

# **Disgustingly Beautiful**

From feminist phenomenology to the female gaze:  
A conversation with Harley Weir's fashion film *Legs Are Not Doors*

Media Studies

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Faculty of Humanities

Master's thesis

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This thesis aims to combine feminist phenomenology with the idea of the female gaze. This exploration of the possibilities of such a meeting is done by looking at a fashion film.

Drawing from film studies, dance studies and especially from the phenomenology of Luce Irigaray, the aim of the thesis has been to take a feminist, subversive look at the idea of the female gaze, which originally sprung from the male gaze, a concept introduced in the 1970s by Laura Mulvey.

Alas, both the female gaze as well as fashion film have, in fact, been around since the beginning of cinema but have only been written into existence during the past thirty years or so.

Harley Weir's *Legs Are Not Doors*, a fashion film around which the conversation centers, is an avant-garde work by an auteur, made for branding purposes. However, as the film shall be looked at from a phenomenological point of view, it allows space for the viewer of the film rather than an analysis of its contents. In other words, this phenomenological application of the female gaze allows the writer/researcher/reader/viewer to inhabit one's body and hence make space for a subjective experience.

In the current interpretation of the female gaze, gender is no longer an issue – the body/space is.

**Key words:** feminist phenomenology, female gaze, girl gaze, dance studies, Luce Irigaray, Laura Mulvey, fashion film

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Tämän tutkielman tavoitteena on ollut yhdistää feministinen fenomenologia naiskatsetta kuvaavaan female gaze -käsitteeseen. Kyseisiä teorioita käyttämällä on haluttu luoda tila(a), josta käsin tarkastella Harley Weirin muotifilmiä *Legs Are Not Doors*.

Tutkielman vaikutteet tulevat niin elokuvan- kuin tanssintutkimuksen kentältä. Kirjoittamisen lähtökohtana onkin ollut hahmottaa kehollinen tila, josta käsin katsoa, tarkastella ja kokea Weirin teosta. Työn tarkoituksena on ollut etsiä vaihtoehtoisia tapoja ajatella female gazea, joka on alun perin nähty vastareaktiona 1970-luvulla Laura Mulveyn lanseeraamalle heteronormatiiviselle male gazelle.

Niin female gaze kuin muotifilmi ovat olleet olemassa elokuvan ensi vuosista saakka, mutta ne ovat hahmottuneet näkyviin vasta kuluneiden noin kolmen vuosikymmenen aikana.

Harley Weirin muotifilmi on avantgardistinen, ohjaajansa näköinen työ, joka on tehty brändäystarkoitukseen. Tätä tutkielmaa varten sitä on kuitenkin tarkasteltu ennen kaikkea kirjoittavan, kokevan, kehollisen katselijan kautta. Tämän prosessin tarkoituksena on ollut luoda tila(a) subjektiiviselle, sisältäpäin arvottuvalle katsomiskokemukselle.

Female gazen viimeisimmissä applikaatioissa kyse ei olekaan enää sukupuolesta vaan sallivasta tilasta.

**Avainsanat:** feministinen fenomenologia, muodintutkimus, tanssintutkimus, muotifilmi, Luce Irigaray, Laura Mulvey, female gaze, girl gaze

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Fashion – a personal fascination

My work with this thesis really began with a life-long interest in clothing.

Clothes have played many roles in my life and allowed me to do so in the process, too. I have loved and loathed clothes, fallen for fast fashion in my teenage years, then deemed the rat race of fashion unacceptable as an adult, only to notice how difficult it is to find a balance between want and need. All the same, I have always looked to clothes and to style whenever I was going through a life change or began feeling a yearning for rejuvenation.

Over the years, I developed an understanding that fashion allowed me to play not only with my clothes but with my imagination. I'd bounce ideas of self and possibility back and forth as I flipped through the pages of fashion magazines. I began to understand that I could love fashion without purchasing an item. I began to understand that fashion inspired me, and not only as a consumer. I began to understand that I could feel fashion and that it got not only on but under my skin.

Despite all this, when I was about to begin my thesis, fashion studies was still an area of academic research I had not touched during my years as a university student. And so it now felt fitting: I'd try on something old, something new and something borrowed as I approached the final ritual of my studies. The direction – entering a new area of research to question a seemingly quotidian experience – suited my taste of wanting to explore and experience something previously unfamiliar to me. What would be the result of applying theory to something I had always experienced strongly and held close? And in fact, what might this theory be? The path I was mapping for my writing was really about finding a new point of view on something I had only looked at and experienced from one stance for so many years. I was, perhaps, equipped with the understanding that examining fashion further might halt my enthusiasm over new seasons, but I was ready for that possibility as in truth, fashion had not been an easy topic for me – or for most of us – in quite a while.

This point of entry meant that I had a lot of feelings and sensations under my belt when it came to fashion, but I was only a novice when it came to framing these experiences. I knew researching fashion – no matter the stance – would either ground fashion in a new way or permanently strip it of its appeal.

## 1.2 Fashion film enters the scene

I first came about Harley Weir's fashion film *Legs Are Not Doors* (2015), the core of this research, around the time of its initial release. I saw it on YouTube, and it appeared to me, it seemed, exactly as what it was intended to be – an advert that was highly stylised, full of eye candy, intriguing and annoying at once. Weir's two minutes, which she had directed for the fashion brand Proenza Schouler, communicated an art-world vibe with an urban attitude. The directorial style, the actresses featured, and the cutting-edge clothing – familiar features of fashion films – all contributed to the mix. I realized I was not, however, as interested in the clothing as I was in the world of the film, which, at first glance, seemed to speak of being a woman – be it in a very stylish, very image-conscious world.

In addition, the film surpassed fashion as clothing and operated in a whole different sphere, both elevated and visceral. I need not touch the clothes in order to feel them or to understand their message. This was something familiar, an experience or a sensation I had long lived with.

It seemed the fashion film was a kind of condensed version of everything the label was promising. As part of this experience, I need not instantly buy the clothes in order to experience the world they seemed to be coming from. I could enjoy both the sights of the clothes but also the film itself, as it seemed to have a life outside being a mere clothes rack.

This is what sparked my interest in the theory of the film, as I could sense it was operating in a certain sensorial world. In short, fashion was a backdrop, but senses ruled. I began to understand I could look into fashion as an abstract art form. Fashion film was giving it new life. I was no longer sure if I was experiencing the film or the fashion. Later, I could see that while film was the method and senses the language, fashion – in the very broad sense of the word – were the brushstrokes, the colors.

## 1.3 Phenomenology as a means to understand sensory experience

I have been intrigued by phenomenology throughout my master's studies. The theory has always seemed to illuminate reality and, in doing so, place us inside it. It somehow made the world come to

life, instead of being reduced to its bits, dissected over and over. Phenomenology didn't ask me to distance myself from what I was researching, but on the contrary, to expose myself to sensing and experiencing and to knowing myself in the process.

By means of phenomenology, as it seemed from the get-go, I could dig deeper into the reality of physical experience and in doing so, notice that reality, in fact, is in many ways comprised of physical, visceral, bodily sensations.

Quite naturally, this led me to the realization that I wanted to understand how I was able to experience fashion viscerally, if fashion only really existed in image form in front of my eyes, on screen. Somewhere between the moving images of the film and the sensing cells of my body there was a connection I wanted to grasp. I knew the avenue for this would be writing, even if I was talking about a bodily experience. Words would, perhaps, make that connection, which still seemed like a distance, visible and give it shape and form.

I wasn't sure about the details of the journey I was about to embark upon but was prone to intuit that I could easily apply phenomenology to fashion and especially to fashion film because I was talking about something that was abstract and yet visceral at the same time. I knew, at this point, that I was talking about the reality of the body and about the experience of the subject. Fashion film had become the platform for the conversation that was about to take place.

In addition, phenomenology has a firm history in film studies, which I'd explored during the early stages of my master's studies, and so it seemed like the perfect fit in regards to a fashion film. I already knew this film was rich in texture and that I wanted to explore it as an experience more than anything. These were the starting points of this phenomenological path.

I was ultimately hoping that with the help of phenomenology, I could open and expand on something I was curious about. I didn't want to cut myself out of what I was researching – or pretend that would be possible – but I wanted, rather, to come closer to it, and during the course of the writing process, to illustrate that I, too, was a part of what I was exploring and researching. I could never remove myself from the equation.

All of this did not mean I was interested in finding out who I was, but rather, that viewing myself as a researching subject I could come to see what kind of possibilities this position opened up in



regards to knowing. Simply put, the knowing I was seeking was taking place inside me. The question was not about a precise piece of knowledge I could produce, but about all the possible knowledge that might happen and be produced within me, in my body, and how it might be useful to the subject.

#### **1.4 The influence of phenomenological dance study**

Throughout my studies, I have been influenced by the meeting of phenomenology and dance studies. The approach to research that is produced as a result of this meeting is really about attempting the impossible: talking, writing, about what the body does and what the body experiences. This is seemingly impossible only because we may not be used to it. How does one talk body? Perhaps phenomenology could suggest a way.

I have found the bridge between dance and fashion to be one easily crossed. The similarities between these two modes of expression/experiencing are to be found in the way both of these mediums ultimately move and touch the body. Fashion is an expression translated into clothes which come to dress – and so, touch – our bodies whereas dance is being touched from the inside and channelling that sense of being in one's body into choreography. These experiences happen in the body, informing it, but there is also something for us to see. I have chosen to put the emphasis, however, on what cannot be seen, either in dance or in fashion, and explore from within there.

Another thing that links these two spheres of existence is the idea of movement. We come here to be touched, to be moved. We come here to sense our bodies, and in that act, cloth and all kinds of movement are integral to our experience of the world. How could we not be influenced by this environment? All in all, dance and fashion, when connected by the idea of movement, create a sensual experience of the world. It is almost like saying there's a way of being available out there, one that prioritizes the haptic, body-based experience over the cognitive one.

Leena Rouhiainen (2003) is a dancer and a researcher who has studied dance by means of phenomenology, taking dancers into dialogue with phenomenology. Her research takes the experience of dancers and philosophizes it. Movement becomes matter that is translated into words.

Phenomenological dance study has inspired me a lot and in many ways brought me to explore the

themes of this thesis, too. This is because for me, dance movement, much like fashion, is just another bodily way of existence. Both dance studies and fashion studies – when linked to phenomenology – allow me to explore seemingly obvious experiences which, however, escape traditional explanations. In other words, both the movement-based study of dance and the sensory-based study of fashion give voice to experiences otherwise unseen.

Although fashion is easily taken at face value and approached as mere images or fading looks, when it is approached as a sensory experience much like movement, it also leads us into unknown territory. We can no longer talk about what we see and how to categorize it, but are forced to map the invisible and the subjective: fashion – or movement – that is felt and so, experienced in a broader sense.

All of this has been one of the most important steps I have taken on my journey towards phenomenological fashion study, as it has allowed me to link the unseen into the seen. Phenomenological dance studies have given me the chance to deepen my experience of fashion – or at least the way I am able to talk about it. To consider cloth as I do dance – as movement, touch and being touched, from the inside out or outside in – has offered a new avenue of exploration, one that suggests processes which happen within the body instead of simply out there, separate from the individual and her experience, in society, as phenomena that could very well be measured and analyzed. This new kind of fashion happens as much in the cells of my body as it does on the catwalk.

## **1.5 Knowing and knowledge – the body versus “creative speculation”**

Kaarina Kailo, who has written several studies and books around women’s history, studied matricultures and introduced ecopsychology to Finnish audience, has stated that knowledge is, even at best, ”creative speculation”, which is linked to knowledge when crafting a study. Kailo’s statement seems to imply that no matter what the building blocks, the final result is always an image constructed by the author.<sup>1</sup>

In this thesis, I am choosing to lean towards an understanding of knowledge as introduced by Kailo. This idea of knowledge, to me, comes across as knowledge that is more open, fluid, organic – and therefore, perhaps more honest, if that is a term we might resonate with.

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<sup>1</sup> Kaarina Kailo spoke at Kriittinen korkeakoulu’s webinar Naispuolinen jumaluus which was held on the 25th of January in 2022.

Most importantly, however, Kailo's sense of knowledge hints at that things are not straightforwardly known but become so through our processes. We come to perceive something that intrigues us and then try to create knowledge out of it by hanging our thoughts and impressions onto pieces of study previously written.

The ideas of knowing and of knowledge are not, in my opinion, interchangeable, but one easily moves and dances between them. It is as if the subject returns to knowing in order to produce knowledge – the verb leads to the noun.

Having written this thesis, I would argue that knowing is the state in which we move through this world. Knowing cannot be avoided and it spontaneously takes place in the body. This is the phenomenological knowing that appears in the body, and as suggested by Rouhiainen (2003), having been perceived, may then be written into existence. Some of us hunger for that knowing more than others, yet we all receive it.

Knowledge, in the other words, is the deed linked to this knowing. It is produced, hung up to dry like laundry, only to be re-used, re-purposed and recycled over and over again... We are all parts of this process as producers of this knowledge because we move through this world, more or less, knowing taking place in our bodies.

## **1.6 Theoretical goals**

The central point of the work done around the topic of my thesis has been to make an inquiry about the ways in which it is possible to make reflections of one's self in relation to a fashion film. Or perhaps better said, the goal has been to explore a fashion film when it bounces back from the self. This means to explore possibility, not close down on one.

Phenomenology, because of its permissive nature, has been the tool of choice for this. The reflection and reflecting done as a result of watching this fashion film does not rely on canonized knowledge. It is, rather, a playful and free, associative process where one is situated deep within one's body although the reflective images occur in the outside world. The gaze is equally directed at the spectator who experiences the film as it is in the film, as an object. However, the spectator is not the actual focus of the research, either. She and her body are simply the platform, somewhere the

research can take place.

