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The Social Organization of Fashion Design: A Case Study of the Tommy Hilfiger Corporation

by

Veronica Manlow

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

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9/22/2004
Date

Paul Attewell
Chair of Examining Committee
Prof. **PAUL ATTEWELL**

9/22/2004
Date

[Signature]
Executive Officer
Prof. **PHILIP KASINITZ**

W. Helmreich
Prof. **WILLIAM HELMREICH**

[Signature]
Prof. **PHILIP KASINITZ**

Prof.

Supervisory Committee

The City University of New York

Abstract

THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF FASHION DESIGN: A CASE STUDY OF
THE TOMMY HILFIGER CORPORATION

by

Veronica Manlow

Adviser: Professor Paul Attewell

This dissertation is a study of fashion production at Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc.

The Tommy Hilfiger Corporation, under the leadership of its principal designer, in cooperation with individuals in various divisions, becomes a cultural arbiter, tastemaker, and producer of sign-systems infused with the brand's charisma.

These sign-systems are used by the public to create distinctions and differentiations of identity in interactions and relationships. The relationship between the organization's structure and practices, its culture, the charisma of its leader, external conditions, and the creative processes by which these sign-systems are developed is the focus of this inquiry.

Preface

It is through the sharing of symbols, Emile Durkheim tells us, that society emerges, solidifies, and indeed becomes conscious of itself. Clothing is one of the most important manifestations of collective identity, and has been used to define and present identity from the earliest years of human history. With the emergence of fashion, a more complex semiotic system takes hold encompassing features such as national identity, popular culture, and various competing forms of expression having their origin in social movements and individual interpretations of such phenomena. There is a continuous thread, if you will, in the history of clothing, and that thread is held together by two things: the need humans have to express distinction and identification. Running through these parameters, intertwined as they are, we find both social structure and agency.

Clothes were made at home by women but eventually moved outside of the household, becoming a cottage industry, and then a factory system. Manufacturers hired designers to create fashion. Some designers began to part with manufacturers to work on their own in fashion houses. These designers, working under their own names, eventually achieved a higher status for the profession as purveyors of clothing, and of knowledge about style that could confer a desirable status on consumers. Certain couturiers achieved the status of artist.

Most designers work in an organizational setting and do not receive public

recognition for their work. The designer works as a member of a team, designing clothing under the name of a “master” designer or brand. Such designers tend to be considered craftspersons. They are in fact though, artist-craftspersons.

Creativity and individual talent, similar to that of an artist, is necessary to their work. Furthermore, designers need to possess cultural knowledge to be able to select, create and assign appropriate connotations to the clothing and accessories they design. This combination of skills makes the designer a cultural arbiter.

Increasingly the designer must also possess a certain amount of business skill.

At Tommy Hilfiger, and other such companies, you have a master designer whose name appears on all products that are produced. The creative process, however, is a collective endeavor. Designers can be compared to artists who worked in the guild system of the Middle Ages. Artistic creation involved the participation of assistants, pupils and apprentices of the master artist. At Tommy Hilfiger collective works bearing the signature of the master designer are produced by a team of designers in cooperation with various divisions of the companies. In the design process we see a melding of rational bureaucratic principles with the subjective phenomena of aesthetics and inspiration.

In the world today there is a globalization not only of the economy but of sign-systems used by the public to create distinctions and differentiations of identity. The Tommy Hilfiger Corporation through the concerted effort of its various divisions and external networks becomes

a cultural arbiter, tastemaker, and producer of sign-systems infused with the brand's charisma. In order to create a brand that bespeaks an American identity the firm must draw on elements from the popular culture and imagination. Put another way, we can say that Hilfiger has tapped into the social images or collective representations that Americans identify with and find meaningful, and has brought them together under the Tommy Hilfiger banner. Tommy Hilfiger not only builds on these existing themes, he combines them in unusual ways, and he introduces new ideas, creating a unique interpretation of American fashion, recognizably his own. To accomplish this he relies on the assistance and expertise of a variety of people who must be persuaded to further his vision and define his brand.

As an identification with the master designer is so crucial to the creative process, Hilfiger has carefully constructed his charismatic authority in the firm both by routinizing it in various administrative practices of the organization such as the pep rally or Christmas party or the company newsletter, and in maintaining a "pure" or "live" form of charisma by engaging in interpersonal transactions with employees at formal events and within the company on a spontaneous basis. Hilfiger presents himself as a friendly and accessible individual who does not stand on ceremony. This charisma allows Hilfiger to secure a high level of regard and dedication from employees. Even when there are conflicts, Hilfiger manages to maintain an esteem amongst employees. Hilfiger's charisma pervaded the entire organization. The organizational culture of the firm upholds certain ideals

held by its leader and serves the purpose of binding people together for a common purpose. Through various practices this organizational culture is reinforced and sustained. There is a systematic attempt to dissolve hierarchy and to deal with employees on a more or less egalitarian basis, again, within a system that is highly bureaucratized. The work environment is almost uniformly described as collegial and accepting, not as divisive.

Hilfiger's charisma must also extend to the brand so that the products carrying his name can be said to embody his presence, even when they are licensed to other manufacturers. The products sold can be compared to sacraments and benedictions in that they are infused with the spirit of Hilfiger as master designer, and attain a significance for people on this basis. Hilfiger's charisma is extended through strategic licensing agreements. As such, Hilfiger has positioned himself in such a way as to cover a variety of price points, licensing his name to specialists, while at the same time maintaining control over the products that bear his name.

Fashion remains despite its democratic embrace, a vehicle which marks distinctions and displays group membership and individuality. Hilfiger in his lifestyle brand has provided an invitation to people--many who were below the radar of other designers--to participate in a collective American identity that embraces the urban as well as the elite, as if they were in fact not so far apart. People struggle to redefine situations and to negotiate existing boundaries. Fashion is one way in which this is accomplished and is thus should be studied

carefully by sociologists.

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Chapter 1 – Clothing, Fashion, and Industry

Introduction

The existence and development of a fashion industry in clothing is interwoven with the multiple realities that a fashion system represents. Fashion contains visual and textual aspects, it has a social structure, and it is a collection of individual acts. To begin with, clothing, as a feature of personal appearance which includes various forms of “hairstyles, ornaments, masks, decorations and mutilations”, is an essential aspect of the presentation of self in all human societies (Kuper, 1973: 348).

The use of symbols is in fact an element of the attainment of “modern”, or more simply “human” thought and behavior. This indicates an ability to think abstractly, and in objects created with an artistic intent, to appreciate beauty. Recently, archeologists have discovered two ochre ornaments, engraved with geometrical symbols, at Blombos Cave in South Africa. These artifacts are more than 40,000 years older than the more advanced cave paintings found in France’s Grotte Chauvet. Christopher S. Henshilwood, the leader of the research team, states that the evidence points to “behaviorally modern” homo sapiens in Africa about 77,000 years ago (McFarling, 2002: A1). These symbolic expressions are precursors to more complex representations found once social organization reaches more advanced forms.

The different parts of the structure of appearance “are consciously manipulated to assert and demarcate differences in status, identity and

commitment (support or protest) at the level of personal, national and international relationships”, observes the anthropologist Hilda Kuper. She claims the “rules of that structure are assimilated over time together with other rules of thought and behavior”, and though they may have “received less analytical scrutiny, they are as ‘real’ as rules of kinship, of land tenure, of spatial interaction, or any other rules of social communication” (1973: 348-349). Similar claims of the importance of material culture--particularly clothing--in understanding society, have been made in sociology by Georg Simmel, Gregory Stone, and Erving Goffman, among many others.

Kuper further observes that the term “clothing” should be used in an inclusive sense and be differentiated further into “dress”, the clothing used on everyday occasions, “uniform”, used for ceremonial occasions and “costume”, clothing used for rituals--performances with a mystical or sacred quality (1973: 349). Its modern manifestation is represented by fashion.

Clothing then is an important element of social life and consists of taking natural or synthetic materials and converting them into wearable items. The fabric and the cut of clothing enables or confines the body’s movement and causes the wearer to be received in a certain way--compare two women in the late nineteenth century, one wearing a corset underneath a tightly fitted dress of elaborate material and design with a large bustle, and the other in a loosely-fitted garment of coarse material. By virtue of their clothing the women will not be able to physically move in the same way, and socially they will not be allowed to participate in the same activities or occupy the same space. Clothing is made by

human intervention into cultural items. The question then is: who makes clothing? Clothing, its management within the household, and its tailoring, has been an essential aspect of “women’s work”. In poorer households, women made clothing for the men and children of the house as well as for themselves. In more affluent households, women were able to hire other women to make clothing. These dressmakers followed traditional patterns and did not introduce any radical innovations of style and manner into their designs.

Eventually these domestic arrangements, organized by women, were superceded by the emergence of clothing-making as a “cottage” industry. This industry was organized according to the guild system, though individual tailors, seamstresses and dressmakers too were to be found. In the guild system a master-tailor, for example, worked with a few apprentices and journeymen, with the latter eventually emerging as masters in their own right. Another system for the production of clothing was the “putting out” or “out work” system in which a merchant-manufacturer would “put out” materials to rural producers who would work in their homes. The finished garments were returned to the merchants, and the workers were paid on a piece-work basis. The demand for skilled custom work existed alongside this cheaper, less skilled and more exploitative form of labor (Gamber, 1997: 87). Wendy Gamber points out that many labor scholars assume that artisans and the apprentice system were exclusively male, and that once clothing moved from a home enterprise women were excluded. Dressmakers, seamstresses (women who stitched men’s shirts and pants), and milliners, more often than not, learnt and practiced their skills in the workshop.

Well into the twentieth century women continued to provide custom services, as well as work in factories (1997: 4-5).

Producing dresses, uniforms and costumes in this manner eventually gave way to factories, though vestiges of the “putting-out” system remain in the “sweatshops” that some manufacturers use today. These clothing makers did not employ designers and did not typically make substantial changes in style to the clothing they produced. This form of mass production was best suited to the making of identical products with variations only in size.

These industries, however, owing no doubt, to the emergence of more complex class-based societies, grew into the fashion industry whose task it now was to produce not just clothing in the traditional sense but signs by which different and newly emerging classes, statuses, and parties could be distinguished—using the latter word to describe organized structures of people seeking to exercise social and political power or influence—military systems, voluntary associations like lodges, militias, religious orders and so on. The task of the fashion system was to provide clothing that was to be used to make distinctions between people—economic, cultural, aesthetic, and political. An industry emerged to provide the signs necessary to do this. Once these signs were made available to make distinctions, they became available also to be used as signs of domination: people who could wear more expensive clothes, visibly more sumptuous or rare items, could dominate those who wore more ordinary clothes. Furs and silks, well-tailored clothes, clothes with elite markers of one kind or another could trump cotton and ill-tailored clothes by anonymous makers.

To cater to these needs of the new elite who wanted signs of distinction-- instruments to legitimate their domination, the fashion designer was born. It was his or her task to produce clothes that made it possible for its wearers to distinguish themselves and dominate others--subtly or overtly. In creating these specialized clothes designers drew themes from current culture or historical sources, and in effect became both creators of new cultural elements as well as disseminators of these items.

As the middle class expanded and found itself with a disposable income, more people sought signs of distinction. Fashion designers took markers of elite status and adapted them to a mass audience providing, again a means of dominance through clothing. New markers of status such as the logo emerge, providing a currency that can be easily read. There is an irony. As fashion becomes more "democratic", extending its reach to groups that were formerly excluded, it does not necessarily become less hierarchical. More groups are able to enter into the "game" of distinction, and the fashion cycle accelerates. Signs are commodified. The greater the number of people drawn into the democracy of fashion, the more need there is for low wage laborers to fulfill the needs of this ever expanding system. These inherent contradictions, though, are not limited to the world of fashion.

The provision of body-covering to people eventually became a major capitalist industry--the fashion industry--with very complex structures with economic, cultural and aesthetic dimensions. These issues and claims--some of them at least--can be investigated by an intense study of a major firm in the

American fashion industry, one in fact with a world-wide manufacturing, sales, and distribution system, and a global reach in terms of its cultural influence--The Tommy Hilfiger Corporation.

The Tommy Hilfiger Corporation is a particularly interesting firm to study. It is one of the four major publicly-held American fashion firms, its closest competitor being Ralph Lauren. Tommy Hilfiger, like Ralph Lauren, started out in menswear but also produces women's wear, children's wear, and a variety of other lines. The Tommy Hilfiger Corporation's annual sales reached a peak of \$1.98 billion in 2000, and were \$1.89 billion for the fiscal year ending March 2003 and \$1.87 billion in March 2004. Figures for 2001 and 2002 were much the same (Annual Report 2003, 2004). Sales at Polo Ralph Lauren are \$2.36 billion in 2004, and at Liz Claiborne, a company that owns several brands, \$3.71 billion. Liz Claiborne is the largest publicly held apparel company based in the New York area, Ralph Lauren is second, and Tommy Hilfiger third. In respect to all other publicly held companies based in New York they rank 54, 63 and 66, respectively (*Crain's New York Business*, 12/29/03). Tommy Hilfiger is one of the highest paid fashion executives in the world, receiving the highest annual salary in the U.S., \$27.9 million in 2001 (Rozhon, 3/16/03: B1, B10). This was a peak salary for Hilfiger. His 2002 salary was \$22.4 million (www.com, 9/23/02) and in 2003 it was \$18.3 million (Rozhon, 12/26/04: 4). In comparison, Ralph Lauren's 2002 salary was nearly \$8 million (Rozhon, 2003: B1, B10).

Tommy Hilfiger became well-known in the 1990s, particularly with a youth market, in the U.S. and abroad, that identified with American culture and

style. Unlike other designers who target “safely well-off, middle-class, middle-aged rich” consumers, Hilfiger captured the attention of the “international, mass, multi-racial youth market” (Taylor, 2000: 135) with basic but stylish and good quality sportswear. One youth group he caught—and courted--the attention of, was the urban, inner-city mostly African American hip-hop community. Hilfiger became identified with a distinctive American style, one that combined “preppy” elitist elements of dress with urban “street” style. Tommy Hilfiger’s hip-hop clothing often featured his large red, white and blue logo paired with the Tommy Hilfiger name, boldly written across garments and accessories. Others would follow suit, cutting into Hilfiger’s market share. Hilfiger has since shifted directions from appealing primarily on a mass level to an approach that will make the brand more exclusive. What is lost in volume will be made up for, it is hoped, in higher cost. Presently, in the interest of reinvigorating its core menswear division, the company has decided “to compete more on the product versus the logo side”, says Chairman Joel J. Horowitz . The company is described as being in the process of reinventing its image (Rozhon, 2003: B10). The move away from large logos, says the company, reflects changes in consumer tastes and industry-wide trends (Company Newsletter, Spring 2003: 5).

The Spring 2003 collection retained certain elements of the company’s updated classic American look, with a sporty yet somewhat sensual aspect. The inspiration for this collection was the Caribbean island of Mustique, where Hilfiger vacations. The Fall 2003 collection departs considerably from this orientation. It is influenced by the Beatles and the Mod 1960s. Hilfiger says

about this season's clothing:

America's casualization of clothes has gone as far as it can. Many young people have only known and worn sportswear. It will feel new for a young guy or girl to put on a suit. They're not about to join the establishment. They're just going to redefine it in some cool, tailored clothing (tommy.com/news/fallfashion2003).

A shift away from bold expressions of Americanism could be viewed as an attempt to respond to changing views of the United States in Europe and Asia; targeted markets in which the company is experiencing robust growth. More likely such caution is not necessary and simply reflects a stylistic choice¹. Fifteen percent of revenue in fiscal 2003 (271 million euros) came from Tommy Hilfiger Europe (Annual Report 2003) and in 2004 according to the CEO, Joseph Scirocco, the figure is 22 percent. He reports that enthusiasm for the product is great, particularly in Europe. Several people in the company have commented that the brand perception in Europe and elsewhere is more positive than it is right now in the U.S. Hilfiger at the 2004 company pep rally attributed this disparity to a focused strategy in Europe which from the beginning placed only higher end Hilfiger products in the top stores. Hilfiger describes himself as the number one American brand in Europe, epitomizing American style. No other American designer has approached the level of success Tommy Hilfiger has in Europe, states Hilfiger.

In Spring 2004 the H line of clothes debuted in stores. It is described in

¹ Other designers showed mod-inspired fashions in their collections that season.

the company newsletter as “about sophistication” and “about cool”. At first glance, we are told, “it has all the signature Tommy touches” and an “all-American spirit”. But upon closer look “this collection takes on an identity of its own”. More expensive fabrics and tailoring are used in an effort to appeal to a higher-end customer with a household income above \$60,000. The “faces” for this collection are David Bowie and his “supermodel” wife, Iman. They are described by Hilfiger as bringing together essential elements of this brand: “music, style, elegance, creativity, sophistication”. The ad campaign, shot in Amsterdam, features “highly stylized black and silver shots” of the couple” (Company Newsletter, Spring 2004: 2). Describing the H launch as the most successful Tommy Hilfiger product launch ever, Hilfiger describes the Fall 2004 H collection as even better (2004 pep rally).

The Tommy Hilfiger Corporation has built a strong brand name and remains one of the top men’s brands in the “better-priced” category. The company is continuing to expand its women’s line and is building itself internationally. Present strategy calls for increasing its European and Asian operations and acquiring a branded company in the interest of diversification (dnrnews.com, 1/12/04).

The initial focus of this dissertation will be the influences under which creative decisions are made leading up to the creation of actual styles. Various cultural and historical factors--both internal as they relate to the firm, and external as they relate to the larger culture--contribute to the image that the Tommy Hilfiger Corporation has constructed and continues to impart to its products. One

can ask, relative to decisions that are made: how is brand identity created and sustained across multiple products? Put another way, what informs the core symbolic meaning of products created within this firm and how much flexibility occurs around this constant? Extending this somewhat, one can ask a related question: What contribution does this firm make in upholding, challenging or redefining a particular social order? For this portion of the study the history and culture of the organization, and how it defines its mission, goals and values will be considered. Attention will also be given to its place within the industry.

The second focus is the translation of these ideas into products. This is where organizational aspects might best be studied. For example, issues of leadership, managerial practices, division of labor, interpersonal communication patterns, and technological issues will all come into play in terms of how negotiations are carried out. There will be certain policies and procedures, networks through which information flows, and informal processes that influence outcomes. The question is, then, what are the organizational procedures by which the Tommy Hilfiger style is defined? Marketing research and data on past sales figures and other forms of consumer responsiveness are taken into account by the firm when deciding whether to go forward with particular designs, as are many other contingencies. Different issues may be relevant depending on whether products will be produced “in-house” or designed specifically for licensees. Participant observation, attendance at meetings, and interviewing key people in the company will be the methodologies used to obtain this information.

The third focus will be on the conversion of the product into a marketable

item. What semiotic or symbolic means are used to communicate information about products? Tommy Hilfiger has gained appeal as a lifestyle brand and is actively promoting itself as such. The lifestyle concept requires the vision of a person who can interpret cultural trends within a certain framework. For Hilfiger this framework has been “Americanism”. In presenting products to retailers, the press, and the public, the firm through the Tommy Hilfiger name takes the role of cultural arbiter. Hilfiger as master designer imparts a persona on the products the company produces and licenses to others. This persona grows out of (or is presented as growing out of) his own interests and commitments. He draws on themes traditional and contemporary—music, leisure, sports, the frontier—which have resonance not only with an American audience but with those abroad who aspire to the largely American ideals the firm represents.

The business practices of the firm in respect to the external environment will need to be considered. The Tommy Hilfiger Corporation relies heavily on outsourcing rather than having invested in manufacturing facilities. This allows for a high level of flexibility in relation to market demands. The agreements the Tommy Hilfiger Corporation has with retailers (how much inventory they must commit to, pricing structures, etc.), as well as licensees, affect the design and production of products, and inform internal decision-making processes.

The Tommy Hilfiger consumer identifies with the aesthetic surrounding the product. All products, whether they are produced by Tommy Hilfiger or are licensed to specialty manufacturers (such as Estée Lauder/Aramis for fragrances

and cosmetics, or Jockey² and Bestform for undergarments) are displayed in a 16 floor showroom on 39th Street in New York's fashion district. This horizontal integration of products into a system, where no one division is set apart, points to the lifestyle concept that the Tommy Hilfiger Corporation is actively pursuing³. The company is not selling clothing alone, with a variety of sidelines, it is selling a larger concept around which one can identify and distinguish oneself.

It is expected that these three aspects: creation of an image, translation into a product, and presentation of the product, will be interrelated. Changes in the culture in terms of perceived receptivity of the public to certain kinds of fashion will influence product design and presentation. More than one level of product is sold, and marketing campaigns, and arrangement of merchandise in stores is tailored to the target customer. Information about past sales and reception of items, as well as projective research will inform design, manufacturing, sales, distribution and marketing decisions. If consumers are not receptive to a certain style, creative energies will be focused elsewhere. Often, new ideas will be put forward by the firm, which it is hoped, will have an impact on the public. The Tommy Hilfiger Corporation is receptive to what other firms are doing just as it influences other firms in the industry. There is a flow and counterflow, or feedback loop, that occurs between all these "systems" in the fashion industry.

The Significance of Clothing and Fashion in Society

² Jockey held the license for 9 years but underwear is now made in-house.

³ Most firms do not display licensed and in-house products together, in one showroom.

Fashion and clothing are a means of linking the individual to the collective life, although in very different ways. Giannino Malossi says of fashion products that they are “material goods with cultural content”, similar in many ways to “film, pop music, or software . . .” (1998: 156). Clothing refers to “established patterns of dress” (Rubinstein, 1995: 3). The cultural content of clothing then refers back to tradition. Certain types of clothing such as the sari or various ethnic or religiously defined clothing are socially regulated in response to a relatively fixed system of easily recognizable codes. In extreme cases no innovation may be allowed. Amongst the Amish for instance, religious ideology demands an almost total uniformity. From a semiotic point of view clothing of this type reaches the level of a sign. The sari, in terms of how it is worn, and what kind of fabrics and designs are used, is often considered a garment that embodies caste prohibitions (and certain fixed notions about women’s gender role). Emma Tarlo, an anthropologist who has studied Indian village women in Gujarat, seeks to extend established ideas about the straightforward relationship between clothing and caste. Instead, she points to the influence of diffusion between regional styles due primarily to marriage practices and trade (1996: 141-142) and in the larger Indian context, the incorporation of elements of European dress (such as a blouse or jacket worn in addition to the sari), and the use of foreign fabric (e.g. synthetic materials), and patterns (1996: 46). Economic status and not caste, she argues, is more clearly expressed by the “fineness of fabric” (1996: 149), and sometimes by the amount of material used (1996: 143) than by the style of the sari worn. In any case, she concludes: “constrained by both caste

and veiling restrictions few village women have more than one style of clothing from which to choose at any given time” (1996: 326). The sari can be compared to the tunic dress of ancient Egypt, the peplos in Greece, the Roman toga, and the Japanese kimono, all of which remained unchanged for centuries (Lipovetsky, 1994: 19). Douglas Gorsline in discussing the clothing of the Egyptians comments: “The ancient world was one in which the rulers, nobles, priestly castes, and warriors maintained themselves in absolute power over the great masses of people. It was thus a society in which one general style of clothing could survive for thousands of years (1952: 3). For Indian women today who are not held as strongly by tradition and whose economic position allows, there will be a much freer range of choices, not only in the sari (or another form of traditional dress) but amongst other alternatives. Some Indian fashion designers have experimented with the sari in various ways but mainly for the consumption of women outside of India. We see here the transition though not complete, between clothing and fashion—one moored in absolutes, the other variable--as well as fashion’s connection to modernity.

The Western men’s suit or women’s dress are prototypes of clothing that are much more responsive to the current ideas of appearance, and the desire for novelty, and thus fully become fashion. From these basic types emerge different forms: skirts, jeans, shorts, which in turn are amenable to trends: miniskirts, low-rise jeans, “hot pants”, etc. In fashion, the end result may bear little resemblance to the clothing form from which it is derived. Fashion unlike clothing is amenable to reinterpretation. By nature it is unstable and therefore elusive. Fashion does

not change, as clothing might, in response to diffusion or for practical reasons alone. It changes for the sake of change.

Many scholars of fashion place its origin in the 14th century (e.g. Breward, 1995; Hollander, 1975; Lipovetsky, 1994; Laver, 1967). Baldesar Castiglione's "The Book of the Courtier", written in 1516, provides instruction on comportment for people of the Italian court. Castiglione presents a conversation addressing the issue of how the courtier should dress. Various fashions common to certain regions and dispositions are considered. The courtier is presented as having a choice in "what manner of man he wishes to be taken for." A gentleman by the name of Federico is quoted as saying: "... a man's attire is no slight index of the wearer's fancy, although sometimes it can be misleading, and not only that, but ways and manners, as well as deeds and words, are all an indication of the quality of the man in whom they are seen" (1528/1959: 123). This is a shift from a system of dress based entirely on status.

Fashion--*mode*--exists fully only with the advent of modern cities where a connection to traditional culture has at least been partially severed. In the mid fourteenth century a decisive break with tradition occurred, explains Gilles Lipovetsky. The long flowing, generally unisex robe was exchanged for a short and fitted costume worn with tight fitting stockings for men, and a long and close to the body dress with a low neckline for women. These innovations spread throughout Western Europe between 1340 and 1350. Lipovetsky states: "From this point on, one change followed another: variations in appearance were more frequent, more extravagant, more arbitrary." He continues: "Change was no

longer an accidental, rare, fortuitous phenomenon; it became a fixed law of the pleasures of high society (1994: 20-21). Ruth P. Rubinstein explains the birth of fashion within this society as follows. As monarchs grew in power in the fourteenth century and commercial centers began to emerge, the conditions necessary for fashion were put into place. To demonstrate the power of the royal and princely courts under the rule of one man, elaborate ceremonies and rituals were orchestrated (1995: 137-138). The new social relations that arose called for new form of dress different from those in feudal times. Noblemen were no longer masters in their own right but servants of the king. Knighthood which had to be earned through loyalty, not simply conferred, was in decline. As competition for patronage became necessary it was particularly important to make an excellent impression which would justify movement into a higher status (1995: 143). The emergence of a town bourgeoisie in Burgundy, at the crossroads of the trade route with the East, created status competition with the nobility. One “almost literally” wore “one’s wealth on one’s back”. Sumptuary laws would soon come into existence which forbade “commoners” from displaying “fabrics and styles that aristocracy sought to reserve for itself” (Davis, 1992: 29, 58). Amongst the aristocratic class there was a desire to be able to immediately distinguish between a prince and a merchant, while other classes wished such symbolic boundaries to be collapsed.

Fashion has been studied across many disciplines: history, literature, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, psychology, semiotics, economics, and applied fields of art and design, and business. Lipovetsky points out that while

fashion is everywhere: “in museums”, “in the streets”, “in industry”, and “in our media”, it has a marginal status amongst “serious intellectual preoccupations”. It has generally been dismissed as an “inferior domain”, as “unproblematic and undeserving of investigation”, a “superficial issue” (1994: 3). Thus says Lipovetsky, unlike all other realms of scholarly knowledge, fashion has been an area where the answers seem to be known in advance, and where explanations proposed go largely unchallenged (1994: 4). Gregory Stone noted 35 years earlier that there is no firm base upon which to build his social psychological research on the meaning of clothing. The field seems to have been “meticulously avoided by sociologists” (1959: 7). British sociologist Angela McRobbie says that fashion is a field dominated by praise of great designers, often in the form of coffee-table books. She says there has been no sociological analysis of the art of fashion design (1999: 11). Even if fashion were only a superficial topic, one must not fail to see how much of human history and social organization it has played a role in influencing.

Within the social sciences, the domain in which we will focus, fashion has been discussed by various scholars. There are five main ways in which it has been approached theoretically: fashion as an instrument for creating and maintaining boundaries in society; fashion in the interactional process; fashion as a semiotic system; fashion as a capitalist tool; and finally, fashion as a postmodern text.

Gabriel Tarde, Thorstein Veblen and Georg Simmel did not treat fashion as a superficiality, rather they believed it had a particular logic that could be

understood scientifically (Ortoleva, 1998: 61). Veblen and Simmel focused on fashion as a means of supporting the social structure of the elites (Rubinstein, 2001: 3841). Up until the twentieth century, Rubinstein explains, the attempt by the middle and lower classes to enhance their status through fashionable attire was seen as a violation of the social order (2001: 3844). Neither fashion nor its imitation exists in caste societies, says Jean Baudrillard. They are “born with the Renaissance, with the destruction of the feudal order by the bourgeois order and the emergence of overt competition at the level of signs of distinction.” In this previous social order, according to Baudrillard, “signs are protected by a prohibition which ensures their total clarity and confers an unequivocal status on each” (1976/2000: 50). Signs become arbitrary when they are “emancipated”—accessible to “any and every class” (1976/2000: 51).

Georg Simmel, considered by many to be the first academic to seriously analyze fashion (Lehmann, 2000: 127)⁴, combines both societal and individual factors in explaining fashion. For Simmel fashion is “the most immediate manifestation of modern life,” states Ulrich Lehmann (2000: 129-130). Simmel sees fashion principally as a product of the social demands of modern life. Says Simmel: “Segregation by means of differences in clothing, manners, taste, etc. is expedient only where the danger of absorption and obliteration exists . . .” (1904/1971: 301).

⁴ Lehmann mentions an early essay by Simmel on fashion: “Zur Psychologie der Mode,” *Die Zeit* (Vienna), 12 Oct. 1895, 20-24. He also mentions an earlier article by Charles Darwin’s son, George H. Darwin, on the evolution of female apparel: “Development in Dress,” *Macmillan’s Magazine* 26, Sept. 1872, 410-416.

Although fashion may be seen as a symptom of modern society, its roots in the two antagonistic principles as Simmel describes them, reach back to a more fundamental source. If this tendency were not part of the human condition, advancement would not be possible, Simmel argues (1907/1971: 294-295).

Simmel explains the essential mechanics of fashion:

Fashion is the imitation of a given example and satisfies the demand for social adaptation; it leads the individual upon the road which all travel, it furnishes a general condition, which resolves the conduct of every individual into a mere example. At the same time it satisfies in no less degree the need of differentiation, the tendency toward dissimilarity, the desire for change and contrast, on the one hand by a constant change of contents, which gives to the fashion of today an individual stamp as opposed to that of yesterday and of to-morrow, on the other hand because fashions differ for different classes—the fashions of the upper stratum of society are never identical with those of the lower; in fact they are abandoned by the former as soon as the latter prepares to appropriate them (1907/1971: 296).

Indeed, sumptuary laws were an attempt to curtail the desire for social advancement by those who did not inherit the station in life to which they might aspire.

Simmel would argue that a dialectical relationship exists in fashion. An individual feels the need to conform, and in this way a certain mode of self-presentation is imposed on him or her, yet he or she also wishes to distinguish himself or herself from others as an individual. This essential tension between imitation and differentiation constitutes fashion. Fashion allows for the expression of these two oppositional tendencies. Modern society too is driven by its logic of change. Lehmann states: “Most significant for fashion is its ephemeral, transient, and futile character, which changes with every season. This

insubstantiability with regard to linear progress, as well as fashion's marginal position in the cultural spectrum, appealed especially to those who considered the fragment particularly expressive for modern culture . . ." (2000: 201).

Simmel's trickle-down theory posits that styles are set by the elite in order that they may differentiate themselves as a class. Emulation by the lower classes drives innovation in fashion in order that social distinctions might be maintained. Simmel points out that the "mingling of classes and the leveling effect of democracy exert a counter-influence" (1907/1971: 300). Indeed, since Simmel wrote we find many instances of fashion "bubbling-up" from the working-classes, from the "street" and from various subcultures—the foremost among them, youth subcultures. Much earlier examples can also be found. James Laver attributes the slashed look, a practice of cutting slits in a garment so that the lining would be exposed, to the victory of the Swiss over Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy in 1476. The Swiss troops used lavish silk and other fabrics they had confiscated to patch their tattered garments. The fashion spread to German mercenaries and was eventually adapted by the French Court. Lavar says that this fashion, predominantly for men, became "almost universal in the early 1500s" reaching it's most "extravagant extreme" in Germany (2002: 77-79). In sixteenth century Europe sumptuary laws prohibited certain classes of individuals from wearing gold thread. By slashing the outer material which did not contain any gold thread one could reveal a gold lining. This style was later copied by the elite.

Once an emphasis shifted away from an older, established elite, "trickling up" became a possibility. Designers began appropriating trends from varied

sources, and in some instances, yet again they began to trickle down. “Hippies” communicated a rejection of the establishment by refusing to conform to fashion’s dictates. What began as a rejection of the mainstream, and capitalist enterprise, was eventually taken up by the mainstream via corporate entrepreneurs. Before the hippie look became widely accepted, Yves Saint Laurent developed what was called the “rich hippie look.” His haute couture adaptation is described by fashion historian Colin McDowell as a “civilized” variation of hippie clothing. This look featured gypsy skirts and peasant blouses made from the most costly fabrics (2000: 371). Those who could afford to buy these clothes enjoyed the edge this association brought. Eventually however, the original subversive meaning shifted. In the case of blue jeans, for example, they went from being countercultural, to being “all-American”.

What need do the fashion houses have in elevating elements of “street” culture to “high” fashion? Louis Vuitton purses are made for women who can afford to spend several hundreds, or even thousands of dollars, on a fashion accessory. The 2004 alligator style “l’artisan” purse sells for \$14,000. In 2001 Stephen Sprouse designed a purse with “Louis Vuitton Paris” written across the purse in graffiti style. These purses, sold only in exclusive stores, sold out immediately. It seems the company is making a hegemonic claim through an appropriated form.

A luxury fashion house and by extension, the upper classes, may select any elements of the larger culture they choose, thereby conferring status.

Common street graffiti, an expression of disenfranchisement, becomes a sign of

power when it is brandished by someone of high social and economic status. We find knockoffs of the graffiti inspired Vuitton bag or the newer Murakami bag, found in the pages of *Vogue*, being sold on the streets. While it is true that not all fashion originates in the upper classes, it is ultimately this group—and the designers and fashion editors who cater to their buying power—that control and validate the discourse of fashion. In the sense that Simmel speaks of, these objects become fashion and therefore became desirable to everyone. And, should an item become too prevalent, the upper classes will no longer see it as desirable, and it will fall out of favor. A fashion website notes “the classic Louis Vuitton tote is too easily counterfeited, and now even the soccer mom has one, so it must go” (fashionazi.com). In an ironic sense, counterfeiting keeps the fashion cycle moving, creating new desires. It becomes time for yet another Louis Vuitton purse, one that can be enjoyed by the elite, at least for a time, before it becomes commonplace.

Counterfeiting also creates an awareness of the brand, and an aspiration for acquisition, amongst people otherwise outside the scope of such consideration. Unable to afford the genuine article the unlikely consumer nevertheless becomes socialized as to the value of the brand as a means of distinction. He or she may pursue status through other legitimate, more accessible channels—the moderately priced Nine West, Express, or XOXO purse that imitates the style and logoed design of higher-end products.

Counterfeit items are not only for the financially challenged consumer. The “new Tupperwear parties” in Orange County, California are described as not

featuring household items but coveted designer handbag knockoffs. Victoria Namking observes that many of the “stay at home moms” who come to the parties can afford the real bags: the \$10,000 plus Hermes Birkin bag or the \$2,000 Louis Vuitton Murakami, but they like having many bags and will buy “fakes” for some of the more “trendy” styles, or will resort to a fake bag when they can no longer bear the “enormous waiting lists” (Namking, 2003: 66). In addition to a sense of accomplishment there is no doubt a social aspect to such gatherings. They do not replace the traditional shopping experience, they supplement shopping. Similarly, these dual purposes are met by the shopping excursions taken by friends to places like Chinatown’s Canal Street in New York City.

Pierre Bourdieu’s work continues along the sociological tradition of Veblen and Simmel, focusing on the role of society and culture, to which “signs of distinction” are firmly anchored. Class privilege and power are reproduced via one’s “habitus”, a socially informed consciousness which sets preferences for certain types of material objects and experiences, and promotes mastery of certain skills. One literally inherits the tastes of his or her class and this knowledge, as well as class privilege, is reproduced across generations. As David Gartman puts it, “Bourdieu argues that culture and economy are intricately related in a web of mutual constitution. The class distinctions of the economy inevitably generate the symbolic distinctions of culture, which in turn regenerate and legitimate the class structure” (1991: 421). Bourdieu speaks of “fields” or “worlds of preference” which encompass such diverse phenomena as drinks, automobiles, newspapers, resorts, art, etc. Individuals attach significance to the contents of

these fields and make certain choices based on these judgements (1991: 228). A Celebrity line cruise versus a vacation on a Crystal cruise ship; the *New York Post* or the *New York Times*. Bourdieu uses an empirical method to show that preferences amongst the French for these “symbolic goods”: clothing, music, art, food, literature, etc., correspond to one’s class position. Cultural capital is earned when one acquires those symbolic goods that have had prestige conferred on them by the dominant culture. A “stylization of life”, a desire for “form over function” or “manner over matter” is found in the upper classes and is absent in the working classes, he notes (1984: 5). Specifically of fashion, Bourdieu finds that the aesthetic versus practical/economical interest in clothing increases as one moves up the social hierarchy (Bourdieu, 1984: 378).

