UNVEILING FASHION:

BUSINESS, CULTURE, IDENTITY IN THE MOST GLAMOROUS INDUSTRY

FREDERIC GODART

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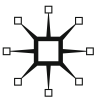

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PREFACE

This book is a translation of a book originally written and published in French, *Sociologie de la mode* (A Sociology of Fashion), published in February 2010 by La Découverte in Paris.[1] For me the English translation was a unique opportunity to address all the suggestions and feedback that I received on the French version of the book – not only from colleagues and students, but also from fashion professionals (whom I interviewed) and journalists (who interviewed me). Therefore, I have significantly updated and expanded the original version, including new data and references, and clarifying extant arguments. Because of all this additional work, I decided to change the title of the book. I dropped the reference to a single academic discipline, sociology, in order to acknowledge the fundamentally interdisciplinary nature of the project and the fact that its aim is to reach out to an audience beyond academic circles, even though it makes intensive use of academic knowledge. The new title, *Unveiling Fashion: Business, Culture, and Identity in the Most Glamorous Industry*, is also an invitation to lift the veil on an intimidating and somewhat dazzling topic, fashion.

The research that led to the writing of this book was initially developed when I was a PhD student in sociology at Columbia University, in New York. It was enriched while I was a postdoctoral fellow in Organizational Behavior (OB) at INSEAD in Fontainebleau, France, and later an

Assistant Professor of the same discipline. It is thus a blend of my American and French experiences, informed by all the exchanges I have had throughout the years with scholars throughout the world, and especially in the United Kingdom, Italy, and Germany.

The translation process in itself was a fascinating experience. The ideas first expressed in French had to be adapted to English, and the now-global nature of this language, forcing me to expand my reach. Fashion is in essence a global phenomenon, and I wanted to express this essential idea, even though its European, and particularly French and Italian, roots appear throughout the book.

I am indebted to many people for the ideas developed in this book, and in subsequent work. Harrison White, Peter Bearman, Karen Barkey, Joel Podolny, and Jean-Claude Thoenig – my PhD committee members – have helped me clarify my ideas and, because of the highest academic standards they cherish and embody, have given me enough intellectual stamina to pursue an academic career. I am, of course, also indebted to my coauthors Ashley Mears, Victor Corona, Andrew Shipilov, and Kim Claes for countless discussions about fashion. Here, I would like also to thank Patrik Aspers, Diana Crane, Guillaume Erner, Priscilla Ferguson, Nicoletta Giusti, Yuniya Kawamura, Brian Moeran, Alain Quemin, and Simona Segre-Reinach for our numerous academic exchanges about the industry. Clara Cornet, Michel Grossetti, and Nawel Nedjari have also commented on my book, and their sound knowledge of sociology and the industry has undoubtedly helped me improve it.

At INSEAD, I have benefitted from many discussions with colleagues and students passionate about luxury and fashion.[2] I would like to thank Sophie Badré, Anca Condrea, Agnès Cosnier-Loigerot, Marie-Valérie Dutel, Tuba Guclu,

Shellie Karabell, Nadir Kernoua, Melodie Konforti, Irina Kulikova, Kelly Lee, Minah Lee, Nancy Leung, Nicole Lu, Joana Marques, Morgan Seidler, André Terrail, and Dilla Wong. In addition, Dilla Wong and Nancy Leung proved to be fantastic Research Associates on several of my research projects.

The original idea for the book came from a discussion with Claire Lemercier at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris. I would like to thank her for convincing me to spend some time writing a book on the sociology of fashion, a project that sounded a bit crazy at the time, but has now proven to be very fruitful. Pascal Combemale, Marieke Joly, and Marion Staub at La Découverte helped me make the book incomparably better. I thank them for that. Olivier Assouly and Dominique Lotti at the Institut Français de la Mode have given me the rare opportunity to deepen my knowledge of the fashion industry, as well as Florence Rambaud at LVMH. The English version of the book at Palgrave Macmillan was made possible because of Stephen Rutt's keen interest in fashion and Hannah Fox's incredible tolerance of my tendency to ignore deadlines. Finally, I would like also to thank Scott Cheshire, Alec McAulay, and Laurie McAulay for their detailed and stylish editing work on my manuscript.

When writing this book, I have tried to be as synthetic and condensed as possible. Fashion is a very rich field, and I could have accumulated endless anecdotes and references, but instead of doing so, I selected what appeared to me essential in order to understand the underlying mechanisms of fashion – again, "unveil" its essential principles. I have provided a long and detailed list of what I think are some of the most relevant references, online or paper-based, academic or business-oriented.

The central idea of this book, that fashion is an ever-changing entity structured by six core principles which have emerged throughout history, was one of the key organizing ideas of my PhD dissertation at Columbia.[3] Since then, I have developed a series of additional research projects that address questions relevant to fashion, to the creative industries in general, and to wider issues related to markets and to the economy, but I remained attached to the six principles and use them to structure my thoughts and research about the fashion industry.

Fashion is a humbling topic. Because it is aesthetically complex and economically challenging, the recipe for successful designs is never guaranteed. As a consequence the fashion industry is a notoriously difficult environment. I hope I remained modest in the expression of my ideas, and I hope readers will find reasons to love fashion in my attempt to understand it.

Paris, 19 September 2011
Frédéric Godart

INTRODUCTION – THE SIX PRINCIPLES OF FASHION

"DAZED AND CONFUSED" BY FASHION…

To most people, fashion can daze and confuse.[1] On the one hand, fashion professionals often feel overwhelmed by the pace of change in the industry, as well as by the pressure exerted on them to squeeze a living out of an inherently creative process that is undoubtedly a form of artistic expression. In a recent (and rare) interview given to *Le Monde Magazine*, the celebrated, Tunisian-born, Paris-based fashion designer Azzedine Alaïa complained:[2] "Why do they force fashion designers to produce, produce, produce? Productivity, productivity, budget, productivity. […] Today, the only thing I want is more time to be creative! […] This is all I want: to do my job as a couturier, but do it well. Otherwise, I'll leave the field." This is quite a striking comment made by one of the most influential designers in the world and a remarkable expression of the key tension that exists in fashion between creativity and financial profit.

Fashion consumers, on the other hand, have a hard time figuring out what drives fashion change, and how to make sense of the new styles and designs that are put forward at least twice a year. The mystery surrounding fashion feeds rumors and conspiracy theories that some actors of the

industry manipulate the public – fashion magazines, for example. The desire of the public to know more about who makes fashion, and how it is actually produced, has led to the emergence of extremely informative documentaries like *The September Issue* (2009, by R. J. Cutler) that describes the day-to-day work of *Vogue*'s British-born editor, Anna Wintour, or *The Day Before* (2009, by Loïc Prigent)[3] that gives unprecedented access to the actual making of a fashion collection. Watching these documentaries, while being a very pleasant experience in itself, would constitute a useful complement to this book.

The lack of clarity about what fashion actually *is*, and the widespread frustration among customers that goes with it, is not new, and is inherently intertwined with fashion itself. To be clear, and slightly contentious, there has been no real willingness so far on the part of fashion professionals to be too explicit about the fashion production process. After all, fashion is based on the constant replacement of goods (clothes and other artifacts) that do not need to be replaced. The objective of this book is to clarify what fashion is about, and what its underlying mechanisms are. This is not the first effort of this kind, but it will attempt something new by extracting the substance of academic work on fashion and confronting it with professionals' reports on their own practice. In other words, this book will address the long-standing divide between theories of fashion and fashion as a living social phenomenon outside academia.

"Lifting the veil" on the fashion industry – unveiling it – implies looking at this object historically, not just in passing by making pleasant and entertaining references to historical anecdotes, but by fully engaging the origins of fashion and its evolution. Fashion here and now is

specific, but its underlying mechanisms go back a long way. The past of fashion shapes its present, and presumably its future, although this book is not an exercise in fashion futurology.

"Unveiling fashion" is also about making use of sociological and historical insights when needed. It means that while fashion is an industry in which a wide and global community of professionals is busy creating beauty, it is also a phenomenon that extends its reach way beyond this community. Fashion does not belong to professionals only, it belongs to everyone. Once fashion items are created, they live a complex life, depending on the whims and dreams of those who purchased them.

It is also important to be specific about what this book is *not*. First, it is not a literary or snappy journalistic account of the fashion industry. This perspective is very valuable and many excellent books have recently taken this approach with regards to the fashion and luxury industries, and more generally regarding the world of luxury and branding.[4] Second, it is not a guide on how to create a fashion brand or company, or on how to conduct a career in fashion. The insights developed in this book can be used to do so, and hopefully they are sound enough to provide a solid map to the underlying structure of the industry, but they are not designed for a practical purpose. Again, there are plenty of very useful books that have been published with this objective in mind. Third, it is not a book about the aesthetics of fashion. No gorgeous pictures of Dior dresses or Louboutin shoes – nothing that can serve as coffee-table adornment. Again, other books do that very well, and the Internet is a great source of beautiful images. In sum, this book is a synthetic account of fashion theories and history, in the light of fashion practice.

Finally, while this book is "scientific" in the sense that it avoids moral judgments and digressions, and tries to be based on facts rather than on opinions, it is also a way to pay homage to the beauties of fashion – the most glamorous industry[5] – and the genius of those who make it possible and alive.

THE MANY FACES OF FASHION

A striking fact that appears from a review of the academic literature devoted to fashion – whether it is in the fields of cultural studies, economics, history or sociology – is that many authors begin their discussion by lamenting the lack of research on this topic. They usually explain this by a disregard for fashion on the part of the social-scientific community, who purportedly consider fashion superficial, or the expression of a social manipulation by upper classes and conglomerates that seek to artificially sustain consumption.[6] Yet, as explained by Italian sociologist Nicoletta Giusti,[7] the 1990s and 2000s have seen the emergence of an interdisciplinary research agenda on the rich and fertile subject of fashion, sometimes collectively referred to as "fashion studies"[8] or, probably more accurately, as "fashion-ology," a term coined by Japanese sociologist Yuni Kawamura.[9] Fashionology[10] is thus, first, a place where the various social sciences meet around a common purpose – understanding fashion in a scientific way – and, secondly, an attempt at reconciling the rhythm of fashion, that of permanent renewal, and the rhythm of science, in which facts are analyzed and theories constructed and then tested.

Fashion has struggled to establish itself as a legitimate subject for research because of its complexity and

ambiguity. As pointed out by American economist Richard Caves,[11] the creative industries in general (such as music, movies, publishing) and the fashion industry in particular, are characterized by a lack of data. This lack of data, which comes from the difficulty of measuring creativity, style, and culture in general, is a serious obstacle to the scientific study of fashion and other creative industries.

Moreover, the definition of fashion itself is ambiguous. Indeed, fashion can be understood in two ways. First, it can be defined as the apparel and luxury industries (to which cosmetics may be added) in which multiple actors, such as professionals or firms, develop careers and strategies in order to produce designs and garments that will appeal to customers.[12] This perspective also includes the consumption patterns of individuals, groups or social classes that use clothes to define their identity.[13] This definition of fashion as an industry largely overlaps with the theme of "adornment,"[14] but is distinct nonetheless. Adornment includes not only clothes but also their associated ornaments, such as accessories, jewelry, tattoos, makeup, and the like. Thus, it can exist outside of fashion as an industry.

Second, fashion can be defined as a specific type of social change,[15] regular and noncumulative,[16] deployed across multiple domains of social life beyond clothing. Fashion as a type of change is regular because it occurs at constant and often short intervals, for example twice a year in the case of apparel and its spring / summer and fall / winter collections. It is noncumulative because it does not add new elements to past changes: it replaces them. Thus, change in fashion differs from what happens, for example, in science or technology, and even in the arts, where change is (most of the time) cumulative.[17] Indeed, as explained by the Austro-British philosopher of science Karl Popper,[18]

scientific discoveries do not emerge from an intellectual vacuum, they are built from previous work by integrating solutions to its challenges, as in quantum physics vis-à-vis Newtonian physics. The American philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn[19] defended a similar idea but in the specific context of what he called "normal science," where the main assumptions made by scientists are not challenged, and where new scientific discoveries are incremental. Similarly, a technological innovation always emerges by connecting innovations belonging to previously unconnected social worlds, such as in the case of the light bulb, which was not invented by Thomas Edison alone but by his team of researchers who had tested a large number of ideas and technologies before developing their own invention.[20] In the arts, an artistic movement is never completely new and is always developed from existing forms, as in the case of rock and roll which was derived from blues and country music.[21] Finally, fashion as a change occurs in many spheres of social life beyond clothing, for example in the attribution of names to newborns by their parents,[22] in the adoption of new ideas in management science,[23] or in the evolution of facial hairstyles in men.[24]

These two conceptions of fashion are related, because fashion as an industry produces styles and designs which are characterized by regular and noncumulative changes. Yet it is clear that some aspects of fashion as change go beyond fashion as an industry, for example in the case of the adoption of some styles of facial hair in men, and that some aspects of the fashion industry are not directly related to the problem of regular noncumulative change, for example in the case of textile-production techniques.

The aim of this book is to provide a synthesis, analysis, and reinterpretation of fashion based on the major

academic studies on this subject, from an interdisciplinary and international perspective. Fashion as an industry is the heart of the study, but fashion as change both regular and noncumulative is not ignored.

FASHION – A CREATIVE INDUSTRY… AMONG OTHERS

The fashion and luxury industries constitute a major economic activity, although their importance is constantly underestimated. According to market research firm Euromonitor International, consumer expenditures in this sector represent nearly 6 percent of world consumption, all subsectors considered, with US$1,696 billion in 2010 for apparel (clothing and footwear) alone, to which US$339 billion for jewelry, watches etc. can be added.[25] By comparison, the automotive sector (the purchase of cars, motorcycles, and other vehicles) constitutes just less than 4 percent of global consumption, and communications spending represents only 3 percent.

Beyond its importance as a business activity, fashion is also a singular object, at the crossroads of art and commerce. While biannual fashion shows in New York, London, Milan, or Paris are an opportunity for fashion designers to display their artistic talent to the world, and dazzle their audiences, the fashion houses must handle, on a daily basis, very concrete issues that can have a critical impact on their survival, like deciding prices, determining the location of their factories, defining their distribution channels, or elaborating their advertising campaigns. These decisions are very close to those that can be made in other industries that appear to be somewhat dissimilar, such as automotive and telecommunications, where

firms are also faced with decisions of production and distribution.

As an industry, fashion is characterized by a fundamental duality, since it is both an economic endeavor and an artistic activity. This idea is central to the work of French sociologists Pierre Bourdieu and Yvette Delsaut who explain that the power of fashion lies in the "*griffe*"[26] of designers, in their signature that has the ability to transform inanimate objects, raw materials such as cotton or silk, into "magical" objects that carry status and class distinctions, as well as meaning, signified by a given color, shape, or logo.

Fashion is also characterized by a very clear distinction between its "feminine" side and its "masculine" side, each of which has its own manufacturing processes and trends. Women's fashion prevails, however, both in terms of economic importance and creative dynamism.[27] Thus, most academic and business studies of fashion focus on women's apparel, despite recent work attempting to change this situation[28] and a significant growth of men's fashion recently. This book, therefore, puts a greater emphasis on women's fashion, but does not ignore men's fashion, the latter being a useful backdrop against which to analyze the former.

Fundamentally, fashion is an economic endeavor, because it produces objects that are sold to customers, but it is also an artistic activity because it produces symbols. It does not simply transform fabric into garments, it also creates objects laden with meaning. The fashion industry is thus inherently cultural and creative. The exact boundaries of the cultural or creative industries are unclear and vary from one author to another, but they generally cover (beyond fashion) business areas as diverse as advertising,

architecture, film, music, painting, publishing, television, tourism, sports or video games. The main thing these industries have in common is that they are characterized not only by the centrality of creativity and aesthetics in the production process, but also by the importance of leisure in the consumption process.

The interest in cultural or creative industries is not new. The study of cultural goods, and culture in general, is a way to gain access to underlying social mechanisms. In particular, the study of "culture" is central to sociology from its beginnings with Émile Durkheim in France and Max Weber in Germany. For Durkheim,[29] the collective and moral dimensions of social life, practices and representations, are intimately linked and must be simultaneously understood. This is also the case with Max Weber,[30] who sees in the subjective meaning given by individuals to their actions, the main access to the underlying structures of the social world. In both cases, culture and social structure are intimately linked.

The study of cultural forms in general and of cultural industries in particular, has since been constituted into a dynamic field of research. In the United States, several traditions have flourished. First, there is the approach known as "production of culture," which examines the influence of market structure on the production of cultural goods, including views on diversity and innovation.[31] This tradition is still active today and focuses on the study of the emergence and dynamics of genres, especially in the music industry, fashion being considered a specific case of general mechanisms that characterize all creative industries.[32] A second tradition, linked to the previous one because it is focused on issues of industrial organization, focuses on problems of uncertainty management in cultural

industries, for example in television,[33] the "processing of fads and fashions"[34] by social actors then constituting the central issue of the creative industries. A third and final tradition is characterized by an exploration of ethnographic practices and artistic performances, especially around the leading figures of sociologists Howard Becker[35] and Herbert Blumer,[36] the latter having directly studied Parisian fashion.

In Europe many traditions can be distinguished. First, a tradition that can be called "culturalist" is interested in the formation of subcultures, such as hippies, mods, teddy boys, punks, and skinheads around particular cultural practices, representations, and performances, especially their clothing.[37] A second tradition, more specifically French, developed from the work of Pierre Bourdieu, explores the formation of artistic and intellectual fields,[38] fashion sometimes constituting the object of study.[39] A third tradition explores professional and market dynamics in the spheres of artistic activity,[40] to which fashion belongs, especially considering the role played by uncertainty in these careers.[41]

The first decade of the twenty-first century saw a revival of research in the English-speaking world on the "creative," "cultural," or "aesthetic" industries to which the fashion industry belong. In economics, Caves[42] tried to define the main characteristics of the creative industries to distinguish them from the industries in which creativity and aesthetics are not central to the production process. In sociology, experiments conducted on the Internet tried to better understand the influence of social groups on the cultural choices of individuals.[43] In geography, the dynamics of industrial locations of creative firms and people has become a key object of investigation.[44] It is

the same in interdisciplinary fields such as urban planning, where the impact of a new creative class on urban economies is analyzed,[45] or cultural studies, in which the relationship between designers and creativity becomes central.[46]

Also, it must be noted that fashion has been used to understand markets in general. For example, the American sociologist Ashley Mears used the fashion modeling market to understand how value is formed in this segment of the fashion industry,[47] and Swedish sociologist Patrik Aspers used what he calls "Branded Garment Retailers" to explore how status markets (where brands matter) are opposed to standard markets (where producers are replaceable), and develop a general theory of the formation of order in markets.[48]

The fashion industry is a particularly relevant point of entry to the cultural industries in general, first because of its economic importance, but also because of its pervasiveness across many spheres of economic and social activity. Fashion is, in many respects, a "total social fact."

THE SIX PRINCIPLES OF FASHION

The concept of a "total social fact" is ambiguous and often used without really taking the time to refer to its origin, which in fact illuminates its meaning. Marcel Mauss,[49] who is generally credited with the invention of this concept, had a pronounced distrust (and even disgust) for excessive theorizing, resulting in an academic work that was very much fragmented and disjointed, often interpreted in contradictory ways.[50] There is no real theoretical opus in which Mauss has developed a general theory of

total social facts and its applications, but he offers the following definition:

> The facts that we have studied are all, if I may say, total social facts, or, if you will – but we do not like the word as much – general: that is to say they put in motion in some cases the entirety of society and its institutions (potlatch, clashing clans, visiting tribes, etc.) and in other cases, only a very large number of institutions, particularly when these exchanges and these contracts concern mostly individuals.[51]

A total social fact is a social fact that involves individuals and social groups deeply, and whose understanding reflects human life in its entirety. From this point of view, the concept of a total social fact combats scientific and disciplinary fragmentation, as well as the dryness that characterizes academic intellectual life. Fashion is a total social fact since it is simultaneously artistic, economic, political, sociological... and it touches upon issues of social identity expression.

The perspective developed in this book is sociocultural because fashion is an industry where the construction of meaning is central, whether it is about styles or about the identities of groups and individuals. The regular and noncumulative change that characterizes fashion is part of this sociocultural framework. Moreover, today's fashion is the result of a long historical process, and the vicissitudes of this process can help us understand the main features of fashion. For example, the geographical location of the fashion capitals – in New York, London, Milan and Paris for the central functions of the industry – is the result of history, of choices made by social actors who have sometimes vanished or are forgotten but who, in a sense, are still alive through institutions and social structures they

have bequeathed to their successors. Similarly, today's fashion can announce tomorrow's fashion. For example, the return of China or India as world powers, and more specifically their importance in the production of textiles and clothes, may be accompanied by a significant influx of designers from these countries on the global style scene. The academic knowledge presented in this book can thus be used for prospects, and for action, whether political or economic.

This book is organized around six principles that constitute as many chapters. These six principles do not establish a static theory of fashion. They come from several traditions of the social sciences and philosophy, and each of them is a synthesis of theory and empirical data on a specific aspect of fashion. The first principle of fashion is the principle of *affirmation* (Chapter 1) through which individuals and social groups imitate each other and distinguish from one another by using identity signals, through clothing or related objects. The second principle is the principle of *convergence* (Chapter 2), which suggests that while styles have multiple origins, production and translation into design occurs in some fashion houses located in a limited number of cities, and the immense variety of these styles is reduced to some trends that are regularly renewed and updated. The third principle is the principle of *autonomy* (Chapter 3), through which fashion houses are partially autonomous from their political or economic environment as far as their aesthetic choices are concerned. The fourth principle is the principle of *personalization* (Chapter 4), which puts the fashion designer at the center of the fashion process. The fifth principle is the principle of *symbolization* (Chapter 5), which gives a prominent role to brands and signs in the relationship between fashion producers

and consumers. Finally, the sixth and last principle is the principle of *imperialization* (Chapter 6), which accounts for the fact that fashion is now to be found in many spheres of social activity beyond its cradle, clothing, and is dominated by a small group of conglomerates, also known as fashion or luxury "empires."

1

THE AFFIRMATION PRINCIPLE – FASHION, BETWEEN THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY

THE CRADLE OF FASHION

Was fashion born during the European Renaissance?

In the early twenty-first century, fashion is so pervasive that it seems inherent to social and economic life, almost a "natural" thing that no one can escape. However, fashion as we know it – with its powerful industrial infrastructure, its widespread appeal as a career, and its media omnipresence – has not always been around. When and where did it appear? As pointed out by American historian Sarah-Grace Heller, the dominant position among scholars is that fashion originates "in the West in the fourteenth- or fifteenth-century courts of Burgundy or Italy, or more generally with the era referred to as 'Early Modernity,'"[1] that is to say with the European Renaissance, usually considered to have started in the fourteenth century. This academic standpoint on what constitutes the "cradle of fashion" derives from the work of French historian Fernand Braudel, who saw the constant and regular change in dress as a byproduct of the emergence of modernity in Europe. Braudel's central thesis is that fashion is what sets the West apart from other civilizations that have not known anything comparable until very recently.[2]

Another example of this position can be found in the work of American historian Valerie Steele, who writes:

> As early as 1393, an ordinary Parisian (not a nobleman) warned his fifteen-year-old wife to stay away from newfangled styles of dress. But it was already too late: the reign of ever-changing fashions had begun. [...] Fashion began, not in France, but in Italy, where it was closely associated with the rise of cities – and with the rising middle class. [...] From Italy, modern fashion spread to the court of Burgundy, which has been called "the cradle of fashion" and "the most voluptuous and splendid court in Europe, Italy included."[3]

American sociologist Fred Davis offers an additional take on the dominant view that fashion, as we know it today, was born in Europe at the end of the Middle Ages:

> There are, to be sure, scholars who claim to detect phenomena akin to fashion among other peoples and in past civilizations. None, however, carries the claim so far as to maintain that fashion – in the sense of a *continual*, largely *uninterrupted*, and ever more *institutionalized* succession of stylistic changes in dress, adornment, and decorative design generally – has existed anywhere other than in the postmedieval West.[4]

It should be noted that other researchers, even in the West, offer alternative perspectives, and that there is no consensus regarding the theory of fashion beginning with the European Renaissance. For example, French historian Philippe Perrot places the emergence of fashion much later, around 1700 in Europe, although he identifies some initial signs of fashion as early as the Middle Ages.[5]

For Heller, however, it is futile to seek a single source and starting point of fashion. Defining such an origin depends on how fashion is defined and on the questions the researchers looking for the origin of fashion are actually trying to

answer. There exist many regular noncumulative changes in dress in societies as remote from Europe as fourteenth-century Japan, where telling someone they are "up to date" ("*imamekashi*") was considered the highest compliment one could make.[6] Similarly, Heller explains that the very idea of fashion being born during the early fourteenth century in Western Europe arises because there is an abundance of historical material on the types of dress prevalent during that specific time and place, while the historical sources from earlier periods, and other civilizations, are far rarer. In other words, the reason why many researchers saw, and still see, fourteenth-century Europe as the origin of fashion is because this specific time and place was the first one for which they had significant sources to analyze.

