The Vincent Vega in Helmut Lang

Framing Helmut Lang's Coolness in Relation to Cool Movie Characters

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Abstract

Coolness is a desired but overlooked concept in fashion. The thesis *The Vincent Vega in Helmut Lang: Framing Helmut Lang's Coolness in Relation to Cool Movie Characters* sheds light on how coolness is created in Helmut Lang's spring 2004 collection in relation to movie representations. The thesis frames coolness as a myth and gendered performance. With the method of representation studies, several movies are analysed in how they present coolness. It is discovered that movies continuously reproduce the same myth. With critical visual analysis, Lang's collection is put in context to these movies. It is shown that Lang's collection has many similarities to the movie costumes and although he tries to break out the gendered myth, he still reproduces it. The thesis contributes to understand coolness as a concept but also that coolness, at least in Lang's case, is heavily dependent on the cinematic representations rather than pursuing his own unique approach.

Keywords

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Introduction

"No-one wants to be good any more, they want to be Cool[.] [...]"[1]

According to the quote from Dick Pountain and David Robins, it is coolness that we all aspire. It is the cool guy or the cool girl who dares to take risks. They are rebels against society's expectations, and they stay cool when they fail and stay cool when they win. But since they are cool, they mostly win.[2] Coolness is defined as: "[...] a *permanent* state of *private* rebellion."[3] Permanent means it transcends several age groups and private means that is not a political protest but a continuous unemotional rebellion.[4] It is further Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter who clarify the influence of American movies on coolness.[5] This proves right when the author looks back at her teenage years during the German carnival. The girls often dressed as *Lara Croft* eager to imitate the coolness she represented. In Germany, this means once a year, for a week, the girls can play and celebrate this fantasy of fighting for justice before the fasting period before Easter starts.[6] Seeing every other girl wearing the same costume, could be seen as a lack of inspiration, but it is also one example of how movies influence the understanding of cool clothing. To stay cool after the costume party, it can be assumed that movies also influence everyday fashion. As people project themselves into movies and might take over the characters' behaviour, they might also want to adjust the characters' costumes to fashion.[7] Even designers probably cannot avoid this influence of films on coolness.

Looking at the cover picture, a similarity can be seen between Helmut Lang's private aesthetic on the left and Vincent Vega, on the right, a character from the gangster movie *Pulp Fiction*. Beneath the shoulder-length, slicked back hair, their also wear a similar tuxedo. Overall, Helmut Lang was also understood by the press as the designer of coolness, for example

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[1] Dick Pountain and David Robins, "Cool Rules: Anatomy of an Attitude," in *Emotions: A Social Science Reader*, ed. Monica Greco and Paul Stenner (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), 152.

[2] Stanford M. Lyman and Marvin B. Scott, ed., *A Sociology of the Absurd* (New York: General Hall, 1989): 90.

[3] Pountain and Robins, "Cool Rules," 152.

[4] Ibid., 152.

[5] Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter, *Nation of Rebels: Why Counterculture Became Consumer Culture* (New York: Harper Business, 2004), 191.

[6] Alice Gustinetti, "The Fifth Season: Origins and Significance of German Carnival," *The Historian Journal* (December 11, 2019), https://thehistorianjournal.wordpress.com/2019/12/11/the-fifth-season-origins-and-significance-of-german-carnival/.

[7] Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz, and Dana E. Mastro, "Mean Girls? The Influence of Gender Portrayals in Teen Movies on Emerging Adults' Gender-Based Attitudes and Beliefs," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 85, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 137.

by Sarah Mower.[8] The 1990s, as the time when Helmut Lang started his career, noted a break in fashion with new designers. It is Caroline Evans who observed that the themes turned darker by tackling "death, disease and dereliction" as a response to the rapid social, economic and technological changes. Further, fashion started to represent the reflective self and the complexities of modernity instead of simply adorning the body.[9] Helmut Lang was one of the new designers who took a rather minimalist approach to his designs.[10] Lang's topics in his designs were not as dark as some of his colleagues and therefore has not gained enough attention in fashion literature. Still, Helmut Lang's fashion shall not be underestimated. He was able to make 'smart' clothing with little twists.[11] Lang found fashion in everyday wear and made it his own. It could be these little twists that made him the ideal designer to implement a myth into fashion without looking like a costume. Helmut Lang captured the identity of the cool kids but turned them into anti-fashion cool adults.[12]

Helmut Lang's coolness could have been influenced by movies and their character representation. The coolness in Helmut Lang's brand identity coming from movies can be one possible interpretation. It is an interpretation set by the author and is part of the methodology to understand coolness in fashion. Even if coolness in fashion is known as part of the field of consumer culture, little has been studied about the myth of coolness in fashion brands.[13] Furthermore, although researchers mention the influence of movies on coolness, they never make clear how.[14] Putting these two gaps together, missing in fashion studies is a study about how the myth of coolness in fashion is connected to movie representations.

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[8] Sarah Mower, "Helmut Lang Dressed a Generation of Nineties Influencers, Then He Disappeared – Sarah Mower Takes Us Back," *Vogue*, September 1, 2015, https://www.vogue.com/article/vogue-runway-designer-helmut-lang-90s.

[9] Caroline Evans, *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity and Deathliness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 4–7.

[10] Harriet Walker, *Less Is More: Minimalism in Fashion* (London: Merrell, 2011), 115.

[11] John Seabrook, "The Invisible Designer," *The New Yorker*, September 18, 2000, http://www.johnseabrook.com/the-invisible-designer/.

[12] Mower, "Lang Dressed Nineties Influencers."

[13] Douglas B. Holt, *How Brands Become Icons: The Principles of Cultural Branding* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2004), 34.

[14] Russell W. Belk, Kelly Tian, and Heli Paavola, "Consuming Cool: Behind the Unemotional Mask," *Research in Consumer Behavior* 12, (2010): 196, https://doi.org/10.1108/S0885-2111(2010)0000012010.

Research Questions and Aim

The overarching aim of this study is to examine how the concept of coolness is created and conveyed through Helmut Lang's spring 2004 collection and the relationship between the film representations and Lang's spring 2004 collection. Throughout the thesis, the myth of coolness follows the definition from Pountain and Robins as a permanent and private rebellion.[15] To reach this aim, a more detailed understanding of the concept of coolness is framed. Further, the thesis delves into the history of Hollywood movies and sheds light on the presentation of the cool persona and his or her costume. Costumes in this thesis refers to the artificial clothing of the movie characters and not to fashion as an ever-changing concept or historical costumes.[16] Further, this thesis looks for differences in the representation of the cisgenders. A cisgender is defined by the APA Dictionary of Psychology as a person who identifies with the gender dedicated to the person's birth sex.[17] Afterwards, the aim is accomplished through the analysis of coolness in Helmut Lang's spring 2004 collection. To understand his aesthetic, the designer needs to be introduced. The author wonders how he implemented the myth into his clothing. In addition, in selected photos from the spring 2004 runway show, it is looked at how the models embody coolness with Lang's clothing. Here, the movie illustrations are central to analyse Lang's coolness.

Overall, the thesis answers the following research questions:

- How to define the myth of coolness holistically in the context of fashion?
- How is a cool persona portrayed in movies between the 1950s and the early 2000s and how do the clothes underline the myth?
- How did Helmut Lang implement the myth of coolness within his designs?
- In what way does the spring 2004 collection embody the coolness that is performed by the cisgender movie characters?

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[15] Pountain and Robins, "Cool Rules," 152.
[16] James Laver, ed., *Costume and Fashion: A Concise History* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2012), 74–77.
[17] "Cisgender," APA Dictionary of Psychology, accessed May 7, 2021, https://dictionary.apa.org/cisgender.

Theoretical Framework

To retrace what a myth is and how coolness can be understood as a myth in films and fashion and how films and fashion are connected, single theories are put together to create a comprehensive theoretical framework. To understand what a myth is and how it is sustained Roland Barthes's mythologies is essential. However, to comprehend why fashion brands use myths and to clarify where myths are coming from, the theoretical framework combines Barthes's theory with the economic perspective from Douglas Holt. Furthermore, the author aligns with the idea of fashion being an embodied experience.[18] In addition, coolness is understood as more than a certain style but a whole performance as indicated by Russell W. Belk, Kelly Tian, and Heli Paavola.[19] It is also Holt that explains that we will experience the myth through the clothing.[20] Therefore, the framework includes a phenomenological theory. Even if the subjective experience of each of Helmut Lang's designs is not analysed, the theory is fruitful as a movie brings performance with it which as a myth could be transferred into fashion. Frankly speaking, this means the coolness in clothing must provide certain feelings, otherwise coolness as a holistic concept is not successfully implemented. Here, Holt's theory is connected to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's embodiment as Holt explains that the model experiences the myth through the clothing and Merleau-Ponty unlocks what this exactly means. To expand Merleau-Ponty's assumption of undifferentiated bodies, Judith Butler's theory on performativity is used to unfold the varied consequences for each cisgender when wearing cool clothing. The combination of these theories enables a critical analysis of how a myth is constructed and what consequences a myth has and conversely how a gender-dependent myth needs to be changed to construct a new myth.

Myths

In order to understand what the myth of coolness is and how a myth can be sustained, Barthes's theory about mythologies is a key theory in this thesis. Overall, a myth like every sign has a signifier and a signified. While the first one refers to the sensory and material substance of an object, the other one is the conventional and cultural aspect implemented in it. As soon as the

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[18] Joanne Entwistle, ed., *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Social Theory* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2015), 57, ProQuest Ebook Central.
[19] Belk, Tian, and Paavola, "Consuming Cool," 184.
[20] Holt, *How Brands Become Icons,* 36.

signifier changes, the signified and also the sign change with it.[21] More clearly, Paul Jobling proposes the example of a white T-shirt as a sign of coolness in temperature but also in an attitude and the transformation of the signified and total sign if the colour (the signifier) of the T-shirt changes.[22] In creating a myth, a whole cultural matrix that ignores the original sign is constructed.[23] Its cultural meaning is taken out of context. The 'first-order' signifying system flows into a 'second-order semiological system'. In other words, a myth is not simply the connection of the signifier and the signified, but a myth is constructed by presuming this pre-existing sign and constructing a new myth around it. A myth is the sum of signs.[24] Even if the focus of the thesis is not to find the origin of the cool objects, for example, the history of the white T-shirt, it is necessary to be aware that myths are a network of signs to understand if the movie characters fulfil the myth of coolness. Coolness can be conceived as a myth due to the symbolic meaning of specific clothing and specific behaviour that all stand for coolness. To understand coolness in the movies and Lang's fashion, these symbols need to be found and connected to coolness.

It is who Philip Thody concludes that mass culture and mass entertainment is central to Barthes's work.[25] Here, signs are used as a shortcut for the audience to understand what an act is about.[26] Accordingly, the coolness in movies is also a shortcut that oversimplifies and constructs stereotypes.[27] In the words of Rick Rylance interpretation of Barthes: "What is most significant about a character, for instance, will be that which is repeated, not a stray detail of dress or appearance."[28] Barthes's implication of myths being stabilised through recurrences is required to understand how myths survive over time.[29] This is especially important as the thesis looks at movies from multiple decades. For the material, this means to investigate if the myth of coolness is reproduced or changed over time.

However, mythologies accentuate the arbitrariness of signs.[30] It seems like every object randomly received a certain symbolic. Still, in Thody's interpretation of Barthes, a myth feels

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[21] Paul Jobling, "Roland Barthes: Semiology and the Rhetorical Codes," in *Thinking Through Fashion: A Guide to Key Theorists*, ed. Agnès Rocamara and Anneke Smelik (London: I.B.Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2016), 135.
[22] Jobling, "Roland Barthes," 135.
[23] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London: Vintage Books, 2009), 138.
[24] Barthes, *Mythologies*, 139.
[25] Philip Thody, *Roland Barthes: A Conservative Estimate* (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1977), 42.
[26] Barthes, *Mythologies*, 15.
[27] Thody, *Roland Barthes,* 42.
[28] Rick Rylance, *Roland Barthes* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), 52.
[29] Barthes, *Mythologies*, 132.
[30] Thody, *Roland Barthes,* 39.

natural and never or rarely changing.[31] Thody points out that people are dazzled by signs and instead of seeing how the world – outside of mass media – actually is, they look at it from this artificial and foreign perspective.[32] Myths according to Barthes are political as they disguise the truth regulated by a certain interest group.[33] Here, critics of Barthes rose their voice for simply denunciating the bourgeois to be responsible for blinding the peoples.[34] The interest in understanding coolness as a myth comes from the consensus in society that coolness signifies a youth rebellion. But if it had been constructed differently, coolness could also mean anything else. This perspective enriches the thesis by illustrating how ambivalent cool objects are and that once discovered their meaning can be changed. Even if the creators of the movies or the movie industry are not part of the research aim, to capture a myth as having political intentions reveals the consequences a myth might have. It further shows the responsibility that Helmut Lang as a myth distributor has. Barthes's insight about the political intentions provided the basis to include Merleau-Ponty's and Butler's theories into this thesis to unlock what consequences the myth of coolness in fashion has.

The myth theory according to Barthes is essential as it puts coolness into a comprehensive picture instead of single symbols. These stereotypes constructed by media bring consequences with them which are central for the analysis of Helmut Lang.

Branding a Myth

Myths do not only simplify classification and help to evaluate situations but are also used for economic profit. This is why Holt's theory of iconic brands is indispensable for the analysis of coolness in fashion brands. On the one hand, the theory helps to understand how the myth of coolness is translated into fashion and on the other hand, why brands adopt myths in the first place. The theory is used as a completion of Barthes's myth creation. Holt explains the side of the myth creator while Barthes describes what a myth is and what consequences a myth and its creation has.

Myths have their origin in the current culture and society as already suggested by Barthes.[35] They arise from contradictions to the so-called national ideology, which is a system of values for everyday life, for example by trusting certain institutions. As the name implies,

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[31] Thody, *Roland Barthes*, 39.
[32] Ibid., 45.
[33] Barthes, *Mythologies*, 169.
[34] Thody, *Roland Barthes*, 50.
[35] Holt, *How Brands Become Icons*, 58; Barthes, *Mythologies*, 132.

different countries can have different national ideologies. As the thesis concerns internationally available movies and examines an Austrian designer, national ideology is more understood from a European and American perspective. The national ideology can be contradicted by individual experiences and this tension between these two develops desires and anxieties.[36] These desires and anxieties form the myths that often support a liberation from the blind trust in the national ideology. In particular, they take place in pop culture.[37]

Brands often implement myths that were publicized through pop culture. This is because it provides a connection to physical objects, for example, through buying the DVD of a movie, and this impulse can be translated into brands.[38] Both insights from Holt are central to this thesis. The desire to rebel against national ideology and the origin of myths in pop culture provide a presentiment that the myth of coolness from movies can be translated into Helmut Lang's clothing. With Holt, it is clarified how movies are a good myth creator.

Holt considers brands to tell stories, a myth, to build an identity value for consumers.

> Acting as vessels of self-expression, the brands are imbued with stories that consumers find valuable in constructing their identities. Consumers flock to brands that employ the ideals they admire, brands that help them express who they want to be. The most successful of these brands become *iconic brands.*[39]

Communicating a myth creates an experience for the customer. As soon as they consume a brand's product, they live the desired myth.[40] In consequence, not simply the product gains a better reputation but further the whole brand.[41] Holt outlines why myth creation or adoption matters in fashion from an economic point of view. In that way, it supports the interpretation of Helmut Lang taking advantage of actively implementing a myth into his brand. Within the runway pictures, Holt's theory shows how and why the myth of coolness as part of our desires and anxieties is translated into Lang's fashion and how the myth guides how a model experiences the myth. Due to his findings that a consumer experiences products, the theory lays another foundation of understanding myths in fashion as an embodied experience which is more discussed in detail in the followed section.

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[36] Holt, *How Brands Become Icons*, 57–58.
[37] Ibid., 59.
[38] Ibid., 59–60.
[39] Ibid., 3–4.
[40] Ibid., 36.
[41] Ibid., 10.

Embodying Coolness

As adumbrated by the previous theories, coolness in fashion is not about passively wearing clothing but experiencing a myth through the clothing. Therefore, the theoretical framework profits from a phenomenological perspective. It is the science of phenomenology that investigates in the first-person consciousness which is also guided by the relationship to objects.[42] This means a body of a first-person is the main part in evaluating an object but is not neutral in it. It is marked by experiences but also, according to Joanne Entwistle and Elizabeth Wilson, by the adjustment to the norms.[43] In that way, the mind and the body are connected.

For this analysis, coolness is treated as an embodied experience as movies do not only transfer a cool outfit to the viewer but also a specific personality that comes with it. In addition, Merleau-Ponty's theory can be applied to this thesis as fashion can be treated as an embodied experience. In contrast to other objects, fashion lives from the body wearing it. Entwistle summarizes Merleau-Ponty's work as the perception of the world as dependent on the placement of the body in its physical and historical space.[44]A physical space between fashion and the body is almost non-existent which might lead to an understanding of fashion as part of the body. Stephen Priest summarizes Merleau-Ponty's theory as the intersection of subjectivity and materiality which especially works well for fashion.[45] A historical space is further provided in this thesis by the time frame the movies are selected in as the approximate time that could have influenced Helmut Lang. However, the thesis does not engage with the subjective perspective of each model wearing Lang's clothing on the runway but uses the performance from the movies as a basis of how the models could have felt like. This assumption origins in Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the first person living in a social world where learning from others is essential.[46] He explains that another person's experiences can slip into the first person.[47] The author reads Merleau-Ponty as indicating that also film characters could be the others that teach a first person how to be cool in the world.

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[42] David Woodruff Smith, "Phenomenology," In *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* ed. Edward N. Zalta (Stanford: Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, Summer 2018), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/phenomenology/.

[43] Joanne Entwistle and Elizabeth Wilson, eds., *Body Dressing: Dress, Body, Culture* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2001), 45, http://dx.doi.org.ezp.sub.su.se/10.2752/9780857854032.

[44] Entwistle, *The Fashioned Bod*y, 48.

[45] Stephen Priest, *Merleau-Ponty* (London: Routledge, 1998), 75, Taylor & Francis e-Library.

[46] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis Group, 2012), 369–370, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[47] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* 370.

Merleau-Ponty's work is criticised for ignoring different gendered body experiences.[48] To include the gendered body, with Butler the author adds a feminist perspective to embodiment. The position of Butler's gender performativity is to see "the social agent as an *object* rather than the subject of constitutive acts."[49] This means gender is not simply a conscious choice of what to wear every day but also the naked body is already clothed through cultural ideas.[50] Gender is a continuously reproduced performance formed through punishment and discipline.[51] The continuously repeated process reminds of a myth with its accompanying stereotypes, as presented by Barthes, and therefore fits perfectly into the thesis. A special role plays drag which can challenge gender by holding up a mirror to gender performance. The parody of the 'original' crystallizes that the coherence between sex and gender is a parody in itself.[52] This thesis is enriched by Butler's theory in order to understand if the myth of coolness is a gendered one and how it is performed in fashion. It wonders if different bodies experience the myth differently. Gender studies is not the main focus of this thesis but needs to be included due to acting is a performativity by definition and an actor or actress automatically needs to perform a certain gender identity. This performativity has real consequences and is hence examined in the context of this thesis in relation to the wearing of clothes from Helmut Lang's spring 2004 collection. In addition, Lang constructed his own gender performance with his designs which could challenge the gendered myth or might not. Both the gender performance in his clothing but also the reflected gender performance from the movies are analysed in the spring 2004 runway photos.