A key question in phenomenological study does not seem to be so much about why, but about how. How does this film affect me? How might we look at and experience it? The phenomenology I use in this thesis is not, then, so much an answer as it is a question or a suggestion or better yet, an opening – an invitation to join a conversation. This is how I look at it – now what do you see, and how do you see it? What is of value to you? This kind of process creates knowledge that may not seem to be of objective value and yet is of utmost importance to an individual. We all make our own creative speculations. This, of course, asks us to re-think the value(s) of knowledge, too.

If anything, the point of phenomenological study is to offer an alternative that is soft and versatile, one that breathes. And by choosing this viewpoint, one begins with how one studies something, not why. Nonetheless, the how becomes the why: we need the how in order to understand the why... It is all part of the same game or, rather, cycle. Eventually, it may also lead to the dissolution of knowledge, per se. However, this would be the beginning of a whole another speculation.

By considering and reconsidering the how we can ask questions about the very meaning of studying it – in this case, a fashion film – in the first place. How could we make space for the kind of culture that respects personal knowing? How could we trust and learn to value knowledge that is produced spontaneously, in the body? Surely, this is a long process of de-learning and re-learning.

However, we might also ask if knowledge needs to be shared at all or is it enough – is it just as valid – if and when it exists in the body of the individual? This is knowing, in other words, the kind of knowledge that remains within and hence escapes outside validation. How might we give more value to such knowing? How might we, once again, situate experiencing within research?

Simply put, when the spectator of the fashion film becomes the starting point, the focus enables a multitude of interpretations in relation to the film at stake. As part of this, it is central to the study to attempt to see the film as not carrying any preconceived ideas with it. The idea, rather, is to only pay attention to the spectator's personal ideas, if any. When a personal or subjective viewpoint is the truth, there are no fixed outcomes to be uncovered, there are only possibilities to be mapped.

In this context the experiencing spectator is really the knowing human being. This human being is

the very root of this study. Because of this, it might be better to define Weir's film as a ductile canvas, an entity that only exists in relation to the spectator. We come to know – as part of our knowing – that the film is, in fact, illuminated only by our gaze. In this framework, we strip the film of its inherent value and make it a blank canvas where it is possible to see various versions of ourselves. This is why, of course, we also see various versions of the film in the process. It is not of importance to analyse what is in the film – rather, it is fruitful to consider whether it is of value to someone: is it able to offer pleasure or inspiration or perhaps a means to create and shape parts of one's identity.

The aim of this thesis has been to explore a sensory viewing experience in relation to a particular fashion film. What gets asked in the process is what kind of a viewing experience such an experience is.

And so, the aim of my thesis is not simply to look for an outcome, but to investigate the ways in which we arrive at those outcomes and, at the same time, the intricacies of how we relate to our world on a personal level. The journey, then, outlined in this thesis is one of first navigating the historical narrative of phenomenology and of the female gaze, then

applying the ideas found there to a more recent case of fashion film. In this process, I shall also situate fashion film into a historical context where it becomes apparent that we are not talking of a completely new phenomenon but rather a piece of cinematic history. The idea is to relate these historical phenomena to a contemporary reception of a particular fashion film.

Through the process of crafting this thesis, it has become obvious that the object of my inquiry relates to time yet is also independent of it because it can and will be received over and over by spectators bound not only to and by time but also their own bodies, stories and points of view including personal histories and catalogues of knowledge and reference. Hence, in this study, while it is possible to see this particular fashion film as part of linear history, it is researched by giving it the context of the subject/ive. At the end of the thesis, this contemporary, subjective, inclusive gaze is reframed so that it may better suit the 21st century landscape we are currently inhabiting.

While the study notes how the fashion film in question is embedded with numerous points of reference, they hold no particular value until a spectator/consumer gives them some.

## 1.7 Framework/s: key questions and structure

Still, all of this does not mean we would need to situate the film in a void, as if it came from nowhere. Instead, I begin this thesis by placing the film firmly in history, only to discover that while a film made in the 2000s seems to portray its time it is, in fact, also highly reflective of the many qualities fashion film has been defined by throughout the past century or so. This understanding helps one to define the phenomenon and the fact that a fashion film still relies on the methods of the past.

The emphasis of the study is, however, in theory. As stated, I have chosen phenomenology as my theory of interest because of its descriptive qualities in relation to the subjective experience, which I am exploring with the help of a fashion film. This phenomenological, subjective experience is located in the body, resulting in the knowing described earlier. The body is the seat of the senses, and in order to create understanding around the senses one needs to become sensitive to the ways in which we describe our experiences.

This is why I have undergone this process with the question:

*Applying a phenomenological female gaze, how might one look at a fashion film?*

In actuality, the main body of this thesis begins with an overview of fashion film and is then continued by an exploration of phenomenology – especially in regards to its feminist applications – and the original idea of the female gaze. After these, Weir's film is discussed bearing the aforementioned theoretical notions in mind. Finally, the thesis ends with conclusions, discussing where the application of the phenomenological female gaze in relation to Weir's fashion film has taken us.

The issues dealt with in this thesis are applied to Harley Weir's fashion film *Legs Are Not Doors* (2015). Weir is a London-born and London-educated image maker born in 1991 who works with both photography and film. In the case of this work, we shall be looking at Weir's short film *Legs Are Not Doors*, a fashion film made for the fashion brand Proenza Schouler. Weir's film is an auteur-like piece yet serves another brand. This, in itself, is emblematic of a fashion film: fashion film is a marketing tool built not only to showcase items of clothing but to function as an almost-piece-of-art. Thus, as it has value on its own, it can and will be consumed over and over.

## 1.8 Influences

Sense and sensitivity, the grounding themes of this thesis, brought me to Luce Irigaray (2002), the french philosopher whose feminist take on phenomenology emphasises not only the language we use but also the question of how we could be inclusive, in the deepest sense of the word. This inclusivity is at the core of what I was hoping to write into being with this thesis, too. This kind of inclusivity means an end to dichotomies and ready-made systems of value. It means each experience is valuable, per se. It means an experience can be described and that yet, simultaneously, it does not need to fit into any category – nor does the one experiencing it.

This, perhaps, makes an experience – or experiencing – problematic if we try to make it fit into pre-existing systems of understanding. Instead, there is an attempt to try to make it real that an experience can exist in its own right. In this sense, an experience – a subjective one – is of highest value and it is its own end. It needs no further explanations or comments. We must leave it be. If anything, we can give and allow it space. This space is what enables an experience to be witnessed.

This way of seeing often seems to imply there is an(other) something or someone to stand up to or against. And when we speak of feminism, we often think of something that goes against the grain. I, however, have chosen to see Irigaray's feminist phenomenology in this thesis as a way to make space for something deeply personal – which, in this case, goes by the name of the subjective. This is something we pay close attention to, so much so, that we choose the words we use with care. It also means allowing space for others, as it means allowing space for the self. These two are not only interconnected, they are mutually inclusive, like symbiotic pieces of an ecosystem. At the end of the day, this way of paying attention to something is an act of showing love and appreciation.

In a way, it slowly dawned on me that my research had an underlying wish: I was hoping to redeem the ability to write and do research from my point of view. I understood I was hoping to feel fully fledged yet felt fragile.

Phenomenological knowing has no hard reason behind it to back it up – instead, it relies on the reality of the body. Simply put, this point of view meant needing to justify it from the inside out. I knew phenomenology had the power to inhabit areas of study that seemed impenetrable otherwise, like dance study, where not only movements but also the way they were being experienced in the body could be described and hence brought into conversation with the help of phenomenology.

Some amount of vulnerability would, then, be required of me, too.

It began to seem, indeed, that phenomenology was at its best when used to capture the bodily experience of the individual. In other words, phenomenology might be at its best when speaking with those fragile parts of the writing self. After all, if it could be used to create dance study, why not fashion study, too, as it easily operates in the same realm of bodily abstracts merging into sensations, seeking human form, seeking words? As movement speaks to the body, so does cloth, and vice versa. There was another conversation waiting to be heard. Our bodies communicate endlessly with multiple things – movements, clothes, images. I was only beginning to dig myself deeper, removing each strand hindering my sight as I moved along, towards some visceral truth.

By now I was, however, aware of the fact that the fashion film I was about to write about operated in a certain world and did not come out of nowhere. This is why I have also chosen to include information about Harley Weir, her background and the fashion world in general. Weir's approach is informed by an education in fine arts. She describes her aesthetic as "intuitive", amongst other things.<sup>2</sup> This aesthetic inclination is an important aspect of not only her work but also of this thesis and its writing. In this regard, the two make a match. In fact, as Leena Rouhiainen has pointed out, the central interest of phenomenology, the "instant experience" is, within its framework, also dubbed as intuition (Tökkäri (toim.) 2015, 112).

Of course, Weir's choices are the most obvious entrance point into the realm of her film, and I have chosen to Weir's voice space. This hopefully again creates dialogue, a conversation, rather than a soil for a singular deduction. Because the thing is, by telling us about her world, Weir allows us to step into it with a certain consideration for the power of intuitive feeling and seeing, even knowing. The choice to write and to see in an intuitive, phenomenological way is not, then, only a choice made separately of Weir's work but rather one that is inspired by it and hopefully somewhat in tune with it although this work is, of course, in many ways, my interpretation of the material.

All of this also raised the question of how it might be possible to choose our methods according to what or who we study. Perhaps finding the right match creates more respect and a more rounded sensitivity towards whatever we choose to engage with. In this respect, recognising the immediate and initial feelings we experience when we come about something are as valid a starting point as any other. Feelings arouse curiosity and understanding, too, while holding a lot of subconscious

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AtzOrWQctD8> Accessed Jan 13th 2021.



data yet to be revealed.

Respecting these hints of initial, immediate knowing – or rather, at this point, recognition — has, in hindsight, been an important part of the methodology I have put together and used. First impressions are a valuable point of entry.

The particles of this thesis, however, were really formed over time. In this process, the phenomenological approach and the intuitive writing style were really the final puzzle pieces to fall into place.

My initial interest in fashion studies lead me to Annamari Vänskä (2006, 2017), who has written about fashion extensively, and who holds both a social and a historical understanding of fashion but also takes gender into consideration. She encouraged me to work with the fashion film I had chosen, noting how fertile a ground it was for many approaches. Interestingly, most recently, Vänskä has, together with fellow researchers, further examined the connections between body, the senses and fashion (Hokka & Särämäkari & Vänskä 2022).

The importance of the body, on the other hand, was really brought to this thesis by getting to know Katariina Kyrölä's (2010) work. In her writing – as well as approach to teaching – the body is the seat of all knowledge, a grounding force to be beckoned.

In this manner, the pieces slowly clicked together. The final step was gaining understanding of the many ways I had been influenced by feminist study over the years. That interest has, by now, lead me to want to understand the consciousness of fungi as suggested by Merlin Sheldrake (2020), a fungi-investing rock star of the academic world, and the ecofeminist world view of Vandana Shiva (2006), where communities are built from the ground up, much like, I think, ideas could be – and how, in fact, it all comes together – but that is a whole another story. What is important for this study is that being exposed to feminist study has been the best possible tool in deconstructing the world as we see it and finding an alternate way in and around it all. Sheldrake's and Shiva's work now create the guidelines of the macrocosm in which this thesis happens.

Especially the influence of Sheldrake has also made me consider how even academic study always follows certain trends and, hopefully, even holds an expansive consciousness that is getting ready to embrace non-human interventions.

Most importantly, however, even if Sheldrake's and Shiva's theories are not utilized in this thesis in a straightforward manner, they have informed my thinking and offered a kind of organic radicalism. Sheldrake teaches that connections can be found all around us and that we are all – all beings – interconnected indeed. Shiva, on the other hand, continues to teach that a new paradigm is constructed from the root up. Both of these ideas are integral to the execution of this thesis: the phenomenological knowledge investigated within these pages springs from the body, firmly rooted in it, while exploring the many ways we interact with the world around us.

When making choices concerning who to refer to in this thesis, two choices have been particularly important: The study on fashion film – and especially its historical implications – showcased in this text is based on two particular writers' work: Natalie Khan (2012) and Marketa Uhlirova (2013, 2020). They are both, as is Weir, based in London and continue their work within the research into fashion film and art history. On the other hand, when talking about the female gaze within film-making, I have decided to include snippets from a text by Zoe Dirse (2013), who herself works in film, particularly cinematography. It has been an enlightening choice to look at film-making from the perspective of a female film-maker who writes. This allows yet another voice that comes from within the practice.

The final and most crucial step in mapping out the theoretical plot for this thesis was, however, in discovering Virpi Lehtinen's (2010) writings on Irigaray. Her interpretation of Irigaray's philosophy helped me to focus on a particular reading of Irigaray as a writer who demonstrated the usefulness of a feminine subject in any literary work.

## **1.9 Phenomenology and the thesis-writing process as a means to empowerment**

One of the most important aspects of the world within which Weir's film exists is also the idea of branding, which finally links a somewhat abstract fashion film into tangible fashion. Fashion films are a form of vital capital when it comes to building contemporary fashion houses and reaching audiences who become possible customers. Although my emphasis is on how a single spectator (re)views Weir's film, I still see it as valuable to come to an understanding of the film's initial purpose, which is not necessarily encoded simply in its contents but in why it was commissioned in the first place.

In the light of the film's brand-driven past, I would suggest it is the phenomenological study of the film that re-owns the film, giving it a new life outside its market value. Without knowing the film's commercial backdrop, the phenomenological process would be much less informed and hence lack specificity. I find that being aware of the origin of the film makes researching it richer, more informed and rounded. In many ways, the fun is in first mapping out the film's edges, then finding an alternate way in, and ultimately, this is what alters the space inhabited by the spectator, too.