Bourdieu gives us the theoretical framework to explain the process by which items of clothing are deemed fashionable. An understanding of class is key to understanding how this process works, i.e. how the fashion cycle operates. Bourdieu explains that the “sole function” of the working classes in the “system of aesthetic positions” is “to serve as a foil, a negative reference point” (1984: 57). Choices—“objective and subjective stances”, as he calls them, in relation to matters such as “cosmetics, clothing or home decoration” are “opportunities to express or assert one’s position in social space, as a rank to be upheld or a distance to be kept.” It is “the very top bourgeoisie” and “artists” who determine the system of aesthetic principles” or who confer status on particular objects. In a class situation more or less static we would find extreme differences between the self presentation and style of life of the upper and lower classes, and these

differences would perhaps only gradually change in response to outside forces. However, with the entry of the middle classes, economically in a position to consume, a new mechanism is put into motion, one that Simmel clearly outlined.

The middle classes too are desirous of “name, renown, prestige, honour, glory, authority—everything which constitutes symbolic power as recognized” (1984: 251). Bourdieu describes the middle classes as “committed to the symbolic”, in other words, keenly aware of appearances. We see, as he words it, “a permanent disposition towards the bluff or usurpation of social identity which consists in anticipating ‘being’ by ‘seeming’, appropriating the appearances so as to have the real, in trying to modify the representation of the ranks in the classification of the principles of classification”. Unlike the working classes, free of such concerns as Bourdieu would have it, the middle classes are “haunted by the judgements of others”, and therefore an individual “overshoots the mark for fear of falling short” (1984: 253). Bourdieu compares this to the “ostentatious discretion” of those who have no such fears (1984: 249). Given this state of affairs, the threat of “popularization” is always there. The upper classes must therefore “engage in an endless pursuit of new properties through which to assert their rarity” (1984: 252). Tastes, argues Bourdieu, are “asserted as refusal of other tastes” (1984: 56). “Distinction and pretension, high culture and middle-brow culture—like elsewhere high fashion and fashion, haute coiffure and coiffure, and so on—only exist through each other, and it is the relation, or rather the objective collaboration of their respective production apparatuses and clients which produces the value of culture and the need to possess it” (1984: 250).

The tension between eliminating class distinctions and the lure of symbolic assertions of actual power can be seen in the former Soviet Union. A rejection of bourgeois dress, as least at times, seems to give way to embracing elite symbols in dress. Simon Sebag Montefiore in a book about the life of Joseph Stalin describes the puritanical, dull and shapeless dress of the early days of Bolshevik rule in the Soviet Union (2004: 3). During the height of Stalin's power however, he describes the fashions seen at a party as being reminiscent of pre-Revolutionary Moscow: "The dress was white tie and tails . . . Henceforth, Stalin's court began to behave more like the rulers of an empire than dour Bolsheviks. Molotov sported the new diplomatic uniform that, like the old braid, marked the new imperial era: it was 'black, trimmed in gold, with a small dagger at the belt . . . much like Hitler's elite SS,' thought the U.S. diplomat Chip Bohlen" (2004: 461).

Some alterations of Bourdieu's theory are necessary in the contemporary U.S. (and French/global) context. While the upper classes in general--and to this we should add celebrities and others held in the public esteem--have the type of authority Bourdieu speaks of, in valuing and devaluing "objects, places and practices", there has always been an acceptable middle ground in American society. And, given the Protestant culture and revolutionary foundation of American society, a rejection of ostentation and luxury--and tradition. The practical and the new were always sought after whether in a pragmatic approach to philosophy or the production of the Ford automobile. A reverence for the independent individual who could make his own way in the world has long been a

part of the American culture. This pioneering attitude extended, to some degree, to women. American women enjoyed more freedoms, at an earlier time, than their European counterparts. In the United States--tastemakers--celebrities, and the wealthy, were and still often are drawn from the working and middle classes. Given this heritage they are less apt to display the same level of contempt that possessors of an ascribed heritage of privilege might in France. Furthermore, youth culture all over the world has become a force in shaping tastes. This culture crosses class boundaries, in fact it often elevates those of simple origins, and it dismisses the establishment. Bourdieu seems to conduct his analysis from the point of view of upper classes. He does not view the situation from the vantage point of the working classes, noting rather that they have been excluded. One must suppose that within the fields from which the working classes make their selections, there too is some hierarchy and means of asserting status. Indeed we know in the realm of personal appearance that acquiring expensive goods--and not so expensive but status granting products--is an indicator of achievement. Even goods that are not so expensive have become substitutes for their more expensive counterparts, conferring status nonetheless. One can today shop at Target, or even Kmart--a store known to cater to the working classes--and be fashionable whereas at one time such clothing would have been practical, inexpensive, and decidedly unfashionable. In an ethnographic study of homeless youth Anne R. Roschelle and Peter Kaufman discuss various means by which these young people avoid the stigma of being labeled "homeless" by classmates unaware of their status. Referring to Erving Goffman's work on "passing" they

discuss how the children use dress and demeanor to blend in with others. Below is a conversation the researcher (Anne) has with a homeless child, Jamie, and her mother in a public place:

- Jamie: Hey, do you think these people can tell we are homeless?
- Anne: No, how could they possibly know?
- Jamie: I don't know. I always feel like people are looking at me because they know I am poor and they think I am a loser.
- Cynthia: I feel like that a lot too—it makes me feel so bad—like I'm a bad mother and somehow being homeless is my fault. I feel so ashamed.
- Jamie: Me too.
- Anne: Jamie, what are some of the ways you keep people from knowing you are homeless?
- Jamie: I try to dress like the other kids in my school. When we get clothes from Home Away, I always pick stuff that is stylin' and keep it clean so kids won't know I'm poor. Sometimes it's hard though because all the kids try to get the cool stuff and there isn't always enough for everyone. I really like it when we get donations from people who shop at the Gap and Old Navy. I got one of those cool vest and it made me feel really great.
- Anne: Is it important for you to keep your homelessness a secret?
- Jamie: Yeah, I would die if the kids at school knew (2004: 34).

This dialogue demonstrates, how, far from opting out or being unaware of the symbolic system through which statuses are conferred, even those who are at the poorest level, make an effort to participate. Status may be provided via Gap

and Old Navy, not Armani and Chanel, but a sense of being cool and feeling good is nonetheless achieved. One can make the argument that this is a false sense of optimism, certainly in the case of homeless youth it is not based on fact. The widening gap between the haves and the have nots is symbolically bridged providing an illusion then that the disparities are fewer. For the individual an immediate lessening of social stigma is a desired and a reasonable end. The ability to dress in an acceptable manner may lead to greater participation in mainstream society--insofar as social mobility is a possibility. For instance, a positive impression may win the regard of a teacher or potential employer.

The addition of different levels of distinction--within and across class boundaries--does not negate but complicates Bourdieu's model. Fundamentally, the model works, though the assignment of those charged with defining aesthetics, and providing such vehicles, must be extended.

Both Roland Barthes and Jean Baudrillard reject the sociological approach in their own work. In The Fashion System Barthes states that he wishes to avoid the very issues sociologists wish to apprehend: the origin of the garment and its connection to social factors (1967/1984: 9). Rather than look at the worn garment which is necessarily connected to a motivated agent or as Bourdieu might see it, a culturally determined member of a class, Barthes selects "described" clothing where action occurs on the level of language (1967/1984: 18). "Written clothing"--that is, clothing as described in the pages of magazines or newspapers by one writer or another--he says, is "unencumbered" by practical and aesthetic influences (1967/1984: 8). It has been abstracted and takes on a new existence,

dependent in this case on linguistic structures.

Baudrillard would reject the very social foundation that Bourdieu adheres to, as well as his logical, top-down mechanism. Other sociologists such as Goffman, Stone, Davis and Rubinstein believe that clothing can be analyzed in terms of signs and symbols but see it first and foremost as a manifestation of the social.

The emphasis of scholars who study fashion has now shifted to fashion as a “means of social criticism”, Rubinstein tells us (Rubinstein, 2001: 3841). This orientation affirms the positing of a hegemonic social order (or orders) being in place which people react against, in a more vigorous and open manner than was ever possible. Baudrillard believes we have passed this stage where a referent is tied to something real. “Renaissance man,” still bound by a definite order, a code, finds in the counterfeit a means of grasping the social status and prestige that are beyond his reach (1976/2000: 51). With the industrial era a “new generation of signs and objects arises.” In this period, there is detachment from reality. The counterfeit, dependant on restriction, is no longer necessary now that “caste tradition” has evaporated. The relation is now between “equivalence and indifference” (1976/2000: 55). From this state, according to Baudrillard, we progress to the last phase of history, simulation. We pass from this second to a third order relationship—the realm of “fashion, the media, advertising, information and communication networks.” What we have is a pseudo-foundation, based on concepts or “models” (1976/2000: 56) in which “every order subsumes the previous order” (1976/2000: 57).

Baudrillard has his roots in a structuralist perspective oriented towards a study of signs as coded values. Baudrillard says in Consumer Society: “consumption is an order of signification, like language, or like the kinship system in primitive society” (1970/1998: 79). Its purpose is to establish a structure of exchange and communication and to provide for group integration (1970/1998: 78). Furthering Marx’s work he ties consumption to a support of the capitalist system. It has become a “duty” in the sense of a Protestant work ethic. One is expected to participate in the market and associate “happiness” with diverse experiences and “intensive use of signs and objects” (1970/1998: 80).

Baudrillard refers in Symbolic Exchange and Death to Marcel Mauss’ work in The Gift. Departing from Marx, Baudrillard seems to find in Mauss an understanding of the importance of consumption and the role the symbolic plays within this system. Mauss asserts that (symbolic) exchange is the basis of social life, the means of social organization (Mauss, 1967: 2). In pre-literate societies, to give something is to give of oneself—“one’s nature and substance”, and likewise it is this, in respect to the other, that one receives (1967: 10). Objects become vehicles of prestige and distinction, and in the exchange and expected reciprocity, they create human ties (1967: 11). Mauss longs for such authenticity in a world dominated by the “cold reasoning of the businessman, banker or capitalist” (Mauss, 1967: 73). Following Mauss’ logic, Baudrillard finds the end of a “notion of value” as was held by the pre-literate societies (1967: 60). This end has led from a productivist system to a third-order “permuted” hyperreality—a “liquidation of reason”—where simulation, best exemplified by

fashion, is privileged (Baudrillard, 1976/2000: 87). A “coherent system of signs” has disappeared (1970/1998: 79). “Against the ethics of production stands the aesthetics of manipulation . . .” (1976/2000: 93). We find this not only in fashion but in other forms of simulated reality such as those generated by computers, television, and the media in general.

According to Baudrillard, people use fashion to create an artificial identity, not based on any solid foundation, although it may be experienced by people as reality. “This is the era of geometrically variable individuals”, says Baudrillard (1976/2000: 78). It is so, in sociological terms, because the non-material culture, reflected in the material culture, has experienced a fracturing of its norms, values and ideals. The superstructure stands alone. This new type of material culture is comprised of “goal-less” objects such as fashion (1976/2000: 94). Baudrillard, in quite an absolute manner, it might be noted, rejects Marxism as no longer applicable to the current situation:

The era of production and labour power merely amounts to the interdependence of all social processes, including exploitation, and it was on this socialisation realised in part by capital itself, that Marx based his revolutionary perspective. But this historic solidarity (whether factory, local or class solidarity) has disappeared. From now on they are separate and indifferent under the sign of television and the automobile, under the sign of behavior models inscribed everywhere in the media or in the layout of the city. Everyone falls into line in their delirious identification with leading models, orchestrated models of simulation (1976/2000: 78).

What exists today is a “semiocracy” where values are totally “commutable”; a reality of the code (1976/2000: 78). One might ask, who

controls this code? Where does the logic of the system emanate? Baudrillard seems to take the structuralist position that it is determined by a kind of pattern. It even has a “reality principle” (1976/2000: 98). In Consumer Society Baudrillard uses a Marxist structuralist argument, stating: “It is the need of the inegalitarian social order—the social structure of privilege—to maintain itself that produces and reproduces growth as its strategic element” (1970/1998: 53). With this order obliterated, only the codes themselves remain, as if there were still an economic or social structure behind them. Stephen Best and Douglas Kellner state: “. . . in Baudrillard’s theory all practices and signs are controlled by and absorbed into the almighty code—a typically vague and undertheorized term” (1991: 117).

Baudrillard not only strips away the social framework of the signifier, he does not allow for personal motivations or agency. When discussing graffiti, he states that it has “no content and no message” (1976/2000: 80, 82); “neither connotation or denotation” (1976/2000: 79). Meaning is at the level of the signifier. Baudrillard cites some instances of graffiti in New York: “Duke”, “Spirit”, “Snake I” (1976/2000: 76, 80). This particular type of graffiti unlike earlier politically motivated graffiti, is devoid not only of ideological but of personal significance. Baudrillard refers to it as “empty signs that do not signify personal identity . . .” (1976/2000: 82). It expresses the collective or territorial orientation of its male Black and Hispanic writers: “Black youths themselves have no personality to defend . . .” (1976/2000: 84). To say otherwise, to interpret these signs as a “reclamation of identity and personal freedom, as

nonconformist . . .” is to indulge in a “bourgeois-existentialist romanticism”, argues Baudrillard (1976/2000: 83-84). Fashion like graffiti, is an “empty signifier” (1976/2000: 79). Baudrillard quotes Barthes’ work in The Fashion System, for instance: “Without content, it [fashion] then becomes the spectacle human beings grant themselves of their power to make the insignificant signify” (1976/2000: 93 in Barthes, 1983: 288). For Barthes, fashion is not without content because society is without content. It is without content because Barthes has made the methodological choice to isolate it as a semiotic system.

Of Baudrillard’s perspective we can ask, has all connection to “caste tradition” disappeared? We still have the elite, comprised as it were of those able to secure capital and power, and whose ability and continual desire to purchase luxury items separates them in appearance and experience from those unable to consume the same products. The business of counterfeiting achieves its success for this reason. In a website article about counterfeit designer purses , Karen Little states: “Fake designer bags may be a bigger draw to New York City than the Statue of Liberty and the Empire State Building combined. Louis Vuitton, Kate Spade, and Coach should all be given inadvertent credit for greatly improving the tourist situation here since 9/11” (Little, 7/6/03).

Referring back to the graffiti purse, we can make the argument as Bourdieu might, that it is desirable to the mainstream and even the working classes because it is recognized by those whose opinion carries some weight—fashion writers, celebrities, “society women”. To these women the graffiti may represent something subversive—which Baudrillard would add is no

longer so, and certainly not when it is on an expensive French purse. The purse, however, cannot be dismissed as an empty signifier. It is individuals who define the meaning of objects. Possessing this particular object, furthermore, links the wearer to the house of Louis Vuitton, a family enterprise which began making expensive luggage, the ancestral home of which can be visited in France. The company today is owned by the luxury conglomerate LVMH Louis Vuitton Mœt Hennessy. We can question Baudrillard's dismissal of personal motivations and identity and interpersonal communication as relics from a bygone era. Fashion becomes a vehicle through which human tendencies are expressed just as they were and still could be through Marxism, religion, sports, or many other forms of self commitment. Certainly, it can be argued that a political reality grounded in a productivist mode has been eroded by a simulated reality where identification occurs around "leading models" (1976/2000: 78). Consider this quote from an article on recent trends in men's fashion beginning on page 1 of the *New York Times* just under an article that quotes George W. Bush as saying that there was "no direct connection between Iran and the attacks of September 11", but "we will continue to look and see if the Iranians were involved" (Shenon, 2004: A1): "There is something about being untucked and more casual that guys find rakish and appealing", says Michael Macko, men's fashion director at Saks Fifth Avenue. He continues, "It's bucking the system with a bit of rebellion but in a very Polo, very John Varvatos way" (Trebay, 7/20/04: B10). Baudrillard contributes a great deal to the understanding of fashion. Indeed there has been a transmutation away from the one to one correspondence between fashion choices

and social class, and between the meanings in which different styles are anchored. He constructs, ironically, a framework that is too confining for the individual and does not allow for interpretations in directions other than the one he proposes.

Lipovetsky takes a middle road when compared to Baudrillard. Liberal democracy is supported, perhaps even created, not obliterated or made irrelevant, by fashion. Precisely because it can only be sustained when a break with tradition has occurred, it coexists easily with democracy. Since fashion has become so pervasive, garnering more and more of society's attention, it provides a kind of bolstering for democracy by creating a sense of indifference toward established practices, and therefore a toleration and even defense of differences and choice. This has an impact on the state. "The state having become an expression of society, has to resemble society more and more; it has to give up the signs, rituals, and mechanisms of its archaic dissimilarity" (1994: 171). The state in effect gives in to fashion rather than using it as an instrument for its own agenda. This may seem like a massive false consciousness on the part of the people and the state itself. Lipovetsky says: "The new democratic citizenship undeniably tends to be passive, apathetic, and abstentionist . . ." (1994: 250). Such passivity and apathy regarding social and political issues is balanced by an aggressive attitude toward consumption. The consumption of various goods, including clothing that is new, distinctive, trendy, expensive becomes an element of a "false consciousness" or an inauthentic commitment, should we take a certain point of view. False consciousness, if it could be called that, may be our best bet, Lipovetsky might venture—compare that to authenticity and commitment of a

militant Islam or fundamentalist Christianity, both a threat to democratic values. However, if this were truly a false consciousness there would have to be a means of escape. In Lipovetsky's scheme, all classes, and society itself, are subject to "fashion's rule". It has become the general form of society, reorganizing the "everyday environment, news and information, and the political scene" (1994: 131). Lipovetsky speaks of fashion in the broadest sense, equating it with adaptation and innovation, and contrasting it with collective tradition. There is an apocalyptic feel to Lipovetsky's understanding of fashion--Fashion replacing the trajectory of History--yet the outcome is quite a bit better than what Baudrillard envisions.

Barthes, in Mythologies, reveals the historical/situated reality behind everyday activities which he takes to be discursive/literary in character and calls "myths". Myths can be enacted, written or pictorial. Myth is generally taken to be a type of speech—a system of signs—given significance by history. "It cannot possibly evolve from the 'nature' of things" although it is taken as such, contends Barthes (1957/1972: 110). Steak and chips become signs of Frenchness for the Frenchman; one knows he is French and is at home when consuming this dish after returning from the colonies (1957/1972: 62-64). In another vignette, Barthes observes in *Elle* a curious juxtaposition: in a piece on women novelists, the number of children is printed, followed by the number of novels she's written (underneath her photograph). Barthes finds that this serves as an admonishment that career or freedom can only come after one has fulfilled her feminine duties (1957/1972: 50-52). In this work Barthes is clearly concerned with cultural ideals

that infuse myths with meaning. These meanings reveal cultural values, associations and changes, telling us how social categories such as status and gender are conceived.

The Fashion System is a conservative and disciplined undertaking, in accordance with the structuralist project of describing social reality in terms of linguistic rules and codes. Barthes' semiological work on sign systems is connected to the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of language based on relations between elements of the sign systems and not the assigned/inherent qualities of the object.⁵ The central idea is that a sign produces a particular meaning that is communicated through the process of signification—in this case via the fashion system. Here, unlike in Mythologies, Barthes does not engage in broad interpretations of fashion, a subject matter that would seem to lend itself to this freedom; rather he confines himself to an analysis of the “written garment”. Barthes states: “We must study either acts, or images, or words, but not all of these substances at once . . .” (1967/1983: 7-8). This has to do with the distinction between language and speech. The garment system, Barthes explains, can be divided into three separate systems: written, photographed and worn, the first in the area of language and the last two in speech (1964/1995: 26-27). Clothing, or any other object, takes on the “status of systems only in so far as they pass through the relay of language, which extracts their signifiers (in the form of nomenclature) and names their signifieds (in the forms of usages or reasons) . . .”

⁵ During the 1960s Barthes and others did not see semiology as separate from the field of structuralism. (Culler, 1983: 79).

(1964/1995: 10). Barthes sees fashion as existing in a separate realm, as a discursive system of signification. He looks at fashion as it encounters language.

A fashion utterance involves at least two systems, Barthes notes, a linguistic or a system of language, and a vestimentary system. Within the latter system the garment signifies something to do with the world, or fashion (1967/1983: 27). Barthes gives an example: “When we read: *Pleated skirts are a must in the afternoon*, or *Women will wear two-toned pumps*, it suffices to substitute: *Pleated skirts are the sign of afternoon*, or *Two-toned pumps signify fashion*” (1967/1983: 44). Barthes’ concern is with the process of signification. This approach brackets out a concern (as does Baudrillard’s) with external factors such as what phase of history we are or no longer are in, and what impact this has, as well as an interest in subjective or intersubjective phenomena.

Fashion on the whole is not writing—though what is accepted as “fashionable” may be constituted in part by writing. It is in fact available in more than just its textual form. It is something actual that is experienced by people, and is manifested to them and by them in various ways. Yet, Barthes chose to analyze fashion in a formal semiological manner, as a “grammar, a description of levels of meaning, of units and their combinatory rules; in short as a kind of system of description” (1985: 46). His focus was limited then to clothing as presented in fashion magazines over one year. He consulted Claude Lévi-Strauss and decided to focus only on the written words, separating out the technical aspects of the garment (design/manufacturing) and the image associated with the clothing (1985: 44). He felt this separation was justified as “description has no

relation to seeing” (1985: 46). “Writing”, he says, “is a self sufficient system . . .” (1985: 47). Although the content of fashion was not in the scope of his semiological consideration, Barthes recognizes that clothing is used to express information about social positions as well as our own objectives (1985: 49). Barthes is not willing, however, to give too much concession to the social aspect of fashion or to individuality. Psychology has shown that individuals can be “classified”, and “any form” can be attributed with “any meaning”, he explains. Fashion follows a “rational order”, and in it he finds “profound regularity” (1985: 60-62).

In the case of the Louis Vuitton purse, the Louis Vuitton name must be defined as desirable in order that any product bearing this name will be desirable. The same graffiti purse displaying the name of an unknown designer or firm would have little appeal no matter how innovative the design. Women who follow fashion accept the vestimentary code taking the signifier—the Louis Vuitton name—to equal fashionableness. The point for Barthes is not that there is no independent social meaning but that meaning is variable. “Plaids are worn at the races” could have been randomly generated by a computer program, it need not be rooted in any cultural value system, and fashion discourse often is not. It is possible to overanalyze arbitrary connections, to read meaning into things unnecessarily, if one is inclined in that direction. The Louis Vuitton graffiti purse as a cultural artifact lends itself more to sociological analysis than does its caption appearing in a magazine ad. We can imagine how Barthes would treat it differently in Mythologies as opposed to The Fashion System.

For Baudrillard, “fashion is immoral” (1976/2000: 98). It knows nothing of value systems, and is capable of devouring ideologies of all stripes. Take for example Yves Saint Laurent’s “rich hippie look”. This pretense seems the antithesis of an egalitarian, counterculture movement. It is “a resistance without an ideology, without objectives”. Fashion itself, Baudrillard says, is “insubvertible”, it acts as the “subversion of all order”. Since it has no system of reference it cannot be subversive. It is “the hell of the relativity of all signs”. Refusal of fashion is not possible (what would replace it?). That which is refused, for example blue jeans, will itself become fashion (1976/2000: 98). For Barthes, fashion is neither moral or immoral, subversive or insubvertible. When asked about the meaning of the mini skirt and other changes in women’s fashions, Barthes says he does not think these “particular” examples correspond to any sociological phenomenon. The meaning of a sign system is not stable: mini skirt does not equal an emphasis on youth over social position nor does it have any erotic quality apart from “rationalizations” people assign (Barthes, 1985: 60-61).

For Barthes, fashion is one of many signifying systems--there is a food system, a car system, etc.—that can be studied from the point of view of semiology. It does not have its own logic. We can look at any part of the garment system from the semiological methodology, at the level of language. Conversely, Baudrillard sees fashion as the central system driving society, extending into science, politics and intellectual life (1976/2000: 90-91). Fashion itself is the deep structure, minus any rational, internal mechanism. In sum, a quote from each theorist illustrates the divergent paths of their work. Barthes:

“My object is fully and entirely writing” (1985: 47). Baudrillard: “Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance” (1983: 2).

That clothing is a vehicle used in the social world to create and maintain distinctions is a sociological notion. The idea that one is actively involved in the process of playing a role ascribed by society through one’s clothing, and that one has the ability with fashion to work around this role or to recast it entirely, involves a social psychological emphasis. Fantasy then is an important aspect of fashion. Why else, says McDowell, would the “extremes of Victorian fashion, from crinoline to bustle” the “hugely overscaled Edwardian millinery” and “Dior’s heavy and cumbersome evening dresses, with trains dragging to the ground” have come about? (2001: 364). Fantasy involves the reading of cultural cues through the creative capacity of the individual. On the larger scale this is carried out by the designer whose vision influences the way others dress. On a personal level, each individual undertakes actions, however small, to manage his or her own appearance.

Throughout history societies have regulated the clothing one or another individual could wear so that attributes such as status, class, caste, profession and gender could be readily identified, thereby giving a certain order to interactions. It is through the control of appearance that these systems are reproduced, and it is at this point that the individual and social meet. Individuals are compelled to present themselves in certain ways depending on status, position, and role (Goffman, 1951: 294). “The divisions and hierarchies of social structure are depicted microecologically,” says Erving Goffman (1979: 1). Individuals in so far

as they have some degree of autonomy—and particularly in modern democratic societies—theyself use clothing to create a particular impression or self-representation that is personally and interpersonally desirable. Clothing in this sense becomes a performative tool.

In order to accomplish these socially and individually motivated presentations of self, “status symbols” are employed. Status symbols “designate” the occupant’s position. People in a similar social position tend to use some of the same status symbols. “Class symbols” are a particular kind of status symbol and include: “matters of etiquette, dress, deportment, gesture, intonation, dialect, vocabulary, small body movements and automatically expressed evaluations concerning both the substance and the details of life”, Goffman contends. (Goffman, 1951: 300). Knowledge of a particular kind, membership or attending certain events, qualify as class symbols. Family name may also be such an indicator (1951: 299-300). While occupational symbols such as a license or credential are institutionally controlled, class symbols are less regulated (1951: 296). In fact, preferences given to job applicants may be based on class symbols but not be representative of official policy (1951: 297). Restrictions of various types are put into place so that class symbols cannot be easily misappropriated (1951: 297-301).

All the factual information that one would need to assess a situation is rarely available. Rather, one must rely on “setting”, “appearance”, and “manner” (Goffman, 1959: 23-24). Goffman states: “For if the individual’s activity is to become significant to others, he must mobilize his activity so that it will express

during the interaction what he wishes to convey” (1959: 30). Stone takes some issue with Goffman’s use of the term “front”, which encompasses those above mentioned aspects an individual utilizes in his or her performance. It implies an appearance calculated to misrepresent or conceal, which Stone contends is not always the case (1959: 107).

In many novels we find instances of the asserting of one’s social position through clothing or the attempt to achieve a desired position by seeming to already occupy it. In William DeFoe’s Moll Flanders the two main characters, neither of whom have wealth or position but affect such a status, each see the other as a means to move up in the social hierarchy, with tragic consequences. Guy de Maupassant’s novel Bel-Ami provides a good example of how important clothing is to impression management, and how one may creatively use clothing to achieve personal satisfaction and to attain social goals. We also see the emotional price one pays for failing at this endeavor.

After having declined Forestier’s dinner invitation due to a lack of proper attire, this old friend, whose circumstance has vastly improved through a marriage alliance, queries Duroy:

You really mean to say you’ve no evening clothes? But that’s something you simply can’t do without. In Paris, you realize it’s better to be without a bed than not to have evening clothes (Maupassant, 1885/1975: 35).

Given 40 francs by Forestier to “hire” clothes, Duroy is unable to resist the invitation to visit a young lady. He is confident that with the remaining 20 francs he could secure a suitable evening costume. This assurance quickly turns to

despair as Duroy realizes he has achieved--with the exception of a "more or less correct" tail coat--a "crumpled look of borrowed clothes on a body they were never intended to cover" (1885/1975: 43). Maupaussant sets forth the self-transformation that these less than ideal clothes nevertheless begin to achieve, given that they are a vast improvement over Duroy's usual attire:

Slowly and uneasily he went upstairs, his heart pounding. Above all, he was worried at the thought of appearing ridiculous; and then suddenly he found himself face to face with a man in full evening dress, watching him. They were so close that Duroy recoiled with a start and then stood dumbfounded: it was his own reflection in a tall wall-mirror on the first floor landing which produced the effect of a long gallery. He was overjoyed as he realized how much better he looked than he could possible have believed.

As he possessed only a shaving mirror he had been unable to see himself full-length. And as it was very difficult for him to see the various parts of his makeshift outfit, he had been exaggerating its failings and was in a panic at the thought of seeming a figure of fun. But now that he had suddenly caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror, he had not even been able to recognize himself; he had taken himself for someone else, a man about town whom at first glance he had thought extremely smart and distinguished-looking.

And, as he peered more closely, he realized that the general effect was, in fact, satisfactory.

So he started examining himself like an actor studying his part. He smiled, held out his hand towards himself, gesticulated, expressed feelings of surprise, pleasure, approval; and he tried out different kinds of smile and expressions in his eyes for flirting with the ladies and showing admiration and desire.

Somewhere on the staircase a door opened and, startled, he began to go quickly on upstairs, fearing that one of his friend's guests might have seen him smirking at himself.

When he reached the second floor, he caught sight of another mirror and slowed down to watch himself as he went by. It seemed to him that he looked really elegant. He was moving well. And he was filled with an inordinate self-confidence. Looking as he did, he would surely succeed (1885/1975: 43-44).

This self-confidence was all but shattered when Duroy encountered the footman whose evening dress was superior to his own. Upon meeting Mrs. Forestier, Maupassant describes Duroy's emotional state:

He blushed to the roots of his hair, not knowing what to say, feeling himself being examined and inspected from head to foot, weighed up and judged.

He wanted to apologize, to invent some reason to explain the shortcomings of his dress; but he could find nothing to say and felt afraid of broaching such a dangerous topic (1885/1975: 45).

Identity is a key point on which to focus, especially if one is interested in fashion as a point of intersection between personal/psychological and cultural/social expression, and indeed as a mediation between the individual and economic, historical and linguistic systems. Clothing and bodily ornamentation have always been important to human beings because appearance is a crucial aspect or semiotic of communication. In all cultures, independent of one another, we find expressions of status being conferred and displayed on the body, whether it be totems, tattoos, ceremonial dress or modern clothing.

Gregory Stone extends George Herbert Mead's perspective on meaning stemming from interaction to specifically include appearance. He believes appearance is at least as important a variable as linguistic and gestural discourse (1962: 86-87). "Appearance and discourse", he says "may be seen as dialectic processes going on in every human transaction", the former setting the stage for the later (Stone, 1959: 89). "*Identification with*" the other first requires "*identification of*" the other, and this initial assessment will influence the interpretation of verbal and other symbols (Stone, 1962: 89-90). Clothing is a symbolic means of anchoring identity (1962: 93).

Stone says of the "social significance of clothing" that it "may be initially traced to its character as a 'mediating' element in social relations." It is through one's use of clothing that "social identity, value, attitudes" are established (1959: 5). Clothing then is a significant symbol with which one enters "ongoing relations with others" (1959: 3). Stone defines "one of the chief functions" of clothing: "to facilitate and organize the encounters of strangers and casual acquaintances by making it possible for them to cast one another in social roles . . ." (1959: 4). Stone explains how pervasive clothing is in terms of conveying social information: ". . . all major changes in social position—moving through the different stages of formal education, getting a job, marriage, parenthood, illness, or death—are marked by changes of wardrobe. Or, if we look at the stratification aspects of social relations, we find overwhelming evidence that differences in social honor, wealth, and authority are reflected in apparel" (1959: 3-4).

In Stone's interviews with inhabitants of a certain community, he found

that the reflection of one's appearance "was found in the eyes of those whose opinion they valued" (1960: 106). This can be extended to explain collective sentiments. Rubinstein referring to Durkheim discusses how the significant images a group refers to become codified, entering its collective memory. Certain styles whether they be in clothing or in art become "a language for social communication." Rubinstein elaborates on J. C. Flugel's contention that the most basic information that clothing can communicate has to do with "power, authority, gender distinction, and seductiveness." Within the "semiotics of dress" are clothing signs and clothing symbols (2001: 3842). Clothing which follows a formal code and conveys a definite meaning, such as a nun's habit, is a clothing sign. Guy Trebay of the *New York Times* explains that then Interim President of Afghanistan, Mr. Karzai, may appear to the West as a "swashbuckling" gentleman in upper class Pastun clothing, but to Afghanis his costume is a "carefully assembled collection of regional political symbols" that can be easily read. His chapan or cape belongs to the Northern tribesmen, his sheared lamb cap is worn by men in Kabul, his jacket is Western, etc. Such a combination of clothing never before worn together in this way bespeaks a unified Afghanistan favorable toward the West (2002, A14). Clothing symbols reflect broader cultural values rather than denoting a particular status. Qualities or states of being such as spirituality, wealth, youth and beauty are conveyed through certain styles of dress which come to be associated with these categories (Rubinstein, 2001: 3843).

Fred Davis sees fashion as a consequence of "instabilities" of collective

identity (1992: 17). So long as individuals were content with conforming to the established codes, or had no choice but to do so, there was no need for any substantial differentiation in appearance from their membership group. He questions whether an identity ambivalence is a byproduct of modernity, along with Simmel, or if it is inherent to the human condition as Freud and Nietzsche have both observed (1992: 23). Tension over identity ambivalence of gender, age, class, social status and sexuality are reflected in fashion. Davis sees gender identity as one of the most important forces directing fashion. So too is status. Class and status have been considered the prime force by scholars who study fashion, Davis points out (1992: 58). Davis warns against an exclusively class based theory of fashion, pointing to Simmel, Veblen and Bourdieu. Rather, he suggests looking at class as one of the many ambivalences (1992: 59-60). Sexual allure or appeal is another of these ambivalences. Flugel, from a psychoanalytic perspective, saw the clash between modesty and display as the main force behind fashion (1992: 82). Davis does not want to reduce fashion to what could be considered psychic drives but he does speak of an erotic-chaste dialectic which he attributes to cultural and historic sources (1992: 92).

Davis asks the same question as does Baudrillard and Lipovetsky: "Is everything subject to fashion?" He says that when speaking to audiences about fashion in the apparel industry he hears from "Endocrinologists, computer specialists, legal scholars, and theologians" that their field is subject to the same dynamic. He concludes that although paradigm shifts, and theoretical and methodological modifications have "fashionlike" manifestations they are not the

same in their scope, objectives and results (1992: 194). Davis adds that the “mass culture critics” greatly exaggerate the extent to which people are “seduced by fashion’s incursions” (1992: 197).

From the perspective of critical theory, the fashion system can be seen as a system which can be subjected to examination as ideology. This critique considers consumerism and the construction of a consumerist ideology. The fashion system can be seen as part of the hegemony that has been constructed with various institutions of consumer capitalism. The shopping experience has been converted into a highly meaningful act, and the commodities, for instance clothing, are “fetishised”. The fashion system is the means by which a commodification of self is achieved. Antonio Gramsci’s claim is that socio-political control is exercised, not by military domination and “class conflict”, but rather by the “hegemony” of the institutions which are supported. The desire to buy marks of distinction makes people think that they are also part of the “elect”, thereby feeling a false sense of power and control.

The fashion system, perhaps somewhat unwittingly, is part of the ideology of a capitalist society, and has become more systematic in a consumer-capitalism. It serves to provide satisfaction to the “masses” by making them believe that they have achieved distinction by the clothes they are able to wear. This can be seen as a form of mystification when firms cater to a mass-market and therefore do not really make the wearer the member of an “elite” or “selected” class. But by advertising and mass-marketing people are made to believe this. “Ordinary” people may wear “logos” and come to believe they have achieved distinction,

social mobility, etc.

In the general area of consumption in which fashion is implicated, McRobbie discusses two distinctive feminist approaches: materialist and cultural studies. These approaches are interdisciplinary, not primarily sociological. McRobbie points out that the left has divided: there are those who have abandoned the critique of capitalist culture “in favor of celebrating popular culture and the values of commerce and retail” and those who have maintained a traditional position (1999: 22). McRobbie accuses those who claim to be closer to the Marxist tradition with maintaining an “outmoded notion” that it is the “Oxbridge elites” or the “new right” that are influencing cultural production (1999: 26). Those who have gone into cultural studies whole-heartedly have discovered that many of those involved in producing culture—artists, fashion designers, DJs, stylists, makeup artists—are drawn from the working classes (1999: 27). There may be a confusion between the two camps, however, on just what constitutes culture.

