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Swiss Friends of Oxford University – Grant Report

Thanks to the generous support of SFOU I was able to travel to Berlin to research for my Bachelors thesis, where I stayed for three weeks to visit archives, museums, and conducting oral history interviews on the topic 'Fashion History in Socialist East Germany, 1970-1989'.

My goal was to trace and contrast both the 'official' state-organised fashion industry and the 'alternative' underground scene. Visiting the German State Archives allowed me to see the records of the DDR Fashion Institute – a collective of designers and others that were tasked to develop a clothing line appropriate for socialist East Germany. It was fascinating to read their reports of conferences and fairs they attended abroad (in Soviet satellite states and especially Paris), learn about the fashion shows that were compulsory for everyone working in the clothing industry to attend and visit the film archive to see the fashion films by Klaus Ehrlich that were produced twice a year to promote the new designs. Having access to the *Sibylle* Magazines and seeing the clothes, drawings, and photographs added an important visual understanding.

At the same time, I met and interviewed many people involved in the East German fashion industry in the 1970s and 1980s. I conducted oral history interviews with the designers who owned the first private fashion boutique in Berlin, who told me about her experience in the fashion industry, how she and her store were surveilled by the Stasi and how she developed new designs with materials she obtained illegally. I also interviewed members of the 1980s punk youth group ccd (chic, charmant & dauerhaft) that organised underground fashion shows with their outrageous designs and making their money on the black market. These interviews were incredibly valuable as they illustrate a more varied, creative culture than the official documents suggest. As such, being in Berlin was immensely helpful to my study. The only way to find the participants for the study was through personal connections and this much more colourful and subversive aspect of the fashion industry would not have been accessible from behind the screen.

These few weeks contributed a great deal to my understanding of the topic and sensitised me much more to the people, dynamics, and the 'Zeitgeist' of the time. I would like to thank SFOU for their support in making this research possible. The experience has been incredibly insightful and will help me both with my Bachelors thesis and my further academic study.

Kind regards,
Anja Segmüller

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