More specifically, Heller mentions a study by Paul Post[7] as the actual origin of the idea that fashion was born in Renaissance Europe. She notes, however, that Paul Post himself had only developed an argument about the origin of modern male dress, not about the origin of fashion as a whole. Post's study was thus mischaracterized by those using his work to define an origin of fashion. Heller's argument, that fashion can be found in other times and other civilizations, has been further developed by many other scholars, for example, Australian historian Antonia Finnane,[8] who studied fashion in China. For her, it is clear that fashion existed in China well before the twentieth century. It was simply ignored by Western scholars not only because of the lack of adequate sources, but also because, historically, Western scholars have shown little understanding of, or interest in, Chinese culture.

The idea that fashion originated in the West, sometime after the Middle Ages, can also be challenged by a simple look at the work of Greek and Roman philosophers: they did not ignore fashion, though they did systematically

subordinate this topic to what they saw as a more important subject – luxury. This is notably the case with Plato, who saw in luxury a significant source of political conflicts and dissensions. In the *Republic*[9] he describes what the ideal state (or ideal city) ought to be. Such a state, he explains, should use the resources that are directly available to its citizens, and nothing more. Any addition to what is strictly necessary – i.e., "luxury," such as jewelry, arts, fine foods or wines – leads states to look for scarce resources elsewhere, in neighboring states, and to start wars. For Plato, war is thus a consequence of luxury. Moreover, Pliny the Elder, a Roman naturalist, philosopher, and historian who is best known for his harsh criticism of gold and money, has also described in his most famous work *Naturalis Historia*[10] the changing fashions in the usage of rings during ancient history.[11]

In sum, fashion has always existed in some form, and it is a phenomenon that goes well beyond Europe and predates the Renaissance. Yet, it is during the European Renaissance that fashion, as we know it today – powerful, widespread, omnipresent – appeared. In this sense, the dominant view in history and sociology is justified, although it needs to be refined. Capitalism, which started its ascent during the Renaissance, allowed the emergence of a new class, the bourgeoisie, which openly confronted the aristocracy. This period is characterized by a certain political tranquility in Europe, with the end of the invasions, and by intense scientific and economic transformations that challenged the traditional hierarchies.[12]

"Affirmation" at the heart of fashion

The bourgeoisie did not hesitate to signify its newly acquired political, economic, and social power through the extensive

use of luxurious clothing and accessories, pushing the aristocracy to react in a similar way. Fashion in its infancy was confined to the elite – bourgeois and aristocrats – because the vast majority of the population was excluded from consumption. It is important to note that, in its origins, men's fashion was as dynamic and diverse as women's fashion, if not more so. Although the existence of fashion as a social phenomenon is evidenced in different traditional societies around the world, the type of fashion that emerges with modernity is different, especially because of its speed and its regularity.[13] It is the European bourgeoisie that made fashion an important phenomenon by challenging the traditional classifications and hierarchies. This phenomenon spread later on to other parts of the world, with traditional orders and hierarchies being transformed.

Fashion as regular change in dress becomes a dominant social formation with the rise of the bourgeoisie, and the dynamics of wealth display that it put forward in order to exist vis-à-vis the aristocracy. The founding principle of fashion is "conspicuity," a term introduced in the study of fashion by the Norwegian-born American economist, Thorstein Veblen.[14] Conspicuity is the agonistic[15] assertion of one's economic position, social status, or cultural affiliation through elements visible and understandable by all. However, if the original conflict between the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy in Europe at the dawn of capitalism constitutes the birth of fashion, this conflict has subsequently turned toward less confrontational identity logics.

Therefore, it seems appropriate to replace the term of conspicuity with the term "affirmation" to express the idea that the founding principle of fashion as we know it is an agonistic assertion of one's identity. The term "affirmation" reflects the same idea of communicating identity

signals through clothing or other objects and practices, without necessarily referring to a blatantly violent posture. Individuals indicate their various social affiliations – the circles to which they belong – through identity signals of which clothes constitute a central, yet not unique, element. Culinary practices, as well as travel destinations, or even language habits, all form identity signals.

The idea that social actors emit and interpret signals is central to economic and sociological theories of markets. For example, American economist Michael Spence,[16] who introduced the concept of "signal" into the economic and social sciences, says that an academic degree, such as a BA, is a signal of an individual's quality in the labor market or, in other words, of potential for future performance in an organization. Individuals and groups put forward their social belongings, whether economic, cultural, or otherwise, through identity-signaling processes, because without them social identity is not immediately noticeable, except in specific cases such as when signs are carried by the body itself and are visible to all; for an example see the cases of certain physical "stigma" as described by Canadian sociologist Erving Goffman.[17] Fashion feeds on these identity signals, and from them are developed the phenomena of imitation and distinction which are the very foundation of fashion.

THE EMERGENCE OF FASHION: THE SOCIOLOGICAL DYNAMICS OF IMITATION AND DISTINCTION

Tarde's "social ties": Fashion as imitation

The entry of fashion into modern sociological and economic thought has occurred through the idea of a "natural" need for imitation in humans. This idea originated in the work

of Bernard Mandeville, a Dutch philosopher of French origin who lived in England. In the *Fable of the Bees*, written in 1714,[18] he tells the story of a hive where all bees lived comfortably in luxury but without virtue. They complained about it, and their wish to live a moral life was fulfilled, leading them to poverty and despair. In one of his remarks that accompany the fable, Mandeville explains – in passing, and without further theorizing – that fashion comes from the need of the upper classes to express their power. Once lower classes have imitated their current style, upper classes adopt new styles, triggering a new fashion. The English economist Adam Smith developed a similar idea, but instead of basing the need of imitation on pride and egoism, he related it to what he called "sympathy," an emotion which leads to imitation as a need to relate to the rich and powerful in order to participate in their happiness.[19]

The idea that imitation is central to fashion was further developed by French philosopher Gabriel Tarde,[20] whose thought, as emphasized by French sociologists Bruno Latour and Vincent Lépinay,[21] has been largely ignored during the twentieth century despite its depth, and more specifically its relevance in understanding the inner workings of the economy.[22]

For Tarde, social life is characterized by a single principle that he calls "universal repetition." Repetition is a dynamic phenomenon that occurs in three forms: "undulation," "generation," and, finally, "imitation." An important point in Tarde's theory is that where these three forms of repetition are interrelated, they are not reciprocal or of equal conceptual importance. He writes: "Generation depends upon undulation, but undulation does not depend upon generation. Imitation depends upon them both; but they

do not depend upon imitation."[23] The first form of repetition, undulation, is for Tarde the foundation of what he calls the "*lien social*," a hard-to-translate concept which renders the idea of a social tie or bond. Undulation binds social beings; it is similar to the waves that appear when a "stone falls into the water," and the "first wave which it produces will repeat itself in circling out to the confines of its basin."[24] The second form of repetition, generation, can be understood as the production of new forms, sometimes related to earlier forms. It is also the reproduction of acting social entities. Generation needs undulation to exist and spread, while undulation can exist without causing generation. Finally, the third form, imitation, cannot exist without undulation, which is the basis of diffusion mechanisms. Nor can it exist without generation, which provides the elements to be diffused, such as philosophical ideas or a craft practice. The distinctive characteristic of imitation is that it occurs at a distance, both from a spatial perspective and a temporal point of view.

It is within this conceptual framework that Tarde developed his theory of fashion. For him, fashion is to be opposed to custom. Both are forms of imitation, but while for a given social entity, a nation or a city for example, custom is a routine imitation of the past of this entity, fashion is an imitation of what is distant, whether in a spatial or temporal sense. Custom is the routine normality of imitation, which allows social entities to be reproduced identically, while fashion is a type of imitation which is less expected, more surprising, and brings something new to the table. Tarde wrote illuminatingly: "In periods when custom is in the ascendant, men are more infatuated about their country than about their time; for it is the past which is preeminently praised. In ages when fashion rules, on

the contrary, men are prouder of their time than of their country."[25] In sum, for Tarde, fashion is a type of imitation that plays with social, cultural or geographical boundaries.

Veblen and Simmel: A fashion based on distinction

The idea that fashion challenges social or cultural boundaries is essential in the theoretical developments that follow Tarde's work, especially in Thorstein Veblen's theory,[26] and in the work of German sociologist Georg Simmel.[27] Both complement, in their own way, the concept of imitation as the main engine of fashion with a second concept: the concept of distinction.[28] Their theories of fashion have much in common, despite some notable differences.

For Veblen, fashion must be understood as a byproduct of the dynamics of "conspicuous consumption," as described in his main, and most famous, book, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, written in 1899. Veblen's theory is, in many ways, a study in social stratification, and begins with a distinction between the "leisure class" and the "working class." This distinction is different from the distinction made by Marx between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, because what Veblen is interested in is not the position of classes in the production process, but rather their relation to both manufactured objects and time. While the working classes, to which both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat belong, make productive use of their time, the leisure class make nonproductive use of their time, that is to say they do not produce wealth. This does not mean that the leisure class is inactive or lazy, but it collectively refuses to subject itself to work. For Veblen, the leisure class is a vestige of "barbarian" societies, an aberration of the past that has survived in the modern capitalist world. The leisure class

is characterized by conspicuous consumption, a mix of squandering and wastefulness. Veblen gives as an example of conspicuous consumption the use of silver spoons. These are no more useful than the less noble regular metal spoons, but are more expensive and scarce, and are thus displayed to guests in order to signal high social status. The frequent and unnecessary change of clothes that are still usable, which is the essence of fashion, comes from this need for conspicuous consumption, which aims at wasting resources for no other reason than social distinction.

For Simmel,[29] fashion is a singular object that can be advantageously used to illustrate, and account for, crucial tensions in society. It is the result, on the one hand, of the upper classes' need to distinguish themselves from lower social classes, a phenomenon well described by Mandeville or Smith for example, and the need of the lower classes, on the other hand, to imitate the upper classes. When the upper classes adopt a style, it is readily copied by the lower classes who wish to participate in the prestige of the upper classes by imitating them. This then pushes the upper classes to adopt a new style to distinguish themselves from the lower classes, and this new style is imitated again in a movement that continues forever, at least in modern capitalist societies where institutional barriers, such as sumptuary laws or customs, do not limit the spread of styles. The dynamic of imitation and distinction as the origin of fashion is a well-known and oft-quoted element of the Simmelian theory of fashion. Yet, for Simmel, the theoretical and empirical interest of fashion lies in its ability to maintain a dynamic balance between opposite poles of social and psychological life, such as universality and particularity, or creation and destruction. Fashion is what unites and reconciles individuals and collectives by

enabling individuals to assert their tastes in a collectively determined framework.

The tension between distinction and imitation is at the heart of fashion, and has repeatedly been used under different forms by fashion scholars to inform their understanding. For example, French sociologist Edmond Goblot, in a short but insightful study of nineteenth-century French bourgeoisie,[30] explains that the bourgeoisie is fundamentally defined by a tension between what he calls the "barrier" mechanism through which it makes it difficult to join and become a bourgeois, and the "level" mechanism which guarantees some homogeneity within the bourgeoisie. Thus, the bourgeoisie protects itself from new entrants by adopting specific sartorial codes, which it keeps changing, and enforcing similarity within its ranks. Goblot, notes, however, that novelty does not come from the bourgeoisie itself, but from avant-garde groups which inspire the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie does not innovate in fashion, but it is an early adopter of changes.

Sumptuary laws: A corset for fashion

The sartorial takeover by the bourgeoisie during the European Renaissance accompanied, or even preceded, its political rise, and did not take place without resistance from the aristocracy, particularly through a series of regulations called "sumptuary laws." These are regulations that govern and limit the use of clothing, food, or drink, often depending on the social, ethnic, or religious affiliation of the individuals to which they apply. They are historically and analytically important legal phenomena for the understanding of fashion, since they are a social and legal expression of the struggle between the aristocracy and

bourgeoisie for the domination of the new capitalist – and later on, democratic – societies of modern Europe.

The origin of sumptuary laws can be traced back to ancient history. Montesquieu in Book VII of his major work, *The Spirit of the Laws*,[31] discusses, for example, ancient Roman and Chinese sumptuary laws. These "traditional" sumptuary laws were intended to clarify certain rules in the realms of clothing or food in relatively stable societies, and persisted until the Middle Ages, for instance a twelfth-century Aragonese sumptuary law prohibiting the eating of more than two types of meat per meal.

Modern sumptuary laws which appeared in Europe with capitalism were defensive, and instead of regulating customs, they aimed at limiting the extent of change. Their justification was often moral (it was claimed for example that dress needs to be regulated in order to defend morality) or economic (the idea being to reduce imports by prohibiting certain foreign products), but they were also, and above all, a way for the aristocracy to attempt to contain the rise of the bourgeoisie. The sheer number of sumptuary laws in history, and their blatant inefficiency,[32] both illustrate the power of fashion to overthrow existing institutions and pave the way for economic, political, and social change.

FASHION IDENTITY: A SOCIO-CULTURAL PHENOMENON

The boundaries of fashion

The Simmelian approach to fashion leads us to see in this intriguing subject a universal sociological phenomenon. Indeed, fashion, because it arises from tensions that lie at

the heart of the dynamics of social life, and contributes to their resolution, becomes a "matrix" through which one can understand social facts in general rather than just a superficial epiphenomenon of the apparel industry. Hence, we may ask "Does fashion have limits?" To answer this question, it may be useful to go back to the etymology of the word. The English word "fashion" derives from the French "*façon*" which means "way" or "manner" and thus shares the meaning of the French word "*mode*," which comes from the Latin "*modus*" meaning the "way" of doing things (see for example the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* for more etymological information on the terms "fashion" and "*mode*").[33] Thus, etymologically, fashion relates to the manner or the way of doing something, especially dressing, eating, and talking, rather than change in itself.

Therefore, historically, the notion of constant change is not first in the concept of fashion. What is first is the *diversity* of practices and representations, of manners or ways of doing, feeling, and seeing things. Understanding fashion requires comprehending social change in general. French sociologist Michel Grossetti offers an intriguing typology of social change which can help shed further light on what fashion actually is.[34] For him, there are two dimensions of change, which he calls "unpredictability" and "irreversibility." "Unpredictability" is related to the uncertainty of a sequence of actions or events, while "irreversibility" concerns the uncertainty of the consequences of these events. For example, a ritual such as a birthday is predictable but its consequences are irreversible – once you hit the "big three-O," there is no way back. However, the outcome of a poker game is unpredictable but reversible (if the bets are reasonable). Routine actions, such as taking the subway, are

predictable and reversible. Finally, certain phenomena that Michel Grossetti calls "bifurcations" are both unpredictable and irreversible. For example, for a given individual, a career change following a redundancy is a bifurcation. Where is fashion in this typology? Fashion is reversible, since the collections are seasonal and are, essentially, erased by the following seasons. The unpredictability of fashion is, however, more ambiguous and depends on the point of view of the social actor affected by fashion. For consumers, it is largely unpredictable, and even if fashion shows are now held at regular intervals, the mechanisms that govern changes in styles and designs remain opaque to the general public. For producers, the evolution of styles and designs is largely known in advance, for example through fairs and style bureaus. That being said, as far as the *choice* of garments is concerned, customers can easily follow trends and they are assured to be fashionable. No need for them to understand how styles are generated. On the other hand, producers can know in advance the range of styles that will constitute the main trends of a given season, but this knowledge falls short of telling them what trends among all those that were collectively selected by the industry will ultimately succeed. (These points will be developed further in Chapter 3.)

The boundaries of fashion are blurred and ever-changing. In the early twenty-first century, fashion concerns mainly clothing and the products that are associated with it, such as accessories (hats, bags...) or jewelry (bracelets, necklaces...), and its influence extends to cosmetics (including perfumes), and interior design. The distinction between clothes, on the one hand, and accessories or jewelry, on the other, deserves to be further explored because it can help address the question of the "functions" (or uses) of

fashion items, as well as their meanings. A common observation is that there is a fundamental difference between apparel, and jewelry and accessories. While the first would serve a protective function (against bad weather for example), the latter two would be social and cultural constructs. Yet, as pointed out by French sociologist and philosopher Jean Baudrillard,[35] the function of objects is a "bond" for their main dimension which is that of "sign exchange value,"[36] that is to say, for simplicity, their sociocultural significance. During the production process, the objects are immediately endowed with a meaning that transcends their function. This is especially true for clothing, which, like accessories and jewelry, conveys meanings related to social status, as already addressed by Veblen or Simmel. In fact, fashion exists only because objects, and in particular clothing, were emancipated from simply fulfilling physical needs, or any other immediate functional utility. Fashion is by definition luxury, and finds its origins in it,[37] an idea that was already present in the works of Plato or Pliny the Elder, but which takes a broader meaning in industrial societies where change happens at a much quicker pace. Luxury is the first expression of capitalism because it generates fashion.[38]

"Oppositional fashion" as a source of identity? From dandyism to anti-fashion

"Oppositional fashion,"[39] which can be defined as an attitude valuing autonomy from mainstream fashion trends, took different forms in history, particularly through the two phenomena of "dandyism" and "anti-fashion." Dandyism emerged in England in the early nineteenth century with Beau Brummell (1778–1840), who invented the modern

male suit and, to a large extent, imposed the wearing of ties. Dandyism is not defined as systematic opposition to dominant fashion trends, but rather as a quest for "style" against fashion, a search for an individual aesthetic absolute opposed to the collective dynamics of fashion. Dandyism can be compared to anarchism in that the dandy, like the anarchist, is opposed to any rule or predetermined norm. However, the comparison stops there because, unlike the revolt of the anarchist, the revolt of the dandy is "sublimated" into his or her clothes and never takes a political or collective dimension. This "sublimation of revolt"[40] also illustrates another important characteristic of dandyism, beyond style and revolt: playfulness. By seeking individual style and ignoring norms, the dandy faces the world as if it were a game. Dandyism, by seeking absolute beauty, refutes fashion's instability.

The anti-fashion attitude, however, resolutely positions itself against mainstream fashion, for example in the punk or goth musical subcultures. Anti-fashion takes fashion as a reference and tries to invert it. However, as pointed out by American sociologist Fred Davis,[41] one major limitation of the anti-fashion attitude is that by being defined solely as a reaction to the way fashion is, it is nothing more than a secondary effect of fashion. Another limitation is that, at least in complex contemporary societies where many fashions and subcultures can coexist, the anti-fashion attitude loses its relevance and is diluted in diversity.

Dandyism and anti-fashion both offer a striking illustration of the mechanisms of imitation and distinction that lie at the heart of fashion. While dandyism is an attempt to neutralize imitation through an extreme form of distinction, anti-fashion is an extreme form of distinction which does not challenge imitation: it feeds on it by inverting it.

"Subcultures" and their fashions

Fashion is therefore an essential element in the identity-building process of both individuals and social groups. As already explained, clothes are a major, though not unique, element in the status signaling of individuals and social groups. However, social status is not the only component of individual and collective identities. The definition of the social mechanisms that underlie identity construction, beyond the already-explored status dynamics, then becomes a salient issue. For the English sociologist Dick Hebdige,[42] one of the founders of the cultural studies academic field, which looks at culture from an interdisciplinary point of view, identity is also a matter of style. It can be conceived primarily as a collective phenomenon which is related to subcultures.

A subculture is a meaning-laden set of practices and representations that can help distinguish a group of individuals from another. It is composed of several facets, such as identifiable clothing items and specific musical tastes, as well as more or less structured political ideas, and particular ways of speaking. This is what Hebdige calls the "homology" between the various components of a subculture. For punks, he explains:

> The punks would certainly seem to bear out this thesis. The subculture was nothing if not consistent. There was a homological relation between the trashy cut-up clothes and spiky hair, the pogo and amphetamines, the spitting, the vomiting, the format of the fanzines, the insurrectionary poses and the 'soulless,' frantically driven music. The punks wore clothes which were the sartorial equivalent of swear words, and they swore as they dressed – with calculated effect, lacing obscenities into record notes and publicity releases, interviews and love songs.[43]

The concept of subculture has been further discussed for other movements, such as the goth scene that emerged in the early 1980s in the wake of punk. For English sociologist Paul Hodkinson,[44] one of the peculiarities of the goth subculture is that it is characterized by a tension between individuality and group belonging. In the ethnographic interviews conducted by Hodkinson, goths emphasize the importance of individuality, and the need to distinguish oneself from the mainstream influences that are followed by "trendies," a term used in the goth subculture to designate people who do not belong to the movement. Yet in this subculture, there is a strong sense of belonging to a homogeneous whole. Individuals claiming to represent, and be part of, the goth movement resolve the tension between individuality and collective belonging by customizing their preferences within a limited and regulated range of clothing or music choices.

Hodkinson also offers an intriguing look at the origins of the goth movement. As he writes, "there is little doubt that music and its performers were most directly responsible for the emergence of the stylistic characteristics of goth," with David Bowie, Joy Division, Siouxsie and the Banshees, or The Cure as noticeable precursors.[45] His discussion of the origins of the goth subculture, and the identity of this movement, is a way for Hodkinson to reinterpret the concept of subculture, and to distance himself from the notion of a homology between the different features of a subculture. For Hodkinson, the concept of "homology" must be dropped (or at least amended) because the meaning of a given subculture is open to debate and discussion, and always varying: "Crucially, the notion of homology indicates the existence of an underlying essential meaning directly symbolized by all the stylistic and

behavioral elements. This book will specifically resist such reductionism."[46]

Fashion, interacting with many other cultural fields, provides individuals and groups with signals that help them build an identity which is no longer only a question of status but also of "style," no longer only vertical – i.e., hierarchical – but also "horizontal," that is to say nonhierarchical. For example, punks and skinheads differ stylistically and politically, but not from a status point of view, because both groups stem from the middle and working classes.

Fashion and appearance (or looks) are two interrelated yet different social facts. While fashion is characterized by constant change, appearance is relatively stable because it is partially inscribed in the body, as in the case of facial features or height. As explained by French sociologist Jean-François Amadieu,[47] appearance influences many aspects of people's lives, including their successes and failures, even if the way it is appraised depends on the historical, cultural or socioeconomic context. However, appearance can be altered, and the idealized vision of the body, and the bodies themselves, may be subject to fashion movements.[48] For Simmel,[49] "adornment" allows individuals to radiate to others and thus to create bonds through aesthetic considerations. It is the "artificial" part of appearance: it is a manipulation of clothing or cosmetic symbols intended to convey a certain impression.

From a historical perspective, fashion thus emerges from the collapse of traditional social structures and their regulatory frameworks, particularly from a legal point of view, as in the case of sumptuary laws: fashion grows where traditions decline. Its dynamics, made of a mix of imitation and distinction, shed light on two important aspects of social life.

First, there are many levels of action between the individual and society. It is in this intermediary space that fashion occurs. By choosing clothes or accessories, individuals constantly reaffirm their belonging or nonbelonging to various social, cultural, religious, political, or professional groups.

Secondly, fashion is "relational." It allows each individual to have multiple identities, which may be public or private, formal or informal, and are often at odds with each other. These identities are never purely individual, they are collective. Fashion is a constant production and reproduction of the social.

2

THE CONVERGENCE PRINCIPLE – THE CENTRALIZATION OF TRENDS

THE ORIGIN OF TRENDS

Focalizing desires

The second principle that defines fashion as we know it today is the principle of convergence. This principle means that fashion is characterized by the existence of trends, a feature that is mysterious and must be accounted for. Trends seem to be a natural phenomenon, but they exist only through the actions of individuals and organizations, and are ultimately created by them. As explained by French sociologist Guillaume Erner, trends are "focalizations of desire,"[1] varying in scope and scale, which lead many people to adopt certain behaviors or tastes for a limited time. Trends exist in many spheres of social life and not just in the apparel industry: "These convergences of collective taste have, for example, led to the acclaim of chocolate fondant cake then macaroons, tennis then golf, hybrid cars after SUVs."[2]

In order to understand the specificity of the convergence principle in fashion, it may be useful to quickly review the form that this principle can take in other domains. For example, American sociologists Stanley Lieberson and

Eleanor Bell[3] in their study of naming patterns in the United States, distinguish between, on the one hand, trends that depend on "commercial organizations and/or social institutions,"[4] and those which depend on "underlying cultural conditions and the operation of mechanisms that are not simply determined by organizational efforts."[5] More concretely, in the first category stand most of the arts and creative industries, and in the second category various social phenomena such as the attribution of names to newborns. In which category do clothing fashions stand? Lieberson and Bell hesitate. Certainly, as they write, "designers, manufacturers, and retailers all play important roles in influencing clothing fashions,"[6] but "there are almost certainly both underlying cultural attributes and taste mechanisms that lead to changes."[7]

The Sun King, Versailles, and the centralization of fashion

In fact, in the domain of dress fashions, the convergence principle is enabled by a centralization mechanism that allows professionals to channel, in a more or less predictable way, changes they would otherwise have a hard time controlling. This means that while the styles and designs produced and created by fashion houses have multiple origins, they are filtered out and produced by a limited number of firms, in a limited number of locations (fashion capitals). The cause of this centralization is far from obvious; it first appeared in France during the reign of the Sun King, Louis XIV (1643–1715), before spreading to the rest of the world. It was the result of a double political process: the assertion of France as a central power in eighteenth-century Europe and the parallel affirmation of Versailles and Paris in French political, cultural, and economic life.

