

**FASHION**  
BETWEEN HERITAGE & INNOVATION  
**LUXURY**

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## Dr. Satoshi Onuma

CHAIRPERSON OF IFFTI  
PRESIDENT, BUNKA FASHION COLLEGE, TOKYO, JAPAN  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE BOARD, BUNKA GAKUEN EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION

The 13th annual conference for the International Foundation of Fashion Technology Institutes (IFFTI) was held from 11th – 14th April 2011 at the Institut Français de la Mode (IFM) in Paris. The theme for this year's conference was *Fashion and Luxury: Between Heritage and Innovation*. The IFM was a particularly appropriate location for this year's conference given the important role that Paris has played in the development and promotion of fashion and the way the IFM continues to actively promote the exchange of thoughts, ideas and research on this theme.

This year's conference attracted approximately 250 delegates from around the world and included those from both academia and industry. Delegates were treated to highly stimulating and informative talks by keynote speakers that challenged the commonly held definition of luxury and also stressed that heritage and innovation need not be mutually exclusive concepts when applied to the fashion industry. The distinguished keynote speakers for this year's conference included: Mr. Dominique Jacomet (Director General, IFM); Mr. Guillaume de Seynes (Executive Vice-President, Hermès International); Mr. Bruno Remaury (Brand Image Consultant); Ms. Florence Müller (Fashion Writer & Curator, IFM Faculty Member); Mr. Bruno Pavlovsky (President, Chanel Fashion and Haute Couture); Mr. Daniel Harari (Director and CEO, Lectra); and, Mr. Didier Grumbach (Chairman, Fédération Française de la Couture, du Prêt-à-Porter des Couturiers et des Créateurs de mode). All of the keynote speakers gave insightful presentations and I would like to thank them for their valuable contribution.

Other highlights from the 2011 conference included the presentation of 30 academic papers by staff from fashion institutions around the world; a tour of Docks en Seine; an impressive fashion design exhibition and a vibrant cocktail party; a private viewing of the exhibition "History of Contemporary Fashion (1990s-2000s)" at the Museum of Decorative Arts; and an informative visit to Lectra's offices which included a presentation of Lectra's activities and software.

I would like to take this opportunity to especially thank Mr. Dominique Jacomet, Director General of IFM, and Ms. Sylvie Ebel, Executive Director of IFM, for hosting this year's conference. I would also like to sincerely thank the entire organizing committee at IFM for the professionalism and tireless effort which they showed in making the many arrangements for this year's conference. The conference was extremely well organized and I am grateful to everyone who has played a role in making it such a success. I would also like to thank Commodore Vijay Chaturvedi (Retd.) for his constant support and guidance as the Secretary of IFFTI.

One of the objectives of IFFTI when it was founded in 1999 was to create opportunities for fashion educational institutions and industry to share ideas, research and knowledge. I am confident that the 2011 IFFTI conference at IFM has successfully contributed towards fulfilling this objective. I look forward to attending many more successful conferences in the years to come as IFFTI continues to fulfill its important role in the global fashion industry.





# Introduction

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## Sylvie Ebel

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, INSTITUT FRANÇAIS DE LA MODE, PARIS, FRANCE

## Olivier Assouly

HEAD OF RESEARCH, INSTITUT FRANÇAIS DE LA MODE, PARIS, FRANCE

Following on from London in 2009 and Taipei in 2010, in April 2011, the Institut Français de la Mode organised the 13th IFFTI conference in Paris on the theme Fashion and luxury: between heritage and innovation.

The symposium first of all proposed contributions from experts, professionals and academics all keen to deal with the conference theme head-on. The symposium opened with an introduction from Dominique Jacomet, the IFM's director outlining the economic issues at stake, followed by a talk from Guillaume de Seynes, Executive Vice-President at Hermès highlighting the historical evolutions that have taken place at Hermès. Bruno Remaury spoke next, on the anthropological foundations of luxury brands. He was followed by Daniel Harari (Director and CEO of Lectra) who pointed out the need for an innovative dynamic in the luxury and fashion industries. The live contributions were complemented by two IFM-produced films that dealt with the heritage issues faced by brands, one with Florence Müller (fashion historian) and the other with Bruno Pavlovsky (President, Chanel Fashion). The day's proceedings closed with a talk from Didier Grumbach (Chairman, Fédération Française de la Couture) on the origins of and issues facing haute couture.

During the course of the conference, over thirty academically researched papers were given by international lecturers and specialists selected by an international scientific committee under the aegis of the Institut Français de la Mode. In addition to the delegates from IFFTI member institutions, a great number of academics and fashion industry professionals also took part in the debates that resulted in a number of topics coming to the fore.

From an epistemological point of view, a great number of the presentations tended to take an academic approach. The conference covered a broad range of subjects (management, marketing, economics, cultural studies, social sciences) with many papers taking a strict empirical approach through field work, observations and expert contributions. Despite the obvious satisfaction felt at presenting this work, we should recognise that research in the domain of fashion and textiles is a work in progress and of recent tradition. In fact, the presentations revealed the varied directions that such research should take, not only due to the different subjects (history, sociology, business history, marketing, management, economics), but also due to the different stances taken with regard to method. There are two distinct trends.

Firstly the "applied" option for the most part, takes a broad view of the idea of research to the point of including student work, workshops and exhibitions, even the creative process as it happens inside fashion companies or for designers themselves.

The second and more academic trend tends toward a more theoretical vision that attempts to create models of a certain number of phenomena observed in order to outline the main principles and provide a more general explanation.

The idea behind the choice of the theme was to underline the way in which fashion and luxury are deeply rooted in the culture and heritage of the producing and consumer countries concerned. At the same time, the historical particularities were immediately linked to more contemporary aesthetic and economic imperatives. It was a chance to highlight the way in which culture and the market connect beyond the key positions enjoyed by certain countries thanks to national particularities and without resorting to nationalism.

If we examine the connecting thread, one question popped up in the majority of the presentations: why should we preserve heritage in luxury and even more so in fashion when renewal is their *raison d'être*? Is it to hold back the planetary dissolution of culture, is it about the systematic preservation of tradition, is sustainability the reason or is the preservation of heritage motivated purely by economics? For the most part the different arguments revealed themselves to be complementary.

In addition, to what extent are these traditions culturally, socially or economically alive? Fashion and luxury have their similarities, but they also have their differences and they are both linked to a national, regional or institutional history or to the history of a business. Fashion and luxury each run on consumer cycles of varying speeds and continuity and brands and companies only survive by introducing innovations that update their own heritage-based components. From this angle, it was shown that the demand for updated products and innovation is not so much a possibility open to brands but more of an absolute necessity dictated by the market and consumption. Unlike other types of merchandise, fashion consumption, and to a lesser extent luxury consumption, can not be content with pure traditional forms. If so, in addition to being prevented from taking advantage of their own history, slowly fossilising companies are finding themselves submerged by obligatory and cumbersome references to a past they can no longer cast off.

So, how is it possible to arbitrate between the heritage-based dimension of a company and the demand for newness and innovation? Is continuity the way to go or should companies split with the past, whether the split be a real or apparent? The different sessions brought directions and ideas to the surface that renew the possibilities of treating the theme of the conference. Many papers dealt with *savoir-faire* and specific skills, with the handing down of traditions, the valorisation of heritage, with national and regional culture and the major effect new technology is having on elements that would appear to be on the margins of modernity. As such, the great majority of the presentations began by highlighting the idea that the cultural and historical roots of fashion and luxury can not be reduced, despite certain prejudices, to the simple preservation of heritage faced with the threat of disappearing traditions. Indeed, the producing countries in question have always used historical knowledge and techniques to boost their own production or to implement brand development strategies that need to generate difference and singularity faced with the uniformisation and globalisation of the offer. As for the orientation of the different sessions, one focussed on sustainability, putting forward the theory that any innovative re-composition of a brand had to take the issue to ecology into account. We saw that it was important to take traditional influences into account in the identity of luxury and fashion objects while underlining the need for re-composition given the current ecological crisis. This is why the preservation of skills and professions has a heuristic value: it should be seen as a laboratory for the observation, inventory and optimisation of techniques that can provide a real source of inspiration in terms of sustainability. At the same time, and rightly so, the demands of sustainability were often presented as being very much at the mercy of the tensions and contradictions imposed by fashion's accelerated cycles.

During the other sessions, a number of papers broadly corroborated the hypothesis that traditions are not intangible fossilised data, but that on the contrary, they constitute a permanent source of innovation when they are brought up to date. This was evident in the work of a number of academics who insisted on the importance of state, regional or industrial policies to valorise historical practices in the different professions in the textile industry. These actions highlight the cultural and, as such, identity-based character of the products marketed, going against the grain of the current trend for globalisation that tends to engender sameness.

Faced with the multiplication of initiatives aimed at exploiting heritage, it was also asked if it were possible to convert pure traditional skills of craftsmen into innovative fashion and luxury brands and under what conditions. The real issue was to examine actual role of the skills and knowledge used by companies, without forgetting the decisive if less visible role of the nebulous economic base made up of sub-contractors.

While the valorisation of heritage is *de rigueur* to the extent that it has become a feature in museums, it is undeniable that its link to the present is vital, meaning its immediate utility, and its social, cultural and economic valorisation. This is why the frequent references made by brands to a history peppered with designers, items, styles, techniques, trends and innovations not only constitute a source of inspiration, but also a growing space for the rejuvenation and regeneration of current brands.

It was thus necessary to distinguish between the types and levels of innovation: technological innovation, style-based design innovation, innovation in marketing techniques, innovation of the brand itself, of merchandising, advertising, information technology and the porosity of the borders imposed by globalisation. To sum up, a major and essential element for the profitable use of traditions is the use of images of craftsmen at work in their surroundings in global advertising. In addition to the depiction and display of traditions, one of the sessions examined the way in which fashion products (dresses, hats, work wear, party gear, and Indian wedding garments) had all been reappropriated and reworked for the modern age.

We see that brands, companies, nations and cultures endowed with different levels of heritage implement innovative strategies that result in successfully exploiting their past for both their economic and cultural advantage.

The real question is how to exhume and highlight heritage: through inventory, exhibition, heritage, archives, narratives, the collective unconscious, long gone designers, aesthetic constants and myths? To what extent are brands pushed into writing their own history in order to reinforce their symbolic capital? In some ways all obligatory references to a history and a heritage could appear to be an attempt to reinforce economic dominance using an advantageous heritage to counter national or international competition not unlike the sumptuary laws that existed in France until the 18th century.

This leads to the question as to how and in what conditions could a luxury and fashion brand develop *ex nihilo*, with no connection to the past and to tradition.

This question is closer to brand narrative than to historical reality and some speakers did highlight the need for the human and social sciences to keep writing the history of fashion and luxury companies, as the history of designers, design and economic structures is necessary for a better understanding of the mechanisms of creativity and economic innovation, whether it involves studying Charles Frederick Worth or working on the evolution of institutional structures in the development of haute couture. Historical work is all the more essential as it reminds us that the heritage of certain brands has a public and social character as is evident from the multiplication of exhibitions worldwide going way beyond the partiality of a brand that commissions someone to write its own history. The heritage of these companies is presented as an object of culture where the public, and not just the consumer, participate in the construction of the reputation and notoriety of the brand that then benefits from it in a broader sense. Continuing on from the papers on fashion and economic history, another session threw a necessary and essential spotlight on the work being done in the social sciences on fashion and luxury with, for example, the attempt to decode the mechanisms of collective belief in the consumption of fashion and luxury products. The paper examined the manner in which myths, rarity, exception and a feeling of exclusivity are forged, aimed at reinforcing the aura that is particularly characteristic and essential to luxury products. The papers in question kept a critical and demystifying eye on proceedings, showing that luxury and fashion, in addition to their aesthetic vocation, constitute powerful engines for consumption inside a liberal economic system that aims to extend market share with a disregard for any ecological or social risk involved.

Given the fact that these issues could not be raised *in abstracto*, meaning without the participation of the structures necessary to the synergy of tradition and modernity, the question of how to actually pass on traditions and the issue of training needed to be addressed. Obviously, the active role of training courses and the existing educational fabric were covered, taking into account the role of networks and information technology. This is why one of the sessions was given over to measuring the theme of the conference from an educational perspective, but on a broader scale the way in which new technologies provide a new way of connecting with tradition, whether it be with new online teaching techniques or the existence of databases of old designs and models. On a broader scale, and in tandem with passing on traditions, technology provides a platform where it is now possible to present and represent designs, professions and sources of creativity. In addition with new design software packages and systems, it is

## INTRODUCTION

now possible to model, conceive and transform so-called traditional forms to conform to the canons of newness and the renewal of the market offer.

It became apparent that tradition could only be handed down if the vitality of the skills of the producers is in line with the desires of the client or consumer. It is not enough to know how to produce, to show an ability to exploit references to the past; one must above all make the consumer appreciate the originality or the historical nature of the product. It is thus important to work on heightening awareness among consumers of the level of complexity of the skills involved, whether they are traditional, contemporary or hybrid. Without this initiation, products are incapable of creating the slightest echo, or of exercising the slightest authority over their target market in as much as they don't possess the requisite knowledge to appreciate the product.

Each of the presentations tackled this educational, cultural and economic task in their own way with unique and different scientific and cultural perspectives. In doing so, the scope of this conference went way beyond the strict field of research, and not just because it brought together over 200 members from numerous institutions in Paris, but above all because its theme tackled essential questions about globalisation which we must relay not only to our peers, teachers, academics and students, but also to the institutions and countries concerned.

# Luxury Fashion: The Role of Innovation as a Key Contributing Factor in the Development of Luxury Fashion Goods and Sustainable Fashion Design

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Angela Finn

QUEENSLAND UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA

## Abstract

Luxury is a quality that is difficult to define as the historical concept of luxury appears to be both dynamic and culturally specific. The everyday definition explains a 'luxury' in relation to a necessity: a luxury (product or service) is defined as something that consumers want rather than need. However, the growth of global markets has seen a boom in what are now referred to as 'luxury brands'. This branding of products as luxury has resulted in a change in the way consumers understand luxury goods and services. In their attempts to characterize a luxury brand, Fionda & Moore in their article "The anatomy of a Luxury Brand" summarize a range of critical conditions that are in addition to product branding "...including product and design attributes of quality, craftsmanship and innovative, creative and unique products" (Fionda & Moore, 2009). For the purposes of discussing fashion design however, quality and craftsmanship are inseparable while creativity and innovation exist under different conditions.

The terms 'creative' and 'innovative' are often used inter-changeably and are connected with most descriptions of the design process, defining 'design' and 'fashion' in many cases. Christian Marxt and Fredrik Hacklin identify this condition in their paper "Design, product development, innovation: all the same in the end?" (Marxt & Hacklin, 2005) and suggest that design communities should be aware that the distinction between these terms, whilst once quite definitive, is becoming narrow to a point where they will mean the same thing. In relation to theory building in the discipline this could pose significant problems. Brett Richards (2003) identifies innovation as different from creativity in that innovation aims to transform and implement rather than simply explore and invent. Considering this distinction, in particular relation to luxury branding, may affect the way in which design can contribute to a change in the way luxury fashion goods might be perceived in a polarised fashion market, namely suggesting that 'luxury' is what consumers need rather than the 'pile it high, sell it cheap' fashion that the current market dynamic would indicate they want.

This paper attempts to explore the role of innovation as a key contributing factor in luxury concepts, in particular the relationship between innovation and creativity, the conditions which enable innovation, the role of craftsmanship in innovation and design innovation in relation to luxury fashion products. An argument is presented that technological innovation can be demonstrated as a common factor in the development of luxury fashion product and that the connection between designer and maker will play an important role in the development of luxury fashion goods for a sustainable fashion industry.

## Introduction

Contemporary fashion researchers interested in exploring ways in which to realise a more sustainable fashion industry are faced with a key problem –consumer behaviour. In recent decades the need for individuals to constantly replace fashion clothing, neither worn out nor damaged, has resulted in tonnes of textiles being buried as landfill or dumped on developing world markets in the guise of 'charitable'

## Keywords

Fashion  
Design  
Sustainability  
Luxury  
Innovation  
Creativity  
Craftsmanship

donations (Fraser, 2009). Following a decade of serious research, the 'un-sustainability' of these practices is now considered to be common knowledge in the field of fashion design and in the wider academic community. However, the question to be answered is, amongst the mountains of clothing that are being discarded, why are there not more Chanel, Vuitton or Saint Laurent? This paper explores the theory that integral characteristics of luxury goods contribute to a connection between the maker and the consumer of a product and directly contribute to the when and how of its disposal.

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### Literature Review

The concept and values of sustainability have been readily accepted and adopted by governments and educators in Australia and New Zealand; in particular the concepts of minimising environmental impact seem to have been at the forefront of what has become known as the sustainable agenda. Sustainability however, is not only to do with saving the environment. For the purpose of background and context, it is important to briefly revisit the foundations of sustainability to avoid becoming a user of what has been referred to as 'the 'S' word'; a phrase used to explain the practice of confusing the word sustainability with terms such as green, eco or organic (Silverman, 2007).

The word 'Sustainability' has become a catch phrase for academics, researchers, marketing managers, publicists, politicians and brand managers (and others) in the last decade: at last count there were over 100 definitions for 'sustainable development' in existence (Article 13, 2010). The vanguard work "Our Common Future," (also referred to as the Brundtland report) was commissioned by the United Nations Assembly in 1982 and delivered in 1987, provided the most commonly reference definition of sustainable development (Brundtland, 1987). This report formalised a set of beliefs that remain central to the idea of sustainability: the world's resources are not inexhaustible, continued growth and development is possible without destroying the planet, it could be possible to eliminate poverty, cooperation beyond government level is possible and could provide solutions to what remains a global issue.

Although many writers still prefer Brundtland's definition of sustainable development as the oldest and the best, and refer to "people, profit, planet" as "the three pillars of sustainability" (Bader, 2008), some suggest that the ideas of sustainability have moved on in the three decades since they were developed.

*"The EU "A popular way of expressing the three pillars of SD [sustainable development] is known as People, Planet, Profit (or PPP or P3), where People represents the social pillar, Planet the environmental pillar, and Profit the economic pillar. At the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, 2002, this was modified into People, Planet, Prosperity, where the change of Profit into Prosperity is supposed to reflect the fact that the economic dimension covers more than company profit. Other well-known terms are the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) and the UN's Global Compact" (Heijungs, Huppés, & Guinée, 2010).*

The way in which we think about wealth is also changing. The substitution of prosperity for profit is timely in this respect but also demonstrates a positive and realistic move forward in design for sustainability. Recent years have seen a change in research focus to positive outcomes involving wellbeing as a central theme. The way in which we feel about clothing, in particular luxury branded clothing, may also be about to undergo a similar change.

The fashion and textiles industries can take a significant share of the responsibility for many of the business practices which have proved unsustainable in the past. In particular the dyeing processes and manufacturing processes associated with the textile industry since the industrial revolution have been responsible for enormous environmental damage (Sellappa, Prathyumnán, Joseph, Keyan, & Balachandrar, 2010). This damage, such as mercury poisoning as a result of textiles dyeing, have long term consequences. A recent study showed that mercury levels in Diss Mere, a shallow lake in the town of Diss in Norfolk, UK, reached their highest levels in the mid nineteenth century and remain at an elevated level considered contaminated over 150 years later (Yang, 2010). In developing countries the process of tanning leather (used for fashion shoes, handbags and luggage) continues to be a cause of major poisoning of water sources with chemicals that have the potential to cause carcinoma (Akan, Moses, Ougubuaaja, & Abah, 2007; Jaiswal, 2006). Further, despite an increased awareness of the hardships faced by factory workers in mainland China and India, off-shore manufacturing remains a mainstream practice in the fashion industry in Australia (Weller & Studies, 2007) and New Zealand (Blomfield & Trade NZ, 2002). The practice of outsourcing production has resulted in the invisibility of our manufacturing systems and in turn has made the problems of using unsustainable manufacturing processes 'disappear'. Media exposure of cases such as Nike® using sweatshop labour in their offshore factories had some effect in highlighting ethical issues but the problem remains that the fashion industry is very adept at selling goods

to consumers –despite bad press (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001). The danger is the emergence of ‘green’ and ‘eco’ brands as marketing tools to simply sell more fashion: a practice referred to as ‘greenwash’ (Arnold, 2009).

A striking example of this discord between wanting to ‘do good’ and actually ‘doing good’ [sic] is the case of the purchase of “make poverty history” wrist bracelets for fundraising from a factory in China with sweatshop labour conditions (Reynolds, 2005). Similarly, it appears that while we are happy to talk about Sustainability in reality we appear far more likely to ‘talk the talk’ than ‘walk the walk’. Throwaway fashion, pile it high / sell it cheap, inexpensive clothing items continue to make up the bulk of our wardrobes if the prevalence of brands such as Top Shop, H&M and Uniqlo (and similar brands such as Supré in Australia and New Zealand) continues. More concerning, it is the same bulk of these wardrobes that is contributing to environmental problems by ending up as landfill and to social and economic problems as a result of being sent to developing nations rather than to landfill (Fraser, 2009). The effect on these developing nations has not as yet been studied in depth, although Fraser has estimated the quantity of clothing from charitable donations in New Zealand that end up overseas to be quite significant (Fraser, 2009)<sup>1</sup>. The influx of millions of free garments into an economy would undoubtedly effect the development of a fashion industry and stifle the potential for manufacturing jobs and training that would result. It is unfortunate that our consumer behaviour, in combination with our desire to do ‘good’, has resulted in an outcome that goes against the very report that suggests that conserving and reusing resources will eventually eliminate poverty.

As mentioned in the introduction it is interesting that of the millions of tonnes of second-hand clothing, donated to various charities throughout Australia and New Zealand, why are there not more labels like Chanel or Louis Vuitton? Sturken and Cartwright identified that it is possible to strip objects of the signifiers of their manufacture to enable commodity fetishes to be developed through branding (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001). If this is the case, it may also be possible for objects to retain these signifiers that indicate their manufacture. It is these signifiers that can be used to create a connection between the user and the maker (Finn, 2008). In fashion terms, the signifiers that could be significant are the methods of production themselves, in particular hand finishes that have obviously been made by individuals rather than by machines. In terms of establishing luxury products in the market, this connection between maker and user is often exploited in advertising to promote the history and tradition of quality craftsmanship, in many cases almost anthropomorphising objects as having the quality of a loved family member. It is important then to better understand this connection in relation to questioning why luxury goods endure long beyond their expected life to become treasured items passed on from generation to generation.

The connection between innovative design and luxury product is not new. An earlier study presented at the recent Global Fashion Conference in Porto, Portugal (Finn & Finn, 2010), discusses this in more depth but for clarity, some key points will be made here. The designs of Gabrielle ‘Coco’ Chanel first gained recognition in the 1920s, notably her design for the Little Black Dresses in the late 1920s and the Chanel Suit in the 1930s. Her innovative use of cutting, and particularly her use of wool jersey for the haute couture market is well documented (Davis, 2007; Haedrich, 1972). The re-emergence of the designer in the 1960s saw the Chanel Suit re-designed for a 1960s market with a shorter skirt length and innovative use of tweed wool fabric for the luxury fashion market<sup>2</sup>. Again, the re-birth of Chanel under the leadership of Lagerfeld in the 1990s saw the Chanel Suit (now designed for a younger market) gain popularity once more.

There is a distinction between innovation and creativity in terms of design despite the terms often being used interchangeably by many writers in the discipline (Marxt & Hacklin, 2005). Richards (2003) identifies that innovation is to transform and implement rather than explore and invent. In other words, the exploration and invention of design variations based on a classic block (or cut of garment) while creative cannot be said to be innovative. Characteristic of Chanel’s design method was her ability to be innovative. The success of her designs can be contributed in part to her innovations in relation to fabric, cut and fit of the garments she designed. As her designs are now referred to as ‘classics’ –the innovation was not focused on the design aesthetic: there has been relatively little change to the ‘look’ of the suit since the 1930s. That the suit is recognisable as a Chanel (aided by the use of branding such as logo buttons featuring the signature interlocking ‘c’ design) is a contributing factor to the ongoing success of the luxury brand. However, a closer look at the way in which the suit is made reveals some innovations in the manufacturing methods have also taken place. These innovations may have had some consequences for the democratisation of the label but could still prove the cause of future changes in consumer behaviour in regard to luxury product branding.

### Research Method

A qualitative multi-method approach has been adopted for this research. A literature and contextual review of works relating to iconic fashion design associated with luxury brands, in conjunction with the analysis of individual luxury fashion objects (object analysis) have been used to explore an experimental method of object analysis. The criteria and the outcomes of this analysis, as outlined in this paper, have been used to support an argument that is presented for the purposes of discussion and debate rather than as the results of a definitive study. This paper builds on the author’s previous works and provides some early results and discussion from what is a larger, ongoing, collaborative research journey.

### Findings and Discussion

For the purposes of this discussion, an analysis and comparison will be made between two suits designed for the luxury fashion brand Chanel® and made in Paris, the first in 1965 and the second in 1991. These garments (objects) were examined to determine the methods of construction, the hand stitched details and the cut and quality of fabrics in relation to common definitions of luxury products that combine quality and craftsmanship with creativity and innovation (Fionda & Moore, 2009; Traldi, Gill, & Braithwaite, 2009; Weaver, 2010). The garments were viewed at length and documented through the methods of sketching, note taking and digital photography at *The Powerhouse Museum* in Sydney, Australia (2010). The method of comparison was based on object analysis – an emergent methodology discussed in Andrade (2004). In this paper Andrade outlines how researchers could gain from using the primary source of a surviving artefact (in this case an evening gown) as a source of information for historical research. In her conclusion she suggests that:

*“While it is dangerous to extrapolate too much from mute objects that survive for unknown reasons, it is clear that this method of object analysis can lead to useful questions, if not to definite answers, about the nature of couture” (Andrade, 2004 p.117).*

In a similar way, this examination, documentation and analysis of the garments chosen to be discussed here has enabled the further exploration of a developing theory surrounding the connection between user and maker in relation to luxury designer fashion, innovation and sustainability.

Table 1: Table of results

Characteristic/ Detail	Hand Finishing Techniques		Industrial/ Mass Manufacturing Methods		Allowances for Bulk Garment Cutting		Other Details/Observations	
	Object A	Object B	Object A	Object B	Object A	Object B		
Garment ID	Object A	Object B	Object A	Object B	Object A	Object B	Object A	Object B
Lining	x	x		x		x	The treatment of the lining in both the skirt and the jacket are a strong indicator of the quality make of this garment. The lining has been cut the same shape as the outer (which would not be possible in bulk cut garments as cutting is not 100% accurate). The stitching through all of the layers of the jacket would prevent the loose weave tweed from 'dropping' as a result of extended hanging or wear.	It should be noted that the 1991 garment has not been worn but was purchased from Chanel boutique and donated to the museum. There are some signs of hand stitching: e.g. the hand stitching on the label is prominent, although combined with machine stitching on the care label. The label itself has started to become detached (even though the garment has not been worn or laundered). This could indicate a lower quality in a garment regardless of branding (Romeo, 2009).
Buttonholes	x			x				
Buttons	x			x				
Zip Closure	x	x		x				
Hook & Eye Closure	x							
Garment Labelling	x			x				
Hem Finish	x			x				
Object A = Chanel Suit, 1965. Designed by Gabrielle Chanel (Chanel, 1965).								
Object B = Chanel Suit, 1991. Designed by Karl Lagerfeld for Chanel (Lagerfeld (for Chanel), 1991).								



Photos

1 Wool Tweed Fabric used in the Chanel Suit designed in 1965 has a hand loomed quality in that it does not look perfectly even in spacing or tension (Chanel, 1965).

### The Suits

The first of the two suits is article number A8945 –Women’s suit (Wool)– designed by Gabrielle Chanel for Chanel, Paris, France, 1965. For ease of use this will be referred to as ‘Object A’. The suit has a label in the back neck of the Jacket that reads “Chanel Made in France”. There are two pieces: a knee length skirt cut on the bias with a centre front inverted pleat and a semi-fitted, collarless jacket that finishes at the high hip. Both garments are fully lined with no care labelling; the Chanel label appears only on the jacket – indicating that the garments were intended to be purchased and worn as an ensemble. The outer fabric is loosely woven wool tweed in soft pastel colours (shown in Figure 1). This suit is a stereotypical example of the Chanel Suit of the 1960s era. The second of the two suits is article number 91/2020 –Women’s suit (Wool), designed by Karl Lagerfeld for Chanel, Paris, France, 1991. For ease of use this



will become “Object B’. This suit is comprised of two pieces: a straight skirt finishing below mid-thigh (approx 4-5” or 10-13 cm above the knee) and a fitted double breasted jacket finishing at the high hip. Both garments are fully lined. The outer fabric is Wool Boucle with silk lining. Labels that read “Chanel Boutique” (and accompanied by care labels) are attached at the back waistband in the skirt and at the centre back neck in the jacket. The suit is also typical of the classic Chanel style of the 1990s.

In order to summarise the basis of comparison between these garments a matrix has been created to identify the garment characteristics or details that were to be compared and to identify the construction methods that have been compared (Table 1). In this case, the details have been considered in relation to the methods of construction and cutting that were used: with a focus on comparing the individual hand-made finishes that are traditionally indicative of high quality craftsmanship with the machine finished or automated machining<sup>3</sup> on the garments (Romeo, 2009). The results show that the 1965 garments (Object A) involved a greater use of these methods of hand finishing than the 1991 counterpart (Object B). From the observations made in the analysis (a subset of results is presented in Table 1) it is possible to identify that there have been significant changes to the production methods, in consideration of the relatively unchanged design of the suit. Although Object A (1965) has been constructed by machine stitching on the longer seams the jacket and skirt both have a significant amount of hand stitching and finishing. The lining on Object A for example, is not cut with an extra pleat at the hem level to allow movement of the fabric in cutting or sewing (to compensate for inaccuracies in manufacture). The hem of the jacket is supported (or weighted) with a gilt chain (a feature that has become a signature of Chanel). Figure 2 shows these features of the lining. The jacket lining is attached to the outer fabric through all layers (mounted) by a series of rows of stitches approximately 5cms apart (quilted) that finish approximately 5cm above the lower edge of the lining. These rows of stitching have been used to provide support to the outer garment fabric which is a loose weave wool tweed (figure 3).

In contrast, while Object B represents the aesthetic of the classic Chanel Suit (fitted, short jacket, collarless, simple skirt), the construction of the garment is significantly different. The construction, wherever possible, has been done using machine stitching. There are three points of hand stitching on the suit: the label (Figure 4), the side seam lining closure and the back of the zip closure. The 1991 version of the Chanel suit (Object B) demonstrates the same construction as most suits currently on the market apart from the hand stitched label (the label would normally only be stitched on by hand if it had been forgotten in the construction prior to the lining being closed). The mainstream market might use machine stitching to close the back of the zip and the lining but dressmakers in small workrooms would probably close these areas by hand stitching also. The more recent suit (Object B) also demonstrates signs of being designed for bulk cutting. The extra pleat in the lining is certainly an indicator of this. The hem design of Petersham braid on the jacket and the skirt has eliminated the requirement of hand stitching at the hem. The use of fusible interfacing in the main body of the jacket has also eliminated the usefulness of, or need for, the quilted lining seen on Object A. Although there is limited space to include more images from the analysis, based on these few examples it is possible to arrive at the conclusion that there has been a drop in quality between the Chanel suit between 1965 and 1991.



## Conclusion and Suggestions

There is a distinct connection between luxury, craftsmanship and innovation. The perceived quality of a luxury garment and the actual quality of the garment are not necessarily in accord. The connection between maker and consumer is evidenced in the signifiers that remain as a result of the production of the garment: in this case the evidence of hand sewing emphasises the human maker as opposed to the mechanisation of mass production methods. These indicators are also involved in making judgements about the quality of a garment. There is a risk however for companies that deliver products that might be considered to be of lesser quality than that ‘promised’ by the concept of luxury branding.

*“Much like warranties, brand names can signal product quality. If the claim associated with a brand is of high quality, and the product turns out to be poor quality, the product can suffer potentially grave monetary consequences” (Rao & Ruekert, 1994).*

It would be dangerous to underestimate the ability of consumers to feel duped when the quality promised by a luxury brand is not the same as the quality delivered, regardless of the label that is attached. The focus for Sustainability has been for companies to continue to make a profit while considering the environment and the people that they affect in doing so. In practice this means that corporations have shouldered a large part of the responsibility for ensuring that they have corporate policies that encourage sustainable practices (Corporate Social Responsibility). If we replace the ideas of profit with those of

### Photos

- 2 The lining is of a better quality in the 1965 suit (Object A) and is weighted by a metal chain that is attached by hand stitching visible here (Chanel, 1965).
- 3 The Jacket lining is ‘quilted’ at intervals of approx 5cm to prevent the outer fabric from dropping during extended hanging or wearing.
- 4 The 1991 Chanel suit has hardly any hand sewn details, but the label is a prominent example. The label here is already becoming detached which is an indication of poor quality stitching (Largerfeld for Chanel, 1991).

prosperity, it could follow that consumers might be inclined to take a more active, participatory role. Luxury branded goods, whether high quality or perceived to be high quality, are considered to be more valuable than goods purchased in the mainstream market. A move away from large scale manufacturing to a more traditional workshop environment may result in fashion garments having more imperfections that result from being 'handmade' and in turn have more perceived value with the consumers who buy them.

An opportunity of further research would be to more closely examine the reasons why, in some cases, the attachment between a consumer and certain 'favourite' clothing items has become separated from the actual quality of the items themselves. Has the ability for consumers to determine quality been overcome by the branding of the products? Rather than the existing 'luxury goods tax' in Australia perhaps we should consider a 'non-luxury goods tax' for goods that are of a lesser quality in terms of manufacture, materials or design: independent of the labels that are stitched inside them.

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## Notes

1. At the time of writing Kim Fraser is in the process of publishing her research regarding the need for better statistics involving the amounts of clothing ending up in landfill in New Zealand. A recurring theme, and commonality between Fraser's work in New Zealand and the author's own research, is that the assumption that statistics from the northern hemisphere (UK and USA) may not apply for Australia and New Zealand studies in these cases.
2. Chanel had used tweed prior to this for suiting in the 1920s and 1930s; however, she is best known for the innovative soft open-weave tweeds that she used in the 1960s.
3. The term automated machining refers to a machining process that involves very minimal skill or interaction on the part of a machinist/operator. An example of an automated machining task is an automatic buttonhole whereby the garment is positioned on a machine bed by an operator who initiates the process by depressing a foot pedal (in this case) and the machine automatically makes and cuts the buttonhole. This is considered to be an unskilled labour task.



# Revealing Historic Traditions of Craftsmanship in the Context of Sustainable Fashion

Alison Gwilt

UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY SYDNEY (UTS), AUSTRALIA

## Abstract

Sustainability in fashion continues to be viewed as a fringe activity, both within the industry and the high street, perhaps due to a perception that creating or using sustainable fashion demands a radical change in process or behaviour. While it seems that it is the fashion designer who carries the responsibility for solving the problem, little accountability is placed upon the wearer (other than to consume less). Moreover, the misconception that engaging with sustainability is difficult is further confused by the use of specialist terminology, which acts as a barrier to accessibility. This paper intends to explore the proposition that both the fashion designer and the wearer should be equally engaged in the lifecycle of a garment and that examples of inspired techniques and processes can be located within the historic traditions of craftsmanship in the luxury sector.

Fashion designers who are unfamiliar with the principles of sustainable design often consider it as an after thought to design practice, relying upon computerised tools to reduce the negative environmental impact associated with the production and use of a garment (Black, Eckert and Eskandarypur, 2009). However this solution-focused approach does not challenge or encourage designers to seek alternative strategies for designing and making clothes. Furthermore, few designers consider a lifecycle approach to design, and yet there is great scope for integrating sustainable strategies in fashion design practice where the engagement of the wearer becomes critical.

While the fashion designer needs to be empowered to behave and think sustainably, the wearer also needs to become an active participant in the use phase of a garment's lifecycle. Within the luxury sector the creation of a couture garment provides the wearer with an experience and a means of engaging in the world on both a rational and emotional level. Through the lens of 'emotionally durable design' (Chapman, 2005) the lifecycle of a garment relies upon developing a relationship between the garment and the wearer, and historical case studies can be drawn from couture that demonstrate such a relationship can exist. Moreover, by revisiting the historic techniques and processes of the luxury sector that are relative to sustainability, this paper intends to reveal and recontextualise the notion of traditional craftsmanship within contemporary sustainable thinking.

## Introduction

In the production of fashion, Janet Hethorn and Connie Ulasewicz (2008), believe that a model for sustainable fashion is best viewed as "interconnecting people, processes and environment." (2008, p.xv). The use of the word 'processes' relates to the authors belief that it is how fashion is produced that needs to change in order to improve environmental and social issues. But while fashion designers are now aware of environmentally friendly fibres and sustainable textile solutions, the real challenge for the designer and the production team is to select and utilize appropriate sustainable design strategies within their design and production process, and specifically in utilizing strategies that can lead to the extension of a garment's life-cycle during the use phase. If sustainable design principles are to be truly integrated within fashion practice then the designer and production team needs to better understand the use phase of a garment and explore the relationship between the wearer and a garment. However the fashion industry typically engages in little research and development that sits outside of trend gathering and

## Keywords

Sustainability  
Fashion designer  
Wearer  
Luxury  
Couture  
Tradition

market analysis; in fact the time devoted to the research of new processes, techniques, materials, and so on is greatly lacking within the industry as a whole (Sinha, 2000; Sinha, 2002). With further insight of the use phase appropriate sustainable strategies can be utilized at the creation stage, which can lead to improved wearer engagement and appropriate care and disposal systems.

### Engaging with fashion

The production methods for fashion garments vary greatly, dependant upon the size and scale of the company and the sector for which the garments are being produced. A fashion business can be run as a small local owner/designer company producing high quality or luxury garments or can be a large international brand that produces inexpensive garments offshore in various locations. What remains more or less consistent is the method of production; a garment is sketched, a paper pattern is drafted, a toile is produced, the full sample range is made, and then selected garments are manufactured for retail. However, the debate between large versus small-scale production is a topical question for the fashion industry. The homogenised fashion often seen in the high street is usually a consequence of large-scale manufacturing, and a number of studies have noted that one future direction for the fashion industry may lie in a growth of smaller fashion enterprises that are run at the local level (Allwood et al, 2006; Draper et al, 2007; Black, 2008; Fletcher, 2008). At the local level it becomes possible to cultivate the production of garments alongside those of relevant services; a localised fashion industry –such as the Paris couture industry– can begin to grow into a sustainable community of skilled artisans, service providers, and suppliers who can think at a global level and yet act a local level (Manzini, 2003; Fletcher, 2008). However, the growth of a localised system of fashion producers and services providers is stimulated by an engaged and motivated community of wearers, which points to the need for the contemporary fashion industry to consider a new proposition where the responsibility for a garment is shared relationship between the producer and consumer.

Jonathan Chapman (2005) in his book, *Emotionally durable design: objects, experience and empathy*, argues that the designer should seek to lengthen the lifespan of a product whilst increasing resource productivity and reducing waste. He suggests that the designer should begin by questioning why it is that consumers dispose of products that still function and then should aim to reduce the impact of consumption by creating products that “...caters for deeper, more profound and poetic human needs, taking users beyond the ephemeral world of technocentric design towards a rich, interactive domain of emotionally durable objects and experiences.” (Chapman, 2005, p.24). In the world of fashion production the haute couture garment has a unique existence that offers a single user –the wearer– an authentic product, unlike a ready-to-wear technical reproduction, and the customer’s experience is one in which empathy and engagement is encouraged. In the production of an haute couture garment the wearer is provided with a specific item that has been executed to a flawless fit, moreover it is the subtle ways in which the garment is proportioned for the client that makes this process so exact. For example, if the client has a sloping shoulder the collar, pockets and shoulder seam of a jacket may be realigned to offer the illusion that the body is symmetrical. If the client has a fuller figure then vertical seamlines are redistributed to flatter the figure. Most substantially, when garments are inclusive of embroidery the embellishment will be scaled and situated according to the dimensions of the client (Shaeffer, 1993).

According to Alexander Palmer (2001) the wearers of haute couture would repeatedly wear and rotate their garments for many years. A common misconception was that a wearer would never wear a garment beyond the season for which it was created. This myth was clearly ill informed yet was continually perpetuated by the fashion press of the day. Having interviewed over a hundred couture clients Palmer found that many saw their purchases as long-term investments, and this fact was clearly understood by the couture houses. That haute couture garments should be considered an investment and offer such longevity was a testament to the design and durability of fine fabrication and production. Many of the couture clients of the 1950s had extensive wardrobe systems in place for care of garments. Maids were often employed, notably those who were skilled seamstresses were preferred. Storage space was often large and in some instances thermostatically-controlled. During the lifetime of the wearer the haute couture garments “...were handled as beautiful objects –a collection of very socially significant commodities...” (Palmer, 2001, p.234). It could be argued that the clients of haute couture were emotionally attached to their garments and an extended garment life-cycle was viewed positively, which was evident in the manufacture of the couture garment. During production of a garment the couture seamstresses would employ techniques such as deep hems and generous seam allowances. Examples of haute couture garments originally created in the 1950s, which are held in the Royal Ontario Museum, show that whilst alterations were made to garments often fabrics were not cut or removed. This meant that the

garment could be reconfigured in a number of ways over a period of many years. Clients were able to employ alterations if there was a need for updating or upsizing and there are many examples of haute couture garments in museum collections today that are a testament to this observation. Furthermore, within its lifetime one haute couture garment could have had two owners, which further reflects the value and potential longevity of the haute couture product (Palmer, 2001).

The wearing out of clothing provides a motive for disposal but it is not the only reason that the wearer discards an item. Clothes that become unfashionable; clothes that no longer fit; clothes that fit but do not look good; a life change; all become reasons for throwing away clothing that is often still functional. Where clothing goes for disposal largely depends upon the wearer's relationship with the garment. If clothing is still in a good condition, the empathetic wearer will place the garment in a recycling system rather than throw it away or may perhaps keep and store the item for later rediscovery. However, an indifferent wearer will discard a garment to general waste because of a perceived sense of finality that cannot be obtained from recycling (Fisher, Cooper, Woodward, Hillier and Goworek, 2008). While most products are capable of creating some empathy at the point of purchase, empathy also has a lifespan that is governed by the relationship between the product and the consumer; therefore waste becomes a symptom of the expired empathy (Chapman, 2005; Fletcher, 2008).

The fact that wearers will keep some clothing for extended periods of time should inspire the fashion designer to question how their created fashion garments are being used. The Local Wisdom project (Fletcher, 2009) records the interaction between wearer and clothing and attempts to uncover why it is that a wearer will keep some items of clothing but release others. Fletcher's project reinforces Chapman's notion of emotionally durable design, in that the people in Fletcher's study have engaged with their garment on a much deeper, emotional level. A suit is kept because it is worn for a wedding; a cardigan is kept because the owner had it knitted from her much-loved dog's hair; a favourite dress is passed between sisters who live apart from one another. These narratives demonstrate that while a fashion designer may help create an initial connection between garment and wearer, the wearer becomes responsible for continuing the relationship during and beyond the use phase. Nevertheless, if wearers are to consume less, then the fashion designer needs to engender the relationship between garment and wearer and explore creative opportunities so that clothing becomes typically retained rather than discarded. The fashion designer then needs to prepare fashion garments for the prospect of repair and alteration, or create garments that may be redirected towards inventive design services that may focus on, for instance, the remodeling or leasing of garments. These opportunities will be explored in the next section, which focuses on the use phase of a garment's lifecycle.

### **Exploring the use of fashion: laundering clothes**

Once a garment has been purchased the wearer will lead it through a series of distinct, and often personalized, acts from wearing, washing, storing, repairing (adaption and alteration) and through to disposal (Bras-Klapwijk & Knot, 2001). Each of these distinct acts will be executed differently according to a wearer's routine that often becomes habitual. A wearer will, for example, tend to wash certain types of clothes such as coloured clothing at a different temperature, usually colder, than white articles. This example of a laundering habit has usually been learned through practices passed down by the family members. The mother, grandmother or other relative has usually demonstrated how to use a washing machine, provided advice on stain removal, or the careful washing requirements for delicate fabrics.

The need for washing clothes comes from standards of cleanliness, relating to sweat and skin contact (Fisher et al, 2008). Clothes are washed because they are considered 'dirty'. But what constitutes 'dirty'? For some wearers that may mean washing a garment after a brief wearing, for others it might be after a whole day or perhaps two days of wearing. Fisher et al (2008) determined that sports or work wear clothing are often viewed as the dirtiest clothing and therefore washed at a much high temperature than other articles. However, clothes such as jumpers and items used for a shorter period are often said to require 'freshening up'. In understanding the relationship between types of dirt and appropriate laundering treatments the wearer is able to distinguish between clothes needing a full wash and ones needing a 'rinse'. What can be assumed from this is that wearers do not think of the appropriate care that is required in relation to fabric type, or that other methods of 'freshening up' (other than washing a garment) may exist. This pattern of behaviour also extends to ironing and tumble-drying. Human error creates problems in tumble-drying clothes: for instance, drying clothes at high temperatures causing shrinkage, or the distortion of garment shapes. Furthermore, the wearer falls foul to the incorrect identification of fibre types, which results in different fibres being mixed together in a batch for drying despite the need for separation according to their required and different drying times. Equally, irons are used at incorrect tempera-

tures; steam is used unnecessarily; and this is made worse by the complex composition of fabrics (Fisher et al, 2008). While all of these errors and problems lead to a reduction in the lifespan of a garment it seems that the wearer routinely washes and cares for garments using methods passed down through families without exploring other options.

If designers wish to aim towards a reduction in damage created by laundering then exploring strategies that allow consumers to wash garments less would provide a positive solution. In examples of couture garments held in museum collections, the use of dress shields in garments seems not uncommon. Often used in the underarm of a blouse, for instance, these components are used to protect the life of the fabric so that body odours do not erode the light and delicate fabrics. Furthermore, the fashion designer has the ability to provide the consumer with support through improved labeling, better design approaches and increased garment care information. These and many other creative opportunities are presented when the fashion designer thinks through the integration of sustainable strategies in design practice that focus on an improved garment care phase.

### Exploring the use of fashion: repairing and altering clothes

The UK report from DEFRA, *Public Understanding of Sustainable Clothing* (Fisher et al, 2008) acknowledged that few wearers undertake the repair of worn or damaged clothing. There seems little evidence of repair work being done as a normal, regular activity, except in relation to sewing on buttons and fixing hems. This lack of engagement by the wearer occurs because of a number of problems: a shortage of skills in the household; the attraction of new and relatively cheap clothing; the price of repair in comparison to new clothes and the availability of repair services. However the repair and alteration of clothing has been practiced for generations both in an industry context and in the home. Initially conducted for economic reasons fabrics were carefully maintained and repaired, since labour was cheap compared to the cost of textile materials and garments. As an example, in the years preceding the 1950s it was common for the couture houses to undertake garment maintenance for free, or for a nominal charge, although this service received no direct promotion (Palmer, 2001). Presently, the maintenance of garments still remains as a service for the couture clients, with companies such as Dior providing the arrangement under what is considered as a typical guarantee agreement. Often it is not practical for the clients to return to the house of purchase for maintenance work and particularly during the 1950s clients would turn to local businesses for alterations and repairs. However, within two generations the culture of repairing and altering clothes in contemporary society has largely disappeared. Nevertheless, there is an emerging grassroots movement within sustainable fashion fringe groups that have emerged through numerous blogs and social network sites, which has revived an interest in the use of craft skills for sustainable fashion outcomes. Though it seems that the creative practice of re-modeling clothing is indicative of contemporary craft practices and has reignited an interest in the creative potentials of altering clothing, society in general seems to be remote from such practices (Fisher et al, 2008).

While Fisher et al (2008) remarked that as a society, wearers are not engaged in the practice of repairing or altering clothing; the fashion designer is ideally located to encourage this as a practice. One solution exists in the concept of modular clothing where any one piece can be replaced without affecting the rest of the system. Worn out pieces can be renewed and styles can be reconfigured by interchanging the modules; these types of products become flexible to the wearer's need providing the option of standardised products which offer the opportunity for customisation into a wide range of garments (Quinn, 2002). However, the idea of a modular system is not a contemporary concept since there are many examples of modular schemes in fashion history, for instance in the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century the bodice worn originally as an outer garment became an under garment, sleeves could be detached and reattached accordingly (Hart and North, 1998). Modularity can offer the wearer a range of clothing combinations typically found in a large collection, while only manufacturing several core designs. The economics of mass production make it expensive to manufacture small numbers of individual products yet very cost effective to produce large numbers of a small range (Quinn, 2002). Designers would therefore be able to reduce their production costs considerably and offer more competitive prices to the wearer, and so the opportunity for repairing, altering or replacing worn out component pieces, becomes great. Furthermore, designers should begin to endorse the wearing of visibly repaired garments as socially acceptable, thereby encouraging the wearer to overcome outdated social stigmas (Fletcher, 2008).

The life-cycle of a fashion garment can be further extended through the use of a product-service system combination, which places a dual focus on both the product and a service rather than concentrating on the product in its entirety. A product-service model allows the wearer to gain both a garment and a service through a number of different approaches. A garment can, for example, be complimented with



a take-back scheme that allows the wearer to hand the item back to the producer when they have ceased to wear it (Bras-Klapwijk & Knot, 2001). These product-service models provide the possibility for new niche business opportunities that could revive ailing businesses, especially if the interest in a slow fashion movement gains impetus. As designers seek to reduce the over production of fashion garments diverse business opportunities can flourish: including repair and alteration services; fashion leasing services; and remodeling services that can positively impact on the amount of textile waste being generated through excessive consumption.

### Designing through the lens of the wearer

If the fashion designer needs to think about garments and ideas that are relative to sustainability then the fashion designer should think about designing from different perspectives. Rather than see designing from an external (professional) perspective, the fashion designer could approach designing from an internal (wearer) perspective. The fashion designer has the opportunity to engage with design from a direct observation and engagement with the wearer, who is the main user of the garment. This might seem an obvious point to make but for the majority of the time fashion designers are typically concerned with the aesthetics of a garment; conversely, it would seem that clothing designers, for example those who create uniforms, are primarily focused on the functionality of a garment (Hethorn, 2008). This then means that the fashion designer does not typically consider both aesthetics and functionality in equal measure. However, if the balance between aesthetic and functional values were equally shared then this would provide an approach for "...designing for individual well-being" (Hethorn, 2008 p.58). Hethorn describes a number of activities that designers could be engaged in that would help the designer see fashion from other perspectives: observation of wearers, watching how people move or how they arrange combinations of clothing; participant observations, where the designer directly experiences the same activity as the wearer to gauge the comfort and suitability of a piece of clothing; interviewing wearers, either as an individual or group to draw on a personal response to clothing; managing data electronically, gathering together information through computerised programs and tools that allow a designer to approach the visual analysis or database, including the blog as a useful resource site. Drawing on the knowledge and experience of the wearer allows the designer to think beyond the production or retail phase, and consider how fashion garments are to be used, cared for or disposed of. This type of information could lead to new, inspired ways of developing fashion that is purposely designed not only for aesthetic reasons but also for functional reasons, for instance creating fashion that can expand and retract with the body enabling the wearer to reduce the need for different garments over periods of fluctuating body changes (Hethorn, 2008)

### Conclusion

It is becoming increasingly important that both the fashion designer and the consumer need to engage with sustainable design strategies for fashion in order for garments to work sustainably. That a fashion designer can create a low wash garment while the wearer chooses to continue with poor learned laundering practices (rather than following the instructions provided by the designer) demonstrates that a shared responsibility is critical. Furthermore, if the wearer accepts the responsibility of a garment then there needs to be recognition for the difference between a 'need' and a 'want' at the point of purchase. Chapman (2005) argues that if a damaged vacuum cleaner is replaced, it may be morally acceptable to 'need' a new one yet it would be immoral to buy 2 or 3 vacuum cleaners. Moreover, while there may be a 'need' for one new vacuum cleaner, in some cultures it is not actually an essential item at all. Therefore the wearer should be evaluating the purchase of a new garment in relationship to the real need and consider whether alternative options may exist to reduce the unnecessary consumption of fashion clothing. If the fashion industry and press were to encourage consumers to think beyond buying products that reflect their desires for status, prestige, and social recognition, then garments may inherently achieve a longer, more useful life-cycle. It may seem that a reduction in consumption from the fashion industry's perspective does not make economic sense; but this is a myopic view. The vision for the future of the fashion industry could reflect a balanced and creative approach to the design, production, use and disposal of responsible fashion garments. Exploring fashion through the perspective of the wearer provides the fashion designer with the opportunity to prepare a garment for an improved, and extended life-cycle and in turn offers a concept for a localized fashion industry of both producers and service providers that is reflective of a system adopted by the Paris couture industry. Moreover the true challenge is not to design and produce sustainable garments but to encourage behavioural change within our society. The ideal scenario is one wherein the designer drives design for sustainability through an integration of products,

services and systems, which then advocates widespread change in the fashion production process and in the public's attitude to the consumption and use of fashion garments.

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# A Sustainable Synergy of Traditional and CAD Based Silk Saree Designing/Production

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Kumaraguru Kasinathan

PEARL ACADEMY OF FASHION CHENNAI CAMPUS, NEW DELHI, INDIA

## Abstract

Handloom industry in India has gone through lot of changes and evolution in the past few decades in terms of innovations and introduction of new designs, and technology addressing various new product ranges. The industry has greatly benefited through the new technology for creating different designs for most product groups/clusters. However certain clusters/product groups continue to use the traditional design craftsmanship.

This paper analyses the usage of 2 different design techniques, both traditional and modern by different cluster groups and bring out the advantages/disadvantages of each technique. The analysis for the research work will be based on various clusters in Kanchipuram (a famous silk saree production hub near Chennai) and Coimbatore (a textile town), in Tamilnadu, South India. These 2 centres are the manufacturing hubs of various clusters producing handloom ethnic silk and blended products like saree (pudavai), skirt (paavadai), half-sari (thavani) and other product ranges.

In the overall view these 2 clusters, produce similar products and serve similar end users, but vary in price, design, materials, technology and manufacturing methods. While Kanchipuram has seen almost a total shift to modern technology for both design and manufacture, in Coimbatore both traditional and modern methods continue to coexist.

An initial analysis has shown that while products are similar, there are variations in price, design, materials, technology and manufacturing methods. The method adopted is based on the price of the product and the order size anticipated. The cost of manual designing and conversion of same for weaving technology is considerably less (mainly due to high cost of computer hardware & software as well as computer designer's charges) and hence more affordable for low cost and low volume products. Also traditional saree designers are able to produce better designs through manual methods of sketching and illustration. Once a particular design is well received in the market the same is further developed for variations and mass production using modern CAD/CAM technology.

The paper will throw light on the identification of the various parameters under which the traditional design and production are still used in South India and identify the marketing & business strategies to foster the sustenance and livelihood various traditional weaving communities in and around Coimbatore. It will also throw light on educating the weavers on how to use the modern techniques to scale up their best selling designs and leverage it for improving their livelihood.

## Introduction

Indian Handloom industry produces large quantities of contemporary and ethnic hand silk products to the world. Particularly the main products are Silk sari, Carpets, Rugs and Bedsheets etc. In this the major product manufactured by the handloom in India is Sari, Highly Silk & Silk Blend Saris.

There are many places producing silk and silk blend sarees in India, the places are Banaras, Chanderi, Tanda, Surat, Aurangabad in Northern India and Kanchipuram, Arni, Kumbhakonam, Tiruchirappalli, Coimbatore, Salem, Bangalore, Mysore Venkatagiri, Kothapalli, Balaramapuram in Southern India. Among the major places in Southern India, Kanchipuram and its adjoining places are well known for 100% silk saree design & production and Coimbatore and its allied places are well known for Silk and Silk Blend Sarees (mixed with cotton) design & production.

## Keywords

Handloom Industry  
Heritage Craftsmanship  
Silk Sarees  
Traditional Designers  
CAD Technology  
Weaving Clusters

The research work carried in this paper briefly explains about the places are Kanchipuram a major silk sari hub & Coimbatore a major textile hub in Southern India, these two places are producing a handloom ethnic silk and blended products like saree (pudavai), skirt (paavadai), half-sari (thavani) and other product ranges but vary in price, design, materials, technology, manufacturing methods and the end users and market stores are same.

People who are engaged in silk production in these two clusters belong to certain weaving community such as Devangha in Southern India for whom it has been a family hereditary business for the past 100 years as Designers, Weavers, Merchants, Traders and Retailers. In Kanchipuram they are known as Devangha Chettiar and in Coimbatore as Devangha Mudhaliar with each community believing different gods, beliefs and lifestyles. And their lifestyle has bearing on their Culture, Life Cycle, Colors, Design Senses, Design Interpretation Skills, Design Methods, Weaving Skills, Utilisation of Technology, Marketing Skills and Salary Wages.

These 2 centres manufacture the same product, but the product varies in price and its manufacturing process; for example Kanchipuram uses the CAD/CAM Technology very effectively for the silk sari design and manufacture. In Coimbatore, people still use the traditional manufacturing process because of low cost and low volume products. Few of the designers and manufactures try to adapt the CAD/CAM technology, but they faced various problems in the market level business and product pricing strategy. As a via media the designers and manufactures in Coimbatore try to adapt simplified methods of CAD Designing and also manufacturing (mainly due to high cost of computer hardware & software as well as computer designer's charges). A few of them are interested to design and manufacture the product in a traditional approach to maintain the craftsmanship and heritage of the Indian Handloom industry.

In this paper, how these 2 clusters are adapting recent computerized design and manufacturing techniques for their own product development and what are all the advantages and disadvantages evidenced in the areas of the design, preproduction, production, trading and retailing. Also the paper delves into the methods adopted by these weavers to overcome from the various issues from different practical situations and how they are trying to maintain their traditional heritage with the adaption of CAD/CAM.

## Literature Review

### Sari

Saris (pudavai) are woven with one plain end (the end that is concealed inside the wrap), two long decorative borders running the length of the sari, and a one to three foot section at the other end which continues and elaborates the length-wise decoration. This end is called the pallu; it is the part thrown over the shoulder in the nivi style of draping.

Hand-woven, hand-decorated saris are naturally much more expensive than the machine imitations. While the over-all market for hand weaving has plummeted (leading to much distress among Indian hand weavers), hand-woven saris are still popular for weddings in all Indian communities and other grand social occasions in India and saris has various diversified products such as skirt and half-sari to the Indian women.

### Sari weaving techniques used in South India

There are two main techniques adopted in saree weaving process in India as follows:

- Interlock (Korvai) Sarees
- Brocade Sarees
  - . Zari with Single and Multi Color Brocades
  - . Plain Saree with Brocade Borders
  - . Check Pattern with Brocade Borders (Ilkal saree)

### Brocade Sarees

The most popular weave used in Sarees is brocade a technique widely used in all the places of India, especially Kanchipuram weavers use this concept extensively with silk and zari (Gold/Silver wrapped silk yarns) materials to enrich the product value and richness.

### Characteristics of the Brocade Saree

The main characteristics of brocade fabrics,

- Heavy gold work
- Compact weaving



Photo  
1 Sari

- Figures have small details
- Metallic visual effect
- Pallu –a wide middle portion with decorative motifs all over, with one cross border on the top and another at the bottom

### Extra Warps and Wefts concept in Brocade Weaving

The brocade designs, as mentioned earlier, are made with extra threads other than the ground threads. These extra threads are usually weft threads. When these extra threads are picked from one border of the fabric to the other, the threads appear on the face of the fabric in the design portion and float on the back of the fabric in the remaining portion.

### Kancheepuram Saree Industry

Kancheepuram is known as the “Silk Paradise” of the world. The Sarees, woven from pure mulberry silk and embellished with fine Gold thread (zari) are known for its dazzling colors and are available in every design and variety that one can think of in the early years, till a century and a half back, Kancheepuram was a cotton weaving center primarily. The Scenario has changed today. The pinch, better-woven and more expensive silk sarees are from Kancheepuram.

Kancheepuram Sarees are very heavy and gorgeous Sarees and are used specially for marriages in South India as their traditional wedding Saree. Kanchipuram produce Sarees with designs that are heavy in both style and fabric weight with very wide borders. In fact, the main feature of Kancheepuram Saree is the time consuming method of interlocking its weft colors as well as its end piece in the process of creating solid borders “Pallu” and a solid “Mundhi”.

Introduction of computerized Jacquard borders in Kancheepuram Silk Sarees has proved to be a boon to Kancheepuram, which is getting its past glory. Today, about 13,500 kg of raw silk and 8,000 marcs of gold zari per month are required by the silk industry in the cooperative sector. Under the private sector, the monthly requirement of silk is, 1,20,000 kg and 45,000 marcs of gold zari. The requirement usually goes up during festivals, due to more demand for saris.

### Coimbatore Saree Industry

Coimbatore is a well-known textile town in Southern India, and also called as Manchester of Southern India, 60% of the cotton yarn & fabric exports of India are from this textile town. The major hand weaving clusters near to this town are Sirumugai, Punjai Pulliampatti. These two places are quite popular for Handwoven Korra /cotton Brocade Sarees.

The materials used in these sarees are cotton, kora silk (China art silk), these silk is comparatively cheaper than the mulberry silk. Sarees produced from these places are mixture of two yarns example cotton in warp vs Kora silk in weft, to minimize the cost of product cotton yarns are used to handle the product with easy care.

Other than sarees, the diversified products like skirts, half-sarees, and salwar-kameez are produced from these places and have obtained good response from the customers. The major patterns used in these places are dobby and jacquard using the handloom. Introduction of CAD/ CAM technology are not very much adopted by the manufactures and designers because of the product pricing. The Korra silk products are mostly sold to the local retailers in Southern India and some exports are done to the Arab countries. Women generally prefer Korra silk fabrics compared to mulberry silk fabrics for their regular use because of its ease of handling care and regular use.

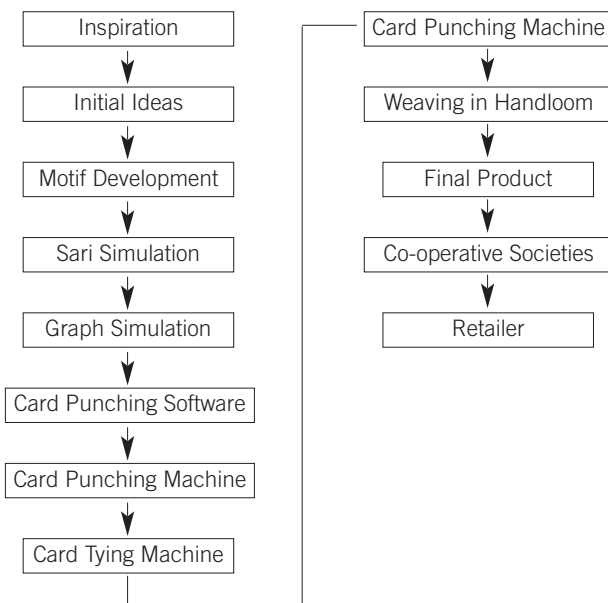
### Research Method

The manufacturing process and utilization of technology differs from these two sectors. Kanchipuram weavers adopt the CAD/CAM Technology starts from design to production; in Coimbatore both traditional and CAD techniques are being adapted in designing while utilisation of CAM in saree production is rarely used



Photo  
1 Kancheepuram Saree Industry

### Process Work Flow of Kanchipuram Saree Industry



#### Inspiration

Kancheepuram is very ancient city dotted with large number of temples. The city is considered as one of the foremost ‘Shakti Peetas’ of Tantric works in India. And the major temples are

- Ekambaranthar temple
- Kailasanthar
- Iravatheswar temple.
- Vaikunda Perumal temple
- Mukteswarar temple
- Kamatchi Amman temple
- Varadaraja Perumal temple
- Yadhothkari Perumal temple

The above temples were constructed by Pallavas in the 7<sup>th</sup> century ending with the Nawab of Arcot during the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when it fell under the British rule.

Each temple has its own architecture style and in the form of sculpture, patterns, color and the construction. All these factors are major influences for the Kanchipuram designers to choose their inspiration.

#### Initial Ideas

The inspirations from temples are mixed with natural or geometrical shapes to explore the creative ideas to convert the final motif.

#### Motif Development

The traditional motifs found in Kancheepuram saris include borders, checks, stripes, floral buttas, Rudraksham (representing Rudraksha beads), Gopuram, mallinaggu, mayilkan (peacock’s eye), Kuyilkan (nightingale eye) and more on with natural leaves, flowers and fruits.

Patterns are also formed by lines and squares and when the jasmine motif is found either inside a square or scattered all over, it is called mallinaggu. The Thandavalam motif has parallel-line motifs running all over the body of the sari. In the pattu motif, the pallu and the border alone have floral motifs independently woven on them.

Emblematical motifs such as fresh mango, sweet grapes, elephant, the sun, moon, chariots, yali, swans, elegant peacocks, parrots, lions, coins, the graceful three bells of an anklet diamond, lotus, pot, creeper, flower, parrot, and hen are very common in these sarees. However these days depiction of stories from mythology scenes likes great epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata along with the Bhagwad Gita being used as motifs. Tribal designs as well as modern patterns are also seen.



Photo  
1 A temple in Kancheepuram

From all these influences the final motif is drawn using pen tool in the CAD industrial software GC kala, PCTex, Teckmen Systems etc. Using this software the editing and design manipulation effects are done easily.

### **Sari Simulation**

Once the final motifs are drawn in CAD the next process would be repeat setting. In this process, the borders and pallu designs are set with proper repeat size using the developed motifs.

Motifs and other geometrical patterns are arranged according to the trends, colors, materials and handloom capability and the final sari simulation works are sent to the cooperative society peoples for the final design approval.

### **Color Ways**

Once the design is approved, designers can manipulate the various color combinations from the approved design. All the color combination simulations are sent to the cooperative society once again to weave the first sample sari from any one of the sample colors.

### **Graph Simulation**

Once the sample color and design is approved, the designers have to convert each motif/pattern adjusted with the different hooks capacity of the jacquard loom into graph form this process is called the graph simulation

### **Card Punching Software**

Most of these cards punching software are programmed for DOS operating systems and its works on the Windows 98 platform. Graph simulations are converted as punch card simulations to the card punching machine.

### **Card Punching Machine**

Once the simulation has created from the punching software, it is transferred to the computerised card punching machine. This machine is suitable for all types of Handloom, Powerloom for different hook capacities. Advanced card punching machine has a feature where very old hand written graphs can be converted as punch card simulations and hand punched cards can be also be converted as punch card simulations.

### **Card Tying Machine**

Punched cards are numbered and arranged in a tray to the tying machine. In this machine each card has 2 peg holes in the right and left side of the card for lacing .The material used for lacing is nylon or thin cotton twine.

### **Card Mounting Machine**

Tied cards are transferred to the mounting machine which is normally placed in the head of jacquard loom. In this process each tied card bundle are lifted to the cylinders area attached in the cylinder peg latches.

### **Weaving in Handloom**

The loom which is used in Kanchipuram clusters are 120, 240 hooks capacity single lift double cylinder jacquard loom, one cylinder for borders and another for pallu or body design. These looms are made by carpenters from small scale industries. Each weaver has its own way of handling the loom and the weaving process.

The raw materials used in Kanchipuram saree weaving are:

- Silk Threads
- Golden zari

*Silk Threads:* The mulberry silk is enormously fine as well as tough and comes from Karnataka, threads provides it astounding luster, typical texture, sturdiness and finish. The silk thread used for weaving is made up of three single threads twisted together but now, the three-fold silk thread had been refurbished with a two-fold one in order to cut down the production cost. The tedious procedure of making a Kanchipuram silk saree starts with the chore of preparing the Silk threads. The first step is to twist the thread and then dyed them in a variety of color as silk is very high.

*Golden zari:* The State of Gujarat holds an implicit cartel in the manufacture of 'Zari' especially, the City of Surat. Zari is used while making a saree. It is a Silk thread twisted with thin Silver wire and then immersed in pure gold. It is believed this tradition started during the Mughal period. First, gold is made into a liquid form and then coated on the silver. This will add on to the beauty and the value of the silk. The quality of zari also determines the quality of the saree. If quality of zari is good, then the luster of saree would linger for a longer extent or else the saree would be firm and hard. The saree is unique in itself since it is entirely hand woven with dyed silk yarn with interleaved designs made with 'Zari' amenable to dyes and will maintain its sheen after dyeing. The threads are dipped in rice water and dried in Sun. The twisted yarn is said to be much stronger than crepe and guaranteed to last 30 to 40 years. This is basically due to the fact that India has the exclusive feature of producing diverse varieties of silk. The heavier the silk, longer is its durability. The time to weave for one complete saree is depends upon the pallu and body design elements, taking 3-5 days.

**Final Product**

Once the saree has been completed on the loom after the weaving process, it is inspected thoroughly with the help of magnifying glass to identify the fabric faults and rectified using the comb, scissors to cut the extra entangled threads and then folded neatly. Before packing the sari, the weight of the sari is measured and the product number is marked in the product label along with its length.

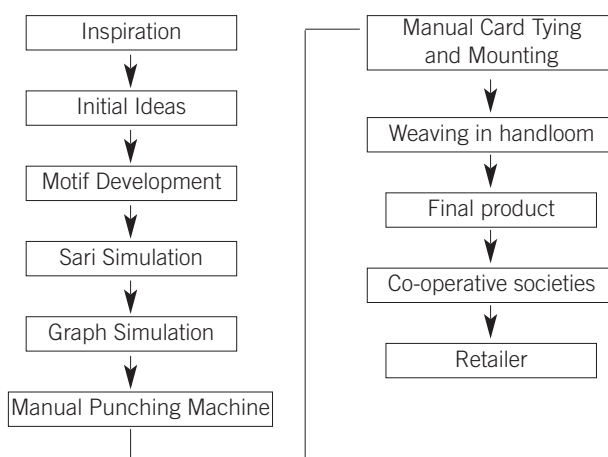
**Co-operative societies**

Packed saris are dispatched to the cooperative stores, these cooperative stores work in both the government and private sector. The method of operation for cooperative stores works in two modes. First mode of the cooperative societies is to collect the woven the sarees from weavers and fix a sales margin for a individual saree and sell it to the retailers. Second mode of the cooperative societies work as manufacturers for specific retailers, in this mode the society has its own weaving unit; they outsource the design from freelance designers. In the same mode a few of them lease the loom from weavers for a contract period of 2-3 years from the individual weavers.

**Retailers**

Some retailers in southern India are EBOs example: Nalli Silks, RMKV, Pothys etc., which area very famous in Chennai capital of Tamilnadu State and also have braches in US and other Asian countries. Other retailers sell the product in separate department along with the other apparels.

**Process Work Flow of Coimbatore Saree Industry**



**Inspiration**

Coimbatore is a place of textile town and Manchester of Southern India. It is surrounded by Nilgiri Hills and the clusters Sirumugai, Punjai Pulliampatti are very near to the hills. The climatic condition of the place is cold in Autumn/ Winter and hot in Spring/Summer. Apart from very few temples are located in these places are:



- OthiMalai Aandavar temple
- Bannari Amman temple
- Anjaneyar temple
- Then Tirupathi temple

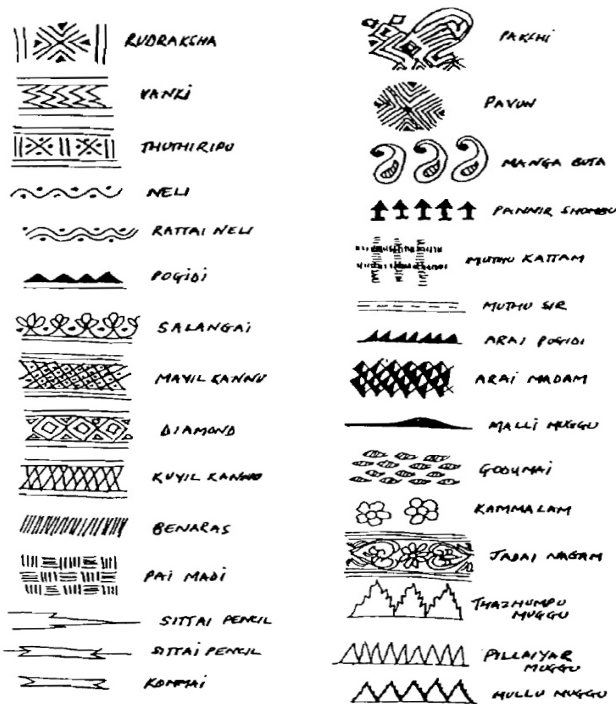
People who work as a designer are inspired by more natural and geometrical forms, as well as temple patterns are used. They are also influenced by Kanchipuram and Banares products to add more richness to saree. Upcoming young designers explore through other media such as internet, art books, magazines, digital CDs.

From the internet they are influenced by other country patterns, art forms which are then redesigned according to the South Indian style, colors, repeat methods & preferences.

**Initial Ideas**

All the above inspirations are started with initial sketches keeping in mind the product, cost and market demands.

**Motif Development**



The above mentioned sketch has taken from the famous designer Mr. Saravanan, SS Designers, Punjai Puliampatti, and Coimbatore. He is working as a designer for the past 15 years. He started the sari design learning from his father. Shown above are sketches that are used as common traditional pattern all the time in this cluster. These motifs are quite popular in the market and with constant demand from customers. These patterns are very much liked by women of all the age groups. These patterns are not only used in sari, it is use in half sari, Salwar Kameez for 15-24 age group girls and basic tops & skirts for 5-12 years girl children.

From the above sketches, few patterns are created from the various influences example:

- Rudraksha - Inspired from the lines in Rudraksha seed
- Neli, Rattai Neli - Inspired from curly stem plants
- Salangai - Inspired from jewelry which is worn in the Anklet
- Mayil Kanna - Inspired from the eyes of peacock
- Benaras - Inspired from banares silk sarees
- Pai Madi - Inspired the pattern from handwoven floor mats
- Sittai Pencil - Inspired the sharp edges of pencil
- Manga buta- - Inspired from the mango shape
- Pannir Shombu - Inspired from the vessel used to sprinkle a rose water in the Indian sacred function

- Kammalam - Inspired from the flower lotus
- Pillaiyar Muggu - Inspired from nose of God Vinayagga
- Thazhumdu Muggu - Inspired from Eucalyptus tree

From all these major influences the final motif is drawn as a hand sketch or using the regular graphic software as Adobe Photoshop, Paint Shop Pro.

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### Sari Simulation

Once the final motifs are drawn using Adobe Photoshop, the proper repeat arrangement is set by the repeat setting method. In this simulation process, designers try various repeat manipulation methods with various color ways. Design approvals for these clusters are done by the cooperative societies head and also the retail store managers.

### Graph Simulation

After the design approval, the individual motifs from the saree simulation are converted as a point paper according to the hooks capacity of the jacquard.

### Manual Card Punching

In this cluster, card punching processes are done by hand using hammer and nail by a certain community people whose traditional work is card punching and tying. Either they work as family business or groups. In this process time consumed is very high when compared with computerized card punching machine. Use of computerized card punching has started in these places recently. Finally the punched cards are sent it to the weavers.



### Weaving in Handloom

The loom which is used in Coimbatore clusters are 120, 240 hooks capacity single lift double cylinder jacquard loom, one cylinder for borders and another for pallu or body design. These looms are made by carpenters from small scale industries. Each weaver has its own way of handling the loom and the weaving process.

The raw materials used in Coimbatore saree weaving are:

- Cotton yarn
- Korra Silk (China Art Silk)
- Artificial Zari

#### *Cotton Yarns*

High twisted fine cotton combed yarns are mostly used in warp of the fabric for lower priced sarees. The cotton yarns are manufactured from near by spinning mills in Coimbatore. Once the yarn is produced it is dyed in the yarn dyeing machine and then finally coated with wax to reduce the abrasion in the heald eye of the loom.

#### *Korra Silks*

Art silk is a synthetic manufactured fiber which resembles silk but costs less to produce. Art silk is just a synonym for rayon.

High priced sarees are manufactured with 100% of Korra silks in warp and weft ways of the fabric. These yarns are bought from China by leading yarn traders in Coimbatore. These silk yarns are comparable with mulberry silks in luster, typical texture, sturdiness and finish. The main draw back of the saree is durability is less. Price is cheaper than mulberry silk.

Despite a generally similar appearance, genuine silk has unique features that are distinguishable from artificial silk.

#### *Artificial Zari*

These are yarns are manufactured by the principle of cover spinning called as Artificial Zari. The core of the yarn is either cotton or korra wrapped with synthetic metallic yarn. The main color are in artificial zari are gold and silver.

### Final Product

Once the saree is completed on the loom after the weaving process, it is inspected manually and measured the length of the saree marked on the label, finally packed sent it to the cooperative societies

Photo  
1 Manual Card Punching

## Cooperative Societies and Retailers

Cooperative stores work as private sector. The method of operation for cooperative stores works in only one mode. The cooperative societies collect the woven sarees from weavers and fix a sales margin for an individual saree and sell it to the retailers.

Cooperative Societies are tied up with a few of the local retailers / stores in Coimbatore and other cities in Tamil Nadu. Apart from these societies are tied up with North Indian retailers from Bombay and Delhi. As the cost is very less when compared with Kanchipuram silk sarees people across India from various regions & culture prefer these type of Korra sarees for regular use.

## Findings and Discussion

### Analysis of Design Elements

#### Color

Kanchipuram sarees are usually made in bright or earthy-crimson, brilliant reds, saffron, orange, bright green, henna green, maroon, black, peacock blue, turquoise and ochre with bright divergent borders. Even the color combinations are vibrant. A mango yellow body is set out by a deep maroon border. A parrot green body is matched with a bright pink border. These days silver is being used in addition to gold. Weavers also make tissue sarees using only gold or silver metal threads. With their alluring colors and wonderful designs, Kanchipuram silk sarees are worn by the rich and prosperous across India.

In comparison Coimbatore Kora Sarees maroon, blue, yellow are the most powerful colors which are used in all the sarees, and these colors are adapted by the designers in their designs development when fashion changes for different seasons.

When compared between these clusters in the color analysis, the major differentiate is black which is used for extra figured patterns for the body putta in Coimbatore korra sarees. In Kanchipuram black color is not used in wedding sarees. If they wanted to use black color in the motif, the weavers show the design with very small floats in the face side of the sari for non wedding sarees.

#### Motif

Analyzing the motifs of the patterns which are used in the Kanchipuram and Coimbatore sarees, there are many common motifs used in both the clusters, with a few motifs and patterns that are exclusive to each of the clusters, because of their various reasons like:

- Followers of Different god and temples
- Influence of atmospheric conditions
- Influence on history of the places; ex: Survivor, King, Events and so on
- Festivals, Dance, Marriages, Beliefs

The following table explains the motifs which are majorly used in both the clusters and about their influences from which part of inspiration.

S. No	Motif or pattern	Kanchipuram Saree	Coimbatore Saree	Comments
1	Checks, stripes	Y	Y	Used in pallu and body putta designs
2	Rudraksham	Y	Y	
3	Temple gopuram	Y	N	Temples in Kanchipuram have very big gopurams
4	Mallinaggu	Y	Y	
5	Mayilkan (peacock's eye)	Y	Y	Effectively used in both the clusters
6	Kuyilkan (nightingale eye)	Y	Y	
7	Thandavalam motif	Y	N	
8	Mango	Y	Y	
9	Sweet grapes	Y	Y	
10	Elephant	Y	Y	
11	The sun	Y	N	God in Kanchipuram temples are associated with element of sun
12	Moon	Y	N	Associated with god signs
13	Chariots	Y	N	Associated with King Pallavas Ratham
14	Yali	Y	Y	Associated with sculptures and temples
15	Swans	Y	Y	Inspired from sculptures and paintings in the temple
16	Peacocks	Y	Y	Associated with sculptures and temples
17	Parrots	Y	Y	Associated with sculptures and temples
18	Lions	Y	N	Lion is not depicted in Coimbatore weavers community
19	Coins	Y	Y	
20	Bells	Y	Y	
21	Anklet diamond	Y	Y	
22	Lotus	Y	Y	
23	Pot	Y	Y	
24	Creeper	Y	Y	
25	Flower	Y	Y	
26	Parrot	Y	Y	

27	Hen	Y	N	Hen is not depicted in Coimbatore weavers community
28	Epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata, Bhagwad Gita	Y	N	Very complicated patterns and colors, it's very difficult to weave in Coimbatore based weavers, and using korra silk accuracy in the design is very limited.
29	Tribal designs	Y	Y	
30	Neli, Rattai Neli	N	Y	Influence from trees in the forest
31	Salangai	N	Y	Salangai is the dance anklet used as a accessory worn during Indian Classical dance
32	Benaras	N	Y	Kancipuram Weavers want to differentiate their sarees
33	Pai Madi	N	Y	Influenced from hand-woven called "pai" which is used for floor coverings
34	Sittai Pencil	N	Y	Influence from shape of pencil
35	Pannir Shombu	N	Y	Influence from shape of pannir kalasm
36	Kammalam	N	Y	Inspired from Rangoli Shape
37	Pillaiyar Muggu	N	Y	Influence of God Vinayaga in their temples
38	Thazhumdu Muggu	N	Y	

Y: used N: not used



### Analysis of Materials

Comparing the materials which are used in both the cluster saris, each has different characteristics and the physical properties, the major characteristics and physical properties are taken as a survey from the weavers. Retailers and customers and the finalized rating grades are shown below:

S.No	Type of Yarn	Price	Properties Rating					
			Luster	Comfort to Skin	Durability & washing	Strength	Richness	Tradition
1.	Mulberry Silk	Rs.3000-3800/Kg	Very Good	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Very Good	Very Good
2.	Gold Zari	Rs. 5000 -10500/ Kg	Excellent	Poor	Poor	Satisfactory	Excellent	Excellent
3.	Twisted Cotton	Rs.700-1200/Kg	Poor	Excellent	Excellent	Very Good	Satisfactory	Normal
4.	Kora Silk (Artificial Silk)	Rs. 2500-3000/Kg	Very Good	Very Good	Very Good	Excellent	Good	---
5.	Artificial Zari	Rs.400-700/ Kg	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	--

While the broad usage of materials are as above in Kanchipuram different designs are made in a range of material to suit the preferences and affordability of the customers while in Coimbatore the range is limited to materials with lower price ranges.

### Analysis of Design Process & Methodology

When analyzing the design process development, the major difference is shown in the area of CAD packages and CAM Machines

Kanchipuram cluster is a highly evolved and high in revenue generation when compared to other saree clusters in India, because of the product quality & range, higher price bracket and the brand image. Most of the designers in Kanchipuram are very comfortable to buy the industrial CAD packages because ease of use, quick results, better accuracy. Also their revenue generation being good they can afford to buy the specialized CAD packages and the charges for designers. Weaver's wages are very high when compared to other clusters due to the higher turnover and margins.

The typical setup of design works in Kanchipuram has a design studio with a head designer with a team of minimum of 3 or 4 junior designers working in the design team. Hence design charges and no of designs created per month is high when compared to Coimbatore clusters.

In comparison in Coimbatore cluster, the product selling value and price range being less when compared with Kanchipuram, Coimbatore designers can't afford to buy the specialized CAD software and most of the designers in these cluster they prefer regular graphic software as Adobe Photoshop, Paintshop Pro for their design development. These software are generic software, easy to learn and adaptable by the young designers. People who are working as a CAD Textile Designers in these clusters try various pixel manipulation techniques to show their fabric simulation outputs, which are similar to the specialized CAD Package outputs. The major difference is that a greater number of steps are required to simulate a fabric design in graphic packages.

A designer working in Coimbatore can afford to buy the regular graphic packages when compared with industrial CAD packages, the main advantages of this software being cost reduction, and easy to learn and explore the different type of designs.

The below table shows the comparison between each software packages in the area of saree design development:

S.No	Industrial CAD Software (Kanchipuram Cluster)	Regular Graphic Software (Coimbatore Cluster)
1.	Cost of the software is high	Software cost is less when compared with CAD software
2.	Very few steps to create and edit the design	More steps are required when compared with CAD software
3.	Technical Knowledge needed to train in the software	With out technical knowledge learner can be trained in the software
4.	Design Copyrights are effective and safe, secure.	Format of the design file is generic, its is not safe and secure
5.	Easy to memorize the steps	More steps are required to memorize
6.	High configuration of hardware system is required.	Medium Level Hardware configuration is enough to install the software
7.	A separate PC has allocated for this software, because of its hardware key.	Can be installed in any PC, there is no hardware key.
8.	Fabric Simulation can be developed with 2D & 3D	2D simulation only can be developed
9.	Plug-in options are not preferred for this software	Design plug-ins can be added in this software from the various web resources
10	Software updating can be done after the renewal of payments	Free internet updating can be done at any time
11	Can be configured with electronic jacquard support	It can't be configured with electronic jacquard support

## Analysis of Preproduction Process

The main analyses of pre production process are Computerized and Manual Card Punching with Card Lacing methods,

### Computerized Card Punching With Manual Card Punching Process

Once the design is approved from the cooperative society it has to be converted as Point paper simulation in the punching software in Kanchipuram cluster while in the Coimbatore cluster the normal graphic software is used to convert the design as a point paper using image manipulation methods. Hence in this process some more time is required after that it has been sent to manual card punching process.

S.No	Computerized Card Punching (Kanchipuram Cluster)	Manual Card Punching (Coimbatore Cluster)
1.	Accuracy, Fast	Hence it is manual and hence accuracy is less and the process slow.
2.	Can be punch any type of jacquards	Can punch only for handloom jacquard
3.	One operator is enough to punch and feed the card	Two persons are required to punch & feed the cards
4.	Electrical Power is needed	Power is not required
5.	It can punch up to 360cards/hr with the maximum speed	Can punch up to maximum 100cards/hr manually based on person's experience
6.	Retrieve the punch card simulation from hand made punch cards using scanner.	It is not possible in this process
7.	Point paper simulations can be stored in the hard disk, it can be retrieved at any time	It is not possible in this process
8.	Other graphic file formats can't be supported by the machine; Ex: Photoshop	It is not possible in this process

### Computerized Card Lacing With Manual Card Lacing Process

In this process, once the cards are punched from the machine and it is arranged in a tray with the proper numbering and then shifted to lacing machine. Lacing is the process of tying up the cards one another in sequence as per the design by using nylon or thick cotton thread. Automatic machines can tie up to 180 cards/hr. In comparison the manual process the cards tied up together manually in sequence and the process time depends upon the tying skills of the person.

## Wages Structure

The wages are basically for the designers and the weavers

### Designers Wages

When comparing the designer's wages between the two clusters, Kanchipuram works on two modes, with the design and the card punching being done by same person in the first mode, and in the second mode designers create the design and convert as point paper. The card punching is done by the weavers themselves. The charges are separate for each process.

In Coimbatore, the designer develop the design and the point paper, the converted point paper send it to the manual card punchers.

S.No	Method of Operation	Kanchipuram Cluster	Coimbatore Cluster
1.	Design to Point paper	Rs.1 / Sq.inch	Rs.1 / Sq.inch
2.	Design to Final Punch Card	Rs.6	--
3.	Card Punching Only	Rs.4	Rs.2
4.	Card Lacing	0.50paise	0.50Paise

### Weavers Wages

When comparing the weaver's wages in these two clusters Kanchipuram weaver's charges higher than Coimbatore, because of its finer silk material and the interactive designs.

S.No	Kanchipuram Cluster	Coimbatore Cluster
1.	Minimum of Rs. 1200 – Maximum of Rs.1800	Minimum of Rs. 500 – Maximum of Rs.1400

Number of days required to weave one silk sari in Kanchipuram is 5-6 days depending upon the design while in Coimbatore it takes 4-5 days, with the weavers spending 10-12 hrs/day on the loom.

## Sales Margins

### Cooperative Society Sales margin

The sales margin in two clusters varies and depends upon the season, example sarees from Kanchipuram clusters are preferred by customers during wedding and festival times. In Coimbatore, the production and manufacturing is same in all seasons, because its products sell in all the seasons. The margin value which is followed in leading cooperative societies in two clusters is mentioned below:

S.No	Selling Season	Margin Values in %	
		Kanchipuram Cluster	Coimbatore Cluster
1.	Deepavali (Oct – Nov)	18	20
2.	New Year & Pongal ( Jan)	20	18
3.	Wedding Seasons ( Sep – Nov)	24	20
4.	Normal Period ( Feb- Aug)	15	17

During wedding and festival seasons the retailers of Kanchipuram sarees reduce their margins and make it up by increased sales volume while Coimbatore are bought regularly by customers and hence maintain their higher sales margin

### Retailers Sales Margin & Trading

In Kanchipuram price of the sari is fixed by the co-operative societies depending on the weight of the saree, amount of zari intertwined with the silk and intricacy of design. Retailers fix the margin value of 15-20% of each product. Silk sari prices can vary between Rs. 2000 to Rs. 50,000. Some upscale retailers bring out sarees with names and themes of our Tradition and Heritage (like Samudrika Pattu, Parampara Pattu etc.) where the design and processes are the same but the Brand name/theme reflects our Heritage/Tradition hence commanding a premium in the market. In these cases the margins are higher.

In Coimbatore Cluster, the margin value is same as in Kanchipuram, it is unique selling product, retailers won't fix any brand name for these type of korra sarees and retailers set the discount sales season for korra sarees and the discount prices are reduced from 10-20%. Some times retailers want to instigate the cooperative societies to develop the same design in pure silk and korra silk to satisfy the customer's expectations with reduction of price.



Photo  
1 Sari Retailer

## Current Trends and its Repercussions

In summary of the analysis of design process and production methods for each cluster, both want to increase the production as well as wages/revenues for designers and cooperative societies. In order to achieve this designers have to develop more designs for each season based on the various requirements from cooperatives and retailers. Designers are compelled explore various other sources and media other than traditional resources e.g. Internet, CDs, Art Books and software plug-in. Use of these kinds of resources has unfortunately affected the traditional and heritage methods of Designing. These influences are affecting the traditional values of the product and utilization of more on CAD/CAM Products demolishes the traditional craftsmanship. This has also affected the livelihood of the manual card punching and lacing workers.

