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Fashion as enterprise

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Pierre Cardin, a young Parisian couturier born in Italy, designed the coat dress on the cover of this book (figure 1.1). In his early years, Cardin had been the director of tailoring at the house of Christian Dior, the firm that helped to orchestrate the comeback of haute couture during the postwar era. In 1948, when it became apparent that Christian Dior's designs were being leaked to mass-market garment manufacturers, the French police interrogated Cardin at length. The young designer was found innocent, but he was deeply offended by the episode. When starting his own business in the 1950s, Cardin innovated and designed fashions that embodied a hopeful future for the postwar consumer. In 1959, he was banned from the prestigious *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne* – the trade association for the haute couture industry that had been established in 1868 – for having designed for *All Printemps*, one of the large department stores on boulevard Haussmann in Paris. Although Cardin was eventually welcomed back to the *Chambre Syndicale*, his eyes were fixed on a broader clientele. In the transformative times of the 1950s and 1960s, the old system of haute couture was challenged by the demands of consumer culture. Cardin licensed his brand more widely than any couturier before him, putting the name of Pierre Cardin before the masses.¹

Our cover photo from February 1961 is more than a picture of an outfit designed by Pierre Cardin. The image embodies the complexities of the European fashion system and speaks to its place in the new global order that was in its infancy in the postwar years. At first glance, the picture looks to be a publicity photograph taken in a well-heeled Paris suburb to advertise a new collection. However, the picture is not from the archive of Pierre Cardin, but from the vast collection of business records from the American chemical giant, E. I. du Pont de Nemours and Company, of Wilmington, Delaware. As the world's largest manufacturer



1.1

DuPont photograph of a Pierre Cardin coat dress, 1961.

of synthetic fibre, the DuPont Company was one of the invisible players in the international fashion-industrial complex of the postwar era. To build consumer trust in man-made materials, DuPont routinely collaborated with French textile mills and couturiers in the *Chambre Syndicale* to showcase fabrics made from its synthetic fibres. The coat dress by Pierre Cardin was made from a Lesur fabric woven from lightweight Shetland wool blended with Orlon acrylic, a synthetic wool by DuPont.² If we took the picture at face value, we would only see yet another Parisian costume. But when we look deeper, a far more complex and interesting story emerges.

The new fashion scene

The seventy years that followed World War II witnessed the demise of the old European fashion hierarchy that dated from the mid-1800s. For more than a century, elite haute couture houses, most of them members of the *Chambre Syndicale*, had dominated Western fashion. In 1858, Englishman Charles Frederick Worth and his young Swedish business partner, Otto Gustaf Bobergh, set up a fashion salon on the rue de la Paix in Paris. This enterprise, Worth and Bobergh, was the first haute couture house to be run on modern principles. Previously, elite dressmakers had collaborated with wealthy clients on the design of a personalized costume. Under the system introduced by Worth, the couturier – or the couturiere (a female designer) – presented the client with an original creation that was the product of his or her imagination.³ In the United States, extremely expensive couture outfits worn by the European social elite were described and illustrated in *Godey's Lady's Book* and emulated by fashion-conscious consumers within their budgets. The story was much the same in other Western consumer societies, from Britain to Germany.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the Norwegian-American economist Thorstein Veblen and the German sociologist Georg Simmel theorized about the global power of fashion centres. Paris ruled over women's fashion, while London was the capital of men's tailoring. Veblen observed that fashion was essential to the display of social status and to the emulation of one's social betters.⁴ Simmel emphasized the trickle-down movement of fashion. No sooner were designs emulated by the lower ranks than they were abandoned by the elites for newer, more distinctive styles.⁵ These theorists were fascinated by fashion because it underpinned and reflected the social hierarchy, and because 'the masses' seemed so willing to emulate fashions worn by 'the classes'. While fashion came to encompass a more diverse range of consumer products, including home furnishings, it was particularly powerful in female dress. Men's wear and children's attire, although they also followed fashion, overall changed less markedly and less quickly than women's attire.

More recently, the eminent American sociologist, Diana Crane, observed that a major shift in consumption and meaning occurred within the fashion system in the mid-twentieth century. Fashion went from being an emblem of high social status to being a commodity that could be enjoyed by nearly everyone in the West.⁶ Ready-to-wear triumphed over custom-made dresses, whether the consumer was a Danish princess who was fitted for her evening gowns in a Parisian couture salon or a British schoolteacher who sewed her own clothes. The casual look, developed in response to changing lifestyles, became the new order of the day. Affordable easy-going outfits were made possible by advanced technologies such as synthetic fibres and high-speed knitting machines, by young designers concerned to create styles that embodied modernity, and eventually, by outsourcing production from Europe and North America to low-wage economies in North Africa, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Asia.

In 1999, Teri Agins, the senior fashion reporter at the *Wall Street Journal*, sized up the American scene in *The End of Fashion*. The American woman, who in the postwar years had been celebrated as the 'best dressed woman in the world', now drove to the mall in a velour tracksuit, trainers, and a pink baseball cap. Elegance had disappeared, a result of the casualization of everyday life.⁷ More recently, the Paris-based fashion forecaster, Lidewij 'Li' Edelkoort, issued her manifesto on the state of European fashion, similarly declaring the end of an era. 'It's the end of fashion as we know it', she told *Dezeen* in March 2015. 'Fashion with a big F is no longer there ... Actually the comeback of couture, which I'm predicting, could bring us a host of new ideas of how to handle the idea of clothes. And maybe from these ashes another system will be born ... fashion has become a way to say "cool". And it's no longer addressing clothes.'⁸ Edelkoort's predictions followed on the heels of the growing popularity of 'normcore', a unisex clothing style in part popularized by Silicon Valley entrepreneurs Mark Zuckerberg and the late Steve Jobs. Normcore aficionados have rejected sartorial rules for bland everyday clothing that is practical and anonymous: T-shirts, jeans, and sneakers. The goal is to buck the idea that fashion is a vehicle for expressing difference, and to use clothing as a form of camouflage, as a tool for blending into the crowd.⁹ As historians, we are less concerned with the latest dictates circulating on the Web than with the broad historical developments that transformed the fashion business from 1945 to the present. We contend that the postwar shakeup in Paris did not result in the end of fashion, but gave birth to an ever-powerful and increasingly global fashion industry. The hegemony of Paris and prescriptive modes of dress were replaced by a global network of intermediaries and 'fashion for everyone'.

