what he defines as ‘queer affect theory’ to review fashion images. Drawing on the work of Sedgwick (2003) and Deleuze, he argues that fashion images have the potential to create feelings of emotional and social detachment from normative understandings, thus producing opportunities for viewers to reconsider ideas of masculinity and femininity that arise from heterosexual middle-class expectations.

Filippello explains that when a viewer looks at fashion images they engage in an affective exchange between their own body and the body in the photograph, despite the absence of the photographed body in their immediate physical environment, a concept employed by Harriette Richards (2023) who suggests that fashion images reflect the cultural mood of any given time. She reflects on the work of Jonathan Flatley (2008) and Ben Highmore (2016) who agree that it is ‘structures of feeling’ (Williams 1977) that shape the cultural world in which fashion images circulate. Cultural feelings are based on experience and are therefore dependant on the cultural context of the experiencing subject, but as Richards explains ‘[m]ood is public as much as it is private; moods are infectious or “catching”, meaning that we share mood together.’ (2023: 254). Ilya Parkins (2020) explores collective feeling through an examination of the transformative power of the wedding ritual and wedding attire, symbolic structures that underpin cultural life, that she states act ‘as an index of moods that affiliates individual to collective feeling.’ (2020: 81). She explains how weddings invoke a particular mood of joy, a communally understood feeling (Berland 2011), that is both relational and reciprocal. Moreover, dress, being universal, profoundly intimate, and affective, is an ideal vector for mood. As Susan Fraiman points out ‘[m]oods, [...] are often shared, collective, and social, shaping our experience of being with others’ (2012: vii). Employing this logic, clothing and dress have the capacity to initiate a process of mutual becoming.

Instead of the structuralist constructivist representational influence of Hall, Barthes' semiotic position, or a Deleuzian approach to fashion and fashion media, my framework for the fashion milieu brings together the ideas of Merleau-Ponty, Simondon and Stiegler to consider communal feeling. Merleau-Ponty, a phenomenologist well known for his work on fleshy, corporeal aspects of experience, sets out his notion of a milieu, which I deploy and extend to introduce my concept the fashion milieu. I bring Merleau-Ponty into dialogue with the ideas of Simondon and Stiegler to investigate the role technology plays in the dephasing of the fashion milieu, a metastable system in which the user and fashion media are situated. As Simondon states 'the psychological world must be called the transindividual universe rather than the psychological world' (2020 [1964, 1989]: 312) as is it actualised by the individuals that make up the collective through relations that are simultaneously emotional, individual and collective, an idea that has not yet been explored in studies of fashion and fashion media and which I discuss through my empirical work in Chapter 6.

2.5 Theoretical Framework: Merleau-Ponty, Flesh and the Genesis of Sense

2.5.1 The Milieu

Merleau-Ponty (1967 [1942], 2014 [1945]) investigates the ‘in-betweenness’ of the relations that make up the lived environment with an emphasis on the role of the body in perception. Drawing on the work of George Canguilhem (2008 [1965]) and Jakob von Uexküll’s (1864-1944) idea of the Umwelt (environment) (1967 [1942]: 145-184), he declares that the body is more than a unity, it does not end at the parameters of the skin but is rather involved in a complex feedback loop between the individual (its internal organs and physiological process) and its lived environment.¹¹ Thus, the body extends into the environment in a reciprocal arrangement where the environment extends back into the body creating a continuous circuit or system constantly seeking to resolve the tensions that arise through the body’s relation with the world.

For Merleau-Ponty the lived environment is experienced from a perspective particular to the organism depending on their needs and sensorimotor capacities, which means the same physical location is experienced differently by different organisms. Merleau-Ponty’s notion of embodiment concerns the human body in three different ways. Firstly, in its innate capacities, it has arms and legs, it stands upright, is a particular size etc. Secondly, in that it has the potential to develop abilities or skills such as walking and talking that open the world to it in a particular way. Finally, the body has the ability to develop cultural skills which are structured by the invisible and symbolic framework integral to experience which is instituted in the bodies of those who participate in collective life. We come to know that balls are for throwing, beds are for sleeping in, and how clothes should be worn in particular situations, through our relations with culture, namely ideas that are shared with others who participate in the social world, and which are learned through our previous experience. As such, Merleau-Ponty claims that objects are not perceived objectively, but rather through the sensory value of the object and its function to the whole. In this sense the objects of the world contain the potential for an indefinite multiplicity of perspectival views: they are metastable, creating tension which requires resolution through the actions of the perceiving subject.

Moreover, for Merleau-Ponty the body is not a separate thing subjected to a causal relation with its environment: it is not acted upon, but rather it moves itself to optimise its

¹¹ Jakob von Uexküll (1926), *Theoretical Biology*, New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co.

position in the milieu, thus suggesting a meaningful environment to which it adjusts and orients itself. He develops his idea of the body schema to account for the circuit that develops between body and world which forms a multi and metastable system of which both are constituent parts. He claims that we acquire skills which become embedded in the body schema of individuals and these become learned to the extent that they occur below the level of conscious awareness. We act without having to think about it. Thus, there is no interpretative distance between consciousness and world. Subjects, objects, and nature, as constituents of the milieu, are rather entangled and intertwined in a dialectic relation. Merleau-Ponty uses the example of a football player and his perception of the football pitch to demonstrate this when he states the football pitch, is 'pervaded with lines of force [...] and articulated in sectors [...] which call for a certain mode of action and which initiate and guide the action as if [the player] were unaware of it' (1967 [1942]: 168). As the game progresses the player moves across the pitch and between the other players, drawing on learned behaviour; their skill as a footballer, to play forward a move in the game. They are also aware of the rules, the structure of football instituted in the flesh of embodied subjects. It is during the playing of the game, where every action performed by each participant shifts the energies of the match, that the player becomes aware, through their body, of the skill of their opponents and the strengths, and weaknesses, of their own teammates. They are also aware of where the goal is in relation to their body, and how fast they must run to take up the ball in a particular space on the pitch and in the game without having to think about it. There is a pre-reflective complicity between the football player and the game that transpires as all the football players respond in a continuous negotiation with the milieu. The experience of the player cannot be reduced to an interpretive distance between consciousness and world. In the playing of the game consciousness is 'nothing other than the dialectic milieu and action' (1967 [1942]:169). Hence, actions or behaviour, once learned, happen below the conscious awareness of the experiencing subject. The subject no longer has to think about performing them: the body responds automatically. As such the behaviour becomes embedded in the body schema of those who participate and so creates new structures of behaviour.

2.5.2 Structures of Behaviour

Merleau-Ponty investigates the physical, vital and human order structures of behaviour to explore the ambiguous nature of form (1967 [1942]). Form, he declares, is an expression, the taking up of the past in the present situation which emerges through a dialectic relation between the organism and the potential within its milieu. A physical structure, he claims, is a system of internal relations continually and creatively resisting external influence to achieve equilibrium in a metastable system. Rather than soliciting a release from external forces that penetrate them, vital structures go beyond their limit to create new structures in which these forces can be contained and provide an optimal condition for their own project (pp.137-145). A living organism acts to make sense of its world and to bring equilibrium to the metastable system thereby creating a unity of the past, the present, and an ideal that is both physical and virtual: an expression (pp.145-160). The human order involves a third level of behaviour, one that encompasses the structure of consciousness, which Merleau-Ponty describes as being subject to the weight of 'work'. By this he means encounters with 'use objects' in a milieu populated with objects of culture: the vestiges of the material traces of expressive acts, such as dressing oneself in clothes and producing or reading fashion media posts. These relations, he declares, integrate into new cycles of behaviour as new structures emerge. Merleau-Ponty challenges the classical theory of action which argues for there being an external relationship between action and consciousness and instead suggests this relationship as dialectical. He declares perception as being part of a human milieu, where perception is directed at human intentions as opposed to pure objects and their supporting qualities (pp.160-184). Sensation is therefore not primary data for perception, rather the unity of perception is an originary act. This position is one that has historically been contested in social and cultural theory but is, nevertheless, the position I employ to show how feeling and knowing are inextricably linked. I elaborate on this idea via my empirical work as discussed in Chapter 5.

2.5.3 Language

Merleau-Ponty advances his theory to consider more complex behavioural structures. He considers language (2014 [1945]: 179-204) where he challenges the idea of language as a system of signs, a theoretical position that has historically dominated studies of fashion and fashion media as discussed above. He instead proposes that humans make sense of language through grasping it perceptually through its structure. Here structure is understood as a unity of meaning expressed through the relations between its constituent parts, in the case of language in letters, words and grammar. Merleau-Ponty draws on the work of Ferdinand Saussure and his friend and colleague Claude Levi-Strauss to consider how human individuals embody social structures that are integral to the circuit that forms between the individual and their lived environment.¹² Structural linguistics reveals how rules and resources external to the subject are socially constructed and passed on through generations. However, as Crossley (2004) explains, '[t]he danger of structuralist linguistics, and indeed of structuralism in general, for Merleau-Ponty, is that it tends to forget [that language has a concrete existence in and through the speech acts of human beings]; to put the derived and abstract model of structure before parole, as if it were its cause' (2004: 97). By this Crossley infers that by embracing the idea of structure, structuralism loses sight of the notion that language, although socially constructed, is spoken through embodied individuals. Moreover, it is these individuals who, through use, modify and develop the structures of language, 'because the historical "mutation" of structures, a process which is constant, is strictly inexplicable if structures are not "centered" in the innovative and improvised actions of "man"' (Crossley 2004: 98). Merleau-Ponty argues that language is ambiguous, it exceeds what is written or spoken and is therefore 'metastable' relying on the reader to 'gear into' the material trace, an expressive act that bears the weight of the reader's past experiences and the historical and cultural context in which it is perceived. The expressive reading does not pre-exist before it is performed. It is actively constituted in its relationship with the written text or spoken word in the moment of perception which, he reminds us, always occurs through the body.

This thesis adopts the ideas of Merleau-Ponty to investigate the lived experience of reading or watching fashion media on a mobile phone as an expressive act. Here the user 'gears into' to the material trace of the fashion media post through the symbolic structure of fashion. It is reading that bears the weight of the user's past experience and the cultural context in which

¹² Saussure, F. 1996. *Course in General Linguistics*, New York: McGraw-Hill.

it is perceived. I am particularly interested in the feelings my participants experience that occur below their conscious awareness, but which are felt through the fleshy, feeling body. I turn now to outline Merleau-Ponty's notion of 'flesh' to examine how my participants' feelings are integral to the sense they make of the world and self and how they inform collective becoming through fashion.

2.5.4 Flesh

Crossley (1996) outlines a division in thinking between those who approach the study of the body as 'lived' and those that believe it is 'acted upon'. Crossley argues that common ground can be achieved between the two approaches that can inform a study of embodiment, power and subjectivity. He reviews the work of Michel Foucault (1926-1984), who shares an interest but takes an opposing position on the body to Merleau-Ponty. Foucault maintains that '[t]he body is broken down by a great many distinct regimes; it is broken down by the rhythms of work, rest and holidays; it is poisoned by food or values, through eating habits or moral laws; it constructs resistances' (Foucault 1987: 53). Foucault agrees with Merleau-Ponty, that the body should be considered not merely as a physiological system, but rather in terms of behaviour. However, he declares that behaviour is inscribed on the body through socio-historical forces. Elizabeth Grosz (1993), David Levin (1989) and Bryan Turner (1984) acknowledge the value of both Merleau-Ponty's notion of embodiment and that of Foucault, but conclude that these two different positions are irreconcilable. Crossley, however, makes connections between the two thinkers and declares that there is no need to delineate between the notions of lived and inscribed bodies as he sees them as compatible and complementary. He draws the conclusion that the body is both active and acted upon and the tension between these positions constitutes the 'human body qua socio-historical being. The body as a mastered and self-aware being is, [...] formed in this interstice.' (1996: 114). He goes further to describe these views not as opposites, but as poles, or, employing Merleau-Ponty's later work (1968[1964]), reversibilities of the same flesh.

In *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968 [1964]), Merleau-Ponty attempts to establish an ontology of the flesh.¹³ Reversibility is central to Merleau-Ponty's later thinking. Key to this concept is the notion that to see something is to be a being who can also be seen. Put another way, there is a reversibility between the seen and the seer, a commonality or shared way of

¹³ Published posthumously from an unfinished manuscript and working notes of a book.

being that is never completely the same, nor completely different. To demonstrate reversibility, he offers the example of two hands touching. He claims that the hand in the activity of touching opens itself to being passively touched. By this he means that it has a sense of its capacity to reverse touching to being touched: there is a reciprocity of the body schema, of touched and touching which he describes as ‘productive negativity’. Reversibility is possible because there is a temporal and spatial gap between the two positions, a differentiation, a divergence that holds them apart, which Merleau-Ponty defines as *écart*. He states that form emerges from the figure-ground relation, whereby the world takes shape by drawing on the range of possibilities or potential in the metastable system in which the organism resides. The world opens up in a specific way: through divergence and differentiation there is an opening up of a dimension of the lived environment. The idea of a dimension is prominent in Merleau-Ponty’s work. He declares that in the existential analysis of lived experience, a dimension of experience is defined as a facet that is ever present, that haunts experience, but that cannot be reduced to it.

However, the lived environment is a world of objects and nature, but it is also a social world made up of dressed, feeling bodies which bear the weight of culture. Merleau-Ponty explains that there is a mutual recognition of the body schema by those we encounter, where body schemas fold into one another. Here the action of the individual being is inscribed in an expressive act made visible in the world which is recognised by others as something they also have the capacity to do: the perceiver and the perceived understand that they are ‘made of the same stuff’ (Merleau-Ponty 1964a [1961]: 224). The idea of fashion media and user being made of the same stuff is a concept I employ in Chapter 5 to explore the relations between fashion media users and those they encounter through fashion media accessed via their mobile phone. However, as David Morris (2010) explains, ‘[i]t is absolutely crucial to Merleau-Ponty’s ontology that the perceiver and perceived are not two different appearances of one being, but two divergent ways in which being is’ (2010: 4 original emphasis). The implications of this are that behaviour has a collective aspect; a general mode of being that is neither substance nor consciousness, but rather emerges from the encounters between subjects, objects and the natural world, they are of the same *flesh*. Thus, *flesh* is a site of reciprocity and mutual responsiveness ‘the formative medium of the object and the subject’ (Merleau-Ponty 1968 [1964]: 147).

However, Merleau-Ponty has been criticised by feminist theorists (Butler 1999; Grosz 2005; Young 2005), critical race theorists (Fanon 1986 [1952]) and disability studies scholars (Garland-Thomson 2011) for his failure to acknowledge the power relations inherent in cultural contexts. Whilst acknowledging that these issues were omitted from Merleau-Ponty’s original

discussion, Gail Weiss (2015) argues that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of embodiment can be helpful as it

[...] suggests that the gender, race, and ability of bodies are not innate or fixed features of those bodies, much less corporeal indicators of physical, social, psychic, and even moral inferiority, but are themselves dynamic phenomena that have the potential to overturn accepted notions of normalcy, naturalness and normativity

(Weiss 2015: 77)

Weiss argues that it is Merleau-Ponty's insistence that we engage with the world through and with the body that brings attention to how an individual's gender, race and bodily abilities (able or not) differentiate their experience of the world and their interactions with it. This approach enables insight into how sexism, racism, and the neglect in considering disability, effect bodily interactions as they bear the weight of cultural expectations which have become normalised.

Merleau-Ponty considers consciousness not as 'I think', but rather declares intentionality as bodily movement, 'I can'. This is a concept Iris Marion Young (2005) critiques as she argues that Merleau-Ponty ignores how women and girls, through embedded social and historical structures, face doubts around their physical abilities, which creates a tension resulting in a feeling of 'I cannot'. This inhibition is understood by Young as being culturally determined and unrecognised by Merleau-Ponty who, she argues, views experience through a so-called universal lens, one generally experienced by boys and men.

While acknowledging that Merleau-Ponty did not himself address the specific aspects of identity construction prominent in the study of social sciences, he does acknowledge the weight of the past and the ideal. As Nick Crossley (2004) points out, Merleau-Ponty emphasises the social and historical nature of the world in which the experiencing subject resides. Crossley explains how the social world is underpinned by the embodied knowledge of its structure, an invisible framework, instituted by social agents through the flesh of their bodies.

2.5.5 Institution

Merleau-Ponty (1968 [1964]) draws on Husserl's concept of *stiftung*¹⁴ to develop his notion of institution. He declares that perception is informed by culture, it carries over, or extends beyond natural perception to a cultural world, by which he means a world experienced through cultural instruments, hereby culture is something perceived. Yet Merleau-Ponty maintains that Husserl fails to account for the body, a situation, he claims, that requires resolution. However, Rajir Kaushik (2022) reminds us that there must not be any confusion that Merleau-Ponty is proposing biological essentialism, but rather suggests that 'the public sphere is not only human institution, [but also] natural institution [which] does not have a teleology independent from the human or to which the human submits' (2022:179). Institution involves the anchoring that happens through memory which gives weight to the now through its past, through passivity of what the past memory brings, but which informs the future (Merleau-Ponty 2010 [2003]: 76-79).

However, central to my argument is the idea that memory is stored in technological prostheses (the fashion media post) leaving a material trace that paves the way for collective memory. Thus, it has the potential to influence the flow of energy through the system generating a new sense by going beyond what currently makes sense; it is at once open to this new sense, whilst being anchored to it. Memory is not simply human, psychological or personal, but also ontological: it acts to hold events together through separating them. The weight of the past is inherent in the experience of the now, and it is institution that offers weight to experience and that holds the potential for a sequel. While the past is absorbed or inscribed in the present through the material trace of an expression, it also steers the future in a continuous process of becoming. Moreover, institution is integral to understanding history as residing in both the personal and public level and at the point of their interchange.

In Chapter 5 I apply Merleau-Ponty's notion of 'institution' to my concept, the fashion milieu. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, clothing and dress are the raw material of fashion, but fashion is a collective activity as it necessitates adoption by large groups of

¹⁴ Husserl, in his later work, considers the notion of *Stiftung* or *Ur-Stiftung*, meaning 'institution', 'establishment', or 'primal institution' or 'primal establishment'. *Stiftung* is therefore a term that accounts for a normative formation that happens below the conscious awareness of the perceiving subject. It is the transcendental basis of pre-reflective experience. Husserl draws on Euclidean geometry to argue *stiftung* accounts for the sedimentation of history embedded in the lifeworld. Institution is therefore temporal rather than spatial and is a constituent of the human order. For an overview of the notion of Husserl's *Stiftung* and the development of his work in Merleau-Ponty, see Kaushik, R. (2022) *The Passivity of Institution in Merleau-Ponty: Pandemic thinking in HUMANA.MENTE Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 2022 pp. 177-194.

people for the objects of fashion to be deemed fashionable. Fashion involves becoming collectively with others. Both fashion and fashion media leave a material trace. They are expressions externalised in technical supports that open possibilities for the conservation of collective memory that can bear weight on the experiencing subject in the present, but which also informs the future. It is through institution that there is the potential for a new sense, but it is sense anchored in the past. Thus,

[t]he notion of institution decentres the subject, explaining the process by which experience is afforded meaning and “objects” in terms of rules and resources which are trans-individual and historical. It thereby connects the subject to others and history and society at a level which is both deeper than and prior to their individual consciousness.

(Crossley 2004: 99).

It is institution that connects the fashion media user to others who share their interests through an invisible framework that is taken up by social agents through the flesh of their bodies. My participants discuss influencers, billboards, and fashion collections, individuals and objects associated with fashion that are recognised and understood by those who share an interest in fashion. Merleau-Ponty makes explicit that human becoming is caught up in social relations, and that social relations are structured by both nature and institution. The process of becoming therefore involves a meeting of embodied agents each with needs, goals, and desires, but it is a meeting engendered through technologies. Crossley explains how participants of the social world relate to each other intercorporeally through the objects they possess, expressions which echo a resonance in the bodies of those they encounter (2004: 101). Habit and institution play a role in this process.

2.5.6 The Fashion Milieu

In closing this chapter, I introduce my concept of the fashion milieu, which I elaborate on further in Chapter 5. The fashion milieu is a dynamic, lived environment composed of subjects and objects including fashion media. Fashion media, which I define as the externalisation of memory through technological prostheses, are intertwined with subjects in a continual, co-constitutive process of becoming. It is a milieu structured by a symbolic foundation associated with fashion-related technologies – such as catwalk shows, collections, and billboards – that create a shared understanding for socially embodied agents interested in

fashion. Fashion, in this sense, represents a shared journey of becoming which fosters a sense of *philia* – a deep, affirming bond with other beings.

Participants in the fashion milieu, including the fashion media users in my research, are not limited by their physical boundaries. Instead, they extend into their environment, which reciprocates this extension, forming a seamless, self-regulating system. The technological prostheses – fashion media posts in the context of my project – are inherently ambiguous, allowing for limitless interpretations that require active engagement by users. This engagement involves a creative, experiential reading shaped by individual history and cultural context. It is a dynamic interpretation that emerges from the interaction between user and media, rather than existing as a prior fixed understanding.

I define the key characteristics of the fashion milieu through an analysis of my research invariants which I evidence in my empirical work in Chapter 5. They are as follows:

1. **Hapticity:** Subjects experience the world through a sensory mode that blends self and environment. The world awakens an echo in the body schema of the experiencing subject through which they make sense of the world and self, generating a new sense.
2. **Feeling and Knowing as Interlinked:** The body is integral to perception. Subjects draw on a personal reservoir of past experiences held tacitly inside them which they play forward in the present through their feeling body not only to make sense of their experience, but also to inform future experiences.
3. **Motility:** Subjects move themselves to optimise their position in the milieu, thus suggesting the existence of a meaningful environment to which they adjust and orient themselves. There is a pre-reflective complicity between subject and world where the subject responds in a continuous negotiation with the milieu. The subject's experience cannot be reduced to an interpretative distance between subject and world. Consciousness is nothing other than a dialectic of milieu and action.
4. **Intercorporeal Self-Evaluation:** Through encounters in the fashion milieu, subjects engage in an intercorporeal exchange which informs their sense of self and affirms their position in the collective. I show how technologies have the potential to disrupt the flow of energy that transcends across the distributed system which influences the feelings of those who participate. This is significant as feelings inform the future actions and behaviour of experiencing subjects and influence the formation of collective life.

In Chapter 5 I show through my empirical work, how my participants describe feeling ‘bored’, ‘empty’, or ‘lonely’ offline. I argue that these descriptions are a result of a void they feel at being emotionally disconnected from the social world. They respond by picking up their mobile phone to log into social media, which brings about a shift in feeling to one of ‘anticipation’ and ‘excitement’. The participants describe ‘scrolling’ through social media until a post captures their attention. They stop to read the fashion media post, which offers them a sense of ‘comfort’, ‘inspiration’ or ‘happiness’. This, I argue, is a result of them feeling a sense of affirmation at feeling part of a collective. I show how my participants experience an emotional connection to the fashion milieu which offers them a sense of *philia*, of belonging to a collective that shares their interest in fashion. Moreover, it is a feeling which extends into the future. As such, fashion involves becoming collectively with others.

The fashion milieu, therefore, is a lived environment that offers participating subjects an emotional connection to collective life, a sense of *philia* within a distributed system of interconnected subjects and technological objects. However, it is a system that bears the potential to influence the feelings of participating subjects: importantly, feelings are integral to the way that collectives are formed. I explore this idea further in the Chapter 5 through a detailed analysis of my findings.

Chapter 3

Feeling Collective Becoming Through Mobile Phones and Social Media

As discussed in the introduction to this thesis I understand mind and body as inextricably linked, thus I understand feelings as being apprehended through the body. To account for the context and operation of my participant's feelings I draw on the ideas of Simondon, who understands affect as the individual coming to realise that they are more and less than a unity. He argues that affect is the driving force of the psycho-social process which, through a process of transduction, transcends to an emotional response that emerges through the individual-collective relation. It is this feeling of an emotional connection that incorporates the individual into collective life. As such, I understand my participants' feelings as emerging through their social relations which are a phase in the process of the continuous becoming of both the individual fashion media user and the wider fashion milieu.

Taking Jesper Aagaard's (2018) concept of the mobile phone as a portal through which users undergo an experiential transportation, this chapter uses Aagaard's work to argue that my participants use their mobile as a portal to an online dimension of being where they encounter others who share an interest in fashion. Through a review of current literature, I discuss how the mobile phone, and digital networked media accessed through it, engender a sense of *personal* communication between users which has the potential to affect them. It is an affect that transcends to an emotional bond between fashion media users and the collective they encounter online who share their interest in fashion. Thus, technology has the potential to disrupt the flow of energy that traverses the fashion milieu which influences my participants' feelings. This is significant as feelings are integral to the sense that individuals make of the world and self.

I am interested in the implications of this technological disruption on the formation of the social world and how it impacts on the users' subjectivity. To foreground this interest, I review literature in fashion studies that understands fashion and dress as a 'technology of the self' as postulated by Foucault (1988). By this I refer to how the practice of dressing documents a continuous process of becoming. I follow this discussion by looking at how the quality of feeling engendered through mobile phones and digital networks has been conceptualised.

As discussed in the thesis introduction, I extend my theoretical framework to consider the work of Simondon to account for the specificity of technology in my research. I begin with a review of literature that explores the similarities between Merleau-Ponty and Simondon to foreground the theoretical framework I employ for my project. I follow this with an

investigation of Simondon's ideas and evaluate the terms I use in this thesis, particularly his theory concerning transduction, individuation, and the transindividual. My research seeks to consider fashion, fashion media, and mobile phone technology as technological prostheses integral to human becoming. I am particularly interested in how fashion media captures the user's attention and, in the process, disrupts the individual-collective relation. I employ Simondon to consider the feelings my participants describe when reading or watching fashion media and the role these feelings play in the disruption of the transindividual relation.

3.1 The Mobile Phone as a Portal to an Online Dimension of Being

The mobile phone is now prevalent in everyday life, as the postphenomenologist Galit Wellner (2016) states '[a]fter a few decades of constant penetration to each and every aspect of our lives, it is now rare to meet a person who does not use a cell phone' (2016: 1). The evolution of the telephone into a mobile device in the early 1980s set users free from the tether of the land line in a physical location, enabling them to take their mobile phones, now small enough to fit in their pockets, with them wherever they go, making communication possible regardless of where they are. Scholars of digital technology James E. Katz and Mark Aakhus (2002) define this phenomenon as 'perpetual contact'.

Moreover, Wellner explains how the development of mobile phone technology to include a screen extends auditory communication to a visual sense which impacts 'our very embodiment' (2016: 97). This is an idea discussed by Jess Hardley and Ingrid Richardson (2021), who explain how mobile phones have become integral to the dynamics of embodied experience: they are ever-present and take up a habitual relation with the body (2021: 627).

Rich Ling (2010) investigates the ubiquity of the mobile phone and claims that this technology has altered the way that social situations develop and the way they are carried out. His investigation encompasses a discussion around the layering of co-present and mediated interactions that occur through mobile phones, namely how users – although present in their physical surroundings – seem to be oblivious to them when speaking to someone on a mobile phone.

The postphenomenologist Jesper Aagaard (2017, 2018) observed how his students appeared to struggle with 'perceived passivity, which they seemed to find almost unbearably boring' (2018: 48) when in the classroom, whereupon they turned to their mobile phones or laptops to engage with online content that was unrelated to their educational pursuits. This prompted Aagaard's further research to investigate if this response to boredom was purely

related to them being in an educational context whereby he asked his students about their engagement with mobile devices outside of the classroom. Hence, Aagaard describes a situation similar to my own observations in 2013 when teaching fashion communication students: this motivated me to investigate fashion media students' encounters with fashion media accessed through their mobile phones as an everyday experience.

Aagaard's findings reveal how his students regularly use their mobile phones to access social media, both in the classroom and in their everyday lives, which in the process renders them unresponsive to those with whom they share their physical space. He explains, '[i]t feels like [the mobile phone user] has mentally exited the room and left behind the empty shell of a body' (2018: 49). One of my participant descriptions demonstrates this same phenomenon when Tarana describes how she can be physically present with her mother, but is at the same time unresponsive to her. She explains "My mum says I have tunnel vision at this moment so I'm just completely there [on social media accessed through her mobile phone] ... What's she [Emma Hill, a fashion influencer] going to say? Where is it going to start?"

Aagaard draws the conclusion that when engaging with media technologies, people 'move' to 'mediated realms of elsewhere' (2018: 51) whilst still residing bodily in their physical space. He arrives at his idea of a portal which defines a gateway from one place to another. Rather than residing in a physical space and looking-out on mediated content, he argues that users, through their engagement with their mobile phones, actively enter a mediated realm leaving behind their immediate world: theirs is an 'experiential transportation'. By this he suggests that although physically present, the mobile phone user is experientially absent in their physical environment.

My research explores this shift in attention from my participants being fully present when offline to experientially leaving their physical environment to engage with fashion media posts encountered online. Aagaard's description of how the mobile phone acts as a portal concurs with my own data on this technology's spatialising actions upon user's emotions. My research reveals how my participants move out of their physical position/reality, into an online dimension of being where they encounter others who share an interest in fashion which brings them a sense of affirmation.

This is an idea that has not previously been explored in studies of fashion and fashion media. However, the implications of it are that fashion media disrupt the flow of energy through the social system which in turn has the potential to disrupt the transindividual relation, an idea I elaborate on in Chapter 7. But for now, in this chapter, I turn to literature in fashion, fashion media and digital culture to consider how social media posts accessed through mobile

technology capture the user's attention and to what end. This review foregrounds how my project aims to investigate not what technologies (fashion, fashion media, and mobile phone) are, but rather what they can do and the implications of this doing. To do this I first review how scholars of mobile phone technology account for the sense of personal communication that these technologies provoke. I draw on current studies to consider how social media posts capture the user's attention as a foundation for my research.

3.2 Attention

The postphenomenologist Robert Rosenberger discusses the idea of attention in relation to using a mobile phone whilst driving. He declares that using a mobile phone has become a learned behaviour, a habit that has an impact of the field of awareness. Hereby, rather than being experientially present, where the driver's attention is focused on their physical environment, of driving the car, there is a shift in attention to the conversation they are having on their mobile phone. This shift in attention, he maintains, occurs because the driver perceives a communication with another embodied subject which takes on 'special meaning within one's awareness' (2014: 29). The idea of a of a communication device capturing the attention of the user by offering a sense of an encounter with another person is central to my findings. In Chapter 6 I discuss the diachronic structure of my participants' experience so as to show how their experience unfolds over time. My participants discuss feeling "bored", "lonely", or "empty" in their physical environment, to which they respond by picking up their mobile phone to log into social media without having to think about it. Their action of logging into social media brings them a sense of what they refer to as "anticipation" or "excitement" at what they might find, which is followed by a feeling of "comfort", "happiness" or "inspiration" at reading a fashion media post. In Chapter 7 I develop this idea to argue that social media captures my participants' attention because they have come to know that social media has the potential for a connection with another embodied individual who also has the capacity for affect and emotion. This knowing takes on special meaning within their awareness despite the other person being physically absent. Put another way, the mobile phone acts as a portal to an online dimension of being where my participants experience a *feeling*, an emotional connection to someone who is absent in their physical space, yet perceived to be present.

Jane Vincent (2006, 2009, 2011) argues that the attachment users feel to their mobile phone results not from a relation with the device itself, but rather through the relationships they encounter through using it. She explains this as an emotional attachment which she explores

through a theoretical lens that builds on interactionist theories that emerged around the end of the twentieth century (Barbalet 1998; Bendelow and Williams 1998; Hochschild 2003; Kemper 1978). Vincent acknowledges the sentient relationships between users and their mobile phones including touch, through touching the device itself; hearing and sight resulting from engagement with the information that flows through it; and finally smell and taste, which she explains occurs through association with media content or conversations with others. From an interactionist perspective Vincent explains how the senses reach much further than the simple function they would first appear to perform (2006). However, whilst acknowledging the biological underpinning of emotion, the focus of Vincent's work is on the importance of emotions in social life. This broadly interactionist approach therefore sits in the analytical space between biological and social constructivist understandings (Bendelow and Williams 1998: xviii).

This thesis concurs with Vincent's understanding that users's attachment to their mobile phone results from a sense of a social connection afforded by it but instead investigates the affective and socio-cultural dimensions of mobile phone engagement. It reveals the emotional dynamics inherent in the participants' interactions with fashion media through digital interfaces which influence the way that collectives are formed. The focus on technological disruption through an investigation into the experiential transportation facilitated by social media platforms, particularly in the domain of fashion consumption, offers a nuanced understanding of how the fashion milieu simultaneously offers a sense of *philia*, but disrupts the transindividual relation.

3.3.1 Personal Connections: Mobile technology

Connecting via telephone is obviously not a new phenomenon. Since the second half of the nineteenth century the telephone has facilitated conversations between people across geographical boundaries without them needing to be physically present. The sociologist Christian Licoppe (2004) describes how the transformation of the communication landscape brought about by the ubiquity of mobile technology has paved the way for what he defines as the 'connected management' of social relations. Here the physically absent party makes themselves feel present through the frequency of communications across multiple channels to the point that 'co-present interactions and mediated communication seem woven in a seamless web' (2004: 135). Writing in 2004, Licoppe explains how calls made on a mobile phone tend to be shorter than those made on a landline, particularly with young phone users, but are

frequently made. His research reveals that mobile phone calls tend to be used to facilitate coordination, such as to inform a person we may be meeting that we are going to be ten minutes late, but they also work as a means of reassurance in the maintenance of a social relation. Thus, strong bonds between communicators depend on a series of interactions that are frequent enough to constitute a continuous conversation (Berger and Luckmann 1966). The potential for perpetual contact facilitated by a mobile phone therefore offers a structure for the development and maintenance of social relations, providing a feeling of presence over distance. Campbell and Park (2008) develop this idea to explain how brief but frequent communications made through mobile phone technology sustain a sense of social fellowship which acts as a kind of relational glue between those who communicate through it. As such, the practice of using a mobile phone has led to a shift to what they define as a ‘personal communication society’ (2008: 376).

The introduction of a SIM card means that the mobile phone user is personally addressable. When we connect through mobile phone technology, we are in contact with people and not locations, which brings with it a further sense of it being a personal communication device. Further, the introduction of the smartphone in the first decade of the twenty first century has transformed the mobile phone into ‘an expressive multimedia tool’ (Hjorth and Richardson 2014: 190), rather than a mere communication device. Through the use of ‘Apps’, mobile phone users are able to check the number of steps they walk in a day, sign up for music playlists, find out about the weather, read the news and play games.¹⁵ The inbuilt camera enables them to take photographs which can be shared through numerous digital media networks they access through social media platforms, a practice integral to fashion media. In what follows I discuss how social media, and digital networks have been conceptualised by scholars to explore the expansion of a personal connection to a networked public experienced in an online dimension of being, the focus of Chapter 6 of this thesis.

3.3.2 Personal Connections: Digital Networks and Social Media

Manuel Castells (2011 [1996]) explains how the last quarter of the twentieth century saw a massive change in social structures. He introduces the concept of ‘the network society’ where the social world is structured significantly through micro-electronic based information

¹⁵ An App is an abbreviation of ‘Applications’, i.e., software that brings together particular features in a way that makes them easily accessible to the user.

which flows through communication technologies. Castells defines a network as a set of interconnected nodes which has no centre. Networks are ‘patterns of contact that are created by the flow of messages among communicators through time and space [...] Networks process flows. Flows are streams of information between nodes, circulating through the channels of connection between nodes’ (Castells 2009: 20), as is the case with social media networks. The prevalence of information in the form of social media posts that circulate in their billions between accounts constitute the nodes in a network of flows, a flow that is almost infinite as it is constantly updated by users. Lee Rainie and Barry Wellman (2014) dismiss those who claim that digital networks are isolating systems and argue instead they are simply being incorporated into social life. They see digital networks as having the potential to shift the ways we communicate and form communities, posing questions around the nature of sociality. As they explain ‘[p]eople are not hooked on gadgets – they are hooked on each other. When they go on the internet, they are not isolating themselves. They are conversing with others – be they emailers, bloggers, Facebookers, Wikipedians, or even organizational web posters’ (2014: 6). The prevalence of social media, incorporated into daily routines, changes the ways people interact as communication increasingly happens in a network facilitated by technology but made up of individuals and ‘[i]n the world of networked individuals, it is the *person* who is the focus’ (ibid., my emphasis).

This thesis builds on this notion to claim that the personal focus of networked culture amplifies the sense of person-to-person communication discussed above in relation to mobile phone technology. By this I mean that the bringing together of mobile phone and digital networked media accessed through social media platforms, or the ‘concretisation’ of these technologies to use a Simondon term (2017 [1958]: 26-51) (a concept I introduce later in this chapter), intensifies a sense of personal communication facilitating an affective and emotional connection with others in an online domain through the social media posts they encounter.

Central to this argument is the idea that social media has a particular quality – that of it being a participatory medium – unlike mass media that preceded it (Hinton and Hjorth 2013). danah boyd and Nicole Ellison (2007) were among the first to define social network sites (SNSs) as web-based services that permit individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, create a list of other users they communicate with, and view lists that others have shared.¹⁶ Thus, they identify social networks as *user-oriented* technologies. Moreover, as boyd (2010) explains, participants of social media go there to

¹⁶ Throughout this thesis I follow boyd’s chosen personal style, using all lower case letters for her name

socialise with others, to see and be seen, and to share information with others who share the same interests. She therefore proposes the concept of ‘networked publics’ to explain a public that has been restructured by network technologies. However, boyd is keen to point out that networks do not dictate a participant’s behaviour, but structure an environment in a way that shapes the space as well as the imagined collective that ‘emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice’ (2010: 41). As such, I argue that networked technologies have the potential to disrupt the flow of energy that traverses the network, which in turn has the potential to influence the affective and transcendent emotional connections between users who participate in social media which influences how collectives are formed. I elaborate on this notion in Chapter 7 where I show how fashion media in the form of social media posts have the potential to disrupt the transindividual relation.

The idea of collective becoming is fundamental to my position. boyd (2010) explains that cultural and media studies tend to see the public in terms of ‘audience’, but stresses that the public in this case are not passive audiences, an idea introduced in the previous chapter where I outlined Hall’s theoretical perspective of media reception¹⁷. boyd cites Michel de Certeau (2002) who maintains that the production and consumption of cultural objects are intimately connected, a notion taken up by Henry Jenkins (2006) specifically in relation to media and by Mizuko Ito (2008) who understands ‘publics [as] (re)actors, (re)makers, (re)distributors, engaging in a shared culture and knowledge through discourse and social exchange as well as through acts of media reception’ (2008: 3). boyd sees Ito’s notion of public as acknowledging the influence of social, cultural, and technological developments that have occurred with the prevalence of digital networked media, but she draws attention in her own work to how ‘networked publics are publics that are restructured by networked technologies; they are simultaneously a space and a collective of people.’ (2010: 41), a position with which I concur and demonstrate through my findings in Chapter 6.

The concretisation of mobile phone and social media is significant, as it intensifies a sense of personal communication which provokes affective and emotional connections that capture the user’s attention, thus directing the formation of their feelings. Moreover, it is a personal connection to a networked public that users access through mobile phone technology.

¹⁷ boyd acknowledges that ‘public’ is a messy and contested term that carries different meanings across disciplines. She explains how Sonia Livingstone (2005) understands the term ‘public’ from a sociological lens as a group of people who have a shared understanding of the world, a shared identity, a sense of inclusivity, and a consensus as to the collective interest of the group. For Jürgen Habermas (1991), public refers to the civic functioning of public space, the ‘public sphere’ where society engages in ‘critical public debate’ (1991: 52). Michael Warner (2002), on the other hand, understands public not as a single space, but as many overlapping public spaces from which individuals are either excluded or included.

Thus, technologies have the potential to disrupt the long circuits of intergenerational and ancestral knowledge necessary for transindividuation. This thesis investigates the implications of this disruption on the user's subjectivity. To foreground this interest I review current scholarship that explores the role technology plays in the formation of the self, with a particular focus on scholars who consider fashion as a technology.

3.4 Technologies of the Self

In his Vermont lectures Foucault (1988) explains his interest in exploring the ways humans develop knowledge about themselves. His idea of 'technology of the self' captures the ways technologies 'permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts and conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality' (1988: 18). This requires training and modification not only in the sense of skills acquisition, but also by acquiring particular attitudes. He maintains that to 'know yourself' has obscured the idea of 'taking care of the self' which has transformed the moral principles of Western society (1988: 22). He explains how the self is not expressed in technologies external to human being, but is rather the principle that uses these technologies (1988: 25). As such, technologies of the self are the techniques and practices which are associated with particular attitudes that are adopted by individuals. It is through these practices, which operate in fields of power, that subject-positions are established.

Sean Nixon (1997) draws on Foucault (1988) to consider representations of the 'new man' depicted in fashion photography, advertising images, and shop display photographs in the 1980s. Nixon maintains that technologies of the self are 'specific techniques or practices through which subject-positions are inhabited by individuals' (1997: 322), and which are conducted in fields of power-knowledge relations bounded by a discrete number of discourses as discussed above. Nixon employs Foucault's theory to consider practices of grooming, dressing and shopping, which, he argues, are a response to looking at fashion images which are coded by viewers as attributes and characteristics that relate to new forms of masculinity. Thus, reading fashion images influences the viewer's techniques and practices, which informs their subjectivity.

Agnès Rocamora (2011) employs the same concept to consider personal fashion blogs, where bloggers regularly post images of themselves that they associate with the style they adopt in their everyday lives. Rocamora notes how blog posts tend to focus on new clothing

acquisitions, or the styling of clothes they already own in new ways, which in the process tells the blogger's story. Hereby the practice of dressing acts as a technology of the self that documents the 'process of identity construction through clothes' (2011: 410). Further, she explains how blog technology requires the frequent posting of the blogger's personal experiences in the public realm through which they convey the ongoing story of the self. However, Rocamora maintains that it is the bringing together of technologies, namely fashion and photography, and screens and personal fashion blogs, that provide a significant space for bloggers to construct their identity.

Jane Tynan (2016) similarly looks to the ideas of Foucault to 'consider the demands fashion makes on our bodies' (2016: 185). She claims that fashion as a collective, systemised and prescriptive practice provides fertile ground to study the power relations inherent in culture that shape social and political discourses. As Tynan explains, a Foucauldian analysis of fashion is valuable because Foucault's 'approach transcends politics; he sees power as everyday, socialized and embodied' (p.189). Joanne Entwistle (2023 [2000]) also acknowledges Foucault as offering an approach to think 'about power and its grip on the body [that] can be utilised to discuss the way in which discourses and practices of dress operate to discipline the body' (p.19). As discussed in the previous chapter, Entwistle has been instrumental in establishing dress as a situated bodily practice. She employs Foucault to review the structuring influence of social forces that are inherent in the practice of dressing oneself.

The theoretical positions of Nixon, Rocamora, Tynan and Entwistle through their acknowledgement of identity as a process of *becoming* rather than *being*, and by recognising fashion as a technology that informs a sense of self, are helpful in foregrounding my research. However, they are not concerned with the affective, feeling aspects of lived experience which is fundamental to the concerns of this thesis. Although Foucault sees the body in terms of behaviour rather than a physiological system, his focus is centred on the social body rather than the affective feeling body central to the concerns of this thesis.

Zizi Papacharissi (2018) similarly investigates how users tell their stories through the channels of social media which, she argues, informs their sense of self. As a participatory medium, social media offers the user a space to share their own stories, which she claims are integral to human becoming. She states,

We all tell stories about who we are, and through telling these stories, we connect with others and affirm our own sense of self. For human beings, this is our *modus operandi*. It is how we survive – through expression and social connection.

(Papacharissi 2018: 1)

Social media easily accessible through a mobile phone has become a dominant space for telling stories (Sujon 2021: 11). Hence, social media posts offer users an opportunity for expression and social connection, which affirms their subjectivity (Papacharissi 2018). I develop this idea by demonstrating how social media posts take the form of short but frequent exchanges with others: they are the material trace of an expression in an online dimension of being through which users sense a continuous conversation that enables a feeling of absent presence, as discussed above. Social media posts act as relational glue that sustains an idea of social fellowship through which users come to know the self and their position in collective life offering users a sense of *philia*. As such technology (fashion, mobile phone, and social media in the case of this thesis) has the potential to disrupt individual subjectivity and collective becoming.

3.5 Quality of Feeling

To foreground my interest in the role technologies play in influencing the feelings of fashion media users I first turn to Fortunati (2005), Vincent and Fortunati (2017), and Vincent (2011), who situate their discussions of mobile technologies within the literature of sociology and social psychology (Barbalet 1998; Bendelow and Williams 1998; Hochschild 2003; Kemper 1978). They look to the work of Gabriel Tarde (2012 [1893]: 561-594) to consider the quality of feeling that emerges through the user's encounter with their mobile phone. This recent literature encompasses Tarde's notion of 'the social heart', which he describes through the metaphor of a piano that requires the care of a tuner as it inevitably from time to time goes out of tune. It extends Tarde's metaphor to consider how 'the mobile phone can be considered as the "tuner" of social and public sentiment' (Vincent and Fortunati 2017: 314). This approach, whilst acknowledging the potential of technologies to shift, or disrupt, public sentiment and therefore social life, does not account for the fleshy or corporeal nature of the user which are central to the concerns of my project.

Hinton and Hjorth (2013) similarly discuss the quality of feeling, in this instance through social network sites (SNSs) to review the participatory nature of social media relations. They develop boyd's concept of networked publics, discussed above, and arrive at a new concept they define as, 'intimate publics' (2013: 44). They clarify how the term 'intimacy' refers to not

only intimacies that exist between lovers, family members or close friends, but also intimacies that can exist between strangers because of a shared bond that transpires through belonging to the same cultural group, namely a town, city, nation, or other collective underpinned by a sociological or political symbolic structure.

The importance of technology in cultural becoming is a notion discussed by Benedict Anderson (2006 [1983]) in his work on nationalism. Anderson sees national identities as connected and constituted by forms of communication. He claims the nation is an ‘imagined community’ because members will probably never meet in person but, nevertheless, consider themselves part of a community through an understanding of a shared commonality. Anderson describes how technology, such as the mechanised production of newspapers and novels, provided the opportunity for a standardised language, which he claims paved the way for a national consciousness (2006: 32-46).

In Chapter 5 I build on this idea to show how fashion acts as the relational glue that brings together a collective of individuals through a shared interest. I argue that the invisible symbolic structure associated with fashion offers a sense of *philia* to my participants which brings them a sense of affirmation. It is a sense of affirmation that occurs through an intimate exchange: an affective and emotional connection that transforms the collective into a community of like-minded individuals.