Because of this, I also believe the phenomenological process undergone in this study can function as a way of empowerment and as a way to defy the world as it seems to be given to us. By choosing phenomenology – especially in relation to such a piece of popular yet avant-garde culture as this fashion film – one refuses the world of ever-increasing (financial) gain and instead chooses the colors of one's own world. In this context, even a small fashion film can have an ever-evolving life span, where it gets watched and experienced over and over, instead of having a single, short-lived purpose of advertising where it loses its momentum quickly. In this newly defined phenomenological (fashion) world, what something means is not defined from the outside in. The point of such research is never, however, to just say what I think, feel or experience. The point is to say these things so that everyone could say theirs.

At the final stage of the study I go on to explore *Legs Are Not Doors* more deeply. At this point it has become clear that it is not of any specific value to this study to try and analyse the contents of the fashion film in great detail. Instead, what is explored is the potential of the film. I hope not to leave footprints all over it, but to instead make and suggest new pathways, many of them.

At the end of the day, this thesis has been a way for me to reconnect not only with a voice of mine but with a way of being in the world. This way is the way of the senses, and I hope that they will lead you as you move along these lines.

I have consciously chosen a very intuitive approach in this work. For me, this has meant allowing a certain space around my work, a fluidity and a flexibility of the mind, which enables unexpected routes but still allows you to keep your eye on the prize.

In relying on intuition, I have been especially inspired by Asta Raami's (2016) work. Raami has studied intuition at Aalto University and published popular books around her research findings. She is not saying that using intuition automatically creates better or different results, but she is making a

point about how important research often includes an element of intuition. The only difference between a hard-boiled academic study and a researcher's statement about using intuition is only really the fact that a researcher names their approach. This is, of course, to say that intuition is perhaps always present in research but is rarely discussed.

The reason behind why I chose an intuitive approach in the first place has been, however, the fact that intuitive thought seems to allow a more organic way of thinking. Intuitive thought follows the patterns of tree branches: going wherever they may, always reaching further, towards the light, until they make beautiful shapes. In my experience, this is the way of the intuitive mind, too – always getting "there", but softly, with trust. An intuitive process is one that leads us along new paths yet allows very natural connections. It is the antidote to forced outcomes.

In this regard, approaches suggested by creative writing have also influenced my work and especially my way of conducting this thesis. Learning from creative writing teachers such as Natalie Goldberg (2004) has allowed me to gradually understand that writing is where the work is done, and how in writing, each moment is fresh and everything else remains speculation. Remembering this has helped me stay curious about the end result of this thesis.

I have been very lucky during this writing process, as I have been able to connect with deeply feeling and thinking peers who offered both their support and their feedback. I would like to name this as the presence of empathy, a force to be reckoned with, the importance of which is gradually better understood in the work place too, studied by the likes of Miia Paakkanen (2022).

Most of all, my understanding of what it means to do research has been formed by influence coming from feminist studies. For me, this means that the researcher, as a subject, is an embodied being who becomes a part of their research. Likewise, the researcher always holds and uses power even if this is not their conscious intention. All of this means that research should be done with an attempt at transparency, which, in turn, leads to a kind of authenticity. This is not an objective authenticity but rather, an honesty where the nature of research gets questioned in the process. In other words, research is not a fixed being or a result set in stone but rather, an organic process where researcher influences the research.

The most important thing feminist study has given me has been an awareness over one's position as a researcher. In this thesis, I have made an attempt to embody that position. It has meant engaging

my bodily reactions from the start – asking, does this film disgust me or does it please me or does it do both – and gradually learning to understand the knowledge gained through my senses, theorizing it through academic history though we inevitably live in the digital 21st century.

In its most simple form, empowerment means recognising one's self as one is, without excessive programming from the outside, and owning up to it. For me, in writing this thesis, I have chosen to give and to create myself this empowering space by allowing my mind – my thought – the routes it most readily takes.

As I prepare to let go of this thesis, I am also engulfed by the awareness that the pathways I have chosen owe to the many trains of thought that have taken place within the 20th century. These pathways have gradually become more and more flexible and fluid, allowing us to make notes about our minds as much about what we were supposedly researching. Though I have chosen to hone in on phenomenology, my processes also nod towards the kind of "thinking" found as much as in our minds as in the strategies of other species. This is why I must also extend my thankfulness further, reaching for connections yet to be found. In the end, however, it has been this very flexibility that has enabled me to experience this writing process as liberation.

This way of knowing and becoming helps produce an openness to unexpected outcomes. The rhizome, as a figuration for methodology, invites divergent thinking/acting/becoming that involves the formation of aberrant connections and the disruption of regulatory forces. To become rhizomatic we endeavour to remain playful as we explore the inherent multiplicities within our practice. (Lyle (ed.) 2020, 85.)

Though the form of this thesis has forced me to settle for an outcome, I can not control the forces that govern the thinking process, its endlessness and its unbound possibilities.

Following this introduction, we shall first look at fashion film and its history in order to begin understanding the phenomenon at hand.

## 2 Fashion film

### 2.1 Fashion and film

Some images related to film and the style their protagonists exuded have stayed with us for decades. I think of Marlene, singing in that perfectly lit bar, holding her hat with one hand while flirting with both eyes. Likewise, I think of Barbara, between those almost empty shelves, coiffed to a tee, sunglasses on, her face barely moving as she plans atrocities with her lover.

First we had Audrey Hepburn in Givenchy and Grace Kelly in Dior, now Keira Knightley in Chanel and Maggie Gyllenhall in MiuMiu. Fashion has always been a part of film simply because what we see is what we get: no glimpse of a movie star is complete without a recognition of what they are wearing — or not wearing — and what that tells us about who they are.

However, as stars of the past and present portray, fashion and film have a relationship that is much closely knit and multidimensional than to simply convey images of people clad in glorious, glamorous clothes. The connection and the play between the fantasy of the film and the so-called reality of fashion is evident. For example, the fact that we refer to these stars by their first names, not by the names of the characters they've played, tells of a symbiotic relationship. It is film stars, as characters, as film stars, wearing clothes, clothes wearing them, that make the difference.

Towards the end of the 20th century, the connections and intricacies of fashion and film were getting increasingly intertwined and the trend has continued as we've entered a new millennium. So much so that now, in fact, we no longer talk about fashion and film, but about fashion film. The two have become mixed, interconnected, intertwined, and finally, merged into one. Fashion film is a term that is both old and new, predetermined and evanescent. Most importantly, it is a term that requires clear definitions. A historical perspective may help us in doing that.

### 2.2 Fashion film: a historical narrative

As stated, fashions seem to have always been a part of the viewing experience – whether intentional or not. However, the term fashion film still rings relatively new.

The chronological development of fashion film, though, cannot be framed solely to the end of the 20th century. It seems safe to say that fashion film as an idea has existed ever since the beginning of

cinema itself. *Journal of Visual Culture* even dedicated the majority of an early 2020s issue to matters of fashion film history. The shared aim of the articles was simple: to map out the many ways in which fashion film has, in fact, existed prior to the digital age, too, and how those past incarnations of the moving fashion image have now become a kind of archaeological site to excavate as our eyes have opened to notice the emerging genre. And as we excavate, our interpretations of the idea of fashion film continually shapeshift.

Marketa Uhlirova (2013, 2020) who has written about fashion film history using the perspective of media archaeology, is one of the writers featured in the recent issue of *Journal of Visual Culture*, and has stated that regardless of different time periods, styles and technical gear available, fashion film can be traced and recognized as a genre as early as the beginning of the 20th century:

A juxtaposition of fashion film at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries reveals some pronounced parallels. In both periods, it emerges as a mode of cinema distinguished by an aesthetic of display, one that privileges short visual spectacles, presentational (exhibitionist) style and musical scores over narrative continuity and dialogue. (Uhlirova 2020, 341.)

A historical perspective, then, reveals a key theme: fashion film has existed far longer than we may be tempted to think and that it has always had some special characteristics to it which will help us define and recognize it. The key is to understand that the genre may only now be defined yet has existed and hence evolved over time.

So, fashion has been recorded and shown on film for a century. Even some stylistic coherence can be found, as suggested above by Uhlirova. What is crucial and particularly fruitful are the similarities found in the fashion films of the past and of the present, as they are what ultimately sow the historical narrative together, suggesting an arch.

It also seems important to attach the emergence of fashion film into the historical moment where modernity began to take root. This allows us to understand the qualities of fashion film better: fashion, film and the (forward) movement ideals of modernity seemed to go together well, as Uhlirova writes in another article:

Many fashion photographers (and photographers of fashion)

throughout the twentieth century were interested in representing the fashion body as a mobile, dynamic entity, or otherwise injecting movement into static images. Informed by the modernist and avant-garde obsession with depicting motion and speed. (Uhlírova 2013, 140.)

Ever since there has been cinema and the fascination for movement and spectacle, there have been images of fashion, on celluloid, moving. In many ways, it is the very movement of the fashion film we are most compelled and perplexed by, and what has continued to drive fashion film to evolve into its own genre, hybrid or form. Those concerned with and mesmerised by movement have carried fashion film forward. Uhlírova describes:

film was embraced as part of twentieth-century fashion's growing tendency towards temporal experience and greater mobility, appearing in a variety of contexts and in hybridized multimedia forms - - - At a fundamental level, movement and change are the touchstones of the everyday "performance" of fashion—the wearing, the gesturing— as well as its life cycle and eventual decay. (Uhlírova 2013, 138-139.)

I would also like to point out that the aspect of temporality, this seeming idea of fashion existing for a moment only, in whatever form, is also an important feature of how fashion will be thought about later in this thesis, in relation to the particular fashion film in question. That is to say, we shall be discussing a form of fashion that has very little to do with clothing and which is, in fact, well represented by fashion film in particular.

Going back to the historical narrative of fashion, it is safe to say that there are two distinct features that weave fashion film together throughout the past hundred years or so: fascination with said movement and mobility, and "and aesthetic of display" as stated earlier. By applying even just these two features we can begin to map out an understanding of fashion film as a distinct genre. These features display fashion film as a moldable platform eager to change – much like fashion itself.

### **2.3 Fashion, film, image – fashion film towards the end of the 20th century**

Another view on fashion film emerges by exploring the end of the 20th century. The added speed of development and the importance of images pave the way for a more distinct, new type of fashion film – one that may be informed by the past but could easily be seen as its own phenomenon.



Annamari Vänskä (2017) describes this new hybrid, now truly a fashion film, as it appeared at the turn of the millennium:

Contemporary fashion is thoroughly intertwined with visuality. A new genre has been created: the fashion film. It is an attempt to intertwine brand image with moving image, and to go from costume drama into a film that mediates fashion and narrates a desirable lifestyle. (Vänskä 2017, 126.)

Vänskä (2017) suggests that one of the first fashion films was, in fact, *Sex and the City* (1998-2004), the tv show that first aired before the turn of the millennium and made sex talk casual. What was interesting about the characters were not just the men — or women — of their lives, but actually, the clothes they wore. Audiences followed not only the narratives but the dress choices, which always seemed to be tuned in to the characters' personalities. Vänskä continues:

The series also made fashion into a character of its own, mainstreamed exclusive designer labels—especially the shoe designers Manolo Blahnik and Christian Louboutin— and granted the series' costume designer, Patricia Field, a position as fashion guru. It connected characters with reality: clothes worn by the characters were auctioned in reality. While the series offered viewers a virtual shopping spree, it also provided some viewers with actual designer clothes. (Vänskä 2017, 126.)

What seems obvious here is that the boundaries between fashion, film and viewer started to become more and more thin: not only is the fashion of a film a spectacle to behold but it also becomes an influence, a desirable object and an attractive idea of a certain lifestyle. *Sex and the City's* Carrie is both a descendant of and a reaction to Marlene, Grace, Audrey, Keira and Maggie. The fashion(s) of a film – or rather, in its later form, of a moving image concoction – have started to emerge out of the picture and into the streets.

In this sense, *Sex and the City* is a prime example of what happened to fashion, film, image and the abstract some twenty to thirty years ago: at the end of the millennium the fashion image became more and more intangible, less and less fixed. Fashion is not just about the clothes the stars or the characters wear, it's about a dimension of its own. Vänskä explains the continuum since the 1990s:

The 1990s was a decade when fashion visualized in an accelerating speed and was increasingly represented in image-form. Even though visuality has defined fashion since the birth of the modern fashion system and the modern fashion media at the turn of the 20th century it was now intertwined in the lives of people through advertising, music videos and lifestyle magazines with glamorous advertising. In the twenty-first century this development has only increased with the invention of “new media,” the Internet, social media with its different image-based applications, and blogs. Images produced new visibility for fashion and became important means of influencing how fashion was perceived, marketed, and disseminated. Images of clothes became more important than clothes, and fashion became a field where editors, photographers, graphic designers, stylists, and art directors could use their creative freedom and intuition in producing fantastical narrative-like scenarios that created an alluring atmosphere around the designs and imagined consumers. (Vänskä 2017, 124-125.)

It is easy to find the ideas of movement and display which were discussed earlier as part of fashion film’s history now in relation to the historical development of fashion film as described by Vänskä. At the end of the 20th century, one sees even more emphasis on image, advertising and the ability to share or mediate the fashion image. Vänskä is also implying that soon enough, fashion film would become fertile ground for image-makers and influencers who would be able to capture the essence of a brand in their work, using fashion film both as a platform for expressing their sense of aesthetic while also communicating the values of a particular fashion house, for example. This tendency is easy to follow to the stream of images on Instagram, for example. There, fashion is now consumed on a daily basis by devouring a seemingly endless flow of attractive images where consumer – now, of images, not of clothes – and content creator are difficult to separate.

Fashion film has become a new kind of creative tool for brands and designers. Gareth Pugh (2012b), the designer, quoted by Nathalie Khan in her essay dealing with Pugh’s fashion films, describes the process: “Rather than just bring you the new collection, we bring the universes, the Gareth Pugh universe to introduce who I am and what I do to a new audience” (Khan 2012b, 256).