In this transformation, the old couture houses shut their doors, and the rue de la Paix lost some of its cachet. However, for most consumers,

the world of fashion changed for the better. Fashion became less elitist and more democratic. In the first two decades after World War II, clothing was still expensive, and consumers thought of new apparel as an investment. It was still common for the average European woman to get fitted for her clothes by a local seamstress or to make her own dresses at home. As Europe recovered from the war, these practices gave way to the convenience of buying readymade fashion in the shops. Starting in the 1960s when the Dutch-owned chain retailer, C&A Modes, introduced an early version of 'fast fashion' to teenagers in Mod London, more and more consumers had access to clothing that was created to be worn for a season or two and then discarded.¹⁰ One unintended consequence of the ramping up of the fashion cycle was the emergence of the used clothing trade and the recycling business, mainly but not exclusively in developing countries. Consumers in the city of Ndola on the Copperbelt of Zambia in Africa rummaged through second-hand clothing stores that stocked discarded Western clothing, while industrial workers in Italy shredded imported American rags to create recycled fibres that the Prato woollen industry would mix with virgin wool to create stylish fabrics for global export.¹¹ One person's discarded fashion was another person's treasure, or the fibres were reborn as a jacket available from such diverse companies as the activewear producer The North Face and the creative label Vetements, two prominent brands in the new fashion system.

This book shifts the debate on fashion from the broader culture to the internal culture of the fashion trade – and then returns to the broader culture by explaining the significance of value creation for the fashion industry. While creators and designers of fashion have been the subject of many stimulating studies, this book reconnects the two faces of the fashion system: the designer who stands in the spotlight and the manager who works in the shadows. The history of entrepreneurs, with their charge of strategies, risk, and experimentation – and their failures – complements the more visible creativity of the designer. This book emphasizes the work of fashion professionals who worked behind-the-scenes as intermediaries: trendsetters, retail buyers, stylists, art directors, advertising executives, public relations agents, brand managers, and entrepreneurs. The celebrities of postwar and contemporary fashion, from Elsa Schiaparelli to Karl Lagerfeld, have received their fair share of coverage in the fashion literature. Editors and socialites, from Diana Vreeland to Anna Wintour, are also household names among fashion bloggers and their fashionista followers. In contrast, the intermediaries who served as information brokers and negotiators within the fashion system were omnipresent but often invisible. Their names are lesser-known in the annals of fashion history: Jean d'Allens, Giovanni Battista Giorgini, Erling Persson, Maurice Rentner, Margareta van den Bosch, and Harriet Wilinsky, among others. This constellation of actors was characterized by a cosmopolitan outlook,

an openness to new modes of operation, and the acknowledgement that women had something to say about fashion, not simply as consumers, but as fashion buyers, executives, and leaders. It is crucial to understand the role of these actors in order to fathom the process of value creation in the fashion industry.

Fashion, a cultural and economic activity

Over the course of the last seventy years, the European fashion business has moved from celebrating the craftsmanship of haute couture to revealing in ever-changing fast fashion, from everyday elegance to everyday casual (figure 1.2). This book examines the transition from the old system to the new in a series of case studies grouped around three major themes. Part I of the book deals with the transformation of Paris from a couture production centre to a creative hub for design and brand management. Part II examines the special role of retailers and retail brands in promoting European fashion, with reference to transnational exchanges between Europe, America, and the wider world. Part III explores seminal developments in a select group of global fashion hubs on the European periphery or entirely outside of Europe, and their roles in critiquing the mainstream fashion system with heritage marketing, vintage aesthetics, ethical brands, and local styles.

This anthology embodies a new approach to the study of fashion history. It is highly interdisciplinary and informed by design history, cultural anthropology, ethnography, management studies on creativity, and the 'new' business history. The book differs from most work in fashion studies because it pulls back the curtain on firms, trade associations, and government organizations to examine how value is created. Intrinsicly, this value is both artistic and commercial, and it is rooted in both design and management. Some fashion history researchers emphasize the creative genius of the designer, but we contend that creativity was embodied both in the designer and in other actors within the firm, whose collective expertise formed a winning entrepreneurial combination. Furthermore, the process of value creation was transmitted from one generation to the next, and know-how was circulated geographically.

Thirty to forty years ago, the study of fashion and clothing was the purview of museum curators and costume historians who focused on object appreciation or social history. Influenced by art history, classic works such as James Laver's *A Concise History of Costume* (1969) discussed basic style changes over the *longue durée*.¹² Since the 1980s, fashion studies has blossomed into a field that encompasses a large literature on clothing, meaning, and cultural identity.¹³ We now have a deep understanding of fashion and the body, apparel production, gender and dress, and a range of subcultural looks, from the zoot suit to Punk.¹⁴ A slew of talented



Byrrh Advertisement by Georges Léonnet, *L'illustration*, 16 April 1932, illustrating the interwar influence of Scottish tweeds in the development of casual wear for women.

researchers in cultural history, sociology, and anthropology have contributed to the growth of fashion studies as a vibrant field.