Both theories do not mention the influence of media on embodied experiences. This study transfers these theories into pop culture.

Previous Research

The upcoming section presents relevant studies for the research topic. It introduces the previous research and explain how its outcome are useful for this thesis. The literature represents the

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[48] Entwistle and Wilson, *Body Dressing,* 46.
[49] Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," in *The Performance Studies Reader*, eds. Henry Bial and Sara Brady (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016), 214.
[50] Elizabeth Wissinger, "Judith Butler: Fashion and Performativity," in *Thinking Through Fashion: A Guide to Key Theorists*, ed. Agnès Rocamara and Anneke Smelik (London: I.B.Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2016), 287–288, 294.
[51] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1999), 33, Taylor & Francis e-Library; Wissinger, "Judith Butler," 288.
[52] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 175.

gap that this thesis contributes to and covers the topics myths in fashion but, in particular, studies about Helmut Lang and the myth of coolness. Since the literature about Helmut Lang is limited and coolness in movies is little studied, online magazine articles about Lang and additional journal articles about the selected movies are taken into account to support the research outcome.

Myth and Fashion Brands

That fashion brands implement myths is exemplified by Douglas Holt and Douglas Cameron in a study of the denim brand Levi's within their book *Cultural Strategy: Using Innovative Ideologies to Build Breakthrough Brands*. Levi's as a brand symbolizes post-war youth rebellion. After the brand started to struggle, they revived the myth to push nostalgia but also needed to reinvent it to catch a new customer base. Levi's ended up adding a new gender ideology into the brand's myth which was successfully accepted by the customers.[53] Holt and Cameron represent with this study that myths are relevant for a profitable fashion brand. However, as Holt notices in his book *How Brands Become Icons: The Principles of Cultural Branding,* for fashion brands it is not as easy to keep a myth due to the character of the ever-changing trends.[54] It seems like it was only possible for Levi's to establish a myth as long as the employers do not rely on trends.[55] Keeping this case study and Holt's findings about fashion in mind, this thesis wants to contribute to the research in myths within a fashion brand by still being part of the fashion industry.

Helmut Lang's myth

[…] Lang's cool, urban silhouettes, marrying basic shapes with edgy colour combinations and advanced technological fabrics, which were both the crucial look for fashion insiders, and the key influence on other designers, eager to find a new vision of the modern.[56]

This is how Rebecca Arnold in her book *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety* describes Lang's aesthetic as well as his influence on following fashion designers. She is the first in academic literature to mention Lang as the designer of coolness. Even if she also presents the influence

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[53] Douglas Holt and Douglas Cameron, "The Cultural Studio Forms Underground Levi's 501s in Europe," in *Cultural Strategy: Using Innovative Ideologies to Build Breakthrough Brands* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 314–336.
[54] Holt, *How Brands Become Icons,* 14, 34.
[55] Ibid., 34.
[56] Rebecca Arnold, *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety: Image and Morality in the 20th Century* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 20.

of movies in fashion during the 1990s, she neither executes Lang's coolness nor the influence of movies regarding coolness further.[57] In the book *Less Is More: Minimalism in Fashion* by Harriet Walker, Helmut Lang is referred to as one of the minimalists of the deconstruction era along with other designers like Martin Margiela and Ann Demeulemeester in the 1990s.[58] Her book is fruitful for this thesis insofar as it shows the aesthetic of Helmut Lang and how his work ranks with other designers during his career. The deconstructivism movement questions the stereotypical beauty standards and destroys and reinvents already existing clothing.[59] "In so doing, it emphasizes the idea of an independent fashioned body under any garment."[60] It is Entwistle with her book *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Social Theory* who clarifies how a body is fashioned. Both women- and menswear shall move the attention to certain body parts thereby other people can file a person into one of the cisgenders.[61] Next to the categorization, her results are that clothing creates or reproduces the power relations between the cisgenders.[62] The differentiation between gendered experiences in fashion opens the door for suggesting that coolness is a gendered myth. In addition, the book helps to understand how Helmut Lang implemented deconstructivism in his designs. Like this thesis, Entwistle uses Merleau-Ponty but also Butler to underline how a body experiences gender through fashion.[63] This approach exemplifies how to successfully interlock the two theories. Although Entwistle criticizes inferring fictional to a non-fictional setting, this thesis explores how fashion is influenced by fictional movie characters.[64] As an extension for the gendered fashion, also Entwistle and Wilson's cooperation in the book *Body Dressing: Dress, Body, Culture* and, for a better understanding of menswear, Anne Hollander with the book *Sex & Suits: The Evolution of Modern Dress* are added into this thesis.[65]

A more detailed analysis about Helmut Lang or the brand is only found in Barbara Vinken's *Fashion Zeitgeist: Trends and Cycles in the Fashion System*. Otherwise, only within little sections, Lang is mostly appreciated for his different use of material. These diverse fabrics

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[57] Arnold, *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety,* 20, 34–37.
[58] Walker, *Less Is More*, 101–121.
[59] Maria Skivko, "Deconstruction in Fashion as a Path Toward New Beauty Standards: The Maison Margiela Case," *ZoneModa Journal* 10, no. 1 (July 29, 2020): 42, https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.2611-0563/11086.
[60] Skivko, "Deconstruction in Fashion," 42.
[61] Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 135, 138.
[62] Ibid., 145, 171.
[63] Ibid., 48–56, 136.
[64] Ibid., 79–80.
[65] Anne Hollander, *Sex & Suits: The Evolution of Modern Dress* (London: Bloomsbury Academic 2016), 83, ProQuest Ebook Central; Entwistle and Wilson, *Body Dressing*.

constructed new forms of volume, falling, gleaming and more.[66] Further, he used transparent material as an illusion of a second skin on the models. In the words of Vinken, Helmut Lang surprised with his fashion by transgressing the codes of sexiness.[67] The unconventional material made him also famous for bringing street style on the runway in contrast to fashion from the upper clothes. Coming from the quiet, conservative and 'mean' place Vienna, as Lang himself described his hometown, he turns the inside to the outside with his fashion.[68] However, the use of luxurious materials also provided a feminine and soft touch to his clothing as Claire Wilcox in the book *Radical Fashion* explains.[69] He is further described as a rebel, even if he was less radical than Margiela or Rei Kawakubo in his creations.[70]

The literature about Helmut Lang formed the overall understanding of his designs. This is essential for the selection of the material for this thesis. Even more, it exemplifies possible interpretations of Lang which is used in dialogue with this thesis. Although coolness was mentioned by Arnold, this aspect in Lang's fashion has never been studied.

Coolness

The concept of coolness is mysterious. Several previous studies have tried to understand what coolness is and what it means for brands. The following studies are described more in detail in the upcoming first chapter to provide a detailed picture of coolness as a myth. The presentation in this section provides an overview of the purpose of the several papers talking about coolness and how they are useful for this thesis.

One central study for this thesis is Belk, Tian and Paavola *Consuming Cool: Behind the Unemotional Mask* who shed light on where coolness is coming from, how it changed and how different nations understand and live it. To reach their aim, they took benefit from literature review, historical analysis and interviews comparing Finns and Americans. They point out the contradiction between trend-orientated cool consumption and subcultural coolness. While subcultural coolness decides naturally what is cool, cool consumption imitates their style. Belk, Tian and Paavola's differentiation and description of the history of coolness is beneficial for this thesis because it clarifies that there exists an ideal cool guy who is part of

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[66] Barbara Vinken, ed., *Fashion Zeitgeist: Trends and Cycles in the Fashion System*, trans. Mark Hewson (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 130–131.
[67] Vinken, *Fashion Zeitgeist*, 137.
[68] Claire Wilcox, ed., *Radical Fashion* (London: V&A, 2001), 42.
[69] Walker, *Less Is More,* 115.
[70] Ibid., 115.

a subculture and has more to it than the newest clothing.[71] The characteristics of this ideal cool guy are presented by Kathleen A. O'Donnell and Daniel L. Wardlow in the article *A Theory on the Origins of Coolness* who show that coolness is a young phenomenon to fit into a peer group and Daniel Harris in his article *Coolness* who explains what the ideal cool guy does and wears.[72] In summary, coolness is a rebellion of the youth to differentiate themselves from the parental generation. In addition, in the book *A Sociology of the Absurd*, Stanford M. Lyman and Marvin B. Scott connect coolness with taking risks.[73] It must be noted that this thesis does not agree with Harris's point of view that the new generation aims to ruin the older generation's good taste.[74] Even if the term 'ugly' is used in this thesis to underline abnormality, especially in the analysation of Lang's clothing to be different is embraced as it questions standards.

To review coolness as a mostly masculine discipline is not discussed in previous research. The contrasting juxtaposition of the cool guy and the cool girl has its origin in the thriller *Gone Girl* from 2012 written by Gillian Flynn and its later picturization in 2014.[75] One example of an academic analysis regarding the cool girl is *Revenge of a Cool Girl* by Agnieszka Piotrowska who centred her work around the fact that the cool girl pleases the man and at one turning point turns into a killer.[76] Another angle, which is supported by this thesis, reveals the video essay *The Cool Girl Trope, Explained* where the cool girl is not a cool girl because she wants to but because other men prefer her like this.[77] Similar to this angle of the cool girl is the bad girl as described by Jeffery A. Brown and Claudia Herbst in their separate chapters in the book *Action Chicks: New Images of Tough Women in Popular Culture,* which therefore is used as a synonym for the little researched cool girl.[78] The cool girl as a critical persona and as a performance to please men supported this thesis in involving a gender perspective on coolness.

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[71] Belk, Tian, and Paavola, "Consuming Cool," 200, 202.

[72] Kathleen A. O'Donnell and Daniel L. Wardlow, "A Theory on the Origins of Coolness," *Advances in Consumer Research* 27, ed. Stephen J. Hoch and Robert J. Meyer (2000): 16, EBSCOhost; Daniel Harris, "Coolness," *The American Scholar* 68, no. 4 (Autumn 1999), https://www.jstor.org/stable/41212928.

[73] Lyman and Scott, *Sociology of Absurd*, 90.

[74] Daniel Harris, "Coolness," *The American Scholar* 68, no. 4 (Autumn 1999): 46, https://www.jstor.org/stable/41212928.

[75] Gillian Flynn, *Gone Girl* (New York: Broadway Books 2012); *Gone Girl,* directed by David Fincher (Twentieth Century Fox, 2014).

[76] Agnieszka Piotrowska, „Revenge of a Cool Girl," *Mai: Feminism & Visual Culture*, May 15, 2019, https://maifeminism.com/revenge-of-a-cool-girl/.

[77] The Take, "The Cool Girl Trope, Explained," December 12, 2019, YouTube video, 19:16, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bEKNFX7LWRk.

[78] Jeffery A. Brown, "Gender, Sexuality, and Toughness: The Bad Girls of Action Film and Comic Books," in *Action Chicks: New Images of Tough Women in Popular Culture,* ed. Sherrie A. Inness (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 47–74.; Claudia Herbst, "Lara's Lethal and Loaded Mission: Transposing Reproduction and Deconstruction," in *Action Chicks: New Images of Tough Women in Popular Culture,* ed. Sherrie A. Inness (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 21–45.

Although the essential function of movies in constructing the myth of coolness is mentioned in the previous research, it is never clearly defined which movies were the most framing ones and why.

Methodology

Overall, fashion studies is an interdisciplinary field. This is why a mixture between several methods from other disciplines is often beneficial in order to reach the research aim.[79] The following section describes and explains the choice of the methods, namely representation studies and critical visual analysis, and how they relate to the material and theories. Together the methods are fruitful in achieving the research objective as representation studies creates a stereotypical understanding of coolness that can then be critically discussed through critical visual analysis. It must be noted that the first research question on how to define the myth of coolness holistically in the context of fashion provides the basis for this study and therefore does not follow a method that needs to be mentioned further.

Representation Studies

In movies, a character is overdrawn to make his or her role clear to the audience.[80] In an example of Barthes, all Romans have curls in staged presentations. This is a shortcut for the audience to classify characters without the director having to explain the entire setting.[81] With continuous repetition, a picture of a specific group or a single character can be constructed across various films or in Barthes's words a myth.[82] Seeing a similar costume on another character in a new movie will directly bridge the gap to a previously seen film which makes a character for the audience more tangible. Stereotypes make the world's chaos more organised.[83] The method of representation studies sheds light on the stereotypical cool film character as this has not been studied in previous research. This method is used to analyse selected films which are stated in the following section.

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[79] Heike Jenss, *Fashion Studies: Research Methods, Sites and Practices*, ed. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 137.
[80] Barthes, *Mythologies*, 15–18.
[81] Ibid., 15.
[82] Ibid., 132.
[83] Richard Dyer, ed., *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation* (London: Routledge 1993), 12.

Representation studies according to Richard Dyer is defined as: "[…] analysing images in terms of why they matter, what they are made of, and the material realities they refer to."[84] Matching with this thesis, also Dyer's research includes movies.[85] More in detail, the method is implemented by analysing how a film character can be understood as cool and if applicable, who portrays the character in the movie. Frankly speaking, how the cool persona is represented. The fact of who was portraying the character is only included if it brought further insights about the coolness of the film character. Furthermore, due to the field of fashion studies and as implicated by the theory of Holt and Merleau-Ponty a myth is directly transferred into the clothing of a person.[86] Whatever a character wears, also cultivates his or her personality and the other way around. Hence, the coolness in the costume of the characters is reflected. The analysis of past formative movies answers: *How is a cool persona portrayed in movies between the 1950s and the early 2000s and how do the clothes underline the myth?*

However, even if movies are fiction, they have real consequences for real people:

How a group is represented, presented over again in cultural forms, how an image of a member of a group is taken as representative of that group, how that group is represented in the sense of spoken for and on behalf of (whether they represent, speak for themselves or not), these all have to do with how members of groups see themselves and others like themselves, how they see their place in society, their right to the rights a society claims to ensure its citizens.[87]

Mostly unconsciously, movies shape our perception of how reality shall work, especially at a young age.[88] Therefore, internationally known movies can guide our understanding of the world and in the following our understanding of coolness. The method of representation studies also unlocks the similarities and differences of the movies to the concept of coolness. Especially looking at the similarities, it is analysed what myth is modelled to the audience.[89] Furthermore, the movies are considered in their cultural context to see if the myth changed over time.

Representation studies provides the groundwork to explore what stereotypes Helmut Lang engineered into his design. The found stereotypes are the basis for the desires and anxieties of the customers and the private person Helmut Lang, as described by Holt.[90] The cool characters transform an idea of coolness that is later translated into Lang's designs and can then

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[84] Dyer, *Matter of Images*, "The Matter of Images – Second Edition", note: the definition is taken from the abstract of the book without any page number.
[85] Ibid., note: see above.
[86] Holt, *How Brands Become Icons,* 36; Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* 93, 95.
[87] Dyer, *The Matter of Images*, 1.
[88] Behm-Morawitz, and Mastro, "Mean Girls?," 141.
[89] Sarah Casey Benyahia and Claire Mortimer, *Doing Film Studies,* (London and New York: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 86, ProQuest Ebook Central.
[90] Holt, *How Brands Become Icons,* 2.

be lived through embodied experiences of his fashion. Still, the method has its limitations that need to be considered. It has the risk of finding patterns in stereotypical representation where none exist or at least have not further formative effects on the audience.[91] Another risk of this method is the danger of getting lost in the material. A movie provides lots of analytical angles and therefore the author must monitor to not lose track of the theoretical framework and the research aim.

Critical Visual Analysis

To make sense of how fashion is influenced by myths coming from sources outside of fashion, the clothing itself needs to be analysed. After applying the method of representation studies, using visual analysis unfolds the real consequences of the cinematic representations in fashion, as representation studies already suggested.[92] In addition, it shows how Helmut Lang transferred the myth into his designs. The method is used for selected runway photos from the spring 2004 collection from Helmut Lang. The selection is explained in the followed chapter. The method is applied to answer the following questions: *How did Helmut Lang implement the myth of coolness within his designs? In what way does the spring 2004 collection embody the coolness that is performed by the cisgender movie characters?*

The specific method followed is Critical Visual Analysis by Jonathan E. Schroeder.[93] Even if he exemplifies his method with campaign photos, critical visual analysis is favoured because it contextualizes images into their cultural history. The method connects both individual and structural consequences, for example by taking gender into account.[94] Adding an individual perspective and a cultural context is essential for this thesis to conclude how each model's experience of Lang's fashion could have been influenced by the analysed movies. Regarding the theories that are connected to the method, Barthes's and Holt's theory who explain the concept of myths, are expanded with Merleau-Ponty's embodiment and Butler's performativity. Merleau-Ponty and Butler enhance the analysis of Lang's clothing by revealing the individual consequences of a myth. The method in connection with the theories

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[91] Benyahia and Mortimer, *Doing Film Studies,* 88; Franklin Fearing, "Influence of the Movies on Attitudes and Behavior," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 254, no. 1 (November 1947): 76–78, https://doi.org/10.1177/000271624725400112.

[92] Dyer, *The Matter of Images*, 1.

[93] Jonathan E. Schroeder, "Critical Visual Analysis," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods in Marketing*, ed. Russell Belk (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2006), 303–321.

[94] Schroeder, "Critical Visual Analysis," 303–304.

comprehends how the gendered body can embody coolness by wearing Helmut Lang's clothing.

At first, all photos are put into their context. This further includes the subcategories of subject matter, form, medium, style, genre and comparison. It must be noted that the pictures from a runway show, even if they are a staged performance as Schroeder's example of an ad campaign, try to be as close to reality as possible. Therefore, in contrary to Schroeder's example, the subsections are kept small as it is not significant for the interpretation of the clothes how the photos were edited. The main part of the critical visual analysis is composed of the description of each picture and the inquiry for symbols or characteristics of coolness in the clothing. Thus, the result of the first and second chapter are required to solve the puzzle of Helmut Lang's coolness. The focus lies on analysing whether the associations not only from the film costume but also from the character traits can make the models cooler. Each look concentrates in particular on the similarities and differences to one movie to understand in-depth how the cisgender movie representations are embodied in Lang's clothing or if Lang constructs a new myth of coolness. However, other influences from other analysed movies are included as a supporting argument. Lastly, Lang's coolness in his designing approach is highlighted.

Due to no contact with the designer or the models, the interpretation of the clothing according to the myth of coolness is highly subjective and is only one perspective of Helmut Lang's clothing. Helmut Lang as a non-referential minimalist might not directly take his influences from mass media as supposed in this thesis.[95] Another important limitation is that combining the theories of Merleau-Ponty and Butler with a critical visual analysis is only partially suitable for assuming how it must have felt like to wear the spring 2004 collection. This is because none of the objects were worn by the author and the models were not asked how they felt in Lang's clothing. However, due to the story and characters in movies and also due to the acknowledgement of coolness being an embodied performance by Belk, Tian and Paavola, it is essential to analyse Lang's clothing as an embodied experience.[96] Further, the author supports Entwistle's argumentation that fashion is always an embodied experience and therefore needs to be considered in any methodology.[97]

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[95] Walker, *Less Is More*, 14.
[96] Belk, Tian, and Paavola, "Consuming Cool," 184.
[97] Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 57.

