

Season 1, Episode 17: Athleisure x Optimization

SPEAKERS

Marcelle Kosman, Hannah McGregor, Anne Helen Petersen

[Material Girls Theme plays: “Shopping Mall” by Jay Arner and Jessica Delisle]

Hannah McGregor 0:30

Hello, and welcome to Material Girls, a pop culture podcast that uses critical theory to understand the zeitgeist. I’m Hannah McGregor,

Marcelle Kosman 0:38

And I’m Marcelle Kosman. And this week, we have an extremely fancy guest. Anne Helen Petersen, pronouns she/her, is a writer and journalist and recovering academic. She writes a fabulous newsletter called Culture Study and is the host of a brand new podcast of the same name. She’s also the author of four books, most recently *Out of the Office: The Big Problem and Bigger Promise of Working From Home* (co-written with Charlie Warzel) and *Can’t Even: How Millennials Became the Burnout Generation*. Welcome, Anne!

Anne Helen Petersen 1:15

It is an absolute pleasure to be here.

Marcelle Kosman 1:17

Thank you so much.

Hannah McGregor 1:19

What a delight. So we’re having a larger conversation today about athleisure, which I’m very excited about because I live in Vancouver, which is the city that is sponsored by athleisure.

Anne Helen Petersen 1:31

And also I can look out my window and see you because I’m right over the border. So yeah, I’m waving to you.

Hannah McGregor 1:36

Can you?

Anne Helen Petersen 1:37

Lummi Island; I can see Canada, Canadian Rockies.

Hannah McGregor 1:41

Incredible.

Marcelle Kosman 1:42

Look at you two.

Anne Helen Petersen 1:43

Yeah, but also I'm wearing—most days—today, I am not wearing athleisure. Most days, I am wearing athleisure.

Hannah McGregor 1:48

Just head to toe athleisure. Well, speaking of what we're wearing today, I thought maybe we could start off by talking about what we're wearing, and whether, to steal one of your popular phrases Anne, whether any of our outfits are rich texts. **[Anne laughs]**

Anne Helen Petersen 2:03

Okay, so I had a thing that I had to appear on camera and be professional earlier today. So I am wearing mascara. My mom was over earlier today and she was like, "Why do your eyelashes look weird?" I was like, "Mom! Shut up!" **[Hannah laughs]** So I'm wearing that, and then also I am wearing my big splurge sweater of the year. Every year, I get one nice, new sweater. And it's from Saison, which has my number. Saison is a French sweater company that is always like, "Oh, don't you want to be a very fashionable French lady who wears sweaters that last until they're 80?" You're like, "Yes, that's me. That's me. That is who I am. Please let me buy one of your sweaters."

And the good news is that I have actually worn it probably twice a week ever since buying it, so I love it. But it was sort of ruined for me after I did a

podcast with Amanda Mull about sweaters and why clothes are so crappy. And I was like, oh, surely my sweater has no plastic in it, right? My fancy French sweater. And then I went and looked at the tag and there was, of course, some plastic in it. But that's what I'm wearing.

Hannah McGregor 3:15

I mean, I'm dressed in—other than this cotton button down, I am dressed in head to toe plastic. Which is to say I'm wearing leggings and a sports bra and nary a natural fibre to be found between the two of them. I was telling Coach before y'all arrived that, in addition to recording this episode, I'm also recording an episode later today of another one of our shows *Making Worlds*, about Tasmin Muir's Locked Tomb trilogy, which is about necromancers, and so this is my goth athleisure that I have crafted to cross the boundaries between these two aesthetics.

Anne Helen Petersen 3:50

It works.

Hannah McGregor 3:50

And Marcelle?

Marcelle Kosman 3:52

I am wearing a combination of purple athleisure; I'm wearing a cropped purple sweatshirt from the truly evil Gap—

Hannah McGregor 4:03

Ooh.

Anne Helen Petersen 4:04

The truly evil.

Marcelle Kosman 4:05

The truly evil, although maybe this one was a "Gap for Good" purchase, hard to say. **[Anne laughs]** We should definitely do an episode about social-justice-washing.

Hannah McGregor 4:16

Yep.

Marcelle Kosman 4:17

And my purple leggings are from Snag, where I honest to goodness buy the majority of the things that I wear for comfort. Bras, underwear, tights, pantyhose. I hear they're going to come out with jeans soon, and you know what, I will be there.

Hannah McGregor 4:34

Wear the heck out of those.

Marcelle Kosman 4:36

I will be there.

Hannah McGregor 4:37

Thank you, Snag, for dressing me head-to-toe, again, in plastic. But it feels so good.

Marcelle Kosman 4:42

This episode brought to you by Snag.

Hannah McGregor 4:45

And plastic.

[Upbeat musical interlude]

Marcelle Kosman 4:49

Okay Anne, get ready because these segment intros are just for you. We're starting off with "Why this, why now?", when we ask the materialist question: what are or were the historical, ideological, and material conditions for our object of study to become zeitgeisty?

Hannah McGregor 5:09

And of course, today we're talking about the rise of athleisure. And Anne, you suggested this topic, and it's taken me down some delightful research

rabbit holes, mostly about how much I hate Chip Wilson. **[Anne laughs]** But before I double down on my trademark misandry, can you tell us what drew you to talking about athleisure? Why is this a topic that fascinates you?

Anne Helen Petersen 5:32

Oh, I just think the way that we convey our readiness to be casual and exercise and always ready to exercise, all of that is just so fascinating and also not new, right? Casual wear itself has this long lineage that I only know the larger, vague parts of, that I'm so excited for you to teach me about, but I think back on white corded sweaters with V-necks and stuff like that, that rich people would wear to play tennis. Like, that, to me, that's the antecedent. There are these ways that we have performed the ease with which we can do leisure at any moment. But then also how you have to do it in a certain way so as not to suggest that you are unkempt. There's such a line between sweatpants and leggings, and, like, where do joggers come in? And so I think that our current moment, where you have all of these different variations of athleisure, and also the whole entire segment of athleisure that's like, here's the athleisure you wear on a date, here's your formal athleisure. Recreating those categories is all fascinating to me. So yeah.

Hannah McGregor 6:48

100%. There's so much class involved in it. I mean, talking about these histories, I immediately started thinking about the rich horse girl.

Anne Helen Petersen 6:57

Yeah.

Hannah McGregor 6:57

And the long history of wearing jodhpurs in an oversized sweater and that being the fanciest thing you can wear, because it suggests that you own horses.

Anne Helen Petersen 7:05

Right, right.

Hannah McGregor 7:07

And then also the racialized histories of athleisure, right? Like the way that you can wear forms of athleisure in professional environments if they come out of white culture, but hip hop culture has been wearing forms of athleisure for decades, and that is explicitly not allowed in a lot of professional or fancy spaces. It's tied in with a lot of complex histories. So I am going to sketch a little bit of that history for us in this segment.