This anthology builds on the bedrock of fashion studies and takes an entirely new turn. It combines the insights of fashion studies with the new culturally oriented business history to offer a distinctive take on the European fashion system since 1945. To understand what is innovative about our approach to business history, we must take a look at what came before. For much of the late twentieth century, the historical study of modern enterprise was dominated by the work of Alfred D. Chandler Jr., a professor at the Harvard Business School who was called the ‘dean’ of business history because of his influence on the field. Chandler used social-science methods to explore the managerial revolution in American business and its global triumph during the Cold War. In a series of books that included his Pulitzer Prize-winning magnum opus, *The Visible Hand*, he examined the role of professional managers in major corporations in the United States and Europe, mainly manufacturers, in an effort to explain the success of the American business model. How and why did the large, multidivisional enterprise, run by professional managers, come to dominate the American economy, and how did this model come to be admired and emulated around the world? Chandler and his followers did much to advance our understanding of modern management practices in important companies such as DuPont, the General Motors Corporation (GM), and Sears, Roebuck and Company.¹⁵ The Chandler school explained how managers in such enterprises harnessed technological innovations to redefine and reshape markets, and how they created new strategies and tactics to manage complex multidivisional companies, many of which had global influence.¹⁶

Although culture underpins economic activities, cultural analysis was largely absent from the Chandler paradigm. A devotion to the cult of objectivity led Chandler and his followers to adopt a certain degree of detachment, scrutinizing managers without concern for their personalities or personal lives. Reading Chandler, one would never know that Alfred P. Sloan Jr., the organizational man who headed GM for some four decades, was a dedicated follower of fashion with a taste for exquisitely tailored suits. This telling personal detail about the man at the top helps us to understand why this particular mid-century Detroit automobile manufacturer had a strong commitment to design management.¹⁷ As consumer society unfolded, people looked to buy goods that could help them establish their place in the social hierarchy.¹⁸ The mechanisms of ostentatious consumption studied by Thorstein Veblen did not entirely disappear. Quite the contrary: they migrated to unexpected places with the help of visionaries like Sloan. Under his leadership, GM pioneered the idea of a ‘car for every purse and purpose’. The annual model change, a now-ubiquitous marketing concept, encouraged consumers to think of

automobiles as fashion accessories.¹⁹ Sloan acknowledged that fashion mattered; Chandler and most of his followers did not.

The Chandler school of business history was notable for other silences. Topics such as consumer culture, small business, women, minorities, and brands were left out, along with the strong story line that can make history readable and engaging. Starting in the 1980s, a new generation of researchers influenced by American studies, social history, and cultural history began to challenge the Chandler model. These innovators took a 'cultural turn' and created the new business history. Committed to highly readable narratives, advocates of the cultural turn homed in on the relationships among enterprise, culture, and society.²⁰ Working in North America and to a lesser extent in Europe, these pioneers ventured into topics such as advertising, marketing, consumer culture; material and visual culture; and product design and innovation.²¹ It was only a matter of time before this new generation of researchers turned its attention to beauty products, hair salons, and colour forecasting.²² Fashion was also a natural fit.²³

In their recent book, *Reimagining Business History*, Philip B. Scranton and Patrick Fridenson have built on the foundation of the new business history to lobby for further developments in the field. During the heyday of the Chandler school, the entrepreneur was most often depicted as a white male in a large corporation. Scranton and Fridenson are representative of researchers who have striven to interrogate a wider range of business actors, whether they are black or white, men or women, gay or straight. The new business history also acknowledges that there is no such thing as a 'free market', and that, in addition to firms, we need to examine institutions such as national governments, city councils, and consumers' associations. Furthermore, while quantitative data is important, the new business history does not stop at the balance sheet. It is now possible to study small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), private companies that did not make their accounts public, and enterprises situated on the margins of the law. This more open-minded way of studying business history has informed our approach to under-researched questions and actors in the fashion system.²⁴

Concurrent with the development of the new business history, an innovative group of curators began to acknowledge the importance of business enterprise to the fashion system. In North America, two exemplary curatorial works combined the study of artefacts and business records: Alexandra Palmer's book on Parisian couture in Toronto for the Royal Ontario Museum and Dilys Blum's exhibition catalogue on Elsa Schiaparelli for the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Palmer looked to department store records, while Blum examined a range of business and trade materials.²⁵ In Europe, Sonnet Stanfill took a similar approach in exhibitions and publications for the Victoria and Albert Museum.²⁶ These museum-based researchers

started with the objects and then moved into trade journals, newspapers, and company archives to probe the inner workings of the firm. In contrast, the authors in this book are mainly academic researchers who begin the opposite way, posing questions about the creative process and looking to the documents for evidence. However, our approach is highly sympathetic to the work of Palmer, Blum, and Stanfill, the latter of whom has contributed to this book.

In this anthology

Fashion is a cosmopolitan field of activity that links large metropolitan centres in Europe and North America to the global periphery. For centuries, all types of manufacturing have moved to new locations in pursuit of cheap labour, better markets, and new talent. Clothing and fashion are no exceptions. As nineteenth-century Westerners looked for goods that helped them to define their place in the social hierarchy, fashion was added to the consumer identity kit.²⁷ In response to the demand for affordable everyday clothing, entrepreneurs such as John Barran of Leeds mechanized the European readymade clothing industry.²⁸ Barran and like-minded entrepreneurs adopted the sewing machine and other mechanical devices to expand the production of ready-to-wear in cities such as Leeds, Berlin, London, New York, Paris, and Philadelphia.²⁹ To further reduce costs, they employed labourers to work long hours in crowded factories or as outworkers in bleak tenements.

During the twentieth century, several factors exercised pressure on costs in the garments industries. The democratization of fashion emerged first and foremost in nineteenth-century United States, which was the world's largest consumer market. Department stores, chain stores, mail-order catalogues, 'specialty' stores, and countless small shops retailed fashion goods that were made in thousands of factories and workshops. Some of these workshops were subsidiaries of retailers, but most were independent entrepreneurial ventures. Pressure from the market to lower prices, as well as fierce competition among garment makers, resulted in low wages and difficult labour conditions, especially in workshops that produced goods for the lower end of the market. In the early twentieth century, some eighty per cent of garments produced in the United States were manufactured in New York City, and the rest were made in industrial cities such as Philadelphia, Chicago, and Rochester, New York.³⁰ Garment makers could start a workshop with a small amount of capital, often benefiting from extensive kinship networks in the trade. But the unpredictability of trends made garment manufacturing a high-risk enterprise, and bankruptcies were frequent. The fragmented and volatile industrial landscape, combined with the complexities of the supply chain, made it difficult to control the labour force. From the 1960s onward, retailers in the