In 1648, after the Peace of Westphalia, which ended the Thirty Years War in which most European states were involved, France became the leading European power, succeeding Spain in this role. The Spanish kingdom never fully recovered from the loss of Portugal and the United Provinces (today's Netherlands). Louis XIV then continued the policy of state centralization which his predecessors had started, including gathering the country's aristocrats at the Court in Versailles. For Louis XIV, the creation of the Court was a way of controlling the various local authorities in his country, and affirming his sovereign power. This was especially true after the double revolt of the Parliament of Paris and various aristocrats during the period known as the "*Fronde*" (1648–1653), which threatened the French monarchy.

As far as fashion is concerned, the absolute monarchy of Louis XIV generated an unprecedented centralization of clothing trends in Europe. This was a new situation: until then various influences, for example from Spain, the Netherlands or England, struggled for the attention of European aristocrats and bourgeois. This centralization of fashion was to some extent a conscious strategy on the part of the King and his government, not only to occupy the minds of the aristocrats and distract them from their political intrigues, but also to strengthen the power of France and its ruling dynasty in Europe and beyond; this is why Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619–1683), French Minister of Finance from 1665 to his death, was able to declare that "Fashion is to France what the gold mines of Peru are to Spain."

Today, the centralization of fashion enables a coordination of trends that are defined by a core group of fashion houses located in a limited and slowly evolving number of "fashion capitals" – Paris, New York, Milan, and London.

Its structure has changed over time, especially in opening up to newcomers as capitalist modes of production and consumption extended across the world, but it retains its role as a way to reduce uncertainty in a market that is inherently unstable.

THE FASHION INDUSTRY AND ITS SOCIAL NETWORKS: FROM UPSTREAM SUPPLIERS TO DOWNSTREAM CONSUMERS

The market for fashionable goods

Fashion has the characteristic of being both an industry and an art. As an industry, it can be represented as a flow of goods that are produced by fashion houses, these firms serving as a collective "interface" between "upstream" suppliers (for example textile makers) and "downstream" customers. This conception of markets as an interface between an upstream and downstream was defined by American sociologist Harrison White.[8] His work was further popularized by Paris-based economist Olivier Favereau and sociologist Emmanuel Lazega in a series of interdisciplinary studies.[9] The central idea of this perspective is that markets are sets of complex social networks.[10] These networks connect the various market participants, over time, and lead to the formation of relatively stable market "profiles," which position the various producers in "niches" based on the quality of their product and their volume of production. This approach is innovative because it challenges some assumptions of traditional neoclassical economics.[11] In particular, while economists conceive of markets as ephemeral social formations where demand and supply meet, leading to the formation of a price, Harrison White takes into account a multiplicity of actors, and the

temporal dimension of their exchanges. Indeed, for White it is not sufficient to consider only supply and demand to understand markets. Producers' suppliers must be added to producers and consumers.

Thus, in the fashion industry, fashion houses, the producers that create the styles and designs found in glossy magazines and retail spaces, source raw materials from worldwide suppliers. They turn inert materials such as cotton or silk into cultural products laden with meaning. In addition, the specificity of markets is that they are bets on the future. Producers commit at *time t* to produce a certain quantity of goods to be sold at *time t* + 1. The structure of demand at $t + 1$ is not known in advance and represents a major risk for producers. This phenomenon of "a bet on the future" is reflected vividly in fashion, where production cycles start as early as 18 months in advance in some cases. As pointed out by the American economist Peter Doeringer and fashion practitioner Sarah Crean, the director of the Garment Industry Development Corporation (GIDC) in New York,[12] a fashion house is always working on at least three collections simultaneously: that of the previous season, for which sales must be tracked; that of the current season, for which models and their promotion must be tackled; and that of the next season, for which styles and orientations must be defined.

The centralization of fashion is ensured by the fashion houses that create the styles and designs which are found in the shows of major world cities. Historically, it has taken various forms. First, at its origin, it depended on the centralizing political power and expansion of the French monarchy: "Colbertism," an ideology that promoted the concentration of textile production in France, enabled French dressmakers and tailors to exert their domination

over their European competitors. Before the invention of fashion magazines and fashion shows in the late eighteenth and late nineteenth century respectively, Parisian styles and models were presented through "dolls" which wore miniature versions of recent trends. Centralization subsequently changed with the emergence of high fashion in the second half of the nineteenth century. Parisian couturiers, sometimes called *grands couturiers*, while retaining some flexibility in their designs, were united by strong personal ties and the existence of a trade association coordinating their activities.

Despite its centralized nature, the apparel industry is characterized by the existence of several segments that cater to different types of consumers and are based on different production processes. Doeringer and Crean[13] organized the various segments of fashion into a pyramid. The further away from the base of the pyramid, the more expensive the products and the better their quality, the shorter their production and product cycles, and the greater the uncertainty in demand and the work needed to differentiate the products. Thus, at the top of the pyramid reigns "Haute Couture," a designation that is legally protected but which can also simply designate very high-quality garments. Haute couture is characterized by extremely high prices and a fairly short product life-cycle, a year at most. The creativity of haute couture designs, the quality of fabrics used to create the garment, as well as the fact that models are unique, makes it a peculiar segment. Below haute couture, Doeringer and Crean distinguish several ready-to-wear segments: the first one, "Designer Collections," is expensive and of good quality but the models are not unique; then there are collections known as "Bridge Fashion Collections," widely diffused and characterized by

moderate prices, and finally there is mass fashion ("Better Fashions"), defined by even lower prices. Haute couture and ready-to-wear are characterized by the existence of collections and annual changes of designs. At the bottom of the pyramid, "Fashion-Basics," such as jeans or t-shirts, and "Basic Commodities" (socks, underwear…) do not follow seasonal cycles of ready-to-wear fashion and haute couture, and in this sense, while they belong to the apparel industry they are at the periphery of fashion, closer to commodities.

Any future for haute couture?

The mythology of fashion gives a very significant place to haute couture, a French specialty of custom-made and artistic high-end fashion. However, the founder of haute couture, Charles Frederick Worth (1825–1895), was not French but English. In 1845 he moved to Paris where he found glory working for the famous and powerful, such as the Empress Eugénie, Napoleon III's wife, in a relationship reminiscent of that of Rose Bertin and Marie Antoinette (see Chapter 3). Haute couture as a profession was organized in 1868 around the Chambre syndicale de la confection et de la couture pour dames et enfants (Trade Association of Women's and Children's Wear and Couture) which became the Chambre syndicale de la couture parisienne (Trade Association of Parisian Couture) in 1911. In 1973 this trade association (now called Chambre syndicale de la haute couture) was included in the larger ensemble of the Fédération française de la couture, du prêt-à-porter des couturiers et des créateurs de mode (French Federation of Couture, Ready-to-Wear, and Fashion Designers), alongside the Chambre syndicale du prêt-à-porter des couturiers

et des créateurs de mode (Trade Association of Ready-to-wear and Fashion Designers) and the Chambre syndicale de la mode masculine (Trade Association of Men's fashion). It looks after the interests of haute couture professionals.

The term "haute couture" itself is legally protected in France and the list of designers that belong to this field is regularly reviewed by the French Ministry of Industry. In the early 1990s, a reform led to an easing of the requirements for becoming an haute couture house. For example, the minimum number of 75 designs to be presented during a show was reduced to 50 "*passages*" (walks) of designs, and the minimum number of employees was also reduced, these adjustments happening in response to changing practices and consumption patterns.[14] In 2011, for the spring / summer collections unveiled between January 23 and 26, the Chambre included 11 members: Adeline André, Anne Valérie Hash, Atelier Gustavolins, Chanel, Christian Dior, Christophe Josse, Franck Sorbier, Givenchy, Jean-Paul Gaultier, Maurizio Galante, and Stéphane Rolland and four corresponding members, that is to say foreigners: Azzedine Alaïa, Elie Saab, Giorgio Armani Privé, and Valentino, as well as several guest members.

Many French and foreign designers create clothes of comparable quality to those of official haute couture designers, but are not included in the haute couture shows because of the legal protection of the designation. The haute couture fashion shows do not happen at the same time as the *prêt-à-porter* (ready-to-wear) shows. Haute couture clothes are generally unique, custom-made, very expensive (several thousand to tens of thousands of euros) and reserved for wealthy clients, at most a few thousand people worldwide.

The question of the "end of haute couture" is regularly raised in the media, as well as in the fashion industry

itself. Indeed, simply in terms of numbers, the decline of the sector is clear: if there were 106 haute couture fashion houses in France in 1945, there were already only 23 in 1975, and 11 from 2002 on.[15] Additionally, the high cost of haute couture creations, combined with a limited – yet wealthy – clientele, sits uneasily with the logic of profitability of contemporary fashion groups. Haute couture remains alive, however, for several reasons.

Firstly, because haute couture occupies a prominent position in the public eye and participates in the creation of an image of fashion as "luxury," as noted by *Vogue* (French edition) in 1973: "What's more anachronistic, more dream-laden than sailing vessels? Haute couture. It discourages the economist, contradicts profit-seeking, is an affront to democratization [...] Why haute couture? Some critics think [...] and why Champagne?"[16]

Secondly, haute couture remains a significant economic activity that contributes to the international reputation of Paris. The French authorities are well aware of this fact, as evidenced by the attention paid to the reform of haute couture in the early 1990s.[17] Haute couture also survives because it is a "laboratory of ideas," a "creative melting pot," in the words of the French Ministry of Culture's reply to the "Written Question No. 19645" (on "The employment situation in haute couture") of the Paris Senator, Nicole Borvo (French Communist Party), published in the Official Journal of the Senate on December 19, 1996.

And finally, haute couture constantly reinvents itself. Facing major financial difficulties, couturier Franck Sorbier recently sold tickets to his July 2011 show with prices peaking at €8,000 for the "diamond" ticket, including a night at luxury Parisian hotel Murano and one of the show's dresses.[18]

Producing fashion: Methods and processes

The production methods in haute couture and high fashion have changed very little since the early days of the industry: they remain largely manual and require extensive technical craftsmanship, hence the retail price of designer clothes. A documentary by Loïc Prigent, *Signé Chanel* (2005), which follows the completion of a collection at Chanel, illustrates the various professions that exist in the world of haute couture. When Chanel's head designer Karl Lagerfeld and his team draw sketches and choose fabrics, the "*Premières d'atelier*" (lead seamstresses), Madame Martine, Madame Jacqueline and Madame Cécile, are indispensable in implementing the creator's aesthetic "visions." Similarly, some items of clothing require the help of specialized craftspeople, like Madame Pouzieux for trimmings and braids, or Monsieur Massaro for shoes. Haute couture remains a largely artisanal and artistic activity, and necessitates the collaboration of numerous professions.

Yet, as emphasized by economists John T. Dunlop and David Weil,[19] the rest of the industry has adopted more modern production techniques, even if they have changed little since the 1930s. Thus, they explain that, in the 1990s, around 80 percent of the garments produced in the United States were made using a process known as the "Progressive Bundle System" or PBS.[20] This process is inspired by Taylorism, that is to say it is based on the principles of "scientific management" as defined by American engineer Frederick Winslow Taylor (1856–1915) in his 1911 book *The Principles of Scientific Management*.[21] Whilst a full explanation of scientific management, and the many debates that surround it, goes beyond the scope of this book, it is worth noting that Taylor's goal, as described in the opening

pages of his book, is to allow employers and employees to achieve "maximum prosperity." According to Taylor, this prosperity can be attained only through the use of scientific methods in the organization of work: for each task of a given production process, managers must define *the* unique and most effective way to accomplish this task, either by adopting the empirical methods developed by workers, or by improving them. This first step leads to "objective" labor standards that workers must follow and that managers must enforce in a spirit of collaboration.

However, if the PBS method in fashion is Taylorist in inspiration, it differs from similar methods in other industries. Indeed, the loose nature of fabrics makes the use of machine-tools and fully automated production lines difficult, contrary to what one might find in other industries like the automotive industry. This is why fashion is an industry that is, still today, very labor-intensive.[22] Specifically, the manufacture of a garment is divided into a number of operations that are performed sequentially. Each operation is executed by a group of workers who, at the beginning of a production cycle, receive a package of unfinished clothes they need to process. Once the task is completed, they pass this transformed "package" to the next group and so on. While each task usually takes very little time, a few minutes at most, an entire day is generally attributed to it in order to cope with possible delays. Thus, if a pair of pants requires only 28 minutes of cumulative work, the entire process of production may take around 40 days because 40 operations are needed.[23] The advantages of the PBS system in terms of cost are certain, but PBS can also slow down the production cycle when one of the critical operations is delayed and thus it can generate stocks of unfinished clothing.

Since the 1990s, however, new production techniques have emerged, both in terms of design and of the organization of work in factories. Regarding creation and design, the dissemination of computers and dedicated software has made the testing and previsualization of designs significantly easier. Regarding production, the emergence of the "modular system" could potentially revolutionize the production of clothing, and as a ripple effect, fashion itself by accelerating change cycles. Like the PBS process, the modular system is based on an idea of labor division, but this division takes place in small groups or teams of workers, between five and 30. Unlike what happens in the PBS process, workers can help each other if one of the stages of the production cycle slows down, thus fostering a process flow that is much smoother. There is also some supervision that is internal to the teams. Dunlop and Weil[24] make the final point that in the case of the modular system, compensation is not based on individual production, but on the performance of a production team. Thus, they argue that the modular system introduces a triple revolution in garment production: a collective compensation, some internal supervision, and the acquisition of multiple skills.

Various empirical studies suggest that the modular system is more efficient than the PBS process, especially where the most "basic" segments of the industry are concerned, because of a better self-regulation of employees.[25] This leads Dunlop and Weil to wonder why, when the modular system is more efficient than its competitors, and is actually actively promoted by many industry players, including trade unions and businesses, it represents only a fraction of the production of clothing around the world. According to their findings several explanations are possible, notably resistance to change due to the cost of this innovation.

If the different segments of the fashion industry can be represented as a pyramid, then the production process leading from suppliers of raw materials, such as cotton or silk, to the final consumers of clothing can be represented in the form of a "value chain" – an arrow that can be decomposed into several slices – a concept widely used in management, originally developed by American economist Michael Porter.[26]

A value chain is a stylized representation of the different stages of a production process. At each step, some "value," in an economic sense, is added to the product because of its transformation, hence the name of the concept. Thus, the value chain of fashion consists, according to Jennifer Bair and Gary Gereffi,[27] of nine elements or steps: 1) the creation of textiles from raw materials; 2) trim and labels; 3) design and product development; 4) cutting; 5) assembly; 6) laundry and finishing; 7) distribution to retailers; 8) marketing; and 9) retail. For Bair and Gereffi, at the beginning of the twenty-first century only three steps remain the province of fashion houses in industrialized countries and have not been outsourced to subcontractors in low-wage countries: design, marketing, and retail.

Tables 1 and 2 can help assess the impact of offshoring to countries with lower wages on the American apparel industry. They provide an overview of apparel and leather industries in the United States between 1997 and 2001, using the NAICS (North American Industry Classification System) codes 315 and 316, respectively. More recent data is provided in Tables 4 and 5, but data at the turn of the millennium is particularly informative regarding the transition of production from industrialized to industrializing countries. A first conclusion can be made about the two markets: there is a steady decline in production,

Table 1 Production and employment in the American clothing industry, 1997–2001

						Change		
	1997	**1998**	**1999**	**2000**	**2001**	**1998–1999**	**1999–2000**	**2000–2001**
Industrial data								
Production (millions of 1997 US$)	68,018	64,649	61,816	59,615	54,121	–4.4%	–3.6%	–9.2%
Total employment (thousands)	711	649	578	520	456	–10.9%	–10.0%	–12.3%
Total employment, workers (thousands)	592	542	471	420	369	–13.1%	–10.8%	–12.1%
Capital expenditures (millions of 1997 US$)	941	935	986	962	751	5.5%	–2.4%	–21.9%
Commercial data								
Exports (millions of 1997 US$)	8,274	8,412	7,876	8,104	6,469	–6.4%	2.9%	–20.2%
Imports (millions of 1997 US$)	47,084	52,298	55,104	62,928	62,429	5.4%	14.2%	–0.8%

Note: Nominal data. Apparel manufacturing (NAICS 315).
Source: US Department of Commerce: Bureau of the Census; International Trade Administration (ITA).

Table 2 Production and employment in the American leather goods industry (including footwear), 1997–2001

						Change		
	1997	**1998**	**1999**	**2000**	**2001**	**1998–1999**	**1999–2000**	**2000–2001**
Industrial data								
Production (millions of 1997 US$)	10,877	10,231	9,711	9,563	8,481	–5.1%	–1.5%	–11.3%
Total employment (thousands)	85	81	74	69	62	–8.8%	–6.2%	–10.8%
Total employment, workers (thousands)	69	65	60	55	49	–8.9%	–7.1%	–11.2%
Capital expenditures (millions of 1997 US$)	167	136	154	153	96	13.2%	–0.6%	–37.0%
Commercial data								
Exports (millions of 1997 US$)	2,422	2,459	2,293	2,322	2,285	–6.8%	1.3%	–1.6%
Imports (millions of 1997 US$)	19,277	19,530	19,976	21,463	21,865	2.3%	7.4%	1.9%

Note: Nominal data. Leather and allied products (NAICS 316).
Source: US Department of Commerce: Bureau of the Census; International Trade Administration (ITA).

employment, and investment in the United States from 1997 to 2001. This trend is an extension of a decline in the sector that started in the early 1980s. A second conclusion is that this decline in production in the United States is offset by increased imports. This substitution of local production by imports is typical of offshoring dynamics.

In Figure 1, an analysis of employment in the same industries in France shows trends similar to those observed in the United States. Note that the decrease in employment in apparel and leather goods is not decelerating. Offshoring has thus affected all developed countries, and is still affecting them, although some have been less impacted than others (for example, Italy was able to maintain some economic districts dedicated to clothing or footwear, such as Brenta,[28] despite harsh international competition). Some authors even argue that traditional fashion districts could be revived in the West, such as New York's Garment District[29] or Cholet and Roanne in France,[30] but this remains to be seen.

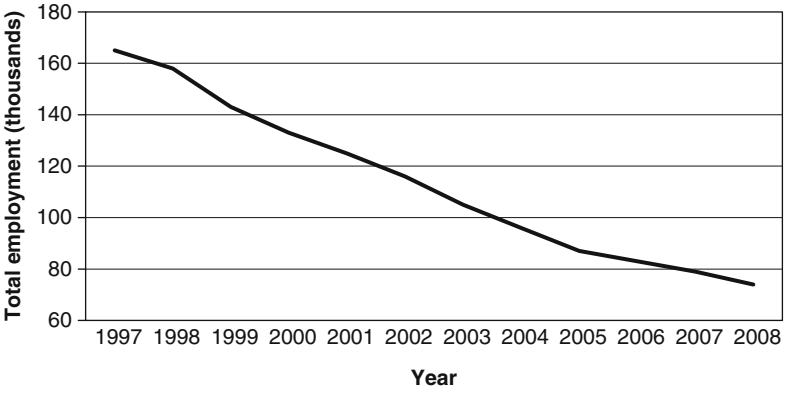

Figure 1 Employment in the apparel and leather goods industries in France, 1997–2008

Source: INSEE

Does offshoring mean the end of centralization in fashion? In fact, this centralization persists because of the definition of design and marketing in a handful of fashion capitals and the presence of significant consumer markets in industrialized countries.

THE DYNAMICS OF FASHION CAPITALS

Fashion Week, fashion shows

The most influential fashion shows are held in sumptuous and glamorous places in New York, London, Milan, and Paris. Nowadays, the timing of the collections is well organized and allows the various players in the fashion industry to travel from one city to another without having to skip important shows. The coordination of the agendas is conducted at the highest level between the professional associations of the major fashion capitals: in New York, the Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA) founded in 1962; in London, the British Fashion Council, founded in 1983; in Milan; the Camera Nazionale della Moda Italiana (National Chamber of Italian Fashion), founded in 1958; and finally in Paris, the Fédération française de la couture, du prêt-à-porter des couturiers et des créateurs de mode (French Federation of Couture, Ready-to-Wear, and Fashion Designers,) founded in 1868. The whole set of fashion events in these four fashion capitals is known as "Fashion Week." This term is not completely accurate since all the shows taken together last almost a month and consist of several fashion weeks, one per city. The first is that of New York, which traditionally took place in Bryant Park in Manhattan but moved in 2010 to the Lincoln

Center in the Upper West Side. This fashion week is now known under the designation "Mercedes Benz Fashion Week," named after its main sponsor. The second is that of London. The third, *Settimana della moda*, is that of Milan. The shows end with the Paris collections.

As an example of a typical Fashion Week schedule, consider fall / winter 2011–2012: New York, February 10 to 17, 2011; London, February 18 to 23, 2011; Milan, February 23 to March 1, 2011; and, finally, Paris, March 1 to 9, 2011. Similarly, the shows for spring / summer 2012 took place in New York from September 8 to 15, 2011; in London from September 16 to 21, 2011; in Milan from September 21 to 27, 2011; and in Paris from September 27 to October 5, 2011.

It is important to note that the past decade has seen the appearance and development of "intermediary" collections, which do not lead to fashion weeks of major shows but allow designers to renew their designs more frequently and test the market. These collections are called "pre-fall" and "pre-spring" and, as their name suggests, they precede the fall / winter and spring / summer collections, respectively. Also, note the existence of the "cruise" or "resort" collection for summer, which is mainly the province of the most prestigious designers. From this point of view, fashion is accelerating.

It is also important to mention that not all designers organize fashion shows to showcase their collections to the public, and runway shows are just one way among many for them to interact with buyers of major retail chains. For example, some organize "trunk shows" or "trunk sales" in which they sell some of their designs, exclusively to buyers and a few selected customers, shops or individuals. Finally, let us mention the recent emergence of shows on the Internet, such as in the case of the Dutch duo Viktor

and Rolf's Spring / Summer 2009 collections, where a single model, Canadian, Shalom Harlow, wore all the designs of this collection in a virtual setting. These "digital" shows allow fashion houses to reach a wider audience and save significant amounts of money on the high cost of a traditional show, on average around US$150,000 according to American journalist and designer Josh Patner.[31]

Is there a fashion capital of the world? Is Paris over?

A nagging question obsessing many fashion professionals is where "the" fashion capital of the world is located. Specifically whether Paris, the cradle of contemporary fashion, is still the center of the industry or whether New York or London has replaced the City of Lights at the top of the fashion hierarchy.[32]

This question takes on a particular resonance today with the debate surrounding the global competition between cities to attract individuals belonging to the "creative class,"[33] among them fashion designers. In France the debate has taken a very specific turn, and is focused around the debates regarding the restructuring of the space within Greater Paris,[34] with the big French fashion conglomerates such as LVMH and PPR playing an important role in the international influence of the French capital.

"Paris, fashion capital" is the subject of a book by Valerie Steele, *Paris Fashion: A Cultural History*[35] which traces the history of fashion through the lens of Paris and analyzes the changing role of the French capital in the fashion system. For Steele, the answer is clear: Paris is still a major global fashion center, but faces competition from many other places. Her compelling conclusion is that Paris is no longer "the" unique fashion capital of the world, but one

of its main fashion capitals, *primus inter pares*, which must deal with influences from around the world, not only New York, London, and Milan, but also Tokyo or Antwerp, and increasingly Beijing, Mumbai, or São Paulo.

In fact, the question of whether Paris is still the global fashion capital is ambiguous because the answer depends on the definition of the term "capital." If one considers that there can only be one capital of the fashion industry at any one point, the answer is negative: there is no longer a single fashion capital, but several cities that influence fashion. This is the perspective adopted by Steele. If one considers that among all the "capitals" of fashion, hierarchies can be established, the answer is different depending on the point of view.