And the history that I'm going to focus on starts in post-World War Two America, with the sales challenge that textile companies like DuPont were facing as they were trying to create markets for the cool new fabrics that they invented during the war. They were like, "Cool, we've got these really meet new, stretchy, plastic-based textiles. How do we convince people to buy them?" And because women were emerging in the same historical period as both the primary buyers of household goods, and a rapidly-growing demographic for the fashion industry, a lot of the new marketing for these artificial textiles like polyester and spandex, really focused on women, of course. So I read a profoundly entertaining article by Kaori O'Connor about the history of Lycra, which is DuPont's trademarked name for spandex. I also found out that the difference between spandex and lycra is none. **[Marcelle and Anne laugh]** It's just Kleenex and tissue.

Anne Helen Petersen 8:42

Yep.

Hannah McGregor 8:42

Now I know. And the crisis that DuPont was facing about the disappearance of the girdle—

Marcelle Kosman 8:49

Oh no!

Hannah McGregor 8:50

—because that was their big sales point. They were like, "Lycra makes a really comfortable girdle." But then meanwhile, women were like, "Maybe we don't want to wear girdles anymore," and DuPont was like, "Fuck, we

were really counting on you wearing girdles.” **[Marcelle laughs]**

Anne Helen Petersen 9:03

They were like, “Just wait 50 years and we’ll reinvent the girdle.” **[Hannah laughs]**

Hannah McGregor 9:08

We’re gonna call it shapewear! **[Anne and Marcelle laugh]** So, Marcelle, I wonder if you could read a little excerpt from this article for me.

Marcelle Kosman 9:16

Oh, truly, it would be my pleasure. “Having wrestled for more than twenty years with the problems of stress decay, tensile strength, colorfastness, and resistance to degradation by gasses, solvents, and lights; having undertaken extensive market research to establish the existence of a consumer market for lighter girdles; having created Lycra for this market and having spent \$10 million on research and development, DuPont now found that the market for girdles was fast disappearing for reasons that had nothing to do with the technological capabilities of the product, and everything to do with a change in culture that it did not understand.”

Hannah McGregor 10:02

Fabulous. Thank you. So, would either of you like to theorize what was happening in the 60s and 70s that led to a declining girdle market?

Anne Helen Petersen 10:10

Oh, feminism!

Marcelle Kosman 10:10

Was it martians?

Anne Helen Petersen 10:15

Hippies! **[Hannah laughs]** Martians, feminism, hippies, all three, all together Yeah, it was just seismic culture change in the way that we thought about dressing.

Hannah McGregor 10:24

Yeah, 100%. And maybe any theories about what new use of spandex stepped into the void left by girdles?

Marcelle Kosman 10:30

Exercise wear! You know, the like **[hums a tune]**.

Hannah McGregor 10:32

Yeah, yeah, yeah. The rise of aerobic clothing.

Marcelle Kosman 10:36

Aerobics! That's the word I'm looking for.

Hannah McGregor 10:37

The 70s, in particular, we get the emergence of aerobicswear, like, the image of Flashdance aesthetic.

Anne Helen Petersen 10:48

Jane Fonda.

Hannah McGregor 10:49

Yes. Jane Fonda. Exactly. So O'Connor theorizes this shift from girdles to aerobicswear as a shift in the locus of control for women's bodies. So she basically says the girdle represented an external and socially dictated control of women's bodies that restricted movement and your ability to breathe, whereas aerobics, on the other hand, encouraged movement and mobility, and displayed rather than disguising the body. And so it became this internalized mode of disciplining the body, which is that you produce the body that looked good in aerobicswear, rather than disciplining the body via the application of a girdle.

Anne Helen Petersen 11:32

I mean, it's all like Jane Fonda though, too, right? It's like Jane Fonda transitioning from this unruly woman over the course of the 1960s and 70s, and then was like, "Oh, and now I'm gonna marry Ted Turner, and I'm going to do aerobics all the time." Real shift in feminism too.

Hannah McGregor 11:48

100%, and a kind of emergent consumer feminism, which is not a coincidence, because we actively see these corporations figuring out how to reshape political movements via consumerism.

Anne Helen Petersen 12:02

Yeah.

Hannah McGregor 12:03

So we're gonna come back to this relationship between activewear and bodily display and the notion of women's bodily management in the next segment, but for now, let's keep tracking the history.

Marcelle Kosman 12:14

I just want to confirm like athleisure isn't the same—like, what I'm wearing right now is not the same thing as 70s and 80s aerobic exercise clothing, right?

Hannah McGregor 12:26

Yeah, I think there's a really different history and I think there's some key differences. And one of those is the shift from athleticwear being a specialized uniform intended for really specific activities, to what we're seeing now, which is its saturation across women's fashion, across different demographics, across different social contexts. The "leisure" added to the "ath." **[Marcelle laughs]**

Anne Helen Petersen 12:51

Yeah. Right. Because before, it was either sweatpants, stuff that—like, looser fabric, things that were more casual in that capacity. I think that the kaftan was actually the better antecedent for athleisure in the 70s.

Hannah McGregor 13:07

I love that. There was also a moment, I think also in the 70s, where ballet fashion got really big. So that was a moment of crossover from a specialized sport uniform into streetwear for women.

Marcelle Kosman 13:25

Like a big sweatshirt and leggings, as long as you had the slouchy socks.

Anne Helen Petersen 13:31

Right? That's very 80s. And it's like the B.U.M. Equipment sweatshirt. Very aspirational. Or Esprit.

Hannah McGregor 13:38

Oh, my God, Esprit.

Anne Helen Petersen 13:40

[Laughs] You just say that word, women of a certain age will—

Hannah McGregor 13:44

—just have to lie down.

Anne Helen Petersen 13:46

Yeah. [Marcelle laughs]

Hannah McGregor 13:47

But the particular version of athleisure that we were talking about, the contemporary incarnation, the one that's obsessed with bodily discipline and that concept of being always ready to do a sport? That really comes along with the rise of Lululemon.

Marcelle Kosman 14:04

So let's dunk on Chip Wilson, right?

Hannah McGregor 14:06

Yeah, yeah.

Marcelle Kosman 14:07

A little bit?

Hannah McGregor 14:07

Yeah, it's time. It's time. Boy, I hate this guy. You know why I hate Chip

Wilson? I hate Chip Wilson because he is the richest man in Vancouver. He owns the most expensive house in Vancouver and he uses his money to back conservative political candidates. Chip Wilson has actively got a mayor voted in who has campaigned on the promise of more policing. Chip Wilson sucks, but also, he's also super fatphobic. So at least we've got that.