## Solution

To overcome these issues and strike a balance between business/economic necessity and preserving the traditional/heritage influence on the designs, cooperative societies can develop an crew or team to develop designs based on the traditional and heritage patterns and offer these to the weavers in the form of CDs, plugins files to be used their CAD software. Artists who belong to these clusters, they can develop various art forms, pattern from their local influences in the form of digital CDs.

The above measures will help the saree designers to create the designs easily, fast and to preserve and showcase the heritage and traditional values. Societies can also create a workshops/training programmes for the existing manual workers in computerized card punching process whom they can employ assuring them their livelihood.

## Conclusion and Suggestions

The silk industry in South India has dealt with many highs and lows and has made its charisma felt internationally. However, the challenges faced by it today are undertaking amendments to suit shifting customer inclinations, use of modern technology, merchandise mix and value-added products. The market for such high cost silk sarees is dwindling and mainly restricted to wedding purchases. In order to attain these requirements the silk saree industry needs to a revolutionize.

This paper focused on specifically the silk saree clusters in Kanchipuram and Coimbatore and comes out with solutions to increase its market and at same time preserving the Tradition and Heritage. The overall design process and production methods of the saree clusters in South India in Kanchipuram and Coimbatore have been elucidated to set the perspective and further analysis amplified the problems faced in the design and production processes hampering growth and preserving the tradition. Based on this research work each cluster wants to promote and increase market for their products. To achieve this they need to new innovative designs like Chamudurika pattu, Vastrakala Pattu, Parampara Pattu and use various marketing and promotion strategies like Reversible Saree, Two in One Saree, Pocket Saree and so on. But in order to achieve this designers and weavers have to adapt the various CAD/ CAM methods in their design processes as well as the production methods. When the technological methods are increased in these clusters, the original heritage and traditional imprint of the design elements are missed out as they rely on readily available Artwork Books, Art CDs, Plug-in, Digital Patterns to accelerate the design and production processes. This has an effect of losing out on traditional and heritage designs.

To overcome from the above problem, cooperative societies in each need to develop various designs centrally and have to make these available to the weavers for adoption. This can ensure that the traditional and heritage inputs in the designs can be still find expression in the products and manual workers suitably trained in mechanized methods to ensure their livelihood and still give the clusters to cater to the Market needs.

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# The Grand Fashion Narrative in the Australian Museum. Curating the Luxury Design House Retrospective

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Robyn Healy

RMIT UNIVERSITY, MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

## Abstract

Over the last 25 years the increased presence of fashion in museums worldwide has generated debate about curatorial modes and the understanding of fashion projected by these modes. Many find the idea of the fashion exhibition itself is a contentious one (Sudjic, 2001). For fashion is not a simple exhibition proposition. For the exhibition mode creates curious tensions between appearance and experience of fashion, narratives about circulation and consumption of clothes. There is always difficulty in capturing the sense of fashion, transitory in nature and in form. Kaat Debo from Antwerp's Fashion museum observes this elusive element "Why and above all how can one 'preserve' something that is in constant movement, asking to be consumed?" (Debo, 2002, p.11).

In reviewing customary and exploratory curatorial practices for fashion in the museum the single luxury design house exhibition stands as a popular and powerful fashion narrative. The retrospective is an exhibition form which seeks to address ways to engage with a commercially active enterprise and living designer, express seasonal clothing collections and convey associations of wear in the luxury market. The genre has expanded the wider community's experience of luxury fashion, which is known through images rather than an experience of the garments themselves (Anderson, 2000). However realization of a retrospective survey can create contentious dialogues. In representations of luxury fashion other associations are formed. Criticisms directed towards the genre generally attack the approach of hagiography (Craik, 1994; Steele, 2005; Stevenson, 2008) conservatism (Beward, 2003), replication of art values or point to commercial advantages for living designers (Sudjic, 2001).

The retrospective 'looks back' over a large body of work. An engagement with the repository of a design house, sharing creative outcomes produced over a period of time. Studying intricacies of design process, from idea progression, final resolution to wearer engagement, commercial success or failure. The museum through the retrospective provides an extension to fashion practices by constructing everyday experiences of luxury fashion. The museum's challenge in displaying the 'œuvre' of an active luxury design houses is traversing complex relations operating between creative and commercial enterprise, contemporary and historical modes, corporate and public experience. Therefore curatorship of an exhibition concurrently deals with both museum and design house hierarchies of power. In organizing these relationships dilemmas to navigate concern negotiation about levels of artistic control, financial contributions, and profits. However, Fiona Anderson (2000) argues that museums are drawn to staging fashion exhibitions for other qualities, in strategically positioning the institution to particular cultural associations related to entertainment, celebrity, status, morality, consumerism, sexuality and image. The luxury design house retrospective invites associations with conditions of pleasure, notoriety and exclusivity.

This paper studies curation of luxury design house retrospectives. I consider how museum retrospectives communicate heritage values of luxury fashion houses through representation/experiences of design. Reflecting upon curatorial methods to articulate aesthetics, design values, consumption and circulation activities. I focus upon two exhibitions presented in Australia *Yves Saint Laurent Retrospective 1987* and *Valentino Past, Present, Future 2010*. In these explorations I reflect upon meanings and fashion knowledges drawn from these exhibitions in relation to luxury fashion and connections to political, social and economic concerns impacting on local fashion, cultural tourism and everyday experiences.

## Keywords

Exhibition  
Archive  
Institutionalisation  
Retrospective  
Valentino  
Versace  
Balenciaga  
Yves Saint Laurent

## Yves Saint Laurent Retrospective – New York to Sydney

*Yves Saint Laurent* 1983 was a new style of fashion exhibition initiating an opulent narrative for experiencing twentieth century fashion. Considered a controversial model, it was the first exhibition staged by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York to focus on the work of a living fashion designer. Drawing attention to conventions and protocols for displaying contemporary design. Under the guidance of special consultant Diana Vreeland (1972-1989) former editor of New York *Vogue*, the Yves Saint Laurent exhibition disseminated experiences of exclusive fashion to an extended community. Vreeland's task of presenting fashion in a major fine art museum was possibly a contentious one. In attempts to establish fashion amongst the canons of fine art she departed from contemplation of the single work, to an expression of fashion assembled in 'collections', applying theatrical effects to evoke an atmosphere of luxury. Although critically seen as a model not based on scholarship or accompanied by groundbreaking text, Vreeland sought to simply engage the museum in the delectation of luxury clothes.

In this pursuit curator Vreeland attempted to share her understanding of Saint Laurent. She created particular exhibition environments, to forge aesthetic connections between garments related to either similar design concepts or social engagements. For instance eveningwear was grouped together, or garments were clustered in similar colour palettes or material combinations. Yves Saint Laurent was portrayed as a designer producing beautiful, wearable clothes, with an emphasis on design values of haute couture collections and their desirability. In this narrative fashion was not studied in the context of a larger history. Vreeland did not attempt to position the work in either historical frameworks or follow chronological sequences. For Vreeland the designer personified the creative enterprise of the luxury design house. In this early exhibition model dialogues about design are clumsy. Text was not necessarily positioned to broaden understanding of fashion systems. Prominence was placed upon tracing the designer's individual traumas and creative anguish. There were obvious glimpses into lavish lifestyles of both designer and clients. Vreeland's approach ignored radical changes occurring in the fashion system and omitted recognition of collective practices (Kawamura, 2005). As expected, reception of Vreeland's reading of luxury fashion through Yves Saint Laurent's clothing collections was popular but polarized critics. Public responses ranged between overwhelming admiration to disdain about lack of analysis, or critical engagement with the fashion system and societal issues. While Carrie Donovan from the *New York Times* declared after her viewing that "pleasure is the first word that comes to mind, for this show is, among other things, a triumph of luxury and glamour over its dreary surroundings" (Donovan, 1984, p.6). Debra Silverman's (1986) contentious study of Vreeland's curatorship at the Costume Institute described the exhibition as depicting "triumphs of surface, contempts of history". Silverman's study alluded to manipulative practices of the fashion industry in generation of cultural experiences to promote their own social and business interests. She noted that the exhibition:

Paradoxically... celebrated Yves Saint Laurent as an haute couture artist, obscuring the dialectic between exclusive design and mass merchandising at the heart of his success. Saint Laurent welcomed the Met show as the triumphant return of haute couture into the public mainstream. Whereas the sixties had forced haute couture underground, the eighties brought luxury back into the spotlight. The opulent couture fashion, and the customers who could afford it among the Reaganite elite, were now, ironically, characterized as the 'return of the repressed' (Silverman, p.90).

In testing ways to curate luxurious fashion Vreeland attempted to construct a saturated visual composition. She staged the exhibition in an imaginary environment of simulated luxury. Here, museum visitors were potentially immersed into various constructs of luxury fashion, which included interactions with specific smell and sound sensations<sup>1</sup>. The next generation of Costume Institute curators Richard Martin and Harold Koda understood Vreeland's exhibitions proposed a different kind of fashion narrative, one more attune to "the nonchalant editorial fluency of the fashion magazine rather than the scholarly discourse of art" (Martin & Koda, 1992, p.19). This was an installation model they believed laid groundwork for future exhibition tactics, which continued to explore diverse ways for fashion to engage with the museum. Obviously an exhibition provided a rare opportunity to appraise and scrutinize design outcomes, decisions made by one design house over a period of time. However, the wide dispersal of luxury fashion discovered in a retrospective was akin to mass experiences of fashion found on the catwalk, or fashion current representation on the web.

In extending museum dialogues, the retrospective represented a new form of fashion experience, expanding ideas of spectacle or grand narratives known from catwalk, or magazine. In the retrospective mode luxury fashion was primarily experienced through access to original garments. Proximity to clothing sourced from design house archives and private wardrobes of the 'rich and famous' allowed for scrutiny and

familiarity with garments rarely found en masse in museum collections. In the retrospective dialogue distinctive and subtle design traits were exposed. Design processes were further considered by referencing original sketches to detailing authentic accessories with fully dressed mannequins. Displaying collections of haute couture drew attention to distinctive qualities, tracing variations in specific seasonal collections, observation of shifting clothing preferences of clients and noting desirable aesthetics for a particular time. Display practices, which draw certain parallels to fine art practices, in reference to hierarchical categorisations and values associated with unique compositions. However at the same time Vreeland was working within an existing model she was attempting to explore the distinctive language of fashion (Barthes, 2006), therefore grappling with representational modes of a transitory nature, articulating both design process and wearer experience in states of both 'dress' and 'dressing'<sup>2</sup>

Elizabeth Wilson recognized the complexities involved in producing the grand fashion narrative put forward by Vreeland, understanding this strategy was possibly designed for serious museum acknowledgement of fashion practices (Wilson, 2005). Even though this was a strategy which was not yet fully realized but opened up potential for exhibitions to express diverse fashion relations.

### The flying kangaroo and Yves Saint Laurent

The *Yves Saint Laurent Retrospective* represented the most affluent aspects of Western design in promotion of luxury fashion design. However the authority conveyed by the exhibition tour is perhaps underestimated, in promoting an understanding of luxury 'appearances' globally that simultaneously advanced the lucrative nature of fashion business. Although drawn from the original Vreeland show, surprisingly the exhibition was not orchestrated by a major museum. Instead artistic and commercial control of future exhibitions was organized directly by the luxury company Yves Saint Laurent International. Consequently certain museum conditions for costume display were relaxed. There were fewer adherences to conservation conditions for lighting, less restriction on public exposure or arrangements for material conservation. Stephen de Pietri<sup>3</sup> was appointed Director of international exhibitions for Yves Saint Laurent to steer the design and creative style and curate the contents for each venue in collaboration with the designer. The travelling show aimed to present luxury fashion to new audiences who were not familiar with either social or heritage values associated with exclusive forms of Western fashion. The tour employed the exemplar of haute couture design as a traditional and enduring model of 20<sup>th</sup> century luxury fashion. An industry model, which was constructed upon traditions of original design and exclusive production, specialized skills and garments crafted for an individual. Attributes, associated with power and glamour, which are particularly aligned with the authority and prestige of French culture (Adams, 1987). The exhibition toured to venues away from major fashion capitals in either Europe or America. Venturing outside these traditional or well-known centres of Western fashion was influential in disseminating the idea of luxury Western fashion to fresh audiences and potentially creating new luxury markets.

In promoting the *Yves Saint Laurent Retrospective* as an influential model of fashion design the exhibition was sought after by both Russian and Chinese governments, specifically to encourage development of local fashion, (Watson, 1987). Staging of the exhibition was viewed as an economic strategy to encourage and inspire young designers, opening up opportunities for foreign investment. By exposing this 'successful' model of French fashion, the exhibition was intended to work as a catalyst for new enterprise. In China the attraction to Western fashion was part of major economic reform. Saint Laurent visited China to open the exhibition and mentor local arts and fashion students (Hyde, 1985). While in the Soviet Union<sup>4</sup> Mikhail Gorbachev's new policy of 'glasnost' facilitated an invitation to Yves Saint Laurent to offer some direction for the fashion industry. The response to the exhibition was varied. For most Soviets luxury fashion was an unfamiliar and remote experience. Consequently many visitors perceived the works as artistic compositions rather than wearing apparel. De Pietri recalled, "The Russians were famished for fashion, style and design. They almost salivated at the silks, taffetas, velvets" (Quoted by Symons, 1987, p.21).

In Australia the *Yves Saint Laurent Retrospective* was staged at The Art Gallery of NSW in 1987, where 218 garments were displayed from 1958 to 1987 (Meek, 1987). De Pietri shared copious stories in the Australian media about the exhibition's extraordinary reception around the world (Howell, 1987; Symons, 1987). The show had already toured extensively before arriving in Australia. He cited garments viewed by 1.5 million visitors, in Beijing, Paris, Moscow and Leningrad (Howell, 1987). Curating each venue individually, the content was adjusted accordingly. For instance the Russian exhibition at the request of Yves Saint Laurent contained more fur and gold, and the Chinese exhibition showed a chronological survey. However De Pietri was uncertain about the Australian version. He was concerned whether his curatorial selection could create synergies between Australia's climate and more casual lifestyle. However

he conceded, “I didn’t really know what to bring to Sydney. Saint Laurent doesn’t do clothes for hot weather or swimwear. I thought that most people seemed hungry for French fashion, real Parisian haute couture” (Watson, 1987). Large exhibitions of fashion either representing international or Australian fashion were rare experiences and consequently the Yves Saint Laurent show was keenly anticipated. This was the second major exhibition of twentieth century fashion to tour Australia. The first *Fabulous Fashion 1907-1967* drawn from the collection of the Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art<sup>5</sup> was staged at National Gallery of Victoria and Art Gallery of NSW in 1981. Although small collections of historic haute couture are found in the collections of the National Gallery of Victoria and the Powerhouse museum, an exhibition about one designer had not been investigated.

*Yves Saint Laurent Retrospective* was the first fashion retrospective staged in Australia. The Art Gallery of NSW in bringing the exhibition to Australia was concerned with the currency of fashion for cultural exchange, strengthening French relations and institutional alignment with luxury industries. Although international perception of the Australian fashion industry was limited, the 1980s witnessed emergence of a vibrant fashion culture, one defined by small independent practices. In Melbourne establishment of the Fashion Design Council of Australia (FDC) in 1984 representing the rights of independent fashion designers, a body which identified a shift away from conventions relying on European traditions (Wood, 1986). In formation of organizations of this kind the stranglehold of large fashion houses over consumer tastes was being questioned.

However the exhibition’s major sponsor Qantas<sup>6</sup> connected further with ideals of the luxury fashion house. Through marketing the company’s locally manufactured airline uniforms, which were designed by Yves Saint Laurent in 1985<sup>7</sup> The endorsement expressed Qantas’ allegiance to international design and showed the increasing presence of international franchises. Financial support for the exhibition and accompanying publication included members of the Australian clothing industry for example Sportscraft manufacturers of the Qantas uniform and purveyors of clothing for the mass market. However, while the curator contemplated Australians starved of couture, the Director of the Art Gallery of NSW Edmond Capon reflected in the catalogue forward about Yves Saint Laurent’s creative methods, delving into discussions about less familiar dialogues about fashion design (Meek, 1987). The Australian catalogue was designed for the local exhibition. Disappointingly there was no major essay or curatorial reflections. No one seemed sure how to construct or share the critical framework. Instead display garments were simply listed in exhibition groupings accompanied by basic descriptors and illustrated with either original sketches, photographs from catwalk parades or press photographs.

The scale of the exhibition was overwhelming. The exhibition installation conveyed an impressive sight resembling part-department store, part-theatrical performance. Groupings of garments were assembled on mannequins with matching gestured poses; skirted suits for instance were displayed on mannequins seated on chairs. The installation introduced new forms of fashion engagement with clothing. Groupings stimulated an understanding of design house repertoires and facilitated exposure to extensive and recurring design variations. This new museum configuration challenged customary practices of display and viewing habits. The reception from the fashion industry was enthusiastic encouraging further understandings and wider consideration of the language of fashion. Although the show was not necessarily targeted at mentoring the Australian fashion industry, flow on effects inspired interest about fashion from many perspectives. The *Yves Saint Laurent Retrospective* exhibition was a model for fashion dissemination, which critically positioned dialogues relating to fashion in a major museum. It acted to diversify the nature of exhibition content in Australian museums offering opportunities for future explorations of fashion genres for exhibition. Perhaps the most lasting legacy of the exhibition was the fashion discourse it generated. Art historian Bruce Adams for instance called the exhibition “the resurrection of the desired world” where “exhibits are presented as if they were a social presence”...Saint Laurent designs depend on a separation from the surrounding world... Essential to the success of Saint Laurent is our knowledge of those glamorous individuals who have actually worn his designs, and to whose culture his work belongs. In a similar way, further authority is bestowed on his designs by the many elements absorbed from the high arts” (Adams, p.47).

While there was increased debate ensued about categorization of fashion as an art form spurred on by display of clothing in a fine arts venue. Discussions arose about relevance of French luxury fashion in the Australian marketplace and the conservatism implied by this model.

### Valentino Retrospective – Past, Present, Future

A lot has changed in 23 years, since the *Yves Saint Laurent Retrospective* toured to Australia. There is an increased fashion presence in local museums, regular exhibitions and rising academic interest. The

final section of my paper considers how the museum positioning of luxury fashion has shifted during this time? In addition to this question I reflect upon public perception of heritage values generated by luxury fashion house exhibitions?

For several years Tony Ellwood Director of GoMA Gallery of Modern Art (GoMA) actively pursued an exclusive haute couture exhibition for Brisbane competing against major international galleries. During his pursuit Ellwood had slowly integrated fashion in the Gallery's program to interact with more diverse experiences of contemporary visual culture. The Gallery began introducing fashion in 2009 with a survey of Brisbane based designers Easton Pearson<sup>8</sup>. Followed by *Hats: an Anthology by Stephen Jones* from London's V & A museum. GoMA's recent engagement with fashion supports increasing diversification of curatorial practices and concerns, and reflects increasing community interest in fashion exhibitions. Recent successes of the Bendigo Art Gallery have perhaps encouraged this direction by extending the haute couture narrative established with critical success in 2008 of *The Golden Age of Couture: Paris and London 1947-1957* from London's V & A museum.

The original exhibition *Valentino Themes and Variations* curated by Pamela Golbin at Les Arts Decoratifs in Paris was organised to celebrate Valentino Garavani's retirement in 2008 by looking back over his design repertoire spanning fifty years. However this exhibition diverged from Sydney's *Yves Saint Laurent Retrospective* by reflecting major creative shifts occurring within the workings of the luxury design house produced by retirement of an eponymous designer to introducing new creative directors Maria Grazia Chiuri and Pier Paolo Piccioli. Alongside the staging of major exhibitions to mark Valentino's retirement both in Paris and Rome (Museo dell'Ara Pacis), a documentary was released. *Valentino: The Last emperor* (2008) argued Valentino Garavani was perhaps one of the last designers to command exclusive creative control over a luxury brand defined by a particular style of luxury fashion and design practice. Viewed as the personification of haute couture, Valentino was the image of the grand couturier. Valentino's lavish lifestyle activities were set amongst his creative direction of meticulously hand-crafted garments. The projection of the cloistered environment of 'old school' luxury poignantly marked the end of an era in 21st century haute couture. The documentary reminds us how dramatically the fashion system has changed, with declining numbers of haute couture houses and limited patronage. Therefore the Valentino exhibition proposal for Brisbane established a seminal moment in haute couture. The exhibition served as a potent statement in documenting the passing conservatism of luxury taste associated with traditional haute couture practices and signalled potential new directions for haute couture's next phase. On August 6, 2010 the Honourable Anna Bligh, Premier and Minister for the Arts in Queensland issued a ministerial statement officially launching *Valentino Retrospective-Past, Present, Future* at the Gallery of Modern Art (GoMA). The agenda for the exhibition was much deeper and more ambitious than a simple engagement with fashion.

The cultural experience of luxury fashion was targeted to draw crowds to visit Queensland. Although several major haute couture retrospectives had been staged in Australia, none had ever toured to Brisbane. As a result the exhibition was perceived as a key mechanism in positioning Brisbane as a major cultural and creative hub. Bligh championed the allure of luxury clothing exclaiming that "Every woman in Australia will want to see Valentino's dresses" (Giles, 2009). While media releases connected garments to famous clients making associations to European royalty, Hollywood celebrities and members of high society the world over, including garments worn by Australians Cate Blanchett and Nicole Kidman (Giles, 2009). The Australian public was familiar with haute couture wardrobes through Web, and magazines in particular through coverage of events like the Academy awards and were enthusiastic about experiencing the real garment. Staging the Valentino exhibition to coincide with Brisbane's Fashion Festival further reinforced Brisbane's credentials for fashion and style. The opening of the exhibition therefore attracted Australian designers participating in the festival including Collette Dinnigan, Akira Isogawa, Anna Plunkett and Luke Sales from Romance was born.

Pamela Golbin curated the Australia exhibition reducing the original Paris collection to 100 garments. Describing her selection in Australian *Vogue* Golbin emphasised iconic examples, selecting 'ambassadors of the brand' (Spring, 2010). The comprehensive catalogue explored recurring themes and techniques found in the creations of Valentino. Golbin sought to engage with defining garment characteristics. Her curatorial approach dissected various elements that informed Valentino designs. In this endeavour Golbin scrutinized clothing structure and aesthetic choices through application of ornamentation, use of volume, surface and line (Golbin, 2008). The exhibition installation *Valentino Retrospective-Past, Present, Future* collectively addressed the overall aesthetic impact of garments. A scheme, which contrasted markedly to the *Yves Saint Laurent Retrospective* where garments were defined in quite specific environments associated with leisurely past-times of affluent clients. Golbin argued her premise for display was

concerned with aesthetics of pleasure, to enable Valentino's creations to move someone emotionally, viewing these beautiful things like a bunch of flowers (Spring, 2010, p.259). This interpretation of luxury moved away from individual delectation to ideas of mass consumption and enjoyment. Steering away from traditional associations and dialogues about haute couture concerned with individual pastimes of the rich and famous, the exhibition proposed to contemplate poetics created by mass experience of haute couture clothes and ignite connectedness to conditions of beauty. Consequently clothing creations were exhibited on open display. The Gallery established an environment for contemplation of clothes. Following this principle exhibits were accompanied by minimal information allowing viewers to engage with clothing uninterrupted by any diversions including furniture props or extensive labelling (Sorenson, 2010). Responses to these exhibition dynamics heightened visitor experience, arousing audible sighs, jaw dropping and obligatory references to desired garments. Generally garments commanded 360° views allowing garments to be traversed from all directions. Sylph like mannequins- further elongated clothing, providing a regularised aesthetic throughout the exhibition.

Predictably *Valentino Retrospective-Past, Present, Future* unlike the *Yves Saint Laurent Retrospective* was not about challenging audiences. The exhibition generated few critical reviews or debates about wearability, or ignited debate about representational forms. For the fashion retrospective was now a recognized form of fashion narrative. Large attendances and the continued courting of luxury design houses by museums worldwide supported the continued appeal of retrospectives. The Valentino exhibition was a crowd pleaser attracting over 2,000 people per day. When the exhibition closed over 202,000 people had experienced the show. *Valentino Retrospective-Past, Present, Future* brought to Australia a set of ideals about luxury fashion expressed through an extensive repository of fashion. The exhibition illuminated and exposed specialised fashion knowledges captured in close scrutiny of haute couture garments. Although heritage qualities of luxury were strongly expressed there was little interest in the next generation of Valentino designers. Haute couture can be a laboured device in the museum's dialogue about fashion by placing too much emphasis upon traditional technique. However these large exhibitions covering one designer's work act to disseminate collections from rarified experiences to community events. Placing design house archives outside the fashion industry into the public domain.

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## Notes

1. The smell of YSL perfume 'Paris' greeted visitors as they entered the exhibition.
2. In Barthes' early essays, *History and sociology of clothing 1957* and *Language and clothing 1959* (Barthes, 2006), he proposed a possible history and sociology of clothing forms (Barthes, 2006). The study of signs identified two groupings, 'dress' and 'dressing', which represented the social institution and the individual act respectively. In adopting the Saussurean model, Barthes extended Trubetskoy's structuralist work and applied the linguistic distinctions 'langue' (institutional) and 'parole' (personal) in his comprehensive discussion about characterisation of clothing relationships. In Barthes' analysis, subtle yet obvious distinctions are made between dress and dressing that assist in distinguishing complexities inherent in clothing appearances and dressing systems.
3. De Pietri worked with Vreeland at the Costume Institute, and was hired by Yves Saint Laurent who was impressed by his staging of exhibitions.
4. The Soviet Union was dissolved in 1991 and become known as the Russian Federation.
5. The first venue was at the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne, an institution with an active collection of Australian and international fashion.
6. QANTAS originally the Queensland and Northern Territory Aerial Service Ltd established in 1919, was Australia's first international airline also known as The Flying Kangaroo.
7. Qantas flight attendants from 1985 to 1993 wore Yves Saint Laurent designs.
8. Pamela Easton and Lydia Pearson founded their design partnership and business Easton Pearson in 1989.

# Virtual Flagships: an Evolution in Brand Communication?

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Tim Jackson

LONDON COLLEGE OF FASHION, UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS, UK

## Abstract

Since the mid-1990s many fashion and luxury houses have enhanced their brand status through the design and development of extravagant flagships stores. Typically such stores are innovative in design and enable luxury houses to deliver a unique and luxurious shopping experience consistent with their brand signature. The visibility of such stores allows brands to reinforce the notion of design leadership through employing world class architects such as Rem Koolhaas (Prada) and Peter Marino (Chanel), to create pioneering retail spaces. The term flagship store has subsequently evolved to reference signature buildings, which represent the design leadership synonymous with luxury brands.

It is strange then that luxury brands have been slow to lead in another area, specifically the use of the Internet. Often caught up in issues associated with the distribution and fulfilment aspects of ecommerce, many have overlooked the tremendous opportunities for brand communication. At the height of flagship store roll outs, Tom Ford commented in 2001, "I realised a long time ago that one can either design a dress or design a brand... a dress does not exist in a void, it exists in a world". Although he was primarily referring to flagship stores, the principle translates more critically now to the online world. In June 2009 Angela Arendts, CEO of Burberry, stated "Advances in digital technology and its absorption by consumers are bringing fundamental changes to our ways of operating". In other words opportunities for brand engagement are moving online.

Now more than ever the Internet is a medium that can enable a brand to engage with their customers in creative and customised ways. The scope of technical applications available combined with increasingly sophisticated, information hungry and globally networked users, provides a new world in which consumers and not brands dictate behaviour. Since the world in which consumers shop, communicate and entertain themselves is increasingly online, any brand seeking to lead the design agenda in the real world arguably needs to do so in the online one too.

This prompts some important questions: if retail is inevitably moving online, how might a brand's website reflect the sort of design leadership that flagship stores have done up to now? In essence what might a Virtual Flagship look like and do?

Two luxury brands, Chanel and Giorgio Armani, are in many ways synonymous with design leadership; both brands show couture and RTW collections and are led by visionary designers. In many respects their websites are impressive but arguably fail to stand out as extraordinary. This paper will explore how the brands are represented through their sites including how heritage is communicated. For example, Chanel has an impressive website with techno wizardry galore. Yet there is probably a missed opportunity in satisfying the substantial interest that exists in Gabrielle Chanel and therefore the brand's heritage. The site only really pays homage to the heritage of Gabrielle Chanel through a couple of clips tucked away under one part of the News section. Given the considerable interest in the history of the brand as illustrated by the 2009 film 'Coco before Chanel' and its 455,000 fans on Facebook, the site could usefully provide an area dedicated to illustrating the evolution of its design philosophy and products.

## Keywords

Brand  
Flagship  
Heritage  
Luxury  
Online  
Design



## Literature review

### Flagships

Much has been written on both retail environments and the various roles that physical flagship stores perform. The significance of retail environments and store atmospherics on consumer behaviour is well documented (McGoldrick and Greenland, 1997; Turley and Milliman, 2000). Flagship stores in particular make an important contribution to marketing communications (Moore, Fernie and Burt, 2000). Such stores also facilitate memorable sensory experiences which contribute to brand positioning (Schmitt and Simonsen 1997), and repositioning (Moore & Birtwhistle, 2004). When Prada decided to rebrand itself at the end of the 1990's the luxury brand appointed the architects Office of Metropolitan Architecture (OMA/AMO). The architect's stated aim was to "renew the brand by counteracting and destabilising any received notion of what Prada is, does, or will become" (Koolhaas, 2001). This conceptual underpinning to the rebrand suited Prada which was worried that their stores were beginning to look too much the same. Miuccia Prada (Armstrong, 2002) commented, "It is time to do something more individual and personal". An approach centred on individualism and design leadership was intended to combat any perceived fashion homogeneity through associating the brand with art, popular culture and communication technology. Innovative store design was central to Prada's repositioning strategy and has become important to luxury brands as a differentiator and means of enhancing and focusing the shopping experience for customers. According to OMA/AMO, "AMO applies architectural thinking in its pure form to questions of organization, identity, culture and program, and define ways –from the conceptual to the operative– to address the full potential of the contemporary condition" (OMA/AMO website ([www.oma.nl](http://www.oma.nl)) 2001).

The notion that shopping spaces can be conceptual and deliver esoteric non-merchandise related benefits to a brand is also a key characteristic of what a flagship store provides. Christian Blanckaert, when Executive Vice President of Hermès, considered it important for Hermès stores to be places of theatre (Blanckaert, 2002). Similarly, Vittorio Radice viewed shopping as "the moment of freedom for individuals" and 'place more important than the product' when overseeing the repositioning of Selfridges, which included the design and development of the Bullring store in Birmingham (Radice, 2002). Gilmore and Pine (2002) have written extensively on retail experiences including the conceptualization of 'experience places' suggesting a model based on a 'rich portfolio of experiences'. The flagship stores built and operated by luxury brands also provide opportunities to extend the concept of luxury through extravagant design, construction and exquisite service. Mark Lee, whilst CEO of Gucci, described the new Gucci flagship store that opened in Ginza district of Tokyo in 2006 as showing the most luxurious face of the (Gucci) brand (Jackson, 2007). Indeed the retail experience delivered by a luxury flagship store is important to consolidate the ultimate allure of the brand (Moore & Birtwhistle, 2005).

One can argue that the existence of flagship stores within a luxury brand's retail portfolio raises consumers' expectations of other brand touch points; also that the requirement for brand consistency and continuity demands equivalent distinction across their online platform. This view is supported by Lohe and Spiller (1998) who argue that the reputation of a brand's physical store can enhance consumers' perceptions of their online store. As such some of the characteristics of flagship stores translate online; in particular those most consistent with design leadership and differentiated brand identity linked to an original essence and heritage. Design leadership is often connected with taking risks, not working to a formula and creating a surprise for the consumer rather than just satisfying a need. In 2006 François-Henri Pinault underlined the link between luxury and risk pointing out that "Luxury would be nothing without adventure and risk..." and that "The challenge lies in creating surprise, not in answering a need". Similarly, Alber Elbaz "there is nothing more dangerous than to create with a formula because we all know that the best invention happens when a formula didn't exist or when the formula just didn't work." At the height of flagship store roll outs, Tom Ford commented in 2001, "I realised a long time ago that one can either design a dress or design a brand... a dress does not exist in a void, it exists in a world". Although he was primarily referring to flagship stores, the principle translates more critically now to the online world.

### Online

Some argue that online retailing of luxury brands' products undermines many of the distinctive elements of luxury products, which are intrinsically sensory and concerned with artisan manufacture. This has raised concerns over the possibility for the luxury brand experience to be successfully conveyed online (Okonkwo, 2007; Kapferer and Bastien, 2009). However, luxury brands need to address the issues associated with their online presence and it is no longer a discussion of whether, but one of finding the

most suitable and successful method of being online according to Bedos, CEO of Boucheron (Jackson, 2010a). The need to fully engage with online media was reinforced at the recent *International Herald Tribune* conference on Heritage Luxury. There by Karl Lagerfeld referred to digital as 'the whole world of today' adding "If you don't embrace it, you will be lost" (Arthur, 2010).

In June 2009 Angela Arendts, CEO of Burberry, stated "Advances in digital technology and its absorption by consumers are bringing fundamental changes to our ways of operating" (Jobling, 2009). The rise in digital media, social networking and mobile access to the Internet has all contributed to changing expectations of consumers in how they relate to brands. This expectation of engagement is underlined by a quote from Suzy Menkes in January 2010 "The world change when fashion, instead of becoming a monologue, became a conversation" (Bellaiche et al, 2010). In other words opportunities for brand engagement are moving online.

Internet brand engagement has been evolving and creating new opportunities for at least the last three years with innovation tending to be driven by mass-market brands. Unilever's Dove brand produced ground breaking video campaigns in 2006 and 2007 which were virally distributed through the social network YouTube. Since 2005 YouTube has been the vehicle for numerous branded videos including the various H&M designer collaborations and Topshop's launch of its Kate Moss range. The latter video provided a 'behind the scenes' view of Kate Moss chatting with buyers and designers within Topshop's buying offices, helping to promote Kate's design credentials.

Over the last two years more brands have built social networking media, such as YouTube, Myspace, Facebook and Twitter, into their brand strategies. In mid-2007, six hours of video were uploaded to YouTube every minute. By contrast, in 2009 this has increased to 20 hours of video uploaded to YouTube every minute (equivalent of the information output of 1200 TV stations). According to the latest Internet World Stats, there are currently in excess of 1.6 bn Internet users in the world. Facebook alone has more than 300 million active users, with in excess of 2 billion pieces of content (web links, news stories, blog posts, notes, photos, etc.) shared each week and 8m users become a fan of a brand everyday. There are more than 65 million active users currently accessing Facebook through their mobile devices a fact presumably not lost on Donna Karan, Chanel, Gucci and Net-a-Porter all of which launched iPhone applications in 2009.

John Studzinski, senior managing director of The Blackstone Group revealed that 1.7 bn people in the world have PCs, 4.6 bn people have mobiles and another 1 bn will have mobiles in the next three years. He added, "800 m people visit social networking sites now already. In terms of Facebook, 36% of entries mention at least one brand and in Twitter, 19% of all tweets mention at least one brand." (Jackson, 2010b)

Real-time accessibility is another evolution illustrated by the trend for live-streaming ready-to-wear runways shows in fashion weeks. Louis Vuitton streamed its SS 10 ready-to-wear show through Facebook in October 2009, with Alexander McQueen and Burberry also streaming fashion week shows in 2010. Burberry demonstrated some degree of customisation through an interactive facility enabling viewers to pass live comments on the designs as they appeared on the runway.

The skincare and beauty site Liz Earle runs a variety of media including a blog, with archives, podcasts and an interactive chat room. The most interesting facility is the chat room in which customers can attend scheduled discussions and Q&A sessions with assorted Liz Earle skincare product experts and even researchers.

Many luxury brands came to recognise the significance of Facebook quite late, with a number of the more iconic names, including YSL only establishing a Facebook page in 2009.

Customisation technology is evolving and can offer consumers opportunities to evaluate some decisions before purchasing. H&M has offered online shoppers a facility where they can customise a 3-D model of themselves, adapting face and body shape characteristics before interacting with virtual clothes to try on. This represents a more sophisticated version of the old 'drag-and-drop' feature where items of clothing are selected to dress a generic male or female avatar. Similarly, online vintage clothing retailer Atelier-Mayer features an innovative 'Style Me' page which enables its customers to input individual measurements in order to discover what is available. Personal style advice is also provided, along with a zoom and rotate 360 degree facility.

Customisation using 3D avatars maybe an aspiration for premium brands and some have experimented with this for a while. Along with global brands including Adidas, Giorgio Armani immersed his brand into 3D using the Second Life 'world'. His virtual version of the real world Milan store has been selling virtual Armani products to fashionista avatars. Giorgio Armani has his own avatar, which closely resembles his real-world appearance and can also be seen, on YouTube, providing a tour of the store for the editor of

'Style.com'. Presence in such pioneering spaces can arguably mould perceptions of a brand's capacity for innovation, creativity and design leadership. The enigmatic Karl Lagerfeld also embraced 3D with his presence in avatar form as DJ in the super trendy computer game Grand Theft Auto 4. Such forays into 3D avatar existence are few and far between but may represent a glimpse of the future for branding. These various examples provide a snapshot of the diversity of pioneering ways that some brands are using to engage with their customers and demonstrate innovation and creativity in website design, function and communication.

### **Heritage**

Luxury brands differ from premium and mass-market fashion brands in many ways most obviously by quality, price and exclusivity. Further, many luxury brands do not design or sell clothing, a product category which is the principal focus of fashion as conveyed through the runway shows of fashion weeks. However, there are some vital characteristics that also distinguish a true luxury brand from other brands associated with fashion.

At the forefront are brand heritage, authenticity and design leadership. Heritage and design leadership are two elements which distinguish the luxury sector, populated by iconic design talent working with signature dynasties, from the largely fashion follower mass-market fashion brands. Heritage is not some abstract concept but a real context in which an iconic design dynasty, print, product and even national identity is used to deliver unique package of product benefits to customers.

The recently launched Gucci 'Digital Flagship' provides a good blend of technologies and heritage. The site features a section named 'World of Gucci' that delivers Gucci family history combined with an assessment of what it means to be 'Made in Italy'. Although the detail is limited the focus is on the spirit of artisan manufacture and Italian style, both of which are components of the dream and legendary quality that Italian luxury brands are perceived to offer.

### **Research**

#### **Aim**

To analyse the websites of two leading luxury brands to see the extent to which they are innovative and convey the heritage associated with their brands.

#### **Sample**

Two luxury brands, Chanel and Giorgio Armani (GA), are in many ways synonymous with design leadership; both brands show couture and ready-to-wear collections and are lead by visionary designers. The designers are known to be pioneers in their fields and have unusually represented themselves in 'avatar' form, which suggests an empathy with digital and Internet technologies. The two luxury brands also represent French and Italian artisan manufacture within their respective heritages.

#### **Data collection method**

Research of the two brands' websites was undertaken at points between October 2009 and October 2010. The research is exploratory and so qualitative in nature. It uses an adaptation of content analysis to assess the content and level of innovation of both brands' sites.

Criteria used for analysis were as follows:

1. Each site was explored thoroughly for evidence of heritage expressed by reference to the history of the brand and its artisan craftsmanship;
2. Each site was analysed for originality, innovation and creativity in the design of the website including its aesthetic, sensory impact and opportunities to engage customers. This was benchmarked against the provision of competitor sites.

#### **Website / online platforms**

Armani has a number of websites. All were reviewed although it is the Giorgio Armani.com site that provided the focus for the Armani research since the Giorgio Armani brand represents the luxury product category and is all designed by Mr. Armani.

The Chanel.com portal provided the focus for the analysis.

## Findings and discussion

In many respects both brands' websites are impressive but arguably fail to stand out as extraordinary in terms of design leadership.

### Armani

The GA brand operates a variety of sites according to product and in each case the focus is on the presentation of products either in a lifestyle context or as framed runway shots from fashion weeks. Non-clothing product categories tend to rely more on the use of moody video vignettes shot in black and white to complement a functional web page of well presented merchandise for purchase. There is text based explanation of the fashion season's inspiration but no reference to manufacture. The GA 'Frames for Life' site showcases the brand's optical collection and provides some more innovative features than the standard GA site. For example it includes an interactive option to select frames from the video vignette which can be stored into a 'collection' by the customer. However, the opportunity only exists for the customer to interact with the GA video material and so offers limited opportunity for personal customization or engagement with the brand.

In 2009 Armani opened its 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue store in New York. The GA site featured this via a click-through icon to promote the store opening. The click-through took the customer to a dedicated page featured a tantalising and movie-like cab journey through the city at night before ending with a night-time shot of the 5<sup>th</sup> Av store labelled with a banner stating 'One place, different shopping experiences'. However, having had expectations raised and been invited to 'challenge your senses', the opportunity to explore the store was and still is (in 2011) limited to a text display denoting the product categories and a few images of products located on each floor.

Opportunities to reveal aspects of the store design and indeed take a tour were missing until a video of the store opening event was added to the page in 2010. Since 2009, YouTube has featured a variety of videos which convey the excitement and full splendour of the 5<sup>th</sup> Av store and its celebrity packed opening, suggesting that it took Armani time to 'catch up'. By contrast, a lesser-known UK Bamford and Sons' website has allowed customers to take a video tour (not live) through its real-world Sloane Street store. A customer can move around the well stocked store and zoom in on products, pulling down product information menus on the way. A similar, roaming visual facility is used on the Giorgio Armani site to show its restaurant in the 5<sup>th</sup> Av store. However, the somewhat clinical view of an empty restaurant lacks warmth and a sense of indulgence admirably conveyed by another New York based brand Dean and DeLuca whose website, albeit purely culinary, serves up a more enticing visual treat.

The research finding which is arguably most surprising is the lack of any reference to Giorgio Armani the individual and personality, any of the brand's rich cultural history or Italian style and artisan manufacture. The heritage of the Armani brand is diverse and includes many modern cultural references including for example, the wardrobe for the 1980 film *American Gigolo* and the globally curated 'Giorgio Armani Retrospective Collection' of dresses and gowns. However despite its collective contribution to Armani's global branding the websites do not feature any of these. Similarly the value assigned to the 'Made in Italy' component of Italian luxury goods is overlooked and a possible opportunity lost by failing to show or make any reference to the skilled artisan manufacturing that takes place in Italy.

### Chanel

Chanel.com contains excellent visual presentations across all product categories. There are also additional features, which vary across the site. The clothing section features well-shot but essentially predictable runway show footage of seasonal collections. The accessories area includes an option to zoom in on detail, while the fragrances features audio-visual references to product related narratives associated with the brand's heritage. This is particularly the case with iconic Chanel N°.5 perfume. In 2009 N°.5 perfume was represented using an image of the bottle accompanied by a small amount of text speaking of its history. However, this section of the site now features a variety of information and moving imagery including the 'The N°.5 Story' which hosts a video cast from Jacques Polge Creator of Chanel fragrances. It represents a significant enhancement on what was on the site before and delivers a fascinating blend of production insights and historical perspectives on Chanel's design and involvement in the creation of the original perfume. It demonstrates an effective mix of current fact and historical information, playing on the heritage of Gabrielle Chanel. Similarly the fragrance section of the website includes a mini-film illustrating some aspects of the design bottle design process for the Bleu de Chanel scent.

Ironically the 'News' section of the site contains the bulk of material associated with the concept of heritage. There are a number of short films by Karl Lagerfeld but they are modern day enactments of

scenarios involving Gabrielle Chanel, such as her meeting with the Duchess of Windsor in the 1950's. The archives on this site go back to 2008 and contain an eclectic range of art, fashion and contemporary culture packed through pictures text narrative and video. This provides a significant underpinning of the Chanel 'DNA' but there is still a conspicuous absence of any reference to ateliers at work or any of the traditional dress making associated with French luxury handmade manufacturing. Equally there is little original film footage of Gabrielle Chanel or Paris fashion in her day, which would help reinforce the authenticity of the brand.

Interestingly, the unofficial Chanel fan group page in Facebook includes a section for fans of the brand to share their favourite Gabrielle Chanel quotes, which is a good indicator of how interested people are in the heritage of a brand; surely an insight for the brand to explore further? Yet there is probably a missed opportunity in satisfying the substantial interest that exists in Gabrielle Chanel and therefore the brand's heritage. Given the considerable interest in the history of the brand as illustrated by the 2009 film 'Coco before Chanel', and its 455,000 fans on Facebook the site could usefully provide an area dedicated to illustrating the evolution of its design philosophy and products, perhaps from 'Coco to Karl'.

## Conclusion

Conventional web-design wisdom suggests that sites need to offer more than a store, be easy to navigate and fast to upload. However, although 'media' represents the new creativity, luxury brands should beware adopting technologies in an attempt simply to template an 'ultimate website'. The fast changing reality of the Internet and digital technologies means that whatever is today's differentiator is tomorrow's commodity. Reliance on technology alone is dangerous since it is generic and can quickly become 'yesterday's news'. Creative use of media based on customer insights and a brand's DNA is more likely to be successful. Often it is the simple things that can either let a brand down or differentiate it from its peers; for example the store locator feature of brands' websites invariably illustrates a store location via a map. That information could usefully and simply be supplemented by a photograph of the store in its retail surroundings. Perhaps the real dilemma for a luxury brand is in determining where to strike the balance between exceeding the evolving design and technology expectations of customers and dictating and not responding to trends?

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# Heritage and Innovation in Luxury Brands' Flagship Stores

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Anthony M. Kent

LONDON COLLEGE OF FASHION, UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS, UK

## Abstract

The aim of this paper is to explore the contribution of heritage and innovation in the design of flagship stores, and their implications for luxury brands.

The Literature Review establishes the role of distribution and specifically flagship stores in the conceptualisation of luxury. It subsequently examines theories of history and heritage in branding, architecture and the built environment in the context of brand identity. Buildings generally have been understood to symbolise good taste, power, and status and can embody heritage. Corporate identity has provided an additional focus for many commercial architectural projects in which innovative designs have been an important point of distinction for luxury brands. The use of buildings as a selling and branding device has led to the appearance of the expressive, or iconic landmark.

The paper draws on two continuing strands of research undertaken on retail flagship stores and on re-use of buildings using interviews, photographs and case studies. It argues their contribution to brand value both in terms of heritage and innovation.

The findings emphasize the communicative significance of flagship stores, and demonstrate that luxury brands can develop and extend their identity through such innovative, iconic buildings and also from a heritage perspective, differentiate themselves by the meaning and reputation developed in the past. While meaning and brand values change over time, through the use of distinctive buildings, firms can invoke consumers' repertoires of memories.

## Introduction

Luxury has become increasingly difficult to define as it has opened up to more relative, subjective, dynamic and multiple conceptualisations (Kapferer and Bastien, 2009). At an extreme it has been critically de-categorised, to represent the ultimate limit of design, manufacture, distribution and communication (Sicard, 2006). Luxury goods have complex characteristics, both tangible in their quality, design, lifetime value and performance, and also intangible, as status symbols conveying personality, prestige and superiority (van Dijk, 2009).

From an ownership perspective, exclusivity and limited availability of the product continue to define luxury brands; for Armani, luxury's enduring quality is its uniqueness, for Pinault, the challenge lies in creating surprise (Jackson, 2007). From a marketing perspective, luxury goods are distinguished by "consistent and intensive branding and marketing strategies" (van Dyck, 2009, p.14). Both positions demonstrate a concern with authenticity (Tungate, 2009), although here too, an objective definition of "authenticity as the original or the attribute of the original is too simple to capture its complexity" (Wang, 1999, p.354).

Part of the complexity lies in the democratisation of luxury fashion, which has permeated every aspect of consumer society (Silverstein and Fiske, 2003; Okonkwo, 2007). Aspirations towards attaining luxury fashion brands have been heightened by the availability of luxury-style goods at lower prices, and advances in globalization, technologies and communications which have made fashion more accessible. Both personal indulgence and conspicuous consumption have become essential characteristics (Thomas, 2007). Widespread availability of luxury has led to consumer fatigue for highly visible, branded luxury products and stimulated demand for personalisation. Experiences fit this new demand for subtler, tailored forms of luxury, which are difficult to recreate.

## *Keywords*

Brand  
Flagship Stores  
Iconicity  
Identity  
Marketing  
Retail

This complexity of tangible and intangible qualities, of authenticity, brand consistency and uniqueness are invested in the luxury products themselves but also the physical environment in which they are initially experienced by consumers (Mintel, 2008). The enduring nature of this environment, its design and location, create opportunities to develop and sustain both heritage based and innovative brand strategies.

**Literature Review**

Distribution has been shown to play a key role in luxury management (van Dijk, 2009; Kapferer and Bastien, 2009). Moore and Doherty (2006) define luxury fashion retailers as ‘those firms that distribute clothing, accessories and other lifestyle products’ (see Table 1). In the context of luxury fashion retailing in London and New York, Fernie et al. (1998) acknowledge that luxury fashion brands firms restrict their representation to one ‘flagship’ store and distribute product via in-store concessions and wholesale agreements. Their work demonstrates the importance of location of these flagships noting that in London, Bond Street and Sloane Street account for 85% of the total designer stores in the city, with Madison Avenue and Fifth Avenue housing the majority of New York’s luxury retailers.

Exclusively designed and/or manufactured by/or for the retailer	Exclusively branded with a recognised insignia, design handwriting or some other identifying device
Perceived to be of a superior design, quality and craftsmanship	Priced significantly higher than the market norm
Sold within prestigious retail settings	

Table 1: Luxury flagship store characteristics (Source: Moore and Doherty, 2006)

Increasing retail competition has led to a number of responses, including investment in design to offer customer experiences, and in fashion stores toward more luxurious environments.

Customers for a Prada bag want to have a “Prada experience” which involves enjoying the luxury of a visit to the store. In Milan, Armani, Gucci and B&B Italia commission interiors for stores that turn brand and corporate ideas into imaginative architecture and design, as well as create perfect staging for products. Lesser known shops also function as “spatial logos” in a trend towards idea of luxury and price-less refinement (Klein, 2005).

**Heritage branding**

The contribution of history and heritage in branding, and its application to luxury, requires an overview of marketing and organisational theory. Urde et al. (2007) distinguish between three heritage branding themes: retro-branding, relating to a particular epoch and using nostalgia as a theme; iconic branding, emphasising mythmaking in the transformation of the brand into an iconic one, and heritage marketing. This latter perspective focuses on interaction and interpretation, and can be understood as a process by which things come into the self-conscious arena when a person wants to preserve or collect them (Ashworth and Howard, 1999). Moscardo (1996) views the visitor experience as a developmental process of their own understanding of the offered heritage constructed through a variety of experiences with different types of products, and through interactions with or participation in the interpretation of exhibit. McIntosh and Prentice (1999) are concerned with visitors’ affirmation of the authenticity of heritage attractions through three psychological processes: reinforced assimilations, perception and retroactive association. Ideal interpretation implies re-creation of the past and kinship with it (Tilden, 2007).

Historical studies of business and commerce, distinct from those of heritage, broadly demonstrate the importance of the past in shaping the future. Organisational histories serve a number of purposes including the assertion and discovery of sources of organisational traditions and cultures; the seeking of glory, reputation and reliability and the breaking away from a negative past (Ooi 2002). The effective packaging of history entails a continuous series of activities that feed symbolic interpretations to people, enabling them to interpret the past with their own backgrounds and experiences. Organisational identity can be explained as a sustainable story, and also history-telling, which is unique to the organisation (Carroll, 2002). In summary, these theories point towards consumer interaction and a co-creative process of meaning-making. The implication for luxury fashion brands is that “histories can be used strategically to mobilise strong and positive feelings and embed these feelings into people’s experiences of organizations” (Ooi, 2002, p.617).



Corporate and brand identity provide a further dimension to the relationship between heritage, luxury and the built environment of the flagship store. Where corporate visual identity is defined by corporate name, logotype or symbol, typography and colour (Melewar and Saunders, 1999), in corporate branding, visual identity is normally the crucial name and/or logo that play an important part in creating awareness and recognition (Balmer and Greyser, 2006). Architecture and location too have a role in this identity formation (Melewar and Jenkins, 2002; Melewar and Akel, 2005). Jorda-Albinana et al. (2009) cite AEG and Olivetti in Italy as the pioneers in identity design for the formal and coherent design for their buildings, advertising, products and sales outlets. In these cases architecture reflects the brand in the consistency of its design and visual appearance. In luxury retailing, such distinctions are particularly important, since retail identity is communicated in and experienced through their stores, both internally and externally (Din, 2000).

Combining these themes, Urde et al. (2007) believe that 'heritage brands' have distinct defining criteria and a specific approach for effective management and leadership with a primary focus on corporate heritage brands, and additional reference to product / service branding (see Figure 1). These heritage perspectives demonstrate the contribution of the physical environment to experiences and participation, and also affirm the authenticity of heritage.

Buildings generally have been understood to symbolise good taste, power, and status (Berg and Kreiner 1990). The corporate brand can also be communicated through the re-use of historic buildings and heritage of the built environment (Snodgrass and Coyne, 2006). In this way design should demonstrate a reassuringly familiar connection to the past while at the same time surprising users with its inventiveness (Liedtka and Mintzberg, 2006). The urban design literature provides additional dimensions to the contextualisation of the past; meaning is achieved through legibility, cultural associations, perceived functions, attractions, qualitative assessments (Carmona et al., 2003). In a rapidly changing environment, visual and tangible evidence of the past is valued for the sense of place and continuity, and the relative permanence of place helps establish meaningful qualities, it embodies a social memory (Rossi 1982; Carmona et al., 2003).

Examples of this process are evident in both established and new centres for luxury consumption. In Shanghai, the Bund attracts department stores and flagship stores including Armani at Three on the Bund and Bund 18, while the elegant former French concession area houses Dunhill and Vacheron Constantin have flagship stores (Chevalier and Lu, 2010).

However, the demands for uniqueness have led luxury and fashion brands to develop flagship stores using distinctive new designs and overtly branded buildings. The rise of consumerism in the 1980s and 1990s combined commercial interests and architecture and for the first time "buildings began to be looked on purely as images or marketing objects" (Glendinning, 2004, p.10). The AT&T building completed in 1978 saw the start of a new type of architecture, "the expressive landmark" that came to challenge the previous tradition of architectural monument (Jencks, 2005). Rem Koolhaas's commodification of design responses in the 1990s, resulted in architecture as a selling and branding device, typified by free-flowing three dimensional forms and metaphor laden ways of communicating.

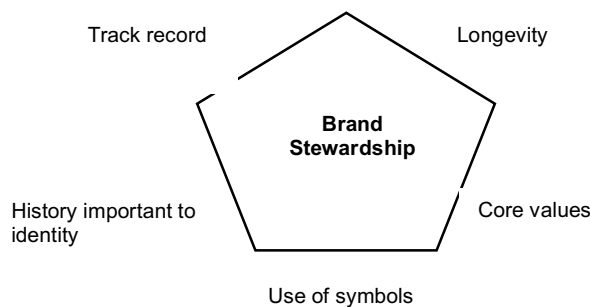


Figure 1: The elements of brand heritage (Source: Urde et al., 2007)

These iconic buildings were used not only in commercial location strategies but also urban regeneration and place marketing. Their success came to be defined by discourses drawing on three elements of distinctive design, celebrity (signature) architect and media engagement (Sklair, 2006).

The centrality of communication and the medium to iconic buildings, at the expense of the future or the building itself has been extensively criticised (Kulkarni and Joseph-Lester 2004; Glendinning, 2004; Sudjic, 2005). Nevertheless, they have been defended for their heightened experience, where ultimate

meaning is partially open but always consistent enough to provoke and to invite de-coding, and their endless and superfluous variety is achieved through the liberated imagination (Jencks, 2005).

The communicative value of the signature building and the re-use of distinctive buildings, has been clearly understood by the retail industry (Hiss, 1987); for Rem Koolhaas, retailing is the “single most influential force on the shape of the modern city” (cited in Barrenche, 2005, p.7). From the 1980s, fashion designers, including Armani, Comme des Garçons, and Gucci, hired architects to distinguish their brand, buildings, megastores and epicentres, extend their prestige and contribute to their internationalisation strategies (Manuelli, 2006). Epicentres and their restructured conceptual spaces, were themselves a competitive response by Koolhaas and Miuccia Prada to the fashion designers’ prevailing flagship store strategies (Glendenning, 2004).

The three dimensional, sensory microcosm of the retail store can represent the brand as a ‘brandscape’. Real locations enable the brand to be staged and encountered in its purest unusual and unique style (Riewoldt, 2002, p.8) and send out powerful signals, communicate images and promise new experiences. The brandscape forms a material and symbolic environment that consumers build with marketplace products, images and messages. The design of the retail environment merges with the brand image down to finest details to achieve expressiveness through the “purposeful use of characteristic forms and calculated elements of surprise” (Riewoldt, 2000, p.79). At its most extreme, brandscaping draws on entertainment to create multimedia-packed places of pilgrimage, where fantastic environments enable owners to add significance to their merchandise (Sherry and McGrath, 1989; Peñalosa, 1999).

Sklair’s conclusions on iconic architecture (2006: 1906) are that “the relationships between what buildings mean, how they look and how they make different categories of those who experience them feel, need to be explored”. The flagship store has a specific role to play in communicating and showcasing the brand through spatial design. However, ‘stores that tell stories’ to enable consumers to make meanings from such places are not necessarily the creation of branded store designers. In this context ‘brandscaping’ has been used as a theoretical framework to define the co-created symbolic and physical environment that consumers build with marketplace.

This section demonstrates how different conceptualizations of luxury agree on the role of the retail flagship in the distribution and customer experience of luxury brands. Heritage has a role in linking the past to the future, in part directed by the brand through story-telling and symbolism, but also co-created by interaction and experiences with visitors and customers. These elements contribute to brand identity, which is evident in the design of flagship buildings and the internal spaces where such interactions take place. Older buildings but importantly for luxury brands, innovative iconic stores provide environments in which the brand can develop. The research question arising from the review addresses the extent to which flagship stores create environments to communicate brand heritage.

### Research Methodology

The research design draws on and synthesises two strands of extant research. The first project used mixed qualitative methods to define the ‘retail flagship’ and its function from a retail industry perspective and consequently it did not engage specifically with luxury or fashion businesses. Drawing from Kozinets et al. (2002) interviews, photographic evidence, and content analysis of media references were used. Content analysis was undertaken from all references to flagship stores in the UK news, using online databases and physical resources. Fourteen respondents were interviewed in order to explore the flagship concept and to gain insights into the retailers’ knowledge of and intentions for flagship stores. 225 photographs of the exteriors and interiors of stores were taken or drawn from the researchers’ archives, and supplemented by retailers’ own visual material in commercially sensitive environments. Photographs have been used as evidence in anthropology, and more recently in ethnographic approaches to consumer research (Pink, 2005). The focus was on close analysis of locational context, architectural form, external and internal design features, use of space and layouts of product, corporate communications (including logos and symbols), form and colour. The research was cross-referenced with a case study analysis of Regent Street, London to provide a detailed area study. This street is owned by one landlord, the Crown Estate, who is currently implementing a strategy flagship stores largely in fashion clothing. Therefore it provides an opportunity to examine a distinctive grouping of self-styled flagship stores in a central shopping location.

The second strand of research was undertaken with UK retailers and the process of architectural design. Four stores in England were purposively sampled from two companies whose design and development appear to have particular significance. Each store highlighted a specific design issue that demonstrated a change in architectural direction, in effect each became a flagship store for the company

to assess its design policy. These formed case studies, with each store differing in age, design, and purpose and representing a specific generic type in centre, edge of centre and out of town locational contexts. The cases were developed through interviews, observation and documentary sources. Using a snowballing technique, contacts were established and relationships developed with informants, including architects, designers, town planners, historians, senior managers, executives and department heads in architectural practices and retailers. Observations were made during site visits beginning with brief scoping visits, followed by close examination and photographic recording, and in-depth guided visits with architects or planners. These proved most useful in highlighting important design features and less obvious, successes or failures in the development construction.

## Findings and Discussion

The findings demonstrate the use of the flagship, across all cases, as having a branding function. Retail flagships are more than stores: they are positioned to communicate corporate and brand values to customers and employees, competitors and communities. Respondents used the terms “beacon” and “lighthouse” to describe this aspect. In their bricks-and-mortar embodiment, they can be considered as constituting, in addition to a retailing sales function, a spatial form of advertising and promotion. The function of a flagship can be understood within a marketing communications strategy, the benefits of which transcend that of the store itself. It gives the brand exposure to different audiences, demonstrates confidence and expresses interest, and at a more emotional extreme, excitement; it raises the tempo. The flagship can be understood as the ‘purest expression of brand’ to internal and external stakeholders.

Closely related to this theme is that of the “ideal”. The flagship, at the very least it is the best example of the retail brand. Products, service and environment combine to provide leadership and best practice, as a prototype for the store group. Flagship stores are where customers and visitors “see the diversity of the product and the background as well” and stores are differentiated from others through the quality of their staff and services. In the clothing sector, the flagship is defined by their function to showcase their best profile, effectively to catch the eye, and where cost may not be a prime consideration. In Urde’s Heritage Brand Stewardship model, these qualities specifically support the luxury brand core values and operationalises the use of appropriate symbols.

“Designed space” forms the third theme. Location can define, and be defined by the flagship store. Harrod in London and Jenners in Edinburgh, typify distinctive local positions. In London but more especially in Birmingham, Selfridges plays an important role in defining Oxford Street and the Bullring shopping area. Selfridges creates a distinctive, monumental presence to define the start of an experience of shopping on Oxford St: it is the first building to stand out from the western end of the street’s post war development. As well as defining the street, Selfridges is also defined by the street, in that it can never aspire to Knightsbridge, or the select and smaller scale of Bond St.

Regent Street’s central location and architectural integrity create an environment for memorable experiences before entering the distinctive traditional world of Libertys, or the more recently established flagship stores. The street is deliberately planned to create a differentiated environment from the competition in neighbouring Oxford Street and nearby Bond Street. Avoidance of internal structure is evident in flagship store design and the Regent Street re-positioning will create larger store spaces to replace the small sites designed in the 1910s-20s. Clothing retailers’ flagships are clearly determined by ‘style’ and interactivity, both with products, and socially with other people, in which interior design plays a significant part in the experience. They are the latest manifestation of the brand, embracing a holistic approach to showcase distinctive experiences. In this respect, the store enables customers to interpret and create their own heritage.

Size often distinguishes flagships, where extravagance is part of the experience, and historical reputation may be a significant part of the experience. The authoritative design and layouts communicate to the customer, but the purchase may then be made online or at a warehouse location. However, the flagship is not necessarily the largest store; some flagships can be smaller and quirky, being distinctively different from the surrounding environment. Some locations can accommodate smaller, more specialist retailers; Covent Garden and its fringes provide opportunities for fashion retailers seeking a flagship store defined by its proximity to a large target market and compatible competition.

Market research and strategic marketing form the fourth significant theme arising from the research. Flagship stores provide feedback from customers and staff about the “ideal” retail brand. They can be defined by their relationship to other stores, to transmit new ideas to other stores in the multiple group as part of an organic process of internal communication. Respondents identified the stores’ role in setting standards of service to staff as well as products and layout. These are locations where new products,

services and concepts are trialled and if successful, adapted for other stores. This finding supports Urde et al's requirement to create a heritage track record to purposefully live up to its values and promises.

The second strand of research demonstrates the success of the communicative power of buildings in their ability to command media attention. Innovative flagship store design follows Sklair's (2006) analysis of iconic buildings relating design, signature architect and media discourse. The distinctive design of the building itself and its communicative power can engage the viewers' imagination and generate ongoing discourses and multiple metaphors amongst its stakeholders and the media. The potential for generating these types of communication and the degree of building distinctiveness are summarised as follows:

- A single landmark or iconic building. The organisation uses a single iconic building to create discourses in the media and other stakeholders. Its enigmatic form can inspire many metaphors to build relationships with the brand, and it becomes highly visible as a 'beacon' to both internal and external stakeholders. These buildings demonstrate power and prestige, and are characterised by their free-flowing form, in which there is an enigmatic relationship between the parts of the building and the whole.

- Multiple iconic buildings. The multiple retailer, or multi-site organisation, employs signature architects whose individual designs create a number of distinctive buildings. Individually and cumulatively they create discourses and stakeholder engagement with the brand at a local level and build local relationships. Collectively the discourses of iconic architecture will also define the brand identity.

- Store architecture draws on the heritage of the 'locale'. New buildings demonstrate the sensitivity of the architecture to the environment using architectural features. Where buildings are re-used, they draw on and amplify the heritage and history of the site and its neighbourhood. They build on the local relationships of stakeholders with the existing building.

- Stores share one or more design elements of a successful building. Some distinctive elements of a landmark store are applied to other stores as a design feature. In other words, a formula that attracts approval of multiple stakeholders, through its more or less modest dimensions.

## Conclusion

This paper provides a framework for understanding how heritage can be used by luxury brands and emphasises the store as a medium for communication of the brand. It demonstrates the ways in which heritage and innovation can be conceptualised in those stores in which luxury, in its broadest sense, is initially experienced by the consumer. The flagship store can make a significant contribution to the visibility of both luxury and fashion brands, as important showcases for products and services that communicate core and symbolic values to internal and external stakeholders. They provide opportunities to demonstrate leadership with new designs, products and experiences. Moreover the most successful environments also offer possibilities for interaction and enable the heritage brand to tell its story.

More broadly, architecture is not well understood as a medium for communicating a consistent retail brand identity and consequently, brand heritage. However buildings present opportunities to create a distinctive visual style for designers, architects and brand strategists. The sense of permanence in architecture contributes to its visual communicative power, and engages with stakeholders in the open-ended co-creation of the brand. Meaning and the value of the brand changes over time, and through the use of distinctive buildings firms "can invoke consumers' repertoires of memories through their brand communication to imbue their consumption with a sense of continuity and connection to the past" (Arnould et al, 2006:98).

Public interest can enable some buildings to become a brand in their own right. Innovative buildings have an ability to inspire visitors through their ambiguity, a characteristic that can be used as a part of a communications strategy by the brand owner. In this context Jencks (2005) discusses the iconic building's ability to liberate the imagination; the implication for luxury brands is to create a more memorable and enjoyable experience through consumers' interpretations. Such buildings enable the brand to change, recognising that adaptability is a key to maintaining a brand's relevance over time.

In its exploration of flagships both in their heritage based and iconic forms the research findings point to a diversity in branding that frequently does not match the intended marketing aims. This is indicative of the experiential and evolutionary nature of the flagship. As such this paper charts a phenomenon that is in transition and that has yet to establish rules of behaviour and orthodoxy on how things "ought to be done." Further research could examine the flagship building's relationship with, and contribution to, the history and heritage of the location and extend Urde et al.'s (2007) work on brand heritage in the field of luxury.

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# References to the Past: the Role of Heritage and Cultural Values in Fashion Branding

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Chitra Buckley

LONDON COLLEGE OF FASHION, UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS, UK

## Abstract

This abstract discusses the role of heritage and cultural values in fashion branding and draws on an empirical case study, carried out in 2005-6, of UK high street retailer Topshop, star of the Arcadia group. The study provides a snapshot of a key chapter in Topshop's evolution as a cutting-edge fashion own-brand: 'the Biba for a new generation' (Freeman 2006). Topshop's brand transformation was underpinned by integrating the notion of heritage into clothing collections in three different ways: firstly via exclusive collaborations with British design pioneers, secondly, by juxtaposing heritage and emergent designs in the product mix, and lastly by acting as commercial curator and philanthropist, Topshop promoted designers with diverse fashion legacies and differing styles (Celia Birtwell, Barbara Hulanicki and Zandra Rhodes). Thus in these instances, heritage transmitted the symbolic dimensions of exclusivity, eclecticism and an innovative and distinctly British design identity to the Topshop brand. As an independent brand, however, Topshop remained free from the style and craft constraints imposed by a traditional design heritage. This model of seamlessly integrating heritage and the cultural values they represented into the Topshop brand was grounded in the form of sociality that governed their product development practice.

Topshop's form of sociality was characterised by an 'open' culture of communication, flat organisational structures and buying team autonomy to explore fashion innovation in imaginative ways. In forging alliances with renowned and emergent designers, Topshop redefined the cultural, symbolic and social capital of the British high street by blurring the boundaries of high street and luxury brands (Cartner-Morley, 2005; Verdict Consulting, 2008). Bourdieu (1993a) argued, in the battle between Balmain and Courrèges, that the struggle for fashion positioning centres on ousting the prevailing values of incumbent leaders; in this case the 'label snobbery' associated with heritage and luxury brands. With these strategies of sociality, Topshop challenged the traditional positions in the UK fashion landscape.

Research in the own-brand mass market sector has ignored the role of heritage in the construction of fashion brands. Here, alliances with Rhodes, Birtwell and Hulanicki formed a key strand in Topshop's design narrative and depicted the foundations of rebellious British style and 1960s vintage prints as facets of brand identity. In the past, each designer had introduced radical change in fashion prints, textiles, colour and silhouette and contributed to London's reputation from the 1960s as a hub for youth-driven trends and pace-setter of innovation (Whately, 2008). Thus, by proxy, these cultural values of contemporary British fashion design: unconventionality, eclecticism and novelty (Goodrum, 2005) became synonymous with the Topshop brand.

## Introduction

This paper draws on the findings of an empirical investigation into the practice of continuous clothing development within the leading UK retailer, Topshop, and derives theoretical insights from the fashion marketing and sociology disciplines. The empirical data were drawn from a single exploratory case study in 2005-6 and provides a snapshot of a unique chapter in Topshop's fashion buying operations.

At the time of the case study, Jane Shepherdson spearheaded Topshop's centralised buying and her bullish leadership was deemed transformational; her buying tutelage accredited with changing Topshop

## *Keywords*

Heritage  
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Social Capital

into a revolutionary UK fashion brand, 'the Biba for a new generation' (Freeman, 2006). Topshop's brand transformation was underpinned by integrating the notion of heritage in three different ways: via exclusive collaborations with British design pioneers (Zandra Rhodes, Celia Birtwell and Barbara Hulanicki), by juxtaposing heritage and emerging intrinsic designers and lastly by promoting diverse fashion legacies and design signatures. In this case, heritage transmitted the symbolic dimensions of exclusivity, eclecticism and an innovative and distinctly British identity to the Topshop brand. As an independent brand, however, Topshop remained free from the style and craft constraints imposed by a traditional design heritage. This distinct model of seamlessly integrating a British design inheritance and related cultural values into the own-brand was grounded in the form of sociality that governed Topshop's product development practice. Shepherdson and her longstanding colleagues cultivated a flat hierarchy and buying team autonomy in decision-making, atypical for the fashion industry, with considerable financial success (Lansley and Forrester, 2005). At the same time, she led Topshop to create a collaborative hub for cutting-edge fashion design in the UK. By forging alliances with renowned and emerging designers and co-opting the fashion press, Topshop redefined the cultural, symbolic and social capital of the British high street and blurred the boundaries between high street and luxury brands (Cartner-Morley 2005; Verdict Consulting 2008). Bourdieu (1993) argued, in the battle between Balmain and Courrèges, that the struggle for fashion positioning centres on ousting the prevailing values of incumbent leaders; in this case the 'label snobbery' associated with heritage and luxury brands. With such strategies of sociality, Topshop successfully challenged the traditional positions in the UK fashion landscape.

Research into the evolution of an own-brand has ignored the role of heritage in the construction of mass-market fashion brands. Here, alliances with Rhodes, Birtwell and Hulanicki formed a key strand in Topshop's design narrative and depicted the foundations of rebellious British style and 1960s vintage prints as facets of brand identity. In the past, each designer had introduced radical change in fashion prints, textiles, colour and silhouette and contributed to London's reputation from the 1960s as a hub for youth-driven trends and pace-setter of innovation (Whately, 2008). Thus, by proxy, these cultural values of contemporary British fashion design: unconventionality, eclecticism and novelty (Goodrum, 2005) became synonymous with the Topshop brand.

This paper explores this topic in the UK context and starts by reviewing the literature on the role of heritage and cultural values in the construction of a fashion brand. The rationale for using a cross-disciplinary methodology is then briefly explained. The case study findings discuss Topshop's design narrative as the building blocks of a contemporary legend and illuminate the strategies of sociality that underpinned the retailer's evolution into this generation's revolutionary high street brand. The paper concludes by summarising the role of heritage and cultural values in this mass-market own brand and offers suggestions for further study in this topic.

### Mapping the Field: Heritage in Fashion Branding

Constructing successful and enduring fashion brands depends on creating compelling stories around the products that communicate the essential brand values or as Tungate (2008) suggests 'in a lot of ways, branding is telling a story'. Stories have become tools used by fashion companies to educate the consumer not only about the quality, the purchase and use of the product, but also to explain its history, roots and trajectory. Brand storytelling serves to proliferate relevant cultural values (Corbellini and Saviolo 2009). Long-lived European brands such as Burberry or Hermès, are born with history and derive considerable confidence as well as 'uniqueness and a cult of inherited values' that are respected and re-interpreted in the product ranges (Kapferer and Bastien 2009). However, the myth created around the brand 'the source of the brands social idealization' may be invented, borrowed or inspired. For example Ralph Lauren's imagery is derived from the Great Gatsby era of the 1920s and the 1950s WASP (white Anglo-Saxon Protestant) society, lifestyle and pursuits including polo and sailing; all of which are highly typified and unrelated to the founder Ralph Lifschitz' own background (ibid). Kapferer and Bastien (2009) also argue that although newer fashion brands, founded in the US, China or elsewhere, frequently emphasise qualities other than history or country of origin, the most dynamic brands integrate history in three different ways. These include an authentic history that also engenders modern myths, the re-appropriation or borrowing of a true story or lastly the creation of a contemporary new legend that is inspired by a certain era or lifestyle (for example Ralph Lauren or Shanghai Tang, inspired by Shanghai society of the 1920s and 1930s). Thus history becomes heritage only when it is developed into a story that consists of four 'building blocks': place (Britain for Burberry), people (founders or inspirational designers), brand legend (story told as a legend) and products (the Trench for Burberry). These dimensions are invoked and interwoven through imagery and evocative language to communicate a mythology and the core



values of a brand to a target audience. Burberry's stylistic codes: Britain, outdoor garments and the legendary check have been refreshed by designers Menichetti and Bailey, to convey contemporary British multiculturalism and Burberry's global identity, yet remain consistent with the latter's heritage in durable, high tech fabrics, originally worn by the military and explorers (Corbellini and Saviolo 2009).

Literature concerning the role of heritage in fashion branding is largely linked to luxury brands rather than high street fashion brands such as Topshop. In the UK context, mass fashion brands emerged in the 1980s and were created largely from retail own-brands rather than manufacturer brands (Moore 1995). The character of contemporary fashion retail in the UK is inextricably linked to London's reputation as a consumer market that embraces novelty and street-driven trends and is distinguished by its mass eclecticism in fashion clothing (Beward 2005). Such cultural values were reinforced from the mid-1960s onwards by iconic designer-retailers including Barbara Hulanicki with Biba (the original Biba ceased operating in 1975), Mary Quant, Laura Ashley and Vivienne Westwood who rejuvenated the UK high street (Andrews 2004). The UK fashion retail own-brand has overturned the concept of own-label collections, which emanated largely from the grocery sector<sup>1</sup>. Grocery retailers initially launched own-label food products as less expensive versions of manufacturer brands (Brídson and Evans 2004). Fashion retail own-brands, conversely, accentuated values that offer sustainable competitive advantage and emphasised product innovation and differentiation from the outset (Newman and Patel 2004; Mintel 2006). Topshop's own-branded hit products included the narrow leg 'Skinny Baxter' jean, the carrot-shaped 'Boyfriend Jean', full 'Russian skirt' and unstructured knitwear. Each represented a significant silhouette change from the prevailing shape at the time (see Figures) and has since become a key contemporary high street fashion product. Leveraging heritage, however, consists of more than collections of innovative products and entails connecting the brand to compelling and authentic stories including people, imagery and quotes (Corbellini and Saviolo 2009). Leveraging heritage in a high street brand, where in-house designers are usually anonymous and countries of origin vary, requires a different genre of storytelling to those associated with luxury brands.

To make sense of the stories and design narratives created by Topshop at that time, a cross-disciplinary methodology combining concepts and theory from fashion marketing, cultural production and sociology was used to explain the findings from the case study and is briefly explained below.

### Methodology: Using a Cross-Disciplinary Approach

The investigation encompassed a cross-disciplinary methodology and included a single exploratory case study of Topshop's product development practice in 2005-6. Forming part of a methodological 'toolkit', early grounded theory was used as an initial inductive analytical procedure. Early grounded theory suited the exploratory nature of the case study, and assisted in constructing 'sociality' as a conceptual category to explain the distinct form of interaction underpinning Topshop's product development practice. Sociality, as the play-form of sociation, represents the underlying drivers of interaction symbolically, and is characterised by the individual playing a role rather than performing a function (Simmel 1964; Maffesoli 1996). Simmel's (1964) sociological theories of interaction and groups were used to investigate the form of sociality fostered by Topshop's buying organisation to sustain its struggle for positioning in the UK fashion landscape. Bourdieu's (1990) conceptual framework and notions of field, habitus and capital in *Social space and symbolic power* helped to explore the relations of power and status between the high street brand and the incumbent leaders in UK fashion.

Topshop was selected as an exemplar on three criteria: product range, market share and fashion differentiation (Mintel 2006) –see Appendix 1. Topshop's creative practice was relevant due to the firm's public commitment to offer leading-edge fashion merchandise:

"We decided we had to have a real point of difference to the rest of the high street. Our mission was to become the absolute fashion authority, to be the first with every new trend... Topshop has to epitomise a new British eclectic style. To be first with fashion is a given; we must always be ahead of the market in terms of product." Buying Director, Topshop (Industry Forum 2004)

An exploratory research design, considered instrumental in defining questions and hypotheses for further research, was used as this is an unresearched area. Three principal elements were explored: the forms of interaction, the viewpoints of the buyers, merchandisers and designers and the underlying social structures. The first objective was to identify the chief forms of interaction that emerged between the buyers, merchandisers and designers. The second objective was to examine the perspectives, beliefs and values of the stakeholders. The third objective was to analyse the social structures of power and status that constrain and buttress these forms of interaction.



Photos

- 1 Boyfriend Jean
- 2 Skinny Baxter Jean

The case study simultaneously takes into account a contemporary phenomenon and its real-life context (Yin, 2003a). Often used in management research, it offers a holistic view of the complexity of a process that is 'close to the empirical experience' (Eisenhardt 1989). A key strength is the potential for data triangulation from several sources of evidence including observation, interviews and documents, which offers a comprehensive strategy capable of handling numerous variables and fewer data points (Yin 2003). Data triangulation largely overcomes the problem of researcher bias, often considered a weakness in the internal validity of a case. The classic single case study offered a deeper understanding of the specific social setting of Topshop rather than comparative insights from several retailers. Clear constructs were framed within a story that was coherent and plausible. Multi-case research, which entails studying more contexts (Eisenhardt (1989) recommends between four and ten different organisations), offers less rich contextual insight and description will tend to be rather *thin* (Gibb Dyer and Wilkins 1991). Generalising from one case to another was not possible with a single case. Findings were, therefore, systematically generalised to theory (Yin, 2003b) to provide external validity and to illuminate the broader issues of conflict and the struggle as the engine of fashion. By explaining and describing constructs in their social context, the insights were instrumental in developing a 'snapshot hypothesis' and generating emergent theory of the creative practice in high street fashion branding.

Adopting a cross-disciplinary approach and single case study method tackles high street fashion branding in a novel manner. The investigation takes into account the richness of the individual's viewpoints and remains close to the empirical material, whilst making connections to the forces that drive change and innovation in the field of UK fashion.

### Topshop's Design Narrative: the Creation of a Contemporary Legend

As a burgeoning high street brand Topshop's design narrative engendered a contemporary legend that was inspired by the avant-garde spirit of British design pioneers of the 1960s and 1970s: Zandra Rhodes, Celia Birtwell and Barbara Hulanicki. Zandra Rhodes, a textile designer, launched her first collection in 1969. Her clothing, described as 'witty, brilliantly coloured, slightly ethnic and very romantic... stunningly beautiful and entirely her own' were an extension of herself as the brand (Monsef, Nothdruff et al. 2005). Shepherdson, described Rhodes as 'an original... She encapsulates what is so exciting about British fashion, she's brave, instinctive and always true to herself' (ibid: 46). Rhodes designed a capsule collection of tops for Topshop in 2005, in her vibrant signature prints and sheer fabrics. She had recently made a comeback to fashion design after a twenty-year gap. Her renaissance included the launch of the Fashion and Textile Museum (FTM) in the regenerated district of Bermondsey, London, both as a design resource and a showcase of her considerable fashion legacy. Thus Rhodes' originality blossomed in the 1960s and was rejuvenated and updated with Topshop in the mid-2000s.

Textile designer Celia Birtwell, reputed for her hand drawn printed fabrics, collaborated with Topshop in 2006 on an exclusive range of dresses and tops in a selection of her archived prints (see Figure), some of which had adorned the feminine, bias-cut dresses created by Ossie Clarke, her former husband, in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Callender 2006). Although less of a 'household name' than Rhodes, Birtwell enjoyed a strong following from fashion aficionados and industry insiders.

Topshop's recent collaboration with Barbara Hulanicki in 2009 was also a renaissance in fashion clothing for the designer, who has worked mainly in interior design for the last thirty years. Founder of the revolutionary Biba store in High Street Kensington in 1963, Hulanicki had pioneered cutting-edge fashion at reasonable prices including signature prints, midi silhouettes, and coloured platform footwear and was considered to be the forerunner of high street fashion (Bubble 2009).

Having gained worldwide recognition during the 1960s and 1970s at a defining moment in British fashion history, Rhodes, Birtwell and Hulanicki thus embody key persona in British design heritage. Topshop's contemporary legend is inspired by their emotional memory and the legacy of fashion signatures exemplifying avant-gardism, originality, femininity, hand drawn prints and revolutionary high street fashion. Cultural values derived from these collaborations embrace the veneration of radical fashion innovation and the promotion of distinctive individual style that is rooted in British design discourse (Breward 1995). Topshop's contemporary legend was then created through referencing the past, invoking these cultural values and contributing to the fashion renaissance of Rhodes, Birtwell and Hulanicki. At the same time, such exclusive collaborations reinforced the Topshop's cultural and symbolic capital and the status of the brand in the UK fashion system.

Place becomes part of a company's heritage when a story is created around it (Corbellini and Saviolo 2009). The spirit of London as a laboratory for street trends, eclecticism and style innovation features strongly in Topshop's collections via the sponsorship of NEWGEN since 2001 and the promotion of up-and-coming London Fashion Week designers. By juxtaposing fringe and established designers in their



#### Photo

- 1 Topshop collaboration with Celia Birtwell, *Vogue* April 2006

assortment mix, Topshop invoke the individualistic and rebellious style that Anna Wintour, Editor-in Chief, US *Vogue* remarked differentiates London from other global style cities:

“We do look to London for the street scene and street culture. It’s a fearless way of dressing. They don’t worry about the rules the way we do in the States, or indeed Paris or Milan. There’s a rebel quality to the way kids in London dress”. (Finnigan 2009)

Eclecticism and street style, the essence of the ‘London Look’, is embodied in the haphazard, market floor layout and the boutique atmosphere throughout the Topshop chain and especially at the Oxford Circus flagship store. London as a place represents a distinct building block in Topshop’s brand heritage.

An iconic product embodies another component of a brand’s heritage (Corbellini and Saviolo 2009). As an independent brand, free from the style and craft constraints imposed by a traditional design heritage, Topshop nurtured diversity in the assortment mix by forging alliances across different segments of the British fashion system. Core product ranges, emerging and renowned designers and large commercial brands constituted the assortment mix. Topshop’s pivotal position as philanthropist (particularly to emerging designers) and commercial curator has been a key component in fostering diversity, with the Oxford Circus store as the prime display space. Mandi Lennard, a fashion publicist commented in *The Independent*:

“Topshop’s store in Oxford Circus has become a hub for people within the industry... It all changed when they started hooking up with new designers. They have people in charge of their young designers who really go beyond the call of duty. It’s almost become a sort-of pseudo fashion academy”. (Frankel 2005)

Topshop has not developed one iconic product, but nurtured diversity and experimentation, thus creating a story around their assortment that emphasises fashion opinion leadership, creativity and expertise in fashion movements.

Championing original design and taking fashion risks has become part of contemporary Topshop folklore with the decision to launch the Unique collection (originally created by in-house designers in 2001) at London Fashion Week in 2005. Jane Shepherdson described the decision:

“At the time, no high street store was showing at London Fashion Week, so it was quite exciting, but equally quite a risky thing to do...because we were putting our head above the parapet a bit...people could easily come back and say what are you doing... you’re rubbish, you’re just high street”. (Whately 2008)

The decision was risky, as the move was likely to earn criticism both for the quality of the designs and for the shift into a sacrosanct sphere of the UK fashion system. The Unique catwalk collection challenged traditional market boundaries by promoting high street fashion design in the luxury fashion market. By showing and competing alongside other catwalk collections, Topshop refuted the allegation of designing derivative clothing and Unique proposed an alternative view of fashion design that was rooted in a lack of pretension and inspired by urban, street-driven style codes. Topshop’s journey from the high street to the catwalk was a direct bid to legitimise the eclecticism of the British high street as a design concept in the national and global luxury fashion arena. By promoting eclecticism, trend-driven styling and using an anonymous design team, Topshop challenged the traditional values of the incumbent fashion leaders at London Fashion Week. As Jane Shepherdson claimed to *The Guardian’s* Fashion Editor:

“The label snobbery that used to exist around designer brands has not just declined – it’s been turned on its head. Now it’s considered smarter, more savvy, to have found something fantastic on the high street”. (Cartner-Morley 2005)

Although the leading fashion commentator, McDowell (2005), was sceptical of high street creative and design skills and felt that Unique lacked a ‘point of view’, the collection was bought by Colette, the influential Parisian store and Opening Ceremony in New York, both of which are noted for independent thinking and taking style risks (Rushton 2005). Topshop’s fight was similar to the battle over the intrinsic values of a label that Bourdieu (1993) had observed in the 1960s between the traditional bourgeois Balmain and the left-wing newcomer Courrèges. Topshop’s struggle for recognition of high street design has become part of its brand story and contemporary legend. At the same time, the cultural values of eclecticism, rebellion and novelty were incorporated as symbolic dimension into this contemporary legend. The juxtaposition of pioneers with emergent designers embodied eclecticism, rebelliousness and challenging the status quo was embodied in the launch of Unique and novelty represented through the continuous innovation in core clothing collections.

Topshop's model of integrating heritage and cultural values in fashion branding was grounded in the form of sociality that governed their product development practice. Topshop's sociality was characterised by an 'open' culture of communication, flat organisational structure and buying team autonomy. Open communication stimulated idea-sharing and interaction between both lateral functions (buyers, merchandisers and designers) and senior management. Topshop's struggle for a leading fashion positioning in UK retail 'the absolute fashion authority' was sustained by this practice of an inclusive form of sociality and the autonomy of individual buying team members to compete on clothing development. Through autonomous decision-making, Topshop's management encouraged the competitive interaction between the buying team members to continuously improve collections in fashion design and concept. The pro-active decentralisation of product decision-making to the buying teams, ensured the alignment of personal success to the collective objective. Internal competition, founded on autonomous effort, formed a powerful socialising force that sustained speed and competence in clothing development. This socialisation process encouraged the adoption of certain modes of behaviour that included experimentation and courage.

Experimentation was carried out by buyers, merchandisers and designers as trials in shape, colour or fabrication. Pre-season clothing trials tested the consumer's reaction to a new style and gauged the potential longevity and sales volume of an item, which was then modified to achieve volume sales as an 'in-season driver'. Topshop created exclusive colour palettes to support the testing and marketing of progressive colours to fashion innovators and leaders, often about twelve months before the rest of the fashion industry. By trialling new colours and shapes, the buying teams were able to evaluate the direction of fashion codes and pick up on the incipient tastes of consumers. Since 2001 the TS Design department has represented a trend laboratory, which contributed to Topshop's profile as a fashion leader and frequently passed on selected key products for the core departments to exploit fully. Experimentation and constant trialling of concession brands, designers or individual styles, therefore, assisted substantially in creating avant-garde clothing and provided opportunities for volume buys. These aspects contributed to developing balanced assortments that blended cutting-edge styling with depth and volume in key items.

Although experimentation as a powerful tactic and socialising tool kept the buying teams engaged and motivated, the process of autonomous decision-making was critical to the success of Topshop's experimentation. Buyers and/or buying teams had the legitimate authority to place commitments, make style decisions and manage open-to-buy budgets, with management support. Management provided a guiding and advisory role, and fostered an organisational climate that acknowledged and accepted mistakes, provided there was proof of reactivity to solve the problem. Hence the combination of autonomy and experimentation provided the freedom and confidence to generate and exploit new clothing ideas.

On occasions when there was insufficient time to trial a style or colour, the buyer had to make an immediate 'brave' decision to commit to an all-store option. The buying teams were often exhorted to 'be brave', an axiom that, in the Topshop context, inferred risk-taking to launch a radical new fashion, untested colour or explore new design projects. The socialising concept of bravery or courage had underpinned Topshop's product and corporate strategy since the advent of Jane Shepherdson at Brand Director level. Indeed, she had been promoted throughout her twenty-year career in Topshop on the basis of her 'ballsi-ness' and 'bullish' approach to buying. In a discussion of Shepherdson's legacy, the Guardian journalist remarked:

"She changed the retailer (Topshop) from a purveyor of cheap and tatty vest tops into arguably the most important fashion brand in this country, a Biba for a new generation ... without question, Shepherdson has revolutionised the high street". (Freeman 2006)

Without doubt, advocating a brave approach contributed to Topshop's culture of introducing radical fashion change and successfully challenging the traditional landscape of UK fashion retail (Mintel 2006).