The notion of social media as engendering a sense of intimacy between those that participate has been well established (Abidin 2013, 2021; Entwistle and Wissinger 2023; Findlay 2019) and will be further discussed in Chapter 6 when I outline my findings. However, to summarise, there is a shared understanding that the posting of social media content offers the potential for intimacy if it is relatable to users, where the content seems more ‘real’ or ‘authentic’ (Abidin 2013; Entwistle and Wissinger 2023; Findlay 2019). However current studies of fashion media do not acknowledge the fleshy, feeling aspects of experience fundamental to my project which seeks to investigate intimacy as an affective and emotional connection integral to the transindividual relation.

Grant Bollmer (2018, 2019) insists on the significance of materiality in relation to intimacy when he states ‘[t]hus, any understanding of intimacy must equally acknowledge the materiality of infrastructure’ (2018: 50). Bollmer builds on the thoughts of Lauren Berlant (1998) and states, intimacy ‘is about the “world” one makes through the presence of others’ (2018: 53). I pursue this line of inquiry as I seek to consider the feelings provoked by fashion, fashion media, and mobile phone understood as technological prostheses integral to human becoming. This inquiry encompasses an understanding of technology as material artefacts with

the potential to disrupt long circuits of intergenerational or ancestral knowledge fundamental to transindividuation, an idea I employ to analyse my findings in Chapter 7.

Drawing on the work of Raymond Williams (1921-1988), particularly his notion of 'Structures of Feeling', Rebecca Coleman (2018) similarly makes a case for a focus on the materiality of social media networks. She explains how social media reworks notions of time through connectivity, immediacy and instantaneity. Hereby bodies, technologies and socio-cultural structures become intertwined resulting in an 'aliveness' which, she argues draws similarities to Williams' idea of 'pre-emergence'. Coleman draws together the materialist tradition evident in the work of Williams with more recent materialist approaches to media to rethink social media as constituting an *infra*-structure of feeling (2018: 68). She explains how the dynamism of culture, in that it is constantly evolving, finding new forms or adaptations, is always in the process of emerging. It is the pre-emergent, the affective flows of information that traverse the space of social media, that create a structure of feeling that is shared by those who participate. Coleman and Bollmer both bring the materiality of technology to the foreground in their discussions of social media to highlight its importance in the production of feelings, particularly the shared intimate feelings that emerge through social media. In addition to Williams' and Coleman's use of the materiality of feeling, I develop an alternative theoretical framework able to consider these intimate relations as an intercorporeal exchange between users. To do this I employ the thoughts of Merleau-Ponty as discussed in the previous chapter, whose ideas I bring into dialogue with the work of Simondon to specifically account for technology and to explore the potential that technology has to dephase the fashion milieu which I now move on to discuss.

3.6 Theoretical Framework: Simondon

As discussed in the introduction to this thesis I extend my theoretical framework to include the ideas of Merleau-Ponty and Simondon, which I deploy to account for the specificity of technology in my research. In this section I conduct a review of the literature concerned with the similarities in their ideas to foreground the theoretical framework that informs my project.

In making a connection between the philosophical thinking of Merleau-Ponty and Simondon I follow scholars including Andrea Bardin (2015), Miguel de Beistegui (2005), Xavier Guchet (2018), Donald Landes (2013), Simon Mills (2016), David Scott (2014: 46-49), and Diego Viana (2023), who provide a body of work that offers a foundation to compare the work of the two thinkers.

Donald Landes' (2013) thesis, *The Paradox of Expression*, is chiefly concerned with the structure of expression. Landes charts the development of Merleau-Ponty's thinking to propose that the structure of expression is paradoxical; one only knows what is meant *after* expressing it. By this he means that expression accomplishes nascent meaning, as opposed to externalising an already determined internal idea. Landes draws on Merleau-Ponty's later work (2003 [1995] 1968 [1964]) to explain how form is drawn from 'the felt presence of so many possibilities that are never made explicit' (2013: 8). It is on this point that Landes draws on similarities in the work of Simondon (2020 [1964, 1989]: 8), who maintains that the individual exceeds itself, it exists in its relation to the 'pre-individual'. The pre-individual is a reservoir of potential that exists prior to the individual, which creates a tension that requires equilibrium. However, it is not separate from the individual, but rather integral to a process of individuation. Drawing on thermodynamics, Simondon maintains that the pre-individual is metastable; it is neither stable nor unstable, but is instead precarious, a supersaturated system rich with potential energy constantly seeking equilibrium in its relation with the individual through the individuating process. As Simondon states:

[...] it can be supposed that individuation does not fully exhaust pre-individual reality and that a regime of metastability is not merely sustained by the individual but carried by it, such that the constituted individual transports along with it a certain associated charge of pre-individual reality that is animated by all the potentials which characterize it; an individual is relative, like a structural change in a physical system; a certain level of potential remains, and further individuations will be able to emerge.

(Simondon 2020 [1964, 1989]: 8)

By this Simondon means that each individuation is a phase in the continuous process of becoming for both the individual and its associated milieu. The individual does not begin and end at the boundaries of their skin. They are more *and* less than a unity. They struggle with the problematic of potential harboured within them that they constantly seek to resolve. This idea has similarities with Merleau-Ponty's thinking around potentiality (the infinite number of perspectives) that tacitly resides in the Gestalt which require a creative solution, an action by the perceiving individual.

Mills (2016: 212-216) and de Beistegui (2005) conceive that there is little evidence to suggest a dispute between Merleau-Ponty and Simondon and argue that they share a common ambition to move from a purely phenomenological position towards an ontological solution. In his later work Merleau-Ponty (2004, 1968 [1964]) looked to modern biologists, as discussed in the previous chapter, to overcome the dualism of consciousness and object. He declares that it is through embodiment that the conscious emerges; consciousness is immanent to the activity of nature. Simondon (2020 [1964, 1989]) similarly sets out to overcome notions of dualism through his proposition of individuation which begins from the pre-individual.

Mills' (2016) considers Merleau-Ponty's notion of the *milieu* which, as discussed in the previous chapter, draws on Uexküll's idea of the *Umwelt*. Uexküll describes a relation between organism and world, where the lived environment initiates and guides the organism's behaviour, indicating a meaningful environment to which it responds, but at the same time relies on the structure of the organism: the *umwelt* is a multi and metastable system. Mills points out similarities to Simondon's concept of 'the associated milieu', (2020 [1964, 1989]: 5). The difference between the two being that Simondon, from the outset considers the *development* of the individual. As Mills explains:

[w]here Merleau-Ponty moves towards ontology as a means to get beyond the subject-object dualism Simondon takes this as his starting point [...]. Where Merleau-Ponty describes an organism's ontogenesis as the production of a disequilibrium generated via negativity, Simondon founds his entire philosophy on the notion of *metastability* and the transductive mode of individuation that this enables.

(Mills 2016: 215-216 original emphasis)

Diego Viana (2023) discusses this same point, declaring that Merleau-Ponty reflects throughout his philosophical thinking on the possibilities offered by phenomenology to review genesis and perception. Later he goes on to develop an ontological perspective that draws on the concept

of Nature. Whereas Simondon's approach, through his conception of ontogenesis as being more than the origin of entities, is anchored from the beginning on the problem of Nature (Viana 2023: 247-248). Although not strictly phenomenological, Simondon's philosophy of process and becoming is embedded with phenomenological influences. Bardin (2015: 39-44) points out that Simondon conceived his notion of individuation at the same time as Merleau-Ponty reviewed the concept of Nature in his later work and claims that the ideas of the two thinkers seem to converge: 'they give philosophy the task of questioning Nature as a "primordial being" which is not yet a subject, thus giving voice to "complete reality"' (2015: 41).

In addition to a similarity in ideas of primordial being, of preconscious potential in Merleau-Ponty, or the pre-individual in Simondon, and of the organism-milieu relation, as discussed above, Viana highlights resemblances in the work of Merleau-Ponty and Simondon relating to the notion of genesis. Merleau-Ponty takes up Husserl's (2001a) genetic phenomenology, which sets out to account for the emergence and flow of apperception and apprehension, but assumes the intentional structure of the object as already present. Genetic phenomenology is, in this case, oriented to the objective structure and is linked to consciousness. Merleau-Ponty breaks the link between the static and genetic, emphasising the idea of genesis and elevating it as being more than a stage in perception, thereby posing a shift from the genetic phenomenology of Husserl, to one where 'phenomenology can become a phenomenology of genesis' (Merleau-Ponty 2014 [1945]: xxxii). Here, sense lies not in the relation to the object, or structures of intentionality and thought, but rather in the situated relation between the embodied subject and their lived environment, that is, in nature and history. Viana points out the similarities in Merleau-Ponty's thoughts relating to the genesis of physical and vital structures and the human order, to Simondon's regimes of individuation, namely physical, vital and psychosocial, a point also made by Bardin when he states, 'the subdivision of the third chapter of Merleau-Ponty's *La structure du comportement* into three parts (*Ordre physique, ordre vital, ordre social*) clearly corresponds to the structure of *Individuation* [in Simondon]' (Bardin 2015: 42 original emphasis). However, Bardin claims that Simondon makes a detour from Merleau-Ponty's thinking by insisting that perception, signification, and sense depend on ontogenesis itself, and that the question to be answered when facing an object should be, as Viana states 'what sort of genesis sustains the persistence of this object' (Viana 2023: 254). The pre-individual does not therefore relate to perception, or sense, but perhaps more to Merleau-Ponty's concept of 'wild being'. Bardin quotes a working note written by Merleau-Ponty which makes reference to Simondon, the only reference to his former student

in his entire corpus of work, that discusses this point and his idea of brute or wild being, which states:

Simondon's point of view is trans-perceptive: perception is for him on the order of the inter-individual, unable to account for the true collective – There is something true here [...] We do not constantly perceive, perception is not coextensive with our life – Nevertheless, one no longer knows what one is talking about if one *places oneself* in the meta-perceptual [...] For my part, the philosophy of brute (or perceptive) being takes us out of the Cartesian *cogito*, of Sartrean intersubjectivity [...] but for it, the nexus [*foyer*] remains the perceptive field, insofar as it contains everything: nature and history. Simply, instead of saying: to be perceived and perception, I should rather say: brute or wild being and 'foundation' (*Stiftung*).

(Merleau-Ponty 1958: 42 in Bardin 2015: 43 original emphasis)

The working note outlines Merleau-Ponty's position in relation to Simondon who claims perception as being trans-perceptive. However, Merleau-Ponty's clarification of terminology suggests an attempt to synthesise their thinking. Guchet (2018) argues that this point should not be treated as a rupture in the ideas of the two thinkers as he claims Merleau-Ponty's later work took on a similar position to Simondon. Guchet also argues that Merleau-Ponty's later introduction of the terms 'dehiscence', meaning the opening of the embodied subject to its own being, and 'chiasm', the intertwining that captures his understanding of flesh, reflect his concern with genesis and relation. Here the focus is on the invisible inherent in the structures of the visible (Merleau-Ponty 1968 [1964]: 112) that 'invite one to explore its conditions that remain invisible, the excess of itself from which it is detached and beneath which it flows' (Viana 2023: 255) as discussed in the previous chapter. This idea bears similarities to Simondon's notion of individuation. For Simondon, being itself necessitates a need to exceed its unity, reaching out to a relation through perception, affect, technicity and more, that envelops subject and object. However, Simondon (2020 [1964, 1989]) recognises the situated character of knowledge; his notion of genesis emphasises how knowledge is inextricably intertwined with the social and historical, and importantly for my research, encompasses technology. As de Beistegui (2005) argues, Merleau-Ponty and Simondon shift us from the ontology of the object, in line with twentieth century scientific developments that look to a world as *phenomena*, rather than a world of things, to account for a phase in the continuous process of becoming of both the organism and their associated milieu.

In this section I reviewed current scholarship that makes a connection between the work of Merleau-Ponty and Simondon. This body of work highlights the divergence of ideas in the two thinkers, but clearly makes a case for a shared understanding and value of concepts relating to primordial aspects of being, the human-milieu relation, and genesis; put more succinctly, the ontogenesis of being, concepts that are central to my argument in relation to reading or watching fashion media. There is an explicit difference between Merleau-Ponty's sense of 'embodiment' – which the thesis will take forward in relation to the fashion media user – and Simondon's insistence on context and the generation of an associated milieu, which we see play out in the fashion milieu. The focus of this thesis is to investigate the implications of technological disruption. Thus, the synthesis of the ideas of Merleau-Ponty and Simondon is important to consider, as Simondon, elevates and makes explicit the role of technology in his theory of becoming, a feature missing in Merleau-Ponty's body of work.

3.6.1 On the Mode of Existence of Technological Objects

Simondon's *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects* (Simondon 2017 [2012, 1958]: xv) aims to reconcile the gap 'between the attitudes provoked in man by the technical object and the true nature of these objects'. He maintains that objects have historically been divided into two categories. First, objects of beauty: cultural expressions of humanity, and second, objects of utility: technical objects which he states are 'devoid of signification and bracketed off from the social' (2017 [1958]: 17). Simondon sets out to resolve this division by promoting a new way of thinking that brings technology, culture and humans together, which he describes as a 'culture of technology'. He does this by bringing together the fields of philosophy and engineering to arrive at a philosophy of 'mechanology'. Here his focus is on the 'lives' of technical objects, or what he calls 'technical individuals' such as engines or transistors, and their evolution from an abstract state to one of concretisation (2017 [1958]: 25-51). Simondon offers an example of the shift from water cooling to air cooling systems in combustion engines (2017 [1958]: 30-31). Water cooling systems, he claims, are abstract because they are a separate system attached to an engine. Whereas an air-cooled engine is concrete because the system for cooling the engine is integrated into the engine itself: it becomes a single system. This example demonstrates the progression from the arrangement of discrete structures to a single concrete system that supports multiple functions. Simondon's focus aims to consider the agency of material objects within 'the context of a broader

motivation to theorize the technical as imbricated within the social or cultural' (Egliston and Carter 2022: 600).

Earlier in this chapter I discussed how the bringing together of mobile phone technology with social media platforms amplifies a sense of personal communication between users. As with Simondon's example of the water cooling systems discussed above, the mobile phone and social media (both technologies aimed at sociality) have become concretised to form a single system that supports multiple functions; one function being that users have the potential to post and read or watch fashion media which they access through their mobile phone.

However, the fashion milieu describes a single system underpinned by the invisible symbolic structure of fashion. I consider clothing and dress as a technology which, through a process of transduction, form a new structuration that comes to exist in a network, namely that of fashion, a durational and symbolic structure that acts as a means of becoming collectively with others. As Simmel (2020 [1904]) states, '[t]wo social tendencies are essential to the establishment of fashion, namely, the need of union on the one hand and the need of isolation on the other. Should one of these be absent, fashion will not be formed' (2020 [1904]: 96). Simmel's focus from a sociological perspective sets out to show how fashion acts as a function of social class. Malcolm Barnard (2020), by contrast, focuses on the idea of fashion as communication. Drawing on a semiotic understanding of fashion he states, 'whatever else fashion and clothing do (protection, decoration, preserving/abandoning modesty, for example) they are always performing a communicative function' (2020: 201). This notion is also taken up by Fred Davis (2020) in his chapter 'Do Clothes Speak? What Makes them Fashion?', when he says, 'we know that through clothing people communicate some things about their person, and at the collective level this results typically in locating them symbolically in some structured universe of status claims and lifestyle attachments' (2020: 226).

I build on the idea of fashion as a means of communication, but instead of a semiotic understanding, I situate communicating individuals in a milieu as discussed in the previous chapter. I also extend my theoretical framework by deploying Simondon's notion of transduction to investigate how ideas are communicated between fashion media users and the fashion media posts they encounter across a single lived environment: the fashion milieu that spans both offline and online dimensions of being (this is an idea I elaborate on through an analysis of my findings in Chapter 6).

3.6.2 Transduction and Individuation

Simondon, like Merleau-Ponty, argues that the individual is more than a unity situated in a milieu, a lived environment. Drawing on ideas from thermodynamics, and cybernetics, he sets out his notion of an ‘associated milieu’, which is at once an external and internal milieu rather than a physical or external environment. For Simondon, the associated milieu is that through which the individual engages in acts of communication and energetic exchange within a system constantly in flux, engendering internal resonance in both individual and the associated milieu in which they reside (2020 [1964, 1989]: 167-256).

Simondon (2020 [1964, 1989]: 21-54) contests Aristotle’s established theory of hylomorphism where a thing consists of form and matter, which when combined constitute the substance of the thing, but where the two domains do not speak to one another. Thus, in hylomorphism form is separated from the substance that is its cause. A well-used example is that of a brick which is formed through clay being shaped by a mould. Simondon states hylomorphism negates consideration of the *process* by which the brick comes into being, for example the preparation of the clay to make it ready for moulding, and the manufacture of the mould through which the brick comes to be a brick.

Substantialism, on the other hand sees ‘being as consisting in its unity, given to itself, founded on itself, not engendered and as resistant to what is not itself’ (Simondon 2020 [1964,1989]: 1). Hence, the view from the perspective of hylomorphism and substantialism is to ‘take the finished individual form as their unit of analysis and then look to the past to describe the nature of its reality (Mills 2016; Scott 2014)’ (Tucker 2022: 5). Simondon instead argues that it is necessary to rethink the individual in terms of the conditions of its genesis, its process of becoming, which he defines as ontogenesis, and to replace the idea of form with that of information. I understand my participants as being more than a unity: they extend into a milieu, as discussed in the previous chapter. However, Simondon’s theory explicitly addresses the role of technology in the continuous becoming of the subject and its associated milieu, an idea I elaborate on through a discussion of my invariants in Chapter 6. Further, Simondon’s notions of transduction and individuation offer a way to consider a flow of information in the form of fashion media posts that transcend digital networked media accessed through mobile phone technology and its potential to dephase the system.

Simondon reworks the cybernetic notion of information, understood as a measurable entity sent from sender to receiver, to argue that information flows not between two predetermined individuals, but rather between the pre-individual integral to the individual and the undetermined of the associated milieu (2017 [1958]: 119-121, 2020 [1964, 1989]: 55-94). Applying this idea to my research, information flows between the pre-individual of the fashion

media user and the potential integral to the fashion milieu. The pre-individual consists of the habits my participants have mastered, the culture they inhabit, and the personal experience they deploy to make sense of the present, an idea that draws similarities with Merleau-Ponty's notion of experience bearing the weight of the past and ideal. The fashion milieu is a lived environment that has been extended by the concretisation of the mobile phone and social media into an online domain. Moreover, these technologies have become embedded in everyday life to the extent that they have a habitual relation with the body. The concretisation of social media and mobile phone technology amplifies a sense of personal communication with others which becomes significant in their field of awareness. As such, fashion media posts have the potential to affect users, an affect that transcends to emotional bonds with others they encounter.

For Simondon, communication occurs within a multi and metastable system, a system with potential which creates incompatibility or tension between the individual (fashion media user) and collective dimensions (fashion milieu). It is a tension that requires resolution. The idea of a metastable system draws on concepts integral to thermodynamics, whereby a system is neither in a state of equilibrium, nor depletion, or entropy (Simondon 2020 [1964, 1989]: 5-8). It rather retains potentials that require resolution, a containment that occurs through the generation of a new order. However, being metastable, this is only ever a temporary state. Metastable systems are therefore dynamic, in constant flux seeking equilibrium. Thus, individuation describes a phase in a continuous process of becoming. Here the relation between form and matter is not one between inert matter and form imposed from outside, but is rather a force, or energy exchanged in their encounter (Simondon 2020 [1964, 1989]: 25-28). To this end information, for Simondon, is an 'energetic system through which form emerges' (Mills 2016: 12).

Simondon develops a theory of transductive logic (2020 [2005; 1989]: 68-69) to explain the operative nature of individuation: how the individual overflows itself in both directions, internally to the organism and externally to the associated milieu. Transduction is an operation that propagates across a domain and in the process offers a grounding for further structurations. Simondon (2020 [1964, 1989]: 62-67) famously uses the process of crystallisation to demonstrate transduction in a physical system. Here the crystal is formed from a small seed or intrusion in a saturated aqueous solution which causes tension in a metastable system, between the interior of the solution and the seed. From this encounter the crystal grows from the seed in all directions. Simondon explains how the solution (a pre-individual system) and the intrusion (introduced from outside) become organised around a single point, which results in a tension between disparate forces that enables a reorganisation of the system. The crystal that

forms is a resolution of the tension in the instability of the liquid, but it is a metastable system as the potential of the pre-individual is not exhausted. Each crystallisation bears the weight of the previous crystallisation; it is not deductive but rather offers a structure from which another can form. However, there are no preordained terms or orders of complexity prior to the relation between seed and solution: the crystal is formed in and through a process of individuation. Andrew Feenberg (2019) employs Simondon's idea of transduction and individuation in the context of digital networked media and explains '[t]he invention of online community can be compared to the speck of dust that precipitates the super-saturated solution' (2019: 236) facilitating a new structure. I develop this idea in Chapter 6 to show how fashion media can be compared to a speck of dust that dephases the fashion milieu by forming a new structure on which other structures grow that span both offline and online dimensions of being.

Simondon's work has been employed by scholars who share an interest in digital technology to conceptualise the bringing together of the physical and digital worlds (Feenberg 2019; Hui 2016; Nash 2016; Ornati 2022, 2024; Rantala and Muilu 2023). I engage this conceptualisation to explain how ideas transcend across offline and online domains through my participants' relations with fashion media in the form of fashion media posts, bringing together two orders of magnitude to form a new order: a single lived reality. Michael O'Hara (2019) draws on Simondon to consider the digital realm by looking at how the algorithm can be considered as traversing states. Here the potential of code in its abstract state moves to a state of concretisation through its implementation into hardware (2019: 224). O'Hara considers the work of Katherine Hayles (2012, 2017), who explains her position on digital technology as a theory of co-evolution of embodied cognition and technics. Hayles, who also cites Simondon as an influence, argues that large scale networks, such as those inherent in social media, and algorithms that function within them, perform complex decision making that is recursive and feeds into human cognition below the conscious awareness of the perceiving subject. Thus, she explains, computational technologies externalise human cognition and operate within 'complex ecologies' (2017: 34). O'Hara brings this thinking into dialogue with an 'enactivist' notion (Malafouris 2013; Thompson 2007) of bodily perception, which argues for a dynamic and material account of action to account for the role of the body in the production of technical objects.

This thesis is not concerned directly with data collected through social media or algorithms integral to digital networked media, although both are fundamental in the distribution of fashion media through social media platforms. The examples above help to develop a context for my research that explains the complex ecologies that emerge in the

bringing together of digital and physical realms through technology. The ethical implications of this co-joining of human neural networks with digital networks (Coleman *et al.* 2018) offer a foundation for my discussion in Chapter 8 that looks at the implications of the disruption to social life that results from the emotional relations engendered through fashion media accessed through mobile phone technology.

As previously indicated, the bodily, or affective aspects of experience encountered through technology are fundamental to the aims of my research. The thoughts of Galloway and Thacker (2007), Hansen (2004), and Terranova (2004) are useful in foregrounding my project as they reflect on Simondon's thinking to consider how technology structures experience and influences embodied psychosocial behaviour. This is a view also employed by Adrian Mackenzie (2002) who draws extensively on Simondon to investigate the affective nature of contemporary technologies. Mackenzie argues that mass media, along with other technological developments such as telecommunications and genetically modified food, bring collectives of living and non-living bodies together 'in programmed, repeatable sequences' (Mackenzie 2002: 31). To this end, he states technicity must not be considered as secondary to human nature itself.

I deploy this idea in relation to fashion, fashion media, and the mobile phone, technologies of sociality bearing the potential to bring living and non-living bodies together to form collectives through programmed sequences, which through repetition become normative. Clothing and dress are a technology which, through a process of transduction, form a new structuration that comes to exist in a network, namely that of fashion, a durational and symbolic structure that acts as a means of becoming collectively with others: a single system through which individuals communicate. However, through a process of concretisation the social function of fashion is offloaded to the associated milieu, namely through fashion media posts accessed through social media platforms offering users a standardised language that is underpinned by the symbolic structures of fashion. Examples are ideas associated with fashion objects and subjects such as a catwalk show, an influencer, a spring/summer collection, which offer a sense of a shared commonality between fashion media users. As discussed above, the concretisation of social media and mobile phone technologies amplifies a sense of personal communication which becomes significant in their field of awareness. Thus, fashion media posts have the potential to influence users via affect, an affect that transcends to emotional bonds with others they encounter. It is the concretisation of fashion, with fashion media, and mobile technology that offers a symbolic structure for a collective whose members share similar interests and through which they experience a sense of *philia*.

Hjorth (2012) notes ‘[i]n a period marked by the geographical and electronic mobility afforded by mobile media, we see that one is still very much tethered – psychologically and emotionally – to a sense of home and *belonging*’ (2012: 190 my emphasis). Drawing on the work of Doreen Massey (2005), Hjorth explains how place is more than a geographical location: space extends to our experience of it, and the personalisation of mobile phone technology shifts the way in which we experience the world and construct ‘community’. Hjorth explains the implications of this when she says, ‘the [mobile] phone has become the multimedia device akin to a miniature caravan that houses all personal details, much like the function of one’s home as a symbol for domesticity, privacy and family’ (Hjorth 2012: 199). According to Ian Tucker (2023), ‘[i]t is through affective-emotivity that the underdetermined moves/rises/amplifies *into* the here and now of individuations – a rise that will incorporate the subject into the collective’ (2023: 7 original emphasis). Thus, when brought together to form a single concrete system, these technologies offer a connection, a feeling of belonging to a collective who share the same interests, but it is a collective becoming which occurs through technology. Simondon’s theory of individuation enables me to look at the role technology plays in this becoming collectively with others through a shared interest in fashion. However, fashion by its very nature is constantly in flux. Reading or watching fashion media is thus a phase in the continuous process of becoming that extends both internally (psychic) and externally to the individual (collective), paving the way for a transindividual relation, a concept Simondon introduces to bring these separate but connected relations together in a systematic unity.

3.6.3 The Transindividual Relation

The notion of transindividuation is fundamental to my research. It is important to note that the transindividual is not the bringing together of individual and society, but rather the unity of the internal (psyche) and external (collective) relations (Simondon 2020 [1964, 1989]: 327-355). However, the psyche is a compound, made up of both emotion and perception. The unity Simondon describes is therefore not simply between the interior and exterior of the individual, it is a more complex unification.

Simondon was keen to dispute the substantialist position that proposes a new substance such as the individual ‘soul’ or the collective ‘society’ (2020 [1968, 1984]: 8-9, 315). He instead maintains that psychic individuation and collective individuation are a continuation of vital individuation, not separate from it. For Simondon, living beings perpetuate their first

individuation in a process he defines as ‘individualisation’. The individual, as long as it is a living being, carries within it the pre-individual, which constantly looks outside of itself for resolution – it is a metastable relation in continuous negotiation with the associated milieu. The individual is therefore continuously resolving problems that arise through tensions between interior and external domains. It is a resolution that occurs through a continuous process of individualisation with the lived environment external to it that births the somatic and psychic realms (2020 [1968, 1984]: 278-281).

Simondon maintains that perception requires the invention of form to resolve the tension between disparate forces, a notion he defines as the ‘perceptive problematic’. However, perception is experienced by individuals, who also require solutions to the affective problematic of understanding that they are more than a unity (2020 [1968 1989]: 279). Here, there is a unification of the psychic and collective in a single individuation with two reciprocal dimensions: the interiorisation of exteriority and the exteriorisation of interiority, which Simondon sees as the psychosocial. For Simondon, psychic life cannot be defined as an interior life of each individual in the system, or as discrete human individuals who live collectively. Rather, he maintains that psychic life is life lived through the relations individuals have with each other. The individual cannot solve the problem posed by the pre-individual alone, it must do so through its relations with the associated milieu. Affect therefore arises as the result of an individual becoming aware that they are more than a unity and that they require a relation external to themselves to resolve the problem of the pre-individual. Thus, affect and emotion are the driving force in the psycho-social process. This understanding of affect is one taken up in the field of body studies (Venn 2010; Manning 2010) to reconsider the individual-collective relation.

Simondon offers a way to consider affect and emotion as being collective and integral to the sense fashion media users make of their world and self. As Ian Tucker (2022, 2023) points out, social life emerges through relations engendered by digital technology that are simultaneously emotional, individual and collective. He explains how he contributes to a recent body of work influenced by Simondonian thinking to consider ‘the operation of individuality in the data-rich environments of everyday life’ (2023: 9) where data and emotions of individual social media users are ‘not separate but rather become entwined in the unfolding of the metastable relations that constitute the living being’ (ibid.). I contribute to this discussion by considering fashion media in the form of social media posts accessed through mobile phone technology and how they are entwined in the unfolding of the relation between fashion media user and the fashion milieu. For Simondon the individual is situated in a milieu underpinned

by invisible symbolic structures embedded in culture that become normative (2020 [1969, 1984]: 312). As such, the individual makes choices based on structures previously embedded in collective life. However, Simondon argues:

[...] not everything is given in culture, and we must distinguish between culture and transindividual reality; culture is neutral in a certain sense; it has to be polarized by the subject that calls itself into question; on the contrary, there is in the transindividual relation a requirement of the subject to be called into question by himself, because this calling into question is already begun by others; the decentering of the subject relative to himself is carried out in part by others in the interindividual relation.

(Simondon 2020 [1964, 1989]: 312)

Simondon explains that the interindividual relation can mask the transindividual relation as it resolves the problem posed in the human-associated milieu relation. However, the interindividual relation does not penetrate the individual on a human level, and so reflexivity is avoided; it is a purely functional mediation. Thus, Simondon suggests that the interindividual relation avoids the individual having to reflect on the problem of the individual, it rather remains a simple rapport between the individuals who make up the collective. The transindividual, on the other hand describes ‘a process in which one’s relational self is interrogated, exposed and reconfigured. This process involves a disconnection from the collective – in the form of encountering a new relation through exposing existing relations to the collective and disconnecting.’ (Tucker 2022: 8). As such, the transindividual relation requires the individual to traverse solitude whilst remaining part of the collective.

Simondon (2020 [1964, 1989]: 313-314) references Nietzsche’s example of Zarathustra’s relation with the tightrope walker to explain his notion of the transindividual relation. The tightrope walker, whilst entertaining a crowd, falls from his tightrope and lies crushed on the ground. The tightrope walker in this moment becomes isolated from the collective (the crowd he is entertaining). ‘[I]t is only at the moment when the tightrope walker becomes absolutely ordinary, upon the fatal fall that strips him of his quality of tightrope walker, that he may become for Zarathustra the vector of a relation of another type than that linking individuals on the basis of their roles and constituting life in society’ (Combes 2013: 37). Zarathustra carries the tightrope walker away; he sees the tightrope walker as solitary, which leads him to seek out his own solitude in a mountain cave. It is the ordeal of the tightrope walker falling that triggers the transindividual.

Simondon's notion of the transindividual is key for my consideration of the emotional relations engendered by mobile phone technology and digital networked media, as discussed above. I argue in Chapter 7 that the feeling of a personal connection provoked by mobile phone technology and digital networked media strips the producer of the fashion media post from their role and constituting life in society to reveal them as being 'made of the same stuff'. Put another way the 'fashion model' or 'influencer' come to seem ordinary; they are sensed by the user as being individuals with whom they can experience an intercorporeal exchange, or what Simondon calls the resolution of the problem of 'embodied Immanence' (Simondon 1989:191 cited in Mills (2015: 68)). However, these relations do not incite the fashion media user to call themselves into question, to reflect, interrogate and reconfigure the relational self. Thus, the fashion media user is not able to disconnect from the collective and traverse solitude. Whilst being an emotional relation, the fashion media user-fashion media relation remains an interindividual relation that masks the transindividual relation by resolving the problem posed by the perceptive and affective problematic. To this end, fashion media pose a disruption to the transindividual relation, particularly for those who have grown up with mobile phone technology and digital networked media, which has political implications which I elaborate on in Chapter 8.

Chapter 4 Technological Disruption

In this chapter I extend my discussion above that looks at the role technology plays in the human-world relation to specifically consider ‘digital natives’, those who have grown up with mobile phone technology and social media. The participants of this study are fashion media students at the London College of Fashion. A marker of the group is their age. In 2019, when they participated in my research, they were all between 19 and 24 years old, meaning they were born between 1996 and 2000. This is a generation that has grown up with mobile phones and access to digital networked media. As a foundation for my study this chapter discusses how scholars of mobile phone technology and digital media have conceptualised the lives and feelings of digital natives.

This chapter concludes with an account of the work of Bernard Stiegler, whose ideas I adopt to consider the implications of the technological disruption that arises through fashion media encountered on mobile phone technology. I evaluate Stiegler’s notion of ‘tertiary retentions’, a third type of memory that has not been lived by the experiencing subject, and I employ it to consider how fashion media posts influence the formation of community.

Stiegler explains how the prevalence of mobile phone technologies and the access they offer to digital networked media has monopolised symbolic production in the digital age. Moreover, the functioning of these technologies is controlled by large corporations who use them to generate capital which has led to a shift in *philia*. He claims that this shift in control deprives users of their *savoir faire*, (i.e., their skills and abilities), and their *savoir vivre*, (i.e., their knowledge of how to live), absences which impact on their own understanding – the very issue exemplified in Stiegler’s (2013 [2010]) book title, *What Makes Life Worth Living*. I close the chapter by introducing Stiegler’s idea of technology as pharmakon – meaning that technology can be either poison or cure. Stiegler advocates for a new ‘general organology’ to restore the curative aspects of the pharmakon where the user is able to adopt technologies rather than merely adapt to them. This is important as this shift would enable the user to take new journeys of knowledge (Bradley 2020: 474) that diverge from those generated by Big Data that traverses digital networks.

4.1 Digital Natives

Michael Dimock (2019), in his work for the US based Pew Research Centre, defines those born after 1997 as belonging to Generation Z, a generation that Adam Renfro (2012) argues comes to an end with those born in 2010. Generation Z have been born into a world where digital culture and the internet prevail. Because they have grown up with smartphones, online games and social media, they are ‘digital natives’ (Prensky 2001). A life structured by flows of digital information accessed through smartphones is all they’ve ever known. ‘Hence, in so many ways, these technologies influenced their [Generation Z] education, socialization, and development’ (Atay and Ashlock 2022: 3).

Anna Dolot (2018) explains how despite their being individuals, attempts have been made to define different groups of people that share birth years. These generalisations are defined as ‘generations’, who by ‘[s]pending lives under equitable conditions (e.g., economical, historical), being exposed to the same events (e.g., cultural, environmental), and being impacted by similar technologies may influence [them] enough that they think, make decisions and behave in a similar way’ (Dolot 2018: 44). Dolot highlights how Generation Z live between real and virtual worlds which they see as complementary to one another. They can switch easily between both to source and check information which they can immediately share with others. Hence, they are continuously processing information and regularly use social media. As Csobanka (2016) explains, Generation Z are ‘active social media users [who] have many contacts and they mainly live their everyday relations through these channels (personal meetings are also important to them, however, keeping online contacts have an equally important role)’ (Csobanka 2016: 68). Thus, the digital world is integral to their everyday lived experience.

Chris Evans and Wenqian Robertson (2020) review the four phases of the digital native debate, which they define as conception, reaction, adaptation, and reconceptualisation, to consider the challenges facing educators. They describe these challenges as including students’ multitasking, and problems associated with social media, which present difficulties concerning the development of new strategies to reach digital natives (2020: 269). As discussed above a marker of my participant group is their age. In what follows I review literature concerned with the adoption of mobile phones and social media by Generation Z as a foundation for my research, as my participants were born into this generation and have grown up with these technologies.

Gerard Goggin (2013) sees youth as being an important focus in the initial development of mobile communication and media research. In his own work he demonstrates how mobile phone culture, such as text messaging, was strongly connected with young people, who, with the prevalence of mobile phones, found new possibilities to engage with their peer groups. danah boyd (2014) describes the complicated nature of teenage social life in a networked age. She draws on her own research conducted between 2003 and 2012 with teenagers from across America, to 'create a nuanced portrait of everyday teen life in an era in which social media has become mainstream' (2014: 25). Her findings show how social acceptance depends on the teenager's ability to socialise with their peer group in a space the group deems to be 'cool'. boyd explains how previous generations had more freedom to 'hang out' with friends in public places such as the park, mall, diners and parking lots; spaces the group, by being there, made 'cool'. However, in the 1980s there was a shift which saw fear in letting teenagers out alone without adult supervision, which changed the dynamics of teenage social interaction. Teenagers still craved the company of their peers and when mobile phones became more reasonably priced and available, they were embraced by this group as they offered the potential for social interaction from the safety of their home. Moreover, with the introduction of social media there was a shift from online communities, such as bulletin boards, that emphasised a connection between users based on the shared interests of individuals, to the organising structures of social media which promoted the idea of 'friendship', of *intimate* social relations. Early adopters of internet technologies had also set out to socialise online with other people, but boyd explains, were often seen as 'geeks', whereas social media normalised the practice of sharing information and connecting with 'friends' – hence for teenagers it became *the* cool place to socialise, to 'hang out' in public. Denied the freedom of meeting their friends in person in public places, they embraced technologies that seemed to offer them the freedom they desired. As boyd states, '[w]hat teens do online cannot be separated from their broader desire and interests, attitudes and values. Their relation to networked publics signals their interest in being a part of public life' (boyd 2014). Thus, she maintains, teens are not using technology to escape reality, but rather to extend reality in another dimension.

Moreover, parents encouraged the adoption of mobile technologies as they offered them the opportunity to keep in touch with their children when they were apart, which has been described as an additional form of surveillance in a seemingly dangerous world. As Sherry Turkle (2011) states, mobile technologies and social media 'have made parents and children feel more secure.' (2011: 152). The mobile phone, she argues, changes the notion of separation as teens who carry a mobile phone are always tethered to their parents and carers. Adolescence

is a stage where children cross the threshold to independent life. With the prevalence of mobile phone technology, parents can be in constant contact with their teenagers who understand their parents and carers to be just a text message away, which Turkle maintains delays the separation process. The traditional view of adolescent development sees autonomy and strong personal boundaries as a sign of maturity; here the development of ‘an independent self capable of having a feeling, considering it, and deciding whether to share it’ (2011: 174-5) is key to achieving a state of maturity. However, Turkle explains how the perpetual contact offered by mobile phone technology discussed in the previous chapter means users can share their feelings at any time, importantly, even as they are being formed. She explains how the teenagers she spoke to described how ‘[w]hen a feeling bubbles up, [they] text it. Where things go next is guided by what [they] hear [or see] next’(ibid.). Thus, Turkle claims the emotional state and future behaviour of teenagers are not merely influenced by the communication, but rather the communication becomes integral to what they come to think, feel, and do, thus diminishing their sense of autonomy and impeding the development of strong personal boundaries. What is lost in this process is time for teenagers to be alone, time to reflect on their emotions in private. The perpetual contact offered by mobile phone technology, along with the intimate network of relations accessed through it, mean that if one person isn’t available there will be someone else in the network to share with. Thus, the teenagers in Turkle’s study appear to rely on a communication with another person to validate their own feelings. Turkle notes the importance in the shift from an inner- to an outer-directed sense of self and draws on the work of the sociologist David Riesman, who, writing in the mid 1950s, states that without a firm sense of purpose people looked to their neighbours for a sense of validation. Whereas

[t]oday cell phone in hand, other-directedness is raised to a higher power. At the moment of beginning to have a thought or feeling we can have it validated, almost prevalidated. Exchanges may be brief, but more is not necessarily desired. The necessity is to have someone there.

(Turkle 2012: 176-177)

Turkle, coming from the psychoanalytic tradition, states that narcissism, rather than indicating that a person loves themselves, describes someone with a personality that is so fragile that it needs constant support. Having a mobile phone, she states, doesn’t necessarily promote narcissistic tendencies, but it does make communication between users easy and over time the practice of sharing feelings before reflecting on them privately becomes normalised. The capacity for perpetual contact, Turkle states, although enjoyed by teenagers, by offering them

freedom to participate in intimate publics, and in providing a sense of acceptance to a social group, may not be in an adolescent's developmental interest, a concept I return to later in this chapter.

The American psychologist Jean Twenge (2017), in her research into generational differences, reports similar findings to those of boyd and Turkle. Twenge notes how Americans born in 1995 and later grew up with mobile phone technology and probably had an Instagram page before they started high school at the age of 14. They are the first generation to have grown up with an almost continuous opportunity to access the internet through their mobile phone and hence have an expectation of perpetual contact. Twenge draws on four large, nationally representative surveys of 11 million American high school students. These surveys have been putting the same questions to teenagers since 1960 and Twenge sees ten important trends emerging from her research. These are: childhood extends into adolescence; teens spend more time online than any other group before them, and there is a noted decline in in-person social interaction. They are less interested in religion, but more interested in safety, and are less involved in civic activities. Teens are insecure about future employment, but more interested in inclusion, and have different attitudes to sex, relationships and having children to previous generations. Finally, teens are more independent in their political opinions. In her analysis of the data, Twenge notes a particular spike in changes in teen behaviour and importantly in their emotional states in 2012, a year, she explains, that coincides with the period that the majority of Americans began to own smartphones. Such generational shifts, Twenge suggests, have significant implications on subjectivity and how collectives are formed. These are concerns central to the aims of my research

The studies discussed above concern American teenagers whereas my research has been conducted with a group of European fashion media users studying in London. However, both have grown up in a Western context and share many similar global references. Like the subjects in Twenge's study, my participants all describe growing up with mobile technology and explain how they 'grew' the number of followers they had on Instagram from their early teen years. Following boyd, social media for them, is understood to be the place to 'hang out', to socialise and people watch, and to participate in public life. In Chapter 6 I discuss how my participants note their social media relations as being different to those of close friends and family, but they do not appear to them as subordinate to in-person relations. Further, the practice of logging into social media is one that has become embedded into their everyday lives; it is something they do without having to think about it. As their mobile phones become 'invisible' to them, they experience a sense of the presence of those they communicate with at a distance, and the bite-

sized, frequent communication brings with it a sense of continuous conversation which sustains the idea of social fellowship, a concept I elaborate on in Chapter 5. Fashion media in the form of social media posts offer the potential for my participants to feel a sense of belonging to a social group, which brings them a sense of affirmation. Yet their social media relations, engendered through their reading or watching fashion media, do not appear to sustain their innate feelings of belonging when they are offline: they need to go back for more, an idea I elaborate on in Chapter 7. The trust that the social group will remain an infinite dimension when they are without their mobile phone seems to be somewhat missing, despite them reporting the value of the intimate relations they develop through social media – it seems that my participants avoid being alone with their thoughts.

However, they need not be alone. The continuous flow of social media posts and the millions of social media accounts to connect with mean that there is always someone there for them. However, with this continuous connectivity comes a responsibility to be available to respond to other users and to ensure they are up to date with what is going on in their intimate publics. Riley, one of the teenagers in Twenge's study, explains this when she discusses being at home doing her homework where her phone is with her, she says 'it's like someone is constantly tapping you on the shoulder and you have to look' (Twenge 2017: 71).

Yet this practice of 'keeping up' takes up a significant amount of time meaning Generation Z users, such as my participants, have grown up with less time to spend in face to face encounters and to be alone to wonder, reflect, to look to an inner sense of self; 'keeping up' is a practice that has become normalised. Being short of time came through in both boyd and Turkle's research, especially free time to hang out and do whatever users wish. boyd noticed that much of her teenagers' time was planned for them by their parents or school. She quotes a parent she communicated with during her research, who says:

Bottom line is we live in a society of fear; it is unfortunate but true. As a parent, I will admit that I protect my daughter immensely, and I don't let my daughter go out to areas I can't see her. Much different to when I was a kid. Am I being over protective? Maybe. But it is the way it is. Is it depressing? No it is not as we keep her busy very busy without making it depressing.

(boyd 2014: 88-89)

Teenagers, particularly from middle- and upper-class backgrounds reported being enrolled to after-school clubs, sports clubs, music lessons and other structured activities, which meant that they did not have unstructured time to spend with friends. The teens were especially vocal

around how they were unable to be alone with friends in public, something they were desperate to do. The parents in boyd's study described their children's time 'hanging out' as 'time wasted' and feared their being bored would lead to them getting into trouble, a notion, boyd explains, that is backed up by research which shows a correlation between boredom and deviance. However, this claim was much disputed by the teenagers she spoke to. They wanted the freedom to see friends unaccompanied and to see them in public spaces, both to socialise and 'people-watch'. As boyd states '[t]eens are passionate about finding their place in society' (2014: 8). What is different for this generation is that they have come to understand the intimate transitional space of social media, and the perpetual contact offered by mobile technology, as integral to everyday life: it is a dimension of their lived reality, an idea I elaborate on through an analysis of the invariants of my study in Chapter 6. As boyd notes, 'teen's perennial desire for social connection and autonomy is now being expressed in *network publics*' (ibid. original emphasis), an intimate network of relations a notion outlined in the previous chapter, or as the French philosopher, Michel Serres (1930-2019) puts it:

[...] [t]hese children inhabit the virtual [...] They no longer have the same head. With their cell phone, they have access to all people [...] They no longer inhabit the same space. Without us even realizing it, a new kind of human being was born in the brief period of time that separates us from the 1970s. He or she no longer has the same body [...] They no longer communicate in the same way; they no longer perceive the same world.

(Serres 2015 [2012]: 6-7)

For Serres the generation that has grown up with mobile technologies and access to the internet experience the world in a very different way to previous generations. He acknowledges the significance of media for this group, particularly in relation to attention where he states this younger generation no longer have the ability to concentrate for more than several seconds before needing new stimulation. Further, it is the media, he claims, who have taken over the function of teaching, as this group spend so much time reading it, time, Serres claims, of 'seduction and consequence' (2015: 6). As I argue in this thesis, fashion media, in the form of social media posts easily accessible on a mobile phone, capture the attention of users, attention once given to family, religion and tradition, that is, those structuring ideologies that for many years held strong before somewhat disintegrating. But as Serres explains, '[e]veryone speaks of the death of ideologies, but what is disappearing is rather the *belongings* recruited by these ideologies' (2015 [2012]: 9 original emphasis). I propose that the belongings once recruited by

these ideologies have not disappeared, but have rather shifted to collectives, which through an emotional connection, become communities underpinned by alternative cultural and social structures – in the case of my participants, to that of fashion. In Chapter 7 I demonstrate how fashion media in the form of social media posts short circuit the long circuits of intergenerational or ancestral knowledge necessary for the development of the transindividual relation. As such, my participants come to rely on fashion media for a sense of affirmation, but they constantly need to come back for more. It appears that the fashion media user lacks trust that the fashion milieu will remain an infinite dimension for them when they aren't connected to social media. Moreover, they no longer have to traverse solitude, to be alone to wonder, reflect or look to an inner sense of self as there is always someone there for them if they log onto social media. By this I mean they respond to the feeling of a void that they experience when they are alone by picking up their mobile phone. It is a practice that has become embedded in their everyday lives, as I show in Chapter 5. Social media, for my participants, is an ever-present social world that resolves the perceptive and affective problematic proposed by Simondon. It is through their encounters with fashion media that my participants experience an interindividual relation that masks the transindividual relation, an idea I expand on in Chapter 7.