So. Chip Wilson. In 1998, he founded Lululemon, apparently after attending a yoga class and noticing how good women's butts looked in yoga pants. Maybe apocryphal, but that's the story he tells, so, cool! Also, he says that he named it Lululemon because Japanese people struggle with pronouncing the letter L and he thought that was funny.

Marcelle Kosman 15:05

[Sighs] Cool.

Anne Helen Petersen 15:06

Cool guy.

Marcelle Kosman 15:07

What a cool guy.

Hannah McGregor 15:08

Way to go, Chip.

Anne Helen Petersen 15:08

Love this guy.

Hannah McGregor 15:10

Anyway, I have this longest quote from him describing the founding of the company that I think is really illustrative and Anne, I'm wondering if you would mind reading this longest Chip Wilson monologue.

Anne Helen Petersen 15:23

"I came from the world of technical snowboarding apparel where clothes had to function under extreme, life-or-death conditions. And they had to

be flexible enough to use in different settings. When the surf's up or the snow dumps, there's no time to change from street clothes to sports gear and back again. My first company catered to this nascent market. But, like most athletic companies at the time, we didn't pay proper attention to the neglected women's market.

Lululemon was the first company of its kind to focus on a growing market of highly educated, well-travelled, athletic women. We made clothing to be functional first and foremost. And in the functional placement of elements like seams and zippers, we created new and beautiful styles. The clothes could easily go from the gym to the street because the fabrics wicked sweat and didn't stink"—side note, that's not true—"and the styles were fresh and flattering. Our focus on performance pushed us to innovate."

Hannah McGregor 16:18

Thank you. Now tell me, professional close readers of media, what do you make of Chip Wilson's framing of the dawn of Lululemon?

Anne Helen Petersen 16:27

He's just like, so much hubris. He's like, "No one has ever made athletic gear for women before," which is just not true.

Marcelle Kosman 16:34

And the women who wear Lululemon are smart and savvy and cosmopolitan and they travel. They're well-educated.

Anne Helen Petersen 16:41

Well-educated is the real dig, right? It's like, if you're smart, then you want Lululemon. I also, and we can get at this a little bit more, but I think the framing of "we made the clothing to be functional, first and foremost" is so counter to how I now think of Lululemon's style. It makes sense, I think, maybe foundationally, that what they were really thinking of was this crossover utility of being able to still wear the thing that you exercised in and not look ridiculous in a public space.

But I also think that that discounts too how they pushed the market, right, like part of the reason it doesn't feel ridiculous in a public space is through the way that they saturated the market. And also, and he doesn't mention this, used pretty classic merchandising tactics to create a demand for all different colours, like an overconsumption of Lululemon that helped, in turn, make it ubiquitous and created the market for knockoffs as well.

Hannah McGregor 17:44

Yeah. And this emphasis that he has on the idea that they're functional first, and that they are for functional bodies.

Anne Helen Petersen 17:54

Yeah.

Hannah McGregor 17:55

Also reminds us of this really fraught relationship between form and function that we see throughout conversations about athleisure, which is, you know, it is an aesthetic, but it's an aesthetic that is being framed here really explicitly as being first and foremost about function and thus as demonstrating to people something real and true about you and your body.

Anne Helen Petersen 18:20

Yeah. And also, there's a certain type of person that he thinks should be in those clothes, and by—

Marcelle Kosman 18:29

Yeah.

Anne Helen Petersen 18:29

—he doesn't mention it, but that also means that there's a certain type of person, a certain type of body that he doesn't want in those clothes.

Hannah McGregor 18:36

Oh. Oh, Anne, he does mention it in the next quote that I'm gonna give you from him. **[Marcelle laughs]**

Anne Helen Petersen 18:41

Oh, I'm so excited!

Hannah McGregor 18:42

So in the same piece, which was published in *Forbes* in 2018, Wilson distinguishes between athleisure, which he insists Lululemon is not—he says athleisure is non-technical, fast fashion that is just stealing the aesthetics of companies like his—and the term he prefers for his own company's designs is “street technical” or **[Marcelle laughs]** “streetnic.”

Anne Helen Petersen 19:07

“Streetnic.” No.

Hannah McGregor 19:08

“Streetnic” didn't catch on. But that emphasis on the relationship between clothes and the bodies that wear the clothes went from subtext to text, let's say, in 2013; that was the year when a bunch of Lululemon yoga pants were being recalled for being see-through—

Anne Helen Petersen 19:26

Yeah.

Marcelle Kosman 19:27

Mhmm. Mhmm.

Hannah McGregor 19:28

—and he was quoted in an interview as saying that “some women's bodies just don't work” for Lululemon clothes.

Marcelle Kosman 19:37

What a piece of shit. **[Anne laughs]**

Hannah McGregor 19:39

So isn't that fascinating to think about this, like, some women's bodies just don't work for these clothes, which is obviously fatphobia, but it's framed in such a very particular way.

Anne Helen Petersen 19:53

Right. And also that the fault is the body, not the clothes, right? It's a broken body, not a broken piece of clothing.

Hannah McGregor 20:02

Yeah, his garments are perfect for the bodies that they were made for.

Marcelle Kosman 20:05

That's right.

Hannah McGregor 20:06

And they were made for very particular bodies. So, again, we've got this idea that athleisure is displaying a body that is being worked on, and demands a body that is already the product of that work. So it both demonstrates that you are participating in a particular kind of physical—sort of working on your body towards, I'm gonna give away the next section, but towards optimizing it.

Marcelle Kosman 20:31

Oh, that's in the title of this episode! **[Marcelle and Anne laugh]**

Hannah McGregor 20:35

Oh, it's in the title of the episode. And yeah, again, demanding that the body already be optimized in order to justify—in order for the clothes to work on you. I personally think the best theorizer of athleisure and its relationship to bodily expectations is Jia Tolentino, who writes really brilliantly on the subject. And she has this wonderful profile of Outdoor Voices, which is another trendy athleisure company, that she wrote for *The New Yorker*, where she argues that athleisure is perfectly suited to “an era in which, for many women, improving their looks and their lifestyle has become a job they're supposed to regard as fun.”

Anne Helen Petersen 21:11

Yeah, whew.

Hannah McGregor 21:14

Are we all having a great time?

Marcelle Kosman 21:16

Athleisure! So comfortable!

Anne Helen Petersen 21:19

I'm having so much fun right now in these high waisted leggings!

Hannah McGregor 21:23

Oh my god, I love constantly working on my body, it's good. [Anne laugh] She has another longer piece on athleisure in *Trick Mirror* where she talks—it's called "Athleisure, barre and kale: the tyranny of the ideal woman," and Anne, I'm gonna throw this back to you and ask you to read us a little Tolentino excerpt to segue us into our next segment.