## Conclusion

Since Jane Shepherdson was promoted to Brand Manager in 1998, Topshop has created a design narrative combining different fashion genres including 1960s vintage prints, cutting-edge emergent design and 'rock chic' that have become the foundations of its contemporary legend. Collaborations with reputed British designers Zandra Rhodes and Celia Birtwell formed a successful design story that celebrated British fashion cultures and heritage. Alliances with the NEWGEN emergent designers, the Fashion East designer project and Hyères Festival contributed the quintessential values of contemporary British fashion design: unconventionality, eclecticism and novelty, to Topshop's brand identity. Such alliances

along with celebrity endorsement from Beth Ditto and later Kate Moss as a famous co-designer (among others), are elements that positively influence the creative positioning and psychological value of a retail own-brand (McColl and Moore, 2009). Topshop, using the Oxford Street store as prime display space, was the first retailer to develop strategic collaborations so extensively and continuously across all sectors in the UK fashion industry (Mower, 2007). By doing so, Topshop has emerged as the instigator and creator of a commercial design space; 'a hub for people within the industry' (Frankel, 2005) rather than a traditional fashion retailer. This versatile and evolving strategy has become the blueprint for a transferable design space that has facilitated Topshop's global expansion and garnered considerable attention in the international fashion arena (Cocozza, 2007).

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### Note

1. Fashion clothing own-brand penetration is currently at 65%, compared to the food sector at 30%.

# Innovation, Interaction, and Inclusion: Heritage Luxury Brands in Collusion with the Consumer

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Kay McMahan & Jane Morley

QUEENSLAND UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA

## Abstract

Many luxury heritage brands operate on the misconception that heritage is interchangeable with history rather than representative of the emotional response they originally developed in their customer. This idea of heritage as static history inhibits innovation, prevents dynamic renewal and impedes their ability to redefine, strengthen and position their brand in current and emerging marketplaces.

This paper examines a number of heritage luxury brands that have successfully identified the original emotional responses they developed in their customers and, through innovative approaches in design, marketing, branding and distribution evoke these responses in contemporary consumers. Using heritage and innovation hand-in-hand, these brands have continued to grow and develop a vision of heritage that incorporates both historical and contemporary ideas to meet emerging customer needs.

While what constitutes a 'luxury' item is constantly challenged in this era of accessible luxury products, up-scaling and aspirational spending, this paper sees consumers' emotional needs as the key element in defining the concept of luxury. These emotional qualities consistently remain relevant due to their ability to enhance a positive sense of identity for the brand user. Luxury is about the 'experience' not just the product providing the consumer with a sense of enhanced status or identity through invoked feelings of exclusivity, authenticity, quality, uniqueness and culture. This paper will analyse luxury heritage brands that have successfully combined these emotional values with those of their 'heritage' to create an aura of authenticity and nostalgia that appeals to contemporary consumers.

Like luxury, the line where clothing becomes fashion is blurred in the contemporary fashion industry; however, consumer emotion again plays an important role. For example, clothing becomes 'fashion' for consumers when it affects their self perception rather than fulfilling basic functions of shelter and protection. Successful luxury heritage brands can enhance consumers' sense of self by involving them in the 'experience' and 'personality' of the brand so they see it as a reflection of their own exclusiveness, authentic uniqueness, belonging and cultural value.

Innovation is a valuable tool for heritage luxury brands to successfully generate these desired emotional responses and meet the evolving needs of contemporary consumers. While traditionally fashion has been a monologue from brand to consumer, new technology has given consumers a voice to engage brands in a conversation to express their evolving needs, ideas and feedback. As a result, in this consumer-empowered era of information sharing, this paper defines innovation as the ability of heritage luxury brands to develop new design and branding strategies in response to this consumer feedback while retaining the emotional core values of their heritage.

This paper analyses how luxury heritage brands can effectively position themselves in the contemporary marketplace by separating heritage from history to incorporate innovative strategies that will appeal to consumer needs of today and tomorrow.

## Introduction

The Internet presents heritage luxury brands with the opportunity to expand by communicating their core message and heritage to a wider audience (Okonkwo, 2010) and opportunities to develop deeper relationships with consumers (Christodoulides, 2009). However, in this paper we see there are traditio-

## *Keywords*

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Luxury  
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Innovation  
Emotion  
Branding  
Consumers  
Online  
Digital Technology

nally a number of key elements that must be in alignment to successfully maintain a luxury brand (Fionda & Moore, 2009) and these remain essential when developing digital strategies.

Key challenges luxury heritage brands face when developing successful online strategies that maintain brand heritage are; opening to new ways of thinking, understanding the internet as a 360 degree experience rather than a traditional one-way marketing communication, recreating the luxury atmosphere and experience online, deciding how accessible to make products, and positioning the brand beyond their website (Okonkwo, 2009). While many luxury heritage brands may see this as a potentially perilous experiment that could compromise their positioning, some have started to embrace digital technology and are finding ways to utilise this new medium while strengthening, rather than weakening, their brand.

## Literature Review

### Elements of Luxury

There are a number of elements key to maintaining a luxury fashion brand that appear consistently across models of numerous academics. These commonalities are exemplified in overviews such as Fionda & Moore (2009) *The Anatomy of the Luxury Fashion Brand*, which analyses academic papers and interviews with luxury brands, to define key elements: Clear Brand Identity, Marketing Communications, Product Integrity, Design Signature (including Iconic Products and Eminent Designer), Price, Exclusivity, Heritage (or Story), Environment/Service, and Culture. However, while we found many similar recurring elements in our literature review, we have combined these with factors such as the aspirational consumer and digital technology using the following categories: The Symbolic Functions of Luxury; Brand Image and The Consumer; Interactive Marketing Strategies and the Social Web; Balancing Signature Style and Iconic Products with New Designers and Changing Fashions; and Providing Consumers with a Unique Luxury Experience. This presents a solid foundation of the essential elements recent literature has identified for luxury heritage brands to maintain positions in both offline and online strategies.

### The Symbolic Functions of Luxury, Brand Image and the Consumer

There are two powerful symbolic functions that luxury can play; one being to enhance our image in the eyes of others and the other to enhance our self-concept (Vigneron and Johnson, 1999, as cited in Fionda & Moore, 2009, Kapferer & Bastien, 2009) making it a powerful tool to develop and communicate the consumer's identity (Fionda & Moore 2009, Okonkwo, 2007). Traditionally luxury was used as a visual indicator to demonstrate and uphold class barriers through dress and possessions. While class barriers have dissolved and we are now living in a relatively classless 'meritocracy' where anyone has the opportunity to achieve social status, (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009) luxury is still used as a social stratification tool to recreate a hierarchy (Okonkwo, 2010, Kapferer & Bastien, 2009). As a result, to desire luxury is to desire becoming part of an elevated class (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009).

While a high price tag is widely accepted as a necessary element of luxury products (Fionda & Moore, 2009) this must be accompanied by a story that gives the items intrinsic as well as extrinsic value (Keller, 2009). Kapferer and Bastien (2009, p.315) explain: "Luxury is qualitative not quantitative and therefore high price alone does not guarantee luxury brand positioning as this measures wealth not taste or social sophistication". When consumers buy luxury products they purchase a package containing the tangible product and intangible social and psychological enhancements that come with that product and brand (Okonkwo, 2007). As a result, the value of the product is greater than the sum of its parts and the brand must communicate the value of the 'package' to the consumer. Luxury brands must live up to their price tag (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009) by demonstrating the product's integrity as well as the brand's prestige and exclusivity.

In addition to communicating an elevated social status and enhanced self-image through luxury consumption, consumers also develop enhanced self-esteem and ego fulfillment resulting in a stronger and more positive idea of themselves (Okonkwo, 2007). Part of what makes a luxury brand valuable is the positive psychological effects that can be obtained by consumers as they align themselves with the brand imagery. The brand imagery includes both a vision of the idealized brand user, and a personality or association attached to the brand itself (Keller, 2009). Positive associations are also created through the brand imagery associated with what situations the brand is purchased or used for, and what shared or individual experiences consumers have tied to the history or heritage of the brand (Keller, 2009). It is imperative that luxury brands understand the external and internal emotions created by their heritage and brand position and use these to develop successful marketing strategies.

Luxury brands must tell a story that either involves their own past and history or that they have develo-



ped from scratch (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009) to encourage emotional connections with consumers. Heritage can create advantages over competition as it enhances the authenticity of a brand and facilitates consumer relationships (Urde, Greyser & Balmer, 2007). Increased credibility and feelings of trust are common among heritage brands (Urde et al., 2007) because over time the brand has opportunities to build strong 'brand stature' measured on characteristics of *esteem*, consumer respect, and *knowledge*, or consumers' familiarity with the brand (Keller, 2009). While trust and credibility are extremely valuable, to ensure relevancy in contemporary contexts the brand must also successfully develop strong 'brand strength'. This is measured on three criteria of *differentiation*, or point of difference, *energy*, or momentum of the brand, and *relevance*, how broad the appeal is amongst consumers (Keller, 2009). A brand leader needs to be strong in all these categories (Keller, 2009) to successfully utilise heritage.

While heritage is a valuable tool for luxury brands when heritage is viewed by brands as a static history it can inhibit innovation, prevent dynamic renewal and impede ability to redefine, strengthen and position brands in current and emerging marketplaces. To enhance the relevance of a brand in contemporary contexts, brands must view heritage not as interchangeable with history but as representative of an emotional response that can be adapted in contemporary contexts. Urde, Greyser and Balmer explore the benefits achieved from this view:

"An historical overview is necessarily grounded *in the past*. Corporate heritage brands embrace three timeframes; *the past, the present and the future*... a brand's distinctive, and historical, traits have been invested with meaning and value that afford benefits to brand communities of today and tomorrow just as in previous decades or centuries. As such, the brand's traditions have a salience for the present: value is still being invested in the brand as well as extracted from it. Heritage brands are distinct in that *they are about both history and history in the making*." (Urde et al., 2007, p.7)

To successfully create this balance between historic and contemporary values, brands must not exploit their heritage by drawing from it without further adding to it (Urde et al., 2007). Successful luxury heritage brands are defined by their ability to balance the timelessness of brand heritage with innovative strategies for brand positioning that find relevance in the present and future (Okonkwo, 2007). As a result, there is no tension or contradiction between heritage brands being viewed as innovators using cutting edge strategies or technology. In fact, "adaptability is a key to maintaining a brand's relevance over time". (Urde et al., 2007, p.16)

Historically luxury was only available to a select group of consumers and they were content in the knowledge that few could afford the price tag that luxury carried. In recent years the luxury market has expanded, with more people of moderate means having access to the product and all its inherent passion (Okonkwo, 2009). Where once "... 'old luxury' was about the attributes, qualities and features of the product and much of its appeal was derived from status and prestige" (Unity Marketing, 2006, p.15), the new luxury consumer defines the category from their point of view. "Today's new luxury consumers focus on the experience of luxury embodied in the goods and services they buy, not in the ownership itself." (Unity Marketing, 2006, p.15)

This new aspirational consumer can choose to buy 'up' or 'down', but still requires the prestige and emotional relationship luxury provides. Many authors see this shift as being more 'democratic' that it's "for everybody and different for everybody" (Unity Marketing, 2006, p.15).

So whereas luxury was a top-down experience with a distance between brand and consumer, this relationship is evolving with access to digital technology and the internet, to a consumer who believes they are 'king' and in total control (Okonkwo, 2009).

### **Interactive Marketing Strategies and the Social Web**

Historically most luxury brands were established by a specific designer whose name and heritage still drives marketing and branding strategies. For these designers, as for today's luxury marketers, the components remain the same where "all elements of marketing must be aligned to ensure quality products, services, experience and flawless value" (Keller, 2009). Even today, Okonkwo (2007) states that the key to building luxury brand image is powerful marketing.

Companies once confident they knew their customer and had 'negotiated meaning of the brand' (McCabe & Malefy, 2010) are now struggling with new tensions inherent in their consumer and the rise of digital and social media and the internet. Traditional marketing allowed heritage brands to be the 'custodian' (Christodoulides, 2009) of its message and produced strong strategies that positioned itself in the marketplace. With the advent of new technology and the power consumers have to manipulate or 'interfere'

with the message, Christodoulides (2009) believes brands must now become 'facilitators' of the message and drive marketing strategies that embrace this new model.

While many heritage brands have been hesitant to adopt new technology, marketing is still about the brand engaging with customers and "Companies must stay abreast of new meaning human beings generate in their lives" (McCabe & Malefyt, 2010, p.260) Currently, the luxury consumer understands the increased power they have and brands must acknowledge this and 'converse' with them, harnessing their strength to spread the brand message

Consumers demand deeper relationships with, and more say in, the experience they have with the brand. However, in developing these new relationships the literature suggests a note of caution. As Kapferer and Bastien (2009, p.317) states: "There are two ways to go bankrupt: not listening to the client, and also listening to him too much." The tension remains for the heritage brand marketer to understand the complexities and advantages that the new models offer, while maintaining a distance, a credibility or an authenticity that still creates profitable and successful marketing strategies.

### **Balancing Signature Style and Iconic Products with New Designers and Changing Fashions**

Heritage luxury brands often represent two elements; the commercial properties of the brand, including logo and trademarks, and the identity and creativity of the founding designer. (Troy, 2002, p.26). Luxury is about being unique and therefore the creative identity, passions, tastes and idiosyncracies intrinsic to the founding designer are what makes a strong statement and gives the brand enhanced authenticity creating emotional bonds with the consumer (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009). As a result, the creator feels bound to develop an appealing, charismatic and unique identity so the brand can transfer these properties to the products (Troy, 2002, p.27). This identity develops a symbolic handwriting or mark often referred to as the *griffe*. Vinken explores the phenomenon of the *griffe* in *Fashion Zeitgeist* (2004, p.81) "The *griffe*, is the sign of the house, guarantees original authorial authenticity. It stands as the signature to uniqueness, the inspiration and the ability of particular individuals."

When the founding designer ceases to operate in the business it is important to maintain and build upon the *griffe* with many brands highlighting the value of being faithful to historic positioning and the founding designer to maintain brand authenticity (Fionda & Moore, 2009). Part of this is the continuation of a signature style representative of the brand in the eyes of the consumer. Troy (2002, p.27) explores Derrida's view on signature stating, "...in order to function, that is, to be readable, a signature must have a repeatable, iterable, imitable form; it must be detached from the present and singular intention of its production". In this context a luxury fashion partnership may be defined as a brand that represents the timeless classic aspects of luxury, and a high profile designer who brings fashion to the relationship (Kapferer & Bastien 2009). For a successful heritage luxury fashion, new designers need to create product that identifies and continues to express and repeat elements of the original creator's signature style while imbuing creations with their own creative identity to make the product relevant in the present.

It is important to honour both the brand and the new designer by creating a mix of iconic products synonymous with brand heritage as well as innovative new seasonal fashion product that showcases the designer and the brand's evolving identity. This tension between the iconic and 'fashion' product mix is symbolic of a growth trade-off that luxury brands face as they are torn between expanding their consumer base by appealing to new contemporary consumers and retaining classic customers (Keller, 2009). Iconic products clearly reflect the brand DNA or brand signature (Nueno and Quelch, 1998 as cited in, Fionda & Moore, 2009) and demonstrate characteristics of high quality, exclusivity and authenticity (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009) often stemming from close connections to the heritage of the brand (Fionda & Moore, 2009). Iconic products are frequently aspirational (Fionda & Moore, 2009), because they represent the brand essence. In addition to being strongly tied to the DNA of a brand, it is important that the products reflect the personality and values of the creator (Okonkwo, 2007, Bruce and Kratz, 2007 as cited in, Fionda & Moore, 2009). The appointment of an eminent fashion designer to reinterpret iconic products and develop new styles can help create this balance between tradition and innovation and enhance the relevance of heritage luxury brands in the contemporary market.

Product integrity is a key characteristic of luxury products (Fionda & Moore, 2009) and is essential whether this integrity is demonstrated by craftsmanship and precision (Okonkwo, 2009), physical manifestations of luxury (McCabe & Malefyt, 2010), or a reflection of design signature (Fionda & Moore, 2009). Okonkwo (2010) states that a steadfast dedication to perfection, even in the face of involved and time consuming production processes is what luxury is all about on a product level.

However, Kapferer and Bastien (2009) disagree, believing cheaper equivalent products may actually perform better than luxury products, as long as the flaw is part of the luxury brand's story and works to

enhance its authenticity in the consumer's eyes. This reiterates the importance of the story or heritage of a luxury brand in determining the level of authenticity and expectations in the consumer's mind.

Exclusivity is a key characteristic for luxury fashion (Okonkwo, 2009, Okonkwo, 2007, Keller, 2009, Fionda & Moore, 2009, Kapferer & Bastien, 2009) Many believe a brand or product gains exclusivity from limited accessibility causing tensions when brands try to grow and attract new consumers while retaining traditional consumers (Okonkwo, 2009, Keller 2009, Kapferer 2009). However, Troy (2002, p.27) explores Boudieu and Deslout's view that the position of the designer is actually instrumental in determining the exclusivity or rarity of the products:

“It is the rarity of the producer (that is to say the rarity of the position that he occupies in the field) that establishes the rarity of the product. How else, if not by one's faith in the magic of the signature, can we explain the ontological difference –which reveals itself economically– between the replica, signed by the master himself (this multiple *avant la lettre*) and the copy or fake?”

The answer may lie in both the accessibility of the product and the status of the designer and brand. The idea that designer and brand have an effect on exclusivity is supported by the evidence that many consumers still choose to buy the original luxury products while convincing counterfeit goods are easily accessible. Therefore, heritage luxury brands must not only protect the distribution, product availability, and licenses to ensure exclusivity (Fionda & Moore, 2009), but must also ensure the precise and relevant positioning of the brand and its designer.

### Providing Consumers with a Unique Luxury Experience

For luxury fashion brands it is as important to brand the experience and the product (Moore, 2003 as cited in Fionda & Moore, 2009) and some believe the experience of luxury must be ‘multi-sensory’ and experiential (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009, Atwal & Williams, 2009) making it a challenge for luxury heritage brands to successfully offer online. The luxury experience is also about the searching, waiting and longing for a product (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009) which contradicts the ‘immediate’ experiences new technology has encouraged. “Luxury has to know how to set up the necessary obstacles to the straining of desire, and keep them in place” (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009). Traditionally this was maintained through limited availability and the rigid lead times of the fashion calendar.

The offline flagship store is seen by some as an essential ingredient to maintaining luxury as it ensures that consumers get the true ‘experience’ (Fionda & Moore, 2009) and helps to ensure the brand controls this experience and is in alignment with all brand elements (Keller, 2009, Fionda & Moore, 2009). As a result, luxury fashion brands see an additional obstacle to success online as they are challenged to recreate the store sensory experience for online consumers (Okonkwo, 2010).

Online strategies should not aim to compete with offline retail and marketing but complement them (Okonkwo, 2010). Brands should therefore not focus on recreating the offline experience but instead create new and unique online experiences. As a result if, “innovative experience design will become an increasingly important component of luxury marketing” (Atwal & Williams, 2009, p.345) then the innovative experiences that luxury heritage brands should aim to create are those that reinforce and contemporise their heritage and brand position while giving something additional and unique to online consumers.

### Research Methodology

It was imperative that the findings for this paper were up to date with the fast paced fashion industry and the rapidly evolving digital revolution. We therefore adopted an approach that uses recent academic literature, newspaper articles, conference presentations, company websites and media interviews. As Gummesson (2004, p.325) states in *Qualitative Research in Marketing*, “true scholarship in marketing is engendered by committed entrepreneurial researcher spirit”. In response to this and in the interest of triangulation we conducted a literature review that along with our combined experience in the industry guided our analysis of these media and online sources to assess current industry practices. In line with luxury branding and online strategy expert, Uche Okonkwo (2007), we use case illustrations to explore the methods luxury brands are using to strengthen their heritage or story with digital technology.

### Findings and Discussion

Luxury fashion brands have been slow to embrace the Internet for the first twenty years of its existence (Okonkwo, 2009), and while many now are putting energy into building a strong online presence, there

are still many refusing to move wholeheartedly into the digital world. While many luxury brands are nervous to move online for fear of losing brand positioning by breaking with traditions. (Okonkwo, 2010), their inability to innovate in response to the digital world may become one of their biggest threats.

Renowned fashion commentator for the *New York Times* and *International Herald Tribune* Suzy Menkes, notes two distinct schools of thought amongst luxury heritage brands stating "...there is a divide between those who think of heritage, of a past as something that you have to drag into the future and others who seem to be jumping into the future" (Sanderson, 2010)

These opposing approaches are also identified by Scott Galloway, professor from New York University's Stern School of Business and developer of the Digital IQ Index for luxury companies, noting that 2010 "had been a seminal year for the luxury industry. Some brands have put the weight of their organization behind digital, while others have stood still and have been left behind" (Menkes, November 9, 2010). The 2010 index placed Louis Vuitton and Ralph Lauren at an equal second place, showing that some heritage luxury fashion brands are moving into the digital age with success.

Here we analyse how some of these brands are developing successful digital strategies that not only maintain the essential components of a luxury brand, but enhance their position and relevance in the contemporary marketplace. We will focus on traditional luxury heritage brands; Louis Vuitton, Burberry and Hermes, in conjunction with references to luxury brands Ralph Lauren and Tom Ford.

### Louis Vuitton

Louis Vuitton's effective strategies support Christodoulides' (2009) view that successful online strategies build relationships, develop interactivity and offer greater customisation that creates deeper relationships with the consumer. While retaining the integrity of the offline stores, Louis Vuitton is moving towards increasingly interactive marketing strategies that give the brand heritage relevance and create a unique online experience that is not available offline. This move ensures online strategies support rather than compete with the offline retail arm as advocated by Okonkwo (2010).

As the Louis Vuitton website (2010) states, "Personalisation has been a tradition at Louis Vuitton since 1854"; however, until recently these services were only available in-store. Although hand painted and made-to-order luggage remains exclusive to the offline stores, hot stamping initials onto luggage is now available online. This lets the consumer experience customization online but also builds consumer desire to explore additional in-store services later. By offering this service, Louis Vuitton has increased the interactivity between online consumers and the products providing a truer experience of the brand by reinforcing their heritage and relevance. This customized luggage also supports their online marketing campaign exploring their travel-steeped heritage.

Louis Vuitton first used innovative digital technology to invoke the brand's heritage of 'the art of travel' with 'Louis Vuitton Soundwalk'- downloadable journeys through Beijing, Hong Kong and Shanghai. The brand capitalized on 'Soundwalk' by facilitating positive conversations around the brand in the social web inviting international high profile bloggers to experience 'Soundwalk' in Hong Kong. This resulted in the bloggers sharing experiences with their online followers through articles, comments, photos and video footage. As luxury consumers see blogs as a more honest, reliable and authentic source of information than the brand websites (Okonkwo, 2010, Christodoulides, 2009), this strategy successfully created a more interactive and authentic experience for online consumers.

Louis Vuitton continues to build digital journeys ([www.louisvuittonjourneys.com](http://www.louisvuittonjourneys.com)) that are increasingly interactive and communicate the heritage and evolving identity of the brand. The website (2010) describes the campaign:

"Travel is an emotional experience, a process of self-discovery. It has also been the defining value of Louis Vuitton for more than 150 years. In more recent decades, Louis Vuitton has established itself as one of the world's leading fashion houses. In this way, we communicate in two different but complementary ways: with seasonal fashion statements and a long-term campaign about the company's core values..."

Louis Vuitton has gradually increased the interactivity of this marketing campaign, allowing the viewer greater control of their experience. In the journey *Shooting Stars* where Annie Lebovitz interviews Mikhail Baryshnikov, the viewer is able to choose from one of three perspectives that gives a big picture, middle ground, or up close and personal interview. This viewer-driven experience is further enhanced with *An Encounter with Greatness* in which the viewer has the option to talk to any of the three legendary footballers profiled and ask questions from an extensive list. These journeys heighten the heritage of the brand, empower the consumer to control their experience and also give Louis Vuitton a platform to communicate their evolving identity.

With these strategies Louis Vuitton has successfully harnessed digital technology to give online consumers a unique experience and increased the relevance of their brand heritage.

### Ralph Lauren

Ralph Lauren also capitalizes on its 'story' offering interactive marketing campaigns and unique online experiences. Like Louis Vuitton, Ralph Lauren has grown business and offered customization without diluting its brand position by limiting customized offerings to its iconic aspirational products. Ralph Lauren has offered customization of its polo shirts since 2003 and in 2009 facilitated positive conversations in the social web through its Rugby site ([www.rugby.com](http://www.rugby.com)) site where it offered 'Make Your Own Rugby Shirt'. This offer allowed consumers to customize rugby branded clothing and share the designs on Facebook, email, or the web site. With strategies such as these, Ralph Lauren has extended its reach while reinforcing the driving essence of the brand and contemporizing its position as an innovator.

Ralph Lauren has also developed cutting edge technologically-enhanced public marketing campaigns. Using 'architectural mapping' to turn buildings into a 4D Ralph Lauren visual experience at its UK website launch in 2010, Ralph Lauren created a new experience for both launch guests and online consumers via video on their website. In addition, Ralph Lauren (RL) uses a unique technique they coin 'merchan-tainment' where the consumer can watch RL TV for inspiration, education and window shopping. The essence of this strategy is captured by David Lauren, Senior Vice President of Polo Ralph Lauren:

"What we do online is we show the product, we sell the product and then we create a context around it. So you can see how the models wear it, you can see the worlds in which they live it. People want that outfit because they want entre into that world. So now you can buy the product, you can read about the dog that she has on her lap, you can watch a video about the car, you can book a trip to that house. We have created a virtual experience or a real experience now to literally step into a Ralph Lauren advertisement." (Menkes, November 12, 2010)

Ralph Lauren has built on this experience with their development of RL Gang "The world's first shoppable children's storybook". This storybook is a unique online experience allowing children and parents to watch and listen to a story narrated by Harry Connick Junior, click on any of the characters and buy the Ralph Lauren products featured. This brands Ralph Lauren as an innovator and creates a unique shared experience for parent and child that encourages spending and develops deeper meaning and emotional links with the brand. These strategies build Ralph Lauren's online presence but also strengthen and support the brand offline.

### Burberry

Burberry has frequently been in the media for its eager adoption of digital technology and the unprecedented accessibility it gives consumers to the product and designer. Some authors believe it is important to maintain a level of distance between the luxury brand and the consumer (Kapferer & Bastien 2009) to maintain brand position and exclusivity. However, the success of Burberry's digital strategies, evident in its soaring profits, acknowledges that if a brand understands its core values and heritage this will act as a guide for the level of accessibility it can give its consumers.

For Burberry, their democratic heritage may even be further supported and strengthened rather than compromised by reaching out to a wider aspirational customer. Burberry's Chief Creative Officer Christopher Bailey identifies the wide reaching accessible elements of Burberry's heritage, values and iconic products that make it relevant to past and contemporary consumers:

"I would say that the trenchcoat really makes the past present. We live off the philosophy of that trenchcoat, we live off the fact that it is a democratic piece, that it talks to so many different types of people –men, women, old, young, fashionistas, traditional, classic. We are a tale of contradictions at Burberry and I think that's what the trenchcoat is..." (Menkes, November 11, 2010)

Like Louis Vuitton and Ralph Lauren, Burberry is set to offer customisation of its iconic product announcing plans to launch the opportunity to 'Design your own Burberry Trenchcoat'. While the details are yet to be released, Catherine Moellering, Executive Vice President of the *Tobe Report* confirmed at the Arts Initiative Conference in New York November 2010, that the strategy is planned for next year.

In addition to these personalised products, Burberry has developed interactive marketing strategies that create a unique online experience. Through their affiliated website The Art of the Trench ([75](http://www.theartof-</a></p>
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thetrench.com) consumers can take photos of themselves, family or friends in their Burberry trenchcoat and upload them to the public website. Bailey explains:

“Artoftthetrench.com celebrates our iconic trench coat, capturing the emotional connection behind our distinctive outerwear heritage. Everybody has a different story related to their coat or the first time they came into contact with one –I love the idea that people from all over the world can share those stories and images with each other and all the different attitudes and expressions of the Burberry trench coat and the people who wear it” (*Bangkok Post*, December 9, 2010)

The website also has social media application as visitors can interact with each other, tagging and commenting on ‘favourite’ trench portraits and cross-posting them on other social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter (*Bangkok Post*, December 9, 2010). Through this strategy, Burberry acknowledges and successfully harnesses consumer power offering an interactive and authentic experience of the brand and its heritage that functions to both deepen relationships with consumers and create positive conversations in the social web.

Burberry’s ‘democratic’ brand essence continues throughout its digital strategies with an open invitation to live-stream its fashion shows and even buy product directly from the runway. As well as instant access to runway product, the public is given unprecedented access to Christopher Bailey with online videos of him talking to consumers and answering questions sent via text. This drive to draw a greater pool of people into the heart of Burberry and give them up to the minute access to the designer and product is Burberry’s solution to the greater speed and immediacy of the fashion industry. Bailey emphasised that he sees a need for a new way of thinking in the face this and that responses should be authentic to what the brand does (Menkes, November 11, 2010).

While this accessibility (which seems at odds with the luxury fashion industry) clearly works authentically with Burberry’s heritage, the brand still goes to lengths to ensure a level of exclusivity is maintained for its core luxury consumers. For example, while the world was invited to live-stream Burberry’s fashion show on the internet, only a select group were invited to watch the show in 3D around the globe (Carmichael, February 8, 2010). As a result, while Burberry has increased its accessibility to consumers, with live public runway shows, online videos of Bailey, the art of the trench and product customization, the brand strategy still respects the need for exclusivity in maintaining a luxury brand.

### Hermès

Hermès has also adopted an interactive approach to its iconic products and marketing strategies to attract a wider aspirational consumer online. Initially Hermès launched a competition to invent a print for one of their iconic ties, encouraging ‘creatives’ to explore the Hermès archive of prints and logos as part of the design process. While Hermès selected only a handful of designs to put into production, the value lay in the interest sparked in younger consumers that strengthened and contemporised the brand heritage.

Hermès built on this strategy by developing an interactive marketing website I Love My Scarf ([www.jaimemoncarre.com](http://www.jaimemoncarre.com), 2010) that contemporised the brand for a wider group of consumers by demonstrating ways to wear a Hermès scarf through diagrams and documentary style photos of young ‘IT’ girls from around the globe. This strategy was further expanded to include the opportunity for consumers to go to exclusive in-store events, buy a scarf, and have photos taken and displayed on the website. Matt Irwin, the photographer for the campaign, expressed the essence of the strategy:

“The campaign is a youthful Hermès, a young realistic vision of the brand –it’s fun, real and honest. But at the same time, it’s still very much in keeping with ethos and bloodline of the brand. We wanted to create something accessible and fun. We came up with this idea of imagining all the things you could do with the scarves on a day-to-day basis, rather than in a high fashion sense... It’s a historical brand with its eyes set firmly on the future.” (Alexander, September 3, 2010)

The significant participation on the website and in-store events demonstrates how effective this strategy has been in encouraging and fostering a young aspirational consumer while adding strength to the brand position for all consumers through enhanced relevance.

### Tom Ford

While greater on-line accessibility is working for Burberry and Hermès, other luxury brands are successfully rejecting accessibility and using exclusive and controlled digital strategies that work with the brand

heritage or story. For example, Tom Ford (who has a history as a designer of heritage brands and is now building his own brand essence) has realised the brand rests on his individual traits and tastes saying, “I’m doing it my way or I don’t want to do it. I have that luxury” (Foley, 14 September, 2010).

Although Ford understands the Internet and digital technology, in contrast to high-speed fashion offered by Burberry, Ford has responded in line with his brand essence (or story) by slowing it down to his time-frames and releasing digital footage and images when he is ready. Ford explains:

“...The way the system works now, you see the clothes, within an hour or so they’re online, the world sees them. They don’t get to a store for six months. The next week, young celebrity girls are wearing them on red carpets. They’re in every magazine. The customer is bored with those clothes by the time they get to the store. They’re overexposed, you’re tired of them, they’ve lost their freshness... I’m holding everything back, controlling all the photography...” (Foley, 14 September, 2010).

While Burberry and Tom Ford represent polarised strategies of exclusivity and accessibility, it is possible the majority of brands will find a comfortable middleground that both increases accessibility and defends exclusivity. One avenue may be through online businesses such as Moda Operandi. Moda Operandi will give consumers the unique opportunity to buy straight from the runways but will deliver the goods four months later, much closer to in-store delivery dates than Burberry’s unheard of four week turn-around (Menkes, November 11, 2010). Moda Operandi will increase accessibility but maintain exclusivity through a limited members-only policy. Retaining a significant waiting period for online sales, this type of distribution supports Kapferer and Bastien’s (2009) assertion that luxury brands must make the consumer wait for products.

While in the past consumers have been confined to retailer/buyer product selections, with companies like Moda Operandi they will now be able to access the entire collection. This will increase product integrity by making the full vision of the designer available to the public rather than just the more saleable commercial pieces favoured by retailers. As a result, this on-line strategy further strengthens many key elements of luxury branding, such as exclusivity, product integrity and signature style and in the future will actively facilitate conversations in the social web with plans to include photo-sharing and virtual closet organisers (Binkley, 2010).

By analysing the effective digital strategies of these luxury brands we see the common theme is the importance of drawing from the ‘story’ or heritage of the brand to make it relevant and to strengthen both online and offline brand positioning. We assert there are four key steps to developing successful online strategies for today’s luxury heritage brands:

- identify the extrinsic and intrinsic value of the brand heritage or ‘story’ and what it means to consumers
- if appropriate to the brand heritage, expand online offerings to iconic aspirational products and consider customised or tailored offerings
- develop innovative and unique interactive online experiences that give something additional to online consumers
- harness the power of the consumer by facilitating positive conversations about the brand in the social web

## Conclusion

As we have explored in this article, heritage luxury brands must utilise their heritage as an emotional response or experience that must be relevant to contemporary consumers. By using heritage to develop innovative strategies for interaction and inclusion, brands can deepen relationships with the new experientially-driven consumer. By maintaining the traditional key elements of luxury branding and embracing online strategies that converse with the consumer and give them unique online experiences, brands can strengthen their position and successfully harness consumer-power to market the brand beyond the company website.

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# Transitioning from Contract Manufacturing to Luxury Branding: A Premium Fashion Enterprise in China

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Yuefeng Ni & Hong Yu

BEIJING INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY, CHINA; RYERSON UNIVERSITY, TORONTO, CANADA

## Abstract

The paper reports a case study that investigated the challenges faced by China Silk in its pursuit of developing and sustaining a luxury brand in domestic markets and expanding to global markets. Based on the finding, we propose branding strategies that integrate management, operation, design, and marketing for China Silk's future business development over the next 5 to 10 years. Findings will also provide implications for other apparel contract manufacturers seeking to transition to their own luxury brand development.

## Introduction

For nearly three centuries, China has been the most populous country on the earth. Considering the size of its population, China is bound to have substantial textile and clothing industries merely to satisfy the needs from within the country. China's large population has also enabled a rich supply of labor resources, providing ample opportunities for low-cost assembly manufacturing to flourish. In the past three decades, many companies in developed countries have moved their labor-intensive production bases, including textile and clothing manufacturing, to China.

The apparel industry in China is comprised of mostly small –and medium– sized enterprises. A small number of these enterprises produce domestically well-known brands, and almost none of them produce internationally known brands. Few of China's clothing exports are of Chinese brands; instead, most exports are under renowned foreign brands through various forms of specification contracts or full package supply. As these activities are in the low-value-creation end of the global commodity chain (Gereffi, 1999), such clothing firms earn only very small profits from the exports. According to the 2005 *Clothing Industry Report* (Anonymous, 2010), in 2001 the worldwide average price for clothing exported to the U.S. market was \$3.51 per square meter; the most expensive clothing was from Europe (\$12.37/m<sup>2</sup>), followed by that from Japan (\$6.33/m<sup>2</sup>). Clothing from China was only \$4.72/m<sup>2</sup>, much lower than clothing from Europe and Japan, and just slightly higher than the world average. The report also found that, despite recent increases in China's exports of value-added, finished textile and apparel products, contract production still accounted for the majority of the total business.

The global commodity chain involves a wide range of activities in design, production, and marketing of a product (Gereffi, 1999), and Chinese manufacturers are latecomers. In the past 30 years, many Chinese textile and clothing manufacturers have successfully established themselves as leading original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) for world markets. However, as low cost is the essential survival tool for maintaining competitiveness, incremental increases in labor costs, land prices, rent, and production costs in China will eventually eliminate their OEM advantages (Yam, Lo, Sun, & Tang, 2003). The increased pressure for cutting costs has become even more prominent in recent years due to the worldwide economic and business recession.

Since the mid 1990s, many large Chinese companies have begun to recognize the importance of developing their own global brands and moving up on the value-creation ladder (Fan, 2006). Some have developed original design manufacturer (ODM) capabilities by integrating design and innovation in their portfolios, while others have ventured into original brand manufacturer (OBM) territory with an effort to establish and market their own brands, first domestically and then internationally (Lee, 2005). As luxury

## Keywords

China  
Fashion enterprise  
Luxury branding

becomes a mainstream aspiration, some of these companies strive to cash in on this market demand (Branding in China, 2007). One such company is Shenzhen China Silk Enterprises Ltd. (hereafter referred to as China Silk), a large premium fashion manufacturer. China Silk is among the top 100 apparel companies and the top 10 most competitive silk enterprises in China (China Silk, 2010) and was awarded the prestigious “High Grade Silk Logo” by the China Silk Association (China Silk Association, 2010). As a recognized OEM, the company contract manufactures for over 100 world-famous fashion brands such as Ralph Lauren, Giorgio, and Mark & Spencer. However, its own brand, Sancticsilk, has not attained significant brand recognition since its inception in 1995, and each attempt to enter lead markets in Japan, the United States, and Canada has resulted in failure.

The objective of this study is to identify and investigate the challenges faced by China Silk in its pursuit of developing and sustaining a luxury brand in domestic markets and expanding to global markets, and to propose branding strategies that integrate management, operation, design, and marketing for China Silk’s future business development over the next 5 to 10 years. Findings will also provide implications for other apparel contract manufacturers seeking to transition to their own luxury brand development.

**Literature Review**

The need and pressure for Chinese manufacturing industries to upgrade from low-cost OEMs to value-added enterprises with proprietary technology and branding is widely recognized (Eng & Spickett-Jones, 2009). For China Silk, we have developed two research questions: (1) What are the main challenges in the process of upgrading towards domestic and international branding? (2) What kind of framework(s) can be utilized in guiding the domestic and international branding processes? To answer the research questions and structure the research direction, analyses, and recommendations, a brief review of the stage model of brand development and luxury fashion brand dimensions will be undertaken. While the stage model of brand development offers a roadmap and diagnostic tool for exploring China Silk’s transition process from OEM to OBM, luxury fashion branding dimensions provide a framework for guiding China Silk’s branding strategies in the home market.

**Stage Model of Brand Development**

According to Cheng, Blankson, Wu, and Chen (2005), Johanson and Wiedersheim-Paul produced a seminal piece of work on the internationalization process in 1975 in which they claimed that psychic distance was the propelling factor for a firm to engage in its internationalization process. A more recent work by Anderson, Graham, and Lawrence (1998) identified a five-stage model of internationalization based on a study of a small group of firms. The five stages are (1) aspiration, (2) procedural, (3) behavioral, (4) interaction, and (5) conceptual. Furthermore, Cheng et al. (2005) conducted an empirical study on eight manufacturing firms from newly industrialized economies in the East Asia region (South Korea and Taiwan) and proposed a stage model of international brand development (see Table 1). This most recent model plays an important role in shaping the data analysis, discussions, and recommendations of the current study.

<b>Stage 1: Pre-international brand development</b>		
Missions	Problems	Strategies/approaches
Establish a presence, survive, and then develop nationwide brand at home.	Inefficient and ineffective production systems, lack of technical capability and qualified technicians, and inexperience in business operations.	OEM contract arrangements, joint venture agreements, and outsourcing experienced staff.
<b>Stage 2: Global lead market carrying capacity</b>		
Missions	Problems	Strategies/approaches
Establish a presence in lead international markets, and then expand brand awareness.	Lack of required know-how, resources, etc., and low level of brand reputation.	Joint venture with indigenous firms, OEM contract arrangements.
<b>Stage 3: International branding and marketing succession</b>		
Missions	Problems	Strategies/approaches
Start to focus on developing own brand name in the lead international markets.	Less technological support and transfers from developed countries, conflicts with OEM customers, enormous R&D expenses.	Launch advanced products, sponsor global activities, reassert brand image, and move corporate headquarters to benefit from Country of Origin effect.
<b>Beyond stage 3: Local climax</b>		
Missions	Problems	Strategies/approaches
Turn to focus on brand development in developing and under-developed countries.	Low brand image/reputation in the developing and under-developed markets, and issues related to localization.	Localization in the forms of local activity sponsorship, local advertisements, the use of local press conferences, and selling shares to the local investors.

Table 1: Stage Model: International Brand Development  
 Source: Adopted from Cheng, Blankson, Wu, and Chen (2005).

### Luxury Fashion and Luxury Fashion Branding Strategies

The definition of a “luxury” brand has long been debated. Traditionally, luxury goods are considered as exclusive to the affluent and are symbols of status and quality (Atwal & Williams, 2009). Further, luxury brands have well-established brand identity and high brand awareness, and command high levels of sales and customer loyalty (Phau & Prendergast, 2001). However, scholars noted that changes in contemporary consumer behavior have led to new views of luxury (Atwal & Williams, 2009). While these new luxury products and services still provide superior levels of quality, taste, and aspiration compared with other goods in the same category, their price points are more or less within reach of middle-market consumers who are trading up (Silverstein & Fiske, 2003). This new perception of luxury may suggest that premium brands are synonymous with luxury products, although scholars argue that premium and luxury have very different connotations. For example, Doyle and Stern (2006, as cited in Kapferer & Bastien, 2009) claimed that luxury is merely a “trading up” from premium products which are upper-range branded products, whereas Kapferer and Bastien (2009) disagreed, arguing that a premium brand cannot become luxury by simply increasing the price and that the traditional marketing rules appropriate to premium products do not apply to luxury brands. For purposes of this paper, the terms *premium* and *luxury* are used interchangeably.

Luxury fashion goods are distinctive because they represent a large portion of luxury goods sales, they are fast-changing, and they are very diverse in product assortments. Thus, branding of luxury fashion is complex and costly (Fionda & Moore, 2009). Researchers observed that in this time of experiential economy, the luxury sector still employs traditional marketing concepts, though these concepts no longer effectively relate to consumers’ changing lifestyles. Hence, success for luxury marketers rests in their strategies for creating brand-related experiences that connect with luxury consumers (Atwal & Williams, 2009). Fionda and Moore (2009) conducted case studies to investigate critical dimensions for creating and maintaining the success of a luxury fashion brand and suggested the following nine interrelated components for consideration: (1) clear brand identity, (2) marketing communication, (3) product integrity, (4) brand signature, (5) premium price, (6) exclusivity, (7) heritage, (8) luxury environment and experience, and (9) culture. These dimensions provide a framework for a consistent and coherent approach to luxury fashion branding strategy and serve as a point of departure for the current study. In particular, in the process of transitioning from contract manufacturing to luxury branding in the domestic market, China Silk can use this framework to facilitate understanding of their brand’s critical dimensions and develop proper brand management strategies.

### Research Method

A case study method was implemented involving on-site visits and in-depth interviews with China Silk’s general manager and senior management staff, a review of the company website and other internal documents, and an extensive external search of relevant industry information and academic literature. A qualitative data analysis method, including triangulation, was utilized.

A semi-structured in-depth interview with the general manager of China Silk was conducted in the company’s headquarters in Shenzhen, a blooming city in Southern China. The interview was between 2.5 and 3 hours in length and was followed by site visits that included informal interviews with relevant personnel and review of internal documents. Considering the exploratory nature of this research, a qualitative case study method is appropriate (Yin, 2003). The interviews were designed to explore the opinions, understanding, and visionary perspective of the management on the selected topic. Extensive notes were taken during the interviews and site visits by the researcher and a research assistant, and these notes were used for further analysis.

### Findings

#### Overview of Shenzhen China Silk Enterprises Ltd. (China Silk)

China Silk was established in 1985 as a combination of five state-owned enterprises on the Chinese mainland and in Hong Kong. The company has experienced continued growth since inception, and by late 2008, China Silk had 15 companies under its banner, 28,000 square meters in production space, 8,400 employees, annual output of more than 10 million yards of printed silk, and silk apparel of 13 million (piece or set), with annual sales revenue reaching US\$160 million (China Silk, 2010).

For over 20 years, China Silk chose to engage in OEM arrangements as a long-term business model. Interviews with senior management indicated that this choice was made in response to several considerations. Firstly, as OEM arrangements bring in foreign exchange, the governments offer incentive

programs to encourage companies pursuing such arrangements. Thus, contract manufacturing is deemed honorable for state-owned enterprises. Secondly, unlike domestic sales which often involve “receivable problems,” the OEM contracts are from more developed economies with proper credit systems and timely payment. Hence, companies doing contract manufacturing can expect relatively smooth transactions. Finally, because the contract orders come from many developed markets, seasonality of varied production demand is balanced out and stability of production is maintained. Therefore, although OEM is very difficult to do and the profit margin is very low, it involves fewer business risks for such a large state-owned enterprise.

China Silk’s own brand, Sancticsilk, was created in 1995. Interviews with senior management suggested two reasons for this effort: higher profit margin and confidence established through many years of contract manufacturing for diverse international high-end markets. The core concept of Sancticsilk is stylish design with attention to detail, and the target market is women of high profile who appreciate high-quality fabric, fine workmanship, and elegant designs. Sancticsilk was one of the earliest fashion brands ever created in China and received extensive media attention. In its early years, Sancticsilk won a number of major national design awards and became a clothing supplier for celebrities and TV hosts of many well-publicized events throughout China. However, the initial fame was short-lived. The brand did not achieve wide recognition among Chinese consumers, even though it was sold at some of the country’s premium retail stores, including Beijing’s Wang Fu Jing Department Store (one of the most famous shopping areas) and Lufthansa Friendship Shopping City. During the same time period, China Silk’s international expansion to markets in Japan, the United States, and Canada also failed (X. Zhang, personal communication, July 16, 2010).

### Challenges and Issues in the Process of Upgrading Performance to OBM

Using Cheng et al.’s (2005) stage model of brand development as a diagnostic framework, we found that China Silk is primarily positioned at stage 1 and stage 2 of the branding process and the two stages took place almost concurrently, not sequentially. China Silk has experienced many of the problems identified in the abovementioned stage model.

**Main issues at stage 1: Pre-international brand development.** As indicated in the stage model, the primary objective for stage 1 is to establish a presence and then strive to become a top-tier brand in the home market (Cheng et al., 2005). The proposed strategies include utilizing OEM arrangements, joint venture agreements, and qualified personnel to gain experience of business operations and improve the company’s product and service offerings at home. These strategies help establish or enhance the company’s reputation and image as it promotes its own branded products at home. In the case of China Silk, the OEM operations have been the mainstay of its core business, but what the company has learned from the process has not been effectively translated into the knowledge and capacities necessary for a successful development of its own brand.

Through this case study, we found four main issues at China Silk. Firstly, some systematic problems have been inherited from the prior state-owned enterprise mindset, which included a lack of market orientation. Before 1979, China’s economy was characterized as a centralized planning system in which the country’s central, provincial, and municipal governments controlled production and distribution of goods (as well as pricing decision-making) and state-owned stores primarily monopolized the retail market (Sternquist, 2007). Economic reforms in urban areas in the 1980s gradually introduced market competition (Wing, 1996), but developing a market-oriented management style requires much more time and endeavor in China’s nationwide economic reform. To date, China Silk’s senior management still maintains certain ways of thinking as “former government officials,” instead of being entrepreneurs. They tend to be risk averse and lack strong determination for growing their own brand. As one of the senior managers interviewed indicated, “For someone at my age, approaching 60, our way of thinking is already somewhat outdated... to manage such a big company with multi-thousands of employees, we can’t risk...”

Secondly, China Silk’s management style toward planning and managing manufacturing and day-to-day operations is focused on the short term. Management efforts are predominantly geared toward increasing production volume rather than product quality. Data indicated that lack of proper training and systematic quality-assurance procedures resulted in defect rates as high as 20%-30% for certain product categories such as shirts, skirts, and dresses (Ni & Long, 2010). Those products that could not pass the strict standards of quality inspection under OEM agreements were sent to domestic retail channels for discounted sales. The production frontline managers interviewed also claimed that during busy seasons,

they were asked to hire a large number of temporary workers to work overtime in order to complete particular targets set by the OEM orders. Throughout the entire process, there was no time for the managers to establish and implement strict product standards and quality-control procedures. When the busy season ended, senior managers were eager to lay off the temporary workers so as to quickly and effectively reduce operating costs. Meanwhile, the frontline managers were asked to work on daily production maintenance rather than product standards and quality-control management. This seasonal production cycle continues year after year, allowing no time or opportunity to build the company's own branding mechanism.

Thirdly, technical incapability is prevalent. China has been known for silk production for thousands of years; however, its silk production technology is not among the most advanced in the world. China lags behind in post-processing and finishing technologies, printing and dyeing technologies, and other value-added techniques. Meanwhile, fashion requires creativity, innovation, and often involves small quantities and quick turnaround times. To meet these requirements, apparel manufacturers need strong capabilities in market research, design, and agile production. Although a number of excellent designers and market research agencies have emerged in China, the research and design capacities in the apparel sector have failed to meet the needs of the industry's rapid development. Field research suggests that even though China Silk is one of the largest apparel companies in China, it has not established a strong R&D division. The equipment in the design center is relatively outdated, the R&D methods are not very advanced, and the center's staff is small, young, and not very experienced. There do not appear to be any substantial research and development activities going on.

Finally, the senior management lacks a sound understanding of a luxury branding strategy. Today, China's apparel market includes a great variety of styles and brands, but nationally well-known brands are extremely scarce. Why? Possibly because many apparel enterprises are overwhelmed with pursuing immediate profits to ensure their short-term survival, and so they neglect long-term strategy and brand building. China Silk is no exception. Performance evaluation of the management is focused on current production volume, short-term profits, and quarterly and annual assessments, rather than mid-range and long-term plans. In marketing planning and implementation, senior managers often emphasize only sales promotion and consider product sales as the ultimate goal of the whole enterprise. Concurring with most marketing executives in the industry, China Silk's management believes that sales promotion is brand development, and as long as the sales increase, the value of the brand will naturally increase, as well. This belief clearly demonstrates a misconception of brand development and is detrimental to a brand such as Sancticsilk which intends to be positioned as a premium fashion brand in the domestic market.

**Main issues at stage 2: Global lead market carrying capacity.** At this stage, the major objective is to establish a presence in one or two of the leading global markets (i.e., the United States, Japan, and/or the European Union) and strive to enhance and gain international brand recognition there (Cheng et al., 2005). Based on this framework, China Silk had chosen the right global markets to enter, but their failed efforts reflected two problems.

The first issue was China Silk's lack of a strong foothold in the domestic market before its international adventure. It appeared that China Silk's international expansion did not originate from a conscientious strategic branding plan. The brand development strategy in the home market was inconsistent and inconstant, making it difficult to obtain a relatively high level of brand awareness. For example, China Silk once had retail operations at premium fashion stores in Beijing. Each year, market demand for fashionable silk garments was very high in March, but by the end of September there were almost no sales at all. The seasonal variation in demand is common because very few people in China buy silk garments in winter and early spring. This requires China Silk's branded products to continue to improve and innovate, to adapt to market changes in consumer demand. Our field research indicates that China Silk has a significant amount of work to do in this regard.

The second problem was China Silk's lack of required know-how and resources in its overseas markets, including advanced technical know-how and intensive market demand information (Cheng et al., 2005). Ideally, China Silk should have set up an experienced team to collect the relevant information in the markets it had chosen to enter. Alternatively, a local consulting firm could have been hired for this purpose. The interviews indicated that China Silk had done limited marketing research before they tested the water in the selected markets. Therefore, their efforts were destined to fail.

## Recommendations and Implications

The challenges that China Silk is facing in the process of transitioning from OEM to OBM are typical for many apparel manufacturers in China. Our field research identified a few main issues in this process. In

essence, in the stage of developing a top-tier brand in the home market, the main problems lie in the senior management's lack of success in establishing a vision and commitment to brand development, balancing between the enterprise's short-term profit objectives and long-term strategic plan, and developing a thorough understanding of branding strategies. Once the mission of this stage is accomplished, the enterprise can move forward to international expansion.

We propose that for the next 5 to 10 years, China Silk should devote their efforts primarily to brand development in China's markets, in addition to maintaining an appropriate level of OEM operations. Considering the company's well-established OEM experience for many global luxury fashion brands in the past 20 years and its current pursuit as a premium fashion brand in China's markets, China Silk's own brand, Sancticsilk, should continue to aim for similar brand positioning. This is because China's booming economy has fueled the popularity of luxury items in the consumer market. Although industry experts estimate that currently only 1% of China's population (about 13.7 million people) earn enough to afford high-end luxury branded products, the country's rising wealth will soon make China the most lucrative luxury market in the world (Chandler, Wang, & Zhang, 2004). Further, research indicated that after more than a decade of embracing western brands, Chinese consumers increasingly favor Chinese brands, from high-end fashion to food service and technology (Prasso, Wang, & Zhang, 2007). Therefore, the timing is ideal for Sancticsilk's renewed branding effort.

Fionda and Moore's (2009) luxury fashion brand dimensions should be used as a guide in this endeavor. Specifically, China Silk should work on creating a clear brand identity that differentiates the brand and offers customers a strong emotional and functional appeal. Marketing communication strategies should be diversified and geared toward providing a unique experience that customers can relate to. Direct marketing, social media, sponsorship, advertising, and fashion shows are important strategies, and China Silk has done some work in these aspects. However, many of the company's past efforts appeared to be opportunistic. Future work has to emphasize careful planning and execution in a cohesive manner with a consistent message about the brand.

Product integrity is critical, as superior design, material, and workmanship, as well as innovation, are the key ingredients for luxury fashion products. To ensure product integrity, China Silk needs more long-term vision, strategic planning, and higher levels of investment; production arrangement dictated by the volume of orders (as seen in the current OEM operations) will not achieve the desired result. The brand signature is an iconic feature of a luxury brand. For China Silk, the brand signature could be certain specific design details, finishes, or color themes that are recognizable and consistent in the creative direction of the products. Premium price is also an essential element strongly linked to brand positioning. Exclusivity involves "managed scarcity" (Fionda & Moore, 2009, p. 355) that controls the brand image. Premium price and exclusivity are closely related but challenging to implement. In China, many apparel companies include sales promotion as long-term activities, whereas others grant licenses extensively, resulting in serious cannibalization. China Silk must realize and understand that more frequent sales promotions and uncontrolled accessibility of the brand dilute brand equity and could be detrimental to the image of a luxury brand.

The heritage dimension is about the history and story of the brand. For a young brand like Sancticsilk, it is important to start building a story about the brand that includes something tangible about the products, such as design features, materials, and/or designers that make the brand authentic. Luxury environment and experience refers to the context within which luxury fashion products are marketed. A prestigious distribution and retail environment and superior customer service are critical in providing the ultimate brand experience for targeted customers. China Silk should carefully select distribution outlets that are appropriate for the brand positioning, strive to create a store environment that enhances the brand image, and more importantly, implement customer service policies that provide customers the best possible experience when interacting with the brand. Culture refers to the collective commitment behind the brand, from all personnel including senior management to various stakeholders and networks (Balmer & Gray, 2003). This dimension is vital because without consistent efforts throughout the entire organization, the brand message will not be cohesive.

The journey from contract manufacturing to luxury branding is challenging yet rewarding. For China Silk, this process will involve realigning business priorities, learning, and growing. At a practical level, China Silk could utilize the framework developed by Birnik, Birnik, and Sheth (2010) integrated with the luxury fashion brand dimensions (Fionda & Moore, 2009) and the stage model of international brand development (Cheng et al., 2005). Birnik et al. (2010) suggest that companies in the process of upgrading performance should start with a customer –and market-oriented mindset, and define the company strategy with a sound understanding of customers and the market, clear target positioning, and well-

aligned product and service offerings. This strategy includes balancing heritage, quality, invention, and innovation. When implementing the strategy, the company should implement ongoing audits and realignment to embed the brand internally for external success. Finally and importantly, these companies should separate contracted manufacturing operations from the business development of branded luxury products and services. After establishing a solid brand performance in the home markets, the company can begin contemplating its next adventure, expansion into global markets.

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# Tradition and Innovation from New Technology

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Christina Cie

AUCKLAND UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, NEW ZEALAND

## Abstract

This paper will consider tradition and innovation as the habitual partners respectively of luxury and fashion. Swapping these partnerships around, in the context of technology, generates a new conceptual way forward.

Technology is often viewed as the innovation itself yet, like any new dress, it dates. Technology is a conveyor of innovation; innovation being a new way for humans to do something, rather than just a new thing. Innovation, of all kinds, is a cultural as much as a concrete phenomenon.

The Textile and Design Laboratory [T+DL] at Auckland University of Technology [AUT] is an academic and industry research facility for whole knit and ink jet print technologies. This paper will consider how work originating from the T+DL spans visual and industrial production that references from the traditional, to the innovative, and back again.

It will consider the work of three practitioners using the T+DL facilities. One is a young student using digital mechanisms to reproduce handwork. She works to capture the personal expression of the individual. Another bridges the divide between traditional and digital knitting and printing approaches, striving to combine the best of both techniques. The last of the three works purely digitally, using technology to show us what otherwise we would not be able to see.

Fashion is all about context. As a barometer of a time, or a person, it is viewed primarily in comparison to what surrounds it or to what precedes it. This is how, despite the clear investment of time, skill, money, and thought, fashion can sometimes be portrayed as empty or vacuous. If considered merely as a 'cipher', or a carrier of messages from its contextual surroundings, then fashion has to have insignificant meaning in order to carry and not confuse. To consider fashion's ability to embody contextual references, from within its own cultural and chronological tradition, turns it from fad into an extended vocabulary of elements arguably as rich in semantic meaning as any established language, visual or otherwise.

Luxury is all about context. Necessity or indulgence? You decide. To those without clean water for example, it must feel like a luxury. Those who can safely drink from a tap would not consider it in that context, if indeed they paused to consider it at all. Swapping assumptions again, luxury is the ultimate expression of innovation. Whereas fashion might absorb something new as it is, luxury is the final expression of improvement for that new way of doing something; considered and refined to want nothing more. Its proportions, its presentation, its presence is as perfect as is possible. It needs nothing extra, and that is why customers pay extra.

No break with the past is ever clean. Using the T+DL itself as a case study, this paper will also consider how this model of production can produce a more sustainable and personalised product, addressing contemporary issues within fashion manufacturing by an approach that recalls the origins of one of the prime meeting grounds for fashion and luxury – haute couture.

## Introduction

This paper will consider the meaning of key terms: fashion, which is often associated with innovation, and luxury, often associated with tradition. It will then use a wordplay based technique or 'mash-up' for a fresh look at these associations by putting them into new contexts, and consider three case studies, all using new textile technologies, in the light of these findings.

The 'mash-up' technique is currently associated with music (Shiga, 2007), but is an established inspirational technique for fashion design. Fashion often utilises a conjunction, even clash, of disparate

## *Keywords*

Fashion  
Luxury  
Tradition  
Innovation  
Digital Production  
Ink Jet Printing  
Whole Garment Knit

sources to generate striking new ideas. Dries van Noten combined the work of Belgian painter Jef Verheyen with Chinese ceramics for his Spring 2011 collection (Blanks, 2010). Angela McRobbie mentions an extreme example, of a collection influenced as “Faster armed and hard Chicano girls join Princess Leia over a metal cheeseburger” (1998, p. 63). In the context of this paper that reconsiders elements in fashion production, borrowing the ‘mash-up’ technique, which from its earliest sense is a mixture or fusion of disparate elements (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2010a), is innovative but essentially appropriate.

## Literature Review

As a system that shifts and changes over culture and time, language often contains multiple meanings, and each user will have their own particular understanding. As an agreed system, it generally works well, yet disputes still arise due to what exactly someone might have meant. A large part of the practice of Law revolves around exact definitions of what a word or phrase or sentence might mean. This paper begins with definitions of the key terms: *fashion*, *luxury*, *tradition* and *innovation*. All definitions here are sourced from the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a widely accepted authority on the English language.

**Fashion** – as professionals working in this field, our use of this term refers to the customary dress of a particular time and context, determining what is ‘in fashion’, but this meaning is late in a long line of definitions (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2010b). Along that long line of definitions and usage, fashion passes through a sense of pretence and pretension (definitions 5a and 7). There can be a pejorative, dismissive subtext to the context of the word, implying something lightweight in scales of cultural importance compared to established disciplines of cultural production such as literature or sculpture. This may be due in part to its own trend-driven culture that prioritises the new, in a ‘here today but gone tomorrow’ creed of production.

**Innovation** is now often linked with technology, particularly as a driver of business and national prosperity, but it does not mean invention. “Invention is the first occurrence of an idea for a new product or process, while innovation is the first attempt to carry it out in practice” (Fagerberg, 2005, p. 4) but with a later coda, “what we think of as a single innovation is often the result of a lengthy process involving many interrelated innovations.” (Fagerberg, 2005, p.5). It is the introduction of something new, which includes alteration and renewal as well as novelty and is rapidly followed, as a definition, by the effect that this introduction has on an established system. It can be seen primarily as a different way for humans to do things, and the systemic changes that must result from the arrival of an invention into an established system. The word originates from Latin, meaning to renew or to alter (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2010c). The first semantic pairing or association might then look like figure one below:



Figure 1: by Christina Cie

**Luxury** still denotes excess (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2010d), but as Western morals have changed, so has this term. No longer associated with vice as “vicious indulgence”, the word now refers to something that adds “to enjoyment or comfort in addition to what are accounted the necessities of life” (definition 5b). Self-indulgence, reinforced by self-doubt, is now encouraged, particularly as a psychological impetus in marketing and advertising campaigns (Pollay, 1986, para. 78-80). “You do not only buy an object: you buy social respect, discrimination, health, beauty, success, power to control your environment” (Williams, 1980, para. 47).

**Tradition** (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2010e) has come to mean the handing on of ways of doing things (definition 4a), the passing on of custom. The reliance here, on time to grant authority, can mean that tradition is perceived as ‘old’ and ‘old-fashioned’, as much as carrying a perception of the use of the best of materials and techniques, refined by time and practice.

The second of the suggested semantic partnerships or associations might then appear as figure two that follows:



Figure 2: by Christina Cie

Interestingly, in one of the few books on commercial branding and luxury fashion houses, the author states “The core characteristics of luxury brands are: *brand strength, differentiation, exclusivity, innovation, product craftsmanship and precision, premium pricing and high quality.*” (Okonkwo, 2007, p.11, author’s italics), with no mention of heritage or tradition.

## Research Method

This paper suggests reconsidering these associations, by reconfiguring them. This will be achieved through a consideration of technology, the medium through which these associations are often achieved.

**Technology** has had a long journey through time to be the term we now use, and the *Oxford English Dictionary* details this. It comes from the Ancient Greek word *techne* meaning essentially craft or art, although this extends well beyond contemporary boundaries to include the principles as well as skills involved in production, and the practice of medicine, horsemanship and many other activities (Parry, 2008). Considering this core meaning, that includes principles and practice as well as products, technology then is far more than machinery. Much study on innovation focuses on the development and introduction of new technology into business (Moore, 2002; Rogers, 1995).

Reading horizontally, figure three gives the semantic pairings already discussed. However, could technology work as a medium to transpose those habitual associations, so that fashion is considered in terms of its traditions, and luxury as the ultimate expression in innovation? If read diagonally, figure three gives an alternative pairing:



Figure 3: by Christina Cie

**Fashion** as cultural and chronological **tradition** turns it from fad into an extended vocabulary of elements arguably as rich in semantic meaning as any established language, visual or otherwise. This continues to develop through time and technology.

**Luxury** as the ultimate expression in **innovation** turns it from a self-indulgent activity to having a valid place and purpose in the development and diffusion of products. This includes development of the technology that produces them.

## Findings and Discussion

The Textile and Design Laboratory [T+DL] at Auckland University of Technology [AUT] is an academic and industry research facility for whole knit and ink jet print technologies (Textile + Design Laboratory, 2010). The technology features a flat bed ink jet printer capable of dress length or whole garment printing and two whole garment knitters, by the Japanese firm Shima Seiki, with access to a laser cutter. This paper will consider how work originating from the T+DL spans visual and industrial production that references from the traditional, to the innovative, and back again.

It will consider the work of three practitioners using the T+DL facilities. One is a young student using digital mechanisms to reproduce handwork. She works to capture the personal expression of the individual. Another bridges the divide between traditional and digital knitting and printing approaches, striving to combine the best of both techniques. The last of the three works purely digitally, using technology to show us what otherwise we would not be able to see.

### Alysha Gover

Innovation has a long association with new technology, but as mentioned earlier, technology is a conveyor of innovation: innovation being a new way for humans to do something, rather than just a new thing. It is how it is used that defines it. Innovation of all kinds is a cultural as much as it is a concrete phenomenon.

If innovation is considered a process as mentioned earlier, rather than a product, then it is not a one-off achievement. Once the initial invention is launched, this process involves ongoing refinement, both of the technology and the techniques. According to a cost-benefit analysis, various companies will select to pause or halt this process at a particular point that suits their management and market position. Those with both the cash and the clients to continue will take that process to its ultimate expression, possibly long after the innovation first entered the market. That dedication to refinement and perfection is one of

the things that is purchased; “When people purchase a luxury fashion item, they don’t just buy the product but a complete parcel that comprises the product and a set of intangible benefits that appeal to the emotional, social and psychological levels of their being” (Okonkwo, 2007, p.2). Those expensive, time-consuming, labour intensive materials and techniques that we associate with the ultimate luxury in dress, haute couture or made to measure, then exist as the ultimate expression of innovation in fashion and textile technology, aside from the time or traditions of their use.

On Waitangi Day, New Zealand’s national day, local Masters student Alysha Gover visited an exhibition by local art and graffiti collective, Cut Collective. Looking at their large-scale mural on panels of plywood, drawing on their graffiti background with layered stencil based images, she was reinspired to return to her sketchbook. Constantly working in a CAD environment with wholeknit or seamless knit technology combined with ink jet printing, Alysha’s design aesthetic prefers balanced or symmetrical relationships (Fraser & Gover, 2010). Her workflow now counterbalances original handwork with digital reproduction for clean up that retains the original freshness in a way that tracing paper held at a window cannot (A. Gover, personal communication, November 18 2010).

This is aided by the way in which the technology has been configured – drawing techniques with pencil and paper translate reasonably well across media to the stylus and graphics tablet, with minimal accommodations. It is the user interface here that is crucial. Borrowing a tool from an established tradition negotiates access to a technology for a particular group of users already skilled in the use of that tool. This also occurred during the development of electronic music, when the adoption of a keyboard as a controlling device generated users trained in its use by the piano (Pinch & Trocco, 2002, p.43). The tool chosen can also determine the parameters within which the technology comes to operate (ibid, 2002, p. 309), such as constraining the style of drawing.

Design inspiration for Alysha’s Masters was drawn from the natural degradation of the built environment. During a study trip to the Shima Seiki headquarters in Wakayama, Japan, the developer and manufacturers of the equipment used at the T+DL, the rust on decaying buildings in the industrial area contrasted strongly with the clean new, high-tech machinery she was there to learn.

On her return to New Zealand, this examination of textures including concrete, tree bark, rusts, natural degradation and decomposition was translated back into knitted structures. She deliberately selected a luxury fibre called ‘Perino’, manufactured locally from a blend of merino, silk and possum hair. New Zealand has a long tradition of wool production, but possums introduced to New Zealand in the nineteenth century pose a significant threat to its environment and wildlife (Landcare Research (NZ) – Manaaki Whenua, 2010). At a wholesale price of NZD\$500 for 3kg, Perino is ordinarily only used in garments for the commercial tourist market due to its cost. Aware that commercial considerations would constrain her work when employed, Alysha chose to use this costly fibre for her Masters work as her chance to explore and express herself at the highest level.

She encountered a number of technical difficulties, as expected in exploratory work at this level. The Shima Seiki design system has a set of pre-programmed stock knitwear shapes, and to date the Perino had only been used for such designs but not used in trend-driven fashion. Finding the boundaries of the system and discovering what is possible, Alysha was assisted by T+DL specialist, Gordon Fraser (no relation to Angela Fraser featured later in this paper). Gordon knew that it was technically possible to make her design for a three-panelled hood in one seamless piece, but not until a designer asked him, did he need to discover how. The combination of technology at the T+DL is particularly conducive to the addition of print to the workflow. Print on knit is not common, but Alysha wanted to make use of the opportunity and extend her practice. The stitch structure selected needed to be as flat as possible to enable the print to sit properly on the garment, but the selection of Perino as the fibre led to other issues. How to print on hair which, with no crimp, can work its way out of the twist of the plied fibre and sit at a distinct angle to the knitted surface? Print design elements such as thin lines or intricate work had to be reconfigured to avoid diffusion, and to fall within production as well as design parameters.

Such experimentation supplements Gordon Fraser’s existing, extensive knowledge, and the successful application of complicated, specialist technology usually requires such specialists with on-going professional development for such personnel. Alysha’s design requests could be seen in the context of a luxury, but they permitted experimentation and expanded the experience of what is possible.

### Angela Fraser

If tradition is the passing on of custom, often down generations, then Angela Fraser’s work can recall a generation back and more. Angela’s mother, Betty Fraser, was a high school teacher in Otago, on the South Island of New Zealand. In the 1960s, she would make appliqué pictures from scraps of fabric to

entertain her seven children. Her pictorially based works soon included other textile techniques such as hand and machine embroidery, batik and felting (Fraser, 2002). One of Angela's earliest memories is of sitting under her mother's knitting machine, unusual in that place and time, and watching the weights coming down on lengths from the machine (A. Fraser, personal communication, November 22 2010). Angela was only finally taught to hand-knit by her grandmother, a tailor and milliner.

By the time that Angela herself was a knitwear designer, her mother's work encompassed large-scale murals. She favoured a Cubist, flattened sense of space, influenced by Klee, Matisse, Braque and Picasso and considered her work to be in the context of fine art –the line just happened to be drawn in the finest wools from local quality spinners Mosgiel Wools rather than paint. A member of the Otago Art Society, she took her work seriously, using money from her full-time teaching to purchase a dedicated embroidery machine. With the support of her husband, she always had studio space, although it was for a long time also the 'clothes room' and shared with her seven children's wardrobes. Angela is now a textile design tutor at Auckland University of Technology (AUT). Her work with primarily fashion students has required her to up-skill herself over the last three years to design and print digitally. The digital ability to produce complex and colourful pieces has enabled students such as Nadeesha Godamunne to win international recognition with work that retains an illustrative hand-worked aesthetic (Fraser & Godamunne, 2009).

Like these students, Angela is most interested in work that begins from original hand-done artwork rather than a photograph. Pressed for time when creating learning videos for her students, she incorporated an image from one of her mother's murals into a textile design. Although necessarily 'flattened out' by the digital photograph, the image retained the intricacies and interest of the knit structure that formed it, and the design was a success. Since then, Angela has incorporated images from her mother's work on occasion. This work contains a further layer of heritage and tradition, of passing down and passing on. Betty Fraser's largest wool mural measures 5.5 metres long, 2 metres high and depicts a local Maori legend, of the Taieri taniwha, or monster. Betty, Angela and their family, or 'whanau', include ancestry from Ngai Tahu, a Maori tribe from the South Island of New Zealand, whose vision statement translates to "For us and our children after us". (Ngai Tahu, 1996)

Betty and Angela's stories encompass this connection between fashion and tradition. With her grandmother, a milliner and tailor, passing on the skill of hand-knitting to her, and her mother having already taught her machine knitting, Angela found well-paid work as a knitwear designer in a country then with significant international trade in wool. With her mother's commitment to her art, and her contemporary use of modern technology, Angela firmly believes that if her mother were alive today, she would be using computers and Adobe Photoshop. Her mother's incorporation of knit techniques for a non-traditional means of expression is echoed in her daughter's evident skill at adjusting her practice to a digital workflow, including adapting techniques for such generic rather than specialised software (Fraser, n.d.). These are now being passed on to a new generation of fashion students, to access individually unique yet commercially viable textile prints to build and brand a business, even from a geographically remote location such as New Zealand.

### **Christina Cie**

*I include my own practice here, after some deliberation, as it is complements the previous case studies, and is relevant to the issues involved. Some measure of distance is difficult when it is one's own practice, but the embedded nature of the writer can yield insight precisely because of such an enmeshed position.*

Textile designers have a long tradition of drawing inspiration from nature, particularly flora, but I was never engaged by drawing flowers and leaves. Images from the Hubble space telescope however, that are intriguing in their own right yet also serve a diagnostic purpose, captured my imagination. In using such scientific imagery, I believe that I was not breaking with, but continuing that long-held textile tradition, using the technology now available for a fresh new perspective. At the same time as my interest in scientific imagery began, I began learning about digital or ink jet printing, and realized that this technology would allow me to transpose the images into another medium with minimum alteration or 'translation', and also to retain a wide choice of fabric substrates. Further discussion about the meaning of such images with Sergei Gulyaev, Professor of Astronomy at AUT, reinforced my commitment to retain their integrity and historical provenance. In such imagery, colours are not normally selected for their aesthetic value, but are often linked to some scale of measurement; gradients of such colours are therefore significant. As these are diagnostic images, the translation of such images for screen or rotary printing, with a reduction in colours and gradient effects, risks compromising the information they carry.

Using innovative technology in an innovative way has thrown up some interesting issues. Work for my Masters in Design used geological samples as source material, but I have recently been offered the chance to work with biological research samples. Whilst this is an exciting opportunity, it has made me pause and question using this source material from an ethical perspective, considering the interplay between personal significance and public display:

“Even if it is distinctive, different and a satisfying design, is it right to design a dress fabric for sale from other people’s cancer cells?”

“Cancer is as much a biological reaction as hormone production. Is its visual image inherently ‘bad?’”

“Should buyers, or wearers be informed of the provenance of the design?”

Such questions of appropriation and customisation began much earlier in my career. Working when a student as a gallery attendant, the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) in London held an exhibition including work by Abigail Lane. Called ‘Bloody Handprint’, the red splatters on the white wall appeared to be quite pretty, but were in fact replicated blood splatters from a murder scene, including a bloody handprint. Having to sit in the room for several hours at a stretch, even with the imagery put into the Regency style rooms of the ICA, an entirely different context from that murder scene, was a discomfiting experience.

Angela McRobbie points out that “fashion gains meaning through making connections between itself and forms whose cultural legitimacy and status are already assured” (McRobbie, 1998, p. 63) such as fine or contemporary art. The inspirational ‘mash-up’ is often articulated as part of this endeavour, recontextualising artistic production with a different discipline; when used in a musical context however, the discussion on mash-ups more often turns to ethics and particularly copyright (O’Brien & Fitzgerald, 2006). Regarding reproducibility, consideration of the subject matter of what is being reproduced is as much a measure of evolving social values in cultural production as copyright is for economic production. In an evolving medium, how and how far should innovative technology take such a tradition in textile design as the use of images from nature, including disease? In addition, how far can textile and fashion design be used to articulate social issues in the way that contemporary artists have? These questions are not asked to gain cultural legitimacy by association, as McRobbie describes, but to consider fashion design, with textiles, in the context of their own long histories, with their own terms and traditions, to consider what is feasible for these disciplines now and going forward.

Consideration of sustainability is also often articulated in ethical rather than financial terms. The minimization of waste can be maximized by digitally based production. Tyler (in Orzada & Moore, 2008, p.311) identifies that digital printing methods are cleaner than conventional textile printing methods. Immediate environmental benefits are related to lessening material usage and minimising waste, including laying down less ink on the surface of the textile. Facilities occupy a far smaller footprint than traditional factories, using less water for printing and finishing and so reducing effluent. In collaboration with Associate Professor Frances Joseph, I have written and presented several conference papers examining sustainability and digital workflow in the production of textiles and fashion, with a focus on the opportunity that digital production offers to bring some aspects, particularly sampling, back on shore for local production (Joseph & Cie, 2009).

## Conclusion and suggestions

New Zealand is geographically remote from major international markets yet its own textile and clothing industry has similarly been decimated by cheap imports. Like many other developed countries, the New Zealand government is shifting focus from primary production to high value sectors (New Zealand Government, 2010). Local fashion designers strive to produce these high value products, which build their brands and develop financial stability through exports to larger markets, but still struggle to source the basics of this (H. Morris of ‘Lonely Hearts’, personal communication, March 29 2010).

Forman & Jørgensen (2004) identify modern, large-scale textile production, and its distribution and consumption, with long, international supply chains. Haute couture (as opposed to the branded production lines associated with it) is the opposite of this. Strictly, it is a legal title granted to a limited range of fashion labels that meet strict criteria (Mode à Paris, n.d.), and is characterised by small-scale, made to measure, exclusive and expensive production. Literally translated as ‘high sewing’, the term tells of how such production is the highest level of expression in the craft of making clothes. Innovation in techniques and materials for creating fashion is incorporated into such luxury production, improved, refined and at the end of this process, may become a tradition. This tradition may eventually be supplanted by the next radical innovation, beginning the process again.

The innovative technology held at the T+DL condenses several high-end production processes into one place, available to industry as well as academic users. The modest physical requirements and immediate results of digital production can bring prototyping back on-shore, reducing air-miles, boosting jobs and building skill bases in local design and manufacture enterprises. The on-demand production facilities provided by the technology at the T+DL allow local designers to access that small-scale, one-off or exclusive production at a high-end, but financially viable rate, echoing couture traditions but within their own contexts. It allows them to develop exclusive prints and shapes from intriguing inspirations. From both the couture and local examples, it can be seen how luxury can be a necessity within the context of the development and diffusion of technology as well as the products of that technology.

This paper has endeavoured to reconsider the terms fashion and luxury, innovation and tradition, both separately and in conjunction by a semantic 'mash-up' technique to illuminate the contexts in which they can and could operate. It is the context in which fashion and luxury are considered here which is key. *Fashion* as a word is not only a noun naming a phenomenon, it is also a verb naming a dynamic activity, from Latin meaning to make, or to 'fashion' something (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2010f). Both fashion and luxury revolve around innovation, its development, its diffusion and its evolution into traditions. By reconsidering associations and assumptions within its own cultural and professional practice, then fashion, as McRobbie suggests (1998, p.64), "ought to be able to exploit more readily and less anxiously its distinct identity and its history." This will allow fashion, with its striking ability to embody contextual references, to be as much the witness as the spectacle.

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Betty and Angela's stories encompass this connection between fashion and tradition. With her grandmother, a milliner and tailor, passing on the skill of hand-knitting to her, and her mother having already taught her machine knitting, Angela found well-paid work as a knitwear designer in a country then with significant international trade in wool. With her mother's commitment to her art, and her contemporary use of modern technology, Angela firmly believes that if her mother were alive today, she would be using computers and Adobe Photoshop. Her mother's incorporation of knit techniques for a non-traditional means of expression is echoed in her daughter's evident skill at adjusting her practice to a digital workflow, including adapting techniques for such generic rather than specialised software (Fraser, n.d.). These are now being passed on to a new generation of fashion students, to access individually unique yet commercially viable textile prints to build and brand a business, even from a geographically remote location such as New Zealand.

Christina Cie

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# Is TechnoCraft a New Cornerstone for Luxury Fashion?

95

Marie O'Mahony

UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

## Abstract

This paper considers how technology and craft have come together to form TechnoCraft and questions whether this is simply a fashion trend, or has the potential to become a cornerstone in the evolution of luxury fashion.

The author defines TechnoCraft as the bringing together of technology and craft in terms of production and/or aesthetic, and uses historical contextualisation to explore how the shift from craft to technology has denoted fashion luxury (Thomas, 2007). Influencing drivers of TechnoCraft include the impact of globalisation, mass production, emerging economies, sustainability and ethical issues (Klein, 2000). These factors contribute to challenging the conventionally distinct aspects of craft and technology.

The paper appraises the emergence of TechnoCraft through four case studies, each focusing on a specific designer's work: Martin Leuthold of Jacob Schlaepfer, Manish Arora, Hussein Chalayan and Hardy Blechman of Maharishi.

Schlaepfer provides fabrics to many of the leading Haute Couture collections, with industrial processes that are refined with the handmade and specially crafted tooling (Leuthold, 2008). This appraisal includes the author's interview with Leuthold, looking at how TechnoCraft in Haute Couture can mitigate the threat posed by derivative low cost technology and craft products that pervade the high streets.

The work of Indian fashion designer Arora combines craft with the aesthetics of technology. Spacecraft imagery fuses with Mumbai street scenes and delicate embroidery with futuristic tailoring. Arora describes his work in the context of a "global Indian designer brand" (Arora, 2009). The author considers the role of TechnoCraft in the establishment of Arora's luxury fashion brand that carries global appeal while retaining a strong cultural identity.

Technology and innovation is strongly associated with the designer Chalayan. Starting with a core concept, Chalayan gathers technologists around him to help realise his ideas. The relationship is that of visionary artisan working with facilitators. The case study discussed centers on the development of the Ballerina Dress (Spring/Summer 2000) that the author worked on as technologist. The subject is the 'technology craftsperson'.

Maharishi is both streetstyle and luxury with a blend of technically innovative fabrics and hand crafted techniques. The greater the handmade element the more expensive and luxurious the finished garment. Best known for 'camouflage' fabrics, Maharishi's luxury here can alternate between bling and the understated (Blechman, 2004). The focus of this discussion is the role of TechnoCraft in establishing a luxury streetstyle.

The paper concludes that there is sufficient evidence from the case studies to indicate that TechnoCraft is now an established and growing direction for luxury fashion –from haute couture, branding and creative process to streetstyle.

## Introduction

This paper considers how technology and craft have come together to form TechnoCraft and questions whether this is simply a fashion trend, or has the potential to become a cornerstone in the evolution of luxury fashion.

The author defines TechnoCraft as the bringing together of technology and craft in terms of production and/or aesthetic. The paper uses historical contextualisation to explore how the shift from craft to



## Keywords

Fashion  
Craft  
Luxury  
Design  
TechnoCraft

Photo  
1 Manish Arora exhibited at the TechnoTextile Exhibition, The Science Gallery, Trinity College Dublin.

technology has denoted fashion luxury (ibid). Prior to the Industrial Revolution the provenance of goods could be traced back to the individual craftsman often through the use of their individual maker's mark. When production moved from the cottage and atelier to the factory these marks became brands and logos served as a guarantee of consistent quality and traceability. At the high end of the market "...luxury companies made their brands, rather than the actual products, the objects of desire" (ibid). Although a sound business strategy, branding has also led to the proliferation of fake goods so that brands and logos alone as signifiers of luxury have been rendered obsolete. In this context, some luxury brands are increasingly looking at a combination of technology and craft –TechnoCraft– to formulate their aesthetic and brand of authenticity.

To help set the context of TechnoCraft it is worth noting in more detail the influencers of globalisation, mass production, emerging economies, and sustainability.

Globalisation is the result of integration of economies and societies around the world. It has opened new markets as well as close existing ones. An illustration of how this has the ability to take place simultaneously can be seen in the cotton industry. A cotton farmer in West Africa can expect to sell one kilo of cotton for 185 Central African francs (CFA) which is around about £0.24 sterling (Day, 2010). On the global market he is competing against American cotton farmers who in 2008/2009 were awarded \$3.1bn (£1.9bn) in subsidies, an amount that exceeded the market price by approximately 30%. For the luxury fashion industry globalisation offers the potential of access to all with increased volume of sales, but also the proliferation of fake goods. It also brings with it a danger of oversaturation of the market and the dilution of cultural identity that would normally accompany an association of place with the product, a feature absent from the globalised product. In combining technologically advanced materials and processes with bespoke and hand crafted finishes, designers are creating a new luxury. An example of this can be seen in the work of designers such as Jean-Charles de Castelbajac (Fr) whose *Le Manteau Cocon* (1999) combines quilting techniques with the highly technical lightweight and rich aesthetic of gold Mylar from the space industry.

Mass production is where standardised goods are produced using an assembly line system. One of the pioneers of mass production was Henry Ford at the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1909 Ford announced that he was only going to produce one make of car, the Model T, and that the chassis would be the same for all cars. With respect to choice, or customisation, he said that "Any customer can have a car painted any colour that he wants so long as it is black" (Ford, H., Crowther, S, 1922). Offering an advance on Ford's notion, fashion's little black dress is redesigned each season but customers at the luxury end of the market want something more personalised, so that we are seeing the emergence of mass customisation. The utilisation of Computer Aided Design (CAD) and Computer Aided Manufacturing (CAM) in this process has delivered the benefit where "The "individual" pattern or small series need not be hand-made any longer" (Stattmann, 2005). The process is used to great effect by shoe designer Marloes ten Bhomer. Ten Bhomer creates small numbers of highly sculpted shoes that combine traditional leather with advanced textiles such as carbon fiber. These involve the hand made as well as industrial production techniques such as laminated and CNC-milled leather, rotational moulding and laser sintered rubber (ten Bhomer, 2010).

Emerging economies are countries that are undergoing a rapid rate of growth and industrialisation from a position some way behind the developed nations. In 2010 there were around thirty of these markets, with China and India the largest. Many of these countries have played an important role as a source of low cost labour for the luxury fashion industry. However, this relationship is now changing: "The strikes, stoppages and suicides that have afflicted foreign factories on China's coast in recent months have shaken the popular image of the country's workers as docile, diligent and dirt cheap" (*The Economist*, 2010). Better paid workers means greater consumption for all markets. For example, in 2006, China officially had three hundred thousand millionaires (ibid). These are new markets and they cannot be expected predictably to follow more established luxury shoppers' buying patterns. Signs are already showing that these new shoppers in Shanghai and Beijing are looking for a different experience where a "blend of localization with international appeal is a key formula to attract this new luxury consumer" (red-luxury.com, 2010).

Sustainability refers to the capacity of our world to remain productive and diverse over time. Products, from their design and production to use, reuse and end of life has an impact on our environment, and sustainable products are those that have a low impact on natural resources. There is a shift in thinking about sustainability coming from environmentalists, designers and increasingly economists: "Today we are in a world where economics really only recognises manmade capital. But the reality is that there is also human capital and there is also natural capital" (Sukhdev, 2010). The luxury fashion industry is

recognising its value in events such as the International Herald Tribune's annual Luxury Fashion Conference. The 2009 conference saw Christian Blanckaert, Executive Vice-President of Hermès International declare the end of "pop luxury" while Dries Van Noten's discussion of his twenty year relationship with a Kolkata embroidery atelier further signalled a move towards a more sustainable form of luxury (Roy, 2009), one that combines old and new, tradition and technology.

## Research Approach

The research method for this paper is that of case studies in analysis. The author uses four examples that each offers a different approach to the subject both conceptually and in practice. This allows for a comparison between studios as similarities and differences are noted and discussed. The approach sees specific issues highlighted in individual practice that allows a discussion.

The research is qualitative, drawing first on primary sources of literature, then personal interviews and examples through the case studies themselves. These form the basis for the concluding section that sets out by these examples how TechnoCraft is the new cornerstone of luxury.

## Case studies

The paper appraises the emergence of TechnoCraft through four case studies, each focusing on a specific designer's work: Martin Leuthold of Jacob Schlaepfer, Manish Arora, Hussein Chalayan and Hardy Blechman of Maharishi. These are deliberately drawn from different cultural backgrounds that have strongly influenced their work, and each maintains a strong global position that is linked to their sense of local identity. An important aspect of this success is the way in which they bring together craft (associated with local) and technology (linked to global). These case studies explore this dynamic and the way that it informs the practice of TechnoCraft within luxury fashion.

### Case study 1: Martin Leuthold of Jacob Schlaepfer

The origin of the St Gallen based company Jacob Schlaepfer can be traced back to 1904 with the establishment of an embroidery business by Rudolf Vogel. This was later bought by minority shareholder Jakob Schlaepfer in 1934, renaming it Jakob Schlaepfer. Today it is run under the creative direction of Martin Leuthold. Schlaepfer provides fabrics to many of the leading Haute Couture collections including Yves Saint Laurent and Christian Lacroix. The company signature is its use of industrial processes that have been refined with the handmade and specially crafted tooling.

Christian Dior has described the importance of highly skilled workmanship to his luxury couture house as the craftspeople, tailors and seamstresses, working in his atelier who "...constantly strive for perfection" (ibid). The esteem of the studio can be seen in some of the quotations that appear on their web site – "The fabric is half the fashion" Yves Saint Laurent, and "Jacob Schlaepfer is the best European embroidery" Yushuiko Horita (www.jakob-schlaepfer.ch, 2010). In the author's interview with Martin Leuthold he was asked how the recognition of quality and luxury can be maintained as the market is increasingly being flooded with low cost heavily embroidered and detailed lasercut clothes found in high street chainstores such as H&M and Zara or on the internet where a full length embroidered and bead embellished wedding dress can cost as little as US\$37.00 (www.wholesale-dress.net, 2010). Leuthold's response is philosophical as he stresses the difference between what they are doing and the work that is produced in the Swiss atelier. The low cost garments are either low-skill or entirely machine based on inexpensive fabrics. The Schlaepfer fabrics combine refined technological advances with highly skilled craftsmanship using materials that are themselves of luxury quality. The company web site reinforces this mark of difference with Romeo Gigli's quote typical as he describes "Schlaepfer's creative designers succeed in combining everything that implies handcraft with everything that technology can produce".

It is the detail of the Schlaepfer approach that allows them to maintain an aesthetic that is firmly based in the luxury market. Fabrics are not simply lasercut or embroidered, the technologies are greatly refined specially for their use and often with patent protection or hand skills included in the process. They have collaborated with Swarovski to develop thermo-fixable paste gems while their Emboscan technology combines lasercutting with embroidery for delicately layered textiles with a structured lace-like quality. It is not possible to reproduce the quality or aesthetics achieved by this approach using either technology or hand crafted processes on their own. The bringing together of the two allows the couture atelier to successfully mitigate the threat posed by derivative low cost technology and low skilled craft production.

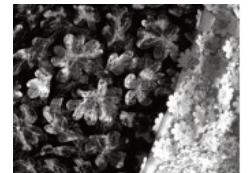


Photo  
1 Jacob Schlaepfer, lasercut and embossed fabric.