The trend towards making auteur-driven mini films within fashion has also been evident in big, traditional fashion houses like Dior and Chanel as they have employed big-name film-makers to

create stylised moving image advertisements for them. The likes of Sofia Coppola and Martin Scorsese have both made a contribution. These works from the first two decades of the 21st century are really the beginnings of auteur fashion films. In a sense, having a renowned film-maker craft a fashion film for advertising is a way of acknowledging how much fashion films now matter. It is also a clue as to how fashion films are used in order to make brands more appealing, accessible and to load them with added value.

Fashion films have hence become a part of brand-introduction and brand-building. A designer's world is not only shown but even constructed through these films. What the film can be like has no bounds, and may be a work of art created in co-operation with a photographer or a film-maker with a distinct style of their own. As one might already guess, the co-operation, in turn, brings and adds further value to the brand by connecting the brand to something it values outside itself. Thus, the value of the brand increases. The collaborations will be selected carefully and curated mindfully. The voice of the fashion film auteur contributes to the brand.

These current forms of fashion film make it clear that fashion films no longer simply show fashions – be it garments or runway shows – but create fashion to be viewed and consumed outside the seemingly original idea of creating fashion for the sake of having clothes to wear. Instead, it is possible to simultaneously understand fashion films as independent works of art and as intricately woven branding attempts breaking the idea that it is only possible to connect to a brand by purchasing a garment with its tag on it. In the sphere of the fashion film, consuming moving images is as valuable as buying objects, if not more so. And this is all due to the fact that fashion film has come a long way since being a streamed runway show or a perfume ad with a celebrity in it.

By the end of the 20th century, rather than simply talk about fashion and film there is indeed now talk of fashion film, without having to separate the two into their own slots. It's the third dimension, "an art form of its own right" (Vänskä 2017, 124-125). To understand fashion film, we must divorce the idea of fashion and film and commit fully to fashion film. This is also the important distinction I want to make in this thesis: in the discussion that will take place during the forthcoming chapters fashion film will be dealt with as an independent phenomenon one can engage in a conversation with.

It was increasingly through the emergence of the British SHOWstudio, an online platform dedicated to fashion film, and the rapid changes in digital culture, towards the end of the 20th century fashion

that is recorded and spread digitally online started to morph into a dimension of its own. Moving fashion images were no longer clearly film – in the sense that those images would have a singular life as a piece of film-making. It became more and more difficult to pin the images back into their origins as they were getting circulated at an increasing speed, spread easily and might not even have an end goal – such as selling a product – beyond themselves. It's no longer about fashion on film. There's another, a new, meaning to it all. Fashion – not only on film but as film. As Natalie Khan puts it, "We no longer refer to images of fashion, or representations of one particular dress, but instead a much wider notion of fashion as image" (Khan 2012b, 255).

As fashion began to appear more and more on screens of all sizes – a long stretch from catwalks – the new platforms where fashion became available "challenged the immediate experience of fashion as live event, as well as fashion as material object" (Khan 2012b, 252).

Fashion film may, at this point, be described rather as a genre creating something ephemeral out of time rather than simply showing items of clothing in time. When we first discussed the connections of fashion and film – and perhaps considered cinema as a place where fashions could be exhibited – by now, it has become obvious that fashion is not only on film, but instead in film, sown into it, as of itself. If there is a materiality to this fashion, it is to be found in the mediating product and how it is able to appeal to us and our senses and sensibilities.

Additionally, what is transformative about the ideas that started to emerge through SHOWstudio are the connections between still and moving images as used in fashion. Nathalie Khan explores this idea in her essay *Cutting the Fashion Body: Why the Fashion Image Is No Longer Still* (2012a, 238), highlighting the ideas of "time, fragmentation and a sense of play". This description does not seem to, once again, land too far off from where we started – movement and display – but further develop these ideas, perhaps simply by finding new ways to play with the old. Experimentation seems to, time and again, be one of the most permanent features of fashion film.

What is at least equally important about Khan's point of view is, however, the fact that SHOWstudio put an emphasis on referencing fashion photography rather than cinema. This kind of fashion film is, from the start, more bound to fashion than it is to film. As a result, it is difficult to say if fashion film belongs more in the tradition of film, photography or fashion. In a sense, that is the correct deduction to make, for fashion film has a life of its own.

Once a still fashion image takes on a new time frame through digitally spreading moving images, (fashion) film spectatorship changes, too. This, in turn, takes fashion out of the objects and makes it about the experience.

The new experience of seeing a fashion film is one of watching a fashion film, letting it roll, freezing it over and over, image by image.... Fashion film, in this sense, belongs to the viewer/person experiencing it and does not always have a predetermined purpose. As Khan puts it, "It is important to remember that movement informs our experience of the image" (Khan 2012a, 239). What is the viewer, offered moving images of fashion, truly experiencing? What is the means to an end like and what is the end, really? This is something I shall explore later in relation to Weir's fashion film.

From the place we've landed, it makes more sense to understand fashion as image or fashion as images rather than fashion on film. It is not about what we look at and see – and might desire – but about what we experience, through the images. In fashion film, anything can be transformed into "fashion" – an apple, a shoe, a landscape. This kind of fashion film is very inclusive, in many senses of the word. It has abandoned the confines of dresses and landed in a whole new place.

And so fashion, then, by means of fashion film, becomes an experience, a feast for the eyes, the senses – an experience of materiality, but not material. This kind of fashion film, emerging out of time yet continually developing towards a new end, is the kind of fashion film I shall be discussing in this thesis.

## **2.4 Fashion film history in a nutshell**

Through an excavation and mapping of fashion film history it becomes evident that fashion film has not only existed long before the digital age, but that it has also always been sensitive to technical developments and embraced them gladly, in the spirit of experimentation. Likewise, fashion film has, throughout time, focused on movement and display – features also found in fashion, clothing or cloth. This is one of the ways in which fashion film could imitate fashion.

In many ways, fashion film has been at the forefront of new methods and forms, defied definitions and even lacked acknowledgement, which it has only gained in the past ten years or so. As shown, the writings that have begun to appear are changing the narrative.

In those writings and in those excavations, it has been found that fashion film has, in fact, been a coherent genre for quite a while. Some of the elements of that genre have included the desire to evolve and use its ingredients in ever-morphing ways. Throughout time, especially towards the turn of the millennium, the way fashion film has been used – and whether it has been property of fashion or of film – has evolved. Inevitably, what we make of it and the perspective from which we look at it have both shifted.

Because of all this, fashion film has opened itself up to a huge potential. In a sense, it is because of this development that fashion film can be discussed in this thesis in relation to phenomenology and the female gaze. It means that fashion film has gained momentum and that it has stamina and an energy of its own. There is no need to look at it from one perspective only. It can be explored in a multitude of ways.

Fashion film is capable of both expressing the view of a brand as well as respecting and utilising the vision of its maker. While doing this, it emerges as an independent product, not dependent on the fashions it shows nor the longevity – or the lack of – of a particular trend. Fashion film now exists as a whole, in and of itself.

The general trend seems to have been towards a more ephemeral fashion image, one that moves, though it references the still, and seems to tell about much more than just the latest fashions, which, to be honest, as a result of this process are now very passé.

As exploring fashion film history has allowed us to truly know and situate the so-called object of research, in the following chapter, the focus shifts onto showcasing the way in which we go on about looking at this particular film. In other words, the next chapter, which deals with the theoretical viewpoints present in this thesis, gives us a perspective on why and how we shall come about the kind of notions we – or I – do later in chapter four, where the focus further moves on to Weir's fashion film.

### 3 Theoretical framework

#### 3.1 Introducing the female gaze

We have long known the male gaze. If not because we've read about but because we've been submitted to it throughout our careers as cinemagoers.

Laura Mulvey first introduced the concept in her essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1989 [1975]) in the mid-seventies and since then, we have known to look for the dominant viewpoint in films. Mulvey introduced the concept using classic Hollywood films such as Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (USA, 1954) to make her point.

While the male gaze, which informed us of how, as spectators, we were directed to look at the film and its characters from an all-male perspective – including that of the director and male protagonist – helped awakened cinema goers uncover the dominant structures, it only showed us how things are. It was not yet possible or mainstream to imagine what another option would look like or how it might play out.

In order to access an alternate perspective we must, in a sense, first imagine it.

We might begin by asking ourselves what the female gaze is like? And yet, it seems to define it would go against its very nature. Why imagine another option if its only role were to replace an existing model with another?

And so, if we are to imagine a female gaze, surely it should be one that does not discriminate but instead, is open for the views and gazes of the many. Rather than being simplistic, the female gaze should, then, be complex, not by default but as a tool. It should be inclusive and therefore of substance. It should be powerful because of its potential and interpretations, not because it casts a shadow upon any other forms of existence. A female gaze should not be a mere anti-male gaze.

One might even ask if a female gaze has the potential to be a term that could begin creating a path towards an experiential reality which is free of preconceived notions and ways of defining what we see. In this sense, one could argue that Mulvey's male gaze has only been a starting point. In short, one should be careful not to create a version of the female gaze that is only secondary to the male

gaze or only exists in comparison to it.

How, then, to approach the concept? To use and utilise the idea of the female gaze we must, in a sense, fill it with its own potential. This means it should not be a ready-made formula extracted from films in the same manner the male gaze was. And as, preferably, the female gaze is not a ready-made construction like the male gaze – and it should, by its essence, be more than a counter reaction – we cannot analyse and dissect it in a straightforward way.

This is why I would like to think the power of the female gaze lies in how we come to contact with it and allow it to be seen and digested, including various interpretations. In this respect, the female gaze is, over everything else, a means to an end rather than an end. The female gaze itself is a subject, not an object. The female gaze moves, interacts, creates. It's a verb.

In order to form a gaze, we must place it somewhere, acknowledge that it is part of the world. A female gaze, however, unlike the male gaze, happens from a place, not just towards something. This is where I believe the true potential of a female gaze lies, too: its purpose is not to define, but to enable. And this is why, when we begin talking about a female gaze, it becomes more important to talk about the looking than that which is being looked at. This could be the beginning of a gaze that allows us to (re)define our world, not one that maps it, ready for us to digest and follow,

In many ways, like fashion film, female gaze would not exist – in the sense of being recognized – did we not first construct it historically.

All in all, when the male gaze appeared, there was now a gaze to be traced, tracked and revealed in narrative cinema. All along, it seemed, we had been coaxed into watching films from a heterosexual male perspective, objectifying the female in the process. The protagonist was male, the camera operator was male, and the director was male. As a result, in some peculiar way, we, as spectators, then also seemed to be male, or at least, had no choice but to identify as one. Looking at females had become arbitrary, then commonplace. Males were given the power of a gaze and somehow it taught us that visual pleasure meant looking at a desirable woman.

What Mulvey established with the now long-standing concept was a way of mapping out



the way films were made. We were taught that cinema, in a sense, belonged to men, and as viewers, so did we. There seemed to be no place for women, as spectators, or, more importantly, for female spectators. Mulvey's gaze was a matter of being exposed. She was finally showing us the invisible we'd been looking at for a long time.

To understand film history, it seems necessary to imagine that there has, in fact, always been a female gaze as much as there has been a male gaze. Only, it has not been discussed. At least, not until recently.

Truth be told, however, females have been making films ever since cinema was first invented. Between the lines – or the takes – there must have been a female gaze, somewhere, lurking behind the scenes, noticeable, yet somehow, it remaining invisible to the general public.

Zoe Dirse, the Canadian film-maker, has explored issues of female image-making in an essay of hers (2013). She has quoted Judith Mayne, for example, in figuring out the framework for not only her image-making but also, the writing process:

All feminist inquiry is, in a sense, a reading against the grain of patriarchal institutions, an unearthing of contradiction and ambivalences at first invisible to the naked eye. (Dirse 2013, 16.)

Even if criticism dealing with the male gaze – not only its dominance on screen, but also, in academia and the conversation that follows – has been sparse, it has not been non-existent. Dirse brings into conversation scholars who've contributed to the on-going conversation such as Teresa de Lauretis, who questions the male-centered narrative – not only stating that the male gaze is not the only way to look at films, but also, that the dominant theory has narrowed the way she experiences films. In de Lauretis' words,

When I look at the movies, film theorists try to tell me that the gaze is male, the camera eye is masculine, and so my look is also not a woman's. But I don't believe them anymore, because now I think I know what it is to look at a film as a woman. (Dirse 2013, 15.)

De Lauretis' choice of word is interesting: she says she now thinks she knows what it is like for her to look at a film. It almost feels like somewhere along her lines, the seed of the new female gaze is sown: she is determining the way she looks at something in her own terms, instead of relying on definitions coming from the outside. At the same time, she seems optimistic about the fact that a woman's look – as she calls it – exists and that mapping it out would be a worthwhile pursuit.

Zoe Dirse writes out the broader dilemma in its most simple form: "Is my gender an issue in relating to the subjects?" (2013, 24). Or, more broadly: "What happens when the bearer of the look is female and the object is female?" (2013, 26). In these two questions, Dirse maps out the central issue relating to the female gaze. De Lauretis and Dirse seem to represent and reflect two sides of the same coin: if we want to talk about a female gaze, it's necessary to both give it some theoretical framework but also, enough space to breath and defy overt definitions.

This is why we cannot necessarily be certain of anything when we enter a discussion about the female gaze. It asks us not to take histories, theories or dominant structures and constructions for granted. Rather, it begs us to ask whether a whole different approach is possible. The male gaze has dominated film studies. To include the female gaze does not only mean a watershed moment, but a new kind of longer narrative altogether, too.

In some way, to establish a female gaze we need, perhaps, simply let go of the roles first defined by Mulvey: the male subject and the female object. It's not a question of reversal. It's a matter of re-building and space-making. I understand that this notion is also paradoxical since were it not for Mulvey, I would doubtfully even be discussing the importance of such an idea as a female gaze.