Material Selection

As representation studies is centred around the illustration of cool influential personas in movies, the main criterion for the material selection is world-famous Hollywood blockbusters. For Lang to possibly be influenced by movies, he also needed access to them. In addition, the decision is influenced by the explicit mention of the importance of American movies on coolness from Harris and Potter and Belk, Tian, and Paavola.[98] The movies are restricted within internet research to consider other people's opinions in the selection about who are the most influential cool personas. Here, the online magazine BroBible is especially helpful.[99]

It is important to be guided by a clear definition of coolness for the selection. Required categories following previous research are to be a criminal human rebel, violent, and in case of a group homogeneous.[100] Afterwards, the movies are chosen in comparing the costumes to Helmut Lang's spring 2004 collection. The time frame that is presumed is the 1950s up to 2003 as Helmut Lang was born in 1956 and the latest date his spring 2004 collection could have been influenced by is 2003.[101] In addition, the choice resulted from the desire to compare the representation of both cool cisgenders. The female representations *Desperately Seeking Susan* starring the singer Madonna and *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* are chosen due to Madonna and Lara Croft being understood as highly eroticized which is fundamental for the cool girl.[102] The selected material is *The Wild One* from 1953, *Rebel Without a Cause* from 1955, *Desperately Seeking Susan* from 1985, *Pulp Fiction* from 1994, *The Matrix* from 1999, *Fight Club* from 1999 and *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* from 2001. To understand coolness in the material, the support of previous research is essential.

Moving from fictional to non-fictional coolness, Helmut Lang's spring 2004 runway show is used to crystallize what coolness means in fashion. To understand if Helmut Lang and his fashion were cool, one of his last collections before he left the brand is chosen. It is important to look at his peak to understand the hype and the correspondingly created myth around him and his brand. The decision is fruitful due to Walker's comment of Helmut Lang's designs varied little and not followed trends during his career.[103] To guarantee an in-depth

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[98] Belk, Tian, and Paavola, "Consuming Cool," 196; Heath and Potter, *Nation of Rebels*, 191.

[99] Neil Bulson, "50 Coolest Movie Characters Ever," *Brobible*, August 9, 2014, https://brobible.com/guyism/article/50-coolest-movie-characters-ever/.

[100] Belk, Tian, and Paavola, "Consuming Cool," 196–197, 200; Lyman and Scott, *Sociology of Absurd*, 90.

[101] "Helmut Lang: What to Know About the Fashion Brand & Designer," Highsnobiety, accessed January 31, 2021, https://www.highsnobiety.com/tag/helmut-lang/.

[102] Georges-Claude Guilbert, *Madonna as Postmodern Myth: How One Star's Self-Construction Rewrites Sex, Gender, Hollywood and the American Dream* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2002), 100–101; Herbst, "Lara's Mission," 26–27.

[103] Walker, *Less Is More,* 118.

analysis, eight styles are defined in regard to what literature named as typical elements from his designs and their similarities to the movies. The previous literature is more clearly unfolded in the third chapter. It is tried to provide a different spectrum of Helmut Lang's fashion. Still, since many looks are similar in the collection, the final choice is mostly to look at the closest similarities to the movie costumes. The similarities of the clothes within the collection represents that the chosen photos are able to speak for the whole collection. Here, it is important to find the closest connection to directly one film, to highlight Lang's coolness not to coolness as a whole, but the relationship directly to one film costume and how he made it his own. In addition, it is essential to use photos from both cisgenders. However, as part of Schroeder's method named 'comparison', other runway looks are used in order to underline the consistently occurring design characteristics. The photos are provided by the website Vogue Runway, Livingly and First View.

Although the author tried to pick movies in line with the opinion of others, limitations in the material are that the concrete selection of only seven movies in this large period of time is always subjective. Therefore, the selection can be flawed. The same applies to the few pictures of the spring 2004 collection that are analysed.

Delimitations

Coolness is a wide-ranged word and is dependent on the author's understanding. The coolness in this thesis focuses on the rebellious perspective. The concept of coolness is two-folded as it is something continuously changing, but there is also a specific type that we understand as cool.[104] Addressing someone is as diverse as everyone's personality which makes objective results impossible. The definition of coolness as a permanent and private rebellion, in contrast, is more stable which is in line with the myth definition of Barthes and further Holt to translate a myth into the DNA of a brand. Although the myth is more stable, this does not exclude little changes over time. Another facet of coolness that is excluded in this thesis is authenticity. There is a difference between a person who enforces coolness and one that just has it. However, since all movies are staged, a movie can never be an example of authentic coolness. Even more, the embodied coolness coming with Lang's clothing is like wearing a costume of coolness.

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[104] Sandra Maria Correia Loureiro, Jano Jiménez-Barreto, and Jaime Romero, "Enhancing Brand Coolness Through Perceived Luxury Values: Insight from Luxury Fashion Brands*," Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* 57 (2020): 3, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102211.

Outline

The following sections analyse the myth of coolness in Helmut Lang. It starts with framing what coolness as a concept means, why it is so central to fashion and where the myth of coolness is coming from. It is discussed what role movies play in framing the myth. The chapter provides a clear definition of what coolness is from a theoretical perspective. The second chapter looks at the representation of coolness in film characters, in their costumes and in the stars portraying the film character within Hollywood films in the period 1953 to 2001. It bridges the gap between the theoretical point of view and the practical reproduction or change of the myth. In the third chapter, the myth of coolness in Helmut Lang's spring 2004 collection is investigated. It starts with an introduction of Helmut Lang and his work. The critical visual analysis of eight photos of his spring 2004 runway show connects the movie costumes to the collection and illustrates how the myth of coolness can be experienced by the cisgenders through Lang's clothing. The thesis ends with a conclusion bringing all parts together, concluding the outcome of the analysis and presenting possible additional research angles for future research.

Chapter 1: Coolness as a Concept

This chapter provides a discussion of what coolness is, why it matters for fashion and what role pop culture, with a focus on movies, has in the construction of the myth. This chapter is significant for the explaining of what coolness is in an overarching manner. It constructs a frame for this thesis. To claim that the myth is only based on movies, as reflected on in chapter two, would be wrong due to the different pre-existing cultural contexts they refer to. This is the reason why the first chapter substantiates coolness with previous research and with the theoretical framework consisting of Barthes, Holt, Merleau-Ponty and Butler. The first chapter answers the question: *how to define the myth of coolness holistically in the context of fashion?*

The Cool Guy

Coolness is more than a certain style. It is an attitude towards life. It is a verbalized and embodied performance.[105] In the words of Belk, Tian and Paavola, coolness has its origins in emotionless toughness. Even if the person feels insecurity or inferiority, he or she would not show it.[106] This toughness makes someone less vulnerable, and this is in particular central for teenagers. The concept of adolescence as a period between child- and adulthood was constructed after the Second World War. The trigger was a new industrial wage system and the emerging system of education. This new generation should learn how to reproduce its belonging middle class. However, the teenagers, still being young and inexperienced, received the task to take responsibility for their own sexual, moral and intellectual immaturity.[107] Being born during the Second World War as an age of violence and the now traumatized, peace-craving parental generation laid the foundation for an aggressive young counterculture.[108] The violent model also solved the issue of the powerless figure of the adolescent with pursuing a lifestyle that frightens others.[109] The original cool kid was against the older generations, suddenly self-confident, and a violent rebel.

An interesting outcome of the literature is that coolness still seems to be mostly a phenomenon of the youth. When older people try to be cool, their aim is also to feel young.[110] O'Donnell and Wardlow suggest that coolness is a crucial topic for teenagers until today as they all suffer from narcissistic vulnerability. During this life period, cutting the cord to the parental generation and joining peer groups is central. Hence, identification is not only personal but part of a group identity. The search for a new 'family' is part of the cool identity. This process is called "signifying osmosis."[111] Critically seen in the study from O'Donnell and Wardlow is their rejection of a common understanding of coolness. According to them, every group has their own definition of coolness.[112]

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[105] Belk, Tian, and Paavola, 184.
[106] Ibid., 184, 187.
[107] Leerom Medovoi, *Rebels: Youth and the Cold War Origins of Identity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 3, 24–25.
[108] John Clarke, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson and Brian Roberts, "Subcultures, Cultures and Class," in *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, eds. Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (Birmingham: Taylor & Francis Group, 2003), 18.
[109] Mick Farren, *The Black Leather Jacket* (London: Plexus Publishing Limited, 2008), 21.
[110] Joeri van den Bergh and Mattias Behrer, *How Cool Brands Stay Hot: Branding to Generation Y* (London: Kogan Page Limited, 2016), 98.
[111] O'Donnell and Wardlow, "Origins of Coolness," 14.
[112] Ibid., 15.

In contrast, part of the results from Belk, Tian and Paavola are the linked terms to coolness. These include "rap music, jazz, extreme sports, sunglasses, *The Matrix* (film), trending clothes, expensive and trendy brands, tattoos, smoking, drugs, and alcohol."[113] Considering these results, coolness does not appear as subjective as in O'Donnell and Wardlow's article. Another difference in Belk, Tian and Paavola in comparison with O'Donnell and Wardlow is that coolness is mostly a group phenomenon, but it also exists a single, unreachable, cool guy.[114]

In particular, drugs and tattoos, but also extreme sport reveal a certain risk coolness takes with it which Lymann and Scott unfold further.[115] In a dicey situation, the real cool guys can be discovered by holding back their emotions. One way of risk is the physical risk which appears in form of the ever-present danger of pain or potential death. Other possibilities are a financial or social risk. Financial risk does not only mean money but also emotions coming along with the loss of it. The social risk is the personal mask in public. It is the role that someone plays at public occasions.[116]

The sunglasses, mentioned in the quote from Belk, Tian and Paavola, can help to let emotions disappear and distance a person from the world.[117] They make emotions reflected in the eyes invisible or the other way around, the sunglasses block the emotions from others as its wearer can easily look away.[118] Smoking, in general, appears to be another main factor for coolness. It can be annoying for others because of the smell. This smell remains in the clothing which makes it part of a cool person's identity. Overall, it is bad for the health, but this risk is borne with pleasure as the cool character is a rebel against his or her health. It is this nihilism of life that in the words of Harris results in the 'live for the moment' mantra.[119] It could be the last day. So better enjoy another cigarette before it is too late. On the contrary, Judith Brown names smoking a "bored pleasure" as a symbol of having time for pointless activities.[120] Another perspective that is provided by Brown is the suggestion of cigarettes symbolizing cool isolation with the ejecting of smoke.[121] The two items of sunglasses and cigarettes are coherent in their myth creation. They both create a thin distance to the counterpart.

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[113] Belk, Tian, and Paavola, "Consuming Cool," 196.
[114] Ibid., 200.
[115] Lyman and Scott, *Sociology of Absurd*, 90.
[116] Ibid., 90.
[117] Belk, Tian, and Paavola, "Consuming Cool," 190–191.
[118] Ibid., 197.
[119] Harris, "Coolness," 43.
[120] Judith Brown, *Glamour in Six Dimensions: Modernism and Radiance of Form* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 7.
[121] Brown, *Glamour in Six* Dimensions, 2.

Endless travelling with a motorcycle is another aspect of the myth of coolness that developed after the Second World War. The new biker subculture appeared in the 1950s.[122] Here, as seen before, the anti-position to the sedentariness of the bourgeois is a main indicator of coolness. But also, other conspicuous features are connected to travelling without an aim. Endless travelling not only brings adventure by discovering new places but represents infinite freedom by not having an organised daily routine. Annoying duties like work or school will not bring any satisfying outcome and in the following is neglected.[123] In addition, continuously leaving everything behind will not cause responsibility for someone's actions. The freedom to do whatever you feel like is considered cool.

Not only the biker subculture became iconic but also their uniform. It consists of a leather jacket and a pair of denim trousers.[124] The history of the leather jacket starts in the First World War. German aviators and later various state representatives from the Third Reich presented themselves in leather garments.[125] This history chased the leather jacket: "The Nazi uniforms, banners and regalia were designed to impart an overwhelming impression of power, and power is always attractive."[126] After the Second World War, the war clothing was left behind.

> "As the shaky, dazed and damaged world returned to a semblance of civilian life, it found that a by-product of war was a deluge of war surplus clothing."[127]

The availability, as well as its history, made it the ideal uniform for young rebellion. Moreover, the functional aspects of the material leather fitted well into the lifestyle of the bikers. The material is robust and thus offers protection against accidents, but also enables movement.[128] It must be noted that these functions also incentivized to use the practical brown leather jacket as workwear. Therefore, the focus of the countercultures was its 'bad' black version.[129] Like the leather jacket, also the denim jeans scores with comfort and resilience.[130] Various subcultures after the initial biker culture, translated the rebellious character of the leather jacket to their

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[122] Daniel R Wolf, *The Rebels: A Brotherhood of Outlaw Bikers* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 5.
[123] Wolf, *The Rebels*, 271.
[124] Mark D. Austin, Patricia Gagne, and Angela Orend, "Commodification and Popular Imagery of the Biker American Culture," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 43, no. 5 (2010): 945.
[125] Farren, *Black Leather Jacket*, 23–26.
[126] Ibid., 26.
[127] Ibid., 33.
[128] "4 Basic Leather Qualities, An Overview Guide to Leather Grades," CP Slippers, last modified September 29, 2019, https://www.cpslippers.com/blogs/journal/4-basic-leather-qualities.
[129] Farren, *Black Leather Jacket*, 33–34.
[130] Roshan Paul, ed., "Denim and Jeans: An Overview," in *Denim – Manufacture, Finishing and Applications* (Sawston: Woodhead Publishing, 2015), 1–2, https://doi.org/10.1016/C2013-0-16377-5.

group, for example, rockers, punks and postpunks.[131] Despite wearing the same garment, the distinction between rebellious subcultures was created through decorations on the jacket, for example, with buttons.[132]

Overall, the myth of coolness is a continuously repeated composition of single cool elements. They often come from a different background and take original history like in the example of the leather jacket or function like in the example of the sunglasses out of context and add a new layer into them. The fact that it is a rebellion makes it a political myth as suggested by Barthes.[133]

The Cool Girl

The cool girl is aggressive and violent, and she smokes and drinks. She is a man or at least behaves like one.[134] At the first glance, the difference between the cool girl and the cool guy appears irrelevant but despite the same behaviours, the myth of the cool girl is identified by her typical physical appearance. A typical cool girl has big breasts, long legs, big lips and long hair which according to Brown exhibits a sexualised hyperfeminine ideal body type.[135] A cool girl can be clearly identified as a woman but acts like a man. Thus, it supports Butler's argument of gender performativity as the woman can easily switch to a stereotypically men's behaviour. The cool girl is almost like a male drag demonstrating the arbitrariness of gender.[136] The figure turns itself against the coherent sex and gender.[137] She is a parody of masculinity. In the argumentation of Brown, this can be understood as a tool for empowerment because it mobilizes the power from being born as the sex man to simply a masculine gender performance.[138] The cool girl power is even greater because next to the advantages of being a man, with her feminine appearance, she still has the feminine advantages of seduction.[139] A different argumentation is provided by Piotrowska who says that a cool girl can also be a person

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[131] Andi Harriman and Marloes Bontje, *Some Wear Leather, Some Wear Lace: The Worldwide Compendium of Postpunk and Goth in the 1980s* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2014), 116, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[132] The analysis of the masculine youth rebellion as a post-war movement, the leather jacket, and the Wild One is connected to a pre-study the author did about the leather jacket. Due to further interest in the influences of movies in fashion but also due to the continuous interest in the concept of coolness, the author continued her studies about it.

[133] Barthes, *Mythologies*, 132, 137–138, 145.

[134] Brown, "Gender, Sexuality, and Toughness," 54.

[135] Ibid., 63.

[136] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 175.

[137] Ibid., 173.

[138] Brown, "Gender, Sexuality, and Toughness," 57.

[139] Ibid., 65–66.

that is only what her man wants her to be.[140] One step further takes it the video essay *The Cool Girl Trope, Explained* where the argumentation is that the cool girl hardens the perception of the superiority of masculinity.[141] It is the ambiguous argument that Butler adds to her analysis that even a parody of the gender roles can be part of the misogynist culture.[142] By reproducing certain symbols of the power relations, if not questioned, they can support gender performance.[143] Regarding the cool girl, the author of this thesis argues that Brown misses questioning what the cool girl says about being a man and continues to sexualise women as an object of seduction. The way gender needs to be reproduced follows similar patterns of the continuous repetition of a myth by Barthes. It is through the cool girl that the myth of coolness turns out to be a gendered one.

Coolness in Fashion

As suggested in the detailed derivation on the coolness of the leather jacket, clothes matter for coolness. Coolness is not only an attitude but a certain style.[144] It is this style that can unitize a group or create a single cool guy or girl. Through the clothing experienced by the body, coolness can be lived.[145] However, to implement coolness as a stable myth into more than just clothing but into the concept of ever-changing fashion seems to be hard.[146] In addition, a cool person does not consume like the bourgeois. But it is Harris who alludes to the fact that the denial of a future, which the young rebels internalized, translates into the desire for the direct satisfaction of needs. This attitude brings the rebellious youth back to consumption from which they originally wanted to set themselves apart.[147] This is where fashion can take over the myth of coolness and make it its own. As Holt describes, through the products consumers can live a myth that they admire.[148] A certain style can send signs of coolness to another person. Moreover, wearing and experiencing fashion is the closest an embodied experience can get as it melts with the own body. It was Merleau-Ponty that targeted the body as the source of

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[140] Piotrowska, "Revenge of Cool Girl."
[141] The Take, "Cool Girl Trope."
[142] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 176.
[143] Wissinger, "Judith Butler," 290.
[144] Belk, Tian, and Paavola, "Consuming Cool," 196.
[145] Ibid., 200.
[146] Holt, *How Brands Become Icons,* 34.
[147] Harris, "Coolness," 43–44.
[148] Holt, *How Brands Become Icons,* 3–4, 8.

sensation.[149] Hence, cool fashion is an identifiable feature for others but also supports the wearer to be and stay cool.

Moving on from cool fashion to cool fashion brands, brands can tackle the myth and make it part of their brand identity. As Holt proposed, brands take on myths to transfer a higher value into their products.[150] Customers can experience the myth and a piece of their identity through the products and everything else from the brand.[151] To find the myth market the brand should approach, according to Holt, national ideology, cultural contradictions and the populist worlds are the main instances to form the so-called myth market. The national ideology is the consensus with the values of a nation that decides what is good. The everyday contradictions against these aspired values are the cultural contradictions and these construct the myth market where brands can respond to. A special role in defining the myth market plays the populist world as they include a complete picture of countercultures.[152]

A myth for a fashion brand is desired because as soon as a myth is established, it is hard to be copied by others.[153] In the viewpoint of Holt, a fashion brand can never turn into an iconic brand if it continues to be fashion.[154] In other words, with its never-ending trend hunting, it can never reach the state of a full implementation of the myth of coolness. On the contrary, it can be argued that fashion designers can keep a myth if they manage to reinvent themselves by staying faithful to the myth.