Paris is certainly "the" fashion capital of the world from a purely financial point of view because the two largest luxury and fashion groups of the world, PPR and LVMH, are based in Paris. From a media standpoint, Paris remains the frontrunner, especially because of the existence of haute couture that increases the interest in the French capital and gives rise, in fact, to four Parisian fashion weeks instead of two elsewhere.

In terms of "brand power," the picture is not as clear. French brands (Louis Vuitton, Chanel, etc.) are still very powerful, but the Italian (Gucci, Prada, etc.) or American (Calvin Klein, Ralph Lauren, etc.) brands for example are also very well established in the global fashion and luxury landscape. That being said, many Italian (Fendi, Bulgari), American (Donna Karan, Marc Jacobs), or British (Alexander McQueen, Stella McCartney) brands are owned by the French conglomerates.

Regarding "creativity" and the development of new talents, London and New York currently hold the upper

hand, and most new influential designers (Phoebe Philo, Marc Jacobs) are Anglo-Saxon. They are also regularly hired by French fashion houses (Phoebe Philo for Céline, Marc Jacobs for Louis Vuitton). We can then adopt the view defended by Valerie Steele and say that Paris is still central, that it stays ahead of the pack, but that it has lost its crown as the unique capital of the fashion world.

Fashion's urban identity

Underneath the magnificence of the collections and the glamour of the prestigious guests attending the shows, local socioeconomic structures are also at play; and each fashion capital is characterized by a particular history. The dynamics of the fashion capitals can then be addressed through the issue of globalization, and from different perspectives, combining the global and the local.

In the early twenty-first century, there are a limited number of fashion capitals, New York, London, Milan and Paris.[36] Historically, Paris and London are the first two fashion capitals. Paris established itself early in this position, firstly because of the political domination of France in eighteenth-century Europe and, secondly because of the centralization of different forms of power in France within the Paris area. As French sociologists Michel and Monique Pinçon-Charlot write: in France, "all dominant poles in all fields, political, artistic, cultural, economic, are [...] concentrated in Paris."[37] However, the centrality of Paris in the French fashion industry is not total, and other important cities are significant centers for apparel production and design in France, for example Lyon, Roanne, and Cholet. In the eyes of the world, however, it is Paris that represents the French fashion and luxury industries,

notably because the French capital is constructed as such in the media.[38]

Like Paris, London has benefited from its status as an imperial capital to impose itself early on as one of the world capitals of fashion. A sort of "division of labor" between Paris and London emerged in the early nineteenth century, the former influencing mainly women's fashion and the latter men's fashion. The importance of London in men's fashion is deep-rooted: "For more than two hundred years, history and legend have made of England the chosen land of masculine elegance,"[39] this importance is also due to the tutelary figure of the father of dandyism, Beau Brummell who was English. This distinction has now receded, but there are still some traces, especially in the importance, at least symbolic, of London Savile Row tailors in the definition of male sartorial norms.

To some extent, Paris and London are fashion's "original" capitals. New York and Milan imposed their presence later on. New York's reign began at the end of World War II, although it was already an important center of the textile industry within the United States in the nineteenth century. New York fashion designers are responsible for the invention of the concepts of ready-to-wear and sportswear. Milan became a fashion capital in the late 1970s. This may seem surprising given the place occupied by Italy in the history of fashion, as explained in Chapter 1. In reality, the Italian case is unique in the sense that there was a strong competition among cities to become "the" Italian capital of fashion. Immediately after the war, various cities tried to take the lead, especially Rome, Florence, and Venice. Rome was particularly well placed due to its position as the Italian political capital, and the presence of a major film industry there which allowed it to convey a glamorous

image. Yet it is Milan which emerged as the undisputed capital of Italian fashion because of its status as the main industrial center of the country.[40]

These four fashion capitals, however, are not the only fashion-relevant cities, and other places play an important role. In the media, several cities have an influential fashion week, for example Los Angeles in the United States and São Paulo in Brazil.

A major trend, at least before the start of the 2008 global financial crisis, has been the emergence of new fashion weeks in various countries.[41] There is no comprehensive list of all fashion weeks, but the website Europaregina.eu[42] provides links to 178 fashion weeks across the world; among them 57 in North America, 53 in Europe, 27 in Asia, 22 in Africa and the Middle-East, 14 in South and Central America, 4 in Oceania, not forgetting a "world" fashion week. The proliferation of fashion weeks, however, does not challenge the dominance of the big four.

From a creative standpoint, that is to say as far as the generation of new talents is concerned, Tokyo in Japan and Antwerp in Belgium deserve a special mention. Tokyo has produced many influential designers, but failed to retain them. Thus, for example, Kenzo Takada (born 1939), Rei Kawakubo (born 1942), and Yohji Yamamoto (born 1943) all relocated to Paris at some point between 1960 and 1980. This significant brain-drain has led to a renewal of Parisian and Western fashion,[43] but Tokyo was consequently depleted of the necessary talent-base to secure the status of fashion capital. Antwerp witnessed the same scenario: it was, and still is, a noted source of eccentric talents, but designers who are trained there tend to leave the city, notably to settle in either Paris or London. Antwerp has been able to consolidate its image as a fashion center

through the coordinated efforts of various local industry players, despite the absence of a major fashion week,[44] but like Tokyo, this city has not been able to retain its talent to build up a presence in the global fashion week scene. Los Angeles, São Paulo, Tokyo, and Antwerp have great stylistic influence on the rest of the world, in addition to their media and creative dimensions.

Other cities, like Copenhagen, Stockholm, or Berlin, which do not support a major fashion week, have a certain stylistic influence, sometimes through other arts – film or music for example. Finally, some cities occupy an important position in the fashion industry from an economic standpoint, for example Barcelona, Madrid, Moscow, Mumbai, Hong Kong, Beijing, and Shanghai. These cities are the entry points to significant markets in the field of fashion and luxury, however, they have not yet transformed their economic position into a better symbolic position in the media.

Several conclusions can be drawn from this brief overview of the global fashion capitals. From a sociological point of view, the structure of the fashion capitals shows that fashion is characterized by the existence of different levels of social action. At the global level, a limited number of fashion capitals attract most media attention in the industry, form the most creative avant-garde, define much of the styles, and include the largest fashion houses. Yet, at a local level, other actors are emerging and are acting in their specific environment: for example, Miami has positioned itself as the fashion capital of Latin America. The global and local levels are not, however, separated: they interact constantly.[45] The local fashion capitals feed the global capitals with ideas and talents, and these global cities in turn filter and coordinate the dynamics of the industry.

This leads to an intriguing economic question. How do some cities become respected fashion capitals while others do not? Why do they keep their role for so long while the socio-economic world is constantly changing? The fashion capitals are the result of past choices which form specific economic pathways, a theory known as "path dependence."[46] Thus, the actual power of Paris in the fashion industry, which does not correspond to the actual power of France in economic terms on the global stage, is the result of accumulated advantages over the centuries, in terms of brand equity, business or know-how. Finally, from a geographic standpoint, fashion reflects an important reality: even if the fashion capitals are part of a global level of action, the fashion houses and their creations are linked to a given geographical space. Even in a globalized economy, the products come from somewhere, and are connoted by their origin.[47]

This then leads to a paradox. Although the heart of fashion, design and marketing, is centralized in some fashion capitals where the most powerful houses and the most influential designers are located, production has been offshored to many low-cost countries.

To resolve this apparent paradox, we need to make a detour through consumption, the downstream of the industry, as reflected in Table 4. This table shows consumption levels in the clothing and footwear industries,[48] for the ten largest world economies in 2010. These economies are defined following the ranking made by the International Monetary Fund, based on Purchasing Power Parity, that is to say by not taking into account the exchange rates but the amount of goods and services a currency unit can afford to buy in the geographic zone in which it has legal tender status. Values are expressed in billions of US$ in order to facilitate comparisons. They are nominal, and

therefore do not correct the effects of inflation, and use the annual exchange rates between currencies; therefore the values are affected by changes in foreign exchange rates, averaged annually.

Table 3 shows that the United States remains by far the largest market in the apparel industry. China and Japan are respectively the second and third largest markets for clothing. However, when the main European economies – United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, and France – are aggregated, they represent US$283 billion, which would be more if smaller economies not reproduced here were to be added. As can be seen, despite the phenomena of outsourcing in the textile industry, the older industrialized countries are still the main markets for the products of the fashion and luxury industries.

However, an analysis of growth presented in Table 4 for the period 2005–2010, reveals a different picture of these

Table 3 The apparel market in the major world economies, 2005–2010 (in billions of US$, annual exchange rates)

Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
United States	308	317	325	318	316	318
China	121	138	156	174	191	216
Japan	113	114	114	110	103	101
United Kingdom	81	83	84	83	83	84
Germany	76	76	79	79	79	82
Italy	69	68	69	70	69	70
Russia	38	45	53	61	55	63
Brazil	30	33	36	40	44	50
France	47	48	49	47	47	47
India	25	28	31	35	39	44

Note: Nominal values using annual exchange rates.
Source: Euromonitor, compilation of national industrial data.

Table 4 Growth rates of the apparel industry in the major world economies, 2005–2010

Country	Growth 2005–10 (%)	Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) 2005–10 (%)
India	79.7	12.4
China	78.5	12.3
Brazil	66.6	10.8
Russia	64.6	10.5
Germany	8.4	1.6
United Kingdom	4.2	0.8
United States	3.3	0.7
Italy	1.8	0.4
France	–0.1	0.0
Japan	–11.0	–2.3

Note: Nominal values using annual exchange rates.
Source: Euromonitor, compilation of national industrial data.

industries. It is important to note that the growth rates presented in Table 4 are nominal, and therefore include inflation. The newly industrialized economies, India, China, Brazil, and Russia clearly take the lead, while the older industrialized countries stagnate or regress.

These figures call for several comments. First, they reflect the rise of new actors in the global economy, a phenomenon now well established. They also reflect a major fact: these new players, despite their rapid growth, in terms of size are still behind traditional players, like the European Union, the United States, or Japan. Then there is a gap between the still-dominant presence of Western countries and Japan, and the phenomenon of relocation of production already observed. As of today, the fashion industry is characterized by a "decoupling"

between the areas of production and consumption, the concept of decoupling being defined here as "the autonomization of an interaction framework vis-à-vis other frameworks."[49]

In sum, the centralization of fashion is not only evidenced from the point of view of style, marketing and finance, but also in terms of consumption. The transfer of production to low-cost countries and the replacement of local production in industrialized countries by imports have not affected the centralization of fashion so far. However, it is possible, and even very likely, that the rise of China, India, Brazil, or Russia will lead to a reorganization of power, just as World War II led to the admittance of New York into the inner circle of world fashion capitals. Nonetheless, it has not happened yet.

Convergence in the garment industry is based on control mechanisms of the production process, a true centralization of the industry, which is not inconsistent with the offshoring of clothing manufacturing. This centralization is required by the industrial nature of fashion. More specifically, the construction of factories and the establishment of distribution networks are expensive and risky. Decentralization, even partial, would lead the industry, in the current state of technology, to too large a level of uncertainty for most investors. Similar phenomena are observed in all creative industries, such as music,[50] where the objects affected by fads are produced in factories, and therefore imply an immobilization of capital and labor. Thus, if, as Guillaume Erner points out, fashion professionals do not convene any "secret meetings on the shores of Lake Como"[51] to define trends, the fact remains that the industry is structured to reduce risk as much as possible.

Styles and designs are channeled through well-organized production and manufacturing processes. In other sectors of social life, convergence does not need to be centralized and operates through mechanisms of influence diffusion. This leads then to the question of the autonomy of fashion vis-à-vis other spheres of social life.

3

THE AUTONOMY PRINCIPLE – THE EMERGENCE AND DYNAMICS OF STYLES

FASHION'S AUTONOMIZATION

The power of the Queen

The third principle of fashion as we know it today is its autonomy as a creative endeavor. The emergence of the autonomy principle in dress fashion is recent and, as is the case for all of the other principles, the result of a long and intricate historical process. Symbolically, it is Queen Marie Antoinette of France (1755–1793) who made this principle possible, and allowed it to expand across Europe and beyond. Before Marie Antoinette, fashion was subjected to the dictates and choices of the aristocracy and bourgeoisie, and trends emerged mainly from dynamics that were external to the world of dress. With Marie Antoinette, fashion was emancipated and became – to a large extent – an autonomous field which obeyed its own logic. For the Queen, who was born in Austria and always struggled to impose herself in the French Court of Versailles, the autonomization of fashion under her auspices was a way to gain empowerment and compensate for her political weakness, notably her subordination to the king.[1]

Marie Antoinette's "*modiste*" (milliner and dressmaker), Rose Bertin (1747–1813), who was sometimes nicknamed the "Minister of Fashions,"[2] played an instrumental role in the autonomization of the field of fashion. She was a seasoned entrepreneur who ran the shop Le Grand Mogol (The Great Mogul) in Paris. She was able to speak on an equal footing with certain ladies of the Court, and to be treated as an equal by them, though not without resentment on many occasions. This expressed the new strength of her field, fashion. Eventually, this empowerment of fashion led to the emergence of forms of expression specific to this activity, and the emergence of a dynamic of its own. It was also accompanied by a growing difference between women's and men's fashion, the former becoming much more dynamic than the latter, which was characterized by the "great renunciation" described by psychologist J. C. Flugel.[3] In the late eighteenth century men's fashion became sober and somber, challenging changes that were too abrupt and focusing on statutory details.

Flickering styles

Fashion regularly draws from the other arts, for example when the French couturier Yves Saint Laurent (1936–2008) created dresses inspired by the paintings of Mondrian, that is to say blocks of primary colors (mostly red, yellow, and blue) separated by straight black lines. However, it also created a repertoire of styles that is specific to clothing. Thus, the examples of punk and goth, mentioned in Chapter 1, show that fashion is a form of self-expression, like language or music, but with its own codes.

Looking at how fashion borrows influences from other arts, but also creates its own styles, raises the question

of stylistic diffusion (or dissemination), an idea that is intrinsic to fashion as we understand it today, just like the idea of change which we have already analyzed. Diffusion in fashion is special because on the one hand, it is organized by the industry as a whole and, on the other hand, there is no sense of an absolute "best" fashion. From this point of view, catwalks and fashion shows are to be distinguished from trade shows in other industries, such as automotive or aerospace, where the idea of technological progress is central – cars and planes get better and safer every year. Does fashion get "better" and more beautiful with every new season? While most artistic and scientific fields are based on the idea that there are some works or theories intrinsically and absolutely better than others, this is not the case in fashion, where what is best is always ephemeral and context-dependent; what looks good today in fashion did not look good five years ago, and will not look good five years down the road. Why is this so?

STYLES AND DESIGNS IN FASHION

Understanding styles

The concept of "style" in fashion is extremely ambiguous because it covers different realities. First, it may refer to deep changes in sensitivity similar to those underlying the emergence of new genres in music. An example is the emergence of the "futuristic" style in fashion. Futurism as an artistic movement was symbolically born in February 1909 with the manifesto published by the Italian writer Marinetti. In the 1920s, fashion designers, especially the

Italian Ernesto Michahelles (1893–1959), better known by the name Thayaht, tried to incorporate some aspects of futurism into the field of clothing. Yet it was not until the 1960s that futurism definitively entered fashion with, amongst other features, the use of nontraditional materials and fabrics, such as plastics and metals by Paco Rabanne, and the famous collection "Moon Girl" by André Courrèges, which was inspired by space exploration and was an ode to the Space Age (in 1964). Several conclusions can be drawn from these great stylistic innovations. First, it is difficult to pinpoint the exact origin of styles – a stylistic *Milliarium Aureum*[4] – because there is always a multitude of actors involved in their emergence. The emergence itself is a process consisting of different stages. Styles are a "cultural repertoire" from which creators can draw their inspiration, and are generally recognized by consumers. It is important to note that, like cultural themes such as futurism, colors, fabrics, or patterns are styles in fashion.

Second, style can refer to what is stable among the sartorial choices of an individual, group, or fashion house, and by extension, any other social actor. With regard to individuals or groups, the example of subcultures already mentioned may help illustrate the idea that style can be conceived of as a relatively stable array of influences. The goth style, for example, is a blend of fabrics (velvet, lace), color (black, purple), patterns (tartan), and cultural references to other movements such as punk or New Wave. For any fashion house, a stylistic stability can be observed in the recurrence of aesthetic choices. For example, English designer Vivienne Westwood (born 1941) is known for popularizing the punk style, through her shops Let It Rock, Too Fast to Live Too Young to Die, and Sex, in the 1970s in London, then on Parisian catwalks from 1982, and back

to London five years later.[5] From this point of view, styles are "clusters of sartorial details that contribute to overall appearance."[6]

A third conception of style in fashion can refer to changes in trends, which can be observed in each collection, spring / summer or fall / winter. Fashion houses and consumers then try to meet what they perceive as the dominant trends. These trends can be colors, materials, patterns, or even broader cultural influences, such as futurism and punk, as already mentioned.

Thus, the meaning of the concept of style depends on the perspective under consideration. There are stylistic movements that serve as reference for designers and consumers. These reference styles can themselves be combined to form new reference styles. Then there are specific styles, which are often combinations of reference styles, but can sometimes become reference styles themselves, as in the case of Chanel, which created industry wide stylistic icons, such as the famous "little black dress" in 1926, or the tweed suit, worn, for example, by Jackie Kennedy in a pink version. Finally, there are the stylistic trends that orient fashion houses and consumers twice a year.

The question of the relationship between the different levels of styles is empirical and has, so far, been little explored. The concept of "design" can help provide some answers. We can define design as the actual interpretation of a style or, as Sproles and Burns wrote: "A design is a unique combination of silhouette, construction, fabric, and details that distinguishes a single object from all other objects of the same class."[7] Thus, during a fashion show, a fashion house presents a set of designs (typically around 25) that constitute a collection. Each design is a specific interpretation of the stylistic trends of the season, or of some of them, and of

what might be termed the stylistic legacy of a fashion house, its very own style. It is in designs that the know-how of a fashion house is expressed, and to be more sociologically accurate, the know-how of all the individuals involved in creating a fashion house's collection.

How do designers and fashion houses know what the seasonal stylistic trends will be? The production process in fashion is, as we have already seen, long and complex, involving many players, and can take more than a year to implement. It is very important for producers to know well in advance what stylistic trends will prevail. The number of stylistic references, and their combinations, is considerable. A simple bet by fashion houses on the styles to come is too risky. Several coordination mechanisms necessarily exist.

First, fashion designers share tastes and sources of inspiration. Analyzing the example of how fashion is created in New York, geographer Norma Rantisi[8] shows how networks of alumni (from the city's Parsons The New School for Design or the Fashion Institute of Technology), and the shared knowledge among New York-based designers about what museums, magazines, or shops to observe, leads to shared representations and practices. From these shared representations come clear common ideas about what fashion is and ought to be, and ways of implementing these ideas into designs.

Second, and in a more direct manner, fashion designers, like other artists, share information at receptions, cocktail parties, and business events that, while they may seem frivolous and hedonistic to the general public, are essential in the process of sharing stylistic trends.[9] To be clear, designers rarely share sensitive corporate information on future designs, notably because of legal constraints. Rather

they share information about supposed up-and-coming artistic trends, artists, or cities. This information in turn helps them create their collections.

Then there are "agencies" or "forecasting bureaus" whose function is to identify styles and trends, and make them available to professionals. Among the most influential offices are Nelly Rodi, founded in 1985 in Paris,[10] and Worth Global Style Network (WGSN), founded in 1998 in London.[11] Also, the role played by the trade press and blogs specializing in the distribution of styles is crucial. *Women's Wear Daily* in the United States and the *Journal du Textile* in France both allow fashion professionals to keep abreast of key developments in their industry. Blogs such as *The Sartorialist*, created by Scott Schuman in New York, and *The Business of Fashion* (*BoF*), created by Imran Amed in London, play a similar role on the Internet.

Finally, the various fairs like Première Vision ("First Vision") in Paris[12] allow different professionals, in particular the style bureaus, fashion houses, and weavers (textile-makers), to coordinate on a number of trends up to 18 months before the collections are available to end-consumers. The website of Première Vision offers a very illuminating description – despite the self-laudatory tone – of a process that can lead to stylistic coordination across fashion houses, and is driven by the need to cope with the vagaries of customer tastes:

> **Especially prepared for you: exclusive Fashion information and trend forecast.**
>
> Well ahead of the salons, the Première Vision fashion team organises meetings with top experts to help weavers in their creative process. This program involves meetings, synthesis and inspiration. It is a precious information support that benefits the entire creative chain.

A unique and resolutely professional approach
which has earned Première Vision the praise of professionals from throughout the world. Première Vision in its shows is constantly aiming at a mix of creativity and business thanks to an ongoing quest for excellence, and exclusive services.

The fabric areas and forums
event-oriented displays that showcase the fabric designs, with a clear presentation of fashion directions to come, thanks to the last creations of exhibitors... everything is undertaken to inspire you and favour contact-making.[13]

These various consultation mechanisms illustrate how the diffusion of fashion styles is characterized, in the words of American sociologist Herbert Blumer,[14] by the existence of a "collective selection" process, which leads fashion professionals to filter trends based on tastes they develop through contact with their peers and from different shared sources. Thus, for Blumer, fashion does not originate in a desire for "class differentiation," a mechanism put forward by Mandeville, Smith, Simmel, and Veblen, but in a willingness of individuals to be fashionable. To achieve this goal, they follow the advice of professionals who are more attuned to the trends than they are.

Fashion, intellectual property, and ethics

Copying styles or even designs is at the heart of the dynamics of the fashion industry, and a key element of its autonomy as a field, because it allows fashion to refer to its own creations, rather than external influences. Under these conditions, what happens to intellectual property in this industry? The issue of intellectual property is central to economic life, particularly through the institution of

patents, which were created in order to generate innovation. For example, in the pharmaceutical industry new drugs are legally protected from being copied for a period of time in order to allow pharmaceutical companies to generate profit from their new products. In some cultural and creative industries, like music or movies, the question of intellectual property has become especially prominent with the advent of content digitization. The latter evolution has led to a profound restructuring of these industries and the establishment of new regulations.

In fashion, intellectual property takes on a whole new meaning because of the historically rampant imitation between fashion houses. At this stage, a distinction can be made between counterfeiting and imitation, which is related to the distinction previously made between designs and styles. Counterfeiting, a legal concept, assumes different definitions across countries. On the international stage, the World Trade Organization (WTO) takes a broad approach and defines counterfeiting as a violation of patents, trademarks, copyrights, or geographical indications (codified in the so-called Agreement on "Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights" (TRIPS) discussed by the main world powers during the "Uruguay Round" between 1986 and 1994.[15]) The TRIPS agreements are complex, and the details of their content intricate. What matters, however, is that intellectual property is treated seriously on the global stage, and that significant amounts of power and money are at play when it comes to counterfeiting. Imitation, a sociological concept, is at the heart of the institutions and strategies that characterize the fashion industry and, as was made clear in Chapter 1, there is no fashion without imitation.

The way the law regulates the reproduction of styles and designs in fashion varies from one country to another,

and, in a particularly significant opposition, between the United States and the European Union. While American law traditionally offers very limited protection to designs in the field of fashion, European law,[16] and the various national laws of European Union member states, is much more drastic, especially since the adoption in 1998 of Directive 98/71/EC on the "legal protection of designs."[17]

The copying of European designs by American fashion houses has a long history: during his first trip to the United States in 1913, French couturier Paul Poiret was initially shocked by the extent of the replication of his designs that took place in the New World. However, he soon accepted what he saw as an indirect form of homage paid to him and his designs by the Americans who nicknamed him the "King of Fashion."[18] In 1932, the American fashion industry organized itself into an association, the Fashion Originators' Guild of America, and decided to ban copying within its own ranks, but did not prohibit the copying of European designs. However, in 1941, the Supreme Court, in *Fashion Originators' Guild of America v. Federal Trade Commission*, issued a decision in which it considered the Guild's practices as contrary to the laws of free enterprise, including the famous Sherman and Clayton Antitrust Acts, a basic competition legal framework in the United States.[19]

Nevertheless, American fashion houses have not remained idle since then, and do not hesitate to defend their brand, their "label," which is the heart of their market identity. Recently, the United States House of Representatives addressed the issue of protection of designs and proposed a bill, HR 5055,[20] later reintroduced as HR 2033,[21] which would protect the designs for a period of up to three years (as of 2011, this has not become a law). Even if this

law were to be enacted, the protection offered by United States law would be lower than the European protection, which can last for up to 25 years for both registered and nonregistered designs.