**Case study 2: Manish Arora**

The work of Indian fashion designer Arora combines craft with the aesthetics of technology. The Indian designer launched his label in 1997, followed by his diffusion label Fish Fry in 2001 and making his debut at London Fashion Week in 2005. His work brings together futuristic imagery with meticulously hand-crafted embroidery, appliqué, quilting and beading. Spacecraft imagery fuses with Mumbai street scenes and delicate embroidery with futuristic tailoring. In the TechnoThreads exhibition at The Science Gallery, Dublin (2008), Arora's work was positioned in the section titled Aesthetics of Science. The exhibition catalogue emphasises the contrast here between the hand-made and technological, noting that "It seems ironic that today it is the mix of craft and machine that has come to denote luxury" (ibid).

Lisa Armstrong has lamented "It is an absolute truism that today's fashion is global" going on to describe it as "bland" and "depressing" before noting with reference to Arora, "how reassuring that some designers still think local while acting global" (Armstrong, 2006). TechnoCraft as it is employed by Manish Arora is used to establish his brand globally by maintaining a strong local cultural identity. India has long been recognised for its fine hand craft techniques and these are used to good effect in luxury clothing for the growing India luxury market. Applying these skills to an aesthetic that is both local and international is one that alludes many Indian designers that are successful on the home market. Arora combines craft techniques with technology aesthetics to develop a brand that is appreciated nationally and internationally. He introduces the futuristic look both in the tailoring and decorative surface of his clothing. For the luxury customer the appeal is this craft and technology, East meets West and the sense of the exotic that accompanies this unique creative vision.

Arora aligns his work to art in his conceptual use of TechnoCraft. In his 2010 Wonder Wall Collection at London's Conran shop, framed samplers are shown from a number of the designer's collections. The work is elevated by this process of framing and hanging as "wall art" to the status of artwork. Textiles that began as samplers displayed on the designer's wall as inspiration have been taken and produced in limited editions so that the customer is invited to buy the framed work as "investment pieces". Placing the work in this context the designer is reinforcing the conceptual influence of the British Pop artist Eduardo Paolozzi. Both share an exuberant sense of colour, love of kitsch, robots, space and mechanical toys that are then reinterpreted with a hand made aesthetic in their work. The art critic Clement Greenberg equates kitsch with "folk or rudimentary culture" (Greenberg, 1939), while Edward Allington celebrates its unique position in art: "Kitsch is usually seen as art's antithesis –that which is worse than ugly" (Allington, 2003). In both Paolozzi and Arora's work it is the bringing together of craft and technology that allows them to interpret kitsch as art.

**Case study 3: Hussein Chalayan**

Hussein Chalayan graduated from Central St Martins in 1993 with a collection that included silk dresses that had been buried in the ground for months to give them an aged appearance (O'Mahony, 2001). His career has since been notable for his ability to bring together technology and innovation. Much of this involves a collaborative process with craftspeople and technologists, often blurring the line between the two so that the technologist is in effect the craftsman (Sennett, 2008). Starting with a core concept, Chalayan gathers technology craftspeople around him to help realise his ideas.

In the early part of his career, Chalayan's collaborations focused on craft that was given a technological aesthetic. This included his 1996 Nothing, Interscope (Spring/Summer) Pixelated dress with husband and wife duo Eley Kishimoto. The design appears pixelated and digitally designed, but it is derived from hand painted watercolours of flowers that have been repeatedly put through a colour photocopier to achieve the effect (Chalayan, 1996). Hand crafted techniques are here used to convey technological aesthetics. In before Minus Now, Spring/Summer 2000, his Ballerina dress is outwardly made of silk but beneath lies cutting edge technology to enable the dress to expand and change shape<sup>1</sup>. The development process involved a consistent dialogue between craft and technology in order to achieve control over the Shape Memory Alloy (SMA) used to change the shape of the dress. The technology had first to be mastered by the technocraftsman before going on to push the limits of its capability in the volume and weight of fabric that could be moved in a predictable as opposed to random manner. The solution combined the technical SMA with the ancient art of Japanese origami with forty-five meters of wire carefully folded before expanding when subjected to electricity (heat). The designer has inverted the craft technology process, affording the garment the ability to appear as non-technological couture before revealing its true dual nature.



Photo  
1 Hussein Chalayan, Ballerina Dress

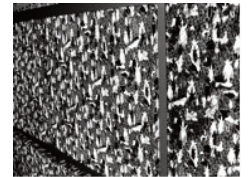
Chalayan uses photography and film to explore further realms of his work in a way that would not be possible using conventional concept to sketch methods. A parallel can be seen in the way that the artist David Hockney works with his iPhone sketches where he draws the Yorkshire sunrise able to see the light based colours that he is using as opposed to paint pigment that appears dark in the low light (Weschler, 2009). In a collaboration with British photographer Nick Knight, Chalayan's robot controlled airplane dress is reworked as a series of stills and 3D animation for SHOWstudio 01 Limited Edition Box Set (2001). The sequence of images is based on corrupted and distorted 3D scans of the original dress. While Hockney chooses to send his iPhone images free of charge and in a way that they can be distributed without limitation, Chalayan and Knight use the conventional art form of a limited edition box set to denote art, exclusivity and by extension luxury. The images reproduced in British *Vogue* are available to all, but only a select few can afford the luxury of owning the box set.

#### Case study 4: Hardy Blechman of Maharishi

The streetstyle menswear label Maharishi was set up in 1994 by Hardy Blechman who remains its creative director. He started as an importer of military surplus clothing, gradually altering and reworking the garments before embarking on the development of their own camouflage designs. The label is translated from Sanskrit for 'great vision'. The philosophy behind the label is the reappropriation of camouflage so that it becomes recognised as a symbol of peace rather than conflict (ibid). Maharishi is both street-style and luxury with a blend of technically innovative fabrics and hand crafted techniques of appliqué, embroidery, beading and hand finishes. The greater the handmade element the more expensive and ultimately luxurious the finished garment.

The environmental benefit of recycling has been with the label since its launch working with the ethos of 'respect nature: utilise technology' (Blechman, 2004). These garments have by their nature been mass-customised in that no two are exactly the same. Rare surplus garments are utilised and reworking intensive with hand stitching and appliqué undertaken by artisans in India so that the end result is far removed from military clothing that might otherwise become landfill. The embroidery motifs frequently use symbols based on peace and good luck while the clothing is made "smudged with herbal incense, blessed, and washed in saffron water to symbolically cleanse it of its military associations" (Maharishi 2010).

Maharishi print details about the garment on the inside of their clothes. This includes conventional wash and care details alongside information about the origin of the materials and the meaning behind the pattern used. This is for the wearer only and not visible from the exterior becoming an unexpected secret in a luxury streetstyle garment.



## Discussion

TechnoCraft in luxury fashion takes many forms and allows the balance between technology and craft to constantly shift with each collection. In doing so it retains a dynamism with the possibility for continuing reinvention in the hands of the designer. The case studies discussed in this paper illustrate just four approaches being taken yet even within these examples it is evident that the designers themselves are constantly reassessing and refining their own methodology.

External trends that are not exclusive to the luxury industry play an important role in TechnoCraft. To remove sustainability, mass-customisation or other factors discussed from the equation and much of the philosophy behind the work would be weakened. The partnership is needed to afford the conceptual depth and layering of meaning that the luxury customer demands. The end product is not enough, the whole process, service and inclusion of the customer is vital.

The fashion designer Marc Jacobs has expressed the view that "When you look at [Louis Vuitton], you see it as a mass-produced luxury.", or as Thomas puts it more bluntly, "Vuitton is the McDonald's of the luxury industry". As designers constantly strive to find ways of offering their customers more they are increasingly looking at ways of personalising their products in what is effectively mass customisation. An example of this is Scabal who produce the ultimate luxury suiting fabric that incorporates lapis lazuli, diamond chips and gold (Scabal, 2010). Their Private Line collection allows customers to have their own unique pin stripe that uses their own text or name printed 'ticker tape' style to form the pinstripe. From a distance it looks like a normal stripe, it is only on closer inspection that the text is revealed. The luxury jeweller John Hardy, based in Bali, inscribes each piece of jewellery with a short message on the reverse that can be seen and read by the wearer alone. Creative director Guy Bedarida describes it as "like a little secret for the wearer alone... that's our trademark" (Bendell, 2007).

The greatest threat to the system of luxury comes from mass market that uses a combination of technology and craft but in a very different way, one that is invisible to the consumer and not a reason for their

Photo  
1 Maharishi, Gorskuba reflective print wall display in London studio

buying the product. The sports trainer is an example of this, where as many as forty different high technology materials can be used to create a shoe that is then made by hand. The skill of the maker is likely to remain an important point of difference between the trainer that costs \$100 and the hand-made shoe from Bontoni that starts at \$4,000. The former taking less than an hour to assemble and the latter thirteen weeks (Bailey, 2010). While the skill level in much of mass produced clothing and footwear is currently low, this is likely to change as the demand for higher wages increases and the availability of low cost labour decreases.

### Conclusion

The demand for new luxury is expanding geographically, demographically and culturally. The luxury market relies on product differentiation, and this is offered by TechnoCraft. The flexibility offered in this bringing together of technology and craft means that TechnoCraft can be applied to a range of conceptual and applied fashion practices. In this paper the case study examples show how TechnoCraft can be used as a point of difference to mark luxury apart from low cost products appearing on the mass market which tends to use either technology or craft but rarely both together in a meaningful way. In emerging economies looking to establish their own cultural identities in the world, TechnoCraft is used to meet the global-local trend showcased through designers such as Manish Arora.

Where roles and definitions are reassessed we are starting to see an increasing number of what Sennett refers to as 'the technologist as craftsman'. TechnoCraft allows designers at the cutting edge to push boundaries beyond fashion and into fine art. This can be seen in the example of the luxury streetstyle consumer who wants to convey their style, status and knowledge in layers so that like-minded contemporaries will know that there is a printed text inside their clothes but others will not necessarily be aware of it.

There is evidence within the case studies that TechnoCraft has become an established direction for luxury fashion. On the basis of these studies, TechnoCraft may be well positioned to continue to evolve and develop to become further refined and meet future needs of this industry.

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## Note

1. Author worked on this project as technology craftsperson.

# Shaping the Fashion Curriculum for the Future: Lessons from Creative Graduates Creative Futures

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Elizabeth Rouse

LONDON COLLEGE OF FASHION, UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS, UK

## Abstract

This paper draws on the findings of a major UK study of graduate destinations *Creative Graduates Creative Futures* to explore what lessons can be learned for developing employability skills and designing the curriculum of fashion students in 21<sup>st</sup> century.

*Creative Graduates Creative Futures* which was hosted at the University of the Arts London and funded by 26 UK Higher Education Institutions is a unique and major longitudinal study undertaken in 2008-10 of 26,000 creative graduates leaving universities and college in the UK in the period 2002-4. The survey results provide UK educators with an invaluable resource for examining the value of creative education and their contribution to developing the work force of the creative industries. This paper draws on this data to examine the particular characteristics and experience of fashion graduates who were the second highest group of respondents in the survey, identifying commonalities and differences with graduates in other creative disciplines. It describes of their working patterns –the level of employment and self employment, portfolio working and life– long learning, and levels of job satisfaction. It interrogates the feedback from graduates on the skills and attributes they developed, the activities within the curriculum, their views on internships and how well they felt they were prepared for employment. It seeks to establish what was valued and what graduates felt was missing from their education and what was needed to support them in their future careers.

The paper argues that we need to build on the key features of creative and fashion education such as project based learning, professional development, team work, teaching by practitioners and participation in live events which were seen as most useful to students in developing their careers but that further emphasis on IT, networking and client facing skills are needed. In the UK, graduates value the nurturing of creativity and innovation, and the development of visual and presentation skills but educators need to develop learning which promotes self confidence and self management alongside entrepreneurial skills. The paper sets out a manifesto for employability –an education which prepares graduates for a career of portfolio working and lifelong learning, which develops discipline based working methodologies, which builds a stronger connection with the commercial and professional world and which is attuned to the high value placed on creativity and engagement in creative practice.

## Introduction

Fashion is a vocational subject and students are drawn to fashion courses by the promise of employment<sup>1</sup>. Changing national and international contexts make it timely to reflect on the extent to which art and design courses, and fashion courses in particular, provide graduates with the skills they need to have successful careers. This debate is relevant to higher education institutions that are shaping their curriculum for the future, for employers seeking recruits and for governments developing their workforce development strategies.

This paper examines the notion of employability from the perspective of policy makers and educators, and draws on the findings of major study *Creative Graduates Creative Futures* to examine the working patterns of fashion graduates, the skills and attributes they have developed and to explore the ways their education could be improved to enable them to make the transition into successful careers.

## Keywords

Employability  
Fashion  
Career Patterns  
Graduate Destinations  
Creative Graduates



## Definitions of Employability and the UK Policy Context

Employability can be measured by the success of graduates in finding employment. In the UK a key performance indicator for universities and courses is the data published annually on levels of graduate employment six months after graduation (HESA). However whether this is a reliable indicator of the **value** of courses in terms of employability is questionable. Many factors outside the educational experience provided by universities and colleges have an impact on levels of employment. The potential to fulfil a job should not be confused with the actual acquisition of a job as this is subject to external influences such as the state of the economy.

Since 2008 we have seen a significant change in the national and international economic context, the prospects for our graduates and the higher education policy environment within the UK. In the previous two decades there was a period of sustained growth in the creative and cultural sectors with employment growing at an average of 4.2% (CCSkills, 2009) and in tandem, from 1999/2000 to 2007/8, a significant growth of 58% in student participation in art and design education (HESA, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2009). However the economic down turn and financial crisis has led to a decline in employment rates for graduates. A poll conducted by the Higher Education Careers Unit has recently reported that “nearly one in 11 graduates are unemployed six months after leaving university –the highest proportion for 17 years” (Shepherd, 2010).

How will UK universities and colleges ensure that students are prepared to meet the challenges and complexities of working lives in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? How will we nurture talent and support the transition into the workplace? How will we ensure our students continue to contribute to the economic success, and play a role in the economic up-turn?

### Is employability about having the right skills?

The relationship between skills and employability, and the role of universities and the economy have been on the policy agenda for a long time. In the sixties Robbins<sup>2</sup> identified *instruction in skills* as one of the aims of HE and he suggested that entry to HE for most people was linked to their prospects of subsequent employment. Dearing (1997) drew attention to the role HE plays in the modern economy and in particular global competitiveness, and placed great emphasis on what he termed key skills communication, numeracy, use of IT and learning how to learn.

More recently the Leitch Review of Skills (2006) emphasised the important contribution universities have to play in the competitiveness of the economy through their role in developing “higher level skills”. The notion of “higher level skills” was taken up in by Government in a consultation paper.

Employers particularly value broad ‘employability’ skills, such as communication, motivation, independence, analysis, confidence and problem solving. This is one of the strongest messages from employers to government (DIUS, 2008, p.6)

Alongside this more generic definition of employability skills, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of creativity and the role of universities and art colleges in nurturing and developing creativity and innovation.

Global competition is growing as other countries recognise the economic value of creativity. To face this, our creative industries need the best business support... and an abundant pool of talented people with the **right skills** to meet the needs of an expanding sector... We will conduct research to ensure that academia is equipping students with the skills they need to make the most effective contribution to the creative economy. (DCMS, 2008)

An underpinning value of vocational education is its connection to the economy and its role in supporting the fashion industry by producing “employable” graduates. But what are the right skills? Employers sometimes talk of needing “oven-ready” graduates or requiring staff who “can hit the ground running”. In all of the reports referenced above there seems to be an underlying view of skills as simply “objects” that can be acquired. Is it as simple as that or is there a more complex process involved? How do we best prepare students for the world of employment?

### Employability as process

Yorke has suggested that employability is about demonstrating the potential to find employment. It is a

“set of achievements –skills, understandings, personal attributes– that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupation, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy” (Yorke, 2006, p.8)

Similarly Harvey (2002) argues against a simplistic “magic bullet” model of employability which implies that by simply undergoing the educational experience students develop employability skills. He suggests that there are a number of other factors which should be considered relevant such as personal characteristics, age, gender, the nature of the educational experience and external economic factors. Harvey highlights the complexity of the process of developing employability by presenting two models to illustrate the difference in the two ways of thinking:

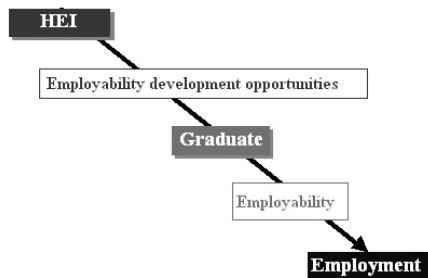


Figure 1: “Magic bullet” model of employability (Harvey, 2002, p.17)

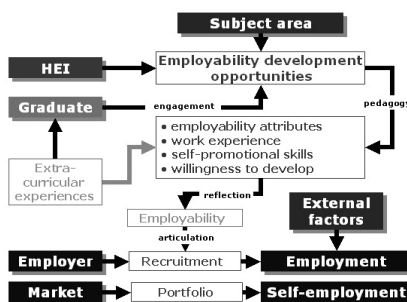


Figure 2: Employability as process (Harvey, 2002, p.20)

This second more complex model proposed by Harvey is premised on the view that employability is a process and part of a lifelong learning journey. It acknowledges the role of pedagogy in promoting certain attributes and includes the notions of engagement, reflection and articulation as processes that are ongoing. Employability then is seen as a **process** which goes beyond simply acquiring the “right skills” and gaining initial employment. It addresses issues of maintaining employment and obtaining new employment, of success, change, and progression.

This view of skills and employability as a continuous process of learning has also been explored through a qualitative research project commissioned by the Higher Education Careers Services Unit (HECSU). (Bowman, Hodkinson & Colley, 2005)<sup>3</sup> The research examined “transitions into employment” and the authors argue that such transitions should be seen as:

a continuous process of change, which begins long before the Masters course, and will continue on into the graduates’ working lives. Throughout this process, the young people were learning about themselves and their place in the world. They actively constructed their own sense of student and employment identity, and their own employability. In this transitioning work, students went through phases of greater or lesser pro-activity. (Bowman, Hodkinson & Colley, 2005, p.94)

On employability, the research concludes that:

If students were learning to become employed and employable during their courses, much of the significant learning took place after they had left. None of these young people were ‘oven ready’ for high-level employment, despite the increasing demands from employers that they should hit the ground running. Even those with the smoothest transitions had to learn once in the job, and often, ...relied on learning done during extensive work experience prior to taking the degree, in order to get and hold down the sought after position.

It was not only that people learned how to do whatever job they were aiming at. They also learned to construct their own employability. Rather than acquiring general core employability skills, this entailed getting to know the ways into particular, targeted arenas of employment,

such as interpreting. It entailed developing and increasing their social and cultural capital in relation to the targeted field... Put differently, rather than acquiring the skills, understanding and knowledge about employability, successful students learned how to change themselves into the sort of person who was more likely to be employed in a particular occupation (Bowman, Hodkinson, & Colley, 2005, p.97).

The research also highlights that rather than focusing on generic skills, in order for them to be successful, it is important for the graduates to have **sector specific** knowledge, contacts and be part of networks. These findings are supported by those of *Creative Graduates Creative Futures* as we will see below.

### Creative Graduates Creative Futures

This study, commissioned and funded by a partnership of 26 UK Higher Education Institutions and hosted at the University of the Arts London, is a unique and major longitudinal study of early career patterns of creative graduates<sup>4</sup>. The research was conducted between 2008 and 2010 and had two stages. Nearly 27,000 creative graduates (first degree and foundation degrees) who left universities and colleges in the UK in the period 2002-4 were surveyed in 2008. This was followed up in 2009 by qualitative research examining in more depth through interviews the career paths of the graduates and their experience of working in the recession. The survey achieved a 14% response rate making it the largest detailed study of its kind and one which is broadly representative of practice-based creative arts graduates. Fashion and textiles students were the second highest group of respondents at 21%. (Ball, Pollard & Stanley, *Creative Graduates Creative Futures*, 2010, p.31).

The research had a number of aims. One was to establish the value of a creative education for the individuals concerned but also the benefits for the economy and wider society. It sought to understand the nature of creative education from the perspective of the graduates themselves, what they felt they gained from their studies, and how their experience influenced their employment outcomes. The study also sought to investigate graduate destinations and career patterns and to establish whether the creative sector had the capacity to absorb the growing number of graduates emerging from UK courses in creative disciplines. In particular, however, it sought to discover the issues and challenges faced by the 21<sup>st</sup> century graduates and explore the complexities of their working lives –with a view to informing priorities for curriculum development and for designing appropriate kinds of support for creative industries/enterprises. It must, of course, be acknowledged that the research relates to the experience of students graduating before 2005 and changes to the curriculum and pedagogy are likely to have occurred in the interim, and there will have been some variability and differences in the experience of students on different courses and studying in different institutions.

In this paper I will focus on what can be learnt specifically by the providers of fashion education and so I will draw on the findings of the research relating to fashion graduates which has been published (Ball, Pollard & Stanley, *Creative Graduates Creative Futures*, 2010), (Ball, Pollard, Stanley & Oakley, *Creative Career Stories*, 2010), (IES, 2010) and the unpublished data provided to my institution as a partner in the research (Oakley, 2010). I will focus on three areas –the working patterns of graduates, the skills and attributes graduates developed and the activities they experienced and their assessment of their usefulness.

#### The working patterns of fashion graduates

The key findings of *Creative Graduates Creative Futures* is that the majority of graduates are working in creative occupations; portfolio working is a major established working pattern and that working on a self employed basis is a key feature of portfolio working, with graduates relying on combined income streams. In general graduates are satisfied with their working lives and place a high value on the opportunity to be engaged in creative practice.

Fashion graduates share these characteristics but are more likely to have had permanent employment than other creative graduates and less likely to run their own business or have worked freelance (Ball, Pollard & Stanley, *Creative Graduates Creative Futures*, 2010, p.107). Nevertheless as can be seen from the table below nearly half the graduates will have worked in a freelance capacity since graduation and though a very high proportion will have had permanent work, over a quarter will also have had periods of unemployment. Fashion graduates were also less likely to have engaged in further study but still a relatively high percentage of 64% will have experienced some form of further development since graduation.

Table 1: Employment activities engaged

Activity	Current	Engaged in since graduation
Full time work	89.9	99.7
<i>Permanent contract</i>	64.4	77.3
<i>Temporary contract</i>	6.5	44.9
<i>Fixed term</i>	18.5	44.9
<i>Own business</i>	14.5	21.4
<i>Freelance</i>	26.3	47.1
Further Study	29.6	64.0
Unpaid or voluntary work	5.5	39.1
Unemployed, seeking employment	3.2	26.9
Career break or family responsibilities	6.6	24.9
Other	2.5	4.9

Source: *Creative Graduates Creative Futures* Appendix 6 Tables (B1a:10 and B1b: 12) (IES, 2010)

A significant proportion of fashion graduates have portfolio careers with 41.1% reporting engagement in two or more employment activities, and 39.8 % reporting that they are self employed in any one of their jobs (ibid. Tables C2:3 and C3:8). However as Table 2 reveals fashion graduates work in organization which are diverse in size.

Table 2: Size of organization

No others	1-10	11-20	51-250	Over 250
19.8	20.4	18.1	18.7	23.0

Source: *Creative Graduates Creative Futures* Appendix 6 Tables (C8:4) (IES, 2010)

Fashion graduates report a high level of satisfaction with their careers, that a significant proportion is working in areas relevant to art and design, to their subject, and that many are working in their chosen careers.

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Satisfied with work	76.4	11.3	12.3
Relevance of activities to art and design general	78.9	6.8	14.3
Relevance of activities to degree	69.9	10.9	20.0
Working in chosen career	68.9	13.5	17.6

Table 3: Satisfaction and relevance

Source: *Creative Graduates Creative Futures* Appendix 6 Tables (C9:3, 6, 7 and 10) (IES, 2010)

The emergence of portfolio working and greater prevalence of self employment suggest that the model of employability which is based on matching graduate skills to the needs of employers is becoming outmoded. Graduates move between jobs, and are likely to have periods of portfolio working and self-employment, and occasionally unemployment.

The two case studies recorded in *Creative Career Stories* exemplify this. A free lance menswear fabric designer has a portfolio career combined with freelance illustration and craft work. He worked full time for two years for an established British designer, then in a fabric buying job for a major classic label. He moved a German company as fabric and trends manager but the company went bust. He used the period of unemployment to improve his portfolio before getting offers from three couture houses. He is now freelance at the request of his employer. Another case study of a self-employed textile designer/maker/craftsperson shows she really only started her career four years after graduating and a period of employment as travel agent. She did a free business skills course which gave her support on how to

approach selling her work and started making handbags alongside her textile works.

Whilst the core skills of creative practice in fashion might remain the same, the employment contexts in which they are applied and the skills needed to sustain employment are quite different. Has the educational experience of graduates prepared them for their working lives in this new environment? What did the graduates value in their courses, what extra support did they need?

### The creative curriculum: skills and activities

The pedagogic approach of British art and design education has been identified in *Staying Ahead* (The Work Foundation and Nesta, 2007) as one of the factors contributing to the success of the British creative and cultural sector. It is characterised by active learning and project based enquiry is one of its key features. Other common elements of the curriculum experienced by creative graduates include work placement, external/live projects, participation in competitions, shows/exhibitions, peer and self evaluation, contextual and critical studies, teamwork, teaching by practitioners, and personal and professional development.

Work placements are highly valued, particularly for gaining insights into working practices, building contacts in the industry, and in securing work after graduating. Nearly 40% of fashion graduates had a mandatory placement, 26.8% experienced additional or non mandatory placements but 37.9 % had no experience of placement (A7.7)

The most important part of my course was the year I spent on work placement .This is where I learnt about the fashion industry and met contacts who helped to start my career (Oakley, 2010)

The most commonly experienced named course activities were shows and exhibitions (94.2%), teamwork (88.3%), peer and self-evaluation (87.4%), contextual studies (85.1%), teaching by practitioners. PPD (77.8%) and field trips and visits (76.4%). (Table A12/13:2) (IES, 2010). There is a measure of alignment but also some significant discrepancy between the activities most commonly experienced and those perceived as being most useful. The most useful in descending order were perceived to be PPD, teamwork, teaching by practitioners, peer and self evaluation. However business and enterprise activities which were experienced by only 38.8 % were rated as highly, as was careers education and guidance. Next in importance was exchanges and international experience which were experienced by only 25.4% of the respondents. Participation in competitions, field trips, contextual studies, and voluntary activities were rated as the least useful (Table a12/3:5).

As Ball et al (Ball, Pollard & Stanley, *Creative Graduates Creative Futures*, 2010) point out fashion design students believe they had developed strong creative and visual skills which are important in developing their careers. The skills which were perceived as having been best developed in their courses were: creativity and innovation, presenting your work, visual skills, research skills, making and technical skills, self management, flexibility and adaptability, critical thinking, collaborating with others and project management.

However there are a number of areas where there is the significant degree of mismatch between the development of skills and their perceived importance. These are networking skills, using IT and software, understanding client needs and developing self confidence. This is supported by evidence from the in-depth interviews undertaken as part of the qualitative research, the findings confirm a lack of preparedness for self employment, and entrepreneurial skills:

At my degree show I was asked can you make me 100 of these scarves by the end of this month? And I didn't know; so I said I am not sure... I didn't know what I was selling... I went to see some people but I didn't present myself well... Even now I am not very confident. (Self employed textile designer) (Ball, Pollard, Stanley & Oakley, *Creative Career Stories*, 2010, p.52).

In making suggestions of how of course activities might better develop skills over a quarter of fashion graduates identified careers education and guidance (28.1%), using IT/software (26.8%), and business and enterprise activities (26.8%). Other significant areas were work placement, industry insights, technical skills and networking.

The authors of *Creative Career Stories* identify some success factors in making the transition to employment. These included being prepared to undertake temporary contracts and unpaid work to get a foot in the door. The report suggests that very few graduates got jobs through responding to an advertisement (Ball, Pollard, Stanley & Oakley, *Creative Career Stories*, 2010, p.9). Personal contacts and networks are important in finding work and developing careers:

“I thought I’d be designer straight away... I ended up applying to everything on the internet and industry magazines from suppliers to couture houses, not knowing what is applicable, what is suitable, and whether my portfolio was appropriate. My first job after university was production assistant to an established fashion designer where I’d done work experience when I was 17. I’d kept in contact with them and two months after graduating I called them... (Ball, Pollard, Stanley & Oakley, *Creative Career Stories*, 2010, p.67)

They emphasise the importance of testing different kinds of work and of willingness compromise, as well as self belief and resourcefulness:

Graduates who expressed an openness to new opportunities were adaptable, pro-active and naturally enterprising in their outlook appeared to be more successful in finding work and making progress in their career... the more enterprising were constantly assessing their situation looking for connections (Ball, Pollard, Stanley & Oakley, *Creative Career Stories*, 2010, p.11)

Such students demonstrate the activities highlighted in Harvey’s model of employability –engagement, reflection and articulation. It is clear from the career stories that many graduates used work experience and unpaid internship graduates to gain significant experience, and were able to demonstrate a strong work ethic and build work contacts. As Bowman et al argued:

rather than acquiring the skills, understanding and knowledge about employability, successful students learned how to change themselves into the sort of person who was more likely to be employed in a particular occupation (Bowman, Hodkinson & Colley, 2005).

### **A curriculum for the future**

The findings of this important research challenge fashion educators in the UK to create a curriculum which prepares graduates for a career of portfolio working and lifelong learning, which develops discipline based working methodologies, which builds a stronger connection with the commercial and professional world and which is attuned to the high value placed on creativity and engagement in creative practice.

The curriculum will need to encompass the development of skills and attributes which enable students to be successful in the new employment environment and the likely patterns of their working lives. Careers education must respond to the need of graduates who will be working freelance or on short term contracts in their early careers as well as those working in permanent employment. It should focus on the skills needed to build contacts and networks, on developing presentation skills, pitching for work and job seeking skills. In discussing career trajectories staff must enable students to develop realistic expectations of building their careers through a variety of means such working freelance and even unpaid internships. Students will need a more thorough engagement with business and enterprise skills and the business aspects of working freelance, in a self employed capacity, and contract working.

The curriculum must maximize the opportunities for work placement and industrial experience, and where possible increase real world learning through interactions with industry partners and employers in live projects. To achieve this there needs to be more collaboration, and stronger partnerships with the fashion industry to enable students to experience the diversity of employment opportunities and work patterns.

However this growing diversity of employment patterns and requirements does raise the question of whether it is really feasible to produce graduates who are “oven-ready” and can be successful in all of these contexts. As has been suggested above we need to recognise that employability is something which is developed during a course, learning continues on the job and throughout life. We need to encourage graduates and their employers to recognise the need for continuing professional development and to invest in training.

Lastly we need to maintain the strengths of the fashion curriculum as it stands and develop the discipline based skills which are important to graduates and employers. We need to ensure student have the opportunity to develop a range of creative, intellectual, visual and technical skills and to use both conventional and digital technologies. Education which fosters creativity and innovation demands an approach which gives students time to reflect, to risk take and experiment. However we must also recognise that the practice of activity based learning and the acquisition of creative and technical skills can be increasingly difficult to sustain in an environment of funding reductions and of pressure for shorter courses such as Foundation and accelerated degrees. Nevertheless educators need to build the confidence of their students and enable them to articulate the benefits their creative education for their own career development, for the fashion industry and the wider society.

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## Notes

1. My own institution's website markets fashion courses in these ways: "Our graduates work across a very wide spectrum of careers in fashion. While a few go on to become household names, the majority choose not to establish their own labels, working successfully and influentially as company designers, freelancers and consultants or as journalists, stylists, photographers, illustrators, editors and retailers" (Central Saint Martins) "We offer a unique portfolio of courses that aim to reflect the breadth of opportunity available in this vibrant industry." (London College of Fashion) [www.arts.ac.uk](http://www.arts.ac.uk)
2. The Report of the Committee on Higher Education, chaired by Lord Robbins was published in 1963 and recommended a significant growth in higher education in the UK.
3. This qualitative research was relatively small scale and sampled four students from each of six different Masters courses in two universities and conducted four rounds of semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted at the beginning and end of the Masters course, 6 months after they left and 18 months after they left.
4. This study also provides an update on a smaller scale study *Destinations and Reflections* (Blackwell & Harvey, 1999) (which examined the career patterns of creative graduates at the end of the last century).

# The Role of Fashion Education in the Dynamic Transmission of Heritage and Creativity

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Rosemary Varley & Edwin Phiri

LONDON COLLEGE OF FASHION, UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS, UK

## Abstract

Fashion management degrees, at once time perhaps viewed a little sceptically by business schools, are attractive to applicants, have avid industry support and have therefore proliferated both nationally and internationally. London College of Fashion was one of the forerunners in this discipline and the world famous BA Fashion Management is a market leader, with high entry levels and an excellent reputation with graduate employers.

As the product life-cycle would predict, fashion business and management degrees have multiplied and variations have emerged, one of which is the increasingly specialised course, for example Fashion Buying, International Fashion Marketing, or Fashion Promotion and Media. Reflecting this trend LCF have again been innovative, and now offer a suite of vocationally orientated Foundation Degrees, which provide graduates with the opportunity to position themselves in the job market at different stages in the product development and marketing process: Design and Marketing, Buying and Merchandising, Marketing and Promotion, and most recently Fashion Retail Branding and Visual Merchandising. Whilst the more general Fashion Management course offers wide scope, the specialist degrees give students the opportunity to concentrate on one area of business and gain depth of knowledge, application and skill. The danger with the specialist approach is the creation of, to coin an overused term, the silo mentality with a curriculum that drifts towards 'training'. The challenge for HE educators is to enhance specialisation whilst maintaining academic integrity and benchmarking.

This paper reports on a cross-course collaboration that involved 160 students, four separate courses, a UK retailer with one of the strongest brand reputations in the country and... Sherlock Holmes. The project placed students in close-to-life 'retail head office' teams and set them the challenge of seeing a heritage inspired collection through from conception to consumer, within the context of a major fashion department in one of the most well-respected retailers on the high street. The project helped the students to see exactly how they would work in their specialist role and how theoretical concepts manifest themselves in practice. They also learnt how, and perhaps more importantly, why they would need to work collaboratively with, and depend upon decisions made in other departments within the fashion organisation. An analysis of the student experience demonstrates that not only did the students find the commercialisation of their work for a well-known retailer in the first year of their degree engaging and motivating, but they came to clearly understand the necessity for teamwork and conflict resolution and why it should be practiced. Peer to peer developmental interaction, together with industry input and feedback helped students gain a clear picture of processes, roles, the need for planning and decision-making and how they, individually and collectively, contributed to the product development and marketing critical path. Perhaps the most important outcome however, was a greater respect for the strengths, skills and academic understanding of the different student groups. In an industry where networking and collaborative practices are the norm, we are convinced that this project is nurturing appropriate management capabilities.

## Keywords

Fashion Education  
Collaboration  
Teaching and Learning  
Strategy  
Brand Development  
Heritage Theme



## Introduction

Industry collaboration is undoubtedly nothing new for fashion and textiles institutions; the symbiotic relationship between the fashion industry and educators spawned specialist colleges like LCF and the requirements of employers has shaped their evolution. However it is rare, even with the wealth of curriculum-based collaboration experience found at LCF, for an industry project to cross over four separate courses, especially for LCF School of Management and Science where the articulation of beneficial outcomes for industry collaboration has been challenging. From the outset course teams were committed to the project, but some expressed concerns that the logistics of it could be insurmountable. Nevertheless the pursuit of an opportunity for students to practice collaborative learning and team-working on such a scale was too exciting an opportunity to be missed by a group of academics so closely in touch with the needs of employers; “within fashion businesses, creating fully functioning teams that also work well with each other is essential. But is not always easy to achieve” (Collins, 2010: 43). The following extract from the briefing paper gives the framework for the project, as outlined by the collaborating company.

*Our Own-Brand Menswear Department are planning their ranges for A/W 2010. Recently our company has received a wealth of press attention in response to the increasingly fashion orientated product offer in their womenswear departments and the menswear department are keen to follow this lead and capitalise on this favourable reaction from fashion commentators. As a famous department store group, we have approached LCF as the only specialist fashion college in the UK because we feel that **LCF students will be able to bring energy, freshness and innovation** to our product ranges and the way they are presented to customers.*

*We are not just interested in a relevant set of product designs; but we are keen to see how students approach the range planning, visual merchandising and marketing of a new range of products for their very loyal customer. We want the benefit of your input **from the conception of the product to the final presentation of the garments to the consumer.***

The company briefing also introduced the details of the required outcome of the project from the company perspective:

*You are to work in teams to produce a capsule collection for the own-brand menswear department inspired by the theme of Sherlock Holmes. The collection should be a total of 12 products, 6 of which should be presented as prototype garments. The collection will be sold in the flagship London West End store and on the website and should be supported with a full range plan, including financial commitment. You should also present a window display design and in store visual merchandising plans as well as an out of store marketing campaign for the launch of the collection.*

## Teaching Strategy

In order to design an appropriate teaching and learning strategy for this project, the dual outcome required fundamental consideration; students needed to deliver outcomes to satisfy both the academic merits for their course assessment and the possibility of a commercially sound idea for the collaborative corporate partner. According to Reece and Walker (2003) it is important for educators to know where they want students to finish and what they want them to learn. That way they know when the students have got there. The teaching strategy therefore needed to address not only how the academic assessment and possible commercial viability of the final outcomes would be judged, but also the teaching style adopted to take into account that this was a major project at the end of the first year of a three year degree programme.

Reece and Walker (2003) suggest that the choice of teaching style can vary but common rules for consideration apply; in particular the objective set for students to achieve and the number of students being taught. For this project the teaching involved large groups of students across a number of different course disciplines that were required to work collaboratively to a common brief, albeit each tailored to a specific course and subject speciality. All students were given an outline of what their colleagues on other courses were working towards which helped build awareness of the different elements of the project. The teaching and learning strategy also took into account that the way students learn depends on the type of learning that is involved. According to Reece and Walker (2003) learning can be classified into three main types or domains: psychomotor, cognitive and affective.

### Psychomotor Learning

As the word suggests 'psychomotor' learning involves both a 'psycho' aspect involving understanding and memory, and a 'motor' aspect –the movement and co-ordination between brain and limbs and as such it relates to the manipulation of objects, tools, supplies or equipment; 'Psychomotor skills are usually learned either from a demonstration or from written instructions' Reece and Walker (2003:17). In the case of this project the making of the prototype garments and the prototype visual representation of both the in-store merchandising and the window display represented this type of learning, and whilst these creations were largely undertaken by students on the more design orientated courses, Fashion Design and Marketing, FDM (in the case of garments) and the Fashion Retail Branding and Visual Merchandising, FRBVM (in the case of visual representations) the students from the other two courses had a significant input into the decision making process about those physical outcomes; in particular the Fashion Buying and Merchandising (FBM) students worked closely with FDM to ensure the garments were a selection from an agreed range plan, and the Fashion Marketing and Promotion (FMP) students worked closely with FRBVM to get a degree of integration between in-store communications and out of store campaigns.

### Cognitive Learning

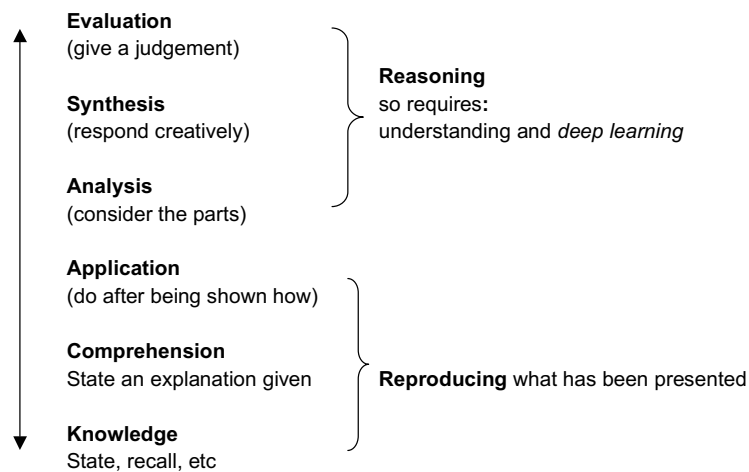
Cognitive learning broadly encompasses behaviours that require 'thought processes' to assimilate specific information and so the cognitive teaching domain is concerned with getting students to memorise and understand and often involves question and answer sessions to ensure the topic makes sense to them. This leads them into working out a problem and expanding their understanding by transferring the body of knowledge that they have acquired to a variety of different circumstances. The project achieved this in two ways. Firstly, the students worked in cross-course teams of around thirteen or fourteen, and were given hour long dedicated tutorials to exchange ideas and discuss progress in the presence of a facilitating academic staff member. In addition a team of mentors from the collaborating company joined two of the sessions for all groups, which gave rise to lively interactive sessions. The students also worked in smaller course-only teams (of 2 to 4 students), in which they attended seminars and workshops with course tutors in order to apply theoretical material and technical knowledge covered in previous units within the course. Thus the tutorial, seminar and workshops activities allowed students to question 'what, why, who, where, and when' and gain information that was helpful for understanding and realisation of the project aims and objectives. The final project outcome included a written illustrated report for academic assessment and group presentations of the project for judging by the industry collaborator, and so these two elements provided extensive evidence that this domain was effectively met.

Bearing in mind that one of the key motivations for the retailer to collaborate with LCF on this project was because they felt 'LCF students will be able to bring energy, freshness and innovation to their product ranges and the way they are presented to customers' (see above extract from briefing paper), it was vital that the learning accommodated the process of personal hypothesis-making rather than 'rote learning' or 'surface learning'. Students needed to understand the concepts of the brief and interpret them into the expected outcomes for the unit. Self-directed study was therefore key to maintaining this independence of thought. The theory of learning that informed the teaching strategy at this stage was the cognitivist school; 'The cognitivist school looks at the thinking process involved when we learn.' Petty (2009: 4).

The cognitivist theory of learning is sometimes referred to as 'constructivist' because it describes how learners construct their own knowledge and supposes that only when learners have 'made sense' of the topic will they be able to reason with it to solve problems and do other tasks. The constructivists' view is that we identify the students' current ideas, which they may have to modify or abandon as they construct new meaning. This project applied this theory by ensuring students were adequately briefed about the project but allowed them to express themselves in terms of what they wanted to do in interpreting the brief but still maintain the heritage and positioning of the brand with its current target audience. The inspirational 'theme' of Sherlock Holmes was given to the students, but they were free to interpret this in a manner that 'made sense' to them in the context of their course specialism.

Since students were placed in a unique position to work for an industry partner and with students from different courses, the challenge was to fully grasp a new topic and be able to use their own learning successfully in this unique situation. One theory to consider when considering students' learning in such a case is Bloom's taxonomy as shown in Figure 1.

High cognitive demand – reasoning required



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Low cognitive demand – little reasoning required

Figure 1. Bloom's Taxonomy

Source: Petty (2006:14)

Bloom split learning into a spectrum of tasks or skills, which he referred to as the 'taxonomy'. At one end of the spectrum the skills are relatively undemanding but they get more difficult, more connected and much more useful towards the other end. Learning for a given topic is only complete when all the skills in the taxonomy are attained. This project took students through all the stages of the taxonomy and was evidenced by attendance at lectures and tutorials, feedback from student buzz meetings, students' self-directed meetings, site visits, specialist professional talks, the final project presentations and the awards ceremony, together with the marking, grading and provision of feedback on the submitted assessment by tutors.

Other considerations of the teaching strategy included the behaviourist school of learning theory, which advocates that students require some reward or 'reinforcement' for learning. According to Petty (2009) learning takes place step by step rather than happening all at once, and is strengthened by repeated success. This project took this on board by ensuring that key points were stressed and summarised at the beginning and end of each class, formative feedback was provided during group tutorials and previous learning covered in other units in the year was incorporated. Formative feedback and progress review provided opportunity for reward and reinforcement as students were provided with developmental feedback and commendations as appropriate at each stage of the project process. The final judging decision for the 'best group project' was taken by the retailer's Buying and Brand Director who has a very high press profile, which provided a strong reward incentive and helped to motivate the students in their learning.

## Affective Learning

Affective learning involves the demonstration of feelings, emotions or attitudes towards other people, ideas or things and so the affective teaching domain is concerned with ensuring students have the correct attitude to the learning. It can be argued that, unless students have the 'correct' attitude then any other learning is superfluous. According to Reece and Walker (2003:17) attitudes like 'showing for safety', 'checking work after completion' and 'working effectively as a group member' are important aspects in developing a constructive learning attitude. In terms of the latter, this project used group interaction on three levels. The following extract from the student's briefing document explains this from the start:

*You will be taking on a simulated role within the [retailer's] headquarters and you will be working on a project outcome that is relevant to your course. You will be collaborating on this project in three ways:*

- *Firstly, you will be working in small groups with colleagues on your own course. This will enable you to use your combined strengths to come up with the best ideas and carry the project out in the most productive way.*
- *Secondly, you will be collaborating with people from the menswear buying and merchandising de-*

*partment at [the retailer], so you will need to consider their requirements and those of the customer who shops in their stores. This is an amazing opportunity to work with people from one of the best known and respected retailers in the UK.*

*- Thirdly, you will be collaborating in larger teams made up of students from other courses within LCF School of Management and Science. This will allow you to take into consideration all aspects of creating, developing and managing products from the design phase right through to selling. By working with other students who represent different departments within a retail business you will get to understand how they work and the kind of decisions they have to make and how this affects other departments. This is as close as you will come on your course to actually working within the industry and so it will be great preparation for next year's work experience.*

This project used the idea of cross-course student working groups, which involved collaborative discussion, working and presentation. Affective learning was encouraged by getting students to update each other on progress on a weekly basis, and in some cases, through the airing of views in an informal, tutor-facilitated learning environment. They were encouraged to think through what they were doing, reflect on what they had achieved to date and reinforce the direction they were heading. In some cases students were required to change deep-seated feelings, for example about the collaborating company's brand image and what they felt fellow students should be doing. The group dynamic also helped to deal with motivation issues and the allocation of workload. Feedback from the students obtained through unit evaluation and the completion of personal and professional development statements across all the courses involved confirmed that students who participated in the project enjoyed the interaction, team-bonding and, on reflection, had experienced a change of 'attitude' towards their own learning.

As well as the cross-course tutorials and course specific seminars, the teaching strategy combined a variety of techniques that included lecturers, seminars, tutorials, self-directed study, student site visits and specialist talks from relevant professionals from the retailer. Occasionally a lecture took place, but the nature of the project and the need to emphasise student centred learning meant that the lecturing during this project departed from the traditional 'lecture slot' and instead adopted a highly interactive learning experience for students. Traditionally a university lecture is a '50-55 minutes of largely uninterrupted discourse from a lecturer with no discussion between students and no student activity other than listening and note-taking' (Gibbs et al, 1992:9, as cited in Edwards et al, 2001:2). Even if the session was time-tabled as a lecture and the expectation from the students that one person was responsible for delivery, there was adequate flexibility in the 'lecture slots' to allow for student-to-student and student-to-teacher interaction so that the teacher was removed from a position of being the sole purveyor of information.

The humanistic school of theory advocates that meeting the emotional needs of learners is important for learning to take place successfully. According to Petty (2009:17) 'Teachers are encouraged to help each learner choose what knowledge and skills they want to learn, and negotiate a unique 'learning contract' or 'action plan' for each individual'. This was vital in the case of this project because the brief from the collaborative partner needed to be interpreted in a unique way by each group and the infusion of 'own' ideas from students' was key to realising the 'fresh' input the company was looking for. Students on the project were therefore encouraged to explore their own interpretations of the theme and negotiate the learning to suit the outcomes of each respective group.

## Concluding Discussion

A teaching strategy, as defined by Reece and Walker (2003:36) is 'a purposeful combination of student activities supported by the use of appropriate resources to provide a particular learning experience (process) and/or bring about the desired learning (product)'. The diverse teaching strategy implemented in this case was designed in order to address the three domains mentioned previously and took into consideration the suggestion by Reece and Walker (2003) that application of teaching strategies in the three domains could combine a number of delivery methods as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Possible Application of Teaching Strategies in the Three Domains Considering Strict Adherence to 'Classical' Definitions.

Teaching Strategy	Domain					
	Cognitive		Affective		Psychomotor	
	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High
Lecture*	XXX					
Demonstration*	XX				XX	
Team Teaching*		XX				X
Discussion*		XX		XX		
Debate*		XX		XX		
Question and Answer*		X XX				
Video*		XX	XX		XX	
Seminar*		XX	XX			
Laboratory/Workshop*		XX	X		XXX	
Gaming/Quiz		XX	XX			
Brainstorming*		XX				
Buzz Group*		XX				
Field Trip*		X		X		X
Role Play*		X		XX		
Ice Breaker *			XX			
Simulation *		X		X		XX
Case Study		XX				
Project/Assignment*		XX	XX		XX	
Tutorial*		XX	XX			X
Open/distance learning		XX				
One to One		XX		XX		X

Elements implemented in the LCF project marked \*  
 Source: Adapted from Reece and Walker (2003:106)

Overall, the project adopted a teaching and learning strategy that can be most closely aligned to andragogy, which Mezirow (1981) suggests is the professional perspective of adult educators and is defined as an organised and sustained effort to assist adults to learn in a way that enhances their capability to function as self-directed learners. Figure 2 presents Mezirow’s Charter for Andragogy, which outlines a set of principles and assumptions that informed the learning and teaching strategy for this project. Teachers of adults need to help learning that will continue after students have left the learning institution (Reece and Walker, 2003). The adoption of this approach was particularly important because the courses concerned were part of a programme of foundation degrees leading to BA honours (which by definition are required to simulate the work environment for learning) and because of the need for the outcomes to be ‘fresh’ and of potential commercial value to the collaborating partner.

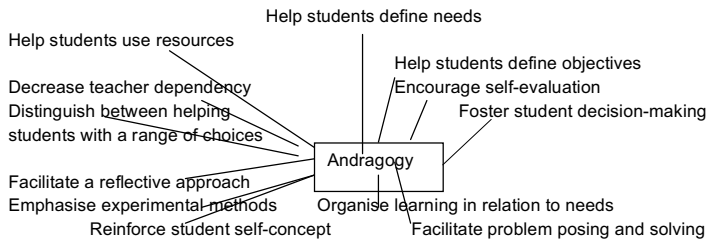


Figure 2. Charter for Andragogy (Mezirow, 1981)  
 Source: Reece and Walker, 2003:93

This project also benefited from the adoption of an andragogical approach of learning because of the type of learners and the project required to be delivered. It could be suggested that a move from behaviourist principles towards the more humanistic approach is more appropriate for adult learning and was certainly useful for this project because students worked collaboratively and the intended outcome of the project was an integrated collection of evidence. The project not only helped the students to see exactly how they would work in their specialist role, but how and perhaps more importantly, why they would need to work collaboratively with and depend upon decisions made in other departments within the fashion organisation to achieve the realisation of a brand concept in the retail setting.

Analysis of the student experience using qualitative data collected via unit evaluation questionnaires demonstrated that not only did the students find the commercialisation of their work for a well-known retailer in their first year highly motivating, but they came to understand clearly the necessity for teamwork and why it should be practiced. It was also apparent that the students gained a clear picture of processes and roles adopted in the product brand development from initial concept through to presentation

to the consumer in the retail environment. They also learned how important planning and decision-making were in that process and how they, individually and collectively, contributed to the product development and marketing critical path. The use of the Sherlock Holmes heritage as an inspiration for the end result helped to contextualise the project in a cohesive and easily understood thematic boundary. The heritage theme also reflected the brand values of the retailer concerned, being one with a long history and strong reputation for quality, service and tradition. The constant reference to the retailer's brand image helped to guide the students to commercially viable recommendations, yet the Sherlock Holmes heritage theme gave them a suitable platform for their creativity. Perhaps the most important outcome however, was a greater respect for the strengths, skills and understanding of the different student groups and how these could be used for collective benefit. In the fashion industry where networking and collaboration are the norm in the practice of product development and marketing, this project used effective teaching and learning strategies to nurture particularly appropriate management knowledge and capability.

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# Working Women during the Turning Point from Japanese-Style to Western-Style Clothing

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Naomi Ajima

BUNKA FASHION COLLEGE, TOKYO, JAPAN

## Abstract

This paper focuses on the Taisho period and introduces the relationship between advances in women's careers, associated with modernization in Japan, and the shift to Western-style clothing.

The shift to Western-style clothing by men began in the first year of the Meiji period, and the shift by women began in the Rokumeikan era; however, this was limited to wealthy women. Women's Western-style clothing in this era consisted of clothes for ceremonial and social functions worn by the privileged class, symbolizing the gilded cultural enlightenment.

After the Sino-Japanese War, Russo-Japanese War and World War I, Japan underwent social changes and faced economic slowdown. Advances in jobs by women as wage-workers began in this era, to support economic life in the recession. While career clothing came to be accepted, a clothing movement arose, and as a mean to promote better dressing, women civilians advocated a shift to Western-style clothing. In such a way, the advance of working women encouraged the popularization of such clothing, and thus, their success created an era in which the style of dress shifted from a Japanese style to Western style.

- Focusing on how working women transitioned, the actual picture of working women and the issue of higher education are discussed.
- In the Taisho period, the change towards Western-style clothing progressed through magazines: *Fujin-no-Tomo*, which played a central role, is covered in this chapter.
- Western-style clothing first became incorporated through functional uniforms.
- In the entertainment industry, Shingeki and film actresses dressed themselves in Western-style clothing from early on, and served as vanguards for normal women, who aimed to don the latest trends and styles.

Together with the rapid modernization of Japan, working women collectively participated in capitalist production organizations as individual persona, and established an important element.

Western-style clothing, which, during the Meiji period, consisted of ceremonial clothes, changed to civilian-style clothing in the Taisho period, leading to a trend in adopting uniforms, or functional clothes, as fashion. Accordingly, the emergence and success of working women were linked to clothes and their development and popularization.

## Introduction

The dawn of the Meiji period marked Japan's full-scale entry into the modern era. The shift towards Western-style fashion began with men's clothing and moved to women's clothing in the Rokumeikan era. However, restricted as it was to the ceremonial and social dress of the privileged class, this "cultural awakening" was far from universal, and did not take hold in the daily lives of the Japanese people.

As emerging industries flourished in the modern era, women also advanced further in society, and those that entered the workforce also adopted Western-style clothing.

"Social advancement" was the key concept that drove Western fashion trends among Japanese women. The following discusses the relationship between the modern "working woman" who began to play a central role during this period of history, and the shift from Japanese to Western-style clothing, both of which emerged at the same time.

## *Keywords*

Modernization  
Working Women  
Japanese-Style Clothing  
Western-Style Clothing  
Uniforms  
Fashion

## Chapter 1: Rise of Working Women

### 1. Defining the “working woman”

“Working women” were defined as those who held jobs for pay. The phrase “working woman” became common parlance following the Sino-Japanese War. Prior to that time, employed women were known only by their job title –such as “factory girl”, “midwife”, or “hairdresser”

The Japanese citizenry fell deeper into poverty as the country fought a series of major conflicts: the Sino-Japanese War, Russo-Japanese War, and World War I. As more and more women lost their husbands in these battles, they were forced to work to support their families. During the Meiji period, women did not think of employment in terms of personal gain, but in terms of the family –and their wages were used to supplement the household budget. Though on the surface it appeared that women were taking their place in the workforce, these wartime shifts did not contribute to bettering women’s position in society.

#### Historical markers in women’s employment

- 1872 Sate-run Tomioka silk thread plant opened in Tomioka, Gunma prefecture. Female workers were employed in 1873.
- 1874 Government established a teacher’s school for women.
- 1875 National Printing Bureau, Ministry of Finance first employed female workers.
- 1885 First women doctors emerged.
- 1886 Nurse training schools were established to develop nurses in order to found Japan Red Cross Medical Centers in various locations.
- 1887 Jikei University Hospital in Tokyo established a full-fledged nurse training institution to recruit candidates.
- 1890 Telephone system established between Tokyo and Yokohama, unmarried women employed as telephone operators.
- 1898 Bank of Japan employed female clerks.
- 1899 Japan Railway Company employed female ticket clerks at Ueno station.
- 1901 Mitsui draper employed female shop clerks.

(Murakami, 1971, p.85-373 )

The types of employment that women engaged in expanded greatly towards the late Meiji and early Taisho periods.

During this time, Japan saw the emergence of women factory workers, teachers, doctors, midwives, childcare workers, wardens, stenographers, nurses, telephone operators, journalists, interpreters, dentists, bank and insurance company clerks, rail and post office employees, department store clerks, pharmacists, photographers, typists, music teachers, waitresses and more. Most of these positions were in industries that had just arisen in the Meiji period, and women worked at these jobs alongside their male counterparts. One result of this was the need for women’s restrooms at all job sites.

In 1924, 13 years into the Taisho period, the Tokyo Employment Bureau *Koho* (Vol. 27) stated,

Working women now number 865,000. Of these, 97,000 are midwives, nurses, or pharmacists, 61,500 are elementary teachers or other educators, 43,800 are government employees, 92,600 are administrative staff, retail clerks, typists, or operators, and 43,200 are newspaper or magazine journalists, musicians, and the like. The number of female doctors has also increased from 306 in 1914 to 1,032 in 1924, according to the June 1936 issue of the *Joikai Zasshi* (Wakita & Hayashi & Nagahara, 1987, p. 233).

It is clear that by this time a large number of working women were on record, and a major reason that the government assured a place for women in the workplace was a capitalist one: they could be hired at a lower wage.

### 2. Actual conditions for working women

There were two main routes for women to get jobs during this time. They could either be hired following some kind of schooling (graduation-based employment), or be hired on as full employees following a training period at the company (apprenticeship-based employment). A May 1908 publication entitled *Joshi no Shinshokugyo* listed the following ways that women could become employed.



### Graduation-based employment

Sample wages are as follows: musicians (graduates of regular courses at the Tokyo University of the Arts; monthly salary 30-35 yen), artists (graduates of sewing/artificial flowers courses, Joshibi University of Art and Design; 20-30 yen), and Japanese painters (the highest wage among the groups; 30-35 yen, with some independent shop decorators or embroidery specialists). Assistant female doctors are paid 30-40 yen per month. Nurses, who having finished 3 years of courses and passing the certification exam earn 1 yen per day, are an example of a women professionals that earn a higher wage than college graduates. A new job where women can earn a higher wage than female teachers is that of a silk thread maker (graduates of a three-year regular threadmaking course in sericultural school; about 30 yen per month) (Teshima, 1908, p.34-86).

Within this period, modernization meant westernization. The textile industry led nationwide initiatives to import materials and machines in addition to inviting instructors to Japan from France, Italy, the US, Germany, Austria, the UK, and China. This suggests that the women workers played a key role in the textile industry, since maintaining the newly introduced technology required a certain level of intellectual ability. (Yanagi, 1982, p.166-167)

### Apprenticeship-based employment

Unlike graduation-based employment, wages for apprenticeship-based employment were typically paid at a day rate and were usually lower than those for graduation-based employment. For example: a female shop clerk for the Mitsukoshi draper, between the ages of 14 and 34 and preferably unmarried, could earn a daily wage starting at 40 sen. A telephone operator could earn an average daily wage of 29 sen plus a semiannual bonus after a three-month apprenticeship, though she must be unmarried and between the ages of 13 and 20 at the time of employment (current average age: 16). National Railroad employees earned a daily wage 30-50 sen, with semiannual pay raises and bonuses. Bank of Japan employees (aged from about 14 or 15 to 20, mainly unmarried and in a temporary position, could earn a daily wage of 20-50 sen after a 6-month apprenticeship, with semiannual pay raises and bonuses)... workers for the National Printing Bureau (the first government agency to hire women) gave Grade 7 trained female workers a daily wage of 17 sen, while Grade 1 workers earned 40 sen, ages around 14 or 15 to about 40. Graduates from girls' schools could obtain a monthly wage of 12-35 yen as managers of other female workers (Teshima, 1908, p.45-79).

In addition, hiring requirements such as "unmarried women preferred" or "must be unmarried" were imposed on the apprenticeship-based employment system, while employees under the graduation-based employment were free from such requirements.

Monthly wages for working women in the Taisho period were as follows. According to the article "Women's Monthly Wages" in the *Asahi Shimbum Company*, dated January 27, 1923,

the monthly wage for female teachers was 72 yen 80 sen 7 rin (comparatively higher), followed by that of typists at 42 yen 09 sen. However, the wage for typists varied from 39 yen to some 120 yen... the average monthly wage for shop clerks for major department stores was 33 yen 75 sen 9 rin and that of female clerks was 33 yen 69sen 3 rin.

### Higher education for women

The opening article of the *Joshi no Shinshokugyo* was an opinion piece regarding the advisability of higher education for girls. "Higher education shall be limited to a handful miserable girls" by Masataro Sawayanagi (vice-minister of the Education Ministry). (Teshima, 1908, p.1) Masataro Sawayanagi noted that "generally, girls do not have to work once they marry". He therefore concluded that girls targeted for higher education would be "miserable" girls who were "smart but unmarriageable due to their poor appearance, unfortunate widows that must work for their families" or girls from rich families who could study for fun. He further asserted that there was "no need to build a large facility for a handful of people." (Teshima, 1908, p.2-3)

During the Meiji period, women who were employed typically retired when they married. This was partly because employers wanted to hire unmarried women and partly because the women's husbands or mothers-in-law did not understand why the wives would have to continue their jobs after marriage. However, in the Taisho period, the purpose of work made a significant shift from "work for the sake of the family" to "work for the sake of the women themselves". The pioneers of the "self-motivated workers" were dubbed "working women".

## Chapter 2: Progress of the Shift towards Western-Style Clothing

### 1. The Clothing improvement movement

During the Meiji and Taisho periods, movements emerged that would take Japan from traditional garments and towards more functional clothing in line with modern times.

The first such movement, driven by women's magazines in the Meiji period, was known as the "Progressive Apparel Movement". The second was called the "Clothing Improvement Movement", and emerged as part of the larger Lifestyle Improvement Movement promoted by the semi-official Lifestyle Improvement Alliance, the Japan Clothing Improvement Society, and others (Fuma, 2007, p.7).

Because the Clothing Improvement Movement occurred as part of the Lifestyle Improvement Movement, it was promoted as an economical solution during the hard times caused by a spike in consumer prices following World War I. It was the Lifestyle Improvement Alliance that played the central role in this movement, an organization that was formed in January of 1920 following the close of the Lifestyle Improvement Workshops held by the Ministry of Education.

Yoshitaro Ozaki's *Keizaikaizen: Korekarano Saiho*, Vol. 2 was published by the Japan Clothing Improvement Society in 1921. Ozaki's ideas on improving clothing are captured in the following quote: "In these busy modern times, more and more people are talking animatedly about 'activities' and 'work', yet our traditional Japanese clothing is quite ill-suited to such purposes... it is likely that the rest of the world considers movement in Japanese clothing rather inconvenient. Accordingly, our first order of business must be to improve Japanese clothing in terms of ease of movement." Ozaki contended that the Japanese needed to make clothing that achieved two primary objectives: (1) allowing easier movement and (2) cutting back on wasted fabric (Ozaki, 1921, p.1-2). He listed the following factors as contributing to these aims:

- Shorter sleeves, hems reworked for easier movement
- Cut narrower in the torso, less overlap for less wasted fabric
- Slightly simpler and faster sewing methods
- Avoiding belting of the waist or stomach
- Undergarments designed to keep the body warm
- Updated clothing that keeps pace with modern trends
- Sophisticated styling for a elongated, sleek silhouette

(Ozaki, 1921, p.3-4).

The combination of these seven factors was, Ozaki claimed, "the future of Japanese-style clothing". Ozaki dubbed the way to achieving these improvements "visual acclimation", based on his conviction that getting used to seeing the new fashions was critical. His clothing improvement strategy was "first substance, then style", and he would attempt to make the shift first to more economical dress, then to more progressive clothing, and finally to Western-style clothing (Ozaki, 1921, p.4-6).

Ozaki himself felt that "the ultimate destination of Japan's Clothing Improvement Movement is Western-style clothing", and he considered improved Western-style clothing the ideal "clothing" that would result from "clothing improvements". As such, he promoted Japanese-style Western clothing as the way to dress in the modern era (Fuma, 2007, p.49).

"Progressive clothing" was neither Japanese nor Western, but rather came from a desire to create clothing that was functional and work-focused.

### 2. Fujin-no-Tomo magazine and the shift to Western-style clothing

#### *Fujin-no-Tomo* magazine

*Fujin-no-Tomo* was a women's magazine first published in 1903, and advocated the shift to Western-style clothing as a means of improving the social position of Japanese housewives. In 1919, the magazine held a competition for the best women's working wear. Prizes were awarded in two categories: "progressive clothing based on the Japanese *kimono* and *hakama*", and "simple clothing based on Western-style clothing". The winning items were announced in Issues 7 and 8 of Vol. 13 of the magazine. Preproduction Western-style clothing samples based on the winning entries were sold as "light dresses". The price for a light dress was 3 yen 20 sen, while the undergarment sold for 1 yen 70 sen.

"Think of what we could save just on our clothing budgets if these kinds of dresses became popular!

We could supplement our meager food supply with the extra money". ("From a woman who has tried the light dress", *Fujin-no-Tomo*, Issue 9, Vol. 13, p.80)

To further align with lifestyle improvement principles, the magazine also invited the Western-style dress-

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#### Photos

- 1 Prizewinning working wear (Western-style) (*Fujin-no-Tomo*, Issue 7, Vol. 13, p.70)
- 2-3 (Progressive clothing) (*Fujin-no-Tomo*, Issue 8, Vol. 13, p.76)
- 4 Light dress (*Fujin-no-Tomo*, Issue 9, Vol. 13)

maker Yoshitaro Nishijima to be a fashion consultant for the magazine. He explained how to Western tailoring methods, which used sewing patterns labeled with measurements. Nishijima's Western-style dress-making instructions appeared in every issue of the magazine, and the magazine company's Western-style Clothing Division sold the accompanying sewing patterns. The "blouse and skirt" pattern featured in Issue 10 of Vol. 14 of *Fujin-no-Tomo* (Fig. 1) sold for 50 sen, while the "half-coat" pattern featured in Issue 11 (Fig. 2) sold for 40 sen (*Fujin-no-Tomo*, Issues 10 and 11, Vol. 14).

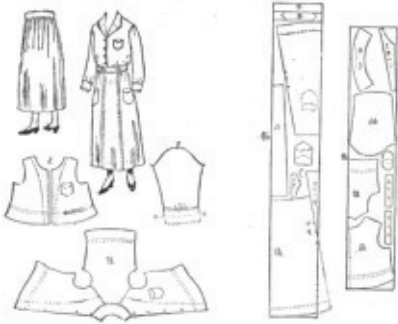


Fig. 1 Yoshitaro Nishijima "blouse and skirt"  
(*Fujin-no-Tomo*, Issues 10, Vol. 14, p.144-145)

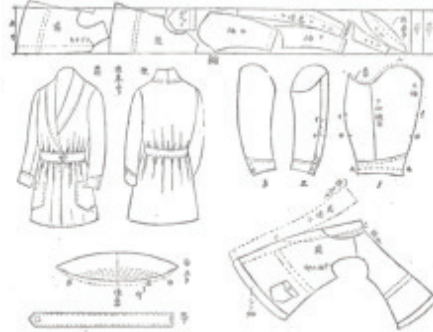


Fig. 2 Yoshitaro Nishijima "half-coat"  
(*Fujin-no-Tomo*, Issues 11, Vol. 14, p.140-141)

The Fujin-no-Tomo Corporation, with its mail-order ready-made clothing, articles on Western-style clothing, pattern sales, and other activities promoting the spread of Western-style clothing, helped transform Taisho-era Western dress into the fashion of the Japanese public.

### Results of the Lifestyle Improvement Survey

The Lifestyle Improvement Alliance spent three years putting together the *Seikatsu Kaizenchosa Ketteijiko*, which it published in February 1923.

There were five items related to women's clothing: (1) Japanese women's clothes should also gradually shift towards Western-style clothing, (2) working women in particular should wear Western-style clothes on the job, (3) women's work clothes should include a *monpe* (a type of *hakama* worn in northern Japan) or a *karusan* (*calçãõ*) with tight sleeves, (4) women engaged in housework should wear a coverall whenever possible, and (5) transitional women's clothing should have tighter sleeves, a narrower obi belt, a tightened collar, a shortened skirt/hakama and Western-style undergarments (*Seikatsu Kaizenchosa Ketteijiko*, 1923, p. 47-49).

With these results, the survey concluded that the clothing improvement trend was a trend towards Western-style fashions. The more changes that were made to create "progressive clothing", the more the garments tended to resemble Western styles. As a result, the progressive clothing movement did not take hold, and instead paved the way for the full-scale adoption of Western-style clothing.

### 3. Advisability of Westernization in Japanese clothing

In the Taisho period, when adoption of Western-style clothing by the general public had just begun following the establishment of the policy that Japan would shift from Japanese to Western dress, Western styles were still considered strange because not many citizens wore them. The following are real opinions from the era: According to a second discussion on the "advisability of Western-style clothing for housewives" in the *Tokyo-Asahi Shimbun* evening edition dated March 25, 1925, the number of respondents who answered that this change "should be allowed" was 125, and the number that felt it "should not be allowed" was 211.

#### Opinions of those who responded "should be allowed"

I think clothing must keep pace with the times. Particularly today, as life becomes increasingly active and complicated, clothing must be more active as well... Western-style clothing is the dress of new era, from the perspective of economics and time... so there is no reason to endure our inconvenient and centuries-old habits any more.

My personal principal is, "If you won't work you shan't eat". Therefore, I definitely say it should be allowed for housewives to wear Western-style clothing... Japanese clothing is no match for the sportiness, wearability, and simplicity of Western-style clothing in terms of health.

Actually, all my clothes –from my primary garments to my hat– are remade from my kimono. This is proof that prejudiced criticism is simply nonsense... sooner or later, the economical and convenient advantages of Western-style clothing will conquer Japanese clothing.

As these opinions indicate, the vast portion of comments noted that Western-style clothing was more convenient and functional.

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### Opinions of those who responded “should not be allowed”

Students should be allowed to wear Western-style clothing, but not housewives. It is inconvenient and discordant, since Japanese clothing matches perfectly with our current Japanese homes and furniture, which are designed with a slower, more peaceful lifestyle in mind.

It is pointless to adopt Western-style clothing for housewives to do domestic chores at this moment. It is not economical anyway. Western-style clothing for working women may be well and good, but I strongly disagree that housewives should wear Western clothing, since it is poor-looking, ill-shaped, and discordant.

Westernizing Japanese housewives' clothes is nothing less than a partial abandonment of the Japanese traditional lifestyle. We should be proud of our treasured kimonos, unique in the world. I insist that Japanese clothing never be totally abolished.

The number of respondents who answered “should be allowed” was 125, while those who answered “should not be allowed” totaled 211 –meaning that an overwhelming portion of respondents answered the latter. However, among those who answered “should not be allowed”, a significant number of them included comments that began, “unlike working women...” This suggests that a large number of women considered working women totally different than housewives, even though they are the same gender. In fact, a vast number of Japanese shared the idea that Western-style clothing belongs to foreign culture and the only ones who should wear it were working women. By this logic, Japanese housewives should not have to mimic them.

The Taisho period was a period of transition in terms of clothing?from the Japanese traditional kimono to functional Western-style clothing via progressive clothing. The history of modern style had entered a new era, shifting from functional uniforms to fashionable items.

## Chapter 3: Relationship between Working Women and the Shift towards Western-Style Clothing

### 1. Uniforms and their cost

#### Uniformed positions

Nursing was the first profession to adopt a uniform towards the end of the Meiji period (Photo 5).

Women conductors also required a uniform. Tokyo Metropolitan Automobiles and the so-called “blue buses” started running in 1919 (eight years into the Taisho period) and hired women conductors, who were made to wear white-collared Western-style outfits as a uniform (Photo 6).

In 1919, factory girls at the Tobacco Manufacturing Division of the Monopoly Bureau were supplied with Western-style cotton uniforms.

In 1920, factory girls employed by the Morinaga snack-making company had white work uniforms with white caps. Though they made 20–30 yen a month, these uniforms were provided by the company.

The Nagasaki Women Teacher's Association specified clothing for female teachers in 1921. Women elementary school teachers who participated in the Ministry of Education's Lifestyle Improvement Workshops organized a Clothing Study Group to promote the move towards Western-style clothing (Photos 7-1, 7-2). Osaka Municipal Bus began service in 1924 with women conductors, who were called “red collar girls” because of the standard red-collared uniforms they were made to wear.

However, the work uniform for the majority of female factory workers, who made a monthly salary of 10 yen or less, was a Japanese kimono with corded sleeves or covered by an apron. Some of them wore “progressive clothing” consisting of a *monpe* over a tight-sleeved jacket.

Many women working for the government or as administrative assistants wore progressive clothing as their work uniform, with tight-sleeved kimonos accompanied by a *hakama*, shoes, and apron; or else with a work jacket or coverall worn on top.

The Lifestyle Improvement Movement of the Taisho period was a reform movement promoted by educators, and as such, it played a theoretical and instructional role. Those who wore Western clothing were the working women who are modern proponents of the shift to Western style clothing and had the financial resources to actually purchase them.



#### Photos

- 5 Japan Red Cross Medical Nurses 1910 Nakayama, C. (1986) p. 91
- 6 1919 Tokyo Metropolitan Automobiles women conductors Nakayama, C. (1986) p. 106
- 7-1 (1921)The Nagasaki Women
- 7-2 Teacher's Association specified clothing. Nakayama, C. (1986) p. 106.

### Western clothing and its cost

So how much did Western clothing cost during this period? Toshiko Tsuda, a craftswoman and the wife of famed painter Seifu Tsuda, was a proponent of the shift towards Western style clothing. According to her,

a coat and skirt cost 59 yen, a white blouse made of crape silk (outerwear) costs 18 yen, a petticoat (one-piece type) made of hemp was 7 yen, a slip (one-piece type) also made of a hemp blend is 4 yen, and a corset costs 6 yen 50 sen, for a total of 94 yen 50 sen. Minor additions included socks for 2 yen 50 sen, shoes for 16 yen, a hat for 10 yen, and gloves for 4 yen 50 sen for a grand total of 127 yen 50 sen. (Nakayama, 1986, p.370).

The price of Western-style clothing in the Taisho period was less than one-fourth of what it had cost during the Meiji era –meaning that in terms of price as well as custom, it was no longer the exclusive property of the privileged class. Still, it remained out of reach for ordinary citizens, when clothing fabrics and tailoring costs were taken into account. Imported wool fabric was a typical example: tailoring costs alone run between 15 and 20 yen.

In fact, one of the reasons that the Japan Clothing Improvement Society held its workshops was to encourage at-home dressmaking in order to eliminate tailoring expenses. To further reduce costs, measures to promote ready-made clothes were highly sought-after. For example, the *Fujin-no-Tomo* company's ready-made "light dresses" sold for just 3 yen 20 sen.

The popularization of Western-style clothing could now be seen in the advent of at-home dressmaking and the shift to ready-made clothing.

## 2. Western clothing as fashion

### Working women: adopters of Western-style clothing

Female authors, journalists, doctors, teachers, activists, and other women who held graduation-based employment positions were considered part of the "intellectual class". These women were the early adopters of Western-style clothing, as their social lives required it.

The New Women's Association, formed in 1918, led the fight to revise Article 5 of the Peace Preservation Police Act, which prohibited women from becoming political activists. During these activities, Raicho Hiratsuka and Fusae Ichikawa discussed the idea of wearing Western-style clothing to meetings, since it was too much trouble to walk in geta and kimono. (Nakayama, 1986, p.371).

Hiratsuka and Ichikawa wore Western-style clothing to speech meetings held by the New Women's Association. This rare sight earned them a reputation, and their meeting with Article 5 reform proposal representative Toyokichi Tabuchi, who was presenting at the discussions, appeared in the July 20, 1920 edition of the *Tokyo Asahi* newspaper (Photo 8).

In the entertainment industry, Shingeki and film actresses dressed themselves in Western-style clothing from early on, and served as vanguards for normal women (Photo 9).

The first women radio announcers came on the scene in 1925, and these women were on the cutting edge of fashion for their time .

Working women in prominent positions such as these were the very first to adopt the Western trends, which would then spread to the general public and become popular among the citizens of Japan.

### The emergence of the "modern girl"

American and European women wore their hair bobbed during World War I, and the shift from longer to shorter dresses was demanded by wartime lifestyles. After the war, however, these styles became part of the fashion of modernism. "Modern girls" did away with unsanitary corsets in favor of undergarments and frilly skirts, with their hair closely cropped in the back and bobbed in the front and side. Felt hats covered their eyes, which were thin-lined, and their lips shone with richly colored lipstick. The modern girl had abandoned tradition to showcase her own unique personality and freedoms, and courage and letting loose themselves were seen as virtues.

Following the Great Kanto Earthquake, Tokyo began to rebuild itself as "New Tokyo", a modern-era metropolis. Cafés, dance halls, movie theaters, and other Western-style features sprung up one after another in the city's entertainment districts, which were inhabited by the new "modern girls" and "modern boys".

"The 'modern' in 'modern girl' can be taken to mean *modan* [lit. "haircut"], and cutting their hair is the first step that these girls take." (*Fashion to Fuzoku no Nanaju-nen* p. 188, "My Modern Girl Diary" by Noriko Awaya)

A feature article in the *Fujin Koron* (Issue 4, Vol. 10, 1925) entitled "Culture derived from the Marunou-



Photos

- 8 Raicho Hiratsuka and Fusae Ichikawa wore Western-style clothing July 20, 1920 Tokyo Asahi Simbun
- 9 Actress Itoko Tatsumi 1912 Nakayama, C. (1986) p. 92

chi-building” included “feedback from women who have cut off their hair”.

“Akiko Midorikawa (dressmaker): as the primary breadwinner for my mother and children, I can only maintain a certain level of income by having hassle-free hairstyle and can only practice dressmaking by finding time to do so”.

“Yoshiko Okada (actress): as a lazy person, I was so delighted when cut off my hair. It was exhilarating, weightless, and hassle-free, although I did feel a little empty” (*Fujin Koron*, 1925, p.174-186).

However, the publisher received mixed reactions: “One of the hot-button issues in the news media this year (1926) is the haircut of the so-called modern girls. At the time, there were just two typical Western hairstyles: an asymmetrical part on the side and pulling back the hair to hide the ears. Moreover, a Japanese coiffure was a must in order to attend a Kabuki performance. In times like these, women who love something new had their precious hair bobbed. Arguments for and against the bobbed hair style arose in response to this trend, and continued without end. Some insisted it was truly ridiculous for women to cut their precious hair, while others responded that bobbed hair was a true symbol of the liberation of women. A great controversy had arisen”. (*Shiseido Geppo*, 1926, June, p.5-6)

The “modern girl” trends emerged in the last days of Taisho period, and became a mainstream movement in the first year of the Showa period. (Photo 10)

### 3. Social reforms brought about by working women

The Marunouchi Building was built in 1923, and housed nearly the full spectrum of positions for working women—who by then numbered nearly 1,000. The building itself was nicknamed “Marubiru”, and the writer Chogo Usui defined the women who worked there as follows in his *Marubiruno onna no kao, fukuso, hyogen* (The Faces, Clothing, and Expressions of the Marubiru Women):

The thousand young women who work here epitomize the new generation of working women, and they are vanguards of the ‘modern girl’ trend, ushering in a new era... they have shifted from a traditionalist approach to one centered on freedom—a move from the spiritual to the material, from abstinence to pleasure, and from old concepts of chastity to free love... no matter how you look at it, the ‘Marubiru women’ represent a new breed of modern, up-to-date women... as their numbers continue to increase and their trends become mainstream, I am almost sure that they will be the ones to rule the new era. (*Fujin Koron*, 1925, p. 221-223)

Together with the rapid modernization of Japan, working women collectively participated in capitalist production organizations as individual persona, and established an important element.

### Conclusion

Western-style clothing, which was the ceremonial dress of the privileged classes during the Meiji period, had caught on among the general populous via progressive clothing styles during the Taisho era. It went from functional clothing used as work uniforms to the wildly popular fashion of the day, and this shift was the beginning of the universal adoption of Western-style clothing in Japan that we see today.

Given the above, the emergence and success of working women were linked to clothes and their development and popularization. This was the unique feature that characterized women’s Western-style clothing in Japan.



Photo  
10 Modern girls  
Mainichi Shimbun

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# The Luxury of a National Heritage: Dutch Heritage Strategies<sup>1</sup>

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Maaïke Feitsma

ARTEZ INSTITUTE OF THE ARTS, ARNHEM, NETHERLANDS

## Abstract

In a search for authenticity, preservation of and capitalisation on the brand heritage has marked previous decades. Fashion scholar Bruno Remaury has determined five key strategies through which luxury brand make use of the brand's past to give it value for the future: evoking the time of its origin, drawing on its stylistic repertoire, the use of its timeless emblems, an explicit juxtaposition between past and present, and applying museum methods to display a brand's heritage (Remaury, 2004).

Taking this theory as a starting point, and working within a Dutch context, this paper explores how one can legitimise a brand without an age-old heritage; when there is no past to relate to and no stylistic repertoire to draw on. Is it still possible to place yourself in a certain tradition and create a sense of longevity?

The Netherlands have only recently build up a fashion culture and as a result there are no luxury brands with a rich brand heritage. Nor has the nation itself a distinct fashion history or a narrative to refer to. Where some brands invent their own brand heritage, Dutch designers have applied an alternative strategy to place their products in a historical perspective: by drawing on their national heritage.

Juxtaposing the visual and narrative ways in which Dutch designers have made use of their national heritage with the strategies as employed by the established luxury fashion brands, reveals three main differences. While Dutch designers make use of the same strategies, the past they refer to is very different than that of the established luxury houses: they use a past from outside fashion –a national heritage instead of a brand heritage–, a past which is not necessarily connected to an elite culture –but in contrast to folk culture– and which endorses characteristics like timelessness and durability instead of the 'new', which is traditionally so central to fashion.

While these differences leave the question whether these Dutch brands aspire to position themselves as luxury brands, this paper substantiates the claim –based on Lipovetsky's *postmodern luxury*– that they do see and position themselves as luxury brands, but their concept of luxury is somewhat different than that of the time-honoured luxury brands.

## 1. Introduction

In an age where authenticity is a main objective, heritage has become the source of legitimacy for luxury brands like Louis Vuitton, Hermes, or Chanel. Conservation and exploitation of brand heritage has characterised the previous decades. In his article *From the shop window to the museum: the relationship between a brand and its heritage*, Bruno Remaury (2004) states that the history of a luxury brand is first of all a strategic and stylistic reservoir, constituting what is put on offer for consumption. He describes five main strategies, which all make use of the brand's past to give it value for the present: evoking the time of its origin, drawing on its stylistic repertoire, the use of its timeless emblems, an explicit juxtaposition between past and present, and applying museum methods to display a brand's heritage.

But how do you legitimise your brand when you simply do not have a brand heritage to draw upon; when there is no past to refer to and no stylistic repertoire to put to good use? Is it still possible to place yourself in a certain tradition and create a sense of longevity?

Until the 1960s, the Netherlands have never seen themselves as a fashion country. The rich travelled to Paris to buy their clothes, the well-to-do ordered copies of Parisian models at a local 'maison' and the rest of the population made their own clothing after women's magazines patterns, which were simplifications of the latest Paris trends. And the same applies for ready-to-wear garments by the Dutch confec-

## Keywords

Brand Heritage  
National Heritage  
National Identity  
National Dress  
Dutch Fashion  
Luxury



tion industry. As a result there are no Dutch luxury brands with a rich, history-laden past. Nor has the nation itself a distinct fashion history or a fashion narrative to refer to, like for example the Italians or British do. A number of brands –such as Tod’s, Hogan or Gérard Darel– have invented their own history and aura of legitimacy through for instance a fictional founder or a suggested relationship with icons such as Cary Grant or Jackie Kennedy (Erner, 2006: 78-82). By contrast, Dutch designers have in recent years applied an alternative strategy to place their products in a historical perspective: that is by drawing on their national heritage. Instead of referring to a brand history, or the fashion history of a country, the Dutch use their cultural history to give their products a sense of longevity.

This paper will explore the visual and narrative ways in which Dutch designers have made use of their national heritage in their designs and communication and juxtapose it with the strategies as employed by the established luxury fashion brands, like Louis Vuitton or Gucci. Through this I will demonstrate that, although Dutch designers use their national heritage instead of a brand heritage, their main strategies are the same as those of the luxury brands researched by Remaury. I will, however, also demonstrate that the Dutch conception of luxury accentuates a different element of *postmodern luxury*, as described by Lipovetsky (2007), than the established luxury houses.

## 2. The Past in the Present

The central question that Remaury asks himself in his article is: “What are the visual and narrative ways in which the heritage of a brand is put to use in the global strategy of the brand offer –from the products themselves to advertising and point of sale?” (Remaury, 2004, p.20). In the following I will ask myself the same question, but now within a specific Dutch context.

### Strategy 1: Evoking the time of its origin

Luxury brands often apply what Remaury calls the *logic of reconstitution*: they explicitly display elements, which have not a direct relation to the history of the brand, but evoke memories of another age in which the brand originated. So, through using stylistic features and décor they recreate an era and place the brand within this period (Remaury, 2004).

By using vintage cars or steam trains as a backdrop for their bags and suitcases, Louis Vuitton evokes memories of travelling in the 19th century, the era in which the brand was founded (Figures 1 & 2). While their 2007 advertisement has a polished and contemporary look, their 1994 advertisement also recreates the era by the used font type and the slightly blurred image, with (too) loud colours, which we associate with photochromic photographs –colorized images produced from black and white negatives–, which were especially popular during the latter part of the 19th century, as modern colour photography was not yet commercially viable.

When we look at Dutch culture *the era* that the Dutch identify with most strongly is the Golden age of the 17th century, when the Dutch Republic experienced an economical and cultural florescence. Ever since the ‘branding’ of the Dutch nation during the early 19th century it is this era that is commonly seen as the age wherein the contemporary Dutch society is rooted (De Jong, 2001, p.30).

When Dutch fashion brands use the *logic of reconstitution*, they do not refer to the age of the brands origin, but to the origin of the Dutch nation. A recurrent method to hark back to the 17th century is by using the stylistic features of the paintings by the Dutch Old Masters like Rembrandt van Rijn, Johannes Vermeer en Jan Steen. A clear example of this is the photo series *Golden Age* by the renowned Dutch photographer Erwin Olaf for the Dutch fashion brand People of the Labyrinths (P.O.T.L., founded in 1984) (Figure 3). The P.O.T.L. F/W collection of 2005/2006 was inspired by the Dutch 17th century and Olaf portrait the designs using the same light, compositions and themes as the paintings by the Dutch Masters. In the same way that Johannes Vermeer placed his female models often in front of a window through which light shines into the room and places the woman in a ‘spotlight’, Olaf places this model in front of a 17th century style window, against white walls and next to a chair, which is reminiscent of the chairs painted by Vermeer.

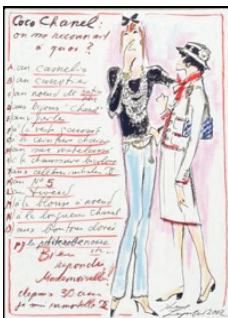
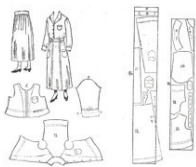
### Strategy 2: Stylistic repertoire

A second way in which the heritage of a brand is put to use is through reworking and transforming their stylistic repertoire. The stylistic repertoire of the brand, which usually comes from the product itself, or in other words the classics of a brand, are rearranged and brought up to date (Remaury, 2004). A well-known stylistic repertoire is that of Chanel, which Karl Lagerfeld has used ever since his appointment as artistic director at the fashion house in 1983 to develop new designs within this easy distinguishable framework. Lagerfeld has illustrated these ‘elements for an immediate identification of Chanel’ in a drawing



#### Photos

- 1 Advertisement campaign by Louis Vuitton featuring Catherine Deneuve, 2007.
- 2 Advertisement campaign by Louis Vuitton, 1994.
- 3 People of the Labyrinths, F/W 2005/2006, photo from the series ‘Golden Age’ by Erwin Olaf.



of which the caption read 'Chanel's spiritual heritage' in 1993 (Figure 4). These elements are: shoes with a black pointed toe, the 2.55 Chanel bag: a padded bag (matelassé) with a gold chain, the little black dress, a multi-coloured brooch in the shape of a cross, the 'Chanel suit' jacket, a catoga (bow), a camelia and the golden button embossed with the double-C (Floch, 2000, pp.85-115). In later years Lagerfeld has made several of these drawings in which he analyses the stylistic repertoire of Chanel, in these drawings we see more and more 'elements for an immediate identification of Chanel' (Figure 5, 6).

As Dutch fashion brands are relatively young brands, they do not possess a rich stylistic repertoire of their own. Dutch designers, however, take the stylistic repertoire of Dutch national dress as a starting point. Subsequently, they transform its shapes, character or techniques to bring the design up to date.

What is important to note here is that the Dutch have not one official style of national dress, but that it is characterised by the country's regional diversity: every community has or had its own style of dress. This sounds like a contradiction in terms – a *national* dress that is not *national* – but ever since the early 18<sup>th</sup> century it is exactly this diversity that is seen as a characteristic of Dutch identity (Koolhaas-Grosfeld, 2010, Verhoeven, 1998). This regional dress plays a double role; it is a symbol of local culture, while at the same time it has become a symbol of national culture and national unity during the latter part of the 19th century (De Jong, 2001).

Generally known is the *Fashion Show* collection (FW 2007/2008) by Viktor & Rolf for which they took inspiration from the traditional dress of the Netherlands. According to the Dutch quality newspaper, *Trouw*, they felt the need to go back to their roots, back to their native country (Rheenen, 2007). Interesting in this context is that they took their inspiration from different regional dress styles and combined them, which is a common method of working among Dutch designers. This underlines the multi-layered symbolism; although the traditional dress differs regionally, they are all acknowledged as expressing Dutchness. Viktor & Rolf used – among other styles and techniques – Staphorster stipwerk (a painting technique from Staphorst) (Figure 7, 8, 9), Indian Chintz (which is a highly popular textile in Dutch traditional dress)<sup>2</sup> (Figure 10, 11) and red coral chokers typical for the dress of Zeeland (Figure 12, 13).



