



European Fashion: The Creation of a Global Industry

Alexis Romano

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Book Reviews

REGINA LEE BLASZCYK AND VÉRONIQUE
POUILLARD, eds, *European Fashion:
The Creation of a Global Industry*.
Studies in Design and Material
Culture. Manchester University
Press, Manchester, 2018. 344 pp.,
66 b/w illus. £20 (PB). ISBN:
9781526122100 (PB)

The importance of the network in the fashion industry and the burgeoning field of Fashion Studies is foregrounded in a new volume edited by Regina Lee Blaszyk and Véronique Pouillard on the business of European fashion from 1945 to the present day. *European Fashion: The Creation of a Global Industry* starts from the idea that fashion creation is not just the centralised product of a small group of well-known (Parisian) designers that trickles down as a physical and symbolic measure of value to other producers, consumers and places, but is instead a complex and collaborative venture built on the work of many lesser-known professionals, namely trendsetters, retail buyers, stylists, art directors, advertising executives, public relations agents, brand managers and entrepreneurs. The editors begin with an image of a model wearing a Pierre Cardin ensemble, made from a synthetic wool fabric by the DuPont Company, to illustrate their contextual framework and objectives, a reconsideration of the notion of Paris haute couture as a spatial and symbolic monolith and centre in the traditions of Georg Simmel and Thorstein Veblen.

Although Paris is a constant reference point throughout, chapters highlight the industry's underpinning by a network of fashion professionals across Europe

(and beyond), which the editors deem a product of the political and economic apparatus of a 'unified' post-war European state. Part One, 'Reinventing Paris Fashion', introduces readers to this historical context, in its exploration of Paris's shift from a 'couture production centre to a creative hub for design and brand management' (p. 6) between 1945 and 1970. The volume increases progressively in its global scope, with Part Two studying 'International Connections and the Role of Retailers', with examples from Italy, Sweden and the United States, and Part Three branching out to include Japan, Scotland, India and Hong Kong in 'European Fashion on the Periphery'.

A primary contribution of the book is its inclusion of many individuals normally left out of historical narratives, some of whom are women such as I. Magnin buyer Stella Hanania (Sonnet Stanfill), Filene's sales promotion manager Harriet Wilinsky (Regina Lee Blaszyk) and designers Margareta van den Bosch (Ingrid Giertz-Mårtenson) and Anita Dongre (Tereza Kuldova). This approach brings international history to a human level, though the female consumer is absent from most articles (at least on the surface). The volume's scope of subjects and geographies studied is matched by the interdisciplinarity of its approaches to the study of business and management, informed by design history, cultural anthropology, ethnography. This is how the editors contextualise their 'new' business history, one that departs from the social-science focused Chandler School. (Alfred D. Chandler, Jr's studies of management practices in large American

companies dominated twentieth-century business history.) Methodologies in *European Fashion* include object biography (Wessie Ling, Shiona Chillas, Melinda Grewar and Barbara Townley) and theories concerning the ‘culture’ of companies (Pierre-Yves Donzé and Ben Wubs; Rika Fujioka and Ben Wubs). As such, this volume purports to illustrate a shift in both Business History and Fashion Studies, resulting from the cultural and social ‘turn’ in the Humanities, although this is now rather standard for UK and US research at least.

One unifying thread is the study of how value is created, and how this might be rethought to include not only the artistic product of the couturier, typically valorised as authentic, exclusive and secretive, but also the collaborative and commercial worth of fashion work. For instance, authors present new ‘creative’ business models that illustrate how the artistic and commercial are interwoven, including the increasingly prevalent ‘Sleeping Beauty’ brand, which draws on the symbolic capital of heritage (Johanna Zanon), and how the large-scale conglomerate LVMH rethinks the management of creativity (Donzé and Wubs). Much of this creativity is redefined by the editors as ‘storytelling’, as a way of thinking about marketing practices (Donzé and Wubs; Giertz-Mårtenson; Chillas, Grewar and Townley; Kuldova). Although texts provide alternative symbolic constructions to Paris couture, many illustrate the continuing importance of luxury brands and Paris, and predominantly draw on Pierre Bourdieu’s theories of symbolic production to the exclusion of much other philosophical writing.

In studying the various intersections of global, national, local and (to a lesser extent) individual identities, this volume also contributes to research on fashion and place, while highlighting the global importance of the fashion industry. Certainly, traditional locations remain central: many authors discuss the United

States as a main political (Véronique Pouillard) and marketing and merchandising (Florence Brachet Champsaur, Stanfill, Blaszczyk) player. But it is perhaps the articles that consider the shaping of a post-war European fashion network (Pouillard, Brachet Champsaur) that strike most poignantly in this post-Brexit moment. Further, the volume’s study of the permeability of national borders mirrors the Europe-wide research project behind it. *European Fashion* is one of the research outputs of ‘The Enterprise of Culture: International Structures and Connections in the Fashion Industry since 1945’ (2013–2016), which was funded by HERA II: Humanities in the European Research Area, an organisation that supports transnational humanities-focused projects and now comprises twenty-five countries. ‘The Enterprise of Culture’ involved the participation of various European institutions, among which the UK featured considerably, with some of the project’s principal investigators based at the University of Leeds, the University of St Andrews, the University of Newcastle and the University of Warwick; the Victoria and Albert Museum was also a partner. The future of such collaborative endeavours is now under question in the current political climate, which has inadvertently shifted the original intended conversation of this volume. Alternatively, perhaps it simply renders its call for Europe-wide ‘networking’ in fashion and academia all the more urgent and timely.

ALEXIS ROMANO

Parsons, The New School for Design

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JONATHAN FAIERS AND MARY WESTERMAN BULGARELLA, eds, *Colors in Fashion*. Bloomsbury Academic, London and New York, 2017. xvii + 227 pp., 20 b/w illus., 42 col. pls. £81 (HB); £23.31