Materialist feminists who have looked at the fashion industry, such as Rowbotham, Phizacklea and Tate, have no concern with the symbolic role played by consumer goods, says McRobbie. They are solely concerned with the production of goods. Material feminists point to the exploitation of a mostly female, and sometimes child, labor force in the Third World. They have also written about sweatshops, and home work by women, in the First World (1999: 32). The idea that the consumption of fashion and other non-essential items is enjoyable to women, even to working class and poor women, in all parts of the

world, is not addressed or is dismissed as “false consciousness” (1999: 33). McRobbie points to feminist work of this type and its total condemnation of women’s magazines. The images are thought to be “designed to make women attractive for male consumption”. The fashion and cosmetic items sold in these magazines are deemed “paraphernalia of oppression”. The hope was that ordinary women, like feminists, would break free of these bonds (1999: 48). It has largely dissipated.

In the mid-1980s feminist scholarship was influenced by poststructuralism and psychoanalysis, says McRobbie. The poststructural position opposed the earlier idea of a “true form of womanhood”. Women’s magazines, and consumer culture in general, presented yet another form of femininity that could be subject to analysis (1999: 48-49). Feminist psychoanalysis pointed to the involvement of unconscious female desire in having the “perfect body”, “relationship”, and a “glamorous lifestyle”. A call for repudiation of this would lead to guilt and associated tensions (1999: 49). Today, feminists involved in cultural studies, by and large, believe a separate women’s culture exists and is worthy of academic study (1999: 50).

The theorists we have considered find different explanations for what fashion is, what drives fashion, its mode of expression, and what it communicates. Fashion we see stretches from textual to visual, to experiential to epic, even apocalyptic, manifestations. It can accommodate both individual agency and social agendas (not to mention psychic imperatives) or in some cases neither, acting according to its own objective. Now we move to another realm that has

not been fully discussed, just as broad in its scope--fashion in industry.

Fashion Design, Production, and Marketing in a Global Economy

The production of clothing moved out of the domestic sphere to a guild system and later to an industrial manufacturing or factory system. Once mobility from one class to another became possible, an industry ready to furnish signs of distinction, differentiation, and association was born. By extending its reach to those once outside the scope of fashionable consumption, the industry attained the capital it needed to grow and become a major force in the world of commerce.

At the beginning of the twentieth century technology enabled clothing for women to be mass produced and sold at “hitherto unheard of prices” (Gamber, 1997: 156). For the first time, the lower classes, now free of legal and social constraints that regulated their consumption choices, had the economic means to acquire fashionable clothing. Fashion, its “laws and customs mobile” has made tradition a thing of the past with respect to clothing, observes Malossi (1998: 59). The role of the fashion industry in modern society, is on the one hand, democratization. Fashion is made available to the masses. On the other hand there is still a social call for stratification based on status, class, prestige, taste, and of course gender. The industry then has another role—a paradoxical one: to create signs of distinction which allow individuals to mark boundaries, in the process defining their identity. An important shift has occurred, it is individuals constructing identities that otherwise might have been regulated by the state, tradition, or other authorities. Their choices are provided by a system of free enterprise whose main concern is to sell to them, ideally to change their

consciousness in the process. In doing so one may ask how this serves to enforce or improve the social order.

Attitudes which may be reflected in music, films, political movements, etc. necessarily reflect or oppose certain values and systems. Those in the fashion industry draw on these larger cultural references—as well as creating new ones—and give them form within an organizational context. In effect, the industry manufactures a semiotic system. Without the social context that insures a receptive audience, these sign systems—clothing infused with meaning—would not be necessary. As there is profit to be made, many such organizations exist, each competing with the other. Often one firm is able to create a niche for itself, or claim a larger share of the market, and prospers as a result. The major firms have a global reach, or near-global reach, and are able to influence a mass audience. There are also smaller houses that provide sign-systems for a more select clientele. The result of all this activity is a powerful system that shapes economic markets around the world. Millions of jobs are created and redistributed. Many prosper, and many are exploited.

Bridget Foley of *W* magazine describes this as “the era of the mega luxury brand” (1/04: 22). The luxury sector plays a key role in the global fashion economy. It is estimated to bring in about 68 billion dollars (Horyn, 11/5/03: A1, C7). In the past, the fashion industry consisted of many small firms, a few of which were couturiers, and a variety of small and larger retailers. Today, the industry is dominated by a few powerful international conglomerates and publicly held companies, and in the retail sector by a few consolidated department stores.

Large luxury goods conglomerates, namely LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton SA and Gucci Group NV, have been buying out and building up independent fashion houses. Large clothing producers such as Kellwood have also been acquiring companies with growth potential (Galloni, 2003: A3), as have wealthy investors such as Silas Chou and Lawrence Stroll (who backed Tommy Hilfiger). In the case of the latter partners, promising designers are identified, heavily invested in, in terms of “marketing and brand building”, and in three to five years the companies are taken public (Agins, 11/21/03: B1, B6). Competing with these powerful global conglomerates are independent couture and ready-to-wear companies as well as retailers like Hennes and Mauritz, and Zara, which copy the designs of the high-end fashion houses and sell them in a timely manner at a fraction of the cost. In 2004 Karl Lagerfeld, who designs for Chanel, put out a low cost line of clothing at H&M.

Once fashion became a major industry, the success of a product no longer depended on its intrinsic attributes alone. It became harder for the unknown designer to rise on his or her own and continue to be independent. Success in today’s global economy requires creative talent first but cannot be achieved without being able to create and sustain a brand identity. In addition to an innovative marketing program, one must have the capital and international business expertise necessary to arrange cost effective production and distribution techniques. There are those who would say that artistry does not figure prominently in this new equation. Fashion journalist Lisa Marsh claims: “the American design houses that have reigned supreme—Polo Ralph Lauren, Tommy

Hilfiger, Donna Karan, and of course, Calvin Klein have proven that design is a small part of the business of fashion.” She goes on to say that these businesses “draw breath from things like the marketing and positioning of the company’s image, shrewd partnerships with retailers, regular support from the fashion press, and above all, astute business management who can see beyond the hype” (2003: 7). It can be argued, however, that it is not *either* fashion design *or* commercial and publicity related activities that these firms must focus on. Successful firms are organized in such a way to achieve excellence in both arenas. They are in a position to hire the most talented designers available, as well as leaders with proven business skills, and individuals with a variety of technical and creative capacities. Increasingly, many of these qualities may be possessed by fashion designers. Fashion design schools are responding to the “newly consolidated, intensely competitive and technology driven luxury goods sector” by adding business courses to what may have before been a purely artistic and technical curriculum (Rohwedder, 1/9/03: A7, A9).

For a brand to gain prestige and for it to be effectively marketed to retailers and to consumers willing to pay the price this level of product commands, quite a lot of design talent must go into its formulation and production. In addition to a visionary designer like Lauren, Hilfiger, Karan or Klein (or anyone who might succeed them as a chief designer), many talented people are involved in the cooperative, creative effort of getting the product off the ground, onto the marketing table, and into people’s closets. Of course when it comes to Calvin Klein underwear, produced by the same licensee who produces

Jockeys (and used to produce Tommy Hilfiger underwear) there is little contribution in the way of design, though there may be some minor distinctions in fabric and cut. The only difference says Marsh, is the name on the waistband (2003: 49). Insofar as these names on the waistband are rarely seen by others, its chief significance is to indicate to the wearer that he has “arrived” or achieved some distinction. Such products may rely entirely on marketing, but only because a place has already been secured for the brand. This is achieved in no small part by the recognition given by industry insiders and consumers to the quality and stylistic features of items put forward.

McRobbie discusses three ways in which the small scale fashion scene has been transformed in the U.K. The emergence of “big brands” a phenomenon she refers to as “prada-ization”⁶ has undercut independent U.K. fashion design. Middle range fashion brands like French Connection have opened numerous stores in prominent locations and have instituted massive advertising campaigns. Banana Republic had its first fashion show in Spring 2004. Such companies take ideas that designers present on the runways and mass produce “high-quality versions” shortly thereafter. At the higher end, corporate fashion houses—McRobbie mentions DKNY and Calvin Klein—are able to exert an influence along “every point in the fashion chain” through diversification with products ranging from accessories to household items, and through high-end advertising campaigns. Companies such as the Italian-based Diesel specialize in the rapid marketing of fashions that begin in a variety of youth subcultures (2002:

⁶ Referring to the Prada company.

59-60). Major retail specialty stores such as Hennes & Maurtiz, Zara, Banana Republic, and Express have adapted to changes in fashion by providing up to date styles to women. Unlike 5 to 10 years ago explains Kady Dalrymple, executive vice president of the women's division at Express, women do not want to wait for what was on the runways one year ago to appear in stores (WWD, 5/7/03, 8).

The Stockholm based Swedish firm, Hennes & Mauritz (known as H&M in the U.S.), makes "low cost versions of top designers' fashion" which it is able to get into its stores about 3 months after the design is conceptualized. The time-to-market for "high fashion products" is 3 weeks. Hennes & Mauritz doesn't own any factories, but orders from approximately 1,000 suppliers. Hennes & Mauritz has about 900 stores in 18 countries (less than 5% of its sales come from the U.S.), and sales of about 6.2 billion (Sylvers, 2003, W1, W7; Women's Wear Daily, 2/25/04, 18). Its flagship store is a 35,000 square foot space on Fifth Avenue in New York City. Sales in its first year were \$65 million (Lee, 2003 and Georgiades, 2004: B4B). Hennes & Mauritz employs 70 in-house designers "who keep a close watch on trends" (Lee, 2003). Spring 2004 ads, released in all countries Hennes & Mauritz operates in, intend to position the company as a moderately priced place for apparel where "everyone" can find something (Women's Wear Daily, 2/25/04: 18). It has been innovative, says Michelle Lee, in making consumers "not feel guilty about wearing an item once or twice then never again". Lee and others have called their fashion "cheap chic" (Lee, 2003). Inspiration comes not only from the catwalk but from watching what people are wearing in the street and listening to consumers, says Margareta Van Den Bosch,

chief designer of men's and women's at H&M for 16 years (Women's Wear Daily, 5/7/03: 8).

The Spanish retail clothing chain, Zara, outpaces Hennes & Mauritz and other European rivals such as the Gap⁷ with its rapid production and delivery system. Unlike corporate fashion houses that produce and stock merchandise on a seasonal basis, Zara comes out with seasonal collections inspired by fashion designers at reasonable costs which can be updated within a given season according to consumer demand. If enough customers ask for an item with a rounded neck rather than the V neck on display, a new version can be in stores in about 10 days. And, if an actress creates a stir with something she's wearing, Zara can reproduce a version of the outfit and have it stocked in all its European stores in a few weeks. Instead of producing its clothing in Asia, Zara utilizes its own higher cost factories in Spain. Trucks deliver the items to stores that can be reached within 24 hours, and more distant stores receive their shipments via air courier. Zara's operational model is more akin to that of the grocery store, or to methods used by companies like Wal-Mart and Dell Computers (Tagliabue, 2003: W1, W7). Most apparel imported to the U.S. from Asia comes in by boat. Amongst the "quick response guys", says a Hong Kong sourcer, 60-70% have their merchandise flown in by air cargo (Women's Wear Daily, 1/20/04: 24).

Express with 660 stores in the U.S. also wants to be known for the "look of the moment". Like H&M many of its designs are conceived almost one year in advance but says Dalrymple, it has "cut its lead times and can get products into

⁷ Hennes & Mauritz purchased 10 stores from Gap Inc. in Germany (Socha, 2004: 2).

the stores in six to eight weeks time” (Women’s Wear Daily, 5/7/03: 8).

Marie Claire senior shopping editor tells readers:

You don’t have to spend thousands to wear the latest trend. Certain stores, like Bebe, Zara and Club Monaco⁸, specialize in interpreting runway looks for less. They get new shipments often, so merchandise is always current. Make them your first shopping stop (Yraola, 2004: 22).

These retailers provide competition to the designers while at the same time being dependent on designers and not in a position to fully replace them. They contribute to increasing the competitive intensity of the environment designers operate in, causing them to search for ever more efficient, cost effective operational strategies.

Consumer demand and the overall global economy have had a profound influence on how various sectors of the apparel industry operate. Gary Gereffi explains the factors that account for the geographical shift in the manufacturing of apparel in the U.S.: “the search for low-wage labor and the pursuit of organizational flexibility” (1994: 102). As U.S. textile firms became larger and more powerful they were able to demand that apparel companies pay higher prices, place larger orders, and settle accounts according to their terms. U.S. retailers were also consolidating and becoming stronger. During the 1960s and 1970s a few giant department stores bought up many independent retailers, a trend that is continuing today. This allowed department stores to demand lower prices from manufacturers than could apparel companies. Competition between

⁸ Owned by Polo Ralph Lauren.

the department stores also drove down retail prices (1994: 103-105).

The retail sector and the apparel industry can be viewed as buyer-driven commodity chains which operate on a global scale. Eileen Rabach and Ean Mee Kim point out that the “‘media-ization’ of capitalist consumption, which sells an ideology, set of values, and life style along with the product, adds to the pace and frenzy of capitalist competition . . .” (1994: 137). To keep up with consumer demand, with each other, and in order to become more powerful by transforming the market, these firms must produce “multi-product lines” which are continually modified, updated and replaced (1994: 136-137).

In producer-driven commodity chains, such as the automotive and aircraft industries, transnational corporations “play the central role in controlling the production system” (Gereffi, 1994: 97). In producing Model Ts, Ford instituted a standardized production system which was successful so long as there was little or no need for innovation. Alfred Sloan who became president of General Motors, introduced through massive advertising “planned obsolescence”. Ford could not compete and was overtaken in sales by GM in the 1920s (Schoenberger, 1994: 53-54).

In buyer-driven industries where a demand for change is accelerated, and competition is steep, flexible production networks or commodity chains work best. In the post-war period, East Asia became a “dominant force” in the manufacture of textiles and apparel, with Japan the leader. In the 1960s world export of apparel increased nearly sixfold (Appelbaum et al., 1994: 189). By the early 1970s Hong Kong became the world’s leading apparel exporter providing

low-waged, lower-priced manufacturing (1994: 190). In the 1990s the need to “quickly produce what consumers demand” led to an expansion of manufacturing in the Pacific Rim countries (1994: 190-191). In the 1960s a quota system was imposed by developed countries on the amount of apparel that could be exported by individual countries so as to protect their own textile manufacturers. Limits were imposed on various categories of clothing, such as men’s woven-wool shirts (Buckman, 2004: B1, B8).

Since trade protections were lifted in China in January 2003, Chinese exports have climbed 22 percent. China has become the major apparel manufacturer. Consequently, American manufacturing jobs are evaporating at an accelerated pace. In Baltimore, for instance, there were 500 factories that produced apparel in the 1940s; now there is only one. Eighteen thousand textile jobs are lost each month or 600 jobs per day. Since 2001 about 2.8 million American manufacturing jobs have been lost (Ellis, 1/20/04). After China joined the World Trade Organization, quotas on several apparel items were lifted. In 2003, the U.S., with the agreement of China, reinstituted temporary quotas on some categories of apparel: bras, knit fabric, and bathrobes, as the gains China was making were detrimental to domestic manufacturers as well as the newly developing textile and apparel industries in places such as Bangladesh and Uzbekistan (Buckman, 3/22/04: B8). It is expected by 2005 that nearly all quotas in textile imports will be lifted. China has been widely criticized by U.S. manufacturers for unfair practices amidst a climate where one quarter of jobs in the textile and apparel industry have been lost since it joined the WTO in 2001.

Textile industry officials contend that: “China and other Asian countries are unfairly taking control of the market by keeping their currencies weak against the dollar and then dropping their prices even more to compete unfairly.” The National Textile Association and the American Yarn Spinners Association fear that China may soon control 75 percent of the U.S. apparel market if quotas are lifted (Barboza, 2003: C6).

The removal of quotas will apply not only to China but to all members of the World Trade Organization that ship apparel to the U.S. The result expected is that U.S. buyers will concentrate on fewer countries since there will no longer be limits on the number of garments they can purchase from one country. It is expected that China will be the main beneficiary with many apparel manufacturers likely to switch production there. Competition will intensify. However, international companies, those who purchase apparel overseas, and retailers who buy directly from apparel manufacturers, have been described as “hedging their bets”; hanging on to production sites in various locations until it becomes clear in 2005 what direction will be most advantageous (Buckman, 3/22/04: B8).

Garments that require “high levels of quality, quickness of delivery, and flexibility in the alteration of style, tend to be manufactured in higher-wage areas that have highly integrated local ‘industrial districts’ such as Hong Kong and Seoul.” On the other hand, “garments that allow for high-volume standardized production and that do not require quick delivery or high quality, tend to be produced in low-wage areas” (Appelbaum et al., 1994: 202). With decentralized

production the same firm may utilize many different manufacturers across the globe depending on its particular needs. High-end fashion items may be manufactured in Italy, or fabrics may be purchased in France and clothing made in Hong Kong. Lower priced and simpler garments may be manufactured in Bangladesh, for instance. Today one sometimes finds labor exported from the Third World to factories located in Italy, for example, so that the highly regarded “Made in Italy” label can legitimately be used. Similarly, garments carrying the “Made in the U.S.” label may have actually been made in the Mariana Islands, a U.S. possession.

Gereffi has devised a five-tier system with the skill of workers and the quality of production decreasing as one moves down the tiers. Tier one encompasses Italy, France, U.K., and Japan, a source for high-fashion designer firms. Below this, department stores and specialty chains which sell higher quality “private label” merchandise tend to utilize “established Third World suppliers” residing in second and third tier countries, Hong Kong being in tier two and India in tier three, for example. Large discount stores like Wal-Mart and Target, and large designer firms like Liz Claiborne, are also able to use second tier manufacturers due to the lower costs they secure in exchange for higher volume, perhaps even year around orders. However, smaller discount stores that sell low-cost merchandise tend to use the three outer rings. Eastern European countries, the Carribean, and Sri Lanka belong to the forth tier, and Bolivia, Madagascar and Qatar belong to the fifth ring, for example (1994: 110-111). Sometimes “triangle manufacturing” is utilized with East Asian manufacturers

transferring technology to lower-cost production sites and themselves managing the quality control, finance and shipping for those firms. This allows for production to be dispersed across the globe with less work and involvement on the part of large firms (1994: 116) who may focus their efforts on design and marketing. This innovation can be compared to the evolution from manufacturer to jobber⁹ in the rise of the Garment Center in New York. The jobber has now become not only a designer but a global manufacturing contractor. Ironically, many of these modern day “jobbers” if we may call them that just for a moment, are according to some industry insiders, ashamed of their Garment Center roots and take care to associate their names with their Madison Avenue retail locations and not their Seventh Avenue garment district offices.

Today’s ready-to-wear and mass produced fashion requires a complex network of organizations transversing national boundaries sometimes for its design, and increasingly for its production and dissemination—the latter being both actual (sales), and symbolic (media). The flexibility of this system mirrors the social demand for innovation, generated in part by the industry itself and in part by a growing consumer market. India, a “tier three” provider of low-waged labor for first world companies, is simultaneously seen as a consumer market by these same companies—Tommy Hilfiger leading the way in enthusiastically introducing his total lifestyle concept in stores throughout the Indian subcontinent in 2004. It is in this context of continually shifting mass culture, says Malossi, that “fashion

⁹ The jobber was a middleman who arranged for garments to be made for a business person by a garment manufacturer.

products acquire meaning and value” (1998: 157).

Chapter 2 -- The Designer

The Rise of the Designer

In order for the designer to be seen as an important entity in his or her own right a change would have to occur in the way people thought about fashion.

Dressmakers had been anonymous figures, working behind the scenes whether in small or large scale enterprises. In any event, they did not get personal credit for their creations. Eventually designers would be recognized as skilled craftsmen and craftswomen as well as, in some cases, artists. And, some would be considered celebrities.

The development of the couture industry placed the focus on the couturier. Couture is defined by the then curator and associate curator of the Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art: “It represents the fusion of fashion—the modern entity composed of novelty and synergy with personal and social needs—and costume—the consummate arts of dressmaking, tailoring, and constituent crafts to apparel and accessories (Martin and Koda: 1995: 11). The couture industry began in the 19th century, with couturiers designing for European royalty. The emphasis in its early stages was on costume and dressmaking with a focus on the uniqueness of the individual for whom the clothing was being made. The styles made for Europe’s elite were copied by those who could afford such services (Drew, 1992: 15). While women dominated small-scale French couture in the 1920s and 1930s, once fashion was “reconceived as big business and high art” it was men such as Christian Dior, Christobal Balenciaga and Jacques Fath

who achieved recognition (Steele, 2000: 8).

Charles Frederick Worth established the business of couture. In Paris in the 1860s he produced *his own* collection, shown to customers on live models. Linda Drew states: “Not only had he conceived the idea of the fashion show, but also he had mastered the art of selling a dream to women” (Drew, 1992: 15). From his collections, shown semiannually, customers could select the clothing they would like made for them (Martin and Koda, 1995: 47). Worth and not his client became the arbiter of fashion. Instead, that is, of being dictated to by the customer, the fashion designer became the source of authority. Caroline Rennolds Milbank states: “Worth led the way by conducting himself like an artist, not a tradesman, and making sure his establishment was exclusive. By the end of the century, couturiers like Doucet were accepted as gentlemen in society, and before World War I Poiret had exotic parties to which everyone wanted to be invited” (1989: 121). The *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne*, a regulatory institution funded by the French government, was built on Worth’s innovations.

For most of the 20th century Paris designers had been influential in setting the fashion standard, at all levels. New York’s Seventh Avenue manufacturers would adapt sketches of the latest couture designs for their clientele. Gerry Dransky who reported on the couture houses in the 1960s for *Women’s Wear Daily*, says of Coco Chanel: “Coco vowed she’d never do ready-to-wear because she didn’t want to dress everybody”. The couturiers were already rich, they did not need to sell to a large audience, he observes. “Their snobbishness was greater

than their greed” (Agins, 1999: 23). Nevertheless, Paris design houses allowed American manufacturers to send their best sketchers to their fashion shows in exchange for a cover charge of several thousand dollars, and an agreement to purchase several couture items (Marsh, 2003: 28).

The U.S. had department stores such as R. H. Macy in New York, Marshall Field’s in Chicago and John Wanamaker in Philadelphia (Agins, 1999: 23). The stage was already set for the contemporary designer’s entrance. “World War II disrupted Paris’ couture industry, allowing American designers to gain prominence.” Nancy L. Green tells us that the war: “furthered the progressive shift in American women’s clothes. Simplicity and comfort became the watchwords of American ‘style’” (1997: 67). Dorothy Shaver, the vice president of Lord & Taylor, set the stage a few years earlier when she began promoting American designers instead of the manufacturers for whom most designers worked (Crane, 2000: 138-139). In the United States, through the 1960s, it was still the norm that the manufacturer’s name appeared on the label. Only European couture designers had achieved considerable recognition under their own names. Of course it is important to remember that only a few designers achieve prominence under their own names. The majority of designers, today as in the past, continue to work under someone else’s name, be it a designer, manufacturer or retailer.

Claire McCardell is regarded as one of the most important American ready-to-wear designers of the 20th century. During the 1940s McCardell was influential in establishing a unique American style, referred to as the “American

Look” (Stegemeyer, 1984: 35-36). Influenced by the simple lines and classic draping of Madeline Vionnet, McCardell’s designs were intended not only to be fashionable but to be practical and comfortable (Baudot, 1999: 12, 82).

McCardell worked with easy to care for fabrics such as denim, ticking, gingham and wool jersey (Stegemeyer, 1984: 37). California native Bonnie Cashin is another example of an American designer who instead of looking toward Paris, designed functional clothing for the active woman (Steele, 2001: 192), and like McCardell, designed for a mass market (Crane, 2000: 139). This approach can be contrasted with Parisian couturier Christian Dior. Francois Baudot describes his fashions as “elitist” and not focused on the “practical realities of life” (1999: 144).

Crane informs us that between the late 1940s (after the war) to the 1960s, there was a turn back toward Parisian couture. American manufacturers produced line for line copies of these styles, some highly priced and others of lesser quality, in large quantities at lower prices (2000: 139-140). But this would not prove to be a full turn. Beginning in the 1940s American designers were promoted in the fashion press. With designers’ names becoming prominent, manufacturers and retailers became less important (Milbank, 1989: 130). Ready-to-wear designers were to become more well-known than American couturiers, in fact, as their names and designs were advertised and sold all over the country (1989: 132).

Richard Martin and Harold Koda attribute the “rebirth” of couture in the late 1940s and 1950s to the attention that Christian Dior’s 1947 collection drew. It was referred to by Carmel Snow of *Harper’s Bazaar* as the “New Look” (1995:

12). Dior presented a “nostalgic femininity of corsets and, most controversially, flowing skirts that would use up fifty yards of material” as *The Fashion Book* describes it. And this just after a period of wartime “austerity” (1998: 27).

Haute couture “remained in place as a guiding light of fashion” in the 1960s say Martin and Koda (1995: 12). However, in the early 1960s London designers began capturing the world’s attention by adapting young people’s “street” styles in their designs (Crane, 2000: 138). In the 1960s people were called to reject commercial fashion in favor of their own natural look (Rubinstein, 1995: 114). The hippie way of dressing—a style originating in the U.S., featuring handmade and ethnic-type clothing was to become the ultimate form of this type of self-expression (1995: 220). Beginning in the 1960s a “bubbling-up” phenomena occurred. Styles originating in the streets were copied, causing Paris’ influence to wane (Crane, 2000: 140). As Simmel pointed out as an exception to his “trickle-down” theory, the “mingling of classes and the leveling effect of democracy exert a counter influence” (1904/1971: 300). What had begun as an oppositional youth culture’s anti-fashion statement was picked up by the fashion industry and marketed to the mainstream and to the upper classes.

Yves Saint Laurent belonged to that French haute couture tradition that saw fashion as part of the art world. Both Paris and London fashion was influenced by the youth culture of the 1960s. But McDowell explains that finding inspirations in what was happening in the streets meant different things to Saint Laurent than it did to the London designers. His was an “intellectual” and not a “visceral” inspiration. It was not “pop culture” but the current Left Bank artistic

and philosophical climate that influenced Saint Laurent (2000: 47).

Yves Saint Laurent was among the French designers who produced “civilized” variations of “hippie” clothing. He created the “rich hippie look” featuring gypsy skirts and peasant blouses intricately made from the most costly fabrics (2000: 371). The hippies’ motivation for embracing Indian clothing had to do with associating traditions of the East, India in particular, with authenticity, while the West was seen as superficial and misguided. This distinction was embodied in the hand spun cotton materials used by Indians, and the synthetic fabrics used in the West. Wearing Indian “peasant” clothing identified one with the “third world”, and its values, which were taken to be more meaningful. In the Western context these clothes represented freedom from constraints and egalitarianism, while in India the same clothing was connected to an intricate system of hierarchies. Such clothing became a symbol of the counterculture in the West. These identifications held on some level too for the wealthy women who wore Saint Laurent’s rich hippie look.

After the short hemline of the 1960s was met in the later part of the decade with a “militant dropping of the length to below the knee” a decisive change had taken place. The new long length maxi skirt was rejected by women. This was a “trauma to couture, becoming a challenge to the supposed ultimate authority of fashion.” The pantsuit, introduced at the same time, however, was a success (Martin and Koda, 1995: 39).

The new freedom of expression in the fashion of the 1960s continued in the 1970s. Several styles co-existed. Someone wearing ethnic clothing could be

seen next to someone in hot pants and platform shoes. Steele tells us editors and designers fearing being labeled as “fascists,” should they tell women what to wear, “adopted a new language of ‘freedom’ and ‘choice’” (2000: 13). During this time California style sportswear began to dominate the sportswear industry. This, she explains, contributed to the shift in production away from New York and to the West Coast (1997: 69-70).

A shift in attention away from couture had occurred. Martin and Koda explain: “Fashion design in the early 1970s was dominated by ready-to-wear and sportswear, both because of new standards of casual behavior and because of the expanded interest of the bourgeoisie in fashion.” Yves Saint Laurent was instrumental in drawing attention back to couture and to Paris. Saint Laurent’s fall/winter collection of 1976-1977, a luxurious Russian “peasant” inspired look is described by Martina and Koda as “counter-revolutionary to the 1960s.” He “refreshed couture, making it seem desirable and distinctive in a time of ready-to-wear leadership” (1995: 41). Yves Saint Laurent captured the attention of the public, and had inadvertently paved the way for the emergence of “superstar” designers from ranks less prestigious than his own.

Jeffrey A. Trachtenberg says that the creating of a “designer mystique” in the 1970s was a “brilliant marketing” tactic. “It revived the men’s wear industry, it boosted women’s wear sales, and it meant higher retail prices and greater profits. The designers themselves shared in the riches, buying country estates, hiring private chefs, and emerging as eager bidders at the famous auction houses” (1988: 12-13).

The 1970s are often described as the decade of the designer fashion craze. During this period “aspirational” brands to be marketed to a mass audience appeared. Fashion, for more people, became a means of living a fantasy. A trend that started in the 1940s—the designer label—had matured in the 1970s. The American designer had attained a prestige that before was limited to the couturier. Instead of being tied to a manufacturer, many designers headed their own conglomerates and began to license their names to manufacturers (Crane, 2000: 147). Of course most designers continued to work under someone, be it a manufacturer or another designer.

Carl Rosen, a clothing manufacturer who headed a company called Puritan, decided to market designer jeans. He first approached Pierre Cardin with the idea. Cardin, offended by this notion, and Rosen’s rough demeanor, is said to have remarked: “Mr. Rosen? There are no cowboys in Paris” before walking out of the room (Marsh, 2003: 42-43). The American designer Calvin Klein was Rosen’s second choice. He was to become the premier jeans designer. They signed a licensing deal which Marsh says became legendary in the industry. Klein received a \$1 million signing bonus, \$1 million every year, and a royalty of \$1 per pair of jeans sold, with a built in cost-of-living increase. Calvin Klein jeans were introduced in 1978, during the early stages of the “designer jeans craze”. His jeans featured his name on a label on the back pocket. They were promoted in controversial television commercials such as the provocatively posed adolescent Brooke Shields saying: “nothing comes between me and my Calvins”. One third of Puritan’s \$80 million sales that first year were from Calvin Klein

jeans, making them second to Gloria Vanderbilt jeans (2003: 43-44). Gloria Vanderbilt jeans were manufactured by the same businessman who would a few years later decide to promote the career of Tommy Hilfiger.

The designer logo was an important development that would contribute to the recognition of designers, and the massive demand for their highly visible products. Jeffrey Banks, a designer who worked with Calvin Klein during the early years of his career, in the beginning of the 1970s, explains how the Calvin Klein logo came about. Banks decided to make a present for Klein. It was a T-shirt in his favorite color (chocolate brown) with the Calvin Klein logo. Previously this logo was only used on the folder for the press kit. Banks had this emblem silk-screened on the sleeve. Barry Schwartz, Klein's friend and business partner, thought it looked great and assumed it was part of the line of clothing to be presented. This inspired Banks to have more T-shirts with logos made. He had the "salesgirls", the women who seated people at the shows, each wear one. The next day buyers were asking for the T-shirts (2003: 37).

Many designers in the 1980s attained "star" status. Karl Lagerfeld was hired by Chanel to revive the business, and Giorgio Armani became known world-wide. This trend continued in the 1990s and in the beginning years of the twenty first century with fashion conglomerates hiring well-known designers, or promoting designers as stars, to represent their brands. Tom Ford who designed for Gucci until February 2004 commanded a salary of \$4.7 million. In April and May of 2003 he made \$38 million by "exercising his stock options" (Wilson, 2004: 1).

A lot of what's discussed in fashion theory—the famous couturiers and their runway shows and ads—are a direct factor in the lives of only a small segment of the population. Couture fashion is bought by less than 500 women worldwide. Certainly it has a huge influence but more attention should be given to designers and firms who produce middle range and even mass, lower-priced fashion, and to the meaning fashion has for people of all classes. We find a focus on the elite and on countercultures, each occurring at the ends of the fashion spectrum. The same need for distinction and identification exists amongst those who do not participate in the highest, cutting-edge levels of fashion. (It even exists amongst those who don't acknowledge participating in the fashion system.) The industry understands this, as do the couturiers themselves who make most of their money on a middle range audience through licensing their name to manufacturers who produce more accessibly priced goods.

We live in a status conscious media culture where people of all classes receive what might be termed “hegemonic” messages, though the content of these messages are now diverse in terms of how they say one should present oneself, what it means to be fashionable, etc. Those who design for the “masses” must be attuned to the general culture, much more so than the couturiers who can, at least in some segments of their business, reject this audience.

As fragmented as societies may become, imitation for the purposes of fitting in, and attaining higher status—while at the same time being an individual—remains an essential feature of human interaction. It has become more complex, with people balancing multiple allegiances/identities that go beyond divisions of

class. Personal expression through fashion, and the ways in which fashion is produced and disseminated, provides us with an understanding of how people negotiate the evolving social and cultural domain. Designers provide a bridge that helps people connect these ends—not any more on just a local or national level, but on a global one. The globalization of the fashion industry means also a globalization of the signs used to construct identities.

The Designer as Artist and Craftsperson

In answering the question of whether a fashion designer is a “craftsman”, an “artist” or an “artist-craftsman”, to use Howard Becker’s (1984) classificatory system, we must first distinguish between these terms. Becker defines artists as those who make objects that are unique, and are neither useful nor necessarily beautiful. Craftsmen, on the other hand, produce objects that primarily have a use-value. Artist-craftsmen stress both the beauty and elegance, as well as the utility of their products. Fashion can be any of the three types of objects but should they hang in the closet and not just in the art gallery or museum, they are apt to fit either of the last two definitions, and consequently so would the object’s creator. Of course, the definition of artist is sometimes broader than Becker’s own.

Crane points out that there are “virtually no sociological studies of fashion design as an occupation”. She argues that the work a designer does is constrained by the social and organizational environment within which he or she operates. Fashion industries vary by country. The prestige and role of the designer, then, will be influenced in her view by four structural variables: 1. the structure of the

clothing industry; 2. the organization of education for the arts; 3. The existence and vitality of urban street cultures; and 4. The development of fashion worlds, consisting of designers, their clienteles, shopkeepers, magazine editors, and department store buyers. Crane mentions that in France and Japan: “the decorative arts and recorded cultures are highly valued, while in the United States commercial values predominate in all sectors”, and in England: “cultural values and perspectives are highly correlated with social class origin.” These structural and cultural factors affect the role “assumed by or assigned to” the designer (1993: 56).

In France the designer, particularly the couturier but also the créateur who designs expensive ready-to-wear clothing, tends to be viewed as an artist. These designers form the majority in France. In the 1980s the status of designer as fine artist was officially recognized by the French government through the funding of fashion museums and exhibits in the Louvre among other places. Beginning in the 1980s, designers started to work in the Sentier, Paris’ garment district. This group of designers target the lower priced youth market and are influenced by American sportswear and urban street fashions (1993: 56, 60-61). The fashion world in France, even today, is linked to its associations with “the highly prestigious art world”. This connection gained French designers, originally of lower social status, entrance into elite social circles (1993: 57). Crane points out that the designer’s collection is presented in France as “the creations of a single individual working alone in the studio”. Crane says that the increasing prestige of the profession, and its participation in an elite lifestyle, attracted practitioners of

higher social status, so that, for example after World War II men who could have entered careers in law, medicine or architecture might become fashion designers. At this point the designer as artist role was combined with that of a corporate executive, whether it be the designer himself or herself, or more frequently, a partnership with a business executive. The designer, who once acquired prestige by involvement with the avant-garde, became part of establishment. Clients of the French couturiers were comprised of the wealthiest women. No more than 10% were French. "Arab princesses and wives of American billionaires" tended to make up the rest of their clientele. The créateurs also catered to a luxury market. The young designers of the Sentier addressed the youth market, a segment that had been "abandoned" or never addressed by French designers (1993: 58-60).

The London designer tends to be an artisan, argues Crane. Due to the lack of prestige accorded to the profession of fashion design, and the degree of stratification in British society, the person who embarks on a career in fashion is likely to be from a lower middle class or working class background, and without possibility of gaining entrance into the university, says Crane. Trained in the fine art model, which takes an oppositional stance to the established culture, he or she is likely to see himself or herself as a part of London counterculture. Crane argues that English designers do not have the same access to upper class circles, which in England are made up of the establishment and not those who have acquired wealth or fame on their own (1993: 62-63). Some designers, the "glorified artisan", do cater to the established, conservative upper class client

(1993: 64-65). Others work for large manufacturers, or abroad where more opportunities exist (1993: 62-63).