7 Clogs with heels by clogs with heels by Viktor & Rolf, FW 07/08  
 8 Staphorster stipwerk on clogs with heels by Viktor & Rolf, FW 07/08  
 9 Lady demonstrating the traditional Staphorster stipwerk painting technique

10 Dress from Indian Chintz by Viktor & Rolf, FW 07/08  
 11 Wentke (traditional long, waisted coat from Indian Chintz), mid 18<sup>th</sup> century

12 Dress from Indian Chintz by Viktor & Rolf, FW 07/08  
 13 Wentke (traditional long, waisted coat from Indian Chintz), mid 18<sup>th</sup> century

Although Dutch designers have in recent years often referred to traditional dress, and thus seems nothing special, within the present comparison between established luxury houses and the Dutch it is very remarkable. Where luxury houses customary present themselves as part of the lifestyle of the aristocracy, rock stars, athletes, politicians, actors, or in other words, the rich and famous – or at least outstanding figures –, the Dutch chose to associate themselves with common people. This chasm becomes even clearer, when one takes into consideration the historical (Dutch) view on folk culture; during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century this culture was seen as a symbol of national culture and this imagery was promoted within the country as well as abroad. This national awareness caused Dutch city dwellers as well as foreign tourists to explore the Dutch countryside, with the local population wearing traditional dress as a main attraction. As a result Dutch folk culture became a cliché, was commercialised and through this lost its authentic image. Dutch townspeople and village people drifted further and further apart, and the latter became to be seen by the former as backward and different. Therefore, folk culture became to be seen less and less representative of modern Dutch culture. This gradually led to a negative view of Dutch folk culture, from 'an image of the self to images of a disadvantaged social group, looked down upon by the 'modern' Dutch' (De Jong, 2001, p.621-625).



14 Fisherman from Volendam  
 15 Hope, Francisco van Benthum, FW 2008/2009  
 16 Hope, Francisco van Benthum, FW Collection 2008/2009 (photo by Barrie Hullegie)

Another example in which we clearly see this element of 'the common people' is Francisco van Benthum's FW collection of 2008/2009 *HOPE*. This collection was inspired by Dutch fishermen and showed several features of their traditional dress, especially that from the village of Volendam (Figure 14). Van Benthum uses the traditional caps, the wide, peg-top trousers and classic necklines (Figure 15). For an accompanying photo shoot the models are shot in black and white and combined with pictures of grey

Photos

- 4 Chanel's spiritual heritage', drawing by Karl Lagerfeld, 1993.
- 5 The beat goes on... not what but how next?, June 1991
- 6 2002

skies and stormy seas (Figure 16). In these images the models are cast against Dutch weather phenomena, which act as a foil, whereby a certain mood is expressed. It shows the sea as a dangerous place and the fishermen as hardworking, hardy men, instead of men of leisure, who go sailing for recreational reasons; as working class instead of leisure class.

**Strategy 3: Timeless emblems**

In addition to its stylistic repertoire luxury brands possess a collection of timeless emblems, which can give products a sense of belonging to a brand, without necessarily staying within the framework of the stylistic heritage. These timeless emblems like logo's, symbols or distinctive patterns stay relatively stable, as to 'change without changing', because a sudden change might obscure the message. As a result of the recent race for innovation the emblems have become more and more a way of ensuring the continuity of the brand heritage (Remaury, 2004).

The Dutch nation has a collection of timeless emblems which consists of – among others – wooden Clogs, the Dutch national flag, the colours orange (in reference to the name of the royal family), red, white, and blue (the colours of the national flag), windmills, cheese, tulips, ice skating (tour skating and race skating, not figure skating), the Dutch landscape (polder), Delft earthenware, Dutch cuisine (Dutch smoked sausage, Dutch stew), the (16<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup> century) shipping trade and Frau Antje (the cheese girl). What is important here is that these symbols are often used outside their conventional context, while still bestowing the aura of Dutch cultural heritage to the products.

Klavers & Van Engelen have used a ruff –although this type of stiff white collars were worn throughout Europe from the late 16th and early 17<sup>th</sup> century, they remained highly fashionable among the Dutch regents in the later 17<sup>th</sup> century (Calasibetta & Tortora, 2003) and therefore they are seen as an icon of the Dutch national heritage –as a starting point, but have abstracted it to the level where a ruff makes up an entire dress (Figure 17, 18). The ruff is used as an icon, just as the wooden clogs with heels from Viktor & Rolf (Figure 7, 8), but there have been many more instances of the use of Dutch icons in fashion in recent years.

The 2011 S/S collection of SIS, the diffusion label of the design duo Spijkers & Spijkers, was inspired by a Dutch folk song from around 1775 *Daar was laatst een meisje loos*. The song tells about a girl who dresses like a boy to become a sailor, but is found out about and becomes the captain's sweetheart (Geheugen van Nederland, n.d.). Consequently, the show started with a film of moving clouds, and the show was accompanied by music by Enya: the song *Sail Away*. The clothing itself had all kinds of maritime references: the main colours were sea colours like plain blue, green and white and seashell prints and buttons. The grand finale of the show consisted of three dresses with large 17th century sailing ships on them in blue and white (Figure 19). While the cut of these dresses have nothing to do with the Dutch stylistic repertoire of traditional dress, these last three dresses still referred clearly to the Dutch national heritage through the emblem of the Delft Earthenware; it looked like the models were wearing traditional tile picture with sailing ships, in themselves icons of Dutch heritage (Figure 20). Thus we see several Dutch icons –the Delft Earthenware, the sailing ships– outside of their traditional context of ceramics and seascapes, but still bestowing the modern dresses with Dutch heritage.

These are all quite traditional emblems of Dutch culture, but Dutch designers also take the minimalist and conceptual form of Dutch modernism in art and design as a source of inspiration (Teunissen, 2006, Van den Berg, 2008). Lingerie designer Marlies Dekkers, for example, did not only design a collection named *royal blue delft* for S/S 2007 and threw a 'So Dutch' opening event of her Paris store in 2006 (Figure 21, 22), in Dutch quality newspaper *Het Parool* she also describes her style as Dutch –sober but smart– and ascribes this to the polder landscape with its clear lines, and gets a lot from her inspiration from the work of Dutch artists like Mondriaan and Rietveld (Lampe, 2008).

Other contemporary emblems are the postbags of the PTT (Dutch mail), which designer Jan Taminiau used for his *Postzak* collection for S/S 2005 (Figure 23). Here we see again references to everyday life, instead of the life of the Dutch elite.



21 *Royal Blue Delft*, Marlies Dekkers, S/S 2007



22 *So Dutch*, opening ceremony of Marlies Dekkers' Paris store, 2007



23 Jan Taminiau, dress from *Postzak* (postbag) collection, S/S 2005

**Strategy 4: Juxtaposing past and present**

A fourth heritage strategy that brands make use of is the *confrontational strategy*: an explicit juxtaposition between the past and the present. This approach makes visible what customers have in mind when they buy a product of a certain brand –the narrative of the brand; a story about its ori-



Photos

- 17 *Molenteenkraagjurk*, Klavers & Van Engelen, F/W 2008/2009
- 18 Ruff, c. 1615-35, collection Rijksmuseum Amsterdam
- 19 SIS by Spijkers & Spijkers, S/S 2011
- 20 Tile picture depicting the schip Twee Gebroeders by Dirk Danser, 1748

gins, its craftsmanship and the age of the brand, while at the same time expecting a contemporary design. This contrast between heritage and innovation is most often applied at the points of sale, but also in the press and advertising (Remaury, 2004). A recent international example is the 2010 campaign by Gucci which contrasts original black and white photographs from 1953 of Gucci artisans in its historic Via delle Caldaie building in Florence with the title *Forever Now* (Figure 24). The juxtaposition between the historic photograph and the 'NOW', becomes a bridge between the brands past, present, and future, through the caption:

*"The man. The passion. The dream. Guccio Gucci lived the artisan's life of Florence in 1921. Authentic. Enduring. Dedicated to perfection. His spirit inspires our traditions today. The beauty of what he began nurtured by generations of craftsmen for 90 years. His desire to create what lasts forever moves each of us. Touching our past as we craft our future. Compelling us to carry his iconic legacy forward –now and forever"* (Gucci advertisement, *Forever Now*, 2010).

A comparison between Dutch cases and the luxury houses as discussed by Remaury is complicated by the fact that, while this strategy is most often applied at the points of sale and in advertising, only a few Dutch designers actually own their own stores, nor do they have their own shop-in-shops at department stores, nor even a corner in specialised boutiques. And, as the budget to make use of extensive advertisement campaigns also lack, they are limited in creating their own brand universe.

A clear juxtaposition, however, between the Dutch past and its present are the *Pearls from Makkum* project (2006), a collaboration between Royal Tichelaar Makkum and fashion designer Alexander van Slobbe. Royal Tichelaar is the oldest company of the Netherlands, since 1594 this family business has specialised in pottery, especially the white and blue Delft earthenware. While their common ground is the dedication to craftsmanship, quality materials and heritage, Van Slobbes vision takes the Royal Tichelaar style into the fashion arena. *The Pearls from Makkum* are a series of porcelain pearls, which come in different colours and decorations, like one with the traditional windmill pattern in white and blue, and can be worn on a silk ribbon (Tichelaar, n.d.) (Figures 25, 26). Van Slobbe meant to design a Dutch product, made from local materials and inspired by Dutch culture, in which wearing pearls on a ribbon is an ancient tradition, and where the fishermen of the Zuiderzee would buy their wives a single pearl when business was good (Van den Berg, 2008, p.51-53). The Dutch cultural heritage is stressed through the narrative of craftsmanship, quality and history, while this is visually enhanced through the patterns and also by photographs in which earrings from the same line are shot in the style of Vermeer's *The girl with the pearl earring*, which was Van Slobbes source of inspiration (Figures 27, 28). At the same time the innovative design of the 'pearls' is very contemporary, and looks like nothing worn in traditional dress. Here we see again an association with the Dutch folk culture; that of the fishermen of the Zuiderzee.

**Strategy 5: Museum and/or gallery exhibition method**

The last strategy as described by Remaury (2004) is a direct heritage policy in which the brand creates spaces to display its heritage, or in other words, it opens a museum or designs gallery exhibitions especially for its brand. Internationally renowned are the fashion exhibitions of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and les Arts Décoratifs, which have shown the heritage of many fashion houses. Well-known examples of specialised museums are those of Hermes, Louis Vuitton and Yves Saint Laurent. However, having ones own museum does not exclude the option of gallery exhibitions, as the recent exhibition (October 2010/February 2011) *Voyage en Capitale, Louis Vuitton et Paris* on the history of Louis Vuitton at Musée Carnavalet in Paris makes clear.

The story told through an exhibition ranges from purely historical to confrontational strategies, as described in the above. A clear example of the latter strategy within a Dutch context is the exhibition *Gone with the Wind*, which was on show in 2009 at the *Zuiderzee museum* in Enkhuizen. This is a combination of an open-air museum and an indoor museum dedicated to documenting and showing how people – mainly fishermen and farming communities – used to live and work around the Zuiderzee between 1880 and 1930. Thus, this fashion exhibition was placed within a Dutch folk culture setting, instead of a 'high art' setting. The exhibition was curated by Alexander van Slobbe and Franciso van Benthum and was meant to explore Dutch traditional dress thematically based on the idea *from craftsmanship to abstraction*. They asked more than fifty Dutch designers, stylists, fashion photographers, and product designers to create installations taking the traditional dress collection of the museum as a starting point and centred around Dutch themes like the Old Master Johannes Vermeer, flowers, *De scheepjongens van Bontekoe* (a children's adventure book from 1924 by Johan Fabricius, based on a ship's log of a VOC captain on a group of young boys, who join the VOC as cabin boys) and Oranjefeesten (parties in honour



Photos

- 24 Forever Now, Gucci advertisement campaign, 2010
- 25 Pearls from Makkum, Alexander van Slobbe for Royal Tichelaar Makkum, 2006
- 26 Pearls from Makkum in Delft earthenware style, with Dutch landscapes featuring farms and windmills, Alexander van Slobbe for Royal Tichelaar Makkum, 2006
- 27 Pearls from Makkum, Alexander van Slobbe for Royal Tichelaar Makkum, 2006
- 28 Girl with the Pearl Earring, Johannes Vermeer, c. 1665-66, Royal Cabinet of Paintings Mauritshuis

of the Dutch royal house). The pieces of the museum collection –the source of inspiration– were placed next to their contemporary counterparts, opening a dialogue between the past and the present, heritage and innovation.

A similar method was applied in collaboration between the *Zeeuws Museum* and designer Monique van Heist during 2010 in the exhibition *Mode met Monique* (Fashion with Monique). The designer was asked to draw a parallel between the heritage of the museum and her *Hello Fashion* project, which is a continuous collection of Monique van Heist's classics by which she challenges the fashion system. The collection is permanent, grows slowly at a random pace, unconcerned with the traditional fashion cycle and will be available for unlimited time. Thus, denouncing fashion's short-lived glory as suggested by commercial forces (Monique van Heist, 2009). This slowly growing, timeless, and classic collection has the same characteristics as the traditional clothing collections; where men and women would not so much replace their clothing, but add, as the different pieces were timeless. Here, we see the same dialogue between an innovative fashion project and Dutch clothing traditions; the present and the past.

However, it is not only the traditional elements of Dutch heritage that are drawn on by Dutch designers. Marlies Dekkers finds her inspiration in the work of Mondrian and Rietveld and during her *15 years of Marlies Dekkers* exhibition at the Kunsthal in Rotterdam (2008), she placed her lingerie next to their artworks. And thus, opposing a more recent Dutch cultural heritage and contemporary design (Lampe, 2008).

## Conclusion

Turning back to the central question of this paper; "What are the visual and narrative ways in which the heritage of a brand is put to use in the global strategy of the brand offer –from the products themselves to advertising and point of sale?" we have seen that the main strategies applied by Dutch luxury brands are predominantly the same as the those described by Remaury (2004).

There are, however, three main differences between Dutch luxury brands and the established international brands. Firstly, the Dutch do not apply these strategies to their brand heritage, –as it is as good as non-existent– but they take their inspiration from outside the fashion arena and turn to their national heritage to give their work a sense of longevity. Secondly, where the established luxury brands always refer to the world of the aristocracy and/or the rich and the famous, the Dutch often refer to Dutch folk culture; the world of the common people, and even a culture that has been looked down upon for the greater part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The third difference is a result of their interest in Dutch folk culture; while national dress is of course not completely 'free' of fashion; the 'new' is not a central goal. Within traditional dress characteristics like timelessness and durability are more important than ephemerality.

At first hand this seems an unbridgeable gap, and leaves the question whether these Dutch brands aspire to position themselves as luxury brands after all? I would like to argue that they do see and position themselves as luxury brands, but their understanding of the concept of luxury is somewhat different than that of the time-honoured luxury brands.

Lipovetsky (2007) has described *postmodern luxury* as something which combines the traditional desire to distinguish yourself socially though your appearance, with a narcissistic dimension: your own opinion of yourself, your own intimate experience. And, he states that this second element has become more important in recent years. I argue that it is this dual character of postmodern luxury, which can explain the differences between the established luxury brands and the Dutch ones.

In the use of their heritage the established luxury brands still lean more heavily on a traditional type of luxury, which is based upon a battle for prestige. This is not surprising, as this explicit elitist method has been part of the brand's history for many years, and therefore cannot just be discarded. This also clarifies the less important role that the association with the aristocracy or economical and cultural elite plays for Dutch luxury brands; while they do associate with the upperclass of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, this association is not part of their brand heritage. In addition to this, according to economic historian Jan de Vries, a new type of luxury developed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century in the Netherlands, which was not based on a royal court, but on urban society and which he characterises by an integrating rather than by a differentiating effect. The basic forms of expressing status and achieving comfort were remarkably similar between city and country, and between rich and poor. It was the cost and specific quality, rather than the types of objects and their general form that differed (De Vries, 1999). Thus, while the appearance was more or less the same, the (traditional) luxury was in the craftsmanship and the materials.

The lack of an elitist tradition in combination with a lessening importance of this 'prestige' element, make that the Dutch are not in any way limited to explore different features of Dutch culture, such as folk culture. Thus, when compared, the Dutch seem to focus more on the narcissistic dimension –or personal experience –of postmodern luxury; which considers association with the elite as less important. Their

conception of luxury is one of *emotional luxury*, which is characterised by intimate experiences (Lipovetsky, 2007).

Lipovetsky (2007) also describes a new need for timelessness and durability, which the established luxury brands find in their craftsmanship, and which Dutch brands find in their traditional dress, with its ancient techniques as well as the timelessness –from a fashion perspective– of its silhouettes.

Concluding, we can state that although the Dutch use the same strategies, the heritage they refer to is very different: they use a past from outside fashion, a past which is not necessarily connected to the elite and which endorses characteristics like timelessness and durability instead of the ‘new’, which is so central to fashion.

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## Notes

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2. Indian Chintz was imported by the VOC (Dutch East India Company) from India from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. From 1660 onwards chintz became highly fashionable, first with the elite and soon also with farmers, fishermen and craftsmen. After 1770 chintz went out of fashion, but remained a standard element of Dutch traditional dress, especially within the regions surrounding the Zuiderzee (later the IJsselmeer). While originally an exotic textile it was soon adapted, and is nowadays seen as an icon of Dutch identity, much like the white and blue Delft earthenware, which is originally based on Chinese porcelain. A contemporary use of chintz within a Dutch context can be found in the designs by Dutch fashion brand Oilily (Arts, 2010, pp.50-68).

# Bespoke as the Staging of a Garment: a Contemporary Roman Case Study

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Pascal Gautrand

INSTITUT FRANÇAIS DE LA MODE, PARIS, FRANCE

## Abstract

Rome is the political, legal and diplomatic heart of Italy with a high concentration of male government employees, lawyers and diplomats. This has led to the city developing a local system of made to measure suits and shirts in addition to the international ready-to-wear market.

Paradoxically, observing the local particularities and traditional Roman values can be a source of renewal for contemporary fashion design.

It so happens that local, regional or national particularities are generally linked to the historical and contemporary way of producing and acquiring garments. As such, a particular point in space, such as a city, can produce a diachronic series. So my study will concentrate on the city of Rome –where I was resident at the Villa Médicis in fashion design for a year– on the political, legal and diplomatic heart of Italy with a high population of politicians, government employees, lawyers and diplomats. In today's world, these professions require suits and shirts that correspond to very precise codes and are worn by a multitude of working men. So Rome has developed a local system of made-to-measure men's shirts and suits in addition to the international ready-to-wear system. In 2010 over 230 such places were listed<sup>1</sup> which means a large swathe of the male population have retained a taste for bespoke garments. Far from carrying out a complete analysis of a local fashion micro system, this paper will cover the point of view of one particular way of approaching fashion and clothes with regard to heritage-based particularities. How can fashion design renew itself inside this relatively restrictive Roman framework?

On a historical level, when we observe the contemporary western fashion system, it tends to mainly valorise the aesthetic and the creative. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the fashion system relied on a direct relationship between the client and the manufacturer: local seamstresses abounded along with women who knew how to sew and made garments for the whole family. The number of locations and the omnipresence of the producers of the work made the activity and a certain culture of manufacturing extremely visible in society at large. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the huge industrial and marketing progress that occurred in the clothing sector brought the idea of design and the figure of the designer to the fore as the main values of a brand. As a result, fashion moved from being manufacturing-based to being image-based, from the production of objects to the production of brands, from the real to signs. In Europe, the movement of production overseas has made the stages involved in production practically invisible to the consumer. Design and aesthetics have become the main components in the fashion system, leaving little space for the values linked to manufacturing and the techniques involved in producing garments.

On the other hand, one of the interesting points that comes from the examination of the particular case of “work clothes” is the basic primordial issue of their functional nature. The importance of this notion leads to the design, trend or style aspects of the work garment finding themselves relegated to a supporting role. So this notion of permanence in the work garment means we can observe and isolate certain issues that are also true for fashion garments. Style and design include just as many issues linked to the oscillations between the unique and the collective, between the individual and the group, between the exception and the norm, between the one-off piece and the mass-produced, between craftsmanship and industry. However, to a certain extent, heritage seems to be well placed to re-inject some uniqueness to a system that is largely dominated by mass-production.

## *Keywords*

Bespoke garment  
Manufacturing  
Personalization  
Masculinity  
Standardization  
Craftsmanship

During my time as resident in the “fashion design” section at the Villa Médicis in Rome, in 2008-2009, I took a keen interest in what is behind this huge trend for unique garments. In order to illustrate this I will base my analysis on an experiment developed in collaboration with the local hand-made fabric manufacturers, which produced a sort of map of skills that in turn became the exhibition *When in Rome, do as Romans do* that was presented at the Valentina Moncada gallery in January 2009 as part of Rome’s fashion week.

With the aim of establishing a parallel between the local system –based on the manufacturing of unique pieces– and the international retail distribution system, I came up with an exhibition project that entailed having thirty Roman tailors of bespoke shirts “copy” a mass-produced shirt from Zara the most standardized product available – both in terms of the product but also in terms of the stores that sell them. It was a cotton blue and white striped men’s shirt, a traditional, relatively timeless model that has been around for over fifty years and will probably be still around in fifty year’s time! It is an industrially produced shirt that is sold all over the world in huge quantities in a chain of stores that even standardise their points of sale: the perfect example of the current fashion system, based on low production costs and a maximum retail capacity on an international scale. The high level of internationalisation in fashion leaves little room these days for the idea of local particularities or a culture of manufacturing.

On the contrary, the system of the Roman tailors relies on the direct retail relationship between manufacturer and client; I was interested in highlighting those particular values by inviting thirty Roman tailors to “re-make” the same shirt. So thirty unique pieces were made each characterising each tailor’s own culture, not to promote their own design skills or creativity as it was a question of “copying” a precise model, but more to display the particularity that the skills of each tailor imprinted on the shirt that made each product unique. As a result, the same object, made by thirty different people, is still a different object, even if the aesthetics are the same. In addition, the installation of the thirty shirts was accompanied by a series of video portraits of men, each of whom told a story about a shirt. This set up, besides the invisible values linked to the manufacturing of the garment, underlined the idea of the appropriation of the garment by each client-consumer. The idea was to show how a standard shirt can become a good-luck charm or an object that projects values that go beyond the aesthetic, values that are invisible to others but that –for those of us who create that particular link and the projections on to the garment– change the meaning and value of the object.

Rome may not be a fashion capital –in the same way as Paris, Milan, New York or London– but it is unquestionably the political capital of Italy. It is the country’s legal, diplomatic and aristocratic centre that at the same time includes many professional congregations that are obliged to dress themselves in a classic, even traditional manner. Why then, in the eyes of the client, would a bespoke shirt be more singular than a ready to wear shirt? There are doubtless a number of reasons. The very act of having a shirt made to measure supposes an arbitrage between personal choice and the obligation to belong to a group when the time comes to choose one’s tailor. The share of personal expression relies first of all on the choice of fabric, colour, motif and details such as the type of collar, its rigidity, the shape of the cuffs or the different types of buttons and buttoning options. Through the choice and enumeration of his own taste, the level of implication on the part of the client in the creation of the garment is obvious. The fact that the client is ordering a product that doesn’t exist yet confers a greater responsibility on the client in terms of design, unlike the ready to wear system where the onus is on the brand, the designer or the couturier and his team. Involvement on this level inevitably changes the client’s perception of his own shirt. In fact, in Italy the concept of the Latin term *ad personam*<sup>2</sup> is very present. The term is often used in everyday language or in the press, not merely to define a political stance; it is also frequently found in presentation brochures or on the Internet sites of Italian tailors who provide a made to measure service.

Beyond personal aesthetic preferences, the personalisation of the made to measure shirt also occurs through the application of the client’s initials. According to a frequent custom in Rome, men have their initials stitched on the left side of the shirt. They can be placed elsewhere, on the cuffs or on the collar. Choice is expressed through the thread used, its level of contrast with the fabric of the shirt, and the type of characters used: capitals, lower case, straight or in italics. This factor is crucial in terms of self-presentation but also in terms of the position one adopts relative to the group one belongs to, or, on the contrary, the group one wishes to be differentiated from. In Milan in the eighties for example, ambitious young men had their initials often stitched very obviously on the collars of their shirts. Their symbolic importance is such that tailors often offer to stitch them by hand even if the rest of the shirt is entirely machine-sewn. It is as if the most obvious reflection of the client’s personality on the shirt must imperatively be the result of the most “human” part of the manufacturing process.



In addition to the degree of representation and self-valorisation, for the client, having a shirt made to measure also represents the notion of belonging to a group. First of all the very product in question, the shirt, is a veritable archetype of male clothing, in as much as it expresses the passage to adulthood and the representation of masculinity. As such, when a young man turns eighteen, he is often given the gift of a made to measure shirt by his loved ones. So having a garment made is almost a ritual or a rite of passage. As for the representation of masculinity, I can quote a story told to me by one of the tailors. It was about a police woman who came to have her work shirts made to measure as her male colleagues had theirs done at the same tailor. And while salaries in general are not very high in Rome, she insisted on only wearing made to measure shirts at 100 or 120 Euros each under her uniform... Having her shirts made to measure was also doubtless a means for the policewoman to compete with her male colleagues on an even playing field by joining the "club who wear made to measure shirts, made by this tailor". In other cases, the colours and choice of fabric, types of stripes are often also used to show one's membership of a particular political party. In the same way that the a tie of a certain colour can also make a political reference, these extremely traditional garments use numerous symbols that are not written down but that nonetheless exist and project the idea of belonging to a group.

I should point out that word of mouth is essential in this system as it doesn't rely on marketing or advertising. When one knows a good tailor, one passes on the information only to colleagues or people one likes. As a result a system has developed that is not unlike that of private clubs, to the extent that certain tailors I approached to make a shirt and take part in this exhibition did not wish to take part and above all wished to avoid any kind of publicity or even to avoid any confusion with the thirty other tailors. Their usual clients are often made up of politicians and international businessmen whose custom enables the tailor to fill his orders and leaves no room for new clients. These boutiques are often invisible from the street and are not in either the yellow pages or on the Internet, they represent the marketing antithesis of the average ready to wear chain that searches for the best sales zone with the most footfall and the highest possible level of visibility through advertising.

The manufacturing process is very often invisible in the contemporary fashion system. When the client walks in to a ready to wear store the product is already there, most often the result of overseas production. One doesn't know where it was made, some "made in" labels indicate the origin of the product in a very vague manner –and at times are completely false. For all of these reasons, it is quite difficult to get a real idea of the manufacturing and work involved. Both the manufacturing and the human input to that manufacturing are major components of the design of these garments, most often ignored by current brands. In fact, this local micro-system relies on the handing down of skills, on heritage and the notion of family to which Romans and Italians in general are much attached. Until now, all of these points work in favour of the continuation of a system that has almost disappeared everywhere else in Europe. Most of the tailors I met with in Rome are tailors from father to son for many generations often in the same location with the same skills and a clientele that is also passed down from one generation to another. This entails an emotional attachment to the work that can be felt, it is symbolically very important for tailors to practice and maintain the profession of their ancestors. This is becoming an issue today in as much as the younger generation do not have the same emotional ties to the job and sometimes finding someone to take over the business is not easy.

The idea of manufacturing is also extremely important for tailors as it is handed down orally from father to son, from master to student. For example, when his parents died, one of the tailors I met inherited a ground-floor shop and a basement workshop. His first reaction was to break with tradition and so he decided to modernise everything. He went to Ikea to buy office furniture: a mixture of "fake black wood" melamine panels with smoky glass and brushed aluminium. Once the store was refurbished, he soon found it impossible to be both in the workshop and the store as he took care of both the shirt cutting and the customers. So to solve the problem he set up a big plank of chipboard on a table in the centre of the store, totally out of keeping with the sparse Ikea look of the furniture and that is where he now cuts the shirts for his clients. In doing so and in a completely involuntary and unthinking manner, he shifted manufacturing right into the centre of the point of sale, by pure necessity. His initial wish to have a fashionable, modern store meant the type of furniture he chose had a certain neutrality to it, but at the same time, his almost emotional attachment to both manufacturing and customer relations (the two mainstays of his profession), meant he had to make some awkward modifications to his space, thereby proving the importance of the visibility of manufacturing in this system.

The idea of handmade garment and specifically things that are "made in Italy", are a question of national pride in Italy, much more than in France. When one lives in Italy, it is common to hear the expression

“made in Italy” every day. This subject is in the news at the moment as a law<sup>3</sup> has just been gone through to control fake labels and to give a real value to the term “made in Italy”, as it has been tarnished by the scandals of the clandestine Chinese workshops in the Prato and Naples regions and imported Asian products with fake “made in Italy” labels.

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To conclude, it is easy to believe that all of the elements that make up the links between the client and his garment, between the tailor and the garment he makes and between the client and the tailor, contribute to the “design” of the garment and the choice of tailor. Whether they come from one’s own personality or narcissism, from one’s relationship with the social environment or the local manufacturing culture, these elements are added on as an extra layer to the garment, not a visible layer –the aesthetic is untouched– but symbolically to the extent that they transform the perception the client has of the garment. The translation of these elements into the contemporary fashion field would doubtless be an efficient means to bring some meaning back to the international fashion system and to ready to wear brands who only very rarely take these values into account. But how is it possible to introduce non industrial, truly singular actions to a milieu that is completely industrialised from manufacturing to advertising?

### Notes

1. *Un guide sur mesure. Rome, 239 lieux de la Capitale où l’homme peut se faire réaliser vêtements et accessoires sur mesure (A made to measure Guide. Rome, 239 places in the Capital where a man can have clothes and accessories made to measure)*, by Andrea Spezzigu and Pascal Gautrand, introduction by Silvia Venturini Fendi, Palombi Editori, 2010 (The Italian and English versions have already been published, the French version is in the works).
2. Latin term: that which addresses the private individual, that which comes from his private life.
3. The “Reguzzoni-Versace” n.55 law of April 8<sup>th</sup> 2010, unanimously voted by the Italian parliament, forbids the use of the label “Made in Italy” on textiles, shoes and leather goods whose different production stages have not occurred for the most part in Italy. At least two of the following must take place in Italy: thread-milling, weaving, dye-finishing and manufacturing.

# The Role of Luxury Fashion in Reviving Heritage Fashion Arts. An Indian Perspective

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Meenakshi Sehgal

INDIAN RETAIL SCHOOL, NEW DELHI, INDIA

## Abstract

Pre-independence India was used as a dumping ground for machine made textiles causing the traditional art and weaving to fade away because of a lack of jobs for the great weavers and artisans; effectively, causing the indigenous textile trade to diminish. The onset of globalization in the 1970s brought India's tryst with luxury brands like Chanel, LVMH and Burberry inspiring young designers to create fashion different to what people were wearing at the time. Their interest led to a gradual revival of Indian weaves, prints, embroidery and patterns. To understand this relationship between luxury and heritage revival, from an Indian perspective, this paper first reviews their historical association. Using interviews we then explore the challenges faced by the Indian designers to revive the various traditional garments when the craftsmen were merely handful. This background, along with sales data from modern day textile companies, helps us examine the role of the Trickle-down Theory in revival of heritage via the luxury route. We observe that though luxury inspires a revival of heritage, due to the application of the Trickle-down Theory the non-luxury fashion segment presents a number of innovations within the traditional garb in order to stay competitive in the market. We also discover that new entrants into the fashion industry commonly use the heritage route to establish a foothold in the marketplace.

## Introduction

Everyone aspires to acquire luxury items since these are unique and rare, but it can be argued that since culture creates heritage it is already quite common. This approach makes it appear as though luxury and heritage do not share a relationship since one is a rare object of desire, while the other is readily available. Furthermore, there exist many definitions for both terms, which further blur the obvious relationship between them. It is, as such, important to derive accurate definitions of luxury and heritage, which in turn would highlight the close relationship between these, something, which is not immediately evident.

While defining luxury appears to be a simple task, the plethora of explanations for this concept makes it quite complex. The root of the term, Latin words "Luxus" and "Luxuria" as in words of Roux and Floch contribute towards the genesis of the word "luxury", that which involves an indulgence of the senses (Stegemann, 2006). However, even the root of this term makes it difficult to define what luxury is for few and more importantly for some, what it is not?

Dictionaries often equate luxury with extravagance, opulence and rankness (University of Notre Dame, n.d). While, Roux and Floch (Stegemann, 2006) say that luxury is about pleasure, refinement, perfection and rarity, as well as appreciation, but not necessarily price. As such, luxury can commonly be defined through very limited supply and recognition of value. However, luxury is also an evolving and subjective concept since it is primarily built on consumer perceptions, as the meaning of luxury is determined by personal and impersonal motives (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004). Most importantly, this word is used to express an inessential but desirable item or a state of extreme comfort or indulgence.

Even with the many approaches to defining luxury presented before, the most useful and accurate definition of luxury comes from Dubois, Laurent and Czeller (2001). The authors propose a definition based on the nature and characteristics of the concept of luxury. They highlighted six identifying facets of

## *Keywords*

Cultural Attrition  
Luxury  
Heritage,  
Fashion  
Trickle-down Theory and  
Revival

luxury; namely, 1) excellent quality, 2) very high price, 3) scarcity and uniqueness, 4) aesthetics and polysensuality, 5) ancestral heritage and personal history, and 6) superfluosity.

Though the luxury fashion is normally associated with creativity, exclusivity, craftsmanship, precision, high quality, innovation and premium pricing, this means whenever we talk of luxury our historical heritage cannot be forgotten. Defining heritage is as slippery as the precise meaning of luxury. But, perhaps, Karl Lagerfeld (Menkes, 2010) comes nearest to explaining the link to a modern brand's history, indirectly the heritage. He takes as his mantra for ever-updating Chanel the words of the German writer and poet Goethe: "Make a better future by developing elements from the past."

For Mary-Adair Macaire, Chief Executive Officer of Pringle of Scotland, a brand's history is about both products and concepts (Menkes, 2010). "Heritage is all about the physical artifacts and intangible attributes which connect the brand to its past", Ms. Macaire said. In the same spirit Diego Della Valle, Chairman of Tod's says, "The heritage of a high-quality product lies in the focus on the production process, in the knowledge of the artisans, which usually is passed from father to son." (Menkes, 2010) As such, luxury-heritage products can be looked at as unique high-quality goods, often of high value, designed and produced by the ancestral knowledge of artisans, influenced by history, to enchant our senses. India, a diverse land, is a mosaic of faith, culture, customs and languages that blend harmoniously to form a composite whole, a perfect stage for rich traditions and heritage of fine craftsmanship and creativity. Modern India has seen a revival of its ancient heritage and traditions and also an influx of high-end international luxury brands like Chanel, Cartier, LVMH, and Burberry. However, the great economic diversity in consumer base means that while a certain economic strata routinely patronize high-end brands, for another section a visit to McDonalds or Costa Coffee is luxury.

As such, luxury and heritage play a unique role in this developing nation to drive the wheels of fashion. Since fashion and luxury are closely related to our heritage, as defined before, this paper provides insights into the unique Indian perspective on the relationship of luxury and heritage. A review of the historical association between fashion and luxury in India is discussed to provide a background context. We then explore the influence of luxury brands on Indian designers and their role in indirectly stemming a revival of the Indian heritage arts.

Further, the effect of Indian designers on reviving heritage and traditions in the mass market, through the application of the trickle-down theory will be discussed. In the end, we summarize the paper with an overview of luxury in India.

## Literature Review

### Historical Background

There is a myth that the maharajas of pre-independence India were the first ones to discover luxury. This perception, however, is not true. Indian history, dating back to 5000 years (Jaitly, 1990), is replete with numerous stories of the higher classes, the noble and royalty, and their love for quality desirable objects, something that can now be referred to as Luxury. Richly embroidered clothes worked on with gold thread and precious stones, caps, jackets, waistcoats and turbans to match, formed a trend that came in with the slave dynasty in the 10<sup>th</sup> century (Jaitly, 1990). This trend was carried forward by the Mughals, and has continued well into pre-independence times and even today's India

During ancient times, weavers produced weaves for temple complexes, fabrics to garb the idols, drape as curtains, and clothes for priests, thereby making temples the centre of attraction. These weavers also catered for trade from across the seas (Jaitly, 1990).

Each state and region in India offers indigenous weaves and designs based on the cultural, religious and social needs of the area and also the existing climate and environment. During the Mughal period, hundred of weavers were kept busy weaving brocades and the finest of muslins for the nobility. The embroidered textiles not only adorned the nobility at the Mughal courts but also the carved stone halls of the highly decorated living areas of the palaces. The Mughals introduced the famous "Kani" shawls of Kashmir, a prime example of luxurious textile, to the world. It is a known fact that Napoleon's wife and Empress Josephine between themselves owned almost four hundred of these fabulous and highly expensive "Cashmere" Shawls (Jaitly, 1990).

In each era, conquest and travel brought enrichment to the repertoire of the weavers. Marco Polo, who had travelled to India in the 13th century, was spellbound by embroidered leather. Other European travellers from the same era had also commented positively on the high quality of Indian embroidery. It is thus evident that though traditional art, weaves and embroidery existed in India from times immemorial, it was exclusive, expensive and restricted only to the rich and elite thereby classifying it as luxury (Crill, 1999).

Arrival of the East India Company saw temples of India fading as the weavers' focal point. Weavers and the merchants vied with each other to obtain contracts from the company that demanded perfect repetition of designs rather than specialized skill and creativity. Machine made copies of "Kani", the destruction of the Indigo plantations and the end of the privileges—both social and economic, pushed the Indian weavers into a pathetic state or almost oblivion (Jaitly, 1990). This was the beginning of the end of Indian traditional weaves, creativity, embroidery and patterns.

It is thus seen that fashion and luxury existed in India many centuries ago. The British, during their reign in India almost crippled this handicraft, as they had to find an international market for their products due to industrial and cotton revolution. Most of the Indian embroidery that has survived is from either the rural domestic traditions or from urban workshops. Both traditions are still evident in India today (Crill, 1999). During the Indian freedom struggle of early and mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, late Mahatma Gandhi effectively revived the spirit and tradition of Indian handloom weavers and spinners by converting the art of spinning and weaving into a political weapon against the British to press for self reliance and independence. This marked the, politically motivated, revival of traditional weaving and spinning (Jaitly, 1990). Of course, luxury fashion would bolster this revival in the coming decades.

### Resurgence of Indian Heritage

Globalization, open economies, foreign direct Investments and international relations have made today's society internationally connected. Both, the print and electronic media, easy and open availability of international magazines and increase in general awareness via the Internet are assisting the present generation in following international fashion closely.

During this time, a small group of like-minded Indians who had benefitted from unique opportunities of international study and travel began to see the depth of Indian craft and design heritage. They rediscovered a reservoir of delicate skills, however, this had to be nurtured and brought back to life. In an attempt to merge their international experiences and Indian skills, this like-minded fraternity came to the conclusion that contemporary designers must revitalize their own roots and identities. This was essential if Indian creativity was to be taken out into the world in a way that benefitted both the craftsmen and the modern consumer.

Ritu Kumar is an excellent example of this revival process. She, along with a few others, three decades ago, became India's leading designers of garments, fabrics and accessories. Her forte is traditional Indian clothes that draw heavily on the textile and embroidery heritage of India. Kumar, who is a pioneer in reviving Indian traditions and heritage has pioneered the term Fashion in the Indian context, and more importantly has demonstrated that handmade products can not only be profitable but more glamorous than those made by machine (Zwaag, 2005).

1970's witnessed the rising of young men and women who were strongly motivated to create clothes very different from what most people were wearing at that time. But there is no denying that James Ferreira, Bina Ramani, Rohit Khosla, Hemant Trivedi, and Xerxes Bhatena were the forerunners. Each of them has made a very definite contribution in bringing design sensibility back to Indian clothes and in turn inspired future generations to take up design as a full time vocation. Another big impact on the contemporary Indian fashion scene was the setting up of the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) in 1986 under the umbrella of the Government of India, Ministry of textiles. Though it was meant to educate and produce professionals for the fashion world, it has been more successful in creating fashion designers (Boroian, 2010).

Indian designers have been on a mission to revive the fading Indian traditions, art and culture. Sabyasachi, one of them, has been working to popularize the sari and its various forms by recreating the magic of Patolas, Kalamkari and Khadi drapes. He experiments with weaves and textures that gel with the cocktail circuit. He believes that when one draws from culture, creativity comes straight from heart and the mind naturally follows the heart. As a designer, he helps people connect with their roots. (Bajpai, 2010).

While Kumar and Sabyasachi have been working on revival of textiles and different costumes, Rohit Bal, having introduced the gold leaf prints from the Mughal era and 'Ajrak' (the art of textile dying and printing) is rooted to craft in terms of technique. He is now putting his weight behind Kashmiri embroidery. "I plan to go back to my native place in Kashmir and work with the craftsmen there. There's so much to draw inspiration from," says Rohit who is known for mixing and matching Indian sensibilities with international designs. "The trick lies in cutting edge, yet classic, designs that can survive fashion seasons," he says (Bajpai, 2010).

Today's young designers like Samant Chauhan and Nitin Bal Chauhan are joining the revolution and started on the path of revival in 2003. Nitin explores the heritage of his native state, Himachal Pradesh in North India, and concentrates mainly on Himachali weaves and embroideries. They have contemporized the Chambal embroidery with chic chappals, bags and photo frames. Their idea is to lend a global appeal to Indian heritage. Similarly Anand Kabra admired the exquisite Kalamkari designs from the coastal Andhra Pradesh. After he became a designer, he realized that the craftsmen from Southern India needed to innovate their craft if they wanted buyers. He got the artists to make prints on fabrics and sarees (Pret Patriotism, 2010).

In India, high-end fashion implies bridal wear. Designers like Tarun Tahiliani, JJ Valaya, Rohit Khosla, Abu Jani and many more have championed the cause of "Indian couture". Their trademark is the use of traditional crafts, colors, and embellishments on predominantly Indian silhouettes. They are particularly popular for their elaborate wedding clothes (Boroian, 2010). Table 1 provides an overview of Indian designers practicing in different categories.

Bernard Barber (1957) depicted a 'trickle-down' theory of fashion as a symbol of social class whilst Gabriel Trade (1903) outlined a theory of imitation. Rene Konig (1973) emphasized the displacement of sexual urge and Herbert Blumer (1969) formulated a theory of collective selection. However, each of these theories ultimately fails to provide a definitive account of the processes shaping the many vicissitudes and disparate progressions of contemporary fashion innovation (Fashion Worlds n.d., para 5, 2000) Today, the fashion world is fast changing. Historically, Couture was only for the rich and affluent people, and the Indian designers also catered to this small segment of society. But even though the aforementioned theories fail to provide a comprehensive picture of fashion innovation, it is undeniable that couture influences high street as well. As with most industries, fashion needs innovation to survive and prosper; innovation relies on the inventive and original ideas of designers to prompt change, and change is what keeps the market healthy and interested. Inventive and original designs need the hotbed environment of the highest level and couture to nurture its experiments. The second level, ready to wear, although also inventive and original, relies on couture to 'soften up' the market and translate avant-garde notions into a truly marketable product.

The aforementioned theories are combined with the historical perspective presented to postulate a theory of relationship between the couture and high street fashion in reviving ancient ethnic arts. In the following sections interviews and sales data are used to analyze the market from a current perspective.

### Research Methodology

This paper is based on exploratory research and the data collection tools are Primary and Secondary data. An interaction with leading Indian designers through personal interviews and through a questionnaire was also undertaken.

For Primary data collection and to ensure an authentic and recent perspective in to Indian luxury fashion, five designers who had been in the industry for the last few decade and also some young designers were personally interviewed. As the respondents were highly literate and the topic was sensitive the questions asked to the individuals were loosely structured using a high degree of flexibility methods to obtain valuable new insights on the issue.

Vinod Kaul, the founder Executive Director of Fashion Design Council of India (FDCI), a forum which works towards promoting the interests of India as a country and markets the individual designers supporting their endeavors to enter main stream fashion, stated that, "In India, couture is more understood as bridal collections. Since there was big money in the bridal collections, most of the designers stuck to this form of fashion and this way they also contributed in preserving the Indian traditional weaves, designs and embroideries." He further stated that, "A handful number of designers call themselves 'revivalists' as they focused on the knowhow and expertise in developing the dying Indian heritage. They popularized and commercialized their work by bringing in sensibility of design, creativity and innovativeness, yet preserving the old traditional craftsmanship." He named Vidhi Singhania and Muzzaffar Ali as the pioneers in this field (V. Kaul, personal communication, November 2010).

Taking a lead from Kaul's views, Vidhi Singhania was contacted. Singhania stated, "I work out of Kota in Rajasthan and endeavour to revive an ancient art, better the lives of hundreds of families of weavers (approx 300) by keeping their looms busy, giving them designs, colour, quality inputs and marketing facilities." She said, "I focus on reviving, protecting and contemporizing designs to make a fashion statement which would last for many years. My passion is for Kota Sarees and I try to rejuvenate the art of weaving." In her quest to revive and retain different forms of Indian heritage she has now moved to Varanasi and Chanderi, adding variance to her collection. She further stated that, "Indian heritage is strong and every state offers a rich treasure of textiles, weaves, patterns, embroidery. So much so, many

international brands, including luxury brands, draw inspiration from India. For example, French luxury brand Hermes recently showcased a collection of Sarees." On asking her of the challenges she faces, she said, "Commitment to quality vis-à-vis time is my main challenge. Then is the protection of intellectual property rights (copyright)." To substantiate this she said, "While I am working on my weaves for a certain fixed number of pieces, the designs get stolen and find their way into the market before my collection. My other challenges are that the dyeing techniques used in the interiors are not sophisticated; and the metal (silver) prices have gone up. As we use lot of silver in our designs (Zari) the cost of individual product shoots up" (V. Singhanian, personal communication, November 2010).

Madhu Jain, who also can be called a revivalist, when contacted, shared similar views as Singhanian. However she mentioned that one of the challenges in reviving ethnic art was that the artisans were not paid well and thus unwilling to do supreme quality work. In her words this back-to-roots movement is gaining momentum, though the industry is not sure about its sustainability. She also stated that there was demand of prêt line by the mass department stores like Shoppers Stop, Westside and Lifestyle. She recently showcased to the world India's fading craft traditions and old textiles woven in as many as 25 panels put together to create a 110 foot high and 40 inches wide tree trunk in the Delhi Commonwealth Games. Nearly 300 weavers, 500 craftsmen and 200 artisans worked for over three months to create the 'tree of knowledge'. She said, "This will further interest and create a demand for Indian craft products in the global market and help promote Brand India. It will also provide sustainable livelihood to weavers and rural textile craftsmen" (M. Jain, personal communication, November 2010).

Another sect of designers also uses the traditional weaves and designs, but they buy the weaves and fabrics from intermediaries. Manoviraj stated in his interview, "I use traditional fabric from Bihar which I procure from local dealers and style it in western designs" (Manoviraj, personal communication, November 2010). Other designers like Rohit Gandhi and Rahul Khanna, Ashima and Leena Singh, Poonam Bhagat, Manju Bobby Grover and Anjana also follow a similar approach.

Joseph Sam, the ex CEO of Rohit Bal, when interviewed, had contradicting views. He said, "This is not a revival. Actual revival will take place when the corporates step into fashion industry of ready-to-wear. Raymonds tried this concept through their brand 'BE'. In their perception the luxury hinted at in these ready-to-wear lines came through the limited editions of the constantly changing collections." In Sam's understanding though the 'BE' clothes were labeled 'ready-to-wear' but the prices were closer to those for diffusion wear (J. Sam, personal communication, November 2010). As such, 'BE' did not succeed in their efforts. Kaul had also shared similar views in his interview and had felt that for continued sustainability this was possible if a foreign brand got associated with this concept, which was a distinct possibility in the future.

Approximately 74 designers were also contacted to obtain their views through a questionnaire sent via emails and personal interaction. An analysis of the answers provided by the 32 respondents is shown in Figures 1 and 2 (all figures can be found at the end of this paper). The questionnaire is attached in the Annexure.

In all cases, the designers accepted that their work reflected the use of traditional textiles, weaves, patterns and embroideries. In their opinion there was a revival of Indian traditional work and demand had increased in the last decade or so. They also felt that weddings were highly instrumental in reviving the traditional work and the market had a bright future. They were also asked as to what segment of society they were targeting. A summary of their views is as depicted in the Figure 2.

It is evident from the above analysis that 75% of the designers cater for all the segments and 25% for both, high and the middle-income groups. None of them cater only for the middle and masses, i.e. Pret collections.

The Secondary data collection tool was used to study the market share of men's and women's wear segments. Quantitative and qualitative data was used to understand the growth patterns in both categories. Break-up of men's wear category wise, i.e. ethnic wear, was unavailable. However, figures for women's ethnic wear were available and are discussed below. Women's wear segment comprises of 32.2% share of the Indian apparel market. This share has grown steadily since 2005. In 2009 it grew 13.7% in Value and 4.8% in Volumes, as shown in Figure 3.

Valued at INR 190.4 Billion (Bn) the Saree market recorded 6.5% growth in volume and 11.9% growth in Value in 2009. It is the Super Premium and Premium Segments that have experienced highest growth in 2009, as compared to previous year. In both, the Super Premium and Premium ranges, Saree Value growth was 25.4% and 19.9% and Volume growth was 14% and 10% respectively, as also shown in Figure 4(a). This growth contributes towards the traditional and ethnic wear sales (Sarees), which are part of Indian luxury brands.

Women's ethnic Salwar Kameez sales have increased from 2094 Bn units in 2008 to 2339 Bn units in 2009, the growth rate being 11.7% in 2009 as compared to 2.9% in 2008. The women's ethnic Salwar suit market was worth INR 116.6 Bn in 2009, which was a growth of 14.2% over the INR 102.1 Bn market size in 2008. Value growth was highest in the Super Premium range (36.9%), which resulted from a 10% growth in average selling price and 25% growth in Volume sales in 2009. However, the Premium range has shown a Volume and a Value growth of 18% and 22.7% respectively, as shown in Figure 4(b). In both the cases of Sarees and Salwar Suits, which show a phenomenal growth in volumes, the spurt has been due to the revival of the traditional and ethnic weaves, textiles and embroidery by the designers who have presented it in an innovative and creative manner. This is also attributed to the fact that the lower end spectrum of society is also adopting ethnic designs spurring a large-scale revival. The statements of industry leaders, as cited below, further corroborate this phenomenon.

Having read the interviews of senior managers of leading large format stores published in various magazines and journals, personal interaction with designers and analyses of the available data it is observed that the Indian ethnic market has been seeing an upswing for the past few years. Max, the value retail arm of the Landmark group, has been seeing encouraging sales in the segment. "Women's Indian wear alone accounts for around 25% of our revenues," says Vasanth Kumar, executive director of Max. "We're now planning to introduce Sarees in our next store in Chennai." (Anand, 2010).

The Landmark Group's premium department store, Lifestyle, too has a similar story to share. "From a 30:70 ratio around two years ago, the ethnic and western wear balance now stands at 50:50 in all our stores," says Kabir Lumba, MD, Lifestyle. "Even though the average spend on western wear tends to be at least 15% higher, it's ethnic wear that drives the volumes and accounts for 20% of our sales." Lifestyle's Indian wear label, Melange, is performing so well that Lumba says they are interested in "looking at spinning it off as a bigger brand with exclusive outlets" (Anand, 2010).

While there are scores of women's western wear brands in the market, ethnic wear does not have too many brands. Industry experts, however, feel that the current spurt in sales is because the stores woke up to the potential late. Westside is among the first few players that unlocked the potential of this market. "Even for women who prefer western attire, 20-30% of their wardrobe invariably comprises Indian wear," says Gaurav Mahajan, COO of Westside (Anand, 2010). Govind Shrikhande, CEO of Shoppers Stop also supports this fact when he says, "Indian wear accounts for 25% of our sales and we're positive on this category" (Anand, 2010).

Nielsen Global Luxury Brands Study carried out in 2007 reported that 35% Indians who participated in the survey agreed to buying designer brands. This is the third highest percentage globally with Greece and Hong Kong being the first two leaders. Vatsala Pant, Associate Director, Client Solutions, The Nielsen Company, stated, "With the flourishing Indian economy and greater disposable incomes of consumers, India has become a potential hub for designer brands from across the world. The increasing experimental nature of consumers in India has also helped the fashion industry to spread its roots in the country," (Banerjee, 2008). The study revealed that if money were no object, Gucci (41%), Calvin Klein (31%), Christian Dior (26%), Versace (25%), Diesel and Giorgio Armani (22%) were the most coveted international brands among Indian consumers. The local designer brands are also popular amongst Indians with a whopping 40% of the respondents buying these brands. This is the sixth highest percentage globally for a country that buys local brands (Banerjee, 2008).

### Findings and Discussions

India has had a rich tradition of luxury. Addressed as the Golden Bird, India has experienced Maharajas and Nawabs who had refined tastes and were connoisseurs of luxury. Jacques Cartier visited India in 1911 in pursuit of fine pearls. He also persuaded a number of Maharajas to reset their jewels using Cartier designs. The necklace, created for the erstwhile Maharaja Bhupinder Singh of Patiala by the House of Cartier in 1928 is one of the most expensive pieces of jewellery ever made. Indians still have the concept of luxury connected to their lives; one would not fall short of instances, be it the luxurious Residence Antilla of Mukesh Ambani in Mumbai, or world's most expensive tie by Satyapaul (Mishra, 2010).

To maintain heritage in the form of fashion and luxury, the key is to identify, convince and respect the artisans, educate them and get the right value for their art works besides ensuring basic financial support. They should be introduced to modern techniques and computers.

The designers who took the lead about three decades ago in reviving the dying Indian traditions and art, have to now spread awareness by way of their work and pass it on to the new generation of designers. Their products have to cater for all segments of the society thereby maintaining the luxury factor for the



elite class and at the same time achieving mass circulation by targeting the other middle and lower strata through ready-to-wear collection.

Indian fabrics are good and are prepared keeping in mind the region and environment. One of the major handicaps of the Indian fabric is that it does not lend itself easily to style. The only way to make Indian fabric appealing to a larger audience is by educating craftsmen on how to make their works commercially viable and contemporary.

The growing economy is causing Indians' wallets to get thicker, allowing them to afford luxury items. This is significant because the designers have seen a growth in the demand for ethnic wear, while the luxury segment has also grown the most. This not only shows a revived interest in heritage based ethnic products amongst consumers, but also means that, if affordable, consumers will turn to luxury products. The unavailability of ethnic goods in the mass market has therefore allowed luxury fashion to spur a revival of heritage ethnic designs, not only at the artisan level, but also within the consumers' minds due to luxury being desirable. This can be substantiated by the growth in the higher segments of the market and the designers' responses confirming that they have seen an increased demand for ethnic groups.

All of this means that while the prêt market is slow to move because of the trickle down, the higher ability to spend more means that Indians are just straight shooting for the luxury products because that is the only place where the ethnic revival is available at the moment. The higher growth in the upper segment would also go on to suggest that if the prêt lines were to incorporate these much quicker, those who do not buy luxury, because they cannot afford it, would likely spur a greater growth in the lower segment as well. Not only the sales data, but also the interviews with industry experts wishing to expand their ethnic collections, absolutely confirms this finding.

## Conclusion

The research carried out and interaction with the designers indicates that the influx of international luxury and premium brands, opening of malls, distribution and price wars have made the market extremely competitive. Also, the rarity of skilled artisans is the biggest hurdle in designers' efforts to revive and popularize Indian weaves, prints, embroidery and patterns. It is even difficult to convince crafts persons that their talent could also become their source of livelihood. The designers' back-to-roots movement is gaining momentum, as shown by the increasing sales in the up-market sales. Most designers and textile historians feel the actual success of the movement can be judged only once there is enough work for every artisan in the country, as is being attempted by Vidhi and Madhu, which is directly related with the market and the buyer.

It is also felt that with the revivalists reviving the dying Indian ethnic weaves and designs, and the economy improving and stabilizing, there is a substantial growth and demand in the fashion luxury segment. If the designers associate themselves with the corporate retailers like Shoppers Stop, for the prêt lines, this segment will also show an increased demand and acceptability. This in-turn would revive the heritage in long run, thereby confirming without doubt that luxury can spur a revival of heritage throughout all segments of society.

Various leading brands like Lladro, Jaeger LeCoultre, Harry Winston, The Rose, Foevemark have special wedding lines in India. A majority of the luxury brands find the traditional wedding a great platform to shore up both equity and sales. The onset of wedding season in India, signals the season for splurging. This shows that along with the Indian brands of ethnic and traditional wear, the westerners are also looking at India as a growing market and have ventured into designing typical Indian wedding lines e.g. Hermes. To further substantiate this finding, statement of French ambassador to India Jerome Bonnafont at a luxury summit is highly relevant. He said, "because of lavish Indian weddings, media advertisements, maharajas and Bollywood stars, I feel the art of luxury is alive in India" (Pandey, 2008).

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Figure 1. An overview of the responses obtained from designers responding to email survey

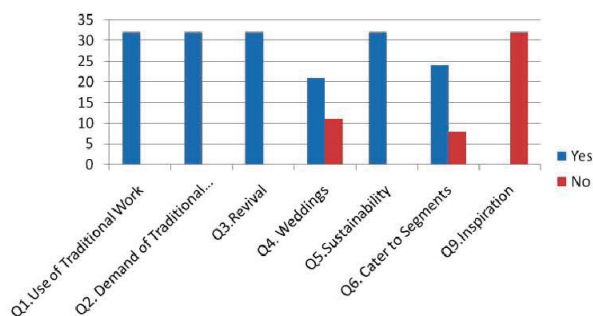


Figure 2. The segment wise purchase pattern of clients – as indicated by designers’ responses

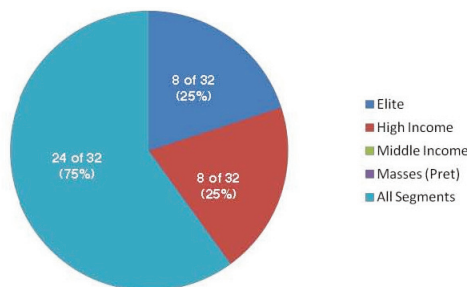


Figure 3. The growth in women's-wear segment from 2004 to 2009. (Images Year Book, 2010)

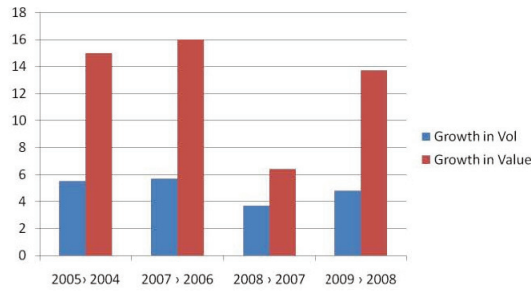


Figure 4. The growth in volume, value and average selling price, over financial year 2009, of (a) Sarees. (b) Women's ethnic salwar suits. (Images Year Book, 2010)

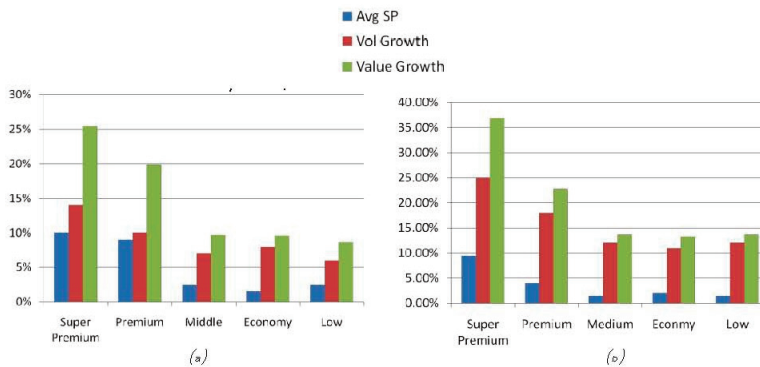


Table 1  
Designer Category List (Boroian and Poix, pp.242-243, 2009)

Design Category	Trademarks	Designers
Old guard (Classical Indian)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Use of traditional crafts, colors and embellishments on predominantly Indian silhouettes</li> <li>- Elaborate wedding clothes</li> <li>- Responsible for updating ethnic fashion</li> <li>- Influence from the Mughal period</li> </ul>	Tarun Tahliani, Rohit Bal, JJ Valaya, Ritu Kumar, Abujani, Sandeep Khosla
Old Guard (Avant Garde)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Non typical Indian designs, focused on fusion or Western wear, no embellishments</li> <li>- Asymmetrical cuts, surface texturing, drapes, pin-tucks and pleats</li> <li>- Influences from Belgium and Japan</li> </ul>	Rajesh Pratap Singh, Ashish Soni, Abraham and Thakore, Narendra Kumar, Shahab Durazi, Wendell Rodricks
Neo Revivalists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reinvention of ethnic India by giving contemporary spins to very traditional handicrafts and appropriating Indian drapes and silhouettes for western clients</li> <li>- Influenced by Dries van Noten and Marni</li> </ul>	Sabyasachi, Anamika Khanna, Anupama Dayal
Modern India (Street Influence)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Channeling street influences, multi cultural mythologies, popular cinema, and changing identities</li> <li>- Freshness, innovation, and wit brought into their designs</li> </ul>	Manish Arora, Gaurav Gupta, Aki Narula, Nandita Basu
Modern India (Contemporary Indo-western)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Western designs incorporating a modern Indian touch</li> <li>- Flexible silhouettes</li> </ul>	Rohit Gandhi, Varun Bahl, Sonam Dubal, Payal Jain, Gauri and Nanika, Karan, Rina Dhaka, Monisha Jaisijng
Soft Fashion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Eco – friendly</li> <li>- Promotion of self sustaining business of fashion</li> <li>- No superficial embellishments, designs rely on techniques developed to add quirky detailing, subtle surface texturing</li> </ul>	Anshu Arora, Kiran, Dev R Nil, Varun Sardana, Samant Chauhan

Annexure

*Questionnaire Seeking Views of Designers*

You are requested to offer your views by ticking the relevant option or writing Yes or No.

Q1. Does your work reflect the use of traditional textiles, weaves, patterns and embroideries?

Yes                      No

Q2. In your view has the demand of traditional Indian work increased in the last decade or so?

Yes                      No

Q3. Do you feel that there has been a 'Revival of Indian Traditional' work?

Yes                      No

Q4. Are the Indian weddings instrumental in reviving the traditional work?

Yes                      No

Q5. Do you see a sustainable future for the traditional work in India?

Yes                      No

Q6. Does your work cater to different segments of society?

Yes                      No

Q7. Which segment of the society buys your products?

- a) Elite – Celebrities, Industrialists and Business people
- b) High – Income Group
- c) Middle Income Group
- d) Masses
- e) All mentioned above

Q.8. Which of these luxury brands you prefer?

- |                  |                   |
|------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Louis Vuitton | 6. Prada          |
| 2. Hermès        | 7. Hennessy       |
| 3. Gucci         | 8. Armani         |
| 4. Cartier       | 9. Moet & Chandon |
| 5. Chanel        | 10. Fendi         |

Q.9. Do the luxury brands inspire you in any way in your work?

Yes                      No

Q.10. Any suggestions or comments (in your own words)?

# Defining Luxury the Indian Way

Nien Siao

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PEARL ACADEMY OF FASHION, NEW DELHI, INDIA

## Abstract

In recent years the Indian middle class demographics has been growing rapidly. India has also the fastest growing population of millionaires in the world. With the new found wealth there have been changes in aspirations to acquire, to undertake experiences and indulgences. The entry of luxury brands in the country was strategized with the intent to take on this opportunity of shift in economic and aspirational paradigm. However the brands soon realized that grabbing a share of the Indian market is more difficult than anticipated. There are clear indications that luxury brands have not felt the pulse of the Indian consumers as they do not seem to understand their likes and tastes and the social, tribe, cultural and personal psyche of the Indian consumers. The luxury brands announced their presence with splashy advertising campaigns, targeting the high income, so called old money elite. But the results were poor, largely because this customer segment consists of frequent international travelers who prefer the experience of purchasing the luxury goods at the international destinations, where brands offer them wider choice, better service and more competitive pricing than what is currently available in India. Brands are now focusing on new pockets of wealth emerging in regional hubs across the country. Studies reveal that there is visible development of newly affluent tribe made up of young professionals, entrepreneurs who have the spending power but lack sufficient knowledge and awareness of luxury brands to drive significant change.

India is a land of diversity, with a multitude of cultures, languages, religions, festivals, colours and aesthetic sensibilities. The study aims at a better understanding of the differences of taste, aesthetics, perceptions and influences that eventually shape their decisions of lifestyle and consumption choices, to enable the luxury goods to make informed choices for promotion to consumers.

In the meanwhile the fashion industry in India has seen some prominent designer labels acquiring the status of luxury brands. Immense efforts by fashion councils and the fashion industry through promotions have contributed to building image of designers as larger than life role models and affirming their labels the status of aspirational luxury products. Over two decades of the Indian fashion industry the indigenous luxury brands have acquired loyal consumers forming a niche segment. There are no real figures or studies to suggest whether these two segments of luxury market are the same group. In general luxury conjures different images to different people, understood as 'hugely expensive product' by some, perceived as value of experience by others and by another lot dismissed as obscene gluttony. The objective of the paper is to study the current scenario of the Indian Fashion Designer labels which are considered luxury brands and its western luxury brands counterpart in the country. It explores the perceptions and attitudes of the Indian consumer to the word "luxury" and the concept of luxury. The research investigates awareness of the Indian consumer groups in terms of parameters that define luxury and attempts to analyse the influences of these perceptions. The study attempts to understand the perceptive values attributed to Indian and Western luxury brands and the significant parameters that are important to the luxury customers when making a buying decision. The research collected data and material from literature, internet and trade publications and obtained findings from primary research of the market and the consumer segment, both luxury consumers and non-consumers. The scope of study confines itself to apparel and fashion accessories brands located in Delhi. As in other developments, the need for clarity of an Indian luxury identity, the ways of thinking, practice and thus its outward expressions are linked to the social, cultural environment and there is certainly a need to learn afresh from an emerging, potential market. It is hoped that the results presented below will stimulate further research for a clearer understanding of Indian luxury definition, the consumer, and the Indian luxury identity.

## *Keywords*

Luxury  
Indian Luxury  
Consumer  
International Luxury  
Brands  
Luxury Products  
Indian Fashion  
Designerwear

## Introduction

The paper presents a study of the Indian luxury market and factors that make this market different from other emerging markets. With the recent economic growth it is not only the Indian middle class that is expanding but India is also slated to have the fastest growing population of millionaires in the world. The emergence of the luxury market was strategized to take on the opportunity of shift in economic and aspirational paradigm with changes in aspirations to acquire, to undertake experiences and indulgences. The international luxury brands soon realized that business in the Indian market is more difficult than anticipated. There are clear indications that for luxury industry to thrive there needs to be much more insight than marketing, for one feeling the pulse of the Indian consumers, provide for the finer nuances of localized needs and strategize keeping Indian retail environment in mind. The context of luxury products is reviewed from the viewpoint of luxury consumers and new consumers thus providing for what could be expected from the future consumers. India is land of diversity with a multitude of cultures, languages, religions, festivals, colours and aesthetic sensibilities. The study aims at a better understanding of the differences of taste, aesthetics, perceptions and influences that eventually shape their decisions of lifestyle and consumption choices, to enable the luxury goods to make informed choices for promotion to consumers.

The objective of the paper is to study the current scenario of the Indian Fashion Designer labels considered luxury brands and its western luxury counterpart in the country. It explores the perceptions and attitudes of the Indian consumer to the word "luxury" and the concept of luxury. The research investigates awareness of the Indian consumer groups in terms of parameters that define luxury, perceive values attributed to luxury brands, the influences of these perceptions and the significant parameters that are important to the luxury customers when making a buying decision and.

## Background

The Indian luxury market, including products, services and assets currently at \$4.76 billion, small compared to global standards, is likely to grow to touch \$ 14.7 billion by 2015,( CII-A T Kearney report). India has about 1.6 million households earning over \$ 100 K (Rs. 45 lacs) or more per year, spending about \$ 9K -10K (Rs. 4 lacs) per year on luxury or very premium goods and services which is predicted to rise to about 14%. (www. citeman.com, 2010)

With an urban population of 280 millions, India has 28 million rich and upwardly mobile making up 10% of the urban population. Of these 1 million are luxury consumers, 6-7 million are very affluent, 9-10 million are mid-affluent, while another 11-12 million are the mass affluent. (Source: Technopak)

At present the Indian economy is thriving having shown its strength in the service sector, as an IT hub, as centre for research and development, as an upcoming centre for creativity, growth is predicted at 8% for the next few years. The luxury products segment has shown the strongest growth, growing at 22% despite the recession affected last two years.

Who is the luxury fashion consumer?

In this current luxury market, women are highly influential in luxury buying decisions, however in India, 60% of luxury buyers are men. The luxury consumer has evolved beyond the 'brand loyalist' to a smart and savvy discerning consumer. The current luxury consumer is highly sophisticated and brand literate. They are fashionable and aware of their tastes and preferences. Their choices of luxury products are based more on an understanding of their own style needs and less on the 'brand-name' factor. The current luxury consumer smart and intelligent, powerful, individualistic, highly demanding, has high expectations, has a disposable attitude and has strong values and principles.

## Research Method

The preliminary study draws on secondary research sources to understand the status of the Indian Luxury market. Subsequently interviews with a cross section of luxury consumers and non-consumers was undertaken to obtain their views as consumers. The participants were across demographics of men and women from 20-45 yrs. Many of the participants were still students but were identified for the study as they were seen to be consumers of luxury goods. Some were studying to be fashion designers who will go on to join the rapidly growing fashion industry aspiring for their share of pie of the luxury market while there were also fashion marketing professionals.

The research collected data and material from literature, internet and trade publications and obtained findings from primary research of the market and the consumer segment, both luxury consumers and non-consumers. The scope of study confines itself to apparel and fashion accessories brands located in Delhi.

## Findings and Discussions

### Luxury products market

The most visible segment of the luxury industry is the luxury products segment such as apparel, accessories, personal care, watches and jewellery. According to CII-AT Kearney Report the apparel segment has grown at 19% between 2007-09. The three big segments of the fashion luxury apparel market are the international branded apparel, Indian designer wear and accessories. International brands cater to the casual wear, formal western wear and accessories, while Indian designers cater to the traditional / ethnic wear market. Canali, the Italian luxury men'swear was an exception when it experimented with the Nawab Collection inspired by the rich, elegant history of the Maharajas which was a runaway success. International brands have stayed away from the Indian wear market. Though Indian designers have tried their hands at western formal and casual wear, they haven't met with too much success. Market for men constitutes about 60% of the market. Louis Vuitton, Burberry, Gucci, valentine, Zegna, Gas, Diesel, Versace, Armani, Hugo Boss, Dunhill are brands who have established shops in the five metros. Many have partnered with Indian associates such as Murjani Group, Sachdeva group, Raymonds, DLF, Genesis Colours etc. Most Indian designer brands have been mono-brands, but with Madura garments introducing The Collective a multi-brand concept, there are attempts to try out varied formats.

### Retail Space

The international brands first moved into the five star hotels when they entered the country. Slowly they migrated from the hotels to the luxury malls such as DLF Emporio in Delhi while some like Diesel have even ventured into the high street. Most Indian designers have found retail space in luxury malls. Well known designers such as Ritu Kumar and Tarun Tahiliani also retail through their stand alone stores. Retail opportunities for young designer brands are offered by multi-brand format retail outlets like Kimaaya or Ogaan, creating distribution options for individual designers.

### Luxury Promotion

With the growth of luxury market there is an emerging luxury print media with almost 60 fashion and lifestyle publications now vying for eyeballs. Fashion shows, fancy store launches events and end of season sales help create awareness and promote the luxury brands equally. FDCI, Fashion Design Council of India, the forum that promotes fashion in the country since 1998, has expanded its basket of shows from two regular seasonal ones to include fashion weeks on menswear and couture wear. In tune with the receptivity of the fashion promotion many event promoters have jumped on to the bandwagon by organizing fashion weeks in B towns across the country. In a manner these events promote fashion and luxury amongst new markets. Such an understanding creates the basis for higher aspirations.

The luxury brands announced their presence in India with splashy advertising campaigns, targeting the high income, so called old money elite. But the results were poor, largely because this customer segment consists of frequent international travelers who prefer the experience of purchasing the luxury goods at the international destinations, where brands offer them wider choice, better service and more competitive pricing than what is currently available in India. Brands are now focusing on new pockets of wealth emerging in regional hubs across the country. Studies reveal that there is visible development of newly affluent tribe made up of young professionals, entrepreneurs who have the spending power but lack sufficient knowledge and awareness of luxury brands to drive significant change.

The initial response to Zara, the affordable fast fashion brand from Spain, a premium segment brand, was very good due to the brand's high recall value and attractive price points. These indications not only affirm a latent demand for premium contemporary fashionable apparel but also inform that the Indian consumer is maturing and will slowly transit from premium to the luxury segment.

### Indian Fashion Designerwear Industry

The Indian designer wear industry estimated at US \$ 125 million is clearly accepted as the top end segment of the market. It caters to the traditional wear, sarees and designer wear segment of the market. Weddings are a once in a life events for many Indian families, not limited to the HNIs alone. Such occasions are opportunities for consumers to acquire the aspirational designer wears from luxury Indian designer wear for traditional clothing and accessories from the international brands.

It is apparent that the Indian Designer brands cannot be faulted with aesthetics that suit the Indian sensibilities. Though sensibilities may vary across the country, media promotion of the designers' works and Bollywood films are gradually influencing aesthetics, so much so that the panorama of fashion is

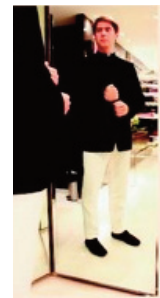


Photo  
1 Canali Nawab Collection

acquiring a cohesive silhouette. The 'anarkali' an outfit inspired from the Mughal India, more popular in north was found to be equally popular in the southern part of the country after it was worn in the Bollywood film *Ethiran*, whose hero is a super star from Tamil Nadu. Perhaps such phenomena will set the stage for a more mature fashion consumption, leading to systematic aspects that will facilitate trend forecasting and fashion distribution and logistics.

In the meanwhile the fashion industry in India has seen some prominent designer labels acquiring the status of luxury brands. Immense efforts by fashion councils and the fashion industry through promotions have contributed to building image of designers as larger than life role models and affirming their labels the status of aspirational luxury products. Over two decades of the Indian fashion industry the indigenous luxury brands have acquired loyal consumers forming a niche segment.

### Accessories

Accessories include hand bags, belts, sunglasses, wallets, luggage, cuff-links, ties etc. These products by international brands mainly meet all the criteria that the Indian consumer is looking for –Badge value, and low prices. Most luxury consumers were first initiated into the luxury buying through accessories. These were the first products bought by many young consumers for a taste of luxury experience. Accessories did not need to be customized for India hence were easier to retail and convert the consumer to higher value products. Louis Vuitton has been quite successful in establishing itself as a luxury brand in the accessories segment. The accessories segment however faces challenges of absence of multi-brand distribution options, at the same time there is easy accessibility of these products overseas.

### The Indian Luxury Consumer

The Indian consumer can be categorized over traditional and non-traditional luxury consumers, known as the new luxury consumer, (Okonkwo 2007) who desires to cherish a complete package of products and services that offer solid value through innovation and an exceptional experience in every element of the brand. The traditional luxury consumers in India such as in industrial Dynasties, who inherited old wealth understand luxury and value the heritage behind it. The Maharaja of Patiala encrusted in the Patiala Necklace made up of 2930 diamonds, commissioned in 1928, the largest single commission ever executed by Cartier at that time was the traditional image of the Indian luxury consumer (Pushpanjali Sharma). Besides there are another 8-9 million consumers who can afford luxury, but are not yet oriented to its finer points and so don't understand its value. They are not active consumers, but they do veer towards luxury. These consumers are more individualized than ever, expecting every product, service and experience to address their unique needs. India is creating a new generation of entrepreneurs, achievers and dreamers. Demographically the Indian luxury consumer is younger in age between 30-45 years, with a high number of men and women with professional qualifications. Amongst the growing affluent group, a majority of the new consumers are engaged in enterprise, the source of new money, with 20% being corporate executives, many qualifying as Gold Collars, the professionals who travel across globe for career, and the BPO generation who live for the time and express their freedom with a consumerist mind set. Only 1% comprises the traditional rich.

According to *Forbes*, India has the fastest-growing population of millionaires in the world however international luxury brands have not been very successful in establishing a niche in the Indian market. It has proven to be more difficult than anticipated. Part of the problem stems from the fact that these luxury brands don't seem to understand Indian consumers. The business of modern luxury goods, like most successful enterprises these days is all about adding value to machine-made products of the same inherent value (124. Twitchell). Following these assumptions, they created splashy advertising campaigns initially targeting the old money elite. But the results were poor, largely because this customer segment consists of frequent international travelers who overwhelmingly prefer the experience of purchasing luxury goods abroad, where brands offer them wider choice, better service and more competitive pricing than what's currently available inside India.



Photo  
1 The Maharaja of Patiala

### Indianness Surviving Globalization

Symbols of Indianness have survived globalisation, and it is this character, that has defined the preferences of the luxury shopper in the country. India's myriad traditions, religious beliefs, colourful festivals, caste and community systems along with democratic political system presents a complex maze of background that shapes an Indian consumer. In India a feudal aristocracy existed along with extreme poverty. Private enterprise was always allowed to flourish. Industrial houses were free to flourish alongside state-owned enterprises, creating a sizable vault of old money with suitable refined taste. Indian have always



placed the highest value on education, basing their caste system on the hierarchy formed by the level of education. For eg. Scholars were placed at the top of the caste system. Today India's economic resurgence is linked to knowledge –based industries, creating a segment of 'educated new money' (Chadha R, Husband P; 2006). Religion and spirituality form the core of India's daily life and is deeply ingrained in everything that dictates life. There is a lot faith in karma and there is very little that may be attributed to an individual's ambition or achievement. Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and a multitude of other religions have a following here, leading to a potpourri of festivals, customs and dress. In India luxury brands have to find a way to blend in with the milieu of local traditions. While Indians are adopting western clothing, they continue to wear ethnic outfits with a sense of pride.

According to CII-AT Kearney report the Indian Luxury consumers are HNIs earning anywhere upwards of INR 20-30 lacs (US \$ 44,000/-). While fashion awareness is rapidly getting enhanced indicated by intense interest by media, entertainment and growth of fashion retail, awareness of brands is also getting established. It was acknowledged by many respondents that planning for the first luxury buy was well thought and planned. As an aspirational target when there is a monetary value attached to it, the act of acquiring that luxury product marks an achievement of target that you have been striving for, that effort involves mental satisfaction and achievement. Luxury products are meant to be perennial with time. Possession of luxury items results in self-esteem elevation, boost self worth, any one saying otherwise are not being honest or in denial.



Source FICCI Survey on Luxury Goods and the Indian Consumer in consultation with Ogilvy & Mather

It was observed from the interviews that for many luxury consumers the first exposure to luxury was through fashion and lifestyle publication, while the experience of the first acquisition was often outside India limited to generally accessories e.g. sunglasses, handbags, watches or even jackets but never dresses. These markets were in the US, UK, Hong Kong, or Dubai, Singapore. They were also perceived as offering wider range and more variety in terms of brands and having a large customer base these markets had the privilege of retailing new collections before the Indian market. It also indicated that the luxury consumers were open to exploring new brands and were seeking buys to suit their choices.

Luxury does not seem as expensive in the US or other countries where the earning capacity and spending capacity is in proportion, whereas luxury goods may seem much more expensive when you earn in Indian rupees. Indian luxury market attracts lower tier items as it is also a market that is testing out, finding its feet. Due to Government policy, imposition of tax, luxury goods are priced at almost 35% more than the same product available elsewhere in the world. Most luxury consumers were well exposed and travelled abroad for holidays. The fashion forward group were confident of their choices in design aesthetics and could put a look together without resorting to being a fashion or brand victim. CII AT Kearney reports that well travelled luxury consumers are not averse to comparing price points with international prices yet there is an increasing trend for Indian consumers to shop within the country.



Source FICCI Survey on Luxury Goods and the Indian Consumer in consultation with Ogilvy & Mather

### Findings and Discussion

There have been a lot of speculations about where luxury industry in India is heading. A study of young consumers in the age group of 19- 25 years, the potential luxury consumers, through interviews and

discussions indicate how the Indian mind-set is working. The so called “middle-class-mind-set” a phrase that sums up the Indian approach to luxury buying gives an insight into what is important to them and what values do the youngsters bring to table.

- Longevity, exclusive characteristics and value for money, equate it to an investment that upgrades personal image and holds value in the eyes of beholder. Luxury products of high quality and design classicism that will last over longer duration. In this aspect they are willing to invest in accessories which include handbags, sunglasses etc. There is a clear opinion that fashion in garments are too time bound and when worn beyond season might display the consumers' fashion backwardness. It would not help to project their fashion prowess.
- An innate sense of value for money is observed in very young consumers who are excited by the growth of the luxury market, as it means there is something for everybody but it also empowers them to make choices and build up on their ability to be luxury consumers. There is a feeling that more brands mean more awareness and thus knowledge empowerment.
- It was observed that youngsters who were still studying were limited to aspiring for the luxury products displaying a maturity beyond their years. Responsibility towards careful buy as they were supported by parents so far was a common statement. Majority of youngsters who were students were financially dependent on parents for their academic activities, similarly for their social spending. This limited their ability to spend on 'indulgence'. However there was great optimism about their ability to earn well in their future professions and expressed aspirations to buy luxury goods for themselves and parents.
- The survey also revealed that the wait for an experience of buying luxury is something they would like to cherish in anticipation as it would be akin to achieving an aspiration.
- There is concern about whether the buy is real, as fakes are equally good and widely available, sometimes the original brands have been found to be wanting in quality. The young aspirants feel that value of luxury should also be seen by others and not just experienced by self. Lack of knowledge limits their understanding of real and fake
- There is also a concern about the image that goes along with using a luxury product as it would also require the user to dress up accordingly to carry such a product. This clearly indicates some hesitation and confidence in individual fashion statements. Over all the market and consumers need to mature and develop confidence in their fashion image projection.
- The reality of the other side of India is not far from the minds of a young consumer. Certain opinions question self indulgence and feeling greedy about it. There is a tacit feeling that luxury can best be enjoyed when the economy allows individuals to have a choice. Brands being involved in CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) are perceived as consciousness and are looked upon favourably, however it was very small group routing for this opinion.
- A large no of surveyors expressed opinion about quality of uniqueness and exclusivity for the Indian market and tastes. A normal Indian consumer is spoiled short of indulgence even in ordinary buys. The mom & pop store next door would hand deliver your groceries every day and even for a buy as small as a loaf of bread, comes rain or heat. When customized tailoring is available to all segments of the market right from tailors round the street to high-end couture brands providing exclusive service, it is no wonder that there is specific demand for products and services that are customized to individuals or groups. These unique features differentiate the Indian market from the rest of the world.
- The marketing strategies and brand promotions are sometimes seen as being aggressive in trying to attract customers. The consumer is well aware of what these are aimed at, obviously his pocket. The ambience for luxury buying can get intimidating especially for young aspirants and there is a consensus amongst the young aspirants that they would like to be shown more respect by the brands and wooed in style.
- The young consumer affirms that there is less awareness about luxury and originality and ingenuity of the product needs to be understood better. At present a luxury product is being viewed by the brain instead of the heart i.e. emotions. In this respect there are factors which give them better sense of achievement, satisfaction and well being than a luxury purchase.
- The present generation is at the transient stage of consumption and it is but natural for them to go through a growing phase, mature mentally and emotionally with materialism.
- Luxury maybe classy and sophisticated but it will viewed as such only when the whole environment in the country grows and develops together.
- Luxury brands need to ensure that they actually are what they profess to be, any quality problems are viewed as not living up to promise of quality.

### **Fake Luxury**

A small segment of non-consumers are not averse to flaunting a fake as the original luxury brand. They pass off fake premium brands as the luxury goods. In the eyes of the real consumer these are the people who live in fear of being exposed or discovered of their fake exterior. "You are not what you are professing to be". These are the people who are the fashion victims, maybe feel inferior or may be loud personalities.

### **Premium Service**

Service including after sales service in Indian luxury market is unsurpassable in the world. In order to sell in the market the service segment of the luxury products go all out to provide exclusive preview to selected clientele and in the process there may be instances where products are delivered to valued customers ahead of lead time. A potential customer is detected as a serious customer the moment they walk in. It is whispered that the sales staff is specially trained to scan serious customer as in India lot of people do not fit the profile of the luxury customer as there is influx of new money. Beyond the 5 metros or even the B towns, there are many places in India where luxury is personally presented and delivered for the view of selected few. It almost takes you back to the times of feudal lords where women were treated with utmost delicacy, pampered and surrounded by splendor, sheen, and glamour. This service is very similar to the trunk shows of the Western America, where vendors travelled to interiors of the rural landscape to show a trunk load of luxury products to the family as in customized service, orders are taken and delivery made exclusively. This practice has been adopted by some multi brands in the Indian industrial towns.

### **Quality**

A distinct difference is perceived between the Indian luxury brand and the international brand. The Indian Designer brand has strengths in the traditional or Indian wear, the fineness of embroidery, which cannot be provided by the international brand at present. While the product quality, fit and drape and craftsmanship of the international brand is perceived to be far superior, though may not provide to the aesthetic sensibilities needed by the Indian consumer.

### **What is the Indian Mindset?**

The Indian consumer is directed by its mindset as in any other market. At the moment a large chunk of the population is still 'aspirer' rather than being a 'consumer'. A population which has lived frugally for generations has yet to come to grips with the fact that they are earning more than their forefathers ever did. This state as looked upon with a lot of apprehension by the older generation while the young consumer does not view money and wealth with the respect as by earlier generation.

### **Conclusions and Suggestions**

The Indian luxury market has the potential to be successful however they need to take the Indian consumer along while customizing strategies to local conditions and requirements. These insights cannot be superficial but truly understand what makes a flamboyant Punjabi different culturally from a reticent native of South India. Brands such as Mont Blanc, Louis Vuitton, Rolls Royce have tailored some promotional activities to tickle the Indian psyche. For e.g. when creating invitations for potential consumers in the Punjab in Northern India, for example, the invitations are more lavish and the language more boisterous than those sent to consumers in Southern India. ([www.businessoffashion.com/2010/01](http://www.businessoffashion.com/2010/01))

The Indian luxury market is positively buoyed by a strong economy, growing personal income and consumers' willingness to spend. Making a success of the luxury business in India is a challenge to better understand and interpret the trends about the Indian consumer that Indians are getting richer younger and on the other, they are no longer shy of spending on themselves, that colour and design choices for different regions will be specific to their aesthetics. On the clothes front, the Indian consumer is used to intricate embroidery and embellishment, vibrant colours and rich fabrics, where as western prêt-a-porter ranges are simpler, emphasizing silhouette, cut and styling.

Understanding India means knowing that wedding is an important event and the market is huge, Diwali and other festivals are equally important for clothes and gifts.

That brands irrespective of their origin need to invest in understanding the local mind-set and owes respect as due to any consumer, yet the Indian consumer is extremely price conscious and will have high expectations. Price sensitive Indians compare prices in London and Dubai and won't pay much of a premium. India may be a luxury hinterland, but you won't find any takers for last season's goods. It's not the money; it's the mind set of seeking maximum value.

As in other developments, the need for clarity of an Indian luxury identity, the ways of thinking, practice and thus its outward expressions are linked to the social, cultural environment and there is certainly a need to learn afresh from an emerging, potential market. It is hoped that the results presented below will stimulate further research for a clearer understanding of Indian luxury definition, the consumer, and the Indian luxury identity.

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# Alexander Van Slobbe and the Invention of Dutch Luxury

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Nanda van den Berg

ARTEZ INSTITUTE OF THE ARTS, ARNHEM & AMSTERDAM FASHION INSTITUTE, NETHERLANDS

## Abstract

This paper examines how Alexander van Slobbe, one of the Netherlands' most important fashion designers, succeeded in founding a luxury clothing brand in a country that has long had no fashion tradition and which is well known for its Calvinist, 'luxury-averse' attitudes. Van Slobbe has created his own identity as a 'Dutch fashion designer', and as such has drawn freely from Dutch stories, icons and histories. The idiom of his conceptual fashion is minimalistic, however, in line with the modernism that has characterized international fashion developments since the 1990s. He is introducing a new concept of couture –one which continues the classic couture tradition, but which also breaks with it by giving it new form (both masculine and feminine) and new substance (both modernistic and refined). His inherently luxurious, but austere idiom can be conceived as being 'Dutch luxury' because it is not loud, but nevertheless meets all kinds of distinguishing features of luxury quality.

## Introduction

When Alexander van Slobbe gave his new shop in South Amsterdam the name *NL = New Luxury*, in 2008, he was touching on a new theme in Dutch fashion; the letters NL, after all, also stand for the Netherlands. A paradoxical combination: for how could characteristic Dutch austerity relate to a new conception of luxury? Alexander Van Slobbe (Schiedam, 1959) is generally regarded as the initiator of a unique Dutch fashion idiom. He is a master craftsman with a conceptual vision, who graduated cum laude in Fashion Design at the Hogeschool van de Kunsten (now ArtEZ) in Arnhem in 1984. Van Slobbe's design concept is in keeping with the Netherlands' tradition of functional, sober and minimalistic design and does not refer to any Dutch clothing tradition; in this country, after all, fashion had always come from Paris.

From a historical perspective, it is only the country's typically sober, black regent's costumes and white *molenkraag* ruffs of the seventeenth century that have succeeded in gaining the Netherlands a place in international costume history<sup>1</sup>. This costume arose from a strictly Calvinist attitude to life which presented the Dutch population with a number of thorny dilemmas in the country's Golden Age, such as 'How to be rich, yet humble'<sup>2</sup>. One solution was to wear a sober, black uniform, in which hierarchical differences in social standing and wealth could still be subtly expressed through the considerable differences in fabric quality. From a self-defined identity as a 'Dutch fashion designer', Van Slobbe draws liberally on the rich arsenal of his country's historical legacies, icons, stories, rituals and traditional techniques. In fact, the inherently modernist qualities of Van Slobbe's work would almost seem to be the natural continuation of this tradition of apparent simplicity.