There is a deep disagreement among scholars regarding whether imitation in fashion has a positive or negative impact on innovation in this field. In essence, some have argued that because fashion is inherently a status-based industry what really matters is the label, not the design itself.[22] From this standpoint, fashion does not need a protection of designs, only of labels and logos. Another view differentiates between "close copy" (replicating a design) and "remixing" (being inspired by several designs).[23] While the debate is still on, note that fashion has functioned for centuries with a limited amount of protection, and that establishing a distinction between different levels of imitation seems hazardous, if not impossible to implement in practice.

In addition to the legal constraints that weigh on fashion, there are moral constraints. Fashion, as well as luxury, is traditionally the subject of various moral criticisms, accused, often in a pell-mell manner, of being shallow, perverse, dangerous, or even useless. These judgments are too numerous to be exhaustively listed, but they date back to the roots of various human civilizations, including Western civilization. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the attacks against fashion have not stopped but their nature has changed: it is no longer about criticizing the supposed immorality of fashion in itself, but rather the practices of fashion houses and financial groups to which they belong. These new criticisms of the fashion industry are organized around several themes.

First, the working conditions in factories in low-cost countries which produce clothing and fashion accessories

for Western markets are regularly called into question. This reality of fashion, despite several campaigns (notably in the 1990s), is overlooked, but nonetheless an issue that needs to be addressed, remarks English sociologist Angela McRobbie.[24]

Second, the use of furs and animal materials for making clothes is a subject of discontent for groups defending animal rights.

Third, the fashion industry is accused of promoting anorexia among young girls, because of the glorification of an unrealistic female body image. In 2006, the tragic deaths of Uruguayan model Luiselli Ramos (born 1984) and Brazilian model Ana Carolina Reston (born 1985), both as a result of anorexia nervosa, have led some professional associations in the world of fashion to supervise and control the eating practices of models, for example in Madrid, Milan, and New York.[25]

Fourth, fashion is accused, from a political point of view, of generating artificial consumption needs,[26] leading to negative environmental consequences in terms of resources and waste.

More recently, the fashion industry has been subjected to a number of satirical parodies from activists who use the industry to convey a broader political message. One of the most enjoyable examples is the case of "Serpica Naro," a fictional Anglo-Japanese fashion designer created by the Milanese Chainworkers group.[27] These activists confronted the fashion industry regarding the issue of precarious work by creating – from scratch – a fabricated designer and brand ("Serpica Naro"), and managing to use her to conclude the fashion week in Milan. "Serpica Naro," an anagram of "San Precario," the (fictitious) Patron Saint of temporary workers, was supposed to present in February 2005 a collection

based on a representation of precariousness. The Chainworkers group organized a false demonstration denouncing the show, before finally revealing the skeleton in the closet in what turned out to be a great media victory.

The philosophical fear of fashion

Is there a "philosophical fear" of fashion,[28] deeply rooted in Western civilization, and exacerbated by the autonomization of this field?

From some religious points of view clothing is clearly associated with sin. Immediately after their fall, Adam and Eve covered their nakedness with fig leaves – there is no need for fashion in a sinless world. In the Ancient Greco-Roman world, fashion was also condemned, but not in itself, rather because it was associated with luxury, and deemed to be an expression of human vanity.[29] For example, when Roman naturalist Pliny the Elder (23–79 AD) condemned precious metals such as gold, which, according to him, pervert humans by diverting them from the pursuit of wisdom and knowledge, he also condemned luxury in general, and jewelry in particular. He wrote: "The worst crime against man's life was committed by the person who first put gold on his fingers, though it is not recorded who did this."[30] Interestingly, Plato (424/423 BC–348/347 BC) did not condemn clothing as such, since it can be useful in winter as a protection against cold weather. What he condemned, particularly in his treatise *The Republic*, were the excesses that can be associated with luxury, and their deleterious effects on philosophical and moral activities. For him, because luxury requires the use of scarce resources, it necessarily leads to war among states, which try to control those resources. Aristotle (384 BC–322 BC) took a more

nuanced approach, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*[31] he too denounced immoderations, but he did not systematically reject luxury or fashion which he saw as inherent to social life. For Aristotle, some fashion and luxury is necessary for a balanced life.

Broadly speaking, European moralists of the modern era (which started at the end of the fifteenth century) condemned fashion and luxury. This condemnation was clear, for example in France with Rousseau (1712–1778) who saw in luxury the incarnation of everything he hated in civilization, as he explained in the *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts*.[32] However, others, including Voltaire, Adam Smith, and Friedrich Nietzsche, saw fashion and luxury in a positive light.

Voltaire (1694–1778), like Mandeville before him, saw in luxury the utmost expression of civilization. For him, luxury creates wealth and employment, and brings happiness, and for all these reasons must be revered. Adam Smith (1723–1790) is generally regarded as one of the founding fathers of economic science because of his concept of the "invisible hand," through which markets function without a central authority. Yet he was also a philosopher who developed, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*,[33] a theory of "sympathy" that binds people together.[34] In the fifth part of his philosophical opus, Smith focuses on customs and fashions. For Smith, anticipating Veblen and Simmel, individuals, where possible, imitate those who are better off, because they want to participate in their happiness; but fashion itself is neither good nor bad, it is just a social process that needs to be accounted for. For Nietzsche (1844–1900), fashion is an expression of modernity, an age of postnational identity, and because of this it needs to be embraced.[35]

To a large extent, Nietzsche paved the way for a reversal in the moral perception of fashion that happened in the nineteenth century, when many philosophers and artists started revering fashion, not only dandies as already mentioned, but also members of the Romantic movement, and writers such as Balzac.

THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF DIFFUSION: FASHION AS A MODEL

Fads, fashions, and cycles

To borrow a distinction that has become classic and widely accepted in the study of fashion, we can differentiate between two types of diffusion: "fads" on the one hand, and "fashions" proper on the other.[36] The word "fad" refers to a sudden popularity of short duration for an artist, an idea, or a word, and is sometimes replaced by the concept of "craze" (for example in the work of sociologists Bernard Barber and Lyle Lobel).[37] "Fashions" relate to more structured and sustainable changes. The examples of fads are legion, and in matters of dress they can refer to, amongst other things, the use of accessories related to stars (Michael Jackson's glittery white glove), or the success of brands (Vuarnet sunglasses).[38] Fashions are more durable, they are stylistic changes that are slowly diffused by the fashion houses.

As explained by the American sociologist Diana Crane,[39] diffusion theories are central to the scientific study of fashion, but are characterized by a great diversity and a lack of consistency. The traditional Veblen–Simmel theory of fashion diffusion, going from the top to the bottom of society, is generally called the "trickle-down" approach,

that is to say that it is going down from upper to lower classes. More modern theories focus on the "up" and the "across" directions. In the case of "trickle-up" diffusion, fashion comes from the popular classes, and is adopted by the upper classes: for example, the goth style comes from working- and middle-class America and Europe, and is now a reference for some major luxury designers, such as Karl Lagerfeld. In the case of "trickle-across" diffusion, social groups belonging to the same social class exchange styles. For example, Hebdige notes the influence of "glam rock" on the punk movement, both working-class subcultures.[40]

A very important concept when one looks at the issue of diffusion in fashion is the existence of "cycles." The most famous study on the issue of cycles was conducted by the American anthropologist Alfred Kroeber,[41] who studied the evolution of eight measurements of the "evening dress" (four for length, four for width) during a long period, from 1844 to 1919. To define his measurements, he used the illustrations reproduced in three magazines: the *Petit Courier des Dames*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and *Vogue*. Kroeber showed that the average measurements of women's evening wear do not vary randomly: they depend on measurements from previous years, and do not fluctuate wildly. He then showed that the evolution of different measurements occurs in varying intervals (between 35 and 100 years): this means that a given measurement returns to a certain level after following a complete evolution of growth and decay. For Kroeber, these cycles in fashion are an illustration of the way social and cultural life – "civilization" – evolves in general.

The fact that trends are not purely random, but depend on what was done in previous years, has been unveiled in other fields. For example, the economic historian Dwight E. Robinson[42] studied the evolution of shaving and trimming

of the beard among English upper class men between 1842 and 1972. He distinguished five styles of facial hair ("sideburns alone," "sideburns and moustache in combination," "moustache alone," "beard," and "clean shavenness") and counted the number of portraits of men in the *Illustrated London News* exhibiting one specific type of facial hair. He showed that until 1885 the proportion of clean-shaven men declined steadily to a low of less than 20 percent, then increased steadily until the 1970s to represent over 80 percent of the population under consideration. Looking in detail at the different styles of facial hair, Robinson notes that sideburns dominated in the early nineteenth century, but that they were replaced by beards and moustaches in the twentieth century, before the clean-shaven style prevailed. He then concludes that "waves" of nearly one century characterize the evolution of different styles of facial hair, and a wave of nearly 170 years for the opposition clean-shaven/whiskers (all combinations of sideburns, moustaches, and beards).

In a less easily quantifiable domain than the length and width of skirts, or facial hair styles, American sociologist Stanley Lieberson[43] showed that this phenomenon of diffusion is also reflected in the allocation of names for newborns. The distribution of names attributed in a given year depends on the names given in the previous year. Moreover, names also depend on the social and cultural backgrounds of the families. An important point in the study of Stanley Lieberson is that if the choice of names depends on the sociocultural affiliation and socioeconomic status of the parents, it takes place outside of any institutional constraints, and presents, according to him, a "pure" case of diffusion, unconstrained by institutions. Cycles in fashion can thus be understood as a combination of two phenomena: the

existence of some "historical continuity,"[44] and the regular return of certain trends.

The idea that fashion is an "endogenous process," that is to say that it is autonomous and does not depend on external influences, seems well established by scholars such as Kroeber, Robinson and Lieberson. For example, Robinson[45] notes that the introduction of the safety razor by Gillette in the early twentieth century did not start the wave that saw the triumph of the clean shave, but rather accompanied it, and benefitted from it; in this case a fashion movement generated a technical innovation.

Yet, fashion is not completely autonomous and in many cases it is influenced by forces which are external or exogenous. What are these forces? There are plenty. First of all, there are all the customs, moral values, and legal frameworks already discussed, which limit the field of possibility in sartorial appearance. Then there is the organizational and institutional structure of the fashion industry, which oversees the production and selection of clothing styles. Finally, there are the cultural, economic, political, and social forces that determine change in fashion. This leads us to another important idea when we focus on the dissemination of styles: diffusion does not unfold in a social vacuum. If there is an endogenous logic of fashion it must be complemented by an exogenous perspective.

The notion that change in fashion depends on underlying societal forces is supported by much research. Psychologists George Bush and Perry London[46] provide a vivid example of the kind of influence that social change can have on dress fashion. Until the 1940s, boys' clothing in the United States depended on their age. Thus, young children wore shorts, prepubescent boys wore "knickers" or knickerbockers, a type of knee-length trousers, and adolescents wore trousers.

The authors note that the purchase of the first pair of trousers was a major event in the life of a young American. Yet "knickers" disappeared very suddenly during World War II. They explain this firstly by the transformation of the role of youth in American society and the disappearance of the "prepubescent" category. Secondly, they highlight the growing uniformity in American society that promoted the wearing of trousers. In all cases, the "knickers" disappeared with the changing role of adolescents in American society in the 1940s. Carol Robenstine and Eleanor Kelley,[47] however, emphasize the need to distinguish between different types of exogenous influences on fashion. They demonstrate that the institutional and political changes in France between 1715 and 1914 did not influence the stability and change of clothing styles, contrary to a popular belief that changes in clothing follow political changes. However, they do not exclude the importance of purely societal changes, such as changes in social roles like those highlighted by Bush and London in their study.

Thus, change in fashion is both endogenous and exogenous, that is to say it is due to mechanisms which are internal and external to fashion. The autonomy of fashion, which is based on endogenous change, is thus limited, but it exists nonetheless. Marie Antoinette and her *modiste* Rose Bertin helped fashion to move from a state of complete subordination to the whims of the ruling classes, to a partial autonomy in which dress styles follow their own logic.

Considerations on a few spectacular failures of the fashion industry

The image of fashion given in this book so far is that of a well-organized industry in which producers have

established coordination mechanisms that prevent them from major failures. Yet, if this picture remains generally correct, there are cases where the whole fashion industry, or some fashion houses in particular, have failed. Understanding the reasons for these failures may help shed light on some central mechanisms of fashion. Three examples of styles or designs that did not diffuse are described and analyzed: the "midi" dress in the 1970s, the miniskirt revisited in the 1970s and 1980s, and the "sarong" for men by Jean-Paul Gaultier, also in the 1980s.

Two American specialists in marketing, Fred D. Reynolds and William R. Darden,[48] trying to understand the reasons why consumers adopt or reject particular products, focused on the failure of the "midi" dress in the early 1970s in the United States (named "midi" because it was of mid-calf length). They relied on two surveys conducted in the American state of Georgia in 1970 and 1971 to support their conclusions on why the "midi" dress was rejected. They distinguished three stages in the process of adoption/rejection by consumers: first the phase of "awareness," in which consumers learn about the existence of a product; then the phase of "information," in which they learn about the characteristics of the product; and finally the "assessment" phase, in which they form their opinions and make a decision on whether to buy the product. They also distinguished two types of individuals, "opinion leaders" who forge their opinion through the specialized media, and the "nonleaders" who listen to both the opinion leaders and mass media. In the case of the "midi" dress, both groups agreed (the "nonleaders" following the "opinion leaders") that this type of dress was simply not feminine enough and was too old-fashioned, covering a large portion of the legs. It did not meet the aesthetic requirements of the early

1970s in the United States, marked by a desire to expose body parts that were previously covered.

The American sociologist Fred Davis[49] was very interested in the relationship between clothing and identity, especially through the prism of gender. Here the example of the miniskirt is relevant.[50] It was introduced by British designer Mary Quant in the early 1960s, and was popularized in Paris by the French designer André Courrèges in 1965. Its success was increased and amplified by the deep social and cultural movement that gave birth to the events of May 1968 and the so-called "sexual revolution." However, attempts to reintroduce the miniskirt in 1977 and 1987 ended up in a resounding defeat for the fashion industry, in particular because of the cultural sensitivity of these periods, which rejected all forms of extreme sexualization of the female body, which appears very clearly eroticized with the miniskirt. It was not until the early 1990s, and a far greater social acceptance of eroticism, that the miniskirt settled permanently in the landscape of Western dress.

Fred Davis analyzed, in the same vein as the relationship between clothing and gender identity, another famous case of stylistic failure, this time for a fashion house, Jean-Paul Gaultier.[51] In 1984, the French designer Jean-Paul Gaultier, already known for his avant-garde and iconoclastic designs, tried to introduce the sarong for men in the West. The sarong is a piece of rectangular cloth worn around the waist by men, women, and children in South and South-East Asia, in the Arabian Peninsula, and in the Horn of Africa. As explained by Fred Davis, it was a complete failure, received with indifference and sometimes hostility by both fashion professionals, and the general public. This failure can be explained by the resistance of French, and Western consumers in general, of the early

1980s to a style that erased the distinctions between genders. Jean-Paul Gaultier tried to refute the idea that he did not respect gender differences, but with no success.

The three examples discussed above illustrate in their respective historical and social contexts an important idea: if consumers are not ready to adopt a style or a design, it is likely to fail, despite the highly advanced marketing tools developed by the fashion industry. In short, a failure in a creative industry can be understood as a mismatch between the convergence of tastes that operates through the influence phenomena, and the industrial convergence that occurs through institutional market centralization.

Modeling imitation

The case of "fads" is different and has received separate treatment in economic and sociological research, although there is a lot of confusion among researchers about what constitutes a "fashion" and what constitutes a "craze," sometimes leading to hasty generalizations. Whereas the logic of fashion is rooted in the social, defined by specific social mechanisms, the logic of fads is rooted in randomness. While this does not mean that fads cannot be understood, it does mean that they cannot be predicted. The phenomena of imitation, already mentioned, can be understood as a conceptualization of fads. Recent work in mathematical sociology has attempted to model the diffusion of fads, for example the work of Matt Salganik, Peter Dodds, and Duncan Watts[52] at Columbia University in New York. This work shows the great interest that there is in associating mathematical modeling with experimentation. Their starting point is the traditional theory of imitation, as described by Le Bon, Simmel, Tarde, and Veblen.

The discussion about fads is enriched by two questions, first regarding the process by which imitation occurs, and second concerning the conditions governing its diffusion. The starting point of these questions is an approach called the "hypodermic needle," which posits a direct and univocal influence by the mass media on individuals, who accept the information communicated to them without challenging it.[53] This model has been criticized by American sociologists Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld,[54] who propose an alternative theory called the "two-step flow of communication." For them, the messages sent by the mass media to their audiences are filtered out and interpreted by "opinion leaders," who thus influence the opinions and decisions of their "primary group," that is to say their most immediate contacts.

This model itself has been recently criticized by Duncan Watts and Peter Dodds[55] in a research project based on computer simulations. They start with the idea defined by the American sociologist Mark Granovetter[56] that each individual is characterized by a "threshold" after which he or she can be influenced by his or her social environment. Specifically, Granovetter uses the example of riots, but his model can be extended to other types of collective behavior, such as the diffusion of styles in clothing. When does an individual choose to join in a riot or to adopt a certain style? It depends on his or her sensitivity to the actions of individuals who make up his or her environment. Thus, a person who is easily influenced will join a riot or adopt a style if only two or three people around him or her are involved in the riot or have adopted the style in question. However, an individual who is not easily influenced will join a riot or adopt a style only if a significant proportion of his or her entourage is involved in a riot or has adopted

the style in question. Watts and Dodds then show that the model of the two-step flow can sometimes be correct, but it is more the exception than the rule. In most cases, the diffusion of a craze occurs when individuals who are easily influenced sway other individuals who are easily influenced. Movie stars and famous people matter in fashion, but probably less than it is generally thought. In this case, what then is the role of designers, these "heroes" of contemporary fashion? We shall address this in the next section.

4

THE PERSONALIZATION PRINCIPLE – FASHION AND ITS PROFESSIONALS

THE EMPOWERMENT OF FASHION DESIGNERS

The founder of haute couture, and "contemporary" fashion in general, was Charles Frederick Worth (1825–1895), a British designer who opened his fashion house in Paris in the late 1850s. He introduced many innovations still in force in the early twenty-first century, such as biannual fashion shows, the use of living models, whom he called "*sosies*" (doubles), to present designs to clients, and a marketing strategy based on fashion magazines and mail order.[1]

For the French philosopher Gilles Lipovetsky,[2] Worth symbolizes the emergence of what he calls the "hundred years' fashion,"[3] which ran from 1860 to 1960, when mass consumption (which will be discussed at length later on) changed social life in general, and fashion in particular. The emergence of designers complements the previous principle of creative autonomization, by empowering the designer, and therefore allowing a personalization of fashion creations: "the move Worth made was crucial: it amounted to abolishing the millennial logic of subordination or collaboration between dressmaker and client in favor of a logic that honored the designer's independence."[4]

The centrality of the personalization principle in fashion can paradoxically be found in the story of Martin Margiela, a Belgian designer who created his own house in 1988 (Maison Martin Margiela), after spending a couple of years working with Jean-Paul Gaultier. Instead of trying to attract attention to his person, he decided to develop a "mystery designer" identity by never appearing on photographs and never giving interviews, instead sending faxes to answer journalists' questions.[5] By doing so, Margiela drew media and public attention to himself and his team, highlighting another interrelated feature of the fashion industry: design and creativity are the province of various professionals, not merely star designers. Today, Martin Margiela has left his own house, letting his team design the collections, with no known creative director.

"CREATING" FASHION

Fashion design as a "profession"

The fashion designer is the most central and iconic figure in the fashion industry as we know it today, leading to the emergence of a "fashion star system" that has taken a global dimension. Fashion designers remain prominent figures in the media and culture. For example, the house of Italian designer Gianni Versace (1946–1997) is one of Miami's main tourist attractions. Built in 1930 by a Standard Oil[6] heir, Casa Casuarina was acquired in 1992 by Versace and turned into a luxurious mansion, which can now be visited and hosts distinguished guests in rooms costing upwards of US$10,000 a night.[7] American designer Michael Kors (born 1959) is an important media figure,

but also one of the judges on the popular American reality television show, *Project Runway*, first aired on Bravo, then on Lifetime TV (starting in 2009), and hosted by the American model of German origin, Heidi Klum. In yet another domain, Paris-based German designer Karl Lagerfeld recently participated in a campaign to promote road safety and responsible driving where he wore a "retroreflective" yellow jacket, compulsory for roadside breakdowns in France since October 1, 2008, over a white shirt and spotless tuxedo (complete with bow tie), stating: "It's yellow, it's ugly, it goes with nothing, but it may save your life."[8] Finally, several movies inspired by the life of Coco Chanel reflect the international iconic status of the French *couturière*, for example *Coco Before Chanel* (2009), by Anne Fontaine, on the ascent of Coco Chanel, starring Audrey Tautou, or *Coco Chanel and Igor Stravinsky* (2009), by Jan Kounen, on Coco Chanel's relationships with Boy Capel and Igor Stravinsky, starring Anna Mouglalis.

The personalization of fashion, starting with Worth, has profoundly changed the structure of the industry by emphasizing the designer and his or her "label." However, this is not an isolated movement. Pierre Bourdieu[9] notes, for example, a similar trend in literature, with the emergence in the nineteenth century of the novelist as an emblematic figure of the literary field. Thus, there is a general tendency to see creativity not as a collective endeavor, but as an individual feat – although a fashion designer rarely creates alone.

This leads us to question the position of fashion designers from the perspective of the sociology of professions. The term "profession" is generally applied to a limited set of careers, including lawyers and doctors, and this use has influenced the construction of the concept in sociology.

It is customary to distinguish between the concepts of "profession" and "occupation," the latter having the more casual connotation of a job that does not require specific qualifications. Saying that fashion design is a profession in the sociological sense is thus loaded with meaning.

For the American sociologist Andrew Abbott, who wrote the most comprehensive and fruitful book on the topic, professions are "exclusive occupational groups applying somewhat abstract knowledge to particular cases."[10] The advantage of this simple definition of the concept of profession is that it is not based on external characteristics such as the existence of dedicated schools or professional associations to decide what type of work constitutes a profession. What is important from his point of view is, first, the process by which an occupation becomes a profession and, secondly, the interaction between the different professions that make up a professional system in a given industry.

A profession is characterized by a form of exclusivity, a central feature of couturiers and fashion designers. For couturiers, because the profession in France is regulated, exclusivity is, above all, legal. For fashion designers, if there are no legal restrictions on setting up a fashion house, a very strong competition exists and the barriers to entry are numerous, such as needing to obtain an internship at a distinctive house or a degree from a recognized school.

A profession is also characterized by the existence of abstract knowledge applied to specific cases. Abbott divides professional activities into three phases: diagnosis, inference, and treatment. These three phases can be found in fashion design: first, the diagnosis of stylistic trends; then the inference – the definition of ideas and themes of creation which meet these trends; and finally the

treatment – creating designs that respond to trends. There is a reversible movement in fashion, from the abstract to the concrete.

There is also a constant struggle fought by fashion designers to maintain and increase control of their "jurisdiction," that is to say their exclusive area of activity, not only in contention with other creative professionals, fashion managers, and investors, but also in dealing with customers who try to impose their tastes in terms of clothing. This idea that professions are in constant struggle to redefine their jurisdictions is central in Abbott's work, and, according to him, constitutes the heart of the dynamics of professions.

The emergence of designers as central players in fashion took place in two stages, first through the autonomization of the field of fashion, with the emblematic figure of Rose Bertin (see Chapter 3), and then through its personalization, starting with Charles Frederick Worth. The first victory was won against customers and clients who ceased to dictate their tastes to designers, the second against investors by imposing the label, or name of the fashion designer, as the ultimate value in the industry. This two-step conquest of professional autonomy has, however, been accompanied by a lot of infighting within the fashion industry.

Let us focus on the French example because of its centrality in the history of the industry. As reported by the French historian Alfred Franklin,[11] the creation and design of clothing was the subject of a struggle between "corporations" until their abolition in 1791.[12] Several periods can be distinguished in this "familial" struggle among corporations belonging to the same line of work. The first is from the late thirteenth century to 1675, which saw the progressive imposition of the monopoly of the guild of

tailors against other guilds in terms of designing clothing for men, women, and children. A 1660 statute states that a master tailor can only have one apprentice at any given time. It then details the modalities of the apprenticeship, which lasts for three years and is followed by a "*compagnonnage*" (a form of extensive and intensive mentoring) of the same duration, culminating in the achievement of the masterpiece that leads to the title of master.