However, critics have noted a flaw in Simondon's account of individual-collective relations in that he neglects the political aspects of technical mediation (Bock 2022; Lotti 2015; Viana 2023; Voss 2019). To address these criticisms I extend my theoretical framework to include the work of Stiegler. Stiegler draws on Simondon's notion of individuation and the transindividual to review the politics of the mediasphere, a subject central to the concerns of my research. He explains that he modifies Simondon's notion of psycho-collective individuation, through which the individual (I) and collective (we) emerge, to include the 'individuation of a technical system (something Simondon strangely didn't see)' (Stiegler 2014 [2004]: 51).

4.2 Theoretical Framework: Stiegler

In Chapter 1 I introduced the work of Merleau-Ponty to account for the intercorporeal relation between the fashion media user and those they encounter when reading or watching fashion media on a mobile phone. In the previous chapter I extended my theoretical framework to include the work of Simondon to address the specificity of technology central to my project. I now introduce the work of Stiegler, to consider the political implications of technological disruption. In what follows I outline Stiegler's notion of tertiary retentions, a third type of memory that has not been lived firsthand by the experiencing subject. The notion of tertiary retentions is fundamental to my project as I understand fashion media as a technology, the material trace of an expression, a memory manifested as a digital object that has the potential to affect my participants, fashion media users.

4.2.1 Tertiary Retentions

Dominic Smith (2013) describes Stiegler as a phenomenally prolific writer and philosopher of technology, authoring more than thirty books and numerous interviews and articles that are 'wide ranging in the themes he submits to philosophical interrogation' (Smith 2013: 92). However, in an interview in 2012 with Ben Roberts, Jeremy Gilbert and Mark Hayward (Stiegler, Roberts, Gilbert, and Hayward 2012), Stiegler explains how he has worked for nearly thirty years on the concept of memory. Memory is a topic central to the work of Yuk Hui (2016, 2017) who draws on Simondon's idea of psychic and collective individuation to demonstrate how the synthesis of memories includes a social dimension. Moreover, he points out that 'the synthesis of social memory is fundamentally technical' (2017: 308). He explores this idea further through the work of Stiegler who argues that technical objects are exosomatic organs through which individuals exteriorise their physiological and psychological capabilities and store their memories and knowledge, a concept I introduced in the introduction to this thesis. Exteriorisation allows for the distribution of knowledge across generations, but carries the risk of the individual losing their knowledge as it is no longer something stored within them. Drawing on Derrida's (1974 [1967]) rethinking of the Phaedrus in *Plato's Pharmacy*, Stiegler proposes that technology has a pharmacological dimension: that it can be either poison or a cure. Plato, in his analysis of the grammatisation of speech into writing in ancient Greece, acknowledges writing as a placeholder for knowledge, but at the same time declares that writing leads to a loss of knowledge. By this Plato understands writing as leading to forgetfulness: that

the reader will rely on the material trace of writing rather than their own abilities of remembering. Further, Plato remarks on the limits of writing declaring it the mere recording of speech. Thus, the author is not present, and writing is therefore speech that is *dead*, it cannot be contradicted and hence poses a danger to the dialectic.¹⁸ However, it is writing, that in ancient Greece constitutes politics by making the written rules of the city available to all, thus also constituting community and fixing the city's identity.

Derrida (1974 [1967]) puts forward a deconstructive account of the pharmakon and argues that repetition, made possible through writing, is important to human becoming. He challenges the idea of writing as the simple recording of speech, declaring instead that nonpresence is presence. '*Differance*', the absence of the originary presence, offers at once the possibility and impossibility of truth. What is true or untrue are both inscribed within the material trace of the written word and therefore both are inherent in the repetition of the supplement. Put another way, writing, in that it has the potential for repetition, makes up for a lack of unity; it can relieve it, as it is enough the same and enough other, but its interpretation is in the hands of the reader.

Stiegler (2011 [2001]) re-evaluates Derrida's project, arguing that Derrida, although revealing the ambiguity in the relation between anamnesis (recollection or remembrance) and hypomnesis (the making technical of memory or memory substitutes such as writing or machines), fails to really develop the curative dimensions of the pharmakon in relation to the question of technology.

Stiegler proposes that 'we should reread Derrida with Simondon and beyond Simondon' (Stiegler 2020: 85). He acknowledges the importance of Simondon's concept of individuation and the transindividual in his understanding of temporality but criticises Simondon's notion of information as lacking consideration of tertiary retentions, a third kind of memory additional to primary retentions – what is present for me in first-hand experience, and secondary retentions – what is retained through past primary retentions. Stiegler claims that Simondon's account remains limited as he 'draws no consequences whatsoever with regard to the inherently pharmacological character of exosomatization' (Stiegler 2020: 316). Stiegler argues that the exteriorisation of memory into technical objects constitutes tertiary retentions which play a fundamental role in the human experience of time. For Simondon, human collectives can only

¹⁸ Plato's Dialectic refers to a method of discussion where one examines their assumptions and basic concepts. Characteristics of Plato's Dialectic include: confronting multiple positions, ordering concepts, and embracing multiplicity in unity. According to Plato, the dialectic is the first step in the process of philosophical inquiry and is the path the soul must take to reveal true reality.

occur through the adoption of a shared past, an ‘adoption process [that] rests on the possibility – opened by epiphylogenesis (i.e., technical memory) – of gaining access to a past that was never lived, neither by someone whose past it was nor by any biological ancestor’ (Stiegler 2010 [2008]: 90). However, although ‘never lived’, the common past is a condition of the possibility of a collective future. Tertiary retentions which Stiegler describes as the *what*, are synchronised with an individual’s own memories, described as the *who*, to form a *we*. But it is important to note that for the *I* to become a *we* it must adopt an imagined past that has not been lived by the experiencing subject.

The postphenomenologist Pieter Lemmens (2017) explains the importance of tertiary retentions when he states,

[...] tertiary retentions are fundamental to *any* intentionality or attention in the sense that they are originally constitutive and conditional for the production of the primary and secondary retentions (and protentions). Moreover, tertiary retentions underpin all forms of intentionality and make up the flow of consciousness.

(Lemmens 2017: 192 original emphasis)

Lemmens argues that tertiary retentions inform perception and therefore have the potential to influence affect, emotion and action, but also, importantly, how one anticipates the future. As Stiegler states mnemotechnologies, such as photographs, cinema, phonograms, compact discs, computers, digital media, and mobile technologies, have ‘industrialized memory’ by enabling an unprecedented extension of memory into technical objects (Stiegler 2011[2001]: 79-130). These objects simultaneously offer a rendering of the past, but also carry an indeterminacy, hence they conjugate the past and reality, whereby the viewer can relive a past that is not their own, through which they can anticipate the future.

This thesis builds on Stiegler’s notion of tertiary retentions to argue that fashion media in the form of fashion media posts accessed through mobile phone technology are the material trace of an expression, the exteriorisation of memory, which are shared with others through the channels of social media. It is through fashion media (the *what*) that the users’ memories (the *I*) become synchronised with those they encounter to form a collective (the *we*). It is through a process of individuation that the fashion media user becomes part of the fashion milieu: through the sharing of an imagined past that has neither been lived by them, nor transmitted as ancestral knowledge. It is a past that can only be achieved through the supplement, in this case fashion

media: the prosthetic memory support of a recording that has the potential to influence affect, emotion and action, and through which the user comes to anticipate the future.

Moreover, Stiegler claims that the prevalence of digital technologies in contemporary culture has monopolised symbolic production as their functioning rests with large corporations who use them to generate capital. In an era of global media communications, ‘information, [which is] nothing without the organizational architecture for its storage, processing, and access’ (Crogan 2010: 141) rests with a very small number of producers who control the prime material of memory from which the experiencing subject can select what becomes eventful. Stiegler claims it is marketing and global corporations that have paved the way for a service society, where the producer is deprived of their *savoir faire*, their skills and abilities, as these functions reside externally to them in their technologies. Further, the user, or consumer, is denied their *savoir vivre*, their knowledge of how to live: they no longer know how to cook as they consume food that is ready made for them, nor can they any longer orient themselves in the world without GPS, or research information on where to go out, to shop, or read the news without their mobile technology. I demonstrate in Chapter 7 how social media, by curating information for the user, has impacted on their ability to focus their attention; they find it challenging to do this themselves when living in the moment in their physical environment. Stiegler claims this disruption in the generation of knowledge impacts on their fundamental understanding of what makes life worth living (2013 [2010]). Moreover, this impact is felt not just by the individual user of technology, but also by the collective. Bradley (2022) in his work on cultural politics makes clear the significance of this disruption and quotes Stiegler who states:

The problem, today, in the period of what we call disruption, is that it seems impossible to reconstitute any knowledge and that forms of behaviour are now produced, not by social systems, cultures and knowledge, but by marketing that exploits ‘big data’ and digital tertiary retentions insofar as these are calculable, computable and as such constitute the worldwide data economy.

(Stiegler in Bradley 2022: 369)

Fashion, fashion media, and mobile phone technology are technologies aimed at sociality that, through the process of concretisation, have extended the social world into an online domain, an idea I illustrate through my empirical work in Chapter 6. However, the process of concretisation occurs through the organisational architecture of social media, digital networks, and mobile

phone technologies. Thus, as Stiegler (2019 [2016]) explains, the prime material for memory in the form of tertiary retentions is controlled by large corporations who are interested in generating profit rather than encouraging time for criticality and reflection or sustaining the long circuits of generational knowledge necessary for transindividuation. In Chapter 7 I show through a discussion of my invariants how fashion media short circuits the long circuits of transindividuation. Fashion media offers the user a sense of affirmation, but the feeling of affirmation my participants describe is only short lived. Fashion media does not offer the empathy and long-term support that brings growth and personal maturity to users. Instead, it incites users to come back for more; ‘keeping up’ becomes something fashion media users *need* to do.

4.2.2 Technologies of Sociality

Stiegler takes up Aristotle’s notion of *philia* to consider the intimate relations engendered between users in digital networked media frequently accessed through a mobile phone as discussed above. *Philia* means fondness or appreciation for the other, and as Stiegler (2013) explains, is a term that means more than friendship as it ‘designates the way every living being, whether human or animal, is by necessity bound to other living beings from the moment he or she comes to the world’ (Stiegler 2013 [2010]: 17). Stiegler makes this point in his analysis of social media where he asks if new forms of friendship emerge through social media participation or if in fact, they facilitate new forms of *philia*. He explains how a network of ‘friends’ in a social media context is in fact a network of friends, acquaintances, and other contacts all brought together under the banner of ‘friendship’ which, he claims, is misleading. Social media – he uses Facebook as an example – has a mode of functioning that includes creating a profile and engaging in dialogue, a process of sociation. However, the creation of a profile, he argues, is problematic as the information is used by advertisers and marketing to capture the attention of users, as is the case with the data trail users leave through their participation in digital networked media. The implications of this being that feelings integral to becoming are directed by the influencing structures of the technological system of which the user has little to no control. Fashion involves becoming collectively with others. But the feeling of collective becoming disrupts the long circuits of intergenerational knowledge integral to the transindividual which has political implications, an idea I discuss in Chapter 8.

Stiegler explains that citizenship is formed through the exchange of energy between group members. However, it is an energy influenced by culture: the written and unwritten rules

that act as a structure for communication paving the way for a transindividual relation. He maintains that ‘psycho-power’, a form of power generated through the creation of a never-ending chain of affects, short-circuits the user’s long-term desire to the drives for profit thus posing a risk to *philia*. Stiegler attributes psycho-power to marketing and large global corporations that own digital networked media and social media platforms which he claims disrupt the transindividual relation: relations ‘grounded in inter-generational, ancestral relationships’ (2013 [2010]: 27). In Chapter 7 I show how fashion media short-circuits my participants’ long term desire to work in the fashion industry. Fashion media posts capture my participants’ attention by affecting them. It is an affect, which through a process of transduction, transcends to an emotional response that incorporates them into the collective. They come to feel a sense of affirmation at belonging to a community that shares their interest in fashion. However, the sense of affirmation they describe is short lived as it cannot sustain them when they don’t have a functioning mobile phone and access to fashion media. As such, ‘keeping up’ with fashion media has become a basic need for my participants.

Further, the globalisation of computational capitalism brings a ‘universalisation’ of knowledge based on calculation (Crogan 2019; Hui 2016), which eliminates diversity in favour of statistical and probable functions based on averages. This reduces singularities and deviations from the average and creates feedback loops, or echo chambers, that disable what Stiegler defines as ‘noodiversity’, meaning different ways of thinking (Stiegler 2022: 27). As Benjamin Herm-Morris (2021) explains, in digital networks algorithms present users with content based on predictions, producing hyper-synchronisation, which mean users only encounter content within filter bubbles. These ‘small worlds within which we are placed automatically can seem mostly ‘cosy’, insofar as they consist of our favourite content and are mostly free of any views that might bring our own into question’ (Pariser 2011: 11 in Herm-Morris 2021: 45). Moreover, social media systems are closed systems ‘that cannot be modified or repurposed by the individual. Conversely, the network is perpetually defining us as fixed digital constructs, comprised of binary affiliations measured by engagement’ (Herm-Morris 2021: 46). Thus, digital networks create trends that are shared across global digital networks that are amplified by calculation (Stiegler 2011: 6). Stiegler argues for the need for open systems not founded on calculation, but rather on social expression. This idea is adopted by Anne Alombert (2022) who, following Stiegler, outlines the urgent need to revisit computer science outside of a computational paradigm to reconsider the co-evolution of this technology with biological organisms (2022: 39). Or as Susanna Lindberg argues, to place focus on ‘the philosophical concepts of technics and humanity; [...] to trace the unravelling of an idea of

“technological humanity” in contemporary philosophy and the emergence of a bio-technical conception of existence beneath it’ (2023: 5). However, restoring the curative aspects of the pharmakon requires a move away from thinking of technological systems to thinking of a general organology. This thesis reveals a disruption in the transindividual relation which results in a pattern of digital dependency characterised by anxiety and addictive behaviour. Stiegler’s notion of technology as pharmakon argues that technology can be either poison, or cure for the lack of human essence. However, to restore the curative aspects of the pharmakon, technology must be considered on its level, so that the flow of energy through the system can be redirected to reform the long circuits of intergenerational knowledge necessary for transindividuation.

4.2.3 General Organology

Ling explains how Stiegler’s pharmacological framing of technics and technology as containing potential to be either poison or cure, avoids technological determination (2020: 236). Technological determinism assumes technology as autonomous in its development. It is a point of view that denies consideration of the social and cultural factors that reside outside of technology. Stiegler’s pharmacological perspective understands technologies as metastable. That is, he sees that technologies are co-evolved in relations with human agents. However, Ling notes a weakness in Stiegler’s account as he seemingly continues to express the toxic fate of these technologies even when he sets out to discuss them otherwise. Yet Ling points out that Stiegler, although critical of the hyper-industrial era, accepts that digital networked media and computational technologies are here to stay: the genie cannot be put back in the bottle. Thus, a new model that enables the curative aspects of the pharmakon must be found. As Stiegler states:

[t]he moment has come for society itself to mobilize to assume its responsibilities, to “take itself in hand” as they say. To stop offloading its problems on to those it increasingly accuses of incompetence as it in fact abandons its own competences to them. By competences here, I mean that set of rights and duties which makes up what we call citizenship.

(Stiegler 2010 [2008]: 171)

By this Stiegler argues that it is through sociation, the competence of society, and not merely its representatives, that political abilities will be mobilised to create new systems that disrupt current conditions. He therefore proposes an idea for a three stranded general organology

(2020): the describing, and practising, of ‘transductive’ relations between psychic and somatic organs of psychic individuation; the social organisation of collective individuation; and the technical organs integral to technical individuation. Through this initiative, of bringing all three together, he claims ground could be laid for new economic and technological models whereby wealth could be understood as not ‘just a matter of monetary accumulation, but rather the cultivation of richer and richer forms of local knowledge, which alone will allow the kinds of common protentions that constitute the horizon of what we could imagine in terms of a sustainable future’ (Bishop and Ross 2021: 127). As Alombert (2022) explains, Stiegler is keen for the establishment of a design and theoretical approach to digital technologies whereby they become supports for collective knowledge rather than merely devices for collecting and processing data and capturing attention (2022: 43). In Chapter 8 I elaborate on Stiegler’s idea of the pharmakon: that technology can be either poison or cure. Stiegler considers attention as ‘taking care’ (2010 [2008]) which this thesis deploys to review the shift in my participants’ attention that occurs through their engagement with social media as discussed earlier in this chapter. However, it is important to note that Stiegler does not deny the potential benefits of digital networked media. As he makes clear when he says

[a]ll this is not about preventing or denying the existence of social networks, or ignoring the dangers they represent. It is foremost about inventing the future of social networks, *in* social networks, and *with* social networks. But this is only possible if we are able to arrive at an understanding of these networks which *are at the same time* technological and social, and to attain such an understanding as to make these networks capable of becoming *agents of reflexivity*.

(Stiegler 2013 [2010]: 26 original emphasis)

Stiegler’s quote brings us back to his idea for a general organology, where the human-technology-world-relation is thought of as being inextricably linked in a continuous process of becoming. He claims that it is imperative that we restore the curative aspects of the pharmakon by establishing a new form of information openness with the potential to create new journeys of knowledge for social media users. This requires a new way of being with technology that supports users to adopt, rather than merely adapt to the technological prostheses that are now integral to human becoming (Bradley 2024: 4). I elaborate on this idea in Chapter 8 when I look at the implications of technological disruption.

Chapter 5

The Fashion Milieu

Drawing upon Merleau-Ponty's conceptualisation of the milieu as discussed in Chapter 2, this thesis develops a theoretical framework I define as the fashion milieu – a nuanced spatial-perceptual environment that mediates embodied experience and cultural signification within fashion's dynamic landscape. Merleau-Ponty sets out his idea of a milieu in his early work (1967[1942]), which he develops in his lecture series on the theme of the 'Concept of Nature' (2004 [1995]). His later lecture series looked to investigate, firstly, the intertwining of life and psycho-chemistry, and secondly, the intertwining of humanity with animality and Nature. His intention was to 'grasp humanity [...] as another manner of being a body' (2004 [1995]: 208) rather than accept it as merely 'animality + rationality'.¹⁹ Merleau-Ponty draws on the ideas of what he defines as 'the modern biologists' to examine the concept of the *Umwelt* (Uexküll 1985 [1909]: 222-245): an environment maintained through a complex feedback loop between the organism and its lived environment.²⁰

In *Structures of Behaviour* 1967[1942]), Merleau-Ponty critiques traditional reflex accounts of the relation between stimulus and reaction through a review of the work of the physiologist Kurt Goldstein,²¹ to argue that the organism is not passive. The form of the stimulus shapes the response, but the organism moves itself, meaning it acts, to take up an optimum position in its milieu indicating a meaningful environment to which the organism adjusts and orients itself.

Merleau-Ponty declares that structure, or form, are neither 'things' in themselves nor 'ideas', but rather a process of the self-organisation of experiential, movement and linguistic fields, which are not governed by pre-existing principles. Drawing on Wolfgang Köhler's Gestalt physics he arrives at a model where behaviour and 'form', understood as a process whose properties are more than the sum of their isolated parts, are modified by every change in a single part of the process.²² Form, or what he defines as 'structure', is therefore a dialectical, non-linear, and dynamic relation, irreducible to linear mechanical causality (see Thompson

¹⁹ For an account of Merleau-Ponty's lecture series 'The Concept of Nature' see Moyle, T. (2021 [2020]), *Animal Behaviour and the Passage to Culture in Jakob Von Uexküll and Philosophy: life, environments, anthropology*, New York: Routledge.

²⁰ Merleau-Ponty associated the term 'modern biology' with the work of Jakob Von Uexküll, George E. Coghill, Kurt Goldstein, Arnold Gesell and Catherin S. Amatruda, and Georges Canguilhem among others.

²¹ Goldstein, K. (1934) *Der Aufbau der Organismus*, The Hague: Nijhoff; trans. *The Organism*, New York: American Book, 1938. (A classic work on the holistic aspect of the life of organisms, on which Merleau-Ponty relies in *The Structure of Behavior*).

²² Koehler, W. (1930) *Gestalt Psychology*, London: G. Bell.

2007). For Merleau-Ponty the relation between the organism and its milieu is a ‘constellation, an order, a whole, which gives momentary meaning to each of the local excitations’ (1967 [1942]: 14). The excitation, however, is undetermined before the event; meaning is not already formed in the world, but rather generated through an expression, a creative response to the structure in which the organism resides: an operation of being that generates a new sense.

The fashion milieu is a milieu structured by a socio-cultural-historical framework that develops over time. The symbolic underpinning inscribed in the material traces of expressions associated with fashion, such as catwalk shows, collections, and billboards, act as an invisible framework that is instituted by social agents through the flesh of their bodies. It is through institution that the participants of the social world come to sense that the circumstances they encounter are shared; they generate a tacit sense of collectivity which offers them a sense of *philia*. As stated in the introduction to this thesis I understand clothing and dress as the raw materials of fashion, but fashion is a collective activity as it necessitates adoption by large groups of people for the objects of fashion to be deemed fashionable. It is the symbolic structures of fashion, instituted in the corporeal schemas of the individuals, that holds them together as a collective of embodied, feeling social agents who share an interest in fashion. I apply Merleau-Ponty’s idea of ‘flesh’ to investigate the relations between fashion media users and those they encounter through fashion media as an intercorporeal exchange through which they evaluate the self, and their place in the fashion milieu.

Through an analysis of my empirical work, I discuss the invariants of my study. The invariants are what remain stable, by which I mean they are themes that are evident in each of my participants’ descriptions. I begin by discussing the first invariant to emerge through my research, namely how my participants’ experience of fashion media is haptic: perception occurs through the incorporation of the senses; thus the body is the locus of sense. The second invariant reveals how fashion media posts affect my participants and move them emotionally, moreover, feeling and knowing are inextricably linked. The third invariant relates to motility, that my participants move themselves to optimise their position in the milieu indicating a meaningful environment to which they adjust and orient themselves. Moreover, through repetition, these movements become habituated in the body schema of the perceiving subject, such that they retreat from consciousness and happen without the fashion media user having to think about them. The fourth invariant demonstrates how my participants undertake an intercorporeal evaluation of the self. My participants measure themselves against those they encounter through fashion media, but this is a measurement that occurs through an intercorporeal exchange which informs their sense of self and their position in the fashion milieu. I show how

fashion media offers my participants a sense of affirmation that occurs through them sensing a feeling of a connection to collective life, a collective in which they see their future.

5.1 Hapticity

Ingrid Richardson and Rowan Wilken (2023) explore how mobile technologies open the world in new ways, how they facilitate ‘new modes of sharing and connecting, of attention and distraction, of being together and alone, of seeing and feeling, of touching and being “in touch” (Colley 2014: 45)’ (Richardson and Wilkin 2023: 313-314). The body schema, a concept discussed in Chapter 1, expands and adapts to a new environment opened by mobile technologies that facilitate perpetual contact and the notion of absent presence as discussed in Chapter 2. They go on to explain how contemporary media is dominantly visual or audio-visual as it is largely screen dependent. But, as Merleau-Ponty argues, vision should be understood as not only audio-visual, but as a tactile vision. Looking, tasting, smelling, and hearing are all a means of ‘handling’ or coping with the milieu in which one resides (1964 [1948]: 133). The body in the world is in a sensuous world. It is like ‘the heart is in the organism: it keeps the visible spectacle constantly alive; it breathes life into it and sustains it inwardly, and with it forms a system’ (Merleau-Ponty 2014 [1945]: 209). Furthermore, there is an interchangeability between the variables in the organism-milieu relation. The organism as a living being spreads out, it organises the milieu from a central point of reference, but at the same time opens itself to receive it. Merleau-Ponty describes the sensing of tactile vision as haptic, noting that ‘the visible is what we grasp with our eyes; the sensible is what we grasp through our senses’ (2014 [1945]: 7) original emphasis).

Hapticity is a notion central to Merleau-Ponty’s thinking, as he declared touch as the sensory mode that integrates our experience of the world and self. According to Merleau-Ponty, this extends to visual and auditory perception: he suggests that as we look the eye touches the world and judges its texture, weight, temperature; it is the preconscious experience of touch that allows us to determine the sensuous quality of what we perceive, that gives the world depth. The same applies to auditory perception; we make sense of what we hear through the qualities of touch in that we hear the ambiances of our world. He explains,

The lived object is not rediscovered or constructed on the basis of the contributions of the senses; rather, it presents itself to us from the start as the centre from which these contributions radiate. We *see* depth, the smoothness, the softness, the hardness of objects; Cézanne even claimed we see their odor.

(Merleau-Ponty 1964 [1948]: 15 original emphasis)

The idea of seeing depth through vision, of the eye touching the world, was apparent in all my participants' experiences of reading, or watching fashion media and is integral to the constitution of the fashion milieu. Elle, for instance, describes looking at a post put up on Instagram by an ASOS influencer. She explains how, through reading the post, she understands that the influencer is in a hot country, and she knows this because she feels the light on the street and, through this, gets a sense of the warmth of the sun in her own body. She explains,

E: She's like, it's a street, she's wearing cream trousers and a blazer, like smart ... but you can tell it's hot, it's a hot country but not like the beach, it's a proper street.

K: It's a hot country, how do you know it's a hot country?

E: The light on the street, you can just tell, you just know it ... it just feels warm, but fresh, she looks fresh. Actually, you can't see much of the street, she's quite close up, but you just feel the sun and she, the way she's standing, you can tell she's relaxed, like you feel on holiday, you know it's like [pause].

K: The way she is standing, you can tell she's relaxed and it's sunny, that makes you think she's on holiday.

E: Yeah, you just get a feeling inside of it being warm and being on holiday.

K: A feeling inside?

E: It's, it's like ... it's hard to describe, but it's like - I feel the sun and I feel relaxed it's like I'm there - on holiday, I get it, you know what I mean.

Elle describes how she finds it difficult to describe the feelings she experiences; they happen below her conscious awareness but are integral to the sense she makes of reading the fashion media post. It is through her own body schema that Elle comes to make sense of her experience, she "feels the warmth of the sun" and the "feeling of being relaxed" in her own body. As she herself says, she "get[s] it", so it is as though she is there herself on holiday. As Merleau-Ponty explains '[q]uality, light, color, depth, which are there before us, are there only because they awaken an echo in our body and because the body welcomes them' (1964 [1948]:164). Elle's body is open to the intercorporeal exchange with the fashion media post; the post guides her

feelings, and she responds to the ambiguity in the post through a creative action, an expressive reading of what she sees.

Wiktoría similarly describes reading a fashion media item posted on Instagram Stories by a peer from college. She describes the photograph in the post as a model standing in front of a foil backdrop. She explains that she has used a similar backdrop in one of her own fashion photographs. We discuss this and she says:

W: It was a girl and ... umm ... behind her there was like these, 70s/80s you would have these foil things, like background made of like pink foil or something that I made a shoot before with using that, so it was basically a portrait with yeah the backdrop was made out of foil.

K: Right so the backdrop's made out of foil, and you've used that backdrop before.

W: Well not the same one [laughs] but similar.

K: Can you describe it?

W: It's like shiny and pink, it's not thick strips hmm, it's kind of like made of like thin foil strips.

K: So it's pink and shiny and is made of thin foil strips.

W: Yeah like fringing, and ... you know that material ... it's ... gets like static, it's like ... sticks to everything ... you know ... its makes me kind of cringe [laughs].

K: It makes you cringe.

W: [laughs] Yeah it's like difficult to describe, but like it like sticks to you, the feeling [shakes her arms] I'm like ... you like shudder, you like feel it inside.

Wiktoría's description makes evident that she makes sense of the post through her own body schema. She explains how through her experience of using a foil backdrop in the past she knows that it becomes static and "sticks to everything" which "makes [her] cringe". Wiktoría draws on her previous experience of a foil backdrop to make sense of the fashion media post which makes her shudder. It is a feeling that she experiences through her body in the moment of recalling the fashion media post that makes her shake her arms, as she explains "you like feel it inside".

As discussed in Chapter 1 Merleau-Ponty maintains that, rather than being an assemblage of organs, 'I hold my body as an indivisible possession, and I know the position of

my limbs through a *body schema* that envelops them all' (2014 [1945]: 100-101 original emphasis). He develops the idea of the body schema as a summary of bodily experience so well established, they are constantly ready to be brought into action, an action that happens below the subject's conscious awareness making them difficult to describe, as Elle and Wiktoria mention in the quotes above.

Merleau-Ponty describes how the body inhabits space and time. In relation to time Merleau-Ponty explains how, at each moment, 'previous postures and movements constantly provide a standard of measure' (2014 [1945]; 140). The body tacitly preserves, for instance, the living memory of an illness when we come to feel better, or memories of our childhood body in adult life, these 'gaps in memory' express the temporal structures of our body; they are enveloped in the present and are maintained implicitly in future actions. Elle's quote demonstrates how she makes an intercorporeal connection between the influencer's pose and an experience she tacitly preserves in her body, of feeling relaxed, as she says, "like you feel on holiday", which is maintained as "a feeling inside" her which she draws on to make sense of her experience of reading fashion media. Wiktoria's experience makes evident an intercorporeal connection to the fabric of the foil backdrop which is tacitly held in her body schema that she deploys to make sense of the Instagram Story she encounters. It is a feeling she experiences in her body that makes her shake her arms and shudder as she recalls reading the post. Merleau-Ponty declares 'I am not in space and in time, nor do I think space and time; rather I am of space and of time' (2014 [1945]: 141). Wiktoria's previous experience of working with a foil backdrop is not something she has to consciously recall; it is rather enveloped in the temporal structure of her body and it is her body that forms a background through which the foil backdrop appears. Elle and Wiktoria's descriptions reveal that their bodies do not need to go through a process of representations, nor are they subordinated to merely symbolic or objective functions. The body is not in a system of current positions, but is the consequence of an 'open system' of an infinite number of equivalent positions and orientations. The body schema is a system of equivalences, an immediately given stability by which motor tasks are instantaneously transposable. As Merleau-Ponty notes: 'This is to say that the body schema is not merely an experience of my body, but rather an experience of my body in the world' (2014 [1945]: 142

For Merleau-Ponty the body's spatiality is a 'situational spatiality' which differs from that of objects external to it in the world. To demonstrate this, he offers the example of leaning

on a desk with both hands.²³ He explains how the accent is on my hands touching the desk, ‘my whole body trails behind them like a comets tail’ (2014 [1945]: 102). The perceiving subject is not unaware of the remainder of their body but their awareness folds into their experience of leaning on the desk through the pressure of their hands in the action of touching the desk. They do not require a determined relation to other positions or external co-ordinates, the body is instead active in the object of perception and the situation of their body’s tasks. Merleau-Ponty claims, the body is a form that resolves the figure-ground relation in the Gestalt, ‘insofar as my body is polarized by its tasks, insofar as it *exists toward* them, insofar as it coils up upon itself in order to reach its goal’ (2014 [1945]: 103 original emphasis). For Merleau-Ponty the body schema is the way in which the experiencing subject expresses their body as, in, and toward the world. Here, bodily space forms the background against which the external object appears as the goal of practical action in external space. It is both a bodily and an external space that together form a practical system, and it is through movement that the spatiality of the body is enacted.

Elle explains how she moves around the space of social media by using her fingers on the touchscreen on her mobile phone and this happens below her conscious awareness. She describes how she uses her finger to ‘swipe right’ which she knows will take her back to the ASOS influencer’s feed. She says:

E: Think just swipe to the right.

K: So you swipe to the right.

E: With my finger, like this [acts the movement].

K: So you use your fingers on the screen of your phone?

E: Yeah I swipe with my finger like this and that takes me to her account.

K: Right, so you swipe to the right and you’re going back onto her account; right, so swiping to the right you know that you’re going – you’re making a decision to go back to her, [E: yeah, well yes and no] So you’re swiping to the right, you’re making a decision to go back to her account?

E: Well, I don’t decide exactly, my fingers decide.

²³ There have been discussions in contemporary studies of the body schema around the distinction between ‘body image’ and ‘body schema’ including Gallagher 1986; Gallagher 1995; Gallagher 2005a pp.17-24; Gallagher and Cole 1995 p.369; Gallagher and Zahavi 2008 p.145; Paillard 1999 p.197. For an overview of these discussions see Halák, J. (2016) Merleau-Ponty on Embodied Subjectivity from the Perspective of Subject-Object Circularity in ACTA Universitatis Carolinae Kinathropogica, Vol. 52, 2 pp. 26-40. Accessed online 30th January 2022.

Elle's comments are reminiscent of Merleau-Ponty's description of leaning on his desk with both of his hands. Elle, through her action of touching the screen of her mobile phone, is not unaware of her body moving around the space of digital networked media; it is, as Merleau-Ponty explains, as though her body trails behind her like a comet's tail. Her body is polarised by its tasks; it exists towards her goal of reading or watching fashion media to make sense of her experience, but her action of swiping to move herself happens below her conscious awareness; it is her fingers that decide. The idea of my participants' fingers deciding the action of moving around the space of social media is a theme evident in each of their descriptions of reading or watching fashion media on their mobile phones. Another example is Hannah's description of logging into Instagram. We discuss this and she says:

K: Ended the phone call, your Instagram button is there, and you're in your room [H 'mms in agreement softly in background throughout] sat on your bed?

H: Yeah.

K: And you press Instagram ...

H: [overlaps K's] It's a 'go to' like...

K: Ok so it's what you do first when you pick up your phone?

H: Yeah you just do it, like go to Instagram.

K: So you decide to open Instagram.

H: Umm well I just do it ... it's like ... It's hard to describe... but you just, well your fingers just do it, you don't have to think about it ...

K: So your fingers just do it?

H: Yeah like It's like they ... they know how to get there; they don't need me [laughs].

K: So they know how to get to Instagram?

H: Yeah and umm it feels ... it sounds a bit ... but like anticipation, it's exciting.

As with Elle's description above, Hannah explains how her action of moving herself into the space of social media happens without her having to think about it. As she herself explains, her fingers "know how to get there, they don't need [her]". Hannah's body follows her fingers like a comet's tail through which she moves around the space of social media accessed through her mobile phone.

Richardson and Hjorth (2017) explain how they owe a debt to scholarly accounts of hapticity (Parisi 2008, 2009, 2015) in their work that looks at the relation between gamers and their technology. They explain how gamers accumulate embodied memories of the game-controllers they use which 'through the repetition of particular actions and their effects create a 'haptic bond' with the interface of the game' (Richardson and Hjorth 2017: 1656). The gamers develop positive relationships with particular controllers because of how they feel as their fingers use them to move their body around the space of the game they are playing online. The functions of their fingers "'stand in" for the perceptual body' (pp.1657) shifting, or disrupting, how the gamers experience their world. Richardson explains hapticity in relation to her project that looks at the mobile phone users' sense of 'touch' in a post covid world, and how mobile phone technology has become so embedded in the body schema of users that they have shifted the idea of what it is to have a body. These technologies are now integral to how we keep in touch with friends, family and others we might only know in an online capacity, and as such the shift in the body schema is now 'collectively felt; it is a way of being together or achieving "mediated social touch"' (Paterson 2007)' (Richardson and Wilken 2023: 318). It has been argued that touchscreens are incapable of replacing the very 'fleshy' feeling of touch, but Richardson and Wilkin argue they can afford what she describes as 'a sense of touch *in potential*' (2023: 323 original emphasis).

As discussed in Chapter 3 mobile phone technology and social media accessed through it have now become embedded in everyday life, particularly for digital natives, those who have grown up with these technologies, as is the case with my participants. However, an investigation into mobile phone technology in relation to fashion and fashion media has not yet been undertaken. This thesis reveals a haptic bond between fashion media users and the fashion milieu; a nuanced spatial-perceptual environment that mediates embodied experience within the dynamic landscape of fashion. It is touch that integrates their experience of the world and self. Moreover, as Richardson explains, using a mobile phone has a habitual relation with the body. By moving their fingers across the touch screen of their mobile phone the fashion media user's body trails behind them like a comet's tail, it is a body polarised by its task of connecting with social media, a social world where they go to see and be seen. Following Richardson, the

ubiquity of mobile phone technology has shifted the body schema of the individuals that make up the collective by offering a feeling of personal connection, a way of being together, which influences the sense users make of fashion media. Through looking and listening to fashion media posts my participants touch the world and judge its texture, weight, temperature. It is the preconscious experience of touch that allows them to determine the sensuous quality of what they perceive which gives the world depth. It is the body schema that acts as a system of equivalences through which my participants make sense of their experience. Thus, there is no interpretative distance between what is seen or heard when they read or watch a fashion media post, or what they feel by touching the touchscreens of their mobile phone, and the meaning they make of their experience – a view that has dominated studies of fashion media, as discussed in Chapter 1. For Merleau-Ponty perception occurs through and with the body. As he explains ‘[m]y perception is therefore not a sum of visual, tactile and audible givens; I perceive in a total way with my whole being; I grasp a unique structure of the thing, a unique way of being, which speaks to all my senses at once’ (1964 [1948]: 50)

5.2 Feeling and Knowing Are Inextricably Linked

In this section I analyse the second invariant to emerge from my research: that my participants’ experience of reading or watching fashion media on their mobile phone is both affective and emotional, and that feeling and knowing are inextricably linked. I situate my findings in relation to Merleau-Ponty’s philosophical position that declares the body as being integral to perception (2014 [1945]). As discussed above, it is through and with the body that my participants come to make sense of their world. I develop the idea that my participants are enmeshed in a milieu which initiates and guides their actions through the incorporation of use objects, cultural objects, rituals and language, including technologies such as fashion, fashion media and mobile technology, and that these technologies fold into ‘the tissue of habits through which we flesh ourselves out’ (Morris 1999: 1). I demonstrate how technologies have the potential to disrupt affective flows that influence the sense fashion media users make of their experiences, and their world.

In Chapter 4, I discussed the development of postphenomenology and introduced the notion of ‘intentionality’. Intentionality, a term derived from the Latin verb *intendo* meaning to aim, hold, or stretch, is a concept first introduced by Franz Brentano (1838-1917), who defines it as ‘reference to a content, direction towards an object [...] or immanent objectivity’ (Brentano 1995 [1973]: 88). It is a notion that proposes phenomena as experienced internally in the mind.

This claim is rejected by Husserl (1969), who develops the concept of intentionality to emphasise the intentional object as being both inside and outside of the mind. As such, he defines intentionality as ‘living’ or ‘functioning’. He states, ‘[t]he living intentionality carries me along; it predelineates; it determines me practically in my whole procedure, including the procedure of my natural thinking, whether this yields being or illusion’ (1969: 235). Merleau-Ponty goes further still to argue that the world can only be accessed through the body: the world and the lived body cannot be separated, they are tied together through an ‘intentional arc’. It is the moving body that opens up the world to the experiencing subject and makes experience possible.²⁴

5.2.1 The Intentional Arc

For Merleau-Ponty, objects are not perceived objectively but rather through the sensory value of the object (a constitutive element of the milieu) and its function to the whole. In this sense, objects contain the potential for an indefinite multiplicity of perspectival views: they are metastable, creating tension which requires resolution through the actions of the perceiving subject. Objects of perception are therefore lived realities, rather than ‘real’ objects. I show through an analysis of my findings that the space of digital networked media accessed through mobile phone technology is pervaded with lines of force and articulated in sectors which call for a certain mode of action that initiate and guide fashion media users, but it is as if they are unaware of it. In what follows I show how my participants (constituents of the fashion milieu) draw on their learned behaviour in the present, which influences their future actions. The milieu shifts with each action taken, as the fashion media user responds in a continuous process of negotiation with the fashion milieu. The fashion media users’ experience cannot be reduced to an interpretative distance: consciousness, for them, is nothing other than the dialectic of milieu and action. The user plays forward their previous experience tacitly held in the body to make sense of the present, which informs the future. Merleau-Ponty defines the tight connection between lived body and world as the intentional arc, which I now elaborate on through a discussion of my findings.

²⁴ For an overview of the development of intentionality see Sunday, A.C., (2021) The Doctrine of Intentionality in Merleau-Ponty in International Journal of Research and Scientific Innovation (IJRSI) Volume VIII, Issue 1, January 2021. ISSN 2321-2705

An example is provided by Lucy, who recalls reading a post that has been shared by a friend on Instagram Stories.²⁵ Lucy's friend, Sophie, is a model working in the fashion industry, who shares a photograph of an outfit from a collection being shown on a catwalk. The collection has been designed by the brand Viktor and Rolf. Lucy explains how when she sees the post has been put up by Sophie, she feels curious:

L: Umm ... curious I suppose ... umm ... it wasn't like conscious, it was more of an impulse I suppose, I just usually, I just click it, I'm not really thinking about it, it's just in the back of my head, kind of like ... umm ... you just know it ... it's kind of like ... something that comes from ... like inside you.

Lucy's comment demonstrates how her feeling of curiosity happens below her conscious awareness and moreover it is held tacitly inside her, rather than being something she thinks about in her mind. Later in our conversation she explains how her opening the Story was almost instant and that there wasn't time to think about it. She says:

L: I don't think so, it happens pretty quickly, it's almost instant, I don't think there would have been any time for me to think about what I was doing, I've just gone and done it.

Lucy's comment bears a resemblance to Merleau-Ponty's description of the football player's experience of playing a game of football. For Lucy, Instagram is pervaded with lines of force (the potential in the dynamic system which connects with Lucy's previous experience tacitly held inside her) which call for a certain mode of action, that of using her fingers to open the Story, which guides her behaviour without her being aware of doing it. Lucy's experience cannot be reduced to an interpretive distance between consciousness and the world, consciousness is the dialectic of milieu and action. For Lucy, the practice of being a social media user has become a skill she has mastered; social media accessed through mobile phone technology has developed a habitual relation with her body. This becomes clear when she says:

L: Umm ... I don't think it feels that abnormal to me because it happens quite a lot every day. I mean I'm used to scrolling through social media, I mean I pick up my phone and look at posts all the time, I don't even think about it. Just kind of gets to the point where you have to close the app at some point otherwise you could be on it all day.

²⁵ Instagram Stories is a feature of Instagram that allows users to share photos and videos that disappear from their profile, feed and messages after 24 hours.

Lucy's learned behaviour (of using social media by moving herself around the space of the digital network by using her fingers on the touch screen of her mobile phone) has become second nature, such that she is no longer aware of doing it.

Hubert L. Dreyfus (2002) argues that the process of skills acquisition occurs through several phases: from novice to advanced beginner, to competence, then proficiency, and finally to becoming an expert. With each stage the practitioner requires less and less thought to accomplish the practice and achieve their goals until they get to the stage where they can rely on feeling and familiarity to 'perform the appropriate action without calculating and comparing alternatives. What must be done, simply is done' (2002: 110). Dreyfus discusses Merleau-Ponty's notion of motivation as being connected to relieving tension in action until there is equilibrium. Dreyfus defines what he calls 'skilful coping' as 'when there is no requirement for mental representation in achieving a goal. It can be *purposive* without the agent entertaining a *purpose*' (2002: 111 original emphasis). This begs the question, if one can act without representing a goal, what is it that motivates skilful action? Merleau-Ponty maintains that higher animals and human beings are motivated to achieve 'maximal grip' of their situation: to achieve equilibrium in a metastable system. The intentional arc which ties body and world together is central to its success.

Lucy's description evidences this sense of equilibrium – of coping with her environment. She explains how her curiosity around the Instagram Story arises because she knows that she and her friend have shared interests, such as art, and that she therefore assumes the post will be of interest to her. She tells me how she and her friend have previously been to see exhibitions together, that they spend time together offline, and that it is these experiences, along with reading previous posts put up on social media by Sophie, that leads her to make this assumption. She explains:

L: Just through conversations with her, and typically you don't think someone's going to lie to you the whole time, she's speaking to you and obviously if she knows a fair bit about what she's talking about there's got to be a level of interest there. So, I suppose I don't know it's something I'm going to be interested in, but you assume based on previous posts and previous experiences.

K: So that knowing comes from previous experiences? You've experienced her posts before. So when you saw Sophie on Instagram you describe there being a curiosity...

L: I don't think it's necessarily that I know what it's going to be it's just an assumption, an educated guess that it's unlikely that she's going to post

something completely random that I would have absolutely no idea what she's going on about so there's probably some level of interest that I would have with whatever she posted, you just kind of feel it, it's like a sense you get.

Lucy's comments demonstrate how she plays forward her previous experiences into the present to make sense of her experience. She doesn't know that it's something she is going to be interested in *per se* but makes an assumption based on previous posts and previous experiences. Furthermore, her previous experiences come to her as a feeling, "a sense", rather than her having to draw on rational knowledge stored in her mind. We discuss this and she says:

K: So it's an assumption, an educated guess. Can you say any more about that?

L: Hmm well it's like a feeling inside, you just know it, you like feel it, like a a gut feeling.

K: Right, so it's like a gut feeling.

L: Yeah it's difficult to explain it, you don't need to think about it, you just like know it already, you feel it inside without having to think about it.

For Lucy, the assumption that the post will be of interest to her is like a "gut feeling", something that she knows already "without having to think about it". It is feeling inside of her.

The intentional arc is the tight connection between lived body and world that offers Lucy the potential to achieve 'maximal grip' of her experience. This is borne out by a comment made later in our discussion where, having read the Instagram Story, she realises that it was of interest to her, and this brings her a sense of affirmation. She says:

L: It's, it's difficult to describe, but as I say, it's a kind of warm feeling inside, like an affirmation – I was right, I knew I would find it interesting, it's a good feeling, you know ... we like the same things.

