



Institute for Capitalising
on Creativity, University
of St Andrews

The Business of Fashion: Historical Perspectives



Department of History
& Welsh History,
University of

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School of Management
and Languages

Paper Abstracts



Session One: Networks, connections and markets

Caroline Evans, Central St. Martins, UK

Modeling Modernism: the First Fashion Shows 1900-1929

This informal presentation maps my recently completed research project on the history of the first fashion shows in France and the US. I analyse the fashion show as a fulcrum between commerce and culture, and argue that the 'mannequin parade,' as the fashion show was called, drew on the artistic language of modernism to translate business and management methods into visual seduction to create what one contemporary journalist called 'the arithmetic of fashion'. The resulting book aims to combine business, design and intellectual history in a single treatment that connects production to consumption, and fashion to the visualisation of knowledge.

Véronique Pouillard, University of Oslo, Norway

The Paris-New York Fashion Business, 1920s-1960s

This paper presents the current advancement of a book-length study on the transatlantic networks in the fashion business, focused on the Paris-New York nexus from the 1920s to the 1960s. It is based on a business history approach, exploring the structure and functioning of the enterprises. This means, in this case, addressing two major questions. The first concerns local/global networks and sales. This part of the manuscript is developed by looking at exports, and at the law framing the business, especially in terms of intellectual property in the realm of fashion design. The second question concerns the management of the fashion business, and is developed through the study of professional associations on both sides of the Atlantic.

Session Two: From Fashion House to High Street

Florence Brachet Champsaur, EHESS and Galeries Lafayette, France

Madeleine Vionnet and Galeries Lafayette: The unlikely marriage of a Parisian couture house and a French department store, 1922-1940

In the past, fashion history has traditionally produced monographs on talented designers emphasizing the creativity of the luxury *couture* business and the tastes of its elite clientele. This case study, based on the unpublished records of *Galeries Lafayette*, offers a balanced and decompartmentalized interpretation of relationships among the players in the fashion system. Fashion designer Madeleine Vionnet never considered herself as an artist and was well aware of the commercial aspects of the business, while the owner of *Galeries Lafayette*, Théophile Bader, tried to generate corporate synergy between the couture house and the department store. The examination of the partnership between Vionnet and Bader raises important questions, not only about counterfeiting but also about the transfer of creativity from designers to manufacturers.

Artemis Yagou, VU University Amsterdam

In search of a “design Esperanto” in Greece: The case of fabric and dress designer Yannis Tseklenis

Big opportunities emerged for the Greek fashion industry during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s as manufacturing and especially textiles took advantage of low labour costs and the flexibility offered by local producers. Even so, private and public stakeholders failed to reach the consensus necessary to achieve sustained, design-oriented development, and the textile sector eventually declined. The activities of fabric and dress designer Yannis Tseklenis exemplify the potential that Greek design presented during that period. Tseklenis ambitiously attempted to innovate and operate within the international fashion system. His work grasped current trends and was based on a skilful matching of inspiration with recycling of existing styles and iconographies. The themes of his collections were drawn from a very eclectic range of subjects, including Greek antiquity, Byzantium, Impressionism, Russia, voodoo, and the work of contemporary Greek painters. His designs for female school uniforms also added a touch of style to an outdated institution. Promotional strategies emphasised the designer’s brand as an indicator of quality and as a strong selling point. The case of Tseklenis illustrates the dynamics of a design-based business attempting to combine cosmopolitanism and worldwide success with a sense of patriotism, local pride and the search for a uniquely Greek approach in the global arena.

Session Three: Materials, Process and Style

Regina Lee Blaszczyk, Innovative Histories and University of Delaware, USA

Seventh Avenue Style: The Hidden History of How the American Woman Became the “Best Dressed Woman in the World”

This talk presents my ongoing research for a trade book on New York City as the center of American style. I draw on the history of technology and the history of innovation to reframe the city’s history as a hub for the design, production, sale, and promotion of women’s apparel. This project builds on the work of geographers like Norma Rantisi, who have explored the complex social and economic networks that undergirded the garment business. It expands on the concept of the industrial district to get at the heart of the creative industries that created the American look. It examines how new technologies and new technological practices such as scientific management enabled economic growth and the development of that elusive concept known as “style.”