Passing trends and fashions have never played a role in Van Slobbe's designs. In his modernistic, hand-made pieces in neutral colours like black, beige and dark blue, his emphasis is on the unique synthesis of form and material that in his view can only be achieved by hand. Van Slobbe himself describes these characteristics as a form of abstraction, saying: "There is a history, a tradition, a craftsmanship and a guiding principle in those things in which I see an abstract quality. A characteristic I find striking. A Dutch way of thinking<sup>3</sup>." But shouldn't fashion simply be as beautiful as possible? How comfortable could the luxury of exclusive fashion ever be within a Dutch context of sobriety and austerity? What inspires Alexander van Slobbe to create luxury? And since this conceptualisation of luxury is being presented as something new, does it hold anything of lasting value?

## Keywords

Alexander van Slobbe  
Dutch Fashion  
Dutch Design  
French Couture  
New Luxury  
Minimalism  
Emotion and Experience  
Continuity  
Masculine-Feminine  
Ambivalence in  
Modernism

### 1. Dutchness as Interaction

Van Slobbe had no Dutch precursors in the development of his personal fashion idiom. From the nineteenth century onward, the regional costumes that had always been seen as typically Dutch gradually began to give way to the cosmopolitan fashions of urban areas, with styles that were modelled directly on French fashions. Alexander van Slobbe's concept of Dutch fashion, as well as his unique idiom, is therefore an instance of "'poesis' [...] where before there was nothing"<sup>4</sup>, and it derives directly from manual treatment of the fabric, through the principle of 'problem-finding and problem-solving'<sup>5</sup>. His 'Dutch fashion' is born of his interaction with the material. For example, silk or organza is torn into strips and woven or crocheted into a new fabric, as in a crocheted couture skirt with plaited waist in the Summer 2008 collection. The check fabric in typically Dutch colours for a men's jacket in the 2001 *So* collection was made from farmer's handkerchiefs torn into strips and crocheted together. Other techniques derived from the classic couture tradition form other important starting points for Van Slobbe's designs, such as cutting fabrics on the bias, but he will often alienate these techniques, for instance by using the language of women's couture – like the three-quarter-length couture sleeve and the *ton-sur-ton* principle – in men's fashion<sup>6</sup>.

Many of Van Slobbe's clothes do not follow the contours of the body but take form only when they are put on: it is the body itself which gives them shape. This is a significant departure from a centuries-long tradition of French fashion, in which a corset or interior construction played an important role in achieving the desired shape. A collection which seems to address this issue very directly is van Slobbe's *Biedermeier* collection from 1993, the eighth for his women's label *Orson + Bodil*. Several pieces in this collection were made of coutil, a material created specifically to make corsets, and were so stiff that they could stand up by themselves. In a dress from the *Biedermeier* collection you could proceed only in a slow, regal pace, and when the wearer sat down the dress became a sort of table. These stiff garments seemed to refer to the very tradition in fashion history that Orson + Bodil was created to abandon. The fact that the pieces can also be experienced as independent objects, like a chair or a table, also links them with the 'Dutch design' that forms a reference framework for Van Slobbe. Until Van Slobbe entered the scene as a Dutch fashion designer, 'Dutch design' was limited to lamps, chairs and tables. Then there is the choice of the name *Biedermeier* for this modernistic collection, a name which refers to the straight-laced Biedermeier style dating from the first half of the nineteenth century, a style synonymous with the solemn chastity of those parts of Holland where church and state were one. According to Van Slobbe, traditional Dutch costume is based on this Biedermeier silhouette, and "it is the timelessness in that folklore that I think is so beautiful," he says<sup>7</sup>. There therefore seems to be a connection between his enduring, modernistic silhouettes and the continuity of the silhouettes of Dutch regional costumes, many of which have remained practically unchanged for centuries.

However, Van Slobbe's own idiom cannot be compared with the archaic forms of these regional silhouettes. In keeping with the rectilinear forms and primary colours of Dutch art, he approaches Dutch fashion in a minimalistic and modernistic way. The square and the rectangle are often an important starting point in his designs.

A woman who wears his garments is not afraid to button or tie them into shape herself, since they do not follow the contour of the body like a shawl or a skirt. The wearer allows herself to be surprised by an apparently formless piece of cloth that only falls into shape on her body through the form that she herself gives to it. For example there is the *Beauty*, a large t-shirt that looks like a length of cloth and only takes shape when you put it on. There is the *Wokkel*, a wraparound skirt that you have to double over and fasten with a bow. Or the *Arna*: a straight jacket made of two square cloths, but with a fitted back. The apparent formlessness of these garments, their 'abstraction', which takes shape only when on the body, after the wearer has knotted, wrapped, tied or twisted them into place, is directly linked to Van Slobbe's starting point: the development of a new idiom. The idiom is such a new fashion concept that it has no other reference, but is, in itself, entirely Dutch.

In March 1994, Van Slobbe's label *Orson + Bodil* showed for the first time in Paris. A former class from the Fashion Department in Arnhem – (Viktor & Rolf, Lukas Ossendrijver, Pascale Gatzem, Marcel Verheijen and Saskia van Drimmelen) were simultaneously showing their 1994/1995 collection in the Institut Néerlandais in Paris, under the name *Le Cri Néerlandais*. National and international media saw similarities in the conceptual approach to design among these Dutch designers and dubbed the new movement 'Dutch Modernism'. A characteristic 'Dutch style' was born, linking the designers to one another.

## 2. Luxury and Authenticity

The *Orson + Bodil* brand was originally launched in November 1988 by Van Slobbe and his then business partner Nannet van der Kleijn in reaction to the working methods of the Dutch ready-to-wear industry of the time, focused as they were on maximum efficiency. As Van Slobbe says: “For us, the handmade product was the only answer to the industry, with all its codes and laws and impossibilities. The industrial demand of a minimum production of fifty pieces in one colour or in one size was enough for us to realize that we couldn’t follow that direction and so had to go into production ourselves. [...] There was no alternative as a designer, you had no choice [...] we knew that we had to escape from the conventions of the middle segment –which dominated Dutch fashion at the time. It was either that, or shut up and just get on with earning pots of money.”<sup>8</sup>

From its earliest beginnings, *Orson + Bodil* was an entirely hand-made product. For Van Slobbe, this is an inherent aspect of the quality of the clothing. *Orson + Bodil* clothing styles arise out of a specific combination of form and material, a combination which can only be created by hand; but it is not the intention that the customer sees this. The fact that they’re hand-made is invisible. “For instance, I’ve used some simple blind hemming. You can’t do that with a machine. I try to have the quality of the form and the handling go together, and in doing so I vary from the visible to the invisible. Handwork yields the perfect form.”<sup>9</sup>

The inherent luxury of *Orson + Bodil* garments therefore lies not in the choice of material, but for the most part in the time that was put into their making. The garments are of the highest quality and will last a long time. Van Slobbe also makes constant use of the technological advances that the industry has achieved in weaving and knitting. *Orson + Bodil* has always been a lightweight product. Van Slobbe almost never uses interiors, shoulder pads, fusible interfacing or anything else that makes for a heavy construction. The lightness is the result of the technique, the form, the pattern, and the way it is put together. The luxury of the garment, the comfort brought about by the treatment of the materials chosen, only becomes clear when the garment is put on. “It’s about the experience of clothing. First of all I see it, for the wearer, as an intimate relationship, as a secret that only the wearer knows [...] And second, it’s about the gaze of the other [...] I don’t make images with legs. The only experience of the viewer that I want to achieve is the glimpse [...] I don’t believe in direct, frontal experience, in a legible image [...] I see neither a man nor a woman as a walking logo.”<sup>10</sup>

Van Slobbe’s subtlety could be seen as an example of a typically Dutch reserve, but sometimes his Dutch references are more direct. Between 2000 and 2008 his men’s and women’s collections would occasionally contain numerous eclectic references to the techniques employed in Dutch regional costumes. This has been in line with a movement of recent years in which global fashion has gone ‘back to its roots’ in an attempt to be as authentic as possible<sup>11</sup>, but Van Slobbe’s clothing is modernistic rather than nostalgic or folkloric. His ability to contextualize Dutch heritage in new forms is well demonstrated by the *Makkum Pearls* (2006), the result of a collaboration with Makkum-based *Koninklijke Tichelaar*, the oldest company in the Netherlands, which has been making porcelain and earthenware on the banks of what used to be called the Zuiderzee ever since 1594. The ‘pearls’ are round, hollow, porcelain beads: some have flattened sides or are halved, and they have been given a variety of glazes and decoration. They include pear-shaped earrings whose form clearly recalls earrings in paintings by Rembrandt and Vermeer. Van Slobbe evidently wanted to make a Dutch product with local elements. The luxury of the *Makkum Pearls* is experienced similarly to that of the subdued luxury of his clothes. It is derived not just from their perfect form and decorative power, but from the experience of tradition and craftsmanship, of history, stories, emotion and a specifically Dutch idiom. The artisan background and the heritage that are ‘baked’, as it were, into these objects, strongly define their value. Like Van Slobbe’s clothing designs, the *Makkum Pearls* are not subject to the whims of fashion; they are part of the permanent stock in the *NL = New Luxury shop*.

## 3. A creative Archive

Alexander van Slobbe’s Dutch idiom is minimalist, an idiom having links to technology, industrial production methods and straightforward reproducibility. In the 1960s models were photographed in assertive poses and their clothes had silhouettes that were reductive in [their] A-line frame, angular seaming, and square hems. Simple shifts and moulded wool overcoats, though exemplified by the collections of the French designers André Courrèges and Pierre Cardin, were mass-produced both in the United States and abroad<sup>12</sup>. Models were posed next to spaceships and other futuristic technological achievements. Van Slobbe’s minimalistic concepts, however, hark back to 1950s couture designs such as the ‘sack dress’ and the ‘turtle back’ by couturier Cristobal Balenciaga –of whom it was also said, incidentally, that his style slowly evolved in a closed universe.

Alexander van Slobbe acquired his love for clothes by birth. Beautiful, well-made clothes were always part of his daily life. His mother, grandmother and aunt were always involved with clothes. They would buy patterns at Lanvin in Paris, for example, and use them to make several outfits. Twice a year Van Slobbe would accompany his mother to Paris to buy clothes at Kenzo, Courrèges, Dorothee Bis, or Sonia Rykiel. His parents ran two lunch rooms in Schiedam and his mother always had to look smart. It is this background against which his love for well-made clothing should be seen, and out of which his concept of 'ordinary luxury' arises. Van Slobbe's mother, Riet van Slobbe, was an outgoing, modern woman who dressed every day in design clothes that not only looked top-notch but gave her the freedom of movement she needed in her work. She sent Alexander to the anthroposophical Free School in Rotterdam, where his creativity was stimulated through knitting, crocheting, making his own clothes, silver-smithing and so on, and where his ideas on quality, sustainability and durability were doubtless further shaped.

A good example of these ideas is formed by the so-called 'archive pieces': new, unprecedented, archetypal pieces which, once he has introduced them, invariably form part of his subsequent collections. The simple slacks with elasticated waist is an example. Or the pullover with a deep, gathered V-neck, made of a poplin cut on the bias: the *Pascale*. It is a translation of a knitted pullover, but woven and sewn. The *Arna*: a straight coat made of two square cloths, but with a fitted back. There's the dress that is nothing more than two sheets of leather and a V-neck, the raincoat with sleeves cut in one, a sort of car coat that he has done in at least ten different materials, the wraparound skirt, and the all-purpose shawl. His archive pieces are developed over a period of years and are never linked to fashion or trends. One result is that *Orson + Bodil* customers can wear their original purchases indefinitely. If a garment gets too short, Van Slobbe adds a band to it; if the lining wears out, it can be renewed. This might look like Dutch thrift, but it is a durability that resides principally in the garment itself<sup>13</sup>.

Every new *Orson + Bodil* collection includes a number of these 'archive pieces' presented anew, in another material or using another technique. Fourteen women's collections for *Orson + Bodil* were issued before financial considerations compelled Van Slobbe to concentrate on his designs for the men's label *So*, a brand that had originally been conceived as a ready-to-wear label but which had become an internationally successful designer brand. Van Slobbe's heart did not lie in such a commercial approach; he wanted to return to his own core values and motives. Using money from the 2003 sale of *So* to the Japanese sales and distribution chain Jo'IX, in 2004 he breathed new life into *Orson + Bodil*. The first new collection Van Slobbe created was an archive collection – based entirely on archive pieces that had undergone only minimal changes in proportion. The clothes looked as modern and timeless as the ten-year-old prototypes on which they had been based.

Van Slobbe wants his archive pieces to form a counterpart to the industrially produced items, like chairs, lamps or tables, which people are quite willing to spend money on because they are expected to last for many years. "And that's just what you can't do with clothes. Consumer behaviour with regard to clothes has meant that people now expect to enjoy something only for a very short time. Very few articles have spontaneously survived this transient fate – the Chanel jacket, for example, the jeans, the white t-shirt [...] Consumers have to realize that that's what they want, that a piece of clothing can have lasting value, and that they need that clothing. I would like to turn fashion into something people see as having that lasting value," he says<sup>14</sup>.

#### 4. Dutch Luxury vs International Luxury

Alexander van Slobbe has therefore extended the concept of durability to include that of continuity. This is in keeping with developments in the international experience of luxury, in which perception, emotion, authenticity, links with tradition, and intensity all play a role<sup>15</sup>. Van Slobbe's fashion elicits this experience of luxury at several levels. In accordance with the modern desire for emotion and poetic experience, van Slobbe has woven his own 'continuity' into his oeuvre, for instance by means of his recurring forms, which speak to us of time, re-working, and complexity. Surrounded by a circle of Dutch artists, architects and graphic designers, his fashion has been accepted into the art domain of the Netherlands. By referring to a specifically Dutch heritage and by collaborating with Dutch handicraft companies, Van Slobbe has succeeded in imbuing his work with a meaning which appears to be a logical continuation of a Dutch clothing tradition –if there ever was such a thing. So his oeuvre links to international trends in the re-evaluation of heritage, authenticity, craftsmanship, emotion and experience which contribute to modern experiences of luxury.

Quite apart from this, however, van Slobbe's clothing is of a remarkable quality. It is characterized by a unique idiom, timelessness, sublime craftsmanship and costly materials. All these attributes refer to the classic concept of French couture as handed down to Van Slobbe by his mother: a luxury which has long



been seen as 'feminine'. However, Van Slobbe brought these 'feminine' principles of couture into men's fashions; entire collections arose out of the principle of 'alienation'. Van Slobbe put men into twin-sets in feminine colours, and gave them three-quarter-length sleeves –originally conceived by French couturiers to allow women's wrist jewellery to be more visible, or to have the sleeve hemline be level with the jacket hem. At the same time he gave his women's clothing the refined restraint more usually associated with men's suits. The sensation of luxury is not called up by the 'image' of this clothing, but by wearing it, and it is brought about by the palpable experience of its comfort and quality, its lightness and wearability. Despite this luxury quality, *Orson + Bodil* clothes are 'basic' –they are made for daily wear. They are down to earth, in what is perhaps a Dutch way.

But shouldn't fashion, from an international perspective, simply be as beautiful as possible? Van Slobbe does not believe in a direct, frontal experience, in a legible image, in something like the 'total look' of Coco Chanel.

That 'total look organizes the whole of the feminine figure or 'silhouette' as conceived by Coco Chanel'<sup>16</sup> that 'offers us a narrative about the acquisition of individual freedom,' writes Jean Marie Floch<sup>17</sup>. Chanel borrowed 'signifiers of work and masculinity' from the male wardrobe, and these 'were retained so as to be very clearly and very precisely correlated with opposite signifiers: wealth and femininity [...] more to the point, the game of inversion is a strategy by which Chanel was able to establish a definition of feminine identity that would be unique to her.'<sup>18</sup>

Chanel's classic, linear silhouette was profusely laden with 'baroque elements, the accessories (bracelets, necklaces, brooches, and so on) and the chain of the quilted bag. Solid areas, glistening, fusions, interlacing, flashes or ephemeral glimmers: 'the great visual effects of the baroque are recognizable here,' writes Floch<sup>19</sup>.

Such typically 'feminine' luxury characteristics are not to be found in clothing by *Orson + Bodil*, but it does use the inversion of male and female attributes to create a 'narrative of individual freedom. In designing for *Orson + Bodil*, Van Slobbe does not think about a single type of woman, but 'about their variations, their freedom of movement, the material. More than anything I want [them] to feel good in it.' Chanel took elements from the world of sport and from men's wardrobes, and designed clothes that were practical and comfortable. Alexander van Slobbe has borrowed elements from couture and brought them into men's clothing, and has taken modernistic elements –like inherent quality and palpable luxury– from the world of men's clothing, and used them in women's clothing. With her clothing, Chanel created a narrative for women who wanted to be like her; with *Orson + Bodil* clothing, Alexander van Slobbe is creating a couture wardrobe for Dutch women who want to be themselves.

So Van Slobbe is introducing a new concept of couture – one which continues the classic couture tradition, but which also breaks with it by giving it new form (both masculine and feminine) and new substance (both modernistic and refined).

## 5. In Conclusion

In short, Alexander van Slobbe's *NL = New Luxury* shop sells exclusive clothing that is distinguished by its quality, durability, longevity, and by the fact that every single article –down to each buttonhole– is hand-made, although this remarkable fact is invisible. His idiom may be said to be archetypically Dutch, because it is unique and has no other frame of reference. His work has gained van Slobbe an authoritative position in Dutch fashion history. His inherently luxurious, but austere idiom can be conceived as being 'Dutch luxury' because it is not loud, but – in the tradition of 'how to be rich, yet humble' –nevertheless meets all kinds of distinguishing features of luxury quality.

On the other hand, van Slobbe's fashion also meets the global criteria of luxury, because this wider definition of luxury has changed radically in recent decades. While luxury used to serve more exalted aims, and over the years came to serve the need for rising status, in recent years the experience of luxury has been much more closely linked to the experience of personal pleasure. Alexander van Slobbe clearly takes great personal pleasure in the fact that working on this small scale means he will never have to make a concession in the quality of his creations. His satisfaction lies in making products he can stand by and that he can talk about and sell in the appropriate atmosphere of his own shop, which is located, to his deep satisfaction, in his own country.

## Research Method

Original research based on archive studies, conversations with Alexander van Slobbe, numerous interviews with figures from the Dutch art and design world and from the circle around Van Slobbe, exhibition visits and comparisons of own findings with those of international fashion theory and other academic source materials.

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## Notes

1. As José Teunissen remarked in De Nederlander bestaat. Dutch Modernism in Paris, in: *Gejaagd door de wind*. Exhibition magazine for *Zuiderzeemuseum Enkhuizen*, March 2009, p.18.
2. Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches. An interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*, New York, 1987, p.189.
3. Nanda van den Berg, *Alexander van Slobbe*, Arnhem/Harderwijk, 2008, p.106.
4. Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman*, London, 2008, p.70.
5. *Idem*, p.26.
6. See Nanda van den Berg: Alexander van Slobbe: turning crafts into concept, in: *Design and craft: a history of convergences and divergences*. Conference proceeding of the 7th Conference of the International Committee of Design History and Design Studies (ICDHS), Brussels, Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie van België voor Wetenschappen en Kunsten, 20-22 September 2010, pp. 392-395.
7. Nanda van den Berg, *op. cit.* (note 3), p.113.
8. *Alexander van Slobbe, and... and... and...*, Valiz publishers, Amsterdam, 2010, p.27.
9. Designer Alexander van Slobbe talks to Nanda van den Berg in *Fashion Practice* (forthcoming publication).
10. *op. cit.* (note 8), p.164.
11. See, for instance, Jan Brand & José Teunissen (eds.), *Global Fashion. Local Tradition. On the globalization of fashion*, Warnsveld, Terra, 2005.
12. Elyssa Dimant, *Minimalism in Fashion. Reduction in the Postmodern Era*. New York, 2010, p.19, 20.
13. Here, too, we hear the echo of an old Dutch tradition, namely the 'remaking' of articles of clothing. A variety of examples of this can be found in the costume collection of the Amsterdam Historical Museum. See Annemarie den Dekker, *Rijk gekleed. Van doopjurk tot baljapon 1750-1914. Hoogtepunten uit de kostuumverzameling van het Amsterdams Historisch Museum*, Thoth, Bussum, 2005, p.34.
14. From a conversation between the author and Alexander van Slobbe on a saturday morning in his shop in Amsterdam, October 2010.
15. See Gilles Lipovetsky, *Luxury and the Sixth Sense and Modern and Postmodern Luxury* in J. Brand & J. Teunissen (eds.) *Fashion and Accessories*, Arnhem, Terra, 2007, pp.24-41; Francesco Morace, *The dynamics of luxury and basic-ness in post-crisis fashion*, in: *Critical Studies in Fashion and Beauty*, Vol 1, N°1, 2010 Intellect Ltd, pp.87-112.
16. Jean Marie Floch: Chanel changing: the total look in *Visual Identities*, Continuum, London/New York, 2000, p.85, 86.
17. *Idem*, p.90.
18. *Idem*, p.91.
19. *Idem*.

# (Not) Only for the Happy Few? The Dutch New Luxury

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Constantin-Felix von Maltzahn

RADBOUD UNIVERSITY NIJMEGEN, AMSTERDAM, NETHERLANDS

## Abstract

*Purpose:* To explore the critical dimensions necessary to create and maintain the success for a high-street fashion brand connected to the phenomenon of New Luxury in fashion retail.

*Design/Methodology/Approach:* Based on an assumed relationship between brand and consumers, this study adopts a dual approach of qualitative and quantitative research methods in the form of a case study on the Dutch middle-market fashion firm *Cora Kemperman*. The effort involved questionnaire-building and in-store completion with a random consumer sample as well as a sufficiently large number of semi-structured interviews with patrons. Furthermore, the research also took on a brand-related perspective in the form of semi-structured interviews with management, designers, stylists, retail managers, and shop personnel in order to explore their knowledge and experience worlds, supported by secondary research such as internal documents and the public presentation of the brand.

*Findings:* The study has identified four interrelated areas that are crucial in the creation and maintenance of the brand proposition. Contradictory to its market position and price level, the brand *Cora Kemperman* relies on sales strategies from the luxury goods industry. In so doing, the firm has successfully maintained and nourished a market position, which capitalises on a highly loyal customer base across different age groups as well as cult-like following among patrons.

*Originality/Value:* An empirical understanding of the critical dimensions of the New Luxury concept will assist in effective and advanced (high-street) fashion brand management.

## Introduction

In an era of increasingly generic high-street fashion and fickle consumership the margins are tight to secure retention and establish a strong position in the market. According to Stockert (2004), one main reason for this development is that during the past few decades the continuously growing number of multi-label corporations housing various brands under the same roof (e.g., LVMH, PPR, Richemont) and chain stores with international market orientation (Inditex/Zara, MEXX, H&M, Mango) have driven out of the market the vast majority of small-scale retailers with more particularised product ranges and strong patronage. As a result, the link between consumers and the industry got lost (Jacobs, 2006). The combination of these two factors has led to evermore standardised production circuits and more and more uniformity in attire products. By the same token prevalent customer approaches in this segment are largely driven by direct and push marketing with the aim to be able to segment and pitch dissimilar consumer groups using different targeting strategies (Perna, 1987; Stockert, 2004; Jackson & Shaw; 2006; Easey, 2008).

Further up the market's spectrum, the luxury goods industry functions according to a set of different principles. Here, attributes such as quality, exclusivity, and individuality feature as the main assets for establishing a loyal customer base as well as helping to guarantee leverage and sales volume (Teil, 2004; Husic & Cicic, 2009; De Barnier & Rodina, 2006; Vickers & Renand, 2003; Cox, 2008). Following Haupt (2004), the luxury sector relies on a mix of marketing strategies and individual consumer approaches in the form of personalised in-store performances in an attempt to establish emotional connections between brand and consumers. As opposed to the large bulk of high-street retailers, personal ties with the salespeople constitute a key component in the relationship between consumer and company (Okonkwo, 2007). Within this retail environment a sense of "emotional luxury", defined as a sense of

## Keywords

Consumer Retention  
Sales Pitch  
Luxury Branding  
In-Store Performance  
High-Street Retail

uniqueness which is integrated into the value creation chain, constitutes a key component in the sales process for establishing of long-term relations with customers (Lipovetsky, 2007). By means of personalised sales pitches and unique retail environments luxury enterprises try to create sensual consumption experiences, thus becoming purveyors of experience-worlds that reach beyond their products' functional and aesthetic properties.

What this paper aims to address is the concept of "New Luxury" in the context of high-street fashion retailing. First, the idea will be introduced and discussed in the context of contemporary luxury consumption. Next, Gilles Lipovetsky's concept of "emotional luxury" will be singled out as one crucial dimension in contemporary luxury marketing. Finally, these concepts will be discussed in context of a case study on the Dutch fashion firm *Cora Kemperman*. Based on a combined approach of qualitative and quantitative methods this paper argues that, in spite of the firm's mid-market position and price level, its market success hinges on elements akin to those from luxury retail. On the one hand, the brand capitalises on intense in-store performance by the shop assistants, whereby consumers are pitched and attended in highly personalised ways. On the other hand, the firm's strategic positioning in keeping a low profile and retaining exclusivity through limited stock margins represents a form of "New Dutch Luxury", which pairs moderation in terms of affordable luxury goods with a socialising rather status-differentiating function (De Vries, 2008; Jacobs, 2010).

## 1. Literature Review

Evidently, the luxury goods industry, of which luxury fashion forms an important part, constitutes a stronghold in today's market economy. In 2006, Egon Zhender International estimated the global luxury goods sector a \$170 billion business. In the same key, Kwak and Yoffie (2001; cited in: Caniato et al., 2008, p.176) index the branch with a growth rate of about 6% per year (see also Fox, 2009)<sup>1</sup>. Following Luzzini and Ronchi (2010, p. 8), 'the growth trend varies with geographies: it is 1.7%, in Italy, 4.5% Europe, 6.9% in North-America, +7.3% in Asia-Pacific, +9.7% in Latin America, +9.8% in Middle-East.' Similarly, for the forthcoming 5 to 10 years the study forecasts a growing polarity between high-end and low-end consumption specifically in the emerging markets of China, Brazil, and India.

Conceptualisations of luxury are typically derived from either a consumption perspective (Vickers & Renand, 2003; Twitchell, 2002) or from an application as a product branding device (Dall'Olmo Riley et al., 2004; Birtwistle & Moore, 2004; Birtwistle & Moore, 2005). There has emerged a strong strand of literature that seeks to explain luxury consumption particularly in terms of having a symbolic function that operates at the individual and collective level. On a theoretical level, then, it is suggested that luxury and non-luxury goods can be conceptualized according to functional, experiential, and interactional symbolic dimensions (Vickers & Renand, 2003, pp.461-2; see also Ward & Chiari, 2008, p.12; Moore & Birtwistle, 2005, p.268). The former traditionally has been situated in the context of brand image; product uniqueness and regimes of scarcity; product quality and product performance; timeless brand and product features; store atmosphere; and patron status (Husic & Cicic, 2009, pp.241-2; Beverland, 2004, pp.457-61). Phau and Prendergast (2000, p.124) suggest that luxury brands 'evoke exclusivity, have a well-known brand identity, enjoy high brand awareness and perceived quality, and retain sales levels and customer loyalty'.

In addition, Brun et al. (2008, p.556) contend that arousal factors have become important sales arguments in luxury retail as customers are increasingly looking for goods that are characterized by reliable performances and perfection of details. At the same time, however, they want to be emotionally involved and feel a complete and memorable shopping and ownership experience. Fastening on this increase in demand, French philosopher Gilles Lipovetsky (2007, pp.31-2) introduced the concept of "emotional luxury" which is defined in the following terms:

*What might be called the new age of luxury is not just the visible transformation of supply, but also the metamorphosis of demand, its aspirations and motivations, the relations of individuals with social standards and with each other as well as with consumption and scarcity. Individualising, emotionalising and democratising are the processes that are reorganising the contemporary culture of luxury.*

In short, the idea describes a sense of uniqueness that is integrated into the value creation chain. Based on the guiding principles of the luxury industry –as, for instance, scarcity, sensual experiences, or individuality– firms create bonds with their main audience groups by providing experiences that reach beyond their products' functional or aesthetic properties. Lipovetsky is quick to admit that these conditions are not necessarily limited to the premises of high-ticket enterprises, but might just as well represent a

viable alternative for more accessible, rather broadly-oriented market actors. The author further specifies this by introducing a distinction between luxury and semi-luxury. The former is characterised by properties as those just describe above. Semi-luxury, on the other hand, is defined by what he calls ‘a new unobtrusive aesthetic’ which he links to modernist, democratic ideals heralding the renunciation of extravagant ornament and pompous decoration in favour of a new kind of elegance whose foremost characteristics are simplicity, discretion, and affordability (*ibid.*, p.30).

Lipovetsky’s main argumentative thrust hints at a more general shift which in brand perception and consumption practices, whereby luxury is rendered an issue beyond monetary value and artful sophistication (Atwal & Williams, 2009, p.339). Today, luxury consumption is not necessarily expensive, but can be either mass market or personal, authentic or experiential (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2006, p.320). As a result, nowadays buying behaviour oftentimes occurs out of a desire for particular purchasing experiences or product authenticity rather than status-seeking behaviour –even though these two are not mutually exclusive (De Barnier & Rodina, 2006, pp.4-5; Atwal & Williams, 2009, pp.342-4). Consequently, the luxury concept has moved from a largely singular conception of the term towards multiple *regimes of luxury* (Luzzini & Ronchi, 2010, p.8).

In the wake of this development the idea of New Luxury has emerged, defined by Silverstein and Fiske (2003, p.56) as ‘products and services that possess higher levels of quality, taste, and aspiration than other goods in the category but are not so expensive as to be out of reach’. In short the idea describes a kind of affordable luxury for a middle-class public which is able and willing to spend just above the average price level to obtain products and services in return that are inscribed with attributes akin to those from the luxury sector in its traditional meaning. Pflanz (2009, p.7) further distinguishes between “New Luxury” and “Few Luxury” brands. Former of which he refers to as ‘trading-up’ brands like Escada, Burberry, or Boss. “Few Luxury”, on the other hand, he tags ‘mass-clusivity enterprises’ and identifies firms like Esprit, S. Oliver, or Zara as the main purveyors within this category. Okonkwo (2007, pp.237-42) makes a similar argument by discriminating between accessible and intangible luxury, thereby identifying the phenomenon’s “borderline identity” of warranting exclusivity in a mass-market context (*ibid.*, pp.240-41). Rather than framing the issue in terms of a binary opposition between (new/few/accessible/intangible...) luxury and non-luxury goods it is suggested here to think of the luxury segment as a *continuum* whose different levels satisfy different audiences and their respective demands.

### 3. Methodology

Aiming to further explore the concept in the context of middle-market fashion retail, this paper is based on a three-month period of ethnographic research on the Dutch fashion firm *Cora Kemperman*. Based on an assumed relationship between the brand and its main consumer groups and part of a larger body of case studies, the research was initially designed for exploratory rather than theory-building purposes, thereby attempting to add further empirical data to the body of research in comparative consumer studies and fashion marketing. With a research design based on questionnaire-building, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation, the goal was to develop an understanding of the terms and conditions under which fashion consumption takes place in a Dutch context and identify the main drivers in the purchase decision-making process. Comparing the perspectives of consumers and brand executives, the research further sought to identify points of connection and potential gaps in the relationship between the self-perception of a brand (*brand persona*) and the way consumers mostly view a firm. By studying the interrelation between a number of Dutch fashion firms and their main audience groups the aim was to develop an understanding of the factors impacting on patronage behaviour and consumption interests in the context of clothing consumption.

### 4. Data Collection

Part of a larger body of cases and aiming to cover a potentially broad spectrum of Dutch fashion brands and consumer groups, *Cora Kemperman* was chosen for three reasons. First, the company offers a highly recognisable product (colours, fabrics, cut, shape, etc), thereby rendering it a somewhat uncommon case in the Dutch fashion context. Second, with a total of only 9 outlets across the Netherlands and Belgium the brand is relatively small in size, thus making it salient in the context of retention strategies and consumer portfolios. Third, fully relying on word of mouth and its product slate, the company represents an interesting example when it comes to brand positioning and marketing practice. Paradoxically, without any kind of articulated marketing strategy the company has enjoyed enduring market success for the past 15 years.

Multiple sources of evidence were used in the data collection phase to protect the research from bias,

using a comprehensive approach of quantitative and qualitative methods. The questionnaires (Appendix 1) consisted of 16 items in total, with 10 items using statement-based questions and a 6-point Likert scale for measuring general consumer behaviour and subject-related areas; 2 items using a 3-point scale with predefined response options for measuring (buying) frequency and the number of purchased items at a time; 2 open-ended questions for measuring brand perception and the firm's relation with its Dutch national background; and 1 multiple-choice item (choice rate: 3 out of 15) for measuring brand-related consumer values. Completion of the questionnaires (n=234) was done together with consumers within the retail environment in order to ensure a clear understanding of the research questions and internal validity for the general procedure. Next to that, a number of in-depth interviews (n=14) were conducted with patrons in an effort to measure their level of involvement with the firm. The questions mainly focused on the interviewees' personal perspective on, and relationship with, the brand as well as the connection between their individual fashion preferences and their general life- and experience-worlds (Appendix 2). In an attempt to further guarantee the internal validity of the design the research was divided by location, studying consumer behaviour in the firm's outlets in Rotterdam and Amsterdam separately. Prior to that, a test period of about a week in the company's sales branch in Arnhem was supposed to ensure the appropriateness of the approach as well as to test and re-adjust the catalogue of questions. As for the company, digitally-recorded interviews were conducted with the firm's creative director, the head designer and her assistant, the retail manager, as well as the shop managers in both locations and a number of sales assistants. Each of these interviews lasted between one and two hours with the questions focusing on typifying the brand's main consumer groups and their consumption behaviour/interests; the relation between brand and consumers; brand positioning and retention strategies; and the notion of a Dutch national background related to branding strategies and consumer behaviour (Appendix 3). For the questionnaires and interview protocols the central themes, the frequency of occurrence, emergent patterns and areas of contradiction were identified and evaluated. The findings and themes were compared with the literature on the subject area and discussed with colleagues.

## 5. Discussion

The factors moderating the purchasing interests of *Cora Kemperman's* consumers involve both a material and a socio-interactive component. For the regulars in particular, the environment and social exchange with staff and fellow shoppers proved a determining variable in their purchasing behaviour and high frequency of the retail outlets. Seeking to understand the ways brand and consumers interact, four key areas emerged with respect to the predominant value connections at play between supply and demand parties:

- Product integrity
- Aesthetic signature/Product uniqueness
- Exclusivity
- Individuality

### 1. Product Integrity

The term product integrity is adopted here for its encompassing of multiple product features. Following Moore and Fionda (2009, pp.356-7) product integrity involves a product's quality, but equally pertains to related aspects such as craftsmanship, or attention to detail. A moderating variable in brand preference, both during the interviews and in the questionnaires consumers defined quality as a key driver for their recurrent buying behaviour and general interest in the brand/product. Primarily, it was highlighted that *Cora Kemperman's* clothing was experienced as durable, remarkably comfortable, and produced in fine materials and skin-friendly fibres.

The company, in fact, advocates using select fabrics, yarned exclusively at SA8000-certified factories, in an effort to produce the clothes in a manner so they 'fit nicely but also have a smooth feel to them' (quote from an interview with the firm's head designer). *Cora Kemperman's* implicit reliance on product quality directly feeds into their consumers' desire for setting themselves apart by their clothing choices without, however, following the latest trends or compromising fit and apparent use value. Here, the fact that the items are not subject to the diktat of fashion's seasonally changing whims, but instead come in their very own style and combine neatly across different seasons, features as an indicator for product differentiation. As against fashion's "here today, gone tomorrow" adage, the clothing is designed to stand the test of time in spite of their mid-market price tag. This tendency is supported by the results from the questionnaires.

Item 1: "A comfortable fit of my clothes is of primary importance to me." (Rotterdam/Amsterdam)

	No opinion	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
R'dam	0%	0%	2.46%	1.23%	14.41%	81.48%
A'dam	0%	0%	0%	0%	32.35%	67.64%

Item 2: "I like to dress according to the latest fashion trends." (Rotterdam/Amsterdam)

	No opinion	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
R'dam	0%	17.28%	29.62%	24.69%	20.98%	6.17%
A'dam	0%	23.52%	26.47%	23.52%	20.58%	5.88%

Item 5: "I regularly buy fashion-related magazines." (Rotterdam/Amsterdam)

	No opinion	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
R'dam	0%	40.74%	32.09%	7.40%	16.04%	2.46%
A'dam	0%	35.29%	38.23%	8.82%	17.64%	2.94%

Item 6: "I regularly check the Internet for the latest clothing trends." (Rotterdam/Amsterdam)

	No opinion	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
R'dam	0%	40.74%	34.56%	9.87%	13.58%	2.46%
A'dam	5.88%	41.17%	20.58%	8.82%	14.70%	5.88%

Durability also features as a key characteristic when it comes to the price-performance ratio of the clothes. Here, consumers indicated that the quality of fabrics (durability, tactility, maintenance, weaving, elaborate patterns etc.) constituted a crucial asset in their purchase decision-making process. During the interviews with both the brand's retail manager and head designer it became clear that timelessness and versatility constitute an articulated goal of the brand, thereby aiming to produce a kind of clothing that resonates with the principle of collection building and a holistic and durable approach to clothing consumption more in general. The aim behind each new collection is to not displace one season with the next but, instead, to build up a stock of items from which consumers can choose, thereby complementing their existing wardrobe and discouraging disposal of older pieces.

When it comes to more immaterial properties respondents emphasised the clothing's timeless character as well as the importance of sporting flexible attire which is suited for a wide variety of different socio-cultural contexts. Mostly, the clothes' versatility was fore grounded as a key characteristic in this regard; i.e., the products' adaptability to formal/professional contexts and leisure time activities alike, without compromising their desire to dress in an original way. Furthermore, it was highlighted that the clothing offered a multiplicity of options when mixing items either within one single collection or between different seasons. Here, the products' timeless and durable character represents an important incentive for consumers to not only purchase the clothing by *Cora Kemperman* in a one-off way, but to keep on buying and complementing their existing stock of items.

## 2. Aesthetic Signature/Product Uniqueness

The second aspect which is crucial in the brand proposition is *Cora Kemperman's* clearly defined company image, both in corporate terms, thus relating to the appearance of staff and outfitting of the retail environment, as well as the firm's public image as covered in magazines, features, or on the company's own website. Connected to the ways the brand is internally structured and publically represented consumers generally tend to experience the firm as being both unique in terms of its product offerings and reliable/coherent in its internal practices.

Correlating with the specific ways *Cora Kemperman* is positioned in the market consumers build up high levels of involvement based on the firm’s unique and highly recognisable product signature. Evidently, the brand features a product palette which is defined by the use of bold colours and whimsical floating shapes, lending to the products an articulate and noticeable imago. Consumers indicated this aspect as a defining feature in their fashion preferences in general (Item 7: “I prefer to buy clothes with an outspoken look”), with *Cora Kemperman* as a main conduit for this penchant. This corresponds with the results from questionnaire item 14 with a wide number of consumers indicating attributes such as ‘un-conventional’, ‘out of the ordinary’, ‘different’ as defining features of the brand and its product. Item 15 concurs with this tendency.

Item 7: “I prefer to buy clothes with an outspoken look.” (Rotterdam/Amsterdam)

	No opinion	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
R’dam	0%	0%	1.23%	12.04%	38.55%	48.19%
A’dam	5.88%	0%	0%	0%	47.05%	47.05%

Similarly, and far from insignificant particularly in a Dutch context, is the fact that *Cora Kemperman’s* clothing is well known for its forgiving silhouette. In the freely-associative section of the questionnaires (Item 14) the majority of consumers described the firm’s clothes as wearable and rather chic regardless of the wearer’s individual proportion. Codifying the items, a pattern emerged around statements such as ‘fits comfortably (despite my large size)’, ‘good fit’, ‘looks good in all sizes’, or ‘cosy’. This aspect concurs with both the results from Item 1 (“A comfortable fit of my clothes is of primary importance to me.”), where the vast majority of respondents highlighted this factor as crucial for both their decision-making process and general purchasing behaviour, and Q4 (“For what kind of occasion(s) do you wear the clothing of *Cora Kemperman*?”) in the semi-structured interviews measuring the socio-cultural context within which the company’s clothes are primarily worn.

### 3. Exclusivity

Thirdly, the brand capitalises on clear-cut policies when it comes to limited production runs and retail margins, thereby warranting a low profile in the market. By intentionally keeping the brand small and minimising the number of available items per shop exclusivity is a property which is artificially created and sold to consumers. For one thing, the margin of available items is very small, so that many designs come in just one or two pieces per size. For another, the brand shows no ambition to expand the business beyond its current size counting six retail outlets in the Netherlands and three in Belgium. Says *Cora Kemperman*, the brand’s co-founder and head designer:

*Almost every week we get requests about whether we wouldn’t want to open a shop in New York or Israel. And I always say “No, I don’t want that”. [...] Once people have discovered us they also have to make some effort to get the clothes. In return, they get the opportunity to wear somewhat exclusive stuff and that’s why people are loyal towards us. [Translation from the Dutch by the author]*

Needless to say, such a statement should not be taken too literally. And yet, marketing lore aside the brand’s consumers generally seem to put a premium on the limited availability of *Cora Kemperman’s* items as well its low-key presence in the market. Without exception, all respondents during the interviews singled out aspects such as product exclusivity or the chance to purchase products only a handful of other people will possess (due to availability) as a key drivers in their purchasing behaviour (Appendix 2: Q1, Q3). This concurs with the results of questionnaire Item 14, measuring consumers’ main value connections with the brand, which in both Rotterdam and Amsterdam indicate a similar tendency. In both locations the value connections “recognisable” (Rotterdam: 10.79% / Amsterdam: 15.68%) and “special” (Rotterdam: 9.96% / Amsterdam: 20.58%) gave significantly higher scores, with a relatively even distribution for the other items (mean values of 5.12% in Amsterdam and 5.72% in Rotterdam). In addition, respondents in Rotterdam placed great emphasis on the firm’s authenticity, with the value attribution “authentic” yielding a percentage of 10.51%. In both locations, therefore, we can identify an overlap in brand values for the attributes “recognizable” and “special”. Whereas in Rotterdam also authenticity represents a dominant characteristic in consumers’ perception of the brand, in Amsterdam this seems to be of lesser relevance.



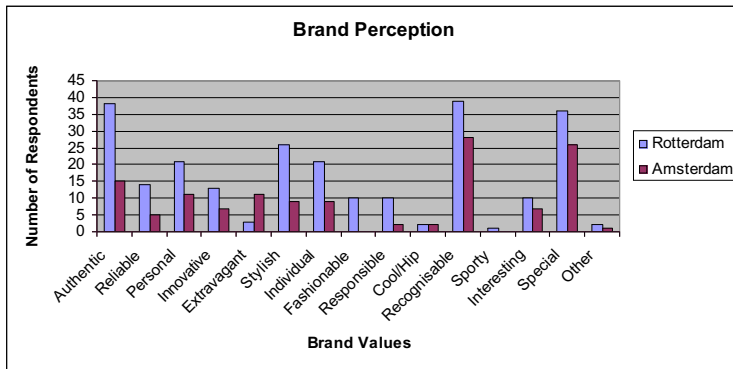


Fig. 1 "Which of the following attributes characterizes Cora Kemperman best?"

#### 4. Individuality

In the literature two more aspects are singled out as determining variables in high-end luxury retail: patron-status and store atmosphere (Husic & Cicic, 2009; Okonkwo, 2007; Teil, 2004; Tynan et al., 2009). Here, the last and most pertinent aspect of *Cora Kemperman's* brand proposition comes into play. That is, among the brand's foremost policies stands the endorsement of personal relations within the retail environment with downright attention to the individual needs and wants of each single customer. For the salespeople, for example, this means to attend one single customer for an hour or two if required. Moreover, *Cora Kemperman* demands from its personnel high levels of involvement with consumers or their individual purchase portfolios and fashion preferences, but the company also advocates to stay abreast of more personal aspects such a customer's family situation or problems at their workplace. Tellingly, one long-time patron explained to me during an interview,

*It's quite like spending time with your friends. You come here and it just feels right. In the end it just doesn't matter all that much whether or not I buy a piece. I mean, in the majority of cases I do, of course.*

It would be wrong to assume that this deliberate advocating of personal relations constitutes a mere by-product of the retail process. Indeed, it features as a strong device in the brand's strategic positioning. During the period of observation and supported by internal documents (e.g., guidelines clearly explaining the required code of conduct and customer approach) it became clear that brand image, retail environment, as well as the experiences provided to consumers are subject to rigid systematisation and a whole apparatus that sits behind their well-functioning. Unsurprisingly, the brand's particular brand of customer pitch was hardly subject to any variation across all three locations. Moreover, the company's coherent approach involves a number of policies concerning the corporate look of the shops and presentation of items, but primarily relates to in-store performances of staff –as reflected in their unreserved friendliness, openness, attention to detail, intimacy, and an individually pitched sales approach. Also, the selection of staff is based on a set of strict criteria, by means of which *Cora Kemperman* seeks to establish a coherent and fairly diverse profile of different salespeople. The diversity among staff is motivated by the firm's eagerness to respond to its different consumer profiles, thus facilitating customer relations in the best possible way.

Next to product-inherent aspects such as uniqueness, individuality, and exclusivity, the staff's individual sales approach was strongly reflected in the interviews, indicating a tendency of the firm's regulars to accord primacy to a wholesome shopping experience and high degrees of perceived personal involvement. This way, the brand establishes long-term buying relations which are –in however subtle ways– fostered through creating an atmosphere of personal relevance for each single customer. The personalised sales pitch hence constitutes a mainstay in the firm's strategic set-up by extending the focus of clothing consumption away from material concerns to emotional connections with brand and product.

#### 6. Conclusion

Above it has been argued that *Cora Kemperman's* sales practices and corporate profile to a certain extent resemble those of a luxury retailer, as reflected in the company's product-centred branding strategy, market position, and consumer approach. The argument has been made that the firm on the one hand acts as a supplier of a unique yet affordable type of clothing. On the other hand, the in-store performance of staff constitutes a linchpin in the brand proposition as it helps create an atmosphere of belonging, emotional proximity, and personal significance for consumers. In sum, then, it is the very

blending of attributes from what characterises “New Luxury” with a clever sales approach which helps establish a more complex grid for (possible) points of connection between the parties of supply and demand. For while *Cora Kemperman* does not fulfil the criteria of a luxury enterprise in its most traditional meaning, the company profile pivots around attributes like (perceived) scarcity, quality, individuality, and authenticity.

A number of authors have claimed that the onset of the New Luxury phenomenon roughly dates from around the 1980s and 1990s (Atwal & Williams, 2009; Okonkwo, 2007; Silverstein and Fiske, 2005; Truong et al, 2009; Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2005). Cultural historian Jan de Vries (2008) makes an interesting point by suggesting that the roots of the development can be found in 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch society where at the time a restrained and culturally heterogeneous national style emerged, which was generated by urban society rather than the diktat of the courts. The trend embraced *taste* as both discriminating variable and achievable social ideal, thereby according primacy to goods with the potential to communicate cultural meaning instead of signalling social distance. As he notes,

*Here, for the first time on such a scale and on so enduring a basis, we find a society in which the potential to purchase luxuries and novelties extended well beyond a small, traditional elite and where the acquired goods served to fashion material cultures that cannot be understood simply in terms of emulation (ibid., p.52).*

The newly-emerging sense of luxury De Vries describes thus needs to be understood in terms of its integrating rather than status-differentiating function, thereby fostering the egalitarian ideals of the proto-modern Dutch society towards the turn of the century. Similarly, in a recent article defining Dutch national style, Belgian socio-economist Dany Jacobs (2010) states that *Cora Kemperman* stands in a national tradition which seeks to bring to consumers a sense of style and quality without compromising the ideals of a society which is deeply rooted in egalitarian principles. As he maintains,

*To some extent we may observe a shift from the cognitive and evaluative stage to the affirmative stage of Dutch fashion identification. (...)*

*Dutch fashion is identified as relatively casual, modernist. A possible new Dutch fashion identity can be related to characteristics which have often been associated with Dutch people: egalitarian and caring, “calvinistically” sober and moderate (ibid., p.10).*

In fact, *Cora Kemperman*'s more exclusive company profile is not the result of high-priced goods (thus rendering classiness a condition of economic means). Rather, the products are inscribed with a sense of uniqueness based on a number of brand-specific policies:

- a) “material exclusivity” through limited production runs in order to keep low the number of available items;
- b) “social exclusivity” by way of a non-discriminate sales pitch and giving each consumer the feeling of being special.

Interestingly, the combination of these two factors has produced a company image which at the same time is perceived as exclusive *and* accessible. Subsuming Jan de Vries' historic account on the development of Dutch social structure during the late 17<sup>th</sup> century and the argument Dany Jacobs makes about Dutch national style, we can identify *Cora Kemperman* as a firm which still lends itself to the Dutch cultural imperatives of urbanity, a broad-based socio-cultural profile, and *burgerlijkheid* (i.e., a bourgeois way of life as a desirable social goal). On the one hand, the firm's low-key market profile, unusual products and relatively high product quality all feed into the New Luxury discourse. On the other hand, the sales practices of the assistants emulate, albeit unwittingly, those of high-ticket luxury enterprises. Following a Dutch understanding of (contemporary) luxury consumption, *Cora Kemperman* strikes an interesting balance between high and low in high-street fashion retail by moderating between old and new, exclusive and accessible, flamboyant and understated.

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**Appendix 1: Questionnaires**

1. A comfortable fit of my clothes is of primary importance to me.	No opinion	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
2. I like to dress according to the latest fashion trends.	No opinion	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
3. I am among the first in my circle of friends to buy a new fashion item when it appears.	No opinion	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
4. Compared to my friends I own few new fashion items.	No opinion	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
5. I regularly buy fashion-related magazines (Vogue, Elle, Marie Claire...).	No opinion	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
6. I regularly check the Internet for the latest clothing trends.	No opinion	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
7. I like buying clothes with an outspoken look.	No opinion	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
8. I like to purchase clothes from brands I can identify with.	No opinion	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
9. I prefer buying brands that work with organic materials and/or are involved with sustainability issues.	No opinion	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
10. I am more willing to make bigger purchases when I am attended on a personal level by the assistants.	No opinion	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

11a. Cora Kemperman is typically Dutch.

No opinion    Strongly disagree    Disagree    Neither agree nor disagree    Agree    Strongly agree

11b. Why? / Why not?

12. How often do you visit the outlets of Cora Kemperman?

1. Once a week    2. Once a month    3. Less often

13. On average, how many items do you purchase per visit?

0-1    2-3    More than 3

14. Please try to name three characteristics you associate with the clothing of CoraKemperman.

15. Which three of the following attributes are most suitable to describe Cora Kemperman as a brand?

Authentic	Reliable	Personal
Innovative	Extravagant	Stylish
Individual	Fashionable	Responsible
Cool/Hip	Recognisable	Sporty
Interesting	Special	Other?

**Appendix 2: Catalogue of Questions / Consumers**

1. Which aspects in particular do you appreciate about Cora Kemperman? Are there certain aspects about the brand you can identify with?
2. Do the brand's clothes form part of your self-identity? If so, how does it show?
3. Would you describe yourself as a fan? How would you describe your relation with the brand?
4. For what kind of occasion(s) do you wear the clothing of Cora Kemperman?
5. Is Cora Kemperman also popular among your friends and/or colleagues?
6. Do you think that, in general, there are one or more consumer groups that are particularly drawn to Cora Kemperman's corporate image? If so, how would you characterise them?
7. What distinguishes Cora Kemperman from other (Dutch) fashion brands?
8. How would you describe the brand in two or three words? Do these characteristics also apply to you as a person?
9. Would you say that Cora Kemperman is typically Dutch? Why?/Why not?

**Appendix 3: Catalogue of Questions / Retail and Brand Manager/ Shop Assistants**

- 1 a.) When you look at your consumers, are there one or more groups of consumers who keep coming back on a regular basis? Are they (roughly) the same kind?
- 2 a.) How would you describe your patrons? What is their mean age?
- 2 b.) Are these real fans of the brand? If so, what do they feel attracted by?
- 3 a.) How many items, on average, do your loyal consumers purchase at a time? What is the average number of items they purchase per year?
- 3 b.) In what way do you make use of that kind of sales figures? Do you discuss the sales figures with your staff?
4. In terms of sales volume, do you profit more from loyal consumers or occasional buyers?
5. Is there a specific way to approach and deal with patrons? Does the brand make use of specific strategies in order to gain information about customers? If so, what do you do with it?
6. What do consumers seek/find in Cora Kemperman and its products?
- 7 a.) Are there specific value connections your consumers respond to? If so, which values are these?
- 8 b.) Do you make use of consumer intelligence in any way?
9. Would you say that the firm's clothing forms part of your consumers' self-identity? Would you be able to describe their self-image?
10. Are there certain (social/professional) groups that feel particularly attracted to the company?
11. Can you say that there is a development in the connection between your consumers and the brand?
12. If you had to describe the brand identity of Cora Kemperman in three words, which attributes would you choose? Do your consumers perceive of the brand in a similar way?

13. What distinguishes Cora Kemperman from other (Dutch) fashion brands?
14. Is Cora Kemperman typically Dutch? Or, conversely, to what extent is it precisely not Dutch?
15. Would you be able to name some general characteristics which are typical for a Dutch national style? Or, of Dutch fashion consumers?

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### Notes

1. It should be noted here that the current economic meltdown has not left unaffected the luxury goods industry. Bain & Company forecasted a drop in sales of about 20 per cent for the first two quarters of 2009 (Bain & Company, 2009). In 2010, a later report confirmed that the industry during the first two quarters of 2009 had experienced a total decrease of 8%, thereby making 2009 one of the most difficult years in luxury retail (Bain&Company, 2010a). Their latest reports, again, confirmed the market's stabilisation, leading to a rise in sales of 10 per cent (Bain & Company, 2010b/c).

# Heritage and Innovation: Charles Frederick Worth, John Redfern, and the Dawn of Modern Fashion

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Daniel James Cole

FASHION INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY, NEW YORK, US

## Abstract

Charles Frederick Worth's story has been told over and over again and is familiar to most fashion students and design scholars. Worth's story (and folklore) has been told repeatedly in fashion history books written during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But while Worth has enjoyed a place of enormous significance, the story of his contemporary, and fellow Englishman, John Redfern has been usually ignored by fashion history, or at best, reduced to mere footnote status. Although fundamental to the history of clothing, Redfern's story is only recently been rediscovered, and only in the past few years has it been properly explored and assessed (primarily by the work of Susan North of the Victoria and Albert Museum.)

Worth is commonly acknowledged as the father of modern couture, rising from the ranks of a notable fabric and dress business in Paris, to leading his own house. Worth was catapulted to success by his fortuitous and well-documented association with Empress Eugenie and her court, and gained the custom of many other women from European royalty, and stars of the stage. Redfern, starting his company in the resort town of Cowes on the Isle of Wight began his business at close to the same time as Worth, developed a clientele that was no less auspicious, dressing Queen Victoria, Alexandra the Princess of Wales, and Lily Langtry among many others. Both Worth and Redfern founded family businesses, and the deaths of both men in 1895 left them in the hands of sons and junior partners. This paper explores how these two men, and the businesses that followed them that bore their names, together and in very different ways, perhaps equally shaped the tastes and the fashion system of the Twentieth Century.

Their story also helps emphasize their differences. Charles Frederick Worth, with lush and luxurious evening clothes and formal aristocratic wardrobes, essentially founded the couture system and the mystique of the fashion designer as exalted artist, paving the way for the outrageous artist as couturier, exemplified in recent times by John Galliano of Alexander McQueen. John Redfern, while creating gowns for the Court of Saint James as equally luxurious as Worth's, was more important in his contribution to the category of activewear, which would develop into one of the most significant fashion areas of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and today. Many of Redfern's innovations in this area, including jersey sport clothes, have erroneously been credited to Gabrielle Chanel. Further, this paper will assert that Redfern Ltd. had a very clear, but as yet undocumented, influence on the development of Chanel's modern and tailored aesthetic.

## Introduction

Charles Frederick Worth's story has been told often and is familiar to fashion scholars. But while Worth has enjoyed a place of significance in fashion history, the story of his contemporary, John Redfern has been ignored, or at best reduced to mere footnote status. Nearly all well-known fashion history survey texts give coverage of Worth, but scant –if any– mention of Redfern. Contini, Payne, Laver, and Tortora and Eubank, all ignore Redfern. Millbank Rennolds, in *Couture, the Great Designers* omits Redfern while including some markedly less important designers. Boucher includes John Redfern, but distills his career to a brief, mostly accurate, paragraph. In *Fashion, The Mirror of History*, the Batterberrys interpret a Redfern plate as:

## *Keywords*

Worth  
Redfern  
Innovation  
Couture  
Designer  
Luxury  
Legacy

Another Englishman, working in Paris, the tailor Redfern, had devised a neat “tailor-made” suit with a short jacket for women, but despite his efforts to simplify women’s daytime clothes the usual effect was heavily draped and fringed, and as stuffily claustrophobic as the gewgaw-cluttered interiors associated with Victorian English taste.

The Kyoto Costume Institutes 2002 publication of fashions from the 18<sup>th</sup> through the 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries includes a short, partially accurate biography Redfern but with erroneous life dates that would have him opening his business around the age of 5.

Recent scholarship creates a different picture of both Worth and Redfern. Pivotal to the history of clothing, Redfern’s story is only recently being rediscovered, and only in the past few years has a proper exploration and assessment begun (primarily by the work of Susan North.) North (2008) puts forward the thesis that in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Redfern and Sons was of equal importance to the House of Worth. It is even possible to assert that Redfern, and his legacy, were actually of *greater* importance as shapers of 20<sup>th</sup> Century styles. An examination of Redfern and Redfern Ltd., in comparison to their contemporaries, calls into question not only the preeminence of Worth, but also aspects of the careers of Paul Poiret and Gabrielle Chanel.

The following explores how Worth and Redfern, in different ways, shaped the tastes and fashion system of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century –themselves, and through the businesses that bore their names after their deaths. Their are intertwined with the major styles of the second half of the Nineteenth Century, and their stories are interwoven with important fashion icons of the time, and demonstrate the power of celebrity clientele to the success of a design house. Both Englishmen, Worth and Redfern founded family businesses; both men died in 1895 and both left their business in the control of sons and junior partners. But in addition to their similarities, their stories emphasize their differences.

### Charles Frederick Worth, and Worth & Bobergh

Charles Frederick Worth is acknowledged as the father of couture, rising from the ranks of a notable fabric and dress business in Paris, to leading his own house. As the story goes, Worth was catapulted to success by the court of the Second Empire. The story of Worth’s rise to fame, and his associations with Princess Pauline Metternich and Empress Eugenie, is a familiar tale but one that has been embellished, even twisted over time, beginning with the rather mythic memoirs of Metternich herself (1922), and of Worth’s son, Jean-Philippe (1928).

Born in 1825, Charles Frederick Worth began his career at a London drapery house. Moving to Paris in 1846, he found employ at Gagelin-Opigiez et Cie, a retailer of fabrics and accessories, and a dress-maker. While in their employ, Worth probably began designing in the dressmaking department. Worth married a Gagelin-Opigiez employee, Marie Vernet, a model at the store. Leaving in 1857, Worth began his own business in partnership with Otto Gustave Bobergh, with “Worth et Bobergh” on the label, and Mme Marie Worth working at the business. Records indicate that Worth and Bobergh was an emporium, much in the model of Gagelin-Opigiez, and sold fabrics, and a variety of shawls and outerwear, with ready made garments as well as made-to-measure couture (Hume, 2003, p.7).

Eugénie de Montijo, the Spanish-born wife of Emperor Napoleon III, was the most important female style setter of Europe during the years of the Second Empire and is associated with many fashions of the time. She encouraged glamour at the French court that contrasted with the reserve of Queen Victoria’s Court of Saint James.

According to some accounts, Worth began his association with Princess Metternich, the wife of the Austrian Ambassador to France, in 1859. Worth set his sights on the princess’s business; Mme Worth paid a call to Princess Metternich, and extraordinarily, was received. Mme Worth presented the princess a folio of designs and the Princess ordered two dresses, wearing one to court at the Tuileries Palace.

“I wore my Worth dress, and can say... that I have never seen a more beautiful gown... it was made of white tulle strewn with tiny silver discs and trimmed with crimson-hearted daisies... Hardly had the Empress entered the throne-room...than she immediately noticed my dress, recognising at a glance that a master-hand had been at work.” (Metternich, 1922)

Eugenie’s admiration of the dress led to her own commissions from Worth and Bobergh, catapulting Charles Frederick Worth to success as other ladies of the court patronized the business.

This well-known story of Worth’s meteoric rise to stardom has recently provoked doubt. Worth scholar Sara Hume questions this account on the basis that it is derived from loving, but unreliable secondary accounts.



The legend that has grown up around his name was built up in large part by memoirs by his son and famous clients written well after his death. After Worth had achieved fame, his clients such as the Princess Metternich, nostalgically wrote of his prominence under the Second Empire. (2003, p.80)

Hume also questions that the custom of Eugenie and Princess Metternich came as early in the decade as 1860, or that he held a place of significant importance in the French fashion system prior to mid-decade. She notes that he did not receive mention in French fashion magazines until 1863, and press coverage for the remainder of the decade was not plentiful. In addition, Worth and Bobergh did not use the designation “*Breveté de S. M. l’Impératrice*” until 1865. Moreover, the number of existing Worth and Bobergh pieces in museum collections from this time is less than what such success would indicate (Hume, 2003).

Worth’s status during these years has been inflated retrospectively, and many other dressmaking establishments were successful at the time. In these years, several were well established. Mlle Palmyre, Mme Vignon, Mme Laferrière, and Mme Roger, all contributed to the trousseau or wardrobe of Empress Eugenie, as did Maison Felix, and it was at this time that *La Chambre syndicale de la Couture parisienne* began. Also emerging in these years, was the great *couturier* Emile Pingat, who came to rival Worth’s importance in late 19<sup>th</sup> century French couture.

The frequent sobriquet of “inventor of haute couture” gives the misleading impression that... Worth introduced a completely new method of designing and selling clothes. In fact haute couture evolved gradually over the almost half century of Worth’s career and represents only a segment of the new fashion industry which developed through the century. (Hume 2003, p.13)

However erroneous the traditional accounts are, it is important to note Worth’s designs for Eugenie and the court promoted French industry and had a favorable impact on the textile mills of Lyon. Soon the house had an impressive client list, including Queen Louise of Norway, Empress Elisabeth of Austria, along with stage stars and glittering *demi-mondaines* of Paris. Although men would dominate the fashion industry in a short time, a man in the dressmaking business was still novel: Worth earned the moniker “man milliner,” and by transforming dressmaking from women’s work to men’s work, the activity of designing fashions was taken more seriously as an applied art.

### John Redfern of Cowes

Across the English Channel, in the resort town of Cowes on the Isle of Wight, the young John Redfern was transforming his drapery house into dressmaking business. John Redfern began his drapery business during the 1850s. Although his business developed slower than Worth’s, he eventually acquired a no less auspicious clientele, including Queen Victoria, Alexandra Princess of Wales, and Lily Langtry. Growing over the course of the decade, the business was established for dressmaking by the late 1860s, and its subsequent steady growth rivaled the importance of The House of Worth for 40 years.

In Cowes, Redfern was able to take advantage of the presence of Osborne House, one of Victoria’s official residences; “the whole island benefited economically and socially from the need to supply the Household and the attending high society (North 2008 p 146).” His sons John and Stanley joined the business during the 1860s. The first recorded clothing from John Redfern was noted at the 1869 marriage of the daughter of W.C. Hoffmeister, Surgeon to HM the Queen; Redfern provided the wedding dress and the bridesmaids dresses (North, 2008, p.146). Certainly the aristocracy noticed the high-profile commission, and Redfern understood the power of celebrity to promote his business in the coming years. At this time a change in dress was underway: more sport and leisure activities were developing specific clothing, and those women who could afford a diversified, specific wardrobe sought more practical attire; clothing for some activities showed the affect of the Dress Reform movement. Ensembles emerged, described in the fashion press of the day as “walking costume,” “seaside costume, and “promenade costume.” More practical outerwear for women was being introduced, even “waterproofs” (Taylor, 1999). At the same time, women’s equestrian clothes were crossing over into town clothes in the form of a “tailor made” costume. For years men’s tailors were producing women’s riding habits, with jacket bodices made in masculine forms. As men’s tailoring standards developed, women’s riding clothes developed similarly, and woolen cloth associated with men’s suiting began to cross over into the general female wardrobe (Taylor, 1999). British tailoring establishment Creed enjoyed the custom of both Queen Victoria and Empress Eugenie for riding habits; opening a Paris store in 1850, The House of Creed contributed significantly to this trend. As tailor made ensembles emerged, lighter weight versions developed for summer activities outdoors.

John Redfern continued with success into the coming years as a very fine ladies dressmaker. However, both of these trends –sport clothing and the tailor made– figured prominently in Redfern’s career as the 1870s began and his business expanded. While neither activewear nor the tailor made were necessarily his “invention,” Redfern would do more to promote these styles than any other designer.

### Worth After Bobergh

Worth and Bobergh closed during the Franco Prussian War. Bobergh retired, and Worth reopened as *Maison Worth*. The Third Republic left Worth without an empress to showcase his work, but other European royals continued to give him business. However the backbone of his financial success now came from the wives and daughters of American *nouveau riche* tycoons, who sought the overt prestige of a Worth wardrobe over the work of their local dressmakers. His popularity with the American wealthy is attested to by the large amount of Worth dresses in American museum collections. From all over Europe and North America, customers came to his house, willing to make the trip to Paris. Worth’s sons, Gaston and Jean-Philippe, joined the business in these years. His reputation was now so noteworthy that Emile Zola created a fictional version of Worth in 1872. He excelled at the ornate draperies of the bustle period, and he reveled in inspiration from 18<sup>th</sup> Century modes, especially popular in the 1870s with *polonoise* style drapery in the manner of Marie Antoinette’s “shepherdess style.”

However, Worth’s true creativity in these years (and in general) has been questioned, and his Hume reputation viewed as inflated:

Monographs of celebrated fashion designers, such as Worth, typically focus on individual genius as a primary force in initiating new fashions. As an individual designer, Worth may not have been the creative genius that his reputation may suggest. The traditional view that Worth was a great innovator may be brought into question by a comparison between fashion plates and his designs (Hume, p.3).

In light of such opinion, it is possible to suggest that his true gift lay not in creating but interpreting trends –already present in such fashion plates– to suit the tastes of his rarified clientele. It is in these years that Worth developed his system of mix and match components of a gown (Coleman, 1989). A series prototypes of different sleeves, different bodices, different skirts were available to be put together in different combinations and different fabrics to create a toilette, maintaining for the client the impression of an original creation.

By 1878, a new silhouette was developing. The understructure that enhanced the buttocks went away, and a sleek silhouette emerged, and princess line construction was essential to it. Worth was important to the popularity of this silhouette. Though he is often credited with inventing the princess line (and supposedly naming it for Alexandra the Princess of Wales) vertical seamed dresses went back to the middle ages. In the late 1850s and 1860s, loose dresses with such vertical seams were worn in the as walking costumes, intended for some measure of physical activity. In its application to this new silhouette, this new style *en princesse* used the princess line seams in a smooth, fitted to the body method, and the term was used to describe both dresses (in one piece from the shoulder to the floor) and with bodices with similar construction. A correlation between princess line construction and the increased presence of women’s tailor made garments has been made (Taylor, 1999): Charles Frederick Worth, in developing and popularizing the *en princesse* style was applying principles of tailored construction to dressmaking, cannily on top of developments in women’s fashions.

Not only did Charles Frederick Worth develop the couture system, he may have truly invented the mystique of the fashion designer as idiosyncratic, exalted artist. Worth needed a personality to suit his fabulous clientele – especially to appeal to the *nouveau riche* Americans –and the “man milliner” affected the role of great artist. He created an outrageous persona, wearing dressing gowns (sometimes trimmed with fur or even tulle) and a floppy black velvet beret. “Such attire satisfied the illusion of a creative genius at work (Coleman, p.25). “Hollander in *Seeing Through Clothes* draws a correlation between Worth’s affected look, and images of Richard Wagner, and Rembrandt (1993): such romanticized *deshabille* was a calculated move, and such affection may have been borne of a desire to mask a lack of genuine creativity with the image of a great artist. The 1880s saw remarkable output from the house; the popular garish colors, the continuation of overt historic inspirations, and the extremes of the return of the bustle in 1883, suited Worth’s aesthetic perfectly. Extant examples of his work in museums from this time indicate a synchronicity of the prevailing modes of the day with his taste for flamboyant theatricality –the “man milliner” cum *artiste* at his finest.

Although Worth was now at the top of Paris fashion, many elite and moneyed customers sought other

designers. Emile Pingat's smaller business attracted the discerning who appreciated the quiet elegance of his work over Worth's less subtle output (Coleman, p.177). Also in these years, Doucet, a decades old emporium of shirts and accessories, launched a couture division headed by third generation Jacques Doucet, and soon rivaled Worth's importance.

## Redfern and Sons

As the Third Republic left France (and the fashionable world) without an empress to be a fashion icon, more attention focused on Britain's royals. Alexandra of Denmark became the Princess of Wales upon her marriage to Prince Edward in 1863. Although she was quickly celebrated for her style, her ensuing six pregnancies kept her out of the spotlight until she re-emerged in 1871 (well timed to coincide with Eugenie's absence.) Alexandra's style helped define fashion in the next four decades. Also of importance as a fashion icon was the Prince of Wales' mistress, Emily LeBreton Langty. "Lillie" Langtry was the most noted of the "Professional Beauties," society women celebrated in the media simply for their looks, and she was, likely, the first celebrity product spokes model. Lillie's hourglass proportions strongly contrasted the lithe Alexandra, but both women were widely celebrated for their beauty, and important to the style of each were the fashions of John Redfern.

By the early 1870s, fabrics from Redfern were in the wardrobes of Queen Victoria and Princess Alexandra, and their custom was included in Redfern's advertising. More significant was the yachting boom that came to Cowes with the Prince and Princess of Wales' enthusiasm for the sport. British Aristocrats, American *nouveau riche*, and other international elite were drawn to Cowes for the developing regatta, and participated in other outdoor activities. The yachting, the wealthy clientele, and the development of sport clothing combined to place Redfern at the right place at the right time. Redfern became the source for yachting and seaside toilettes, and sailors' uniforms often served as design inspiration. Redfern set the benchmark in this category of clothing. Both the Princess and Mrs Langtry enjoyed sporting activities often wearing Redfern; as the widely imitated in anything they wore, they set the styles for this type of clothing.

Genteel activities such as croquet and archery were still enjoyed, but more vigorous sports were becoming more popular. These included hiking, golf, and shooting, and often ankle length skirts (without the fashionable bustles of the time) were worn. Tennis also grew in popularity, with special tennis ensembles. Redfern designed jersey bodices and dresses for tennis (and other sports) and although Redfern was not the only house that featured jersey garments, it became associated with him. Both Mrs Langtry and the princess wore them, and they were documented in *The Queen*, the leading British fashion periodical. Redfern developed a strong relationship with the publication, realizing that paid advertising would lead to more editorial coverage (North).

Redfern continued to popularize the tailor made. The style was a favorite of Princess Alexandra who wore Redfern's, attracted to the combination of style and practicality. Riding continued to be a popular sport for aristocratic women, and the influence from equestrian wear to the tailor made continued. An avid horsewoman, Elizabeth of Austria set styles throughout Europe with her riding habits; a favorite detail was military inspired frogs and braid in the style of the Austro-Hungarian military. This style and other military inspiration quickly found their way into women's tailored costume, including Redfern's.

With royal patronage and coverage in the press, the business grew and expanded internationally. A London branch was the next to be established in 1878, where fashionable gowns were available along with sport and tailored clothes. Managing the London store was Frederick Mims, who took the name Redfern. In 1881 a Paris store opened that took its place in the French fashion scene alongside Worth, Doucet, and Pingat. Leading the Paris store was Charles Poytner, who also took the name Redfern. Under Poytner Redfern's supervision, other stores opened in France, notably a store in the resort town Deauville. By 1884, Redfern and Sons had crossed the Atlantic, and opened a store in New York City managed by Redfern's son Ernest. While Lucile and Paquin are both given credit for being the first transatlantic fashion business, Redfern preceded both of them by more than 20 years. The Paris and New York stores offered the same variety as the London store. Stores in Newport, Rhode Island, and Saratoga Springs, New York catered to the resort customer. While Redfern directly challenged Worth at the Paris store, they also appealed to a broader segment of the market, making the business the more significant. While Maison Worth required its clientele to come to the Rue de la Paix, Redfern and Sons, with branches in England, France, and the United States, brought its product to more of the fashionable world.

### Maison Worth after Worth

By the early 1890s Charles Frederick Worth's role in the house had declined, and as both sons were now active in the company, he essentially retired. Worth left the management of the business in the hands of Gaston, who had already assumed much managerial responsibility. The creative side of was left to Jean-Philippe. The exact chain of events is unclear, as is also the extent of Worth senior's continued role in the house; many Worth dresses from 1889-1895 are unclearly attributed as whether father or son designed them. "It is not possible to determine at what point Jean-Philippe became the lead designer for the house; however garments after 1889 show differences... that suggest a different designer" (Hume, 2003, p.11).

Nellie Melba, the noted Australian opera star, was a long time Worth customer; Melba was particularly fond of Jean-Philippe saying "Jean himself was a greater designer than his father had ever been" (Coleman 1989, p.29). The output of the house in the 1890s shows a remarkable synergy between fashion and *L'Art Nouveau* and *Japonisme* styles developing in the other applied arts. Like Redfern, Maison Worth also showed the affect of the Dress Reform movement, however, that affect showed itself in the form of ravishing, languid tea-gowns along the rubric of Pre-Raphaelite and Aesthetic taste. These were "artistic" costume for the artistic aristocratic lady, and did not show the practical affect that had manifested itself at Redfern.

The decade of the 1900s saw the house of Worth maintain continued success with beautiful gowns, but other designers overshadowed its innovations and styles. Gaston Worth's attempt to enliven the house with a young man named Paul Poiret proved short lived and unsuccessful. The client base had grown old, and now the aging house was dressing aging women.

### Redfern Ltd

In 1892, the company incorporated as Redfern Ltd. The death of John Redfern in 1895 had little affect on the continued success of the business; Redfern Ltd. had transformed "from the most successful ladies tailoring business to an international couture enterprise equal of Worth" (North 2009). Charles Poytner Redfern at the helm of the Paris store, was the most important designer in the company and was equal of Jean-Philippe Worth, Jacques Doucet, and Jeanne Paquin. Featuring designs by Poytner Redfern, the company participated in the Exhibition Universal of 1900. During the 1900s, the focus of Redfern Ltd. was more on couture, moving away from its activewear and tailored roots, although still offering selections in those areas. Underscoring that shift was the closure of the original Cowes store. Royalty still went to Redfern's stores to be dressed, and *Les Modes* joined *The Queen* in devoting a great deal of editorial coverage to the house. North asserts that Redfern Ltd. was the dominant force in Western fashion between the years of 1895 and the 1908 work of Paul Poiret (2009). It is possible to actually establish the pre-imminence of Redfern continued even further into the next decade to 1911. Although these are few years, they are pivotal to fashion history.

Many dress historians treat Poiret's 1908 work as a watershed moment that captivated the fashionable world. One noted fashion historian (Deslandres, *Poiret*, Rizzoli, p.96.) wrote "[as] if women had just been waiting for it, the Directoire line, revived by Poiret, redefined elegance overnight." In light of the fact that Poytner Redfern and Paquin were already doing this line, the extreme nature of such a pronouncement can be easily called into question. Further, the fashion press paid virtually no attention to Poiret until a few years later, making such an "overnight" impact on fashion impossible. Redfern's output was well documented in the pages of *The Queen* and *Les Modes*. Poytner Redfern advocated soft styles, taking inspiration from the 1780s and 1790s. He featured "Romney Frocks" of white *mousseline* in the manner of Marie Antoinette's *chemise à la reine*, and Empire waist *à la Grecque* styles of Directoire inspiration—all beginning a few years before Poiret's 1908 collection. (North, 2009). The commonly held, but retrospective, opinion that this was Poiret's "New Look" in terms of impact on widespread fashion and taste is simply not supportable in this light.

On 3 October 1909 *The New York Times* ran a full-page article on Paris fashions, covering the looks for Autumn and Winter 1910. The article celebrates Orientalist styles for the season, that included Byzantine and Egyptian inspiration, but most importantly Russian styles. Although many designers are mentioned, Poytner Redfern is given the most significance, and the *New York Times* asserts that the Russian style was his creation: "Redfern is a master at these Russian effects, which he is using very much this season for street costumes. He has just returned from Russia whither he goes almost every summer." Maisons Worth, Doucet, and Paquin are all mentioned along with other houses, but Poiret is not mentioned at all.

## The 1910s and Beyond

Paul Poiret became ascendant to Paris fashion, finally by around 1911. His knack for publicity led to elaborate Arabian theme parties, and the press was hungry for the exotic in the few years prior to the war. Perhaps with Charles Frederick Worth as his role model, Poiret postured himself as the eccentric artist, and put forth his creations as great works of art. His designs of these years, with their ersatz Near-Eastern themes were sensationalist and hype provoking, such as his “Minaret” dress and robe *sultane*; while much less elegant than his elegant languid *Directoire* looks of 1908, they grabbed more publicity. *The New York Times* began including Poiret in its fashion coverage in 1910, and the rest of the fashion press followed, so that during the next three years he dominated the fashion media and was prominently featured in the pages of *Harper's Bazar*, *Femina*, and *The Queen*.

Poiret was one of the participating designers in the exciting new fashion journal, *La Gazette du Bon Ton*. In addition to other houses, the roster also included Worth and Redfern. The freshness of *La Gazette du Bon Ton's* style brought life to the two houses, and their designs as represented in *Les Modes* were still stylish. Redfern's relevance outlasted Worth's by a decade, but by now both houses were starting to decline and the glory days of each house had past. The affect on the aristocratic lifestyle caused by World War I impacted both houses further, yet each carried on for several more years.

Also emerging in this decade was the business of Gabrielle “Coco” Chanel. Starting in millinery, Chanel expanded into sports clothes and couture during the course of the decade. A few aspects of her development and story are worth considering. Her early affair with the English-educated horse breeder Etienne Balsam exposed her to an equestrian set that certainly wore English riding apparel and sport clothes, likely from Creed, Burberry and Redfern among others. This certainly contributed to her very lean and tailored aesthetic that stood in sharp contrast with Poiret's opulence. But of even more importance was Chanel's choice of Deauville as the location of her first sportswear boutique. Redfern Ltd had a Deauville store for sometime, selling the company's signature sports clothes; the young Chanel would have unquestionably been familiar with Redfern's product and sport clothes business model. An examination of Redfern designs from the decade underscores the similarity to the Chanel aesthetic. A tailor made costume from Redfern illustrated in *La Gazette du Bon Ton* from 1914, and a sport ensemble from in the collection of the Kyoto Costume Institute, dated c. 1915, both show a marked similarity to Chanel designs that came a short time later. Many of Chanel signature styles, while strongly associated with her today, were actually pioneered long before by Redfern, including, most notably, the use of jersey for sportswear.

As for Worth, he left a legacy into the 20<sup>th</sup> century was of lavish couture gowns and ensembles, that have always been a major feature of the French fashion industry. Edward Molyneux earned the nickname “the New Worth,” as an Englishman who conquered Paris, and he showed great prowess for frosting his sleek elegant flapper dresses with glitter. Perhaps his most significant contribution to the fashion industry of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was his invention of the persona of fashion designer as flamboyant great artist; and the persona took on even more outrageous form in some of his successors. This can be exemplified in recent years with the personalities and manner of Karl Lagerfeld, Jean Paul Gaultier, Alexander McQueen, and John Galliano, among others.

The legacy of John Redfern may actually define clothing in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The intellectual lineage of Redfern is monumental and exemplary of the entire history of 20<sup>th</sup> century clothing: John Redfern mentored Charles Poytner Redfern, who in turn mentored Robert Piguet, who mentored Christian Dior, who led the line to Yves Saint Laurent. Redfern (and his companies) focus on the emerging market of sports clothes led the way to the categories of sportswear and activewear of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and the gradually growing casual aesthetic. The Redfern aesthetic could be tied to such influential fashion design minds as Claire McCardell, Vera Maxwell, Calvin Klein, or Norma Kamali, whose work was not typified by runway spectacle but rather by real clothes.

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# The Dandy as an Innovator: the Usefulness of Paradoxes

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Jeroen Visser

AMSTERDAM FASHION INSTITUTE, NETHERLANDS

## Abstract

Is it possible to start a tradition instantly? Can you innovate out of heritage? Is there such a thing as a timeless, or even an everlasting, contemporary phenomenon?

The answer is yes, and all this shows up within one figure: the dandy. Ever since George Bryan Brummel started this instant-tradition, the phenomenon has never ceased to amaze, nor has it ever gone out of fashion. Due to constant renewal of its own laws and its (highly paradoxical) principles, it has managed to remain innovative. Ephemeral and eternal as it is, dandyism shows a solution for the ultimate design paradox; it creates a new meaning both out of tradition and as a tradition.

The dandy adds meaning, transforms reality, makes luxury out of garbage and vice versa. He takes up a position of ironic detachment, away from the world, and uses this position to his advantage through a continuous quest for beauty and truth. Moreover, the dandy transcends fashion, and transforms luxury, as he does with all forms of reality. Through his transcendence from fashion, the dandy is able to create predecessors of new stereotypes, which he will happily destroy in the same way as he creates them. Fashion for the dandy is nothing more than yet another form of group behaviour, typified by the use of clothing as a distinctive yet homogenizing criterion. Luxury, for most people something with a connotation of wealth, is defined within this article as something that is inaccessible yet desirable for most people. In the case of the dandy, even his talent can be considered a luxury good, even though the dandy would consider himself to be completely talentless. Persistent in his attempts to contradict himself, the dandy finds truth in the middle of paradoxes, hereby creating the perfect environment for the innovation of traditions.

Based on recent, extensive anthropological research (fieldwork) on contemporary dandyism, but also drawing on ideas of earlier research on the subject, this article elaborates on the idea of the dandy as the perfect innovator when it comes to the renewal of tradition within fashion. Tradition in this regard can be seen as a set of values and ideas depending on past convictions or agreements. Innovation then, is the creation of something new, in the broadest sense of the word. In this case, however, innovation should be regarded as a break with tradition, in order to create a new set of values and ideas, which will later possibly form a new tradition. Ultimately, this article will provide a framework for understanding both (contemporary) dandyism, as well as processes of transformation.

## Introduction

Is it possible to start a tradition instantly? Can you innovate out of heritage? Is there something as a timeless, or even an everlasting innovative phenomenon? And is it possible that this ephemeral phenomenon is a tradition in itself? How can one be willing to adopt a tradition that dates back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century on the one hand, while willingly giving this tradition up in order to innovate it on the other hand? Is something still a tradition if it reinvents itself every now and then?

## Dandyism, Tradition and Innovation: Definition, Devotion & Demarcation

The dandy is an ephemeral innovator. This ephemeral tradition will not only provide the framework within which the above mentioned question can be handled, but also serve as an example for an ephemeral, continuous tradition of innovation. Indeed, ever since George Bryan Brummell started this quintessential British tradition during the Regency period, disciples of this phenomenon never ceased to innovate,

## Keywords

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Tradition  
Innovation  
Harmonic Paradox  
Dandy  
Life-Time Performance  
Innovative Traditions



but never broke beyond the limits as set out by the tradition either. Within this paper I will elaborate on the question why dandyism can be regarded as a tradition of continuous innovation, and why the dandy even within this view can be seen as the standard for the contemporary innovator. In order to do this, two assumptions are to be made.

The most important assumption is that dandyism did not die with modernism, and not even with post-modernism. Some scholars argue that dandyism is doomed to dissipate with the rise of modernism (Barthes, 2006; Baudelaire, 1964). Baudelaire regrets the disappearance of the dandy in beautiful prose: “*But alas, the rising tide of democracy, which invades and levels everything, is daily overwhelming the last representatives of human pride and pouring floods of oblivion upon the footprints of these stupendous warriors.*” (Baudelaire, 1964:29). In modernism, Barthes argues, the dandy would have the freedom to do whatever he pleases, which would lead to suffocation of dandyism’s need for individuality (Barthes, 2006). It is Walden who regards this view as “*far too restricted*” (2002: 35). Barbey d’Aurevilly, Walden continues, posed a better statement when he wrote “*For the moment it [dandyism] is asleep but one day it will awake.*” Following Walden, most scholars now agree on the existence of contemporary dandyism (Breward, 2007; Cicolini, 2005; Visser, 2010; Sillevs, 2006), although there are some slight remarks. According to Sillevs and Breward, for example, it is impossible to be a full-time dandy nowadays, due to the heavy societal pressure to do something, where the dandy only wants to be. Moreover, due to postmodernism, where there is such an abundance of diversity in roles, Breward argues that it is very likely that even part-time forms of dandyism are accepted (Breward, 2008). Although in my view the existence of such a phenomenon would be regarded as an oxymoron<sup>1</sup>, I obviously do agree with the idea of the dandy as a figure in present-day society.

Another assumption is that the dandies of today follow the same guidelines, or better, that they are believers in the same “*sartorial spirituality*” (Dutt, 2008) as the dandies of the past. For this assumption, the work of Walden and Cicolini is particularly important. Where it is Walden who sets out the theoretical framework, Cicolini fills in the gaps with examples of greater and lesser contemporary dandies. Adding to this, the fieldwork I conducted in London, in 2007/2008 provides even more valuable information to this overall image<sup>2</sup>. It not only gives an in-depth description of a few contemporary dandies by virtue of the fact that I was interviewing dandies, I was also proving their mere existence. Moreover, as Robin Dutt is quoted: “*So, if the sensational aspect or the sensory aspect of dandyism has never been touched, that has always been understood, by other dandies. [...] there’s knowledge in the eye and then a feeling ‘we are continuing a tradition [...]’.*”

## The Origin of the Species

Barbey d’Aurevilly, who greatly admired Brummell, writes: “*Dandyism was not the invention of a single individual, but the result of a particular type of society that pre-existed Brummell.*” (2002:90). Notwithstanding the words of d’Aurevilly, Brummell is most often to be regarded as the epitome of dandyism (Moers, 1960; Hielkema, 1989; Walden, 2002; Cicolini, 2005; Sillevs, 2006).

Dandyism finds its origin in the Regency period, where Brummell, often referred to as “the Beau”, appeared: “*a nobody, who made himself a somebody, and who gave the rule to everybody*” (Hielkema, 1989:14). Although his status of a nobody is debatable, he inevitably moved up on the social ladder. This was partially due to his friendship with the Prince of Wales, who totally admired Brummell. On the other hand, Brummell acquired his social status largely because of his *understated elegance*, a style that is often used to describe Brummell. It was the innovation of this *understated elegance* that set the example for a totally new tradition; the man’s suit in dark colors such as navy or midnight blue, and black. Developments such as these are not incidental in the ephemeral tradition of dandyism. Still, the most interesting side of Brummell lies not in his sartorial qualities. His witty remarks, although only a few are recorded, are far more important to his dandyism than his threads. After all, since dandyism is a life-philosophy, or maybe even a religion, clothes form the least vital part.

A few decades later it was Oscar Wilde who reinvented dandyism. As an Aesthetic, Wilde advocated the use of luxurious materials, such as fur and silk. In doing so, he rebelled against the then dominating attitude of irrational fear for the *fin-de-siècle* of the 1900’s. Besides indulging in the use of these materials, Wilde was known for strolling through the streets of London in the most outrageous outfits. Important about Wilde is that he was known for his parades long before he was known as the (play) writer and alleged lover of Lord Alfred Douglas. Just as in the case of Brummell, Wilde’s clothes may seem to demonstrate exactly what his dandyism stood for, it was his wit that formed most of his legend.

Where it was Oscar Wilde who set a precedent on aesthetics, so did Quentin Crisp (almost unintendedly) prepare the way for gay rights activists, just by acting out the ‘profession of being’. With his pink dyed

hair, painted fingernails and elaborate suits, Crisp was quite an apparition in mid 1930's London. Indeed, this was only a mere 30 years after Wilde's lawsuit, and sodomy was still considered to be illegal. Quentin Crisp, in this regard, is the personalization of what Baudelaire called "*the man who is rich and idle, and who, even if blasé, has no other occupation than the perpetual pursuit of happiness*" (Baudelaire, 1964:26). Despite the fact that Crisp was not rich (or at least not independently wealthy), he had no other occupation than being. This, together with his numerous witticisms, makes him the direct descendant of Brummell and Wilde, and the forefather of our current dandies.

Nowadays, as "*a sword, and a shield and a crown*" (Horsley, 2008) dandyism keeps on battling against "*the dragon called mediocrity*" (Dutt, 2008). In a desperate attempt to catch a glimpse of dandyism in our contemporary age, I devoted a six-month fieldwork period to this present-day phenomenon as it manifests itself in London. During this period, I spent lots of hours with the most important dandies of our era, known by names as Sebastian Horsley, Robin Dutt and Peter Ffrench-Hodges. They not only allowed me into their world, after a while it even seemed that we were on the same crusade; to find out what it is they are after.

Yet before elaborating on dandyism and its link with tradition and innovation, a description of dandyism is needed. As said in the introduction, it is impossible to define the dandy. Sebastian Horsley, one of the greatest dandies of our age, described it as "*[...] nailing a jelly to the ceiling [...]*" (Horsley, 2008). Therefore, the following paragraph will not try to pinpoint the dandy to a particular definition, but instead it will sketch the circumstances that make dandyism possible.

### Dandyism, a Paradox?

The most unforgivable misunderstandings about dandyism are that all dandyism evolves around clothes, and that every dandy must be a homosexual. This misinterpretation is easily made, and generally takes over all ideas one has about (contemporary) dandyism. Most scholars on the subject, however, have a less restricted view. In general, five characteristics of (contemporary) dandies are mentioned: wit; detachment; a general (yet sensational) sense of style; a deviant attitude towards sexuality and an extreme self-conscious and controlled self-image (Visser, 2010). I would like to add to this list another quality that in fact is the *meta*-quality of dandyism: the harmonic paradox. This harmonic paradox is the *conditio sine qua non* for dandyism; it is the only term that does not restrain the dandy in his peculiar geniality. The harmonic paradox is a double paradox: it is the paradox made possible by dandyism, which is a paradoxical philosophy in itself. It is the dandy "*oscillating between I am Christ and I am a worm*" (Horsley, 2008), resulting in "*usually I'm a glowworm*" (Ibidem).