However, in this thesis, I hope to gradually move towards a more open-ended definition of the female gaze. Dirse has outlined the issues in her essay quoting Rosemarie Buikema:

the consequence of deconstructive thought for feminist theory is that femininity is disconnected from a specific female identity. Femininity can be regarded as a discursive construction and not as exclusively related to a specific biological social group. An insight into the way in which positions of power are distributed in texts between masculine and feminine, and/or between white and black, can be a forceful instrument in the struggle against the one-sided and/or equivocal representation of

femininity. (Dirse 2013, 19)

In other words, when opening up the idea of a male gaze, we must stay careful about not simply imposing a contradictory term – the female gaze – against it, but rather, to stay sensitive to the many ways in which the male gaze can be subverted, not just opposed.

### **3.2 The senses as methodology – phenomenological approaches**

Writer Diane Ackerman (1991, 13) offers us a rather wild and comprehensive claim: that our only way of understanding the world is, in fact, through our senses. The reason for this, according to Ackerman, is because, quite simply, we must first "find" the world through our senses. It is almost like saying that nothing is real until it is felt, sensed and experienced in the body, on a cellular level.

Ackerman goes on to explain that what our senses do, in fact, is tear the world into small, vibrant bits which can then be re-organised for us to comprehend them. It is through the information our senses feed our brains that we begin to make sense of the world. From her point of view, for us to grasp our very consciousness, we must grasp the fact that we are sense-bound. She notes that we are, in fact, "sentient beings", thus proving the point that even our efforts to mentally understand our environment are rooted in our capacity to get to grips with the world on a sensory level. (Ackerman 1991, 15-17.)

It seems, then, that our senses are something we cannot avoid, detach from or even make subservient, imagining ourselves to be but talking heads. Instead, our senses are what allow us to understand the world at large. To sense is to gather the building blocks from which our perceived world is constructed. This world, however, does not simply refer to the world we experience outside ourselves, but rather, already points the way towards a world or a realm of experience happening inside us. In this manner the world does, in fact, happen inside us.

Ackerman's approach makes space for a certain view of the world and even, of knowledge. It places the body, or rather, a sensing human being as a whole, to the forefront of a process where we aim to organise everything we experience into understandable form. In other words, even if understanding is the end goal, a sensory experience is the starting point, the way of collecting data that is later reassessed and reassembled.

Phenomenology, the philosophy of the sensual world, follows the sensory route. Phenomenological knowing – later to be shaped into knowledge – is born out of a direct experience.

The way to approach such knowing must, presumably, be something other than to open a textbook and read an article about it. We can, sure, once again, understand phenomenology as a historical phenomenon, but to understand knowledge produced by means of phenomenology it is necessary to follow its route back to a source other than a mind – the body.

Though mind and body have for so long and so often been separated phenomenology seems to want to give credit to both: we experience in the body, and we process in the mind. An experience as and of knowing becomes tangible in a new way when it is shared by being verbalized.

Phenomenological thought always seems to be rooted in the awareness that our body is a place through which we come, with the help of our senses, into contact with the world. This bodily sensitivity and the crucial role of the body is present in the writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the French phenomenological philosopher. He writes:

Our own body is in the world as 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 1962, 203).

Here, Merleau-Ponty simply maps out the premise: as we perceive the world, we do it based on and in our bodies. He almost seems to go as far as saying that our body gives birth to the world, not the other way round.

Phenomenology holds the body as the source of perception and hence, later, of knowledge, and not surprisingly, phenomenology has also been applied to dance studies. The research done in Finland within dance studies using phenomenology has seeped into this work, too. The links between phenomenological dance and fashion studies haven't been difficult to make.

The approach to research that is produced as a result of the meeting of dance and phenomenology is really about attempting the impossible: talking, writing, about what the body does and what the

body experiences. To say it is impossible, however, only means we may not be used to it. This is why we need to develop a language, a way to talk body. Phenomenology could suggest a way.

The similarities between these two modes of expression/experiencing – dance and fashion – are to be found in the way both of these mediums ultimately move and touch the body. Fashion is an expression translated into clothes which come to dress – and so, touch – our bodies whereas dance is being touched from the inside and channelling that sense of being in one's body into choreography. These experiences happen in the body, informing it, but there is also something for us to see. I have chosen to put the emphasis, however, on what cannot be seen, either in dance or in fashion, and explore from within – to explore the experience (of fashion).

Another thing that links these two spheres of existence is the idea of movement. We come here to be touched, to be moved. Or at least that is what happens to us as we enter the world and become its heart, as Merleau-Ponty would put it.

We move in the world sensing our bodies and sensing with our bodies, and in that act, cloth and all kinds of movement are integral to our experience of the world. How could we not be influenced by this environment? All in all, both dance and fashion, when connected by the idea of movement, are integral in creating our sensual experience of the world. It is almost like saying yes – there's a way of being available out there, one that prioritizes the haptic, body-based experience over the cognitive one.

Leena Rouhiainen (2003) is a dancer and a researcher who has studied dance by means of taking dancers into dialogue with phenomenology, particularly that of Merleau-Ponty. Her research essentially takes the experience of dancers and philosophizes it. Movement becomes matter that is translated into words.

Phenomenological dance study has not only inspired me a lot but also, in many ways brought me to explore the themes of this thesis, too. Fashion, much like dance, is just another bodily way of existence if we choose to frame it that way. Both dance studies and fashion studies – when linked to phenomenology – allow me to explore seemingly obvious experiences which, however, escape traditional explanations. In other words, both the movement based study of dance and the sensory-based study of fashion, which I shall attempt in this thesis in relation to a particular fashion film, give voice to experiences otherwise unseen.

Although fashion is easily taken at face value and approached as mere images or fading looks, when it is approached as a sensory experience much like movement, it also leads us into unknown territory. This unknown territory is, in fact, a fertile land. We can no longer limit the conversation to talking about what we see and how to categorize it, but are forced to map the invisible and the subjective: fashion – or movement – that is felt and so, experienced in a broader sense. In this manner, the idea of phenomenology within dance studies has given me the framework required for the sensory exploration of fashion: as I look at fashion images, I pay attention to my bodily reactions and to how, in that act, fashion becomes tangible without the need to touch cloth.

All of this has been one of the most important steps I have taken on my journey towards phenomenological fashion study, as it has allowed me to link the unseen into the seen. Phenomenological dance studies have given me the chance to deepen my experience of fashion – or at least the way I am able to talk about it. To consider cloth as I do dance – as movement, touch and being touched, from the inside out or outside in – has offered a new avenue of exploration, one that suggests processes which happen within the body instead of simply out there, separate from the individual and her experience, in society, as phenomena that could very well be measured and analyzed. This kind of fashion happens as much in the cells of my body as it does on the catwalk.

However, as fashion images, moving ones at that, have been the key to unlocking this thesis, I have also chosen to discuss Vivian Sobchack (2004), the American film scholar, who is known for her work in applying phenomenology within film studies, bringing the visceral to viewing experiences. She has explored phenomenology as methodology within visual culture especially in her book *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (2004). In her work, Sobchack asks the question of what it truly means to be embodied in this world. Embodied is an important word in and of itself, as it implies that we have arrived and taken space within our very selves. It implies that we do, in fact, move in this world as ourselves and don't get overwhelmed by it. (Sobchack 2004,16.)

In this thesis, Sobchack is the final connecting link between Merleau-Ponty's body, phenomenological perceptions inspired by dance studies, and moving image culture. The fashion in the fashion film being explored in this thesis happens, in other words, seemingly on screen and literally in our bodies.

The tool phenomenology uses to reach its goal is, simply put, the experience. Without

this emphasis on the experience — and without the necessity of deeming it either subjective or objective — we would be unable to realize how the viewing of a film is actually a bodily experience, too. To put it slightly differently, images are not simply images, but experiences which come to life when they are seen. This reflects Merleau-Ponty's idea of us enlivening the world and not the other way round. What we see is not really just seen, but felt, experienced and processed within and through our bodies. And it is only through our sensory experience that those images, moving or not, begin a life of their own. This vitality is then translated into and captured in phenomenological writing.

Ackerman's notes on us as wholly sensing beings, viscerally connected to the world we live in, while at the same time internally wired so that we receive and process information on multiple sensory levels, state the same. A visual experience, for example, is not merely visual. Or if that is how we want to call it, it is crucial to expand our understanding of vision further into our bodies, into the complex cellular processes that channel information between skin, brain, tissue and cell and back again...

Most importantly, a phenomenologist does not rely solely on concepts. The work happens within and through the body. This process requires sensitivity and an ability to give the benefit of the doubt.

### **3.3. A feminist exploration of phenomenology: Luce Irigaray and the feminine subject**

To accept that we have, for centuries and centuries, confused a truth of specialists with that of the human itself - Which does not mean that this truth taught us nothing. But that, instead of claiming to impose itself as the sole order possible for everyone, this truth would have had interest in pronouncing itself only in some coteries. (Irigaray 2002, 12.)

Luce Irigaray, the French philosopher who here speaks of a personal truth and its usefulness, has proven to be an important ally while exploring a feminist angle to phenomenology and the general sensitivity that is required when approaching a subject one does not want to name prematurely.

the female body is not to remain the object of men's discourse or

their various arts but that it become the object of a female subjectivity experiencing and identifying itself (Irigaray 1993, 59).

In *The Way of Love* (2002) Irigaray introduces the idea behind true intimacy: the need for the self as well as the other. This self and this other, however, do not create dichotomies or separations, but, on the contrary, spaces in which to meet the self, over and over, with the help of the other.

In this thesis, this self and this other take on the roles of the writing, perceiving, sensing self and of the moving image. The image is necessary in order to meet the self. This is why a seeming other, a separate being, is necessary, but not so as to oppose the self, but rather, in order to be able to engage in a conversation with it. This conversation, however, is not a matter of bouncing ideas back and forth, of two different sides. This conversation is a matter of touching and being touched.

As Irigaray (2002, 151) puts it, "Drawing near necessitates allying two intimates, not submitting one to the other". Again, this intimacy is not a matter of opposites, but nor is it a matter of complete enmeshment. Rather, it requires of us the capacity to simultaneously see two separates as equals, even if different. Irigaray asks us to be intimate, to meet – not lose one's self, not to overrule or be overruled. Irigaray continues:

To include the other in my universe prevents meeting with the other,  
whereas safeguarding the obscurity and the silence that the other  
remains for me aids in discovering proximity (2002, 151).

In her writing, Irigaray is, in fact, inviting us to develop a certain way of seeing and perceiving the other. This way of experiencing aims at meeting the other within a space where true encounter and exchange is possible.

In this thesis, this said space is used and inhabited in order to meet a work of art comprising of moving images without losing or compromising the researcher's/viewer's/writer's self. Instead, hopefully, both the researcher – or, in the end, anyone experiencing the fashion film, as the position of the researcher is here the mere role of an embodied spectator – and the fashion film are enriched by the meeting. In this instance, this meeting takes place on the pages of this thesis.

In particular, Irigaray's take on language has been a vital source of strength:



In this world otherwise illuminated, the language of communication is different, and necessarily poetic: a language that creates, that safeguards its sensible qualities so as to address the body and the soul, a language that lives (Irigaray 2002, 12).

To rephrase Irigaray, the language as it already exists takes hold of the speaker/subject and thus has sovereignty over her. Yet – or as Irigaray carries the thought onward – we imagine language to be "natural", when, in fact, it is a formal order historically determined. Irigaray is suggesting the act of "inventing" "a speaking of their own" (2002, 34-35).

What holds most of the weight in Irigaray's thoughts about language is the fact that we have the chance to remold it and in fact must do so in order to free ourselves of an order that has governed for a long time. Irigaray suggests dividing the language we speak in three different dimensions, so as to better understand how it functions:

One of them concerns their relation to a language in which they are already situated, the other their relation to the world or to the object they have to name, the third their relation to the other (Irigaray 2002, 35).

Her triple axis clearly demonstrates how the language we use in our encounters with the world – and others – is actually formed in relation to many different and differing directions.

This setting implies that while we use language we must, at the same time, take responsibility over the fact that we are its creators as much as its users. To speak a language or to speak with a language is not just about taking certain building blocks and constructing sentences flowing into paragraphs and chapters... It is, rather, about a sensitivity to a subject: the subject of language, the subject position of an object, and the subject of the self.

In this respect, language is one of the most important tools within phenomenology in addition to the sensations of the body. Phenomenology requires a sensitivity to language, a keen inner eye, a desire to explore language and verbal expression as much as it requires visceral receptivity. To approach language in this manner in fact opens it up. It softens language, allowing us more space. And indeed, if we are to name our experiences,

not only as simple perceptions, but as complex nervous rhizomes where word informs body just as much body informs word, there is no other option but to tune in. We are burdened by knowing that language itself carries weight we must try and shed along the way.

In a world where our aim is to explore, sense and perceive even the self seems to become a kind of other we must temporarily take distance from. As soon as we name a perception or a sensation it is as if that experience leaves us and becomes prey. That experience, now a separate entity, an/other, is subsequently perceived, examined and scrutinized. In this way, in phenomenology, our experiences and sensations, our perceptions, become the stuff, the matter, of knowledge, no longer us or ours though from us. Thus, the phenomenological writing process is a kind of constant letting go.

In the final steps of this phenomenological production process the experience is bounced back and forth via language to find its most exact, most productive form. After all, at this stage, our experiences are no longer simply our experiences, but the material a certain piece of knowledge will be made up of. However, to think of this piece of knowledge as fixed, final or unchanging would be going against the kind of truth Irigaray has implied.

Inevitably, Irigaray's self is one that is malleable. This phenomenological self goes through a rigorous process of reception, perception and formulation where language plays an integral part. Irigaray's thoughts create a sphere of their own, one that has influenced the world view I have applied in this thesis.

Maija Butters (2007), when writing about the experience of motherhood, comments on Luce Irigaray's work by concentrating on the differences between the sexes as suggested by Irigaray. She highlights the fact that acknowledging female and male – or feminine and masculine – as two separate, distinct entities does not, however, mean that the setting would create more duality, let alone separation (Butters 2007, 66). On the contrary, these differences compliment a whole, rather than create hierarchies. This seems in many ways an altogether new way of looking at the many expressions of life available to us. Instead of searching for an answer, there may be answers. In order to find the qualities possessed by the various sexes, we must first acknowledge them. Irigaray's sense of truth seems to lead us towards multiple knowings, sexes and selves.