The second period began in 1675 when the tailors' guild was threatened by the emergence of seamstresses, a new corporation that gradually extended its jurisdiction to areas related to clothing, including accessories. The recognition of seamstresses as a corporation is in itself revealing of the type of dynamics that drive professions. Before 1675, many ladies-in-waiting were illegally making clothes for noblewomen, prompting retaliation from the tailors (in the form of fines and forfeitures). Noblewomen, who generally greatly enjoyed the service provided by ladies-in-waiting turned seamstresses, brought the case to the king, who made a ruling that granted the seamstresses the right to create women's clothing, and granted them coats of arms, a necessary symbol for all corporations and guilds.[13] So it was by allying themselves with aristocrats that the seamstresses, until then a clandestine occupation, became a fully recognized corporation, the equivalent of a modern profession.

The third period began with the end of the corporations in 1791, and saw the phasing-out of both tailors and seamstresses. While tailors were able to retain their position in men's fashion, seamstresses were gradually replaced by milliners, who were themselves later replaced by designers. In sum, the reign of the fashion designer is the result of a long and intricate historical process, and fashion, like

many other industries, is a cemetery of forgotten professions and occupations.

The personalization principle, which manifests itself in dress fashion through an emphasis on couturiers and fashion designers in the production process, also finds echoes in other phenomena of fashions or trends. For example, the attribution of first names to newborn babies, although it is subject to passing fashions or trends, is thought of by parents as an eminently individual act. Similarly, the example of goths shows that identification with a subculture is first thought of by participants as a highly individual choice.

Some careers of contemporary fashion designers

To illustrate concretely the reality of careers in fashion, it is useful to analyze the career of a few well-known fashion designers, trying to cover various historical periods and geographical areas to identify possible similarities and differences among designers, according to their place of origin and their time. Here we briefly discuss the careers of Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel, Karl Lagerfeld, Giorgio Armani, Yves Saint Laurent, Calvin Klein, Jean-Paul Gaultier, and Stella McCartney. The sources used to reconstruct the various careers are fashion encyclopedias, to which readers are invited to turn for further information.[14]

Gabrielle Chanel, known as "Coco" Chanel (1883–1971), came from a very poor family, and spent much of her childhood in an orphanage. She learned sewing, and opened several shops in the 1910s. In the 1920s, she created the famous "little black dress." Her business flourished despite the Great Depression of 1929. Yet, while she employed thousands of people, she decided to suspend her

business at the beginning of World War II. Her comeback to Parisian fashion took place in 1954 when she reintroduced her iconic tweed suit.

Karl Lagerfeld was born in Hamburg in Germany in 1938. He left his native country for Paris in the early 1950s and worked as an apprentice to Pierre Balmain, and as an assistant to Jean Patou. In the early 1960s he began a long career as a freelance designer and worked for many prestigious companies, including Chloé and Fendi. In 1983, he joined Chanel and became its artistic director. He also continues to create models for Fendi and Lagerfeld Gallery, his own fashion house founded in 1998.

Giorgio Armani was born in 1934 in Italy. After studying medicine for a short time, he worked in the 1950s as a window dresser for the Italian department store La Rinascente. He then joined the house of Nino Cerruti in which he became an assistant in the mid-1960s. After several years as an independent designer, in 1974 he created his own fashion house with his friend Sergio Galeotti. He is now the head of one of the largest fashion houses in the world.

In 1957, at the young age of 21, Yves Saint Laurent (1936–2008) succeeded Christian Dior, after studying at the École de la Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne. He managed to save the sinking Maison Dior, but his relationship with the house came to an end because of military conscription, in the early 1960s. In 1962 he founded his own fashion house with his partner Pierre Bergé. Since 1999, the fashion house of Yves Saint Laurent has belonged to the Gucci Group, a subsidiary of PPR.

Calvin Klein, born in 1942, is originally from the Bronx in New York. He studied at the Fashion Institute of Technology without graduating, before working as a stylist for various stores in New York. After five years doing this, he

founded, with Barry K. Schwartz, his own fashion house, which is still one of the most influential in the world.

Jean-Paul Gaultier was born in 1952 in France. He soon began to send drawings to Pierre Cardin, who hired him when he was 18. After working as an assistant to Jean Esterel and Jean Patou, he created his own label in 1976 and joined Hermès as artistic director in 2003. He left the French house in 2010 to focus on his own label.

Stella McCartney was born in Lambeth (a district of South London) in 1971. The daughter of Paul McCartney of The Beatles, she started her fashion career very early, interning at Christian Lacroix at only 16, and studying at Central Saint Martins in London. She graduated in 1995 with a graduation collection that attracted a lot of attention, and started working as a creative director for French fashion house Chloé in 1997. In 2001, she resigned from Chloé and created her own brand under the umbrella of Gucci Group, the fashion arm of French conglomerate PPR.

These different careers, spanning more than a century and two continents, reveal a number of important developments regarding how fashion designers emerge. First, it is crucial to understand that there is no single career path in fashion. Thus, while designers such as Yves Saint Laurent were trained and mentored by more experienced fashion designers before creating their own fashion house, others such as Calvin Klein started their own business early, without much mentoring or training. Similarly, the role played by higher education varies. While English and American designers tend to study fashion and design in university settings, like Stella McCartney at Central Saint Martins in London and Calvin Klein at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York, French and Italian designers prefer practical training as apprentices with

experienced designers. This difference is tending to fade, however, and it seems that the Anglo-American type of professionalized career, based on short academic degrees, is spreading everywhere.

Fashioning a fashion designer career

Media attention is focused on a few designers who are presented as central players in fashion. However, not only are the designers the product of a long process of training and learning, but the act of creation itself is very rarely conducted by a single individual on his or her own. A multitude of actors, with different roles and functions, are hidden behind the great names of creation and design.[15]

The career of a fashion designer, at least since the emergence of haute couture in the nineteenth century, is organized in several steps. First of all, there is an initial training which can occur either in a professional framework, such as in the apprenticeship model of medieval corporations and guilds, or in a higher education setting. The former model of apprenticeship, which was notably the one followed by the great names of haute couture, Coco Chanel for example, now appears to be giving way to the latter model focused on higher education, in alignment with the contemporary requirements of professionalization. Yet in the case of fashion, the relatively short length of university-type courses leaves ample room and time for internships with professionals. Getting an internship at a famous house is, then, a major advantage for anyone who wants to start a career as a fashion designer.

After this first step, the creative career itself begins. Different ranks exist in the fashion world, although they are much less formalized than in other professions such as

public administration, academia, consulting, and investment banking. In general, there is a distinction between the roles of leadership and management at the top of the hierarchy, and the roles of support and implementation at the bottom. The collections of major fashion houses are run by artistic or creative directors, the terminology being flexible. Each director works with a team that consists of several designers (interns, assistants or associates) who handle specific aspects of the creative process, the division of labor varying from one house to another. However, labor can also be organized around product lines (men's or women's fashion), or around steps in the process of creation (documentary research on a given style, sketching...). The size of design teams varies depending on the size of the fashion house, but typically includes between four and 40 people.[16] It is also important to note that many designers work as independent (freelance) designers for collections or specific projects (for example, Karl Lagerfeld and Stella McCartney for H&M in 2004 and 2005, respectively), thus complementing the fashion houses' own teams.

The "own label" quandary

For designers, the founding of their own label is a consecration and achievement, even if not all decide to follow this specific path. Traditionally, fashion houses are named after their founder (or founders), as in the case of the house of Dior, which was founded by Christian Dior, but this is not always the case. Some designers found fashion houses that do not bear their name, a famous case being Comme des Garçons founded by Japanese designer Rei Kawakubo in 1969. Similarly, it can happen that teams of fashion designers create a common house with a label that

is not linked to their own names: for example, American designers Jack McCollough and Lazaro Hernandez used their mothers' maiden names to brand their own fashion house founded in 2002, Proenza Schouler.

Fashion designers can also work for several fashion houses simultaneously: for example, Karl Lagerfeld works for Chanel and Fendi as well as for his own brand. Very often there is also the thorny question of succession in a fashion house, when it survives the disappearance or cessation of activity of its founder. For example, after the death of Coco Chanel the iconic French house went through a long period of decline, until Karl Lagerfeld revived it (a case that will be discussed further below). Then there is the central creative tension between fashion designers, on the one hand, and fashion houses, on the other. This tension can be understood as a problem of stylistic and creative compatibility between a person (the designer) and an organization (the house).

For a designer, a crucial challenge is to position him or herself vis-à-vis the stylistic legacy of the house for which he or she designs. For the fashion house, specifically for its executives and shareholders, the main challenge is to preserve this heritage while not stifling the creativity of the designers who represent the brand. Several cases may serve to illustrate this tension. After the death of Coco Chanel, the famous fashion house fell into disarray. Only with the arrival of Karl Lagerfeld in the early 1980s did it return to the front row of Parisian fashion. What happens between a designer and his or her house (if he or she is not the founder) is the emergence of a hybrid identity. Today's Chanel is thus a hybrid between the very specific stylistic legacy of Coco Chanel (the little black dress, the Jackie Kennedy suit…) and Karl Lagerfeld's taste for goth influences and specific colors (black, navy blue, and white).

In the "official" documentary on Karl Lagerfeld, *Lagerfeld Confidential* (2007, directed by Rodolphe Marconi), Karl Lagerfeld himself talks of Chanel as a "sleeping beauty" he had to wake up. One of his most famous collections (fall / winter 2005–2006), shown in the documentary, perfectly illustrates the process of stylistic hybridization between Chanel and Lagerfeld. While the models are advancing on a pure white circular podium, all dressed in black, they seem very "Lagerfeld," and it seems that the designer has erased Chanel's legacy. However, once positioned on the podium, the models reveal, underneath their black coats, colorful tweed suits: a clear tribute to the pink Chanel suit worn by Jackie Kennedy.

The hybridization process does not always work, and a famous example is that of British designer Alexander McQueen at French house Givenchy, who said, in essence, that the stylistic legacy of the founder of the fashion house for which he worked was minor. His experience at Givenchy did not go well, as one may imagine, and he faced considerable criticism from fashion industry figures for disparaging the legacy of his house.

The question of the stylistic hybridization between designers and fashion houses helps to introduce the idea that all human activities depend on a broader set of social relations. This applies not only to economic activities, but also to artistic activities. Fashion, which is simultaneously art and industry, creation and commerce, therefore depends on two complementary, and sometimes antagonistic, environments.

Specifically, economic relations in the fashion industry depend on factors beyond supply and demand, and include a multitude of factors, including status and identity. This idea can be expressed as the "embeddedness" of economic activities in social relationships, and social networks.[17]

Creativity also depends on a multitude of social relations, as shown by American sociologist Elizabeth Currid:[18] the "creative types" cannot exist in isolation and need, in order to exist, a social substrate, for example urban settings, which are the privileged settings for creativity as they provide a high density of work opportunities; Howard Becker[19] calls them "art worlds" – a work of art, a painting, or a shirt, never occurs in an ivory tower.

AROUND THE FASHION DESIGNERS

The organization of fashion houses

To say that contemporary fashion is characterized by an emphasis on couturiers and fashion designers does not mean that in practice, the couturier or the designer is the only figure who counts in the industry. The personalization of fashion is a symbolic phenomenon that should not obscure the reality of labor in fashion.

Firstly, the work of the fashion designer is only possible because of economic and industrial activities that allow the production of clothing. Any fashion house is a profit-seeking organization, and is composed of different functions that can be found in any business, from human resources to accounting, through press relations and information technology. These functions are essential to the survival of fashion houses and cannot be ignored, but they are not specific to fashion and will therefore not be described in detail here. Note that in the case of fashion, they take a specific dimension to the extent that they must take into account the unpredictability and uncertainty that are inherent in any creative business.

As far as the production itself is concerned, the couturier or fashion designer rarely actually produces clothing. In the case of haute couture, it is the seamstresses who translate the visions of the couturier. In the case of ready-to-wear, it is the workers who, sometimes under very difficult conditions, transform inert materials such as cotton or silk into clothing. Then, even from a creative standpoint, fashion designers are surrounded by many other professionals, not only other designers, but also, for example, fashion models and fashion photographers. These two occupations should be discussed in detail because in the eyes of the public they are emblematic of fashion.

Fashion modeling is an essential occupation in fashion because it literally gives a face to designs. The occupation itself is recent: the beginning of modern modeling goes back to Marie Vernet, Charles Frederick Worth's wife and muse. She was the first to walk in a public setting to show her husband's creations. There were fashion models before that, but they worked exclusively in private settings, for selected clients.

The modeling occupation has evolved in the twentieth century, and cannot accurately be called a profession because of the very limited autonomy that characterizes its members. The prestige (or social status) of models is essentially derived from the prestige of the modeling agencies and fashion houses that employ them.[20] Indeed, the selection of models is drastic and consists of two stages. First, aspiring models are selected by model agencies, such as Ford Model Management (founded in 1946 in New York) and Elite Model Management (founded in 1972 in Paris). Afterwards, customers (fashion houses, magazines, photographers, and department stores) make a second selection from the models selected by the agencies.

As explained by American sociologist Ashley Mears,[21] while the fashion modeling career is one of the most desired and fantasized, it is also one of the hardest. The body shape and age of models are constantly monitored by agencies and designers: today, the ideal measurements are about 85-60-85 cm (roughly 34-24-34 in)[22] with a height of at least 173 cm (5 ft 8 in), and the age of models rarely exceeds 25 years. Also, the great uncertainty of beauty standards makes success uncertain. The modeling career is highly compartmentalized and hierarchical, as explained by American sociologists Gina Neff, Elizabeth Wissinger, and Sharon Zukin.[23] At the top of the pyramid are the models who have exclusive contracts with leading fashion houses or large cosmetic brands. Next, one can find the models walking for the shows of the big fashion houses, or posing for prestigious fashion magazines. At the bottom of the pyramid are the models posing for catalogs, and at trade shows (for example, car shows). The 1990s saw the emergence of the "supermodel:"

> Hell for leather, she is extreme. Intense. Modern. Even in her way of telling stories about herself, she has changed. Fashion models are no longer anonymous human hangers, cabin beauties with a faded charm. Stars seen on the covers of fashion magazines and coveted by photographers, they have become true inspirations.[24]

Names like Naomi Campbell, Cindy Crawford or Claudia Schiffer reached the firmament of celebrity and wealth. However, the celebrity of supermodels has experienced a slow decline since the turn of the twenty-first century, and they have been replaced by movie stars, although the possibility of their return has been talked about.[25]

Fashion photographers also play an important role in defining the image of fashion houses, and the diffusion of

stylistic changes from the industry to the consumers. The Swedish sociologist Patrik Aspers[26] wrote a book on fashion photographers in Sweden. Using the socioeconomic perspective developed by Harrison White, as outlined in Chapter 2, he shows that fashion photography is essentially an "associated production market" in which the producer of the images (the photographer) is working with the consumer (the fashion designer or the magazine editor) to produce a fashion image.

Within the occupation of fashion photographers, as with fashion models, there is a hierarchy among two distinct groups: "artistic" photographers and "commercial" photographers. While the former enjoy considerable autonomy in their creative activity, the latter follow the specific instructions of the clients, often producing catalogs. Aspers notes, however, that while art photographers have a higher prestige than their colleagues, they do not necessarily make a better living. Thus, Aspers confirms the desirability of using a socioeconomic rather than purely economic understanding of fashion and creative industries in general. Indeed, the world of fashion photography has shown that social considerations, such as social status or artistic prestige, can sometimes outweigh purely economic considerations, such as salary, in career choices made by professionals and workers in the creative industries.

Finally, we must emphasize that while milliners and dressmakers learned their craft and trade from more experienced professionals, a pattern known as "apprenticeship," the situation has changed today. An example of the apprenticeship model is the French couturier Paul Poiret (1879–1944) – the "King of Fashion" – who learned his trade with the couturiers Jacques Doucet (1853–1929) and Charles Frederick Worth, at the age of 17. Today, most

artists go through a series of academic courses, and design and fashion schools have gained increasing influence in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Fashion consists of many occupations and professions and each of them requires special training. Thus, a fashion designer will not follow the same academic background as a buyer or an accountant working in the fashion industry. It should be noted that many designers manage to move to fashion after studying other disciplines, for example Christian Dior studied political science at Sciences Po in Paris, while André Courrèges was an engineer. More generally, any training in the arts can be preparation for a career in fashion design.

In sum, the personalization of fashion does not mean that fashion depends exclusively on a few key people, but rather that a shared belief gives some individuals – namely, the fashion designers – a prominent place in the creative process. This belief in the ultimate value of the person or individual is a founding principle of modernity; the belief in the existence of isolated "geniuses" like Mozart is a prime example.[27] However, the main lesson from the sociology of culture and arts is that there are no isolated geniuses. Creativity is an inherently social process that involves many people, as is clear in the case of the fashion industry.

Fashion schools: International perspectives

Since an "official" ranking of fashion and design schools, which would help identify the most prominent ones, remains undone, a nonexhaustive selection of the major schools is proposed (classified according to the country in which they are located).

This overview, which leaves out a number of great institutions, is in no way a value judgment on the quality of schools. The information came from official documents available on the websites of these schools, but has been cross-checked as far as possible with more neutral academic sources, including the *Fashion Dictionary* edited by Guido Vergani.[28]

In the United States, three schools stand out: Parsons, the Fashion Institute of Technology, and the Rhode Island School of Design.

Parsons The New School for Design (Parsons for short), is located in New York. It was founded in 1896, and in 1970 joined the wider organization of The New School, based in New York City. There are about 6,000 students at all levels attending Parsons, and the school has opened three affiliated campuses: in France, the Dominican Republic, and Japan. Fashion is only one of several programs offered to students alongside other specialties, such as photography and architecture. Parsons is very active in the American media through television shows like *Project Runway*, which takes place on the schools premises, or *Tim Gunn's Guide to Style*, which is presented on Bravo, Tim Gunn being the program director for Parsons' fashion degrees between 2000 and 2007. Some of the biggest names in American fashion are Parsons alumni: Tom Ford, Marc Jacobs, Donna Karan, and Anna Sui.

The Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) in New York was founded in 1944 by a group of fashion professionals who fled the war in Europe. In 1951, FIT joined forces with the State University of New York, a public university in upstate New York. In 1959, the school moved to Seventh Avenue in Manhattan, the heart of New York's garment district. In fall 2008, there were 7,055 full-time students,

3,010 part-time. FIT counts among its alumni the renowned American designers Calvin Klein and Michael Kors.

The Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) was founded in 1877 in Providence, Rhode Island, in the United States. It has 2,000 students; American designer Nicole Miller is among its alumni.

In Europe, London, Paris, and Antwerp stand out as particularly important academic centers in the world of fashion and design.

Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design (often shortened to Central Saint Martins) in London is the result of the merger in 1989 between Saint Martins School of Art (founded in 1854) and the Central School of Arts and Crafts (founded in 1896). The school has trained fashion designers like John Galliano, Alexander McQueen, and Stella McCartney, who exercised a major influence on the London and Paris fashion scenes in the late 1990s and 2000s.

The Royal College of Art in London, founded in 1837, hosts a prestigious program in the field of fashion, which was established after World War II. The school has fewer than 1,000 students, in all sections. Among its alumni is the English designer Ossie Clark.

Middlesex University in London is a new university, founded in 1992. It grew by merging many small art and technical colleges in and around North London, the oldest of which was founded in 1878. It has around 20,000 students covering most academic disciplines. In the world of fashion, British designer Vivienne Westwood was a former student.

The École de la Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne in Paris was founded in 1927. Numerous influential artists were trained there, for example Yves Saint Laurent.

Esmod was founded in 1841 in Paris. The school now has the unique feature of being present in several French cities (Paris, Bordeaux, Lyon, Rennes, and Roubaix) and many international cities (for example Berlin, Moscow, and Tokyo). Alumni include French designers Éric Bergère and Franck Sorbier.

The Institut Français de la Mode (IFM), or "French Fashion Institute," was founded in 1986 and is the result of collaboration between government and the French fashion industry. The IFM offers a wide array of courses, but is characterized by the fact that it focuses as much on design as on management. Since 2006, the IFM has been a member of the Conférence des Grandes Écoles, an association of all the elite higher education institutions in France.

The Koninklijke Academie voor Schone Kunsten van Antwerpen (Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp) in Belgium was founded in 1663. The disciplines that are taught in this school go beyond fashion. Among the many famous designers who have graduated from the Royal Academy are the "Antwerp Six," a fashion collective composed of Walter Van Beirendonck, Dirk Bikkembergs, Ann Demeulemeester, Dries Van Noten, Dirk Van Saene, and Marina Yee who moved to London in the late 1980s to showcase their revolutionary designs.

In Asia, only Tokyo hosts a fashion and design school with an undisputed international reputation. The Bunka Fashion College in Tokyo, founded in 1919, has trained designers such as Kenzo Takada, Junya Watanabe, and Yohji Yamamoto, who formed the spearhead of the "Japanese Revolution in Paris Fashion."[29]

A first striking fact that emerges from reading these quick school profiles is how centralized higher education in fashion is. The best schools are located in a very limited

number of countries, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, and Japan. This centralization corresponds to the centralization already shown for the creation of designs and the financial domination of the sector, with the notable exception of Italy. A second striking fact is that few of these schools are linked to "traditional" universities, which reinforces the feeling of isolation of fashion as a career, but highlights its autonomy as a field.

5

THE SYMBOLIZATION PRINCIPLE – THE POWER OF SIGNS AND MEANINGS

FASHION, A SYSTEM OF BRANDS?

The fifth principle of fashion is an extension of the previous one – the personalization principle – because it generalizes the power of personal labels by embodying them in brands and emancipating them from the fashion designers as people. While the type of fashion created by Charles Frederick Worth was centered on specific individuals, fashion designers, the fashion that emerged after World War II was brand-centric, thus separating and decoupling creations from their creators.

It is difficult to define an exact time when this transition took place, but it seems that Paul Poiret, the "King of Fashion" – also once called by *Vogue* "the Prophet of Simplicity"[1] – was a forerunner of this industry shift. As early as 1911, he created a line of cosmetics and fragrances with a specific brand, Parfums de Rosine,[2] and in the following years signed a series of licensing agreements with American partners, largely in order to deal with the endemic copying of European designs by the American apparel industry. However, the main objective of Poiret was to reaffirm the preeminence of the designer as a person, the author of his creations, and his initiatives were mostly an expression

of the personalization movement evoked in the previous chapter (Chapter 4). In a way, it was merely incidental that he created one of fashion's first autonomous brands.

The industry had to wait for the emergence of ready-to-wear fashion in Paris to see brands assert their power on the world of fashion.[3] In 1966, Yves Saint Laurent was the first to launch a ready-to-wear brand derived from his haute couture fashion house – Yves Saint Laurent Rive Gauche – which was distributed through a network of franchised stores. Additionally, in a move that was previously unthinkable in the world of haute couture, the production of clothing was given to an outside producer, C. Mendes. A second line, Variation, was established in 1982.[4] The commercial success movement initiated by Saint Laurent was facilitated by a general decrease in production costs, thanks to the PBS process discussed in Chapter 2, and an increase in living standards amongst the population.

Fashion has now become a system of brands, not always related to the names of designers as individuals, which compete to attract the attention of a customer base that is increasingly broader – geographically, socially, and culturally.

BUILDING FASHION BRANDS

Saying that fashion has become a system of brands does not mean that questions of production and distribution should be ignored, or that brands have become the only element that should be considered in the strategy and organization of fashion houses. New principles do not erase older principles, but they can add a layer of complexity to the existing system.

Indeed, the very survival of a fashion house as a profit-oriented company depends on understanding, and taking into account, strategic and organizational factors. However, the relationship between fashion houses and their clients (which is mostly based on marketing and communication) tends to "hide" strategic and organizational elements from the public eye; it is the brand that communicates the signals that persuade consumers to make purchasing decisions.

In other words, the economic reality of fashion houses is of little or no interest to customers, it is the imaginary and symbolic universe of the brand that provides an interface between the worlds of production and consumption. Fashion, as a system of brands, is a system of signs and meanings. Yet the stylistic and semiotic dimension of fashion goes beyond brands, for example into clothing as it is used in interactions among individuals or groups. This idea has led to the development of much research attempting to capture the specificity of the "meaning" of fashion. A linguistic perspective, close to, but distinct from, sociology can help shed light on the signs produced by the fashion system.

Fashion according to Barthes

The French semiologist Roland Barthes was the first to suggest that fashion is a coherent system of signs and meanings, which can be analyzed using tools typically used for the analysis of language.[5] Barthes' analysis focuses on fashion as written and described in fashion magazines, not on the actual clothes themselves. It uses a corpus of texts from two fashion magazines of special significance in his cultural and historical context, *Elle* (founded in France in

1945) and *Le Jardin des Modes* (published in France between 1922 and 1997).