### Traditional Traditions, and Innovative Traditionals

Deriving directly from culture, tradition is typically human. Inextricably bound to human beings, tradition in this regard can be seen as a set of values and ideas depending on past convictions or agreements. This definition, although useful in its simplicity, does not account for the possibility of traditions to change. Although change within a tradition may sound as an oxymoron, one should only take into account a tradition such as hunting, where the basic idea may be the same as a thousand years ago, yet the weapons change with time.

Yet another danger in this regard is to confuse tradition with traditional. Indeed, some people closely following a tradition may seem traditional. But what about the dandy, who can for traditional reason only be seen as anti-traditional, yet closely following the tradition? Furthermore, as Noyes (2009:239) puts it, tradition provides modernity with a "binary contrast". As Noyes argues, it is impossible for both tradition and modernity to exist at the same time, as they both are set for the same space, which they cannot occupy together (ibidem). Strangely enough, Noyes states also that tradition is pluriform (2009:238), and that the current forms of tradition are more performed than ever. Seen in this regard, tradition can adapt all forms, except modernity. Innovation, as a prime partner to modernity, would then be the arch enemy to tradition, and it would be impossible for the two to coexist.

Noyes however also argues that "*Avant-gardes endlessly replace themselves in a 'tradition of the new'*" (2009:245). She bases this on her point of view where "all self-consciously modern forms are in fact hybrids". This is exactly the point where dandyism blends in the debate. Indeed, the dandy is often regarded to be an *avant-gardist pur sang*. Although this view can be challenged in terms of semantics<sup>3</sup>, most scholars would reach an agreement on this, at least on a general level. This then would imply that innovation, in the contemporary idea, is an integral part of tradition, which would leave us with the question how innovation should be seen.

Innovation, as a general term, is the creation of something new, in a broad sense, applicable to many

fields of interest. In this case, however, innovation should be regarded as a break with tradition, in order to create a new set of values and ideas. Obviously, this can result in the creation of a new tradition.

### Detached Traditions

A tradition, Noyes writes, is “*inescapably ambiguous*” [Noyes, 2009]. The dandy, most authors on this ephemeral subject will argue, is inescapably ambiguous as well (Walden, 2002; Baudelaire, 1964; Hielkema, 1989; Cicolini, 2005; Sillevs, 2006; Visser, 2008; Visser, 2010). Interestingly enough, part of this ambiguity derives from the dandy’s urge to be both innovative and traditional. Indeed, the dandy is both part of the tradition, as well as he is the ultimate *avant-garde*. For the dandy this results in an almost rack-like construction, being tied to a strict tradition on the one hand, while this tradition expects him to explore and innovate on the other hand. This might explain the continuous stride of dandies with themselves, exemplified by Sebastian Horsley, who heavily fulminates against the idea of being dependent on the body: “*the dandy needs to deny the natural role of the body. He doesn’t want to be like a fornicating animal, like anybody else. [...] it is to deny the body as a useful force. [...] I only eat to keep talking.*” (Horsley, 2008). This is also where the biggest challenge for most dandies comes from. Detachment, from as many things as possible, is for most dandies a main cause. For some dandies it is the principal reason that women cannot be regarded as dandies: “*How can you be detached with a womb?*” (Horsley, 2008) This detachment ultimately leaves the dandy alone, with nothing left but suicide: “*It is the only way of getting life on your own terms*” (Horsley, 2008)<sup>4</sup>. On the other hand it forms the basis for his self-development, because he is trying to get self-control in various ways, something that would be impossible without detachment. This in strong contrast with most traditions, which usually attach strongly to preset norms and values, in order to maintain themselves. Henceforth, the only way that dandyism can be explained in terms of tradition is as in Noyes quote on *avant-gardes* that form a new tradition. Having said this, it might be interesting to take a closer look at the innovative aspects of dandyism.

### Ephemeral Innovators

In order to fulfill his “*eternal quest for beauty and truth*” (Horsley, 2008), the dandy needs to be infinitely innovative in his approach to his own tradition. One could argue that after Brummell’s innovation in men’s dress few things have been changed by dandies. However, if one does so, one fails to recognize that every dandy is an artist. The quote by Oscar Wilde “*One must either be a work of art, or wear a work of art*” might then finally become true. Postmodernism largely influenced the possibilities for dandies in terms of becoming a work of art. Especially the fact that performances were from then on acknowledged as an art form lead to the point of view that dandyism can be seen as a life-time performance, where the dandy is both a work of art, the artist, and the audience (Visser, 2010). It is Robin Dutt who said: “*[...] it is almost like opening up a paint box, and experiment. I find that, an utter cliché, the body is a canvas. You can expand it, change it and destroy it, and make it as much as you want.*” (Dutt, 2008), where John Sillevs adds: “*You must be prepared to make a work of art of yourself*” (Sillevs, 2007). Moreover, the voluntary crucifixion of Sebastian Horsley is worth mentioning here as well.

When looking upon dandyism as a work of art, and the dandy as a life-time performer, the step to innovation is not too hard to make. Without getting deep into the subject, art has always served as a precursor of what is about to come. In this regard, the adaptation of Brummell’s sartorial expressions suddenly is not so strange anymore. Even more, Wilde’s seemingly exaggerated clothes and his numerous witticisms were serving as a critique on the *fin-de-siècle*-craze, something people only realized much later (Hielkema, 1989: 68). And was it not Quentin Crisp who openly criticized the gay-hate in early-thirties London, way before anyone else dared? Nowadays, contemporaries like Sebastian Horsley, Robin Dutt, Peter Ffrench-Hodges and Dickon Edwards, were challenging the positive attitude towards group behaviour long before individuality got valued by society as it is nowadays. The dandy, in other words, is reinventing social norms and values, by challenging them. Anish Kapoor, in the introduction to his 2010 exhibition in Bilbao, pinpointed the role of the dandy as an artist: “*I have often said that I have nothing to say as an artist. Having something to say implies that one is delivering a meaning. The role of the artist is in fact that we do not know what to say, and it is that not knowing that leads to the work.*” For the dandy, this is the main cause: there is nothing to say that hasn’t already been said (which explains Sebastian Horsley’s self-introduction as a professional plagiarist), and there’s probably even less originality in terms of individuality, causing the dandy to look desperately for innovation, out of tradition.

### A'Rebours

Now where does this labyrinth of elaborations leave us? First of all, the dandy, and his life-philosophy of

dandyism, must be acknowledged as an ephemeral phenomenon. So, the tradition of dandyism did not stop at the rise of modernism, nor did it break with the emergence of postmodernism. Instead, dandyism reinvents its own tradition continuously, because one of the effects of this tradition is innovation. In order to agree with this argument, it is very important to understand that all elements that form the dandy are leading towards a non-position that results in the dandy being on an eternal quest. This eternal not-knowing, combined with the natural open attitude of the dandy seems to be a perfect breeding ground for innovation. Better said, the result of the unique character of the dandy is that he is the perfect innovator. The tradition of dandyism might even be considered a continuous innovation instead of continuing a tradition. The dandy is always out of his time, whether he is ahead of it or beyond it is not clear, but it is not important either. It is, as Robin Dutt beautifully puts it: *"It's almost like seeing all of us [the dandies] trapped in a time that we haven't chosen. We use things as memories of places that we have never been"* (Dutt, 2008).

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## Notes

1. Dandyism, in my opinion, is to be regarded as a complete life-philosophy. Within this cadre it is impossible to be anything outside the life-philosophy of dandyism, simply because anything that you will do derives from your dandyism, which directly is who you are. That is unless someone isn't to be regarded as a dandy.
2. For a complete overview of this fieldwork I would like to refer to my thesis "Contemporary dandyism: a thesis on paradoxes, identity and style." (2008)
3. If the dandy is literally ahead of the crowd, then he still is to be regarded as a part of the crowd; a role the dandy himself would never agree on.
4. In fact, Sebastian Horsley did, sadly enough, commit suicide, or, as he would put it, deicide (all other people would commit pesticide, in his opinion), on the 17<sup>th</sup> of June 2010. We will miss him dearly.

# Using a Professional Organization to Enhance its Reputation. The Case of the Parisian Haute Couture. A Longitudinal Study (1973-2008)

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David Zajtmann

INSTITUT FRANÇAIS DE LA MODE, PARIS, FRANCE

## Abstract

This article aims to show how the belonging to a professional organization can be used by fashion firms to enhance their reputation. This presentation relies upon a longitudinal study of couturiers and fashion designers operating in Paris between 1973 and 2010.

This research presents the fact that a label (in this case the “haute couture” name) possessed by a professional organization constitutes a strong attachment of the members to the network. The reputation has thus in a way been externalized by the adhesion to a collective organization. This works helps us also to think about the links between creative workers and cities.

## Introduction

The aim of this article is to show how a professional organization can be used by firms as a means to enhance their reputation. The framework of this study is neo-institutionalism.

It has been shown (Selznick 1949) that an organization's objectives can be diverted by the action of an ideologically homogeneous minority. The membership collective organization may result from the presence of selective incentives (Olson 1965), and may also be characterized by the possibility of quitting or publicly criticizing (Hirschman 1970). It can also result from the fact (Meyer and Rowan (1977) institutions tend to resemble each other. Moe (1980) considers that Olson relies on hypotheses as regards individuals which are too restrictive, Olson considering individuals as rational, perfectly informed and economically selfish. Olson, on his view, thinks that memberships with a political finding have a strong role. Moreover, he introduces a leadership dimension, the “political entrepreneur” enabling participants like the personnel of organizations or the outsiders to exist. We accept from this view the accountancy of the plurality of interest but also the recognition of the role of third parties.

Granovetter (1973 and 1975) takes from Polanyi (1944 and 1957) the concept of “embeddedness” but considers it with a different logic because he estimates that the embeddedness of economics into society has not disappeared. He opposes to the view of firms as isolated units and points to the fact that firms develop cooperative relationships with other firms. Uzzi (1997) pointed out the fact that critical transactions are dependent on firms that are embedded into social relationship networks.

It has been highlighted that social movements can have a strong effect on the institutional change of an industry (Durand, Monin and Rao 2003). The fact that particular industries offer products that cannot be interchangeable has also been shown (Karpik 2007). However, according to our knowledge, little attention has been drawn to the way a professional network can be used in order to enhance the reputation of its members. In our opinion, we need to go further than this holistic approach.

Therefore, the research gap that is the following: which kind of benefits does a firm search for when joining a collective organization?

A longitudinal study of couturiers and fashion designers operating in Paris between 1973 and 2008 has been conducted. Two types of sources have been utilized: annual reports from the *Fédération Française de la Couture, du Prêt-à-Porter des Couturiers et des Créateurs de Mode* between 1973 and 2008 and

*Keywords*  
Designers  
Haute Couture  
Professional  
Organization

interviews of past and present members of this Federation.

This work has enabled us to identify three different themes explaining the reasons for joining and participating in a professional organization:

- The members of a professional organization seek to preserve their reputation.

We believe that when the members of a professional organization seek protection against counterfeiting the main motivation of this action is a protection of their reputation.

- The members of a professional organization seek financial incentives.

- The members of a professional organization seek for a privileged position towards their national and international competitors.

It appears that the first theme is the first in importance.

This research enhances the fact that a label (in this case the “*haute couture*” name) possessed by a professional organization constitutes a strong attachment of the members to the network. The reputation has been thus externalized by the adhesion to a collective organization.

In 1868 the *Chambre Syndicale de la couture et de la confection pour dames et fillettes* was created. In 1910, this organization (with a slightly different name: *Chambre syndicale de la couture, des confectionneurs et des tailleurs pour dames*) was dissolved. In 1911, the *couturiers* estimating they should have their own body created the *Chambre syndicale de la couture parisienne*. The last institutional change took place in 1973 when two other bodies were created: *Chambre syndicale de la mode masculine* and *Chambre syndicale du prêt-à-porter des couturiers et des créateurs de mode*. These three groups created the *Fédération de la Couture, du Prêt-à-Porter des Couturiers des Couturiers et des Créateurs de Mode*.

It has been shown that *couturiers* can use two strategies to enhance their position: conservation strategies or subversion strategies (Bourdieu 1975). Therefore, it is logical that newcomers using subversion strategies question the current institutional frame. What is original in the case of the Parisian high-end fashion is that the professional organization has dealt with this contestation by creating a new umbrella organization which comprises both its historical body and a new body which accepts the newcomers.

### Couture as the Making of a Profession

Before the French Revolution, tailors (men or women) did not have the right to sell their fabrics and were then only subcontractors, obliged *de facto* to a public anonymity.

Parisian *couture* was really created under the reign of Napoleon III. The mixture of the renewal of a court life and the appearance of *nouveaux riches* gave an ideal environment to the rise of a selective fashion. Worth, who was English, first started with the haberdasher (in French: *mercier*) Gagelin, and had an individual clientele who asked him for advice on their clothes, an attitude which was totally new, the tailor having traditionally no word to say.

Worth then left Gagelin and opened his own company on rue de la Paix in Paris. He established all the codes of the Parisian *couturier*: a clientele of celebrities (starting with the French emperor's wife Eugénie), a “bourgeois” style house, the presentation of the clothes on real people, and most of all, an authoritarian style, making the “*couturier*” the one who decides the style of clothes.

Alongside and after Worth came a cohort of *couturiers* (such as the Callot sisters, Doucet, Paquin or Poiret). All these individuals needed to be clearly distinguished from a lot of *couturiers* working in Paris in order to justify their position and prices to a national and international elite clientele. Therefore the *Chambre Syndicale de la couture et de la confection pour dames et fillettes* was created in 1868.

The *Chambre syndicale de la couture* was created in 1911. Article 4 of its status indicates that no demand for admission should be made without the sponsoring of two members of the Executive Committee of the *Chambre Syndicale*.

Two events brought significant changes to this industry: the sequels of the 1929 crisis and also the consequences of the Second World War.

Before 1929, the French Parisian *couture* industry was a major exporter. Among the big clients were Department Stores in the United Kingdom and in North America. The Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act from June 17, 1930, by raising United States' import duties to *couture* related products (such as embroidery) to high levels reaching 80%, made French *couture* garments totally uncompetitive.

During the Second World War, the *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne* had to deal with a project of the German occupation authorities who wanted to transfer the Parisian *Couture* either to Berlin or to Vienna. The authorities of the *Chambre Syndicale* managed to make the Germans renounce their project and seized this opportunity to be the body, officially recognized by the French Government, which will allow the different quantities of fabrics. This position was followed by the new Government

after France's liberation. Therefore, since then, a list of authorized Couture houses is published by the French Ministry of Economy.

Additionally, since the 1930's, it is the *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture* which organizes the fashion show calendar. This gives this organization a role that cannot be easily bypassed.

In 1946, Christian Dior, leaving Lucien Lelong couture's house where he was working, decided to open his own couture house. He signed very fast a lot of licensing agreements around the world. This licensing system has allowed a lot of couturiers to stay in the couture industry.

A stronger source of income was the perfume and cosmetics activity. The case of Chanel, where the same shareholder controls both the couture and perfume activities, is the most explicit example of this situation.

### The Rise in International Competitors

In the 1950s a growing competition came from Italy. An initiative by an Italian businessman, Giorgini, led to the growth of fashion shows in Florence, and to the interest of American buyers for the Italian offer. Since the 1970s the main fashion shows in Italy have taken place in Milan. However, unlike the Parisian fashion shows, they mix different lines of same brands. A coordination and promotion body, the *Camera Nazionale della Moda Italiana* (The National Chamber for Italian Fashion) was founded in 1958.

In the 1970s, the USA also developed their own high-end fashion industry. Companies such as Calvin Klein, Donna Karan and Ralph Lauren thrived without having a fashion show in Europe.

### The Rise in National Competitors

On a national level, the couture industry was also challenged by national newcomers. The so-called *créateurs de mode* (such as Kenzo) organized fashion shows outside the official calendar and won high approval from left-wing magazines. Some of the newcomers came from the retail industry, others began their careers as fashion journalists. New couturiers decided also to mix *haute couture* and ready to wear. This led to a first initiative: the founding of the *Groupement Mode et Création*.

### The Role of Fashion Journalists or how External Actors can have an Influence on Institutional Change

In contrast to French gastronomy, where the *Guide Michelin* has over the years remained a recognized source of quality approval (Durand, Rao, Monin, 2003), there is no admitted rating book or guide in the Haute couture. Public approval depends as a consequence a lot on the fashion journalists. However, in France, a clear distinction should be made between the situation between before 1945 and after. Before the end of World War II, the magazines for women reproduced the models of Parisian Couture, and no other kind of fashion was considered. Two women journalists Hélène Lazareff and Maïmé Arnodin changed this situation, using what they experienced during and after the war in English-speaking countries. Back in France, the former founded *Le Jardin des Modes* and the latter *Elle*. These two magazines progressively introduced in their publications ready to wear products, sometimes even created in collaboration with producers and department stores.

This produced a marginalization of *haute couture* product for the young Parisian working in the fashion magazine industry. Later, generalist left-wing magazines such as *L'Express*, *Le Nouvel Observateur* or *Libération* promoted new comers.

### How did the Professional Organization Deal with Activists?

This situation had to be addressed by the professional body. Two phenomena occurred: a leading personality, Pierre Bergé, understood that the industry should change its structure in order to stay at an important level. And some of these *créateurs* were eager to join the official body in order to benefit from the visibility of a common Parisian ready to wear show. Mr Bergé became the President of the new *Chambre Syndicale du Prêt-à-Porter des Couturiers et des Créateurs de Mode*.

It must be noted that before 1973, the ready to wear collections of couturier houses were presented during a week that was managed by another professional body: the *Fédération des Industries du Vêtement Féminin*. All the couturiers who were in the situation, asked to be removed from this calendar.

As in French gastronomy, where the *nouvelle cuisine* movement was followed in 1969 by a new name of the former *Maîtres Queux et Cordons Bleus de France* into *Maîtres Cuisiniers de France* (Durand, Rao, Monin 2003), the change of the power configuration of the French high-end industry has resulted in a new shape of the professional structures.

It seems, although we cannot rely on knowledgeable figures, that couture activity has, during the 1980s,

faced a decrease in the number of its clients. The main attention of young people, was, as in the 1970s, concentrated on non *couture* designers, such as Thierry Mugler, who organized dramatic fashion shows. This situation may have led to an aging image of haute couture at the beginning of the 1990s.

A dramatic change in the structure of the industry has also been noticed. A lot of brands are now subsidiaries of publicly owned companies. Therefore, these brands rely less on a professional organization to have help on tax or export matters, for example. The size of the companies has also changed dramatically. For example Christian Dior couture 2009 turnover was € 717 million.

In 2001, *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture* changed its name to become *Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture* and officialized in this way the use of the name *haute couture*.

## Reputation

The presence of reputation leads to the use of a premium by firms, premium which also a compensation for firms' investment in reputation (Shapiro, 1983). In activities where status and reputation matter, a firm's current affiliations have an effect on following affiliations (Benjamin and Podolny, 1999) It has also been shown that organizations can enhance their value by the building and the exploitation of a reputation (Shamsie, 2003).

When the study was started (2008), one must notice that the members faced different situations. Some of them produce both haute couture and women ready to wear, some of them also produce menswear, some of them only produce women ready to wear, or only menswear. The designer of the brand may either be exclusive, or may work for hi/her own brand or even for other brands. If we take the case of young designers, some of them absolutely need to participate in a fashion show in order to gain audience. But in this case, some of them are attached to a regular participation in either the *haute couture* or the ready to wear week, but others will, for cost reasons, ask to skip a season of presentation.

As in the cuisine industry, where a Chef-Restaurant dyad can be observed (Durand, Rao, Monin, 2003), we can, since the 1980s, observe a Designer-House dyad which complicates the situation. The objectives of these two parties could in fact be different and sometimes divergent.

Direct access to all the reports of the *Fédération Française de la Couture, du Prêt-à-Porter des Couturiers et des Créateurs de Mode* between 1973 and 2008 has been possible. These reports have an average size of 8 pages. All the reports between 1973 and 2001 have been analyzed using QSR NVivo8 software. Interviews of major actors of this field have been done between 2008 and 2011. All the interviews were recorded. The President and Executive Director of the Federation have been interviewed. The Executive Director of the French Clothing Industries Federation has also been interviewed. We also met major fashion consultants who were in the business between 1955 and 2010. We finally met participants of the Federation, including former CEOs of companies such as Dior, Givenchy and Kenzo and also young designers who have recently joined the Federation.

Some managers were the CEOs of both couture and ready to wear houses, others managed only ready to wear houses. Some of them also managed high-end fashion and textile brands in Europe (Germany and Italy).

The interviews were conducted face to face, the average length was one hour, some of them lasting more than two hours. The interviews were semi-directive. The themes that were treated were the reasons for joining the organization, the benefits sought, as well the relationships with the other members. A thematic analysis has been conducted. The interviews have been done using direct access. The QSR Nivo8 software has been used to identify themes.

The use of two different sources (annual reports and face to face interviews) has allowed us a triangulation of our data.

## Results

It appears that the members of the Federation had, since their entry into this organization, a clear idea about their aims and that the reputation given by the membership to this organization, was the main motivation of membership.

1) The members of a professional organization seek to preserve their reputation

The reputation of "couture" is used as a way to allow diversification into other products. For example, one former CEO of a major ready to wear brand of the 1980s explained to us: "*It's like in the Bible, at the beginning was the Word, and the Word became flesh. Design is the first level, it's like in the Bible, and after, classically, we learn that in school, design enhances the product. And the product will generate a brand. (...) I had this pattern in mind as soon as I joined the company*". Another one hence told us: "*I gave my designer a total freedom, within the limits of a budget, for the couture collection, but the*



ready to wear collection he had to respect a collection plan”.

The access to the fashion show calendar seems to be the most important motivation. As one referee told us: “I think that fundamentally the first motivation of a newcomer is the calendar”.

The annual meeting reports show also that the aims of the members were quite clear. Hence, the first annual meeting report from 1976 quotes the President saying that: “as concerns haute couture, the idea was to preserve it, to protect a non substitutionable brand image and to prove it was not dead”.

2) The members of a professional organization seek financial incentives

The search for financial incentives was also a motivation for membership. Two main tax deductions have thus benefited the members of this organization: until 1979 a pay back of fabrics used for haute couture collections to the condition that they were produced in France, and from 2008 a tax deduction for the expenses related to the design of clothing collections (whether they be haute couture or ready to wear products)

3) The members of a professional organization seek a privileged position towards their national and international competitors

Members from the organization ask to be protected by the actions from national competitors, in particular a protection against infringement.

They also ask their organization to promote their activities at an international level. They also ask the organization to pay attention to the politics of the same industry's organization in other countries. This was the case with Italy, a country with whom an agreement has been signed by the two professional bodies representing high-end fashion.

## Contribution to the Theory of Collective Action

This study has brought in our opinion some contributions to the theory of collective action.

We do not agree that social changes are the reason for the changes of the professional structure. Rather, in accordance with Bourdieu (1975), we think that the political vocabulary is being used by newcomers to make themselves a place in the market structure. We however agree that we face an identity movement. We also think that, in order to renew old houses, the transgression logical has been introduced in these houses, whereby, by staying in the couture scheme, the privileges (as regards the aristocratic image given by this label) are maintained. The case of Christian Dior, whose haute couture designer has been John Galliano since 1996, is the clearest illustration of this new logical. The challenge underlined by Bourdieu in 1975, attracting young clients and also new members of the “dominant” classes, was in our opinion the same in the 1990's, and therefore superficially related to the 1968 movement.

As a conclusion, we think that professional groups, in what Karpik (2007) called “singularity economics”, tend to be more a tool for a public judgment hierarchy than a traditional lobbying body. By incorporating new players, they can ensure themselves to be a strong tool and to face international competition. What is significant in this case is that very few defections can be found.

We also consider that this study showed that a purely “monetary” approach (by this we mean thinking in direct benefits) should be completed by a view considering the long-term objectives of the firms where in this case reputation reveals to be a decisive factor.

Further research could be done on the shaping of the agenda of a professional organization by its members.

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# Stagnation in Innovations in Wedding Wear: Designers Riding on Heritage

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Saroj Bala & Tripti Gupta

PEARL ACADEMY OF FASHION, NEW DELHI, INDIA

## Abstract

Indian textiles are the most unique example of traditional heritage. The flavor of Indian textiles is reflected through delicate embroideries, intricate weaves, and exquisite patterns in prints. Wedding wear is one of the ensembles which represent the culture and heritage the best.

In India it is estimated that the wedding wear market is close to Rs. 38.4 billion with a growth rate of 13.5%. The luxury wedding industry has been mainly governed and steered by craftsmen who have excellent skills embedded in their genes. There is a huge dependence of designers on the artisans for creating wedding wear ensemble. For most people wedding wear is a huge luxury and is the most important occasion in one's life so people spend a fortune to look special therefore, it offers a great scope of creativity. However, there seems to be a lack of creativity and stagnation.

A market study conducted revealed that although the consumer taste has changed but the designs available are very traditional with limited improvisation and contemporization. We seem to be dependent on the same age old patterns, colors, motifs and techniques. Paisleys, Peacock, Lozenges, centre line patterns and geometrical patterns rule the market and are repeated over the years in same style. There is also a lot of over designing. The Indian ethos for wedding wear is quite traditional but consumer would like to experiment and also see other motifs derived from traditional patterns. There are many Indian crafts available which are finding limited application for wedding wear and few don't find place at all. Today designers are confused and riding on culture without drawing inspiration and further innovating and creating something which is original and yet traditional. There is a need to revive and redesign so that there is a strong foothold of traditions with touch modernity. It is time we take lessons from our glorious past and set new bench marks to grow rather than rest on the past laurels.

Corporatization will make the industry more organized and give designers more opportunity to innovate and experiment. While the designers have got the due limelight the skilled craftsmen are still working in their shadow. Corporatization will help designers and craftsmen share the same pedestal and work hand in hand. It is high time we overcome the "design myopia" and contemporize and innovate to the fullest potential. The overseas market has always been fascinated and overwhelmed by our heritage and there is a huge potential to make a mark.

The myths associated with wedding ceremonies sometimes handicaps the consumer itself to stretch themselves beyond deep rooted ritualistic traditions in their mind set. Is this one of the causes of the stagnation of the wedding patterns/wedding designs? The paper will mainly delve into the stagnation issues and its reasons, consumer psychology and the current environment. How can designers carry forward the magnificent past we are proud of rather than heavily relying on heritage?

## Introduction

India is known for its rich heritage in textiles. The flavor of Indian textiles is reflected through delicate embroideries, intricate weaves, and exquisite patterns in prints. No other country in the world is as rich in textiles as India. Every geographical location has its own weaves, print, resist techniques or embroideries. The motifs, designs or prints which have existed over ages are so rich and balanced that the designers hold them very close to their heart and have carried them forward almost blindly without any

## *Keywords*

Stagnation  
Wedding Wear  
Heritage  
Tradition  
Corporatization  
Contemporization

remarkable changes. This is more prominently reflected in wedding wear which is an ensemble that represents the culture and heritage the best. So the result has been that the motifs in wedding wear have remained stagnant with very less innovation.

It might be true that old classic motifs and designs will always remain ever green and might permeate consumer mind very easily but is it just enough to ride on heritage. This is what has been happening for decades in Indian Wedding wear and has become a stagnant story of motifs in Indian wedding wear. The vicious cycle of using the same old design motifs again and again have led to this impasse. It is true that these creations are created by master crafts men and have the best visual forms with perfect rhythm, balance, harmony and proportion. The old school thought of designers are so fascinated by them that they have created most designs around traditional patterns. Have the designers tried to break the conventional design tricks and execute something that would surprise the consumer mind? Do designers need to conceptualize their ideas around the heritage or go beyond to evade long term stagnation in creativity and keep the design language healthy and progressive? This could be controversial and is one of the challenging thoughts of the authors to research and reflect their ideas on.

### Review of Literature

Fighting off design stagnation can be a very challenging business for the design community. Young creative minds that do not have so much exposure may enjoy freedom of experimentation unlike old minds which might be tied up. Sometimes our hands are tied by what we think we know and as we get older we only build up more and more pre-solved fixes to problems. It's a tough balance; we tend to fall back on these as we carry a growing number of responsibilities with us.

Good design and good thoughts will only get generated when you flex your mind. New thoughts can be generated in a new light when ideas are tossed regularly. Good ideas usually come in those "in between times". It is not necessary to find a purpose but purpose will follow its course in due time on its own. Don't wait for a brief. In case one follow a rigid brief the ideas get restricted.

In India it is estimated that the wedding wear market is close to Rs. 38.4 billion with a growth rate of 13.5%. Wedding wear industry mainly thrives on craftsmen and artisans for its creative motifs and ornamentation most of which is manual, toll taking and done in the traditional way. There are 16 million skilled craftsmen in India with fine dexterity and skills.

### Objectives

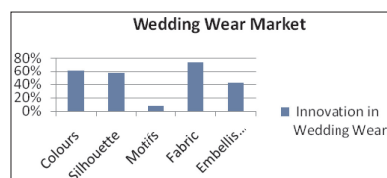
The paper will mainly delve into the stagnation issues and its reasons, consumer psychology and the current environment. How can designers carry forward the magnificent past we are proud of rather than heavily relying on heritage? Is there a gap existing between craftsmen and designers? Where is the scope for bridging the gap and designers contributing to the heritage rather than heavily depending on it?

### Research Methodology

A research was conducted and 30 Designers, 20 Craftsmen and 50 Consumers in Delhi, the capital of India were interviewed through questionnaire technique. Some questions were closed ended and few were open ended. The data and findings are cited below.

### Findings

#### The Wedding Wear Market



The luxury wedding wear has undergone sluggish changes in terms of colors, silhouettes, materials and embellishments. The color palette for wedding wear which was traditionally limited to red, pink, orange, magenta and maroon has been expanded to include golden, bronze, silver, yellow, wine, onion pink, and carrot red. A lot of emphasis is being laid on *accent color* and *highlight*. Green and blue colors which were not used in wedding wear are being used liberally as accent colors and for color contrast. Multi colored wedding wear is also finding its way in the market. The silhouettes for cholis (blouse) and lehanga (skirt) have changed. The cholis have become more sensual and glamorous. The traditional lehanga with gathers and A-line cut is giving way to panel. There has been fusion of traditional cuts and western wear like lehangas with a trail, lehangas and cholis stitched together to give the look of a gown. The sari has also undergone a change in the form of structured saris where designers play with the drape. Earlier silk, chiffon and georgette were ruling the

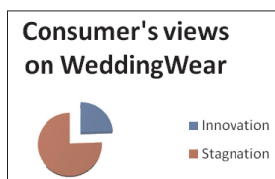
wedding wear market. Now fabrics like brocades, tissue, net, crepe, Banaras hand woven jacquards have almost taken over the market. Mix and match of different fabrics and patch work are also being experimented with.

Embroidery as a design technique is still the most popular but the embellishments have changed. A variety of embellishments is being used with mix and match e.g. sequins, gota, beadwork, zardozi, mukaish, swarovski, stones and crystals. New sparkly embellishments can be seen entering the market every month. Few designers are also using foil printing, techniques of layering and appliqué for surface ornamentation.

In every fashion show the whole package is changed and the *product looks* new but on closer look we realize that there is hardly any change in the motifs. In the commercial market the Mughal motifs like paisley, grapevine, centerline patterns, lozenges and flowers rule wedding wear. The designers are only playing with placement essentially due to the change in silhouettes. So is it the same old product in a new package being offered season after season.

## Consumers Analysis

*Traditional values & strong socio-cultural mind set*

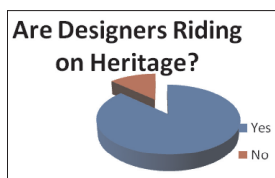


Wedding as a ceremony is very auspicious and all the customs happen according to the culture. It has a very deep and strong social cultural context. There is a certain identity of a bride in every culture. In certain cultures some motifs have a very strong significance and consumers want them to be incorporated in the wedding wear which further limits innovation. E.g. Peacock and parrot are symbols of Kamadev depicting desire, fulfillment and love. Lotus or Padma symbolizes laxmi the goddess of wealth. The pitcher full of water and coconut symbolize intuitive fulfillment, fertility and productivity. The motif of elephant symbolizes abundance where as mango seen as paisley represents ripeness or fullness. Rudrash used as dots symbolizes well being. It is believed that the use of these motifs will usher in good luck for the couple who are starting their lives and hence the consumers want them.

It is an occasion where family members over generations get together so the bride wants to wear what is more widely accepted in the family as well as society. In many families wedding wear is passed on as heirloom and so people want to wear something traditional and classic.

It is equally true that every bride wants to look her best and wants to wear something different. We asked 50 consumers how they felt about the variety of wedding wear that is being offered in the market and 68% felt that there is stagnation and the market doesn't seem to be offering anything new. "After visiting few showrooms my search for *innovation* metamorphosed into *going with the trend*", said one of the consumers who had exposure to the fashion world. "I wanted something exclusive but the clever sales men made me change my views and I am buying what they told me is in trend." said another customer. It seems that there is very little breathing space for design as the fabric is heavily covered with embroidery work. It is almost impossible to figure out the motifs and there is hardly any differentiation between different wedding ensembles. Contemporary designs are almost non existent in the market expressed others.

## Designers Analysis



Designers seem to be working with only few traditional motifs. 87% designers seem to be conveniently riding on heritage. They openly confessed that there is no harm in riding on culture as it is elegant and can be sold at a high price.

*Business centric and not Design centric*

Some of the designers use heritage because *it sells*. The designer for wedding wear have to work within the brief provided by the consumer. In a consumers mind the *look* is most important. They want to look different and yet don't want to drift away from the strong cultural association of wedding wear. The vocabulary for the wedding wear changes from region to region and culture to culture but is quite restricted within it. This imposes constraints on their creative ideas as they go by the clients requirements and work towards their satisfaction. They believe that one satisfied consumer will bring in twenty more so the focus is not so much on creativity and innovation but customer satisfaction to fulfill business objective. It is more business centric rather than design centric. Many time customers want sparkling and heavy look. In certain social circles the bride's dress has to look expensive and represent the family wealth status. So they compromise on their design sensibilities and offer a heavy look

to justify the cost. “For many consumers it will take a certain exposure and confidence when the focus will shift from bling bling to something which has a true aesthetic sense”, said a leading designer.

#### *Risk of innovation*

Wedding wear means a huge investment of time and money for the designer and everything they experiment doesn't always click with the customers leading to huge loss sometimes. It is mostly the upper class that has more exposure to global fashion and are ready to experiment both with traditional and contemporary. The middle segment has a *safe and seen* attitude. Therefore, in this whole scenario designers feel restricted and confused whether to innovate or not.

#### *Little scope for changing classic motifs*

Some designers feel that the traditional designs are beautiful and classic and there is no scope of changing them. Very few designers are bold enough to introduce contemporary design for wedding wear which is a traditional institution. *Contemporization* of tradition is not easy. Traditional design is a way of life. It is the correct and time tested way, accepted by masses and has been there for years. It has a story to tell. Contemporization means a lot of research in to the soul of the design and make changes according to the person who is wearing it today. It requires interaction with the design elements, getting into the soul, imbibing it and bringing small incremental changes or may be a complete change.

#### *Easy to execute*

For few designers *heritage* is a ready made *inspiration* that saves time, effort and money. It is also easy to execute. In luxury wedding wear execution of designs depend heavily on craftsmen. Designers create a lot of art work keeping in mind the limitations of the craftsmen and work around traditional motifs. The designers feel that the craftsmen sometimes have no sympathy with them as far as on-time delivery is concerned. So innovating would mean dancing to the tune of the craftsman. Training them and then run after them is very toll taking.

### **Craftsmen Analysis**

#### *Design, an expression of craftsmen*

Craftsmen are one of the *key* stake holders in traditional and luxury wedding wear. The luxury wedding wear industry has been mainly governed and steered by the skilled craftsmen who have excellent skills embedded in their genes. Most of their motifs are the one's they picked from their ancestors. These motifs have been evolved as a mode of expression of their emotions. They have been inspired from the natural surroundings of the craftsmen and also reflect their day to day life with all the joy, sorrow and festivity. The craftsmen have strong association with the motifs and colors and can unravel the story behind it. Since their life style and values in life have not changed it is difficult for them to bring a change. Most of the craftsmen are still confined to their native places and do not want to transcend territories, explore and bring a change in their motifs. They also fear that any changes in the motif may lead to loss in identity of the craft.

#### *Lack of vision*

The dexterity of Indian craftsmen is extremely good but they lack the vision to go beyond heritage and explore designs and contemporize them. They depend on designers for creative inputs. This is firstly due to the lack of basic education and secondly due to design education. This is a major obstacle in their way to creativity.

#### *Working within the comfort zone*

There seems to be contentment with craftsmen across the board. Some of craftsmen are happy and contented in their comfort zone that they don't want to come out of this shell and experiment. May be for monetary reasons or they feel that there is no point in experimenting if they don't get a chance to showcase their creativity and get orders for it... hence they just want to produce the regular work. This also gives them scope of making as less errors as possible or lest it might be a debit to them. This always remains a worry in their mind. Working on same motifs means more production, better monetary benefits and less error.

#### *Constraints to Innovation*

Some of the skills are so time consuming that quick mass production is not possible. So unless a designer is ready to pay high sampling cost an artisan may not try it. Too many changes or one can call it innovations may also not be feasible sometimes.

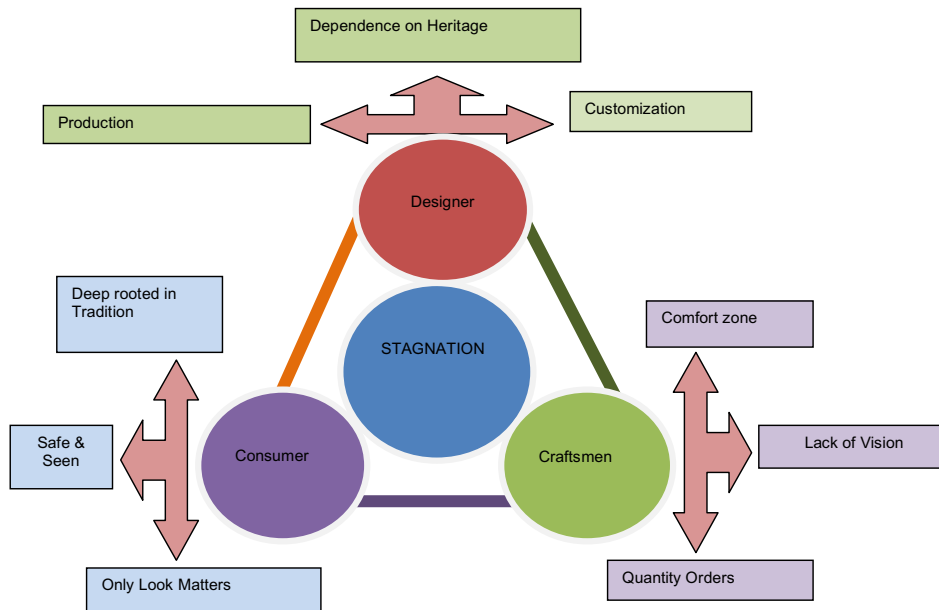


Figure 1: The design myopia

## Discussions

### Contemporization for Globalization

The wedding wear market is huge and growing at a very fast pace. It is also sustaining designers and craftsmen. The world is already fascinated by our weddings as a ceremony as well as wedding wear. Many famous couples come to India to get married and the bride happily wears the lehanga or sari but beyond it there is little adaption in their own countries.

Contemporization and innovation seem to be the call for the day. If we innovate designs Indian wedding wear as a concept will change and there will be a massive growth that will lead to globalization. On the other hand if we keep repeating the same designs and do not innovate to create differentiation some other country might take advantage and enter the wedding wear market. Other segments of garment industry are already facing the competition from other countries owing to their low cost of production. It is time to ponder.

### Key Holders to Innovation-Designer vs Craftsmen

The Innovation in design can be brought in by the two main stake holders-designers and craftsmen but right now there seems to be tussle between them.

The designers feel that they are the ones providing the design brief to the craftsmen so they are the *real entrepreneurs*. Therefore the designers claim that they are the visionaries. The craftsmen feel that they are the real executers and have better skills so they should be considered equal partners in the value chain.

The designers feel that craftsmen are insensitive to innovation and are not ready to experiment where as craftsmen feel that innovation means a lot of hard work .Craftsmen feel that designers treat them as laborers and most of them are not ready to pay the price for sampling on one hand and on the other hand time press the craftsmen to deliver instantly.

The risk for innovation is very high for craftsmen. The designers have platforms to showcase their creativity where as craftsmen have very few opportunities. If it doesn't sell it could be a question of survival for them.

Designers feel it takes a toll on them to create something new but the craftsmen easily dilute it and copy it for others.

Keeping in view the above issues there is a strong need to bring in the two drivers of innovation together. The craft sector is existing as an unorganized sector which is highly exploited by middle men. The government has worked towards alliance of craftsmen by making cooperatives which have helped craftsmen sustain a livelihood and work in an organized manner. These cooperatives have helped in organizing the craft sector to some extent and have worked as a sustainable solution. However in context of

wedding wear market there is a strong need to bring in collaboration between designers and craftsmen. The ideal solution therefore seems to be corporatization.

**Corporatization as the Driving Wheel to Innovation**

Corporatization is the key to success for sustained growth and development in any field. The visibility that the corporate sector can bring to any product is unsurpassable. This concept can therefore become a long term investment to uplift craft and artisans. E.g. the global presence and fan following for sports like cricket, tennis and football is because of corporatization. It has given a new life to young talent and a platform to showcase their talent. This has increased the professional commitment of individuals and they can concentrate and build on their strengths. The sportsmen have become household idols and ambassadors in their own way and many sports person have started giving it back to the game.

Media and advertising have played humungous role in popularizing not only the sports but also the product therefore if the craft also get endorsement by public figures it can lead to popularity. This can further lead to mass ownership thus building a strong brand identity. Crafts need patronage and sponsorship.

In case big giants like Reliance or Birla's step in and take over wedding wear industry it can help to steer in innovation as they will have the money to pump in this sector especially for experimentation in craft. They can bring in designers and the craftsmen together for collaboration so they cooperate with each other and work towards new explorations. This will give craftsmen due credit and recognition as equal partners in innovation and bring them on the same pedestal as designers. It will also bring in the distinction between skilled craftsmen and workers and the monetary benefits will help them to steer in innovation effortlessly.

The designers and craftsmen will not have to worry about dead lines or risk as corporate may not look at short term benefits and will have the time and money to invest in long term profitable projects.

Corporatization will mean creating systems to work, structure and a process flow will immensely benefit the industry. It can bring economic reform in the unorganized sector. Corporatization will bring about globalization but one needs to be careful as globalization poses its own challenges-economic, social and cultural.

Corporatization can also improve the general health and work environment of craftsmen. Generally crafts like embroidery weaving and printing demand long hours of work with unhealthy sitting or standing postures. Corporatization can also help in improving ergonomics.

**IPR Protection**

Intellectual property right is a burning issue in every creative field whether it's the film industry or the music industry. Individuals have become conscious about mimicry of their voice, actions being used for commercial reasons. IPR is a crucial asset for any individual or organization. One of the main hurdles in innovation is copy right issues. What takes days or months to innovate gets copied in seconds. Many designers are deporting the crafts person to their factories to avoid pilferage of designs and the craftsmen work only for them but this does not seem to be a long term solution. Corporatization will help the craftsmen and designers to create new designs and get copyright protection. It may require lobbying and asking

for government intervention. Government should start a drive and map the different crafts and file for international copyright protection regarding the motifs. Till the design gets registered one cannot be sure whether the crafts person will get a due share for their innovation and creativity. Moral and ethical issues cannot just protect the interests of the craftsmen.

There is a need for political intervention to build a standardized price policy for hand crafted materials. If this happens then there will be protection for craftsmen and their financial existence will be taken care of. This will protect the craftsmen and their interest.

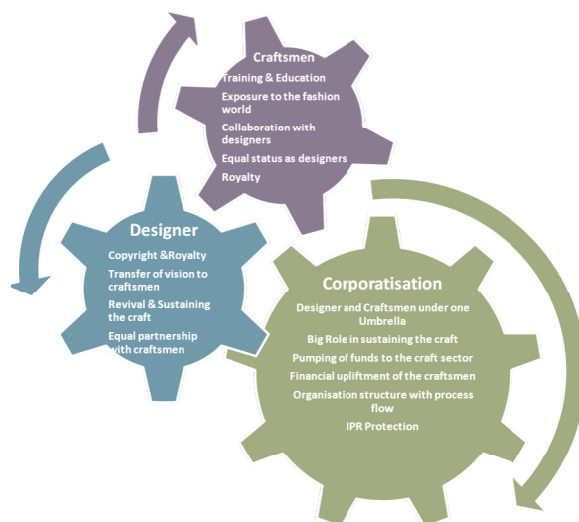


Figure 2: The driving wheel for innovation



## Conclusion

Heritage is precious and we need to cherish and be passionate about it. Innovation does not mean dilution of culture. It means to find new dimensions and inspirations rather than skimming on the surface. There is a great scope of regional motifs and crafts to find visibility in the luxury wedding wear market. There is need to innovate and improvise designs to develop a new culture to take heritage forward. Creativity will never be a quantity game but it is the aesthetic sensibility and acceptance of the same by a consumer which is crucial. Innovations will be subtle and may develop over a much larger time scale than the annual fashion season.

There is a need to develop designs that are visually clean coherent. Because of the customer pressure designers are creating ensembles which are over done, diluting the aesthetic appeal. In the Indian context the Indian consumer wants what he has seen earlier unlike the west where consumer asks for some thing which *no one else is possessing*. It's the *mind* set which needs to change.

What is lacking in our system is a robust design system and to have the conviction to take heritage ahead. So both extremes traditional and contemporary can exist *hand in hand*. Craft is not a *process*. It is sacrosanct... it will never give a 100% output, you can't calculate in mathematical terms and cannot get intravenous results. There will always be a gap between ideation and execution. It takes time to develop design. Changes only happen "a little". Hence instant liquidity may not be possible. If corporate world comes, they will need to have patience and need to have faith and not an *ad hoc* off the peg approach. Design management is very crucial as the same strategies of management may not apply to design field. One does not want the exclusivity of design lost. It should not become a victim of mechanization and one needs to strike a very fine balance.

Innovation and not repetition of heritage will be the key to success to revive heritage else most of us would just be blindly riding on it for next few generations to come... although it seems to be perfect and instant solution to design! The world has reckoned the strength of Indian culture and heritage... and it is time that we contemporize heritage so that India in future becomes a destination for design services.

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# Get Ahead, Get a Hat: Model Millinery in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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Margo Barton

OTAGO POLYTECHNIC, DUNEDIN, NEW ZEALAND

## Abstract

Model millinery was once considered an essential everyday conformist accessory, with images of seas of hats adorning the masses in the earlier part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century; however, at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, an image of many hats would be exceptional. September 1959 *L'Officiel* magazine signalled that hats were 'in', showing millinery in almost every editorial image; a different story was shown in the social pages, with practically no millinery worn at all. Was this the point of rupture when millinery fell out of favour, and when it had to recompose?

Millinery is now out of time and out of place, a bygone object and as such is viewed as a signifier of individual fashion style; shown very aptly by fashion doyennes such as Anna Piaggi and the late Isabella Blow. Model millinery has been relocated from an item of everyday attire to that of special occasions, and to the catwalk, it has been compelled to reinvent itself, it is now positioned as an unusual and rebellious accessory (Todd, 2003) worn by few. Model millinery or one off millinery, relating to the fashion terms: couture or bespoke, is not mass produced. Model millinery fits the dictionary definition of luxury in as "something that is beyond what is essential or what one is accustomed to." (Webster, 2002, p.222).

Milliners now have the opportunity to design fantastical creations for the catwalk when working with designers, such as the collaborations between Stephen Jones and John Galiano. In the forward to Jones' book Galiano states: "I couldn't do a show without Stephen Jones." (as cited in Jones, 2009, p.7). But that is often where the millinery remains, on the catwalk as a spectacle, not on the street or in magazines. Stephen Jones mused on the lack of millinery coverage in magazine accessory articles, he asked: "Why are they remaindered to the Timbuktu of fashion when they are in fact its Shangri-La?" (Jones, 2009, p.13).

In this paper I draw on twenty five years as a milliner and on an interview undertaken with a millinery professional who worked in the period from the 1940's through to the 1970's. I ask if the casualisation of fashion has done millinery a service by accident, if millinery has slipped into the area of luxury almost unnoticed, and if it has moved from the worn to the viewed. I discuss how and why model millinery has become a fashion spectacle in the fashion parade and where millinery sits in today's culture. This paper suggests that a new tradition for millinery has resulted in a luxury accessory, and asks –"If you want to get ahead, get a hat" still rings true.

## Introduction

September 1959 issue of *L'Officiel de la Couture et de la Mode de Paris* was the key motivator for this research. The publication contained ninety-seven models wearing hats and twenty-three were hatless within its editorial pages, and I was struck by the lack of millinery on wearers in its social pages. Admittedly, the social pages contained images of cocktail and evening events, nevertheless cocktail and eveningwear hats did feature in the magazine. There was a noticeable gap between editorial fashion content and that worn on the street.

For some time millinery has been out of time and out of place, many attribute this fall from popularity with the casualisation of fashions and if this caused millinery wearing to being confined to special functions (de Pont, 2011; Fitzpatrick, 2007; Adler, 2003; Black et al., 1999). Another possible cause was the invention of hairdressing techniques and products which made hat wearing difficult (Barton, 2010).

When interviewing Stephen Jones and discussing millinery wearing in the 1980's Janice Breen Burns aptly states:

## Keywords

Millinery  
Hat Wearing Trends  
Fashion Magazine  
Editorials  
Casualisation

“The 1960s ‘youthquake’ had simplified and casualised fashion so efficiently, the thriving millinery industry –bigger than fashion clothes manufacturing at peak times in the 20<sup>th</sup> century– had inevitably withered.” (Burns, 2010)

Heidi Klum from the reality TV program *Project Runway* has a byline about the fashion design/designers popularity ‘One day you’re in. The next day you’re out.’ I speculated if the fall in popularity of millinery wearing happened overnight or if was over a period, and I wondered what the cause was, additionally, it was intriguing that although millinery is no longer part of our daily fashion repertoire, millinery and hats are often part of our everyday language.

### Context

So what is millinery? The field of millinery sits within, but separate from the discipline of fashion. In the context of this paper, I define millinery as any headwear designed and made for women worn in a fashion context. Period or national costume hats for women was not included, neither was headwear such as flowers, scarves and hoods as these items were seen as fashion items worn on the head rather than millinery. The millinery included could have been mass-produced and could have been a one off or model millinery. The important feature of the millinery was that it was used fashion editorials within fashion magazines.

I love millinery, I have been a milliner for 25 years. Over the years there have been many calls that millinery is ‘back in’, recently becoming louder and more frequent (Kaminer, 2010; Zinko, 2010; Van Gelder, 2009; Sewing, 2008; Fitzpatrick, 2007; Witkin, 2006), and with *Vogue Italia*’s Franca Sozzani stating in the online publication of *Vogue Italia* that

“This will be the hat season: in straw or fabric, in any shape and colour.”  
(Sozzani, 2010)

*The Luxist*, a website devoted to luxury and fine living, also believes millinery will be ‘back’ in 2011, with Kirsten Young writing a feature on the subject on December 30, 2010 titled “The Fashion Statement: Will 2011 be the Year of the Hat?”. She goes on to state that, “Not since the ‘80s have we seen so many hats!” Finally, Young forecasts the fashion future stating, “My prediction for 2011? Enter the era of headgear. Hats are back.” (Young, 2010)

Glossy coffee table publications and technical instruction manuals appear to be the primary vehicle for writings on millinery as fashion items. These books rightly celebrate the artistic merit of the milliner or millinery (Jones, 2009; Blow et al., 2002) or the history of millinery (McDowell, 1992; Wilcox, 1946), or a how to of millinery (Anlezark, 1990; Richter, 1961; Hill, 1909). These are all inspiring publications, but they do not add to the dialogue on the fate of millinery, or millinery as a signifier of change. There are limited academic writings on millinery, with most academic writings focused on millinery as women’s work, millinery as a trade along with dress making (Simonton, 2006; Gamber, 1997), millinery and the obliteration of the bird population (Haynes, 1983). The gap in scholarly writing on millinery was an opportunity too good to miss, I decided to ‘throw my hat into the ring’ and enquire into this subject.

My previous writings on millinery focus on the designerly making process of millinery and the use of digital technologies for designing millinery, within these writings I acknowledge that millinery is on the margins (Barton, 2009, 2008, 2008, 2005, 2004). Being on the margins has advantages and offers opportunities, I could draw the analogy between millinery’s circumstances and Baudrillard’s discussion on the bygone object,

“The bygone object always gives the appearance of being a wallflower. Beautiful though it may be, it remains ‘eccentric’”. (Baudrillard, 1990, p.36)

John Laver reported on the cycle of fashion in a succinct manner in his 1937 writings *Some Conclusions*, he developed the following list to illustrate when fashion become dowdy.

“In fact, the following list might be established. The same costume will be

Indecent	10 years before its time
Shameless	5 years before its time
Outré (daring)	1 year before its time
Smart	
Dowdy	1 year after its time
Hideous	10 years after its time
Ridiculous	20 years after its time
Amusing	30 years after its time

Quaint	50 years after its time
Charming	70 years after its time
Romantic	100 years after its time
Beautiful	150 years after its time”

(Laver as cited in Johnston, Torntore & Eicher, 2003, pp.114-118)

I used the sentiments of Laver's list to reflect on the cycle of millinery wearing, and asked where millinery sits on the list above currently. Could the time lapse between the popularity of millinery and 2011 suggest that the wearers perception of millinery has moved from hideous to ridiculous to amusing and that it is presently moving towards quaint and charming and within those classifications possibly luxury?

When talking about the fashionability of millinery, Anonymous stated in the *Washington Post*,

“But what if we're just cruising for a fall? If my beloved fedora can be rapidly adopted by the hipsterati as a fashion accessory, no different from an ironic T-shirt, then it can be unadopted just as rapidly. Fashion is fickle.” (Anonymous, 2010)

I decided to uncover when and possibly, why millinery fell from grace. I put my thinking cap on and asked if millinery slipped into the area of luxury almost unnoticed; and had moved from the worn to the viewed and the often referred to? I deliberated; enquiring whether it was advantageous to millinery to be classified as a fashionable item; or if such a categorization would end the concept that millinery is a luxury accessory?

## Methods

Why did the millinery industry wither? To discover the answer to this question I spotlighted the recent history of millinery, with a focus on millinery wearing habits, in particular millinery which appeared in fashion editorials in notable international fashion magazines.

I drew from my professional experience and from observations to formulate some starting propositions for this case study. I predicted that I would find trends in millinery across the publications and from an interview and reflective practice. Formulating propositions at the start informed the direction and scope of the study (Baxter & Jack, 2008); however, I acknowledged that the propositions could alter over time.

## Propositions and Scope

### Initial Propositions

- The casualisation of fashion and the increased popularity of hairdressing combined to influence the demise of millinery as an essential fashion accessory; and
- The timing of these watershed events occurred in the late 1950's and 60's.

### Scope

These elements were included in the study:

- The activity of hat wearing: models wearing hats in fashion editorials were the primary source, with additional information from milliners and a designer; and,
- The dates of 1939 > 2009: the dates of the magazines sourced.

In addition, there were several defining elements within the study, these included:

- Millinery: as defined as hats and headwear for fashion purposes;
- Wearers: only female women;
- Magazines: fashion editorials the primary source; and,
- Commentary: from a retired milliner (Kennett), a designer (de Pont) and myself a milliner.

These points were not included in the study:

- Millinery: flowers and hoods. These pieces may or may not have been designed and made by a milliner;
- Wearers: children and men; and,
- Magazines: advertisements.

## Data Sources

### Fashion magazines, 1939 > 2009: Primary Data Source for the Study

September 2009 issue of *L'Officiel* prompted me to question millinery wearing and the relationship

between editorials and the public wearer. September issues were chosen as the issue of focus, and I attempted to source only September issues and used a series with the view that it would help me identify the point of rupture. In the film *The September Issue* (Cutler, 2009) Anna Wintour, editor-in-chief of *US Vogue*, commented that the September issue of *US Vogue* was the biggest and the one which sold the most in the year.

After an initial search, I set on a seventy-year sample, and although this was outside Kennett's experience as I was starting six years before he commenced his career, I felt it was an important issue to include. Fashion magazine September editorials from the period 1939 to 2009 provided me with a snap shot of millinery.

Fashion magazine editorials were utilized as a tool to observe how fashion editors viewed millinery at the cutting edge. Magazines are an important cultural artifact and tool, as discussed in Tengblad's paper.

"When I pick up a magazine, I now know that I am holding in my hands a tool that has been used for hundreds of years. It has shaped the thoughts of women, sometimes for good and sometimes for bad. Magazines are powerful." (Tengblad, 2009)

I needed magazines which covered most of the sample period, and which offered multiple views of the same or similar styles, albeit from a different cultural perspective. I surveyed fashion magazines available at the Dunedin Public Library, this library holding an extensive collection of magazines dating back to the 1920's. I surveyed the options, looking at several magazines from the 1940's, including *Vogue* (US), *Harpers and Queen* (UK) and *L'Officiel* (France). Following an initial search of the magazines, I discovered that I could have explored many lines of research; a number of these will make ripe research directions for the future.

Quantitative data collection consisted of counting models wearing hats and models not wearing hats within the editorials, which gave me the percentages of models wearing hats in each publication editorial, and I recorded if millinery appeared on the cover.

### Commentaries on Millinery and Millinery Wearing

- Interview and ongoing discussions with Lindsay Kennett, milliner;

Kennett had worked as a milliner wholly and solely since graduating from art school in 1945; he continues to practice millinery in his retirement. I read my abstract to him and recorded his reactions to this, asking more questions which arose from our discussions. I drew on the many conversations we have had over the years, Kennett supplied me with various informal and unreferenced writings he had accumulated on millinery over the years.

- Reflection on my experiences as milliner and millinery wearer.

Over the years I have been a hat wearer and am a milliner, these experiences and points in time have framed my perspectives on millinery, and I welcomed this personal view through reflections on my millinery experiences. A lot of my millinery designing and making includes developing designs to compliment fashion designers wares in New Zealand Fashion Weeks. In addition, I responded to quantitative data from the magazine analysis and to the qualitative findings within the magazines, along with Kennett, and with my collaborator Doris de Pont.

- Email communication with Doris de Pont, New Zealand fashion designer and collaborator.

De Pont used millinery in most of her catwalk shows at New Zealand Fashion Weeks. She responded to the questions from the point of view of a fashion designer.

### Data Collection

The purpose of the data collection was to identify changes in millinery wearing in fashion editorials in the two key fashion publications, *L'Officiel* (France) and *Vogue* (United States of America), over a period of seventy years and to compare the findings with the experience of two milliners (Lindsay Kennett and myself). Alongside this, I continued to read articles and books which centered on millinery and the trend of millinery wearing.

### Reliability and validity

To ensure validity of the study I believed that I needed to investigate a time span that was outside my experiences and to include multiple voices in the form of sources, writings, images and opinions. I did not want to use historical publications and therefore examine millinery of the periods solely through a historian's lens, as that could bring with it an outsiders view. I desired a contemporaneous review of millinery fashion over a period of time 1939 to 2009.

The collection of magazines at the Dunedin Public Library has gaps in the issues, and the library did not hold all September issues of the publications required for this study. The librarian noted that the gaps in the collection had several possible causes, including intermittent paper shortages, shipping or postage difficulties, theft of magazines, changes in buying plans and constraints on library purchases over the years. September 1949 issue of *Vogue* (US) was missing, there were no 1949 publications available. March 1948 issue was used as a replacement, and I acknowledge that a different season could have different hat wearing trends; therefore, this issue was used for qualitative data only. Of the two chosen publications *L'Officiel* was the magazine which had most of the missing issues; fortunately *L'Officiel* official website: <http://www.jaloufashion.com> has a comprehensive online archive, which partially solved this problem. The mix of online and printed primary material posed a possible threat to the validity of the study; I decided to discount *L'Officiel* as a quantitative data source and to use it for qualitative information only.

### Magazines Investigated

Publication / Year	<i>L'Officiel de la Couture et de la Mode de Paris</i>	US Vogue
1939	September, 1939 Available online <sup>1</sup>	September 15, 1939
1949	September, 1949 Available online	March 1, 1948 <sup>2</sup>
1959	September, 1959	September 1, 1959
1969	September, 1969 Available online	September 15, 1969
1979	June, 1979	September, 1979
1989	September, 1989	September, 1989
1999	October, 1999	September, 1999
2009	September, 2009	September, 2009

1. Online magazines could be a threat to the study; they were used for qualitative data only.
2. This issue was out of the series of *Vogue* (US), it was used for qualitative data only.

## Discussion and Findings

### Data

Date	1939	1949	1959	1969	1979	1989	1999	2009
% Wearing hats <i>Vogue</i> (US)	68%	91%	53%	25%	2%	7%	12%	24%

Figure 1: Percentage of models wearing millinery in fashion editorial: *Vogue* (US) 1939 > 2009.  
Please note, 1949 *Vogue* could be invalid

### Discussion

Prior to analyzing the data from the magazines I spoke with Kennett and I speculated that I would find the biggest change in the number of hats appearing in the editorials between the 1970's and 1980's, this speculation was corroborated by my dates, the hat wearing in editorials in 1979 and 1989 was 2% and 7% respectively.

At the start of this study, I believed that millinery had survived two world wars and a depression only to be killed by hairspray, wigs and new cultural attitudes starting in the 1950's. Kennett also believed this; he travelled to Australia to for business in 1960 and met with the buyer (un-named) from Georges in Melbourne, who told Kennett that "hats are going to disappear, so I am giving up millinery". Kennett told me he thought the man was speaking through his hat (not telling the truth) and thought no more of the comment for a few years. Kennett commented to me that the man must have known something as "within ten years the department stores did away with millinery departments and they were left with one millinery stand in the clothing showroom". This was a very different story to the millinery heydays Kennett remembers where there were several floors of millinery at department stores, and every smart woman was wearing a hat.

Kennett commented that “the seventies were the grimmest period for hats” he named the period as the “great hat depression” and told me how he waited with “baited breath for the Vogues to arrive and hoped and prayed that a hat would be one at least one page.” Kennett was right, the millinery shown in *Vogue* (US) in 1979 was minimal, the 1979 issue featured just one hat, a knitted beanie style by the designer Perry Ellis, hardly millinery, but at least it was a hat. He also mentioned these issues which influenced millinery wearing: trouser suits, wigs, moderation of hat wearing rules at church and of course, hairdressers. Kennett stated that hairdressers were the “vandals of the scalp”; he made it clear he does not like what hairdressing did to millinery, and he said that there was a “battle between milliners and hairdressers, and the hairdressers won”. Kennett and I were in agreement that the 1960’s and 70’s heralded the overtaking of millinery by hairdressing, I was therefore surprised to learn that the battle between milliners and hairdressers had been an ongoing one. A 1937 *Life* publication dedicated a page to this battle, with the byline (*Life*, 1937, p.34):

“Life on the American Newsfront: hairdressers and milliners battle over curls.”

The article states that in a 1937 hairdressing and cosmetologist convention, the hairdressers of New York and Paris declared war was against millinery. The officials of the organization “boldly announced that the new hair style for women in 1937-38 season would be a stack of curls piled high on the head.” *Life* magazine goes on to describe how celebratory milliners John and Frederic of New York reacted; “they fluttered their eyelashes, and declared: It’s too absurd.” The caption under images of the president of the New York state hairdressing association, Emile Martin and the Madison Avenue milliner John say it all. “Emile, the hairdresser, wants curls high” and “John, the milliner, wants the hats low.” There was no middle ground here.

Collaboration with fashion designers is the mainstay of my millinery work, over the past years, and the millinery created for fashion events was usually viewed by me as props, they were created for the spectacle of the catwalk never having any intention of putting my millinery into production. I have noticed a new trend, people requesting to purchase the millinery that I have created specifically for catwalk shows to compliment fashion designers clothes, such as the oversized felt Homburgs shown in the Nom\*D winter 2011 collection below.

I asked a long-standing collaborator, New Zealand designer Doris de Pont a series of questions regarding millinery and fashion parades, millinery wearing, and luxury. Dde Pont used millinery in many of her collections, and she expands on the reasons for using millinery from the point of view of a fashion designer.

DP: The millinery served to give expression to that idea by bringing together the form of the 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial bonnet with the imagery of the South Seas in flora and fauna using contemporary materials and techniques, so encapsulating the central idea and completing (topping off) the look.” (Dde Pont, 2011)

Do you think that the millinery in the show could translate to the street?

DP: “Absolutely, the concepts are eminently translatable to pieces as small as hairclips or as large as sunhats but who will wear them as they hurry about their business... (see the next answer)” (de Pont, 2011)

I asked Doris de Pont if she thought that millinery could be described as a luxury accessory.

DP: “I would consider millinery as a luxury primarily because our contemporary lifestyle makes little allowance for the superfluity of ‘dressing up’. The inclination is to ‘dress down’ so that generally a hat must have an essential function to warrant its wearing. A fashionable hat is no longer an essential expression of being up-to-date but has rather become an optional accessory worn to ‘complete’ a look and is almost exclusively the preserve of the ‘special occasion’ such as a wedding, Cup Day at the races or an audience with a Dignitary. The normal pattern of most lives have made those sort of events rare and the dressing for them, a luxury.” (Dde Pont, 2011)

People want relaxed easy lives, they are busy, and hat wearing takes time. Non-millinery wearers complain about the negative issues with hat wearing, reasons for them not to don some millinery. The most common cry is ‘oh no, hat hair’; I point out that there is no such thing as a bad hair day, only a good hat day. When you scratch the surface about hat-less-ness and today’s fashions, people are worried about standing out in a crowd, they wish to blend in.



#### Photos

- 1 Nom\*D, Danse Macabre collection, at New Zealand Fashion Week 2010, Margo Barton millinery, (Photography Hilary Johnston at New Zealand Fashion Week) used with permission from Nom\*D and Hilary Johnston
- 2 ‘Let’s Gather Here’ collection, by Doris de Pont, Winter 2004, Margo Barton millinery, (Photography Michael Ng / New Zealand Fashion Week) used with permission from Doris de Pont.



## Conclusion

Millinery is out of time and out of place, to be hat-less-ness has become the norm. I propose that millinery had its heyday between 1949 > 1959, and using Lavers classification, I wonder if we could we ascertain that millinery is now on the ascent and could be categorized as quaint.

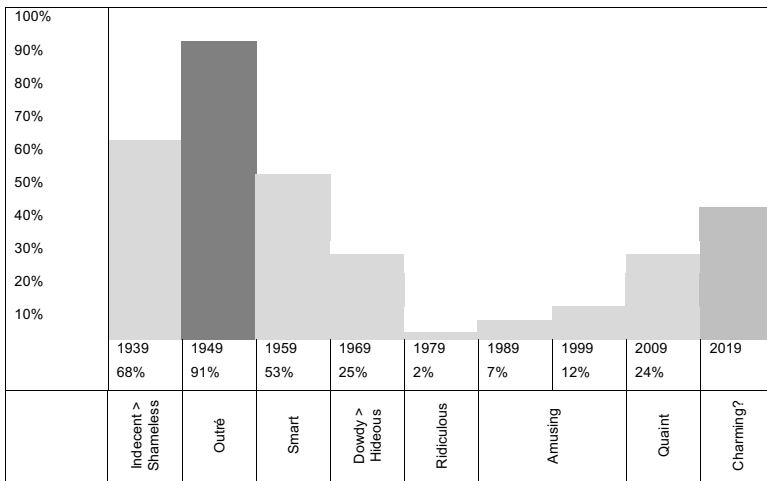


Figure 4: Laver's classification adapted to findings. Please note, 1949 could be invalid

This study has scratched the surface of millinery trends and wearing and there are many directions for future research that have arisen. Some interesting data could be discovered with a comparison of the statistics of hat wearing in editorials from *Vogue* (US) with a publication from the Southern Hemisphere, for example, Australian or New Zealand *Vogue* from the critical periods 1969 to 1999. This data could shed some light on the movement of trends and geographic locations at those times. I noted that there were many hats used in advertisements in *Vogue* (US) right up to and including 1989, the editorials showed a different picture. Why did the advertisers choose to feature millinery in their advertisements?

I observed a considerable number of hats in a 1959 *L'Officiel*, ninety-seven models wearing hats and twenty-three were hatless; I believed that possibly the fashion editors of the time were out of step with the public. Millinery has gone through much iteration, it has been in and out, and fashion editors have used it then dropped it. I noted that all of the millinery in the *Vogue* (US) September 1999 issue and many pieces in the September 2009 edition were in stories that Grace Coddington had styled. I wondered if a voice such as Coddington's could bring millinery back from the margins. Does the future of millinery rest in the fashion stylist and editors hands after all? Moreover, if millinery is adopted by the masses will it cease to be a luxury accessory?

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# A Case Study for Innovation in Contemporary Tweed

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Kirsty McDougall

UNIVERSITY OF BRIGHTON, UK

## Abstract

*Dashing Tweeds* is a woven textile and menswear brand set up in 2006; its philosophy based on the reinvention of tweeds, suitings and traditional luxury woollen fabrics for fashion. Fabrics are sold by the metre or bespoke designed. The company takes inspiration from the functional and aesthetic heritage of traditional British wool whilst embracing innovation in luxury textiles. Early Burberry and McIntosh are inspirational in their adoption of fabric innovation in conjunction with classic British design. The company is dedicated to the evolution of traditional aesthetics and production methods. It embraces the links between heritage and contemporary design innovation in the form of hardwearing, functional, luxury products. This paper will focus on international client case studies that have chosen to work with *Dashing Tweeds*, exploring the market demand and desire for UK produced heritage inspired, innovative products in luxury menswear.

Tweed is a traditional British woollen fabric woven in variations of a twill structure from rough spun blended wool, traditionally used for outdoor activities such as fishing and hunting due to its moisture resistance and durability. Harris Tweed has been hand woven in the Western Isles for many years and is synonymous with British textiles. This method of hand production, high quality materials and durability seals its status as a luxury fabric in the context of the current fast moving fashion cycle. It is imbued with the emotive notion of the landscape and culture which inspires it. It evokes a response in menswear that appeals to memory and nostalgia of less ephemeral and disposable fashion. Much of its appeal is bound up in its association with home spun production, 'authenticity', melange of colour and functionality.

Dashing tweeds combines the heritage of tweed and the use of technical yarn to produce fabrics which have a sense of tradition with an innovative function. Fine reflective filaments are woven into woollen suiting using a variety of new and traditional structures that allude to the tweed aesthetic. A current project is exploring the use of carbon nanotube/polymer composites imbedded in wool textiles with a view to creating fabrics that are recognisable as tweed but possesses hidden function. Designs are based around traditional checks, twills and herringbones. Colour inspiration comes from the surrounding changing environment, much in the same way as traditional tweeds were inspired by the landscape of rural Scotland and Ireland. Dashing Tweeds colour comes from the urban environment of double yellow lines, wet pavements and the parks and architecture of London.

*Dashing Tweeds* appeals to a menswear market that doesn't want an obviously innovative looking aesthetic but enjoys the technical aspect through hidden innovation in a heritage inspired textile. Through analysing the relationship between Dashing Tweeds and their client base, the paper will address market demand and relevance of such a company and discuss the importance of heritage inspired cloth, innovation in materials and sustainable production to the brand strategy and future of Dashing Tweeds and their clients.

## Introduction

Through *Dashing Tweeds* and their clients and peers, this paper will analyse the relevance of heritage and design innovation in today's menswear and woven textiles market, and will explore the themes of tweed and authenticity, hidden technology in textiles within the specific context of bespoke design.

Re-colouring and re-scaling existing designs have become staple methods of fabric design for large companies. There is increased consumer interest in buying into 'heritage and authenticity', possibly as a response to economic uncertainty and a certain cultural anxiety existing concurrently with that.

## Keywords

Heritage  
Innovation  
Tweed  
Menswear  
Luxury  
Function

“... in an increasingly unreal world-consumers choose to buy or not buy based on how real they perceive an offering to be. Business today, therefore is all about being real. Original. Genuine. Sincere. *Authentic*.”<sup>1</sup>

This paper questions whether it is sufficiently satisfactory to advance design innovation to keep proposing modern ‘takes’ on existing brands. A set of sub-questions concern whether application of new textile and material technologies to heritage textile design serves to either devalue or enhance their cultural provenance; whether functional and innovative textiles have developed with regard to their particular technological properties but at the expense of evolution of a more sophisticated set of fabric aesthetics; and what design potential there is in combining material (and immaterial) elements of textile heritage with new developments in textiles technology.

## Context/Literature Review

*Dashing Tweeds* is a design company and seller of heritage based menswear luxury fabrics, and is aware of a growing UK niche smart and technical textiles sector. The current climate sees luxury fashion companies being rebranded and rejuvenated and high value being put on brand heritage. Such companies have ready-made and well-formed brand power and identities that are ripe for modernisation while importantly retaining their core brand values. A good example of this is Burberry: the company appointed Rose Marie Bravo in 1997, who initiated a radical reform of the British classic brand and improvements to the company structure. After difficulties during the early 1990s the company rebranded and significantly turned round its fortunes<sup>2</sup>. The re-branding built heavily on the re-design of classic fabrics and fashion apparel, such as the Burberry check and the Burberry trench coat. Many fashion houses have followed suit, buying the name of a defunct brand and rejuvenating it based on the brand’s heritage, for example, Givenchy and Vionnet.

Brands such as Heritage Research (<http://www.heritageresearch.co.uk/>) make modern facsimiles of historic functional garments with a contemporary cut and aesthetic including the ‘alpine jacket’ and ‘British airborne trousers’. These are carefully chosen to appeal to a contemporary menswear market and are promoted on their website:

“The nostalgia behind these styles is what makes them attractive... they have become timeless fashion items, appealing to a rugged utilitarian image. Attention to authenticity, quality and history is the HR ethos”<sup>3</sup>

In terms of fabric production in the UK, there is evidence of a revival in traditional wool textiles with the fall and rise of Harris Tweed as documented in the BBC 4 documentary ‘Tweed’ (September 2009). Likewise, Fox Flannels in Somerset have been taken over by new owners and rejuvenated the development of collections based on their extensive archive. The ‘Campaign for Wool’ launched in 2010 has “created a campaign to promote the wonderful properties that wool offers to textiles and in doing so, help to support sheep farming as an industry and the textile community internationally” (<http://www.campaignforwool.org/>). Wool is being promoted by the campaign as a sustainable fibre with considerable potential for technical development, while bespoke tailoring in Savile Row, London, has re-branded and is enjoying an increase in exposure and sales.

In parallel to this is a growing development in the use of innovative technology for fashion textiles, as promoted at event ‘Made in Future: a vision of things to come, showcasing fashion & clothing incorporating UK based smart materials technology’ at the House of Commons in 2010. This included a number of companies such as Cute Circuit and Finisterre who work within the area of fashion and integrate elements of new technology to fashion and textiles.

## Methodology

A series of interviews was carried out to inform this study. Interviewing clients, peers and stockists of *Dashing Tweeds* was considered an appropriate and focused method to obtain information required, although the method adopted could be readily applied across a range of other exemplars. Interviews included those with:

- Guy Hills, co-founder of *Dashing Tweeds*.
- Colin Heywood, of Savile Row tailor *Anderson and Sheppard*, a company stocking and commissioning designs from *Dashing Tweeds*.
- Sian Emmison, owner of bicycle retailer *Bobbin Bicycles*, and stockist of *Dashing Tweeds* designs.
- Patrick Grant of *Norton and Sons*, Savile Row, who has rejuvenated two ‘heritage’ brands.

## Findings and Discussion: Heritage, Tweed and Authenticity

“Authenticity is linked to traditional methods passed down from father to son, which privileges manual versus mechanised production and guarantee goods made on the premises”<sup>4</sup>

In response to questions relating notions of heritage, tweed and authenticity, Guy Hills (co-founder of *Dashing Tweeds*) described the company as a weave-based menswear fabric and clothing label, and articulated clearly his company ethos that menswear “is all about heritage and the evolution of it”. (Hills, 10/12/10). Hills was of the opinion that, due to various commercial pressures, the ready to wear market, and competition from big brands the variety in design within the menswear market had diminished. The name *Dashing Tweeds* implies speedy forward movement, a certain kind of style and panache, and undoubtedly a sense of pride and value in cultural and textile heritage. Hills references the “history, substance and mythology” of tweed fabric, noting that tweed “is the original sporting cloth, it’s the original way that men wore colour” And seeking to capture those complex characteristics and signifiers in the clothing of urban tweed-wearing contemporary dandies.

As well as the connection of tweed’s textile heritage with contemporary male urbanwear, Hills also cites that tweed is imbued with authenticity; it is a “very honest material” in that it is – traditionally – woven from 100% wool, a natural fibre. It therefore has – for Hills – an innate authenticity that provides a considerable opportunity for translation as a set of attractive values at this point in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. By novel application of textile technology to tweed, *Dashing Tweeds* seeks to update the idea of tweed, using all the properties, characteristics, associations and cultural values of the original sportswear fabric, which Hills maintains “has somehow been neglected by modern inventions”, but with an innovative contemporary twist. In Hills’ view, “the 70s was all about the brand new –all those new technical fibres; nylon, polyester”, and just as that period was a moment of design renaissance and excitement, so too is the current time. Hills points to the Work of wool producers in Australia, who are developing exciting technical products out of wool such as Merino Cool and Merino Fresh ([www.wool.com](http://www.wool.com)).

Hills has a very particular, potent and fresh perspective on the use of archival fabrics to create designs which reflect the *Dashing Tweeds* ethos of updating and re-thinking:

“We are starting with a clean slate using new structures and materials but with traditional tweed as a starting point. We are making a fabric for our time. It isn’t just a case of re-colouring an existing design. I’m really bored of nostalgia; it weighs heavily on brands and bogs people down. There is no point in brands trying to re-create imagined hay days of the 1930s, 40s –it doesn’t free them up to think innovatively’.

Interestingly, this perspective is not a romantic one, concerned with hearkening backwards to times that are no longer relevant and certainly not reproducible. This is a modern, pragmatic and authoritative stance: one concerned with the practicalities and imperatives of the now, but with a firm sense of what *can* be utilised and adapted through confident and visionary design methodology construction and implementation.

Patrick Grant is the owner of *Norton and Sons* in Savile Row and the new brand E.Tautz/House of Tautz. He was announced as Menswear Designer of the Year at the British Fashion Awards 2010. Both his brands were previously existing menswear labels, rejuvenated by Grant in 2006. Grant is cautious in regards to how his brands use their heritage references:

“... we treat our heritage as something that is fundamental to what we do and what we are but there is always a danger of overusing heritage –and we are very careful to treat it fairly lightly...

... the way we think about the people we have tailored to and the way we think about how we talk about our brand is very much influenced by its heritage. But what we try to avoid doing is being heritage driven in the way we market ourselves...

... so we are trying to present a modern face to the world, we are trying to be relevant in terms the clothing we make and the presentation of the physical incarnation of the brand. With Norton’s it was a very interesting process trying to take elements from our history and heritage and weaving them into a modern incarnation of the brand in such a way that customers get the feeling they are coming to store that is rooted in 200 years of history but they are coming to a store that is has an understanding of the modern world...” (Grant, 25/11/10).

Detailed analysis of Grant’s assertions is revealing. If we consider the range of meanings captured under the word ‘heritage’, then a system of meanings comprising inheritance from the past in the form of phy-

sical artifacts and legacies; intangible societal attributes; monuments of human industry and culture; ancestral traditions, customs and practices; and a notion coupling birthright and genealogical origin is conjured. Grant alludes too much of this complexity in his discussion of company product, appearance, ethos, history, clientele and new customers, but is careful to seek lightness of touch in how this is handled as a tool for marketing a company facing both towards its historical roots and its modern opportunities.

Grant's use of the word 'incarnation' twice is important: a term that literally means *embodied*, it refers to the making material and manifest that which is originally immaterial, if not divine. So, the embodiment of the Nortons' brand, with its complex references to heritage, is via its subtle appeal to its customers rather than through an explicit marketing message. The Norton client is "educated, mature, well traveled, well-informed", capable too of understanding that the Norton heritage design content "is there without pushing it into people's faces". Interestingly, Grant sees his relationship with these clients as that of a 'caretaker' responding to a sense that Norton customers seek the assurances of being "looked after by someone who has all that history but is engaged with the modern clothing world..." and the embodiments cited are those of a young Winston Churchill or Cary Grant "—with all that those associations imply about masculinity, authority, capability and certainty— "but today".

Grant's remarks on the alternative approaches of some brands are that are "wholesale building everything on their heritage". He cites Ralph Lauren as someone has been very successful in branding heritage with a relatively new business: "he started in the late 60s but his brand feels very nostalgic". Nevertheless, Grant is of the opinion that there is a lack of complexity in creating facsimiles of the past in clothing, accessorising and branding. For his company, the design challenge lies in taking brand heritage forward towards greater modernity, and evolutionary and additive approach rather than one of reproduction. In this sense there is a strong echo with Guy Hills' expressed position on the design philosophy of *Dashing Tweeds*.

Grant's use of 'authentic' British produced tweed is important to both his brands, in which, for example tweeds developed from very slightly reworked 40 year old patterns that are included. Again, a sense of heritage 'handing down' an intergenerational physical manifestation of something intangible comes to the fore in Grant's description:

"We had another cloth in that same collection that I had in a suit in that was given to me by a customer who had outgrown it. We made the suit for him 35-40 years ago".

Grant describes that particular cloth as having a Harris tweed's heavy character. Wanting to hold onto its other characteristics, but allow it to be more wearable by a contemporary client, Grant had it reproduced in lamb's wool yarn but hand woven by Breanish Tweed:

"It was made in the same way but with a yarn which was more adaptable and suitable for the way people are used to buying clothes today".

It is clear from Grant's sales that his consumer is interested in how fabrics are produced but are used to a softer handle and quality. He consciously allows a considerable influence both from the aesthetic of historic cloth and the tradition means of production, which he describes as trying to "keep true" to the way those heritage fabrics were made, how they look and their handle. Concurrently, he is very aware that the customers upon which he relies to do this are also customers of, for example, Harrods and Barneys in New York, and are "used to feeling cloth that behaves in particular way". For Grant, the key to balancing these demands is the choice of yarn as well as the unique and traditional manufacture:

"We want to use those weavers as we want that feel and looseness of that hand woven cloth, but we need to make sure it's actually going sell to a broader audience. There are a lot of people who enjoy the roughness of Harris Tweed but that market is very small. I think the guys on Harris need to think how applicable to mass market or the luxury end of the menswear spectrum. And it's not a big mass market, a couple of billion pounds per year. It needs to be adaptable".

Grant is a businessman, and it is correct that the market imperatives drive the critical design decisions he makes for his company. But in tandem with the economic drivers, he is also keenly aware of the omantic and emotional sensibilities that surround tweed and the production of it. It is something he is careful to promote through his brands, and again his language reflects the multiple nuances caught up in the word 'heritage':

"There is genuinely a personal attachment in this country, the USA, and Japan... people feel in some way that there is a tangible value of a cloth being made in a stone built Victorian mill

with clunky old metal machinery, that there is absolutely no way you can replicate in a modern industrial park, purpose built, shiny steel factory...

People want to feel attached to the process of how what they buy is made. I think it's a really important phenomenon. It's something that because a lot of British industry has spent so long not changing the way they do things, actually the world has come right back around to them and they are really brilliantly positioned to take advantage of their uniqueness and oldness..."

Grant explains this phenomenon through society having to cope with the speed at which technology is developing, with increasing dependence on computers, digital communication and habitation of a virtual unreal electronic space. He is convinced that this has resulted in a growing consumer desire to fill leisure and purchasing time with activities which root us back into to a 'real world'. There is a certain romance in thinking how people would have shopped in an establishment where the people serving them would know them personally, but there is also a growing reality in that discerning consumers understand (and want to understand) where their food comes from, and therefore where the fabric comes from that their tailor uses. Where this type of consumer desire and knowledge has been heavily impacted by the phenomenon of shopping on line, Grant sees a very small but critically important market at the top end where "people they want to feel an association with the process in which their purchases are made". And significantly for British industry, Grant is also noting this phenomenon spreading down the consumer chain to high street brands like Jigsaw and Hobbs. These companies are now looking carefully at the sourcing of their cloths and realising that there are consumers willing to pay £200 for a UK-made item that could be made in China for £100.

Colin Heywood of *Anderson and Sheppard* in Savile Row shares Grant's view that the consumer is more interested than ever in the idea of 'heritage' within their menswear purchases:

"I think it's the whole 'Britishness' that people are buying into. They like the idea that we are sourcing English locally made. I think British across the world has that mark of quality that people appreciate". (Heywood 25/11/10)

Like *Norton and Sons* and *E. Tautz*, *Anderson and Sheppard* was recently bought and re-branded based on its heritage and tradition. Heywood states that customers are still more interested in what he refers to as "classic patterns" such as herringbone or pinstripe but notes that many of the woollen merchants he uses tend to maintain a classic range while occasionally designing a fabric that is a bit more flamboyant like "coloured stripes". On this basis, Savile Row has enjoyed a renaissance recently. According to Heywood:

"It has the strongest bespoke suit making heritage in the world. I'm convinced that anyone looking for the best comes to Savile Row."

It is clear from interviews that the notion of 'heritage', mobilised carefully and with great consideration for its nuanced meanings, has considerable consumer value at present. It is argued by both Guy Hills and Patrick Grant that this is not enough on its own, and that the heritage concept needs to be combined with innovative design and contemporary presentation that reflects our times in order to maintain and strengthen its relevance and to advance its potential to both sustain and re-position remaining British mills and traditional materials once considered en route to extinction.

### Hidden Technology in Menswear Textile Design

This section of the paper will explore how the application of technology affects the heritage value and 'authenticity' of menswear textiles. According to Guy Hills, of *Dashing Tweeds*:

"The whole idea of a heritage brand is a modern concept. The Victorians were all about innovations and invention. Science fiction made people worry about the future, the idea of technology taking over which had people craving the comfort of heritage. Technology doesn't dilute authenticity at all.

The idea of 'heritage' for some brands is a false concept and is manufactured. It's imperative to combine modern technology with tradition".

To prove this point, *Dashing Tweeds* is currently working with nanotechnology, implanting technology into traditional fabrics in order to create menswear fabrics with novel functions. Hills explains that tweed provides an excellent weave matrix to hold technologies in, as well as helping people to embrace and feel confident about technology through it being embedded in a recognisable heritage fabric. *Dashing Tweed's* 'Lumatwill' fabric uses reflective yarn within a woollen substrate already, but the company is looking at using smart and other technologies in an even more sophisticated fabric enhancement.



Functionality *and* humour are significant elements of the *Dashing Tweed* brand, as is the desire to widen the choice of exciting forward-looking brand design for modern menswear. The company is, however, certain that its brand look is an alternative to innovative textiles that have a 'technology aesthetic'. In Hills' experience, while the economic down turn seems to have resulted in a tendency on the part of many companies to play safe with their designs, some 'early adopters' are managing to begin to use the opportunity to take some risks with new companies. This expansive thinking is an interesting counter to the attrition of the current moment, and Hills cites his experience of spinners, dyers and weaving mills seeming to be "more ready to help us out with things that aren't the norm".

Not all parties are sympathetic to this approach. Directed at *Dashing Tweeds'* approach, there have been comments on menswear blogs such as "it's tweed for cappuccino drinking Londoners", "you deserve to be run over wearing a dashing tweeds suit" and "they are taking away work from real authentic tweed weavers" (thefederalounge.com). Patrick Grant recognises that there is an aspect of purism in menswear, even with something as seemingly small as changing a type of wool:

"There will always be extremists who will find it distasteful. But that's what they are: extremists. The thought of putting a lamb's wool in Harris Tweed would have all sorts of people freaking out. But actually it would mean that the tweed would go from being worn by 0.001% of the population to 0.1% of the population."

Grant argues that in order to preserve heritage brands there needs to be both an open attitude to new materials and a design responsibility to make textiles that people want to buy. He is adamant that, while it is attractive to be romantic about Harris Tweed using only wool from the island, that attitude guarantees a rapid and irrecoverable shrinkage of that fabric's market. For example, *E. Tautz* gloves are sold in Harrods in both organic sheep wool and in alpaca. The former have barely sold, while the alpaca versions have sold out of two ranges. Both sets of gloves are hand knitted on the same needles and in the same style, but clearly the consumer choice has been for the *E. Tautz* aesthetic, but in the much softer yarn. Such British-made products are always going to be expensive and will therefore only be sold in top end department stores or boutiques, but those consumers are used to a certain quality and feel. Grant is clear that fundamentally a business is about selling product, "and there is no point in surrounding it in a romantic bubble and having nobody buy or it will die out."

Sian Emmison, owner of *Bobbin Bicycles* in London, stocks *Dashing Tweeds* products and recognises the need for a cycling textile that covers both heritage and technological aspects of this particular market niche. She describes why tweed has become a recent trend in cycling:

"It's definitely to do with urban cyclists and the fact that your bike is part of your whole look. You don't have to wear sports clothes. You are constantly looking at your own reflection in the windows of other vehicles in an urban environment –how your silhouette looks. Tweed fits in with the urban cycle chic tribe. Fashion tribalism has been transplanted onto bicycles in London."(Emmison 02/12/10)

Emmison cites the fact that *Dashing Tweeds'* 'Lumatwill' provides an exciting alternative to reflective wear for city cyclists, acknowledging that traditional technology-driven reflective wear is "generally horrible" in terms of aesthetic and feel. She maintains that by providing a stylish alternative –woven in reflective yarns in tweed cycling wear– there is a greater likelihood of style-conscious urban cyclists embracing the safety element of reflection while enjoying the fun and style embodied in this fabric. Emmison is convinced that having technology or a safety element that manages not to look like technology or a safety element is good design, but she also acknowledges the potency of heritage in design echoing Hills and Grant above:

"The heritage element has to exist as you have to move in small increments in fashion, there is so much knowledge and skill that has gone before and you can't exist in a bubble ignoring what has gone before. A massive part of British design is humour and being directional with that heritage".