The presentation asks: What was unique about the New York apparel industry? My presentation will focus on a series of visibly invisible processes and actors: the dry-goods emporium and the department store as machines for selling, the impact of menswear tailoring on the design of woman’s apparel, the strategies of trade groups like the Textile Color Card Association in information management and dissemination, and the role of rayon and synthetic fiber companies in promoting the development of technologically innovative garments. The paper deliberately avoids the term *fashion* because of its contemporary association with rapid change and its historic association with haute couture and other high-end products.

My goal is to write a book that will meet the highest standards of the historical profession, but my intended reader is a general audience.

Eugene K. Choi, Graduate School of Technology Management, Ritsumeikan University, Japan

Mechanising Fashion Creativity: Genesis of A New Business Model from the Evolution of Total Design Centre, Shima Seiki, Japan 1982-2012

Since the founder's invention of the fully automated glove-knitting machine in 1962, *Shima Seiki* (the world's leading producer of computerised flat Knitting machines, in Wakayama Japan) has been pioneering the avant-garde total fashion system. The corporate beginning was focused upon complete mechanisation as well as the automation of knitting machines. Then, the rise of electronics in the 1970s and the 1980s provided the firm with another new business opportunity: the application of electronic control and computer graphics. This swift development of "mechatronics" (mechanics and electronics) began to bridge the two separate realms of the mechanics of textile machinery and of the art of fashion design. So the establishment of Knit Design Centre in 1982 opened the epoch of developing digitalised total fashion system, and a dozen years later in 1994, Total Design Centre was formed by integrating several reformed divisions. Along with its material design 3D simulations, pattern making, and a wide variety of apparel CAD/CAM (Computer Aided Design, Computer Aided Manufacturing) systems, Total Design Centre now stands out as the spearhead of creating new models of fashion business through the application of *Shima Seiki's* cutting-edge knitting technologies. This paper attempts to investigate the inimitable historical context of *Shima Seiki's* ongoing venture of new fashion creativity to enrich readers' knowledge on the unprecedented potential of fashion business henceforth.

Session Four: Organisations, Institutions and Fashion Markets

Birgit Lyngbye Pedersen, Centre for Business History, Copenhagen Business School, Denmark

When Clothes create People: The Federation of Danish Textile and Clothing Industries and the marketing of the Danish clothing industry from 1955 to 1960

My presentation examines the Danish employer organisation The Federation of Danish Textile and Clothing Industries and its strategic marketing effort in the last part of the 1950s, which had the purpose of creating and maintaining a market. From 1951 onwards the Danish clothing industry experienced strong competition when among other things, import restrictions fell away under trade liberalization, and import thus increased considerably. The clothing industry landed on hard times.

The Federation of Danish Textile and Clothing Industries' marketing effort in the first round directed itself at both manufacturers and retailers in order to influence consumers and create an increased consumption. The journal *Clothes Create People (Klæder skaber Folk)* was the first initiative in 1955, and the year after an exhibition in Forum by the same name followed. In 1958 Danish men's fashion council (Dansk Herremoderåd) was established, and in 1959 it was the women's turn with the establishment of Danish women's fashion council (Dansk Damemoderåd).

Even though research interest in the Danish clothing business has increased in recent years, only few have examined how the trade has reacted strategically to challenges over the decades. This paper shows that in the last part of the 1950s the Federation of Danish Textile and Clothing Industries was able to adapt to a new reality through a network with other players where competitive parameters like fashion, design and branding were strategic answers to the challenges faced by the industry.

Djurджа Bartlett, London College of Fashion, University of the Arts London, UK

Does Fashion Need to Change So Quickly, or System versus Process in Socialist Fashion

The 1917 Bolshevik revolution in Russia, and the 1948 coups that brought the Communists into power in East Europe, imposed huge economic, political, social, cultural and aesthetic changes in the part of the world that became known as the Eastern Bloc. Covering more than 72 years of the communist rule in six ex-socialist countries - the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland and Yugoslavia - this paper explores these changes, mediated through fashion.

In order to investigate the conceptual and practical aspects of the phenomenon of fashion in surroundings that differed significantly from its conventional setting, this paper deals with central planning, shortages, state ownership and a controlled and undeveloped market. However, this paper argues that such bureaucratic over-centralization was not only in line with the prevailing economic model. It also demonstrated the socialist fear of change and discontinuity of time. Preferring the synchronic, systematic level over the diachronic, processive level, the socialist regimes attempted to control and tame fashion trends through centralized systems of clothes production and distribution.

Embedded in the socialist slow master narrative, socialist fashion lost its struggle against its dynamic and ever-changing western counterpart. But its very existence, manifested through the regimes' huge efforts to maintain it through their central fashion institutions, and to promote it through their women's magazines, showed the socialist system's deep anxieties about the phenomenon of fashion.