The "warm feeling inside" that Lucy discusses, which she explains is "like a sense of affirmation", suggests her relation with the fashion milieu has reached a state of equilibrium. Further, she experiences a sense of affirmation because she recognises that she was "right", but also because the experience has reaffirmed that her and her friend Sophie "like the same things". Fashion media accessed through mobile phone technology appears to have amplified a sense

of a personal connection with her friend Sophie, an idea discussed in Chapter 2. But the connection occurs through the sharing of a fashion media posts of the latest Viktor and Rolf collection. It is the idea of a catwalk show and a collection instituted in the bodies of Sophie and her friend Lucy that has facilitated the sense of a connection between them: that they “like the same things”. Fashion offers Lucy a sense of *philia*. It is the sense of being bound to other human beings that offers Lucy a sense of affirmation.

The idea of social media users feeling a sense of belonging through a shared commonality can be applied to other milieus, such as a collection of people who share an interest in cooking or watching films. However, fashion (the idea of becoming together through a shared interest in clothing and dress) is universal in that everyone has to get dressed in the morning. Moreover, the choice of what we wear is evident in most social situations as it leaves a visible trace in the public realm. It is the externalisation of an expression into the technological prostheses: clothing (fashion), and fashion media posts, that is available for interpretation by those with whom we encounter in the world. Further, dress has a particular relation with the body in the way it can penetrate the body schema as Entwistle explains, ‘you might love a pair of trousers but not feel comfortable if the waistband it too tight [...] or you might love the style of a shirt but find the fabric too tight or scratchy’ (2023[2000]: 28). The feelings my participants describe, which arise through them playing forward their previous experiences into the present, are integral to the sense they make of the fashion media post but also inform their understanding of their world.

Lucy moves on to describe her friend’s story which, she says, shows a model on a catwalk wearing a “big ...puffy dress that just says “NO” across the front of it”. She reports that the post “says if you click on it, it will take you directly to the original post”. This comment demonstrates how social media initiates and guides her response, but Lucy’s action is an expressive act, she adjusts and orients herself in response to stimulus in her milieu: she “clicked on that and had a look at the rest of them”. Lucy tells me how she understands that the dress is one in “a collection” and that she expects there will be further photographs of the rest of the collection on the designer’s home page. She says:

L: You could just clearly tell that it was from like a show and people don’t tend to release one item, they release a collection, so I don’t know, I just guessed, an educated guess.

K: So an educated guess, something told you, can you say any more about that?

L: Probably just from experience, like seeing a post similar to that even in a magazine or whatever, like when you see photos from fashion week you don't just see the one, you see the whole collection so it's just when you see an image that often means there's going to be more attached to it. You just know it, like you just get a sense that there will be more.

These comments demonstrate the intentional arc that facilitates the successful bringing together of Lucy and the world. Lucy's previous experiences of seeing photographs of collections in magazines or from fashion week held tacitly inside her offer Lucy a "sense" that there will be more than one outfit from the collection for her to look at. It is something she "just knows" a knowing which, as discussed above, she describes as a "gut feeling". Thus, the unwritten rules of fashion, namely of collections and catwalks shows, have become instituted in Lucy's body. But it is an idea that she shares with the others who have an interest in fashion. It is the invisible framework inscribed in the material traces of previous expressions that holds the collective together.

Lucy describes how she finds nine photographs of the different dresses in the Viktor and Rolf collection. She looks at the first one and gets "all she wanted to see out of the image". She goes on to clarify that she "acknowledged the dress, the model, that it's a catwalk" that she has "kind of got all the details from the photo", and has "read the caption", before moving on to the next post. She explains how she was "intrigued" to see the others. She says:

L: Umm ... don't really know I just anticipate what else there is to see, because obviously I've seen all nine of them but all very small, you can see from the colours that they're the same collection, but you can't read what they say on them, so I knew that they were there and I knew there was more waiting for me to read, but I just didn't know what they said yet, so I wanted to move on and find out what they were. I don't think I really thought much about it, it's just a habit that once you've seen it for a few seconds it's kind of the only, the length of time that you look at something on your phone, on Instagram and then I just carried on and look at the rest of them.

Moving swiftly through a flow of images in social media on her mobile phone is an action Lucy has mastered. She doesn't have to think about, as she says, "it's just a habit", an idea I discuss further later in this chapter. Moreover, as she explains, she only looks at the post "for a few seconds", "the length of time that you look at something on your phone", demonstrating a shift in the capacity for attention, a concept central to the concerns of my research. She moves on to say that she looks at each post, but that she needs to spend less time reading each one because

there was less in each photograph that she needed to explore. The intentional arc holds Lucy and world together by playing forward her previous experiences. She says:

L: Because each time there was just less that I needed to acknowledge on the screen. I knew who it was by now, I knew the model because I'd already seen her a few times, I knew it was a catwalk show because it's the exact same location in each picture, I knew there was a caption because it's the same on each one, so all I had to look at was the dress, but not even just the dress anymore because they're pretty similar in each one it's just the writing on the dress.

Lucy reports that the comments on the dress were “funny” and “sarcastic”, demonstrating a shared cultural understanding, and says how she finds the brand interesting. In response she performs an action to ‘follow them’. She explains how the ‘follow’ function means that “if they post anymore then it's going to come up straight on my feed, I don't have to go looking for it it's just going to be handed to me”. This indicates that Lucy sees a future connection with the brand. The intentional arc not only projects the past into the present but offers a structure for Lucy to imagine a future in the milieu; a future which, she explains, includes seeing further Viktor and Rolf posts on her feed. She says:

L: Well I suppose that's the idea of following someone on Instagram is that you want to see more of their stuff so when you first open Instagram all that you see is things that you're choosing to see from people that you follow, on the homepage, and then I just thought I want them there.

Lucy's experience demonstrates how the intentional arc holds together her body and her world and offers it structure, or form: a means of achieving equilibrium in the multi and metastable system which she inhabits. Returning to Merleau-Ponty, I argue that Lucy is situated in a milieu, a lived environment that initiates and guides her actions, but hers is a creative response. She creatively selects one of the many possibilities that are available to her, to bring to the foreground a particular figure-ground relation in the Gestalt. Her body is the locus of sense that brings a unity of the senses. Hence, feeling and knowing are inextricably linked, but it is a feeling Lucy experiences through technology. This thesis understands fashion, fashion media and mobile phone as technological prostheses, the externalisation of memory in technical supports that are integral to human becoming. As Lucy's description demonstrates, technologies fold into ‘the tissue of habits through which we flesh ourselves out’ (Morris 1999: 1). Through her encounters with fashion media accessed through mobile phone technology

Lucy experiences a “gut feeling” that drives her actions, and a “warm feeling inside” that tells her she was right, which offers her a sense of affirmation. In what follows I show through my empirical work how technology has the potential to disrupt affective flows that influence the feelings of fashion media users, a concept fundamental to my research as discussed in Chapter 3. However, it is pertinent to note that users read fashion media posts from their own embodied, but also situated, perspective.

5.2.2 ‘According to them’: An embodied situated perspective

In his later work, *Eye and Mind* (1964a [1961]), Merleau-Ponty looked to the artistic expression of painting to account for the idea of truth is an ‘ideal’ implied through perception, rather than pure consciousness detached from the perceptual realm. He claims that the body is not an assemblage of its parts, it is the blending of body and world. To this end when one looks at a painting the viewer does not see ‘it’, the gaze of the body wanders within it, in this way Merleau-Ponty maintains that we see ‘according to it’. Merleau-Ponty quotes the artist Giacometti who states ‘[w]hat interests me in all paintings is resemblance – that is, what is resemblance for me: something which makes me discover the world’ (Giacometti in Merleau-Ponty 1964a [1961]: 165).

I return to my empirical work to show how my participants view fashion media posts ‘according to them’. By this I mean that they that they see a resemblance that resonates within them through which they discover the world from their own situated perspective. An example is given by Wiktoria, who describes seeing a post put up on Instagram Stories by a peer from college as discussed above. The post shows the front cover of a magazine on which there is a photograph of a woman with Afro hair standing in front of a pink foil backdrop. Across the post, written in large neon letters, are the words ‘It’s official I’m on the cover’. Wiktoria describes her response. She says:

W: [breaths] I’m just getting annoyed at this point, I know it’s not healthy and I realise that but I initially compared myself and especially considering the fact that I did a shoot that was really similar; and I’ve seen the background, like behind the scenes before he posted the cover and I just thought to myself it looks exactly like what I did but worse ... because I don’t really like his style if I’m being honest [brief laughter] But then it made me even more angry because I’m a better photographer, but he’s on a fucking cover! So then I went to see what magazine is that and how many followers it has, and it’s irrelevant but relevant at the same time, and then long story short, I know we’re going to unwrap that

but I decided to post myself and it actually made me really motivated; so all that anger and everything I digested it and made it into something positive.

Wiktorija's description reveals that she reads the post and "initially compared" herself to her peer. She is also a fashion photography student with ambitions of working as a fashion photographer and had previously produced a shoot that was similar to that in the fashion media post. That fact that her peer's photograph had made it to the cover of a magazine made her feel "annoyed", then "angry". Employing the thoughts of Merleau-Ponty, Wiktorija did not see 'it', the post, but rather her gaze wandered within it: it resonated with her and influenced her feelings. Wiktorija explains how reading the post played a role in her future actions as she became motivated to succeed in her ambitions to become a fashion photographer. Moreover, she explains how the post made her feel jealous, a reaction that prompted her to stop scrolling to read it. She explains,

K: So with your permission I'd like to go back to that moment when you're scrolling through the coffees, the people drinking coffee and you're just getting to that story, what happens there?

W: I've stopped it to see the picture, and then the process came of ... firstly - I could take a better picture; so like yeah it became really a moment of stopping and analysing what I'm seeing basically.

K: So you were seeing the other stories and then, it made you stop. What was it that made you stop?

W: I think the main feeling I had was jealousy.

Wiktorija describes how she realises she is jealous through a feeling she experiences in her body. She explains,

W: [gestures to chest and stomach] just this feeling inside your belly, there's this saying in Polish I have no idea how to say in English, but basically there's just this like substance going around your veins, you feel it in your stomach.

The post moves Wiktorija, it affects her; the feeling she describes as a substance going around her veins, that she feels in her stomach, transcends to an emotional sense – that she is jealous of her peer's success. Knowing and feeling, for Wiktorija, are inextricably linked: a characteristic integral to the fashion milieu. However, knowing and feeling are supported by an

invisible framework of symbolic meaning instituted in the flesh of the constituents of the collective that brings them together through their shared interest in fashion, an idea discussed in Chapter 2.

In *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968 [1964]) Merleau-Ponty discusses the relation between perception and language. He argues that perception is a diacritical, relative, oppositional system, from which the perceiver creatively negotiates a particular figure/ground relation dependent on their situated perspective to the whole, namely from a set of potentialities or perspectives, that surrounds them. Yet, he states:

[...] there is all the same this difference between perception and language, that I see the perceived things and that significations on the contrary are invisible. The natural being is at rest in itself, my look can stop it. The Being whose home is language cannot be fixed, looked at, it is only from afar. Hence it is necessary to account for this relative positivity of the perceived (even if it is only non-negation, even if it does not resist *observation*, even if every crystallization is illusory in some respect), especially since it is upon it that the positivity of the invisible rests, There is no intelligible world, *there* is the sensible world.

(Merleau-Ponty 1968 [1964]: 214 original emphasis)

In so saying, Merleau-Ponty infers that institution offers a divergence, or difference, in the whole, a ‘chiasm’, a co-functioning, an exchange between the phenomenal body and the body in the world, between perceiving and perceived. Symbolic meaning is invisible, but the visible and invisible are not in contradiction, rather the visible constitutes an invisible framework inscribed within it (1968 [1964]): 215).

As discussed in Chapter 2 Nick Crossley (2004) points out how Merleau-Ponty emphasises the social and historical nature of the world in which the experiencing subject resides. Returning to the example of a football player, he explains how there would be no game if it were not for the players’ tacit and embodied knowledge of the structure, or rules, of the game sedimented through history. If one player played according to the rules of football, another to the rules of hockey and another to the rules of basketball, there would be no meaningful game; it would be chaos. Thus, the players are collectively aware of the aim of playing football, namely to score more goals than the other team, which motivates their behaviour and initiates and guides their actions. Football is hence a social structure inherent to the sense of playing football, instituted in those who play through the flesh of their bodies. Following this logic, fashion is a social structure inherent to a collective brought together

through a shared interest which is underpinned by an invisible symbolic structure instituted in the flesh of the bodies of those who participate.

I return now to my empirical work to demonstrate the notion of institution and how it structures the fashion milieu. As discussed above, Wiktoria describes an experience of reading a fashion media post in Instagram posted by a peer from college. She describes her responses as “a feeling of a substance going around [her] veins” and something she “feel[s] in [her] stomach” through which she makes sense that she is jealous because her peer’s photograph has made it to the front cover of a magazine. It is through the invisible framework instituted in the flesh of the bodies that make up the collective that Wiktoria understands shooting a front cover photograph as success, of her peer achieving his goal of working in industry, an ambition which Wiktoria shares. She feels it as an echo in and through her body. This success is not visible – not there to be seen in the photograph – but is rather a symbolic reading that is implicit or inscribed in the post. The visible constitutes an invisible framework that Wiktoria gears into through her expressive body. It is the history of fashion media that gives weight to her sense, the tacit knowledge of all the front covers shot in the past that symbolise the status and success of the photographer who shot the photograph. Her peer has taken up a position in this lineage, a position that is Wiktoria’s shared ambition, and of which she feels jealous.

Wiktoria goes on to say that she had previously seen “behind the scenes” photographs of the shoot as her peer had posted these on Instagram a few days before. She explains that in the previous post her peer had posted the credits of those who worked on the shoot, which acknowledged the participation of a creative director. Wiktoria’s tacit knowledge of “behind the scenes images”, “crediting those involved in the shoot”, of the role of a “creative director” are structured by the invisible symbolic structure shared by a social group brought together through an interest in fashion that has a normative function. It is fashion instituted in the collective of embodied, feeling, social agents who share a lived environment: the fashion milieu.

Wiktoria tells me how she had previously put together a shoot that resembled that of her peer’s photograph. She says that she ‘feels’ angry because she managed her shoot without the help of a creative director and that she thinks she is a better photographer. She moves herself around the space of social media to, firstly, look at the profile of the magazine that her peer has produced the front cover photograph for and posted on his profile. She says that seeing the magazine profile helped as she “wasn’t that jealous anymore because it’s not i-D or Dazed, that would hurt my feelings, would be terrible to swallow”. This comment demonstrates Wiktoria’s tacit knowledge of fashion media, and its cultural and historical significance. i-D and Dazed

are magazines with a history, and reputation as being leaders in innovation in fashion media. It is these magazines that Wiktoria has ambitions to work with. She explains that the magazine her peer has produced a front cover for does not have many followers. As Rocamora (2022) explains, the number of followers acquired by a social media account signifies its success, and in the case of fashion influencers, it acts as a metrics of their economy and ‘quantification of the self’ (2022: 1109). Wiktoria’s comment describes how the social media account for the magazine in the fashion media post doesn’t have many followers, which reflects its status, thus, Wiktoria “wasn’t that jealous anymore”. The history and reputation of i-D and Dazed is not visible, nor is the symbolic understanding of the correlation between followers and the success of a social media account. This invisible knowing is implicitly inscribed in Wiktoria’s experience and is something she comes to know through her body, as she herself states, had her peer produced a shoot for i-D or Dazed “it would have really hurt her feelings” and “been terrible to swallow”.

Wiktoria explains that she then moved herself to her peer’s profile to look at further photographic work he had posted. She reports that she feels motivated because she believes herself to be a better photographer. She says:

W: Just a nice little boosting of the ego, in the back of your mind like a little pep talk, like I’m actually better and I can do it, and looking at the pictures, like this is ridiculous, like my pictures are better and his work can be published there, but my work is relatable to a bigger audience, and I would say is considerably better, so how did it make me feel? Basically, just again I would say somewhere here [gestures to stomach area] or something just a nice [moves fingers] I don’t know why I’m doing this, but some sort of tingling, just like something, nice little tingling or pat on the back.

K: So you felt that nice feeling and then what did you do?

W: Then what did I do? I don’t know if it was right after, but I did have umm ... I’m getting my stuff, my life together now, um ... so I did start making my website already because Umm ... yeah I was like, it’s time to actually push my career forward, but I did spend, I guess, it was a day or two days after, but it was 100% influenced on what I’d seen there, because I thought if he can be published, I surely can be published.

Wiktoria’s comment that she felt “a nice little boosting of the ego”, and that her work is better than her peers’ because her work “is relatable to a bigger audience”, manifests as a sense of excitement, a tingling in her body that tells her, “if he can be published, I surely can be

published”. Thus, there is equilibrium in the metastable system, she feels a sense of affirmation that she has a future in the fashion milieu working as a fashion photographer. This is a notion evidenced by her comment that her encounter with fashion media on her mobile phone prompts her to “get [her] life together” showing how she feels motivated to work on her website and push her career forward. I argue that this motivation goes beyond a financial or status motivation and is instead a motivation to belong to the fashion milieu in the future. Wiktorja’s description is evidence of how fashion media in the form of social media posts accessed through mobile phone technology have the potential to affect fashion media users, an affect that transcends to an emotional response that is integral to the sense they make of their experience. Thus, feeling and knowing are inextricably linked: a characteristic of the fashion milieu.

5.3 Motility

I now move on to consider the third invariant to emerge through my findings, namely motility: the notion that my participants move themselves to optimise their position in the milieu, but it is an action that happens without them having to think about it. As discussed in Chapter 1, Merleau-Ponty critiques traditional reflex accounts of the relation between stimulus and organism to argue that the organism is not passive. The form of the stimulus shapes the response, but the organism moves itself, meaning it acts, to take up an optimum position in its milieu indicating a meaningful environment to which the organism adjusts and orients itself. It is the moving body that opens up the world to the experiencing subject and makes experience possible. However, Merleau-Ponty argues that through repeated actions movement becomes a habit, ‘a pre-established motor pattern that is already charged with significance’ (Mooney and Norris (2007: 5). He explains how a baby seeks out an object but watches the object, not their hand. Knowledge of their hand as something that can touch, and that the object is something to be touched, withdraws from reflective consciousness into the domain of the intentional arc, as discussed above. Merleau-Ponty extends this thinking in relation to use objects to offer the example of the blind man using a cane. Through its repeated use the cane becomes incorporated into the body schema as ‘a bodily auxiliary, an extension of bodily synthesis’ (1967 [1942]: 153). The man no longer has to think about the pressure of the cane in his hand or to objectively measure the cane to gauge its reach, it takes up a habitual function that happens without him having to think about it. As discussed above, Dreyfus (2002: 10) explains how a practitioner requires less and less thought to accomplish a practice as they develop a proficiency in practising it until they come to rely on a feeling and familiarity to perform an appropriate action

without calculating and comparing alternatives. Christina Sunday Agama (2021) outlines the importance of motility when she says ‘[t]he things we think and experience – and the way we think and experience them – reflect aspects of the physical structure of our body as well as the things our body can do. Therefore, intentionality is embedded in our bodies and agency. This motor dimension has to be part of the full picture of intentionality’ (2021: 66).

The notion of my participants moving themselves to make sense of their experience was evident in each of their descriptions of reading or watching fashion media on their mobile phone. To demonstrate the notion of motility as a characteristic of the fashion milieu, I now explore Veronica’s description of her self-selected experience of reading fashion media, which starts with her reading an Instagram Story shared by a friend. The Instagram Story she describes concerns musician and actor Harry Styles’ presence at a red-carpet event, the Met Gala, an annual fundraising gala hosted by the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Costume Institute in New York.²⁶ Veronika explains that “she really likes to judge looks sometimes after an event” and so, after seeing her friend’s post, she responds through the action of moving herself around the space of social media “trying to ... umm ... find more [...] to see what other people were wearing”. She explains how she first moves herself to use the ‘search tool’ to find the profiles of fashion magazines who might have reported on the Met Gala. Veronica explains how she does this by moving her fingers across the touchscreen of her phone, and that this happens without her having to think about doing it, she explains “I’m used to it [laughs] ... umm ... it’s just like ... your fingers ... [laughs] they know what to do [laughs]”. As with Elle and Hannah’s descriptions discussed above, it is evident that mobile phone technology and digital networked media have opened the users’ body to the world, which through repeated movement has become a habit they have mastered. As Merleau-Ponty states, ‘[o]ne’s sediment of habitual pre-patterned movements determines an outline and subsequently retreats’ (1967 [1942]: 152). The participants no longer have to think about picking up their mobile phone and using it to move themselves around the space of social media: it happens below their conscious awareness.

Veronica first searches for Vogue, “because it’s like obvious”, but when she arrives at the Vogue profile, she can’t see any posts relating to the event. In response she moves herself to Harry Styles’ official profile. I argue she does this to optimise her position in the milieu, to

²⁶ The Met Gala is popularly regarded as a glamorous fashion event attended by personalities perceived to be culturally relevant to contemporary society. Held annually on the first Monday in May it marks the opening of the Costume Institute’s annual fashion exhibition. The event is highly renowned and tickets are eagerly sought-after. The Gala raises large amounts of money for the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art in New York and is significant in the fashion calendar.

achieve her temporary goal of seeing what other people were wearing. However, she reports that she doesn't see any photographs of others who attended there, either. She says:

V: Umm ... well, his profile, and umm ... but I still don't think I was successful, I don't think he posted it. And then I just, um ... [pause] yeah, I think I found it on Another Magazine's story, not story, but the Another Magazine feed, profile. But it's really hard to know how I get there. I don't know [laughs] It's like, on Instagram you go there and you go there and this is linked to this and there might come up a picture in your feed and you might click on the profile and then see more of it, so I think it was kind of this domino effect.

This comment suggests that the action of moving herself around the space of social media happens below Veronica's conscious awareness, as she herself states, "it's really hard to know how I get there. I don't know". Instagram, and the algorithmic functions integral to it, initiate a response and guide her actions. There is a dialectic relation between the fashion media user and the fashion milieu of which both Veronica, social media, and mobile phone are constituent parts. Veronica eventually finds other photographs of the event on the profile for Another Magazine and, after looking at two or three 'looks', she explains how she completed one further action before logging off: she "went on Google and looked it up" – she moved herself to Google, the search engine, to check on the theme of the event. She says:

V: There was just one more thing I tried to do, because I knew it had, like it's connected to a theme or a topic, and I wanted to, after I looked at these three looks I kind of wanted to know what the theme is, of the Gala, so umm, in one of the posts there was the information, but I didn't really know what it means so I went on Google and looked it up, under the specific topic of it, yeah.

K: Right, so you saw one of the posts had the information, and when you read the information you weren't –

V: It wasn't quite clear no.

K: Wasn't clear, so you come out of Instagram? You made a decision to leave Instagram –

V: It wasn't a decision, it was ... it's difficult to explain, I just did it, I didn't think about it my body just did it, it's like, like automatic.

This last comment makes explicit how Veronica's moves herself to make sense of her experience, and this happens without her knowing she is doing it, her "body just did it". Moving

around social media by using her fingers on the touchscreen of her mobile phone has become a habit for Veronica. It is a pre-patterned motor-system that operates below the level of cognitive reflection within the intentional arc that holds together her body and world. However, Veronica is not passive in her relation with her world; her actions are a creative response to what she encounters and are undetermined before the event. Veronica's relation with social media is dialectical. She makes sense of what she sees through a practical directedness to what she finds prior to conscious reflection, a process Merleau-Ponty defines as 'operative intentionality'.

This section demonstrates how bodily movement is central to the intentional threads that connect the embodied subject, the fashion media user, to the fashion milieu. Encountering fashion media through mobile technology has become a habit my participants have mastered to the extent that they do it without having to think about it. Following Merleau-Ponty, moving themselves around the space of social media by using their fingers on the touchscreens of their mobile phones has become an aim in life, an act of skilful coping to manage tensions as they arise in their lived environment. Thus, motility is a key characteristic of the fashion milieu.

5.4 Intercorporeal Evaluation of the Self

The fourth invariant to emerge through my research is that my participants evaluate their sense of self through an intercorporeal exchange with those they encounter through reading and watching fashion media on their mobile phone. In this section I employ Hoel and Carusi's (2018) conceptual tool, 'the measuring body', to account for 'the relative autonomy of symbolisms and tools and their capacity to decentre the perceiving body' (2018:45). The idea of the measuring body is of particular interest to my own research, as I share Hoel and Carusi's curiosity in investigating how technologies, such as fashion, fashion media and the mobile phone, have potential to disrupt affective flows and the behaviours of those who participate in the fashion milieu. Hoel and Carusi explain how Merleau-Ponty's thinking is currently missing from research in science and related fields that seek to account for knowledge and being as appealing to process, networked agency, and performativity (Stengers 2000; Mol 2002; Latour 2005; Barad 2007; Coole and Frost 2010; Dolphijn and Van der Tuin 2012; Braidotti 2013). They explain this is also the case with research that initiates a renewed interest in technology and symbolisms understood not as external to being but as integral to a process of becoming. This is a position I adopt through the work of Simondon (2017 [1958]) and Stiegler (2011 [2001]) where Hoel and Carusi draw on the ideas of Merleau-Ponty focusing on his later work,

Nature (2003 [1995]) and *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968 [1964]) to consider his notion of *flesh*, an idea I discussed in Chapter 2. They explain how they do this to bring technologies, bodies and symbolic systems into a new model able to offer a rethinking of agency and materiality.

Merleau-Ponty is mostly associated with his idea of embodied perception. However, through a review of his later work, Hoel and Carusi look to take ‘Merleau-Ponty beyond himself’ (2018: 47) to consider the body as a standard, or measure of things. They explain how, in the context of Merleau-Ponty, ‘measuring’, and related terms such as ‘measure’ and ‘measurement’, goes beyond the definition of measurement taken at face value, as a quantitative value of something. I employ this idea to consider measurement in relation to the feeling body integral to my research aims. Here, the body is fundamental to the phenomena it encounters in the world. It is intertwined with a world it targets, co-shaping both the perceiving agent and their milieu through an ongoing process of differentiation. In this sense, measurement is the invisible framework implicit in perception through which the perceiving subject makes sense of their experience and world. Thus, the measuring body is a conceptual tool that neither privileges nor coincides with sensory perception, but rather encompasses the role of technology in the reciprocal arrangement between human and milieu that challenges not only a dualist separation between mind and body, but also a separation between human beings and their environment, and humans and nonhumans.

Hoel and Carusi chart the development of Merleau-Ponty’s ideas of embodied perception through to his later work which proposes the notion of *flesh* and emphasises ‘an expansive and expressive dynamic that does not stop at sensory perception but extends into and comprises intellectual life (Saint Aubert 2008: 10, 14 in Hoel and Carusi 2018: 48). They expand on the notion of *flesh* to bring emphasis to the mediated nature of being and knowing through technologies by bringing them into the perceptual/conceptual complex. Thus, they reveal the relative agency and autonomy of technologies and symbols and their potential to disrupt, or ‘decentre’, the perceiving body.

Merleau-Ponty’s idea of the body schema, as discussed above, demonstrates the potential for the decentering of the perceiving body by: firstly acknowledging the body as being not a subject, but both subject and object; secondly by arguing that the body extends into the environment and the environment extends into it; and thirdly by explaining how it can acquire new habits and incorporate symbolisms and tools which extend the body schema. However, the body is always central to perception. Hoel and Carusi go further by proposing that rather than incorporating symbols and tools, ‘the perceiving body participates in a distributed system that

goes beyond the perceiving body, and that it cannot fully control' (2018: 61). This development is important as it grants symbolisms and tools agency in their own right. To this end the measuring body is not merely an extension of the perceiving body, it instead articulates a distributed system where feeling bodies, technologies, and symbolic systems are intertwined in a lived environment, a milieu. Hereby symbolic systems and technology are standards of measurement with the potential to disrupt the affective flows and behaviours of those who participate. Further, they have the capacity to disrupt perception itself. They open new dimensions of being by expanding the potential scope of actions and meaningful behaviour. They also play a coordinating role through which they influence actions in collective life. They achieve this by shifting collective body schemas, but also by disrupting social, intellectual and cultural understandings of the world. It is the invisible structure inherent in the visible that provides a shared vision through repeatability. Here agency shifts from the observer to the distributed measuring body (Hoel and Carusi 2018: 63).

In what follows I look at Tarana's description of watching fashion media on her mobile phone to reveal how she uses her measuring body to measure herself against those she encounters. Put another way, how she perceives an intercorporeal exchange with others she encounters through fashion media accessed on her mobile phone, through which she makes an evaluation of the self, and of her position in the collective: the fourth invariant to emerge through my research and a characteristic fundamental to the fashion milieu.

Tarana self-selects an experience of watching a vlog on YouTube posted by the fashion influencer Emma Hill. Tarana explains that she has been following the influencer for a number of years and probably watches her vlog two or three times a week. She tells me how she respects Emma Hill's style and believes she is "fashionable". Tarana tells me how she had styled an outfit the previous day that comprised of jeans, a t-shirt, and a blazer she had recently been given as a birthday gift. She explains how over the past couple of years she has been developing a style which had been influenced through watching social media. She says:

T [...] through Instagram and YouTube I had seen one person style a blazer in a formal way and in a casual way – the same blazer – and I wanted to replicate that in my own life so for my birthday I got given a blazer and I styled it in the way I thought I wanted to wear it and the way that this person had shown it on their Instagram and YouTube [...]

The quote above demonstrates how Tarana draws on her previous experiences of reading and watching fashion media to make sense of the present. She explains how her previous

experiences of watching YouTube vlogs have influenced her decision to request a blazer as a gift and offered her inspiration as to how to wear it “in a formal and in a casual way”. This comment demonstrates how social media has the potential to influence the flow of energy that traverses the fashion milieu which in turn shifts the actions and behaviour of those that participate in it.

Tarana describes how on the day in question she hadn't had a chance to check social media because she had been at work, where her mobile phone has to be put away, and so feels a sense of excitement at the anticipation of what she would find. She explains how she logs into YouTube and experiences a feeling in her body:

T: I guess it's like your heart, it sounds silly but your heart is it a bit like, oh it's, it's similar to when you open Instagram and it's like how many people have liked your photo, umm ... it's that same feeling of your heart kind of tightens and you really concentrate on putting in your password correctly, skip the emails, skip the other notifications just open up YouTube, go straight to subscriptions and just start scrolling

Tarana sees a notification that tells her Emma Hill has put up a vlog, to which she responds by using her fingers to open the post, an example of how the milieu initiates and guides her actions. She explains that Emma Hill posts frequently and that “she shows lifestyle, but she ... a big part of it is what she's bought, what she's wearing”, demonstrating Emma Hill's connection to fashion. Tarana explains how she chooses Emma Hill's vlog to watch over other posts because she knows from previous experiences that she will find it interesting. She says the vlog begins with Emma Hill in her kitchen eating breakfast with her husband. Emma Hill is wearing her 'comfie' clothes but soon leaves the shot to go and get dressed for the day. The second scene opens with Emma Hill standing in front of a full-length mirror offering Tarana a view of her apartment in the background. Emma Hill then goes through her outfit, and Tarana describes this moment:

T: They're like those cuff ones, I think Misoma one of those nice brands have been doing these cuffs, and, I think she's like on the PR list so she gets sent bits of the new collections all the time, so, and she normally wears, I think she wears the same ones, but she always tells you where everything she's wearing is from. I'm not always that interested in the earring part of things but meh, I don't like double click ahead um... so that part I'm like ok, yeah, you're still wearing the same jewellery as before – necklace she's normally wearing, she only has like 8 I think so she repeats. Umm the blazer, yeah that was real – that was like a sense of achievement that I had managed to replicate this outfit you know?

K: And that sense of achievement, how do you – how is that? How do you know you have this sense of achievement? There that day, sitting on the sofa

T: It's like feeling proud.

K: So you feel a sense of achievement, you felt proud?

T: It was like looking back on yesterday, was like 'ooo I did a good job', as I was like walking around wearing this good outfit, like if she's wearing this outfit then I have a feeling that, the feeling is that if she's wearing it and I've replicated it, I've succeeded in being fashionable – because I find her fashionable.

Tarana describes the fashion media post she encounters, which includes a description of the fashion objects she sees. However, the focus of her experience centres on how she had put together a look the previous day that closely resembled the outfit Emma Hill was wearing in the vlog. The sense she makes of the post focuses on the connection she makes between herself and Emma Hill through the fashion object. Seeing Emma Hill in a similar outfit to the one she had worn the day before awakens an echo in Tarana, a resemblance that brings with it a feeling of a sense of achievement. Tarana feels proud. She later explains how this feeling of pride transcends to a sense of happiness that she feels through her body:

T: Umm ... happiness, like when your heart feels full 'cos you've like done something good. Like the years of watching her have paid off [laughter]. Because, the thing with clothes is that you see them on like models and adverts and you think ooo that looks really nice and then you wear it and it never looks the same – well like sometimes it doesn't look the same. But watching her it's like a somewhat normal person, the fact that you've, she's like living a normal life and I've managed to replicate that and its actually worked, like I actually really liked the way my outfit came out, and the fact that it's so similar, is just, perfect. It's like a perfect scenario. There was nothing I would have changed in my outfit. And there was nothing I had, I didn't agree with in her outfit. Yeah. I guess there's like a bit of, have like a respect for her, 'cos I really enjoy her fashion, I think she has a really good idea of what works for her and she just goes with it. And the fact that I knew this would work for me and I went with it and it worked out, was also like really nice yeah...

Returning to Hoel and Carusi's conceptual tool, the measuring body, Tarana's comments above show how she uses her measuring body to measure herself against Emma Hill, through which she comes to understand that she too is fashionable. But it is a feeling that occurs through technological prostheses, mobile phone, social media and fashion. Her comment that "all the

years of watching her have paid off” demonstrates how the previous posts she has seen have influenced her styling of a similar outfit, recognition of which leads to her “heart feeling full” in the present. As she explains, she comes to feel proud. Tarana’s body schema is open to the world and becomes intertwined with Emma Hill who is at home in her apartment with her husband talking through her choice of outfit that day. Just as with Merleau-Ponty’s idea of two hands touching, where there is a mutual understanding of touched and touching, but between which there is always a space, an *écart*, there is a dynamic reversibility between Emma Hill’s and Tarana’s body schemas. The body schema is the expressive, but normative map that offers a symbolic structure for the invisible in the visible through an intercorporeal exchange. Tarana recognises Emma Hill’s style in and through her own body. Moreover, it is a style that is recognised and endorsed by the collective as being fashionable through the number of followers Emma Hill has on social media. Thus, Tarana’s comment “I’ve succeeded in being fashionable – because I find her fashionable” and that she feels she has “done something good” signals a measurement of herself against the collective. For Tarana feeling fashionable is clearly an ambition or, following Merleau-Ponty, it is one of her aims in life, that initiates and guides her actions. Tarana’s measuring body is not merely an extension of the perceiving body. It rather articulates a distributed system where her body, and technological prostheses (fashion media, mobile phone, blazer, t-shirt, trousers) are intertwined in a lived environment: the fashion milieu. The symbolic systems associated with fashion (for instance, influencers, the styling of a look, being fashionable) and technology are thus standards of measurement with potential to disrupt affective flows. As such, fashion media accessed through mobile phone technology open new dimensions of being by expanding the potential scope of actions and meaningful behaviour. But these technologies also play a coordinating role, shifting not only the body schemas of those that make up the collective, but also by influencing the social and cultural understanding felt by them: the invisible symbolic framework that underpins the fashion milieu. An example of this is that Tarana ‘likes’ the post, thereby leaving the material trace of an expression which amplifies the sense of a blazer being styled in this way by Emma Hill as fashionable.

However, I argue that the feeling of a personal connection that Tarana feels to Emma Hill is intensified because Tarana sees Emma Hill as a “somewhat normal person”, “living a normal life”. She is perceived by Tarana as a living being who shares the same capacity for perception, affect and emotion. They are ‘made of the same stuff’, an idea central to the argument I develop in Chapter 7 when I discuss how fashion media has the capacity to disrupt the transindividual relation. Tarana explains how she has followed Emma Hill for a number of

years and watches her vlog two or three times a week. Hence, as discussed in Chapter 2, Tarana's communications with Emma Hill are so frequent they provoke a sense of absent presence and social fellowship. Further, her vlog is frequently filmed in Emma Hill's home, where her husband is present, as are her dogs. Emma Hill is no longer merely an 'influencer', an anonymous individual with a functional role in society, she becomes a "normal person", "living a normal life", which amplifies a sense of personal connection Tarana experiences through watching the vlog. Tarana's encounter with Emma Hill is an intercorporeal exchange. It folds into Tarana's body schema and acts as a phase in the continuous process not only of her own becoming, but also that of the fashion milieu. Her experience, directed through the intentional arc draws on past experiences, but it also offers a structure through which Tarana can see her future. As she herself explains:

T: Just like one of those moments where, nothing can ruin that moment. Like I've been fashionable, I've succeeded in – I mean I didn't buy it, but the purchase around this gift, or even, yeah, the purchase I've made has been successful, I have a way to wear them. I also now have new adventures to have with other clothing, but within that same style of jeans and t-shirt, maybe like a different coloured t-shirt, maybe a different coloured jean, different coloured blazer, yeah – it almost, it's like so incredible, it also like opens up new possibilities. Yeah ...

Tarana's experience of measuring herself against Emma Hill through watching her vlog on her mobile phone has opened up new possibilities for her in the future. As she says, "nothing can ruin that moment", she has succeeded in being fashionable and this knowledge offers her "new adventures [...] with other clothing", an inner confidence that she explains is "like so incredible" and "opens up new possibilities". Thus, the intentional arc sedimented through fashion offers a structure in which she can foresee her future. It also shifts Tarana's experience of her relationship with Emma Hill. She explains this when she says:

T: Yeah it was more than – it changed from like someone I just watch and I like the clothes that she wears, or the shoes that she wears – it was like –I like watching her, I like the clothes that she wears and now I've, there's like a new level of connection – like I have worn something like she's worn, and it almost increases that bond a little bit more that I've had.

K: So it felt like, well you're describing that as a bond –

T: Yeah like I'm going to watch – I want to watch more of her videos.

Tarana's description demonstrates a 'fleshing out' of her connection to Emma Hill. Through measuring herself against Emma Hill, she develops a bond with her, which she notes will influence her future actions. She "wants to watch more of her videos", thus they will capture her attention in the future. This demonstrates the potential of technology to dephase the fashion milieu, a distributed system that extends beyond the perceiving body. As Hoel and Carusi's conceptual tool the measuring body shows, symbolism and tools have agency in their own right; they expand the potential scope of actions and meaningful behaviour and contain the possibility to disrupt the affective flows of those who make up the fashion milieu. Moreover, they not only shift the body schemas of the collective but also the invisible structure inherent in the visible, which, through being repeated, provides a shared cultural understanding of the world.

This section has shown how fashion media users evaluate their sense of self through an intercorporeal exchange with those they encounter through reading and watching fashion media on their mobile phone. This intercorporeal exchange informs their subjectivity and influences the invisible structures that underpin the fashion milieu. Through their encounters with fashion media, users gain a sense of being part of a collective brought together through a shared interest in fashion. Fashion offers a sense of *philia* through which they experience a feeling of affirmation.

This thesis offers a view of fashion and fashion media that current studies have been unable to see. Taking a postphenomenological approach to the study of fashion media accessed through mobile phone technology, I show how the fashion media user is situated in a milieu structured by technology and a symbolic framework associated with fashion: the fashion milieu. The fashion milieu is a nuanced spatial-perceptual environment that mediates embodied experience and cultural signification within the dynamic landscape of fashion. It is a milieu structured by the symbolic underpinning inscribed in the material traces of the expressions of others, which form an invisible framework that is instituted by social agents through the flesh of their bodies. This invisible framework brings subjects together as a collective through a shared interest and offers a sense of *philia* to those that participate. Through an analysis of the invariants of my research, the thesis reveals the characteristics fundamental to the milieu: hapticity; feeling and knowing are inextricably linked; motility; and that users undertake an intercorporeal evaluation of the self. Thus, it provides a conceptual tool that can be employed by others as a system of analysis in their own research to account for the feeling, bodily aspects of experience in studies of fashion and fashion media. I have shown how technological prostheses (fashion, fashion media, mobile phone) have the potential to influence the feelings

of fashion media users and disrupt the flow of energy through the fashion milieu which informs their future actions and behaviours. I now bring Merleau-Ponty's ideas into dialogue with Simondon, as discussed in Chapter 2, to demonstrate how technologies (fashion, fashion media, and mobile phone) have extended the fashion milieu into an online domain, namely that online and offline form a single lived reality.

Chapter 6

Offline/Online: A single lived reality

In this Chapter I focus on the human-technology-world relation by deploying and extending the thoughts of Simondon, who sees technology as integral to human becoming. I draw on Simondon's notion of ontogenesis, as discussed in Chapter 2, to demonstrate how fashion, fashion media, and mobile phone (technological prostheses aimed or directed at sociality) extend the fashion milieu into an online dimension of being.

I discuss the fifth invariant to emerge through my research, namely how ideas propagate across both offline and online domains through a process of transduction, and individuation, creating a single lived reality. Simondon's theory of transductive logic (2020 [1964, 1989]: 68-69) offers a means to explore the operative nature of individuation: how the fashion media user is more and less than a unity. I show through my empirical work how fashion media provokes a tension between the user and the fashion milieu. There is a flow of energy between different orders of magnitude that requires resolution, initiating the generation of a new structure that builds on previous structures, which dephases both the user and the fashion milieu. But importantly the dephasing of the metastable system is enabled by the technological prostheses, through fashion, fashion media and mobile phone technology.

I move on to discuss the diachronic structure of my participants' descriptions, how their experiences unfold over time. My participants explain how they turn to their phone to log into social media when they feel 'bored', 'lonely', or 'sad', which offers a sense of 'excitement' or 'anticipation'. They then describe reading or watching a fashion media post, which offers them a sense of affirmation. They do this without having to think about it, a concept discussed in the previous chapter; it happens below their conscious awareness. As such, social media accessed through a mobile phone, is a practice that has become embedded in their everyday lives, it is integral to their becoming.

I develop the idea of technology as integral to becoming through a discussion of the sixth invariant to emerge through my study – that the concretisation of fashion, fashion media, and mobile technology has synthesised with natural life to form a single dynamic system. Following Simondon, I show through my findings how there is an evolution of technical individuals (mobile phone) with digital media networks and human operators which requires an invention, a solution by human and machine. I apply this notion to consider how clothing and dress become concretised. They have become open to the associated milieu through which a material and symbolic structure forms that underpins communication across the social group

integral to the fashion milieu. Fashion has shifted from an abstract state where its function was to protect, decorate, preserve or abandon modesty towards a concrete system open to the associated milieu which acts as a means of communication aimed at sociality. I draw on Simondon's notion of a 'cycle of images', to analyse the seventh invariant to emerge through my research, namely how fashion has become dematerialised when disseminated through social media. As such, the intention of fashion media has shifted to *an emotional connection* between fashion media users who share an interest in fashion. The implications of this are that fashion has the potential to disrupt the transindividual relation, an idea fundamental to my research

6.1 Ontogenesis

As discussed in Chapter 2 Simondon challenged hylomorphic and substantialist theories (2020 [1964,1989]: 21-54) to consider the process, or genesis of all things, which he defines as 'onotogenesis'. Hylomorphism, a central doctrine of Aristotle, assumes a pre-existing principle that brings together matter and form, where substantialism emphasises the primacy of substance, or existence over consciousness, to explain social life. Simondon (2020 [1964, 1989]) argues that we must rethink individuation as a process of becoming, to be understood through the conception of the pre-individual, which acts as the grounding and source of all things (Simondon 2020 [1964,1989]: 1). Simondon explains the pre-individual as a realm of potentialities within the things of the world which offer the potential for individuation. The pre-individual is neither a 'primary entity or substance as such, but rather a *condition* of being' (Mills 2016: 35 original emphasis). However, the pre-individual is not exhausted in the process of individuation but, rather, overflows the individual, which acts as a force for future transformations. By this Simondon means the living individual retains some of the pre-individual in order to actualise itself in its relations with its associated milieu, its lived environment. The individual is therefore relational, a constituent of a metastable system constantly seeking equilibrium. He claims that the individual is more than one, it exists through its ongoing relations with a milieu in which it inhabits. Thus, the individual-milieu relation is in constant negotiation to resolve the tensions that arise through this flow of energy, which is not exhausted but acts as a force for further individuations creating a metastable system pregnant with potential. Individuation is therefore a phase in the continuous becoming of both the individual and their associated milieu. Simondon describes the tensions in the individual-milieu relations as interactive communication between disparate orders of magnitude triggered by an event that requires resolution leading to the generation of structures which act as a basis

from which other structures form. Structuration is a ‘transductive process’, whereby an activity propagates across domains, and ‘each structural region serves as a principle and model, as an initiator for constituting the following region, such that modification thereby extends progressively throughout the structuring operation’ (Simondon 2020 [1964, 1989]: 13).

6.2 Transduction

The process of transduction is evident in each of my participants’ descriptions of reading or watching fashion media on their mobile phone. An example is Liberty’s description which outlines an experience of reading a post in Instagram posted by the model Gigi Hadid. The post promotes an up-and-coming collaboration between Gigi Hadid and the brand Tommy Hilfiger. Liberty explains that she is aware from previous experience that Gigi Hadid had collaborated with the brand on earlier occasions, and how she had bought something from the last collection they designed together. She was therefore excited to learn more about the new collection as she understood from the post that it would be the last collaboration between Gigi Hadid and Hilfiger, something she felt within her body as “a feeling inside, like a little, it’s like a buzz, like a tingle”. Liberty explains that she stopped at the post, it captured her attention, because she saw Gigi Hadid’s name come up as she was scrolling through Instagram. She explains how she stopped because she “noticed her name ‘cos I’m interested in her whereas other peoples’ I wouldn’t really”. She explains how the post “enticed” her, whereby she became “really immersed in the picture” which made her feel “happy, like inspired”.

Liberty describes the post as being a photograph of a model (Gigi Hadid) standing in front of a billboard on which she also appears promoting the new collection. She says “Yeah, so it’s her, like actual her, and then model picture of her in the billboard, and the writing”. The writing on the post explains that this is Gigi Hadid’s last of four seasons collaborating with the brand and that the latest collection would be shown on television the following Sunday. Liberty explains that from reading the text she comes to realise that the collection would be presented as a catwalk show on an American television channel, but she felt sure she would be able to see it online, “even on YouTube if not”, or “she’ll (Gigi Hadid) have it up after as well, like, she’ll be posting things”. Liberty explains how she made a note to herself to look for the collection the following Sunday and that the post “kind of stayed ingrained” in her. She later expanded on this to say, “it had an effect on me”.