Coolness in Pop Culture

Where are all the images of coolness coming from that are established in society? How is that the concept of coolness is so hard to grasp on the one hand and clearly definable on the other hand? Coolness is especially influenced by pop culture. In the survey from Belk, Tian and Paavola, they find out that American movies and actors are the main teachers of coolness.[155] They are the trendsetter. Noticeably, actresses are not mentioned.

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[149] Kathrin Stengel, "Das Subjekt als Grenze: Ein Vergleich der erkenntnistheoretischen Ansätze bei Wittgenstein und Merleau-Ponty," in *Quellen und Studien zur Philosophie* 59, pub. Jürgen Mittelstraß, Dominik Perler, and Wolfgang Wieland (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co. KG, 2003), 109–110.
[150] Holt, *How Brands Become Icons,* 10.
[151] Ibid., 8–9.
[152] Ibid., 56–59.
[153] Ibid., 5.
[154] Ibid., 34.
[155] Belk, Tian, and Paavola, "Consuming Cool," 196.

Following Holt, people interpret populist worlds as trustworthy without commercial interests which makes it the perfect source for a myth. Pop culture, for example, music and sports, are part of this populist world but at the same time a commercialized system.[156] Although popular culture is part of a capitalist system, it can be pointed out through Barthes that, in particular in film, the border between the real, perhaps rather critical gaze and the fictional dream is blurred for the audience. The audience only sees facts in the movie than a showcased system of values.[157] This could be the reason why paradoxically movies can transfer a subcultural myth into mainstream culture. Subsequent, the continuous repetition of a myth stabilizes it and will let the myth survive through time.[158] With the establishment of the myth, the audience learns specific signs that stand for a stereotype. Barthes comments that pictures are more compulsory in sending out meanings but as they do not provide context, they do not have to be more relevant than texts.[159] But it is argued in this thesis that the combination of text and pictures in movies makes it the ideal medium in spreading a myth.

As Barthes describes, a myth often has a certain target group which is in the case of coolness the youth generation.[160] In the words of Wheeler Winston Dixon, teenagers have more free time to watch movies than adults.[161] Especially in a period of life where the own personality is not yet stable, movies can be a projection of oneself on the screen and helps to structure the world.[162] Movies can create dream worlds that teenagers cannot act out in real life.[163] Through the movie characters, they can simulate experiences, they have never had. Those experiences result in a certain perception of reality.[164] The cool person on the screen is a comparable person to understand the vague concept of coolness. This personalisation is an important aspect of movies that create a thin line between the character on the screen and the person playing it. It is Brown who notes the rise of the personality and celebrity culture. It is the mixture of feeling close because of the vulnerable character on the screen but never really knowing who is behind that façade that initiated the fascination around movie stars.[165] It is the

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[156] Holt, *How Brands Become Icons,* 58–59.
[157] Barthes, *Mythologies*, 156.
[158] Ibid., 132.
[159] Ibid., 133.
[160] Ibid., 143.
[161] Wheeler Winston Dixon, ed., *Film Genre 2000: New Critical Essays* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 127.
[162] Fearing, "Influence of the Movies," 79.
[163] Dixon, *Film Genre 2000*, 130.
[164] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* 73, 369.
[165] Brown, *Glamour in Six Dimensions*, 101, 103.

distance that has been already noted in discussing sunglasses and smoking that supports coolness and which makes celebrities an important part of the myth of coolness.

Overall, it is movies that provide an embodied myth. Through the character and his or her story and through the celebrity playing the role, we can project ourselves into new situations that will influence our perception of the myth of coolness. As Merleau-Ponty writes the 'I' turns into a 'we'.[166] He talks about more than observation but about imitation.[167] The distinction between objects, the others and I provide an issue for fashion. Can a person according to Merleau-Ponty still be able to differentiate between the body and the clothing that is merged to him or her? It is this gap where fashion brands that take the coolness from movies, make it part of their identity and consumers will buy it as an embodied experience of coolness.[168]

Interim Conclusion

The first chapter responded to what the myth of coolness is, where coming it is from and what impact it has on fashion brands. Analysing coolness as a concept, it has certain characteristics that define it. These include emotional toughness, a young against old mentality, violence, self-confidence, willingness to take risks, nihilism and irresponsibility to certain tasks that would restrict a cool person's freedom.[169] Certain gadgets like sunglasses can help to underline the myth. In addition, there exists a single cool person as well as cool groups. These are continuously repeated characteristics that stabilized a myth.[170]

The main outcome of this chapter is that coolness is a gender-related myth defined by masculinity. Cool girls are defined as a cool guy imitator with a definite feminine body. This cool girl appears on the inside like a drag king which encourages to question gender but misses to fully review the consequences for the other cisgender.[171] Regarding its impact on fashion brands, coolness can gain a competitive advantage by implementing it as myth to address the desires and anxieties of consumers.[172] The myths that are included in brands often start in pop culture which can be further assumed for coolness. Pop culture can be an example where

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[166] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* 364.
[167] Ibid., 368.
[168] Holt, *How Brands Become Icons,* 60.
[169] Belk, Tian, and Paavola, "Consuming Cool," 184, 196–197; Lyman and Scott, *Sociology of Absurd*, 90; Harris, "Coolness," 43.
[170] Barthes, *Mythologies*, 132.
[171] Brown, "Gender, Sexuality, and Toughness," 54, 65–66.
[172] Holt, *How Brands Become Icons*, 6.

consumers learn about the myth and can later embody it themselves.[173] In particular, teenagers have time to watch movies and, following Barthes, can learn from the movies and turn the values from movies into facts.[174]

Chapter 2: Coolness in Movies

As seen in the previous chapter, especially during the period of adolescents, the search for role models beyond the parents is fundamental.[175] As already mentioned, films influence reality because they play out what life should or could be like. After unfolding overlapping characteristics of the myth of coolness, the following chapter turns to the selected films and finds personas in movies that reproduced, changed or supplemented the myth of coolness. However, the analysis is not a repetition of what has been described before, but it points out certain striking aspects of coolness in the movies. It is especially looked at what the story of the movie is like, what characteristics the role has in his or her fictional world, how he or she dresses and who participated in the movies with the research questions: *how is a cool persona portrayed in movies between the 1950s and the early 2000s and how do the clothes underline the myth?* The movies are presented in chronological order to look for an evolution of the myth. The outcome of this chapter is to learn about the stereotypical cool persona that is created in movies.

The Youth Rebellion: The Wild One and Rebel Without a Cause

The Wild One (1953)

The origin of the stereotypical cool persona as we know it today comes from the 1953 movie *The Wild One*. The movie is about the biker gang conducted by Johnny who occupies and terrorizes a city. It presents concurrence between different gangs, overstrained police, and

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[173] Holt, *How Brands Become Icons*, 59.
[174] Dixon, *Film Genre 2000*, 127; Barthes, *Mythologies*, 156.
[175] O'Donnell and Wardlow, "Origins of Coolness," 14.

scared inhabitants. The chaos between the characters who often misunderstand each other ends in the death of one citizen.[176]

What made the movie characters cool was that Johnny and his gang paralyses the adults who, regarding their main role in society as the working force, should have the leading role. Especially the police officer of the city Harry does not have any control of the young rebels and appear almost as resigning and just letting it happen until the gang will lose interest. The gang's purpose is to drive around and bring fear and terror for its own sake. This youth has no aim and does not even look for it. It is this previously mentioned nihilism of life that Harris describes as a typical evidence of coolness.[177] Even more, with motorcycles, they are endless travellers who can leave town and proceed with their rebellion in the next town instead of really facing consequences. In summary, Johnny is the stereotypical biker guy described in previous literature. It makes sense as the purpose of the movie was to investigate the hipster culture. In contrast, the mass audiences misinterpreted the movie and saw it as the glorification of violence and constructing an allurement for rebellious subcultures.[178]

The Wild One characterised and initiated the male rebellious look and constructed an iconic uniform. It can be argued that until today, the full look stands for youth rebellion more than the initial leather jacket and the pair of jeans that was mentioned in the first chapter.[179] Johnny wears a leather jacket with the logo on the back, a white T-shirt, a pair of jeans and eye-covering sunglasses. These cool garments are reproduced in many other movies like *Grease*, *The Outsiders* and *Rebel Without a Cause* which is analysed in the next section.

Rebel Without a Cause (1955)

Next to *The Wild One*, the movie *Rebel Without a Cause* from 1955 is regarded as a primitive rock of countercultural cool films.[180] In contrast, to *The Wild One*, this movie presents a single cool guy autonomously from a gang. The story of Jim Stark is about the issues of being the new kid at school and the conflicts of a teenager with his parents. At his new school, a gang challenges him to a dare. The girl Judy is part of this gang who later becomes Jim's girlfriend. The dare ends in the death of one of the gang members. The situation escalates and the police as well as members of the gang chase Jim. Plato, one of Jim's friends, follows Jim to warn him.

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[176] *The Wild One*, directed by Laslo Benedek (Stanely Kramer Productions, 1953).

[177] Harris, "Coolness," 43.

[178] Farren, *Black Leather Jacket*, 37–39.

[179] Mark D. Austin, Patricia Gagne, and Angela Orend, "Commodification and Popular Imagery of the Biker American Culture," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 43, no. 5 (2010): 948; Wolf, *The Rebels*, 52.

[180] Belk, Tian, and Paavola, "Consuming Cool," 193.

Due to his unstable emotional state, Plato kills one of the gang members and now becomes the hunted one. He dies as the police shoot at him. Jim takes care of his dead friend and afterwards goes back to his family.[181]

Interesting when comparing these two movies, *The Wild One* and *Rebel Without a Cause*, is the differences between them. While both are underdogs, they are guided by different goals. Johnny seems to rebel because he enjoys making the bourgeois uncomfortable. In contrast, Jim rebels to get his parents' attention, in particular his father. In that way, Johnny is even more a 'rebel without a cause' than Jim is. Jim is unsatisfied with the, in his eyes, subservience of his father to the female side of the family. He attacks him for being effeminate. But probably more relevant for Jim is that his dad fails to be responsive to the needs of his son. The young-against-old mentality, that was suggested by O'Donnell and Wardlow, is counteracted.[182] The teenager is needy like a child and does not completely encapsulate himself from the older generation. Jim, in contrast to Johnny, is also emotional. He cries several times throughout the movie. This is counterintuitive to coolness. One part of coolness is the cooled down emotions. "Suppressing overt displays of emotion remains a way of retaining pride, dignity, and masculine ideals of toughness."[183] But Jim is not scared to show his disruption, anxiety and love. He does not neglect life and prefers to solve issues rather than starting a fight.

The main outfit of Jim throughout the movie is similar to the one from Johnny. He wears jeans, a white T-shirt and a leather jacket. The main difference is the eye-catching red colour of the jacket. The red is a sign of danger and a warning, according to Moss Mabry, who was the costume designer in the movie.[184] It is an indicator of the risk this person is living. Further, it can hold back aggressive emotions because the clothes speak the warning for the wearer.

Another important aspect of Jim's coolness is his personification. A movie can hardly be detached from the actors and actresses involved.[185] James Dean as Jim Stark is one of the best-known legends of the 1950s. The star died young in a car accident which inadvertent made him forever young. People will not remember him as an old man because he never had the chance to get old. As Ed Diener, Derrick Wirtz, and Shigehiro Oishi discovered in 2001, the James Dean effect is a preference for a wonderful life ending early than a life with additional

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[181] *Rebel Without a Cause*, directed by Nicholas Ray (Warner Bros., 1955).
[182] O'Donnell and Wardlow, "Origins of Coolness," 14.
[183] Belk, Tian, and Paavola, "Consuming Cool," 187.
[184] Deborah Nadoolman Landis, *Dressed: A Century of Hollywood Costume Design* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 210.
[185] Brown, *Glamour in Six Dimensions*, 100–101.

little pleasant years.[186] This is another aspect of coolness: the wish to stay forever young.[187] It could be about the freedom of all responsibilities that adults have.[188] Further, this freedom could be connected to the young, healthy and resilient body. Getting older, these nice features can easily disappear.

Being Cool is a Job: Desperately Seeking Susan and Pulp Fiction

Desperately Seeking Susan (1985)

Another subculture, namely the postpunks, are portrayed within the film *Desperately Seeking Susan* from 1985. The movie is about the settled down housewife Roberta who is bored with her life. She finds an announcement in the newspaper about a man who desperately searches for a Susan. Roberta goes to the meeting suggested in the advert and follows the wanted Susan. Through an incident, Roberta loses her memory and starts to act like Susan. While she, in her confusion, begins to live with a friend of Susan's boyfriend named Dez, the real Susan gets to know Gary, who is Roberta's husband and searches for her. In the end, all characters converge at the so-called Magic Club and as Roberta gets her memory back, she leaves her prissy life behind and confesses her love for Dez.[189]

In contrast to the previous movies, *Desperately Seeking Susan* has a strong, cool female main character. Susan is a single cool adult who is not dependent on a man. She has no home, no job and sleeps at friends' places. Thereby, she is similar to the endless traveller of the biker gang. Moreover, she does not have much money, does not want to get an ordinary job and therefore 'works' as a thief. Still, Roberta admires her because she is free. The audience can identify with Roberta being the housewife trapped in a life planned out for her. But Roberta is brave, decides to leave her settled down life behind and live the aspired life of Susan. Roberta makes the transformation into a cool character.

The movie is special due to its postpunk subculture aesthetic. Following the definition of Andi Harriman and Marloes Bontje, postpunk is an umbrella term for "all evolutions of the 1980s proto-punk alternative movement."[190] Therefore by definition, Susan is a cool rebel. Susan and later Roberta are highly decorated with hair ribbons and jewellery. They mix

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[186] Ed Diener, Derrick Wirtz, and Shigehiro Oishi, "End Effects of Rated Life Quality: The James Dean Effect," *Psychological Science* 12, no. 2 (March 2001): 127.
[187] van den Bergh and Behrer, *Cool Brands Stay Hot,* 98.
[188] Wolf, *The Rebels*, 271.
[189] *Desperately Seeking Susan,* directed by Susan Seidelman (Orion Pictures, 1985).
[190] Harriman and Bontje, *Some Wear Leather,* 8.

different materials like fishnet fabric or lace and often combine different colours. A central piece in the movie is Susan's jacket which Roberta later receives and which Dez uses as an identifying mark to mistake Roberta for Susan. It is a green blazer made out of shiny fabric. The collar consists of a different material that shines like silk and has golden and black ornaments. At the back of it, a golden pyramid with an eye and a red semi-circle is stitched on the jacket. As Roberta buys Susan's jacket in a thrift shop, her story of turning into a cool girl starts similar to the history of the leather jacket as a left-over piece with a previous identity. The piece of fabric is almost like the starter set to become Susan.

Another aspect that brought attention to the movie is the actress of Susan: Madonna. The movie was shot in the beginning of her career. Madonna published her first single in 1982 and is, until today, one of the most influential singers.[191] As announced before, celebrities can be role models for coolness, for example with their styling.[192] Even if Madonna has never had one signature look, probably especially this made her a cool icon.[193] Moreover, Madonna knows how to promote herself which made her, for example, lie about her own biography.[194] The identity of Madonna is unclear and contradictory which turned her into a pop-cultural myth.[195] With her self-confidence, Madonna reproduces the cool myth, but she extended the spectrum of the cool uniform with her unique styling from various genres.[196] Even in a movie, she gets to be the role model for one of the protagonists. The whole movie is almost like a guideline on how to be (like) Madonna.

Pulp Fiction (1994)

One of the newer movies that is discussed in this analysis is *Pulp Fiction* which also created new cool identification figures. The movie tells a story in four episodes that are interconnected. The first episode is about the two gangsters Vincent and Jules who retrieve a briefcase for their boss Marsellus. They kill the current owners and with the help of others get rid of the bloodstains. After the work is done, they have breakfast in a diner. It is the diner from the fourth episode that a pair of lovers tries to rob. The next episode is Vincent taking care of Marsellus's wife Mia. They go out and participate in a twist contest. Afterwards, Mia finds Vincent's heroin

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[191] Guilbert, *Madonna as Postmodern*, 1–2, 28.
[192] Harris, "Coolness," 48.
[193] Guilbert, *Madonna as Postmodern Myth,* 30, 35.
[194] Ibid., 29.
[195] Holt, *How Brands Become Icons*, 57–59; Guilbert, *Madonna as Postmodern Myth,* 99.
[196] Barthes, *Mythologies*, 172; Guilbert, *Madonna as Postmodern Myth,* 3–4.

and collapses after snuffing it. After much panic, Vincent and his drug dealer manage to resuscitate her. The third story is about the boxer Butch who outwits Marsellus. He wants to flee with his girlfriend but is temporary hindered from doing so by clashing with Marsellus.[197] The focus of the analysis is put on the three characters: Vincent Vega, Jules Winnfield and Mia Wallace.

Being gangsters as a job underlines Jules's and Vincent's coolness where risk is constantly present. All three risk factors of Lyman and Scott are confirmed in the movie.[198] The physical risk comes with their gangster life where murder or taking drugs is normalised. The gangster duo splits the risk by supporting each other. Their team play is directly visible through their twin suit uniform. The fact that they are two cool men and not just one leader or a single cool ideal is different to the cool myth discussed earlier. Even if the peer group is not as big as in *The Wild One*, the coolness of the two is different to a single cool hero. Jules and Vincent can react to each other's behaviour and have conversations. The movie portrays a close friendship and illustrates that a cool friendship still neglects emotions and keeps a distance. Next, the financial risk is observed in the first episode when Jules and Vincent calmly retrieve the valuable briefcase for Marsellus. The last risk type called social risk is seen, for example, as Vincent and Jules have breakfast in the diner just like everyone else and the situation enrolling in it forces them to take out their guns. No one would have thought that they are hitmen if they had not pointed their guns at the restaurant robbers.

Another cool icon is the gangster wife Mia. Her performance in the movie is mainly remembered for the fun twist contest. The twist scene is a fun break from the crime and drama in the movie.[199] Gangsters do have fun with something other than violence. However, even if they are quirky, they do not look like it.

> The typical cool facial expression is not an actual expression so much as a categorical refusal to betray even a hint of a smile, of a desire to please, and the substitution of a mask of characterless nullity[.] [...][200]

Coolness is a mask, and most people fail to continuously wear it because the discipline to not show any emotions is hard. Mia's outfit became influential for fashion. According to the

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[197] *Pulp Fiction,* directed by Quentin Tarantino (Miramax, 1994).
[198] Lyman and Scott, *Sociology of Absurd*, 90.
[199] IMDb. "Pulp Fiction."; "What Makes the Dance Sequence from Pulp Fiction so Iconic?," Movies. Stackexchange.com, accessed April 1, 2021, https://movies.stackexchange.com/questions/18007/what-makes-the-dance-sequence-from-pulp-fiction-so-iconic.
[200] Harris, "Coolness," 44.

costume designer Betsy Heimann, Mia mirrors the outfit of the men.[201] While Vincent and Jules wear a black suit with a tucked-in white shirt underneath, she wears the hanging-out version over black and somewhat flared trousers. Hollander who did a study on the significance of menswear in *Sex & Suits* notes the suit as sober beauty and the uniform of power. "[…] [I]t suggests diplomacy, compromise, civility, and physical self-control […]."[202] It is this power that makes this outfit perfect for a cool youth rebellion. Additionally, that the suit is an ordinary outfit underlines the social mask Vincent and Jules wear.[203] That the correct outfit to be cool is essential is shown in the first episode. As their suit is full of blood, Vincent and Jules have to change and only get the outworn, seedy T-shirts of the friend who helps them to disguise the evidence. In consequence, they lose their coolness and get laughed at. It does not matter what cool, bad things the two gangsters did before like taking drugs and being violent. As soon as they lose their clothing, they also lose their coolness.