Butters (2007, 66) continues on the idea of a patriarchal society. She sees it as a culture of the

individual and explains that a feminine culture might, instead, be one of intersubjectivity, of relations. In other words, Butler's thinking relates back to how phenomenology might allow us to examine how a female gaze functions, so to speak – although to talk about functioning or operating might not be the right words when trying to enter or create a field that is less rigid and more fluid.

In order to understand the female gaze and the role of phenomenology – especially of later feminist phenomenology – in this context we need to see that we do, in fact, require two, we require a sense of both; the subject and the object, intertwined, easily changing places. An experience of the self is an experience of the other, and an experience of the other is an experience of the self. In a post-patriarchal society or a feminine culture there should no longer be division, only inclusion. It's almost like saying that the other – not as a subordinate but as a co-existing entity – must be included in the experience of the self. To rephrase, this is the experience of the self as part of the world, an experience of the world, of the so-called others, as part of the self.

Of course, all of this means questioning the world as seen and lived in by tradition. This alternate viewpoint, relying on feminist phenomenology, suggests a world of constant interplay. The significance of this worldview for this thesis is in the fact that the fashion film in question shall be explored through a conversation with the film, not by trying to find a sole truth it might contain. This also means that ultimately, I cannot define this film, to pinpoint a single outcome.

Irigaray's work, however, is not without its idiosyncrasies and has faced some criticism as Virpi Lehtinen (2010) points out in the opening remark of her thesis on the philosopher's work:

The debate on Luce Irigaray's essentialism and the dismissal of her thought as heterosexist have obscured her work as a manifestation of open and dynamic feminine being with great generative potential (Lehtinen 2010, 1).

I would suggest that for the exploration I aim to undertake in this thesis the most important concepts used by Lehtinen above are "open", "dynamic" and "generative potential". By underlining these particular concepts I want to point out that the whole idea behind discussing a feminine subject – or being – is so that it could be one that has the ability to change and evolve as is necessary and as it pleases. It's an inside out job.

Naturally, because we are dealing with such concepts as male/female and a feminine subject, heterosexism comes to play. I, however, try to steer this thesis towards the direction Lehtinen verbalises – a manifestation of something else, of something more organic.

In a peculiar way, even a subject needs to be defended, and this is the underlying theme here. What gets defended is essentially not an experience, *per se*, but the ability and freedom to experience as one does. To pave the way for this seemingly new subject one must make sure it is not pre-conditioned, like in the case of the female gaze, let alone the male gaze, which functioned primarily as a rigidly defined framework. As Lehtinen continues:

From the perspective of phenomenology, experience is never fully given, but always open, partial and perspectival, and this also holds true with regard to the articulation of experience (Lehtinen 2010, 1).

To put the idea slightly differently, when it comes to phenomenology, the subject is the one that experiences, rather than being solely experienced by others as some thing. That experiencing is interesting and worth looking into, but it also reminds us of the fact that whenever we look at something from the outside, we, inevitably, come to define or to frame it as one thing, with edges. But, as we shift our attention and look at things from the inside out, nothing is too defined, least of all the self. This viewpoint, hence, requires space and flexibility.

However, I also want to pick one more thought from Lehtinen's work on Irigaray in order to further demonstrate the means and aim of this thesis. Lehtinen writes,

the potential of feminine generativity is not restricted to giving birth and upraising children of flesh and blood, but extends also to activities of giving birth to other types of embodied-spiritual unities, such as pieces of writings (Lehtinen 2010, 10).

The bent towards the inventive nature of phenomenology is putting an emphasis on the language used in describing a phenomenon by means of phenomenology. In a sense, one must invent the language used through subjective engagement in a given experience and not trust automated meanings.

To entertain the thought, one must consider that when writing about subjects and

subjectivities a person, a writing person, is simultaneously involved in the act of creating the self through the practice of writing. In writing, one creates and is created. Existence, therefore, is both relational and relative, forever re-defined by acts of writing, looking, gazing, feeling, experiencing. We are shaping and being shaped. This is the basis of the phenomenology I shall utilize and hold at the back of my mind while working on this piece of text.

### **3.4 Towards a phenomenology of the female gaze**

Phenomenology has made a suggestion as to where a subject might be located: in the body.

In this realm, the seeing eye is part of the body, linking sight into a whole web of sensations that happen within the reality of the body. Visual pleasure is food for the eye, for sure, but to further examine the actual meaning of the gaze – and not of the object – it is vital to turn towards the body, towards an inner world, and hence, the subject.

This is to say that in order to make worthwhile conclusions about the evolving female gaze we must turn our attention more towards the seeing eye – as part of the body – than what is looked at.

In the case of the male gaze, focus was still in the women that were looked at in a heteronormative context, and who, in turn, defined the gaze as belonging to men. Phenomenology helps us free the gaze from the tyranny of a hierarchical world where a gaze is cast from above, as though ranking that which is seen into categories, subordinates and eyes that rule. A phenomenological female gaze is interested in what happens in the body, and how the experience the body has, creates an individual's experience of the world. That world, in turn, is not a place we must enter as though it is given to us, but a reality which is reborn over and over as we see and experience it. The world or the sphere of the body and of the subject is a world which we have the chance to explore, to enter it as happy campers without a map.

As a result of all this, the weight of the matter is in the act of looking. One could even say female gaze is a verb, not a noun, and only by being treated as such is it able to defy the norm of the male gaze. It's almost like saying, we are no longer interested in objectifying any more subjects. Rather, we want to experience the looking, and as a result, say something about ourselves and what our sight held on to, not simply about what we saw and

whether we were able to own it by saying what it was.

Next, we shall take a closer look at the maker of *Legs Are Not Doors*, Harley Weir, and how her stance may have an impact on what we might see in the film.

## 4 Harley Weir's *Legs Are Not Doors*

### 4.1 Harley Weir – a view through the lens of an image maker

I'd say my aesthetic was kind of a mixture between documentary and fantasy. Yeah I'm trying to like figure out like the balance between what I have to say and what someone is as they are. Then kind of asking a question. And I think that's how it is with most of my pictures. There's a lot to work through to do with sex and sexuality and things like that. So I'm trying to figure it out very slowly. With my photography I'm trying to see how it is to be a woman.

I studied fine art when I was at university but my work was more going back to the old school idea of art. Yeah being a bit more intuitive. Being a bit more emotional. Just kind of like feeling it. And also beauty was a big part of my work and that's very very frowned upon within the art world. It's probably the most disgusting thing you could do is to make something beautiful.

Fashion was a really good blend of the two where I could, like, you know be curious and ask the questions I wanted to ask but I was never an artist really. I'm just very very curious.<sup>3</sup>

Harley Weir, who is born in London and studied at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, describes her intuitive style as having an emphasis on beauty – a concept that may, as she says, be even "frowned upon". From what Weir says, we can deduce that her take on her work, which may, at first glance, seem like a departure from current trends, is in fact backed up by tradition. Yet, as she describes, her method leans towards intuition – it leans towards an open-ended feeling process.

Weir's work is firmly rooted in photography yet spans film. Her images come across as emotive and raw, yet considered. Weir herself would say, "somewhere between the mysterious and the quite blatant" (Remsen 2016, 532). Her photography is focused on human beings but also includes images of nature and objects – or nature-objects – which always seem to evoke a sense of the visceral, like seemingly inanimate subjects sprouting from the natural world, speaking to and

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AtzOrWQctD8> Accessed January 13th 2021.

conversing with our bodies.

Weir's imagery could, perhaps, almost be a kind of personal canon of femininity, all very intimate though not autobiographical.

In an article in *Vogue*, Nicholas Remsen even went on to describe Weir, along with two other photographers, as "the highbrow distillers of Snapchat culture, interpreters of a world that's not as weary of seeing its own blemishes" (Remsen 2016, 532.) Another way to put this would be that Weir's images speak to a culture very much concerned with the now, addressing an audience that is very educated in and by images. These images do not exclude or try to overcome the quotidian but rather, find the beauty in the mundane. This seems like an act of rebellion, an attempt to overthrow the perfect.

As Weir says above, her style easily blends and fits into fashion. As part of her repertoire, she works for brands, creating both still and moving images. In her fashion film *Legs Are Not Doors* Weir employs her signature aesthetic and brings it to the service of a fashion brand.

In this study, Weir's ability to create imagery that evokes a sensual response gets centre stage. As part of this, I discuss the ideas of femininity in her moving images, but eventually put the emphasis on how her images address the body and the space of the viewer. Weir's film functions as a canvas. Our task is to sink into this film by means of the senses – by means of our bodies. I hope to point out the way in which Weir's imagery has the potential to draw us in to a field of experience surpassing pre-determined objects and subjects.

The role Weir plays in this thesis is that of a kind of auteur who has the possibility to pave the way for a new kind of visual culture. What that culture, that way of seeing, may be like will be discussed and named later in this study as a result of an inquiry into the responses Weir's moving images, in conversation with feminist phenomenology, evoke.

## **4.2 *Legs Are Not Doors* and the art of the body**

Weir's fashion film *Legs Are Not Doors* is a kind of triumph on color, texture and movement. It's a feast for the eyes, if you will. Still, it offers multiple points of entry and we need not hold on to a single view. In fact, this is our starting point: no need to hone in on a singular result.



Weir's landscape in the film is one of females. She paints a world where bodies move, connect, morph and get performed: Liv Tyler, as pregnant as could be, happy with her belly, happy being a woman, mentioning that womanhood also has its challenges. Red nails, red lips, soft hair, the fringes on her dress falling down to the sides of her belly. Embodied femininity, womanhood as performance, codes we all know and can recognise. A play on words, images, connotations. Something familiar – a tradition or traditional, perhaps. Clearly referenced, we all know the visual edges of a pregnant body.

The characters of the film live out their gender. "Raging water, cliffs," recites Chloe Sevigny. Both abstract, out of context, as well as precise and visceral, we need not know more of her personal poem in order to understand how it sticks to the theme: being a woman, being in a woman's body. Woman, nature, body. All connected here.

What these women seem to be describing is their experience of being a woman, translated into wordy snippets, little flashes of life as a female, dressed in Proenza Schouler. It's as if the text - of the words and of the film — is saying we can all be female, the way we want, and we can dress that womanhood in Proenza Schouler. Not the other way around, not anymore. You don't dress a woman, you are a woman. And if you are lucky enough, she will dress herself in your label.

This is the turn of roles the film seems to employ: to both give the viewer her freedom, and to omit it. To give the freedom of being female as one wishes, but asking you to dress the woman you are in our brand. Whether the clothes make the woman or the woman makes the clothes is not completely clear.

The take-away are the suggestions the film makes. "Hot milk", "housewife", "blue" and "baby blue" all belong here, in no particular order and with no pretense or judgement. The roles of our lives easily become the colors we wear, the switch is instant. And what is hot milk, when a model dressed in Proenza Schouler says it?

It is not always clear, either, if we are watching the clothes or in fact the bodies dressed in them. Or, in the case of *Legs Are Not Doors*, it seems more apt to talk about bodies that have dressed themselves in these clothes. Movement becomes dress, dress becomes body, body becomes dress. Without the moving image there would be no cloth to imagine, no chance to imagine feeling the

slide of the shirt on the stomach.

And this is why Weir's images ultimately speak to our bodies. And these bodies are ones that feel, not ones that have been pre-conditioned from the outside. Though Weir seems to film bodies and people who speak of being a woman, or a female, or about being in a female body, I would rather suggest that this is not so much in order to define as it is to allow.

In the film, much is left to the imagination of the viewer – as in, what is "salty spray"? After all, Weir has a sense of humour, too. Whatever salty spray is in that world, is as much about the spectator as it is about what Chloe seems to be telling us. Perhaps it is no more, no less than a definition of femininity or femaleness, of being in a body. That is a possibility.

Of course, the people we see on the film are professional performers – actresses, models, – who are used to being on stage or staging their appearance. They are highly aware of the image they portray, and this is highlighted and utilised in the film. Clad in Proenza Schouler, all considered colors and textures, hair perfect and loose, voluminous, tied. No string – of hair or of cloth – is out of place here, even if it seems so. This is Weir's version of *je ne sais quoi*, clad in Proenza Schouler.

The clothes, as such, play a part of their own. As a subject of the film tells, "It's funny 'cause I always used to love to watch her get dressed and I was quite a tomboy, so", we understand that wearing clothes has a meaning beyond and even separate from womanhood as such. It's a choice to make, a play on clothes, roles, ideas – much like the film. Freedom of choice is crucial. In a sense, through the clothes, femininity and its expression(s) become completely irreversible and superfluous. This, however, does not make femininity disposable – something that would, in fact, contradict the message of the film. Instead, femininity becomes something we can wear should we choose to do so.

At times, the bodies morph into color blocks and shapes, almost like reduced to pieces of abstract art cloth. We can still understand, even if subconsciously, that we are seeing images of clothes. We are served color choices, patterns, arrangements and compositions, as the designer items translate themselves into a cinema of fashion in front of Weir's lens. These colors engage our senses, as we follow their lines – this dance on surfaces – with our eyes, activating our bodies.

The abstract bodies of Weir's film are, at times, accentuated by the presence of a flowers and

accessories assemblage, reminiscent of still lifes – a little nod to art history. This concoction of deeply hued accessories, fruit, leaves, petals and shells even becomes the last image of the film. It is hard to visually dissect what is included in that image, and it almost seems like the whole composition is rotting. "Everything must go," are the last words of the film, clashing with the image.

Much like the organic and inorganic objects, beauty and fashion seem to be vanishing, evaporating as soon as the film disappears into the dark. At the end of the day, bodies fade away too. What, then, is the difference between a flower and a body?