His theoretical perspective is based on three central concepts that are borrowed from so-called "Saussurean" linguistics, from Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913): the Signified, the Signifier, and the Sign.[6] "Signifieds" are concepts or representations (not the "real" things as such). "Signifiers" are words that are created to identify the concepts (the signifieds). "Signs" link signifiers and signifieds, forming a system because they only have meaning in relation to other signs. In the case of fashion, due to its constant evolution, there are several levels of signifier and signified, and the dynamics of signs are very specific.

Barthes distinguishes two sets of systems – ensembles A and B, sometimes called "A- and B-ensembles," respectively – that connect signifiers and signifieds. These two systems are shown in Figures 2 and 3.

An example of "ensemble A," as shown in Figure 2, and suggested by Barthes himself, is the caption "*Les imprimés triomphent aux Courses*" ("Prints are winning at the races").[7] In this case, four levels of analysis can be distinguished.

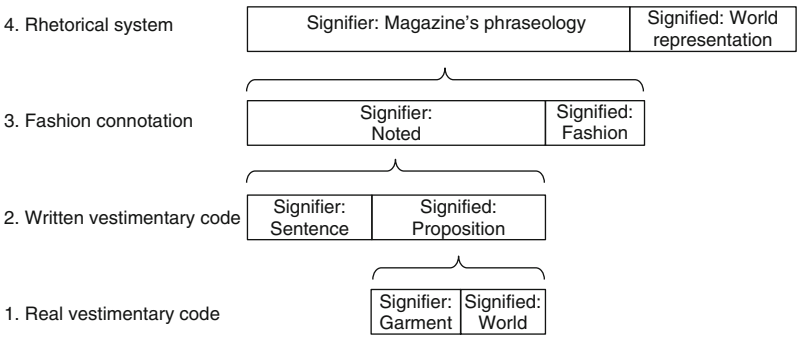

Figure 2 Barthes' A-ensemble[9]

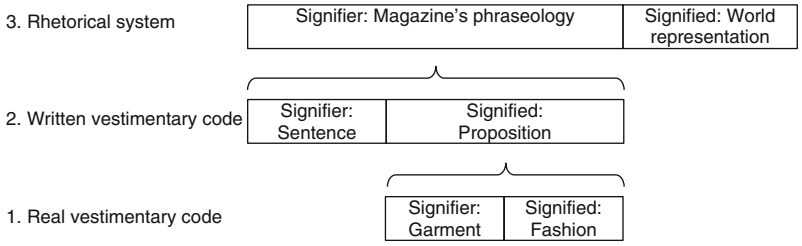

Figure 3 Barthes' B-ensemble[10]

In the first level, the "real vestimentary code," "garment" is the signifier of the world, which is the signified, and thus "prints" means "races" (horse races in this case). The second level, the "*written* vestimentary code," is a first transformation made by the fashion magazines. The "sentence" is the set of concepts contained in the proposition ("prints," "races"). The third level is the "fashion connotation." Indeed, the wearing of "prints" (which is "*winning* at the races") is a fashion trend, and so it is "fashion" ("*Mode*" capitalized in the general sense by Barthes) which is signified by the "prints." Finally, the fourth level of analysis is the "rhetorical system" reflecting the "world representation" of the magazine, the idea of fashion, style, chic, as a conflict and social competition through the idea of "winning at the races."

In Figure 3, we can see a representation of what Barthes called an ensemble B. This ensemble is simpler than the previous one in that it contains only three levels of analysis. Barthes' suggested statement which corresponds to this ensemble is "*Que toute femme raccourcisse sa jupe jusqu'au ras du genou, adopte les carreaux fondus et marche en escarpins bicolores*" (Women will shorten skirts to the knee, adopt pastel checks, and wear two-toned pumps.)[8] In this case, in the first level the signified is no longer the world (of the

"races") but fashion itself, the magazine is describing current trends. That is why the level of "fashion connotation" disappears. In contrast, a connotation is still present in the case of the "rhetorical system" since the sentence of the magazine says that skirts shortened "to the knee," "pastel checks," and "two-toned pumps" constitute fashion, leaving no room for discussion.

Barthes' theoretical approach is very rich and complex, but the main idea that emerges from both ensembles of semiotic systems is that magazines create their own system of signs, which is, to some extent, independent of actual clothing. Thus, sartorial fashion is a social formation in which the symbolic level is relatively autonomous. However, we ought also to note an important limitation of Barthes' approach, acknowledged by him: clothes as physical objects are a system of meanings and signs that is not necessarily mediated by fashion magazines. For example, jeans suggest an informal atmosphere while suits signify a formal atmosphere, at least in the twenty-first-century West. These meanings are relatively stable and widely known. However, as pointed out by Fred Davis,[11] dress is a code that is often ambiguous, contextual, and "undercoded." In other words, if jeans often denote informality, their full meaning varies from one concrete situation to another. For example, their price or brand can be an indicator of conspicuous consumption, blurring their informal dimension and making them ambiguous, a signal of high social status. Similarly, jeans can denote revolt, or youth, or sometimes conformity.

Before looking at the process that leads to the emergence of brands, let us have a look at this "all-encompassing concept."[12] The concept of brand, like most major concepts in the social sciences, has been defined in various ways.

There is, however, one particularly fruitful approach to understanding the fashion industry, which sees the brand as an entity with an "identity"[13] or a "personality."[14] This approach is taken by French marketing specialist Jean-Noel Kapferer, and American marketing specialist Jennifer Aaker. Despite the similarities between their two approaches, there are some differences that should be noted.

While for Kapferer a brand identity must be understood through six cultural dimensions, Aaker's brand personality is constituted of attributes similar to those of human beings. The approach of Kapferer is sociological, while that of Aaker is psychological. They are not antithetical, however, since they are both interested in two important complementary aspects of brands: they are part of broader social contexts that give them their meaning; and they are relatively autonomous actors in the socioeconomic conditions to which they belong.

The construction of brands in fashion and luxury is the object of much attention on the part of the players in these industries. The exercise, however, is far from being easy, and even large groups have faced difficulties when they have tried to build a new brand. For example, while Bernard Arnault, CEO of French luxury conglomerate LVMH had already acquired many well-known fashion houses such as Donna Karan and Marc Jacobs, in 1987 he facilitated the creation of Christian Lacroix to enhance LVMH's brand portfolio.[15] Despite the presence of a very talented designer, and the financial and operational support of a powerful group, the attempt proved a financial failure, and Christian Lacroix never became profitable. In 2005, Bernard Arnault decided to sell the brand to Falic Group and, despite repeated attempts to turn it around, the fashion house ended up being declared bankrupt in 2009.[16]

Beyond the construction of brands, their day-to-day management is also complex. As explained by sociologist Jean-Claude Thoenig and marketing specialist Charles Waldman,[17] a brand that lasts is a brand that manages to create a pertinent social space around it. For example, the Italian fashion house Benetton has created its own space around colored sweaters at reasonable prices, and a defense of political equality and civil rights. It is essential for a brand to create a meaningful social space.

This social space can be structured in many ways, for example, around a national identity, or around the personality of a charismatic leader. National identity is key in the case of Italian brands, which always emphasize the quality and prestige of being "made in Italy."[18] In a different geographic context, Hong Kong brand Shanghai Tang is an excellent example of how national identity can play out in the construction of a brand narrative. Shanghai Tang was created in 1994 by David Tang, who then sold a controlling stake to luxury and fashion empire Compagnie Financière Richemont in 1998. Shanghai Tang was created in order to revive and modernize traditional Chinese styles, not to merge Western and Asian styles. This is why Shanghai Tang tries to promote Chinese designs such as the Mandarin collar, traditional dresses such as the *qípáo*, and the use of Chinese calligraphy.[19] In the case of Shanghai Tang, which is now competing all over the world, and occupies a unique niche, brand identity is anchored in Chinese national identity.

French brand Vicomte A. was founded in 2005 by Arthur de Soultrait.[20] This brand, which competes in the crowded sportswear market against global leaders such as Lacoste, Tommy Hilfiger, Polo Ralph Lauren, and Gant, tries to convey an aristocratic image – its founder is a genuine French

aristocrat – with a hint of irony, for example with the use of original colors such as fuchsia. Beyond this "semantic" positioning, Vicomte A. has also tried to connect with celebrities that could enhance its image, for example Pippa Middleton, sister of the Duchess of Cambridge, Kate Middleton. In this case, the identity of the brand is derived from the identity of its founder who, for once, is not a fashion designer.

Positioning a brand in a social and semantic space can be schematically conceived under two dimensions: a vertical dimension that is linked to the status groups of customers, and a horizontal dimension that is related to lifestyles. The first dimension is hierarchical, the second is not. In marketing, the development of a brand is called "extension," and occurs along one of the two dimensions aforementioned, either as a "displacement" of the existing brand, or through the creation of new subbrands.[21]

The Italian brand Armani can help demonstrate the issue of brand positioning, and define some central issues.[22] Armani is a fashion house traditionally positioned in the high-end segment of fashion, through subbrands such as Armani Privé (in haute couture) or Giorgio Armani (in high-end ready-to-wear). Subbrands Emporio Armani and Armani Exchange, however, are vertical extensions of the original brands to the midmarket, Emporio Armani being positioned in a higher price range than Armani Exchange. The Armani Jeans and Armani Junior brands are horizontal extensions as they relate to different groups of consumers distinguished by type of clothing and age, not status and price.

The case of Armani Exchange illustrates the dangers of extending a brand vertically. While the reference to the Armani brand for the market introduction of the subbrand

Armani Exchange did attract new consumers quickly, the entry of Armani into the midrange market, at low prices, had a devastating effect on the main brand. This negative feedback led the group to rebrand Armani Exchange as A|X, thus making the reference to Armani secondary and less legible. Brand extensions have unpredictable effects, and, given the importance of branding in the fashion and luxury industries, this type of marketing tool should be handled with caution.

The construction of brands also occurs through the types of retail channels chosen by fashion houses, the fashion industry often being a laboratory for the shifts that happen in the retail world in general.[23]

Three types of retailers can be distinguished.[24] First, there are "department stores" that offer a wide range of products in many areas, including clothing and furniture. The first department store, Au Bon Marché, was opened in Paris in the mid-nineteenth century by Aristide Boucicault (1810–1877). The name became Le Bon Marché in 1987. Department stores are often major tourist attractions in cities where they are located, such as Le Printemps and Galeries Lafayette on Boulevard Haussmann in Paris, Bergdorf Goodman or Saks Fifth Avenue on Fifth Avenue in New York, or Harrods on Brompton Road, and Selfridges on Oxford Street, in London. Department stores are divided into sections organized around specialized products and often have affiliated stores in addition to their main store (flagship store).

The second type of retailers includes all "specialized" stores. They can be specialty stores selling clothing, or objects, made by multiple designers, like L'Éclaireur or Colette in Paris, or stores affiliated to a single brand, like the many boutiques situated on Avenue Montaigne and

Rue du Faubourg Saint Honoré in Paris. In the latter case, the shops are either managed and owned directly by the fashion houses, or managed under a licensing agreement. In the latter case, the brands recover, against a various number of services, a portion of the profits earned by the franchisees.

The third group consists of retailers in the so-called "discount" or "mass-market." This group, which includes supermarkets, is characterized by the fact that the products are sold at prices below the recommended retail price.[25]

The boundaries between these three types of retailers are sometimes blurred: it frequently happens that department stores rent out space to fashion companies, or specialized stores diversify their offerings. Similarly, discount shops often adopt a method of organization very similar to department stores. Finally, department stores, through discount sales, can sometimes offer prices comparable to those of their low-price competitors. It must also be noted that malls have become a significant part of the retail experience, mostly in international locations such as Las Vegas, Dubai, and Singapore.[26]

There are other distribution channels beyond the "physical" (or bricks-and-mortar) sites described previously. Historically, peddlers have constituted a very important source for dissemination of styles and fashions in Europe and the United States. They have now lost much of their importance in industrialized countries, but they still play a role in industrializing countries.

Changes in transportation and the media have led to the development of various new sales channels.

First, traditional mail order has become an important economic activity since the founding of Montgomery Ward in the United States in 1872. The emergence of

cable television then led to the development of TV or cable shopping. For example, in the United States, there are powerful networks such as the Home Shopping Network (HSN) (launched in 1982) and QVC (launched in 1986), which are generalists, or the Liquidation Channel (launched in 2008) specializing in the sale of jewelry and accessories.

Finally, the impact of the Internet on the distribution of clothing and related products is important, though not as marked as in other industries. Thus, although in 2006 in the United States, the value of online sales of clothing exceeded that of computers, only 8 percent of garments were sold on the Internet, against 41 percent of computers.[27] Similarly, while the implementation of broadband Internet has led to a profound reorganization of the music and film industries around digital content, this is not the case for clothing. One may recall here the failure of many start-ups that have attempted to distribute clothing on the Internet, such as Boo.com, founded in the United Kingdom in 1999 by Swedish entrepreneurs Ernst Malmsten and Kajsa Leander. The reasons for this failure, and many others, are much debated, but in the apparel industry the relationship with the products is very important, and is lacking when buying online. The construction of a "vestimentary identity" takes place during the interactions between the client and salespeople, as explained by the sociologist Henri Péretz.[28] The salesperson/client interaction is coupled with an interaction between a place and its clientele. Online fashion retailing is still, in 2011, in its infancy, but innovative initiatives are trying to change the business model of the industry, for example by connecting customers directly to producers (fashion designers) via online platforms, and thus bypassing intermediaries.[29]

Some authors propose characterizing the changes that affect retail in fashion (and beyond) as "lean retailing." Lean retailing, which appeared in the early 1980s and continues today, being characterized by a number of technical and organizational innovations (for example, bar codes that allow the efficient management of inventories, and a redefinition of production methods for a faster response to changes in demand).

THE CONSTRUCTION OF CONSUMERS?

What role for the media?

Most consumers still do not have direct access to the designs of the most influential designers. The presentation of collections to the public is fairly recent, French *couturière* Jeanne Paquin is often credited with opening fashion shows to the general public rather than reserving them for private clients.

The audience that is lucky enough to directly attend fashion shows is handpicked. It usually consists of fashion professionals, especially the buyers from major clothing distribution channels (department stores etc.), and fashion journalists. Media and arts celebrities play an important role during fashion shows: their visible presence in the front rows is an affirmation of the status and prestige of the brands and the designers who managed to persuade them to attend.

The general public has access to the collections in an indirect way through the media; historically newspapers and magazines, more recently television, and today the Internet. The media is an interface, or filter, between designers

and end-consumers, who buy the clothes. As explained by the British anthropologist Brian Moeran,[30] fashion magazines, and media associated with them, are the:

> apostles who spread the word, who portray and interpret designers' collections each season – giving them a meaning that readers can cling to, removing all the strangeness that accompanies novelty, reconciling what at first glance may be confusing with the already familiar and thereby creating continuity between previous, present and future trends.[31]

Not only do they inform the widest audience possible on the latest innovations of designers, but they also legitimize fashion by "educating" the public, explaining to customers why fashion is important, why it is worth buying new clothes and discarding old clothes that can still be used.

The role of the fashion media is thus twofold: first, a diffusion of information that enables producers to be connected to consumers; second, a cultural shaping of fashion that allows it to be perceived as a legitimate activity. The main fashion medium is still magazines, printed and online. Among all the fashion magazines, *Vogue* is probably the most influential. Its power as a fashion and style magazine lies in its unmatched international coverage. However, other magazines are also highly influential. In 2008, the business magazine *Forbes* a convincing ranking of fashion editors' influence in the American market based on nine criteria.[32] According to this ranking the most influential fashion editors were: 1. Cindi Leive (*Glamour*); 2. (tie). Anna Wintour (*Vogue*) and Roberta Myers (*Elle*); 3. Kate White (*Cosmopolitan*); 4. Charla Lawhon (*In Style*). The ranking did not include fashion journalists, but some, such as *International Herald Tribune*'s Suzy Menkes,

have exerted a long-lasting influence on the industry, which must be acknowledged.[33] Blogs and websites specializing in the monitoring and dissemination of stylistic trends, such as *The Sartorialist*,[34] created in 2005 by American Scott Schuman, also enable consumers worldwide to have an increasingly global overview of current fashions and trends.

Fashion according to *Vogue*

Vogue is one of the most influential fashion and style magazines in the world. Created in 1892 in the United States by Arthur B. Turnure, *Vogue* was purchased in 1909 by Condé W. Nast. There are now many international editions, such as the British edition (founded in 1916), the French (1921), the Italian (1965), the Chinese (2005), and the Indian (2007), amongst many others (Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Korea, Spain, Greece, Japan, Mexico, Portugal, Russia, Taiwan, and an edition for "Latin America"). There are also versions developed for specialized audiences, such as *Teen Vogue* (2001) and *Men's Vogue* (2005).

The editorial structure of *Vogue* is complex, but each edition has a national editor of its own. Anna Wintour has been editor-in-chief of the American edition since 1988; Alexandra Shulman has been head of the British edition since 1992; Franca Sozzani head of *Vogue Italia* since 1988. Emmanuelle Alt recently replaced Carine Roitfeld as head of the French edition. Roitfeld had held the position since 2001. Each editor-in-chief infuses their edition of *Vogue* with their own style. For example, while the American and British editions are thought to take a broad look at fashion, the Italian and French editions are considered edgier: *Vogue Italia* is seen as being "rebellious" and arty, like its editor-in-chief,[35] while

the French *Vogue* was known for fostering the "porno-chic" aesthetic under Roitfeld's reign.[36] In 2009, the American edition of *Vogue* is the most widely read with a circulation of over 1.2 million readers, while the British edition has a circulation of around 220,000, *Vogue Italia* roughly 140,000, and the French edition about 133,000.[37] All of them, of course, have a massive presence on the Internet, but it is the American edition which serves as the international platform with Style.com.

Vogue's perspective on fashion constitutes a valuable empirical source, because it is both a unique window and a major influence on its time. The following excerpts are from the French edition of *Vogue* and offer a perspective on the history of fashion in France since the end of World War II. First, the Parisian fashion industry, like the rest of the country, was exhausted by the war; the British fashion industry, though less affected than French fashion, was also weakened by the war because of numerous restrictions regarding fabrics. This decline of France and the United Kingdom allowed the American fashion industry to get ahead. Thus, the first postwar French *Vogue* sets the tone of a more "Anglo-Saxon" fashion that was, nonetheless, preparing for the return of Paris among its peers:

> But if "French Vogue" has not been able to reflect on Parisian life during those four long years, "American Vogue" and "English Vogue" could, each in their country, keep the top spot among women's magazines. Starting in October '44, our sister publications devoted many pages to a rejuvenated France.[38]

The "new look" of Christian Dior in 1947 marks the dazzling, and somewhat unexpected, return of French haute couture to the center stage of fashion. By the early 1950s,

Paris had returned to a prominent place, and attracted professionals from around the world:

> The word "collection" is a magnet that, twice a year, gathers in Paris 445 journalists and correspondents from France and abroad. Let us reduce this magic word to numbers and see what realities it hides under a frivolous aspect.
>
> The collections attract 2,000 buyers from 35 nations: this international assembly would fill the vast Opera nave up to its arches.
>
> Collections determine the creation of 10,000 models, enough to dress a city the size of Monte Carlo.
>
> The collections are the result of the work of 60 couture houses: put together in a line, they would cover two and a half times the length of the Rue de la Paix.
>
> The collections, in order to be artfully presented, require that the fashion houses find 300 exceptional beauties who would serve as models. Those pinups would constitute three companies of paratroopers.
>
> The collections provide work to 6,500 employees, seamstresses, and dressmakers: it would take five Le Corbusier's *Cités Radieuses* (radiant cities) to accommodate them all.
>
> The collections ensure that 200,000 meters of fabric are taken into sewing workshops, enough to cover the road from Paris to Deauville.
>
> And finally, the collections of a given season represent a total investment of 1 billion 500 million [French francs] for all the fashion houses in Paris, as much capital as is necessary in France to complete the drilling of an oil well.
>
> This figure seems convincing enough to convey without additional support the significance of the couture event in French life.[39]

The 1960s was the decade that witnessed the emergence of ready-to-wear fashion as an economic activity, which replaced – slowly but surely – haute couture as the driving force of fashion. The acceptance of ready-to-wear in France was not easy, because of the bad reputation of its

predecessor, *confection*, and the American origin of the term ("*prêt-à-porter*" is a translation of "ready-to-wear"). *Vogue* played a central role in the promotion of ready-to-wear:

> Not custom-made (some minor alterations, possibly). These are ready-to-wear models, but carefully selected. Choose one of them and, certainly, someone will ask you where you found it, "made by whom?" This is a test that is quite telling. They evoke the style of Chanel, the style of Givenchy, the style of Saint Laurent... Does this mean that they are nothing more than just a reflection of haute couture? Not at all. But they can adapt, often rationalize, lines, key details that constitute fashion and that, in less than a month, you will find in the streets.[40]

While France struggled to make the transition to ready-to-wear fashion (it was not fully accepted until the 1970s), the United Kingdom and Italy easily adopted this new democratized and mass-market economy of fashion:

> The French are horrendous. It was announced everywhere that Paris was over, that fashion was created elsewhere... and boom! A revolution took place, and fashion resumed its usual way of being made in Paris. Ready-to-wear, having reached adulthood, the age of triumph, has just proved its international impact (...) This ready-to-wear, born more than twenty years ago, does not only shine in junior fashion. It has reached its majority. Here it conquers, and so brilliantly, the largest market, the most difficult, women's wear.[41]

In the early 1980s Paris returned to the front stage after the difficult transition from haute couture to ready-to-wear. Yet the Parisian fashion industry, far from ignoring its past, reestablished some prestigious affiliations with its origins:

> Our heritage is not only made of ancient stones, and if this issue [of *Vogue*] opens up with the splendors of Versailles,

> it is because haute couture feels at home there (...) Each designer has obviously worked hard for his or her clients. Hence a dream-like wardrobe, human, wearable, with a wide range of choices similar to that of Marie Antoinette who, every morning, chose from her sample albums, from among two or three thousand possibilities, her dresses for the day. Today's queens have *Vogue*...[42]

The current regime of French fashion, with its mix of haute couture and ready-to-wear, and its fashion shows centering on the Louvre, dates back to the early 1980s. A system of negotiated coordination has been established at the highest level, between public authorities (the French Ministries of Culture and Economy), large fashion conglomerates, and the various professional associations, to defend the position of Paris in the fashion industry. Similar movements have occurred in other cities, not only the traditional fashion capitals but also potential new entrants.

6

THE IMPERIALIZATION PRINCIPLE – HOW FASHION BECAME SYSTEMATIZED

THE ENDLESS EXPANSION OF FASHION?

Fashion is a total social fact, a phenomenon where most spheres of social life intersect. It navigates between imitation and distinction, individuals and society. It is a set of institutions that produce garments laden with meanings, which individuals and groups use for infusing their identities with more or less conscious messages. The "fashion form"[1] is constituted of permanent change and semiotic diversity. It constantly brings newness to the world and tolerates diversity, thriving particularly well in modern liberal democracies and market economies, but requiring neither the former nor the latter to exist.

During the twentieth century, the position of fashion in industrialized societies and elsewhere changed dramatically. Initially a morally condemned activity, it became a model for many industries, such as the automotive industry, which now plays as never before with original colors and shapes. It has also become an indispensable reference for all forms of culture, and many other creative industries. Consider television series like *Sex and the City* and *Ugly Betty*, films such as *Zoolander* (Ben Stiller, 2001) and *Brüno* (Larry Charles, 2009), and books like *Glamorama*

(Bret Easton Ellis, 1998) and *The Devil Wears Prada* (Lauren Weisberger, 2003). One can then talk about an "imperialization" of fashion, this process and principle being characterized by a movement that is both organizational, with the emergence of conglomerates in the luxury and fashion industries, and societal, with the extension of a dynamics specific to fashion into other industries and spheres of activity.

The imperialization principle is the most recently developed principle of fashion, and maybe the last one. The imperial form of fashion completes Barthes' theory, and his "fashion system."[2] However, when Barthes defined his system of fashion he was focused on the semantic and linguistic side of the industry.[3] It is with fashion conglomerates and the ever-expanding fashion form that fashion becomes completely systematized, incorporating not only meanings (as in Barthes' semiotic analysis), but also organizational and socioeconomic relations (for example, as in the way fashion conglomerates and their subsidiaries are interrelated).