I employ Simondon’s idea of transduction to consider the collaboration developed by the brand Tommy Hilfiger and Gigi Hadid which transcends to a collection of clothing: the

material trace of an expression produced by the collaborators. The collection is then styled into a ‘look’ and art directed for a photograph produced to promote the collection. The casting, the styling of the look, the aesthetic of the photograph, the location and framing of the shot, hair and make-up looks, are just a few of the choices made by the team who produce the photograph from a wealth of potentialities. The development of the collection into a photograph demonstrates Simondon’s notion of transduction, where ideas transcend domains: as the material trace of an expressive act that brings together the initial ideas for a collection (a set of clothing) with the creative response of those who create the photograph of it. Thus, the original idea for the collection creates an initial structure on which the creators of the photograph build a new structure, one that can be seen by a viewer of the photograph without them needing to have an encounter with the actual collection of clothing.

The photograph is then printed as a billboard poster, which is part of an advertising campaign. The design of the campaign demonstrates a further structuration that builds on previous structures: the team responsible for the campaign and billboard design build on the structure of the fashion photograph, which as previously stated, builds on the idea of the design collaboration. The billboard is then available to those who share the vicinity, the physical location of the billboard, creating potentialities, the pre-individual ground, which creates a tension in the relation between the individual viewer of the billboard and their milieu. As Paulo de Assis (2017) in his work on musical performance explains, there is a ‘force, a signal – [...] being transmitted from one instant to the next, at light speed, without any break or loss of energy. A continuous process of differentiation [that] happen[s] and tak[es] place in front of our eyes and ears’ (2017: 696). It is a metastable horizon that creates a tension that requires resolution. Furthermore, when the viewer looks at the post ‘according to them’, they draw on their situated and embodied knowledge to make sense of what they see, their own pre-individual inherent to their becoming.²⁷ The action of making sense of the billboard dephases the metastable system in which the viewer and billboard reside.

The billboard then acts as a structure for a further structuration as Gigi Hadid takes a photograph of herself posing in front of the billboard in situ. She then posts this photograph on her Instagram account. This act builds on previous structures of the collection of clothing, then the photograph of the collection, and further the billboard as part of an advertising campaign, but this time there is a leap to a structuration that crosses the domains of offline and online

²⁷ As discussed in Chapter 5, the perceiving subject does not experience pure matter, but rather the world ‘according to them’. They see a resemblance that resonates within them through which they discover the world from their own situated perspective.

dimensions of being, between the physical and the digital domains (Feenberg 2019; Hui 2016; Nash 2016; Rantala and Muilu 2023).

6.2.1 The Physical Regime of Individuation

Simondon (2020 [1964, 1989]) states there are three regimes of individuation: physical (pp. 95-164), vital (pp. 167-264) and psychosocial (pp. 265-326). Physical individuation is the ‘organization of energy in a metastable system that leads to crystallization and subtends it’ (Simondon 2020 [1964]: 304). The collection, the photograph and the billboard, as examined above, act in much the same way as the seed in the process of crystallisation. As discussed in Chapter 2 Simondon explains the crystal is formed from a small seed, or speck of dust, introduced to a saturated aqueous solution which causes tension in a metastable system, between the interior and exterior of the seed. It is from this seed that the crystal grows in all directions, a tension between disparate forces that bring about a reorganisation of the system on which further structures emerge. I return to Andrew Feenberg’s (2019) suggestion, also outlined in Chapter 2, which argues that an online community can be compared to the speck of dust introduced in a super saturated solution that facilitates a new structure by dephasing and reorganising the associated milieu. By approaching fashion media through a postphenomenological lens, I show how Gigi Hadid’s post acts as a speck of dust that reinforces and informs an online structure by building on ideas previously established in an offline dimension of being. It is a structure underpinned by fashion, a shared understanding of objects associated with fashion such as a collection, a fashion photograph, a billboard, which provide an invisible framework that supports the fashion milieu. Moreover, the post captures Liberty’s attention, she looks at the post according to her, from her situated perspective. Liberty draws on the pre-individual, her previous experiences that are held tacitly in her body. She explains this when she says:

L: I think I saw the figure first and then I saw, what was it ... yeah and then I went behind it and there was a billboard and that’s when I saw it was Tommy Hilfiger, cos I know she’s collaborated with him before so I was kind of ... a bit, I thought that’s obviously Tommy Hilfiger.

K: So that’s obviously Tommy Hilfiger.

L: Yeah I just knew that it was him because I knew about the previous collabs because I bought something before

K: So you knew about his previous collaborations with Gigi Hadid.

L: Yeah and I love their stuff, I mean I bought something so I was really excited to see what new the collection ... like ... it's like really exciting.

K: So it's exciting, how do you know it's exciting?

L: You just feel it, like in your stomach you get like a fluttering, like is it going to be good as the last one?

Liberty's comment describes how she stops at the post because she sees Gig Hadid's name and comes to understand that the billboard is advertising a new collection. She had bought something from a previous collaboration between Hilfiger and Hadid and explains that she "loves their stuff", which creates an excitement which she becomes aware of through a "fluttering" she feels in her stomach. Liberty draws on her previous experiences offline through which she assumes she will be interested in the up-and-coming collection which she learns about in the online domain. As such, offline and online dimensions of being are a continuum of Liberty's lived reality. Melanie Chan (2020) employs a phenomenological methodology in her study of digital technology which emphasises the situated nature of the user-digital networked media relation. Her research reveals how one of her participants (an undergraduate student as is the case with my research) considers her digital self to be as important as her physical self. She goes on to say how they find 'it hard to make distinctions between [their] physical and digital self because they are so entwined' (Chan 2020: 7). I develop this idea from digital culture to show, following Simondon, that offline and online lives are indeed entwined, they are two dimensions of a single lived reality, a multi and metastable system constantly seeking equilibrium. One system is that of the fashion milieu, a lived environment supported by a symbolic framework shared by those interested in fashion.

6.3 Individuation

Through technologies (fashion, mobile phone, and digital networked media), there is an individuation between the user and the fashion media post that dephases both the individual and the associated milieu. Returning to Liberty's description above, Liberty explains Gigi Hadid's post "had an effect on her" and it offers her a sense of affirmation, a feeling of being "happy" and "inspired". Further, she is excited to see the new collection on Sunday, indicating that her reading of the post offers the potential for future participation in the fashion milieu.

But there is also a dephasing of the milieu: for example, the structures created by digital networked media become further established and through use become a practice that becomes embedded in the user's everyday life to the extent that using them is an action that happens below their conscious awareness; Liberty 'likes' the post, leaving a physical trace of an expression that articulates Gigi Hadid's success as a fashion model and design collaborator; by 'liking' the post Liberty reaffirms herself as one of a collective of 78 million followers of Gigi Hadid's account.

As stated above, Liberty's reading of the post offers her a sense of affirmation demonstrating how fashion, a technological prosthesis aimed or directed at social relations, achieves its goal. Through her reading of the post, Lucy resolves the tensions in the metastable system which she inhabits, thus, reading fashion media restores equilibrium. Liberty tells me how she had previously gone shopping with friends, but she was the only person that bought something from the Hadid-Hilfiger collaboration. She explains how the post excited her, she says, "yeah it excited me, I feel like it would be more for me than for somebody else, there was like a connection". Through her reading of fashion media, Liberty senses a connection to a collective brought together through a shared interest in fashion, which transcends to an emotional response: she feels "happy" and "inspired".

6.3.1 The Vital Regime of Individuation

In the case of the vital regime the same process of individuation applies, but the living being, unlike with a physical system, is not concentrated at its boundary with the outside world, rather it comes into being through a relation between forces internal to the organism and those exterior to it. Moreover *'the living being conserves in itself an activity of permanent individuation'* (Simondon 2020 [1964, 1989]: 205 original emphasis). By this Simondon means that the living individual comes into being through a relation between the world exterior to it and its internal processes that are constantly adapting to both its lived environment and internally to itself. But as discussed above, the living individual retains the charge of the pre-individual which lays the ground for further individuations.

Liberty's description of reading fashion media on her mobile phone demonstrates how a living organism comes into being through a relation between its exterior and internal worlds: there is an internal resonance. She draws on information from the digital domain, and her life lived offline, which creates an excitement inside her, an internal resonance which she describes as "a buzz", "a tingling", "a flutter in her stomach" that transcends to a feeling of being "happy"

and “inspired”. Moreover, this affect influences her future behaviour, as she says she makes a note to herself to look out for a video of the catwalk show on the following Sunday. There is an individuation between Liberty and the fashion milieu that spans both offline and online domains, it is a phase in their process of becoming. It is the process of individuation that brings together offline and online dimensions of being (two orders of magnitude) to form a single lived reality. This is an idea that is evident in each of my participants’ descriptions, therefore it qualifies as an invariant of my research.

In what follows I discuss the diachronic structure of my participants’ experiences of reading or watching fashion media on a mobile phone, the unfolding of their experience over time. An analysis of the diachronic structure reveals how logging into social media offers my participants a sense of excitement, an anticipation of what they might find. It appears that this sense of excitement is driven by them knowing that they are likely to find a post that will bring them a sense of affirmation. Social media accessed through their mobile phones acts as a structuration for my participants that has become embedded in their lived experience as they pick up their mobile phone to access social media without realising they are doing it, as discussed in the previous chapter. This shows how technology has the potential to dephase the metastable system. It can shift the pre-individual, a condition integral to becoming, and one that drives my participants’ actions. Through reading fashion media in the form of social media posts they are able to participate in a vaster individuation which brings equilibrium to the system they inhabit. In so doing, technology becomes integral to the process of their becoming.

Diachronic Structure

6.4.1 Phase One: Disconnection

An analysis of the diachronic structure of reading or watching fashion media on a mobile phone reveals a three-phase structure: first, a feeling of a *void*, which drives my participants to pick up their mobile phone and log into social media, which they describe brings with it a feeling of *excitement* in the second phase, followed by the third phase of a feeling of *affirmation* after reading or watching a fashion media post.

I draw on Lucy’s description of reading fashion media on her mobile phone to discuss the first phase in the diachronic structure, that is, how she feels a void in her life offline. Lucy describes being at home in bed in the morning. She has just sent a message to someone on her phone and is waiting for them to respond. She explains this moment as one where there is nothing going on. We discuss this and she says:

L: I suppose it's ... I'm not looking at anything, there's nothing going on in my head and I can't see anything to entertain myself so I've gone looking for something, there's just a nothing.

K: So, there's nothing? Can you describe that?

L: Hmm ... well ... it's like ... a kind of like ... it's an empty feeling.

K: An empty feeling.

L: Yeah, like it's hard to describe, but like inside you just feel nothing, like empty.

Lucy's description reveals how she experiences an "empty feeling"; it is a feeling she describes as something inside her. To account for this void, I employ Simondon's thoughts on the psychosocial regime of individuation.

6.4.1.1 The Psychosocial Regime of Individuation

As discussed above, Simondon introduces the notion of individuation, and I outlined his concept of physical and vital regimes. In what follows I review the final regime of individuation, that of the psychosocial. As previously explained, physical structures reside in a metastable system that is concentrated at the boundary of the object with the world exterior to it, a system which, through a process of individuation, constantly seeks equilibrium. In the case of vital structures, the same process of individuation applies, but the living individual comes into being through a transductive relation between the world exterior to it and its internal processes. Here, there is a dephasing of the system, both of the exterior world, and the internal process of the individual, which are constantly adapting to the tensions that arise through their relation. The final regime of individuation relates to the *psychological domain*, the domain in which perception occurs (Simondon 2020 [1964, 1989]:259).²⁸

As Simondon explains, '[t]he subject perceives in such a way as to be oriented relative to a world' (2020 [1964, 1989]: 269). In this way, he suggests, perception is an act that organises wholes, it is not a mere grasping of data, but rather the mediation between quality and quantity of information, 'the organization of intensities in the relation of the world to the subject'(ibid.). Hence, the psyche is neither pure interiority or pure exteriority, but rather a

²⁸ For an account of Simondon's history of the notion of the individual see Simondon, G. (2020 [1964, 1989]) *Individuation in Light of Notions of Form and Information Vol II: supplementary texts*, pp. 435-652.

process, or operation, of ongoing differentiation and integration of subject and its associated milieu. He states: '[t]he individual individuates insofar as it perceives beings, constitutes an individuation through action or through productive construction, and belongs to the system that includes its individual reality and the objects it perceives and constitutes' (2020 [1964, 1989]: 272). For Simondon, consciousness links the individual to both itself and the world. He explains that at the limit between consciousness and the unconscious there is the layer of the subconscious which 'is essentially affectivity and emotivity' (2020 [1964, 189]: 273). Thus, an analysis of psychical individuality should include a consideration of affect and emotion, particularly when looking at how individuals come together to form social groups, a concept fundamental to my research, as collectives are formed at the level of affective-emotive themes.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Simondon conceptualises affect in terms of the pre-individual, the potential inherent to the individual that exceeds it. He defines this as the 'affective problematic', by which he means the individual understands that they are more and less than a unity (2020 [1968, 1989]: 279). Feelings are vectors that transform what is 'there' to what is 'here' (Whitehead 1978: 87) as affect is the transductive force that drives becoming (Manning 2010: 122). It is the liaison between the relation of the individual to itself, and also the world. For Simondon, affect is metastable; it emerges from the pre-individual and requires a social dimension to individuate. To be clear, the individual is not a synthesis of itself and its milieu, but instead comes into being through a transductive operation, whereby perception transcends to action and affect transcends to emotion simultaneously to form a new order. It is affect that drives individuals to seek out others and it is emotion itself that incorporates the individual into the collective within which each member comes to sense a feeling of belonging to collective life that offers them a sense of affirmation.

I argue that the void, the emptiness that Lucy describes, is a result of her feeling emotionally disconnected from the collective and the world, to which she responds by logging into social media. Lucy, whilst alone at home, is unable to redistribute the pre-individual through a social dimension, and as such, she experiences a void, an empty feeling. Through her previous experiences Lucy comes to know that she will find something, or I argue, 'someone' to connect with in Instagram which will resolve the empty feeling she experiences offline. We discussed this:

K: That's when you say, I'm going to entertain myself, I'm going to go to the Instagram home page and that's your next step. And you get to that Instagram homepage and you open it up and then you see the stories across the top. [L: yeah] so you've gone from that waiting, or that nothing moment, you've seen the

stories and then Sophie's profile, the photo you took, you describe that you know she likes art, she likes things you like. You describe that as ...

L: Just a curiosity I suppose, it's usually just a habit to click on things, but if I actually read it and whose profiles they are there's obviously some that I'm going to be more interested in than others. I was interested to see what she'd done because they just tend to put brief updates on their stories not like big events that they would actually make a post out of, yeah just clicked on it to see what she was doing and then she wasn't doing anything it was the repost of that dress.

Lucy makes clear that 'clicking on' social media posts on particular social media accounts is a habit, it is something she does without thinking about it. She explains that she was "interested to see what she'd done" (i.e., her friend Sophie, a model working in the fashion industry) and so looked at her Instagram Story, an action driven by the void she feels inside herself at being emotionally disconnected from the social world.

Veronika describes experiencing a similar feeling whilst she is sitting in the canteen in college with a friend. They have eaten lunch and are having a conversation when her friend picks up her phone to look at a message that she has just received. Veronica describes "feeling weird" in this moment. We discuss this further and she says:

K: So the moment before you pick up your phone, if you don't mind, can we go back to that moment [V laughs] she's on her phone on your left, can you describe that moment where you say it feels a bit weird.

V: Like doing nothing, like with my hands.

K: Yeah, so, you're doing nothing with your hands and it feels a bit weird.

V: Yeah like umm, I, hmm ... [pause] yeah like, it's just, I could – I have two choices, I could talk but then when she's answering her messages I don't really want to talk because then I feel like I'm disturbing her while she's writing to somebody that texted her right now, so umm ... I wanted to give her the time to answer the messages, umm – I also have, I also feel like I'm here on my own whilst she's busy, so ... like, I could also check if I got any messages as well, so maybe yeah.

K: So you're sitting there and you see her on her phone, and you say it feels weird, [V: yeah] that weird feeling ... how do you know you feel weird?

V: Well no it's not like weird, like that I notice, like 'oh I feel weird' [spoken in a different voice][laughs], it's just that umm, when there's like this space where – I'm like, I don't really want to think about my uni stuff right now and I don't really – I'm not listening to music because she's here, so umm [pause] I feel like I'm doing nothing right now but, I don't want to do nothing ... and

like ... This weird is more like umm, even if I don't want to go on my phone right now, or if ... it's just like [pause] it's like because she's doing it I kind of want to do it as well, and that's why I feel weird maybe [laughs a little].

K: It's that you want to do it as well. If you don't mind, with your permission can we go back to that moment once more? You're sitting in that canteen and she's sitting there to your left and she picks her phone up, and you describe this weird feeling, it's a weird moment that seems difficult to describe? You describe how you look to your left and she's on her phone, you say you're not listening to music because you're in company and you're not going to talk because your friend is on her phone, so you're sitting there and you say it feels weird [V: yeah exactly].

V: It's tricky to say [laughs] like err, I think it's the need to just do something with my hands, and the weird – it's, I don't want to sit there and just like look at her when she's finished, so, I want to do something as well, I mean I don't want to just sit there, I might as well see what everyone's been up to.

Veronica comments that in this moment she has “nothing to do with her hands”, which feels weird, but she goes on to say that she doesn't want to “disturb” her friend whilst she is sending a message, by talking to her. However, she then comments that it feels “like I'm here on my own whilst she's busy”, which suggests her friend has experientially left the physical space for an online dimension of being, as discussed in Chapter 3. Veronika responds to this feeling, as she says, by picking up her mobile phone to “check if I got any messages as well”. Her description makes evident that she does not want to fill this space with her own thoughts, such as her university work, whilst she waits for her friend to return from her encounter in an online dimension of being and to become fully present in their physical location. Veronika “feels weird” because she “doesn't want to do nothing”, as she says, even if she doesn't want to use her mobile phone in this moment, she does so because her friend is doing it, she “might as well see what everyone's been up to”. This conversation makes evident that Veronika feels alone despite her friend being with her in the canteen at college, which resonates with Turkle's notion of being ‘alone together’ (2012). Feeling alone, despite being with her friend and others who share the same physical location, creates what she describes as “a space”, a void, which makes Veronika feel weird. It is a void that occurs through Veronika realising that she is not able to redistribute the pre-individual, and as such she feels emotionally detached from the collective. She responds by picking up her mobile phone “to see what everyone's been up to”. She is aware through her previous experiences that social media offers her the potential to connect with others who share the same interests and thus contains potential for her to experience an

emotional connection to the collective which will fill the space – the void – she feels at being alone.

Lucy, in her focus group reiterates the idea that she turns to her mobile phone when she feels bored, or unoccupied. She explains how if she is busy, she doesn't look at her phone, it is only when she has "nothing to do" that she picks it up, she says:

L: I think it depends because, I know if I wake up and I'm in a rush or I've got something to do that day, like I'm at a shoot or something, if I'm busy all day I won't look at my phone, but if I have nothing to do and I'm bored I will sit there mindlessly for hours on it because I've got nothing else to do, but if I've got things to do and I'm out and seeing people I won't touch it [...]

If Lucy is busy or "out seeing people" there is potential for her to redistribute the pre-individual she carries inside her. However, the relation must affect her before it can transcend to an emotional connection that will incorporate her into the collective and offer her a sense of belonging. When she is bored and alone, this isn't possible and so she turns to her mobile phone to access social media.

Shinkle (2023) discusses the notion of boredom in relation to fashion photographs. She explains how boredom 'cannot be understood apart from the affective and cognitive states of dissatisfaction and emptiness – states that are also characteristic of desire itself' (2023:272). Boredom, Shinkle argues, is a modern condition, a response to increasingly mechanised lifestyles, standardised existence and the burden of unfilled time. As she says '[d]efinitions of boredom are also linked to the void that is left behind when traditionally meaningful aspects of life disappear' (2023: 273). I build on this idea through Simondon's notion of individuation and the pre-individual as discussed above to account for the void my participants describe. As Shinkle explains, fashion, as a mode of self-expression (Lipovetsky 1994), alleviates boredom, but at the same time can sometimes rely on the subject being bored, of experiencing existential emptiness. This comment makes clear how fashion offers an opportunity for expression. It is an expression that manifests in a material trace that acts as a means of communication and thus offers the potential for redistribution of the pre-individual. However, when my participants feel emotionally connected to the social world, the need to redistribute the pre-individual diminishes. As Shinkle explains '[w]e're accustomed to thinking of desire as the affective engine that drives the economy of fashion. But boredom, too, has a vital role to play; (2023: 274). It is boredom, an empty feeling, or a feeling of being alone, that creates a void that drives individuals to seek out others who share their interest in fashion, which in turn offers them a

sense of *philia*, of belonging to the fashion milieu. As such, they describe the moment of logging into social media as ‘exciting’.

6.4.2 Phase Two: Excitement

Having picked up their mobile phone to resolve a feeling of a void offline my participants describe logging into social media which brings them a sense of ‘excitement’, ‘curiosity’, or ‘anticipation’ at what they might find. This feeling manifests as an affect they feel in their body. I now turn to Hannah’s account which describes how her friend from college, with whom she shares a flat, has gone home for a few days and so she is unusually alone and feeling bored. She takes a call from her mum and when the call is finished, she logs on to Instagram. She describes Instagram as a “go to” in this situation which evokes a sense of anticipation. Hannah describes the feeling of anticipation as “exciting”, something she feels as a tingling, she explains,

H: You get like a tingling, like, yeah a nice feeling of like, what are you going to see?

The excitement Hannah feels at the anticipation of what, or I would argue, whom, she may encounter on social media, is something she feels in her body.

A shift in feeling was also evident in Wiktoria’s description of reading fashion media. She begins by explaining how she felt “bored” at home in the early evening, and having spent the day at work feels tired, but says that it is too early to go to sleep. She explains how she mindlessly logs on to Instagram but whilst scrolling through her feed she doesn’t see anything that interests her, which suggests she does not come across a post that affects her and thus captures her attention. Wiktoria gestures that this brings about a feeling in her chest and her head which she says feels

W: like a kind of internal resistance [...] Like if there was a wheel and it got stuck in something and you just can’t, it just doesn’t go smoothly, you just need something different, something to happen.

Wiktoria’s description of feeling “an internal resistance”, “a wheel that has got stuck” makes evident a tension that exists in the individual-milieu relation which requires resolution. Wiktoria responds to this feeling by logging into Instagram Stories, which she describes as

W: [...] the little terrible thing I'm trying to avoid but if I did watch it that means I was probably really tired and I just needed a brain wash and wasn't satisfied by what I'm seeing on my feed so I thought, okay, let's see what's on Insta-Stories.

Logging in to Instagram Stories brings Wiktoría a “wave of excitement”, she describes a shift in feeling from being “bored”, or “stuck”, to an uplifting feeling. We discuss this,

W: It gives a fresh wave of something to get my brain around, like, I don't know, not compare not relate, just something that I could think about in a way, just a little wave of not really happiness, kind of excitement just something [breaths] it's hard to explain, I don't even know how I'm feeling, it's just something that engages me and changes my feeling to something different, takes me to another place that I can then go from.

K: Well then let's move on, can we discuss your description of excitement you said you needed something to change?

W: Yes and that change is ... it just like lifts up the thing I would say like in my head when I'm bored or something, it's like there's some weight on my brain if it makes sense and kind of like gives a bit of fresh air and lifts it up, if what I'm saying makes sense [K: yeah thank you] if I'm thinking about this it just gives a [deep exhaling sounds] okay another wave of something exciting, like an energy shift.

Wiktoría's description makes explicit how logging into Instagram Stories brings about “an energy shift” in the metastable system which she inhabits, from feeling bored, or stuck, to one of excitement. As she says, logging into Instagram Stories offers her a “bit of fresh air” that “lifts her up”. There is a shift in the energy that flows between her and the fashion milieu. Through her previous experience of Instagram Stories, Wiktoría anticipates that she will find something that will “engage” her and “change her feeling to something different”, it will “take [her] to another place”. It is a place that offers her potential to redistribute the pre-individual and experience an emotional connection to a social world which will offer her a sense of affirmation. But it is a feeling that is “hard to explain”, because it happens below her conscious awareness. Wiktoría anticipates that Instagram Stories will offer a solution to the tension between the pre-individual inherent to her and the potential in the fashion milieu, a concept discussed in Chapter 3.

6.4.3 Phase Three: Affirmation

Each of my participants describe reading or watching a fashion media post, actions which bring them a sense of affirmation. As discussed in the previous chapter, Tarana comes to feel proud, which makes her feel happy at styling a similar look to an influencer she admires and understands as being fashionable. In the last chapter I also explored Wiktorija's account of reading fashion media, which reveals how she comes to feel motivated to move her career forward, having seen that her peer's photograph has successfully made it to the front cover of a magazine. She comes to understand that she also has the potential for her work to be published through her encounter with fashion media. Elle likewise describes a feeling of being motivated, or inspired, by an Instagram post she reads that has been posted by an influencer who works for the fast fashion brand ASOS. She describes being at home feeling "bored", to which she responds by picking up her mobile phone. She logs on to Instagram and starts watching a video put up by the ASOS influencer, but there are glitches with the video which make her "agitated", which leads to her feeling "angry". As discussed in Chapter 2, Serres (2015 [2012]: 5) claims that digital natives, those who have grown up with mobile phones and digital networked media, have lost the faculty of attention, a concept central to the concerns of my research. Elle and I discuss her frustration, and she says:

E: It's just like, while I was on this video I was getting angry because I wasn't getting to what I wanted, I wasn't getting to the end thing, it was just taking too much energy and then as soon as I accidentally click through, I see like her colours and her palette and it was like, oh this is actually really nice and then I stopped thinking about being agitated and bored, like it distracted me, like making me think about what was on there.

K: So you said earlier it was a moment, a shift from agitation to [E: relaxation] relaxation and you said you liked it – how do you – you describe that you liked it, a description of that moment is you liked it, how do you know that you liked it?

E: I think it's because I felt that relief of, I don't feel aggravated anymore, so like this is going to entertain me and I'm going to enjoy it.

K: Can you say any more about that feeling of relief?

E: Just like ... kind of, like, a feeling inside, it's difficult to describe, makes me exhale, I just know that I'm going to enjoy it.

This conversation makes clear how Elle is frustrated because she “wasn’t getting to what [she] wanted”, looking at the video was “taking too much energy” – evidence of the limits of her attention span. She goes on to describe the shift in feeling from agitation to one of relief which she feels through her body and describes as an exhalation. Elle clicks through to the influencer’s account and finds a post that captures her attention, whereby she describes being fully immersed in the moment; the post distracts her, she no longer feels bored, she knows from a “feeling inside” that she will enjoy it. After looking at two further posts on the ASOS influencer’s account Elle goes on to say how the post “freed up her creativity”. She was inspired by seeing how the influencer had put together a look which made her want to try on her own clothes. She explains:

E: I think it’s something like freed up my creativity, or it’s given me something to think about that’s not like I said, work, or anything like that, it’s like, oh I like the look of this maybe, I could do this with what I’ve already got, and it makes me want to go and try my clothes on, it makes me want to do something else.

K: So, you can put together the look with clothes you already have, and it makes you want to try on your own clothes.

E: Yeah, I remember feeling – I can do that!

Elle’s experience reveals that social media offers her a distraction. She no longer has to think about “work, or anything like that”, which suggests she does not have to manage her own thoughts as she has a distraction available to her: she is able to draw on the potential inherent in social media to connect with others who participate. The pre-individual in the metastable system in which she resides acts as a force that drives a further individuation. Elle draws on information in the digital domain which affects her. It is an affect that transcends to her feeling inspired to try styling the same look with clothes she already owns. Moreover, through her encounter with fashion media, she comes to believe that she “can do that!”. There is an individuation between Elle and fashion media, a transduction of energy between two orders of magnitude which brings her a sense of affirmation. In each of my participants’ descriptions, the sense of affirmation they describe relates to them feeling connected to the fashion milieu, which resolves the tensions created by the pre-individual. It is a resolution achieved through an emotional connection to the fashion milieu, a collective brought together through a shared interest in fashion that offers them a sense of *philia*. However, they achieve this connection through technology: fashion, fashion media, and mobile phone, technologies aimed or directed at sociality that have become concretised to form a single dynamic system. As Simondon (2017

[1958]: 159-163) states, technologies are elements that fit together and function along with other objects and humans in a dynamic relation with the associated milieu in which they are situated. Thus, they are not external to being but rather integral to the process of becoming.

6.5 Concretisation

In Chapter 3 I gave an outline of Simondon's philosophy of technology, which included a review of his concept of concretisation along with secondary literature that has employed this theory to consider the bringing together of physical and digital domains: two orders of magnitude. I now employ this idea to consider how fashion has become synthesised with mobile phone technology and digital networked media to form a single dynamic system. This is a system that spans both offline and online dimensions of a single lived reality.

Technical objects are often defined as material devices that have value according to their use. Simondon's (2017 [1958]) notion of mechanology challenges this idea and sets out instead to forge a synthesis of forms that brings together natural life and technology. Central to Simondon's argument is that technical objects are the consequence of development and evolution (2017 [1958] 26-51-22). He explains how each individual constitutes an ensemble of elements that together form a body, a system that has an internal cohesion and comes into being through its relation, or exchange of energy, with its milieu. In Chapter 3, I outlined Simondon's analysis of technical objects such as an engine, to explain how technologies also move through a process of individuation, from an abstract state to one of concretisation. In the case of abstract technologies, an example is a tool such as a hammer. Here elements work in isolation and require human action. Whereas in a concretised technology the elements are indivisible and function as part of a whole, a single system differs since there is internal cohesion between elements such that the necessity of human participation is reduced. Simondon's term 'concretisation' does not therefore follow the common usage of the term 'concrete', as making an object appear more 'real', or 'tangible', but rather relates to the evolution of technological artefacts over time.

Following a phenomenological tradition Simondon specifically looks to 'the things themselves'. By this I mean he is interested in how the elements that make up a technology evolve through an iterative process, moving from technical elements (discrete tools), to technical individuals (machines that support the functioning of their own inner structure and incorporate the external milieu in this functioning), through to ensembles (such as information or communication technologies, including digital media networks, or transport infrastructures

that act as networks). Simondon maintains that the iterative process involves an invention ‘that provides a wave of condensation, of concretizations that simplify the object by loading each structure with a plurality of functions’ (Simondon 2017 [1958]: 171). Technological invention assembles disparate parts into a coherent system (Chabot 2003 [1988]: 14), whereby the technical object is simplified by allocating a multitude of roles to the elements that constitute it.

The notion of invention is evident in Simondon’s thinking of the living being, whom he claims, can solve the problems they encounter by modulating their internal structures through anticipation of a potential solution (2020 [1964, 1989]: 167-256), thus they act as well as being acted upon. However, he also understands the individuation of a technical object (an invention) as a response to a technical problem, one that requires a solution by human and machine. For Simondon there is not a single inventor of a technical object, but rather a succession of inventors that communicate through existing technical objects: a coupling of the inventor, the technical object and its associated milieu. Where an abstract technological object is ‘closed’ the concrete technological object is more ‘open’. As such, the object can interact with its environment, which Simondon defines as its ‘associated milieu’. For Simondon the individualisation of technical beings is the condition of technical progress. Moreover, he maintains that individualisation occurs in a simultaneously technical and natural milieu. It is the associated milieu that mediates the human-technology-world relation in a continuous process of becoming (Simondon 2017 [1958]: 59).

Following Simondon, the fashion milieu is a human-technology-world relation that is simultaneously technical; it is made of technologies. Returning to Liberty’s example above, it includes collections, fashion photographs, social media posts, billboards, mobile phone; but also encompasses natural elements, as Liberty, Gigi Hadid, and her 78 million followers are constituents of the same single dynamic system. Simondon notes how as a technological object moves to a concrete state it becomes more autonomous relying less on additional parts, which Simondon states, could be considered as a kind of process of naturalisation, for concrete technical objects ‘prove the viability and stability of a certain structure that has the same status as a natural structure, even if it might be schematically different from all natural structures’ (2017 [1958]: 50).

Yet not all iterations of technical objects can be understood as a move to concretisation. For concretisation to occur, the technological object must reduce the number of component parts and assign existing elements additional functions, and it must become more autonomous, ‘effectively “offloading” the burden of functions to its environment’ (Iliadis 2015:88). In this

sense it does not merely preserve older functions but, through invention, creates new ones. However, it is important to note that a concretised technological object can never be fully natural; by this I mean Simondon makes a distinction between natural and technical objects, whilst understanding them both as being integral to the process of their mutual becoming.

6.6 Concretisation of Mobile Phone, Digital Networks and Fashion

This thesis aims to review the role technology plays in the human-technology-world relation, which in my research looks specifically at the fashion media user-fashion media-world relation. My research therefore encompasses a review of *mobile phone* technology through which fashion media is accessed; *digital networked media* through which social media posts circulate; and *fashion*, which I argue are all technological prostheses aimed or directed at social relations. I now move on to discuss each of these in relation to Simondon's notion of concretisation as outlined above, and then to demonstrate how they have been synthesised into a single dynamic system that spans both offline and online dimensions of being.

6.6.1 Mobile Phone Technology

Adrian Mackenzie (2002) points out the difficulty of reviewing the technicity of concrete technological objects as they are 'weighed down by their context' (2002:12). In this sense the mobile phone, due to its 'physical portability and miniaturization comes at the cost of an increased ramification and layering of communication infrastructure' (ibid.). By this Mackenzie infers that the mobile phone has become concretised to the extent that it is difficult to analyse the user's relation to their mobile phone in isolation from the communication structures, such as social media, that it opens up to users. As discussed in Chapter 2, the mobile phone has evolved from a communication device to an expressive multimedia tool (Hjorth 2012) whereby the device itself has become smaller and simpler to use as its functioning has been offloaded to its associated milieu. An example is how it offers access to digital networks which users connect with through Apps which provide an abundance of functions that provide a source for new technological possibilities. As such, the mobile phone is open, it has the potential to interact with its associated milieu. As Michel Serres (2015 [2012]) states, '[w]ith their cell phone, [his students] have access to all people, with GPS, to all places; with the Internet to all knowledge' (2015: 9). Thus, the mobile phone in its concrete state has the potential to disrupt the individual, the technical object, and the associated milieu creating a new

order. Emily, Liberty and Hannah, in their focus group, discuss an example of this dephasing of the system and the creation of a new order when they describe how when they meet someone offline who they want to keep in contact with, they ask for “their Insta” (meaning the name of their Instagram account) rather than their phone number. They explain:

H: Yeah it just comes out like, ‘what’s your name, what’s your Insta?’ [all agree]

E: Yeah you don’t say, ‘what’s your number?’ anymore.

K: O.K.

L: Yeah in the end they like direct message me.

E: Yeah, it’s not about numbers.

L: I’d say that, and then like you follow them back and then you’re connected.

These comments demonstrate how the function of the mobile phone (of having a phone number) has been offloaded to the external milieu (to social media). Furthermore, in discussing their experience of using their mobile phone, Wiktorina and Lucy disclose how accessing Instagram through their mobile devices has become so embedded in their lives, and that of their peers, that they wouldn’t trust someone who didn’t have an Instagram account. They discuss this:

W: Yeah it’s, I mean it’s how you know what everyone’s doing, I wouldn’t trust anyone who didn’t have Instagram [laughs].

L: Well everyone’s got it, it’s the way you communicate nowadays.

W: Yeah I don’t think I’ve met anyone our age who hasn’t got an Instagram account.

L: No I don’t know anyone, it kind of ... like, well you have to have it to know what’s happening especially in fashion.

This conversation shows how the mobile phone and the access it offers to Instagram have become inextricably intertwined and embedded within the social practices of my participants, especially for those interested in fashion. As discussed above, Simondon states that concrete technical objects prove the viability and stability of a certain structure, in a similar way to a natural structure despite schematical differences (2017 [1958]: 50). The mobile phone offers

stability to users in that it is a technological object that proves the viability of a new structuration (an online dimension of being) that is open to its milieu and relies on the function of digital networks external to it. Thus, digital media networks and mobile technology are an integral element of the associated milieu in which they are situated and through which the mobile phone is concretised. However, it is fashion, which by its very nature is ever-changing, that acts as the glue that brings the social group together. It is a technology aimed at sociality which, through a process of transduction, transcends across both the digital and physical dimensions of a single lived reality. Lucy's comment "well, you have to have it [Instagram read or watched on a mobile phone] to know what's happening especially in fashion" reveals how the concretisation of technology (mobile phone, digital networked media, and fashion), dephase the metastable system creating a new order. But we must not forget that fashion media read or watched in the form of social media posts are digital objects that are encountered by users who reside in the physical world: there is a coming together of two orders of magnitude. Furthermore, they are digital objects that flow through an expanse of digital networks, two concepts I now move on to explore.

6.6.2 Digital Networked Media

Jorge William Montoya (2019) explains that digital objects are made up from binary code that separates them from analogue objects. The user cannot make sense of the digital object without there being a concretisation of technology, '[i]cons, apps, images, videos, sounds, and digital objects, in general terms, are made possible by data, hardware performance, and by the linking of information into networks' (2019: 719). However, he states that what transpires in this interaction is a new evolutionary path, one with the capacity to translate the binary code that constitutes the digital object. Hence, the user makes sense of the binary code when it has been translated into a form in which they can read it, for example, as a fashion media post.

This thesis investigates the relation between my participants as users of fashion media and the digital objects they encounter through social media. As discussed in Chapter 2, Yuk Hui (2015) interrogates the existence of digital objects which he states 'are materialized forms of both *sensitive* and *noetic* data in structural forms' (2015: 4 original emphasis). However, he explains that since 1946 'data' has come to mean something different to the Latin root, *datum*, meaning 'a [thing] given' to rather encompass a further meaning that being 'transmittable and storable computer information' (ibid.). This shift in meaning, he claims, requires a rethinking

of digital objects as purely sense or noetic data as their translation into material form constitutes a new givenness of the object. Hui defines objects as the conceptualisation or structure of data. He offers the example of a chair, which has four legs, is made of wood and whose intention is something to sit on: this being the identity of the object. Whereas digital objects, employing Simondon's notion of individuation, evolve from a lineage of standardised code and web ontologies, which move from abstract technologies to concrete systems that operate across a complex configuration of overlapping networks. Hui claims that digital objects such as a Facebook post or YouTube video are made up of a huge amount of metadata that define their functioning, their relation to other objects, to users, and the backend programme which remains invisible. It is here that Hui draws on the thoughts of Tim Berners-Lee, the inventor of the World Wide Web, who outlines his vision for the Web as,

In the first part, the Web becomes a much more powerful means for collaboration between people. I have always imagined the information space as something to which everyone has immediate and intuitive access, and not just to browse, but to create. [...] Furthermore, the dream of people-to-people communication through shared knowledge must be possible for groups of all sizes, interacting electronically with as much ease as they do now in person.

In the second part of the dream, collaborations extend to computers. Machines become capable of analyzing all the data on the Web – the content, links, and transactions between people and computers. [...] the intelligent “agents” people have touted for ages will finally materialize. This machine-understandable Web will come about through the implementation of a series of technical advancements and social agreements that are now beginning [...]

(Berners-Lee 2000: 157 in Hui 2015: 6)

Hui explains how digital objects play a role in information processing, whereby intelligent agents, as discussed in Berners-Lee's dream for the Web, have the potential to analyse data and create relations between the participants in the network through the use of algorithms (Nash 2016, O'Hara 2019). As the network moves from an abstract to a concretised state it becomes more autonomous in its encounters with users who develop relations through shared knowledge. However, the algorithms central to the functioning of social media in becoming autonomous perform complex decision making that feeds into, and informs, human cognition below the conscious awareness of the perceiving subject (Hayles 2012, 2017), an idea discussed in Chapter 3. This is evident in my research as my participants describe picking up their mobile phones to access social media without thinking about it, whereby there is a shift in the flow of

energy across the system, from them feeling a void, to becoming excited, and finally to feeling a sense of affirmation: there is equilibrium in the multi and metastable system which my participants inhabit. However, the dephasing of the system generates new *relations* between users and data objects that are *not real*, and following Hui, these are relations generated by technological prostheses. The potential inherent in the concretisation of mobile phone technology and digital networked media accessed through social media platforms collapses time and space. However, this restructuring has implications as social media contains the potential to disrupt the transindividual relation. This is an idea central to the concerns of my research which I develop in the next chapter of this thesis.

Networks, for Simondon, are the highest stage of the development of technicity, and it is through them that the world becomes technicised. He cites the example of a city made up of overlapping networks including telephone systems, the electrical grid, and transport and sewage systems where humans act on terminals inherent in the synthesised dynamic system. When a system becomes ubiquitous to the extent that it becomes normalised, then the actions of the individuals it encompasses become embedded within the structure. Thus, the user of a terminal adapts to the operations of the network which become normative, as is the case with mobile technologies that act as a terminal to access digital networked media. As Simondon explains, someone can repair a tool, but they cannot change the network because it is not constructed by them alone. As such the individual merely connects to a network. They can ‘adapt to it, [and] participate in it; the network dominates and frames [*enserre*] the action of the individual, it even dominates each technical ensemble’ (Simondon 2017 [1958]: 229).

Users may, through practice and knowledge, game the algorithm, although this was not evident in my research, but they are unable to change the functioning of digital networked media. This is significant as the flow of energy through digital networks contains potential to shift the users’ feelings – their internal resonance with their associated milieu – from a feeling of void, an emptiness, through to a sense of affirmation.

The concretisation of mobile phone technology and digital networked media amplifies the sense of a personal connection between the user and fashion media. It is a sense of personal connection that increases the potential for an affective exchange that transcends to an emotional connection. Moreover, it is an emotional connection which incorporates them into a collective thus transforming the ways that emotionally connected communities are formed. However, fashion media users are not able to adopt the technological prosthesis because they have little to no control over its functions; they therefore become *users* of the network; they merely adapt to it and participate in it. As such, digital networked media initiates their actions; it dominates

and frames their behaviour and that of the technical ensemble. Viana explains how: ‘when technical networks evolve, they generate a world for themselves, in which the intrinsic possibilities of physical reality (i.e. nature), of psychosocial configurations, and of technical objects and ensembles all function under the same operational logic: they *transduce* together’ (2015: 39 original emphasis) to form a single dynamic system, as is the case with the fashion milieu.

6.6.3 Fashion

Having considered the concretisation of mobile phone technology and that of digital networked media, I now look at the concretisation of fashion, which I understand as a technology generative of a particular sociality – namely of connecting with others who share an interest in fashion, but through a network that is a constituent of the associated milieu of which they have little control. In the introduction to this thesis, I outlined my position that fashion is more than merely clothing or dress; it is rather an embodied process of negotiation with the social world. Fashion involves *becoming* collectively with others which offers a sense of *philia*.

As discussed above, Simondon maintains that technical ensembles are networks of open machines that ‘exchange information with one another via the intermediary of the coordinator that is the human interpreter’ (Simondon 2017 [1958]: 18). Clothing and dress are a technology which, through a process of transduction, form a new structuration that comes to exist in a network, namely that of fashion, a durational and symbolic structure that underpins collective life. As discussed in Chapter 3, fashion has been conceived as a means of communication (Barnard 2020; Davis 2020; Simmel 2020 [1904]), an idea integral to the proposition that fashion acts a ‘technology of the self’ (Nixon 1997; Rocamora 2011). I concur with the idea that fashion acts as a form of communication supported by a symbolic structure that contains the potential for the individual to fit into a collective with others who share an interest in fashion. However, as outlined in Chapter 1, I seek to account for the feelings of fashion media users, namely how they experience fashion media through their body, an idea that has largely been absent in studies of fashion media. In Chapter 4 I employed Merleau-Ponty to introduce my concept, the fashion milieu. I now develop this concept by drawing on Simondon to explain how the concretisation of technology, in progressing from clothing and dress, to fashion, operates across both the offline and online domains. Fashion is a structure that builds on previous structures to form a new order which emerges through invention.

6.7 Simondon's Theory of Invention

As discussed above, Simondon claims that invention requires a type of vision that can foresee a state that does not yet exist, but which can resolve a tension between the incompatibilities in the functioning of the constituents of the system. He believes that invention is made possible because humans are temporal beings. By this he means that they can imagine finalities and take action accordingly. Drawing on cybernetics, Simondon claims that '[t]he place man has in society thereby becomes a relation between an element of activity and an element of passivity, as a mixed status always liable to being taken up again and improved' (2017 [1958]: 120). Invention is therefore more than simply a creative force, but rather a process of circular causality, a relation between material and creative forces, whereby each step in solving a problem serves to condition the problem in hand through 'feedback effects between the materials and the milieu' (Voss 2019: 289).

Simondon, like Merleau-Ponty, draws on Gestalt psychology to employ the notion of form and ground (2017 [1958]: 62). Here form is drawn from a ground of potentiality, the pre-individual, which initiates and guides the actions of individuals in the milieu. In his later lecture course *Imagination and Inventions* (1965-66), published posthumously and translated into English in 2022, Simondon sets out to specifically analyse invention. He develops a theory of the 'image' that draws on the concept of the body schema from phenomenology, as discussed in the previous chapter, and the symbolic function integral to structuralism discussed in Chapter 2. He brings these ideas together with his earlier thesis drawn from thermodynamics, where dynamic systems that contain energy are in constant negotiation with their associated milieu. Simondon's concept of the image refers not only to mental images but also image-objects that leave a material trace, such as is the case with fashion media posts, which evolve in what Simondon defines as a 'cycle of images' (2022 [2008]).

The cycle begins with 'primitive images', a concept that describes images produced through the motor response of individuals with their milieu. This motor response manifests as an action that encompasses an anticipation that flows through the body schema situated in the preconscious or instinctive level of the individual (2022 [2008]: 29-42).

The second type of image emerges from the psychological domain, in perception and cognition, whereby through a synthesis of inter-sensory images, the individual identifies a form that leads to an action. Put another way, he means that images of perception and cognition are not passive, but are rather the coupling of two systems, namely of subject and world (2022 [2008]: 63-92).