United States and the United Kingdom increasingly looked off shore for cheaper sources of textiles and garments. British retailers, for example, turned to Hong Kong, Israel, and Turkey.³¹ By the New Millennium, the West had virtually been stripped of its manufacturing capacity in fibres, fabrics, and fashion. The relocation of most textile and garment production to low-wage economies has made it difficult to monitor and control. The International Labour Organization, an agency of the United Nations that brings together governments, employers, and workers around the world to set labour standards, has met significant challenges in trying to implement its conventions within the global garment industry.³²

Many researchers have examined manufacturing and labour in the garment industry. For the global era, the economist Pietra Rivoli offers the most extensive discussion of the clothing supply chain in her highly readable book about the commonplace cotton T-shirt. Rivoli also acknowledged that her project is to understand ‘the virtues of markets in improving the human condition’.³³ An important group of scholars and journalists that include Naomi Klein, a Canadian social activist whose book *No Logo* denounced sweatshop labour, have pushed for further study of labour conditions in distant production sites, and have reinvigorated consumer advocacy and corporate social responsibility.³⁴ In the field, activist groups such as the Clean Clothes Campaign lobby to improve working conditions and empower labourers in the garment and sportswear industries around the world.³⁵

Although we admire this work, our book focuses on a different set of concerns. The fascinating issue at the heart of this anthology is the inner workings of innovation in the fashion industry. We are concerned about the nature of creativity, the ways in which creators read and respond to the market, and the strategies that have been used to adapt fashion to the new global environment. That history necessarily homes in on the firms, associations, and institutions that create value and, ultimately, make fashion into one of the most desired consumer goods in the world.

Part I: Reinventing Paris fashion

The immediate postwar period – the years 1945 to 1970 – was the last golden age of haute couture.³⁶ The business of high-end fashion had its origins in the luxury trades of the Ancien Régime, yet it was with the House of Worth, founded in 1858, that haute couture came to embody global leadership in women’s wear. As demonstrated by the art historian Nancy Troy and a recent crop of researchers, haute couture orchestrated a tour de force in marketing. The couture houses touted their creations as exclusive, authentic, and distinctively Parisian, and forbade unauthorized reproductions (figure 1.3). Everything about the creative process, the clients, and the semi-annual shows was cloaked in secrecy. At the same



1.3 [Chambre Syndicale atelier](#), where detailed handwork such as sewing collars and cuffs on to garments was undertaken, photographed in the 1950s.

time, the couture houses promoted Paris fashion as a luxury industry with outstanding designs that the whole world should admire. In short, haute couture was a paradoxical business. It was closely guarded, but hungry for attention.³⁷

In the interwar period, the *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne* set up the rules for the trade. Members were only permitted to sell their products to private customers, both domestic and international, and to international corporate clients such as department stores. The *Chambre* refused to give French garment manufacturers and French retailers access to the Paris couture shows. French garment factories and department stores had to work the system to gain access to couture models, sometimes surreptitiously re-importing models that had been purchased by foreign

buyers. These policies, implemented to maintain exclusivity, were debated throughout the interwar period and were abandoned in 1944.³⁸

The book starts with a chapter by Véronique Pouillard that examines the postwar couture industry at an important transitional moment. After World War II, the couture industry began to collaborate with the French garment industry (figure 1.4). A very dynamic French fashion press and a system of government subventions nurtured haute couture and the nascent ready-to-wear industry. Haute couture experienced its final spurt of creativity during the 1950s, serving a rarefied international clientele and especially targeting a North American audience. Around this time, labour costs rose, rapidly rendering haute couture unprofitable. However, the Parisian fashion system did not disappear. As Pouillard demonstrates, it simply changed its business model.

Haute couture put on a new face and adapted to a situation wherein Paris was no longer the only fashion capital. By the late twentieth century, the world had several fashion capitals, each with a distinctive specialization: New York for ready-to-wear; London for boutique trends and for men's wear; Milan for luxury ready-to-wear, accessories, and men's wear; and Tokyo for street style.³⁹ The Paris cluster became more open to new ways of doing business, and haute couture morphed into luxury brands. The voracious consumer appetite for fashion gave birth to a new generation of creative professionals who fostered the development of the London boutique and introduced the designer brands that became the hallmark of the Seventh Avenue fashion district in New York.⁴⁰ One particularly important business practice that enabled the democratization of European fashion was the development of licensing regimes. The Paris couturiers acknowledged that they had to adapt to survive, and they developed a licensing system for linking their names to tie-in products such as perfumes, scarves, beachwear, cruise lines, and gift lines.⁴¹ The proliferation of brands through licensing agreements gave more and more consumers access to upmarket designers such as Pierre Cardin, the Paris innovator who created the coat dress for DuPont and who eventually became the couturier with the greatest number of brand licences. From the 1960s onward, the Paris haute couture houses reinvented themselves as creative laboratories for luxury brands.

While the postwar period showed that haute couture was not a very profitable activity, it also demonstrated that the symbolic capital accumulated by luxury brands had enormous value for the fashion industry. Ms. Postwar Consumer would buy affordable stylist-designed clothes at Monoprix, a chain store developed by Galeries Lafayette, or at its rival Prisunic, a store opened by Au Printemps for the budget-conscious shopper who loved fashion. She could also purchase high-end perfume, accessories, and fine alcoholic beverages branded by Cardin, Christian Dior, or Moët & Chandon.⁴² From the ashes of the old haute couture system, the



1.4 Jacques Heim advertisement, 1956, typifying his collaboration with fabric manufacturers such as H. Moreau & Cie.

Paris fashion industry developed a new business model built around the concept of luxury for everyone.