Anne Helen Petersen 21:45

"This is how athleisure has carved out the space between exercise apparel and fashion: the former category optimizes your performance, the latter optimizes your appearance, and athleisure does both simultaneously. It is tailor-made for a time when work is rebranded as pleasure so that we will accept more of it—a time when, for women, improving your looks is a job that you're supposed to believe is fun. And the real trick of athleisure is the way it can physically suggest that you were made to do this—that you're the kind of person who thinks that putting in expensive hard work for a high-functioning, maximally attractive consumer existence is about as good a way to pass your time on Earth as there is."

Marcelle Kosman 22:27

Oh, man, I cannot wait to dig into the theory about this, because we got to talk about optimization. We just gotta.

Hannah McGregor 22:35

You know what, Marcelle? We're gonna.

[Upbeat musical interlude]

Hannah McGregor 22:44

It's another segment. This one is called the "the theory we need" and it's the segment where we introduce some critical theory to help make sense of our topic. Now, we're not going to be focusing on a particular theorist today, but rather on a theoretical concept in this segment, but some of you are going to detect a heavy sprinkle of Foucault underpinning a lot of what we're going to be saying about practices of disciplining the body. And if that's you, just know that you're right and I'm very proud of you.

Marcelle Kosman 23:13

Hannah?

Hannah McGregor 23:14

Mhmm?

Marcelle Kosman 23:14

Are you proud of me?

Hannah McGregor 23:15

I'm especially proud of you.

Marcelle Kosman 23:17

Thank you.

Hannah McGregor 23:18

And I would be very proud of both of you, if you told me a bit about your understanding of optimization. **[Anne gives a heavy sigh; Marcelle laughs]** Anne, that sigh spoke volumes.

Anne Helen Petersen 23:31

Yeah, I mean, I think that for me, it all is part of this—I mean, if we're thinking in Foucauldian terms, this self-surveillance, like, you have turned the gaze of capitalism on yourself to try to make yourself into a more productive body and always, and not in the service of happiness or fulfillment, it's more in the service of "how can I wring more labour out of myself?" And so everything leads back to "how do I make myself a more

producing body within this scheme of capitalism?” So even something like exercise is primarily framed as a means of regimenting your body so as to be a better citizen within capitalism. So, the example I always think of is, you should meditate not to find inner peace or equilibrium or explore the self, but so that you can work more efficiently, right? That is optimization culture in a nutshell to me.

Hannah McGregor 24:35

Yeah.

Marcelle Kosman 24:36

That's perfect.

Hannah McGregor 24:37

I'm currently reading Jenny Odell's second book.

Anne Helen Petersen 24:40

Saving Time.

Hannah McGregor 24:42

Yeah. And she talks about these 19th-century work optimization manuals that are like, “When you are taking the train to work in the morning, do not read or look out the window because that uses up valuable brain function time. Instead, stare into the middle distance, which is functionally the same as sleep.”

Anne Helen Petersen 25:04

But that's so funny because it's actually a counter understanding to, I think, how we think about optimization culture now, because then they were trying to preserve themselves for the unique period of time that was dedicated to work. And now, because work has spread into every corner of our lives, you must always be multitasking. So while you're on the train, you absolutely have to be listening to a podcast and using your brain capacity. But then when you get to work, which lasts all day, you must also be optimizing yourself to run at full capacity then too with all of your different gadgets and email hacks and all that sort of thing.

Hannah McGregor 25:41

Yeah, and the best thing you can do to be maximally optimized is to wake up at 5 AM and do a two-hour workout before you get ready for work, because that will create a more optimized body.

Anne Helen Petersen 25:50

Absolutely.

Marcelle Kosman 25:51

This is exhausting. Just this conversation is making me so tired. **[Anne and Hannah laugh]** And I would like to go and take a nap.

Hannah McGregor 25:59

No time, Marcelle, you have labour to do.

Marcelle Kosman 26:01

No, my body does not labour. **[Everyone laughs]**

Hannah McGregor 26:05

So, Tolentino, in the same piece about athleisure, links optimization back to 19th-century economic theory. And she quotes William Stanley Jevons, author of *The Theory of Political Economy*, who describes optimization as the drive “to satisfy our wants to the utmost with the least effort—to procure the greatest amount of what is desirable at the expense of the least that is undesirable— in other words, to maximize pleasure.”

Marcelle Kosman 26:39

I don't know about this maximizing pleasure business, based on what the two of you have been just have been describing. It sounds like it's an economic term that is being abused, and I mean, economics is already a form of abuse, but it's being misapplied to individuals.

Hannah McGregor 26:55

Yeah, yeah, for sure. It's taking an idea about optimizing the way society runs so that we can do the least possible labour and have the greatest possible amount of pleasure, to instead relocating the locus of

optimization to the individual.

Anne Helen Petersen 27:10

Well, and I think it's also crucial for us to understand that in the 19th century, there was this idea that leisure mattered, right? That you could still preserve leisure and that people had a right to leisure. And a lot of this intersected with the labour movements, which understood leisure as part— so the idea, especially amongst more liberal economists, that “as we can get better and better at things, then we can work less and less,” transformed into “as we get better and better at things, then we could work more.”

Marcelle Kosman 27:42

And we can do more.

Hannah McGregor 27:43

You could be always working.

Anne Helen Petersen 27:44

You can always work!

Marcelle Kosman 27:46

And if you do what you love, then you never work a day in your life, and so you'll want to.

Anne Helen Petersen 27:51

You'll always be working and never resting. **[Hannah laughs]** And always think of any leisure activity as bad and wrong in some way.

Marcelle Kosman 27:59

A waste of time!

Hannah McGregor 28:00

100%. Unless it's productive.

Anne Helen Petersen 28:02

That was academia that taught me that, but I'm sure other forces taught me it as well.

Hannah McGregor 28:06

Man, the way academia breaks your brain. My supervisor once told me that hobbies were a sign of weakness of mind. **[Marcelle laughs]**

Anne Helen Petersen 28:14

We had a phrase, my best friend and I, and was like, "Everything that is bad is good. And everything that is good is bad." So like, if you're doing something you like, it's bad; you should be working more, right? And vice-versa.

Hannah McGregor 28:26

That's how you know, because if you listen to what your animal body enjoys, that's a sign you're not an intellectual. No pleasure for any of us. So I want to incorporate another perspective here, just because I don't want us to have a totally one-dimensional portrait of the history of optimization. So I found an interesting article by these two sociologists, Daniel Nehring and Anja Röcke, who traced some alternate histories of optimization, particularly self-optimization. And they note that the terms used become much more widespread in the mid-1950s with the invention of mathematical programming—don't ask me what that is, I didn't look it up, I have no way to answer any of your questions.

Anne Helen Petersen 29:10

I think it's just programming. It's just a program—it's not like those little cards, like, you're not using the cards to program your computer.