Certainly, there have been some changes in the British fashion world since Crane's study. Heading two of the world's most prestigious fashion houses are London designers from Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design. John Galiano, who describes himself as a south Londoner of modest background, was appointed chief designer at Givenchy in 1995, the first British designer to head a French couture house. In 1996 he was appointed to Dior and Alexander McQueen, also of modest background, was appointed to Givenchy. Both designers appealed to the French couture houses because of the oppositional aspect they could bring to couture houses that were becoming rather staid. No doubt, the success of these two designers, and of Stella McCartney—who is neither of working class background nor a designer who draws on street culture, will confer a great deal of prestige on the career of fashion design for young British people, perhaps in some way closing the class based chasm. Vivienne Westwood, the British designer who in the 1970s incorporated bondage gear in her punk-inspired fashions, won the Queen's Export Award in 1998, and was awarded a place in the Victoria and Albert Museum which in 2004 featured a retrospective of her work.

Crane describes the role of the American fashion designer as having little prestige before World War II (1993: 65). Perhaps this subordination to large clothing manufacturers had a positive result, speculates Crane. Creative designers like Claire McCardell learned how to make practical clothes that were

also stylish, from low cost and easy care fabrics. Designs that could be worn by all classes were made by some American designers, says Crane. This paved the way for Calvin Klein and Ralph Lauren, who emerged in the 1970s, and whose sportswear was worn “by a broad segment of the American population” (1993: 65-66). Given their broader focus, American designers had to get to know their clientele and that meant learning about the needs of the general population and making clothing suitable to their needs. Crane refers to the successful American designer as a “lifestyle specialist” or “corporate executive” (1993: 67-68).

Crane also discusses the Japanese context and its fashion designers. In Tokyo there are several distinct segments divided by neighborhood: “Harajuku geared toward adolescents, sells a great variety of Western styles, particularly from the United States, Ginza and Aoyama sell Japanese and Western designer clothes to a clientele consisting largely of young women who live at home and spend their own and their parents’ money on clothes”. Japanese apparel firms supply clothing to these markets. Crane says the major role of the Japanese designer is as a business executive. The most prominent designers however are artists who Crane says “attempt to develop new forms of clothing based on traditional Japanese clothing”, considered by many to be “unwearable” (1993: 69-70). McDowell discussing the influence of the Japanese designer, entering the Paris fashion scene in the early 1980s, credits designers such as Rei Kawakubo and Yohji Yamamoto with upsetting the foundation of fashion.

“Fashion—especially in its highest form—has traditionally been about sexuality and the power it bestows on women”, says McDowell (2000: 132). Japanese

designers deconstructed Western fashion and aesthetics, realigning and misaligning seams, and covering the body rather than enhancing femininity in traditional ways (2000: 443).

In a later study, Crane (1999) contrasts the role of male and female designers in France, England and the United States, asking whether female designers may be more likely to detect and be sensitive to the changing realities of women's lives. Crane finds that women have made significant innovations in this type of fashion—particularly when they are at the “periphery” of the fashion industry. On the whole, she finds, both female and male designers are constrained by the organizations in which they work, and the larger context of the fashion industry. Organizations, she says have the tendency of “propelling them toward either sensational or ‘safe’ apparel”. Today, with a globalization of fashion markets and the subsequent dominance of men in the industry, there is less chance of challenging the fashion establishment. Crane sees women designers as “excluded further” (1999: 10-11). McRobbie concurs, explaining that in the U.K. female designers are “milked for the benefit of the corporate brand”, “anonymous”, and employed by companies for no more than “a couple of years” (2002: 60-61).

Crane views the work of the designer as constrained by national and organizational factors, and it is these factors that define the designer as artist or craftsperson. One might also argue that certain practices in fashion design itself, regardless of the context in which they occur—whether at the Gap or at Chanel—are consonant with the work of an artist.

Barthes sees the clothing created by designers as an artistic product. Clothing, he says is a “poetic object”, an intersection of language and matter. Fashion in particular, now quoting Barthes: “mobilizes with great variety all the qualities of matter: substance, form, color, tactility, movement, rigidity, luminosity” (1967/1983: 236). If we take fashion out of its literary realm—which Barthes sees as rhetorically impoverished, e.g. the “creamy and dreamy” petticoat-- and look at actual items of clothing, we see dynamic objects that already embody certain meanings, these meanings given to them by designers. When they are worn, of course, they may take on yet another meaning. Presently, we will consider the garment in its pure state, say on a mannequin or hanger. The qualities of matter Barthes describes, brought into being by the designer, may have innumerable forms. A glance at garments from different periods demonstrates this versatility. It is the designer as poet, or more aptly artist, that must give shape and direction to the matter he or she is charged with manipulating. It is possible then to consider the poetic function of clothing as an artistic one. The designer uses a variety of materials to make a work of art, albeit one that is put to more than just a decorative use. Transforming material into the shape of a human figure, or using material to transform the shape of the human figure as for example some of the avant garde Japanese designers have, can be compared to sculpture. Whereas the sculptor transforms matter consisting of marble, clay, metal, etc. by chiseling, cutting, or melting, the designer does essentially the same with different materials and tools. Both the artist and designer commit to a particular meaning and shape their creations accordingly.

The artist takes some material, for example stone, metal, canvas, paint, and uses it to create a form. This representation is presented to others for them to gaze upon. In classical art forms the aim was fidelity and beautification as opposed to a disruption of such objectives. If we take the Greek and Roman traditions, sculptors made heroic, idealized images of warriors and athletes, with a “pride of bodily vigor” and “noble carriage”, observes Arnold Hauser (1951: 73). The figures created are what we would call today “classically proportioned”. This commitment to a stylized naturalism continued until modern times.

In the fashion system the designer already has the human form available to him or her, in a number of standardized sizes, as well as a number of cultural and aesthetic theories of beauty, proportionality, etc. at his or her disposal. Just as the sculptor and the painter are subject to the aesthetic philosophy current in their time to one degree or another, so is the designer. Within the organizational setting, cultural and aesthetic theories will be further modified according to local definitions--Hilfiger's definition of a men's casual woven shirt is different from Armani's, for instance. This is not so different from the patronage system of the Renaissance where an artist's work would be commissioned. The fact that a patron defined the parameters made the artist no less of an artist. It is then with certain specifications that the designer carries out his or her work, analogous perhaps to carving and painting; here with fabrics, textures and patterns of design. Like the sculptor or painter, the designer also has to take into account the intrinsic qualities of the materials with which he or she is working. It is in mixing the palettes of the colors of the fabrics, and cutting and shaping them that the

designer becomes an artist. The way in which this is done, the amount of attention, time and inspiration that goes into it, may deem certain objects more “artistic” than others.

The designer creates a composition in which shape, proportionality, texture and color are assembled to create a particular effect. In making this composition, the designer in fact is artfully creating a human form appropriate for viewing and appreciation in a social context. These designs are presented to informed and influential cognoscenti—buyers, and fashion editors and writers. The presentation whether in a showroom or on the runway can be compared to an art show, carefully choreographed and edited. The clothes are artfully arranged in the showroom with the aid of various props that will further convey the full message the designer wishes to communicate. In the fashion show, the garments are worn by models with certain ideal-type figures who become living and moving sculptures—performance art. Once selected, these garments are displayed for all to see and to buy, in magazines and in stores and perhaps on-line. When a garment is selected by an individual, she or he can use it to make herself or himself appear in public as an object of art, carefully constructed to elicit admiration, controversy, etc.

Nevertheless, the claim that the designer is an artist has been a controversial one. When asked, “Is fashion an art?”, Norman Norell, “one of America’s most renowned fashion designers, hesitates, then gives a qualified yes.” He says that “The best of fashion is worthy of the name art” (Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin, 1967: 130). Others have rejected this notion very

strongly. The sculptor Louise Nevelson says: “Fashion could be an art but isn’t” (1967: 132). Dilys Blum, writing about designer Elsa Schiaparelli, makes a distinction among designers. She says: “Chanel viewed dress-making as a profession while Schiaparelli regarded it as an art” (2004: 10). Early in the eighteenth century Charles Baudelaire had no doubt about the artistic merits of fashionable clothes. He examines a series of fashion plates and observes:

These costumes . . . have a double kind of charm, artistic and historical . . . The idea of beauty that man creates for himself affects his whole attire, ruffles or stiffens his coat, gives curves or straight lines to his gestures and even, in process of time, subtly penetrates the very features of his face. Man comes in the end to look like his ideal image of himself. These engravings can be translated into beauty or ugliness: in ugliness they become caricatures; in beauty, antique statues (1972: 391 in Blum: 2004).

Fashion designers, most notably the couturiers, have drawn from art.

Yves Saint Laurent created the Mondrian dress of three colored panels.

Schiaparelli collaborated with Salvador Dali, Jean Cocteau, and Man Ray. Her designs incorporated surrealist principles. Blum observes, “her fashions should be understood as another reflection of the zeitgeist of 1930s Paris, a time when a number of surrealist artists were working in and interacting with the world of fashion and many couturiers were keenly aware of developments in the arts” (2004: 121). Schiaparelli designed hats that resembled female genitalia, and gloves with embroidered rings and red fingernails or gold claws (2004: 122).

These expressions added a “touch of whimsy or at their most dramatic a frisson of the unexpected”. In 1936 she collaborated with Dali on a group of surrealist suits

and coats with pockets that looked like miniature drawers, complete with dangling handles (2004: 123). Some designers have moved into the art world entirely, no longer designing wearable clothing.

Designer Issey Miyake aligns himself with postmodernism, concentrating solely on A-POC designs--short for "a piece of cloth". Clothing is made from a single tube of cloth and can be cut out to a desired shape and fit along the melded or seamless edges.

As to whether the designer is an artist, designer Alexander McQueen who now heads the French couture house of Givenchy says in an interview:

I don't think you can become a good designer, or a great designer, or whatever. To me you just are one. I think to know about color, proportion, shape, cut, balance is part of a gene. My sister is an amazing artist. My brother is an amazing artist, amazing, much better than I am. The difference is, they thought they had no choice but to do a manual job. That's what really upsets me (Frankel, 2001: 20).

One can debate this issue endlessly--whether fashion is art or the designer is artist. It seems, returning to Becker's work, that the fashion designer is a rare combination of all three designations: craftsperson, artist, and artist-craftsperson. It is perhaps best to conclude that the process and methods employed by the designer make him or her an artist of a particular kind. It is possible to get carried away by the aura that has enveloped the idea of art and artist over the centuries. Before artists claimed sole authorship, art flourished in all human cultures. Sculptors have made idealized images for religious worship and others have made etchings, and paintings, for this and other purposes. In the Middle Ages, and

during the Renaissance in Europe, artists worked in shops owned by masters and produced collective works of art that bore the signature of the master. One aspect is common to all artists: they take certain materials and transform them into different shapes so that others can gaze at them for aesthetic pleasure or use them for everyday purposes. If we apply these conditions to the designer of clothing, a self conscious, deliberate and goal oriented person, it is clear that he or she qualifies as an artist. The designer takes material—fabric—and converts it into an object—fashion--on which others gaze.

Harrison White (1993) in a study of careers and creativity in the arts argues that artistic careers embody “identity, narrative and style” and each artist strives to forge his or her own unique manifestation of these variables. A fashion designer is no exception to this, however the fashion designer is also different in important ways from the traditional artist. In Schiaparelli’s words:

The interpretation of a dress, the means of making it and the surprising way in which some materials react—all these factors, no matter how good an interpreter you have, invariably reserve a slight if not bitter disappointment for you . . . A dress cannot just hang like a painting on the wall, or like a book remain intact and live a long and sheltered life. A dress has no life of its own unless it is worn and as soon as this happens another personality takes over from you and animates it or destroys it or makes it into a song of beauty. More often it becomes an indifferent object or even a pitiful caricature of what you wanted it to be—a dream, an expression (Blum, 2004: 125).

We might add to this that while some fashion objects may be the one of a kind pieces Schiaparelli refers to, most others are mass produced (as a worse case

scenario we might keep in mind the Wal-Mart garment). Nevertheless, whatever may become of a creation through industrial processes or through the consumer's own intentions, it was invariably conceived, sketched (by hand or via a computer aided design program), and made into a sample. Even if this process occurs in various locales and involves several individuals, there is a creative aspect and a selective process that requires an artistic vision or visions, for the product to be realized.

It must be conceded that the role of the fashion designer—and indeed all designers in a civilization that is both industrial and consumerist—is a complex one in which he or she is at once an artist and a craftsperson, and increasingly a businessperson who must be concerned with reaching a particular segment of the market. There are overlapping roles, though in some cases designers self-consciously classify themselves as artists, as in Schiaparelli's case. For those who refuse such designation or are not given it by others, it still can be argued that the work that they do and the products that they create contain artistic components.

The Designer as Cultural Arbiter

In the Middle Ages in Europe and elsewhere, sumptuary laws regulated appearance through rules about clothing and presentation of self at social ceremonies (Hunt, 1996: 7). They were a “first response to modernity” (1996: 9), an attempt at “social, economic and moral regulation” in the face of “urbanization”, the “emergence of class” and new varieties of “gendered relations”, argues Alan Hunt (1996: 7). To resolve the tension these changes

brought about, regulations connecting “backwards” to the medieval world, with notions often embedded in religious ideologies were put into place (1996: 10). Sumptuary laws can be found in “virtually all civilizations” (1996: 9)—they were well established in fourteenth century Italy (1996: 45)—and have “persisted at least until the dawn of modernity” (1996: 9). Although many scholars dismiss their significance saying they were “generally ignored, slightly enforced and gradually obsolete”, Hunt differs (1996: 9). For Hunt they are connected to the role of the state and the governance or legal regulation of its citizens.

The fashion system as an enterprise which provides signs of distinction to all classes can exist only in modern consumer-capitalist society. Taking a different path from Hunt—not focusing on the connection of sumptuary laws to the developing role of the state—one can consider the role of designers as agents of social control. Clothing as we see is central to the construction of one’s economic standing, social position and gender. Its attributes—the material, pattern, color and silhouette for instance—relate to these social categories. One’s appearance can be seen as a barometer of sorts, providing information about where one stands on the social scale. Clothing, like other possessions such as one’s car or home, is a form of “cultural capital” (Bourdieu, 1984). Wittingly or unwittingly, it provides others with relevant information and speaks to the individual’s self-concept. The scope of its importance has expanded beyond categories of class to provide insight into one’s level of sophistication, preferences, etc.

Designers, in one way or another contribute to the social order—maintaining it, disrupting it, reconfiguring it, etc. Having to negotiate as

they do information pertaining to norms and values, forms of aesthetic expression, political currents, and popular trends, the work they do can be described as that of a cultural arbiter. The role of the modern designer, as it has come to be defined, is one of a leader able to convey his or her “lifestyle” vision to the public. Persuading people to wear *these* garments and to live *this* vision is a means of influencing social action. To do so in a way that can be easily understood, perhaps mainly through a visual medium, the designer often draws on archetypes that by definition are culturally meaningful—the athlete, cowboy, moviestar, rock star, “WASP”. In this way fashion captures the essential myths and stereotypes of a society.

Once designers were running fashion houses, often publicly held corporations, they attained considerable power and public attention. This larger than life status that designers would acquire was very unlike that of the traditional American designer, working anonymously for a large manufacturer. And, it was different though it borrowed from the European couturier, whose persona bespoke exclusivity and privilege. However emulated his or her styles might have been at all social levels (via a “trickling down” process) the couturier designed for an individual client or a select audience.

The aim of the American designer for the most part was to directly reach a much broader middle-class audience. This is reflected in the kinds of fashion American designers made, notably sportswear. We can see by comparing the contemporary American designer with the traditional European couturier or courturière, or by looking at fashion at different periods, how designers mediate

their own creative vision with the social and cultural environment. The product they've designed fits into a particular milieu and without amendment is not transferable to another.

In an earlier period, designers had to rely almost entirely on fashion editors to achieve recognition (Agins, 1999: 25). These editors had the power to “make or break” fashion (1999: 15). Once designer names began to achieve household recognition amongst a large segment of the population, people began looking to these individuals for direction on matters of fashion and taste, bypassing the authority of the fashion press. Hilfiger quite notably accomplished this with a TV, billboard and magazine advertising campaign rather than taking the necessary smaller steps to first win over the fashion insiders. This kind of posture was only possible once the designer had been recognized as an independent entity. The growth of a media culture has a lot to do with this. For example, there are cases of designers' creations being sought after, their careers transformed overnight, after their product has appeared on the HBO hit series “Sex and the City” (LaFerla: 2003, B7).

McDowell asks the question: “How did the cult of the fashion superstar evolve, and why?” He precedes this question with the assertion that “designers are in the top echelons of heroes, alongside film, sport and pop stars . . .” As to why people have elevated the status of designer to such a level, his answer is that designers are some of the richest people in the world, and the lives they lead are often far more glamorous than that of their clients (2000: 80). In order to lead a glamorous life, one needs “wealth”, not “breeding”, McDowell points out. In the

reverse scenario, no matter how wealthy a designer might be, he or she would still be viewed as a service provider and excluded from the society in which his or her clients resided. Being able to lead a privileged lifestyle gave fashion designers access to the “mores of high society”, says McDowell, which in turn gave people confidence in their judgment (2000: 83). Leslie Kaufman comments in *The New York Times*, referring to Yves Saint Laurent: “But he is just one in a generation of designers who emerged in the 1960’s and 1970’s,” and “became celebrities whose personal lives were chronicled almost as assiduously as those of movie stars. . .” (2002: Section 9, 1). McDowell mentions Valentino’s yacht, Ralph Lauren’s life of “aristocratic splendor” and Calvin Klein’s “East Hampton house” as indicators of their class position (2000: 80, 83). People in large numbers bought the clothing of these designers once they had become recognizable talents. Editors and buyers identified with them and with what their clothing had come to represent.

Deborah Root in discussing the commodification of the artist’s name compares this to the commodification of the designer’s name in the fashion industry but sees the later as much more obvious (1996: 129). The Metropolitan Museum of Art sells Diego Rivera plates and other household goods and articles of clothing “ennobled with the artist’s name” (1996: 129-130). In the past there were only “straightforward reproductions” of an artist’s work (1996: 130). Utilitarian objects, are transformed into objects with “aesthetic value” because they are references to an “exalted” artist (1996: 127, 130). In fashion, Root points out, “The ability to purchase a bottle of Chanel perfume for \$40 is meant to refer

to the \$3,000 suit that very few are able to afford. Chanel specifically markets accessories this way because these cheaper, more accessible products constitute the bulk of its business” (1996: 129).

Tommy Hilfiger followed a somewhat different path from most designers. Hilfiger adeptly used the media to create an image for his lifestyle brand, while in the past designers conferred status on their products only after their names had achieved recognition and renown. He is asked this rather odd question: “Have you ever wondered if the acceptance of your clothing has anything to do with how your name looks or sounds?” His response speaks to the issue of an established name ennobling a product:

I don’t think it does. It could be any name. If you have the right product, the right advertising, the right imaging behind it, it could say Johnny Hallyday (Playboy, 1997: 60, 65).

Here we see a shift from a secure, grounded referent to an image.

There is a desire on the part of people to align themselves with something new that could provide an avenue of prestige—and perhaps some diversion. Hilfiger does not refer to his lifestyle, or his accomplishment, personal ideals, and beliefs—he starts with the product. Those who began to buy his products could not have known anything about his life, which initially was very average. They did not buy Tommy Hilfiger because they assumed he was jet setting somewhere or because the upper classes had visibly embraced his creations. For the courturier though, and for those ready-to-wear designers who achieved prominence, this was a necessary step. The courturier is by definition established.

Many celebrities—Sean Combs, Jennifer Lopez, Eve, Missy Elliot, Mary Kate and Ashley (the “Olsen twins”), etc.--have cashed in on their success by starting their own fashion lines. By contrast, the public began buying Tommy Hilfiger’s (and before him Ralph Lauren’s) designs for another reason—not for who he was but for what he promised. They bought into a lifestyle that was projected through advertisements and, not incidentally, many bought his product because it was widely available in major department stores. The designer behind the product was perhaps assumed to represent the lifestyle that the product promoted, as designers before him had. Hilfiger subsequently attained success, he appeared in the fashion press, in newspapers, indeed in the society pages, and on television and radio—but the emphasis has never been on him exclusively.

In a study done in December 2002 at the Tommy Hilfiger store in Bloomingdales, New York City, fifteen shoppers who had selected one or more item were asked several questions about a particular men’s shirt. Questions were intended to be open-ended so as to allow the shopper to express his or her views without feeling that the researcher, myself, had formed any particular opinion on the matter. In fact, I posed as a shopper and said I was considering the shirt for my cousin’s birthday present. The choice of buying one designer’s clothing, or another’s, did not appear arbitrary for the customers. Not surprisingly perhaps, many expressed a liking for or approval of Tommy Hilfiger. Others, particularly women shopping for men, felt it was a suitable choice for the person for whom they were buying the clothing. A woman shopping for her college-aged son asked how old my cousin was. I said he was about thirty. She replied “He’s a

little older but guys love it. I don't think the age matters. It's Tommy Hilfiger."

Another woman said: "Most guys like Tommy Hilfiger stuff. I think he'd like it."

A young woman about 17 or 18 said, gesturing toward the rugby insignia, "I love Tommy Hilfiger, and this makes it look so expensive." A woman referring to her teenage nephews said: "I just know they like Tommy Hilfiger. I know that much. That's about it. It is a difficult age, teenagers. When they get older they really don't care that much." She continues, "Tommy Hilfiger's very popular. I'm sure he will like to have Tommy Hilfiger."

I decided to bring the shirt outside of the Tommy Hilfiger store into the more upscale Marc Jacobs store just across the way. I thought it would be interesting to see what an "outsider", one not in the process of making a Tommy Hilfiger purchase of their own, might think of the shirt. One gentleman I spoke to did not rate it very favorably. He was a well-dressed gentleman in his early 30s. "It's o.k.", he said. I continued: "I'm looking for a gift for my cousin and picked this one up." He said: "I don't know his taste so it is hard to say." I said: "I'm not sure either." He responded: "You can find something much nicer than this." I inquired: "Well, what's wrong with this?" He looked more intently and responded by pointing to the red mid-section of the shirt. I said: "So you don't think these colors are good?" He didn't say anything. After a pause he said: "I don't like it." I said, gesturing toward the logo: "You don't like the logo?" He said: "You should have this here, not here", pointing to the insignia and then to the inside label of the shirt.

The shift away from the celebrity of the designer to desirability or

“coolness” of the product, as Tommy Hilfiger achieved, presents a situation in which the brand as a whole can become the arbiter of a certain lifestyle. In those firms headed by designers, the name of the designer provides a certain caché, placing him or her in the company of an Yves Saint Laurent or a Christian Dior. Even without a visible designer at the helm, though, companies like Abercrombie and Fitch or Benetton are able to convey a particular identity. Later, the idea of instilling a brand with the charisma that had before become associated with a designer will be more fully discussed.

Janet McCue mentions Calvin Klein’s “elevating such mundane stuff as blue jeans and underwear to the status level of a Chanel purse or a Gucci loafer” (1994: 1F). What gives Chanel, Gucci, and then Klein, the ability to elevate mere products to status symbols? Chanel and Gucci in particular, because of their European roots and reputation as producers of luxury products, are associated with high fashion. They have been marketed as elite houses, and have in fact that reputation. Whether or not an individual has heard of Gabrielle Chanel or knows if she is still alive, is not essential. Chanel products, from cosmetics to accessories and clothing, are sold in exclusive stores and boutiques at prices far higher than most other products in a similar category. A certain prestige has become associated with being able to buy and display such items. They are even auctioned on Ebay, and are counterfeited.

Once the product is accepted and gains esteem, it becomes identified with the designer’s name. At this point the name begins to develop a life of its own. The brand and/or logo becomes both a product and a marker of the product’s

value. This is the ethos of the fashion business: product–name–product.

Calvin Klein, today one of the world's most recognized brands, was able to use his position as a designer—once such a position held value in the public mind--to confer status on the products he sold, even if in this case they were principally jeans and underwear. One can also say that Calvin Klein provides a route to prestige and status that is accessible to more people than does the path of Chanel or Prada.

Randall Collins discusses the role of women in status production for the household. In working class homes, the woman is generally the sole manager of status display, in terms of decorating the home and entertaining guests. Upper class males take a more active role in matters of “aesthetic display” (1992: 219). Perhaps the well-settled man may select some of the art, collect antiques, and provide direction when it comes to home décor and the receiving of guests. Just as in the home, where one or both partners are responsible for translating their class position into a lifestyle through the actions they undertake and the material objects with which they surround themselves, designers on a larger scale produce items that others may use in their own status production.

Taste has always been a marker of class. The capacity to “see or know” is a matter of “cultural competence” (Bourdieu, 1979/1984: 2). In societies where there is relatively free mobility, or at least the hope of upward mobility, there is a desire for markers that will allow one to carry off the new social position they occupy or aspire to occupy. Designers and those who produce fashion are not only producing cultural objects but are designating these objects as appropriate to

one or another status or manner of living. They create representations which link something in the actual world—let's say an upper-class lifestyle—to their product. This is manifested in the product itself—perhaps a crest is used or the material or tailoring is exclusive, and in the image—the way the garment is presented. In an advertisement it may be placed in a setting which suggests privilege, such as at a polo match, or sexuality, as in Calvin Klein's jeans and fragrance television commercials in the 1970s and 1980s.

John Berger tells us that we never just see things, we always see them in relation to other things and to ourselves (1972/1984: 9). Designers create styles that will elicit certain associations, just as do artists working in other media. A concentration on the aesthetic aspects—on form and manner—are most pronounced in art but can be found in cooking, clothing and decoration, says Bourdieu. He calls this a “stylization of life” (1979/1984: 5). In couture fashion, this aesthetic focus will be most intense, just as it will be in the creation and presentation of haute cuisine. In fashion though, a designer must always be concerned with form and manner, even when practicality and cost are also an issue. Food at times may be a private matter but so long as one is present before others in the world, appearance is an integral part of the practice and performance of self. Realizing this, the designer must always be aware of the message a particular style has the potential to communicate.

Once people begin looking to the designer for direction or began accepting his or her formulations, he or she became a cultural arbiter—one who provides the means for an appropriate self-presentation and who is capable of

defining what is fashionable, and who shapes trends. The cultural arbiter in fashion can be compared to the literary or film critic or the intellectual or scientist who has gained renown in their respective field, and thus commands a following or at least holds some influence in the eyes of those who are interested in their sphere of expertise.

The following is an outline of the attributes of the designer as cultural arbiter. We will consider the “master” designer who heads a company: the qualities of the master designer related to the personal, social/public, and organizational realm that inform this status, and the role he or she plays. Concerning the personal realm, the master designer has certain individual talents, interests and ideals which informs his or her world view. These factors provide a foundation for the brand that will emerge. The master designer may engage in social activities that together comprise a lifestyle. This lifestyle allows one access to certain types of information. A lifestyle may involve an engagement in popular culture, or fine arts, activities of a certain type, a connection with certain places, etc. Participation in one or another lifestyle leads to an understanding of that sphere. Sometimes this participation may be more constructed than genuine, for example Ralph Lauren who had never rode a horse presents himself as a cowboy. In a related example one can think of how the life of Martha Stewart may differ from the image of “homemaker” presented to the public. Commitments are related back to the product and indeed come to define that product. These associations of the brand, often based on the lifestyle of the master designer provide a window for the public to a particular world, one to

which many may not have access. The master designer often represents the public face of the company, and the image of the brand.

The “master” designer also plays a key role in the organization. Not only does his or her status become synonymous with the company in the eyes of the public, it becomes so within the organization. No doubt the master designer’s persona and lifestyle may be experienced differently within the company, as he or she has a real presence there. In any case, the persona and lifestyle of the master designer defines the direction of the company. The ideals the master designer holds should be consonant with the brand image. If this is not so, there will be a lack of authenticity around the brand, and it will be much harder for employees charged with creative functions to themselves identify with and grasp the meaning of the brand. Individual designers, executives, and people of all positions within the company are expected to personify what becomes the company image, imparted by the master designer. How this occurs will become clearer when we discuss organizational culture.

Other designers in the company can also be seen as cultural arbiters, contributing in various ways to the overall image of the master designer, and to the company/brand. Each designer, to a varying extent based on his or her position in the company, acts as a cultural arbiter. Designers are expected to be creative and to be engaged in activities outside of their organizational life that will lead to the formulation of new ideas and innovations. They must be able to pick up on trends that have a relevance to the company’s overall philosophy, and to be able to incorporate these insights in their everyday work. Perhaps they may

even move the company in a new direction, contributing to a redefining of the brand. Consequently there is both an individual and a collective aspect to the cultural arbiter. The designers work together to achieve a goal which is deemed appropriate for the company. Working in concert with the master designer they promote his or her status of cultural arbiter in the public eye and in the company itself. Achieving a public persona involves the work of designers and others, who within the company are recognized for their unique contributions. This can be extended to firms in which there is no visible designer. The brand in and of itself takes on a public persona and attains certain characteristics. Once inside the company, one would find a particular organizational structure: someone—whether a CEO or a principal designer leading the company, and many designers who each act as arbiters in their own divisions.

Kaufman explains that Calvin Klein¹⁰, now approaching 60 and Giorgio Armani, Oscar de la Renta, and Ralph Lauren already in their 60s, will someday have to “surrender the reins of the companies bearing their names, and hope that their signature vision will live on without them.” Such a transition, she states, is particularly “delicate” in the fashion industry. First, the designer’s “gut feel” for what their consumer wants is difficult to replace. Second, these designers maintain a bond “through an image” with the “masses”, and through interpersonal contact with their “elite” clients (2002: 1-2).

Irene Daria discusses Liz Claiborne’s “first-time ever downward sales spiral” in 1988. Starting in 1987 Claiborne began a reduced work schedule,

¹⁰ Klein has since sold the business.

leaving more decisions to designers. Earlier, she never approved any designs that she herself would not wear (1989: 9-10, 13). In Claiborne's case it was not necessary that she socialize with clients; what went wrong was a lack of direction based on intuitive sense Claiborne seemed to have.

High-end designers like Arnold Scaasi, however, "must demonstrate that they are a part of the world they service." That means attending clients' parties and weddings and being seen at certain events. Scaasi goes as far as to say: "I support the charities that my friends or clients support. I support PEN, the writers' group, because Gayfryd Steinberg does. And I support the Girl Scouts because of Austine Hearst and Edna Morris" (1989: 32). It is doubtful that Scaasi who runs a small, exclusive firm, could be replaced by a new designer who could carry on his vision as has happened with the larger luxury fashion houses. Oscar de la Renta comments: "Once the name gets institutionalized it can go on for a long time." Bill Blass puts it bluntly: "In the end we are no different than Heinz chili sauce" (Kaufman, 2002: 1-2).

Bill Blass retired in 1999 and passed away in June 2002. After his retirement Mr. Blass's companion and former fit model, who rose to become the company spokeswoman, designed the Fall 2000 collection and continued to assist his first replacement. Since his death several designers and others have been fired (Wilson, 2003: 8). Kaufman states: "For firms that churn out merchandise for the mass market and have hundred[s] of millions of dollars in sales, like Polo Ralph Lauren and Calvin Klein, design succession is less of an issue."

David Wolfe, creative director of the retail and fashion consulting firm,

the Doneger Group, is amongst those who have doubts about how well major firms may do after their “visionaries” depart. Ralph Lauren has become a personality and celebrity, consumers may not want to buy his products if there’s no Ralph Lauren, he suggests. Julie Gilhart, Vice President of Merchandising at Barney’s feels there needs to be a “person behind the brand.” Kaufman points out another dilemma: “Once an outsider takes over a company, there is no guarantee—and, more importantly, no obligation—that the standards and style of the original owner be maintained.” Thus, the name itself may become “tarnished” (2002: 1-2).

In 2003 Calvin Klein sold his firm for \$430 million to Phillips-Van Heusen, which also owns Izod. Phillips-Van Heusen whose Van-Heusen shirt division is the largest shirt seller in the world, is expanding the Calvin Klein company, particularly in Asia where there is room for growth (Weber, FIT Lecture, 2/9/04). The main person who now designs for Calvin Klein is Francisco Costa, thirty-two years old. A review of his show of Tuesday, September 16, 2003 concludes that Costa is leading Calvin Klein through “fresh eyes”, drawing on certain themes established by Klein in an innovative way (Horyn, 9/18/03: B7).

Kenneth Cole is another good example of the designer as cultural arbiter. Once he achieved this presence, he used his persona to promote not only the culture of fashion but other cultural issues. He has actively taken a role in promoting social awareness on issues such as AIDS and gun control and has used his fashion advertisements as a platform for these agendas. In his book Footnotes

he discusses his philosophy. In a talk to FIT students in November of 2003 Kenneth Cole's appearance on stage was preceded by a film interspersing the milestones of his fashion career with the major news events of that year. The audience no doubt got the message that Cole sees himself as more than just someone who sells fashion. In fact, Cole tells the audience early in his talk, and reinforces this point throughout the talk: he wanted his work to be about more than just making money. He says he realized that nobody needed what he was selling. His shoes were something he'd have to convince people they needed. Along with this came an understanding that what he did was not important. Cole described how he made it important. When he began selling shoes in 1985 he noticed a consciousness that he compared with the 1960s. People, via the music industry, were concerned with hunger in Ethiopia, for example. Cole decided to use his ads as a platform to call attention to AIDS and to promote condom use. An ad featuring a condom said: "Shoes are not the only thing we encourage you to wear".

Cole tells the audience that he did not have enough money to produce and run ads in the fashion magazines. But with this social message he was able to get top models to volunteer their time, perhaps the photographer too, and thus was able to afford publicity he never could have financed on his own. Cole tells the audience that today there is a name for this: "cause related marketing". He says that he and those who work for him "shudder" at the thought that this is what they were or are doing. "What we do is not marketing", he says, that is "opportunistic and exploitative". A real concern with AIDS, and other causes they represent, is

“embedded in the culture of the entire organization.” Cole presents himself as having a “platform” through fashion where people will listen to what he has to say. He conveys to the audience that he understands that fashion is not experienced as something trivial. “Fashion is an opportunity to define oneself, it is not frivolous”. Cole goes on to say that in life most of our relationships, the kinds of encounters we have on a daily basis, are “superficial and shallow”. “All they know of you essentially is how you present yourself”. This makes fashion a powerful thing, he says. Cole says he is puzzled when he hears a man say: “I’m not a fashion guy”. Not carefully perusing your closet and putting yourself together everyday with respect to how you will be viewed by others is an even bigger fashion statement, he says. “People are still going to define you, you are still part of the game”, notes Cole.

Cole presents us with some very interesting insights into the idea of the designer as cultural arbiter. For such a leader to emerge there had to be changes in the social fabric. His equating the mid-1980s with the 1960s leads us to ask what was different about this “consciousness”. As Cole points out, these movements to end hunger in Ethiopia and the like were started by the music industry. This is in fact very different from what happened in the 1960s. Though the consciousness of the sixties became very much connected to music and popular culture it was not conceived in an executive boardroom on Madison Avenue. It followed the trajectory of a social movement, originating in this case with a counterculture, and gradually--with much opposition--made inroads in the mainstream. Since then, society has become heavily invested in corporate

enterprise of which the fashion industry is a large partner. We can say that there is a culture generated by--or perhaps culture in general is generated by-- music, fashion, film, and the media industries. People are aware of how important it is to conform to the standards that are set by this conglomerate. This is why designers like Kenneth Cole have a platform, and those who are not such big players in this very visible enterprise do not. Public officials, clergy, educators, intellectuals-- the important voices in the past, are no longer as generally influential. Many people are listening to and looking at fashion. One might note in the *New York Times* alone how much space is dedicated to fashion, both in terms of advertisement and journalistic discourse, and as of August 2004 a new Sunday magazine, "T", dedicated entirely to fashion and related areas. If Cole decides to include in his ad a message about gun control, an audience will already be there to absorb this statement.

A designer must first become recognized, otherwise no one will be willing or able to listen to his or her message. Cole shows us that harnessing the media is the effective way to do this. The Cole family had been in the shoe business, but Cole wanted to take it further. He describes the two choices he had. Once he had designed a collection for an Italian factory (he couldn't afford to do this on his own). He could either rent a room at the New York Hilton where 900 other companies would be showing their shoes to buyers, or rent a fancy showroom within a two block radius from the Hilton. He jokes about not being able to afford the hotel room, let alone a showroom. He got an idea--he'd park a truck on the corner of Sixth Avenue and show his shoes right in front of the Hilton. A

friend in the trucking business would be happy to lend him the truck but he laughed off Cole's request as an impossible scheme. An inquiry to the Mayor's office revealed that there were only two ways to park your vehicle for three days on Sixth Avenue: if you were a public utility company performing necessary services or if you were a production company shooting a film. For fourteen dollars Kenneth Cole changed his company's name to Kenneth Cole Productions and within forty eight hours got a permit to shoot his motion picture: "The Birth of a Shoe Company". He sold 40,000 pairs of shoes and the business was in full swing. Cole said when you are in a room full of people who are shouting no one will hear you, if you shout in a room where everyone else is whispering, then you will be heard. This initial attention put Cole in the position where he could employ similar tactics in the media.