The third and final type of image in Simondon's cycle of images concerns the image that emerges from affective-emotive experience, the imaginary, which offers access to the symbolic field (2022 [2008]: 93-138). The image-symbol surfaces from an accrual of images at two opposite poles. It is therefore not fixed but metastable, creating an internal tension which is 'an important condition for invention' (Voss 2019: 290). Thus, the image-symbol contains a tension that requires resolution and hence develops into an action, an action that may offer a diversion from established attitudes, or result in the creation of objects which are comparable to reality represented by the image. Image symbols can therefore be understood as having a universality, which formalises human experience with the world. This formalisation acts as a means for communication, but also solves a problem through invention. In this sense invention completes the image-cycle, and when materialised into a material object (either digital or physical) has the potential to be shared with others: such sharing acts as a structure for new cycles of images. The image-cycle thus constitutes a praxis of life and invention. As such, the material traces of techno-symbolic activity, such as monuments, tools, language, and fashion media posts, come to act as a symbolic structure for social and cultural life. For Simondon techno-symbolic activity goes beyond the individual's affective-emotive, perceptive and biological images, it extends into life and manifests as the continuous negotiation between the individual and its milieu – hence there is no separation between biological, psychic and cultural systems.

Following Simondon, clothing and dress are technologies that have concretised; that is, they have become open to their associated milieu to form a material and symbolic structure that underpins communication across a social group integral to the fashion milieu. They have moved from an abstract state where their function was to protect, decorate, preserve or abandon modesty, towards a concrete state where they are open to their associated milieu. As discussed in Chapter 2 fashion emerges through the relations between people who come together to form a collective through a shared interest. Moreover, these are embodied individuals (Entwistle 2023) who have the capacity for affect and emotion and engagement with symbolic structures through the cycle of images, as discussed above. Through use, a durational and symbolic structure is established that acts as the foundation for the fashion milieu. However, with the concretisation of fashion, social media, and mobile phone technology, fashion extends across offline and online domains. Thus, the invention of fashion in an online domain is encountered through digital objects. Returning to the thoughts of Hui (2015) discussed above, these are objects of purely sense or noetic data that constitute a new givenness of the object.

I now turn to Emily's description of reading fashion media to demonstrate Simondon's idea of the image cycle. Emily describes 'stalking' an influencer named Gully Guy Leo who she had met in passing the previous evening at a fashion event. She describes looking at three posts before deciding to 'follow' him. The first post she describes is a photograph of him dressed in a luxury brand and lying on a bed. She says:

K: Right. So, if you don't mind we'll just go back to that moment, so you're on Instagram – the pictures come up, what's the first picture?

E: A picture of him on a bed.

K: So you're seeing a picture of him on a bed, on the bed, what happens when you see the first picture?

E: It was quite funny because he's got all, like his clothing's probably like Louis Vuitton or something, and he's wearing, he's got bed sheets, trousers, top, like everything is the same pattern – So he's very like classic just like showing off you know ha ha, he's a bit of a show off.

K: So you're thinking, he's classic he's a bit of a show off.

E: Well it's a luxury brand and he's got the lot [laughs].

K: So what he's wearing and the bed sheets are all the same luxury brand.

E: Yeah and he's really young so it's just funny, just made me laugh, it's like he's ... like he's such a show off, but good on him.

K: So you thought, good for him.

E: Well because he's so young, and I know he just loves fashion, and I know from meeting him even just for ten minutes that he's not always had it and he's not up himself, you just feel anything's possible. I mean you just feel ... it's difficult to describe it but like it's emotion you just feel like a connection ... I want it [laughs], but good on him [laughs].

Emily describes the influencer Gully Guy Leo as being dressed in Louis Vuitton clothing, sitting on a bed with Louis Vuitton bed sheets. The brand Louis Vuitton has devised a collection of clothing and a logo that manifests as a material trace of an expression that has become recognisable and synonymous with a luxury brand. It is available for others to experience and thus goes beyond the individual's affective-emotive, perceptive and biological images, it extends into life and so demonstrates the continuous negotiation between the individual and its milieu. Emily reads the post from her own situated and embodied perspective which is

underpinned by a symbolic field shared by those with an interest in fashion. The brand, evident through their logo, is an indicator of success which has become formalised over time. As such it is an image-symbol that communicates with Emily, who draws the conclusion that Gully Guy Leo is a “show off” because “he’s got the lot”, meaning he is wearing so much of it. Emily finds this funny because Gully Guy Leo “is so young”.

However, Emily does not actually encounter Gully Guy Leo wearing the collection, but rather through her encounters with social media. The concretisation of fashion with social media and mobile phone technology has moved from an abstract state to an integrated open system. Namely, its function of sociality has been offloaded to the associated milieu. The first invention is that of the logo which over time has become symbolic of the brand. It is a symbol associated with a luxury brand and so indicates the status of the wearer. The branded clothing is then styled into a look which is worn by Gully Guy Leo in a photograph. The photograph is an invention that solves the problem of the viewer needing to be present to see the clothing and the logo which symbolises Gully Guy Leo’s status. The photograph is then posted by Gully Guy Leo on his Instagram feed. This is a further invention that builds on a previous structure (that of the photograph and logo) into a fashion media post that is visible to his nearly 2,000 followers through Instagram. The photograph of the outfit offloads the burden of its function to its external environment, namely to digital networked media. It is a structure that extends the fashion milieu into an online domain which is a dimension of a single lived reality. Thus, Emily does not encounter the ‘real collection’, but rather the image symbol of it through which she senses an emotional connection to Gully Guy Leo, which provokes her comment – “good on him” – and which makes her laugh. It is an emotional connection that incorporates Emily into a collective of people who share her interest in fashion. Further, it makes Emily feel that “anything is possible”, a comment that is significant as she goes on to say she “wants it”, which I argue is Emily realising that Gully Guy Leo’s success (made evident through his wearing of a luxury brand) is a possibility for her in the future. However, when I ask Emily if she can elaborate on what Gully Guy Leo is wearing in the post, she explains that she didn’t pay it that much attention. She says:

K: So can you say any more about what Gully Guy Leo is wearing?

E: Well I didn’t really pay much attention it was just like, I mean ... I just saw it was all the same brand you could tell by the pattern – I mean the logo – what he was wearing. I didn’t really like notice *what* he was wearing ... he just looked kinda cool, a bit of a show off [laughs].

The concretisation of fashion, mobile phone and digital networked media in offloading the function of sociality to social media, appears to negate the need for the presence, or focus, on a fashion object. Elizabeth Wilson (2020 [1985]) explains how fashion, in its shift to mass production in the nineteenth Century, became available not just to the rich, but to wider society. This democratisation of fashion, she claims, has led to the dematerialisation of clothing and dress as meaning shifts to the symbolic domain. As such ‘[f]ashion speaks a tension between the crowd and the individual [...] dress may assuage that fear [of not sustaining the autonomy of the self]. It may bridge the loneliness of “mass man” by connecting us with our social group’ (2020 [1985]). Thus, ‘fashion is in many ways an extreme of cultural activity’ (Back 2020: 570). This thesis makes a contribution to this debate by employing a postphenomenological approach that encompasses Simondon’s theory of individuation and invention. I propose that the concretisation of fashion, digital networked media and mobile phone technology into a single dynamic network offloads the burden of sociality to the milieu, which negates the need for the presence of a fashion object in any form. Although evident in my participants’ experience of reading or watching fashion media on their mobile phone, the fashion object is not the focus of the experience. As Emily explains, she “didn’t really pay much attention” to what Gully guy Leo was wearing. It appears that the intention of fashion media has shifted from the fashion object itself (clothing and dress) to an emotional connection with others who participate in the fashion milieu. The notion of fashion media engendering an emotion connection is evident when she says: “like it's emotion you just feel like a connection”. Emily, through reading Gully Guy Leo’s fashion media post, feels an emotional connection to him which incorporates her into the collective. She reports feeling “satisfied” after reading the post, which I argue is a feeling of affirmation at experiencing a sense of belonging to the fashion milieu.

The idea of a shift in focus from the fashion object to an emotional connection to collective life was evident in all my participants’ descriptions. Another example is Liberty’s description of her experience of reading fashion media posted on Instagram by Gigi Hadid, discussed above. She explains that the post captured her attention, she felt immersed in it, it inspired her and made her feel happy, but, as with Emily, she could not recall what Gigi Hadid was wearing either in the billboard photograph promoting the collection or as she was physically standing in front of it. We discuss this, and she explains:

K: So, what is she wearing?

L: What, I can remember ... I think it was like jeans.

K: Right, you think she was wearing jeans.

L: I think ... I don't really know what she was wearing, or the billboard properly, you know what I mean, cos there's two of her.

K: So there's two of her, so you're looking at the figure first, can you see what she's wearing?

L: I feel like she's wearing jeans.

K: She's wearing jeans.

L: I feel like I see white, I feel like the colours were white, red and blue, kind of.

K: So white red and blue and you're seeing her first, so you've seen her name, then you've seen her and she's in white, red and blue and she's wearing jeans.

L: Yeah, the whole kind of picture was that kind of colour though, you know what I mean, everything was like caramelising [inaudible?] together like it all really matched – and that's something I like, I get attracted to things that match.

Earlier in this chapter I discussed how Liberty feels an emotional connection to the fashion milieu, reading Gigi Hadid's post makes her "feel connected", which, she says, makes her feel "happy" and "inspired": she feels a sense of affirmation through her body. Yet her description of her experience above makes clear that she doesn't make a connection to the fashion object as she can't see what Gigi Hadid is wearing in the billboard photograph, and she can't remember what Hadid was wearing when standing in front of it. It is the fashion media post, the matching colours in the photograph, that Liberty most poignantly remembers. The post catches her attention, she stops to read it because she knows it has been posted by Gigi Hadid, and it does not disappoint, but it is the harmony of the colours in the photograph that she enjoys, rather than the sight of a fashion object itself.

Shinkle (2023) contests the notion that fashion photographs are nothing more than a kind of advertisement with a goal of selling clothes. She instead suggests that 'the fashion photograph is driven by a more general imperative not to be trivial in the moment of its consumption. In other words, it is the need to stimulate – rather than to document, advertise or sell specific garments – that is fashion photography's primary aim' (Shinkle 2023: 227). I concur with this idea and argue that the aim of fashion photographs when they appear as social media posts is to capture the attention of the fashion media user by affecting them. It is an

affect that transcends to an emotional response which will incorporate the user into the collective. This is an idea evident in Liberty's description of reading fashion media on her mobile phone where her connection to the post seems to be with Gigi Hadid herself who she knows as a participant in the fashion milieu. As discussed earlier, Liberty explains she stops to read her post "cos I'm interested in her whereas other people's I wouldn't really". Liberty knows from her previous experience of reading Gigi Hadid's posts that she will find them interesting to her and, through buying something from a previous collection, comes to assume she will be interested in the new collection. Through her previous experiences of connecting with Gigi Hadid in both an online and offline dimension of being, Liberty comes to develop an emotional connection with Gigi Hadid, which brings with it an expectation that she will enjoy future communications with her. It is a notion which motivates her future behaviour, of picking up her mobile phone to log into social media to see photographs of the collection being shown the following Sunday. However, following Hui, Liberty's relation with Gigi Hadid is not a real relation, it is a relation generated through technological prostheses. Fashion media posts are made up of metadata that define their functioning which travel across digital networks over which my participants have very little control of their function. Moreover, the fashion media user engages with algorithms which perform complex decision making that informs human cognition happening below their conscious awareness. This has implications including the potential to disrupt the transindividual relation, a concept fundamental to my research which I develop in the next chapter. However, Simondon has been criticised for omitting the political aspects of individuation by placing participants outside of socio-economic structures that enable them access to certain market economies. I address this criticism by developing my theoretical framework to include the work of Stiegler, who as discussed in Chapter 3, modifies Simondon's notion of psycho-collective individuation to include the 'individuation of a technical system (something Simondon strangely didn't see)' (Stiegler 2014 [2004]: 51). I expand on this in Chapter 7, but suffice to say here that fashion media users, through their engagement with social media on their mobile phones, merely act on terminals inherent to a synthesised dynamic system underpinned by the symbolic invisible structure of fashion. The user cannot adopt the system as they can do little in the way to influence its function, they instead adapt to it.

Mills (2011) brings Simondon's notion of concretisation into dialogue with the emerging area of software studies. His motivation is to resolve the criticism that Simondon limits his discussion of concretisation to the regime of physical individuation. This problem provokes Feenberg (2002) to propose a humanist account of concretisation. Feenberg claims

technologies embedded in everyday life require a synthesis of the users' skills and human communication into their operational structure whereby social rules and constraints become embedded in the technology. Mills draws on the thoughts of Matthew Fuller (2008) who argues that establishing a discipline of Software Studies would offer access to 'the conditions of possibility that software establishes' (2008: 2). To this end Mills, rather than considering software as a digital object, as binary code, suggests, following Simondon, that we consider software in terms of its operation. He explains that one way of understanding the operation of networked software-based technology is that the associated milieu, rather than being invented and maintained through physical structures, is constructed through the regime of the psycho-social. He uses the example of the Foreign Exchange Market, a techno-social concretisation underpinned by software, as discussed by Urs Brueger and Karin Cetina (2002, 2002a). Here the market is constituted and maintained through the global interactions of traders through a software-based system which structures and displays the interactions back to the traders through screens. The screen, in this instance, acts as more than a mere technology to receive information as traders, through their screens, interact with the market as if with a living organism. By this Mills infers that the market is not itself an object, but rather a process of flows through a network. Thus, the development and operation of the market system is an example of technological concretisation, but it also reveals the development of the associated milieu where the market accessed through the screen is a 'whole' market with a global presence (Cetina and Bruegger 2002, 2002a). The screen acts as the nexus between global and local, it is where tensions between both are resolved, but what is significant here is that the associated milieu is constituted by activity from the psycho-social regime. By this Mills infers that the invented concretisation of a network of devices and operating software requires the actions of the human traders, without which the market system would not exist.

In the case of my research, the single concrete system, (mobile phone, digital networked media, and fashion), supports multiple functions and, as in the case of the market-system discussed above, requires action by human users who share an interest in fashion. Without human participation there would be no social media, or fashion. It is fashion that acts as the glue that brings this collective together through the screens of their mobile phones. The mobile phone is more than a technology through which they receive information, it is a portal to an online dimension of the fashion milieu. As with the example of the financial market discussed above, fashion is more than an object: it is, rather, a flow of energy through a network which users engage with as if with a living organism. Further, it is a flow of energy with the potential

to influence affective and emotional connections between those that participate and who constitute the development of the associated milieu, an idea I develop in the following chapter.

In this chapter I brought together in dialogue ideas from fashion studies, philosophy of technology, and digital culture. My participants' descriptions show how their mobile phones are not merely a technology through which they receive information, but are instead a portal to the fashion milieu in an online domain. Moreover, my research reveals a shift in the intention of fashion media from connection with a fashion object, to a flow of energy with the potential to instigate affective and emotional connections between users. Thus, the fashion milieu is constituted by activity from the psycho-social regime, whereby fashion is not an object but rather a process of flows through a network. My research contributes to fashion studies and research in fashion media by exploring fashion media through a postphenomenological lens. I show how the concretisation of fashion with digital networked media and mobile phone technology extends the fashion milieu into an online domain to form a single lived reality. I argue that in so doing, fashion offloads its function of sociality to its external environment whereby it becomes dematerialised to the extent that it is no longer the main focus of the user's experience when reading or watching fashion media. The intention has instead shifted to an emotional connection to the fashion milieu. The implications of this are that fashion media encountered on a mobile phone has the potential to disrupt the transindividual relation, an idea fundamental to my research which I now move on to discuss.

Chapter 7

Transindividual Disruption

In the previous chapter I established that there has been a shift in the intention of fashion media from a focus on the fashion object, to a connection with a flow of energy that offers the potential for an affective and emotional exchange between those who participate in social media. This chapter builds on this idea by drawing on Simondon's notion of transindividuation to show how my participants feel a sense of being incorporated into the fashion milieu through affective and emotional exchanges with those they encounter through reading fashion media online. Rather than an individuation with a digital object, they experience an *individualisation* with others they encounter, which folds into their subjectivity but disrupts the transindividual domain.

I show through my findings how my participants stop scrolling at particular social media posts, when the posts affect them. As discussed previously the concretisation of fashion, fashion media and mobile phone has amplified a sense of personal connection between users which leads to an intimacy that exists at a social or cultural level that is felt in the body. It is through affect that my participants come to understand that they are more than one, a feeling which creates a tension in a metastable system that requires resolution through a social dimension. Perception and emotion are complementary processes which through a process of transduction (discussed in Chapter 6) transcend to action and emotion simultaneously to form a new order.

The eighth invariant to emerge through my research is that my participants experience an individualisation with those they encounter through fashion media when accessed through a mobile phone; an interindividual exchange that brings them a sense of affirmation. I show how this interindividual exchange, although emotional, does not break free from the utilitarian aspect of the social world. It remains a mode of social linkage sedimented in culture. My participants explain how they feel as if they know those they encounter in social media, but qualify this 'knowing' by saying they 'don't really' know them. The fashion media user- fashion media relation is not a real relation but rather a social relation initiated and guided by technological prostheses (fashion, fashion media and mobile phone), of which the user has little control over its functions. Yet these relations influence users' actions, and the affective and emotional flow of energy integral to their experience; they resolve both the perceptive and affective problematics that are integral to their becoming. However, in so doing they mask the transindividual relation. The fashion media user does not have the opportunity to traverse

solitude, to call themselves into question, a process integral to the transindividual. They are not required to detach from the collective, to reflect, whilst holding a sense inside of a connection to it. As such, my participants do not develop a confidence that their connection to the collective will still exist despite the isolating moment of calling oneself into question.

7.1 The Interindividual Relation

In developing his argument in relation to the psychosocial regime of individuation, Simondon explains that '[i]nterindividual participation is possible when affectivo-emotive expressions are the same. Thus, the vehicles of the affective community are not merely symbolic elements but also affective elements of the life of groups: the regime of sanctions and rewards, symbols, the arts, and collectively esteemed and unappreciated objects' (2020 [1964, 1989]: 274). Moreover, the psychosocial individuation is neither the coming together of already formed individuals that pre-exists social relations, as is the case with liberal accounts of the individual, nor an anthropocentric view that understands the human animal as a social animal by essence, but is rather a transductive operation between the pre-individual energy in its individuation with the collective: it is a psychic and social individuation (Beuno and Schettini 2022: 125).²⁹ As Erin Manning (2010: 122 original emphasis) explains, affect is collective because the pre-individual never exists on its own:

[p]reindividuality is a web of bodies-becoming across the force of life which is *a life*. Being as becoming can never be resolved individually, 'it is the founding of the participation of a more vast individuation, that of the collective' (Simondon 1989: 22). The collective is not the many-parts of the multiplication of discrete bodies. The collective is the multiplicity of *a life*-welling across the topological surface of becoming where the many become one. Before the body individuates as such, before it becomes individual, it is always first and foremost collective.

Manning's quote outlines the role of the body in the becoming of the individual and collective. She makes clear how the body is collective before it becomes individual because it shares the pre-individual. This is an idea fundamental to my research aims which I investigate through the lens of Simondon's transindividual.

²⁹ For an account of Simondon's history of the notion of the individual see Simondon, G. (2020 [1964, 1989]) *Individuation in Light of Notions of Form and Information Vol II: supplementary texts*, pp. 435-652.

7.1.1 Individualisation

I now employ Simondon's notion of affective-emotivity discussed above to analyse Veronika's experience of reading fashion media on her mobile phone to demonstrate how she apprehends an individualisation through fashion media. Veronika describes searching for posts of people who attended the Met Gala. One of the posts Veronika discusses is a photograph of the actor and musician Lady Gaga, who she describes as wearing an "enormous pink dress". She says:

V: Well I was thinking it's not too bad, it could have been worse, and umm, [laughs] I was thinking that it's the first time that I see her in a long time in such a brave dress and she's kind of looking like her old self, but then different, more like happy, I don't know, so I was thinking that's good for her and umm ... that was kind of my impression.

She later explains,

V: Yeah it's like, like it surprises me, and then I feel, like pleased for her, it's like ... oh it's Lady Gaga, yeah so she's back [laughter] like, yeah ...

K: So you think she's back [V: yeah], so you see her in her big dress, and you say she's back.

V: Yeah, she's looking happy, and it, it's good, it makes me feel happy so I 'like' it.

Veronika's description demonstrates how her experience of reading fashion media on her mobile phone goes further than her merely receiving information relating to fashion where the focus is on the fashion object, as discussed in the previous chapter. Veronika does discuss what Lady Gaga is wearing in the post, namely her "enormous pink dress", but her description reveals an ongoing relation with Lady Gaga based on previous experiences as she says "it's the first time that I see her in a long time in such a brave dress" suggesting that she has experienced encounters with Lady Gaga before. Moreover, it implies a feeling of Veronika's connection with the celebrity as a person who shares her capacity for affect and emotion when she states Lady Gaga looks like "her old self, but then different, more like happy". This surprises Veronika, to which she responds by saying "she's [Lady Gaga] back" and "looking happy". Veronika reacts by moving herself around the space of social media, as discussed in Chapter 5, to 'like' the post because she says, "it's good, it makes [her] feel happy".

In Chapter 2 I reviewed current literature from digital culture studies which argues that the bringing together of mobile phone and digital networked media amplifies a sense of personal communication between users. Drawing on the work of Licoppe (2004) I considered how the perpetual contact offered by mobile phone technology facilitates a series of interactions that offer a structure for the development and maintenance of social relations by providing a feeling of social fellowship, of presence over absence. The mobile phone when brought together with digital networks opens up a space for a networked public (boyd 2011) where users go to see and be seen. But as Hinton and Hjorth (2013) explain, the quality of feeling engendered by social networks must be considered to account for the intimacy prevalent in social media relations (2013:44), which includes intimacies that exist at a social or cultural level. This thesis contributes to debates in studies of fashion, fashion media and digital culture by showing how fashion media posts have the potential to connect with users emotionally thus incorporating them into the collective and informing their subjectivity. The discussion above shows how fashion media posts penetrate Veronika affectively and emotionally, as she herself says her happiness is an “impression”. I ask her about this and she says:

K: It was an impression.

V: Yeah, like ... fast ... like in here (gestures to her chest).

K: So you feel it here (gestures to chest).

V: Yeah, umm it's like difficult to describe, but umm, like it's inside you, it just comes.

As Veronika explains, the impression she feels when reading the fashion media post is “fast”, it is something she feels in her chest. As she herself says, it is a feeling “inside” her that “just comes”; she feels it through and within her body. The psyche is neither pure interiority or pure exteriority, but an operation of differentiation and integration of the subject and world. Moreover, the affective and emotional aspects of experience are integral to the sense Veronika makes of the experience; they are the integration of herself and the world.

Ian Tucker and Lew Goodings (2014) explain how the focus in social media research has tended to consider ‘online’ as a space that is distinct from that where offline activity takes place. In this case there is an emphasis on the ‘virtual’, whereby individuals seek to portray themselves online in ways that are different from the offline self. They instead suggest a shift to a focus on social media ‘as providing the means to “extend” one’s body into technological

realms, rather than view what occurs online as fundamentally distinct from offline activity' (2014: 62). Through Simondon's thoughts on information, as discussed in Chapter 3, Tucker and Goodings propose that life offline and the online space of social media are brought together through previously unrelated systems (bodies and technologies) to form a single lived reality. However, they maintain that the consequence of this is that 'social media is to not [to be understood as a means to] characterize people's online activity as *representative* of their inner psychological state, but rather as *informational*' (ibid., original emphasis). Information in this context is understood from Simondon's perspective as a bringing together of the inorganic and the organic into a single dynamic system that spans both offline and online domains. It is a system that facilitates an emotional connection between users through the concretisation of technological prostheses (the mobile phone and digital networked media, and fashion), which enables a flow of energy across a network that negates the need for the presence of a fashion object. As discussed in the previous chapter, fashion is not an object, but rather a flow of energy which the fashion media user engages with as though with a living organism. The idea that the post connects with Veronika emotionally because she feels a connection to another embodied individual is clarified later in her description when she says:

V: Each of them had like a different feeling for me yeah, because umm, in the end umm, I felt like umm [pause] Harry Styles was like the most normal feeling I got, I was like 'oh yeah I like it', and Lady Gaga was something different, was more like a story on its own, because of her story as well, and Kim Kardashian was just like yeah what is this ...

K: So you were saying about the Lady Gaga one, if I could just go back to that moment, it's like it's her story [V: yeah] so you're looking at it, looking at it thinking that's her story.

V: She's been sick, she's had lots of pain and so yeah, but that's why I was surprised, she looks well and like happy, it made me smile.

The discussion above makes explicit that it is Lady Gaga's "story" that Veronika engages with through reading the fashion media post. The sense Veronika makes of the post goes beyond an encounter with a fashion media post, extending instead to a sense of a connection with another embodied individual, who she explains has been sick, and in pain, but now looks well. Lady Gaga's recovery from illness engenders an emotional empathy in Veronika; it makes her feel happy, which makes her smile, a response that becomes evident in and through her body. Through her encounter with the fashion media post Veronika is able to restructure the pre-

individual inherent to her becoming, through which a new individuation emerges. But in this case, it is as *individualisation*, an individuation between Veronika and Lady Gaga, an empathetic exchange through which Veronika coincides with Lady Gaga. As Bardin (2015) explains ‘perception and emotion are complementary processes through which the living being “discovers” external and internal consistence’ (2015: 81). Perception takes place between the individual and its milieu, while emotion requires the mediation of the collective. Veronika’s perception of the fashion media post transcends to an action, of ‘liking’ Lady Gaga’s post, and simultaneously, affect transcends to an emotion: it is her connection with Lady Gaga that made her feel happy which makes her smile. The happiness Veronika feels is integral to the sense she makes of her experience. It is an emotion she feels as an individual and through which she comes to know herself, but at the same time signifies her connection to a social world inherent to the fashion milieu.

Veronika goes on to explain how she and her friend, with whom she had been having lunch in the canteen at college, discuss the post (which they had both encountered) on their way back to class. They compare their thoughts on the looks they had seen on the red carpet, which makes Veronika feel reassured that she knows what is going on. She explains how she needs to check social media in order to have conversations with her friends and peers otherwise she feels “clueless”. Through Veronika’s reading of fashion media on her mobile phone she comes to feel part of the fashion milieu: through the transduction of the pre-individual inherent within Veronika, and the associated milieu, a new form emerges that spans both offline and online dimensions of being. Veronika’s experience of her encounter with the Lady Gaga post is an interindividual exchange that resolves the perceptive and affective problematic, but their encounter has consequences in that it has the potential to disrupt the transindividual relation.

7.2 Fashion Media Mask the Transindividual Relation

In Chapter 2 I outlined Simondon’s notion of the transindividual relation (Simondon 2020 [1964, 1989]: 313-314). Through a review of Emily’s experience of reading fashion media on her mobile phone, I now explore how fashion media in the form of social posts mask the transindividual relation, disrupting the transindividual domain.

Emily tells me about being in the library working on a college project and feels “bored”. She discusses picking up her phone in this moment whereby she looks at a post that had been put up on Instagram by the influencer Gully Guy Leo, as discussed in the previous chapter. She explains how Gully Guy Leo is “interested in fashion, and that’s how he’s famous, just from

his fashion stuff'. Emily had seen him in passing the previous evening at a fashion event. She describes how the next day she 'stalks' him on social media and decides after looking at three of his posts to 'follow' him. She says:

E: Whenever I look at it, someone on Instagram who is into like, is wearing all this nice stuff and has all these followers and obviously, it's like such a nice life, you just, in a way sometimes you just want it, you want it to yourself because you're so interested in it as well, you just like, you know, if you ...

She also explains how:

E: It's just emotionally, you just feel, yes I want to do that, I can feel what it's like to be there, it feels good and I want it.

Emily's description makes it clear that she feels a connection to Gully Guy Leo because they share an interest in fashion which is a symbolic underpinning that connects them. However, as previously discussed, the focus of Emily's encounter is not on the fashion object. Like Veronika's experience discussed above, Emily, through reading Gully Guy Leo's posts connects with his story, the residue of the pre-individual from which she gets a sense of his life as a fashion influencer, a life to which she aspires. Fashion media in this sense offers Emily the feeling of being incorporated into the collective. She explains how through reading Gully Guy Leo's posts she feels an emotional connection to him. She comes to feel what it's like to be there, living his life, which brings her a sense of affirmation – "it feels good", and she "wants it". Emily senses a connection with Gully Guy Leo as another individual who, like her, has the capacity for affect and emotion through which she can restructure the pre-individual. She goes on to explain that having read three of his posts, she wants to see further posts on her feed and so she 'follows' him, suggesting she assumes a connection with him and the fashion milieu in the future. I ask her about her decision to activate the 'follow' function on Instagram and she says:

E: Yeah I just like, you just get a feeling – where you're just like, I don't know you just naturally do it, you're just like ...

K: And what is that feeling?

E: [pause] it's just like a, I can't describe it, you just like, like, I didn't really think about it because the process is the thinking and when you press follow, you're just like oh, I'm going to follow him now, like after I've seen that I feel [pause]

K: So you're going through this process, you see that picture, it was funny, and he's dressed in a luxury brand, it's all the same brand, then you go to the next one and it's the hotel where you met him, then you go the next picture where he's, he's there with famous people and you're thinking yeah, I like this, that's cool I'd like that, and then something happens to make you press follow [E laughs] Can I take you back there?

E: It's just like a ... [pause] a feeling – it's an emotion but you just, like ... I think it's just all a process when you're doing it, like I didn't press follow for like, any like particular reason – well I did press it for a reason, but it was just a, an emotion at that time, like I would quite like to follow him because maybe he'll follow me back, but probably won't, but that'd be nice, but like also inside of you, you're just like kind of [pause]

K: So inside you, in that, at that moment that you pressed follow that's something –

E: Yeah, you just like, your body just tells you to like, follow him, like okay, I'm satisfied, like if I didn't like him I wouldn't be satisfied and I wouldn't follow him – but because I was satisfied by what I saw and I liked it, it made me feel happy I thought well ...

It is evident from Emily's description that her action to follow Gully Guy Leo happens below her conscious awareness. She doesn't think about it, "the process is the thinking", her "body just tells [her] to follow him", a notion discussed in Chapter 5. Through her reading of Gully Guy Leo's posts Emily feels an emotional connection to him that makes her feel satisfied and happy: theirs is an interindividual exchange that offers her a sense of affirmation. As she explains, if she "didn't like him" she wouldn't feel satisfied. Emily's description reveals an individualisation between Emily and Gully guy Leo. There has been a restructuring of the pre-individual, through which a new order emerges, one where Emily feels connected to the fashion milieu. She feels what it's like to be an influencer and comes to know this is something she would like for herself in the future. Her satisfaction and happiness at their connection is something she feels in her own body as an emotion, but it is an emotion that is equally internal and external, an activity within the subject and between subjects that prefigures the discovery of the collective. As Simondon explains:

Individuation in the form of the collective turns the individual into a group individual, linked to the *group* by the pre-individual reality that it carries inside itself and that, when united with the pre-individual realities of other individuals, *individuates itself into a collective unity*. Both individuation, the psychic and the collective, are reciprocal to one another; they allow for the definition of a

category of the transindividual, which can be used to explain the systematic unity of the interior (psychic) individuation and the exterior (collective) individuation.

(Simondon 2009 [1989]: 8 original emphasis)

Emily feels connected to the fashion milieu through the restructuring of the pre-individual reality inside her and Gully Guy Leo that individuates into a collective unity. As she explains, she comes to know that she wants Gully Guy Leo's life; she aspires to a life of working in fashion.

Tiziana Terranova (2004) explains how network culture 'seems to be characterized by an unprecedented *abundance* of informational output and by an *acceleration* of informational dynamics' (2004: 1 original emphasis). She describes how a communication must break through the noise in the communication channel to be effective. This implies that to be effective, the information flow between the sender and receiver of the communication (such as a fashion media post) must break through any interference in the communication channel to connect with its audience. In the case of social media, the post must stand out against the continuous and frequently updated stream of posts that flow through digital media networks which are perpetually available through the portal of the mobile phone, as discussed in Chapter 3. My research reveals how a fashion media post must affect a user if it is to cut through the noise in the busy communication channel. Emily describes how soon after she received a notification that someone had started to 'follow' her. She says she looked through the person's account but didn't follow him back because she didn't "feel" anything. She had a different response to reading posts on this account to that of Gully Guy Leo. The difference being that this person's account didn't penetrate her affectively or emotionally. The communication was not successful in connecting with Emily because it could not break through the noise in social media. It also failed because it didn't meet with the intention of social media, that being to engender affective and transcending emotional connections with others. She says:

E: So with that guy there was a feeling, I felt emotions, I felt something so I feel like you have to follow, but with that guy I just scrolled and there wasn't an emotion it was just a scroll down, scroll down.

Much like life offline, the space of digital networked media is filled with individuals who communicate with each other but through digital objects. Social media users scroll through social media posts on their mobile phone encountering these digital objects that have been produced to capture the attention of users and to bypass the noise in the communication channel

by affecting them. Following Simondon, it is through affect that users come to understand they are more than a unity, it is an affect that requires a resolution through a social dimension. As Simondon explains, it is through affect and transcending emotion that individuals come to feel part of collective life. To this end he says, '[a]ffectivo-emotivity is a movement between the natural undetermined and the *here* and *now* of actual existence; it is that through which this rise of the underdetermined toward the present occurs within the subject that will incorporate the subject into the collective' (2020 [1964, 1989]: 278 original emphasis). It is a collective that spans both offline and online dimensions of being.

Emily then goes on to say that she felt satisfied by reading Gully Guy Leo's posts and so she left social media to return to work on her university project in the library. Her attention shifts back to life offline. She explains:

E: Yeah, I was a bit down, a bit bored and then this happened, and you get to connect with someone and it's like you feel, it's emotion, it's like, like a good feeling, you feel good, like, yeah like satisfied.

This quote from Emily makes evident that, through her encounter with fashion media, she gets to connect to 'someone', rather than 'something' and this resolves the feeling of boredom that she previously felt offline, an idea discussed in Chapter 6. She senses an emotional connection to Gully Guy Leo that resolves both the affective and perceptive problematic. She comes to "feel good, yeah like satisfied". She experiences an individualisation with Gully Guy Leo, an interindividual exchange that brings her a sense of affirmation through their shared interest in fashion. But the encounter with Gully Guy Leo is made possible through technology (mobile phone, digital networked media). It is not a 'real' relation, but rather a relation generated through technological prostheses.

Agnés Rocamora and Alistair O'Neill (2008) interrogate the notion of 'reality' in relation to the street as a context for fashion photographs. They describe this as an interrogation of 'the values conveyed by such images, looking at the idea of the street as a site for the creative performance of 'real' people' (2008: 185). They chart the development of street style photography and acknowledge the importance of the 'straight-up' (a photograph that shows a 'real' or 'ordinary' person wearing their own clothes) in recognising the fashionable styles being worn by 'normal' people who have flair and style. They claim that the inclusion of the straight-up in the media 'celebrate[s] the creativity of ordinary people, [but] it is often as representatives of metropolitan life, of the city they incarnate, as if the city had been styled by the people's inventive power, whose source, in turn, lies in the street, the true origin of

fashionable creativity' (2008: 191). In this way reality is employed as a means for selling commodities. However, as they explain, the selection of 'real' people, who appear as representative of the streets they incarnate, is made by the journalist or photographer who make their choices based on a 'preordained point of view' (2008: 195). It is a view which reflects what is deemed fashionable at the time. As such, fashion media in the form of straight-up photographs appear to be unmediated; they seem to depict 'real people', but are actually sanctioned by fashion journalists or photographers who strip street-fashion images of their complexity and diversity. I contribute to this discussion on the nature of the 'real' in the viewer-fashion media relation by employing Simondon's idea of the transindividual, particularly his thoughts on the interindividual relation and its potential to mask the transindividual which has political implications.

Simondon states that although there appears to be a symmetry between emotion and perception in the formation of collective life, perception structures the individual-milieu relation, whilst emotion structures the relation between the individual and themselves through their relations with the milieu external to them: it enables a transindividual relation. Hereby collectives

[...] are in effect characterised by their own regime of individuation, the ontogenesis of the transindividual. Through this process a peculiar metastable system emerges, characterised by inter-subjective (*not* inter-individual) relations structuring the pre-individual potentials which still existed *between* individuated beings as a 'residue' of previous individuations. These potentials simultaneously become *emotion* within the individual and *signification* within the collective. Emotion is therefore equally as internal as external to the subject: for this reason, as an activity *in* the subject and *between* subjects, it prefigures the discovery of the collective.

(Bardin 2015: 81 original emphasis)

As Bardin's quote explains, the transindividual requires an inter-subjective exchange. My participants' descriptions demonstrate an emotional connection. As discussed above, Veronika describes feeling "happy: at reading the fashion media post of Lady Gaga at a red carpet event, and Emily feels "satisfied" by her connection with Gully Guy Leo through looking at his Instagram feed. However, despite being emotional in quality, these are not inter-subjective relations, they remain interindividual relations because they are not real: they are relations generated by technological prostheses.

Veronika and Emily's descriptions of reading fashion media posts on their mobile phone both show how the connection they make to Lady Gaga and Gully Guy Leo provoke personal relations that go beyond an understanding of them as merely as an actor/musician and influencer which affects them. It is an affect that transcends to an emotional response, however, as Igor Krtolica (2012) explains '[i]nterindividual connections mark the utilitarian aspect of social relations' (2012: 81). By this Krtolica means that interindividual relations are designated as a mode of social linkage sedimented in culture. Simondon maintains that the transindividual relation requires an exceptional event with three principal characteristics: it must be involuntary, disindividuating, and isolating (Simondon 2020 [1964, 1989]: 313-314). My participants in their encounters with fashion media accessed through their mobile phones do not encounter an exceptional event. Moreover, the relations they encounter through fashion media posts are not 'real', they do not break free from their role and constituting life in society. Although emotional in quality, they remain 'social media relations' made possible through technology. Put another way, my participants' relations engendered through their encounters with fashion media posts accessed through their mobile phone do not transcend to personal relations that exist outside of their functional role. It is technology that initiates and guides their actions and influences the affective and emotional energy that flows through a network. Moreover, they are relations sedimented in fashion, a single dynamic system supported by the invisible symbolic structures inherent in the fashion milieu. As Emily's description of her experience makes clear, the emotional connection she feels to Gully Guy Leo, which offers her a sense of "satisfaction" because she "likes him" is based on a shared understanding of him "wearing all this nice stuff" and "having all these followers". As she explains "it's like such a nice life", a life in fashion she wants for herself because she is "interested in it as well". The utilitarian aspect of their relation is both integral to their relation – and indivisible from it. Thus, as she does not experience solitude, and nor does she call herself into question, she cannot restructure the pre-individual into a transindividual relation. As Simondon explains,

The psychological individual has a choice to operate amidst the values and modes of conduct present to it as examples: but *not everything is given* in 'culture' we must distinguish between culture and transindividual reality; culture is in a certain sense neutral; it needs to be polarised by the subject putting itself into question; on the contrary, there is in the transindividual relation an imperative for the subject to put itself in question, because this putting in question of the subject has already been begun by the other. The decentralisation of the subject in relation to itself is effectuated in part by the other [*autrui*] in the interindividual relation. Nonetheless, we must note that the interindividual relation can mask the transindividual relation, to the extent that a purely

functional mediation appears as a means to avoid the true position of the problem of the individual by the individual itself. The interindividual relation can remain a simple connection and avoid reflectivity

(Simondon 2020 [1964, 1989]: 11 original emphasis)

Following Simondon, Emily has a choice to operate within a system of normative structures offered by a culture, but not everything is given in culture. Applying this notion to my research aims, I argue the fashion milieu contains potential which coincides with the pre-individual that resides inside Emily. However, the formation of the transindividual relation requires Emily to call herself into question, to traverse solitude whilst remaining part of the collective. It is a calling into question provoked through her relations with the social world. Emily's relation with Gully Guy Leo does not require her to traverse solitude, to call herself into question. It is rather an interindividual relation that masks the transindividual. The emotional connection she feels to Gully Guy Leo is a purely functional mediation: it remains a simple connection that avoids reflectivity. Fashion has offloaded the burden of sociality onto the associated milieu. The relation between Emily and Gully Guy Leo emerges through the concretisation of technological prostheses (fashion, digital networked media and mobile phone), that is integral to Emily's feeling of collective becoming. Thus, theirs is not a 'real' relation able to break from the utilitarian function, it is a relation encountered through technology which has become embedded as a social practice and, as such, is integral to becoming.

Tarana's description of her experience of watching a YouTube vlog posted by the influencer Emma Hill, as discussed in Chapter 6, makes explicit how the interindividual relations engendered through fashion media mask the transindividual. Tarana explains how when she watches the posts,

T: It feels like she's [Emma Hill] talking to you, like individually, umm ... it feels like, because I've watched her for so long and I watch her maybe twice a week, she ends up sharing so much of her life that you almost feel like you know her, I mean obviously you don't really know her but you feel like you know her online persona, so there's like excitement mixed with like familiarity, of like someone you like seeing a friend that you haven't seen in like a few days and it's like 'ooo, hi', except it's a very one sided scenario. But so yeah there's like a familiarity of like 'ahh okay' we get to reconnect again. There's definitely like a 're- ', like a connection- every time she speaks, which is probably why I subscribed to her in the first place, I felt like a connection to her, we're probably completely different people but there's something there that I can see maybe myself in a little bit, yeah something like that.

The comment that it “feels like” Emma Hill is talking to Tarana “individually” shows how the connection is sensed by Tarana as an individualisation, an emotional connection between two individuals who share the capacity for affect and emotion. Moreover, it is a relation that has built up over time, as Tarana explains, she has “watched her for so long and I watch her maybe twice a week”. The perpetual contact offered by her mobile phone and the access it offers to a continuous stream of regularly updated social media posts facilitates a sense of a continuous conversation where Emma Hill comes to feel present to Tarana despite being physically absent. The sense of a personal connection is amplified by Emma Hill “sharing so much of her life” with Tarana. As discussed in Chapter 6, Tarana explains how Emma Hill shoots her vlog in her home in the presence of her husband and her dogs; it is an intimate view that she shares with her followers. Thus, for Tarana, encounters with Emma Hill are “like seeing a friend”. Tarana senses a connection with Emma Hill, because she says, “there’s something there that I can see maybe myself in a little bit”. Rosie Findlay (2019) introduces the term ‘aspirational realness’ to explore a trope adopted by fashion and beauty brands in the digital domain that seeks to collapse the distance between brand and consumer. A key aspect of this trope is ‘the suggestion of the “real”: “real” women showing products in “real” locations, supported by a mode of direct address that seems refreshingly “real” in another way, by the writing assuming the familiar tone of a girlfriend rather than the succinct formality of product descriptions’ (Findlay 2019: 2). I build on this idea by proposing that fashion media posts that depict ‘real’ women in ‘real’ locations and that use the ‘familiar tone of a girlfriend’ aim to affect the user in order to cut through the noise in social media. They facilitate a sense of an interindividual relation which Simondon claims is made possible when affectivo-emotive expressions are the same. The invisible symbolic structures inherent to the fashion milieu that bring the group together are not merely symbolic elements, but also affective elements of the life of the group (Simondon 2020 [1964, 1989]: 274) through which the fashion media user feels a sense of connection to the collective which resolves the problem of the pre-individual. But as Tarana’s description makes clear, “it’s a very one-sided scenario” because her relation with Emma Hill is not real, it is instead generated by technological prostheses. However, Tarana is not unaware of this, she explains how she “feels like she knows her”, but qualifies this statement by saying “obviously you don’t really know her, but you feel like you know her online persona”. Hence her encounter with the fashion media post resolves the problem of the pre-individual and incorporates Tarana into the collective through an emotional exchange, but the post does not provoke an opportunity for Tarana to traverse solitude, to call herself into question, to

restructure the pre-individual into a transindividual relation. As Tarana explains, she has a relation with Emma Hill's 'online persona' which informs her subjectivity. Her connection to Emma Hill is an interindividual relation designated to a mode of social linkage sedimented in culture that has a social function: of her being an influencer who Tarana encounters through social media. Thus, it remains a simple connection that avoids reflectivity. Tarana later expands on the idea of knowing Emma Hill and makes clear that her relation is based on a shared interest in fashion. She explains:

T: Yeah. It's like, because I have watched her for a while, well I've watched a lot of people on YouTube for a while, it gets very umm ... exciting and fulfilling when you find things in common with someone; and to have this moment to connect in this way of like an outfit and it being so similar was really exciting. Because I'm invested in her life now, I've watched her for so long, I enjoy watching her career grow, I mean her life. She has some nice dogs ... yeah it's really nice to be able to – it's like bonding without actually knowing the person.

Tarana explains how she is "invested in her life now", which she finds "exciting", Moreover, as she states it is "like bonding without actually knowing the person". Tarana makes clear how she is not only watching her career grow, but by following Emma Hill she watches "her [Emma Hill's] life" develop. The above quote makes clear that Tarana is aware that she doesn't really know Emma Hill, but through affecto-emotivity comes to feel a bond with her. The relation is clearly important for Tarana, but it is a relation that masks the transindividual and thus disrupts collective becoming in the transindividual domain. Hence, the psychic avoids the 'trail of transindividuality' (Simondon 2020 [1964, 1989]: 314), where the collective is the 'outcome of an amplifying structure that transforms the bio-psychic individual tensions into trans-individual emotions and meanings, establishing a domain in which the subjects are reciprocal and symbolic in relation to others' (Heredia and Rodriguez 2019: 675).

This thesis makes a significant contribution to knowledge in studies of fashion, fashion media, and digital culture by deploying ideas from a philosophy of technology to show how fashion media accessed through mobile phone technology masks the transindividual. A transindividual relation requires the fashion media user to detach from the collective, to traverse solitude whilst holding an inner sense of belonging to it, a confidence that the connection will exist despite the insulating moment of calling oneself into question. It is a domain from which new structures are formed that go beyond the values and modes of conduct present to it so as to restructure the pre-individual into a transindividual relation. The masking of the transindividual relation has political implications as the formation of the collective inherent to

the fashion milieu remains within the bounds of the values and modes of conduct present to it, an idea I develop further in the next chapter. The social media relation cannot create new values because it lacks the opportunity for reflection. Moreover, picking up a mobile phone to access social media to resolve the affective problematic has become embedded into my participants' body schema (as discussed in Chapter 5), and as such has become a practice that has become accepted and normalised by the social group. My participants automatically turn to their mobile phone when they feel a void whilst offline. It happens without them having to think about it. They turn to their mobile phone, a portal to an online dimension of the fashion milieu, because they know from previous experiences that this portal offers the potential for encounters with others who share their interest in fashion. The fashion milieu in an online domain holds the potential for emotional relations which offer the participants of social media a resolution to the affective problematic, a feeling of being more than a unity, a feeling that requires a social dimension to individuate. Through their encounters with fashion media accessed through their mobile phones my participants experience an interindividual relation which offers them a sense of affirmation: they feel part of the collective, which informs their subjectivity. However, in masking the transindividual, my participants' subjectivity develops through participation in a social world that is initiated and directed through technological prostheses. They have little control over the function of the technological systems that structure the fashion milieu, but which are none the less integral to their becoming. As Adam Nash (2016: 19) points out '[t]he gesture toward the collective sensed by the subject in the digital network is turned back on itself through denial of access to the regulatory operation of that network', disrupting the transindividual domain. Instead, users encounter curated stories which have the potential to manipulate affect, an idea I now move on to discuss.