Coolness for Justice: The Matrix, Fight Club and Lara Croft

The Matrix (1999)

As seen in the results of Belk, Tian and Paavola's study, *The Matrix* is, at least for the Finnish and American participants, a main presentative of coolness.[204] The movie suggests that the human species lives naively in a simulation, the so-called Matrix, constructed by artificial intelligence and only exist in the real world to be energy for the machines.[205] The hacker Neo gets contacted by a woman named Trinity and liberated from the simulation by a resistance movement and is told to be the chosen one to save the humans. Coolness is spread all over the movie like the additional capabilities that Neo receives at the end of the movie to stop a bullet only with his mind. This scene underlines the fact that a myth does not need to make sense. Its intention is more important.[206] Cool is the fact that they not only fight with tools, but they train martial arts and aim to get faster than the machines with only their fists and moves. According to the participants in Belk, Tian and Paavola's study this is cool because using martial arts to fight is closer to one's own death than a fight with weapons where it is more about the person

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[201] Lauren Sanchez, "How to Dress a Lethal Lady: Looking Back at *Pulp Fiction*'s Antiheroines," *Vogue*, October 14, 2019, https://www.vogue.com/article/pulp-fiction-costume-designer-interview.

[202] Hollander, *Sex & Suits,* 83.

[203] Ibid., 1.

[204] Belk, Tian, and Paavola, "Consuming Cool," 196.

[205] *The Matrix,* directed by Lana Wachowski and Lilly Wachowski (Warner Bros., 1999).

[206] Barthes, *Mythologies*, 148.

who does the first shot.[207] As already suggested in *Rebel Without a Cause*, it crystallises in *The Matrix* that the nihilism towards life, described by Harris, cannot be validated as a universal description of coolness.[208] The exposed truth that the world they lived in is just a simulation made by machines, awakens a fighting spirit to save humankind and end the cruelties of the machines. Additionally, the rebellion has more to it than just young against old.

The black uniform of the resistance fighters made of lacquer, leather or cotton, often including long and heavy coats, became significant and therefore was acknowledged in the book *Dressed: A Century of Hollywood Costume Design* by Deborah Nadoolman Landis.[209] Since all garments have the same colour, it is difficult to distinguish them. The unisex uniform makes both the male Neo and female Trinity cool. In addition, it creates a group feeling as previously mentioned in *The Wild One*. The material and the cut make the coat appear massive. The material leather could be an endless reminder of the risk of death is 'sitting' right on the shoulder as it is made out of a dead animal. Leather, as noted in chapter one, is durable and can protect Trinity and Neo from external forces. The length of the coat is overwhelming because it covers the entire body. It is further the whole black colour that almost lets the body disappear. In addition, it is the costume designer Kym Barrett saying that it should remind of a cap from a superhero.[210] Hence, the coat provides power to the wearer. Accessories added to the outfit are a belt and narrow sunglasses. As already noted, sunglasses are mostly used to hide emotions and to create a distance from the audience.[211] The movie barely shows more emotion than cool emotional toughness. The sunglasses support the lack of emotions in the movie by making the eyes visible to the audience. No pain from fights can be seen or any doubt about winning against the machines.

Fight Club (1999)

In the same year 1999 as the release of *The Matrix*, the movie *Fight Club* was published. The movie is about the narrator, a white-collar employee, who suffers from insomnia and in general is unsatisfied with his life. As a consequence, he seeks out self-help groups for diseases like cancer to get support. Within these groups, he meets Marla Singer who is an impostor in these groups like him and suddenly the illusion of curing his insomnia is gone. As a new solution,

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[207] Belk, Tian, and Paavola, "Consuming Cool," 197.
[208] Harris, "Coolness," 43.
[209] Landis, *Dressed*, 470.
[210] Ibid., 470.
[211] Belk, Tian, and Paavola, "Consuming Cool," 190.

he meets Tyler Durden who challenges the narrator to question his capitalistic lifestyle. Both start a fight club where men can break out of society's expectations and later on take their anger outside of the ring and start a countermovement against materialism. In addition, Marla starts an affair with Tyler. More and more throughout the movie the narrator gets clues that he is Tyler himself. To stop Tyler's plans to destroy several skyscrapers, which are part of the capitalist system, the narrator shoots at himself whereby he only kills his alter ego.[212]

Fight Club follows the same pattern as *The Matrix* by fighting against the whole system to make the world a better place. Different to the rebels before, he wants to see the whole money-driving world collapsed. The movie displays the same world that the audience of the movie lives in which makes the rebellion more relatable. Superior to all deluded citizens, Tyler appears to see through the fake facade of consumption. He formulates his perspective supremely confident so that he can form an army following his theories. It is this self-confidence of a cool person and the own insecurities that automatically persuade others to believe him and be part of his cool lifestyle. Another stereotypical cool aspect of Tyler is his enduring and even enjoying of pain. He adds a new aspect to coolness by not being violent because of a rebellion but for self-pleasure.[213] This is why they start the fight club.

Tyler's outfit is a special aspect of the movie. In contrast to the previous costumes, he is more colourful even by being faithful to the classical red leather jacket. Comparing it to the classical rebel outfit from the 1950s movies, outstanding are his colourful shirts or T-shirts and non-jeans but linen trousers. Moreover, he sometimes wears red sunglasses. The coolness in his outfits, besides the classical leather jacket, is his courage to be ugly. Dressing ugly is another way to deduct someone from the boring 'normal'.[214] It is part of Harris's argument of the youth rebellion to reject as he calls it "the good taste of the suburban split-level".[215] By dressing differently from the average, inconspicuous non-cool narrator in his suit, Tyler can be perceived as 'ugly' with his colourful style and random mixture of different colours and patterns. Not only in contrast to the normal citizens but even in contrast to the previously seen exchangeable uniforms from our heroes in *The Wild One* and *Rebel Without a Cause*, Tyler has a flamboyant look. Iconic is his bathing gown which probably used to glowed in light purple and has cups in different colours stitched on it. However, the shine of the colour is steamed by the dirt on it. As a bathrobe is nothing that is required for everyday life and is used as house

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[212] *Fight Club,* directed by David Fincher (Fox 2000 Pictures, 1999).

[213] Lynn M. Ta, "Hurt So Good: *Fight Club*, Masculine Violence, and the Crisis of Capitalism," *The Journal of American Culture* 29, no. 3 (September 2006): 273.

[214] Harris, "Coolness," 46–47.

[215] Ibid., 46.

clothes, the garment does not match with the non-settled cool guy.[216] Tyler in this bathrobe appears like a parody of the bourgeois lifestyle. Another aspect that represents Tyler's self-confidence in his clothing is his exposure of skin with his outfits.[217] He wears a fishnet top in one of the final scenes which can be understood as female clothing.[218] As noted by the costume designer Michael Kaplan, Tyler should look like he gets his clothing from a thrift shop as already seen in *Desperately Seeking Susan*. He goes even further by mentioning that the leather jacket represents blood from a fight which could also be an interpretation for the jacket in *Rebel Without a Cause.*[219] The jacket is therefore a symbol for a fight even without having had one.

Lara Croft: Tomb Raider (2001)

Even though *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* is not the most famous movie of all time, Lara Croft is an iconic female gaming character. The first *Tomb Raider* game appeared in 1996 and the first picturization was published in 2001 with Angelina Jolie in the main role.[220] Therefore, the movie cannot be discussed without considering the computer game. The gameplay and the story of the movie are that of an action-adventure with a female lead. She, as a tomb raider, experiences different mystic adventures while shooting at opponents and jumping acrobatically to move forward.[221] In particular, the film is about a powerful artefact from the Illuminati to control time. This artefact needs to be destroyed before it falls into the wrong hands.

Lara Croft can be interpreted as the classical example of the cool girl. Lara Croft is the main figure in an otherwise masculine dominated genre.[222] Like a man, she is not afraid of making herself dirty by being outside, possessing a gun and having a passion for a good fight (for justice). In early appearances, the character is displayed with a disproportionately big bust size and an unrealistic hourglass figure. The same counts for Lara's personification by Angelina Jolie who in the words of Claudia Herbst "[is] giving credit to the idea of the

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[216] "How to Choose a Bathrobe," Overstock, accessed May 13, 2021, https://www.overstock.com/guides/how-to-choose-a-bathrobe; Note: The assumption that a bathrobe is not an essential object is assumed with the question "Why Do You Need a Bathrobe?" on the online shopping website "Overstock". The fact that it needs to be explained why somebody should buy it, makes it no vital object.

[217] Christian Allaire, "Why Brad Pitt's Style in *Fight Club* Still Packs a Punch 20 Years Later," *Vogue.com*, October 15, 2019, https://www.vogue.com/vogueworld/article/fight-club-brad-pitt-movie-style-mens-fall-trends.

[218] Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 184.

[219] Landis, *Dressed*, 473.

[220] *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*, directed by Simon West (Paramount Pictures, 2001).

[221] "Tomb Raider (1996 Game)," Tomb Raider Wiki, accessed April 3, 2021, https://tombraider.fandom.com/wiki/Tomb_Raider_(1996_Game).

[222] Maja Mikula, "Gender and Videogames: The Political Valency of Lara Croft," *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 17, no. 1 (2003): 80, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1030431022000049038.

unrealistically hyperpowerful female."[223] The unrealistic and idealistic body type of Lara Croft represents how a myth is stronger in its symbolic meaning than its empirical realism.[224] Regarding coolness, attractivity as one aspect of it has been overlooked by researchers. Harris goes as far as saying that coolness is "physically forgiving and democratic".[225] But scanning the previously analysed characters, male and female, most moviegoers would tag them as attractive.[226] Hardly any features can be discovered that call for 'forgiveness'. An exception may be Vincent in *Pulp Fiction*. He has long fatty hair and is not as thin and as muscular as the other cool examples.

At the end of the movie, Lara breaks the cool girl stereotype to assimilate to men and wears a feminine dress. However, at all other parts of the movie, her look follows a different simpler wardrobe. In the movie, she wears monochrome black, white or grey tops and in the game, she has a similar style but sometimes wears a crop top. Further, she wears shorts or trousers in the same colours. In the game, colours like olive green and turquoise can be part of the outfit. As for accessories, she wears a belt and holsters around her thighs. Her hair is braided. Lara Croft's clothing has the focus of revealing as much skin as possible. The basic clothing with no visible design except to fit tightly and is also not suitable for fighting, as noted by Herbst, emphasises that her clothing only serves the function of covering certain parts of her body but without attacking her sex appeal.[227]

Interim Conclusion

The question that this chapter answered is how a cool persona is portrayed in movies between the 1950s and the early 2000s and how do the clothes underline the myth. Overall, the myth of coolness that was developed in chapter one, is strengthened by the discussed movies. The second chapter unfolds how the typical portrayal of a cool persona is continuously reproduced. The cool persona is still a rebel against the current society. It is important to note that not every person following these characteristics is per definition a cool boy or girl. To be a cool rebel,

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[223] Herbst, "Lara's Mission," 37.
[224] Barthes, *Mythologies*, 148.
[225] Harris, "Coolness," 46.
[226] Hollander, *Sex & Suits*, 62; Entwistle and Wilson, *Body Dressing*, 38, 244.
[227] Herbst, "Lara's Mission," 37.

the cool guy must follow the beauty standards to be muscular, and the cool girl must look seductive.[228] In a nutshell, both should be thin and kempt.

Changes within the movies that are visible are the different cultural contexts the movies refer to, mostly orientating at the time the movie was produced in. Barthes considers this as how a myth constructs its own meta-level from a fundament.[229] While in the 1950s the biker culture was significant as seen in *The Wild One*, in the 1980s, it was the postpunk as in *Desperately Seeking Susan* and in the 1990s and 2000s, the attention shifted to the technical danger posed by robots as in *The Matrix*. The discussed coolness in the movies evolved from the rebellious teenager to working as a full-time criminal to the fighter against evil. Individual discrepancies to the myth from chapter one were not carried over into other sequels, such as the emotional outbursts from *Rebel Without a Cause*. Accordingly, this addition to the myth of coolness disappears and the myth stays the same.[230]

Regarding the clothing, it is not as clear as in the character traits to find a pattern between the analysed movies. Many movies repeat the fabric leather as stated by *The Wild One*. This is especially noticeable in *The Matrix* where the leather coat encases the entire outfit. Clearly, Jim in *Rebel Without a Cause* and Johnny in *The Wild One* wear a similar cool uniform in form of jeans, a white T-shirt and a leather jacket while *The Matrix* creates a unisex uniform. More colourful examples are Susan in *Desperately Seeking Susan* and Tyler in *Fight Club*. Both break out of the uniform and have a more individual styling with different use of material. While Tyler wears clothing to deduct from the bourgeois, the cool criminals in *Pulp Fiction* conform to it as a social mask. For *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider,* her clothing in the movie as well as the video game is highly sexualised by being so tight as a second skin. The myth is therefore represented in the costume but further in the acting of the characters and constructs a full picture of coolness.[231]

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[228] Hollander, *Sex & Suits,* 62; Entwistle and Wilson, *Body Dressing*, 38, 244; Brown, "Gender, Sexuality, and Toughness," 63, 65–66.
[229] Barthes, *Mythologies*, 138.
[230] Ibid., 132.
[231] Barthes, *Mythologies*, 145–146.

Chapter 3: Helmut Lang – The Designer for the Cool Boys and Girls

After the last chapter evaluated how the myth has or has not changed in globally known movies, the next section sheds light on the myth of coolness in a fashion brand. This section looks at why Helmut Lang was recognised as cool. The chapter starts with an introduction of Helmut Lang's biography and his aesthetic in the context of the cool myth. This is used to clarify what the designer as the star of the brand has to do with his brand myth and provides an overall understanding of Lang's coolness. Next, with critical visual analysis, each of the eight selected looks from the spring 2004 collection is described and placed in relation with the cool films separately. As the outcome of the first chapter is that gender performance is inserted in the myth of coolness, this chapter more intensively includes Butler's gender performance. In addition, as suggested by Merleau-Ponty, a possible embodied experience through Helmut Lang's clothing of the learned coolness from the movies is included. The followed research questions are: *how did Helmut Lang implement the myth of coolness within the fashion brand? In what way does the spring 2004 collection embody the coolness that is performed by the cisgender movie characters?* A conclusion about the cool aesthetic of Helmut Lang is made by the end of this chapter. In the text, the photos are numbered according to the order they appear on the website Vogue Runway.

Helmut Lang – An Introduction

His Persona

Helmut Lang was born in 1956 in Austria.[232] He lived with his grandparents in Ramsau am Dachstein which is a tiny village in the Austrian Alps. At the age of ten, he moved to Vienna when his father remarried. Helmut Lang hated this new period of his life. Part of it was that his stepmother made him wear suits that did not fit him. He left his father's house when he turned 18 and according to *The New Yorker*, he has never seen his father and his stepmother again.[233] In an *Index* magazine interview from 2004, Lang described the relationship to his stepmother

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[232] Jason Dike, "Digging Deeper: Helmut Lang's Triumphant Rise & Fall," *Highsnobiety*, October 09, 2015, https://www.highsnobiety.com/p/digging-deeper-helmut-lang/.

[233] "The Invisible Designer," The New Yorker, September 18, 2000, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2000/09/18/the-invisible-designer.

as: "I had the classical stepmother in a bad Hollywood movie."[234] In that way, Helmut Lang was a young rebel by tearing himself away from his parents as quickly as possible and doing things his own way. In 1977, he established his first fashion studio with two or three other seamstresses.[235] The Austrian designer appeared in 1986 on the Parisian runway, moved with the brand to New York in 1997 and left his homonymous brand in 2005 to become an artist.[236]

His persona was not the fashion industry's favourite. He abruptly changed the catwalk schedule for New York to what it is today.[237] He ignored award shows where he was expected to collect a prize.[238] He was the cool rebel against the mainstream fashion industry. Going back to the myth from the first chapter, although Helmut Lang was not a young adult anymore when he reached his career peak in the 1990s and 2000s, his rebellion is similar to the young against old dynamic. It is the established old fashion system that the new designer is rebelling against. An interview from *Index* magazine starts with the words: "Helmut Lang is a complicated guy […]".[239] But in a question about his self-confidence he replies:

> That's something that I had quite early on in life, I think. I grew up with my grandparents really high up in the mountains […] [.] [I]t was very detached from civilization, actually. When I was a little kid, I would always gather the other kids together to make things.[240]

Helmut Lang operates as the cool leader of his hometown and later was a pioneer in the fashion industry. Lang saw the potential of the internet early on and was the first designer to show his collection online which represents how much he wanted to democratise fashion to the global audience.[241] However, not so many interviews with him can be found. He keeps his cool distance and gives the press the cold shoulder which may have resulted in the title "The Invisible Designer" from the *The New Yorker* article.[242]

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[234] Peter Halley, „Helmut Lang," *Index Magazine*, 2004, http://www.indexmagazine.com/interviews/helmut_lang.shtml.
[235] Halley, "Helmut Lang."
[236] Highsnobiety. "Helmut Lang."
[237] Dike, "Digging Deeper."
[238] The New Yorker ."The Invisible Designer."
[239] Halley, "Helmut Lang."
[240] Ibid.
[241] Miles Soscha, "Seminal Fashion Moments: Helmut Lang's Online Show in March 1998," *WWD*, May 5, 2020, accessed on February 24, 2021, https://wwd.com/fashion-news/fashion-features/first-online-fashion-show-ever-helmut-lang-lessons-1203626257/.
[242] The New Yorker ."The Invisible Designer."

The Aesthetic

"I was never somebody who thought that a lot of colours together make you more beautiful."
– Helmut Lang[243]

Helmut Lang is considered one of the most impactful designers of the 1990s and early 2000s who influenced many following designers.[244] He is known for his different approach to fashion with a minimalist aesthetic. Further, he was a first mover in the anti-fashion movement in the 1990s and thus, a conducting part of the countermovement against the maximalist 1980s.[245] In a nutshell, coming from the 1960s, minimalism means basic shapes and pieces without decorative addition.[246] Due to its little decoration and often repetition of patterns, minimalist fashion also enabled easy reproduction. This simplification does not sound like progress but in contrast to intuition, minimalism is introduced as social progress as it is detached from gender and embraces the female moving body.[247] Helmut Lang also uses little decoration which might explain why his accessory line was published later in his career.[248] But as described by Walker, the interplay between the garment and the body is essential for minimalism. She goes further by claiming that the simplest looking garments can have the highest complexities.[249] This is definitely so for Lang.[250] Only looking closely at his objects, the details of the designs appear. These details have to be discovered with the body and therefore result in an embodied experience.