Hannah McGregor 29:18

Ohhh yeah, yeah, yeah. The movement away from the cards. And then the discourse of optimization increases even further, "in relation to cybernetic ideas of self-regulating and self-controlling systems." So again, we're talking here about systems rather than individuals, economics, in one case, and computer systems in the other.

So again, these earlier histories of optimization are thinking about us as social beings who are part of systems that relate to each other, and that is pretty fundamentally divorced from what neoliberalism does to the concept of optimization. So, arguably, optimization is what we get when we take self-improvement and throw it into a blender with tech culture and neoliberalism. And Marcelle, I know that you're really well-versed in this, so could you just quickly remind people of what neoliberalism is?

Marcelle Kosman 30:16

[Laughs] You're such a liar. So here's what I believe in my heart that I know about neoliberalism. It is the dominant ideology of our time, it is the logic of the free market, the so-called "free market," and it has been turned and applied to the individual, and so we use the language of neoliberalism, which is an economic term, to explain things like human interaction and the quality of life. And so this is why we can think about doing exercise, which maybe one time we might have thought of as a way to move our bodies in a way that is fun and feels good and instead, we think about it in terms of maximizing our productivity. Is that right?

Anne Helen Petersen 30:59

Also personal responsibility when it comes to health, right? So the person responsible for your health is you and you alone.

Marcelle Kosman 31:05

That's right. And you have a responsibility to maintain your health for the good of society.

Anne Helen Petersen 31:11

And if you don't, you're bad.

Marcelle Kosman 31:14

That's right. If you get sick, you are a burden on the system.

Hannah McGregor 31:18

100%. And that's what the neoliberal discourse of "fat people are a burden on the medical system" —

Anne Helen Petersen 31:26

Yeah.

Marcelle Kosman 31:26

Mm-hmm.

Hannah McGregor 31:26

—which is a fundamentally eugenicist idea, but is rooted in this idea of profound individual responsibility, which then in turn needs to imagine our bodies and minds as infinitely plastic, infinitely reshapeable via these optimizing activities. That's why tech bros love biohacking so much, because it's built in this fantasy of "the body is perfectly plastic, and potentially perfectible if you just work hard enough on it."

Anne Helen Petersen 32:00

Yeah.

Marcelle Kosman 32:00

It's the way tech startups would have cereal bars—maybe this is apocryphal, but I feel like I heard about this, that you join a tech startup, and you don't get benefits, but you do get a cereal bar. So when you show up, you can have breakfast while you go to your computer and do your tech work?

Anne Helen Petersen 32:16

Yeah. I mean, when I worked at BuzzFeed, not only did we have a cornucopia of cereal bars, but also the mini yogurts that had just like a little bit of granola on top. But then we also had all sorts of other snacks that were meant to make it so that you would never leave the building. And catered lunch is not about you saving money on lunch. It's about you—

Hannah McGregor 32:38

Working through lunch.

Anne Helen Petersen 32:38

—eating your sad desk lunch. It's about productivity.

Hannah McGregor 32:42

100%. And again, these built-in spaces for leisure, right? You hear the “Oh, the tech startup always has a ping-pong table” —

Anne Helen Petersen 32:53

We had a ping-pong table. **[Hannah and Marcelle laugh]** And a fro-yo machine that changed flavours every week. Can you imagine me going from academia to that? That was what I did. The whiplash!

Hannah McGregor 33:07

Did you feel like an anthropologist?

Anne Helen Petersen 33:09

Yes. And also, even though tech companies are so renowned for, bad work-life balance, all that sort of thing, it was so much better than academia. **[Hannah laughs]** I was like, “Oh, I’m working so much less. What’s a Sunday?”

Marcelle Kosman 33:23

As you’re describing this, there is a little part of me that’s like, “I know it’s wrong, but I would love it if they provided me with breakfast when I got to work.”

Hannah McGregor 33:31

Honestly, I’m already eating at my desk, but I had to bring my lunch from home. **[Marcelle laughs]**

Anne Helen Petersen 33:37

But I think actually, the comparison and how academia gets on this spectrum is a great example of how neoliberalism has invaded the academy, right?

Marcelle Kosman 33:47

Absolutely.

Anne Helen Petersen 33:47

So within the academy is the responsible of individual to work the way that they do in order to fund their own position and prove their own position, all that sort of thing.

Hannah McGregor 33:55

100%. So neoliberalism and optimization, as we can tell, are best friends, because they're all about productivity and deregulation and individualization and the disintegration of the social safety net in favor of self-sufficiency, et cetera, et cetera. And of course, they're both tied into notions of productivity, the idea that time itself is something that can be used more or less productively, that our days are units of potential productivity, and a failure to optimize our productivity is a failure to use our time properly. A thousand shout-outs to Jenny Odell, obviously. So built into the premise of dressing in athleisure is the idea of a maximally productive outfit.

Marcelle Kosman 34:43

With the rise of work from home, are we seeing an increase in the use of athleisure as workwear?

Anne Helen Petersen 34:51

Yes. Well, you know, it's ubiquitous all across social media, especially as there was a transition of moving more, like, sometimes in the office. It was like, I don't know what hard pants are, like, the difference between soft and hard pants; soft pants are athleisure, because they're not necessarily leggings, they are just—they are soft pants, unrestrictive pants. I think most fashion scholars would probably say that this is an ongoing shift in the casualisation of officewear that we've been seeing for the last 50 years, probably; if we're going back to the shift in using these fabrics that didn't have to be ironed as much, that's part of this larger shift over the course of the 50s and 60s and 70s. And even the idea that women don't have to wear pantyhose with exposed legs, that's part of this too. And men in ties and that sort of thing.

Hannah McGregor 35:45

I got this, Anne, from your podcast, but also that these fabrics make a lot more sense in a fashion market in which tailoring is not a thing for the most part anymore. And so stretchy fabrics fit a wider range of bodies; you can have a greater faith that you can buy something online and probably it's gonna fit you.

Anne Helen Petersen 36:03

Yeah. And also, I think Lululemon is the exception in terms of, it's still sizing in numbers, but most athleisure brands size more like small, extra small, large, extra large, that sort of thing. So they will have the larger bucket, for lack of a better term, in which a person can size themselves. And that creates fewer chances for poor fits, right? Like, there's less loss in that sort of system. Whereas with something like jeans, where you have not only the waist but also the length to consider, there's just—it's a harder fit. And what I think these companies want more than anything is for people to buy things and then keep them.

Hannah McGregor 36:48

Yeah, so it's also an optimization of the fashion industry itself. Yeah. Okay, there's one last set of theorists I want to bring in. We've touched on some of the points that they make already, but I want to say them explicitly, and this is feminist scholars Julie Brice and Holly Thorpe, who have written quite a bit about athleisure. And they describe it as, "the uniform of the neoliberal female citizen," and they link in particular to the neoliberal reframing of health as a purely individual rather than collective and social and structural concern.