*Anderson and Sheppard's* stocking and commissioning of *Dashing Tweeds* fabric reiterates the vitality of imaginations captured and humour to be enjoyed. There appears to have been a real gap filled by fabrics that are enjoyable to look at, pleasurable to feel, and intelligent in their approach to advancing function. The 'Lumatwill' fabric has been very popular, with a range of commercially attractive patterns, and Heywood sees this line in the same vein as the more unusual designs occasionally developed by conservative, traditional and highly successful businesses:

“We’ve noticed a lot of the woollen merchants will have their target area and they will do their safe tweeds that you see over and over again. It’s always nice to have a fresh look. Although we are seen as traditional and we follow a set routine, as far as fabric choice goes, that evolves.”

There is a fine line with regards to how far design can push the conventions of menswear. *Dashing Tweeds* approaches technology by ‘hiding’ it in a heritage inspired textile. This appears to make it more acceptable to a conventional menswear market, and it has certainly proven to be a winning formula.

### Bespoke Design – Savile Row, Bespoke and Innovation

Dashing Tweeds also caters for the growing bespoke market. Guy Hills explains the context for the fall of bespoke in recent years:

“The 1<sup>st</sup> world war was the first time men’s sizing was introduced for uniforms so bespoke started to disappear. The conventions started with the beginning of uniform. Big companies began to impose on men conventions of dressing which were hammered home by advertising. In order for the economics to work people had to fall into line. The money for magazines came from multinational companies. Advertising has shoe horned people into strict conventions. It’s very hard for men to break out of this. There used to be a cheap tailor on every high street and men would get clothes made and a much larger variety of cloths were made locally. The British are very good at expressing themselves with fashion and men could easily do this with tailoring”.

Hill’s perspective is augmented in the scholarly work of University of Brighton academic, Dr Paul Jobling<sup>5</sup>, as well as through a range of texts by other authors dealing with various aspects of men’s fashion in the 1950s and 1960s (Breward 2002; Cole 2000; O’Neill 2000), style culture and new man in the 1980s (Mort 1996; Nixon 1996), and the advertising profession in the 1960s (Nixon 2003). Interestingly, Jobling notes class (im)permeability and the ‘habitus’ of readers in relation to their age, profession and geography (Bourdieu 1994) as critical to this scholarship, and arguably this is a key part in understanding how heritage and an idea of authenticity is mobilized in this paper.

According to Colin Heywood of *Anderson and Sheppard*:

“We’ve been very busy over the past couple of years. The only thing we can put our finger on is the quality of product. In attracting new business, the exposure that is out there for bespoke, we’ve found people are moving away from fashion houses. Most people would think of getting a good suit from a recognised label. Now I think they know they can get good quality, there’s a certain element of service and it’s made for them.”

He describes the longevity of a Savile Row suit as an investment, and talks about how customers bring in suits made by Anderson and Sheppard 25 years ago with fabric still holding up in terms of quality and aesthetic. Adjustments needed for the aging body of the long-term wearer are understandable, but a mark of quality is there in the commitment of customers to decades of ordering their suits “As last. Exactly the same –no changes!”

It appears that menswear works with small changes and slow evolutions, a slight change in trouser shape, a hidden function, a more modern colour. With these increments and considerable design optimism, Patrick Grant predicts a bright future for bespoke:

“I can’t help think that it will grow and grow. There has been a big surge in interest in Savile Row and that’s led to a small uptake in business, which in percentage terms is quite big but in real terms is small. The whole idea of bespoke is clearly a very big trend. It is a large and growing part of the menswear world because people want things that fit and to have choice. Savile Row bespoke has a great future as it continues to be at the top of everyone’s expectations of the ultimate suit. This perception has re-established itself.”

### Conclusion

The consumer of luxury menswear products such as those at Dashing Tweeds puts great value on notions of ‘heritage’ and ‘authenticity’ within the products that they consume. There is an attraction, nostalgia and romance attached to the authentic production of a heritage fabric. Its kudos lies in its allusion to a seemingly less complicated time. We are in the midst of the largest technological revolution since the industrial revolution of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. There is evidence that these times evoke movements that look to the past for inspiration. Fabrics that are a facsimile of fabrics gone by, however, can

only ever be 'real fakes reflective of a different time' if they are not transformed and transitioned by contemporary design innovation, however subtle.

According to the interviewees for this paper, fabrics should be reflective of our time. *Dashing Tweeds* consumers and clients indicate that technology and functionality is desirable in the products they seek, but that these do not have to drive the aesthetic of a fabric. The tactile, beautiful, imaginative and emotional qualities of textiles as we know them can combine with material innovation to create new aesthetics and functions, connecting cultures of heritage and technology towards a textile reflective of our time.

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# Faux pas? Faking Materials and Languages of Luxury

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Ricarda Bigolin

RMIT UNIVERSITY, MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

## Abstract

The connotations of luxury with exquisite craft, unspoken quality and rarity of materials are no longer an assurance of its status or significance within contemporary fashion practice. The definition of luxury articles has changed from solely evoking a sense of exclusivity and has extended into items of inferior materials and less preciousness. The conspicuous consumption of luxury figurehead brands in the nineties, where the attainment of authentic luxury items was symbolic of status, is no longer as relevant. Instead designers celebrate the irony of appropriating and using the language of luxury for ironic and unexpected outcomes. This is an approach taken up by luxury fashion brands such as Chanel; where the symbolic value of a familiar luxury item such as a fur coat is transformed by use of materials or techniques that are in contrast to the articles familiar provenance, or it is also emblematic of many approaches of emerging contemporary designers who use the idea of luxury as a design language.

This paper looks at luxury fashion articles that have been developed into highly recognizable forms symbolic of expense, craftsmanship and rarity that are increasingly being diffused into a design language as a known or generic form without the legacies of craft, tradition or *griffe*. Contemporary fashion practitioners readily appropriate these symbols, altering the article with a use of 'fake' materials or subvert the craft and techniques involved in the original. The use of design examples will indicate an appropriation of a familiar luxury items or language, which will draw on sociology, philosophy and fashion based theory in rendering the definitions of how design is renewing the language of luxury. An example of this is New York based designers "Slow and Steady Wins the Race" in appropriation of luxury brand 'it' bags produced in calico versions or the Hermès "Birkin" remodeled into a four sided 'double' version. This presents the way in which design languages use the notion of luxury articles and transcends the meaning previously attached to them. As a main case study I will also follow the trajectory of the animal hide or fur coat, particularly due to its popular associations with luxury. Contemporary fashion designers will be used as examples, in combination with my recent research project, which has seen the use of a fake elephant hide digital model to produce a series of knitted coats.

Design can update the symbolic value of luxury items, by offering a gesture to the former glory and significance of those items by mimicking their forms, but also by offering new ways for us to understand and engage with luxury. Perhaps luxury can be identified as a symbolic language, rather than particular tangible qualities? The challenge or refusal of the staid criteria of luxury is a consequence of the multitude of ways and means we can now experience fashion articles. The proliferation of a luxury item exceeds simply those who can own it, but now is traded in design terms as a language ready for both appropriation and ironic and ulterior uses.

\* Please note it is intended that this paper would be presented with a series of key images to illustrate core points and examples refer to the paper.

## *Keywords*

Luxury  
Fashion  
Fakes  
Imitation  
Design Languages  
Animal Hides

## Introduction

The once lowly status of the 'fake' has been recently transformed in contemporary fashion by its new role, impacting both design and subsequent languages of luxury. Designers of established luxury figurehead brands have begun to subvert traditions of luxury endorsed by their own brands and high fashion designers on the periphery of the luxury sector are 'referencing' iconic luxury articles. This is significant of greater cultural shifts that have meant that obsessive consumption of luxury products, and their proliferation through expanding luxury markets, has tarnished the desirability of many such items. This

departure is reflected by emerging high fashion designers who take various stances on the use and design of 'luxury' articles, and those from known luxury brands that expose and mock the cult of mindless, mass assimilation of luxury articles from recent years. This prompts the question of whether the prominence of the fake or faux (in choices of materials and as a design concept) has been used as an antidote for designers in coming to terms with an increasingly saturated market of luxury goods, and a way of reinventing these items?

The legacy of excessive consumption, proliferation of 'it' bags and other popular displays of wealth such as fur coats, has meant that in producing new visions of these articles designers engage narratives that challenges the qualities of authenticity. Whilst it is a given that known luxury brands produce luxury articles, the luxury sector's profound influence has fragmented and decentralized the practice of high fashion. There are now high fashion designers who assimilate the language of luxury, producing articles that imitate luxury by either using it as conceptual reference for a design, taking fragments of iconic designs to use in a montage or by the use of imitation or inferior materials. Designers are challenging the quotients of luxury using fake or faux materials in the place of their real counterpart. This form of fakeness is distinct from the deception of authenticity that we associate with the counterfeit, and instead acts as transparent imitation. I will focus on how designers are engaging the fake with growing boldness and its subsequent amelioration in cultural value and appeal. The new fake is symbolic of many things; globalization, expanding and developing luxury markets, and it has also become a language in itself, part of an accepted vernacular that designers are now using.

In uncovering the role of the fake in design and languages of luxury, I will first address concepts of luxury and definitions of the field of fashion that situate my argument. I will examine the way the design of luxury articles reflects two key processes that circumscribe the traditions associated with these items, particularly the use of fake, faux, or ersatz materials and the use of 'mimetic' processes by way of referenced luxury items imitated. I will draw upon a vast array of philosophical, sociological and fashion based theories to illustrate my points. The application of these is filtered through my perspective as a fashion design/research practitioner and will include examples derived from a recent research project. Reviews of literature are thus dispersed and used throughout the paper in different ways, and the research methodology is folded within the structuring of the paper. To represent the complexity and prolific rise of the area of the fake within design itself, I will touch on interconnected, overlaid and lapped concepts that best reflect the complicated and expansive nature of the of fake within. In approaching this now favorable fake, and challenging the faux pas that an imitation of a material or item is of less symbolic and cultural value than the real thing, I will focus specifically on animal hides, and their trajectory of uses in the form of hand bags and fur coats.

### Luxury Fashion

Within the field of contemporary fashion practice, divisions between high-end fashion and the luxury fashion sector have become increasingly ambiguous. The notion of luxury is preserved and perpetuated by those I describe as luxury figurehead brands. Even within this sector it is increasingly complicated to define these, as there are iconic luxury brands, often with a rich legacy and heritage, but recent operations perhaps diffuse their own past philosophies. This has happened simply from expansion in size and scale, and by belonging to known luxury company conglomerates such as LVMH. With diffusion lines, product licenses, and collaborations there are more ways to access and consume these brands that contrast the core fundamentals of luxury, that of exclusivity and rarity. Therefore there are more and more imitations of the original essence of the brand. This affects the usefulness of applying the model of 'fashion as a system' due to the disintegration of such sharp divides between the different levels of luxury practice. Yuniya Kawamura describes this as the 'increasing decentralization and complexity of the fashion system' (Kawamura, 2005, p.49) with specific example to the 'French Fashion System' relating to practice levels of Haute Couture to Prêt-à-Porter. However, the notion of one empirical fashion system implies a uniformity of structure and a set flow and order of operations which does not account sufficiently for ways in which the development of luxury items occurs or the designers and brands that champion them. As discussed by Peter Braham (2007), there is a less distinct influence from luxury brands occupying higher levels of practice within the field. The favored diffusion theory of 'trickle down' does not reflect changing movements and directions of influence or innovation and are better described by 'multiple fashion systems' (Braham, 2007, p.363). The multiplicity of clusters operating adjacently and with connections, compliments Pierre Bourdieu (1995), concept of the 'field' as being a descriptor of practice locales and operations that he applies to arts production (Bourdieu, 1995, p.30). This more accurately accounts for the phenomenon of the production and consumption of luxury goods.

Therefore, in considering the luxury sector as its own field with several connected or 'sub-fields', I would also place adjacent to this others related, such as emerging or known high fashion designers that produce 'luxury' items. In doing this I have also referred to categories set up by online shopping mecca, Farfetch.com, which unites 'the world's best independent fashion boutiques, in categories of 'Luxe', 'Lab' and 'Cult' (Farfetch, 2010). In this way we can see that luxury has become a descriptor for particular qualities known as 'luxe'. Within this online shop's description 'Luxe' fashion is:

'The most coveted fashion labels from around the world. These include Alexander Wang, Balenciaga and Givenchy' (Farfetch.com, 2010).

The divisions between established luxury brands and emerging high fashion designers such as Alexander Wang dissolve, in being placed adjacently to Balenciaga and Givenchy both houses with strong legacies and also known as luxury brands (Okonkwo, 2007, p.45). Even though Wang's brand is not definitively a luxury brand as yet, they are linked together here due to current desirability and the production of 'luxurious' products is perhaps a given within the practice of such topical high fashion designers populating and practicing within fashion capitals, such as Paris or New York.

### Languages of Luxury

Alison Lurie in *The Language of Clothes* states that in considering clothing as a language it too "must have a vocabulary and grammar like other languages" (Lurie, 1981, p.4). If we consider this in relation to the language of luxury, we can thus attribute to this that there too must be 'words' that relate and symbolize luxury. If we continue with Lurie's way of looking at the language of clothing, designers conjugate these words to fit their particular expressions, and in this case those seen to convey luxury. The act of conjugation is a fitting analogy for the design process; designers will take ideas, words if you like, and in combination with others strive to create an original or innovative 'word'. These factors that contribute to the qualities that denote 'luxury' or being 'luxurious' have drastically shifted in recent fashion practice. It is not so simple to define a luxury article as being symbolic of superior craftsmanship and materials, as now these very quotients are challenged by design languages which mock and celebrate with irony the hierarchies and symbols of luxury. Luca Marchetti (2007) in commenting on the nature of luxury suggests that the value of these articles is dependent on relationships between the articles themselves and the contexts in which they are produced:

"The value of these objects does not derive only from the materials they are made in or the way in which they are made, but from a special relationship between those factors and the cultural significance of the context in which they are produced and received". (Marchetti, 2007, p.43)

In reflection of this I will be examining in focus how varying definitions of luxury or languages of luxury are used within design and the subsequent context of their production.

Of key interest are several notions of luxury that account for the intention or message behind the design of luxury articles, and the definitions reflected in new approaches in the design of luxury articles. The transformative and 'magic' qualities attributed to legendary luxury items and how designers may refer to these in the creative process is related. Core to this is several ideas by Gilles Lipovetsky (2007), who defines the premise and vision of luxury brands to be 'built on references to the myths and legends of their past' (Lipovetsky, 2007, p.25). This notion of the legend relates to the selection of two key iconic representations of luxury, the handbag, and the fur coat.

Designer handbags are among the more accessible of luxury articles, their desirability hinges on the griffe or designer label that adorns them. Dana Thomas (2007) describes the bag as a 'neutral' and easily covetable item as it can compliment anyone (Thomas, 2007, p.173). Furs or fur coats are less associated with a brand name and are more so connected to the rarity or exoticness of the animal used, operating differently as a luxury article. I will focus on these with a variety of examples, and also by way of relationship, an animal hide is a material, and can be transformed into a handbag, but also takes on its own particular aesthetic code when used as a coat where its animal origin is more definite. This concept melds well with Lipovetsky's notion of luxury related to reincarnation:

"Luxury was as much a way of ensuring the cycle of reincarnation –a kind of magical combat between the enduring and the perishable– as a symbolic inter-human struggle." (Lipovetsky, 2007 p.25)

## Fake and Faux

In dealing with both the animal hide in its trajectory of uses from abstracted into a material such as leather, or its more direct use as a fur coat I will be considering how it is represented in design languages by the use of fake, faux or ersatz or materials and the concept of 'mimesis', which involves imitating its form. The ersatz, a German loanword meaning 'substitute' relates to the way changing materials transforms and re-orders the design process and exposes new opportunities encouraged by the qualities of these materials. Mimesis, meaning a deliberate imitation focuses the intention of a design process to represent a known form, and opens up the possibilities for this form through transformations that occur during the design process.

The example of the animal hide is an interesting one due to the key ways in which it is used as a design language. Not only is the animal hide subject to little transformation from its original state to become a fur coat, it is also the base for many other luxury articles particularly handbags. In considering this within a design 'language' we could say that the animal hide is abstracted into a handbag, by cutting, finishing, stretching and the animal hide is appropriated to be a fur coat by ways of cutting, and fashioning. The way designers use the fake as a material or a reference in the form of a 'copy' to an original form impacts this language of luxury. This notion challenges the faux pas that an imitation or copy of a material or item is of less symbolic and cultural value than the real thing.

Faux pas has been appropriated in English, where this 'misstep' has come to signify an erroneous judgment in personal style or taste. I will consider this less in the sense of a personal style objective, and more so related to how designers rewrite the rules on the assumed faux pas related to what is and isn't suitable as a luxury item. In addition it also challenges the way within design we approach the notion of the fake. I will also use it to structure the other parts of my argument in considering it in terms of the fake, the faux, ersatz and mimesis. The cloudiness in distinguishing the differences from this family of terms is difficult and to consider it in detail would require extensive analysis and reference to several threads of philosophy. For the purpose of this paper, I will contain the definition of the fake to imply the general copying of another form or material, faux as materials which are directly imitating a naturally occurring one, ersatz as a substitute or replacement material and mimesis as a process which accounts for a form being imitated by another.

Both mimesis and the use of the fake within design languages are present in recent collections from luxury brands, and high fashion designers. Martin Heidegger describes mimesis as a means of 'copying, that is, presenting and producing something in a manner which is typical of something else' (Heidegger, 1991, p.173). This idea can be overlaid, as the notion of mimesis accounts for much to do with the fake as a thing and faux and ersatz materials. Whilst there is a long philosophical history dealing with mimesis, I will be explicitly considering it as a way to explain the translations and transformations that occur in the design process. Of particular use has been Marcus Boon's excellent study, *In praise of copying* that considers the legacy of the copy and copying, dealing with mimesis and the use of montage as practice of compiling fragments of references (Boon, 2010, p.145). In design this can mean a reference being used, and the design involves a close translation of this reference, an imitation of core parts that still bare a trace to the original item. For the ersatz, I will concentrate on the symbolic value and cultural reading that is affected when a material is substituted with one of different quality. In addition these can be used together, where additional processes are added that further transcend the reference of the 'luxury' material or form.

## 'Becoming' Animal: Forms and Materials

Animals as material and as forms have been synonymous with luxury in recent contemporary culture. The use of animal hides as garments can be seen to imbue the wearer with attributes of the animal. As Lurie suggests, in wearing a fur one is also presenting oneself 'as' animal, whilst in wearing leather it is 'not usually to assert that one is a cow, a calf or a bull' (Lurie 1981, p.232). To wear a pelt is to become animal, to wear leather is to wear an abstracted version of the animal. Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concept of 'becoming animal' even though its true meaning does not actually imply imitative qualities (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p.237) can be literally applied here. Leather is a flat 2D material, with little connections to its previous state. Pelts are perimeters, even though largely abstracted through the tanning process, can be read as basic maps of the body parts of the animals they once encased. The notion of becoming, does however lend itself particularly aptly to the design process as it is described as 'creation' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p.106). An idea 'becomes' tangible through choices of materials, and processes that render this material with form. For the example of the animal hide, the animal itself is the idea, and is fed through a process that seeks (in varying degrees) to imitate its form.



New York based designers Slow and Steady wins the Race (SSWTR) have developed a practice that conceptually folds many of the quintessential elements of luxury into an ironic and playful series of products that embrace the everyday, and poke fun at the desirability of rare and exotic materials and cult 'it' bags. For their 'No.19 Luxe' collection a 'fox fur stole' was available in either calico or black velvet. This article is literally translated into a pattern to produce a rendition of the form of a fox using garment making techniques. The pattern making process simplifies the form, creating a vague but still recognizable semblance of the fox. Complexities of the volumes are simplified, as woven material, seams, and thread mimic the natural form. The idea behind such an article is not to have the same significance as a real fox fur stole, but to humorously play with its associations in a design language that celebrates the poor mans version of an expensive item. The SSWTR version is the animal sans fur with no deception in even pretending to be a real fox. In draping a fake fox fur around ones next, an immediate semblance of the real form is produced. This attributes to the phenomenon within design for fashion of certain garments or accessories that become immortalized as generic items, through their proliferation in interpretations and reinventions by designers. Those who wear the SSWTR fox are doing so, because they advocate and form a preference for a type of fashion that is embedded with critical commentary, and one that enjoys the irony involved in having a poor version of a usually exclusive and expensive item.

On a similar path, in using a mimetic process within design to represent an animal I recently completed a research project that saw the development of a fake elephant hide from a digital model to produce a series of knitted coats. The elephant hide itself does not have a popular history of being used in personal luxury articles, but instead was often used as hides to dress rooms, body parts including tusks and feet used in parts of furniture and as exhibits of conquest from exotic hunting adventures. Inserting the elephant into a fashion equation brings forward a humorous play considering like Lurie suggests that a fox brings out 'fox-like' qualities in its wearer (Lurie, 1981, p.232), being 'elephant-like' has not been as popular a choice in fashion. Certainly a fox can be seen as offering immediately more attractive qualities to women such as agile, slender, with glistening coats of palettes of rich amber colors. The elephant and the connotations and idioms such as 'the elephant in room' convey a sense of being awkward, large with dry, dull, and drab matte grey skin. The elephant used was a 3D digital model used in modeling software. This model already imitating the qualities of a real elephant life size, was scaled down and simplified to be able to enter into clothing techniques, in this case 3D seamless knitting. The elephant was 'unfolded' into patterns which were further simplified into a crude and simplistic version of the real with 'elephant hide I & II –front legs and back legs, 'elephant head, ears, & trunk' and a 'pair of tusks'. The garments were developed to be exhibited, which again played with the concept of the 'elephant in the room' literally, and audience members were invited to try the 'hides' and be photographed in varying poses as lone elephants, couples or as a herd. The project questioned and examined the role and arbitrary nature of the references used in fashion processes, and a new approach in using a digital fake model to generate garment forms. The outcomes, knitted in a fine grade Italian merino, entailed elements that we associate with luxury such as exaggerated volumes (Lurie, 1981, p.232), and softness to touch, despite it depicting a less than fashionable animal.

A continuation of this humorous or ironic appropriation of the language of luxury can also be seen in Chanel's Fall/Winter 2010 Prêt-à-Porter collection. Recognized in 'a trend report for Fall 2010' by Style.com in what was described as 'Fur Real. Faux Too' the collection embodied and excessive use of faux fur in every possible way (Style.com, 2010). The opening look from this collection featured model Abby Lee Kershaw in full faux fur ensemble, congering the eskimo, set amongst 'giant chunks of bona fide iceberg, specially transported from Scandinavia' (Style.com, 2010). All parts of the outfit, coat, pants and shoes were covered with faux fur in clumps and patches of different colors mimicking the discrepancies found in real hides. This extreme use seems to celebrate the accessibility of faux fur, and its opportunities in uses. In advocating the faux it also acknowledges environmental and ethical concerns about the farming of furs by presenting it as luxurious and fashionable. Even though the material is not intended to resemble or posture as the real, it's advantages and design opportunities were exploited with humor within Chanel's collection by the myriad of ways in which it was used, in excess, woven into signature bouclé and tweed, and flaunting the qualities that the real material does not have.

### Montage of Fakes

Another example from Fall/Winter 2010 collections of the concept of both the ersatz in materials and mimetic process applied was from Swedish high fashion designers Acne. In this case Acne used lamb fur, to imitate other furs that we would associate with more exotic and rare animals. The piece aptly named 'fur' is described as follows on the Acne website as a "Patched lamb fur jacket in light shades tanned lamb furs and suede..." (Acne Studios 2010). The piece akin to the language used in many other gar-

ments from their collection engages or alludes to a subversion of processes of construction. Germano Celant's (2007) concept of 'the cut' as "an intervention into the traditional conventions of representing and seeing a body or thing" (Celant, 2009, p.201) can apply here, where the image of fur coats appear to be both literally and figuratively cut and composed back together. As an existing form even as a reference to a fur coat, it is sliced and its fragments are used in a new combination. This relates to Marcus Boon's (2010) description of montage as copying where the action of a 'cut' and compilation with other fragments results in a form which humorously shows it breaks and origin (Boon, 2010, p.145) This approach to cutting up and montages of references, often applied with a mimetic intention is also taken up by SSWTR. In addition to the reference of the fox fur stole in their collections they also draw on luxury icons such as designer 'it' bags as references.

In considering the new ways designers approach the design of a handbag, and the quotients of luxury, this seems most notoriously depicted in the rise of the 'it' bag. The notoriety of 'it' bags connects with how luxury brands have worked out more ways to make accessible their worlds (Thomas, 2007, p.191). In documenting the rise of the 'it' bags Prada's iconic nylon backpacks with triangle logo is said to be the origin of this phenomenon (Thomas, 2007, p.172). As an 'it' bag, it reacted against the most preserved and cherished criteria of luxury goods, embalmed within the practices of brands such as Hermès, that of exquisite, rare and precious materials treated with skill and considered hand-craftsmanship. Miucca Prada bravely subverted the notion of the luxury handbag by substituting luxurious materials with industrial ones. Thomas is quoting Holy Bruback from the *New Yorker* described this as a tactic which subverts the languages of luxury because:

'They were made of a material that, according to most people's taste at the time, undermined their credibility. Real bags, the sort of bags people were proud to carry, came in leather, crocodile or silk, not nylon.'(Thomas, 2007:172).

In reflection of Bourdieu and Delsaut's (1975) concept of the *griffe*, we can say that Prada's name was the desirability of the bag and that it subsequently 'transubstantiates' the nylon with greater cultural value. The humble past of the material, being in this case the nylon used in Italian military parachutes, and being machine made as opposed to hand crafted (Thomas, 2007, p.172) congers a practicality and tough bag that surpasses frivolities of luxurious styling, shape or trims. Prada's backpack didn't use a fake material but an ersatz became symbolic with luxury.

Cunningness, or resourcefulness with materials is exhibited when a designer takes the icon of an 'it' bag and imitates it in ersatz materials. This is beyond the counterfeit industry, which profits from deceptive imitation, but it is an overt imitation used in combination with other techniques or materials that clearly transcends the form. Velisarios Kattoulas (2002) in her article describes the different levels of fakes, in extremes of those which are barely similarly bar a badly applied logo, to that of the 'Super Copy' or grade AA copy which is deceptive to seasoned luxury brand connoisseurs (Kattoulas, 2002). These levels perhaps lend themselves to interesting ways of mediating the mimetic process, from channeling the perfection of technique and craftsmanship to reach a 'Super Copy' or engaging in the naive charm of a bad reproduction of misappropriated language and technique, such as is evident in the work of SSWTR. Counterfeits and copies are always tender subjects for designers, as riffs seem to constantly circulate around the distinctions from being 'inspired' by an existing form, to the point of being 'inspired' to produce veritable facsimiles of other designer's work. This perhaps is also embodied in SSWTR collections. At the core of their practice, which is described as having a 'conceptual' approach to accessories and clothing, is the notion of underpinning and playing with the hierarchies of particular symbols. This includes the generic garment styles that we associate with certain materials and immortalized luxury designer. In their 'No.3 Bags' collection they 'interpreted' several 'it' bags such as Balenciaga's "Motorcycle", Chanel's "2.55" and Hermès "Birkin" into a collection which depicted these bags without luxurious materials or expensive trims but as basic 'lo-fi' versions. In an interview from *Dazed Digital* SSWTR explain the motivation behind imitating these bags:

"When we did bags, I was looking at status bags and thinking about the meaning behind them. Why do these things exist? What would it mean if everything was stripped down and it became a canvas? It's almost like a fingerprint where people still recognize it. It's recreating the scale, but altering the materials. People immediately recognize it. It's a signifier of how iconic those bags have become in our consciousness." (Taing, 2009)

This suggests a future that is supported historically where the trade name of materials and products becomes the generic signifier. The qualities for examples of the "Birkin" are distilled and are the starting point of the process; and evolve depending on the chosen materials or other processes used.

This idea of taking the “Birkin” and ‘sampling’ it, as is done in electronic music, within the context of new elements thrown into the mix, reconfigures cultural meanings. In later SSWTR collections such as “No.19 Luxe” they took the “Birkin” and amalgamated it with New York designer As Fours’ bag, to become a four-sided mega status “Birkin/As Four” bag. As described by Boon (2010), humor is the determiner and quotient of a successful montage copy (Boon, 2010, p.145). SSWTR “Birkin/As Four” bag is a success in design as it is humorous to see a rendition of the “Birkin” bag front view, and then to notice that both the side and the back are exactly the same, distinct from the original. Perhaps we make the connection with fake bags that are familiar and copious in quantity, littered throughout markets worldwide and a particular type of fascination with the façade as a single view of a form proliferated in the prevalence of Google image searches. There is a particular evocative hollowness in this piece, as it suggests a sense of finality in the search for originality, as referencing culture suggests there is no real ‘new’. The reduction of stylistic attributes of a bag synonymous with superior craftsmanship, prestige and finesse being reduced into a simple façade and then fed into a montage process creates a tension. The act of mimesis, and the act of montage, develops its own identity through the shared context brought on by the attributes of each reference, that whilst are broken still echo the originals.

## Conclusion

The fragmentation and ‘decentralization’ of high fashion and luxury brands has drastically affected the notion of what is and is not luxury. Qualities deemed luxurious are applied to articles in and outside of established luxury figurehead brands. Subsequently, this has resulted in assorted strands of luxury that equate to languages designers use differently. This context of an increasingly saturated market of luxury and the proliferation of luxury articles in other market levels has meant designers have responded by renewing the value of the fake. From a trajectory of the animal hide as a fur coat or as abstracted into handbag, animals beings symbolic with luxury has been reinvigorated into new languages of luxury by the use of mimetic design processes or faux, or ersatz materials. Luxury brands designers’ subsequently reinvent their visions of luxury, by exploring ways that are at odds with assumed qualities of their own brands. Designers from emerging or high fashion brands comment, refer to and critique the languages of luxury by exploring methods of subversion. This includes the use of ersatz materials, or by using mimetic processes with montage, ‘sampling’, and cutting and pasting of fragments in design processes that take legendary luxury articles and produce new design innovations. The symbolic and cultural significance of the fake takes on new value as both a cultural reflection, and as a shifter in value in the stakes of luxury.

The methods for reinventing or innovating luxury articles and brands are dependent on the exploration of a more critical and conceptual approach that actively engages in questioning the quotients and assumptions of luxury. By doing this, it engages in design processes that use the language of luxury in new ways, challenging the convention of materials and techniques and creating engaging narratives that equate to equally innovative articles. The fake, within a design process, does not condone the counterfeit but challenges the faux pas that luxury should always be authentic.

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# Luxury or the Tradition of the Monopoly. Variation on the “Accursed Share”

Nicolas Liucci-Goutnikov

ECOLE DES HAUTES ÉTUDES EN SCIENCES SOCIALES, PARIS, FRANCE

## Abstract

Starting from this observation, we will show that luxury necessarily forms around a tradition –a tradition of monopoly– and that this is always constructed around invariables: the ostentation of leisure, the ostentation of accumulating different types of capital, etc. This will also allow us to understand how a certain fashion can be born from the dynamic of resentment, the resentment of a reactive, that is to say imitative, nature, of those who find themselves excluded from the use of monopolized goods.

According to Georges Bataille, society produces a surplus of energy that he termed the “part maudite”<sup>1</sup> (the accursed share), that can be used by all in an extension of the democratic process or can be spent by the chosen few. Luxury, the economic mechanism for managing surplus takes the second option: it constitutes the real or symbolic monopolisation of this “accursed share” for the benefit of a small minority. Luxury manifests itself the second this monopolisation comes into being, once it takes shape. As such, Montesquieu taught us that “if wealth is shared equally in a state, there can be no luxury”<sup>2</sup>. For this monopolisation to exist, there must be a structural inequality at the heart of society. In other words a certain relationship of domination and submission must exist to enable the excess in question to be taken by a minority using force.

If we stay with Bataille, luxury or the excess taken is simply surplus, it is but “extra” quantity, and as such has no actual quality. This is exactly what Jean-Paul Sartre taught us: “luxury does not designate the quality of the object possessed, but the quality of the possession”<sup>3</sup>. Luxury is a quality of possession, a monopoly which involves the excess being taken by force by a minority. This is why luxury is never democratic and means that “the democratisation of luxury” an expression that is becoming more and more common in specialised circles is a contradiction in terms. That which is democratic or democratised cannot be a luxury, in as much as it is also that which is accessible to all. Accessibility to all, as we know, is the opposite of luxury. We will come back to this point.

As it is not a quality of the object, luxury is immune to typology. Any type of item can be a luxury item if its use is monopolised by a minority in a show of strength. This is why we must begin by removing the notion of luxury from the notion of taste which establishes a more or less stable distribution of the use of items in the different areas of the social space. We must remove luxury from the schema described by Pierre Bourdieu in *La Distinction*, according to which one loves what one is familiar with; the working class have red meat and open legs, the bourgeois have fish and stiff posture. As such, red meat and fish can only constitute luxury items in as much as their use is monopolised by a minority in a show of strength. This axiom has a corollary: as monopolies can be broken and usage made more accessible, there is no type of item that will always remain a “luxury” item.

We should also agree on the notion of the monopolisation of the use of an item. The quality of possession that applies to luxury has nothing to do with that of the attribute, the conventional or functional logic which links a certain object to a certain group –the black robes and white collars of the lawyer, the den-

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tist's drill, the divine substance to the divine. Such monopolisation concerns objects whose use is specialised. It is vertical as it splits society into professional branches, orders, corporations of experts, etc. The monopolisation that makes an object a luxury object is horizontal in nature: it concerns goods whose use is not specialised in the slightest; on the contrary it is universal, in terms of power anyway. What would a bank teller do with a dentist's drill? What would a bank teller do without a pair of shoes?

Earlier we mentioned that there was no such thing as the "democratisation of luxury". It is however possible to give that appearance. There is no permanent type of luxury object, but there are strong beliefs according to which certain types of objects are luxury objects. The origin of these beliefs comes from the fact that we wrongly believe that we see the cause of luxury in that which is but the temporary consequence of an unstable monopoly that itself constitutes luxury. Luxury manifests itself in certain forms in the quality of the possession. As such, and by "reduction" it is possible to distinguish certain properties in the object whose use was temporarily monopolised, an object which is then referred to as a luxury object. We could end up thinking that this object "is" a luxury object due to these properties, which would lead some to think that luxury is a quality of the object itself and that one can typologise it. But once the monopoly dissolves, the object is no longer a luxury object: this has been the case for a multitude of objects and goods, from the automobile to cottons. So by corollary, luxury can only be considered a quality of an object in its synchronic dimension (if even).

That which by nature escapes monopolisation can never be a luxury. This involves objects and goods such as the air we breathe or knowledge whose main property is that they circulate freely. In general, goods that are available in abundance and common to all tend to escape monopolisation, unless there are laws that regulate their use, in general in the name of tradition, like the sumptuary laws in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance that restricted the use of certain colours to certain social groups. We could also say that goods that are rare to find and use are by nature more apt to be monopolised by a minority –but here again, we should avoid establishing any immediate equivalency as there are a number of rare goods whose use is not monopolised and whose value is weak as a result.

Luxury is a quality of possession by virtue of which the use of the "so-called" luxury object is monopolised by a minority: so a form of rarity is nevertheless needed in order to make this monopolisation humanly possible. To tell the truth, it matters little that the rarity is natural or artificially constructed. Rarity that is monopolised in luxury, the "part maudite", the excess, can be a rarity that is *identified* in nature or a rarity that is *organised* by the minority that intends to monopolise its use. In luxury there must of course be a rarity to monopolise, but this rarity must above all be *designated* according to a number of parameters. Gaining the title of luxury is not merely a question of rarity. Beyond the notion of rarity, which concerns a minority, meaning again a group of *individuals* that organise a *collective* monopoly, we should really be talking about singularity, a singularity that lends itself to individual monopoly; a singularity that once monopolised, represents the ideal of luxury: the work of art.

This essential relationship to rarity explains the most admirable dimension of luxury: in the domain of artefacts, the most immediate rarity is that of the minority crafts/skills, or even the ultra-minority skills, that is to say today, craftsmanship. So luxury is in a way, pre-destined to protect fragile skill bases, and more generally to guarantee a form of diversity that has been undermined by the uniformisation that has resulted from industrial production. This necessary link to rarity also explains why there is, as we mentioned above, a certain need for luxury to have an "artistic" bent –as the "artistic" always ensures a certain singularity open, or more aptly offered to the monopoly. So luxury marginally guarantees the existence of objects and behaviour that are linked to "art" within the overall offer, but under conditions that must of course be explained.

Let's continue. What characterises luxury is that it is monopolised by a minority in a show of strength. But in the specific conditions of democracy and capitalism, it is not possible to accord a "horizontal" monopoly to one group. This is why the monopoly establishes itself on a very real base, that of a certain accumulation of capital –all types of capital– in other words on the basis of the pre-possession of all types of means, mean whose very use has been monopolised. We see clearly here that we can distinguish two types of monopolisation, one dependant on the other: the de facto monopolisation of certain goods that require means, subsumed by the previous monopolisation of the means in question, meaning the means of production. So in these conditions this immediately leads to: firstly, as a system of signs, luxury always denotes the monopolisation of the means of production, meaning non-work or *otium*. Secondly, a luxury object always denotes the accumulation of a certain level of means whatever that may signify (social, cultural or economic capital)<sup>4</sup>, but as rare as possible in any case.

This is why we can rightly speak of “tradition” when referring to luxury, but only in the particular perspective of a democratic and capitalistic society. This tradition is characterised by durable elements that are the signs associated with the concept of non-work and the accumulation of capital, rare capital if possible. This tradition can be outlined as follows:

- Non-work: the object or representation of luxury denotes *otium* –meaning work that is accumulated and crystallised but done by someone else and as such a form of power. This explains that the contemporary representation of luxury is often that of the woman, the traditional symbol for idleness, often photographed doing nothing. Or that we associate the shape of 19<sup>th</sup> century luxury garments such as the crinoline with a form of integrated idleness, or conspicuous leisure.

- Along with non-work goes *non-function*: the object or representation of luxury denotes a certain disinterest in use, the search for the beautiful as opposed to the useful. This manifests itself in the aestheticisation of the shape of clothes whose forms and fabrics often impeded movement and didn't even correspond to the *function* of clothing (cover, keeping warm, etc.). This is also expressed in the provocative attitude of the characters in portraits in representations associated with luxury, an attitude that denotes precisely that “self-presentation”<sup>5</sup> in this case has lost all conventional *function*.

- *The accumulation of a certain level of capital, preferably the rarest kind*. The examples are even more obvious. On a trivial level, luxury objects are always sold at a marginally higher price and require a certain level of means. Of course, the ostentation of clothing itself participates in the connotation of accumulation (quality fabrics, precious metals...). We should note that at a time of huge growth in the ranks of the nouveau riche, where economic capital is slightly less rare, denoting the accumulation of cultural capital can have as much value. This explains how ostentation can in certain cases, give way to a certain discretion in the objects and representations of luxury.

In a democratic and capitalist society, the “tradition” of luxury organises itself around these necessary conditions. Without them, there cannot be a luxury object: we will never see a working woman in an advert for a luxury brand. Neither will we see a t-shirt that only costs a few Euros in a luxury boutique. But these conditions are not enough: a type of object or representation can respect each of these criteria, can, in a way, be a candidate for monopolisation, without having its use monopolised by a minority.

This explains why radical splits with tradition or dynamics of renewal are impossible in luxury products outside the perimeter defined by this “tradition” whose mutation is subject to economic, social and cultural conditions. A luxury producer can attempt to transform his creations or symbolic universe as long as they remain in the orbit of this “tradition”. It is only by virtue of the concept of monopolisation that the luxury sign system can be synchronically confused with that of “non luxury”: as monopolies collapse, luxury is necessarily subjected to a heteronomic dynamic of renewal.

We now understand that to talk about the “democratisation” of luxury is a mistake. However, it is possible to give the appearance of luxury to an object that is in fact not monopolised by any minority, but on the contrary, available to all. In short we can create a simulacrum of monopolisation: one create a simulacrum of monopolisation by investing in boutiques in the neighbourhoods where “normal” people feel they can't even go to shop (i.e. neighbourhoods which have been monopolised themselves). One creates a simulacra of monopolisation by depicting people in advertising who clearly don't have any interest in the actual use of their goods, etc. producing fictional monopolies whips up the resentment<sup>6</sup> felt by reactive beings when faced with the show of strength of the minority – monopolisation. The compensation for these powerless beings –powerless to beat the power of others in creating a monopoly– is, as Nietzsche described, an imaginary vengeance accomplished in the name of equality and justice, a pure reaction whose consequence is, in the end, increased sales for industrial groups who, in reality, produce objects whose use is vulgarised... or the manufacturers of fake luxe items.

Within big industrial groups this has consequences regarding their creative teams. The creative players (designers and artistic directors) and pseudo-creatives (marketing and advertising people) can justifiably be regarded as “organic” ideologists<sup>7</sup> in charge of renewing these monopolistic fictions, to propose products that could aspire to real monopolisation (haute couture) for a minority or, products that could aspire to a simulacrum of monopolisation aimed at the majority. These industrial groups also have the task of creating desire that will enable the object-candidates to be truly or symbolically monopolised. Finally, they also need to watch out for and anticipate the end of monopolies in order to always renew the stock of signs that might make candidates for monopolisation.

In conclusion, we will quickly cover the role of fashion relative to luxury. Fashion is a diachronic imitative flow that intervenes as a real operator in the circulation of signs. It can be a vertical descending flow that permits the *trompe-l'oeil* accomplishment of the impossible “democratisation of luxury”, based on the common thirst for equality. Or more to the point based on resentment: it is a reflex worthy of the “letzte Mensch” (the last man), that of wanting to imitate, the quintessence of the reactive being, wanting to be like the “great and good” rather than fighting against all forms of monopolisation like a true democrat. A last man lacking in all power, incapable of creating anything. As a vertical flow, fashion is thus the dynamic opposite of domination; it represents the dominant relationships themselves... It is only when it becomes a horizontal or oblique flux, or completely unruly as opposed to vertical, that fashion becomes independent of the “tradition” of luxury, where it can construct systems of open signs, open to all identifications be they ephemeral or long-lasting, and circulate universal systems. But then, is it really fashion?

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# Is Creativity the Answer? So what is the Question?

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Wendy Malem

LONDON COLLEGE OF FASHION, UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS, UK

## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to consider a deeper understanding of where creativity and innovation can contribute to the luxury designer fashion economy, and whether one exists without the other.

There is a compulsion to understand creativity, to truly understand what contribution it makes to the creative economy and to designer fashion in particular. Also to debate whether it is based on creative individuals alone or as a cocktail of complimentary talents which together form a creative team. Is social evaluation an integral part of creativity?

If creativity is about the generation of new ideas, how can we interpret innovation into luxury designer fashion? Bianchini and Bortolotti in 1996 suggested: *“Formal innovation is change in the product form, decisive in product fields as those of fashion and design goods. Here innovation depends much less on engineering factors, as for technical innovation, and much more on intangible factors, as aesthetics, imagination and taste, close relatives of artistic creativity”*.

Creativity and innovation can refer to product and also to the skills apparent in realising the designs, and innovation in manufacturing was an ingredient for the rise of “luxury” and “Heritage” and the proliferation of designer brands. This could be the key to the sustainability of the modern day phenomenon: “the Heritage Brand”. Sennett remarks: *“We’d err to imagine that because traditional craft communities pass on skills from generation to generation, the skills they pass down have been rigidly fixed, not at all. Ancient pottery making for instance, changed radically when the rotating stone disc holding a lump of clay came into use; new ways of drawing the clay ensued”*.

The recent report by the Centre for Fashion Enterprise is an attempt to identify what the key attributes are to a luxury or high end fashion product. In the same survey, it identified that in Italy and France, high-end fashion manufacturers undertook what they called “development or innovation”.

Managing people is a key creative and innovative factor in fashion, requiring vision and ideas. Polet, President of the Gucci group in 2006 said: *“Matching the right creative talent with the right business talent is key. It has its ups and downs, and you have disagreements, within a common purpose and a common framework”*. To understand further the contribution of creativity and innovation to luxury designer labels and heritage brands, this paper will focus entirely on achieving the product through innovation and creativity.

## Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to consider a deeper understanding of where creativity and innovation can contribute to the luxury designer fashion economy, and whether one exists without the other. To do so, this paper will focus entirely on achieving the product through innovation and creativity, including ideas, skills, manufacturing and people management as key contributors to the success of the product. It identifies existing relevant definitions of “creativity” and “innovation”. As the discussion is concerned with high-end designer, luxury or “Heritage” fashion product, the study draws on a separate study done by the Centre for Fashion Enterprise and London College of Fashion in 2009, which aimed to define the term “high-end manufacturing” and touches on the relevance of skills and innovation in the production of designer or heritage luxury garments.

Then, to further understand innovation in fashion design, the study applies the key principles from the study of formal innovation in product design, originally undertaken by Bianchi and Bortolotti in 1996, and applies to the fashion designers at Centre for Fashion Enterprise in London in 2010. This reflection on

## Keywords

Creativity  
Innovation  
Fashion  
Designer  
Heritage-Brand  
Manufacturing  
Managing  
Skills

the process, when applied to a contemporary fashion design context, demonstrates how new thinking can add to creativity through a process called “formal innovation”.

Crucial to the successful application of creativity and innovation to the product, is the overall leadership of the vision or brand. This may be the designer-owner in a small to medium fashion business or the Chief Operating Officer (CEO) in a global brand who will manage creativity as “*the ultimate economic resource*” (Cox, 2005).

### Literature Review

The problem as we understand it at the moment, is to do with the lack of published research into creativity and innovation in fashion design, despite the continual rhetoric from Governments and the fashion industry relating to the creativity in the sector. The research field is rich with publications referring to social, cultural, and historical fashion studies however, despite a great deal of interest in design, creativity and innovation, there is little published research to date that explores the theme, in relation to designer or heritage luxury fashion. The aim of this paper is to identify literature that reflects on the practice of creativity and of innovation, rather than following a theoretical point of view. This was found within the Governmental reports mentioned, which were rich with the experience of seasoned industrialists. Also the article in Time magazine, which gave key insights into the ways Chief Executive Officers (CEO) created the conditions for creativity to exist in several of the most successful global fashion houses. Additionally, the work by Richard Sennett, Richard Florida and John Howkins were recommended by design practitioners and contains perceptive reflections based on case studies and their own experience.

Bianchini and Bortolotti's 1996 study into formal innovation demonstrated a deep understanding in the field of product design in Italy, giving insights into the process of design. It lent an interesting model for the framework to this study, which focuses on understanding the existence of creativity and innovation in the product of fashion designers.

### Research Methodology

The research addresses three questions:

1. What has been written already about creativity and innovation with a relevance to high-end designers, luxury or heritage brands?
2. Are there research models that already exist that could be applied to fashion design to understand the application of creativity or innovation in the products.
3. What are the features of high-end products?

Following an internet search for reports and literature to review definitions of creativity, innovation, and high-end manufactured fashion product, data was also sought on managing the creative environment. Then a research model was selected (Bianchini and Bortolotti, 1996), to generate an investigation through questions in a qualitative interview and observation based study focused on a sample of ten designers at the Centre for Fashion Enterprise in London. The interviews and observations were recorded.

The sample was considered to be representative of the field, following the application of 4 criteria; the interviewees were all seen by the fashion press as “emerging” designers in London and considered to be creative; they all showed at London Fashion Week as high-end designers and all had the support of talent spotting organisations, either British Fashion Council/Top Shop's New Gen, Fashion-East or On/Off; they had all been in business for a minimum of four seasons (two years), so there were no start-ups in the sample, and represented registered designer businesses. Geographically 90% of UK fashion designer businesses are in London therefore the designers supported by the Centre for Fashion Enterprise were seen as representative.

The analysis of the data was in three stages.

The first was the analysis of definitions, to select the ones that were most relevant to luxury designer fashion economy. Secondly, there was an identification of the creative approaches of each designer. Finally analyses of these approaches were mapped onto the 4 criteria from the Italian product design study: innovation through a structure change in the product; innovation with changes in production processes; innovation with new uses for the same product and innovation with new materials.

### Findings and Discussion

Creativity is described by many, including Florida, as the generation of new ideas. Cox, in his review of the role of creativity in the economic growth and productivity in UK, said that creativity is “*either new ways*

*of looking at existing problems, or of seeing new opportunities, perhaps by exploiting emerging technologies or changes in markets.*" (Cox, G., 2005)

There is a compulsion to understand creativity, to truly understand what contribution it makes to the creative economy and to designer fashion in particular. Howkins, in his book *The Creative Economy*, believes that *"without creativity, we could not imagine, discover or invent anything, and that creativity is the ability to generate something new"*. (Howkins, J., 2002)

Analysis of the relationship between creativity to economic growth is not new in the quest to originate services and products with enhanced economic value. *"Human creativity is the ultimate economic resource"*, says Cox. He describes creativity as "an asset" and challenges us to begin exploring the nature and extent of the relationship between economics and creativity, and how they combine to create extraordinary value and wealth, as seen in the luxury fashion industries world-wide.

Fashion is a fast moving and judgemental industry where social evaluation is an integral part of creativity. "A specific role of the fashion designer is to act as an intermediary between socio-cultural milieu and the enterprise system". (Bianchini and Bortolotti, 1996). Creativity has to meet high expectations from several quarters as expressed by Boudicca, a design team based in London known for their individuality:

*"There is the language business. Then there is the language of the industry. An industry that likes us to be cult wants us to stay cult. ... additionally there is the language of the customer"*. (Malem, W., 2008)

The production of creative and new ideas can be from one or more people. In a small business it is likely to be the creator-founder alone, but in a larger business a collaborative approach has the potential to encourage creativity, with collective decision-making through negotiation which brings a cocktail of complimentary talents and skills to form a creative team and produce innovative products, services and solutions. The necessary skills for collaboration are *co-operation, integration, bilateral relationships and mutual commitment* (Eckert, C., 2007) which are often absent from small fashion designer businesses. It may not only be due to the lack of the collaborative skills but also the realities of collaboration which are more often a high task uncertainty, joint problem solving and often the transfer of incomplete information which are not conducive to a creator-founder's mission. A collaborative "creative team" approach relies on skills and protocols which include co-operation and mutual commitment.

Steering the acceptance of creative and innovative ideas within the business is essential. This means managing the "gatekeepers" to ensure the viable new ideas get internal acceptance before they are ready for external promotion. The gatekeepers may be the inward facing part of the organisation: including the financial teams, the manufacturing and production people. The outward facing people include the creative and innovation teams, media and marketing. Innovation relies on acceptance just as creativity relies on social evaluation as an integral part. A manager's success relies on *"an altogether intangible skill set, namely an ability to manage intensely creative talent."* (Hume, M., 2006)

Good leaders have the skill to reframe ideas effectively for the larger organisation, as creativity and innovation may not be acceptable initially for strategic or financial reasons.

*"From the investment view, then, the creative person buys low by presenting an idea that initially is not valued and then attempting to convince other people of its value. After convincing others that the idea is valuable, which increases the perceived value of the investment, the creative person sells high by leaving the idea to others and moving on to another idea. People typically want others to love their ideas, but immediate universal applause for an idea often indicated that it is not particularly creative."* (Steinberg, R., 2006)

Organisational structure has been noted to be significant in supporting creativity and innovation. The environment within which the creative teams work to facilitate creativity for innovative solutions is also significant. Recruiting, guiding and motivating creative people demands management strategies, which are understood throughout the business. The balance between the aesthetic ambitions of the creative and innovative individuals and the needs of the business to harness this productivity for mutual benefit can lead to great success when understood by a sensitive and empowered manager. As Richard Florida, in *"Rise and Fall of the Creative Class"*, observes: *"Creativity is largely driven by intrinsic rewards. Surely some creative people are driven by money, but the studies find that truly creative individuals from artists and writers to scientists and open-source software developers are driven largely by internal motivations."* (Florida, R., 2002)

This phenomenon has been understood with significant financial results by some of the Chief Executive Officers heading up luxury and "Heritage" brands over the past decade. The strong brand houses at

Dior, Gucci and Fendi spoke to Marion Hume at *Time magazine* in 2006, about how they have developed successful strategies for managing create people in their businesses, and this has been eloquently expressed by their Chief Executive Officers. Toledano reined John Galliano into Dior in 1998, and expressed his approach. “Where we want to take the brand is not John’s decision; this is something I discuss with the shareholders and I express it to John”. Robert Polet, in the same article as President of the Gucci group said “Matching the right creative talent with the right business talent is key. It’s truly like a marriage”.

“Creativity is not something you add just like seasoning”, added Burke in 2006 as CEO at Fendi. “It’s a crucial, integral part of the business, and [management] is not in opposition. It’s not, “Let’s not use too much of it because it can get dangerous”. You embrace it completely”.

These experienced industrialists have identified clearly that successful designer, luxury and “Heritage” brands rely on the innovations in management to lead the business and create both the environment and structure for innovation and creativity to flourish. This message that creativity and innovation must be embedded throughout the business is repeated when Cox was evaluating productivity for the Creative Industries in UK in 2005:

“Sustained success in business –regardless of the sector– increasingly depends on the ability to innovate: to exploit new ideas and new opportunities ahead of the competition... The ability to innovate in turn, depends on the availability and exploitation of creative skills. In a real enterprise culture, these needs create a virtuous circle; for sustained innovation and growth, companies need to be able to draw on the talents of a flourishing creative community; for innovation to flourish, the creative community needs to be responding to the demands of dynamic and ambitious businesses.” (Cox, G., 2005).

So if creativity is about the generation of new ideas, and “innovation” is the successful exploitation of new ideas, is there a process that carries innovation through to new products, new services, new ways of running the business or even new ways of doing business? The heritage and luxury fashion industries often do not drive such fast moving product cycles, therefore have the economic benefits of lasting advantage of innovation, whereas fashion following businesses are forced to create and innovate at a rapid pace and are denied the advantages of lasting advantage.

Bianchini and Bortolotti’s study in 1996 suggest that “formal innovation is change in the product form, not necessarily associated with changes in product functions and product process. Formal Innovation is decisive in productive fields as those of fashion and design goods”... here innovation depends much less on engineering factors, as for technological innovation, and much more on intangible factors, as aesthetics, imagination and taste, close relatives of artistic creativity.

Their research describes a study that was carried out by the High School of Industrial Design in Florence, which looked to ascertain links between formal innovation and other aspects of the innovative process. It looked at hundreds of objects including chairs, clothes, lamps, desks, crockery, etc. and concluded that formal innovation was associated:

- In 58% of cases with a structure change of the product
- In 36% cases with changes in production process
- In 22% with new uses of the same product
- In 14% with new materials

The process of formal innovation as described here appears aligned with the approach taken in recent times by a “fashion house” or “Heritage” brand to employ a contemporary designer, who is briefed to immerse themselves in the historical archives and identify the “essence” of the founder, and employ as a creative inspiration for a new collection.

Creativity and innovation can refer to product and also to the skills apparent in realising the designs. At the British Fashion Council Awards ceremony in December 2010, Christopher Bailey, the Creative Director for Burberry, was introduced as signifying, “The epitome of how to use tradition”. This reference to skill and tradition is significant to the rise of revamped fashion houses in the big fashion centres of Paris, Milan, New York and London, to include Burberry, Givenchy, Halston and Gucci.

Skill and tradition could also be the key to the sustainability of the modern day phenomenon the “Heritage Brand” where innovation can also be identified in the application, interpretation and evolution of heritage skills. Sennett, in his book the Craftsman. remarks: “We’d err to imagine that because traditional craft communities pass on skills from generation to generation, the skills they pass down have been rigidly fixed, not at all. Ancient pottery making for instance, changed radically when the rotating stone disc holding a lump of clay came into use; new ways of drawing the clay ensued”. (Sennett, R. 2009).

Innovation in manufacturing has been another ingredient responsible for the rise of “luxury” and “Heritage” and the proliferation of designer brands through the twentieth and twenty first centuries. The 2009 report by the Centre for Fashion Enterprise and London College of Fashion entitled “High-end manufacturing in UK”, attempted to identify what the key attributes are to a luxury or high-end fashion product. Simply putting a designer label into a garment was not seen as sufficient to denote a quality level, particularly with the recent rise in collaborations with high street retailers and named designers, as H&M have done with global designers including Lanvin, Jimmy Choo and Sonia Rykiel.

As there does not appear to be an existing definition of what is meant by high-end manufacturing, the research suggested this definition as a starting point:

*“High End manufacturing” is the making and finishing of luxury and high quality goods that are often referred to as “designer label” and which compete globally with re-known international luxury brands.”*

The researchers asked UK designers and UK, French and Italian manufacturers to describe a high-end garment, in an attempt to differentiate the product and to identify “value added” or innovation in the production process. Their comments assisted the formulation of a list of characteristics as follows:

- Use of expensive, luxury and/or innovative fabrics and trims
- Evident high quality of cut (fit of the garment)
- Evident high level of skill involved in the manufacture of a high-end garment
- Evident high quality of seams (e.g. French seams rather than over-locking,)
- Evident partnership between designer and manufacturer in achieving the aesthetic of the garment
- Evident high quality of the finish of the interior of the garment (e.g. bound seams, high-quality linings)
- Specialist finishing as appropriate (e.g. hand-work)
- Evident high quality of overall finishing and high level of quality control applied

Added to the product evaluation, the research team added three manufacturer criteria:

- Investment in machinery (including recent investments and future plans for investment)
- Investment in skilled people (including skills of existing staff and training given)
- Viability of business (length of time trading, expected future time trading)

Manufacturers were given a grade out of five for each of these eleven criteria on the basis of data taken from both the questionnaire and open-question interview, resulting in a total score out of a maximum of fifty-five. On the basis of this evaluation, it is evident that there is a significant difference in between UK manufacturers and French and Italian manufacturers working within the sector. Notably, none of the UK manufacturers achieved the top banding level (41-55) whereas the majority of French and Italian companies in the sector scored highly, attaining this level. It should, however, be noted that there are some differences between the French and Italian manufacturers. Investment in technology, commitment to research and development were particular strengths of Italian companies whilst the French companies scored best in terms of criteria relating to product quality and relationships with designers.

In the same survey, it identified that in Italy and France, high-end fashion manufacturers undertook what they called “development or innovation” as a percentage of hours worked in luxury and high-end fashion manufacturing. This was a particularly high percentage in Italy.

It concluded that innovation and skills were essential to meet all the criteria for high end and luxury manufacturing. What it also identified was the crucial ingredient to innovation as management of the process of innovation and the enhancement through creativity.

Having evaluated existing research in the field, it was apparent that creativity and innovation were evident in the making of product and in people and process management relevant to the creative fashion economy, contributed to by authors including Cox, Florida, Sennett, and Howkins. However there was not research evident which clearly identified how both creativity and innovation related to fashion designer products. This suggested the need for a study of a representative group of fashion designers to evaluate the origination of new products and whether it could be attributed to the exploitation of their creativity through “formal innovation”. The four processes outlined by the principles from Bianchini and Bortolotti’s study were applied.

The study found that the structural change of the product (criteria one) would be closely related to designers’ creative process when reflecting new cultural influences in the way their designs are created and interpreted as new silhouettes and proportions, innovation in processes and techniques, and the design of the structural elements like new garment blocks, 3-dimensional modelling and construction.

Changes in the production process (criteria two) are the innovative ways employed by a designer of exploiting the supply chain and exploring traditional techniques and technology. This is relevant to ethical

approaches including micro production for re-cutting and re-using, cutting from waste and by-products, New uses of the same product (criteria three) could be interpreted as the reference to and reinterpretation of archived and vintage fashion, styling, or ethical approaches including customising and recycling. Equally, ideas exploring the development of unisex or trans-seasonal product; men's wear as women's wear; and adoption of items as accessories. New uses for the same product could be reinterpreted as those strategies for market penetration finding new markets through international expansion of agent's networks, exhibitions and installations, re-evaluating the fashion show or developing a new PR campaign. Finally innovation with new materials (criteria four) refers to the designers who source or develop new fabrics, finishes, surfaces and decoration. Surface decoration and original print development was the prevalent group. In an innovative business sense, examples could include new licensing deals, diffusion ranges or new collaborations, working with new organisations outside the fashion industry like dance companies and working at a slower or faster pace than the fashion calendar.

The Study with Centre for Fashion Enterprise Designers identified:

- In 10% of cases with a structure change of the product
- In 20% cases with changes in production process
- In 30% with new uses of the same product
- In 40% with new materials

This study demonstrates that in an industry where the designer fashion product is judged on its creativity as the key identity of that collection, it can also be seen to follow processes that could be perceived as innovation. In the study of designer fashion in London, a far higher percentage of formal innovation involves innovation through the use of new materials, for which the study includes originated print, knit and surface decoration, new finishes and new fabrics. This category rises to 40% in designer fashion in London, as opposed to 14% where the products in Italy were a broader type of design including chairs, clothes, lamps, desks, and crockery.

Formal innovation through a structure change of the product plunged to 10% with Centre for Fashion designers, as opposed to 58% in a broad definition of product design. There was a marked difference with formal innovation through changes in production process where 20% of the fashion designers compared with 36% in the broader product category, and with new uses of the same product there was a slight difference with 30% and 22% respectively.

All of these four criteria for formal innovation can also be identified when considering innovation and heritage fashion brands, although the emphasis may differ between criteria.

Formal Innovation Association	Fashion Innovation response to criteria
<b>Innovation through with a structure change of the product</b>	<b>New cultural influences on design.</b> Innovation in processes and technique; creative pattern cutting methodology; new shapes; lengths and silhouettes, proportions; new structures
<b>Innovation with changes in production processes</b>	<b>Exploiting supply chain</b> New technologies; exploiting the supply chain; adapting product to suit production in new location; globalisation opportunities; garment finishing and construction; new fabric developments; ethical approaches including micro production for re-cutting and re-using, cutting from waste and by-products.
<b>Innovation with new uses for the same Product</b>	References to archives; vintage clothing; reinterpretation of sports items; new inspiration and concepts; styling; ethical approaches including customising and reusing; recycling themes; unisex and/or trans-seasonal product; men's wear as women's wear; adoption of items as accessories; new collaborations; exploiting changes in markets; market penetration; licensing deals; Press pleasers and show pieces; change seasonality to work at a faster or slower pace than the fashion calendar; daywear as eveningwear and vice versa
<b>Innovation with New Materials</b>	New fabrics, fibres and technologies; new trimmings and decoration; new prints and surfaces; source or develop new fabrics, new colours and finishes; licensing deals; collaborations; product diversification.

Table 1: Examples of new products created through the formal innovation processes at Centre for Fashion Enterprise, London

### Conclusion and suggestions

This paper concludes that both creativity and innovation are applied in the creation of new products in the luxury fashion designer economy, and that commercially, one does not exist without the other. Also

it identifies that creativity is not the same as innovation. We understand that creativity is the generation of ideas by an individual person or by a group of people. We also understand from the discussion that innovation is the exploitation of those ideas. A key finding is that creativity and innovation are both present in the design of the product in high-end fashion, luxury and heritage brands. A second key finding is innovation, as the exploitation of ideas, is also identified within manufacturing and management of the product.

New insights into skills innovation have been identified and these must be present for the environment to be conducive to creativity and for innovation collaboration, including collaborative skills, people management skills and traditional heritage and technology skills.

What has emerged from the study with a representative group of high-end fashion designers in London, is that a creative and innovation approach has been newly identified. It found the designers were using innovation in addition to their creativity, while not necessarily realising it, demonstrating that creativity is extended through the application of a formal innovation process. The main themes are innovation through: structural change of the product; changes in the production process; new uses for the same product and new materials. All of these four criteria for innovation can also be identified when considering innovation with "Heritage" fashion brands however emphasis may differ between criteria.

The limitation of this research is its focus on creativity and formal innovation being limited to UK designers in business for between 2 and 4 years, and not more established designer labels. The study with emerging fashion designers who, although some referred to tradition, heritage and vintage as sources of innovation, do not represent the heritage brands themselves.

While this study highlights the need for creativity, it has also provided new insights into key success factors through the understanding of innovation in design, innovation in the processes and innovation in management for the designer fashion, luxury and "Heritage" brands to continue to prosper.

Further research into the "Heritage" brands themselves could lead to understanding the success levels of creativity and innovation in product development, manufacturing and management terms and determine whether these levels will change in different global markets. There is also the need for further research with fashion designers who have been in business for longer periods of time, probably over ten years, to understand how formal innovation can be applied to more mature design businesses for business growth.

A recommendation for global fashion Higher Education Institutions, is to monitor the convergence of fashion industries and to value innovation in design, in production processes and innovation in management equally, in order to continue the relevance of education to growth in these industries while assuring graduate employment.

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# Luxury in a Modern Context. Conscientious Integrity

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Karen Webster

RMIT UNIVERSITY, MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

## Abstract

This paper responds to the theme 'recomposing tradition and acknowledges the rich history afforded to luxury and translates it into a modern ethos that embraces personal and social value. Capturing the essence of luxury through positive characteristics like artisanship, uniqueness, high quality, bespoke methodology, specialness to the user yet rejecting the outmoded classification of target market elitism. Luxury in our modern era embraces meaning beyond price and monetary worth to enhance true personal and social value. There is no radical split between old and new constructs of luxury but rather a fusion of heritage characteristics within a contemporary context.

The fashion industry works at an incredible speed, the proliferation of new product happens so quickly, it rivals all other product-orientated industries. The days of two collections per year launched under the banner of fall/winter or spring/summer is a long gone illusion of history. New merchandise hits the stores on a weekly basis, retailers competing against each other work in a cycle of constant production and turnover of ideas in an attempt to be the 'first' with the latest look.

This environment has put enormous pressure on the creative process, ideally creative designers would love the notion of time: time to research, time to develop, time to reflect, time to perfect, time to improve and reassess. Time is the new luxury. When designers create something that is carefully, considered, refined and handcrafted with bespoke techniques its value is enhanced because that most valued of concepts: time which has enabled it.

Luxury needs to be redefined. Luxury is not about price positioning and logos, it does however need to revisit the characteristics of value. True value however is not about the price positioning at the higher echelons of the monetary scale but should be assessed according to social, community and environmental consequences. The economic foundations of value have become secondary as luxury is now about the true meaning to the user. Luxury will be different for all consumers, individuals will align with brands whose values they respect.

This is an exciting time to be involved in fashion as the time is ripe to harness some of the social shifts that will enable micro to large luxury businesses with a point of difference to capture the interest of a conscientious market. The fashion industry is going through enormous change, we are on the brink of a new era that requires us to reassess the way we create market and sell luxury product. Unique, custom made, bespoke and couture are embedded terms within luxury fashion narrative. Luxury in its contemporary context extends this where the personal and customised are sought after not just by the elite echelons of society but now accessible to all. When we make choices about how we enhance our lives, the garments we wear, the way we decorate our homes, we will search out products that provide a dimension of 'soul' and offer us something fulfilling

Luxury is no longer defined by accumulation of cultured aesthetics or the price you pay, Luxury today is determined by integrity.

## Introduction

This paper responds to the theme 'recomposing tradition and acknowledges the rich history afforded to luxury and translates it into a modern ethos that embraces personal and social value. Capturing the essence of luxury through positive characteristics like artisanship, uniqueness, high quality, bespoke methodology, specialness to the user yet rejecting the outmoded classification of target market elitism. Luxury in our modern era embraces meaning beyond price and monetary worth to enhance true perso-

## Keywords

Luxury  
Fashion System  
Consumption  
Sustainable Style  
Artisan  
Speed  
Integrity



nal and social value. There is no radical split between old and new constructs of luxury but rather a fusion of heritage characteristics within a contemporary context.

## Background

Over time luxury has been considered a domain where premium products are available to an elite consumer, historically it embraced the arenas of Haute Couture and specialised bespoke practices that the wealthy could indulge in. It created a distinguishing divide between purveyors of 'true purist fashion' and those who wore 'clothes'. Often perceived as the whimsy of the rich, luxury fashion was unique, specialised, elite and premium. By contrast clothing was everyday apparel worn by those who simply could not have access to the higher echelons of fashion.

The notion of a particular tier of society possessing accessibility to the luxury market by virtue of their social positioning has been pivotal to fashion discourse over the past 150 years. As we ease into our second decade of the 21st century historic models should no longer stratify our contemporary society. History has imposed structures of class and status as target market definers of fashion, most distinguishable by theorists Simmel, Bourdieu and Veblen, a construct that essentially has lost its relevance. (Simmel, 1997, Bourdieu 1984, 1977, Veblen, 1899)

In Veblen's tome, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, luxury was seen as the domain of the wealthy. (Veblen, 1899) Veblen identified that wealth was displayed through two key vehicles. Firstly through extensive leisure activities, those of a higher social standing who didn't need to work as a result of living on inherited wealth and secondly through lavish expenditure on goods and services which defined their position. Veblen proposed that the wealthy upper class (the 'leisure class') had an obligatory role to uphold the sanctimony of purchasing luxury style products that reflected their position in society.

"Since the consumption of these more excellent goods is an evidence of wealth, it becomes honorific; and conversely, the failure to consume in due quantity and quality becomes a mark of inferiority and demerit. ... In order to avoid stultification he [the leisure class gentleman] must also cultivate his tastes, for it now becomes incumbent on him to discriminate with some nicety between the noble and the ignoble in consumable goods." (Veblen, 1899)

Simmel like Veblen considered that fashion's very existence was the domain of the wealthy and higher social tiers of society. "Fashions are always class fashions, by the fact that the fashions of the higher strata of society distinguish themselves from those of the lower strata and are abandoned by the former at the moment when the latter began to appropriate them." (Simmel in Carter, p.68)

Bourdieu extended this construct and implied that luxury was 'afforded' by the wealthy but 'appreciated' by the educated and cultured. (Bourdieu, 1984)

"Bourdieu's *magnum opus*, the great French sociologist used consumer survey data to show how class distinctions are reproduced through matters of taste. He finds that seemingly personal preferences –such as aesthetic choices in furniture, clothing or art– are actually learned social behaviors. Moreover, those choices have little connection to sensory experiences (such as pleasure) but rather serve to distinguish members of different classes from one another, rendering visible the structure of social hierarchy."

(Ref: <http://thesocietypages.org/economicsociology>)

This paper starts from the premise that historic theories of conspicuous consumption as purported by Simmel, Bourdieu and Veblen are too restrictive to address the major shifts in social patterns over the past fifty years that have enabled a diffusion of social status and redefinition of what luxury is. This is not a critique or analysis of their theoretical positions but rather a reference to their significant role in historically positioning the notion of luxury.

## Context

The new luxury is not about class distinctions but about personal meanings, values and integrity. By essence the parameters of class and status are blurred in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Further education within industrialised countries is now the norm rather than the exception and the outmoded notions of career determining status only needs to see their latest billing accounts from plumbers, electricians and builders. A familiar personal image is a builder who after completing a day's work drives home to his monolithic house in a newly developed suburb in the latest model Porsche. The notion purported by Simmel, Veblen and Bourdieu in differing variations that the working class is rarely fashionable or has access to luxury is hardly relevant. Luxury has a history built on an outmoded model of status and wealth. It can no longer be predominantly defined by class or be regarded the domain of the wealthy consumer.

Luxury has been through a whirlwind redefinition in the past twenty years. There has been a significant shift in the concept of luxury during which time prestige (or the concept of) has become mainstream. Through massive branding campaigns that graced the world's glossy magazines the mega luxury brands flooded the market with their logos. UK industry publication 'FW' has aptly named this 'logo a gogo.' (Ederfeld and Horton). Through fashion communication vehicles such as advertising, marketing and promotion, aspirational fashion became an everyday reality. *Masstige* a term coined by Michael Silverstein and Neil Fiske in a *Harvard Business Review* article "Luxury for the Masses." (Silverstein and Fiske) and evolved by UK based social trend group Future Laboratory (*Viewpoint*, issue 15) was the obvious fusion of prestige product for the masses. Premium brands realised increased profits in the accessible category areas of sunglasses, shoes, cosmetics and skin care. Those aspiring to buy into the luxury culture had entrée to the glamour and positioning of indulgence.

Dana Thomas author of *How Luxury Lost its Lustre* claims, "The luxury industry has changed the way people dress. It has realigned our economic class system. It has changed the way we interact with others. It has become part of our social fabric. To achieve this, it has sacrificed its integrity, undermined its products, tarnished its history and hoodwinked its consumers. In order to make luxury 'accessible' tycoons have stripped away all that has made it special. Luxury has lost its luster" (Thomas, D., p.13)

Luxury in its initial formation was about premium product created with expensive materials in a crafted manner that required depth of expertise and dexterity. By the 1990's, although these elements were considered important, the value became the brand itself, buying into a logo that signified wealth and status. The interlocking C's of Chanel, the LV symbol of Louis Vuitton, Prada's red stripes are all signifiers that the purchaser had bought into a prestige community. Branding reigned supreme for over two decades; the notion of buying into the feeling or the mood a label evoked was critical rather than 'what' was actually being purchased. For many years marketing, promotion, image creation and branding became the key focus of creativity within luxury-focussed organisations. Marketing was seen to directly increase sales and profitability which are measurable and therefore a worthwhile investment.

By contrast if we take a nostalgic trip back in time to the halcyon days of the 1960's. Product focussed industries were buoyant, in fashion the system worked quite methodically and predictably. Two seasons of new looks were launched each year and whatever the designers and manufacturers created as the look, was the look! Retail buyers didn't put a squeeze on profits and the customer was effortlessly coerced into buying the seasons trends. The season's trends were easy to digest; they were fed straight from leading fashion houses in Europe and the global fashion industry followed blindly. Designers were heroes and they provided an aspirational dream worthy of yearning for. Fast track to the 1990's and roles changed, the design and manufacturing teams are delegated to the back room as the fast talking sales and marketing teams took control, using the buzz word that took over fashion; branding.

Where does it go next? Luxury has evolved from being unique prestige product for a few, then *masstige* for all with the logo driving sales. What and why do we want to buy now? In the current social climate, neither the premium product nor the brand concept are the key determinants of luxury. As proposed in the *David Report Bulletin*; "Yesterday's luxury was for the few. It was quite shallow and was desired because it separated you from the masses. The luxury of today is a growing part of society (at least in the developed countries) and more people adapt to it every day. But what happens to the concept of luxury if everyone can take part in it? Is it a contradiction?" (David Report, p.2)

Luxury's future status will be determined by characteristics embedded in the fashion system and how the end user signifies the value of these. The next aspirational interpretation of luxury fuses heritage and mass accessibility into a new construct. A cultural shift has established a contemporary positioning where although the production and consumption are relevant, it is now the system of fashion embracing conceptualisation, production, communication and dissemination that affects the luxury status.

The importance of considering the total 'fashion system' was purported by Roland Barthes in his critical essay; *The Fashion System* (Barthes, 1990) In essence the total fashion system has to embrace meaning and value while still considering the significance of the product and brand. As proposed by Michael Carter, referencing Roland Barthes: "The fashion system is the totality of social relations and activities that are required for fashion to come into existence. To isolate just one dimension and then declare it to be the source, the cause or the essence of fashion would be to fail to grasp the pattern of relationships that constitute fashion as a system." (Carter, p.145) The new luxury will be determined by embedded traits within the fashion system including integrity, respect, artisan qualities and an appreciation of craft, time and service.

The contemporary fashion system of product development, clothing production, garment distribution and the selling of lifestyles in the guise of fashion marketing embrace processes focused on speed,

appropriation, homogeneity, discounted prices and overt consumption. Such characteristics do not provide enhanced value and meaning to the consumer.

### Overt Consumption or Sustainable Style

Luxury's foray into *masstige* has brought speed, efficiency cheaper prices but it also has brought diminished standards and the strategy of most companies appears intent on chasing the mighty dollar, which can sacrifice the ability to truly profit. The fashion system has entrenched processes and mechanisms that have created a fast paced industry built on overt consumption at one end of a polarised continuum that pulls the demand for product that is price sensitive. At the other end of the pole is a push strategy of a constant flow of product in high volumes. Such mechanisms, generally the domain of the mass market, may not traditionally be considered as being relevant to luxury. In the world of big business however that is exactly where it has located itself. The positioning of luxury has in some way been defined by this push pull scenario; consumption versus production, as a brand's success is highlighted by more entry level merchandise that floods the market. Veblen recognized that waste and overt consumption was a guiding principle of fashion. "This requirement of novelty is the underlying principle of the whole of the difficult and interesting domain of fashion. Fashion does not demand continual flux and change simply because that way of doing is foolish; flux and change and novelty are demanded by the central principle of dress –conspicuous waste." (Veblen in Carter, p.49)

The cycle of excessive consumption has led to customers responding with frustration, boredom and complacency. Natasha Silva Jelly from the *age.com.au* states; "The new era of fast fashion –where a plethora of chain stores have become masters in the art of catwalk-inspired creations at lightning speed and minus the expensive swing tag –along with a consumer shift towards more eco-friendly choices, have impacted on the allure of luxe." (Silva-Jelly, 2009) There are fundamental shifts in the way the consumer buys and fashion organisations have to change the way they create, market and merchandise product to suit. Customers are starting to reject the notion of constant spending and are searching for balance in what they purchase

The past ten years has seen a major cultural shift towards sustainable awareness. While the fashion industry continues to perpetuate a model of constant supply the growing trend that cannot be ignored is actually towards restraint. There has become increased interest in sustainable product and manufacturing processes and the related social implications; a consideration of 'what we buy.' An evolving consumer trend is also that of sustainable style, predicted by trend forecaster Li Edelkoort in 2002. (Edelkoort, 2002) This is focused on 'how we buy'.

Edelkoort claims customers will seek out "products we buy as souvenirs, precious objects or well worn favorites." (ibid) We are seeing a new attitude, across the globe the increase in interest in campaigns that claim, 'buy nothing day/week/month'. The media frenzy when artist Alex Smith Brown as part of a fashion related anti-consumerism campaign, made her own dress and wore it for a year.

"So, here's the deal –I made this dress and I wore it every day for a year. I made one small, personal attempt to confront consumerism by refusing to change my dress for 365 days. In this performance, I challenged myself to reject the economic system that pushes over-consumption, and the bill of goods that has been sold, especially to women, about what makes a person good, attractive and interesting. Clothes are a big part of this image, and the expectation in time, effort, and financial investment is immense."

(Ref: [www.littlebrowndress.com/brown](http://www.littlebrowndress.com/brown))

Outspoken UK based fashion designer Vivienne Westwood contributed to this cultural shift when she made her provocative statement to buy nothing. "If you ask me what I think people should be getting next season. I'll tell you what I'd like them to buy –nothing. I'd like people to stop buying and buying and buying... There's this idea that somehow you've got to keep changing things, and as often as possible. Maybe if people just decided not to buy anything for a while, they'd get a chance to think about what they wanted; what they really liked." (Westwood quoted in Thomas, L.)

Luxury is now about halting the cycle of overt consumption and giving customers a refreshing reason to buy. That means products that have a purpose, that function for ones lifestyles, products that offer something special. This is particularly relevant post the global financial crisis, as a new attitude has influenced fashion customers who put spending on hold while economies across the globe spiraled out of control. The global economic situation provided the opportunity for fashion advocates to step back and reassess how they spend their hard earned dollars. The question asked by fashion consumers do we need so much stuff? When a customer parts with their 'image dollars' (the funds invested in fashion) rather than

being a victim of a fast paced system that requires constant replenishing the global shift is for merchandise that is unique, embraces quality and has true value. Ben Kline from the Leo Burnett agency in Chicago commenting for Adweek claims: "We are seeing a shift from a trade-up culture to a trade-off culture." (Green) This is a great time for businesses that focus on beautifully crafted, artisan designs; products that will last.

Where next for luxury, does the heritage of premium product or the value of the brand still have resonance in the wake of the global financial crisis? Society has evolved rapidly in the past two years although the signifiers have been there for a while, the jolt of a global economic slap in the face has made consumers sit up and assess the world we live in. Consumers are not just cutting back on what they spend but the shift is in a reassessment on what is important, what is valued. Customers will seek out true value and integrity; products that capture the spirit of artisan creators, sustainable style and brand authenticity. Davis Wolfe, co-author of *Ageless Marketing and Firms of Endearment* claims: "The zeitgeist reflects a shift away from narcissistic and materialistic values. ... This is the future of luxury brands: not just value but core values; not just low prices but high product longevity; and not just superficial bling but deep customer connection." (Green) This trend sees a reassessment of consumer spend into areas that have meaning to the wearer, terms like sustainability, investment dressing, longevity and heirlooms have become customary when assessing the value of a purchase. This combines with a desire to not be seen as a victim of over consumption.

Silva-Jelly in an article on *age.com* references global style barometer *Women's Wear Daily*, "...such sentiment was on display at a luxury briefing conference in London recently, where former Morgan Stanley Luxury analyst Claire Kent was quoted as stating: An 'it' handbag will become an embarrassment – a clear sign that you don't have your own view of fashion." (Silva-Jelly) Silva-Jelly suggests that consumers have developed a bout of 'luxury fatigue'.

### Speed or Slow

Speed and price have dominated product development now for such a long time it is hard to consider retail life without these concepts. In 1970, Alvin Toffler wrote the book *Future Shock*. "A phrase coined on the analogy of culture shock to describe 'a new and profoundly upsetting psychological disease' caused in Western Post-Industrial Society by a 'rising rate of change that makes reality seem, sometimes like a kaleidoscope run wild. Change is avalanching upon our heads and most people are grotesquely unprepared to cope with it.'" (Toffler in Bullock and Trombley, p.345) Fastrack (literally) 40 years and the world in fact has quickened its speed even beyond Toffler's predictions. The fashion industry works at an incredible pace, the proliferation of new product occurs at a speed that rivals all other product orientated industries. The halcyon days of two collections per year launched under the banner of winter or spring/summer is a long gone illusion of history. New merchandise hits the stores on a weekly basis, retailers competing against each other work in a cycle of constant production and turnover of ideas in an attempt to be the 'first' with the latest look.

Designers have found themselves victims of a system ruled by consumption; coming up with new ideas on a constant basis for the sake of feeding the system. This environment has put enormous pressure on the creative process, ideally creative designers would love the notion of time: time to research, time to develop, time to reflect, time to perfect, time to improve and reassess. Time is the new luxury. When designers create something that is carefully, considered, refined and handcrafted with bespoke techniques its value is enhanced because that most valued of concepts: time which has enabled it. Time has become the negotiable currency. In today's society it is the quick or the dead. As a consequence products that take time to create have a special value, which goes beyond money. Time rich processes are now precious and highly treasured.

The David Report eloquently suggests: "Time has turned into luxury. True luxury. Time is more or less one of the only things you can't buy with money. Time allows place for dreams. Time allows you to find harmony... how many people live in total harmony? Time gives your imagination and your creativity space. Time enables you to reflect. The great luxury in the future will be about taking control over your own time, because it will never come back." (David Report, p.7)

A strategy worth considering into the future is 'slow clothes', a potential movement that responds to the notions of speed, appropriation and homogeneity within the fashion industry. Many fashion organisations have considered the notion of 'slow' fashion but until there is a shift in the system it will be difficult to halt the constant flow of product that is produced in superficial conditions. The mass chains and department stores set the pace on ridiculous delivery cycles so the proliferation of new product within the fashion industry works at a speed that no other industry could consider. Luxury organisations have

become entrenched in a system that skips processes so as to get as much product into the market utilising minimal time and resources: The sausage factory mentality towards garment production. According to Dana Thomas; “To meet profit forecasts, the luxury companies have cut corners. Some use inferior materials and many have quietly outsourced to developing nations. Most have replaced individual craftsmanship with assembly line production, much of it done on machines.” (Thomas D., p.10) There are alternative lifestyle options. Martin Raymond, Editor of Viewpoint states; “Many are now asking if the future really is about making our world a faster, slicker, more transient place. Or should we be re-visiting ‘ideals’ of slowness, artisanship, integrity of product –aspects of our lives hitherto relegated to the past: a place where quality was as much a matter of time as it was of talent, patience and slow but consistent and humane productivity levels.” (Raymond)

### Homogenised or Unique

Imitable product appears in diverse cities across the globe, creating an atmosphere of sameness, global luxury brands around the world offering replica merchandise, a concept that strips creative industries of their uniqueness and vitality. Driven by fiscal benefits apparel corporations aren't considering that mass produced, homogenised branded merchandise may not be fulfilling the needs of a consumer who was becoming increasingly frustrated with the lack of real value in available fashion. In the quest to capture global markets, the fashion industry has created an environment of homogeneity. “Certain theorists argue that the overall effect of globalization is to decrease or ‘flatten out’ the cultural differences between nations as individuals within these nations are subsumed into a single global culture.” (Bullock and Trombley, p.486)

The new luxury will mean that the brands with retail stores in major cities across the globe, dispensing the same product in synergistic modes may need to reassess the model they are working within. An interesting concept is that one of the golden rules in most marketing textbooks and an increasingly important factor in design process is ‘know your customer’. A virtually impossible concept in a world where the customer base is diverse and from varied cultural backgrounds. This is the massification of retail based on assumptions about consumer types that span the world, generic customers with similar tastes and common desires. Have the world's fashion consumers been dispensed into one big melting pot? If the answer is yes to these questions, this creates a rather bland and depressing image, especially in the world of fashion, an industry that is traditionally portrayed as being innovative, creative and focused on diversity.

By contrast consumers are aspiring to personal goods and services and increased support for smart, bespoke and intelligent product. The consumer is searching out product that is unique, items that are special, individual pieces not readily available or maybe they are created for using specialist methods. A new found appreciation for hand crafted finishes and technology enhanced treatments. The concept of unique directly links creating modern products that become keepsakes. Luxury within a contemporary environment is not about excess but about meaning. According to the David Report Bulletin “Luxury is about to change from a commodity to an experience.” (David Report, p.11)

There has been a resurgence in the appreciation of locally produced merchandise that reflects the peculiarities of its inherent culture. A concept termed by Faith Popcorn as ‘Lococouture’: It is a completely new opportunity for neighbourhoods to be reborn and for unknown designers to get their start. Another benefit of locouture: it's sparking a return to old fashioned cottage industries, since the quantities are too small for mass production.’ (Popcorn and Hanft, p.145). The future of creative product industries will be enhanced by the opportunities of merging the benefits of a global environment with a local identity. The result would hopefully be products that reflect the value of their creators, offering regional uniqueness and that the world can access with respect.

“There will be a great wish for authenticity in the society in the future. The ongoing globalisation is erasing regional specialness with the speed of a bullet. The same look-a-like hotels and airports, giant shopping malls or superbrand luxury stores are popping up all over the world. Find a new cultural luxury. Locally produced and controlled products with textures and flavours with a unique twist, made with great craftsmanship. Supreme desirable products that will attract all our senses and stick out from the noise as original and genuine.” (David Report, p. 8)

### Superficial or conscientious

The notion of overt consumption has often been associated as a defining paradigm of fashion which has been embedded in a perceived culture of frivolity and superficiality. William Hazlitt considers; “Fashion

is haughty, trifling, affected, servile, despotic, mean and ambitious, precise and fantastical all in one breath – tied to no rule and bound to conform to every whim of the minute.” (Hazlitt in Carter, p.59) More recently *i-D magazine* mockingly stated: “to be fashion conscious or “fashionable” is still deemed to make you “fickle”, “shallow”, “dumb”, “ephemeral” [and] “fascist”” (Barnard, p.2) No longer should fashion wear the mantle (excuse the pun) of being shallow and frivolous, the new era that is dawning is instead responding to a world of inappropriate practice and the new aspiration is for clothing with a conscience.

Luxury needs to be redefined. Luxury is not about price positioning and logos. It does however need to revisit the characteristics of value. True value however is not about the price positioning at the higher echelons of the monetary scale but should be assessed according to social, community and environmental consequences. The economic foundations of value have become secondary as luxury is now about the true meaning to the user. Luxury will be different for all consumers as what is important for one individual can vary significantly to the next. Customers will align with brands whose values they respect. This is where the overwhelming criteria is based on integrity.

According to the David Report, “We see a new kind of responsible luxury that is evolving from the inside. It looks quite different from luxury, as we know it today. If Thorstein Veblen still would be around it is not impossible that he would have described it as conscious consumption. But future luxury will not be all about consumption. It will probably be more about cultural experiences than material possession. More about sharing than keeping.” (David Report, p. 2)

## Conclusion

Today a new era has evolved, rising from the quagmire of fast fashion, quick response and homogenised styling, the fashion with integrity is reclaiming its position as the soulful leader which pays tribute to the artisan and the personal. After many years of product focused on financial rationalisation there are emerging opportunities for a system, which respects the intrinsic value of bespoke and traditional techniques interpreted into a modern context.

Luxury will be products that are crafted with care, often hand made to provide a sense of the unique utilising quality process. This may include heritage techniques embracing bespoke and couture methodology, these will not be preserved for the sake of luxury’s continued existence but because they provide value within the fashion system. Luxury is no longer just about the price you pay, the world where the more expensive the more prestigious the product is not pertinent unless the product is valued by the user. An inexpensive product that provides meaning to the end user may for that individual be a valued item and for them luxury. Think of the parent who is provided a gift that has been handmade with love and care by a child. The uniqueness and personal meaning fills the item with meaning. Can we find similar depth from products we buy?

This is an exciting time to be involved in fashion as the time is ripe to harness some of the social shifts that will enable micro to large luxury businesses with a point of difference to capture the interest of a conscientious market. The fashion industry is going through enormous change, we are on the brink of a new era that requires us to reassess the way we create market and sell luxury product. Unique, custom made, bespoke and couture are embedded terms within luxury fashion narrative. Luxury in its contemporary context extends this where the personal and customised are sought after not just by the elite echelons of society but now accessible to all. When we make choices about how we enhance our lives, the garments we wear, the way we decorate our homes, we will search out products that provide a dimension of ‘soul’ and offer us something fulfilling.

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