Once a cultural arbiter, a designer must settle on who his or her audience will be and how he or she will cultivate this audience. This is perhaps much the same for a political candidate or anyone in a leadership position who must appeal to the public. Cole describes his job as anticipating and understanding what people will want and giving it to them, but not as they expect. He describes this as the gray line--being edgy but not going so far as to not to be appealing.

Designer Oscar de la Renta describes this process of taking the market into account in a talk in 1985 to FIT students. If a trend or a strong influence is "valid to my direction" he will "take it in consideration" but he will "not change". He believes more strongly in "sticking to your message", especially since he says that there is enough room for many expressions. Today, unlike the 1940s or

1950s he says: “There is not one fashion. There is a space for everyone.” When asked by a student about the “woman he designs for” de la Renta responded: “Any woman who can afford my clothing”. De la Renta demonstrated his responsiveness to the market when he said earlier in his talk, and to a New York Times reporter 17 years later, that his decision to leave Paris and couture was based on his realization that the future of fashion was in ready-to-wear (Hirschberg, 2002: 15). In de la Renta we see simultaneously a disdain for commercialism but a willingness to make certain adjustments (such as licensing). De la Renta expresses several times an interest in making money, thus his move to America. He says of America in comparison to France: “America is most influential because we have the market”. No one cares about France because it will not translate into “sales volume”, he states. At the same time he does not approve of the way most American women dress, and says he is satisfied to be able to make his “point of view” with a select customer that values his vision. More recently he has taken a different turn, developing the O Oscar line which features a jacket, for example, in the \$75 range, much cheaper than his bridge line where a jacket would be about \$425 or in the couture line from \$1,000 to \$4,000 (Agins, 3/5/04: W1). Cole, who branched out to accessories, men’s clothing and more recently women’s clothing, said he had to decide at some point whether he would appeal to a larger audience and thus compromise on integrity and quality or sell more to the same customer. He decided on the latter.

Whether a designer decides to appeal to the masses or shuns them for a select clientele he or she can still be seen as a cultural arbiter. Oscar de la Renta

admires the fashionable woman who starches her white cotton shirt rather than wear a more convenient no-wrinkle material. He believes fashion is a matter of discipline. He says:

Women dress today to reveal their personalities. They used to reveal the designer's personality. Until the 70s, women listened to designers. Now women want to do it their own way. There are no boundaries. And without boundaries, there is no fashion (Hirschberg, 2002: 15).

Nevertheless, fashion continues to exist even while (once exclusive) Isaac Mizrahi designs for Target, and both Oscar de la Renta and Michael Kors go after "the Banana Republic customer" says Agins (3/5/04: W1). There is a need for fashion at all levels and therefore the audience open to the designer is larger than ever. As de la Renta said, there is no one fashion. There are therefore many niches for designers. Even though large scale companies may have taken a market share, in fashion the landscape is always shifting, allowing entry points for new designers, and audiences eager to receive them. In 2004 the two opposite ends of the fashion spectrum are both profiting: luxury items and lower-priced up-to-the-minute fashion firms like Zara and H & M (Agins, 3/5/04: W1).

Cole's role as cultural arbiter is one of the more extreme positions. Most designers do not even pretend to want to make political and social changes; they admit that their objective is first and foremost profit. Nevertheless, as do other large corporations, fashion firms often wish to give something back to the community. They may contribute to various causes—usually things that are safe and do not have the potential to offend potential customers, and will enhance the image of the brand. They may, for example, contribute to community or

educational outreach programs. This indeed becomes part of the organizational identity of the company and exposes the brand in ways that can be influential. It allows the designer to add another dimension to his or her public persona. Marc Weber, President of Phillips-Van Heusen describes his company as “very benevolent”. Building schools in Central America, working to raise the minimum wage paid to their workers, and donating clothing and money are amongst some of the activities he mentions. Other activities have a clearer business aim. The company sponsors celebrity golf tournaments so as to “influence the influencers” who may continue to wear the clothes they were given. Just to be sure, an entire team of photographers is hired by Phillips-Van Heusen to photograph the celebrities in their Izod golf attire. Outfitting all the lifeguards in Ocean County, California, and the staff at Walt Disney World, to whom 33 million tourists come into contact with each year, also gets an exposure that could not be achieved by advertising (FIT lecture, 2/9/04).

The designer as cultural arbiter must constantly add to his or her repertoire, not only in the designs he she produces but in respect to his or her own image. The designer must work consistently to maintain, and hopefully to expand, his or her influence which in turn is extended to the brand. This is achieved by personal appearances, corporate sponsorship, aligning oneself and/or the brand with celebrity and adeptly using the media to disseminate this information to the broadest possible audience.

As the middle class expanded, more people sought and could afford signs of distinction. Fashion designers appropriated signs of distinction that once may

have been firmly anchored, allowing people to “buy into” these signs irrespective of objective class position. So long as codes are no longer rigidly enforced, people can actively construct a personal identity based on innovations provided to them by designers and by the larger industry. Values are not totally commutable within this scheme. Even if signs become only tenuously connected to signifiers, the designer or fashion house takes on a value in the estimation of the public and particular individuals, allowing for certain items to command a greater price than others. There is not one arbiter of fashion, there are many, each speaking to a particular community of people who value his or her judgement or hold his or her name—or that of the brand--in regard. Increasingly, as the fashion industry becomes more complex, we find consultants who can be hired as cultural arbiters to assist designers. Such individuals or firms specialize in areas such as trend spotting, color forecasting, and branding strategies. Designers then use this information in creating new design concepts, and to enhance their brands.

Chapter 3 – The Emergence of the Fashion Industry in the United States

The Culture and Business of Fashion

Fashion in clothing is a multifaceted phenomenon. It is an essential instrument for the presentation of self and identity in everyday life, an element of the socio-economic statuses of individuals, a cause and consequence of changes in society, and a fundamental element of its culture. It is also a business which involves the manufacturing of products and their merchandising.

Fashion is connected to developments in the cultural realm, from “high” culture, be it classical, contemporary or any other genre of art, to commercial and popular trends. Painting, sculpture, dance, popular music, film and television have all influenced the direction of fashion. Each of these media, depending on their social and political objectives, have taken fashion in a new direction.

Many fashion designers, especially those who attended European schools, are trained in the tradition of the fine arts. When compared to the innovations of young British artists McRobbie describes the world of fashion as a “weak shadow”, “hampered by its gendered, dressmaking history”. Often, she says, fashion designers merely “emulate a fine art mode, as a second best” and avoid a connection to “radical scholarship” as it is too “sociological or too political” (1999: 18). Nevertheless, fashion by its very nature achieves a far wider exposure than the fine arts, and has the ability to immediately absorb any number of art forms, social movements, class and gender distinctions, etc. Fashion becomes the face of the social movement, political stance, musical style, and of the person or

people behind these forms of expression. At the same time fashion achieves a more personal meaning, at the individual level, than would say, accepting a philosophy on an intellectual level alone. The person wearing punk clothing and accessories, and therefore embodying that stance toward the world will experience it more deeply. Others will respond to him or her accordingly so that personal convictions are actualized in everyday transactions. “Wearing one’s heart on one’s sleeve” (and one’s sleeve on one’s heart), applies here.

Richard Martin, at the time curator of the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, states in the preface of Hilfiger’s (1999) book Rock Style: How Fashion Moves to Music “. . .rock has surpassed film to become the greatest interlocutor with fashion”. Music stars such as Madonna, Deborah Harry of Blondie, and Grace Jones, for example, can be said to have influenced fashion. In the early 1980s Madonna with her rising pop stardom became a trend setter. Early on she promoted a street style based on the New York club scene. Later in her career, designers such as Jean Paul Gautier, Gianni Versace and Thierry Mugler helped her define a unique style. Hilfiger in his book says: “Madonna is the greatest fashion story ever told . . .” He continues: “Artists like Madonna and David Bowie spend as much time on their look as on their music. Both aspects are equally important” (1999: 114).

Sometimes the impression a musical celebrity creates leads to lucrative contracts. In 2004 Christina Aguilera was paid two million dollars to wear Versace clothes, particularly to promote the underwear as outwear trend. She replaces Britney Spears as the 2004 Versace model. One website describes

Aguilera as “a highly sexualized woman with hip-hop and porn star influences”. Aguilera has posed for nude photos, and has singles such as “Dirty” to her credit; her 2003 tour was entitled “Justified and Stripped”. Versace appreciates the image cultivated by Aguilera, and sees it as a vehicle for gaining exposure for and selling its brand.

Even for those performers like Bruce Springstein who seem to disregard fashion, it is of prime importance. Springstein may not be promoting products but he is promoting a certain self-image, or to be more cynical, he is the product that is being promoted. In Hilfiger’s words: “Bruce Springstein’s look is no frills, and it’s meant to tell you that he’s all about the music. Jeans, t-shirts, button down shirts with rolled up sleeves, bandanas—he wears the working class uniform of his New Jersey upbringing” (1999: 136). This style can be contrasted with glam or glitter rock in the 1970s. It was a “hedonistic” rejection against the perceived “idealism” of the 1960s, an English movement that didn’t resonate well with Americans. Costumes were extravagant and colorful. Prince is perhaps the closest American example of someone influenced by glam rock (1999: 75). Punk, another music form that developed in the U.K. in the 1970s is described by Hilfiger as “an insult to the status quo and all the aspirations it represents”, arising in the face of a troubled economy (1999: 101). Deborah Harry of Blondie is described as bringing a “Marilyn Monroe glamour to the otherwise grimy world of punk”, stripping it perhaps of some of its political overtones (1999: 122, 101).

Perhaps no form of music would be more influential in fashion than hip-hop, growing in influence at a time that fashion was becoming a powerful status

industry. Hip-hop culture began to have an influence on mainstream fashion in the 1990s. Hip-hop music began in the Bronx, New York in the late 1970s and grew into what would be called “hip-hop culture”, encompassing music, fashion, dance, and a distinctive way of speaking and otherwise relating to the world. Once an inner-city phenomena, by the second half of the 1990s hip-hop captured the interest of suburban American youth, and indeed people worldwide. “Baggy pants, oversized athletic jerseys, expensive sneakers, long a fashion standard of the hip-hop community, have become the unofficial uniform of suburban fans. And thanks to music videos, films and hip-hop magazines, teens in the suburbs and outside the U.S. can stay informed with ‘what’s going on’ in the city” (Newshour’s hip-hop report, online).

From its beginnings hip-hop adherents were fashion conscious. Before hip-hop youth wore designer fashions they wore track suits from athletic companies such as Nike, Adidas and Reebok, “accessorized by huge medallions and gold jewelry” (Hilfiger, 1999: 128). In the early 1980s Run DMC, one of the founders of hip-hop sang “My Adidas”, bolstering sales for the company. In the late 1980s, long before mainstream American youth began to wear hip-hop styles, the category that was to come to be known as “urban apparel” was considered “gangwear” and was outside of the scope of mainstream retail establishment (Agin, 4/20/04: B1). The outsider connotation of the apparel no doubt appealed to many young men as had the “zoot” suit and the “gangster” suit in the past. Matthew Durlington defines corporate white America’s commodification of urban Black culture as “cooptation” and equates it with blackface minstrelsy. White

privilege is inherent in the ability to “coopt” aspects of black expression, he argues. Durington theorizes that the appeal to suburban mostly white youth is related to their own alienation, an uncertain economic future, and the “moral panic” that this identification causes (amongst parents for instance) when they resist societal values (1998, unpublished paper).

In the early 1990s a sportswear brand called Cross Colors, started by two Black designers, began selling not only to a Black but to a wider clientele. The look was associated with “inner city gangs and prison inmates” (Akins, 4/20/04: B1).

Tommy Hilfiger was one of the first well-known designers to approach prominent hip-hop artists and give them his clothing to wear. Nelson George describes a chance encounter in 1992 at JFK airport between Tommy Hilfiger, his brother Andy, and Grand Puba, a well-known hip-hop artist in the 1990s who had incorporated Tommy Hilfiger into some of his lyrics. Andy Hilfiger recognized the performer and Tommy Hilfiger invited him and his “crew” over for a shopping spree (George, 1999: 162). Grand Puba mentions this affiliation in one of his lyrics: “Ay I ain’t mad at this game it’s been good to me I get Tommy free” (Lyrics from *The Next Spot*, 1996). Rozhon who interviewed Hilfiger for an article appearing in the *New York Times* describes the encounter differently. Maxwell Dixon (Grand Puba) and his friends were dressed in Tommy Hilfiger. “Mr. Hilfiger remembers that he was delighted with the way they wore his clothes, and started making some clothes bigger and brighter, and some logos immense” (12/26/04: 4). As described on the PBS Newshour’s website report on

hip-hop style: “His [Tommy Hilfiger’s] moment of triumph came when Snoop Doggy Dogg performed on Saturday Night Live in 1994, dressed from head to toe in Tommy clothing. Snoop’s performance exposed Hilfiger to a national audience, and according to industry estimates, Tommy Hilfiger’s sales increased \$90 million dollars that year.” Hilfiger describes designer fashion’s appeal to urban youth:

When the grunge movement was happening in the early ‘90s and white rockers were dressing down, the hip-hop kids were wearing Tommy Hilfiger, because they wanted to wear a designer. They didn’t want to look like workers or ordinary people. Prominent designer logos announced an identification with the standard of success they wanted to attain. So they took designer clothes and made them their own—twenty sizes too big—and their pants down to their knees (1999: 128).

While young suburbanites may well feel alienated by a culture pressing them to succeed, working class urban youth are striving to be admitted to that culture, or to what they believe that culture to be--on their own terms. Each group it seemed had something the other admired. Designers such as Hilfiger would act as intermediaries, or cultural arbiters, creating symbolic means of bridging these gaps. What Hilfiger presented was a preppy-urban mixture—a cultural hybrid. Traditional rugby, sailing or polo performance sportswear was made in brighter colors and paired with logos and bold details. This was an upgrade from traditional kinds of athletic wear, e.g. the oversized basketball jersey, and it carried with it upper class connotations, an oversized fit, and the designer label.

In the mid-1990s, Hilfiger says some retailers backed away fearing his

“preppy brand was skewing too urban.” “Wall Street people were whispering to me”, he says, “‘you’re turning into a black brand’ . . .”. (Agin, 4/20/04: B1, B3). Hilfiger recounts his response to the press: “When hip-hop kids first started wearing Hilfiger, the press came to me and said, ‘What are your white customers going to think about these black kids wearing your clothes?’ And I said, ‘I don’t care. I’m proud, and those kids look great’ (1999: 127). Urban apparel was to become the fastest category growing category in menswear (Agin, 4/20/04: B1, B3). “Hip-hop is pop culture today”, says Scott Hunter Smith, marketing manager for Heineken. He explains that 70% of hip-hop music is bought by white kids. “It’s what’s hot, what’s relevant. This is what kids are listening to—it’s a lifestyle more than just music. Hip-hop is the dress, the clothes, the fashion and so forth” (*Beverage Aisle*, 2003: 22). By 1997 Gap ads had featured L.L. Cool J, Missy Elliot, and Run DMC. Rapper Moe of W.A.F. gives his perspective on the connection between hip-hop and fashion:

Now hip-hop gear comes in a wide variety. The big names like Versace, Tommy Hilfiger, Polo by Ralph Lauren, Nautica and Guess are the best known. If you don’t wear what everyone else is wearing, you’ll be considered a bama. A bama is a southern word meaning “from the backwoods,” or uncool—it’s someone who can’t dress.

Nowadays fashion is based on who is talking about what he wears in a video. Rappers like Jay-Z, and the late Notorious B.I.G. talked about Versace in their rhymes. Just mentioning the name on their albums or whatever the rhyme is like advertisement. I wouldn’t be surprised if they were getting paid for it. Tommy Hilfiger is also represented fully by artists such as Raekwon and Ghostface from the Wu-tang Klan.

The following are some hip-hop lyrics that specifically mention Tommy Hilfiger:

“She likes to wear fly dip gear, Tommy Hilfiger,
Polo and Donna Karan sportswear.”

–Da Youngsta Lyrics

“And others couldn’t figga, How me and Tommy
Hilfigga, Used to move through with vigga.”

–Q-tip of A Tribe Called Quest

“Phonograph hip-hop put me on top. ‘Lo wears, and
Tommy Hil fly with a knot”

–Raekwon, lyrics from *Criminology*

(PBS Newshour’s hip-hop report)

Designer merchandise is often mentioned as a means of indicating an
elevation in status:

“Get off the freeway, exit 106 and parked it
Ash tray, flip gate, time to spark it
Gucci collar for dollar, got out and walked it”

–Nelly, lyrics from *Hot in Here*

“Took you from the projects and an abusive pops
From the bottom to the top
The skateboard to the drop
From the nada to the Prada”

–Jay-Z, lyrics from *Girls Best Friend*

“My flow’s first class and yours is Coach like the
bag, the Prada mama, my girls rock Chanel and
smoke mad marijuana Admiring my shoes by
Gucci, I’ll be eatin’ sushi, playing with my
coochie”

–Lil’ Kim & Notorious B.I.G., lyrics from *Drugs*

(milanostyle.com)

Bill Zwecker of the *Chicago Sun Times* reports that “For some time,
Lauren has jealously watched Tommy Hilfiger become an urban icon by
aggressively marketing inner-city youth—ironically pushing clothes that are not

less ‘preppy’ than the updated classic looks from the RL label.” According to industry insiders, he says, an “eight figure” endorsement deal with Jay-Z is being signed (Zwecker, 2004). Could Jay-Z have courted Ralph Lauren? In a song released on November 19, 2002, Jay-Z who owns Rocawear with partner Damon Dash, who runs Roc-a-Fella Records, mentions Ralph Lauren:

Through rappining whatever’s happening
Roc-aware I’m the young black Ralph Lauren
Every time I get out they put me right back in

(www.lyricstime.com)

Russell Simmons, founder of Def Jam Records, and of Phat Farm fashions (in 1992), is sure of the commercial power held by the hip-hop community: “If we decided that Tommy Hilfiger is hot, he gets hot. If we decide to walk away from Tommy Hilfiger, he gets ice cold” (*Beverage Aisle*, 12/15/03: 22).

Indeed, several rappers who once endorsed other’s products now have their own clothing and product lines. Hip-hop star Sean (P. Diddy) Combs, once walking the runway in Tommy Hilfiger, began his own fashion label in 1998, and opened a store on Fifth Avenue in New York City. Combs considers himself the “urban Ralph Lauren”. The “Big Three menswear brands of the 1990s”: Polo Ralph Lauren, Tommy Hilfiger, and Nautica, explains Agins, have steadily lost market share to Sean Jean, Rocawear, Phat Farm, FUBU, Ecko and Enyce (4/20/04: B1). Queen Latifah, Eve, Eminem and Bow Wow have also started clothing lines.

Presently, we can also see the reverse mechanism being put into place as urban fashion became mainstream. Enyce was bought in 2004 by Liz Claiborne

and Phat Fashions by Kellwood. Combs plans to buy a “significant stake” in Zac Posen, a 24 year old New York designer who caters to young socialites and is a favorite of the fashion press (4/20/04: B2). Many of the hip-hop clothing purveyors are veering toward more dressy styles, and are abandoning the baggy sportswear. In a 2004 ad for Rocawear a Black man is pictured in a contemplative pose on a yacht, perhaps somewhere in Nantucket, wearing a pink sweater and white pants. Clearly, he has arrived, the inner city a distant memory, if at all. Jay-Z announcing that he owns a “Benz” and a private jet speaks of trading up to more sophisticated clothing:

“nigga one life to live
 I can’t let a day go
 ride without me being fly fresh to death
 head to toes till the day I rest
 and I don’t wear jersey’s
 im 30 plus
 gimme a crisp pair of jeans
 nigga button up’s
 S.Dot’s on my feet
 make a sight complete”

--Lyrics from What More Can I Say?

Not only following but hoping to surpass the corporate fashion powerhouses, Rocawear is hoping to become a “lifestyle brand” that “spans apparel, vodka, films, a private club, maybe a magazine and a hotel chain.” Leigh Gallagher states: “Rocawear is one of the nation’s bestselling men’s apparel brands . . . seizing market share from Tommy Hilfiger and Ralph Lauren, longtime mainstays of status-hungry rappers and their fans.” Dash plans each new venture to be a “commercial” for the next, killing “five birds with one stone” (Gallagher, 2003)

Industry insiders credit celebrities with enormous influence on the direction that fashion takes. Kim Kitchings, director of market research and planning for Cotton Incorporated says there has been an upward trend from 1994 to 2003 “in the percentage of consumers looking toward celebs as fashion inspirations”. The trend, she finds, is most pronounced in women aged 16-24 with nearly half looking toward celebrities when making fashion purchases. A New York retailer states that celebrities give trends validation (*Women’s Wear Daily*, 2/5/04: 1). *Women’s Wear Daily* reports that a “free frock and a complementary bauble or two” are no longer sufficient for some celebrities. Lately, actresses have been demanding six figure payments or consideration in future advertising campaigns in exchange for wearing a designer’s or jeweler’s product to high profile events such as the Oscars (Jones & Melina, 2004: 3). Andrea Hansen of the jeweler H. Stern calls this “branding through red carpet placement”. Celebrities too are using the prestige of fashion houses in conjunction with TV, film and endorsements “to increase their brand and create a positive image” (2004: 19).

Celebrities themselves may become brands, as we have seen in the hip-hop and music industry in general. Angela Phipps Towle notes that Jennifer Lopez has been described as “one of the best entertainment brands”. Brian Dubin who specializes in transforming people into brands, states:

Your client, whether they are an athlete or an actor or an actress, has intangible assets: a name, a reputation, a credibility and an image. All of those attributes may be combined into something that could be made into a brand. When they are turned

into a product or service, then they become tangible assets.

Once a celebrity becomes a brand, an identity complete with “core brand values” can be marketed, product lines can be launched, licensing deals secured, and endorsements made (Towle, 2003, online).

Has fashion moved from being an innovative enterprise with links to art and new cultural developments to becoming merely a corporate branding mechanism, enlisting as it does celebrities, musicians, and athletes to draw in more consumers? Cecile Rohwedder and Alessandra Galloni mention some of the drawbacks of being a large publicly held company, namely “performance pressure, shareholder scrutiny and short-term interests that can pit investors against long-term strategies planned by executives.” Privately held companies such as Chanel, Armani and Missoni, it seems, have the creative advantage of being free to be more adventurous and unique in their fashion statements (11/18/03, B8). Whether firms are public or private, large or small, they are part of an industry that must be responsive to globalized capitalism and to the changed social settings in which they find themselves. These developments shape the way the fashion industry appeals to consumers.

Michael J. Silverstein and Neil Fiske describe the post-World War II consumer as having an “appetite for sameness” spurred on by the country being united in a common purpose. Mass produced goods: cars, refrigerators, household goods, and indeed clothing were manufactured for an audience eager to acquire such products (2003: 4). In a talk given by Coca Cola’s brand director,

William I. Schermerhorn discusses how Coca Cola has adapted itself as a brand to the changing values of American consumers. Rather than adhering to “one reality” the brand has reinvented itself to continue to be “relevant”.

Schermerhorn describes a consumer similar to the one Silverstein and Fiske describe. From 1945 through the mid-sixties traditional values: “simplicity, security, discipline, obligation, and conformity” were the ideals that the big American brands conveyed. They kept themselves simple, and made themselves known and trusted. Then there was a major shift.

Everything that had been right in the 50s became ‘wrong’ in the late 60s. The nuclear family began to break down. More mothers went to work. And the prominence of brands—along with people’s trust in them—faded with the forces that made brands bastions of the marketplace to begin with.

The new values brought about by this “cultural revolution” were “transience, complexity, freedom, self-indulgence, entitlement, and individuality.” The next major shift took place in the 1980s. “Neo-traditional values” including “substance, streamlining, risk management, and balance” took root. Speaking in the late 1990s and looking toward the future, Schermerhorn speaks of Coca Cola now standing for “fun, refreshment and specialness”. This is in response to today’s consumer’s desire for newness, entertainment, and products that will define a person’s self image. The latest “watchword” Schermerhorn says, is “bonding” (Schermerhorn, online).

Silverstein and Fiske describe today’s situation as one in which taste is fragmented. Middle-market consumers are “sophisticated, demanding, and self

absorbed". They contend that "U.S. households have more money to spend on premium goods" than they would have had in the 1970s, for example, because of higher real incomes, rising home equity, and increased savings on goods that can be purchased from discount retailers such as Wal-Mart, Cosco and Circuit City (2003: 4-5). Furthermore, people's spending is not entirely determined by their income level. They may "trade down" or do without in some areas to be able to consume higher end products in other categories (2003: 2).

Social factors contribute to consumer patterns. Women's entering the workforce, their earning higher salaries, marriage and childbearing occurring later than ever before, and divorce being more prevalent, give rise to a different type of consumer. In 2000 the median age for marriage was 25.1 (it was 20.8 in 1970), and the age of first time mothers was 26.5. Marrying and bearing children later leads to a longer time frame in which one has discretionary income, and indeed has the opportunity to continue to develop a personal "identity and an image". When marriage does occur, it takes place (for most of the population) with a certain degree of savings and security, allowing the new couple to pool their resources and consume more freely. Divorced people, despite less wealth (particularly in the case of women) tend to invest money in "making themselves feel better, changing their self-image, and attracting a new partner". Consumers are also described as being "better educated, sophisticated, better traveled, more adventurous, and more discerning than ever before".

Silverstein and Fiske define the new consumer in four key ways based on their motivations for spending on new-luxury goods. They term these need based

consumer behaviors “emotional pools”. “Taking Care of Me” involves rewarding and rejuvenating the self. “Questing” is a process of consuming to gain new experiences, and would include such purchases as travel, cars and computers. “Connecting” builds relationships through consumer choices. People connect through gift purchases; dining out, for instance. “Individual Style” involves using consumer choices to “demonstrate one’s success in life and express one’s individuality and personal values”. Silverstein and Fiske contend that the last two categories are often associated, for example when “people choose particular goods to send signals to prospective partners about who they are and what they are looking for” (2003: 7-8).

Once it was only the wealthy who could afford luxury goods, today those in the middle-market consume new luxury products and services. Noting a demand or a probable interest on the part of consumers, entrepreneurs set out to provide them with new products and experiences. Silverstein and Fiske mention, for example, Howard Schultz of Starbucks who “fell in love with the Italian coffee experience and bet that other U.S. consumers would”, and Gordon Segal of Crate & Barrel, who “wondered why American stores did not offer the kind of beautifully designed and affordable home goods he enjoyed while living in Europe” (2003: 5-6). Other forces on the supply-side that contribute to emergence of “mass prestige” or “masstige”—products between mass produced and “superpremium” or “old luxury” goods—are changes in retailing and access to flexible supply-chain networks and global resources. The shopping mall made it possible for premium specialty retailers like Victoria’s Secret to “expand quickly”

and reach the middle-market consumer. Discount mass merchandisers, initially known more for their low end items, now stock premium products as well.

Costco, for instance, stocks the largest selection of premium wines, selling more than any other retailer. An ability to provide upscale “mass prestige” items at affordable prices hinges on the availability of cheaper but skilled foreign labor. Sourcing, manufacturing, assembling and distribution of goods can be arranged via “global-supply-chain management service” companies (2003: 6-7).

Sportswear emerges as a viable item of fashion, it might be argued, when the work ethic declines as the central force in people’s lives, and consumerism becomes more dominant. Don Slater describes one way of looking at economic history up to the twentieth century: “a process of saving, investment and accumulation at a social scale, underpinned by a Puritan work ethic.” “Enforced social saving and investment” and “deferred consumer gratification” were the norm. Another approach, the revisionist, is to see the consumer revolution as beginning before the industrial revolution: “as early as the sixteenth century, in which we can discern, firstly, a new ‘world of goods’ (a wide penetration of consumer goods into the everyday lives of more social classes); secondly, the development and spread of ‘consumer culture’ in the sense of fashion and taste as key elements of consumption; thirdly, the development of infrastructures, organizations and practices that target these new kinds of markets (the rise of shopping, advertising, marketing)” (1997: 17). Certainly, consumerism becomes a cultural value in America with the prosperity of the 1950s and a corresponding increase in the middle class.

The observations of David Riesman and colleagues in The Lonely Crowd provided an early understanding of individual in consumer society. While the inner-directed person—whether the Puritan of old or the founder of the traditional family business—followed an expected and disciplined course of action, the more modern other-directed person is defined by fluctuating tastes (1961: 79). For such an individual, surface impressions replace a well-defined social order (1961: 116). We are told that modern, other-directed people are motivated by status and that status is marked by consumer choices (1961: 134). It has become possible for a person to assume a status that was not necessarily his or hers at birth.

While the choice for the inner-directed person was somewhat predictable, as he or she was bound to certain ideals such as salvation or progress, we have no such assurances with the other-directed person. For the other-directed person, consumer choices become the main vehicle for communication of information about oneself. Today, one has far greater choice in terms of how a self can be presented. Etiquette, in the past defined context appropriate behavior. Today socialization is in consumer taste, say Riesman et al. One distinguishes one self from others and blends in based on appearance (1961: 74). As the emphasis is on appearance and not conduct, a person can be said to be on display before his or her peers (1961: 75-76). Cultural objects, they say, “are hardly given meaning in private . . .” They only attain meaning in relation to other people (1961: 77-78).

Clothes used to have three main distinctions: work clothes, formal clothes, and domestic clothes. In the 1930s different length clothing became appropriate for different times of day. “Evening events called for long dresses,

perhaps with a train for white-tie occasions, floor length for black tie and informal dinners, while mid-calf lengths prevailed during the day” (Milbank, 1989: 118). There also were clothes for specific sporting activities such as riding, tennis, and swimming. These clothes were not relevant to the general population. They were only used by those who participated in these specialized activities. When leisure became a significant organizing principle in social life—“the non-everyday in the everyday” (Lefebvre, 1991: 40), or people working to evade work rather than working being an end in itself—sporting activities became a site of such escape. Practicing sports allowed one to feel that he or she was defining himself or herself apart from a particular status. In traditional societies time away from the ordinary took the form of an organized collective ritual, e.g. Mardi Gras. The individual committed to an ideal of individual freedom, of controlling his or her destiny, seeks to get away from social control, namely work and one’s daily responsibilities. This is achieved by choosing activities such as sports, exercise, yoga, excursions, beauty treatments, etc.-- and the wardrobe that goes with these activities. The consumer needed to be clothed differently and “sports” “play” etc., become the contrast of work.

The ironic reversal of the “blue jean” is of interest here. Originally pants that would withstand the rough and tumble of work, blue jeans become the supreme item of sports clothes. Of course we still find that jeans differ across gender lines—today many boys and young men can be seen wearing baggy jeans while girls and women tend to wear a variety of tight fitting jeans that are more often than not “low rise”. This distinction can be understood as a way to

differentiate the sexes. The male body is concealed while the female body is revealed. For young people, at least in certain social circles, going against these gender norms carries charges of homosexuality.

Sportswear and American clothing in general has been responsive to the needs of the population and to the cultural and social changes they faced. Designer Michael Kors states: "Sportswear exists because American women were the first to live the modern, fast-paced life (Seeling, 1999: 183).

In response to the "consumer revolution" of the last few decades, Paul Smith argues that the industry has responded with "mass designer fashion". Retailers and consumers want new styles, more frequently. It is a circular process, with the industry working consistently to create this need. Mass customization falls somewhere between couture and mass produced fashion, says Smith. It does not require the level of "artistry" of couture but is not stable in design. Each season unique items are produced of a level of quality superior to typical mass produced apparel (1997: 252). Despite the variability, items are identified with a certain designer or house based on their style and perhaps even the use of a logo.

In a society where it is possible to be upwardly mobile and to move from one class to another, the symbols of those who had long been at the top are coveted. To begin with, sporting clothes—outfits made for polo playing, riding, yachting, sailing and the like—were worn by those who engaged in these activities. Aldo Gucci, described as a marketing genius, started the myth that the Gucci family had been saddlemakers to medieval courts. "The world of stables and

horses became a rich source of ideas for Gucci products. The double stitching used in saddlemaking, the green and red webbing from girth straps, the hardware shaped like linked stirrups and horsebits became Gucci trademarks". These reference points helped establish Gucci as an aspirational brand. By the early 1950s, owning a Gucci bag or luggage was an indication of "refined style and taste", and wealth (Forden, 2001: 24).

Ralph Lauren was certainly smitten. A friend, Warren Helstein, recalls an early purchase Lauren made at Gucci: a "horse-bit-buckle belt". Helstein describes this experience as a genuine "achievement" for Lauren (Gross, 2003: 87). Lauren was to go on to create an empire using such techniques himself. Lauren was one of the first American designers to commercialize basic sporting items, to take them out of their upper class, largely European context, and market them to all who could afford them. Lauren is quoted as saying "I present a dream." He describes his clothing as vehicles that transport one to a desirable place. Clothing becomes a ticket to a particular lifestyle.

They are worlds you'd like to be a part of. In that world you'd wear that kind of thing. I don't see a pant. Everything is connected to something else. Nothing is apart. I design into living. It's a lifestyle (Gross, 2003: 3).

Lauren's aspirational marketing of fashion seems to have been derived from his own experience. Lauren, though of humble background, is described by those who knew him early on as attracted to high quality, exclusive items. Lauren was "especially impressed by anything English", notes an informant (2003: 86). While a young man selling ladies gloves, Lauren, still living with his parents in

the Bronx, was invited to his boss' Manhattan apartment. Looking around at his collection of English antiques Lauren is quoted as having said: "Someday, I am going to have all this" (2003: 87). Helstein describes shopping excursions he embarked on with the young Lauren. He and Lauren would comb the thrift shops for clothing, like a tweed hunting jacket discarded by someone who no longer needed it (2003: 69). Helstein explains that at this time exclusive men's items were not as expensive, and men learned where to get them not from "advertising and PR" but by word of mouth (2003: 88). Lauren seemed initially to gain access to this world (if only in his imagination) the only way he could: by acquiring pieces of clothing and accessories intended for the upper classes. Later, when his finances permit, he is able to fully live the lifestyle to which he aspired. Not everyone will be able to achieve this final step but in the world of fashion, they are told, the intermediary step—the level of impression management—is just as important.

The Ralph Lauren Polo store which opened in 1986, was housed in the Gertrude Rhinelanders Waldo House, a landmark mansion completed in 1898 on the corner of Madison Avenue and Seventy-Second Street. Lauren's choice of decor speaks to the aspirations he once had and that he supposes others might.

The decor is described by Gross:

. . . oak floors, Honduran mahogany paneling, vaulted ceilings, ornate plasterwork, Waterford chandelier, antique Cartier vitrine and green glass Art Deco panels etched with polo players (discards, appropriately, from the old Polo Lounge in New York's Westbury Hotel), gas burning fireplaces, and a plethora of "real" old drawings, photographs,

bound volumes, aristocratic bric-a-brac and shabby chic gewgaws: elaborately framed photos, walking sticks, picnic baskets and hatboxes, steamer trunks and sticker-covered old luggage, antique tennis racquets, fishing rods and lacrosse sticks artfully left about as if waiting for the house's long-departed occupants to finish packing for a summer in Newport on the Cape, in the Adirondacks, or in Sun Valley (Gross, 2003: 13)..

Lauren spent more than \$30 million restoring and decorating a building he did not himself own but rented from Jaymont Holdings, Inc. (Trachtenberg, 1988: 10). Gross calls it Lauren's "Disneyland and Disney stores rolled into one" (2003: 13). Lauren in the quest for higher status that Gross so bluntly describes, found the formula that would bring him wealth: creating "instant heirlooms for the legacy deprived" (2003: 69). Lauren "built an empire by maintaining a consistent product and by promoting an image of exclusivity" (Trachtenberg, 1988: 4).

Lauren cannot provide for his customers the reality of an upper class existence. What he does provide is certain material aspects: clothing which brings to mind an upper class sporting life. Not incidentally Lauren also provides the stage set of a privileged life, filtered through his imagination. One enters a retail space that has been carefully orchestrated to provide the feeling of an estate. For those minutes spent shopping, one is transported to another reality, which if purchases are made, can on some level continue. An environment like this—the Polo lifestyle—is seductive and has effectively drawn many people, as the financial returns demonstrate. Lauren has successfully tapped into a social-psychological need for identification and differentiation using the American

archetype of white Anglo-Saxon Protestant refinement. Ironically, Lauren's profits come from his bread and butter items, the ubiquitous polo shirt in its many forms, and blue jeans. These are the items through which most people can gain access to the world he has created.