So alongside the neoliberal privatization of health care and other public institutions that might promote health, instead we get this idea that health is about individual choices and behaviors, and that failing to participate in said behaviors is a moral and social failing. So athleisure becomes the outward marker of a properly self-disciplined body, and by extension, of an appropriately behaved citizen, who's managing themselves properly so as not to prove a burden to the rest of society. Which is the argument that they're making by calling it, again, "the uniform of the neoliberal female

citizen,” and the business practices of the companies that sell athleisure are in turn designed to encourage this understanding of consumption as self-optimization.

Marcelle Kosman 38:14

Hannah.

Hannah McGregor 38:14

Yes, Marcelle?

Marcelle Kosman 38:15

You’re giving away your thesis before thesis time.

Hannah McGregor 38:19

Well, then I guess it’s time for our next segment.

[Upbeat musical interlude]

Marcelle Kosman 38:25

All right, final segment. In this one, we get to watch Hannah bringing together the history of our object of study and our theoretical framework to articulate a thesis statement that we then get to—mwah!—pick apart.

[Hannah laughs]

Hannah McGregor 38:41

Oh, can’t wait. Ahem. Athleisure is a global industry that is already worth over 350 billion US dollars, and is forecast to double in size over the next decade. This growing market segment can be linked to various things: the invention of new high performance fabrics that are more comfortable than the more structured fabrics of the past; a shift in dress culture that allows for more casual clothing and professional environments. But ultimately, athleisure is indivisible from the neoliberal culture of self-optimization, in which each individual is expected to be a maximally productive and self-disciplined subject. The social and moral demand towards self-optimization finds its clearest expression in the well-managed body, a body that serves as an outward assurance that this good neoliberal citizen

will only contribute to and never demand anything from society. In this essay, I will.....

Anne Helen Petersen 39:40

Wait wait, wait, wait. I feel like this is slightly too negative about athleisure.

Marcelle Kosman 39:48

Woahhh.

Anne Helen Petersen 39:48

Like, too down on athleisure, because the thing is, is that I agree with you about everything that is wrong with the ethos, the underpinning of Lululemon, which, we have to be clear, he has sold the company, he is no longer affiliated with the company, even though he still makes statements as if he were still affiliated with the company. And you can't wash that toxicity out.

Hannah McGregor 40:11

[Laughs] I think he still owns a bunch of shares. I think he just doesn't have—he's doesn't have the controlling share in the company, but he's still profiting off of it.

Anne Helen Petersen 40:18

Oh, yeah, to be fair. But there are so many other companies that are doing a lot with athleisure, that are expanding the size to make actually comfortable and cute clothing to work out in if you are in a larger body, which has not been available for a really long time. They have done so much to create much better, I think, maternity wear, like, stuff that is much more comfortable and for the long term while you're breastfeeding or have a body that's in transition from different shapes.

And I think that it's also kind of cool to have different options when you're just getting boobs, too; something like a sports bra is a great transition from when you're about a tween into a teen, there's just something that like—but maybe that, too, is like, “Oh, you're optimizing tweens.” But I was wearing Umbros and soccer shoes. I didn't play soccer; that was just

what was cool. Like, I was still incorporating these parts of sports culture into my wardrobe at that time. So I think I just want to be ambivalent a little bit.

Hannah McGregor 41:31

[Laughs] You've come to the right place.

Marcelle Kosman 41:33

You know what we haven't talked about yet?

Hannah McGregor 41:35

What?

Marcelle Kosman 41:35

We haven't talked about the range of colour options that are available in athleisure that you just don't get anywhere else. You know, you go into Goodwill, and you go to the athleisure section, and it is a cornucopia of neon. And I, for one, am here for it. **[Anne laughs]**

Hannah McGregor 41:53

Yeah.

Anne Helen Petersen 41:54

And some of the stuff—not all athleisure is created equal—but some actually does last a long time. And to have high quality clothes that you can wear for a long time, that's great, right?

Marcelle Kosman 42:05

Optimized fabrics.

Anne Helen Petersen 42:06

I do have a tip though, for anyone who wants to know how to get the smell out of their athleisure. **[Hannah laughs]** We can we can save that for the Patreon, though.

Marcelle Kosman 42:15

Oh, yeah.

Hannah McGregor 42:16

I mean, I love that claim about “the clothes don’t stink,” which is like, yeah, they do. They for sure do.

Marcelle Kosman 42:24

They totally do, you just can’t smell it anymore, Chip.

Hannah McGregor 42:27

You do hot yoga, you’re not going to work after that.

Anne Helen Petersen 42:32

No, oh my god. Well, especially if you’re like me, and you did hot yoga, like multiple days with the same yoga pants—

Hannah McGregor 42:39

Man.

Anne Helen Petersen 42:40

—because you didn’t have washer-dryer in your building because you were a poor graduate student who could only go to hot yoga because you were a poor graduate student?

Hannah McGregor 42:46

I also did hot yoga through my PhD because I was a poor graduate student.

Anne Helen Petersen 42:50

Yeah.

Hannah McGregor 42:51

And the way that your second day sweat sort of reactivates the day one sweat.

Anne Helen Petersen 42:56

It's so real, like, at day three or four, it's just crusty. Your pants can stand up by themselves. **[Hannah laughs]**

Marcelle Kosman 43:05

You guys are so gross.

Anne Helen Petersen 43:06

I didn't have a washer-dryer! **[Hannah laughs]**

Marcelle Kosman 43:07

When I sweat, it smells like flowers. I smell—lilacs, specifically. It's a pleasure to be around me in hot yoga.

Hannah McGregor 43:17

To back to your your intervention, Anne, I wear a lot of athleisure, and ironically, part of the pleasure of it for me is that plus-size athleisure is about the celebratory display of a body that is very specifically not optimized. When I wear athleisure, when I wear some high-waisted yoga pants and you can see my belly, I feel like I'm giving— like, flipping the double birds to Chip Wilson. Like, he'd be so mad. **[Marcelle laughs]** And that makes me feel great. And athleisure—the colourways, like Marcelle said—athleisure gets very gay. It gets really over the top clownish at times. Yeah, in Vancouver, people wear black athleisure, so black, nobody wears anything other than black. But that's Vancouver's fault, not athleisure's fault. **[Marcelle laughs]**

Anne Helen Petersen 44:21

And there's so many impossible sports bras with weird straps in places where they don't need to be. There's design stuff that's kind of playful and I appreciate that.

Marcelle Kosman 44:32

I guess what this is sort of making me think about is, and forgive me, I know that we've done multiple episodes about this, or multiple episodes that that bring in this complication, and I just can't, I simply cannot

remember any of them. But there's the way that things are designed and the intended market, and then there's the way that people use them. And there is often a major disconnect between those two things.