Fashion is instinctual. It's not just about following trends, or creating styles – it's about spotting the right combinations, creating appealing proportions and conveying a powerful image. This rule does not apply simply to the act of putting together an outfit or a look, but to Weir's film, too. *Legs Are Not Doors* shows designer items, for sure, but also creates them – it transforms the clothes into whole new images. Now, they are fashion images, or fashion film images – often, in this case, still-like compositions which the camera explores.

However, what is both most prominent and tangible and yet most difficult to penetrate intellectually when looking at Weir's film is the way it affects us and makes us feel, on a bodily level. The core message is conveyed through the senses – our senses. The core message reaches our core... Statements are made using colors and textures, not words, even though they are a part of the film, too. The most powerful impressions are sensed, not underlined. It is almost like whatever these moving pieces of clothing and objects, in contact with bodies, on the film, make us feel is what our bodies, as a whole, are capable of making us feel.

The fact that we are capable of experiencing Weir's film first and foremost with our bodies does not bind or restrict us. Quite the contrary, it is what frees us. When, as spectators, we are sensing bodies, we cannot, in fact, be controlled. Interacting with the world – as with this film – as a body allows us to (re)define ourselves.

In this context, I would simply like to highlight the fact that this film has a way of communicating that relies on the body's capacity to receive information of sorts. That is to say that even without words or cognitive processes, we are able to understand. This understanding utilises processes other than those situated traditionally within the brain. This, naturally, leads to the realisation that

knowing takes place all around our bodies instead of the head.

To look without a body – ours – would be false, a pretense. Where that body is located and what it is comprised of is a more complex question. We are not talking about a particular body nor are we talking about a normative body. However, we are talking about a shared body, a body to recognise. That ephemeral yet viscerally felt body is the basis of being able to share our sensory experiences in words at all. This body does not exist on screen, though Weir's images help us locate it, nor off it, as such. This body is shared and yet it is deeply personal. This is a body we have access into through sensory experiences. This body has, by now, taken us far away from female fantasies and into shared ground. This body belongs to all.

Following these thoughts, it appears that looking into this fashion film is only part of the whole. It's almost like the film is interchangeable with any other film, or a painting, or a sculpture. Essentially, we're trying to draw a picture of ourselves with the help of phenomenology. We're trying to do it with a further or fuller understanding of ourselves as sentient beings. In a way, phenomenology as it exists in relation to this fashion film is the phenomenology in any work of art we reflect ourselves upon. It may be that Weir's film is particularly ripe for this kind of exploration, though, as it is so dense on the surface, offering us bodies, touches and slides.

#### **4.3 Harley Weir and the female gaze**

Though Weir's photographic style, as such, easily comes across as contemporary, her means of expression links her to a particular tradition of seeing. First of all, it seems Weir often photographs women, for women. These implications may, of course, refer to her fashion-world relations, as fashion advertising frequently aims to sell products to women, but, especially as Weir has background in fine art and often takes photographs and makes films – be it for fashion brands or not – we may also look at her work through the idea of the female gaze, which was introduced as a concept earlier when laying down the theoretical framework for this thesis.

The female gaze as an issue, however, has, of course, undergone a process of transformation during the course of its life. A contemporary answer to Dirse's question is suggested by Charlotte Jansen (2017), who has interviewed female artists working with female bodies in front of their cameras. Jansen notes that when women start working with female objects, it is like taking back a power – so, a form of emancipation – because now "Women have the right to self-objectify and to exploit

without critique, just as men have been allowed to do since the earliest forms of art emerged” (Jansen 2017, 9). This is a very powerful reversal of the roles and a very strong statement. It seems to imply the female gaze has broken out of a form and transformed itself into energy and vigor.

Jansen also points out that ”at times, using the female body is only a means to an end: it’s material that is available, over which the photographer-model has total ownership and final sovereignty” (Jansen 2017, 9). This could be read as a way of saying that when a female artist works with a female object/subject, she is always, in some way, working with her self. This could be seen as another, very direct answer to Dirse’s open question. It also suggests a link to the fluid, no-bounds body which was tentatively discussed in relation to Weir’s film.

To further this understanding, Jansen simultaneously writes that the choice to photograph women is, for a female photographer, often ”a way to understand identity, femininity, sexuality, beauty and bodies” (Jansen 2017, 9). This easily links to Weir’s ideas about how she curiously approaches her subject matters, hoping to explore and navigate the topics closest to her. Weir is, in other words, intimate with her subject/s.

In the act of photographing or filming as described by Jansen and Weir, the (female) body is subject matter through which the artistic process takes place. The emphasis is on the one looking, the one looking for the image to capture. However, this in no way means that the bodies that function as the matter of the art would be subordinated to the makers. Again, quite the contrary. The bodies of these makers – both in front of and behind the camera – are ripe with possibility. And, as we see Weir’s film, we start to come to an understanding of how all the material is, in fact, a way of figuring out a route towards something that wants to be known. Likewise, for the spectator, this attempt at knowing happens in the body, over and over again.

In essence, Zoe Dirse (2013, 24-26) has defined the issue about the female gaze in asking: ”Is my gender an issue in relating to the subjects?”, and conversely, ”what happens when the bearer of the look is female and the object is female”? Dirse’s questions easily relate to Weir’s work, though they have undergone an inevitable process of transmutation. Still, we need the term, female gaze, even if only to have somewhere to start from.

In addition, we might ask what kind of connotations the fact that Weir positions herself as a photographer taking pictures of women, for women, creates. Though Weir talks about her work

through the qualities it entails – such as intuitive and emotional or mysterious and blatant – another way to further look at the images is to connect them to the female gaze, mapping out the basis of Weir’s way of looking at things and showing them. Weir’s approach and the application do not, in my opinion, exclude each other, but rather, compliment each other.

And in fact, combining the female gaze and fashion photography appears as a definitive feature of 21st century fashion photography. Alessia Glavino and Franca Sozzani, who both work for Vogue, were asked about how the female gaze plays out in an exhibition of theirs that took place in 2016. Glavino replied:

I believe that the most important thing that happened in the past five years in photography is how women have actually taken back the gaze. We see so many images of women shot by women on social media and Instagram. And so many of these photographers are brilliant and are somehow completely changing the way we look at the woman’s body.<sup>4</sup>

Glavino goes on to put a lot of emphasis on the creative power of a fashion photograph: ”The female act of claiming back the lens and redefining a woman’s female gaze toward another woman, it becomes a subversive act. And it’s like a revolution.”<sup>5</sup>

Interestingly, Glavino talks about how the photographers are changing the way we look at a woman’s body. She speaks not of how we show women, but of how we look at them.

Glavino’s statements seem to imply that a change is not only underway but has already taken root in fashion photography and started to turn things around. Weir is a part of that movement. The female gaze suddenly appears both completely current as well as traditional. It is traditional because the term is backed up by a theoretical background and a tradition of image- and film-makers who have long used, discussed and become aware of the gaze they are imposing on us. It is current and contemporary because of its applications.

The most interesting and the most complex question is, of course, that of whether a female gaze is a certain way. Weir’s gaze is female because of her gender, but is her style as it is because of the gaze

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<sup>4</sup> <https://archive.nytimes.com/lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2016/11/01/the-female-gaze-in-fashion-photography/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://archive.nytimes.com/lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2016/11/01/the-female-gaze-in-fashion-photography/>

she holds and employs or because of, say, her educational background and personal preferences? Or how do all of these elements come together? And perhaps the female gaze that has been discussed throughout this thesis is not simply one that could be interpreted by means of the image's maker but by a wider idea of a way of seeing. Perhaps it is possible that the female gaze is now becoming a space rather than a directive. This idea shall be explored in more depth in the final chapter of this thesis.

All in all, what we know for sure is that the images Weir creates are distinctive, and that we may speak of them not only in relation to the female gaze but also, in regards to the so-called movement which has begun to appear on the pages of fashion magazines and sites online. The fashion image is getting repurposed and is a ground for change within fashion as much as it is a fertile soil for theoretical study. I would also like to suggest that these evolving fashion images impact – and should do – academic study. It is because of the change occurring within an industry like fashion that we need new terminology to better reflect current phenomena. In many ways, though not unproblematic, the fashion industry is a dynamic field eager to find new ways of doing, representing and seeing things and that's why it may have something to teach us. Again, this topic shall be further explored in the last chapter.

#### **4.4 Experiencing the disgustingly beautiful**

Regardless of its social aspect, fashion is and can be experienced individually and very subjectively. We could make a long list of all the ways fashion impacts us and our bodies. Not all of them are negative.

Besides equalling an endless flow of new seasons and clothes to fill the world with, fashion can also be interpreted as an ephemeral entity; a phenomenon constructed through image- and brand-making.

All the same, fashion has to land on an individual, on the body, to have an actual life. For the purposes of this thesis, however, it is important to make the distinction between the life of a garment and the inner experience of an individual which comes to life as a result of that individual developing a connection to, say, a fashion film. By this latter definition, fashion is anything that is felt in relation to fashions.

This is actually why fashion film is particularly interesting: because it somehow begins to bridge the gap between the initially distant consumer and a tangible item. This is where phenomenology is at work: it shows how the senses aim to draw the pieces of clothing in question closer to the viewer of the film. One might even ask if, in fact, a viewer already owns those pieces of clothing, because they become so real, so vivid, due to a consumer-turned-spectator's senses? Of course, this means a re-evaluation of what it means to own, to possess, in all its glory, fashion.

In the phenomenological world of *Legs Are Not Doors* to see cloth is to feel it, as though against the receptive cells on the inner surface of the skin. That is where our sense of touch lives when we watch a film like that of Weir's, and that is how deep a fashion film will go when utilised the way Harley Weir has. It's like, as though, we wear the clothes. What we feel when we look at a fashion film is what we want to feel again when we wear something we saw being worn on that film.

In other words, in *Legs Are Not Doors*, the body appears both on and off screen. As viewed, as experienced. To apply phenomenology to the fashion film is to try and track the distance between the visual content and our sensing bodies, only to notice how narrow it is to begin with. And it is here that the link between Harley Weir's *Legs Are Not Doors* and how we look at it and respond to it gets activated: in truth, we cannot understand the film without understanding how it affects us. In the case of a film like *Legs Are Not Doors* and us wanting to read it with a phenomenological female eye all emphasis goes on the viewing experience. This is also the only way to defy the fashion film becoming but a representation of normative female figures.

*Legs Are Not Doors* is a phenomenological film because we cannot understand it by simply thinking about it – and we don't need to. Weir's work gives us more space.

The film attempts to engage our senses in many ways: there is movement, there is skin, there are varying materials longing to be touched. It is almost as though we are tempted into the world of the film, to focus our senses into it, to engage our consciousness. In order for us to tentatively feel what the film is asking us to feel we must give it our attention and our very core, the sensing part of us. This also means giving ourselves away, to the experience of how an image may in fact make us experience ourselves more intensely. It is not only that we are in conversation with the film and its images; we are in conversation with ourselves, as sensory, sentient, beings. Through our senses and through our sense-making abilities, we are in contact and in connection to the film and its imagery. This is why Weir's film is not just a concoction of super stylish images – it is actually an invitation



for us to explore ourselves, to take what we please, to leave the rest. And not let it bother us. Not too much.

There is no doubt that much of the film's content is solely sensory: high in colors, movement and textures. We see surfaces meeting, arousing a more physical experience. What the film does is force us to engage our bodies. Because of this, the film is also inclusive as it does not require for us to be familiar with any particular piece of knowledge. No brand, either. We might be. But we need not be. There is a liberty in how it is enough to feel, to sense and to experience. In that feeling, sensing and experiencing lies a unique pleasure, one that binds together beauty and disgust.

This is why phenomenological production of knowledge – if knowledge, in fact, is even the most perfect term here – is also knowledge available to anyone. It lacks hierarchy. It holds no key you must be in possession of to know it. One's body, its many processes, possibilities and limitations, are the encyclopedia you are to read.

When it comes to *Legs Are Not Doors* we are ultimately exploring a piece of work from the point of view of its possibilities. Not simply or straightforwardly as an achievement in film-making but rather, in some curious and peculiar way, as a set of moving images that become a part of our reality and the way we build it. This is the reality we live in and interact with on a daily basis but also the reality inside us. Feminist phenomenology seems to be of the opinion that we should be the judges of that world.

In a way, this film offers us images, ones that we may hold on to with our sensing bodies, and allows us to organize them as parts of our world as we wish to. This world or this reality, the one constructed as a result, by us, won't be defined from the outside because it cannot be. Here, phenomenology gives space not only to interpretation – for that would be a function of the mind – but to receptivity. In many ways, that kind of visual pleasure may be the most radical kind as it is not fixed on any particular dogma. Instead, this phenomenology of the body is fluid and flexible, in movement. In this scenario, the state most desirable may be that of change, of never arriving.

All of this is also why a fashion film such as Weir's has much to offer academic discussion though it hails from a whole different landscape.

When we choose to engage in a conversation with a film like Weir's, we also discover our own potential in the process. That potential has to do with possessing images instead of images possessing us. This potential is unlocked by the application of feminist phenomenology.

In truth, of course, fashion has been paving the way for cultural change long before the academic world ever took note. Still, in this case, it is hard to say which owes which.

The only thing that is clear is that while women - in fashion, in film, in front of or behind the camera - have created new ways of looking and seeing, the academic world has been keen to follow and to follow up, creating a language, a terminology, with which to speak of this phenomena. They are two sides of the same coin. And, they have a shared interest: to make more space for an inclusive, self-reflective means of existence. This is why we need both womxn who make things but also womxn eager to see, sense, experience and express things in new ways.

Now, while Weir's film has given us a unique sense of what a feminist phenomenological viewing experience might be, next, we'll gather the bits and pieces collected along the journey of this thesis and look at not only what it's shown us but also, where it might lead us along the way.