The multinational luxury groups that emerged in the late twentieth century are now some of the most profitable businesses in Europe, but their histories are largely unexplored in fashion studies. Pierre-Yves Donzé and Ben Wubs examine the French company Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton, SE (better known as LVMH), the largest luxury goods group in the world. Acknowledging that creativity is a major resource for LVMH, these historians consider the ways in which the creative process is socially constructed in relation to other functions within the group, such as finance, distribution, management, and corporate strategy. As Per H. Hansen, the prominent Danish historian of business and design, has argued, the stories that corporations tell about themselves are often more revealing than the products that they make.⁴³ Donzé and Wubs explore how LVMH has reinvented brands that date from earlier decades and even earlier centuries, and how the firm promotes these brands using stories about romance, heritage, and luxury. Continuing in this vein, Johanna Zanon examines the Parisian 'sleeping beauties', dormant couture brands that entrepreneurs have reawakened for the twenty-first century. She considers how one French father-and-son team, Guy de Lummén and Arnaud de Lummén, reinvented Madeleine Vionnet and Paul Poiret, and considers the role of heritage stories in their rebirth.

One important question that emerges from our reinterpretation of Paris fashion relates to the value of history to the fashion business. Do the genuine histories of luxury brands and their constructed narratives have as much immaterial value as the recent investment in the past seems to suggest? And does history really matter? This is a fitting topic for consideration at a time when many old haute couture firms have been folded into luxury groups or have been rebranded as modern labels, and when large conglomerates like LVMH have established nonprofit foundations to preserve their heritage and advance European art and culture.⁴⁴ Is the revisiting of old designs and brands a way to give soul to the brand, or to refresh creativity?⁴⁵ Only time will tell.

Part II: International connections and the role of retailers

Today, the global fashion industry is dominated by giant corporations, from multinational retailers such as H & M Hennes & Mauritz AB (the Swedish firm that owns H&M, COS, Cheap Monday, and other brands) and Inditex (Industria de Diseño Textil, S.A., the Spanish parent company to Bershka, Massimo Dutti, Zara, and other brands) to luxury goods conglomerates like LVMH and holding companies such as Kering. But giantism in the distribution of fashion and luxury goods is a relatively recent phenomenon, and some comparatively small privately-owned firms, such



1.5 The H&M Fifth Avenue flagship store in New York City, on the occasion of the launch event of the *Comme des Garçons* collection for H&M, 13 November 2008.

as Chanel, have remained extremely dynamic. Historically, family-owned department stores and (in the US) specialty stores were the most important actors in delivering fashion to the consumer.

The French novelist Émile Zola, who depicted the Bon Marché in *Au bonheur des dames* (*The Ladies' Delight* or *The Ladies' Paradise*), contributed to the mystique of the Parisian department store and the stereotype of the fashion-crazed consumer. Many elements documented in Zola's 1883 novel – profligate shoppers, aspirational counter clerks, and charity-minded entrepreneurs – have become the staples of fashion and consumer history. Generations of intellectuals and social critics chastised the penchant for fashion as morally suspect, and blamed consumer society for phenomena such as kleptomania, sexual promiscuity, debt, and personal bankruptcy.⁴⁶ Published a century after Zola's novel, Michael B. Miller's history of the

Bon Marché is an exemplary scholarly work that has inspired many rich studies.⁴⁷ But some three decades hence, we can begin to see the many dimensions of fashion retailing that have not been scrutinized.

In Part I, the focus on Paris as a creative hub helped us to understand how the birthplace of haute couture adapted to late twentieth-century trade winds that dropped licensing regimes, ready-to-wear, luxury brands, and heritage marketing on its doorstep. Part II considers the retailer's role in shaping taste, responding to consumer expectations, and disseminating fashion merchandise. This section shifts the discussion from the companies that create fashion to the companies that sell it, and explores the give-and-take among producers, distributors, and consumers.

The first generation of historians who studied modern consumer culture, including T. J. Jackson Lears, William Leach, and Richard Tedlow, demonstrated how new types of enterprise shaped consumers' expectations starting in the late nineteenth century.⁴⁸ The readymade clothing industry was in its infancy, and 'fashion' and 'fabrics' were synonymous. Some retailers that sold fabrics began to diversify their stock, and in doing so, pioneered the concept of a store with different departments that each carried a special line of merchandise. Emporia like the Bon Marché catered to the bourgeoisie and wealthier classes who could afford fashion merchandise. In Milan, the Grandi Magazzini 'Alle Città d'Italia', founded by the brothers Ferdinando and Luigi Bocconi in 1865 and renamed La Rinascente in 1921 under new ownership, is a case in point. In the physical store and by mail-order catalogue, the Bocconi brothers' emporium sold fabrics, thread, lace, and other goods needed for dressmaking; hat shapes and the ribbons and feathers for embellishing them; stockings and undergarments; and some readymade clothing, such as shawls, capes, and coats. The Bocconi store did little trade with the working classes, but reached middle-income households where the breadwinner was a physician or an engineer.⁴⁹

As the great style capital of Europe, Paris played a seminal role in the growth of fashion retailing. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, department stores began to crop up on the grand boulevards of La Rive Droite, or the Right Bank of the river Seine, from the rue de Rivoli to boulevard Haussmann.⁵⁰ In Germany, department stores were slower to develop, but by the early twentieth century, they 'surpassed all but American stores in both number and sales volume'.⁵¹ The Philadelphia entrepreneur John Wanamaker is often identified as the father of the American department store because of his commitment to a broad selection of merchandise, fixed prices, and other modern business practices. Large American cities such as Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, New York, and Philadelphia, and smaller ones around the country, all had family-run department stores on the main street. Some American entrepreneurs recognized the value of specialization, and stores dedicated exclusively to

fashion appeared, among them William Filene's Sons Company in Boston and Henri Bendel, Saks, Bergdorf Goodman, and Lord & Taylor in New York. Ongoing research suggests that these large fashion-only retailers may have been a distinctive American phenomenon. Writing in 1966, for example, the fashion journalist for the London *Times* noted, 'Nothing like the American fashion specialty stores exists in England.'⁵² Collectively in the transatlantic world, department stores and specialty stores dominated the fashion scene until the late twentieth century, when chains garnered significant competitive advantage. In the UK, for example, local family-owned department stores mainly disappeared from the high street. They were pushed aside by chain department stores such as Debenhams and House of Fraser; by fashion multiples such as Aquascutum, Austin Reed, Burberry, C&A Modes, Country Casuals, Jaeger, Topshop, and Wallis; variety store chains such as Marks and Spencer; and eventually by international chains such as H&M, Primark, and Zara.⁵³