And so while the intention behind athleisure may have been only certain bodies in certain ways to promote a certain kind of culture, what we're talking about with athleisure right now is the way that people have been like, "I like feeling good in my body. And this makes me feel good. And my body is not the kind of body that Chip Wilson wanted to see in it." And that's kind of cool.

Anne Helen Petersen 45:22

Yeah. Well, and I think also, a lot of people—like, I was looking at some stuff about Hoka running shoes, about the percentage of people who do not wear them to run in. They just wear them because they're comfortable.

Hannah McGregor 45:36

I just wore them for a week at Disney.

Anne Helen Petersen 45:40

Great! You know, wear something that is well-made and comfortable and that makes it less likely that you're going to wreck your body. That's cool. And I think that there are a lot of people who wear this clothing, not because they want to be ready to go to a yoga class, but because it feels good on their bodies.

Marcelle Kosman 46:01

Totally.

Hannah McGregor 46:01

Yeah, that ambivalent relationship to athleisure, I think, is in some ways a microcosm of our ambivalent relationship to leisure in general, which is that there are these histories, if we trace it back, to leisure that is actually about not working, that is actually about being comfortable, being at ease, doing nothing, having a bodily and temporal freedom from labour and all of the things that it attaches to you. And for me, wearing a bunch of stretchy

clothes so that I can more comfortably contort myself on my sofa **[Anne and Marcelle laugh]** feels very physically liberating in a way that has very little to do with optimization, unless I'm optimizing my couch pose.

Anne Helen Petersen 46:55

I do think that the one complication here, and this has to do with our complicated relationship with leisure, especially, I think, as millennials who find it very difficult to not work, is that maybe we just found a uniform that really does allow us to always be working. So here's a uniform I can wear on a Zoom call that is also the uniform I can wear while checking emails while laying on my couch while watching Netflix. Like, have a balance of work pervade everything that we do.

Hannah McGregor 47:31

Yeah,

Marcelle Kosman 47:31

Totally.

Anne Helen Petersen 47:32

Yeah, not great. **[Hannah laughs]**

Hannah McGregor 47:36

I disagree. I think it's great. I love how we could never stop working.

Anne Helen Petersen 47:43

I do and I don't. I'm like, "Oh, yeah, I can do the things that I want to do." Like, I always end up doing the things. But at the same time, I'm like, "Can you just stop saying yes, like, stop looking at your phone?"

Hannah McGregor 48:01

If you want to look at your phone less, and in general think about work less, may I recommend five days at Disney with a high energy eight-year-old? **[Marcelle laughs]**

Anne Helen Petersen 48:13

That is the thing I was just talking earlier, about how concentrated time with kids as a non-child-haver is a great way to not think about work.

Hannah McGregor 48:22

Yeah. And you know what's a really great thing to wear when you are hanging out with kids?

Anne Helen Petersen 48:28

Athleisure.

Hannah McGregor 48:29

Yeah because they at any point might ask you to go on a slide. **[Anne laughs]**

Marcelle Kosman 48:35

Or to lay on the ground and be the base of their airplanes.

Anne Helen Petersen 48:42

You know in Mad Men, Betty, like, never played with her kids ever? Maybe it was because she was always freaking wearing a house dress, like, she couldn't—who wants to play on the ground when you're wearing a house dress and your hair's done?

Marcelle Kosman 48:54

Simply couldn't.

Hannah McGregor 48:56

She's got a girdle on.

Anne Helen Petersen 48:56

She was absolutely wearing a girdle.

Marcelle Kosman 48:58

That's right.

Hannah McGregor 48:59

And that girdle might not even be made out of Lycra.

Marcelle Kosman 49:02

It might have had, like, bones.

Anne Helen Petersen 49:04

Yeah, 100% bone.

Hannah McGregor 49:07

Okay, there's one last piece of this equation that I do want to touch on. And that is just because I want to bring the conversation back to how much I personally hate Chip Wilson, and that is Landmark Worldwide, the personal development company that is definitely not a cult and like other things that are not a cult, has sued a lot of publications for calling it a cult. That's the top way you know something's not a cult, is it's sued a bunch of people for calling it a cult. So scholars—

Marcelle Kosman 49:36

I feel like Scientology is also not a cult.

Hannah McGregor 49:38

Not a cult! Famously. You can tell because of all the lawsuits.

Marcelle Kosman 49:41

That's right.

Hannah McGregor 49:42

So scholars call Landmark Worldwide an example of a corporate religion, because it focuses on using self-improvement techniques to improve personal and employee productivity. And Chip Wilson loves it. He pays—like, Lululemon pays for employees to attend Landmark Worldwide workshops. And it is fundamentally built into the ideology, values, and marketing discourse of the company, including those famous bags—

Anne Helen Petersen 50:16

The famous bags, I feel like they've moved away from the famous bags, but—not a cult shit.

Hannah McGregor 50:23

He also tried, as part of his funding the new mayor of Vancouver, he tried to create a new policy where unhoused people, in order to access public resources, would have to attend a Landmark Worldwide weekend-long self-improvement training.

Marcelle Kosman 50:38

No.

Hannah McGregor 50:39

So when we're talking about the degree to which this fetishization of self-optimization has woven its way through our contemporary culture, Lululemon becomes a symptom rather than a cause, right? That leisure is just yet another outcropping of something much more insidious, that is snaking through our politics and our social structures, as well as our internalized relationships to our bodies and our understandings of time. And I think it's useful to go back to what Marcelle was saying about—

Marcelle Kosman 51:15

Me?

Hannah McGregor 51:15

—the idea that—yeah, Marcelle, you. Yeah. The idea that we take up the objects that we are presented with, and then figure out what to do with them. And that there is both profound value in historicizing these objects—I mean, I would say that's the whole premise of the podcast, is the value in historicizing these objects—and then also recognizing that, well, it's the blocks that we have to play with. So what are we going to do with them, folks?

Marcelle Kosman 51:48

So, okay, I have to ask the two of you because I am, personally, I self-

identify as a person who doesn't work. I have jobs. **[Laughs]** But I think I'm really good at not working, sometimes to my own detriment. And in the same way that we're talking about athleisure as being something that might be handed to us for one thing, but then we use it for these other things, I want to hear from the two of you about materialist critique, which is the vegan bread and gluten free butter of our show, and how it is that, as millennials in the gig economy, it is that the two of you make it work for you. What do you do with it?

Hannah McGregor 52:34

Yeah, Anne, is this constant critical engagement with the culture around us actually just an extension of our workaholicism?