In February 2004 Comme des Garçons opened a "provisional" retail store in Berlin. This is the first time an established fashion house has opened a store it intends to close—hopefully while a success—within one year. The company plans to open 20 stores in 2004, one in Brooklyn. Horyn explains that this tactic accepts that fashion has become "highly perishable" and that consumers want a "different shopping experience". The mass merchant, Target, tried something similar: a six-week "pop-up" outlet in Rockefeller Center for Isaac Mizrahi. Seth Matlins, brand agent at Creative Artists in Los Angeles says: "This approach 'eventizes' shopping." Nancy Koehn, a professor at the Harvard Business School says that young people are less like to "take cues" from "established channels like fashion magazines and mass advertising". This new approach which relies on word of mouth (which in the case of fashion often generates media publicity) may be effective in reaching this audience, and others. While companies like Louis Vuitton reach consumers with "aspirational advertising and monolithic real estate," for example a 20,000 square-foot store on Fifth Avenue and Fifty Seventh Street, soon to be outdone by a Paris store to open in December 2004, the Comme des Garçons store is attracting people in a 700 square-foot space without any decoration and without even its name outside. This store seems to tap into an over-saturation on the part of some fashion-conscious people. One designer

shopping in the store says that “I think people are tired of things you can get everywhere in the world” (Horyn, 2/17/04: A1).

Michelle Lee prefers to focus on the uniformity and consistency of stores such as the Gap, Urban Outfitters, and Victoria’s Secret. She describes their clothing as “McFashion.” Just as one can get the same meal in “Dallas or Munich” she says, one can find the same clothes at Gap stores all over the world (5/4/03, online). This is not entirely true, as McDonald’s provides, in addition to certain standards—which themselves are variable, e.g. beef is entirely omitted in India—regionally specific menus, and introduces new items on a temporary basis. McDonald’s as its popularity attests, provides more than just mediocre food. It allows one to enter into a certain modern and convenient American lifestyle. Although Gap is at the forefront, Lee says that “Nearly every major retail chain today represents McFashion”. The clothes, the arrangement of clothing, and other items in the stores, the decor, and the message are all standardized for the “fashion illiterate”, she says. The message being “wear our clothes and you’ll fit in.” The preponderance of such clothing and the ease with which it can be bought (convenience and low prices) like McDonald’s food makes it “unsatisfying, commonplace and utterly forgettable”, says Lee. The selections are either “risk free basics”, or if fashionable, “strictly” “whatever’s hot at the time” (5/4/03, online). Of course, the fact that the same clothes are available all over at a given point in time does not mean that they do not provide the consumer with the feeling of participating in fashion. Indeed “fitting in” is important to people and given that the clothes change each season, they also provide one with a sense of

immediacy. This momentum spurs the aspiration of the shopper who may well fear being left behind. Suddenly, everyone is wearing pastels. Perhaps splurging on high end designer clothes is not an option, but surely a trip to the Gap is possible and one can, with a few key purchases, update an otherwise dull or out-moded wardrobe.

As for the experience of shopping, one doesn't necessarily need to go to Ralph Lauren for a pleasant change of environment. Staged environments that speak to one's aspirations for a better life or a better world can be found at the more moderately priced Victoria's Secret. As Lee tells us, they have created a boudoir, and in this pink and white retreat can be found items that are currently "hot" (5/4/03, online). One is not limited by the potentially drab neighborhood store. One can participate in a global fashion system, if in no other way just by browsing, which many people spend a considerable amount of time doing. Far from limiting consumption choices, more choices have become available to a wider audience.

In a society which has been variously described as a "lonely crowd" (Reisman et al., 1961), as a "world of strangers" (Lofland, 1973), a place suffering from a loss of community where everyone is "bowling alone" (Putnam, 2000), branded fashion becomes an instrumentation for marking oneself with an identity that is shared with others. This cannot be compared to the sense of belonging that is found in a community or in interpersonal relationships, but fashion is presented as a way of forging or maintaining these highly sought after connections. Buying fashionable clothing is also tied to the ideal of moving up

the social hierarchy. Shopping itself and acquiring products is a form of achievement. If there is a feeling of anonymity in today's world then designer fashion provides a way to buy into an identity and a sense of belonging. I am a Tommy Hilfiger person. I wear Calvin Klein jeans and carry a Louis Vuitton logo purse. I "rock Chanel" and people "admire" my "Gucci" loafers, as Lil' Kim says. I went from "nada" to "Prada" (Jay-Z). Alongside these claims come qualities like being "sophisticated", "hip", "cool", "American", "international", "an insider". These qualities are acquired through the brand. Amongst strangers one can at least identify others by their clothes or logos, and in this way feel a sense of elementary belonging.

Women's Ready-to-Wear Fashion

The particular industry we have today and the culture from which it arose and had a hand in creating, emerged from more humble beginnings. The American approach to fashion, from the beginning itself, has focused as much on business as it has on artistry. Ellen Curtis Demorest, the inventor of the paper pattern in the 1850s, not only sold her patterns worldwide and sold custom-made clothing in New York, she, along with her husband, promoted fashion through a monthly magazine, made numerous fashion innovations, and before any other courturier or courturière, began using her name on beauty products and fragrances. Caroline Rennolds Milbank describes the Demorests as perhaps "nineteenth-century versions of today's couture-calibre designers whose top of the line work is aimed at a chosen few but whose licensed products are mass distributed" (1989: 28). American designers are credited with introducing the

notion of “democracy” in ready-to-wear clothing, placing fashion within the reach of the average woman (1999: 16).¹⁰ For this to happen, business and fashion had to unite.

French haute couture designers made clothing for the wealthy upper classes. The scope of fashion did not reach much beyond this level. The working classes and those unable to afford dressmakers who could copy couture styles, wore industrial “off the peg” clothing (1999: 11-12). Restrictions placed on France during World War II aided the U.S. in assuming a place for itself in the world of fashion, specifically in ready-to-wear clothing (Baudot, 1999: 122, 124).

Well into the seventeenth century the tailoring of clothing for both men and women was considered a male enterprise. By the eighteenth century this would shift. Millinery and dressmaking became a “female pursuit”, while tailoring remained in male hands. This development opened up many career opportunities for women, the study of which Wendy Gamber points out, has not been adequately dealt with in the literature (Gamber, 1997: 10).

America was to become the capital of ready-to-wear fashions by the late nineteenth century, with production centered in New York (Green, 1997: 48). In the middle of the eighteenth century, textile production was the first sector to undergo industrialization, beginning in England. France would follow, and in the early part of the nineteenth century the United States would adopt British textile technology and begin to invent its own (Dickerson, 1995: 23, 26, 28).

Fashion in Europe in 1650 “was restricted to a small group of elite men

¹⁰ Men’s fashion will be discussed separately.

and women who had the resources to invest in heavy, ornate garments made from costly silks and gold and silver brocade . . .” states Jennifer M. Jones. She continues pointing out that the rest of the population “possessed an extremely limited wardrobe, comprising either coarse, homemade clothing or castoffs of the upper classes”. By the end of the eighteenth century fashion had extended further down the class hierarchy, allowing people in all classes to (potentially) participate to some degree (1994: 943).

In the eighteenth century special orders from Europe could be made by American merchants or individuals of means. However, European fashions were mostly inappropriate for the more relaxed American lifestyle. Alice Morse Earle describes the American context: “masked balls and fancy dress parties, which were the chief and most constant of London pleasures, were not an American resource; they were frowned upon” (1903/1970: 396). Though some sought out European fashion, she goes on to say that American “amusements” were simple affairs requiring comparatively simple clothing: “spinning matches, at singing schools, and various gatherings of women alone in country towns—and of men alone; and in the capitals, the royal birth-night balls and assemblies, a regatta, a horse-race, formal dinners and high teas, and a ‘consort’” (1903/1970: 397-398). At the opposite end of the “fashion” spectrum were the New England Puritans who rejected decoration altogether.

When considering fashion for men and for women it is important to take into account not only the historical moment but the ways in which masculinity and femininity are culturally defined. Only by understanding this can we grasp

more fully why certain styles were promoted and adopted and why they may have changed.

The nineteenth century began for women with the high-waisted Empire dress with drawstring for fitting. This plain “neoclassical” style was borrowed from post-Revolutionary France (Jones, 1994: 946). As the century progressed clothing became more elaborate. In the 1830s bodices were fitted, skirts and sleeves full. By the 1850s skirts had “ballooned”. In 1868 the bustle became fashionable (Milbank, 1989: 45). The “popular silhouette of 1870s and 1880s” is described by Sarah A. Gordon:

floor length skirts worn over petticoats or hoops, often drawn tightly across front and gathered in the back in a bustle that emphasized a woman’s curves. Collars were high and sleeves were long and tight. Women wore boned corsets that emphasized their breasts and hips (2001: 26).

The invention of the steam-powered ship in the 1820s brought products of all types into New York making it the fashion center of the U.S. (Milbank, 1989: 10). Milbank explains that “fashion became the province of city shops, burgeoning department stores, small or grand dressmaking houses, and even manufacturers” (1989: 18), and that it was addressed to the increasingly wealthier middle classes who lived in and/or shopped in New York (1989: 16). Sharon Zukin discusses the “extraordinary wealth” from the trade concentrated in New York at this time, owing to the building projects and the expansion of the port. Merchants competed with each other, and many small shops sprang up to cater to the needs of different ethnic groups (2004: 18).

Sailors and soldiers were the first recipients of ready-to-wear clothing (Green, 1997: 25). In the early 1800s “a small group of New England merchants conceived the idea of having ready-made trousers and shirts available for the sailors who had only a few days in port” (Horn and Gurel, 1981: 401). “Slop shops”, as they were called, could be found Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore (Cobrin, 1970: 19). In the 1840s such rough, ready made garments were also provided for those searching for gold out West, for laborers, slaves, and one supposes clothes of a slightly better grade for “the many bachelors who had no wives to sew for them.”¹¹ These clothes were still hand-sewn (Horn and Gurel, 1981: 401). The earliest ready-made clothes were made in the home and pay was by the piece (1981: 403-404). Once it was possible for clothing to be made on a large scale to fit a variety of sizes, the same logic was applied to a civilian population (Green, 1997: 29-33). In New York, Boston, Paris and London, cutting, sewing and pressing were divided among various workers allowing for example, in the “Boston system,” 50-200 garments to be produced in one day (1997: 32). The assembly-line production of clothing no longer required skilled tailors, rather it called for garment workers and sewing machine operators (1997: 33). By 1840, Green states, “the price of a ready-made coat was about one-half that of a custom-made one in New York” (1997: 32).

The general store began to be replaced in the 1870s and 1880s by “mass

¹¹ During the Gold Rush in 1850, Levi Strauss came to San Francisco with the intention of making tents for miners out of rough canvas. Instead, he made trousers which were to become the American blue jean. In response to the miners’ requests, Strauss began to use a tougher material called “serge de Nimes” which became known as denim (Cobrin, 1970: 40-41).

retailers”: department stores, mail-order houses, and chain-stores. This was facilitated within America by improvements and expansion of the railroad system, telegraph and postal services (Abernathy et al., 1995: 178). Urban centers and access to them were increasing rapidly, allowing retailers to have a large volume of inventory, a high rate of turnover, and lower prices (1995: 179). The first department store, the A.T. Stewart Store, was established in lower New York in 1848.¹² Lord and Taylor opened its doors on Broadway in 1869. In the 1870s the better stores moved to Ladies’ Mile on Broadway between Fourteenth and Twenty-third Streets (Zukin, 2004: 21).

The proliferation of department stores encouraged the development of a ready-to-wear industry (Dolkart, 1998: 39). Department stores created a demand for clothing that could be bought right away, and encouraged the consumer, through the decor and ambiance they provided, to return again. The new shopping places says Rachel Bowlby, were “places of culture, fantasy, divertissement,” which the customer visits more for pleasure than for necessity (1985: 6). Indeed, department stores prefigured modern consumption practices.

In the mid-nineteenth century many men¹³ were purchasing ready-to-wear suits while women continued to purchase custom-made clothing. By the end of the century, however, women would become the motivating force in the garment industry’s growth (Green, 1997: 26). Earlier on, a transition to mass-produced garments was inconceivable. Women demanded unique items, dresses made to

¹² It opened in 1848 according to Zukin and 1845 according to Abernathy et al.

¹³ With the exception of the aristocratic and the rich.

enhance the wearer's figure, reflect her taste, and set her apart from other women. The closely-fitted and elaborate structure and ornamentation of female apparel required the skilled, individual attention of dressmakers or home sewers (Gamber, 1997: 98, Milbank, 1989: 18). For the lady who could afford such services, garments were made to fit her form "like wall paper" (1997: 129). For the poorer woman, there was no other choice, apart from homemade clothing, than poorly fitted industrial clothing (Baudot, 1999: 30). And, there was no impetus yet to extend the reach of fashion.

Obstacles to producing ready-to-wear clothing for women were gradually overcome. In the 1850s loosely fitting wraps and outerwear were produced. Gradually, shirtwaists, and tailored skirts and jackets were ready-made just as similar items had been for men (Milbank, 1989: 18). In 1859 census figures show 5,739 workers engaged in making cloaks, mantillas, and hoop skirts (Horn and Gurel, 1981: 403). One hundred and eighteen firms produced women's clothing. The number of firms rose to 562 by 1880 (Dolkart, 1989: 39). Immigrant workers, mostly Jewish and Italian women, worked long hours in sweatshops located in New York on the Lower East Side (Municipal Art Society, 2000: 5). From the 1860s to the 1890s the tailored suit, made of heavy material and consisting of a jacket with a collar, skirt and vest, came to be seen as an appropriate day costume for all classes of women (Milbank, 1989: 18, Crane, 2000: 105). Under this was worn a shirtwaist, an adaptation of the man's shirt, with a small black tie or bow tie (Crane, 2000: 105). This costume could be worn all day by the working woman as well as by the "lady of leisure". An all-day

costume was a revolutionary concept.

For morning, a lady of leisure could wear a tailored suit if she expected to go out, or, if staying home, a morning dress, which was relatively simple. Since she was not involved in housework, she might wear, in her room or to breakfast, various kinds of ever more elaborate peignoirs, combing jackets or others kinds of wrapper. For afternoon, if paying a call or attending a reception, she was required to wear a formal afternoon costume called a reception gown, which was as ornate as an evening dress, possibly featuring a sweeping skirt and a train, though not décolleté. For receiving visitors at home during the afternoon a tea gown, if respectably made, was an alternative to the reception dress. Dinners at home required dinner clothes, slightly more formal or décolleté than afternoon ones, and going to the opera, a ball, or a private dinner party called for the most formal of clothes, as well as the most fashionable. These delineations were further qualified by whether one was yet to be married, newly married, long married, or never married; the weather; the season; one's location—in town, in the country, or at a resort; and, of course, whether one was in mourning or half-mourning (Milbank, 1989: 48).

Simplification of design is an example of the newly emerging apparel industry's influence on fashion (Green, 1997: 29). Nancy Green asks whether the ready-to-wear "revolution" came about in response to demand or whether it created the demand. Modern methods of production and transportation were required for ready-to-wear to be produced, as well as a corresponding transformation in "modes of manners," Green argues (1997: 21). Technological capability seems to have coincided with the appropriate cultural moment, urged on by industry. Milbank explains that by the Civil War, American women of a certain class "had begun to be interested in getting an education, in trying their

hands at jobs previously held almost exclusively by men, and in engaging in athletic endeavors” (1989: 12). Simplicity in style was a response to the needs of American women, and, could indeed be more easily manufactured. A large pool of eastern European immigrants were available to work for low wages, and by 1900, 96,000 workers were employed by women’s clothing manufacturers (Horn and Gurel, 1981: 403). It was during this time too that German Jewish immigrants who would become influential in the development of American fashion such as Strauss, Gimbel, Bloomingdale, Filene and Lazarus arrived. In the 1850s German Jews coming to the U.S. become the dominant group in the men’s clothing industry, in retailing, manufacturing and tailoring. Julius Rosenwald, son of a former peddler who through marriage began working in the clothing business, established Sears Roebuck (Cobrin, 1970: 49).

A public debate began in the 1870s about what women should wear when participating in the newly popular leisure and sports activities. Unlike the dress reform movement of the 1840s and 1850s, rejected by mainstream men and women alike, “the idea that clothes were only for play made them less of a threat to anyone who perceived them as challenging traditional women’s styles”, argues Sarah M. Gordon (2001: 25). Participating in sports: bicycling, swimming, walking and tennis, became associated with ideas of modernity and participation in a new social movement (2001: 30, 32-33). A commercial industry able to furnish items on a larger scale was necessary for the influence of sportswear to grow beyond just a small circle of women. In the beginning information on sewing such clothing was disseminated through women’s magazines, through

patterns, and eventually ready-made sporting costumes were available by mail order and in retail stores.

Beginning in the 1890s ready-made clothing and mass-produced hats were available in the first American department stores (Gamber, 1997: 191). At the turn of the twentieth century custom dressmakers struggled against department stores and their ready-to-wear fashions. Gamber states that by 1920 department stores had won the decisive victory (1997: 193). A “male” fashion industry--encompassing factories, the wholesale trade and department stores--had virtually put an end to the skilled female economy of dressmaking and millinery. Lower prices, convenience, a wide selection of merchandise, plus the allure of often “palatial” retail environments appealed to female consumers, and indeed captivated many (1997: 194-195). The largely immigrant population who labored in the new garment industry had few of the amenities that native born women had enjoyed in custom dressmaking shops (1997: 217).

Ready-to-wear clothing began in Europe but its manufacture was perfected in the U.S., the U.S. becoming the world leader by the beginning of the twentieth century, explains Milbank (1989: 18). New York was to become the garment center, with manufacture concentrated in midtown Manhattan. The area is bounded approximately by 34th and 40th Streets, and by Sixth and Ninth Avenues (Dolkart, 1998: 37). In 1900 the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union was founded in response to the dangerous and exploitative conditions which many manufacturers exposed employees (Horn and Gurel, 1981: 404). By the 1920s states Andrew S. Dolkart, the men’s clothing industry

was “rapidly disappearing from New York” and the Garment Center was dominated by the women’s clothing industry (1998: 37).

Before ready-to-wear clothes would achieve prominence, the French tradition of haute couture was born. Haute couture, the art of custom clothing design, was founded by Charles Frederick Worth, an Englishman who in 1858 set up his house in Paris. While couturiers and couturières maintained “a certain anonymity to guard their reputation” and whose names Lehmann states, “were still traded as well-kept secrets,” Worth wanted to be known and indeed was to soon become the first courturier whose name became known in households all over the world (Lehmann, 2000: 67). Accessible to only the wealthiest women, couture fashion set the tone for all who desired to be fashionable. Dressmakers and tailors, whose task it was to clothe the body, had much lower social status than painters or architects. They “were always regarded as servants” says Peter Wollen (1999: 8). In contrast to dressmaking where the client held the upper hand, the couturier or couturière presented his or her designs to the client from which they would make a selection. Worth established this approach by showing his collections semiannually (Martin and Koda, 1995: 47). Worth, by establishing the category of the courturier, is described by Wollen as redefining the relationship with the client. Now the client came to “his house, rather than the other way round, just as a patron might visit an artist’s studio” (1999: 8).

Crane’s work provides us with a contrasting view of the relationship ordinary people had to clothing and fashion, as well as information on how middle class styles may have been diffused in working class circles. Crane

discusses the greater difficulties nineteenth century French women had, as compared to their male counterparts, in imitating the styles of the middle or upper classes. Middle class clothing for women was “heavily coded with a particular set of values about the role of women . . .” The ideal role for a bourgeois married Frenchwoman was “aristocratic idleness.” Women’s fashions were “exceptionally restrictive and ornamental” making it impractical for the wearer to move around in an easy manner (2000: 29). French women were much more restricted in the public sphere than were American women. Unlike French women, American women could choose their own husbands and leave home unaccompanied (2000: 108). By 1880 one third of college students in America were women (2000: 110). Of course this represented only privileged women. As for the French, the gap between dressing in a middle class style was as formidable as was the gap between classes. Using data from Frédéric LePlay’s nineteenth century study of working class families, Crane states that for the working class Frenchwoman, limited financial resources, a lack of exposure to the bourgeois style of dress, and the inappropriateness of the clothing made it such that only 7 percent of the wives of skilled workers dressed in the middle class style while 20 percent of men in the period 1850-1874 were described in this way (2000: 49). While in middle class homes in France, 62% of families spent more on the wife’s clothing than the husband’s, in working class families the man was more likely to adopt middle class styles, and more money was spent on his clothing (2000: 81). In the U.S. in the last part of the nineteenth century, skilled and unskilled workers spent 14.8 percent of their incomes on clothing while French families spent 8.6

percent. This indicates that clothing was being used to enhance social status as it was not so much more expensive in the U.S. (2000: 87).

Jones finds quite the reverse pattern in male and female expenditure on dress. She contends that during the first half of the eighteenth century women, “ranging from domestic servants to noblewomen, spent about twice as much money on clothes as did their husbands.” By 1750 she notes, “the relative value of women’s wardrobes increased across all classes, often five to ten times more rapidly than did their husbands” (1994: 948).

Rubinstein notes that, much earlier, with the advent of commerce and the growth of monarchies “it was no longer sufficient for a man to dress himself in attire that supported his claim for rank. To demonstrate his power and wealth a husband had to dress his wife and other members of the household well” (1995: 93). This impulse would have been felt most keenly by those of high rank and later by the bourgeoisie. Amongst the working classes, from the data Crane analyzed, she points out that wives of skilled and unskilled workers in Paris owned more items of middle class clothing than did similar women in the provinces and countryside, the wives of skilled workers owning more those of non-skilled workers, thus pointing to diffusion (2000: 55). It stands to reason that in cases of working class homes where the wife’s role was limited to attending to household matters, there would be little need for her clothing to display her husband’s status. The desire for displaying higher status through clothing in the working classes is dependent on their level of public participation and the expectation of the possibility of moving up the class ladder.

In both France and the United States ready-to-wear garments fulfilled a civilizing or assimilation agenda, argues Green (1997: 25). Once a variety of clothing could be made for all people, thoughts of those in positions of authority turned to the appropriate uses of attire. In the late nineteenth century ready-to-wear men's clothes were spoken of in moral terms—to “civilize” or “reform” the masses who did not possess the gentleman's qualities (1997: 77). Richard Wrigley in a book on dress after the French Revolution looks at how clothing as a social indicator became a political one. “Items of dress such as the cockade, liberty cap, or sans-culotte costume were a form of public assertion of varieties of adherence to revolutionary beliefs and patriotic ideals” (2002: 7). The French citizen could not be indifferent to attire as his or her mode of dress was a declaration of support or opposition to the political regime, and consequences were attached to this choice.

In America, photographs, diaries and letters indicate that “even in remote areas” Americans were concerned with meeting middle class standards. In the second half of the nineteenth century, fashionable women of considerable means wore decorated and extravagant clothes copied from the latest European styles made by skilled dressmakers in a few major East coast cities. A “second level” of fashion was based on styles reproduced from women's magazines. Dressmakers in most cities and towns were able to do this type of work. The majority of American women, however, did not have access to such services and made clothing at home (2000: 72). Most women remade their out-dated clothing (2000: 73).

The sewing machine became available earlier to women in America than in Europe. In the 1860s sewing machines were mass produced and could be bought on an installment plan. Patterns were sold all over America. In the 1870s, 6 million were sold per year (2000: 76). Before this women could copy a schematic pattern from a women's magazine such as Godey's Lady's Book and stitch it by hand (Gordon, 2001: 33). In France sewing machines were being bought by working class women who did piece work at home, and patterns were used by seamstresses and not by women at home (Crane, 2000: 76).

Until the 1950s, Paris was considered the "undisputed" center for women's fashion, says Francois Baudot (1999: 30). Famous fashion houses held the power to dictate what was fashionable, and the press dutifully passed along this message (Wark, 1997: 231). Designers and manufacturers all over the world looked toward and emulated Paris styles.

During the time of Worth, New York was the center of American fashion. Milbank points out, contrary to much of what has been written: "Paris dresses were rarely copied faithfully," line for line. Instead, New York designers "used" Paris as a model but altered fashions in accordance with American consumers' tastes (1989: 10). In fact, in the mid-nineteenth century, "fashion plates" with illustrations of clothing from Paris rarely provided general let alone technical design information on how to make the garment. Furthermore, Milbank points out, life in the upper reaches of U.S. society bore little resemblance to the European courts, making Paris fashions largely inappropriate. *Godey's Lady's Book*, which began in 1837, offered advice on modifying Paris fashions as well as

admonitions to those who may not have preferred to do so (1989: 19).

American designers have been credited with introducing “democracy” to ready-to-wear clothing--departing from Paris norms, and extending fashion to the average woman (Baudot, 1999: 16). Milbank contends that even before there was an American fashion, there was a particularly American style arising from “patriotic determination.” She states: “Simplicity in dress celebrated both self sufficiency and the freedoms inherent in a democracy” (1989: 8).

It is French designer Gabrielle (Coco) Chanel who is credited with ushering women into the modern world of fashion. She rejected the fabulously embellished fashion of her male counterparts who sought to exaggerate the female form. Instead, she opted for a graceful “radical” simplicity, sometimes referred to as a “povertizing of luxury.” Chanel was very much a part of the Parisian art scene of the 1920s, and in her mansion she entertained close friends such as Cocteau, Picasso and Stravinsky (Prah-Perochon: 2001: 21). The 1920s were a time where a fusion between art and fashion could be clearly seen. For avant-garde artist Sonia Delaunay, for example, fashion was an extension of art. Maramotti describes Chanel as able to “intuit the predominant social tensions of the moment” and translate them into garments to which a wealthy clientele could relate (2000: 95). Although her designs remained elite their influence was widely felt “Mundane materials” were “transformed by couture handwork”, but their surface simplicity caused women who wouldn’t ordinarily think about couture to take notice (Martin and Koda, 1995: 45). While her clothing was certainly more comfortable and appeared simple the construction was quite

complex: hand tucking, pleating, detailing. An American clientele found her look “less complicated,” and indeed “less ‘French’”, her designs more “appealing and meaningful.” Milbank referring to Chanel, Jean Patou, Madeleine Vionnet and other French designers of this period explains: “Because they were designing simpler clothes that reflected a more democratic general attitude, and because these simpler clothes were by their very nature much more copiable, French designers became, for the first time, household names in this country” (1989: 72).

The 1920s were a period in American history characterized by a shift in mores. Three important factors converged which would have an impact on American fashion: the ending of World War I, the feminist movement, and improved production methods. During World War I women went to work in the factories, in trousers. After World War I women’s fashions were frivolous, reflecting a new more carefree attitude. The feminist movement also had an impact on the fashions of the period. Women for the first time began breaking with tradition and wearing bobbed hair and less fitted clothing. The growth of the garment industry in the 1920s was connected to the ability to mass produce simpler styles of women’s clothing at affordable prices. Skirts became shorter, dresses featured natural waistlines, and in 1925, the “shift” dress had no waistline at all. In addition to cotton, wool and silk, and silk gauze, garments could be made out of a new artificial fabric, rayon. Three fashion magazines, *Vogue*, *Harper’s Bazaar* and *The Queen* were widely circulated and became influential. Pants, although only worn in secluded places such as vacation ranches or resorts, became more popular amongst middle and upper class women between the two

wars. However, they had been worn extensively by women on the frontier or on the farm, under skirts, and by women who worked in factories (2000: 120, 123). The 1920s burgeoning fashion industry presented women with a variety of choices: the carefree flapper look, romantic flowing dresses, the practicality of the walking suit—tailored clothing by day and lavish dresses for evening.

Manufacturing in New York, until World War I, was carried out largely by immigrant women in factory-type loft buildings, called “inside shops”. These industrial buildings were located outside of what was to become the Garment Center, from West 23rd Street to 34th Street. Factory owners fired workers during off-peak times but still had to pay rent. In 1906 Tiffany & Company and B. Altman’s opened on Fifth Avenue, followed by Lord and Taylor and other merchants who catered to the wealthy. Additionally, many wealthy families resided on Fifth Avenue. Quite a few garment factories were located near Fifth Avenue and 34th Street, causing a steady stream of laborers to pass by wealthy shoppers and residents. The headline for a January 16, 1916 New York Times article on the subject read “Menace to Trade on Fifth Avenue.” A “Save New York Committee” was established. All major department stores, many hotels, banks and industries joined and threatened to “boycott all garment firms that continued to manufacture in a zone bounded by 33rd Street, 59th Street, Third Avenue, and Seventh Avenue after February 1, 1917”. Banks promised to refuse loans and real estate brokers refused to show space to garment factories. According to the Municipal Art Society: “So distressed were the merchants by the sight of immigrant workers on the lunch hour loitering among the shoppers—that

the Fifth Avenue Association asked the Mayor to help keep them out. Eventually the ire of department stores profiting from the sale of the garment district's products, and the distaste of customers shopping for that very clothing, forced the district to the west, where it is today" (2000: 2). After the war, garment manufacturers moved to the area that would be called the Garment Center. The most significant buildings at 494 and 500 Seventh Avenue at 37th Street were erected in 1919-21. They were called the Garment Center Capital. Mark Kanner, a Russian Jew who worked his way up in the industry conceived of and carried through the project with the cooperation of 58 garment firms. Throughout the 1920s development continued.

The manufacturer become largely a jobber. Jobbers bought the materials for the clothing and had them designed. Labor was arranged through a "contractor", to be done in an "outside shop". This allowed the jobber to avoid equipment expenses and labor issues and to maintain only an office and a showroom for the finished product. Contractors competed with each other to offer lower prices to jobbers resulting in workers receiving the lowest possible wages (Dolkart, 1989: 41). The practice of factories hiring a "traveling salesman" to sell goods was replaced with "buyers" who'd come to Garment Center showrooms, many via Penn Station (completed in 1910). Hotels sprung up to house the out of town buyers.

By the 1930s designer American sportswear stood on its own (Martin, 1998: 9). While designer sportswear can be attributed to Jean Patou and Gabrielle Chanel in the 1920s and 1930s (1998: 14), Richard Martin sees its true birth in

America and credits American women designers such as Bonnie Cashen, Tina Lesser, Vera Maxwell, Claire McCardell, Clare Potter, and Emily Wilkins with creating the sportswear tradition. It was these woman who “liberated American fashion from the thralldom of Parisian design” (1998: 12). This “new standard” of dress was designed to suit the modern American woman’s lifestyle. These designers “re-thought fashion from its very roots, not simply paring away some of the accretions of traditional prettiness”, says Martin (1998: 9). French “sportswear” it must be stressed, was intended for the upper class woman.

Fashions of this period however, took on a more “glamorous” look when compared to the carefree looks of the 1920s. Once again, dresses and clothing in general became more fitted to the body (1989: 109). Corsets came back and the new less restrictive girdle was developed (Seeling, 1999: 135). Hollywood became an important influence on fashion, bringing a new sophistication, elegance and maturity to American fashion. With the world in the midst of an economic depression the desire for wealth took on a new significance.

Hollywood displayed this through clothing “lavish with the textures of furs and thousands of hand-sewn sequins and bugle beads . . . glittery jewels . . . striking accessories” (Milbank, 1989: 109). The many films made by Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers during this decade, showcased dancing to Big Band music, the main entertainment of the 1930s, says Charlotte Seeling (1999: 131). Joan Crawford, with her naturally broad shoulders, accentuated by costume designer Adrian, was the first to wear what could be termed the “power suit”. In her 1932 film *Letty Lynton*, Crawford’s white organza dress was copied and Macy’s sold

500,000 at \$20 each (1999: 182).

In the same decade, Milbank notes, casual clothes, clothes which had in the 1920s “been shaped the same as formal styles” developed their own look as “sport and leisure” clothes. “Lounging pajamas” and “all manner of pants, shorts, playsuits, and culottes” became popular with women. (1989: 109). Sarah A. Gordon describes patterns for women’s sports costumes from the 1870s to about 1915. In addition to maintaining a feminine sense of modesty, the garments were concerned with “prettiness” and with being in step with the current fashions. “Gym suits were trimmed with silk bows, bathing costumes, with nautical insignia. One skating sweater has the high neck and enormous leg-of-mutton shoulders stylish in the 1890s, complete with stuffing to hold the shape” (2001: 42).

In New York, after 1900, department stores moved further uptown, to Fifth Avenue north of Thirty-fourth Street. B. Altman, Macy’s, Lord & Taylor and Brooks Brothers followed this pattern. By 1930 the area north of Fiftieth Street, near Fifth Avenue, became the most exclusive shopping area with stores such as Saks Fifth Avenue and Bonwit Teller (Zukin, 2004: 22). Zukin points out that shopping, from its inception, was a stratified or class-based experience.

In 1939 with the start of WWII, women’s clothes began to take on a uniform, military quality: angular shoulders, braided fastenings, tight skirts, and flat shoes (Seeling, 1999: 140). In 1939, a woman appears for the first time wearing pants in *Vogue*.

By the 1930s most manufacturers had their headquarters between Eighth

and Madison Avenue in the Twenties and Thirties in New York. Major department stores found their homes in New York as did exclusive shops and custom houses on Fifth and Madison Avenues in the Fifties and Sixties (1989: 109). Stores promoted American fashion alongside European designs (1989: 112). Better department stores such as Bergdorf Goodman held private fashion shows daily.

Martin states fashion in the 1940s was: “logical and answerable to the will of the woman who wore it. Implicitly or explicitly, American fashion addressed a democracy, whereas traditional Paris-based fashion was authoritarian and imposed on women, willing or not” (1998: 13). In the 1940s wartime manufacturing took precedence. Women once again worked in the factories. Shorter more fitted skirts and suit jackets were made in such a way to comply with restrictions. Men’s suits were adapted for women, changing the silhouette to one with broader shoulders and a narrower waist. In 1947 French courturier Christian Dior introduced his “New Look”, a return to femininity that had been repressed during the war years. Many yards of fabric were used to create full skirts with tightly fitted waistlines which accentuated the female figure. The “New Look” could in fact be described as a look back toward a time and place (Europe) and indeed class (upper) when the ideal woman was living a domestic life of leisure. This was the polar opposite of women’s casual sportswear. Dior’s “New Look” began on February 12, 1947 at 10:30, says McDowell. The clock was turned back 7 years to the pre-war fashion. “Not only did the world’s couturiers follow his lead, so did many other designers” (1997: 10, 12). As

influential as Dior's look was, and it was adapted by American designers, America had become a fashion century in its own right--and the sportswear capital--and would not abandon its new direction. Marilyn J. Horn and Lois M. Gurel point out that casual and sportswear was not an area the French cared to enter into (1981: 410).

In the 1940s fashion editors and buyers were unable to get to Paris. The major American fashion magazines along with women's magazines and newspapers that covered fashion, focused on the shows held in New York department stores, custom houses and manufacturers. American designers were highlighted and became "overnight sensations". Claire McCardell trained in couture fashion, brought an American sense of style--using easy care fabrics and designs that were comfortable--to moderately priced sportswear.

World trade increased after World War II with the United States playing an increasingly important role. The United States experienced growth in its own economy and exerted a large influence over the world's economy. It was on its way to being the world's economic leader (Dickerson, 1995: 36). By 1947 the United States textile and apparel industries could boast "an impressive trade surplus", one which they took for granted as they helped Japan rebuild her industry (1995: 127).

After the war, department stores opened branches in affluent suburbs of Long Island and New Jersey. As middle class residents moved to suburban areas, the shopping experience for residents in many downtown or inner city neighborhoods in New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Chicago and Los Angeles

deteriorated. By the 1960s, Zukin points out, many merchants “abandoned” these neighborhoods (2004: 23).

The 1950s woman is described as “demure” and “family-oriented”, quite unlike her “flapper mother”, says Milbank. The newly prosperous United States had entered a time focused on marriage and family life and clothing became more casual. This was at a time when the French woman was “laced” into dresses with fitted torsos, fish tail trains, and trumpet skirts, and the French magazines featured couture fashion (1989: 170, 172).

By the 1950s ready-to-wear had attained a level of “couture-calibre” in part due to standardized measurements in graduated styles (1989: 175). American, unlike Parisian, designers offered “multiple silhouettes” to fit the many different types of American women. Alongside ideals of domesticity were film icons Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell, conveying an image of voluptuous sexuality.

It was in the 1950s, James Laver points out, that a separate market catering to youth came into existence. American youth had their own music, rock and roll, and they wore clothing different from the older generations. American teenage girls wore tight sweaters and cardigans with full circular skirts. Underneath they wore pointed braissières and layered petticoats. For casual wear girls wore tight trousers or jeans (2002: 260-261).

Jacqueline Kennedy had an enormous influence on American fashion. At a time when upper class women were dressed in furs and fussy hats with netted veils, the First Lady would appear in an impeccably tailored simple wool coat

with matching pill box hat. Her style was an understated refinement. Before Mrs. Kennedy, presidential wives dressed in a matronly way. The media coverage of the attractive and youthful Mrs. Kennedy captivated American women, providing them with a coherent role model of the ideal American woman.