Chapter 8

The Implications of Transindividual Disruption

This chapter investigates the ninth and final invariant to emerge through my findings, namely that my participants all report feeling anxious when they don't have a functioning mobile phone and access to digital networked media. I employ Simondon's (2020 [1964, 1989]: 282-285) thoughts on anxiety to analyse my findings to show how anxiety is the result of the fashion media user becoming aware of the residue of the pre-individual within them that they are unable to exchange without a social dimension. However, as discussed in Chapter 3, it has been suggested that Simondon neglects consideration of the political aspects of technical mediation (Bock 2022; Lotti 2015; Voss 2019), particularly questions of capital and labour (Hackett 2015; Hughes 2014). I address these criticisms through the work of Stiegler, who draws on Simondon's notion of individuation and the transindividual, to discuss the politics of the mediasphere, central to the concerns of my research. Stiegler modifies Simondon's notion of psycho-collective individuation, through which the individual (I) and the collective (we) emerge, to include the 'individuation of a technical system (something Simondon strangely didn't see)' (Stiegler 2014 [2004]: 51).

Stiegler introduces the idea of 'tertiary retentions' (1998 [1994]), understood as memory supports that pave the way for collective memory that is passed down through generations. I show how the prevalence of social media accessed through a mobile phone has the potential for collective memory, which lays a foundation for a shared future. But social media is designed to capture the attention of users for financial gain. As discussed in the previous chapter, the concretisation of fashion, fashion media, and mobile phone has the potential to mask the transindividual relation, disrupting the transindividual domain. However, fashion media offers a sense of affirmation for my participants, of belonging to a collective who share their interest in fashion. But these are not real relations, they are rather relations generated through the technological prostheses of which users have very little control over their function. As such, the fashion media user–fashion media relation is a one-sided scenario.

Through a review of Stiegler's notion of 'attention as care' (2013 [2010]) I demonstrate how there has been a disruption to *philia*, a concept that 'designates the way every living being, whether human or animal, is by necessity bound to other living beings from the moment he or she comes to the world' (Lauxerois 2002: 84 in Stiegler 2013 [2010]: 17). For Stiegler attention is both psychological and social. This is what distinguishes attention from vigilance and acts as the interface between psychic and collective individuation. The link between these inseparable

dimensions of individuation is what Stiegler calls ‘attentional forms’, which must be learned. He explains how ‘[e]ducation is the fruit of the accumulated experience of generations. It develops a patina over time like the pebbles rolling in the current along the riverbed that they themselves constitute’ (2012: 2). Further, it is through education that the individual gains ‘*attentional forms of knowledge: know how, life skills, cognitive and theoretical knowledges*’ (ibid., original emphasis). The disruption of the transindividual relation through tertiary retentions means that education no longer occurs through relations with previous generations, but in the case of my participants, has rather shifted in part to the fashion milieu.

Stiegler maintains that social media relations act as a substitute for person-to-person connectivity, but these relations, being one-sided, do not offer the opportunity for my participants’ co-involvement in the development of the relation. The relation is instead formed through encounters with digital objects (Hui 2015) which traverse a single dynamic system, over which they have little control. As such, care has shifted in part from family, friends, relatives, and acquaintances, who in the past both created the social network as well as depended on it (Stiegler 2013 [2010]: 30) to social media networks, creating a shift in *philia*.

My participants are fashion media users who happen to be studying at the London College of Fashion. Thus, they share a desire to work in the fashion industry. Stiegler’s ideas on technological disruption offer a framework to review how fashion media in the form of social media posts short circuit users’ long term desires to the drives, thus offering them a short-term fix. As such, the practice of building a community in the fashion milieu is missing from their experience of reading fashion media which they nevertheless come to depend on for a sense of affirmation. Moreover, they need to come back for more, as the capturing of attention is built into the functioning of the system.

I move on to consider my participants’ comments that discuss how they need their mobile phone for reasons of safety. I draw on the literature on digital culture, as discussed in Chapter 3, to show how being connected is ‘a new non-negotiable: to feel safe, you have to be connected’ (Turkle 2012: 247). Social media offers a safety net for my participants in that there is always someone there for them to restructure the pre-individual and thus avoid anxiety.

I close the chapter by considering my participants’ remarks that describe an addiction to their mobile phone. An investigation into anxiety as a neuropsychological disorder is outside the scope of my research as this thesis employs a postphenomenological methodology and a theoretical framework drawn from phenomenology and a philosophy of technology. To analyse my participants’ comments on addiction I employ Stiegler’s notion of separation anxiety. I propose that the mobile phone acts as a transitional object that stands in for a connection to life

in an online domain. The shift in *philia* brought about by social media, and *care* moving, in part, to the fashion milieu means the fashion media user is denied the care necessary to adopt the transitional object. They are unable to detach from their mobile phone as they have come to rely on it not only for the access it offers to an online dimension of being, but also for a sense of affirmation. Thus, they experience separation anxiety when they don't have a functioning mobile phone on their person.

8.1 Anxiety

The eighth invariant to emerge from my research is that my participants all describe feeling 'anxious' or 'stressed' when they don't have a working mobile phone or access to a Wi-Fi or roaming signal. This notion was evident in a conversation I had with Veronika who explains:

V: Umm ... well yes, but when I don't have the battery then I go off, and umm yeah then I'm feeling anxious [laughs]

K: Right, so not having any battery makes you anxious.

V: Yes if I don't have battery or signal it's stressful.

K: So it's stressful if you aren't able to connect?

V: Yes I feel anxious [...]

The conversation above makes explicit how Veronika feels "anxious" or "stressed" when her phone is low on battery, or when she doesn't have a signal to connect to an online dimension of being – a concept reiterated in the focus group with Elle and Tarana who explain:

K: So your phones are with you all of the time and you're basically checking quite often [T: very often] unless you're at work or unless you're asleep, is there anything else ... when you don't –

E: When there's no Wi-Fi connection.

K: Ahh yes.

E: And that is really anxiety inducing [laughs].

T: Oh yes if I don't have my phone or I don't have a connection it makes me very anxious [laughs].

It became apparent through a conversation with Emily, Liberty, and Hannah that they generally have their mobile phones with them even when they are using their laptop. When their mobile phone is on charge, they rely on their laptop to transcend to an online dimension of being. They explain:

K: Well that's interesting, so you don't often have your laptop, just your laptop in front of you, you'll have your laptop and your phone.

E: Yeah, unless my phone's on charge [all laugh].

L: Literally [laughs], but then I'm like glued to my laptop [laughs].

H: Yeah it's stressful [laughs].

Hannah makes clear that she is uncomfortable even when her mobile phone is charging on the other side of the room because she is concerned that she won't hear notifications as they come through. She says:

H: But, it is stressful when your phone's on charge and like, yesterday I, there wasn't a plug socket near me and my phone was like over there and I felt like uncomfortable because it, I didn't know I'd be able to hear the notifications [giggling], so even that like half an hour that it wasn't with me, you're sort of consciously, like, not getting stuff through, which is quite sad but ...

Hannah explains how the "stressful" feeling she experiences when her phone is on the other side of the room is "quite sad", suggesting that her need for perpetual contact concerns her, an idea I discuss later in this chapter, but suffice to say here it is clear from my findings that not having a functioning mobile phone on their person engenders a feeling of anxiety in my participants.

I pursue a line of inquiry in relation to anxiety drawn from the philosophy of technology, where I employ Simondon's thoughts on the topic to analyse my findings. For Simondon (2020 [1964, 1989]: 282-285) anxiety is the result of the individual becoming aware of the residue of the pre-individual carried within them that they are unable to exchange with their milieu: it is an emotion without action. He explains that the individuated being cannot find a solution to the problem of perception or affectivity and so feels the problem flowing back into itself. As Igor

Krtolica explains '[a]nxiety constitutes here a state of blockage for the individual, who is invaded by the charge of pre-individual nature but who is rendered incapable of being individuated in the collective' (2012: 73). However, Krtolica is keen to make clear that for Simondon anxiety is not simply the result of the problematic of the pre-individual, but rather the 'experience presented by the impossibility of actualizing the pre-individual *in us*' (pp. 74-75 original emphasis). As discussed in the previous chapter, emotion designates the link between the pre-individual and the transindividual, it is 'an *opening of possibilities*' (pp. 87-88 original emphasis). In the case of anxiety, it is an emotion that reveals to the individual their need for a connection with the collective to restructure the pre-individual. In my research the anxiety described by my participants when they are without their mobile phone and the access it offers them to an online dimension of being manifests as their coming to understand that they can't actualise the pre-individual that resides within *them*.

Mobile phones have become so deeply embedded in the everyday lives of my participants, they pick them up to resolve the void they feel offline without having to think about it: their body just does it. However, as I explained in Chapter 6 their intention when they pick up their phone to log on to social media is to connect with individuals who they understand as having the same capacity as them for affect and emotion which offers them the potential to restructure the pre-individual. Hence, following Simondon, when they are without their mobile phone and access to the fashion milieu in an online domain, the feeling of anxiety is amplified.

David H. Barlow (2004), a psychologist renowned for his research into the study, nature and treatment of anxiety disorders explains how early theorists of anxiety, Kierkegaard and Freud, 'based definitions and distinctions of "fear" and "anxiety" on the presence or absence of cues' (2004: 6). Hereby, *fear* was thought to be a reaction to an observable danger, *anxiety* was instead more diffuse, an objectless feeling of apprehension. However, he claims that a review of the terminology relating to the discussion of anxiety, must consider the term *angst*. For Kierkegaard *angst* means *dread* and *anxiety*, whereas for Freud, *angst* is understood to mean a vague apprehension about the future.

Barlow (2004) explains how Kierkegaard (1844-1944) was the first philosopher to suggest that anxiety was rooted within the individual: a fear not merely of death, but of nonexistence, or nothingness. He claims that it was only by confronting this fear that one could discover the essence of being. By this he refers to achievement of a distinction between the self and the objects and subjects of the world. In this sense anxiety might be understood to be a valuable experience as confrontation leads the self to a higher level of existence. By contrast, he suggests, that for Freud (1926-1959), *angst* is an elemental threat to the child stored in

memory which is evoked in the adult self through learned associations. Put another way, anxiety relates to the tenacity of a danger remembered that seemed real in an earlier stage of development. Hereby, anxiety acts to warn of potential danger which triggers internal psychological or external protective measures – anxiety warns of a threat to be dealt with.

Barlow (2004) reviews the notion of anxiety as the warning of a threat through a review of the work of psychologist Howard Liddle (1949). Liddle develops the idea that vigilance is the counterpart of anxiety, whereby,

[...] effective planning for the future and the retrospective enjoyment of past achievements are the means by which human beings construct culture. The capacity to experience anxiety and the capacity to plan are therefore two sides of the same coin. It is in this sense that anxiety accompanies intellectual activity, as its shadow [...]

(Barlow 2004: 9)

By this Liddle means that anxiety motivates a planned approach to the challenges of the future, which in effect enables the subject to perform at a higher level. Barlow explains how, following this logic, little would be accomplished without some level of anxiety, ‘we would all achieve that idyllic state long sought after in our fast paced society of whiling away our lives under a shade tree. This would be as deadly for the species as nuclear war’(ibid.).

My participants explain that they always have their mobile phones with them, except when working and etiquette requires otherwise, or when they are sleeping, and they ensure that they are always charged. They also make plans for times when they won’t have signal, such as when they are on the underground or an aeroplane as they explain how they download information or take screen shots to read at such times. These actions demonstrate an attempt to retain a connection to the collective, even if the connection is offline. Hannah, Liberty and Emily discuss how they screenshot posts to look at later. They explain:

H: Not so much, but I think sometimes, if you see something that’s like ‘oh that could come in useful for inspiration’ or, er, or just something to look up at a later date when you’re on the tube and you can’t like necessarily go on your phone.

L: Often. I do it quite a lot because there is like, I’m on the tube a lot, and there is no connection.

E: Err, yeah it’ll be online, unless I’ve got some long tube journey or I’ve got like a flight or something [all laugh].

K: So is that the only time you're not online, on the tube or on an aeroplane?

L: Yeah.

As the above conversation makes clear, my participants always have their phones with them and are always online, and as noted above they explain how they are “glued to their laptop” when they don't have a working mobile phone. I argue this demonstrates their drive to seek out opportunities for an individuation with a social dimension of being, but it also shows how they make plans to manage times when this isn't possible.

Hannah and Emily, in their focus group, explain that when they are without their phone for a while, they take steps to use someone else's phone in order to keep a connection with their online dimension of being. They explain:

K: What happens if you go flat or you lose your phone?

H: I go on someone else's, like when –

E: Oh yeah you went on my phone [laughs].

H: I had my account like, umm you can have more than one account like you can have a photography account [L: yeah], but I did my account like to Emily's phone, and so that means she gets all my notifications.

E: And I was getting so annoyed I was like, get off of my phone!

H: It was literally so good though, it was like ten minutes!

E: [laughing] she was like can I have your phone? I was like no! I'm on it!

[Laughing]

H: Yeah but that was a stressful week, that was like, yeah.

Hannah and Emily's conversation above relates to an occasion when Hannah's mobile phone was broken, and she had to wait a few days to be sent a new one. She found this time “stressful” and borrowed Emily's mobile phone to connect to social media. As she explains, even connecting for ten minutes “was literally so good”. This conversation makes evident the need for perpetual contact and how my participants adapt their behaviour when they don't have a functioning mobile phone to maintain a connection to an online dimension of being. It is their

understanding of not being able to restructure the pre-individual that motivates a planned approach to the challenges of the future.

However, as discussed in the previous chapter, the connection my participants make through their encounters with fashion media accessed through their mobile phone, whilst being emotional, mask the transindividual thereby disrupting the transindividual domain. I employ the work of Stiegler to address the omission of the political aspects of transindividual disruption through the modification of Simondon's thoughts on individuation and the transindividual by introducing what he defines as 'tertiary retentions'.

8.2 Tertiary Retentions

In an interview in 2010 with the film and media scholar Patrick Crogan, Stiegler explains how he is 'a great admirer of the philosopher Gilbert Simondon. Simondon developed a philosophy of individuation, in which he shows that you can't individuate yourself psychically if you don't individuate yourself collectively' (Crogan 2010a:164). However, as discussed in Chapter 3 Stiegler notes that Simondon omitted consideration of the individuation of the technical system.

Stiegler's exploration of the history of technics leads him to declare that technologies make up for the lack of human essence, which he maintains gives rise to the invention of the human (Howells and Moore 2013: 238) as outlined in the introduction of this thesis. As such memory is exteriorised in the technologies created by human beings, paving the way for a collective memory that can be passed down through generations. According to Stiegler the collective can only occur through the adoption of a shared past (2010 [2008]: 90) which acts as a foundation for a shared future. However, human becoming is always historical and contingent, thus '[s]elective adoption of the cultural and technical heritage is crucial, and always political because the human is not guided by any essential nature to realize its inevitable destiny' (Crogan 2010:138). With hyper-industrialisation the material supports of collective memory – tertiary retentions – are commodified, synchronised and schematised, but they are a past that was never lived by the experiencing subject, nor by their ancestors (Stiegler 2010 [2008]: 90), creating a disruption in intergenerational knowledge. However, this *imagined* past nevertheless acts as the condition of a common, or collective future whereby the *what* (tertiary retentions) is synchronised with the experiencing subjects' own memories, the *who*, to form a *we*, a collective. As Stiegler explains in *Technics and Time 3* (2011 [2001]) when he states, 'my stream of consciousness joins together with past streams of consciousness, including my own,

made accessible to me through tertiary retentions in various, more or less fragmentary conditions' (Stiegler 2011 [2001]: 60-61).

In the previous chapter I discussed how Hannah describes being unusually alone at home as her friend had gone home to visit her family. Hannah was feeling bored and without thinking picked up her phone and logged into Instagram. She describes stopping at an Instagram Story posted by the model Joanna Halpin who she had been following for some time. She describes Joanna Halpin as a “good photographer” who regularly posts photographs of her life as a model, and includes backstage pictures. Hannah recalls how some time ago she saw Joanna Halpin in passing at London Fashion Week and asked if she could photograph her. She explains:

H: [...] But, this person, I think I've followed her literally from the beginning, because when I went to fashion week before I came to uni, I umm, I saw her in passing and I asked to take a photo and she was really kind and she like, I had no idea what I was doing with this camera [laughing] and I was so nervous and she let me take one – she was really kind, and like she knew that I wasn't like experienced or anything but, I think that's just stayed in my head and like, the fact that I like her work is just like an additional [...] because she's a nice person ... I don't know ...

The quote makes evident that from this one meeting Hannah makes a judgement that Joanna Halpin is “kind” and that she is a “nice person”. This knowledge, along with the fact that she likes her photographs, “stayed in Hannah's head”: it informs her experience of reading fashion media. As such, the post captures Hannah's attention, it affects her, she stops to read it. She says:

H: Yeah it was a sign, the Fashion Week sign and that also, that I like her account, I, when I see like some people I'm not that bothered, but then when I see like her especially, like she, I always sort of pay more attention so yeah I, I knew she was going to be there.

[...]

H: It's just, umm ... yeah I just took an interest in her work so when I see that she spotted something and she's like shared it with like her followers it's nice to sort of give her credit by at least looking and seeing what she's done.

She goes to explain how,

H: [...] something inside you just says stop.

Hannah stops at the post because she sees the Fashion Week sign but also because she “pays attention” to Joanna Halpin’s posts and she thinks it is likely that she will be working at London Fashion Week, an event that interests Hannah. Further, it appears that Hannah feels a sense of responsibility to Joanna Halpin when she says that “it is nice to give her credit by at least looking at what she has been doing”.

Hannah describes how Joanna Halpin had posted backstage photographs of a fashion show which she especially enjoys as she “prefers photos when they’re taken in the moment and, um, they’re not posing and models just getting ready and they’re nervous”. She goes on to say how she appreciates the access Joanna Halpin offers her to what goes on behind the scenes and that through her encounters in social media she comes to realise that being backstage is something she would like to do. She explains:

H: Yeah, and I think it’s like when you, when you want to do something, like I’d love to be able to take photos like back, backstage, probably more than I would, than like on the actual catwalk, I find it much more interesting like being behind scenes sort of, understanding how that worked. I think I find that quite interesting when you see like how... how like the development and everything’s put together to like make, like an image or something. So, umm, it’s just nice.

Furthermore, she goes on to say that this is something she believes she could do in the future when she says:

H: Yeah and it’s almost like exciting because it’s like you could be doing that soon or ... Yeah like a sense of like, it also makes you more like umm, motivated, I don’t know. When you see something you just like, you’d love to do, you sort of appreciate that you’re in a position where that’s possible, that you could – I don’t know.

Through her reading of Joanna Halpin’s fashion media posts, which contribute to the construction of an imagined past she has not herself lived, Hannah comes to understand that taking backstage photographs is a career ambition. Moreover, as a student of fashion photography, she believes it is something achievable, an idea that “motivates” her. Hannah explains that Joanna Halpin posts “quite a lot”, which she says makes her feel like she is being “constantly updated with like new things” as Joanna Halpin is “always being invited to like shows or promotions and stuff”. Through Joanna Halpin’s experiences shared through Instagram, Hannah comes to feel part of the fashion milieu. Hannah’s encounter with fashion media enables a restructuring of the pre-individual, but she encounters a tertiary retention, the

exteriorisation of memory into technological prostheses (the concretisation of fashion, digital networked media, and mobile phone), that is shared with Joanna Halpin's followers, a synchronisation that informs the symbolic structures of the fashion milieu in which Hannah sees her future. The notion of synchronisation was evident in Hannah's description, as she explains that "other people her age" also like Joanna Halpin's posts, which she finds satisfying. She says:

H: I feel like connected to her [hesitant] because like, I like her work and I've been inspired by her work to do like a shoot before so... and I feel like other people like my age, or doing the same course as me like her work and appreciate it – So it's like sort of satisfying knowing that I'm like looking at the right thing.

K: O.K. you like her work, and it has inspired you to do a shoot and you say your peers on your course like her work.

H: Yeah, I use her work as like an inspiration and other people in my class they show their work and they look at her photos too, it's satisfying to know, like ... that we're all looking at what she posts, she's, she takes nice photos.

Hannah finds satisfaction in knowing that other people share her interest in Joanna Halpin's life working in fashion and feels reassured that she is "looking at the right thing" indicating that Hannah feels part of the fashion milieu. Moreover, she uses Joanna Halpin's photographs as inspiration for her own work conducted offline, as do her peers, demonstrating the notion of online and offline life conflated as a single lived reality, as discussed in Chapter 6. However, Hannah's feeling of connection to the fashion milieu is enabled through an interaction with a digital object, a fashion media post which she accesses through the portal of her mobile phone. The concretisation of mobile phone, fashion media and fashion facilitate a single dynamic system with a reticular structure over which the user has little control of its functioning. My participants have little agency in the design of the technologised/synthesised network that contains a wealth of potential to influence the flow of energy that passes through the system. They are *users* of the system which they access through the portal of mobile phone technology. As I explained in Chapter 6 Simondon arrives at his theory of a 'cycle of images' to explain how image symbols have a universality which formalises human experience with the world. It is a formalisation that acts as a means for communication between those that constitute the social realm. However, by employing Stiegler's idea of tertiary retentions we see that the image cycle is informed by memories that have been externalised into technological prostheses, memory supports which open new possibilities for the conservation of collective memory, as

is the case with fashion. Returning to the thoughts of Hui (2015, 2016), digital objects evolve from a lineage of standardised code and web ontologies to concrete systems that operate across a complex configuration of overlapping networks. Fashion media in the form of social media posts are objects of purely sense or noetic data that travel across digital networks over which my participants have little control. Moreover, algorithms central to the functioning of social media perform complex decision making that informs human cognition occurring below the users' conscious awareness. The fashion media user–fashion media relation is not a real relation, but rather a relation generated by technology supported by an invisible symbolic structure. Thus, fashion is not an object, but rather a flow of energy that the user engages with as if with a living organism, which has the potential to affect them and bring about a feeling of an emotional connection to a collective who share their interest in fashion. Hannah comes to feel part of the fashion milieu through her encounters with Joanna Halpin, and she comes to know that she would like to work taking backstage photographs rather than catwalk images. This is something she knows, not through her own experience, or through generational knowledge, but rather through her encounters with tertiary retentions, which mask the transindividual relation disrupting the transindividual domain.

However, developing the idea of there being a transindividual disruption (through Stiegler) means that we need to make clear that Hannah adopts an imagined past which she encounters along with others who read Joanna Halpin's posts, whereby the 'synchronization of the *I* as flux is the dissolving of the possibility of exception' (Stiegler 2011 [2001]:100 original emphasis). Hannah does not get to call herself into question, or to reflect on her experience and traverse solitude – processes necessary to restructure the pre-individual into a transindividual relation. Thus, new structures that go beyond the values and modes of conduct present to it are not formed. Hannah reads Joanna Halpin's post from her own situated perspective, she activates the pre-individual inherent to her being. However, it is a standardised past that circulates within digital network media thereby creating a common history of fashion with a global reach offering the potential for a shared future. But, Hannah has little to no control over the functions or regulation of the digital network through which fashion media posts circulate, or of the mobile phone she uses to access them. She merely uses her mobile phone as a terminal to enter an online domain. Following Stiegler, she is not able to *adopt* the technological prostheses, she rather *adapts* to the 'techniques, the ephemeral objects from which commerce is constructed' (Stiegler 2011 [2001]: 118). These are techniques integral to fashion which, by its very nature,

is constantly in flux. Despite this Hannah goes on to describe how her communication with Joanna Halpin brings her comfort. She says:

H: I umm, it's like umm, a nice like, I can't really, it's like comforting 'cos you know her work and you feel like – I like, I saw her in passing once. And I think that always is like, when you've seen someone, seen a fa- not a famous person, but you've seen someone that you just associate with being an online person, you remember that, I don't know – but ... I think, I don't know I think it's comforting when you like their work and it's like, you know that you're going to find ... sort of, some like inspiration or something. So it's just like a nice feeling to ...

For Hannah, the connection she feels to Joanna Halpin through looking at her photographs of her life as a model working in fashion and posted on social media, provides her with comfort. It is a comfort that appears to be reinforced by the knowledge gained from previous experiences that she will find Joanna Halpin's posts inspiring, and that her posts are also referenced by her peers. But Hannah does make clear that she associates Joanna Halpin with someone she knows as an "online person", a comment also made by Tarana and analysed in the previous chapter. In what follows I explore how fashion media posts read or watched on a mobile phone have the potential to capture my participants' attention by affecting them, and in so doing transcends to an emotional connection through which they become incorporated into the collective. But these relations are relations they have with an 'online person'; they are interindividual relations that disrupt the transindividual relation. I develop this idea by employing Stiegler's notion of attention as care to show how the tertiary retentions that circulate through social media have shifted a sense of *philia*.

8.3 Attention as Care

As discussed in Chapter 6, fashion media must cut through the noise in the busy communication channels of social media if it is to capture the users' attention, which I argue it does by affecting them. Such affect is engendered by a preconscious awareness of a communication with another individual who has the same capacity for affect and emotion. However, as Helena De Preester (2021) explains, in today's 'attention economy' it is an individuals' attention that becomes sought after and 'who or what is in control of our attention is of utmost importance for how we experience our lives and what we make of it' (2021: 103).

In drawing on the etymology of attention to consider attention as *taking care*, Stiegler states:

In French as in English *attention* is a word derived from the Latin *attendere*, ‘to shift one’s attention to’ or ‘to take care’. The form has kept this sense in English: ‘to attend a patient’ means to take care of his or her illness. In French the verb *attendre* has today a temporal dimension, and in general *attention* supposes an expectation of some kind, be it positive or negative. *Faire attention*, like ‘paying attention’, is in this sense a synonym of taking care *prendre soin*. This is why a philosophy of care assumes a philosophy of attention, especially in our epoch where an ‘attention economy’ dominates, one which puts to work relational technologies both analogue and digital.

(Stiegler 2012: 12 original emphasis)

For Stiegler, the externalisation of memory through tertiary retentions or memory supports, as discussed above, opens possibilities for the conservation of collective memory that can be transmitted from generation to generation. But, as I explained, tertiary retentions in the form of fashion media posts lead to the synchronisation and systemisation of memories which disrupt the passing down of generational knowledge learned through ancestral relations: there is a disruption in the transindividual relation. Attention, and therefore the *care* of my participants, appears to have shifted at least in part from society, tradition, or previous generations to the fashion milieu which is structured by technological prostheses. My participants describe how they engage with social media through their mobile phone for around 4-5 hours a day and 60-70% of the social media they encounter is fashion media, namely media devoted to the coverage, circulation and consumption of fashion and beauty. This equates to approximately 3 hours a day, a significant timespan as participants report how they access social media daily. As stated above, my participants experience an individualisation with those they encounter through social media, which, using Liberty’s words “has an effect on them”. Their experience of social media folds into their subjectivity and informs the way that emotionally connected collectives are formed. The consequence of this is that fashion media plays an important role in the development of attentional forms of knowledge namely, know how, life skills, cognitive and theoretical knowledges which are learnt both through experience and the users’ social relations. An example of this is how my participants no longer have to manage the void they feel offline at being emotionally disconnected from the social world – they respond by picking up their mobile phone without having to think about it. They no longer have to manage their own thoughts as they know there will be someone in social media to connect with, which creates a distraction: fashion media captures their attention. Like this, they come to rely on their encounters with fashion media for a sense of affirmation. My participants are not unaware of

their reliance on social media, but it appears that the benefits it offers them outweigh the lack of control they have over the functioning of the technological systems through which they access fashion media in an online domain.

8.4 The Benefits of Social Media Versus Control

It is evident from my research that my participants are aware of the lack of control they have over the technologies that have become integral to their becoming. In Hannah, Liberty and Elle's conversation during their focus group they discuss Instagram Stories. They explain how their social media feeds are disrupted by algorithms when they say:

E: Maybe it's the ones you look at more, might go up to the top –

L: Yeah they come up to the top.

H: Yeah, they're like very good at knowing that, what you're interested in, so it sort of encourages you to look and explore what the stories –

L: Yeah.

K: So do you sign up for those or do other people send them, share them with you?

E: You don't sign up for them.

H: You just, you have no control.

L: Yeah.

Hannah's comment suggests that she is aware that social media knows what she is "interested in" but she explains how this knowing encourages her to look at posts, to "explore" what social media has to offer.

The comments above make clear that Hannah is encouraged to look at Instagram Stories precisely *because* algorithms send her posts they think she will be interested in as her feed is curated especially for her. However, it is evident that she understands that this is something over which she has "no control". Nonetheless, the curation, or editing of information into a personalised feed of information is something that my participants see as beneficial to them, an idea discussed by Hannah and Emily, who explain:

E: Well like, the experience you go through when you're looking at it, like I get a lot of inspiration from social media, err, rather than living it, when you're like in the moment and you're there, you're like taking it in, and I feel like I don't get as much inspiration, I don't know how to describe it, but when I'm actually on Instagram or scrolling through on Snapchat, like without even realising I'll just get this inspiration from it, just like by wearing something the next day, it might

have just been naturally, I might have scrolled through Instagram and it might have just inspired me, but without even thinking about it, you know what I mean?

H: It's quite umm, I feel like it's quite manipulated, so they show you only what umm, like photos are very edited down, and in real life you just have to like take in everything and with photos it's just sort of like filtered and you just see what ... what they want you to see, so like, fashion brands will umm, whereas if you saw someone wearing those clothes in real life, they can manipulate it how they want, so I feel like it's a very narrowed down version and I think it's more likely to sort of see something that you're interested in.

As Emily says, she gets “a lot of inspiration from social media”, which she claims she doesn't get from “living it”, meaning her experience of life in an offline domain. She explains how being in the moment, when she is “there, [...] like taking it in”, doesn't offer her as much inspiration. For Emily the focus of fashion media into a curated feed relevant to her particular interests clearly influences her future behaviour without her “even thinking about it”. It happens below her conscious awareness; she is not required to make a conscious effort to make sense of her experience, which is necessary when she is living in the moment in her physical surroundings. Hannah's response equally demonstrates that she is aware of how her Instagram feed is manipulated, how images are “very edited down” unlike “real life” where she has to “take everything in”. She understands that “fashion brands” offer a “very narrowed down version”, which means it is “more likely” that she will “see something” she would be interested in when visiting social media. This conversation demonstrates how Emily and Hannah are aware of the manipulation, or control, of information sent through social media, but this manipulation is seen by them as something positive, as the work, or conscious effort, of making sense of their experience of the world has been done for them. However, what they experience are tertiary retentions that set out to short circuit their long-term desire to ascend their position in the fashion milieu: these can only offer a short-term fix, an idea I develop later in this chapter. Liberty, Elle, and Hannah go on to compare reading social media with their experience of life offline. They explain:

L: I think it's just a different experience online, to like offline, or when you actually experience something in like real life, you know, I don't know, you know what I mean because like, when you're online you've got that and you can always look at it –

E: Go back to it.

L: Yeah like, you can, and it's always going to be the same, whereas when, so it's more simplified and sometimes easier to focus on and just think about that, whereas when you go somewhere and see something you just want to like remember everything and sometimes I just leave a bit, my head's just so full and I don't know what to focus on –

E: And also when I'm on social media like, I'm by myself and I'm in my zone, whereas if I go to something, you're talking to other people like, do you know what I mean like [L: you're distracted] You're in your own zone, you're thinking to yourself, you're not talking to anyone about it you're just really concentrated, whereas when I go, imagine if I went to fashion week or wherever, I went with my friends and I'll be talking to them and like discussing it, whereas here you're actually –

H: Yeah you're getting their opinions and stuff –

L: More like one to one.

It is evident that the permanent presence of social media offers my participants a sense of security: as it is always there for them “to go back to” it acts as a safety net for them. Social media offers a sense of security that they don't feel in their experiences offline. As the conversation above makes clear, my participants, digital natives who have grown up with social media and mobile technology, find real time interactions they experience offline challenging. Ruth Irwin and Te Haumoana White (2024) in their work in education explain how ‘[s]tudents come to the education system steeped in their narrow bubble, and often have very limited critical discernment about diverse epistemologies of knowledge production [...] Ironically, as the Internet offers more connectivity and access to information than ever before, people are increasingly isolating from real life social interactions and from developing their own noetic perspective’ (2024: 81). Liberty's comment that when she goes somewhere to see something her “head feels so full” that she is unsure “what to focus on” suggests she has lost the capacity to focus her attention. This is an idea evident in Emily's response when she explains that when she is in social media she is “in [her] zone” and “really concentrated” on reading it, as she says it feels more like a “one to one” communication. This is not the case when she is out, for instance visiting Fashion Week where she has to manage the distractions of her physical environment which requires her to focus her attention. As a result, I argue, that my participants come to resort to social media for a sense of affirmation and thus avoid the unanticipated event required to restore the transindividual relation.

Hannah goes on to explain how social media, by offering a personalised flow of information, saves her time. She says:

H: I think it's quite personal as well, like you know Instagram, no person's feed is the same; you're like, it's very directed at you personally, so what you see is like a list of like, things you really want to see, instead of like seeing things on fashion week and say you only liked like one thing, um ... it edits it for you ... saves you a lot of time.

The comment above shows how social media, by curating information through algorithms diverts the user's attention to see things they "really want to see", but these are tertiary retentions which are commodified, synchronised and schematised. Thus, there is little opportunity for deviation and bifurcation from the norm. They accept the control of information in social media because of the rewards it offers them as Hannah, Liberty, and Emily's conversation makes evident when they say:

E: It's like a network.

L: Yeah, it's like a community.

E: Yep.

H: And it's so like quick, it's like all it's – it's not something you could do like in real life, I mean offline, where you meet one person and then they give you a contact to like someone else that will be helpful for you, it's so like immediate. And that, we constantly want things now, and like it's perfect for that –

Social media accessed through their mobile phone acts as a "network", a "community" for my participants. They have access to an immediate and almost infinite number of connections to others, which fulfils a need and as Hannah's words suggest, my participants "constantly want things now", and in her view social media is "like perfect for that".

The discussion above shows how social media has captured the attention of my participants. There is a disruption in the flow of energy that circulates through digital networked media accessed through their mobile phone. It is a disruption which influences my participants' feelings, informs their subjectivity, and plays a role in how emotionally connected collectives are formed. As Hannah explains, social media acts as a "community" for those who participate in it. The concretisation of fashion, mobile phone technology and digital networked media provide a short cut to social life based on physical proximity, which my participants understand

as being advantageous. However, these short circuits to intergenerational knowledge shift understandings of *philia*.

Stiegler (2013 [2010]) considers the notion of *philia* in relation to social media, an approach which I employ in my research. He develops Aristotle's notion of *philia* as friendship through the ideas of Lauxerois, who claims that *philia* extends beyond a basic notion of friendship and rather 'designates the way every living being, whether human or animal, is by necessity bound to other living beings from the moment he or she comes to the world' (Lauxerois 2002: 84 in Stiegler 2013 [2010]: 17). Lauxerois maintains that *philia* is a relation between friends who can be affected by love, desire and absence, but these need not be friends of the same species; it may refer to relations with a 'substitute companion'. By employing Simondon's concept of individuation, as discussed in Chapter 6, Stiegler explains how with social media, a 'network of friends' involves engagement with a network of individuals the user may never know in person. They act as a substitute for person-to-person connectivity whereby,

[...] our "friends" and our "friendship", and also operating a selection among our *friends, acquaintance, and contacts of all sorts*, here all lumped together under the appellation "friends", we trigger a profound alteration under *what used to be understood as social networks*: friends, family and relatives, acquaintances, chums, pals, old social structures, the very ones *creating* those networks and *depending* on them at the same time, etc. [...]

(Stiegler 2013 [2010]: 20 original emphasis)

For Stiegler, the synchronisation of collective memory with individuals the user may know only in an online capacity – as I demonstrated above through Hannah's description of her encounter with fashion media – leads to a shift in *philia*. Users turn to their mobile phone when they feel a void offline, a void they fill through an exchange with those they encounter through social media. It is something they do without having to think about it. As such, they feel anxious when they don't have a functioning mobile phone as they have come to depend on their relations with the individuals they encounter in the fashion milieu in an online dimension of being to provide a sense of affirmation. Hence, the synchronisation facilitated by tertiary retentions, has led to a disruption of *philia*, whereby there has been a shift to a situation similar to that in the insect world. Stiegler offers the example of white ants building an anthill, where the ants act as if they are a single organism under the influence of chemical pheromones emitted by the members that make up the colony. The ants comply with the functioning of the colony; they do not critically reflect on their actions, nor respond creatively, because they aren't able to change

the functioning of the associated milieu. For Stiegler the impact of this is alarming as he maintains that *philia*, for humans, ‘in its manifestation as friendship [...] is the most precious good. It is the most precious good for *individual* human beings, because *without it, life is not worth living*’. (2013: 21 original emphasis). The perpetual contact offered by mobile phone technology when concretised with fashion and social media contains the potential to divert the *attention* of users by affecting them. It is an affect that transcends to an emotional bond with a collective that shifts the notion of *philia*. Returning to Stiegler’s idea of attention as care, I argue that this shift in ‘attention’ is a shift in the ‘care’ of those that participate in social media.

In Chapter 6 I established my position regarding fashion, that being how it is more than a material object, but rather a flow of energy that traverses a network, a single dynamic system that contains both human and non-human objects. It is the technical externalisation of memory which has the potential for the conservation of collective memory that can be transmitted from generation to generation. But it is a system tempered by prevailing social structures (Kawamura 2018 [2004]; Clarke and Miller 2002). Fashion offers a sense of *philia* for my participants, a feeling of becoming collectively with others through a shared interest, yet it requires the acceptance of particular cultural perspectives that are constantly changing, leaving in their wake a history of fashion that acts as a foundation for collective becoming in the future. Some examples of this that have emerged through my research are as follows: Emily’s understanding that the logo of a luxury brand is synonymous with success; Tarana’s desire to be fashionable is achieved through the styling of a blazer; Veronika understands she must keep up with social media or she feels “clueless” when talking to her peers. However, as Kawamura (2018 [2004]) explains, the changing landscape of fashion is controlled by the institutions that offer fashion its structure. This is also the case with digital networked media and mobile phone technology which are controlled by global corporations who make decisions relating to their functions. My participants are fashion media users, but also students of fashion media who share a long term desire to work in fashion and to ascend their position in the fashion milieu. Fashion media in the form of social media posts mask the transindividual, but they bring about a sense of affirmation by offering a sense of *philia*. The participants feel part of the fashion milieu. However, these are not real relations, they are rather vicarious social media relations generated by technological prostheses that short-circuit my participants’ long term desire to the drives.

8.5 The Short Circuiting of Desire

As discussed in Chapter 3, Stiegler advocates for a general organology, by which he means the analysis of the three processes of individuation: psychic, technical and social (2012: 166). For Stiegler, general organology is a relational process driven by desire at the psychic and social level, but ‘not by a desire in particular. General organology does not mean libidinal economy in the Freudian sense’ (2012: 167). Stiegler instead takes a pharmacological approach that analyses whether organological development (psychic, technical, and social individuation) either short circuits psychic and social individuation to the drives, or enables long circuits necessary for the development of a transindividual relation. He criticises Simondon’s understanding of psychoanalysis, but claims that ‘if one uses Simondon in order to read Freud and even Lacan, it’s extremely interesting: individuation and technics lead finally to the question of the object of desire. Because the object of desire is a technical object’ (ibid.).

As discussed above, my participants are undergraduate students of fashion media. Hence, they all share an ambition to work in fashion, which I argue, is a shared desire to ascend their position in the fashion milieu. In Chapter 6 I demonstrated how reading fashion media offers my participants a sense of affirmation and resolves a void they feel when offline. I argued that this sense of affirmation is the result of them feeling an emotional connection to collective life, and moreover, it is connection that offers them a sense of a shared future. However, the feeling of affirmation they describe appears to be short lived, as they explain how they constantly feel the need to check social media, and they feel anxious when without their mobile phone.

Stiegler maintains that the culture industries have taken control of desire, as Bradley (2024a) explains:

Stiegler’s argument extending Deleuze’s societies of control thesis is that conscious or unconscious expectations or protentions – fears, desires, hopes, beliefs, motives, reasons and dreams – remain the preserve of the culture industry and are overseen by the marketing and entertainment industries. Simply, they are the lifeblood of societies of control.

(Bradley 2024a: 7-8)

The tertiary retentions that flow through the channels of social media platforms and digital networked media accessed through the portal of the mobile phone must cut through the noise by affecting social media users. They do this by provoking a sense of intimacy with the user which offers a sense of a communication with an embodied individual who they understand as

having the capacity for affect and emotion. But Stiegler points out that the flow of energy through the single dynamic system is disrupted by the industrial exploitation of marketing industries and technology companies for financial gain. Thus, ‘control societies exploit that tendency of noetic beings to regress to the level of the drives’ (Stiegler 2013 [2010]: 11), meaning that users need to come back for more. Returning to Shinkle’s point (2023): ‘the commodity that is offered to the consumer of fashion photography is not an image of the garment or accessory – nor is it even fashion itself – but a sense of temporary and shallow self-realisation’ (2023: 277). In the previous chapter I explained how social media relations for users are ‘a very one-sided scenario’. My participants are not able to play a role in the creation of the networks that offer them a sense of *philia*, nor their regulation (Nash 2016; Van Dijck, Poell, and De Waal 2018); instead they simply use them. As Stiegler explains, to achieve desire, noetic beings must experience co-involvement in order that they can transform themselves through an arrangement of complicity with others resulting in a challenge in a social dimension (Stiegler 2015 [2012]: 3). Stiegler states ‘[a] system that produces complicity [...] creates an attachment to culture’ (2015: 4). To be a ‘practitioner’ infers that there is co-involvement in the development of the relation between the subject and object, or between subjects who make up collective life. The term ‘user’ on the other hand suggests a one-sided relation where the user adopts the conditions of the relation; they are not complicit in the development of its function. Returning to Stiegler, my participants are *users* of the technological prostheses (mobile phone and social media), even when posting social media content as they comply with the functions of the social media platform they participate in. They are thus denied a transformation through complicity that results in an obstacle to the social dimension necessary for transindividuation. Instead, social media posts short circuit my participants’ long term desire back to the drives. As such, they experience a short-term fix that leaves them needing to return for more.

I revisit Hannah’s example above where she explains (like Tarana’s description of her relation with the influencer Emma Hill) that she understands Joanna Halpin as being an ‘online person’ who she happened to meet once in passing at London Fashion Week. Whilst acknowledging that fashion media offers Hannah a feeling of being “satisfied” and “comforted” and a belief that she can achieve her long term ambitions of taking back-stage photographs in the future her encounters with social media merely offer her a short-term fix. Hannah explains that she has been following Joanna Halpin in social media for some time and through her previous experiences develops an expectation of what Joanna Halpin will post which leads Hannah to feel that she knows her. She explains:

H: [Pause] I think because it's become so like usual, it's umm, I can't explain it [hesitant] because it's like such a normal feeling ... I ... I ... I kind of expect it. Like, I expect her to upload, there's an expectation there to like – but, I feel ... I feel like – it's weird I feel like I know her, even though you don't know these people at all, and so I just think it's like er, like umm, like a nice feeling, like a comforting and warm feeling like just, knowing I could go on her account and then look further through her images ... I don't know if that makes any sense ...?

Hannah's description is interesting in relation to the idea of desire and the technical object, as she explains how she feels as if she knows Joanna Halpin but qualifies this statement by saying "even though you don't know these people at all". Tarana's description of her experience of watching fashion media in the form of a YouTube vlog discussed this same sentiment which, in the previous chapter, I analysed in relation to my argument that social media relations mask the transindividual. In this chapter I develop this idea to argue that fashion media short-circuit Hannah's long term desire to elevate her position in the fashion milieu. Through reading Joanna Halpin's fashion media posts Hannah gains backstage access to fashion events which are indivisible from her relation with Joanna Halpin. However, their relation offers Hannah a sense of affirmation, of satisfaction and comfort, a warm feeling. Through their relation Hannah feels a sense of *philia*, of belonging to collective life, but her relation with Joanna Halpin is not based on a relation of complicity. It is rather a short circuit to her long-term desire. Their relation, engendered through technological prostheses, in this case merely offers her a *feeling* of knowing Joanna Halpin: it is actually, and ironically, a substitute for person-to-person connectivity that offers her a sense of *philia*. Sherry Turkle (2015) discusses this same idea in her work that looks at the psychology of people's relationships with mobile technology. Drawing on the ideas of William Deresiewicz she claims that with the prevalence of the mobile phone 'communities have atrophied, we have moved from living in actual communities to making efforts to feel as though we are living in them. So when we talk about communities now, we have moved "from a relation to a feeling"' (Turkle 2015: 173). The practice of building real social relations to create a sense of community is missing from Hannah's experience. Returning to Stiegler's comment in relation to *philia*, Hannah depends on the social network for affirmation, but she has no control over the creation of the social network despite being dependent on it. Her long-term desire to ascend her position in the fashion milieu has been short-circuited through her engagement with social media accessed through a mobile phone. She instead experiences a *feeling* of *philia*, of being emotionally connected to others in the fashion milieu. What she experiences is a short-term fix that cannot be sustained when she

doesn't have her mobile phone or access to social media; without this technology she feels anxious.