Anne Helen Petersen 52:44

Yes, but I also don't know another way, right? Like, this is—ever since, I guess, college, just the idea that “Oh, there's something in front of me, I should think more about it,” it was at the heart of media studies, it was at the heart of cultural studies. Which, I didn't know what cultural studies were until I got into college, but I had learned that in some way, that you read a book, you watch a movie, you look at a movie star; what else do you want to think about in terms of that? Like, what are they encouraging you to think about and interrogate in your world? And also, I don't have a cultural studies mom or dad, like, they're a scientist, they're mathematicians. But I think that what they think is, you ask questions; something happens, and you ask questions. I used to be very involved in the Presbyterian Church and even that relationship was like, you ask questions.

And so I think that when someone, and oftentimes it was a student, or it might be just a reader who's like, “Isn't it exhausting to always be thinking about these things?” or like, “What happens to your pleasure? Like, can you watch a movie for fun?” And I'm like, “Absolutely.” Like, thinking is fun. **[Hannah laughs]** I like it. I just think that you can have those two things at once, right? Like Laura Mulvey, the feminist theorist, famously said that analysis essentially destroys pleasure. And she was talking about male pleasure, the male gaze, and how, if you analyze the way that

scopophilia, the pleasure of looking, works, then you can destroy some of that patriarchal pleasure.

This is not that. I can look at something like athleisure and be like, “Huh.” Like, every day, put it on, and I think something about it, like, how is it that they’re engendering this desire for more sports bras? Why did I resist the Vuori jogger and now I have one? Like, what happened there, that’s interesting. All of that. What is going on with these weird words on this Lululemon bag? Yeah, it’s just still—like, that’s why I write, I’ve always written because I felt like there were words exploding out of me. And I know not every writer has that relationship with with writing. The reason I started my newsletter was because there weren’t enough opportunities for me to write about weird shit at BuzzFeed News. I was like, “I have more things to say, I’ll just keep writing this.” **[Hannah and Marcelle laugh]** Inadvertently wrote myself into my own job, my own newsletter, being my own boss. So I like that I get to be my own boss now and write about only the things that I think are interesting, not the things that other people think are interesting.

Hannah McGregor 55:35

Going through my head that whole time, was that Simpsons line, “Iron helps us play!” **[Anne and Marcelle laugh]**. No, it’s actually more fun when I work hard. But yeah, I really relate to that framing of critical cultural analysis of, it’s a form of attention. And for me, I think the best thing that we can do is pay attention. And there’s a lot of different forms that attention takes and one of the really challenging things for a lot of us coming out of academia, but for lots of other folks as well, is to divorce the process of paying attention from the necessity to produce something out of that attention. I’m still trying to challenge myself to have a thought and not turn it into a book. What if I just have a thought?

Anne Helen Petersen 56:38

Or get paid for it, right? Is it to understand that if I do decide to do that, that I could get paid for it? And I should get paid for it?

Hannah McGregor 56:44

Yeah, yeah.

Anne Helen Petersen 56:45

You know, a fair way. That people will pay me money for it.

Hannah McGregor 56:49

Yeah. 100%. And that's also deeply entwined with the idea of, well, if I'm going to use some of my time to think, that might as well be profitable. I have a different relationship to it as a salaried academic, because then it's like, every thought that I ever have is me putting in more hours for the institution.

Anne Helen Petersen 57:08

Yep. Yeah. Yeah, no, it's complicated. Because in that whole thing about getting paid, too, it's me unlearning the idea that I should do work for free. But then at the same time, I don't only want to do work when I am compensated for it. So how do you do those things at the same time? How do you balance those compulsions? And I think for me, I've just had a lot of friends who have helped talk me through it and guide me through it.

Hannah McGregor 57:33

Yeah, you know, at the end of the day, I come back to this impossibility of living outside of ideology. This is Althusser, like, there is no outside to ideology; we can stand inside capitalism and critique it, and actually we need to, that's really, really vital, but we can't stand outside of capitalism and critique it. We're right in the thick of it.

Marcelle Kosman 57:58

Oh, no!

Anne Helen Petersen 57:58

We're interpellated.

Hannah McGregor 58:00

Aww, interpellated! Marcelle, are you interpellated?

Anne Helen Petersen 58:02

You've be interpellated!

Marcelle Kosman 58:04

I'm absolutely interpellated. Absolutely not outside of this ideology.

[Hannah laughs] I'm just a sleepy guy.

Hannah McGregor 58:14

I'm gonna make us all baseball hats that just say "interpellated."

[Everyone laughs]

Anne Helen Petersen 58:20

I pulled that one out. I haven't used that one in a while.

Hannah McGregor 58:22

I'm impressed. Really impressed. **[Laughs]**

[Upbeat musical interlude]

Marcelle Kosman 58:32

Material Girls is a Witch, Please production and is distributed by Acast.

Why don't you slip into some quick-drying, moisture-wicking, silver-infused yoga pants and head on over to ohwitchplease.ca to check out the rest of our episodes, as well as transcripts, reading lists, and merch. We don't have any athleisure yet, but we will. I mean, we do have t-shirts and sweatshirts.

Hannah McGregor 58:54

We've got hoodies, that's athleisure.

Marcelle Kosman 58:56

We got hoodies. We got hoodies! We have an excellent newsletter at substack.com/ohwitchplease and an even better patreon at patreon.com/

ohwitchplease. Also, we're on Instagram, X, and Threads @ohwitchplease, and on TikTok @ohwitchpleasepod. Anne, are some of the websites where people can find more about you and your work?

Anne Helen Petersen 59:23

Culture Study is at annehelen.substack.com, and then the Culture Study pod, which you can find at culturestudypod.substack.com. If you just Google you can find both of those things. And then I'm on Instagram @annehelenpetersen.

Hannah McGregor 59:36

Beautifully streamlined online presence. Thanks to Auto Syndicate for the use of our theme song "Shopping Mall." And of course, thanks to the whole Witch Please, Productions team: our digital content coordinator Gaby Iori **[sound effect: BOING]**; our social media and marketing designer, Zoe Mix **[sound effect: record player reversing]**; our audio engineer, Malika Gumpangkum **[sound effect: laser]**; our transcriber, Ruth Ormiston **[sound effect: typing]**; and our executive producer, Hannah Rehak, aka COACH **[sound effect: sport whistle blowing]**!

Marcelle Kosman 1:00:10

At the end of every episode, we will thank everyone who has joined our Patreon or boosted their tier to help make our work possible. Our enormous gratitude goes out to Brandice R., Forfoxake, Kathy Y., Afton P., Sarah B., Amelia Y., 3Queersinatrenchcoat. Holy moly. Thank you all.

Hannah McGregor 1:00:36

We'll be back next episode to tackle another piece of pop culture through a whole new theoretical lens. But until then...

Anne Helen Petersen 1:00:43

Later, optimizers!

[Outro music: "Shopping Mall" by Jay Arner and Jessica Delisle]