As compared to the 1950s where entertaining for many Americans was centered in the home, in the 1960s entertainment for the middle and upper classes was more often outside the home and formal. Evening clothing featured “beads, glitter, deep décolletés, feathers and sumptuous materials”. Fantasy and outrageousness became associated with fashion. At this time, Milbank states, “the relationship among fashion, status and celebrity grew so close they began to merge” (1989: 202). (The importance of celebrity would increase in the 1980s and continues to be strong today.) The emphasis in fashion magazines was no longer on propriety but experimentation and being up-to-date. Small boutiques, in New York on streets in the Fifties and Sixties, and in Greenwich Village, featured new styles before the next collections were shown. Department stores such as Bergdorf’s, in order to appeal to the younger client, began to follow the boutique concept within its own store (1989: 206). A new emphasis on youth and freedom of choice was in place (1989: 211). Slimness is in fashion, curvacious femininity is out. Unstructured and brief bras and panties became the undergarments (Laver, 2002: 261).

Zukin explains that by the 1960s department stores became boring to women who sought newer styles and a different kind of shopping experience. Referring to the culture at B. Altman’s and other such stores, Zukin states:

“moderation and gentility became hopelessly old fashioned” 2004: 120). It was during this time after all that “rock stars replaced society matrons as fashion icons” (2004: 127).

The later part of the 1960s were a period in which the work ethic, gender roles and the overall value system began to be once again called into question. It is at this time that casual sportswear become acceptable all around attire for men and women. Before this time the boundaries between formal clothing, work clothing, domestic clothing and sporting clothing were clear.

Laver says that women, “despite the much publicized sexual revolution” women often looked like children in “baby-doll dresses with puffed sleeves, schoolgirl pinafores and gymslips, knickerbockers and the ubiquitous miniskirt” (2002: 261). Perhaps this might have been the fashion establishment’s (whatever was left of it) reaction against those who challenged norms of gender or rejected fashion altogether.

Paralleling the migration to and expansion of the suburbs in the 1950s and 1960s to what before was a vast farmland and later became middle class housing developments, was the growth of retail shopping centers in the 1960s. By 1964 7,600 shopping centers were built, most of them “open-air strip center” (Halkias, 5/29/01).

On the industrial front, the growth of textile exports, which was becoming a problem for developed countries in the 1950s had now “multiplied many times over” (Dickerson, 1995: 128). By the 1960s textile and apparel industries felt the impact of increased imports from low-wage developing countries (1995: 38). In

the 1960s a limited number of countries produced textile and apparel goods. This number greatly expanded in the years that followed (1995: 40, 41). In the 1970s competition intensified (1995: 38).

The 1970s, the decade of the women's movement, introduced a different set of factors to be contended with by the fashion industry. As more women entered the work force they could not meet men on an equal footing, at least not apparently, were they to dress in typically feminine attire associated with the private and not the public sphere. Career dressing for women in the 1970s sought to "minimize the maternal, nurturing, and sexual dimensions of their appearance" argues Rubinstein (1995: 95). The tailored blazer adapted from menswear, is described by Milbank as the single most important article of clothing in the decade. Calvin Klein and Ralph Lauren, "new stars on the ready-to-wear horizon" interpreted "menswear for women" in different ways. "Narrowness" became the ideal body type (Milbank, 1989: 242). Ralph Lauren was the first designer to create a line for women consisting of items such as oxford button down shirts, gray flannel skirts and navy blue blazers. High-end men's specialty stores such as Brooks Brothers and Paul Stuart followed suit (Trachtenberg, 1988: 6). Rubinstein notes various periods in history from the fifteenth century on when women adopted elements of male dress in the wardrobe. She connects this to seduction. Sexual allure is created by incorporation of the unexpected or forbidden (1995: 106-109). In the career arena such dressing appears an attempt to co-opt male symbols of power, authority and prestige replacing female symbols and their connotations with attributes suitable for the workplace.

Chanel's copying the simpler styles more appropriate to the domestic staff than the lady of the house, for whom her fashions were intended, is another example of creating an impression through a reversal of symbols.

The 1970 film "The Stepford Wives" uses fashion to express the social tension that challenges to gender norms had created. The women who question the status quo are seen wearing more masculine tailored or sometimes even "boyish" attire while the ideal women, transformed by the men of Stepford into robots, don frilly pastel colored somewhat Victorian looking frocks, which at the same time complement their enhanced physique, and can be viewed as "sexy". In the film's finale all the women of Stepford (many of whom had been feminists and high achieving professions) are seen in exaggeratedly feminine attire contentedly parading through the supermarket, filling their carts with (branded) household products.

Outside of the office more casual ready-to-wear and sportswear dominated the women's market. Some women continued to wear mini skirts, others adopted the "midi", or "maxi" as it was sometimes called, although more women rejected than accepted this style. Pants became popular. Dress codes were considerably relaxed (Milbank, 1989: 240). In 1969 The Gap retail stores were founded in San Francisco. The Gap furnished Americans and those around the world (female and male) with a casual sportswear wardrobe: hooded sweatshirts, jeans and cargo pants (Laver, 2002: 285). As clothing became more casual and responsive to women's needs versus the designer's vision, "Seventh Avenue began to concentrate on image rather than the actual designs", says

Milbank (1989: 242). This is an important transition which allowed fashion in effect to remain in control of its product, and the fashion designer to be a cultural arbiter.

Focusing more on image may have also been a response to shifts in the textile and apparel industry. Hong Kong became the world leader in exports of apparel in the 1970s and 1980s (Dickerson, 1995: 150). Growth rates in apparel production in the United States continued to drop in the 1970s. The developed countries, the United States, Japan and the European Union countries, dropped to a “near-zero” growth rate in the 1973-1987 period, while developing countries experienced “healthy increases”, explains Kitty Dickerson (1995: 195). Until the economic reforms of 1979 China’s textile and apparel production was for domestic use only. China would emerge as the world leader in apparel and footwear (1995: 155). Production costs in the United States and other developed countries had become high; domestic manufacturers could not compete with the availability of low-cost labor provided by the developing world (1995: 200). The United States responded by becoming part of the global textile and apparel economy. Services were subcontracted to factories overseas where garments could be cut, sewn, and assembled—increasingly in a variety of different countries. Finished goods were sold by U.S. firms to department stores, national chains, discounters or smaller retailers. Image was one of the few things the United States could produce.

Beginning in the 1970s designers gained prestige and clothing firms, be they established couture firms or new firms started by ready-to-wear designers,

sold clothing under the name of the designer. Without the added prestige that a designer's name could bestow on clothing, the clothing produced by developing countries that would become more proficient in the quality and styles offered, could have eclipsed the U.S. and European fashion industries. Europe further adapted to competition abroad by concentrating its efforts on the luxury category, utilizing technology and expertise that could not be matched, and by focusing on quick response fashion.

In the 1970s and early 1980s the disco culture was to have an influence on fashion. Dancing at nightclubs under flashing strobe lights required a new kind of apparel. Rubinstein explains that prior to this era retailers only carried dressy clothes during their holiday season. With disco the need for shiny, glittering and beaded items became year around. A new category of "nightlife" clothes emerged. The disco era introduced once again—to a mainstream audience—the element of fantasy and the ability to adopt a "temporary identity" (1995: 244). Designer jeans became the fashion item of the late 1970s. Others sought genuineness and turned to ethnic styles: Nehru jackets for men, Indian silk scarves, flowing skirts, caftans, Tibetan or Chinese quilted jackets. We see during this period a development that will continue—niche markets.

It was increasingly easy to find a larger variety of clothing or for clothing manufacturers and designers to reach a larger audience. More than 15,000 shopping centers were built in the U.S. by 1972. Enclosed, regional "shopping malls" began to be built around this time as well (Halkias, 5/29/01). The shopping mall was a new concept, a collection of independent retailers assembled

in one space and managed as a unit. The access to credit via installment plans and the store credit card would further fuel this expansion.

Crane explains that in the last three decades fashion has become increasingly varied—paralleling the “fragmentation of contemporary societies.” Up until the 1960s Simmel’s trickle-down theory might have been more easily applied. Fashion was highly centralized. Crane explains that those of the upper classes knew what *the* fashion was—the “rules” about what to wear, when, how, and by whom--and through their example this information was disseminated to others. Today we find the bottom-up model operating as well. Large clothing manufacturers study the market they wish to reach and create styles that reflect *the market’s* preferences (2000: 166). Crane quotes a fashion forecaster in relation to the general public:

A very small percentage of all clothing that is made is fashionable, and then there’s graduating levels from bridge to better to contemporary to moderate. A lot of the ideas are being appropriated into those areas, but the more they become interpreted, the more they become watered down. And that’s intentional, because the people who make the clothing know that even ‘newness’ is going to sell the goods, if its too fashionable, people won’t buy it, because it’s going to be too foreign for them (2000: 165).

Ready-to-wear fashion in the 1980s went in a new direction as compared to the 1970s—conspicuous consumption. Clothing tended to be overdone and elaborate. However, another important influence appeared on the fashion scene—the new emphasis on physical fitness. In the 1980s, the decade of the “fitness craze”, youthfulness and health became ideals for the American woman.

Exercise and dance attire found their way into fashion in unitards, skin tight leggings and other body-conscious styles (Rubinstein, 1995: 101). Where Dior “squeezed and padded” women into shape, this active sportswear required one to “mould” the body into a desirable shape (Steele, 2000: 19-20). Giorgio Armani’s suits were popular among professional women. They conveyed a “powerful” image as they had in menswear, although they were understated, not overly structured and severe in their tailoring (White and Griffiths, 2000: 16).

Couture fashion remained one of the many options, in this case for the decidedly few. Even though it had to compete with up and coming ready-to-wear designers, and continues to face challenges, Martin and Koda do not forecast haute couture’s demise. Many have done this at other points in time only to be proven wrong, they say. However, they speak of couture as “a torch in dim times” and a representation of “our culture at its best” signifying that today’s focus goes in a different (and inferior) direction. “But the couture’s offering of distinction in design and technique remains a compelling force, one even more potent when much other quality has atrophied” (1995: 13). Couture sales at Chanel increased 50% in 2003. Designer Emanuel Ungaro states: “Couture will always have allure and therefore interest will not diminish. Our client list is growing constantly” (Socha, 1/20/04: 32). Couture is custom design, considered aesthetically to be of a higher level. It serves the function of degrading all else in comparison. In the end, the appeal of haute couture is that it is only accessible to the privileged few. This exclusivity has been embraced by ready-to-wear designers who, perhaps one could say, along with the courturiers have found a way to bottle this allure. While

many designers aspire to sell to a larger audience, they often present their clothing as select and intended only for a special clientele. One technique, used at the retail level, is to put only a few garments on the selling floor and to keep the rest in a stockroom. Keeping up an exclusive line which is prominently promoted while selling more moderately priced clothing is another way of achieving exclusivity on a larger scale.

Designers Calvin Klein and Ralph Lauren became more influential in the 1980s contributing to a new American style in sportswear. While Calvin Klein followed a modern minimalist aesthetic, presenting simple, pared-down clothing, Ralph Lauren favored a preppy-look based on styles worn by the “English aristocracy” but with “more flair” so as to appeal to a modern mainstream consumer (Trachtenberg, 1988: 28-29). The two had in common an ability to market more generic product lines to a mass audience—Calvin Klein: jeans and underwear, and Ralph Lauren: polo shirts and jeans, while at the same time maintaining higher priced more fashionable lines.

The early 1980s began the designer jeans craze, Klein leading the way. Jordache jeans also reached out to a mass audience seeking recognition via the white stitched horsehead logo on the back pocket.

In 1989 more than 16,000 new shopping developments were built. Many local and regional stores were put out of business and the department store chains consolidated giving them new strength (Halkias, 5/29/01). The larger fashion companies benefitted and it became increasingly harder for newcomers to enter the playing field.

Retailing strategies would also see changes in the 1980s. Throughout most of the 1980s retailers typically placed their orders from two to eighteen months in advance of the season (Pashigian, 1995: 236-237). Abernathy et al. look at the impact of technological innovation, namely adoption in 1987 by retailers of the bar code tracking system (originally applied to grocery products), on the retail-apparel-textile supply channel (1995: 201). Their thesis is that information processing technology that allows for the tracking of complex market-demand patterns has brought about the emergence of “lean-retailing” strategies. In conjunction with barcode tracking at the retail level, suppliers/manufacturers must subscribe to this standardized practice, labeling goods with bar codes and receiving and analyzing and coordinating large volumes of data sent by their retail partners (1995: 202). This integration allows for short lead times between placing orders and receiving goods, and for flexibility—the ability to rapidly make changes and introduce new products (1995: 186). Minimal quantities can be ordered at the beginning of the season, and new orders can be placed on an as-needed basis (Pashigian, 1995: 237).

Maria Halkias describes the 1990s as the “most prolific period of consumer spending”. It was a time in which department stores lost a significant amount of their market share. Discount stores such as Wal-Mart and Target began to account for more of the total department store spending. In 1990 department stores such as Macy’s and Dillard’s represented 30% of total spending. The discount stores held about 49% of total spending.

Zukin discusses the major discounters: Wal-Mart, Target, Kmart and

Home Depot as “universal” spaces where class differences are suspended and there is a “unity” in shopping at bargain prices. She compares this to the traditional stratified department store where bargain merchandise, and poorer shoppers, were confined to the basement, and more expensive goods and wealthier shoppers occupied the top floors (2004: 69).

Beginning in the 1990s city shopping neighborhoods that had lost many merchants experienced a commercial resurgence with an influx of immigrants who opened stores of various kinds (Zukin, 2004: 24-25).

Clothing in the mid-nineties became more casual. From 1996 to the end of the nineties a bohemian look “became the overriding trend within womenswear at all market levels”. It was based on “mixing and layering” and “combining garments such as shrunken cardigans and dresses worn over trousers, clashing colours such as cerise and orange and multitudinous forms of decoration including velvet trims, embroidered motifs, mirror appliqués and minuscule floral or paisley prints” (Laver, 2002: 289). Casualization was enhanced by “Casual Fridays” at work, a trend that carried over into other days as well. The power suit would have been too stiff and formal, and was often replaced with a softer jacket or a sweater set. This is connected to a new emphasis on femininity, womanhood and indeed motherhood which had been suppressed as women sought entry and acceptance in areas that had been the preserve of males.

In the last few years of the 1990s up to present we can see a dramatic shift in maternity clothing, what Rubinstein calls the “pregnant look”. For much of history pregnancy was hidden. Traditional clothing such as the sari or caftan

accommodated pregnancy, and was no doubt intended to be responsive to such an eventuality. Rubinstein notes that after World War II clothing emphasized women's procreative role by calling attention to the abdomen and emphasizing the hips and breasts (Rubinstein, 1995: 93). Maternity wear itself was discreet, the pregnancy de-emphasized or hidden with specially tailored clothing. Women during pregnancy were largely outside of fashion. Recently we've seen an emphasis in women's clothing on the hips and abdomen—low rise pants, halter tops and even rings and jewels for the navel. Maternity clothing for the first time emphasizes the pregnancy with fashion that calls attention to or even reveals the abdomen. In the June issue of *W* magazine, for instance, Gwyneth Paltrow in the last weeks of her pregnancy is pictured on the cover wearing a rolled up T-shirt and a skirt worn below her belly to reveal the pregnancy entirely. In the picture accompanying the article Paltrow is shown wearing low-rise tight jeans and pulling her shirt up just below her breast.

The most powerful brands leading into the new millenium in the better women's category are Liz Claiborne, Jones New York, Lauren by Ralph Lauren, and Tommy Hilfiger. They command more than a 70% share of the better women's market. The moderate sector, more than half of which are made up by department store private labels is highly fragmented. Analysts have attributed a low momentum in 1999 in this category to "a lack of name brands as well as style and novelty" (*Women's Wear Daily*, 12/8/03: 19).

Women's Wear Daily reports in Spring 2004 that retail sales have been very strong thanks to the interest that the new colorful feminine styles have

generated. "Consumer demand is being fueled by fashions that are some of the most ladylike and colorful in years, retailers said. Pinks, in particular, but also yellows, greens and oranges, are popular across the country, and short tweed jackets, flirty shirts and pretty cocktail dresses are being scooped up by consumers from Boston to L.A.", says *Women's Wear Daily*. The senior vice president of merchandising at Lord and Taylor concurs: "'Grosgrain trim or frayed edges have been strong, and all skirts, especially flirty skirts with tiers, ruffles and pleats,' are doing well, she said, as have sweaters with bows. Pink is the strongest color, in all shades from pale to fuchsia, and green is second" (*Women's Wear Daily*, 3/22/04: 1). Stores report increased interest in designer fashions. Designer sales at Bloomingdale's are strong with Chanel's sales doubling, for instance.

A strategy of major department store brands has been to acquire other brands and to create stronger brand loyalty for its own line (Tsao, 2004). In the 1990s major fashion companies bought smaller companies or joined forces becoming "megabrands". Many went public. During this decade many non-founding designers became "stars". Tom Ford who designed both for Gucci and Yves Saint Laurent until February 2004 is the most visible of these designers. Karl Lagerfeld, with Chanel for 21 years in 2004 has the longest tenure of such designers. Lagerfeld was brought into the privately owned Chanel by Alain and Gérard Wertheimer its owners, to "resurrect the label". Lagerfeld is given complete freedom at Chanel. John Galliano at Dior and Marc Jacobs at Louis Vuitton are designers who became well-known and respected in their own right

(Thomas, 2002: 64).

Tom Ford is credited with transforming Gucci into “one of the world’s hottest fashion labels.” As White and Griffiths point out, fashion has become global, a trend which started in the 1980s.

At the beginning of the new millennium discount stores continued to make gains, accounting for about 70% of total department store spending, with conventional stores taking only a 17% share (Halkias, 2001). As a result, department stores were also losing their market share to specialty retailers such as Abercrombie and Fitch. Department store brands such as Polo Ralph Lauren and Tommy Hilfiger suffered with declines in sales (Tsao, 2004). Federated Department Stores with Macy’s and Bloomingdale’s as its flagship chains has been working to “reinvent the shopping experience” to get shoppers back in. Fitting rooms have been reconfigured and amenities such as cable TV for the shopper’s children and husband have been added. Signage has been changed so that it will be easier to find items a shopper is looking for, and pricing has become more competitive. These changes will be instituted at most of Federated’s stores.

Starting in Spring 2003 sales for department stores improved (Business Week, 11/3/03). In 2004 sales are up for both Polo Ralph Lauren and Tommy Hilfiger. RL shares rose 55% to a price of around \$30 and TOM 30% to a price of about \$15. Analysts point to the women’s market as experiencing the greatest increases, in particular Jones Apparel Group (JNY) and Liz Claiborne (LIZ). LIZ trades at about \$37 and JNY at about \$36. Both are “well diversified” in terms of their brand holding. Liz Claiborne has acquired “hip, high-end brands like Enyce,

Juicy Couture, and Lucky”. Eric Jemetz, senior quality analyst at New Amsterdam Partners says: “When one of their brands is in, other may not be, but overall the portfolio does O.K.” (Tsao, 2004). Recently Liz Claiborne, described by *Women’s Wear Daily* as “striving to be a little big company” has taken on a “boutique business”, Swe, a better-to-bridge-priced knit line. A Claiborne spokesperson describes the product as reaching a niche audience and sees it as an “incubator of ideas”, the design team working separately from Liz Claiborne’s (Clark, 2004: 12).

With more discount stores selling moderately priced fashion, many department stores such as the Federated Group (e.g. Bloomingdale’s) and May Department Store Company (e.g. Lord & Taylor) “have left the moderate category entirely in a bid to attract a more affluent consumer” with “better” priced designer fashion. Federated reports strong sales in its private label INC, enabling them to “walk away” from the moderate labels (*Women’s Wear Daily*, 4/21/04: 10).

Bennett Harrison argues that large, powerful companies with a global reach are favored, and will continue to be a dominant force in American capitalism (1994: 335). In womenswear particularly we can no doubt expect to find powerful larger (multi-brand) but more flexible firms in response both to a global economy and to changing consumer demands. A few top designers will reach a world audience and regional distinctions in fashion will diminish. This does not mean that all women will be wearing the same clothing. Given their strength and international scope such companies are in a position to serve both

mass and niche audiences at a variety of price points. The manufacturing process should increasingly be subcontracted to more specialized producers spread across different areas of the globe, divided according to labor cost and abilities. These operations will be controlled by the firm.

Men's Ready-to-Wear Fashion

Men's fashion as we have begun to see, has its own history, one which is quite different from the developments discussed earlier. Many books on fashion leave out men's fashion altogether, seeing fashion as synonymous with women's wear. Often, when fashion is mentioned, women's fashion is implied. Tim Edwards states, "changes and developments in men's costume and dress are traditionally and historically slower and fewer than those related to women" (1997: 15). However, he points out that they are historically, socially and psychologically of no less importance. Masculinity has been variously defined and we see this reflected in flamboyant aristocratic costumes in seventeenth century France, and the somber Puritan influenced suit intended for commerce (1997: 16). There is perhaps some truth to men's clothing being less linked to fashion and more bound by tradition, moreso in the realm of clothing than fashion. However when we see (recently on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art), the banyan, an 18th century garment worn by men in the home, in rose colored luminescent faille material with multicolored silk floral brocade, we most certainly see fashion.¹⁴ If we look toward Hollywood, today or at its dawn, at

¹⁴ Dangerous Liaisons: Fashion and Furniture in the 18th Century. April 29-August 8, 2004. Banyan. Second half of the 18th century. Purchase, Estate of Irene Lewisohn and Alice Crowley.

performers, in the streets at men in oversized jeans or golf wear or amongst powerful men in politics and industry, we find fashion.

Throughout history clothes have marked a distinction between the sexes (1989: 8). Barbara A. Schreier points out that the early 19th century dandy and its antithesis, the 1950s beatnik, are both representations of a masculine ideal connected to a particular cultural period (1989: 2). Although women have at times adopted what has come to be known as masculine clothing features and styles—strong square shoulders, narrower hips, t-shirts and trousers—men have never done so in respect to their own attire (1989: 9). Of course, definitions of masculinity change so that the 18th century Frenchman lounging in a pink robe with floral designs and a black bow in his long hair would not be thought of today as wearing masculine attire.

Due to the different requirements posed by men's and women's clothing, two separate sectors have emerged: one that caters to womenswear and one that caters to menswear.

This basic dichotomy permeates the very organization of the manufacturing processes; it affects the strategies of individual companies and corporations; it marks the language and imagery of advertising; it is intrinsic to many professional definitions, both new and old. And it constitutes a foundation of the way in which the final products are presented in the marketplace (Balestri and Richetti, 2000: 52).

Differences are considered so great that menswear and womenswear are not only sold separately and shown separately—in Italy for instance, menswear is presented in Florence and women's wear is presented in Milan—but they are

manufactured separately. The wools, fabrics, prints and the manufacturing techniques are different just as are the appearances of the final products (2000: 55). Fashion designers today must elect to study different curriculums depending on whether they choose to design men's or women's fashion.

The main divisions in menswear are formal attire or tailored clothing, which is the foundation of the men's ready-to-wear garment industry, and sportswear. The manufacturing process for menswear is long and complex say Andrea Balestri and Marco Ricchetti. Men's sizing system is far more complex than women's, including "height, configuration, and drop". The sewing process follows to some extent the custom-sewn model slowing the manufacturing process considerably. This translates into a sharply higher sales volume in women's clothes (2000: 56-57). The labor intensity of the work tends to make manufacturing more concentrated and less amenable to flexible production schemes (2000: 58). A growing demand for less tailored clothes, the acceptability of sportswear and a casualization of the workplace in the mid-nineties made inroads in bringing the men's and women's wear market closer together (2000: 61).

In the interplanetary travels of Antoine de Saint Exupéry's "Petit Prince", the boy encounters a king whose magnificent royal purple and ermine robe covers the entire small planet he rules (1943/1971: 41). Prior to the eighteenth century, and for the larger portion of the eighteenth century, men's clothing, says Harry A. Cobrin "were not worn merely for utilitarian purposes, but also for the purpose of parading wealth or social status" (1970: 14). From the eighteenth century

onwards tailoring and not brilliance of color and ornamentation became the means of distinction. Highly skilled tailors were required to properly cut and shape the “lavishly embroidered”, “embellished” and “highly ornamental” coats, vests and knee breeches that men wore in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Cobrin notes that “only men with substantial incomes” could possibly afford such clothes (1970: 13-14). Eventually more and more emphasis was placed on workmanship. In formal wear today Edwards speaks of a “minutiae of details” that separate men of higher status and style. Although contemporary men’s clothing tends to be associated with utility versus decoration, when one looks closely this is not entirely the case (1997: 16). Take for example the necktie. President George W. Bush and presidential candidate, John Kerry both buy their ties from Vineyard Vines, a small exclusive tie maker in New England’s Martha’s Vineyard. The two men have very different taste in ties, a proprietor explains, yet there is a certain look to all the ties produced by this establishment. Colors are more vibrant, and patterns if one looks closely, are often whimsical. Kerry for example, had a custom made tie which at first glance looks like many other ties but on closer inspection one can see small donkeys. Not only do these ties convey a hidden symbolic meaning to those who venture to look more deeply but they can convey an overall message of cultural capital—of participating in an upper class lifestyle and/or of being in the know.

England became a trend-setter for male attire. In the early nineteenth century, Crane points out, the style of the English dandy Beau Brummell was followed by the British aristocracy, and shortly thereafter would be copied by

men all over Europe (2000: 28). Men in the United States and other parts of the world, we might add, also adopted this sensibility. A dark colored coat, and trousers, all cut from the same fabric, became the norm (Lehmann, 2000: 25). Crane describes this transition in middle- and upper-class male attire as a switch from “luxury and ostentation” to “deliberate asceticism.” (Crane, 2000: 28). Women have always remained, to some extent, objects of display (mirroring their social roles) while males have undergone what Flugel (1930/1976) terms the “great male renunciation.” Perusing the stock at Abercrombie and Fitch today we might find that while men’s sportswear is generally serious and purposeful, modeled on actual athletic wear, women’s sportswear is often cute, whimsical and “sexy”—hardly suited for real physical activity.

Valerie Steele asks: “Why did men abandon their splendid costumes in favor of a plain dark uniform?” (1989: 16). The long flowing robe had been the upper-class male costume in Classical Greece, Rome, Medieval Europe and in China (1989: 13). And, she notes: “As late as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, men often wore silk stockings, cosmetics, long curled and perfumed hair, virtually everything except perhaps luxurious underwear . . .” (1989: 15). The seventeenth century suit was a “highly ornate outfit” often “decorated amply with ribbon” and worn with a powdered wig. Rich colors such as purple were preferred. In contrast, it should be noted, the working class man wore a coarse worsted suit or cotton outfit “often without decoration” (Edwards, 1997: 18). But it was only the well-to-do who participated in fashion at this point.

Flugel (1930/1976) explains that the shift away from decoration that

occurred at the end of the eighteenth century, and alongside the French Revolution and industrialization, had to do with exchanging beauty for purpose. Ted Polhemus adds another cause to the explanation: the “Age of Imperialism.” European men wished to display their “presumed superiority” in a “‘rational’ and ‘civilized’ appearance”, quite unlike that of the non-European male (2000: 46).

Steele says that costume historians now believe the dark suit began to be favored before the French and American Revolutions, and before high capitalism. In the 18th century, she argues, Englishmen and American men began to reject Frenchmen’s clothing as “effeminate” and “corrupt,” in that it was based on the aristocratic style. The idea that one was a gentlemen by birth was rejected; the new idea was that one could “achieve distinction” by adopting proper behavior and attire (1989: 16).

Brooke and Laver present a different argument in their history of English costume. They seem to attribute the more casual nature of the Englishman’s clothes to his lifestyle. They state: “The English gentleman with his country habits, wore by preference, clothes much less gaudy than those of his French counterpart” (2000: 162). In 1760 they note costume becoming simpler due to the accession of George III whose court did not practice “extravagance in dress.” The English were also influenced by the pseudo-pastoral turn that incorporated country elements into fashion which took place under the influence of Marie Antoinette. This trend, in about 1780, was described as a “wave of simplicity,” and “not the real simplicity of the time of the Revolution” (2000: 154). Ulrich Lehmann also attributes the shift in men’s fashion to the French Revolution

(2000: 309).

Cobrin says that as early as 1640, with the Puritan Revolution in England: “The sober broadcloth suits worn by the Puritans became the insignia of an active and serious minded business man.” He goes on to say quite persuasively: “Obviously, an enterprising executive intent upon his work, could scarcely enter his place of business, be it a retail store, counting house, or professional office, arrayed with a plume in his hat, wearing a jacket made of a fragile silk, sleeves edged with lace cuffs, and an ornamental sword at his side” (1970: 15). Quite unlike the development of women’s clothes we can see that men’s clothing is connected to the work place, and to his role as provider.

Around the time of the French Revolution, embroidery on men’s coats that could take months or even years of work, had been abandoned. Embroidery was now limited to the edges, the pockets and the buttonholes of the garment (Crane, 2000: 154). Brooke and Laver contend that masculine attire in the beginning of the 1790s “marked the victory of English modes over French ones, and the beginning of a domination which they have maintained ever since.” The double-breasted riding coat was adapted with its two rows of buttons, and tailors began to cut the front of the jacket, leaving the back longer (2000: 160). By the 1800s men’s coats resembled what today would be considered formal wear. The cravat which had been made of lace and was twisted around the neck and knotted up front, resembling what was to become the tie, had “shrunk to the proportions of the modern bow tie” (2000: 174). By 1820 trousers became universal (2000: 190). In 1840 “men’s clothes had not yet abandoned all color in deference to the

growing fashion for black” (2000: 206). Between 1860 and 1865 male attire became more “sombre,” however trousers continued to be worn in a variety of patterns (2000: 224). The year 1870 is described as a year in which a new informality appeared in men’s dress. The sack coat was widely worn although trousers were still made of decorative material (2000: 230). It was in 1880 that men’s dress, according to Brook and Laver assumed it’s “modern hue and cut” (2000: 238). Cobrin quotes a monthly magazine in 1860, the *Mirror of Fashion*, as saying “that it is now regarded as being in good taste to wear a vest and pantaloons of the same material (1970: 28). At the turn of the nineteenth century the short, wide shouldered sack coat was worn but the “frock coat maintained its special niche as a symbol of affluence and social status. Photographs of the day showed that men of prominence, and most public officials, wore, as a rule, the regular frock coat with striped trousers plus a fancy silk vest, or a white vest, or at least a vest edged with white piping.” The sack coat was more practical for business wear and soon even the affluent man abandoned it for the more practical suit consisting of matching coat, vest and pants. Seventy percent of these suits were made in blue serge (1970: 158-159). The clothing of individual men became more alike in its overall appearance than different, even across class lines. For women, being different, or a dissimilarity in attire within a general fashion, remained a defining factor of women’s apparel.

Men’s fashion in clothing has a unique history in the United States. After the Revolution many of the wealthy merchants returned to Britain or left for Canada or other British colonies. As the Revolution was not only political but

also social, argues Cobrin, fashions in men's apparel were profoundly affected. Those men who "formerly had followed European fashions" were compelled to adopt a simple look: "Foreign costume ornaments on clothes were now omitted, and articles of domestic manufacture were favored. Cloth woven in the United States was preferred, and imported fabrics were out of favor" (1970: 16).

In the United States, Green explains that the Civil War "gave the real push" to ready-to-wear men's clothing. There was a tremendous demand for uniforms and industry showed itself that it could rise to the occasion. The settlement and expansion of the West further supported this type of clothing (1997: 45). An influx of single men without family to provide for them needed to purchase clothing. There was also a growing need for clothing of a better quality. Clothing that would provide a fashionable aspect to men's attire in the U.S. Cobrin says that with the development of cities and the "growing importance of the business class, numerically and socially" it was the business and professional classes that became "social arbiters of proper dress" (Cobrin, 1970: 16-17).

During the last decades of the eighteenth century as industry grew, there was a need to clothe the men who held the "newly created occupations". Tailors who catered to wealthy men "could not readily produce garments styled for this large urban population" (1970: 17). At the end of the eighteenth century custom tailors in the eastern seaboard cities began to alter their practices and make ready-made clothing, as well as taking custom orders. Garments were cut in the store and then contracted out to tailors who now sewed at home (1970: 19). Those who dealt in ready-made clothes became known as "clothiers" while the term

“tailor” was reserved for those who sewed clothes for men (1970: 18-19).

Clothing stores, formerly “slop shops” that provided city clothing to sailors now produced higher quality and higher priced clothing for the “white collar class”.

These stores could be found in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Baltimore in the beginning of the nineteenth century (1970: 19-20).

The slop shop retailers, used to aggressive selling methods, “forged ahead quickly as the leading retail clothing merchants in their respective localities” (1970: 20). Cobrin describes the majority of ready-made clothing retailers as “small, poorly lit, shacklike” stores, “dismal and unsightly”. In 1825 Thomas Whitmarsh in Boston, however, boasted of a stock of “5,000 to 10,000 fashionable ready made garments” (1970: 20). Selling methods and display were to rapidly improve. Slop shop owner John Simmons became the most prominent clothing retailer of his time. His nephew George W. Simmons continued to run the business, and modernized the store to include the window display of suits. The store, called Oak Hall, became the “mark of a ‘high class’ store” and was followed by others such as John Wanamaker who opened a store in Philadelphia in 1861, and also called it Oak Hall, and Colonel Joseph Bennet who established Tower Hall in Philadelphia in 1854. Simmons used newspaper advertising and other innovative means such as balloons, to announce sales (Cobrin, 1970: 22-23).

As discussed earlier, menswear was much more amenable to standardization than women’s, and this influenced its rapid development. Green mentions another factor favoring mass production—and therefore uniformity—in

men's wear: it is less seasonally influenced than women's clothing (1997: 140).

Men's involvement in industry and worldly pursuits and his identification with the rational, bureaucratic principles this commitment represented, made it acceptable for him to wear the suit. The acceptance of this as an appropriate masculine identity trickled down to all classes of men, becoming an ideal.

However, Tim Edwards points out, demonstrating that men's renunciation of decoration was not complete: "Whatever apparent uniformity existed in the development of the modern suit was soon undermined and essentially confined to City commerce, though even this was livened up with the use of pinstripes."

During non-working hours there were double breasted suits, navel jackets, sports jackets, velvet smoking jackets often in deep crimson or emerald green, tweed walking suits, Norfolk hunting jackets and seaside stripes, says Edwards (1997: 19).

Brooks Brother's, founded in 1818, is the oldest retailer in the United States. Once a manufacturer of clothing for seamen in New Bedford, Massachusetts, it has been described as setting the fashion agenda on Wall Street for decades with button down dress shirts and boxy suits (Agin and Galloni, 2003: B1). Jeannette Jarnow and Miriam Guerreiro explain that men have been conditioned to gravitate to established brands that are consistent in "quality, fit, and durability rather than style alone". Some of the brand names established at the beginning of the 20th century, or earlier, are still prominent today (Brooks Brothers, Hickey Freeman, Arrow, Hartmarx) (1991: 221). Brooks Brothers was called H. & D. H. Brooks until 1855. Like many other "prestige stores" Brooks

Brothers relocated several times from lower downtown to midtown. In 1915 they moved to their present location on Madison Avenue and Forty Fourth Street (Cobrin, 1970: 24). Brooks Brothers also has a store on Fifth Avenue which caters to a more youthful clientele, and to women, and has also opened a large store on Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills, California (the former Tommy Hilfiger space). By 1840, says Cobrin, “the first steps in establishing the clothing industry as we know it today, already had been taken.” Ready-made garments were accepted by the consumer. “Stylish clothing was offered in the attractive retail stores that were opening in many cities. . . . New firms were entering the industry, and the channels of distinction were steadily extending to all of the rapidly settled areas of the country” (Cobrin, 1970: 24).

Between 1825-1830 the use of the sewing machine and the domestic availability of worsted and wool fabrics allowed the men’s clothing industry to grow rapidly. By 1835 New York was the nation’s leader in ready-made clothing. It was not until the Civil War though that a standardized system of sizing would be established (Cobrin, 1970: 25-26).

Cobrin explains that tailoring was highly skilled work requiring a long apprenticeship. Cutting and designing were the most complex aspects while sewing vests and pants could be done by less skilled workers, often women and newly arrived unskilled immigrants (1970: 60-61). With a “sub-division of operations,” experienced craftspersons were no longer needed and wages declined (1970: 73). Labor conditions in the factories in the late 1880s seemed to be uniformly poor. An inspection in New York revealed the following:

The workshops occupied by these contracting manufacturers of clothing, or “sweaters” as they are commonly called, are foul in the extreme. Noxious gases emanate from all corners. The buildings are ill smelling from cellar to garret. The water-closets are used alike by males and female, and usually stand in the room where the work is done. The people are huddled together too close for comfort, even if all other conditions were excellent. And when this state of affairs is taken into consideration, with the painfully long hours of toil which the poverty-stricken victims of the contractors must endure, it seems wonderful that there exists a human being that could stand it for a month and live. We are not describing one or two places, for there is hardly an exception in this class of manufactories in all New York (Cobrin, 1970: 67).