Retailers have long performed a vital go-between function in the fashion system, acting as brokers between the companies that create the merchandise and the consumers who buy and use it. In many ways, retailers add value to the fashion system by acting as interpreters and tastemakers. They take the pulse of consumers, interact with suppliers to select the goods that will appeal to their trade, and help the merchandising staff to present the items to shoppers in an appealing setting. As Regina Lee Blaszczyk has demonstrated, retail buyers were important 'fashion intermediaries' who connected the store to the consumer, and whose merchandise choices could make or break the season's profits.⁵⁴ In the United States, the men who managed most retail enterprises soon discovered the importance of 'the woman's viewpoint' to merchandise selection and presentation. From the early twentieth century, American department stores and specialty fashion retailers employed women as fashion buyers, merchandise managers, publicists, and advertising copywriters. Store managers believed that the feminine understanding of fashion was a business asset that needed to be harnessed to produce higher sales. In turn, a job as fashion buyer provided the aspirational career woman with an avenue for upward mobility. By examining the internal workings of retailing, we can see how gender stereotypes played out in the fashion supply chain.

The chapters in this section consider four major fashion retailers – Galleries Lafayette in Paris, I. Magnin in San Francisco, William Filene's Sons Company in Boston, and H&M in Stockholm – within the context of the revival of European fashion after World War II and the global democratization of fashion in our own time. Collectively, the essays look inside the department store, the specialty fashion retailer, and the global brand to examine the retail managers, buyers, fashion directors, merchandise managers, and window display artists who have been largely absent from the

annals of fashion history. In France, men tightly held the reins in retailing, but in America and Sweden, women held influential positions in retailers and at global brands. In the postwar era, they helped to disseminate and reinterpret European fashion for the prosperous American market, and in more recent times, some have shaped the design strategies and product development process in global mass-market fashion.

After World War II, European and American fashion retailers faced the challenge of determining what types of goods to stock in their stores. Italian products had cultural cachet and nicely fitted the bill. In the immediate postwar years, the French took their cues from America, where stores like R. H. Macy & Company in New York City put on popular promotions of Italian merchandise. As Florence Brachet Champsaur explains in her chapter, when Galeries Lafayette imported Italian goods, Parisians objected because they wanted to see French merchandise in their favourite high-class department store (figure 1.6). In the United States, two influential stores – I. Magnin on the West Coast and Filene’s on the East Coast – looked to France, Italy, and Britain for the latest fashions. As Sonnet Stanfill shows in her discussion of I. Magnin, Italian fashion proved especially popular among California shoppers because the casual look of Italian ready-to-wear was a good fit with West Coast lifestyle. The buyers sourced Italian fashion for their store, while helping Italian designers to understand the needs of the American market.



The food hall at 'La Fleur de la production italienne', Galeries Lafayette, 1953

At Filene's in Boston, the subject of Regina Lee Blaszczyk's chapter, a large team of buyers, merchandise managers, publicists, and advertising copywriters collaborated to make their fashion specialty store into a one-stop shopping destination for New England fashionistas. Filene's executives dreamt of a great transatlantic entente, wherein North America and Europe would share textiles, fashion, and design sensibilities. However, this goal was never realized due to changing American tastes that rendered obsolete the formal clothes modelled after French haute couture. In the Filene's case study, we see the first signs of ageing in the major retailing institutions that had dominated the commercial landscape since the years around 1900. The women who had been hired to interpret popular taste wanted to remake the consumer in their own image, but the American shopper had a mind of her own and wanted casual styles rather than couture knock-offs. Today, department stores and large fashion specialist retailers are endangered species, lumbering giants in a forest dominated by nimble chain retailers such as H&M.

To conclude our discussion of retailing, Ingrid Giertz-Mårtenson provides an in-depth case study of H&M with reference to the firm's history and the contemporary inclination to associate the retailer with fast fashion. She goes back to the social-democratic roots of H&M, showing that the brand was animated by the desire to make fashion available to mass consumers. Giertz-Mårtenson argues that the founders of H&M were aligned with political democracy and the advent of the consumer-citizen in Sweden.⁵⁵ Some six decades after its founding, H&M's commitment to a consumer's democracy was shaping its internal culture and corporate strategy. This strong tradition stands at odds with the public image of the company as an advocate of throwaway culture and fast fashion. As creative director Margareta van den Bosch explains, it takes H&M about a year to plan a new fashion line – how 'fast' is that?

Part III: European fashion on the periphery

In recent years, the Western fashion industry has ramped up the fast fashion process to deliver new trends to the global masses in rapid fire. H&M is often associated with the fast fashion regime, which is more accurately embodied by the quick-production activities of Inditex (parent company of Zara) and the Irish retailer, Primark, which is a subsidiary of Associated British Foods. Some observers praise the advent of fashion for everyone, while critics yearn for a return to slower modes of production and to more judicious consumption habits. In the age of democratized fashion, pundits have looked to charity shops buckling under the weight of barely worn clothing and have raised questions about the environmental costs of incessant style changes.⁵⁶

Part III of the book looks to alternative visions of the European fashion system that have bubbled up in unexpected places. Collectively, the chapters highlight the relationship between core and periphery, and bring the book to closure with discussion of the global context for value creation (figure 1.7). We shift the focus away from the major creative hubs of Europe and the consumption centres of America to a new zone: the so-called periphery and its players. Here we examine a constellation of people and places that are important to the European fashion system, even though they are at quite some distance, either geographically or symbolically, from any European fashion capital.

Fashion has always been a global trade. The twenty-first century has witnessed a new phase of globalization made possible by international trade agreements, technologies such as container ships and digital communications, and the modernization of Asian economies such as India and China. The sea change in the democratization of fashion began in the late twentieth century with the relocation of garment production to low-wage economies. Many mass-market fashion brands contract with factories or workshops to manufacture goods on their behalf. Competition between subcontractors leads to lower production costs for the retailer.⁵⁷ Pressure comes from the consumer as well, who wants more, better, and cheaper fashion. Over the last few decades, clothing has become less expensive. The design content of cheaper clothing has improved, and rapid response in production has further contributed to the democratization of fashion.