Interestingly, minimalist fashion shall live in a non-referential sphere but is also supposed to bring the best from the past together to produce a new modern look.[251] What minimalism stands for is to create a timeless piece.[252] Minimalism shall not follow trends but add pieces to the fashion world that can be combined effortlessly and are always appropriate, for example, a white T-shirt, shirt or black dress. These items will always repeat their story because they will be around forever. In that way, minimalist fashion and thereby Helmut

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[243] *Antifashion*, directed by Olivier Nicklaus (Arte France, LaLaLa Productions, 2012), 26:38, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8kle_lPRtNs.
[244] "Helmut Lang: The Coming of Age of the Cool," The Fashion Law, June 1, 2018, https://www.thefashionlaw.com/helmut-lang-the-coming-of-age-of-the-cool/.
[245] Walker, *Less Is More*, 101.
[246] Ibid., 9.
[247] Ibid., 11.
[248] Dike, "Digging Deeper."
[249] Walker, *Less Is More,* 10.
[250] Walker, *Less Is More,* 116.
[251] Ibid., 14.
[252] Ibid., 65–66.

Lang's aesthetic contradicts and rebels against the character of trend-orientated fashion.[253] They will continue to spread the myth.[254] Following this minimalist approach, the use of colour is unusual for Helmut Lang who mostly stays within the same black and white colour palette. The choice of monochrome, cool shades might also be an intentional choice to be perceived as cool.[255] But from time to time, he even rebels against himself and adds a dab of colour.[256]

Being part of the deconstructivism movement meaning to question typical beauty standards, Helmut Lang puts things out of context and sometimes even makes them dysfunctional.[257] One example is the spring 2003 collection where in look three, Lang turned a zipper into a necklace which does not follow the original function of this item to close a garment and hold its endings together. The zipper suddenly is an accessory and more or less useless. The same dynamic can be observed with the use of several military and uniform elements in his fashion, for example, the bulletproof vest of the spring 1998 collection.[258] To wear a bulletproof vest as everyday fashion adds a new layer to the waistcoat as a decorative element rather than a pure protection item. Next to being rebellious, this also adds a certain violent aesthetic to his fashion.

Lang was an innovator with his unconventional use of material.[259] Cool were the obvious street style influences which were revolutionary in luxury fashion. One example is jeans that he turned into fashion.[260] It is not only cool due to the different design approach but because it is closer to the rebellious subcultures as seen in chapter one.[261] Another indication of Lang's coolness is his history of sexualising his clothes, even for both sexes, as seen in the spring 2000 collection by bringing a male and a female model on the runway with a transparent black blouse. The looks cultivate that sexiness through showing skin is for both genders. This is especially unusual for men who often hide their body with their clothing.[262]

With his clean lines, little embellishment and rare make-up on the models, he further introduced a more androgynous side to fashion. "Rather, he liberated a generation of women from the fetters of looking 'striking' or making an aesthetic statement, by producing precisely

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[253] Ibid., 118.
[254] Barthes, *Mythologies*, 132.
[255] Hollander, *Sex & Suits,* 68.
[256] Walker, *Less Is More*, 118.
[257] Laver, *Costume and Fashion,* 284.
[258] Adrián Lorca, "#Garments Helmut Lang Bulletproof Vest," *Le Petit Archive*, latest access March 15, 2021, http://www.lepetitarchive.com/helmut-lang-bulletproof-vest/.
[259] Walker, *Less Is More*, 115.
[260] Seabrook, "The Invisible Designer."
[261] Austin, Gagne, and Orend, "Commodification and Popular Imagery," 945.
[262] Hollander, *Sex & Suits,* 83.

the opposite reaction."[263] Lang was known for keeping his catwalk shows plain and focusing on the clothes and the models. The little make-up makes men and women more similar like the cool guy and the cool girl who share a related aesthetic. However, his models were diverse in a very unconventional way. For example, he brought his middle-aged friend Elfie Semotan on the runway who was already too old for the model business.[264] Helmut Lang constructed his gang with models that repetitively walked down the runway. Vogue goes as far as calling them his "handpicked 'family'" or in the words of O'Donnell and Wardlow "peer group".[265]

His Disappearance

All the loved and appreciated characteristics which were so different to what people were accustomed to from previous and contemporary designers, have been put under a test when the company changed its owner to Prada with 51% in 1999. The beloved denim collection was cut down and the brand was commercialized with accessory lines.[266] Prada tried to establish proven strategies for fashion companies within Helmut Lang but missed that Helmut Lang was popular due to the differentiation from classical fashion brands. After Lang left the brand in 2005, Prada sold it to Link Theory holdings which further belongs to Fast Retailing Co., Ltd.[267] The retail holding company confirms that its focus is the contemporary and not the luxury market. Their goal is to make the company more available to consumers.[268] With this strategy and without the original designer, Link Theory holdings has a hard time to keep the popularity of the brand Helmut Lang.[269]

Overall, Helmut Lang's brand history symbolises a cool story full of the typical elements of the cool guy and the cool girl. Following Holt, often the populist myth works well for a brand, signalising a countermovement against commercial interests.[270] By rejecting awards and breaking the rules of the established fashion in the 1990s, Helmut Lang was this rebel. The myth felt apart after his brand got sold in parts to Prada and was destroyed after

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[263] Walker, *Less Is More*, 116.
[264] Sarah Mower, "What Was It Like to Model for Helmut Lang? Stella Tennant, Elfie Semotan, and Jeny Howorth Remember," *Vogue*, March 22, 2016, https://www.vogue.com/article/helmut-lang-models-stella-tennant-elfie-simotan.
[265] Mower, "Model for Helmut Lang,"; O'Donnell and Wardlow, "Origins of Coolness," 15.
[266] Dike, "Digging Deeper."
[267] "Theory," Fast Retailing, accessed February 24, 2021, https://www.fastretailing.com/eng/group/theory/.
[268] Mariko Sanchanta, "Link Theory sets turnround goals for Helmut Lang," *Financial Times*, April 4, 2006, https://www.ft.com/content/5ebf10d4-c3cb-11da-bc52-0000779e2340.
[269] Highsnobiety. "Helmut Lang."
[270] Holt, *How Brands Become Icons,* 58–59.

Lang left the brand. The brand has never matched its success from the 1990s and 2000s.[271] The outcome of this brand introduction is that a Helmut Lang's myth was highly dependent on the designer and his consistent work as a whole to keep the myth alive.[272]

The Summer of Coolness: Helmut Lang's Spring 2004 Collection

The upcoming section dives deeper into how coolness is not only part of the brand's identity but can actively be lived by the customer or the model. The collection from spring 2004 that is discussed is one of Helmut Lang's last ones before he left his brand. The pictures for the critical visual analysis show the models in different looks of the collection walking down the runway. The venue is the Fashion Week and according to the website Livingly it was Paris Fashion Week. Runway shows are a way to promote a new collection and the newest trends.[273] Therefore, in the background of the photos, the audience and the upcoming model can be discovered. All websites from which photos of the spring 2004 collection were used, provide colour photos of the collection and seem to have been taken directly during the show. As classical runway pictures, the photos are frontal portraits, focusing on the front view of the outfit and model.

Look 4

The first look to be described is the fourth look of the spring 2004 collection. It is a white suit including a jacket and pants. There is no shirt underneath, so the model's upper body is partly naked. The jacket goes over the buttocks. At waist level, the jacket appears to have a sewn-on fabric inside with a buckle to close the jacket. In addition, there is also a strap from the attached fabric hanging around the shoulder of the model. Other photos of the look reveal that the other side has the same strap.[274] These straps have similarities to the ones from overalls. The white pants are a bit transparent which can be observed through the translucence of the pockets. The model has about chin-length, slicked back hair.

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[271] Highsnobiety. "Helmut Lang."

[272] Barthes, *Mythologies*, 132.

[273] Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 213.

[274] "Helmut Lang – Ready-to-Wear – Runway Collection – Women: Spring / Summer 2004," First View, accessed May 16, 2021, http://www.firstview.com/collection_image_closeup.php?of=7&collection=4842&image=706083#.YKDbti8Ro dU.

The fourth look of the spring 2004 collection states why Walker concludes Helmut Lang's fashion as "subversion of formality".[275] The model wears a suit, but underneath his upper body is naked and misses a shirt. A suit is not something that would be described as innovative or rebellious. Many employees and employers wear a suit as workwear.[276] However, since everyone wears a suit, it never really represents what kind of profession somebody is doing.[277] The look strongly reminds of the suits from Vincent and Jules in *Pulp Fiction*. Even the hair of the model has similarities to Vincent's unique long hair. It is unique because no other cool hero in the analysed movies from the second chapter grew long hair. Like Vincent and Jules, the wearer could be a dangerous hitman or simply an ordinary bank manager. In any way, the suit will display power which is desirable for the (young) rebel. In addition, Hollander notes that the suit is a sign of "adult masculinity".[278] It is further Entwistle who stresses the suit as a main representative of masculinity.[279] As learned before, coolness is highly associated with masculinity and the direct connection to masculinity makes this outfit cool. She goes further and mentions that the suit can be read in various ways, but one interpretation is the disembodiment and desexualisation of the male body.[280] It covers most of the body and hides any details about it. But if disembodiment and desexualisation is the case for Helmut Lang's look, a question that stays unsolved is why the male model's upper body underneath the jacket is naked and why the closure of the jacket does not hide but emphasises the upper body. The non-functional buckle leaves the jacket open as it is not stitched on the end of the jacket. Lang may try to sexualise the male model with the visible skin even while wearing a suit. The model can embody how it feels to be alluring and therefore perform a different gender. Thus, he can be the seductive cool girl.

Negatively, with this look, the myth is reproduced that coolness is only something for 'attractive' bodies. The model's upper body is trained and what most people would consider as the ideal male body.[281] It is this when the body turns into a performance as noted by Butler.[282] The cool person of Helmut Lang appears to be still the attractive, thin, muscular, young and in particular, male person. Someone will not be part of the cool club if they are fat or older. The only exception was his middle-aged gang member Elfie Semotan who did not model for this

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[275] Walker, *Less Is More*, 116.
[276] Hollander, *Sex & Suits,* 1.
[277] Ibid., 1.
[278] Hollander, *Sex & Suits,* 83.
[279] Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 161.
[280] Ibid., 161–162.
[281] Hollander, *Sex & Suits,* 62.
[282] Butler, "Performative Acts," 218.

collection. It is possible that in other collections the young cool girl is therefore challenged. However, by representing this ideal masculine body type in look 4, the male gender is performed for the audience and hence it must be questioned whether it is a real break in gender roles. Interestingly, the runway look from Helmut Lang is a full white outfit. Following Hollander, it could imitate marble antique naked statues which again underlines the ideal male body.[283]

Overall, *Pulp Fiction* is also represented in previous collections from Helmut Lang. In his spring 1998 collection, the look six has similarities to Mia's outfit in *Pulp Fiction*. In addition, look twelve in the spring 2004 collection has similarities to Mia and is a female version of the male look four. Here, it is important to discuss Mia's fashion to better understand the Vincent's and Jules's outfit. Overall, Mia's look reminds of power-dressing which started in the United States of America in the late 1970s. A woman should be dressed in a men's world full of suits without losing her feminine identity.[284] Like the guys, she wears black pants and a white shirt. To be recognised as a woman, her shirt is hourglass shaped following the ideal female body type and she buttoned down her shirt so the counterpart can almost see her bandeau.[285] In contrast, she covers her hips and bottom with a longer shirt. This is exactly the arbitrary boundaries the myth of gender and appropriate dressing has.[286] Entwistle describes the thin line between dressing like a man and challenging and threatening him in his work or dressing like a woman and challenging the man's sexual appetite. Thus, a woman has to take responsibility for both genders.[287] She must take care of her own outfit but also how the other cisgender will react to it. Mia's outfit can be interpreted as a sign to still be recognised as 'just' the cool girl behind the cool men. In the hierarchy, she is higher than stereotypical feminine women exemplified in Butch's girlfriend Fabienne who is mistreated by him whenever she does a mistake. Still, she is not as much worth as the cool male gangsters illustrated in the fact that she gets Vincent as a babysitter while her husband is out of town.

Both models from look four and look twelve could together embody the famous twist scene from the movie. The embodiment of the clothing from the cool Mia, Vincent or Jules, can be the first step to feel close to who we want to be.[288] Most models have to keep a serious face as they walk down the runway. Therefore, they can with the connection to the twist scene

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[283] Hollander, *Sex & Suits,* 67.
[284] Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 172.
[285] Herbst, "Lara's Mission," 29.
[286] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 187.
[287] Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 172–175.
[288] Holt, *How Brands Become Icons*, 3–4.

have an inner quirky moment to, on the inside, let out pent-up emotions while staying serious and cool on the runway.

Interestingly, previous literature has not dealt with minimalism as a cool aesthetic. But the recurrence of the cool uniform in several movies gives a hint of this connection. Since coolness means to be emotionally reversed, this understatement may also resonate in the clothing choices. But wearing few accessories and plain clothing was uncommon in fashion. It was Helmut Lang who was one of the 1990s designers who brought minimalism and its understated aesthetic on the runway.[289] In this outfit, Helmut Lang also reveals that the colour choice can be an important factor to be perceived cool. Striking in the outfit is not only the missing shirt but also the choice of this colour which is counterintuitive to the in black dressed cool heroes in *Pulp Fiction*. Wearing white garments is associated with being the good guy.[290] Therefore, with Lang's clothing, we can be part of the good cool guys fighting for justice. The question that stays unanswered is whether Lang with his rebellion, as seen in the previous section, was trying to fight for justice within the fashion industry or whether this symbolism was a cover for him being the bad boy.

Look 7

The seventh look of Helmut Lang's spring 2004 runway show reveals another entire white outfit. The model has long hair which is combed and gelled back. He wears a white shirt and white pants. The shirt has one breast pocket and closing buttons. Moreover, the shirt has special details like a collar with a metal finishing. From the viewers perspective, the inner arms of the shirt have an additional stitched-on T-formed fabric. The right arm has a cut-out underneath this added fabric. Therefore, it is not as obvious on the right arm as on the left side that there is an additional sewn-on fabric above the inside of the elbow. Some bare skin is shown before the shirt continues regularly with the cuff. Furthermore, a bandage is wrapped around the left hand. The bandage is repeated on the trousers as an off-white-coloured band that is wrapped around the inner thighs. Another band connects the closing zipper of the trousers to its belt loop. Like before, the pants are transparent.

Similar to the look before, the seventh look represents the bourgeois man, but in Lang's version the shirt is unusable for a formal occasion due to the ripped-out piece. The average

[289] Walker, *Less Is More*, 101, 115.
[290] Brian P. Meier, Michael D. Robinson, and Gerald L. Clore, "Why Good Guys Wear White: Automatic Inferences About Stimulus Valence Based on Brightness," *Psychological Science* 15, no. 2 (2004), 82.

customer would sort this shirt out, bring it to the tailor or even throw it away. In contrast, Helmut Lang puts it on the runway as a finished garment as a form of his voice in the minimalist deconstruction movement. Having the myth of coolness in mind, the cut-out may be a reference to violence. Only provoked pulling can detach such a big piece at the crook of the arm. Unlikely is an accidental grinding at a rough wall or a thorn bush. If so, the missing piece should be on the elbow. The band around his hand supports this hypothesis. It could be the bandage from a boxer protecting his or her hand during the fight or a bandage to support a healing hand. Here, as Holt argues, Helmut Lang addresses a consumer's desires and anxieties.[291] On the one hand, a consumer sees this man with his formal white shirt and understand, this could be him or her. He is an ordinary person. The violent touch reminds of the continuous danger of being a victim of an assault. On the other hand, the consumer may desire this rebellious act of violence. However, as it represents a masculine outfit, it can be assumed that is only a male fantasy. The movie *Fight Club* illustrates this. The nameless narrator works in a typical job with a white shirt as workwear. He is unhappy with his life. As he meets Tyler, the narrator thinks Tyler is the inspiration for him to transfer into a rebel. He shows him a world of "hyper-masculinity" where fighting with a masculine sixpack is on repeat.[292] However, it turns out that the narrator is Tyler and therefore there is no bad influence but the desire to break out of society, to be violent and to finally be a 'man' again comes from himself. According to *Fight Club,* to be bad, inaccessible and to break out of the norms, is a desire that men have consciously or unconsciously. Despite the desire, men may not have the courage or the will to live this fantasy as coolness takes certain risks with it. Therefore, brands with their story can bring consumers closer to these myths through their products.[293] The hyper-masculine coolness can be lived through Lang's clothing as it suggests with the missing fabric that the model comes straight out of a *Fight Club* brawl. Wearing a piece of Helmut Lang, a man can feel being a rebel without actually taking risks.

Other similarities to discussed movies are the straps around the leg. The band around the model's inner thighs does not add any essential features to the pants like holding the single pieces together. Therefore, as typically for Lang, it has no function and needs to have a symbolic meaning.[294] The bandages could be a reference to the gun-holder belts which occurs in *The Matrix* as well as in *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*. The fighters for justice can easily have

[291] Holt, *How Brands Become Icons*, 9.
[292] Ta, "Hurt So Good," 265.
[293] Holt, *How Brands Become Icons*, 8.
[294] Seabrook, "The Invisible Designer."

their hands free to do acrobatic moves while the weapon is easily tangible to kill opponents. Similar to the mentioned military elements in other collections, Helmut Lang uses symbolics of violence in his collections which is also a main aspect of coolness.

What illustrates Lang's coolness in this outfit is how he subtly hints at a fight. There is no blood on the model or bruises to be sure. The evidence of a fight is hidden which could make it part of the social mask to keep a certain face in public. This subliminal coolness is further underlined by the model's sleek and probably well-groomed hair. It is Entwistle and Wilson who note: "[s]mooth hair, however, is likely to be found among those who conform, such as lawyers and bankers."[295] The model looks similar to the narrator in *Fight Club* like a simple white-collar worker with no real intentions to be a rebel. Only the torn-out part of the shirt gives us a hint of his cool personality. A person can look like he or she was in a fight without having the consequences of pain and shame. In addition, Helmut Lang is a rebel in his inoperable straps. The band around his inner thighs does not add any essential features to the pants like holding the single pieces together. Likewise, the lanyard supports no function. It randomly connects the zipper to the belt loop. Helmut Lang's embellishments are similar to the punk aesthetic by being creative in constructing fashion from textiles from other contexts.[296]

Look 10

The next style is a female look. The model wears a white coat. As seen in look seven, on the right arm a piece of fabric is missing. In addition, similar to the previous look, the left arm has a sewn-on fabric which is this time on the elbow. The coat has two side pockets on hip height. Underneath the coat, two tops can be discovered. The first one is zinc white and ends just above the chest, the second one is off-white and does not cover the belly. The model wears white pleated pants. No tool to close the pants like a trouser button or something similar can be discovered in the picture. The model's face looks natural without clearly visible make-up. The hair is combed to the right and laid back.