THE EMPIRES OF FASHION

Identifying the empires

The concept of an "empire" is regularly used in the business world. It is applied to large industrial groups, with operations in various industries and geographical locations. In this sense, business empires, just like political empires, are large organizations characterized by great diversity.[4] In the case of fashion, the metaphor of the "empire" is often used to refer specifically to two companies, PPR (formerly

Pinault-Printemps-Redoute) and LVMH (Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton), although smaller conglomerates such as Spain's Puig could also qualify for the title of "fashion empire."

Table 5 lists the main companies in the fashion and luxury industries, ordered by turnover. A number of precautions need to be taken before analyzing this list. First, one distinctive aspect of the luxury and fashion sector is that many large companies are not publicly traded – Chanel or Versace, for instance. This means that little financial information is available on these companies, making it difficult to establish rankings. In the case of multibrand groups, such as LVMH, PPR, and Puig, financial information is available, but mostly at an aggregated level, that is to say at the level of the conglomerate rather than brand level. This makes comparisons between brands difficult.

One conclusion that can be drawn from this overview is that five types of organization stand out in this sector. First, there are multibrand empires such as PPR and LVMH. Again, however, multibrand strategies are not the prerogative of the two French firms: some smaller groups like the American Phillips-Van Heusen Corporation (which owns, among other brands, Calvin Klein) have also adopted this strategy. Second, there are the large corporations, which are mostly present in fast fashion and the mass market, such as the Spanish group Industria de Diseño Textil SA (shortened to Inditex, of which Zara is a subsidiary),[5] or the Swedish company H & M (whose full name is H and M Hennes and Mauritz AB). Third, there are "watchmaking empires," such as the Swiss Swatch Group, which occupy a significant place. Fourth, the single-brand apparel groups are rare, but they do exist, such as the American company Abercrombie and Fitch. Finally, it should be noted that

Table 5 Overview of the 25 largest companies in the fashion and luxury industries, 2009

Company	Country	Turnover (millions of US$)	Profit (millions of US$)	Number of employees
PPR SA	France	29,086.10	1,532.80	93,000
Christian Dior SA / LVMH	France	25,382.90	3,426.60	74,834
Macy's, Inc.	United States	24,892.00	–4,803.00	167,000
The Gap Inc.	United States	14,526.00	967.00	134,000
Industria de Diseño Textil, S.A.	Spain	13,947.30	1,859.40	n/a
H & M Hennes and Mauritz AB	Sweden	10,889.40	1,881.20	n/a
Limited Brands, Inc.	United States	9,043.00	220.00	90,900
V.F. Corporation	United States	7,642.60	602.70	46,600
Luxottica Group S.p.A.	Italy	7,309.50	724.50	64,000
The Swatch Group Ltd.	Switzerland	5,375.00	793.40	23,000
Compagnie Financière Richemont SA	Switzerland	5,201.90	1,323.40	n/a

Polo Ralph Lauren Corporation	United States	4,880.10	419.80	15,000
NEXT Retail Ltd	United Kingdom	4,813.70	445.00	n/a
Levi Strauss and Co.	United States	4,266.10	460.40	11,550
Liz Claiborne, Inc.	United States	3,984.90	–951.80	15,000
Arcadia Group	United Kingdom	3,742.70	n/a	24,000
Jones Apparel Group, Inc.	United States	3,616.40	–765.40	7,925
Abercrombie and Fitch Co.	United States	3,540.30	272.30	83,000
Citizen Holdings Co., Ltd.	Japan	3,390.80	122.80	22,127
Coach, Inc.	United States	3,180.80	783.10	12,000
Benetton Group S.p.A.	Italy	3,069.30	221.40	8,896
Esprit Holdings Limited	Hong Kong	3,005.00	n/a	n/a
American Eagle Outfitters, Inc.	United States	2,988.90	179.10	37,500
Tiffany and Co.	United States	2,860.00	220.00	9,000
Phillips-Van Heusen Corporation	United States	2,491.90	91.80	11,100

Notes: Reference year: last year available on Hoover's.
Source: Hoover's Business Solutions.

groups specializing in multibrand retailing, such as the American Macy's, also occupy a significant space in the industry.

At this stage, it is important to note that at the top of every fashion empire there is a fashion emperor or empress. In Forbes' 2011 ranking of billionaires,[6] two fashion emperors appear in the top ten: France's Bernard Arnault (the founder and chairman of LVMH) and Spain's Amancio Ortega (founder and chairman of Inditex).[7] Fashion and luxury are still influential industries, notably through the entrepreneurs who constantly reinvent them.

The fashion and luxury industries are characterized by a particularly low market concentration, meaning that there are a large number of autonomous competitors despite the presence of conglomerates and professional business associations. From an organizational perspective, this lack of concentration has not prevented the emergence of national models, as explained by French sociologist Marie-Laure Djelic, and Finnish sociologist Antti Ainamo.[8] In France, the dominant model is that of the "holding" multibrand umbrella organization which, like LVMH and PPR, is active in several industries, such as luxury, apparel, distribution, and cosmetics. The Italian model is that of "embedded flexible networks," composed of many small companies organized in "industrial districts," a concept invented by the British economist Alfred Marshall[9] meaning geographical areas that develop a particular economic activity. Finally, the American model is "virtual," made up of global firms that have offshored their production facilities, and kept control functions (for example, their headquarters) in their country of origin.

These three business models (French, Italian, and American) present three "ideal types" that correspond

to the organizational structure of fashion today, even if national boundaries are becoming blurred. Indeed, some "virtual" American companies, such as Donna Karan, are integrated into French holding companies, and there are "districts" outside of Italy, for example in Cholet and Roanne in France, or even in New York's Garment District.

In fact, the holding or conglomerate form – the two concepts of "holding" and "conglomerate" often being interchangeable – is now dominant. Market coordination is exercised not only through informal exchanges between actors, professional associations, and major trade fairs, but also through the financial domination of fashion empires. It is difficult to find a direct equivalent of empires in other spheres where fashion exerts its influence, such as in the case of first names. Yet, what the empires of fashion represent is a form of "systematization" of extant processes, a centralized coordination that goes beyond the traditional modes of coordination. One can hypothesize that the emergence of websites that list names, and allow parents to guide their choices, are a form of fashion "imperialism."[10] This imperialization takes different forms, like the other principles, whether one is interested in fashions that are deployed in industrial settings or in nonindustrial contexts.

LVMH and PPR: Nonidentical twins?

The two largest luxury and fashion conglomerates are the French companies LVMH and PPR. Each business group is characterized by a specific history and strategy.

First, from a historical point of view, the origins of the two empires are quite different. The ancestor of PPR, Pinault SA, was founded in 1963 by François Pinault. The

company originally specialized in the production and marketing of timber. In 1994, the group became Pinault-Printemps-Redoute, with the purchase of the Printemps department store and mail order company La Redoute, and became a major player in the sector. In 1999 the group entered the field of fashion and luxury with the purchase of Gucci. In 2005, the group became PPR under the leadership of François-Henri Pinault.

LVMH has a different history; its roots are found in some of the oldest brands in luxury and French fashion. Indeed, LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton combines old brands Moët et Chandon (champagne), Hennessy (cognac), founded in the eighteenth century, and Louis Vuitton, founded in 1854. The group itself was created in 1987. Its main shareholder is Bernard Arnault, who owns the majority through a complex financial structure including, most notably, the Groupe Arnault and Christian Dior.

In strategic terms, the differences are numerous, despite some similarities. While LVMH favors a strategy of hiring high-profile and prestigious designers (Karl Lagerfeld for Fendi, Marc Jacobs for Louis Vuitton), PPR encourages the hiring of designers recognized as competent, but less publicized.[11]

Similarly, as far as the overall group identity and acquisition strategies are concerned, there are significant differences. LVMH has recently asserted its core luxury identity by acquiring Italian brand Bulgari in 2011 and becoming an important shareholder of Hermès (more than 20 percent of the shares in 2011). PPR has developed an alternative "sports and lifestyle" identity, increased by the friendly takeover of California-based Volcom, specializing in snowboarding, skating, and surfing.

THE EMPIRE OF FASHION

Change and aesthetics everywhere

The imperial metaphor can be used in a broader sense than the organizational dimension described so far. The empire of fashion can refer to the adoption of representations and practices specific to fashion outside its traditional sphere. The idea that fashion is intimately related to recent developments of modern societies is widespread, but has taken different forms. Thus, for the American sociologist Harvey Molotch, design, defined as "the intentional use of cultural and material resources to create a worthwhile artifact,"[12] is at the heart of the contemporary economy, and since fashion is centered on design, it provides a typical example of the impact that design can have on the economy. Have we entered into an "age of fashion?" Some seem to believe it, and as Gilles Lipovetsky writes:

> We have reached the era of consummate fashion, the extension of the fashion process to broader and broader spheres of social life. Fashion is not so much a particular peripheral sector, now, as a general form at work in society as a whole. Everyone is more or less immersed in fashion.[13]

Indeed, in many spheres of social, political, and economic life, change is subject to cyclical and continuous renewal. Similarly, design has become a central feature of competition among firms in economic markets.[14]

The expansion of the sphere of fashion is associated with profound changes in social stratification in industrialized societies. A sociological theory sometimes called "postmodernism" considers that the "massification" of consumption and cultural practices has created a nonhierarchical space that complements, and sometimes invalidates, economic

and status-based social stratification.[15] The postmodern perspective is fragmented and divided, and is therefore difficult to summarize into a set of coherent ideas, but its theoretical core was created against the traditional sociological concepts of class or status group. For postmodernists, the hierarchical conception of society that is found in the classical sociological theories of Max Weber[16] and Pierre Bourdieu[17] must be replaced or complemented by a nonhierarchical conception.

Fashion has thus become a major phenomenon, found in many areas of social life. Its power in social formation is found not only in its ability to reflect the socioeconomic trends of the moment, but also to provoke and challenge existing conventions and norms. For example, the French historian Michel Pastoureau[18] explained, in a collection of interviews with Dominique Simonnet, that each color has a history and meaning, depending on its cultural context. He hypothesized that we were unlikely to see the color purple triumph in fashion because of its negative connotation in the West, where it was associated with death. Yet, as explained by Erner,[19] purple became fashionable, challenging those long established tastes.

Before developing further the idea of a fashion empire, it is worth noting an apparent paradox. Indeed, if one reviews the evolution of apparel, compared to other sectors of the economy, it is clear that clothing, though still a significant sector, has lost relative importance. French sociologists Nicolas Herpin and Daniel Verger[20] estimate that in the case of France, which can be used as a proxy for the United States and the rest of Western Europe, the decline of the apparel industry results from a relative decline in cost, and the replacement of some of its "functions," such as the defining of appearance, by, for example, cosmetics. In fact,

it appears that, by emancipating itself from basic clothing, its cradle, fashion has been able to conquer increasingly larger spheres of social and economic life.

Chapter 1 showed how fashion emerged from the luxury and clothing trades, and from a simultaneous need for distinction and imitation, which occupies a central place in the social mechanisms of identity construction. Fashion is then a movement of regular noncumulative change. Because it changes regularly, fashion is opposed to traditions, and because it is noncumulative, it is opposed to science and even the arts. So it is a singular object of which we must distinguish several forms, depending on whether it is institutionalized or not, and whether or not it is linked to an industry.

"Fads" are largely unpredictable, and yet they are the most familiar face of fashion. However, most fashions grow in a social substrate that controls them and allows them to deploy. Some noninstitutional mechanisms, pertaining to the social embeddedness of individuals and groups, lead to a noncumulative regular evolution, which is not completely random, as shown in the case of names in Lieberson and Bell's work, or the length of evening dresses in Kroeber's work. One could then defend the argument that this is "real" fashion as it operates when it is emancipated from institutions and social structures. This would overlook the fact that in an industrial context, in which we still largely live in the first half of the twenty-first century, the noncumulative regular change which is, and makes, fashion must be manufactured when it is embodied in objects. Thus, clothing, musical styles, literary genres, car models, even particular types of toasters, must all be produced in factories, by organizations composed of individuals with different socioeconomic backgrounds and interests, which are sometimes divergent.

Fashion beyond fashion

The "fashion form," to borrow the words of Lipovetsky, is found today in many spheres of social life. Many examples can be used to illustrate this idea of an ever-extending empire of fashion.

First, in many areas of social life, permanent and noncumulative change has become the rule. For example, in the field of management science ideas come and go.[21] They follow trajectories similar to those that can be found in the evolution of facial hairstyles or the choice of first names. The very idea of progress in knowledge is undermined by such considerations. One could also consider the world of culture in general as being under the rule of fashion, as a form of change, with the cyclical return of specific genres on the front-stage (for example, westerns or science fiction movies in the case of cinema) and the end of the emergence of new forms, although this hypothesis would require an empirical study to be validated.

In addition, many industries are characterized by a growing aestheticization, and have taken on some features of the garment industry. In the automotive industry, for example, Italian manufacturers Fiat and Alfa Romeo have developed a sound strategy since 2004 under the leadership of CEO Sergio Marchionne. This strategy is multifaceted, but a crucial element is to develop new cars that relate to the Italian "competitive advantage" for design, and this can be seen in elegant and successful cars such as the Giulietta (Alfa Romeo) or the new Fiat 500. French manufacturers Renault and Citroën have tried to follow this strategy, and use in their communication strategies the symbolic capital accumulated by France in the field of fashion and creation: Renault used to present itself as a "*créateur d'automobiles*"

(literally, a "designer of cars" but with the high-end connotation of "couturier")[22] and Citroën boasts of its "*créative technologie*." Similarly, the fact that the French cosmetics brand L'Oréal systematically highlights its geographical origin (Paris) shows that it participates in the same use of fashion as an industry of reference.

Distinct from fashion, but also connected with it in many ways, the luxury world has been deliberately adopted as a reference by many brands, especially in the high-tech or consumer-goods industries. In high tech, the Finnish mobile phone company Nokia developed a subsidiary, founded in 1998 and based in the United Kingdom, called Vertu, which manufactures high-end cell phones that use symbols of luxury watchmaking brands (for example, sapphire screens). In consumer goods, an industry known for its tight margins and intense competition, the coffee brand Nespresso (owned by Nestlé) has organized its retail spaces by drawing on the world of jewelry: exclusive locations, elegant salespeople, as well as a distinguished, luxurious, and understated visual identity.

Empires collapse

It may be useful to distinguish between an industrial fashion and a postindustrial fashion. The first is embodied in objects, the second is not. Both are emancipated from traditions. Clothing depending on the movement of fashion is emancipated from traditional dress, but it is always produced by individuals and organizations. Names, which are subject to fashion movements, are also emancipated from traditional practices, but are not produced in factories.

The imperialization of fashion is not just, as in Lipovetsky's work, an endless expansion of the sphere of

fashion. Imperialization is first a type of organization that witnesses the triumph of conglomerates in the cultural industries. It is also a phenomenon which sees the systematic emergence of an extreme form of noncumulative regular change, deepening the intrinsic logic of fashion, as in the creation of new names to generate a distinction that is even more pronounced, instead of choosing names that are "original" but already exist.

Finally, the subject of the imperialization of fashion raises an unavoidable question, the possible end of fashion itself. If fashion is an empire, then one needs to consider its possible death, because all empires end. As American sociologist Chuck Tilly wrote:

> From Herodotus to Montesquieu and beyond, poets, historians, and philosophers have recurrently produced one of our culture's standard literary forms: the dirge for a fallen empire. Reflection on imperial decline has world-historical resonance because it records for all to see the fallibility of seemingly unshakable human enterprises.[23]

Some authors have mentioned the "end"[24] or even the "death"[25] of fashion. But what would that entail? Certainly, the apparel industry is here to stay for the foreseeable future; humans need clothes. An alternative end could be the termination of fashion because of its overextension. By being everywhere, the fashion form may exhaust its room for growth and wither under the weight of its own success. Another possibility is the end of the fashion conglomerates themselves, jointly hit by the rise of sustainable and slow fashion, and the death of the fashion middle-person in an Internet-driven industry. We turn to these possibilities in the conclusion.

CONCLUSION

This book offers both a deep look into the history of the fashion industry, and a birds-eye-view of the main academic and practical knowledge produced on this industry. In this sense, it is an exercise in "fashionology" at the crossroads of fashion as a significant economic activity, and as an intriguing research topic. It is a sketch of today's fashion, in all its diversity and complexity, as a "total social fact." Like its subject, this sketch is multifaceted. It draws from many sources and various academic disciplines: mostly sociology and economics, but also geography and history. A full integration of all these approaches remains to be done, but research on fashion is thriving, and common principles appear throughout the various disciplines interested in this subject. Six principles have been identified in this work.

The six principles that I have defined provide what can be called an "ideal-type" of fashion, that is to say, a stylized representation of the subject-matter. Although they sometimes overlap, or even contradict each other, the fact remains that each is characterized by a clear logic of its own.

Historically, fashion begins with the manipulation of luxury by the bourgeoisie in order to assert its rise against the aristocracy. While fashion has always existed in some

form, it was with the European Renaissance that it grew to a scale that made it a socially significant phenomenon. This is the starting point of the principle of affirmation, a subtle mixture of imitation and distinction, which helps solve tensions between individuals and society. This principle is found in social domains other than the apparel industry. Using certain words, driving a certain car, exhibiting a certain kind of facial hairstyle, are all identity signals that are more or less affected by the rule of fashion. Fashion as it exists today is the daughter of luxury and capitalism, but has extended its grasp on social spheres beyond its origin. The affirmation principle is to be found in all types of fashion, industrial and nonindustrial, and truly constitutes the historical and analytical foundation of fashion.

At the heart of fashion is also the principle of convergence. This convergence appears with the emergence of trends that may occur through influence processes, in the case of nonindustrial fashion, or through a centralization mechanism, in industrial areas of fashion such as the apparel industry.

The next principle is the autonomy principle, which suggests that fashions and fads are deployed in specific social spheres. In the apparel industry, the creation and dissemination of styles and designs is not entirely subject to the whims of external social groups, such as consumers or producers. Fashion styles and designs exert a logic that is entirely their own, and mostly relate to themselves, although they also borrow from other arts such as painting, movies, music, etc.

The principle of personalization, which puts the individual designer on the front stage, does not mean that individuals are "really" autonomous in their choices. This principle rather suggests that there is a belief shared by

many social actors in the creative autonomy of individual fashion designers, and so the "isolated creative genius" mythology is often fostered, sweeping the organizational reality of fashion under the rug. Fashion, like any other industry, is a complex system of occupations and professions that compete for supremacy, constantly evolve, and sometimes vanish.

The symbolization principle reflects not only the cultural dimension of any fad or fashion phenomenon, but also the decoupling that exists between the concrete objects and symbols they embody. Within autonomous fashion, symbolization constitutes an upper level of autonomy.

Finally, the imperialization principle indicates either a specific organization of creative industries, or a systematization of fashion phenomena outside of industrial contexts. The imperialization principle does not imply a loss of autonomy in the apparel industry, as it sits at an organizational level that is not intended to influence styles and designs.

To what extent can fashion change? Can existing fashion principles disappear and new principles emerge? For example, the disappearance of the affirmation principle, and thus fashion itself, is possible in the event of major political or economic changes, especially in the case of a return to sumptuary regulations. Similarly, the principle of convergence could be questioned if "fast fashion" continues to grow in the wake of the continuous modernization of production and distribution techniques that would make possible the postmodern idea of an implosion of the fashion system into several subsystems.[1] The autonomy of fashion could also be jeopardized, for example in the case of a massive shift in consumer tastes, which would subordinate fashion to external considerations, such as

environmental considerations. The movement known as "slow fashion," which aims at slowing down or even reversing the cycles of fashion by offering clothes that are "sustainable,"[2] both stylistically and in terms of the fabrics used, is already part of this trend. It is also conceivable that the existence of powerful empires of fashion, by making financial and economic considerations predominant, weakens the personalization principle and leads to the disappearance of the "creative superstar" figure. Finally, the principles of symbolization and imperialization could also succumb to major economic developments, such as a massive backlash against brands on the part of consumers or a questioning of the conglomerate as a relevant organizational form.

As far as the emergence of new principles is concerned, it is conceivable that some current evolutions in the fashion industry – for example, the rise of sustainable and online fashion – could lead to new widespread mechanisms that would change the face of fashion. The most recent principle, imperialization, could either lead to an "end" of fashion in the sense that fashion would have reached its most developed state, as in the "end of history" thesis defended by American political scientist Francis Fukuyama,[3] or open up the industry to major changes. Alternative scenarios include subtle modifications to existing principles.

In sum, the six principles "unveiled" in this book can guide the actions of all actors in the fashion industry, individuals and businesses. Indeed, they show clearly that fashion (and fashions) do not evolve in a social void. While the world is mostly unstable, chaotic, and frightening, human activity creates relatively stable social structures that manage to contain and control chaos, creating

meaning and benchmarks for action.[4] These social structures are real, in the sense that they constrain us. There is nothing to gain from ignoring them. In this sense, they are more than constraints; they also allow action to unfold. Thus, understanding the principles of fashion can allow everyone to better act in the face of changes that often seem random and incomprehensible. Fashion is all but impenetrable, and lends itself to scientific analysis that can guide concrete action.

NOTES

PREFACE

1. Frédéric Godart, *Sociologie de la mode* (Paris: La Découverte, 2010). The book has also been translated into Portuguese (Brazil): Frédéric Godart, *Sociologia da moda* (São Paulo: Editora Senac São Paulo, 2010). A Spanish (Argentina) translation is under way.
2. I am closely associated with the INSEAD MBA students' "Retail, Consumer and Luxury Club" which provides me with countless opportunities to observe and interact with key actors of the fashion and luxury industries.
3. Frédéric Godart, "Status and Style in Creative Industries: The Case of the Fashion System" (Columbia University, 2009). For my PhD thesis, as well as for follow-up work, I conducted more than 30 interviews and gathered countless data on the fashion and luxury industries. I did not explicitly use them for this book as I wanted to keep it short, but they certainly influenced my thinking.

INTRODUCTION

1. *Dazed and Confused* is the name of a famous British style magazine: http://www.dazeddigital.com/ [Accessed September 19, 2011].
2. Catherine Maliszewski, "Azzedine Alaïa, mutin de la mode," *Le Monde Magazine*, July 2, 2011. The interview is in French and was translated by myself

into English, like all the texts used in this book for which I could not find a readily available English translation.

3. And more precisely, the focus of the documentary is on four fashion houses: Sonia Rykiel, Proenza Schouler, Fendi, and Jean-Paul Gaultier.
4. Among all the journalistic accounts of the worlds of fashion and luxury published over the last ten years, two are particularly enjoyable and informative: Mark Tungate, *Fashion Brands: Branding Style from Armani to Zara* (London: KoganPage, 2005); Dana Thomas, *Deluxe: How Luxury Lost its Luster* (London: Penguin Books, 2007).
5. Although cinema is a close second: Stephen Gundle, *Glamour: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
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11. Richard E. Caves, *Creative Industries: Contracts Between Art and Commerce* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 2000).
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Djelic and Antti Ainamo, "The Coevolution of New Organizational Forms in the Fashion Industry: A Historical and Comparative Study of France, Italy, and the United States," *Organization Science* 10, no. 5 (1999).

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14. Georg Simmel et al., *La Parure et autres essais* (Paris: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1998).
15. Georg Simmel, "Fashion," *American Journal of Sociology* 62, no. 6 (1904); Gabriel Tarde, *The Laws of Imitation* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, [1890] 1903).
16. Sergio Benvenuto, "Fashion: Georg Simmel," *Journal of Artificial Societies and Social Simulation* 3, no. 2 (2000), http://www.soc.surrey.ac.uk/JASSS/3/2/forum/2.html [Accessed September 15, 2011].
17. Here it should be noted that "non-cumulative" does not mean that fashion is not enriched by time… Each decade and each century adds new styles that can be used and mixed with other styles by fashion designers. However, while in science and technology the idea of progress is prevalent (today's cars perform better than yesterday's cars), it is not true in fashion. Is 2011 better than the fashion from the 1960s? Probably not, but it is probably not worse either, just different.
18. Karl Popper *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*. (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1959).
19. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1962).
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CHAPTER 4

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CHAPTER 5

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CHAPTER 6

1. At this stage, it is interesting to note that even though the idea of an "empire of fashion" can be attributed to

Lipovetsky, the French title of his book is "*L'Empire de l'éphémère*," which literally means "the empire of the ephemeral," hints at a broader theoretical aim than understanding fashion per se: Lipovetsky wants to understand how the reign of ephemerality came to take over contemporary societies, and he found its origin in fashion. "The empire of fashion" is a creative translation of the original title. Gilles Lipovetsky, *The Empire of Fashion: Dressing Modern Democracy*, New French Thought (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987).

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CONCLUSION

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