For large numbers of consumers, especially in the West, the democratization of fashion has been something to celebrate. As the fashion theorist Gilles Lipovetsky explains, fashion is a creative outlet. It allows consumers to express their individuality – even if this means that people dress to look like other members of their group – and the widespread availability of fashion goods blurs class differences.⁵⁸ Yet distinction remains. It is visible through the quality of the garment, through subtle details of the cloth and the construction, and through expensive accessories, particularly handbags which have replaced hats as the favourite fashion pick-me-up. Even in an age of casualization and democratization, distinction has not disappeared, but it has reappeared in new sartorial forms.⁵⁹

There have always been significant human costs associated with mechanized clothing production. Tragedies such as the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in New York City in 1911 and collapse of the Rana Plaza factory building in Bangladesh in 2013 have resulted in a loss of life. These events are testimony to the dark side of the fashion system. More than a hundred years ago, the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory made inexpensive button-down blouses for the ‘Gibson Girl’ who had to look presentable for her job as a teacher, counter clerk, or typist.⁶⁰ Today, factories in Bangladesh, India, China, and Vietnam produce casual clothing for the consumer who tries to make ends meet by shopping at Asda, H&M, Primark, or Wal-Mart.⁶¹



- 1.7** 'Workshop of the Empire' by Jill Kinnear, 2008. Made in Australia from digitally printed single and triple silk georgette and silk shantung, this garment speaks of the role tartans have played in the construction of a Scottish identity and mythology. Both in its construction and pattern (called 'Steel Tartan'), the dress evokes 'empire'.

At the same time, many Asian factories produce high-end clothing and accessories for the status-conscious fashionista who can afford to shop in luxury boutiques at the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II in Milan or on the avenue Montaigne in Paris. Some observers point to the negative side of

offshoring luxury production.⁶² The journalist Dana Thomas has questioned the ethics of a fashion business that uses sweatshops to produce luxury brands retailed at premium prices.⁶³ This research has done much to open consumers' eyes to the Janus face of the fashion industry.

Social scientists have also debated the histories of the relocation of fashion production and its side effects. Their work reveals the complexity of fashion production. While ethically conscious consumers may refuse to buy garments produced in low-wage economies, scholars have shown that diverting production from these countries might be damaging. Many countries that make cheap apparel – locations such as Bangladesh, Vietnam, Laos, but also Montenegro and Bulgaria – are undergoing what the *New York Times* journalist Adam Davidson has called the 'T-shirt phase' of the economy. Britain had the closest equivalent to a T-shirt phase in the eighteenth century when poor farmers migrated to urban factories during the First Industrial Revolution, while the United States had two T-shirt phases, one in the nineteenth century with the rise of the New England textile mills and second in the twentieth century with the industrialization of the New South.⁶⁴ Eliminating the T-shirt phase from a developing economy might result in the withdrawal of foreign direct investment. The loss of foreign capital, in turn, might encourage reinvestment in more advanced industries that pay higher wages. These arguments, however, beg the question as to where clothing would be made, and how much the merchandise would cost in the stores.

Recent media debates over fashion and textile production have advocated for partial re-shoring of the fashion industries back to the West.⁶⁵ Those who advocate for reinvestment in Western manufacturing often link their arguments to the creation of national brands with a heritage identity. In the United Kingdom, the Campaign for Wool, an effort to promote British-made wool fabrics and fashions under the royal patronage of Prince Charles, exemplifies the effort to reinvest in Western industry and heritage.⁶⁶ Here too, social scientists have shown that there is no easy solution. A more complex reality may stand behind a 'made in Europe' tag. In one scenario, some production processes – making the thread, weaving the cloth, and cutting the cloth, for example – are completed overseas, while the finishing is done in Europe.⁶⁷ Furthermore, the site of production should not make us forget that humans migrate. Factories in the West may be staffed with under-paid workers, including illegal migrants who follow factory jobs.⁶⁸

The rise of a multipolar system of fashion capitals has entirely transformed the geographies of fashion production. Several factors need to be considered. Some cities hope to achieve the status of fashion capital in order to boost their local, regional, and national economies. Older industrial hubs, devastated by the offshoring of production, have attempted to reconvert manufacturing spaces into creative centres. This has occurred

all around Europe, from Flanders to Poland.⁶⁹ Spaces that once had little or no association with the fashion system are now vested with new symbolic value by the creative class.⁷⁰ Locales that were once production centres for traditional cloth, whether Japanese cottons or Scottish woollens, have discovered value in their authenticity and heritage. In the final decades of the twentieth century, the reinvention of tradition, combined with considerable soul searching among consumers adrift in a sea of fast fashion, generated a new interest in fashion products that were earmarked by quality and durability.⁷¹

We have seen that although couturiers – whether from France, Italy, or elsewhere – tried to protect their original creative designs from copyists, they were rendered helpless by the accelerated pace at which fashions changed.⁷² In recent decades, the increasingly rapid turning of the fashion cycle has come under scrutiny. The accelerated pace of change has created micro-seasons and confusion over what is a new style. In a very post-modern way, endless revivals of retro styles have diluted the precision that characterised the seasonal change of fashion in the early years of Cardin, Dior, and their peers. Over the past few decades, designers and consumers have complained that fashion is going so fast that there might no longer be any fashion at all. Not everything can find new life in second-hand shops or as recycled rags. Environmentalists deplore overconsumption and landfills piled high with cheap clothes that were made to be worn once, photographed in selfies, circulated on social media, and then forgotten.