The described tenth look but also the followed eleventh look of the spring 2004 collection could be a unisex uniform from *The Matrix*. The long coats in *The Matrix* give a feminine touch to the uniform without making the cisgender man any less cool. The choice of

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[295] Entwistle and Wilson, *Body Dressing,* 38.
[296] Laver, *Costume and Fashion*, 284; Harriman and Bontje, *Some Wear Leather*, 85.

leather, which is stigmatized as cool through the leather jacket, makes the outfit more masculine.[297] Although the length of the coats reminds of a long dress, the cut is not close-fitting to emphasize a female body and therefore does not remind the viewer of an exclusively feminine dress. This is similar to the dynamic of hiding the body in a suit as seen before.[298] Regarding Helmut Lang's version of the uniform, Lang also does not distinguish between a cool hero or a cool heroine. The gendered body is hidden and cannot be put in one gender category. Therefore, the unisex uniform does not provide a reasonable distinction between the two cisgenders and thus breaks the performativity of cisgender. However, in Lang's look, a distinction between the cisgenders is possible through the stereotypical long hair of the woman.[299]

The main connection to the movie is the long coat. Wearing this coat, the wearer can be part of the famous bullet evasion scene from Neo where he leans back horizontally.[300] The coat flaps with the wind and the model and later the consumer feels the risk to get caught by the bullet but also the power to dodge the bullets easily. The fantasy of the easily learned martial arts and jumping into the air without consideration of gravity are all part of the experience. It is the Matrix that makes everything possible that the model has ever dreamed of. With this coat, this dreamworld is brought closer to her. The coat serves another function for Trinity and Neo which is to hide the weapons that have been pinned to their belts on the trousers. Wearing the coat can hide the inside and makes the intentions of the wearer mysterious. The model could also have weapons tucked into her pants similar to the characters in *The Matrix*. If so, the wearer would be ready whenever a fight starts, with the guns right at hand. Weapons worn so close to the body can be mistaken as part of the body.[301] More than the coat, the heroine Trinity in *The Matrix* wears a tank top underneath. Her tank top is tight-fitting and made out of black latex. A similar style has the model in Lang's collection. The tops are tight-fitting. Even more than the weapons, they almost melt with the body and makes it a protective second skin. Furthermore, the separate layers of the look accentuate the embodied experiences the outfit provides. Every single piece touches the biggest organ of the body – the skin.[302] An outfit with a long-sleeved T-shirt would miss the feeling of the coat on the skin. So, as the tank top is so

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[297] Austin, Gagne, and Orend, "Commodification and Popular," 945.

[298] Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 135.

[299] Butler, "Performative Acts," 218; Merran Toerien and Sue Wilkinson, "Gender and Body Hair: Constructing the Feminine Woman," *Women's Studies International Forum* 26, no. 4 (2003): 340, https://doi.org/10.1016/S0277-5395(03)00078-5.

[300] *The Matrix,* directed by Lana Wachowski and Lilly Wachowski (Warner Bros., 1999), 1:46:27–1:46:54

[301] Ibid.*,* 77.

[302] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* 77.

tight to the body and almost feels like the body itself, it makes the transition to embody the cool character fluid. As seen before in the *Pulp Fiction* inspired look, Helmut Lang adds his own interpretation of *The Matrix* uniform into look ten by dyeing the black look into a full white one and by making the coat shorter. However, the changes are not formative enough to diminish the association with *The Matrix*.

The repetition of this white look demonstrates Lang's consistency in his designs. As they all look similar, all looks perfectly fit into one cool wardrobe. A cool person has the choice between various outfits which are not too experimental to what they have worn before. With clothing for the everyday, a cool persona can continue his or her (gender) performance. Therefore, Lang's consistent designs, similar to a myth spreading through speech, helps the model's memory to imprint Lang's myth of coolness.[303] It is like a costume that changes minimal. This is what made Lang successful in implementing a myth into a fashion brand. He does not follow trends and keeps one identity, similar to the case study of Levi's with their continuously used myth of the rebellion against gender performativity in their public appearances.[304]

Look 14

The next look to bring attention to is another womenswear style. It consists of a white tank top and a pair of sand-coloured trousers. The model wears another little sand-coloured tank top above which ends before the breasts. In addition, on the right shoulder, two other straps can be discovered. One strap looks like a cut-out of one of the tank tops protruding to the side and the other one provides a glimpse of the strap of another top as if the model wears three tank tops. The cut-out strap is repeated on the left side. Another interesting detail is observed on the right side. Part of the white tank top is omitted to reveal an underlying tank top, emphasizing the breast of the model. Concerning the pants, they consist of two pieces. In contrast to the top, the main piece is sand-coloured. White pants are attached to these trousers but with many cut-outs or it is simply a band entwining the leg. The trousers almost have a striped appearance. Moreover, the trousers are slim fit following the model's body shape. The model has a natural look. Besides wearing a bit of light brown eyeshadow, the model seems to wear no make-up. The model wears a helix on her right ear. In addition to that, she wears a white bracelet. Her

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[303] Barthes, *Mythologies*, 132.
[304] Holt and Cameron, "Levi's 501s in Europe," 328–329, 332–333.

hair appears oily and is combed to the left side. The woman has long hair which is pulled back behind her neck.

The look is typical for Lang's aesthetic. The missing pieces on the trousers and on the tops do not bare any skin. On the contrary, an 'undergarment' in form of other trousers or another top is exposed. Therefore, no sexual allurement is radiated. This piece reflects what Vinken acknowledges as Lang's construction of a second skin and the relationship of a garment and an undergarment in his designs.[305] The tank top and the colour choice recall an outfit from the 2001 movie *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* when she watches the stars and planets through a telescope. She wears a white top and white nylon looking trousers. She also has a white and thin cardigan lying around her hips. The little lighting of the scene let the white trousers appear darker which constructs similarities to the sand colour in the 14th look of Lang's spring 2004 collection. In Lang's runway look, the strap that falls to the right could stand for a backpack strap from Lara. The crop top could be a reference to the video game while the tank top could be a hint to Lara's movie wardrobe with barely changing styles other than the colour. In addition, in other looks of the collection, for example, look two, the model, similar to the full Lara Croft outfit seen in look 14, has a jacket wrapped around her waist. The embodied experience of Lara's clothes arises from her tight clothing that melts with the body.[306] Following her curves, Lara appears almost naked. Lara performs masculinity on the inside, meaning her character, but performs femininity with her clothing on the outside. The problem with the cool girl is that she plays masculinity and with this performance and her appearance, is fetishized as a sex object.[307] In the movie and in the computer game, Lara is a male fantasy rather than a real female identification figure.[308] Her body is a performance, although an unrealistic one in the video games. It is interesting how even an unhealthy and unrealistic body like Lara's can be part of the collective agreement of performing gender that Butler mentions.[309] Brown, for example, downplays the real consequences of such body ideals by describing them as typical for the fantasy world.[310] However, even by playing a masculine performance, the cool girl will continue to repeat the gender performance as she stays the gender of desire. Likewise, even if Lang's model has a more realistic figure, the technique of layering reconstructs a seductive cool girl. Helpful for understanding this seduction without

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[305] Vinken, *Fashion Zeitgeist*, 137.
[306] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* 77.
[307] Herbst, "Lara's Mission," 22.
[308] Ibid., 26–27.
[309] Butler, "Performative Acts," 217.
[310] Brown, "Gender, Sexuality, and Toughness," 63.

showing skin, is Entwistle with her analysis about underwear. She describes the fetishism of the almost naked body. Similar to Entwistle's analysis but also acknowledged by Vinken's conclusion about the second skin in Lang's clothing, is that the woman plays with hidden skin to seduce the man with the allurement to find out what is underneath.[311] This is particularly striking with the almost glance at the model's right breast due to the missing part of the top pulled over it. However, what Lang also establishes with his look is a seductive cool girl who does not need to show her skin to be considered sexy.

Lang takes the cool girl from the fictional figure Lara Croft into the real world. The cut-outs on the trousers could provide the wearer with the feeling to be part of the adventurous life of Lara Croft whereby running through the woods, jumping around and doing acrobatic moves can be the reasons for ripped trousers. Similar to the missing fabric in the previous looks, the cracks in the trousers simulate wounds and lacerations from a fight. In addition, the cuts of the clothing disturb the peacefulness of the white good girl style. The rebellion in this design is the break with the audience's expectations of the good, non-fighting girl in white walking down the runway.

Helmut Lang's minimalist fashion lives from its details.[312] While looking at a photo of the fashion piece, it is unclear which part belongs to who, how many pieces the model wears and if there are other details hidden. Helmut Lang's love for details shows his craftsmanship and that his clothes are not that simple as they appear at the first glance. With Lang's endless details in his designs, he turns the plain clothing from Lara into fashion. The coolness in the brand Helmut Lang is evident in his clever details. The paying attention to details is rebellious to the pompous side of fashion.[313]

Look 19

At first sight, the 19th look of the spring 2004 collection looks like a simple tight-fitting black dress. But looking at the dress more closely, the dress changes into a top and a skirt. The black tank top has an overhanging black piece that flows down to the chest. When looking at the skirt in detail, it shimmers in dark purple. Two long straps from the bottom of the skirt are stitched on the waistband which has the effect of lifting the skirt. Further, the outfit is composed of a dark blue belt. Like the male model from look seven, the model carries a bandage around her

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[311] Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 184; Vinken, *Fashion Zeitgeist*, 137.
[312] Walker, *Less Is More*, 116.
[313] Laver, *Costume and Fashion, 278.*

right hand. However, this time, the band is black. The female model has black hair which is, like the other models before, combed back. Like all models, she has a natural look on her face without much visible make-up.

A similar look to look 19 can be seen in *Fight Club* by Marla when she first meets the narrator. Marla is the permanently smoking, bad girl with whom the narrator falls in love. Marla is a cool girl because she is an outsider from society which drives her to be part of the self-help groups to find comfort. Unlike the narrator, she barely shows emotions during the sessions in the group which makes her even cooler. However, in the movie, Marla is a featured part and does not play a role in the male rebellion from Tyler. Tyler even calls her a threat at the end of the movie.[314] This is because the consumer culture that Tyler wants to fight against is part of the women's world.[315] The performativity of the cool girl has its borders when the cool girl wants to be part of the actions of the man. Since coolness is a man's domain, a cool girl taking on this profession needs to make sure to not challenge the man, similar to the movement of power dressing.[316] Lang contributes to this power dressing due to on the one hand, with a dress, the Marla imitator from Helmut Lang can be identified as a woman. On the other hand, the little make-up, rare embellishment and the bandage around her hand (coming from a fight?) make her one of the guys. It is this repetition of the strict rules on how to look to conform to someone's gender that makes the concept of gender appear naturally.[317]

In the look 19, Lang could possibly have been inspired by Marla's outfit. His version is more body-toned and shorter. The pulling up of the skirt can sexualise the outfit similar to the ones from Lara Croft who wears shorts and tight tank tops accentuating her body. As noted in chapter two, Lara's clothing is inappropriate for her work.[318] Especially for the jungle where some scenes of *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* take place, the little fabric is not the smartest clothing due to many surrounding poisonous animals. For a fight, which the model indicates by the bandage, a skirt is also not a suitable outfit.

Lang's coolness can be also achieved through aspects other than the imitation from the movies. The pendant fabric can look like a tongue that is directly pointed at the photographer and therefore the viewer. This is a sign of truculence and disrespect towards the observer and can be evaluated as a rebellious act against mainstream society and norms. Overall, the fake 'dress' which transfers into a skirt and a tank top is less plain than it first appears and represents

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[314] *Fight Club,* directed by David Fincher (Fox 2000 Pictures, 1999).
[315] Ta, "Hurt So Good," 273.
[316] Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 172–175.
[317] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 43–44.
[318] Herbst, "Lara's Mission," 37.

Lang's understatement in his designs. The look is the first one in this selection which is black which is often worn by the cool movie characters exemplified by *The Matrix*. Until the look 16 of the spring 2004 collection, all looks are white or off-white. Afterwards, several black looks are showcased. The sorted sequence is almost like the white against the black army which besides the competitiveness enhances the group feeling within the teams to be cool together.

Look 33

The next look of Helmut Lang's spring 2004 collection is a menswear look. From the viewer's perspective, his black hair is laid to the left. He has a short haircut. His arms are visible as he wears a top without sleeves. Also partly visible is the right nipple because of a hole in the tank top. As only parts of the nipple can be seen, the hole is not centralized around it. The tank top's colour is a mixture of forest and shamrock green. Furthermore, the model has black pants on. The fabric is not clearly definable, but it has a similar appearance to the model in look 14. In addition, the outfit contains a belt with a big and silver belt-buckle. The rest of the belt is light brown. On the right side, the model wears a bandage all over the arm. The outfit does not show a clear reference to one particular movie. Therefore, all parts of the outfit are analysed separately in their relationship to the movies.

Similar to *Fight Club*, a man can also reveal his legs or in Lang's style his chest. Tyler turns the cliché of the seductive woman around and is the one revealing little pieces of his skin by wearing short-cut tops, a bathrobe showing his naked legs or the fishnet top. Tyler exposes his skin where normally no man would.[319] In addition to that, the bright colour of Lang's version could be a reflection of the courage to look 'ugly' like Tyler as he dons striking colours in an otherwise achromatic world which is represented by the narrator. The model can wear and embody Tyler's self-confidence. However, the tank top does not have a typical Tyler printed pattern, which makes the green tank top in look 33 closer to Jim's red leather jacket in *Rebel Without a Cause*. For Jim, it works as a colourful highlight while for Tyler, his red leather jacket is more like another layer on his already colourful outfit. Lang, who is a minimalist also in his use of colour, might have had the same intention as Jim with this outfit. Again, Helmut Lang reinvented the colour of the costume and instead of the dangerous red, he chose green

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[319] Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 161–162.

which has a calmer aura as being associated with the colour of safety.[320] Overall, the tank top appears like a mixture of both movies.

The twist in Lang's runway work is that he succeeds to sexualise the man. In that sense, the look from Helmut Lang is no parody of female or middle-class clothing as in *Fight Club* but the possibility to be an object of desire with menswear. Supplementary, it enables the possibility of identification with another group, for example, how women feel when they are reduced to their sexuality. The look can be a political critique on the, on the one hand, sexualisation of the female breast as women have to cover their breasts from the men's eyes and on the other hand, on the anxiety of the maternal and fertile body.[321] According to Herbst, this is also the reason why Lara Croft with her unrealistic, non-human figure is the symbol of infertility.[322] As the nipple is sensitive, the model shows its weak side with his outfit – similar to Jim in *Rebel Without a Cause*. The difference is that while Jim cries and unmasks his inner self, the model makes his body vulnerable through the open presentation of his naked nipple. This vulnerability of the male model is only achieved through an external stimulus – the designer Helmut Lang. As Butler states, the binary framework of gender is fictional and is challenged as soon as examples break out of the prison.[323] Lang constructs a world where also the man can be the sexy and emotional gender. In that way, the sexiness in Lang's clothing, in contrast to *Fight Club*, is not a parody of capitalism but a critique on gender performativity. However, it must be noted that there is no female model with the same look showing her nipple to underline that nipples are something natural. Therefore, the breaking of the stereotypes of coolness and its gender performativity in this outfit is restricted to only one cisgender.

Another similarity to the coolness from movies is the less attention-grabbing ordinary black pants. It evokes associations with the suit pants from *Pulp Fiction*. Although the material cannot be unequivocally labelled, the loose fit is similar to Jules and Vincent's partner look. Wearing the outfit of the cool heroes, the model can take place in the fantasy world of being a criminal without having the scary everyday risk of dying through violence. Another highlight in this cool outfit is the belt or more specifically the belt buckle. Most of the cool heroes wear a belt for practical reasons, probably most visible in *The Matrix* uniform. Cool fashion must be part of the durability that a cool fight or other cool activities bring with it. Jumping in the Matrix

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[320] Stijn V. Mentzel, Linda Schücker, Nobert Hagemann and Bernd Strauss, "Emotionality of Colors: An Implicit Link between Red and Dominance," *Frontiers in Psychology* 8, no. 317 (March 06, 2017): 1, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00317.
[321] Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 52; Entwistle and Wilson, *Body Dressing*, 244.
[322] Herbst, "Lara's Mission," 32–33.
[323] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 140.

from one building to another, as Neo has to do during his training session before actually fighting against the machines, means to not be trapped in the worry to get hindered by his clothing. Contrariwise, it is about freeing the mind as the leader of the human resistance movement says to Neo.[324] In a nutshell, this look 33 is the first one that cannot be clearly defined as a reference to only a single movie.

It is John Seabrook who concludes Helmut Lang's designs as intelligently questioning basic clothing.[325] But regarding coolness, at least in Lang's outfit in look 33, it is more about the courage to get ugly by staying sleek. It is a subtle ugliness in basic and casual pieces with little details which can also mean to alienate an outfit with cut-outs. Lang created pieces for the everyday life that work for many occasions which is important as a cool person. In addition, he created pieces to differentiate from what 'the good taste of the bourgeois' would wear.[326]

Look 35

Look 35 is presented by a female model who has black hair which is laid to the left like the models before. The outfit consists of a long sand-coloured top that ends at the hips of the model and a green tulle dress underneath which is longer and reaches to the middle of the thighs. The green of the dress has the same colour as the green top in look 33. The top misses a thin strap that falls to the side. This missing strap, which narrows the top on the right side, causes some tulle to come out on the right breast area of the model. Even more, the tulle oozes out on the sides of the tank top where it has rips. The tulle covers the right shoulder while on the left shoulder only the strap of the tank top can be discovered. Another detail that appears when looking at other photos of the outfit is that the tulle glimmers.[327]

The style implies a link to the punk and postpunk subculture. A reference to Susan or her personification Madonna in *Desperately Seeking Susan* can be part of this influence. The looks from Madonna in the movie are often a mix of different materials and a dab of colour. The unconventional material is part of the punk and postpunk identity, namely the do-it-yourself aesthetic.[328] In addition, Susan merges masculine elements like boxer shorts with feminine garter belts. Susan also wears a corset which is read as feminine.[329] Overall, Madonna

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[324] Wachowski and Wachowski. *The Matrix*, 53:55–54:18.
[325] Seabrook, "The Invisible Designer."
[326] Harris, "Coolness," 46.
[327] ImaxTree, "Helmut Lang at Paris Fashion Week Spring 2004," Livingly, accessed May 18, 2021, https://www.livingly.com/runway/Paris+Fashion+Week+Spring+2004/Helmut+Lang/D54Fz-8vjRj.
[328] Harriman and Bontje, *Some Wear Leather*, 82.
[329] Entwistle and Wilson, *Body Dressing,* 41.

outside of the movie is a rebel in her sexually explicit clothing and attitude by supporting woman's liberation as well as homosexual awareness.[330] "Gender is always a doing, […]" as Butler argues.[331] So breaking these rules liberates the individuum behind the gender role. It is Georges-Claude Guilbert mentions androgyne features as a classical cool stardom characteristic.[332] However, as a characteristic of coolness, androgyny has been overlooked in the literature. It can be observed in various other superstars like David Bowie and Boy George. Even with her sometimes tomboy looks, Madonna exposed her bare skin often in public which gave her, according to her critics, the reputation of a slut.[333] With Madonna and Susan, the cool girl is not only a masculine copy of the cool guy. Susan in the movie uses pieces from both identities and finds her way. Using cross-gender elements is a typical aesthetic in postpunk.[334] Helmut Lang adds his touch in the spring 2004 look by subtracting the accessories that are typical for the punk aesthetic and can also be seen in Susan's style. What is so cool about this look is his minimalist interpretation of the maximalist punk aesthetic. This makes the wearer of the outfit not clearly identifiable for an observer. Is the person wearing it part of the punk subculture? Is she a young rebel or is she an elegant woman wearing a dress? The look can be understood as one example of how Lang liberates women from stereotypes. A woman can be more than a punk girl or a housewife. She can be both. Helmut Lang illustrates these facets in this outfit: being cool, alternative, sexy, masculine and feminine. How the wearer will feel is depending on the body and the experiences it has made.[335] However, it must be noted that filled with tulle, the right breast looks bigger than it is normally is which has similarities to the unnatural breasts of Lara Croft in the first video games. Hence, it needs to be questioned if Helmut Lang criticizes the objectivization of women or if he reproduces it.