## 5 Conclusions

As I am reaching the end of this writing process, I see both this thesis and its writing as a pathway towards an end goal that was both clear and hazy when I first began. I now see that I have reeled my way back to where I started.

But the thing is, I began with a feeling, an instinct, and ended to a place of words. During this journey, I had to look for something I had lost along the way and something I had started to sense as I moved forward.

In this process, where I've initially been in the dark, slowly putting on lights, Weir's take on her own work has been a big inspiration and a huge help. Her unabashed love of beauty and her way of portraying it with the help of what we might easily deem as ugly – or, in fact, disgusting – has empowered me to explore my own reactions, responses and senses.

The difference between ugly and disgusting is that disgust engages our senses. Ugly may be a concept of the mind, an opinion, a point of view bound by time and culture. Disgust is more personal. It forces us to get to grips with ourselves, to connect with a cellular inner life. In order to understand these sensations, one must engage with one's self. In the process, one might ask, as I have during the course of this writing process, if icky can be beautiful as it is, for sure, sensational. Perhaps disgust could be an avenue of connection.

In terms of our nervous system and our ability to feel when we look at a film it doesn't really make a difference whether we feel pleasure or disgust. The point is that we register. Within all this, what registers as beautiful is a more complex process, one that does not exclude a physical response of ick. We have come to a place where it's possible to receive all kinds of images without dismissing them at first glance. Beauty can and will include bodily sensations that are harder to define than to say they equal straightforward pleasure that does not bother us or throw us off course. This makes for a multitude of responses, and, therefore, a multitude of images that are being circulated. This is also why, at the end of the day, the female gaze equals inclusion and versatility.

During this thesis, I have discussed an idea. In order to discuss an idea, one needs words, a language that feels enough of a language of one's own. Gradually, through the writing process, that idea becomes something else – a view into a film, perhaps, or an analysis. A conversation. A

conversation where image, body and word meet.

In the sensory world of images, moving or otherwise, images actually allow us to feel alive. When the images we receive viscerally move us, we feel a wide variety of sensations. In this manner, we are in conversation with these images and with the power they have. The potential of an image is activated when we, as spectators, begin to make sense of it. In this context, beauty might as well be considered anything that truly allows us to feel, sparking an inner aliveness.

The wheels of time have freed us from talking about the female gaze and served us a whole new concept: the girl gaze. The idea is both contemporary and eternal. Understandably, in order to deal with such a concept, we must give birth to it by means of situating it in time. Still, the idea behind the concept is out of time and can be universally shared. In fact, it is this potential that is its greatest power.

Girl gaze is not a term born within the academic world, yet owes its existence to it. It's a term, a concept, hailing from a firm background in research, decades of cementing its predecessors in academia. And yet now, the girl gaze is first and foremost created and owned by the Instagram generation. It's a concept concerned with the ever-renewing, fleshy now. Its history means that it is part of the academic world and needed in this conversation despite being born outside it, in the throes of digital culture.

In order for a girl gaze to exist, a fe/male gaze, the historical construct of it, is required. However, the girl gaze is not merely a version of the fe/male gaze, but an evolution of it. The girl gaze is what is required for the fe/male gaze to evolve to its next, most recent form. The girl gaze brings into conversation 21st century popular culture and allows it a fresh, new voice.

Likewise, the work done by feminist phenomenologists in the latter part of the 20th century has been needed in order to open up the ubiquitous subject. It is only through this work that it has been possible to re-own the subject. This subject may be a spectator with a gaze as easily as it might be a researcher with a gaze. The crucial point is that there is no one position to look or to study from. This opening of the subject has paved the way for the girl gaze, a subject space which may be occupied by anyone with an open mind and an open gaze. In this regard, feminist phenomenology has made it possible to re-own the subject, situating it deep within the body.

The key to understanding this kind of new female gaze is to recognise that we are, in fact, "learning to look at women" (Girl on Girl p. 8) Girl gaze is about a new discovery, an opening of the eyes – perhaps even of our bodies. We are not to accept a fixed idea about the contemporary female gaze – instead, we are to educate ourselves about it. This is a process of learning and re-learning, releasing old spectacles and approaching the female as subject with a curious and compassionate view.

A conversation about beauty changes when employing the girl gaze. This is not to say we must abandon the idea of beauty altogether. Perhaps, instead, it could be a question of play. For Weir beauty has meant a return to an old school way of seeing and creating. Inspired by Weir, we could or should rather embody a new sense of beauty – one that can stretch as far as entailing disgust or perhaps rather, transforming it into an experience of beauty, one of many. What is crucial about this kind of beauty is the experience of it, not the sight.

Girl gaze re-owns everything it sees. It holds the right to define symbols and sights for itself. This is why girl gaze could be described as a force rather than as a construct. It needs to be allowed to live, breathe, mold and re-mold. It deals with a force that lives outside power structures.

The point I hope to make about *Legs Are Not Doors* is actually rather simplistic: to enjoy it. Of course, one could, when making such a statement, refer back to visual pleasure, but I think the film was not made with such a superfluous motive. When watching the film, a more nuanced approach has to be applied. The film is both short-lived – one minute and fifty-four seconds, to be exact – and expansive. It has an eternal potential that is unlocked by the spectator's body. This is why we can't pinpoint the pleasure it possibly produces to the visual kind. There must be more space around it, more space around the spectator.

In fact, I believe that it is only by looking at a film like *Legs Are Not Doors* – one made by, for and featuring women – that we can begin to understand what the contemporary girl gaze really is.

Female gaze was born out of a dichotomy, from academia and from a quiet herstory of female directors, photographers and makers. It may have become a term that got outdated, a stuffy remnant of the past, but now, directors like Weir are taking it in their own hands and re-owning it in a new way. Weir and her contemporaries have created the girl gaze and rather than being one end of a dichotomy, it is to be an empowering, inclusive space.

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## Suomenkielinen tiivistelmä

Tutkielmani käsittelee pääpiirteissään kolmea aihetta, jotka muodostavat tekstin kokonaisuuden: liikkuvaa muotikuvaa, feminististä fenomenologiaa sekä naiskatsetta, joka englanniksi tunnetaan nimellä female gaze. Näiden kolmen teeman yhteentörmäykset ja -kietoutumiset rakentavat pro gradu -tekstin ytimen ja juonenkaltaisen kulun.

Kirjoitelman lähtökohtana on henkilökohtainen kiinnostus muotiin. Vaatteet, pukeutuminen ja muoti abstraktina ilmiönä ovat kulkeneet mukanani vuosikymmenestä toiseen. Ne ovat kuitenkin vasta nyt ensimmäistä kertaa akateemisen pohdiskeluni kohde.

Tutkielmassa tärkeänä teemana on ollut myös tekstin ja kirjoittamisen haltuunotto. Sen kautta olen pyrkinyt luomaan voimaaannuttavaa tilaa. Olen asettanut kirjoitusprosessille toiveenomaisen tavoitteen löytää oma kieli, jolla kertoa koetusta ja ajatellusta. Myös työskentely kokonaisuudessaan on saanut vaikutteita monesta suunnasta ammentaen näkökulmaa niin empatian tärkeydestä osana työtä kuin ekofeminismin ja sienitutkimuksen suuntauksista, joissa maailma nähdään alhaalta ylöspäin rakentuvana yhteyksien verkostona. Yhtenä kirjoituksen ja kirjoittamisen lähtökohtana onkin ollut lähestyä tutkimuskohdetta mahdollisimman vähän arvottavasta näkökulmasta, tuoden ja luoden tilaa omalle äänelleni ja siten myös kaikille muille äänille, tutkien yhteyksiä ja kohtaamisia ennemmin kuin hierarkioita ja yksinkertaistettuja totuuksia.

Tutkimuksellisesti tekstin keskiössä on kysymys siitä, millaisia katsomisen ja näkemisen tapoja feministinen, fenomenologinen naiskatse saattaa tuottaa suhteessa liikkuvaan muotikuvaan. Tämän kysymyksen ohjaaman prosessin tarkoituksena on ollut ennen kaikkea luoda uusia yhteyksiä ja mahdollisuuksia sen sijaan, että kyseisenkaltainen katse korvaisi ja syrjäyttäisi jotakin toista vaihtoehtoa.

Liikkuva muotikuva eli suomalaisittain muotifilmi on näennäisesti uusi ilmiö, jolle on kuitenkin mahdollista jäljittää historialliset juuret. Muoti ja vaatteet ovat olleet kuvassa yhtä kauan kuin tuo kuva on liikkunut. Nykyisessä muotifilmissä yhdistyvätkin striimattu catwalk ja avant garde - elokuvakokeilut. Erityisesti vuosituhaten vaihteen jälkeen kiihtyvällä nopeudella kehittynyt muotifilmi on matkan varrella muotoutunut ennen kaikkea digitaalisen ajan tuotteeksi. Vaatteet eivät enää ole muotifilmin keskeisintä sisältöä, vaan ne ovat antaneet tilaa ohjaajien tulkinnoille ja

brändien rakentamiselle ja ovat nykyään itsenäisiä taideteoksia, joita katsotaan ja kulutetaan verkossa yhä uudelleen.

Sen katsomisen tavan, jota tutkielmassa alustetaan, lähtökohtana tai aloituspisteenä on toiminut elokuvateoreetikko Laura Mulveyn 1970-luvulla lanseeraama käsite male gaze. Male gaze on alun perin elokuvateoriasta tuttu käsite, jolla on kuvattu ohjaajan, kuvaajan ja siten myös katsojan katsetta, joka on perinteisesti ohjautunut heteronormatiivisesti kohti kameran edessä esiintyvää naista.

Male gazen rinnalle on kuitenkin kirjoitettu myöhemmin vuosikymmeninä female gaze, jonka ovat ottaneet ensisijaisesti haltuun naiselokuvantekijät ja sittemmin niin valokuvaajat kuin taiteentekijät. Female gazen paikka on ollut ennen kaikkea male gazen kyseenalaistajana. Se on ollut ikään kuin kysymyksenasettelu, jossa on pohdittu sitä, miten naistekijäisyys näkyy kuvassa.

Olen tutkielmassani tuonut female gazen rinnalle feministisen fenomenologian. Tämä tekstissäni erityisesti filosofi Luce Irigarayn kirjoituksista ammentava fenomenologian sovellus pyrkii hahmottamaan feminiinisen subjektin olemassaoloa. Tuo subjekti olisi Irigarayn mukaan ennen kaikkea yhteyksistä ja kohtaamisista ammentava, vuorovaikutteinen olemisen, kokemisen ja kirjoittamisen tapa. Fenomenologia perusperiaatteissaan keskittyy hahmottamaan maailmaa ennen kaikkea aistien ja kokemuksen kautta.

Kääntäessäni katseeni kohti Lontoossa koulutetun valokuvaaja-filmintekijä Harley Weirin muotifilmiä *Legs Are Not Doors* (2015) olen pyrkinyt yhdistämään fenomenologista näkökulmaa perinteiseen female gazeen, jossa naiset ovat niin kameran edessä kuin sen takana. Tämän prosessin tai yhdistelmän tuloksena katsomisen tapa ja se, kuinka se tapahtuu kirjoittavassa tutkijassa, on suuntautunut ennen kaikkea sisäänpäin. Sen sijaan, että Weirin filmiä analysoitaisiin tarkastelemalla sen pintaa, fokus on näin ollen ohjattu kohti katsojan sisäisyyttä ja kehollisia kokemuksia.

Harley Weirin näkemys omasta taiteestaan ja tekemisestään on hänen omien sanojensa mukaan intuitiivinen ja utelias. Weir tutkii töidensä kautta esimerkiksi naisena olemista ja seksuaalisuutta.

*Legs Are Not Doors* on tyylitelty, avantgardistinen ja ohjaajalleen uskollinen kahden minuutin muotifilmi. Liikkuvissa kuvissa näemme naisia, asuja, pintoja ja värejä. Kuulemme sanoja, jotka

liitostuvat höllästi ta ilmiselvästi naiseuteen ja naisena olemiseen.

Weirin kuvat puhuttelevat siis kehoa. Juuri siksi ne myös tarjoavat tilaa katsojalle. Koska muoti on vaistonvaraista, niin on myös Weirin pienen elokuvan katsominen. Katsoessamme juuri tätä elokuvaa kehojemme kanssa teemme tilaa kaikille sitä katsoville kehoille arvottamatta niitä.

Female gaze suhteessa Weirin muotifilmiin merkitseekin tilan takaisinottamista. Tuossa tilassa, katsomisen tavassa, oma identiteetti ja se, mitä löydämme ja käytämme kuvasta määrittyy henkilökohtaisesti. Kuvat ovat siis sekä yhteisiä että syvästi yksityisiä ja kuitenkin jaettuja. Luomme ja jaamme, otamme, tilan katsoessamme Weirin liikkuvia kuvia.

Tila, joka siis alkoi female gazena ja jonka ovat ottaneet alun perin haltuun naispuoliset tekijät on nyt muotoutunut joksikin muuksi, uudeksi. Uuden vuosituhanen tekijät ja kirjoittajat ovat löytäneet sille termin: girl gaze.

Girl gazen ymmärtämisessä ja hahmottamisessa apuna ovat matkan varrella olleet siis niin feministinen fenomenologia kuin female gazen historiallinen kulku.

Näin olleen keskustelu Weirin filmin kanssa on siis ollut henkilökohtaisen vastaanottamisen tarkastelua ja sen punnitsemista, minkä koemme kuvissa kauniina. Voiko voimakkaasti kehoon vetoava kuva, joka pintapuolisesti vaikuttaa esimerkiksi iljettävältä, olla kuitenkin meille arvokas ja näin ollen jopa kaunis? Girl gazen aikakaudella kuvien arvoa määrittääkin ennen kaikkea se, mitä kukin katsoja kuvasta löytää ja millaisen arvon se hänen henkilökohtaisessa arvo-, kokemus- ja kuvamaailmassaan saa.