It is evident that fashion media accessed through a mobile phone engenders intimate relations between those who participate in social media as discussed in Chapter 3 (Abidin 2013, 2021; Entwistle and Wissinger 2023; Findlay 2019; Hinton and Hjorth 2013). However, my research reveals that the intimate, close, personal, familiar relations my participants describe, although enabling an emotional connection between those that make up the fashion milieu in an online dimension of being, do not contain the potential for my participants to practice co-involvement, or what Stiegler calls 'complicity', in the development of the social relations that enable a transindividual relation. This begs the question – what kind of intimacy is enabled through encounters with social media? Through the short circuiting of desire my participants develop a *feeling* of intimacy with those they encounter, the encounter merely offers a short-term fix. Thus, desire short circuited to the drives becomes a basic need, the emotional feeling of belonging to the fashion milieu cannot be sustained without a mobile phone or connection to digital networked media. The disruption of the long circuits of desire into the drives means my participants continuously need to come back to social media for further contact: if they don't have access, they feel anxious. My participants are not able to adopt the objects of desire; they cannot instruct the world whilst at the same time being instructed in order to exchange a relationship with the associated milieu. They rather merely adapt to it, they accept a *feeling* of an emotional connection without co-involvement, because the encounter offers a temporary solution to the problem of restructuring the pre-individual that resides within them. They sense a fleeting sense of affirmation that can't be sustained. However, '[o]ver time, a new style of being with each other becomes socially sanctioned [...] needing to be continually in touch does not seem a problem or pathology but an accommodation to what technology affords. It becomes the norm' (Turkle 2012: 177).

8.6 Safety

The perpetual contact enabled through the prevalence of mobile technology and the feeling of intimacy engendered through digital networked media are now commonly accepted by my participants. Being continuously connected to the individuals that make up the fashion milieu in an online dimension of being has become the norm. But in a discussion about the anxiety they feel when they don't have a fully functioning mobile phone, my participants discussed the idea of safety, a connection noted by Ling (2010) when he explains how mobile

technology ‘extend[s] our sense of safety and security, the ability to micro-coordinate [resulting in], the disturbance of the public sphere’ (2010: 3) as discussed in Chapter 3. Emily, Hannah, and Liberty discuss this in their focus group when they say:

E: I feel a bit; no I feel really like [H: Scared.] Scared, like I actually get a bit panicky when it [her mobile phone] doesn’t have charge ... because of like ...

H: Safety –

L: If anything would happen

E: Yeah you just like have to have it.

It transpires that having a working mobile phone on their person has become a necessity, a concept discussed by Wiktoria who explains,

W: That happened like two weeks ago when I forgot my phone and I felt so much anxiety it’s ridiculous, it wasn’t even like just social media, it was like the safety side of things, like what if something happens? But yeah so I wouldn’t leave my phone mostly for the security reasons I just feel like ...

For Wiktoria it isn’t just about not having access to social media, but a fear of “what if something happens?”. Turkle (2012) discusses the notion of safety and draws the conclusion, that ‘[t]his is a new nonnegotiable: to feel safe, you have to be connected’ (2012: 247). She debates what constitutes an emergency in a time of digital networked media and mobile technology and argues that the individuals that users encounter through their mobile phone act as a safety net. It is the knowledge of someone always ‘being there’ that brings them comfort. I employ this idea to propose that fashion media in the form of social media posts contain the potential for my participants to connect with someone with whom they can restructure the pre-individual that resides in them, but only when they have a working mobile phone on their person. I argue that the emotional connection they describe fulfils a need that emerges when desire is short circuited to the drives. Hence social media accessed through a mobile phone becomes a place of safety and ‘having a feeling without being able to share it is considered so difficult that it constitutes an “emergency”’ (Turkle 2012: 245). As such, my participants come to *need* their mobile phone, as it is the portal through which they access an online dimension of being which is integral to their becoming.

8.7 Separation Anxiety

Another topic to emerge through my participants' conversations about being anxious when they don't have a mobile phone is that of addiction. An investigation into addiction as a neuropsychological disorder is outside of the scope of my research as my project employs a postphenomenological methodology and a theoretical framework drawn from phenomenology and a philosophy of technology. I consider my participants' comments relating to addiction by employing Stiegler's understanding of separation anxiety. Building on the idea that fashion media in the form of social media posts act as a safety net for my participants, namely there is always someone there for them, I argue that that the feeling of addiction to their mobile phone that my participants describe is the result of them making a planned approach to the challenges of the future, as discussed above. I propose that my participants experience separation anxiety at the idea of not having a mobile phone, meaning they are unable to detach from the transitional object, namely the mobile phone, that acts as a bridge between their offline and online dimensions of being where they know there will be individuals with whom they can restructure the pre-individual. However, the shift in *philia* has led to a shift in the *care* of my participants who do not have the capacity to detach from their mobile phone.

The term 'addiction' was used on a number of occasions in the focus groups I conducted with my participants as Wiktorina explains:

W: And I'm thinking on a break I will have it with me, just like scrolling without thinking about it – yes it is an addiction okay [to laughter] the point is I am addicted to my phone.

Elle describes how she deleted her social media Apps from her phone because she realised she was spending four hours a day reading social media and was at the time busy working on an important college project which required her attention. She explains how she reloaded the Apps when the project was finished because she is addicted to social media. She says:

E: I deleted mine [social media Apps] for 3 months because like I'm spending four hours a day on my phone and that's a lot of time, but then I downloaded it again because I'm addicted – and it is where you see everything at this time in life – that's how you find everything out these days.

Elle's quote makes clear that she needs to be connected to social media as it is "where you see everything at this time of life – that's how you find everything out these days", which resonates with Veronika's quote discussed in Chapter 6, when she says she feels "clueless" in her conversations with her peers if she hasn't checked social media. It is a sentiment echoed by Hannah who explains:

H: [...] but I think it's funny because like, I'm sure other people say it, like, my dad always says like you don't need to go on it just take a break from it because, I think he sees me like on it and thinks I'm addicted or what, but you have to, I feel like you do have to otherwise, that is the only way you can like understand things that's going on, it's how you see what everyone's been up to.

Hannah's comment makes explicit that her father feels Hannah is addicted to her phone and needs to take a break, but Hannah finds this difficult, because it is how she comes to "understand what's going on" and importantly, it is where she sees "what everyone's been up to". Social media offers Hannah access to a social dimension of being with the potential to restructure the pre-individual. Following Stiegler, I argue that the addiction my participants discuss is their inability to disengage from the mobile phone, a transitional object that is symbolic of the transitional space between the fashion media user and their life in an online dimension of being.

8.8 The Mobile Phone as a Transitional Object

As alluded to above, Stiegler (2013 [2010]) seeks to rethink libidinal economy to consider desire as being constructed through the transitional object, which is simultaneously technical and transitional. A key source of Stiegler's organology is the work of the British pediatrician and psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott (1896-1971) who was influential in the field of object relations theory and developmental psychology. Winnicott (1971) has a special interest in the development of creativity in children, which he sees as integral to the development and maintenance of a true self.

Winnicott (1971) discusses the child's use of their first 'not me' possession. He introduces the idea of the 'transitional object', an object that connects a third space of experience, namely a transitional space which exists between inner reality and external life. According to Winnicott the transitional space marks the space between a child's initial inability,

and their growing capability to distinguish and accept reality (1971: 3). The child acquires material objects which stand in for, or become symbolic of, the mother-child relation and the care the mother offers to the child. However, he notes that the object must be part of a shared reality, not a bundle of projections (p.88). Drawing on the work of Freud (1961 [1923]) Winnicott claims that for the infant to proceed from the pleasure principle to the reality principle the mother needs to be 'good enough'. By this he means that they must 'make active adaptation to the infant's needs, an active adaptation that gradually lessens, according to the infant's growing ability to account for failure of adaptation and to tolerate the results of frustration' (1971: 10). Initially the mother must *adapt* in order that the child can experience the opportunity of an 'illusion' that she is part of them and under the child's magical control. However, she must gradually 'disillusion' the child in order that they can successfully separate themselves from her. The transitional space is space between 'primary creativity' and 'object perception' which is based on reality testing (p.11) and the transitional object is the bridge between the inner and external (or shared) reality from which the child gradually detaches as cultural interests develop (p.14).

Winnicott maintains that play is integral to successful detachment of the transitional object, it 'facilitates growth and therefore health [...] and leads into group relationships' (1971: 41). Play is neither inner psychic reality, or outside the individual, but nor is it in the external world. It rather spans both, facilitating development from transitional phenomena, to playing, then progressing from playing to shared playing, and finally to cultural experience. Playing implies trust and involves the body; it is exciting, precarious, and brings satisfaction (p.52). Moreover, it offers an opportunity for the child, or later, the adult, to be *creative*.

For Winnicott creative apperception is what makes the individual feel that life is worth living, standing in contrast to compliance which 'carries with it a sense of futility for the individual and is associated with the idea that nothing matters and that life is not worth living' (1971: 65). However, he points out that the idea of creativity presented in his work is not necessarily that of a work of art, but rather the approach by the individual to their external reality. Despite the situation, creativity, Winnicott claims, cannot be completely destroyed, but through compliance it becomes hidden whereby the world is recognised, but as something demanding adaptation. Winnicott explains how he develops the work of Freud and Klein, who he says avoid consideration of the full implication of dependence, to arrive at the conclusion that the history of the child must be 'written in terms also of the environmental provision which either meets dependence needs or fails to meet them' (Winnicott 1971: 71).

To move from *relating* to *using* an object, the individual must develop a capacity to use the object via a maturational process that depends on a facilitating environment. The process results in the individual perceiving the object as an external phenomenon. Winnicott explains how the individual first destroys the object, but it remains ‘there’ for them to receive the communication, and has value because it survives destruction, ‘the object develops its own autonomy and life, and (if it survives) contributes-in to the subject, according to its own properties’ (1971: 90). The subject grows emotionally, it has its own life in a world of objects, a cultural world.

For Winnicott ‘cultural experience is located in the *potential space* between the individual and environment (originally the object). The same could be said of playing. Cultural experience begins with creative living first manifested in play’ (1971: 100 original emphasis). However, play, or creativity, in the potential space, happens only where there is a feeling of confidence in the individual. Such confidence emerges through the understanding of the dependability and care of the mother that enables the child to detach from the transitional object.

In Chapter 3 I outlined Stiegler’s notion of the pharmakon, that technology has the potential to be either poison or cure. Stiegler takes up Winnicott to argue that ‘the transitional object is the first pharmakon’ (2013 [2010]: 2). He makes this claim for pharmakon because it is an external object on which both mother and child are dependent yet it provides ‘their serenity, their trust in life’ (2013 [2010]: 3). If care is provided the child can learn to detach from the transitional object and move on to experience new transitional spaces. However, alternatively, if the adult is unable to adopt the transitional object, as is the case when desire is short circuited to the drives, they are denied a feeling of autonomy, of trust in life. As Daniel Ross and Ouyang Man (2021:105) explain, Stiegler generalizes and extends Winnicott’s notion of the transitional object to account for the ‘spiritual’ potential of artefacts to make life feel that it is worth living. However, Stiegler’s pharmacological interpretation, especially in relation to artefacts dedicated to the retention and transmission of memory, makes evident that artefacts also contain the potential for the destruction of knowledge.

I employ Stiegler’s pharmacological interpretation of Winnicott’s notion of the transitional object to argue that the feeling of addiction to their mobile phone that my participants describe is a response to a feeling of separation anxiety. Put another way, the mobile phone is a transitional object that stands in for, or is symbolic of, the attention or care offered to them in an online dimension of being. In the case of my participants this is in part the care offered by the fashion milieu, through which they feel a sense of affirmation. Hence, the mobile

phone is a transitional object that acts as a bridge between their offline and online dimensions of being. Moreover, it offers access to the fashion milieu, to which my participants desire to belong. Fashion media in the form of social media posts, continuously updated and easily accessible through the perpetual contact offered by the mobile phone, mean there is always someone there for them to restructure the pre-individual. However, to develop a healthy apparatus necessary to detach from the mobile phone, the individuals and institutional structures integral to the fashion milieu must adjust their behaviour by offering *care*. First there must be an illusion that my participants and the fashion milieu are one unit, followed by a gradual disillusion that they are in fact separate, whilst holding on to the sense that they belong. If this is the case, they develop an inner confidence in their own self (Winnicott 1971: 54) and trust in their emotional connection to a shared cultural life.

As discussed above, creativity is integral to the process of detachment as creativity implies trust, which brings a sense of satisfaction felt through the body. But in the case of reading or watching fashion media on a mobile phone there is little opportunity for creativity. My participants' social relations, as discussed earlier in this chapter, are very one-sided: to participate they must comply with the regulatory functions of the system. The external environment, discussed by Winnicott, does not appear to meet the necessary requirements for them to adopt the transitional object, namely their mobile phone. They cannot destroy it, whilst keeping it open for communication, hence it does not become an object of value. Put another way, they cannot see the phone according to its own properties as an object in the cultural world; it instead persists as their symbolic connection to life online from which they cannot detach without suffering anxiety. My participants thus experience regression; they suffer a lack of trust and inner confidence to cope without their phone, resulting in what they describe as an addiction to it. As Hannah explains,

H: Before I was very like consumed by like, I was so like adi- I think addicted is the word, when you, when you feel like you haven't been on it for an hour and you're like, oh I'll have a look just in case I've missed something, like now I think I've like made a conscious effort to er, but still like it is everyday – I don't remember a day when I haven't been on my phone so yeah I'm addicted to it.

As Hannah says, she has made a conscious effort not to pick up her phone, suggesting she understands the feeling she describes as “addiction” as something innately bad for her. A notion reiterated by Wiktoria, who says:

W: It's kind of there. I am very anxious if I don't have my phone, I don't like it but I am.

As Wiktoria explains, being anxious when she doesn't have her phone is not something she likes, but my participants appear to believe that they have no choice but to take steps to ensure they have their phone and the connection it offers them to experience a social dimension of life online, to avoid anxiety. Elle and Tarana, in their focus group, discussed how, on occasions when they don't have Wi-Fi, they first feel stressed, but then describe the feeling as "nice". They explain:

K: Right so you still need Wi-Fi to get in there [E: Yes] so what happens when you haven't got Wi-Fi?

E: It's stressful first but then it's nice.

K: Ahh so it's stressful but then nice.

T: Yeah like when you go on holiday and you go somewhere where you have to wait to get to Wi-Fi, or you have to pay, like on the plane, it's like, you just have no choice but not to, the thing is that, I don't need Instagram, but the fact that it's there, is like, oh I wonder what's going on today.

The discussion above suggests that although not having access to Wi-Fi or a roaming signal makes my participants feel anxious, when they can't access social media, they actually enjoy being released from perpetual contact. As Tarana explains, she "doesn't *need* Instagram", but if it is possible to make a connection to social media, they feel they *must* connect to see "what's going on today". The call of the potential in social media, to see "what everyone's been up to", is a call they *need* to respond to suggesting they feel powerless to ignore the pull of the connection to life online. For Freud addiction lies at the root of desire and libidinal economy, and Winnicott regards the transitional object to be addictive. However, Stiegler's term 'generalized addiction' refers to something else (Butler 2021: 125), namely that in a time of hyper-industrialisation libidinal energy is siphoned off to the drives for addictive consumption. Following Stiegler, my participants' long-term goals, their desire to ascend their position in the fashion milieu, is short circuited to the drives, and thus merely offers them a short-term fix. As such, checking social media becomes a need they must address. They become powerless to deny the pull of potential in social media for the restructuring of the pre-individual through

their encounters with fashion media. This creates a dependency on the mobile phone to access the online dimension of being. They are denied the care needed to develop a sense of trust that they will remain a constituent of the fashion milieu while they are without their mobile phone. As Serres states, '[t]he media long ago took over the function of teaching – the time when one hears and sees, the time of seduction and consequence' (2015 [2012]: 6). Serres' words imply a seduction that short circuits a process of sublimation and creates a need for a short-term fix.

I am not the first scholar of media to employ Winnicott's notion of the transitional object. The concept has previously been applied in media studies (Hills 2007) to theorise television as a regressive medium (Silverstone 1994, 1999). Roger Silverstone (1999) draws on Winnicott to consider television as being mythic, theorising play as a dimension of experience in the analysis of television texts along with notions of performance and consumption. This thesis contributes to scholarship in fashion media and postphenomenology by following Lemmens (2017), who as discussed in Chapter 3, proposes a Stieglerian approach to postphenomenology. By employing Stiegler I consider media technologies as doing more than mediating the human-world relation: they are instead integral to it, as they 'open up new ways for reality to manifest itself' (Lemmens 2017: 189). Lemmens suggests a development of the postphenomenological position of technologies being multistable, to instead think of them in Simondonian terms as residing in a metastable system that is at once psychic, social and technical. This is a notion taken up and modified by Stiegler in his general organology. Thus 'human societies for Stiegler are in fact therapeutic systems of care functioning through the continuous adoption of new technologies' (Lemmens 2017: 198). However, these are systems that are subjected to the short-term circuits of both marketing and global technology companies – a condition which results in the adaptation rather than the adoption of technological prostheses. This thesis demonstrates how *attention* and therefore *care* has shifted in part from family, tradition or society to the fashion milieu accessed through mobile phone technology, resulting in a break in intergenerational knowledge and so disrupting the transindividual domain.

However, my participants are aware of their reliance on mobile phone technology and social media networks. As discussed above, Hannah explains, it's "quite sad" knowing that she feels stressed when her phone is on charge across the room. Wiktorina makes clear that she "doesn't like" being anxious when she doesn't have a functioning mobile phone, but acknowledges, nonetheless, that she is. Elle and Tarana both describe a "nice" feeling when they know they can't access the online domain, such as when they are on an aeroplane, demonstrating that they enjoy being released from perpetual contact when denied access to

social media. These comments indicate that there is scope to redress the issues that arise from transindividual disruption, and, importantly, potential for restoration of the curative aspects of the pharmakon.

8.9 The Pharmakon

In an interview with Pieter Lemmens in 2011, Stiegler discusses the pharmacological nature of technology, namely how it can be either poison or cure. Stiegler maintains that his general organology (psychic, technological and social dimensions of individuation) avoids technological determinism by instead proposing a technological condition. Following this logic, technology is integral to the continuous development of the fashion milieu along with the psychic and social dimensions of individuation which conditions the behaviours of the social group. However, to enact the curative dimension of the pharmakon, users of technology (fashion, mobile phone, and digital networked media) must be able to reflect on their actions and be co-involved with the development of the associated milieu. Put another way, they must critically engage with the technological prostheses that structure the associated milieu if they are to develop the maturity to adopt it, and consequently to be capable of detaching from it.

Stiegler discusses how the shift from state to market economy has had an impact on the socialisation of technics (Lemmens 2011: 38) creating a psycho-power that denies the user the opportunity for technical adoption. However, he does not suggest a return to times without digital networked media accessed through mobile technology, but rather advocates for a new industrial model with the potential to produce a new political organisation of the social world. As Bradley (2024a) explains, ‘Stiegler is arguing for a new politics of digital production, to counter the loss or proletarianization of knowledge. Indeed, he is right to note this as countries across the globe are witnessing a phase change in the way digital media (de)forms and controls new subjectivities’ (Bradley 2024a: 13).

Stiegler advocates for new modes, such as open-source software, that offer the potential for users to take back some of the control of digital network systems, to adopt them rather than adapt to them. He claims that the short circuiting of libidinal energy to the drives has resulted in anxiety and addiction in users, whereby the metastable system in which they reside no longer offers them pleasure based on long term desire, as my research demonstrates. However, as is the case with my participants, most users understand that *using* technologies, and being reliant on them, is a problem, but it is one they can’t seem to resolve. It requires care to restore the

curative aspects of technics and the long circuits of intergenerational knowledge necessary for the transindividual relation. As Stiegler and Gagliana state:

[...] today, society in general is destroyed by social networking, by digital technologies. I say that because if we need to be educated, it is because we are very strange animals. Our main organs are not in our body but outside of the body... This is the reason for which the human being must be educated because he has always to learn how to use artificial organs, that is language, social rules, religion, rituals, but also computers, podcasting, et cetera, et cetera. If we understand that education must be based on this process, we have to completely redefine what is education.

(Stiegler and Gagliana 2019 cited in Bradley 2024a: 49)

The externalisation of memory into the technological prosthesis means that human subjects need to be offered care to learn how to use these memory supports, and how to adopt them, which requires education. Bradley (2020, 2022, 2024, 2024a) draws attention to Stiegler's thoughts on the Internet revolution where technologies have advanced at a much quicker rate than the cultural systems that have come to depend on them. However, following Stiegler, he suggests that technologies have the potential for negentropic knowledge that opposes the process of proletarianisation in users, but which requires the creation of dynamic systems that are open enough to offer the user a space for creativity. Hereby the user, through a process of individuation has the potential for deviation and bifurcation. As such, Stiegler's 'negentropic principle is a strategy of differentiation and diversity as it affirms the reconstruction of the faculty of reason which has been devastated by Big Data operations' (Bradley 2020: 472).

It is on this point that Stiegler encourages teachers and educational institutions to transform their pedagogic approach and curriculum to reorient, guide, direct and work with students to develop journeys of knowledge that diverge from those generated by Big Data that traverse digital networked technology. As the proletarianisation of knowledge requires a system of care that supports the adoption of the technical prosthesis, what becomes necessary is a variety of care which can offer suitable tools to address the psycho-power that sets out to short-circuit desire. Such care could create a new form of sociation that engenders trust in the individual-collective relation.

As discussed earlier, fashion is a flow of energy through a system that has the potential to bring together an emotionally connected collective through a shared interest. Fashion involves becoming collectively with others. It is constituted as a group that includes – to name

but a few – designers, pattern cutters, textile producers, marketing experts, branding consultants, journalists, photographers, models, influencers, academic scholars, fashion students, those involved with the distribution of fashion products, retailers, as well as those who buy and wear clothes. Moreover, these are embodied individuals (Entwistle 2023 [2010]) who have the capacity for affect and emotion and engagement with symbolic structures. They are people who share an interest in fashion. It is fashion that brings the group together and has the potential to instil a sense of *philia* in those that participate. However, paradoxically it is the concretisation of fashion, with social media, and mobile phone technology that has led to the disruption of the transindividual relation for my participants. Following Simondon and Stiegler I argue for an approach to technology that considers it on its level by adopting a general organology. It is important that the participants of the fashion milieu, particularly digital natives who have grown up with mobile phones and digital media, are given the care needed to adopt the technological prostheses that are integral to their becoming. Importantly, such a system of care would prospectively restore the curative dimension of the pharmakon.

Conclusion

Mobile phone technology has opened up the world in new ways which facilitate new forms of social connection that have become embedded in the body schemas of users (Richardson and Wilken 2023). As such mobile phones are ever present in everyday life and are integral to how we keep in touch with friends, family, and others we might only know only in an online capacity. This has changed the ways that collectives are formed and is particularly so for digital natives who have grown up with this technology, as is the case with the participants in this research. The evolution from landlines, to first a mobile device and then a smartphone has extended communication into a digital network that is easily accessible through social media platforms. Social media being a participatory medium has created space for a networked public (boyd 2010) where users go to socialise with others, offering the potential for intimate relations that can exist at a social or cultural level (Hinton and Hjorth 2013). This thesis explored these intimate relations through an investigation into the feelings of a group of fashion media users in their encounters with fashion media in the form of fashion media posts accessed through mobile phone technology. It takes a postphenomenological approach to the study of fashion media that considers the mobile phone, social media and fashion as technological prostheses aimed at sociality, to investigate the fashion media user – fashion media – world relation. This is an approach that has not to date been considered in studies of fashion or fashion media.

The thesis contributes to scholarship in postphenomenology by bringing together the ideas of Merleau-Ponty, Simondon and Stiegler as a theoretical framework to account for both the bodily and socio-cultural aspects of experience whilst paying attention to the implications of technological disruption. Drawing on methods from neuro and cognitive science, I also demonstrated the usefulness of the micro-phenomenological interview technique in the collection of pre-reflective descriptions of lived experience that are necessary for a postphenomenological study. My findings show how the pre-reflective aspects of experience are fundamental to the sense fashion media users make of their self and the world. Yet, to date, these perspectives have been largely neglected in studies of fashion and fashion media. My methodological approach also enabled my consideration of the feelings of users, fundamental to this research, and offered a framework for the rigorous analysis of the interview data. The micro-phenomenological interview technical also offered a view of the diachronic structure of experience: of how the experience unfolds over time. This was useful in my research as an analysis of the diachronic landscape of the experience revealed how the participants pick up

their mobile phone to access social media when they feel emotionally disconnected from the world. The thesis offers a methodological and theoretical framework that can be adopted by scholars to investigate the implications of technological disruption in other contexts.

The Fashion Milieu

Merleau-Ponty claims the body is the primary site of knowing the world and situates the perceiving subject in a milieu. This thesis built upon this idea to introduce the concept I term ‘the fashion milieu’. The fashion milieu is a lived environment, where the fashion media user and external environment are entangled and intertwined in a dialectic relation that emerges through mutual and co-constitutive interactions in an open and ongoing process of becoming. The research identified specific characteristics integral to the fashion milieu: hapticity; the inextricable link between feeling and knowing; motility; and the intercorporeal evaluation of the self, through which users develop their subjectivity and come to sense their place in collective life. It is acknowledged that social media captures the attention of users. It is an attention once given to family, religion, or tradition, or ideologies that are said to be somewhat disintegrating (Stiegler 2013 [2010]). Moreover, it has been argued that this disruption extends to the disintegration of a sense of belonging once recruited by these ideologies (Serres 2015). However, my field work demonstrates how the invisible symbolic structure of fashion instituted in the bodies of participating subjects has the potential to bring fashion media users together as a collective. I show how through their encounters with fashion media (in the form of social media posts accessed through a mobile phone) my participants experience a sense of belonging to a collective who share their interest in fashion. It is a sense of belonging that generates a sense of *philia*.

However, Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the milieu does not specifically account for technology. To account for the specificity of technology in my research I extended my theoretical framework to consider the ideas of Simondon, a philosopher of technology. To make this connection I drew on a body of work (Andrea Bardin 2015, de Beistegui 2005, Guchet 2018, Landes 2013, Mills 2016, Scott 2014: 46-49, Viana 2023) that compares the ideas of the two thinkers to explore where they differ but also where there is alignment in their thinking. This allowed me to foreground my approach which consists in employing Simondon’s ideas of transduction, individuation and the transindividual to account for the context and operation of emotion in the space of digital networked media accessed through mobile phone technology. Simondon’s theory of individuation, as understood by Deleuze in his concept of human

becoming, has been deployed in studies of fashion (Eckersely and Duff 2020; Ruggerone 2017; Smelik 2013, 2105; refs) and fashion media (Gibbs 2015; Filippello 2018a, 2018b). However, such a Deleuzian approach does not fully encompass Simondon's later theoretical developments which emphasise the systematic unity of psychic and collective individuation: the transindividual relation. The thesis makes a contribution to the Deleuzian scholarship on fashion by employing Simondon's account of subjectivity, drawing specifically on his later work to study the disruption to the transindividual relation that results from the users' encounters with fashion media in the form of fashion media posts accessed through mobile phone technology.

Transindividual Disruption

According to Simondon communication occurs within a multi and metastable system with potential which creates a tension between the individual and the collective that requires resolution. I applied Simondon's theory of transductive logic to show how the fashion media user overflows itself both internally and externally to the fashion milieu which creates an incompatibility in the system that requires resolution. I demonstrated how ideas transcend across both offline and online domains, bringing together two orders of magnitude enabling a reorganisation of the system. This reorganisation brings together offline and online life to form a single lived reality.

Networked culture is fundamental to life experienced online and is characterised by an unprecedented amount of information which is perpetually updated and easily accessible by mobile phone. To be successful in the communication process the post must break through the noise in the communication channel (Terranova 2004). In the context of my study, I argued, drawing on the work of Rosenberger (2012), that this happens when the fashion media user senses a personal and intimate connection through their reading of the post that takes on special meaning within their awareness. It is an intimate connection that affects them.

I employed Simondon's account of affect to show how my participants come to understand that they are more than one through affect. This creates a tension that requires resolution through a social dimension. I argued, following Simondon, that perception and emotion are complementary processes which through a process of transduction transcend to action and emotion simultaneously to form a new order. Thus, the affect my participants experience transcends to an emotional response through which they become incorporated into the fashion milieu.

Simondon states that as technologies move from an abstract state to one of concretisation they become open to the associated milieu, offloading the burden of their functions to their environment. I make a case that the mobile phone, digital networked media, and fashion, are technologies that have moved from an abstract state to a single concrete system which amplifies the sense of a personal or intimate connection. However, as Simondon explains, the evolution of the technical object (mobile phone) with digital media networks (fashion media post) and human operators (fashion media users) requires an invention, a solution by human and machine. I argued that these technologies, in their shift to a single concrete system that supports multiple functions, is constructed through the psycho-social regime of individuation. Hence, it is a system which requires human operators: without human participation there would be no social media, or fashion.

I deployed Simondon's notion of the 'cycle of images' to show how the image that emerges from affective-emotive experience, the imaginary, offers access to the symbolic field. Simondon explains how the image symbol has a universality, which formalises human experience and acts as a means for communication, but at the same time solves a problem through invention. I drew on this idea to show how the invention of fashion in an online domain offloads the burden of sociality to the associated milieu. An example of this is how the invention of a photograph solves the problem of the viewer needing to be present to experience the fashion object, or how the invention of the photograph into a fashion media post amplifies the sense of a personal or intimate connection underpinned by the symbolic structures of fashion, particularly when read or watched on a mobile phone. Thus, the fashion media user in their encounters with social media does not experience clothing or dress, but rather an image symbol of it. I demonstrated how in the shift to a single concrete system there is a shift in the intention of fashion media, namely the focus shifts from the fashion object to an emotional and empathetic exchange. As such, my participants, through the screens of their mobile phones, interact with fashion not as an object, but rather as a process of flows through a network: as meaning shifts to the symbolic domain fashion in the space of digital networked media becomes dematerialized. Moreover, the thesis demonstrates how mobile phone technology and fashion media accessed through it have become inextricably intertwined and embedded within the social practices of my participants. These technologies offer stability by proving the viability of a new structuration, an online dimension of being.

I used this idea to analyse the diachronic aspects of the participants experience of reading or watching fashion media on their mobile phone. This investigation revealed a three phased structure. My participants first describe the feeling of a void offline, which I argued is

them feeling emotionally disconnected from the world, to which they respond by picking up their mobile phone. It is an action that occurs below their conscious awareness. They log into social media which results in a sense of excitement or anticipation. This, I showed, is them realising the potential to engage with another embodied subject who they understand also has the capacity for affect and emotion and who shares their interest in fashion. They then report scrolling through social media until a post captures their attention, which, after reading, shifts their feeling to a sense of affirmation. There is an individuation between the fashion media user and the fashion media post they encounter.

However, the user does not experience an individuation with a digital object, but rather an individualisation with those they encounter through it. The fashion media post engenders an emotional empathy which is felt through their body. Through reading the post the fashion media user is able to restructure the pre-individual inherent to their becoming. As Simondon states although there appears to be a symmetry between emotion and perception in the formation of collective life, perception structures the individual-milieu relation, whilst emotion structures the relation between the individual and themselves through their relations with the milieu external to them. It enables a transindividual relation.

But this relation is not a ‘real’ relation, it is a relation generated through technological prostheses. Although these are emotional relations that appear to strip the subjects the user encounters from their constituting role in society (as an ‘actor’, ‘model’, ‘musician’, or ‘influencer’) revealing them to be made of the same stuff, they do not transcend to relations that exist outside of their functional role. The utilitarian aspect of their relation is integral to their relation – and indivisible from it. They remain social media relations. The user rather experiences an interindividual relation that masks the transindividual relation disrupting the transindividual domain. The implications of this are that although my participants discuss these relations positively (they describe how reading or watching fashion media posts generate feelings of ‘comfort’, ‘inspiration’, ‘happiness’, ‘warmth’ or ‘satisfaction’) they simultaneously show signs of digital dependency characterized by anxiety and addictive behaviours.

I employed Simondon’s thoughts on anxiety to account for the anxiety my participants describe when they don’t have a working mobile phone on their person. I argued that it is the result of them becoming aware of the pre-individual within them that they are unable to exchange without a social dimension. I argued that the practice of using a mobile phone to access social media when they feel emotionally disconnected from the world has now become so embedded in their everyday lives that they do it without having to think about it: their body just does it. When the participants don’t have a working mobile phone on them, they can no

longer resolve the affective problematic and as such feel the problem flowing back into them. Thus, anxiety is an emotion that reveals to them their need for a connection with the social world which motivates a planned approach to the challenges of the future.

The Implications of Transindividual Disruption

To further investigate the implications of transindividual disruption I turned to the work of Stiegler who modifies Simondon's theory of individuation to include what he describes as tertiary retentions. I argued that fashion media posts are tertiary retentions, memory supports that pave the way for collective memory, which lay a foundation for a shared future. But they are memories that have not been lived by the fashion media user or previous generations. As Stiegler explains, with hyper-industrialisation tertiary retentions are commodified, synchronized and schematized and in an era of global media communications the organisation of the system, its processing and access, rests with a small number of global corporations. It is these global corporations that currently have control of the flow of information through the system which has the potential to influence the flow of affect that in the case of this research is underpinned by the invisible symbolic structure of fashion instituted in the body schemas of those who participate in social media. As such, fashion media users are not co-involved in the building of their social world, the fashion milieu; following Stiegler, they cannot adopt these technologies, they must adapt to them.

Stiegler claims that social media has led to a shift in *philia*. The thesis applied this idea to the context of fashion to show how fashion media short-circuit my participants' desire to elevate their position in the fashion milieu. Through their reading of fashion media they become incorporated into a collective who share their interest in fashion. However, this is merely a short-term fix. The affirmation my participants describe when encountering fashion media cannot be sustained – they feel compelled to go back for more. They explained in their focus groups how they spend four to five hours a day reading social media and 60-70% of the social media they read is media devoted to the coverage, circulation and consumption of fashion and beauty. This equates to approximately three hours a day, a significant timespan as the participants report accessing social media daily. As a result, attention, or as Stiegler maintains, care, has shifted in part from family, friends, and acquaintances to the fashion milieu, which has led to not only to a break in intergenerational knowledge, but also to the disruption of the transindividual domain.

However, social media acts as a safety net for my participants; there is always someone there for them to restructure the pre-individual, but the fashion milieu does not offer them the care needed to detach from the mobile phone, the portal to an online dimension of being. Thus, when my participants do not have a fully functioning mobile phone, they suffer separation anxiety. They claim they feel addicted to the technological prosthesis. By revealing the implications of transindividual disruption, this research contributes to a better understanding of social cohesion and well-being in an age dominated by digital networked media and mobile phone technology.

Avenues for Future Research.

As my research is historically located, it does not account for the experiences of social media platforms that have emerged or become very popular since I conducted my study. The research was carried out between 2018-2019 and my participants described their experience of fashion media in the form of Instagram posts and YouTube vlogs. They did not mention platforms such as TikTok (2016 onwards) which has become popular as a means of communication in fashion over the last three years. A study of the fashion milieu in the expanded contemporary context would be a fruitful area for further research.

It is pertinent to note that my participants were recruited as fashion media users who happen to be fashion media students. I did not study their encounters with fashion media in a classroom setting, but I was interested to work with this group as they share my interest in fashion media. However, as students of the discipline they share a long-term desire to work in the fashion industry. A further study of fashion media users who are not invested in a career in fashion would be useful to fully assess the influence of fashion media consumption on individual subjectivity and collective becoming. Further, my participants were all women, and although from mixed ethnic backgrounds, have all grown up in a European context. In the future, comparative studies focused on fashion media users from non-western contexts, and on those of alternative genders would make interesting contributions to the field.

In terms of my own future research, I am interested in exploring the implications of transindividual disruption on the evolution of fashion communication. As a researcher and teacher of fashion media and communication, I am motivated by Simondon and Stiegler's respective observations and concerns relating to advances in technological innovation moving faster than the cultural systems that depend on them. My research findings highlight the importance of research that considers the pre-reflective aspects of experience that go unnoticed

by the experiencing subject. I propose an interdisciplinary approach to research that acknowledges the feelings of users but also considers technology as a ‘technical being’ with its own developmental logic that evolves through its interaction with humans and the environment. Such research could promote the development of a general organology able to address issues of transindividual disruption and restore the curative dimension of the pharmakon.

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Appendix
Information Sheet for Participants
Participant Consent Form
Participant Details
Email to Course Leaders
Ethical Considerations

Participant Information Sheet August 2017

A study of fashion media reception via mobile, digital, networked technology

You are being invited to take part in a research project run by Kelly Dearsley. Kelly Dearsley is the Programme Director of the Fashion Communication courses in the School of Media and Communication here at London College of Fashion and is also a PhD student with an interest in how we experience fashion media. Before you agree to participate it is important for you to understand why the research is being undertaken, and what it will involve. Please take time to read over the following information. Any questions can be directed to the contacts detailed below. Also, remember that you can decide to withdraw from the project at any time without having to give a reason and without disadvantage to you.

Fashion media reception

Reception studies is interested in how audiences, sometimes described as readers or users, receive media. There was a significant interest in this topic during the 1980s and 1990s, which in the main looked at television audiences, although some work was conducted into the reception of women's magazines. The development of mobile, digital, networked technology has offered a new space for fashion to be disseminated to audiences. Kelly Dearsley is interested in extending this research to review how fashion media is received through mobile phone technology. She is particularly interested in the lived experience of the user.

Project aims and description

Kelly is looking for volunteers to participate in this project. She will conduct focus groups to define what constitutes as fashion media when read or watched on a mobile phone and to contextualise her findings. These will be conducted at the Lime Grove campus and will be audio recorded. The recordings will be used to generate transcriptions which will be used only for the purposes of her research. Once transcribed the recordings will be deleted.

In addition, Kelly would like to interview each of you individually to drill down into a particular experience of fashion media reception to be chosen by you. These interviews will also be conducted at the Lime Grove campus and will be audio recorded. The recordings will be transcribed after which the recordings will be deleted. The transcriptions will only be used for the purposes of this research project. The findings of this work are important not only to the discipline of fashion media, but would also inform research into technology more generally, and to the broader discipline of media studies.

If you are happy to take part in the project you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. You will also be asked to complete a form to provide some details about yourself (such as your age and nationality). Completion of the participant information form is optional you do not need to complete any section if you feel uncomfortable. It is important to note that participation in this project is voluntary, you have the right to withdraw from the project at any time

Confidentiality

The information collected, as well as your personal details will be kept confidential. To ensure confidentiality, the data will be processed in the following way. The recordings of both the focus groups and interviews will be transcribed at which time the recordings will be deleted. The transcriptions will be stored in a password-protected folder on my UAL laptop and any paper copies will be kept in a locked cupboard at the UAL Lime Grove campus.

Researcher:

Kelly Dearsley
Programme Director
Fashion Communication
School of Media and Communication
London College of Fashion
40 Lime Grove
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UAL Research Ethics:

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Tel:00 44 (0) 20 7514 2113

Participant Consent Form August 2017

A study of fashion media reception via mobile, digital, networked technology

Activity Consents

I understand that I have given my consent to participate in this project

I also understand that I have given permission for the interview and focus group to be audio recorded

Data Consents

I understand that the focus group dialogue and interview will be recorded if I consent, and the recording will be used to generate transcriptions. Once transcribed the recordings will be permanently deleted. The transcriptions of the conversations between participants and Kelly Dearsley undertaken during the focus groups and interview process will be used in the dissemination of the findings of this research project. I also understand that I give permission for this material to feed into the development of further research undertaken by Kelly Dearsley, both within UAL and in wider contexts.

It has been explained to me that after the completion of the research, the data will be kept by Kelly Dearsley. It has been explained to me how the information from the focus group and interview will be stored both during and after the period of research.

Statement of Understanding

I have read the information leaflet outlining the nature of this research project which I have been asked to participate in, and I have been given a copy of this leaflet to keep. The proposed project has been explained, and the interest for the project has been made clear. I have had the opportunity to discuss the details of the project and to ask questions.

Rights of Withdrawal

After I have given my consent, I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the project at any time without disadvantage to myself and without having to give a reason.

Complaints Procedure

I understand that if I have any complaints about the research process, I can contact the UAL research committee at the address below.

Statement of Consent

I hereby fully and freely consent to participation in the study which has been explained to me in full.

Signatures

<i>Participant's name</i> (BLOCK CAPITALS):	_____
<i>Participant's signature:</i>	_____
	<i>Date:</i> _____

	Kelly Dearsley
<i>Researcher's name:</i>	_____
<i>Researcher's signature:</i>	_____
	<i>Date:</i> _____

Researcher:

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Participant Details August 2017

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

This information is being collected to contextualize results once the focus groups and interviews have been completed. Completing this form is optional, which means that you have no obligation to fill in any section of this form. You can choose not to complete any section without having to give a reason. The information will remain confidential.

Name:

Pseudonym (the name you would like to go by in the published research):

Place of Residence - term time:

Place of Residence - outside of term time:

Date of Birth:

Gender:

How would you describe your ethnic origin:

Email to Course Leaders July 2017

Dear (name of Course Leader)

I have sought permission from the Dean and your Programme Director to email you to request that you might consider allowing me to make a presentation to your students. The purpose of the presentation is to ask if they would consider taking part in a project I am undertaking as part my PhD research. I am interested in investigating the lived experience of reading or watching fashion media on a mobile phone. I have attached a copy of the participant information sheet for your consideration.

It is important that the students do not feel coerced into participating. I have identified your students because they share an interest in fashion media. However, I will neither teach them nor be responsible for the assessment of their work whilst they study at LCF. If you agree I would like to ask the programme administrator to introduce me to your students. You will not need to be present, and I would ask that you do not discuss my research with the students. If there are subsequent questions, please direct them to my email address.

I will make a five-minute presentation that briefly explains my area of interest. I will leave a sign-up sheet at the front of the class which I will arrange to be collected by the programme administrator at the end of the taught session. I will email students who have shown an interest in participating and will attach the participant information sheet and a copy of the consent form. I will ask the student to take time to consider the information and email the signed consent form to me if they are still interested in taking part. I will then arrange a time for us to meet. They will be informed that they can withdraw from the project as any time and that there will be no consequence should they decide to withdraw.

It is also important that you should not feel coerced into offering me access to your students. Offering me a time to meet with them is voluntary and there will be no consequences should you decide not to support access. If you are happy for me to meet with your students, please could you email me by return with a convenient time for me to make a presentation.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

I would like to thank you for your time in considering this request.

Best wishes

Kelly Dearsley

Ethical Considerations

As a member of staff at London College of Fashion, my first consideration was to identify a cohort of students with whom I would not come in to contact in my role as Programme Director, and thus not be in any way coercive or unethical in my data collection. The UAL code of practice on research ethics works on the guiding principles of respect for persons, justice and beneficence.

Respect for persons recognises the right of the individual to make their own decisions. Biaggio, Paget and Chenoweth (1997) outline the need for staff to acknowledge the power that resides in the staff/student relationship and how this could translate into students feeling obliged to participate in staff research projects. This discussion has been taken up by Miller and Kreiner (2008), whose work reviews the idea of students perceiving they have been coerced into participating in psychological research projects undertaken by members of faculty. It also reiterates that participation in research by human subjects must be voluntary, and how declining to take part or discontinuing participation must not result in any disadvantage to the students. Further, researchers are required to outline the risks and benefits of their work in order that participants can make an informed choice and have autonomy in choosing whether to participate as the uneven power relation between staff and students can lead to student perception of being coerced into taking part in faculty research. The notion of coercion is also discussed by Leentjens and Levenson (2013), who note that students are dependent on their tutors for their education, which makes them vulnerable and solicits the need to protect them from feeling obliged to participate in research undertaken by university staff. They describe students as being in a 'captive' position and discuss how this feeling of coercion is exacerbated if students are recruited by staff members who teach them. Consequently, they suggest that research should be designed to separate the teacher/researcher roles. They state '[s]tudents should neither be asked to participate in research conducted by their own teachers, nor asked by their own teacher to participate in others' research' (2013: 395). Ferguson, Yonge and Myrick (2004) also discuss the issue of power in the student/staff relation and declare that it is the role of the researcher to consider potential problems and develop strategies to reduce the risk to participants. However, the risk of coercion can be mitigated by avoiding the recruitment of students who are registered to the course on which the researcher is teaching. Ferguson, Yonge and Myrick (2004) maintain however, that further mitigation must be considered as the student may understand there to be an indirect relationship with their own staff team as they and the researcher are both employed by the same institution. They outline how students must be

informed of their right to participate, or indeed decline, an invitation to contribute to staff research and be reassured that they would be free to withdraw at any point.

It is also important that staff should not feel coerced into offering access to their students for research projects. To limit feelings of coercion I sought permission from the Dean and Programme Director to email Course Leaders in the fashion media programme with an outline of my research (see email in appendix). I requested that they contact me if they would be happy for me to approach their students, and outlined the approach I would adopt in recruiting my participants. I explained that offering access to their students was voluntary and there would be no consequences should they not wish to support access. I also explained that I would be happy to answer any questions they may have relating to the research proposed. The Course Leaders of the fashion photography, fashion illustration, and fashion styling courses replied to say that they would be willing to give me time with their students to discuss my project with them.

Mitigating the students' perception of coercion was central to my research design. I identified undergraduate students in the fashion media programme as being appropriate for my study. Like my own students in fashion communication, this group also has a particular interest in fashion media as students of the discipline. Working with this group limited the risk of them perceiving coercion, as I would neither teach this student group in any capacity, nor would I be involved in the assessment of their work during their time as students as I worked in a different department. I was given permission to attend a taught session to deliver a five-minute presentation of my research aims and objectives and to give an overview of what would be required of the students if they were to agree to participate. Providing this information offered the students the opportunity to make an informed choice as to whether to participate or not (for information sheet and consent form see appendix). I made it clear to the student group that this invitation was voluntary and that there would be no consequences if they chose to decline. I made four visits to four different groups of students in the programme, each group consisting of approximately fifty students. I joined at the beginning of the taught session where the programme administrator introduced me and then left the room. It was made clear to the students' staff team prior to my visit that they should not promote my research to their students either during the session I attended or at any other time. If students were to ask questions about my project, staff were briefed to respond by pointing students to my email address. To further mitigate a sense of obligation I left a sign-up sheet at the front of the class and asked students who were interested to leave their names and email addresses at some point during the session. I arranged for these sheets to be collected at the end of the class by a programme administrator. According to Menges (1973) a sign-up sheet is an effective means to mitigate a sense of

obligation to participate as in the case of my research the sign-up sheet would only have been seen by the programme administrator who collected it at the end of the session, not by their tutor or by other peers in their class. The collection of the sign-up sheet by a third party further mitigated the risk of the students feeling obliged to support me with my research. Six students left their contact details in each of the first two groups I visited, five students left their names in the third group, and four in the final group.