More specifically, tulle is part of the costume that Roberta has to wear during an assistant job at a magic club where Susan used to go often. Similar to Roberta in the movie, the model can finally be like Susan or the real-life Madonna. All it takes is a piece of her and the attitude will come by itself. Lang's story is similar to the story of the movie with Roberta turning into Susan and it all started with buying her jacket. At least in the model's head, similar to wearing a costume, she can leave the bourgeois life behind and become a cool girl.

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[330] Guilbert, *Madonna as Postmodern Myth,* 2, 99.
[331] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 33.
[332] Guilbert, *Madonna as Postmodern Myth,* 10.
[333] Ibid., 100–101.
[334] Harriman and Bontje, *Some Wear Leather*, 56, 85.
[335] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 69.

Regarding Lang's design approach, if colours are used in his designs, they are the outstanding details as reflected in the previous look. Little colours are also typical for a cool movie character. Colours would be too joyful and less cold.[336] For a cool person, it appears to be more about the cut and the functionality of a garment than embellishing an outfit with lots of accessories. The clothing must endure fights and endless travelling. Regarding outfit 35, the material of the dress is tulle which is extraordinary. As mentioned before, Lang is known for the use of unusual material in his clothing.[337] The spirit of experimentation or rebellion within the choice of material in fashion is remarked in this outfit. Another important example to mention is look 26 where the model wears two tops in two different shades of purple. The tops have an attached plastic hem in the complementary colour yellow. Moreover, it looks like the model wears a cardigan without sleeves and a mini skirt with the same neon yellow plastic-like material which adds up to a melted mass. To use plastic as a material in fashion is a rebellion. Plastic is a cheap and robust material mostly utilized in an industrial environment. It can endure multiple years and, if thick enough, can survive diverse attacks from the outside.[338] This material underlines the myth of coolness as to be cool, the person needs to be robust and strong. Contrariwise, tulle does not match coolness in the same way as plastic because it is a light and transparent fabric.[339] It represents more the soft side of coolness as portrayed in Jim's emotional outbreaks in *Rebel Without a Cause*. A more direct connection to the myth of coolness is that tulle can create aloofness as exemplified by Brown with the curtain of smoke coming from cigarettes.[340] An outsider is allowed to get close to the body because of the visibility of the skin through tulle. The feeling of aloofness could come from the fact that even if another person comes very close to the body, the ability to touch the skin is impossible with the intermediate tulle. Therefore, an outsider can never really touch the unreachable cool person. In general, transparency or showing skin in unconventional ways is a leitmotiv in Helmut Lang's design as mentioned by Vinken.[341]

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[336] Hollander, *Sex & Suits,* 68.

[337] Walker, *Less Is More,* 115–116.

[338] "Types of Plastics," eMachineShop, accessed March 9, 2021, https://www.emachineshop.com/properties-of-plastic/.

[339] Kristene Paul, "3 Ideal Properties of Tulle Netting That Makes It Ideal for Décor & Craft Projects," *Medium*, August 28, 2018, https://medium.com/@pkristene/3-ideal-properties-of-tulle-netting-that-makes-it-ideal-for-décor-craft-projects-642ac577d6b2.

[340] Brown, *Glamour in Six* Dimensions, 2.

[341] Vinken, *Fashion Zeitgeist*, 136.

Look 53

The last look to be described is also one of the last styles of the spring 2004 collection. The male model wears a black leather vest. The revers are visible and fixed with buttons. The right side of the waistcoat is decorated with something that appears like many printed buttons. On closer inspection, the buttons look like pressed bottle caps. In addition, with this closer look, silver plastic films on the jacket can be discovered. The vest has two additional, unsymmetrical side pockets with a zipper. The zip to close the jacket is not only sewn on vertically but makes an arc and goes back down. Underneath the model wears a black, short tank top. Due to the shortness of the top and the open west, the model's belly button is visible. Another interesting aspect of this outfit is that a sleeve on the right side of the arm can be discovered. It is unclear if it belongs to the tank top and turns it into a T-shirt or if it is an attached part on the leather vest. The sleeve is covered with white threads and reminds of a spider web. The rest of the outfit consists of black pants.

At the first glance, the outfit easily creates a connection to the classical rebel outfit, especially the leather jacket from the movies like *The Wild One*, *Rebel Without a Cause* and *Fight Club*. As this is one of the last presented outfits, it highlights what the collection was about: coolness. Although the leather jacket is an object symbolizing the masculine stereotype, mediated by *The Wild One,* Helmut Lang defuses the testosterone. Firstly, the spider web elements as part of the outfit could provide the experience for the wearer to participate in *Lara Croft*'s adventures in the jungle. Wearing the clothes of Helmut Lang can give the wearer the feeling of being on an adventure without actually going into the jungle with dangerous animals. Secondly, the model's tank top is too short to hide the whole upper body, and the model demonstrates his belly button to the camera. Similar are some looks from Lara Croft in the video games. Further, during a red-carpet appearance for the *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* movie, Angelina Jolie wears a tank top that displays parts of her waist.[342] In contrast to Jolie, the belly of the male model is hairy since embracing body hair is a masculine aesthetic.[343] Therefore, as coolness is connoted as masculine, the feminine reference from Lara Croft transforms look 53 into a genderfluid outfit. The wearer's gender identity can be enlarged with other identities. Since humans establish their ideas of the world through their bodies, as Merleau-Ponty

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[342] "Angelina Jolie at an Event for Lara Croft: Tomb Raider (2001)," Photo Gallery, IMBb, accessed May 6, 2021, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0146316/mediaviewer/rm2774435329/.
[343] Toerien and Wilkinson, "Gender and Body Hair," 337.

describes, this implicates, conversely, that further direct experiences with previously unfamiliar objects can open new perspectives.[344]

Even if the crop top catches attention, at the first view, the biker leather jacket is the eye-catching piece of look 53 in the spring 2004 collection with its bronze, silver and golden buttons. The individualization of the leather jacket through decoration by several subcultures and their corresponding gangs was introduced in the first chapter. Lang constructs his gang with his unique decoration. The model can be part of Lang's gang but can also arrange his own if others buy the same jacket. With Lang's special adjustments on the right side of the jacket, it is easy to be identified as one group. Thus, the buttons on the leather jacket can be an alternative to the gang's name printed on the back, as is the case with the gang in *The Wild One*. The leather jacket is wearable power due to the association with *The Wild One* but also due to its history from Second World War. Leather as a cool material is durable and as a dead second skin protects the wearer from (motorcycle) accidents.[345] This can awaken the emotion of being unbreakable which can encourage to take more risks. After Merleau-Ponty, it is this mix of placing the model in time and space and engaging with the object in the present that decides the world's perception.[346]

Helmut Lang's coolness in this look is again the use of material. The pressed bottle caps on the jacket remind of the do-it-yourself movement and the story behind the leather jacket gives it a sense of thrift shop clothing. This implements a history into the clothing even if it is new. It integrates the myth of the young rebel without much money into the expensive designer clothes.

Interim Conclusion

This chapter aimed to understand how Helmut Lang implemented the myth of coolness within his fashion brand. Part of Lang's cool myth is his persona and his work before the spring 2004 collection. His background of breaking out of the expectations of his parents, but also how he rebelled against the fashion industry made it easy to transform the myth into his brand. Lang continuously took risks in his work, for example by being the first one showing his runway

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[344] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* 73–74.
[345] CP Slippers, "Leather Qualities."
[346] Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 48–49.

show on the internet.[347] Furthermore, Lang has always separated himself from the older generation like a youth rebel. His new way of interpreting fashion by being a minimalist, bringing street style on the runway but also by bringing items outside of fashion into fashion are a few examples of his rebellion in design. Specifically in his spring 2004 collection, he used design elements like random straps around the inner thighs supporting no function or cut-outs at finished garments to appear rebellious.

Next to the overall coolness, more specifically the third chapter decoded in what way the spring 2004 collection embodies the coolness that is performed by the cisgender movie characters. Lang uses classical elements of coolness which were seen in movies before like the leather jacket, the jeans or the suit and turn them into fashion. The whole collection shows consistency around the topic of coolness and creates an entire wardrobe of coolness. With Lang's clothing, its wearer can embody the desire of being a cool persona subtly.[348] Little details illustrate the connection to the movies. It is Merleau-Ponty who notes

> *"Behaviors create significations that are transcendent in relation to the anatomical structure and yet immanent to the behavior as such, since behavior can be taught and can be understood."*[349]

Therefore, to be cool can also be understood as a learning process. Here, the theory from Merleau-Ponty can be taken a step further as the experience of clothing can awaken certain learned behaviours from the movies. Suddenly, the cool movie character gets real.

Lang challenges several times the cisgender performance from the movies. With his interpretation of the cool myth, he did not simply reproduce the cool girl and the cool guy but challenges the seductive cool girl figure and the nonsexual man. Mostly this happens with revealing skin on unconventional body parts but also in form of additional layers as a second skin.[350] However, he fails to fully interrogate gender performance due to the clearly performed stereotypical body underneath the clothes. Another example of the failure is the menswear look 33 where a male model shows his nipple through a hole in the clothing which is not repeated for a female model. The boundaries before getting punished by society are set and therefore reproduce gender.[351] A female model with a free nipple would be too much of provocation due to the reminder of being a fertile body. Therefore, similar to the cool girl, it ends up as a challenge that misses to question the consequences for the other cisgender.[352] In addition, with

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[347] Soscha, "Seminal Fashion Moments."
[348] Holt, *How Brands Become Icons,* 6.
[349] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* 195.
[350] Vinken, *Fashion Zeitgeist*, 137.
[351] Butler, "Performative Acts," 216.
[352] Wissinger, "Judith Butler," 290.

the imitation of the cool heroes and heroines, it can be even more understood as an act, similar to the example from Butler of the transvestite that is accepted on stage but not in a private sphere.[353] It can be verified what Vinken concluded about Lang that he found new erotic codes by exceeding them but in addition to that, it can be concluded that he never really challenges gender itself.[354] The reproduction of the gender roles strengthens the myth of coolness as it was introduced in the first chapter and does similar to the movies not develop it but copies the performance from the movies. With Helmut Lang's clothes, it is not only the stereotypical male characteristics that are part of the myth of coolness but further, the male body gets part of the myth. This underlines how Helmut Lang can be understood as a designer of coolness because he repeats the concept of coolness that we learned even on the body itself.[355] It further shows that Lang is not really a creator but an imitator of coolness from the movie representations. Since the connection to the movie costumes are significant, it represents how little Helmut Lang contributed himself to the myth by constructing cool clothes in a new way. His contribution was that he was able to transfer a myth from movies including the movies' performance into fashion.

Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis is to examine how the concept of coolness is created and conveyed through Helmut Lang's spring 2004 collection and the relationship between the film representations and Lang's spring 2004 collection. The thesis fulfilled this aim with representation studies as a method to understand the stereotypes of coolness in movies and building up on this, with critical visual analysis to learn about Helmut Lang's cool elements and possible intentions in his spring 2004 collection. To read deeper into coolness in fashion, the concept of coolness from a theoretical perspective following the theoretical framework of Barthes's mythologies, Holt's iconic brands, Merleau-Ponty's embodiment and Butler's gender performativity was constructed. The development of this theoretical framework is central in order to learn how a myth is established, why myths are important for fashion brands and what consequences wearing the myth has.

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[353] Butler, "Performative Acts," 220.
[354] Vinken, *Fashion Zeitgeist*, 137.
[355] Butler, "Performative Acts," 218.

The first chapter identified coolness as a concept. It cultivated the basis for the following chapters by comprehending the myth of coolness, its origin and the relation to fashion brands. This was necessary due to the various possible contexts in which coolness is applied. The outcome was that there are certain characteristics, objects and personalities that are comprehensively defined as cool. Being a young rebel, detached from emotions, violent, self-confident, taking risks and drugs, neglecting life, having no responsibility, wearing sunglasses to cover emotions and wearing leather, are all considered cool qualities.[356] An important outcome was the distinction between the cool guy and the cool girl. A cool girl internalizes the above-mentioned concept but likewise shall follow certain beauty standards.[357] To get to the bottom of what a myth is and what its consequences are, the first chapter relied on Barthes's perspective on mythology. Further, a myth can be capitalised by brands. This is because brands apply myths to their brand identity to enhance their brand and product value for the customer.[358] In addition, after Holt, it is often in pop culture where myths are constructed which then can be adopted by fashion brands.[359] In particular, Belk, Tian, and Paavola indicated that the myth of coolness is influenced by movies and the actors in it but never really developed how.[360]

The outcomes from the first chapter flowed into the second chapter, to dive deeper into how movies in the cultural context that could have affected Helmut Lang illustrate coolness. The second chapter looked at how a cool persona is portrayed in the movie in his or her character traits and how do the clothes underline the myth. As part of the cool persona, it was further required to have a look at the actor or the actress behind the curtain who played the cool character. Eight movies, namely *The Wild One* from 1953, *Rebel Without a Cause* from 1955, *Desperately Seeking Susan* from 1985, *Pulp Fiction* from 1994, *The Matrix* from 1999, *Fight Club* from 1999 and *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* from 2001 were selected who are identified as cool by the mainstream.[361] Analysing what parts of the myth were reproduced but further what aspects were developed into a new direction, the chapter resulted in understanding how and if the myth of coolness has changed. The outcome of this chapter was that the myth of coolness acquired in the first chapter is sustained in other cultural contexts. This revealed in a more

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[356] Belk, Tian, and Paavola, "Consuming Cool," 196–197; Harris, "Coolness," 43–44; Brown, "Gender, Sexuality, and Toughness," 54.
[357] Brown, "Gender, Sexuality, and Toughness," 63.
[358] Holt, *How Brands Become Icons,* 10.
[359] Ibid., 60.
[360] Belk, Tian, and Paavola, "Consuming Cool," 196.
[361] Bulson, "Coolest Movie Characters."

practical sense how myths survive over time.[362] In addition, the clothing supports the typical characteristics of the myth of coolness. Despite the 'original' cool uniform from *The Wild One* which consists of a leather jacket, jeans and a white T-shirt, the other analysed movies find different ways to express coolness through costumes.

The third and last chapter focused on the brand Helmut Lang and how he transferred coolness into his brand. His rebellious persona as the star of the brand as well as his new way of designing contributed to the brand's myth. After providing an overview, the analysis relied on the spring 2004 collection to read Lang's coolness in depth. With the results from the first and second chapter, it was looked at how Lang embodied the coolness from the movie characters. The findings revealed many similarities between the costumes from the movies and Helmut Lang's spring 2004 collection. In addition, the analysis assessed how he added his own cool touch into it. The theoretical perspectives of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and Holt's iconic brands led to a better understanding of how a model can embody coolness as he or she through the clothing might feel closer to the myth and can imitate coolness as learned from the movies.[363] Therefore, our associations with the movies decide our perception of the fashion item through and as part of our body. Nevertheless, following Butler, the third chapter aimed to acknowledge different bodies from both cisgenders.[364] Hence, the analysis sought how gender is performed, how stereotypes are reconstructed and how and if these are broken by Lang's clothing. Lang achieved to liberate the man from the burden of the desexualised cisgender. However, he misses to challenge the other cisgender and reproduces the ideal male body type. So instead of challenging the myth, he reproduces the myth of coolness as a masculine performance and transfers it into the gendered body. However, this reproduction, next to the movie imitations, probably made him easily recognizable as the designer of coolness.

This thesis reflects how movies can affect designers in their entire brand identity. At the same time, the thesis implicates how exactly movies influence a myth. With Barthes's mythologies the thesis could clarify how a vague concept like coolness is awakened through its picturization. Myths repeat themselves to stay relevant and so does coolness.[365] However, this further led to Holt who explains why stars like James Dean come into mind when thinking about coolness and how brands take advantage of this. It is the myths from movies that further

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[362] Barthes, *Mythologies*, 132.
[363] Holt, *How Brands Become Icons*, 2; Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* 368.
[364] Butler, "Performative Acts," 221.
[365] Barthes, *Mythologies*, 132.

inspire fashion brands.[366] But it is not only how the person acts or who the actor or actress is but also the costumes have an impact on the fashion that people wear. Specifically for coolness, the connection to fashion brands was missing. Fashion brands and myths are underrepresented in fashion studies. To consider fashion as a phenomenon, treating fashion as a first-person but also a social embodied experience is essential. This unlocked that learning from others is an important aspect of Merleau-Ponty's embodiment and explains why people would wear fashion close to their heroes and heroines.[367] The distinction between the cool guy and the cool girl with Butler's gender performativity revealed that even a challenge of gender performance can reproduce the same stereotypes.[368] It is with this framework that coolness was made measurable as a concept through time and made it possible for the used method of critical visual analysis to understand the embodiment of clothing. In addition, it represented how dependent Lang was in his coolness from the movie costumes. Even if the thesis just provides an interpretation of Helmut Lang and the relationship of his designs to films, the similarities are significant. Moreover, it fills the gap to look deeper into Helmut Lang's designs. The outcome of this thesis provides one example of how the myth of coolness can be implemented into a fashion brand. This implementation has real consequences which was exemplified on gender. This thesis further provides a glimpse of how movies can influence how we experience clothing.

For further investigation, long-term studies on how the myth of coolness develops within a brand and if it can be as sustainable as seen in the movies should be regarded. This also implies doing a study on movies and fashion of a more recent topic. Next to coolness, the investigation on other myths coming from movies and how they are translated into fashion brands can be extended. The multiple possibilities of the study on movie myths in fashion brands represent its huge potential for future research.

Overall, coming back to the beginning of the thesis, we want to be like our heroes and heroines from the movies. Therefore, we dress like Lara Croft or Vincent Vega for a costume party or for a week during carnival. Others may not directly identify the impersonated character, but they will understand where to categorise the guy in the leather jacket or the person in the suit with shoulder-long hair. Thus, if we can decide to be someone else for a day, we better dress to be mistaken for someone cool. It is Helmut Lang who helps us in transforming into the cool person we want to be. We can dress like a cool person by not wearing a costume but everyday fashion. We can impersonate this cool persona every day. We can dress

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[366] Holt, *How Brands Become Icons*, 59.
[367] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 369–370.
[368] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 176.

like Vincent Vega and be the bad guy through Helmut Lang. Coming back to the cover picture and the introduction, it looks like even Helmut Lang himself cannot resist copying Vincent from *Pulp Fiction*.

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