Session Five: Enterprise and Swinging London

Richard Coopey, Aberystwyth University

Grannie Takes a Trip – to the Bank: Fashion, Youth and Enterprise in Britain in the Swinging Sixties

Particular periods generate changes in technologies, products and markets which seem to call forward new forms of entrepreneurship. Sometimes these new forms are seemingly based on youthful exuberance and close market knowledge. In recent years this might apply most notably to IT related sectors, where youthful expertise and vision has generated many notable entrepreneurial successes, in areas where traditional Chandlerian companies find the market moving too fast. This paper will focus on an earlier period, Britain in the 1960s, when a similar process seemed to be underway, particularly in the era-defining fashion and music sectors. As London took its place at the centre of the "swinging" 1960s, a number of start up companies emerged, characterized by innovative design and creativity, adventurous and radical promotion and marketing, but above all, by youthful exuberance in management styles. Young entrepreneurs catering for a youthful market in many, though not all respects. Notable fashion entrepreneurs and companies include Barbara Hulanicki and John Fitz-Simon at Biba, and Mary Quant and Archie McNair at Bazaar and the "King of Carnaby Street", John Stephen. The paper will examine the style and methods of these companies, with particular reference to John Stephen and Biba, outlining management cultures, finance, marketing and so on. It will also chart the profiles and similarities or contrasts in the background, experience and ambitions of the entrepreneurs themselves, and the place of these firms in the construction of the London image, and the extent to which they benefitted from that image. Additionally it will critically test the idea that these new firms were independent, and examine their relationship to, and influence upon, larger established companies in the fashion business.

Paolo Hewitt, London, UK

Big Ben: The Face of Mod Business

A look at the life and times of one of the '60s great Fashion entrepreneurs, Ben Sherman. His eponymously titled shirt was one of that decade's most popular items. Its sharp design and colourful appearance, not only sold millions, but formed part of a fashion initiative that helped bring about huge changes in men's fashion. The talk will cover all aspects of the man's life and craft.

Session Six: Sources and Methods in Fashion Business History

Ingrid Giertz-Mårtenson, Centre for Business History, Stockholm, Sweden

H&M – documenting the story of the world's largest fashion retailer

Three years ago H&M commissioned the Centre for Business History in Stockholm to secure and document the H&M history of some 60 years. This is the first time anyone from the outside was allowed to "enter" H&M from the inside. The project dealt with collecting, saving and digitalizing all existing documentation regarding clothing collections, advertising, store concepts, media and annual reports that have been produced by the company. The documentation was also heavily based on interviews (where all material was secured according to scientific methods) to save the "oral history" and experience from past and present collaborators. When making the interviews, many questions had to be dealt with. What perspectives should be considered in posing questions? Everything is not possible to document – so where should the emphasis be? On the business side, on the creative side or on the media-marketing side of this hugely successful company? And how much has the importance of "fashion-trends" influenced the company and added to its success?

This presentation will discuss how it is possible to approach a task like this. To "sell" the idea of documenting the company to the Board was a question of combining the experience from already documented companies to understanding the special needs of a fashion company of this kind. Secrecy is a key word in the H&M world and to try to making the company understand that both for themselves and for future research the documentation of their history was essential. Understanding the historical heritage of a company might be "in fashion" today, but it does not seem to have been a priority for H&M before the project was launched.

Francesca Polese, Bocconi University, Milan, Italy

Labeling: creating identities and understanding meanings in the fashion business

My contribution to the conference will focus mainly on the importance of exploring new sources that can be useful for the study the history of the fashion business. The basic assumption behind my presentation is that historians who want to understand the evolution of the fashion industry (production and consumption) face specific challenges that are posed by the very nature of "fashion". These challenges are especially demanding as far as sources are concerned and they do force historians of business to venture into paths (and use "documents") that are quite remote from the ones they are most familiar with.

I will share with the audience an example based on one of the research projects I am currently involved in and show how labels can be used to analyze the development of the fashion industry from different perspectives. For example, they are a source that provides evidence on the diffusion of new materials (e.g. synthetic and artificial fibers), on the diffusion of brands and on how they

are marketed, on the increase of consumer awareness and consumer expectations, along with differences in consumer practices and persistence of national/cultural preferences in addition to being an interesting source from which to investigate the issues of counterfeiting and on how firms and the legal system (eventually) react to prevent it.

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