Some consumers have begun to demand a slower pace of consumption. Albeit limited to cultural and economic elites, laments over disposable fashion have inspired new forms of production and have revitalized traditional industries. [Chapters 9](#) and [10](#) examine the role of heritage aesthetics as a counterpoint to fast fashion through case studies of the Japanese denim industry, and Scottish tartans and tweeds, respectively. In these essays – by Rika Fujioka and Ben Wubs on Japan and by Shiona Chillas, Melinda Grewar, and Barbara Townley on Scotland – we see companies that have chosen to harness the cult of imperfection and the cult of imagined traditions, respectively, and that seek to create design statements about permanency and legacy in a throwaway world. Are these examples the beginnings of a paradigm shift, or do they simply reflect the interests of niche markets? Regardless, these examples need to be viewed through a pragmatic lens. Such enterprises will never make goods that reach the mass market unless they follow the example of the Asian denim producer Kaihara and reduce costs by relocating production to a lower-wage economy, in their case, from Japan to Thailand.

[Chapters 11](#) and [12](#) are perhaps the most provocative in the book. The first of these, by Tereza Kuldova, is an anthropological study of luxury brands and elite consumers in India that questions the ethics of ethical fashion, suggesting it might be a feel-good quick fix for the environmental

degradation facing India on a massive scale. The reinvention of tradition and the concomitant borrowing of cultural motifs by fashion innovators has a dark side. This case study of India explains how the rise of ethical fashion was less a response to consumer demand than a bold marketing move. More problematic, says Kuldova, is that arguments for ethical fashion were developed in tandem with the rise of philanthropic foundations designed to address, and even mask, deep social problems such as growing economic inequality.⁷³

Finally, fashion also remains a powerful voice for individual expression and collective social messages. Haute couture, as an institutionalized system, developed close ties with the arts. The producers of fashion and the creators of art both use clothing and accessories as vehicles for expression. In our book's final chapter, Wessie Ling traces the Chinese Red-White-Blue carrier bag from its origins in the market stalls of Hong Kong to its dissemination and adaptation up and down the social ladder, from global migrant communities to global luxury brands (figure 1.8).



Stanley Wong, 'Investigation of a journey to the west by micro+polo: redwhiteblue', Tea and Chat installation, Venice Biennale, 2005.

This case study shows how one artefact travelled from the site of its invention in Asia to distant Africa where it was used by poverty-stricken refugees. Yet this ordinary object of mass consumption, with all the symbolic charge that it embodies, was also expropriated by European fashion brands and by global artists, each with different intentions. Fashion has never ceased to signify meanings, whether in its production or in its re-appropriation.

In all four chapters, the authors consider important social and cultural questions from the perspective of the company, the brand, and the larger context, always giving voice to the actors behind the scenes. This balanced perspective, which considers the voices of creators unedited by the public-relations machine, is often missing from criticisms or celebrations of the contemporary fashion scene. Collectively, the concluding chapters speak to the open-endedness of contemporary history, which necessarily raises questions but provides few solutions. We hope at least to provide food for thought.

New directions

Over the past few decades, Western consumers have significantly increased their fashion budgets and have purchased more and more fashion goods. The price of clothing has steadily declined, particularly in the New Millennium with the removal of tariffs and quotas by the World Trade Organization (WTO). Despite the proliferation of inexpensive fashion, luxury brands constitute one of most profitable sectors in today's global economy.⁷⁴ The middle ground has evaporated, and the consumer market is bifurcated into high and low.

The case studies in this book have examined the mechanisms for creating value within the fashion system. Why is fashion such a desirable commodity? What makes fashion 'hot' and saleable at all price points? What makes a Gucci bag attractive to a Middle Eastern heiress who shops at Harrods, and what makes a knock-off appealing to the shopper who frequents the flea market on Petticoat Lane? Is it accurate to think of consumers as fashion victims, or are consumers the driving force behind the fashion system? This book has explored these quandaries by stepping outside the factory and examining the activities that serve as a prelude to manufacturing. Our goal has been to trace the pathways of fashion design, management, marketing, retailing, branding, and consumption. Through this effort, we have sought to understand how consumer desires are interpreted and translated into marketable new objects by the creative class in the fashion system.

Although manufacturing is now mainly located in the East, much of the aesthetic, cultural, and financial capital of fashion has remained in the West. Whether in 1947 or today, fashion experts travel around the world,

exchange knowledge, and relentlessly track new trends. This book has weighed heavily on Europe and America, exploring fashion centres and following in the footsteps of the people who generated fashion know-how. Our chapters have necessarily moved between the local and the global, assessing the transformation of local industries into global brands and codes. Case studies have ranged from Swedish-designed apparel and Scottish tweeds to Japanese denim, Indian luxury goods, and Hong-Kong carrier bags. Our story began with the fading glory of haute couture and ends with the vibrant world of fashion for everyone.

We contend that three geographical ensembles are fundamental to understanding the functions of fashion as a business. One space can be broadly defined as *European*. That space encompasses the relationships among central fashion capitals like Paris and regional manufacturing centres like Scotland. This book explores the changing relationships between those economic regions and taste cultures. The second space is *transatlantic*. Several contributions to this book consider the special fashion-industry connections between Europe and North America, notably the United States, which deserve scrutiny in order to better understand the dynamics of markets and innovation in the twentieth century. While the New York garment district manufactured the lion's share of mass-produced garments, the output of European centres offers a striking counterpoint to the postwar idea of American hegemony in the spheres of economy and consumption. The final space can be called *global*. The major European cities proved to be enduring centres of research and development and innovation in fashion design, while places in the so-called European periphery served as manufacturing centres for textiles and garments and gave birth to new creative fashion hubs. Several contributions in this book shift the focus from Europe to the new production capitals of Asia. Studies of emerging players in manufacturing and branding, notably in Japan and India, rounds out our approach to the business and economic history of fashion production.

Our research blends theoretical and critical approaches with empirical studies. Core questions point to what makes this edited volume unique. Who were the real innovators in the Western fashion system? Why did Europe remain important to fashion despite the upheavals in the global economy in the late twentieth century? What can we learn about the creation of cultural forms by looking below the surface – beneath the hype about brands – and into the ateliers of creative professionals, the design studios of textile mills, and the merchandising offices of mass-market retailers? The case-study approach combines the empirical and the theoretical, and offers lively narratives. We are pleased to pull back the curtain, peek in on fashion experts at work, and show how entrepreneurs and firms created one of the most successful business sectors in modern Europe and adapted it to the changing markets of our own time.