Hours worked were no less than 10, and sometimes as much as 18 hours per day (1970: 69). “Tenement shops” were places several families lived and worked in, using their own sewing machines. The work table served as dining table and people slept on the floors on straw beds (1970: 68). In some places “seats” were rented for those who wanted to work and had no place of their own (1970: 68-69). At the end of the 19th century the manufacturer of men’s clothing had moved out of the Garment Center and was dispersed in other areas of New York City, and in Chicago, Rochester and elsewhere, says Dolkart (1998: 39).

At the beginning of the twentieth century the short jacket and straight cut business suit was made to fit the “amply proportioned, wealthy gentlemen.” By 1910 it became more tapered at the waist. In the 1920s ties with geometric patterns or stripes were worn with tie pins. Men wore black bowler hats to complete their outfit (Nolan, Men’s Fashions of the 1920s). Kidwell and Steele

point out that in 1923 *Men's Wear* reports that English tailors were cutting suits broad at the shoulder, defined at the waist and straight at the bottom. By 1926, they note, the ideal masculine form was represented by the upside down triangle (1989: 132).

Knickerbockers or knickers, short pants several inches below the knee, were worn for casual occasions with a Norfolk or golf coat. In 1925 baggy pants became stylish. This style originated amongst Oxford students who wore the pants over their knickers while in school. Oxford and Cambridge students were the first to violate the Edwardian practice of changing clothes several times during the course of the day. Tweed and flannel were popular fabrics. Gray was the most popular color in men's clothes at this time.

Jazz had an influence on some men in the 1920s. Suits were tightly fitted, jackets long and tight waisted with long black vents. Trousers were tight and "skinny" (Nolan, 1920s online). The 1930s jazz scene would produce another type of suit, the "zoot" suit.

After the great Wall Street Crash of October 24, 1929, many men were out of work and wardrobe was not a priority. Carol Nolan states that, "The Edwardian tradition of successive clothing changes" finally ended. Nineteen thirties style was to exert a lasting influence on men's fashion. Styles continued to emanate from England. The Prince of Wales was a major innovator, introducing the double-breasted dinner jacket, the larger knotted necktie accompanied by a wider-set, flatter collar, vests, and the use of plaids (Milbank, 1989: 115). "Broad shoulders" were the norm in men's suits (Kidwell and Steele,

1989: 135). By 1938, explains Kidwell and Steele, “This athletic ideal, personified by movie stars such as Errol Flynn, Clark Gable, and Cary Grant, was accepted by even the conservative individual as the way a man should look—whether he was naturally built that way or not” (1989: 136). The Hollywood film proved to be a great influence on men’s fashion, as it was with women’s. The “gangster” suit with its wider stripes, pronounced shoulders, narrower waists, bolder plaids and wider trouser bottoms was favored by some men. This style became known as the “Broadway” suit. A summer suit, the “Palm Beach” was a single or double breasted suit made of cotton seersucker, silk shantung or linen. It became a popular suit in the summer on Wall Street and elsewhere (Nolan, 1930s online).

The Men’s Dress Reform was founded in 1929, in response to a perceived dullness in male attire. The suit and tie were considered stiff, overly formal, and uncomfortable. Although the men questioned the “normality” of men’s dress they were unable to offer alternatives that enough men found acceptable. Edwards points out that Hollywood glamorized the suit. It was not until the youth culture of the 1960s that suits were seen as “stuffy and conservative” and for older men (1997: 20).

Malossi proposes that “cracks” in the “shell” of masculinity began to appear in the 1940s, shortly after the Second War. The “virile” and “independent” “man’s man” was “virtually unchallenged through the Fifties and Sixties.” He continues: “The decade of the Seventies promised the promise for a redefinition of genders; it was rejected. The return to normalcy in the Eighties

concealed in the shadows the wrinkles and other signs of decline long evident on the 'hard boiled' physiognomy of masculinity" (2000: 27).

Fashion was curtailed in the 1940s due to directives of the U.S. Government War Production Board. Shortages of material necessitated that men's clothing be made with a minimum of fabric. Vests, pocket flaps and pleated and cuffed trousers were not produced. A reaction against this was the zoot suit which began in the 1930s Harlem jazz culture (Nolan, Men's Fashions of the 1940s, online). Its "drape shape" made it look a few times larger than its wearer. The boldly patterned jacket hung low, almost to the knee, and the pants were high waisted and baggy (Rubinstein, 1995:200). This suit was considered "contraband" during the war but some men wore it to make a statement. After the war, full cut, long clothing was favored just as it was in women's. In the late 1940s, some men wore casual shirts with Hawaiian or other colorful prints. First appearing on the California and Florida beaches in 1946 and 1947, men on the streets of New York could be seen for the first time walking in such shirts, without a jacket (Nolan, 1940s online).

Even though a certain relaxation had begun, up until the 1950s, Steele contends, men's clothes remained relatively "staid and sombre," with little room for individuality (Steele, 2000: 10). Not only businessmen but students and avant garde artists wore suits in the 1950s (Crane, 2000: 175). Men's clothes remain more connected to the occupational sphere than are women's (2000: 175). In the 1950s Hollywood films ushered in a casualization in young men's clothing. Before this, young men wore the same clothes as older men. "James Dean and

Marlon Brando popularized jeans and the motor bike jacket and also transformed the T-shirt into a fashionable item of clothing. There was a vogue for sideburns and greased hairstyles” (Laver, 2002: 260).

Tailored Italian clothing became popular from the mid-1950s on. Suits were imported and American tailors advertised “their versions of these short-cut, single-breasted suits with tapered trousers” made in the “Italian style”. These suits were worn with thin ties and pointed shoes (Laver, 2002: 260).

London youth culture’s style for men in the early 1960s was “colorful, modish, and body conscious” (Steele, 2000: 10). Laver explains that American men were much more conservative and could be found wearing a “combination of Ivy-League style tapered trousers and three-button single-breasted jacket”. By the mid-sixties, says Laver, some concessions to the new trends were made (2002: 264). This new, bolder way of dressing was adopted by some American men, on certain occasions, who were particularly interested in fashion.

Michael Gross argues there were two kinds of menswear in the early 1960s in New York: Broadway and Traditional. “Broadway” was the style of “strivers and immigrants, salesmen, pimps, sports stars”. It was shiny suits and sharkskin. “Traditional” fashion was sold on Madison Avenue for those who had long ago arrived. It was “Ivy League, White Anglo-Saxon Protestant preppy” (2003: 83). From this description we get an indication of how men who were fashion conscious were divided along class lines.

The mod look with its “wild colors” and “bold patterns” was an English look that didn’t sell well to American youth, says Trachtenberg. Ralph Lauren,

working as a tie salesman in the 1960s took some aspects of this look, and inspiration from the now wide European ties he saw in the tailor Roland Meledandri's establishment, and made it his own (1988: 37). After meeting a series of people who rejected his revisionary ideas for ties, he was hired by Ned Brower, president of Beau Brummel, a conservative neckwear company. Brower recognized that the industry was changing and that customers would want "fresh, more exuberant clothes" (1988: 44). Using expensive fabrics not before used for this purpose, Lauren designed his 4 ½ inch ties, full bodied from the neck rather than flaring out gradually (1988: 46, 53). Robert L. Green, the fashion editor at *Playboy* magazine featured Lauren's ties and by 1968 "business exploded" for Lauren and for major stores like Bloomingdale's that sold the \$15 ties (Trachtenberg, 1988: 54). That year "Ralph Lauren, tie maker, became Ralph Lauren, men's wear designer" incorporating Polo Fashions in New York (1988: 59).

This was during a time when the necktie and indeed the suit became associated with conservatism. Elvis Presley, for example, replaced the tie with laces. Outside of the workplace and areas that required a suit and tie many men abandoned this outfit. It would never disappear entirely, and for many men it continued to be required and/or preferred attire.

In the later part of the 1960s more men, especially young men, were wearing brightly colored clothing. Bell-bottomed pants became fashionable in materials from denim to velvet. Some men began wearing jewelry, some bold other styles simple.

The suit was “reformulated” in the 1970s. Edwards describes the variations: “flared, tight fitting” and “wide-lapelled” often in polyester or velvet (1997: 21). In Italy, Giorgio Armani “began to soften men’s clothes”. Instead of “stiffly tailored suits” he designed “‘deconstructed’ jackets” in cashmere and silk-and-wool blends. In addition to the “traditional” masculine colors he introduced “softer warmer shades like camel” (Steele, 2000: 16-17). Armani has been credited “over the last three decades” for “taking men away from big stiff shoulders . . .” says Rozhon (2/24/04).

The look of Ralph Lauren’s Spring 1970 collection was reminiscent of the 1930s and “The Great Gatsby”. The political statement he made was a “faith in society and respect for tradition”, says Trachtenberg (1988: 62). His 1971 line is described as “simplified soft suits, ties printed with partridges and polo players, nautical cottons, plaid wool, gingham and tapestry print shirts, and lots of red, white and blue . . .”. In the early 1970s Lauren began using his polo player logo on Oxford cloth shirts (modeled on a Brooks Brothers’ design), Shetland sweaters (modeled on British originals) and on the “new Polo shirt” (Gross, 2003: 125). Oleg Cassini, Pierre Cardin, and Bill Blass were the main designers of this period.

The late 1970s began what was known as the “disco era”. Bell-bottoms could be seen in brightly colored polyester fabrics, as were tightly fitted shirts with wide collars, often worn with platform shoes. Ironically, some women wore more traditionally masculine tailored clothing at this time. Of course this disco inspired clothing was not suitable for business wear and did not replace the more traditional suit, although it did have an impact on its style.

Jarnow and Guerreiro say that with the move of established designers in womenswear to menswear beginning in the late 1970s, such as Calvin Klein, Pierre Cardin, Yves Saint Laurent, Perry Ellis, Christian Dior and others, the menswear consumer began to become more fashion conscious. Before this time many men made purchases only when they needed to replace a worn out item (1991: 224). In the late 1970s and early 1980s Calvin Klein introduced designer jeans at more moderate prices making them accessible to a wider audience of both men and women.

Sports have been one of the most important influences on contemporary men's fashion. Masculinity in the sense that it is associated with strength, virility, and competitiveness is synonymous with the athlete (Schreier, 1989: 92). Clothing that reflects participation in sporting activities made a smoother transition to menswear than it did to womenswear. The new casualness of the 1960s and 1970s no doubt set the stage for sportswear to be acceptable attire for men to wear.

Laver speaks of a move back toward a "traditional look" in the late seventies and early 1980s, amongst men who followed fashion. "Ralph Lauren, Calvin Klein, Perry Ellis and later Calvin Klein created fashions which often embodied the style of 1920s British aristocrats and American pioneers, a highly successful formula which they have retained to the present day." During the 1980s even more designers who had previously designed only for women, such as Thierry Mugler, Jean-Paul Gaultier and Karl Lagerfeld, introduced menswear lines (Laver, 2002: 276, Jarnow and Guerreiro, 1991: 224).

While feminism threatened to “seriously undermine if not end the reign of the suit”, says Edwards, it “returned in the 1980s with a vengeance”. Rubinstein would argue that there was little danger of that happening. The 1980s, the years of the Reagan presidency, were a “glorification of capitalism, free markets, and finance” and a “celebration of wealth” (1995: 229). The Reagans knew well from their Hollywood days how to manage their appearances. The public image they conveyed would set an example for the American people. Ronald Reagan wore formal morning attire to his inauguration, an “Italian style jacket of black barathea cloth.” This can be contrasted with the vastly more democratic style of Jimmy Carter at his inauguration in a \$175 suit straight off the rack” (The Eighties Look, online).

In the 1980s many American men began to favor Italian suits which feature a “more body-hugging silhouette”. Jackets were more fitted to the body, and pants snugger and narrower. Agins and Galloni, in an article about Brooks Brothers, state: “Once exposed to the continental élan of Giorgio Armani, Ermenegildo Zegna and other Italian labels, American CEOs defected in droves” (2003: B1, B3). Michael Douglas in the 1987 film “Wall Street” personifies the powerful executive male always meticulously dressed in high-priced business attire.

Sean Nixon argues that in the mid-1980s in the U.K. a shift occurred in the “masculine script”. A new sexualized representation of the male body or as he calls it, a “regime of representation”, came to the fore (1996: 3, 12). The new man is assertive, and powerful, as demonstrated by his physique and gestures, and

“narcissistically absorbed” (1996: 119, 121).¹⁵ For example one commercial features a young man who removes his white T-shirt (“to reveal a firm, smooth torso”) and “501” Jeans at the laundrette, and proceeds to wait in his white boxer shorts for them to go through the wash cycle (1996: 2). Perhaps this new sexualization of the male in the U.K. had its origins in the U.S., particularly with Calvin Klein’s underwear ads that began to appear in 1982. Klein took a utilitarian product, often bought for men by their mothers or wives, and turned it into an element of sexual appeal. Mainstream Americans were not used to seeing a man in his underwear, posing provocatively—certainly not on billboards in New York’s Times Square.

Power, sexual appeal and individuality were hallmarks of 1980s style for men. More conservative preppy styles were fashionable too—perhaps related to the direction the republican presidency had established, but so too was the relaxed “Miami Vice” look of a softly tailored dinner jacket over a white or colored T-shirt, worn with jeans, and loafers without socks. For more casual wear, men could be seen in leather “bomber” jackets and jeans. For the first time in the 1980s “creative black tie” became acceptable for formal occasions. The rethinking of formal wear, or rebellion against its conservatism, can be attributed to celebrities who wore different versions of the tuxedo on the “Red Carpet” for the Academy Awards or Oscars. A variety of new styles were introduced such as “fanciful waistcoats and frock coats in fabrics like silk and velvet” (oscar.com). With more designers on the scene, and more interpretations available, men had

¹⁵ What has come to be known as a “metrosexual”.

far more choices than they had in the past.

Designer fashions continued to be strong in the 1990s. It was also a decade of casualization, with the more relaxed atmosphere of the workplace leading the way. Gellers says that “suits went into early retirement and sportswear went to the office” (11/15/04: 24). Urban inspired looks such as Tommy Hilfiger’s became popular, particularly with a young male clientele. For many men a sweatshirt and jeans became a daily uniform, worn whenever and wherever it could be gotten away with. Many fashion commentators and designers have said that the casual look went too far, becoming downright sloppy, and indeed by the new millenium a more dressier men’s sportswear became the style. Suzy Menkes reviewing the 1999 Prada and Gucci men’s shows, comments on Prada: “strictly practical: flap pockets, omnipresent zippers, tab fastenings and a military palette of khaki, fawn, gold, ginger and brown. These clothes are not just sporty but ergonomic, with a sense that form and function are inseparable.” It can be “ultra-cool to be low key” in Prada. Gucci emphasizes “sensuality” over “practicality”. Each line is “quintessentially 1990s”, she says, in that each piece has a distinctive character (1999: 1). The emphasis is on casual stylishness--a man can pull one piece out of the collection and wear it with something he might already have.

The men’s market is described in an article in the *Daily News Record*¹⁶ as being depressed for the last few years. As of Spring 2002 though, it has “rebounded”. The return of the suit, updated product offerings, new brands, and a

¹⁶ The Daily News Record is the menswear industry publication.

revival in the luxury product sector contributed to this increased interest by men in fashion, evidenced by strong retail sales (9/15/03: 81). There has been a return to dressing up in the workplace, and in general more men are dressing up, whether they'd prefer to or not (9/15/03: 90). The vice chairman of Saks Inc. reports that suits are coming back (9/15/03: 82); the executive vice president and general merchandising manager of men's at Bloomingdale's cites "double digit increases in suits and sport coats"; the senior vice president and general merchandising manager of men's at Federated Merchandising Group says career categories have reached an historic "strong point"; and the Men's Wearhouse which has a 16% market share in menswear, speaks of the increased popularity of suits since 2002. Suits and sport coats are reported to be "winning a newfound favor with younger customers". "Men who never wore suits" see the suit as a new, modern way of dressing (9/15/03: 90).

Stan Gellers of the *Daily News Record* proclaims that in the twenty first century men are back in suits again. There is "something new on the horizon" however. Gellers calls it a "softcoat", a new type of blazer, close to the sports coat but less constricted and often in a "gutsy fabric like cotton moleskin, microsuede, corduroy or even wool." Made by sportswear companies these soft jackets are "boxy enough to be layered over a couple of shirts and a sweater—and worn with jeans" (3/15/04: 10). There are even suit separates in rugged unlined cotton or denim (8/2/04: 17).

Beginning in Fall 2002 wovens (shirts that can be worn with a suit or alone) were "setting the pace in men's sportswear". Woven shirts in colorful

stripes and vibrant colors were the big sellers. Christopher Heyn, president of Nautica's sportswear division says "guys are dressing up more, and wovens dress up an outfit more than a knit" (2003: 90). Given a better retail climate retailers are willing to take some risks in "silhouette, color and key items" says the CEO of J.C. Penney. Brands that "didn't pay attention to newness", namely Nautica, DKNY and Kenneth Cole, "fell apart" says Bloomingdale's executive vice president and general merchandising manager of men's . Calvin Klein, Ralph Lauren, and Tommy Hilfiger are described as "doing some exciting things" that have "energized and spurred us on", says Heyn of Nautica (2003: 90). Customers are looking for newness, contends the executive vice president and general merchandising manager of Stage Stores in Houston (2003: 84). *The Daily News Record's* September 2003 "Hot Stuff" list based on market research on the attitudes and behaviors of young consumers, ranks the Tommy Hilfiger striped button-front shirt as #4 stating: "For the past several years blue, button-front shirts from places like Gap or Banana Republic were de rigueur for young men who worked in an office. Now, vertical and diagonally striped shirts from Tommy are threatening to replace the ubiquitous blue shirt" (*Daily News Record*, 9/15/03).

Some industry insiders have noted a desire on the consumer's part to return to older, classic styles. And, they seem to be willing to pay higher prices for "old-fashioned quality". The Chief Executive of J. Crew, Millard S. Dexter, states: "Clothes have gotten too young looking, too sloppy, too weird. There's been an over reliance on cheap clothes, and now we've reached the tipping

point". Richard E. Jaffe, a retail analyst, says "In the 60s and 70s, nobody wanted to be caught dead looking like the 50s". Jan Rinzler Buckingham, the president of marketing research at Youth Intelligence attributes this to a "tremendous appetite for authenticity" amongst young people (Rozhon and LaFerla, 2003: C2). In response to this, and to a downturn in sales for most retailers, companies such as Brooks Brothers, Eddie Bauer, American Eagle Outfitters, J. Crew, Paul Stuart and Ferragamo are reintroducing "exact replicas" of past styles (Rozhon and La Ferla, 2003: C1-C2). This is perhaps nothing new. The 1982 Levi-Strauss "back to basics" strategy in which it resurrected its classic "501" jean was based on marketing research which "uncovered a fascination, almost a reverence, for a mythical America of the past (Nixon, 1996: 117). The successful campaign was a "glamorization of 1950s style" and an assertive masculinity (1996: 119).

Retailers report revived interest in the luxury category in 2003. Senior vice president and general merchandising manager of men's at Saks Fifth Avenue says that his customer doesn't "need another tie or suit, so it's all about filling want" (Daily News Record, 2003: 82). Bloomingdale's executive vice president and general merchandising manager of men's says there is a return to "trading up". "Canali, Armani, Abboud and Boss." They've added more fashion and luxury goods in Polo Ralph Lauren and Joseph Abboud, he states. Federated reports "trading up" from basics for its customer. This is in response to improved sales in the luxury and the low end categories (Daily News Record, 2003: 84).

The *Daily News Record* reports that in 2003 the men's industry has gained momentum with the return of the suit, and updated product offerings, new

brands, and “color, color and more color” on the selling floors (Daily News Record, 2003: 81). European companies such as Etro, Paul Smith and Moschino began presenting colorful striped shirts in bright colors (Gellers, 3/29/04: 16). Tommy Hilfiger was among the American designers who led the way with boldly and colorfully striped and pattern woven shirts. Rozhon reports that these types of shirts can be found anywhere from Bergdorf’s to Wal-Mart. The fashion director at Bergdorf Goodman comments: “Men are feeling more adventurous, and we’re seeing a trend toward patterned shirts”. He adds that sales have “more than quadrupled”. Some retailers have attributed the popularity of these styles to Tommy Hilfiger and a series of print and bus stop ads featuring the shirts that appeared across the country. “When someone like Tommy comes out with such an advertising campaign, it puts the product front and center” says the vice chairman of the dress shirts division of Phillips-Van Heusen (11/13/03: C1).

Agins says retailers hope they can “break men out of the polo-shirt drill with striped and patterned shirts, the single biggest trend of the season” (Agins, 3/7/03: W9). Writing in March 2004 Gellers says the last two or three seasons in menswear have been about “high visibility color”. This he says was in response to “seeing nothing but black and earth-tone suits, dreary shirts and dull ties for too long”. Gellers says we have Hilfiger to thank for “popularizing shirts in living color” (3/29/04: 16). The *Daily News Record* reports in May 2004 that retailers have posted “robust apparel sales”, attributing this to the more colorful fashions. Stage Stores’ chairman, president and chief executive, James Scarborough, says: “This year the name of the game is color. Our merchants did a great job of

adding bright and appealing colors to our merchandising offerings, which created excitement in our stores for our customers” (Tucker, 5/21/04). Gellers describes men’s sports shirts at a show in summer 2004, indicating that stripes are on their way out and multipatterned shirts are in:

Project’s sport shirts took a different tack than The Collective’s. Sure, there were the expected intense, multicolored stripes, but there were also the shirts containing as many as three different patterns: for the body, another for the cuff (inside or outside) and a third pattern for the neckband inside yoke. Then there were the embellished shirts, both stripes and prints, with placed prints or embroideries. Third, spaghetti Western shirts were everywhere, repeating all of the above (8/2/04: 17).

Gellers describes the new male consumer, a citified lifestyle, city slicker, hip, Mr. X. This man is “always 35”--or younger (11/15/04: 24; 8/2/04: 17). Years of casualization have made him appreciate comfort, but he has a taste for luxury. Fall 2005 “in-town garments combine the best of both worlds, active and dressy. . . . there are cleaned up details, slimmer silhouettes, technical fabrics and liners . . .” (11/15/04: 24). Mr. X is described as a guy who loves to break the rules: “he wrote the book about wearing ultra-dressy, peak-lapel suits with jeans—with his shirttails flapping in the breeze”. For the jeans, “price is no object if the fit and wash are right” (8/2/04: 17).

Many men seem to be tired of the same khaki pants and white polo shirt (or T-shirt). Many of the hip-hop clothing purveyors have been pairing sack-like blazers with untucked dress or sports shirts and baggy pants or have been promoting over the top tailored suits. With the return of more dressy styles in the

workplace it seems stylish sportswear offerings will continue at all price points. New and more colorful fashion appears to be a good way for designers and retailers to get men into the stores and interested in shopping. Tommy Hilfiger has shown himself to be an innovative and adventurous designer in this dressier, more upscale trend, as in other trends in the past. He has been a cultural arbiter and indeed a bold entrepreneur for a whole generation of young as well as not so young men. With this success in menswear he has extended his reach to include women and children, through a variety of products. As we have seen, many of the successful menswear designers have broadened their scope and have become or are becoming lifestyle entrepreneurs on a global scale.

Chapter 4 – Tommy Hilfiger Corporation

Nation and Identity in Men's Fashion: Tommy Hilfiger as Americanism

Richard Helgerson (1992) argues that poetry, literature, the church, theater, law, and even cartography has been used to define the nature and bounds of nations. He advances the argument that modern nation states were constituted not only by warfare and territorial aggrandizement but also by the production of discursive forms—texts—that defined the nation and its physical and conceptual boundaries. Poets, law-makers, explorers, dramatists, and mapmakers participated in the construction of the nation-state. Helgerson uses England as his example. To this list one can add sports and movies as making a contribution to defining a nation, as well as clothing styles and fashions in clothing.

Tommy Hilfiger stands out as a designer who has built on existing themes in American fashion and has actively tried to create an American national identity through his fashion. Marvin Traub, former chairman and chief executive of Bloomingdale's credits Hilfiger as one of the designers responsible for the growth of American sportswear (Rozhon, 12/26/04: 4). Most would agree with Emma Moore of the *London Times* who says: "It would be hard to find a designer more fiercely American in inspiration and outlook" (2001). Tommy Hilfiger has provided us with much textual and visual data to be analyzed. He has published books on fashion in which he discusses his inspirations and ideals, and he has been interviewed many times in the press. His words should not be taken lightly. Many people are "listening" to his message. Ian Griffiths points out the need for

fashion theory to incorporate the voice of the designer and others who play an active role in the fashion industry (2000: 72). A designer himself and former head of the Kingston University School of Fashion, Griffiths argues that leaving out the point of view of those involved in the creation of fashion creates a discourse that departs from the real, forcing fashion into one or another poorly fitting framework (2000: 79).

A company like the Italian fashion firm Prada must deal with the dilemma of maintaining its exclusive status while selling to a large enough market to be profitable. As two *New York Times* fashion writers put it, “Prada is caught in marketing limbo. . . . it’s survival is contingent on reaching a broad market—while also retaining its intrinsic cachet of being the cognoscenti’s chosen brand” (Trebay and Bellafante, 2001: D9). Tommy Hilfiger has no such paradoxes to overcome: from the beginning itself he has aimed at the mass market. He became known for his Ivy League, all American preppy-looking sportswear. The company attained success by creating an aura of exclusivity without ever having served an elite clientele. Recently, though it has made a strategic decision to also pursue a more upscale market. Even so, the firm follows a production process that Paul Smith (1997) terms “mass customization.” In the couture business—a side of couture Lou Taylor says has not been widely discussed—the exclusive nature of the garments, often thought of as high art (2000: 121-122), and the upper class status of those who purchase custom made clothes, are celebrated. This confers, in the minds of the public, an elite status on the designer, enabling his or her name or logo to bring in millions from ready-to-

wear and licensed products, while his or her couture creations deplete the house's revenues (2000: 130). Hilfiger has bypassed this initially costly but image-enhancing couture phase by marketing his mass produced casual clothing "as 'designer' products and even as high fashion", argues Taylor (2000: 133). Taylor explains Hilfiger's method of creating attention by "appropriating" the strategies of the old Parisian couture salons.

Thus Hilfiger and others launch seasonal "collections," as if they were couture shows, winning almost as much press coverage as if they were. Just like the great couturiers, Hilfiger too uses superstars at his collection launches . . . Hilfiger firmly established his U.S. success when rap stars, such as Snoop Doggy Dogg wore his clothes in 1994. Like a couture house, Hilfiger too places advertisements in the elite fashion magazines right alongside those of Dior, Gucci and Chanel (2000: 134-135).

Furthermore, he sells his perfumes "as if they were the golden goodies of a top Paris couture house," and has bought expensive retail stores next to Lacroix and Chanel on London's Sloan Street (2000: 136).

Hilfiger's success rests in part on the rise of the U.S. driven leisure and sportswear markets, and its appeal to a global market (2000: 131). Hilfiger attributes his popularity to reaching the "youth market" and becoming a "lifestyle brand" (2000: 134). Taylor argues that Parisian fashion houses have responded to the urgent threat Hilfiger presents by "rapidly" lowering the age of their target consumer, and "modernizing their image of glamorous elitism." The houses of Givenchy, Dior and Chloe all hired "avant garde young London designers" in the mid-1990s (2000: 138). The couture houses have also stepped up advertising

featuring an elite type of beauty, seduction and fantasy that is beyond the reach of Hilfiger (2000:139). Taylor says it does not seem that Hilfiger will be able to “overwhelm the elitist ‘magic’ of the couture product” (2000: 141). Nevertheless, there is plenty of room for Hilfiger on other rungs of the ladder leading up to couture. And, he has certainly begun climbing.

Hilfiger has, in order to be successful with the young audience it targets, appealed to features of upper class “conservative” American life. Hilfiger’s Spring 2002 menswear collection shown at New York Fashion Week is described in *Newsday*:

Hilfiger, who recalled summers spent in Nantucket, wasn’t kidding when he used “New England preppy” to describe his slew of seaworthy styles. Down his runway made from wooden planks suggesting a boardwalk, he sent out boating shoes . . . Then came navy blazers with silk neckties embroidered with upper-crust heraldic crests, at ease in any tony port of call. . . . coloring polo shirts and V-necks in golf shop brights . . . He didn’t miss the boat with nautical looks, either, whimsically embroidering clothes with sailboats, lighthouses and whales. And just to mix it up, he threw in surfer styles such as drawstring pants perfect for a luau in exuberant Hawaiian prints. But it was his pants printed with outrageous, giant lobsters that somehow suggested Martha’s Vineyard on steroids. Hilfiger also saluted American sportswear, blanketing part of his collection in his signature red, white and blue.

Hilfiger was reported to comment after the show (on September 10th): “America is the melting pot. I like athletic, preppy, Nantucket and mixing it all up” (Parnes, 2001: B10). After the events of September 11th but probably not triggered by it, as his patriotism has been constant, Hilfiger signed an exclusive two-year modeling contract with 17-year old Lauren Bush, granddaughter of George and

Barbara Bush. A spokesperson for the Italian company, Pirelli, which features her as the covergirl for their 2002 calendar—famous in the past for its nude shots—echoes Hilfiger’s point of view: “Lauren epitomizes America and all it stands for” (2001, *The Washington Post*, C03). Hilfiger states: “I think Lauren is really all-American” (Wilson, 1/02: 18). No doubt post-September 11th patriotism enhanced Hilfiger revenues as more and more people wished to declare their allegiance to the flag. Hilfiger published a post-September 11th tribute to New York entitled “Our New York,” the proceeds of which went to the Twin Towers Fund (Finn, 2001: D2). The patriotic turn spread, increasing Hilfiger’s standing in the fashion world. *W* magazine reports that even “tony” Bergdorf Goodman has commissioned and is displaying American-themed products. The Council of Fashion Designers of America launched a campaign “Fashion for America” in which T-shirts sold at major department stores, for instance, will benefit the Twin Towers Fund (Wilson, 12/01: 56).

Tommy Hilfiger’s all-American look, with upper-class references, and the noticeable Hilfiger logo appealed to the status conscious urban Black youth among whom he became popular. Once he gained the attention of this market Hilfiger incorporated elements already present in hip-hop culture—baggy oversized clothing, exaggerated trimmings and an enlarged logo—and marketed this new style both to an urban, mainly Black, and to a mainstream audience. This connection to hip-hop street culture was exciting to a mainstream audience and helped “propel” his success. In addition to using hip-hop stars, Hilfiger has also featured Black sportsmen and entertainment figures (Smith, 1997: 257). A

menswear designer working at the firm during this period states that Hilfiger's connection to hip-hop stemmed from his involvement in hip hop culture and his love of the music. It was not devised by a "couple of guys sitting in the boardroom smoking cigars who figured out this was a good way to make money". However, as Rene Chun reports, the hip-hop crowd has defected for "younger, hipper, often blacker labels." She notes a satire in a film directed by Spike Lee where a "clueless Caucasian designer" was named "Timmi Hilnigger" (Chun, 2001: E6). Hilfiger would appeal in a different way than would for instance FUBU ("For Us By Us"). This label takes an oppositional stance in respect to mainstream white culture while Hilfiger patriotically embraces it. This can most clearly be seen by the ubiquity of the red, white and blue theme, embodied in his logo. Hilfiger provides a kind of bridge for the male Black customer he appeals to with this particular style of clothing—he represents mainstream acceptability, wealth and a sporting lifestyle that the leisure class can enjoy. Hip-hop artists are less inclined to overthrow an unjust class system in which racial oppression is a feature than they are to themselves buy into the consumer culture it represents. Yet they combine elements of Hilfiger's or other's logoed sportswear, and their own forms of expression, in a way that communicates a unique fashion message that acts sometimes against the dominant social structure, and the fashion industry. In the documentary film, *The Revenge of the Logo*, Black youth in Harlem speak of "ghetto Gucci", an over the top approach to displaying logos, for instance trimming Timberland boots with counterfeit Gucci material cut from purses bought in New York's Chinatown.

Crane states that while in Paris a connection to the arts may enhance a designer's prestige, and in London youth culture and popular or oppositional culture, in New York it is lifestyle (2000: 167-168). Crane gives the example of Ralph Lauren who "marketed a very conservative, traditional rendition of upper-class American and British life to a huge public" (Brubach, 1987 in Crane 2000: 148). Ralph Lauren and Tommy Hilfiger are similar in this respect, they are not marketing to a social elite, they are marketing the fantasy of being socially elite to a mass world audience. The success of Polo Sport with its big logos and bold designs can be seen as a response to Hilfiger's prominence. In the case of Hilfiger, he focuses squarely on elements of American culture, most often an idealized American culture, that will resonate both here and abroad.

Hilfiger is keenly aware of the need people have to cast themselves in a way that is congruent with the image they feel required to project, and themselves desire to convey. Hilfiger says: "We really started a major trend with the logos. It was all about status and it still is." He continues, "If you go into Middle America, we are *the* designer brand." As for himself, reporter Robin Finn notes that he has all his clothes custom made in London. Hilfiger states: "I don't wear logos, except maybe a letter sweater once in a while" (2000: D2).

Hilfiger is selling status and a particular type of identity. For young people in particular, who are in the process of forging their identity, fashion becomes an important vehicle for communicating a message about oneself to peers. Older people, perhaps more secure about themselves, tend to socialize with others of similar circumstance and may not need to seriously deliberate about their

appearance. They may be in the habit of dressing a certain way. The businessman or waitress by virtue of being in that profession will establish a certain fashion script to follow. As long as he or she keeps within those parameters his or her appearance will not arouse any unusual or undesired type of attention. For young people, however, every detail of clothing seems to be of keen importance. One can be ridiculed cruelly for not conforming with the changing appearance norms. One must consider not only how he or she fits in with his or her primary group but with his or her peers, some of whom will belong to other groups. The primary group may or may not be the dominant group, and peers in the neighborhood may have different expectations than peers in school, etc. Hilfiger provides readily identifiable symbols with which young people can communicate a sense of broadly accepted style. As Hilfiger is a recognizable name which carries a degree of status, and his designs are easily connected to his name through logos and identifiable detailing, his clothes provide a form of currency, particularly for young men seeking affirmation, acceptance, status and power.

Tommy Hilfiger Fashion as Text

Using the approach of Roland Barthes who has restricted his study of fashion in The Fashion System to the “written garment,” text from Tommy Hilfiger’s book American Style will be analyzed in respect to the national identity Hilfiger disseminates through his fashions. Barthes set aside concerns with fashion as it exists in practice--as a real object—to study fashion as text. It is the meaning attributed to the garment that makes it fashion, according to Barthes

(1967/1984). Barthes states: “We must study either acts, or images, or words, but not all of these substances at once . . .” (1967/1984: 7-8). Of course others have decided to do all. For example, Lehmann points out that “real clothing” for Simmel and Benjamin presented not an obstacle but a temporality which contributed to their understanding (2000: 288). Yet Barthes provides us with a method of decoding text to find meanings we may have otherwise overlooked due to other distractions. He says “Speech rids the garment of all corporal actuality; being no more than a system of impersonal objects whose mere assemblage creates fashion (1967/1984: 17). Images need the mediation of words—if not directly in conjunction with the image, than in memory. It is through words that cultural meanings are embedded and signified, Barthes would contend. There is no inherent rationality to clothes or to images of clothes. Without language fashion does not mean anything in particular. Barthes shows us a system of signification over one year by looking at described clothing in a French fashion magazine. He finds that textual meanings shape the reality of the clothes. Sometimes the meanings are arbitrary—pleats are worn in the afternoon, and prints at the races—but they create a reality for the garment that we take as natural.

What textual elements of American culture does Tommy Hilfiger use, in a systematic and coherent way, to develop an American style in fashion? Hilfiger abstracts elements expressed textually, from different sectors of the American culture—from elite to urban “street” culture—to create a fashion discourse. There are several themes that Hilfiger uses to represent his commitment to

“Americanism”, and which he points to as being design inspirations. They can be divided into the following categories, somewhat in order of their prevalence.

Later we will look individually at each, providing textual examples:

1. Sports and sportswear
2. Music
3. Film
4. Television
5. Places (geographic, general, particular)
6. Automobiles
7. Consumer Products
8. Types of People
9. Art

Sports is a dominant theme. Hilfiger mentions the following sports either in conjunction with a photograph or separately: tennis, biking, boating (row boating and canoeing), sailing, bowling, football, baseball, racing, golf, skiing, and surfing. Of sports in general Hilfiger says: “Energy, speed, thrust, the burning desire to win—to me, that’s what sports are all about” (1997: 112). He connects this sporting spirit to clothing when he talks of racing: “All the drivers looked heroic in their uniforms—covered in patches and with their cars emblazoned with logos” (1997: 137). In relation to golf he says, “Golfers are as concerned with what they wear as with their game” (1997: 130). And bowling: “But the embroidered shirts are the thing that really signify that it’s a good-time sport” (1997: 114). Surfing is more broad: “While the British invasion was taking

hold, the California surf scene emerged as a truly American phenomenon, with its own language in music and fashion” (1997: 170). In his comments on surfing, Hilfiger is concerned with drawing boundaries, in separating out those aspects of the sport that are not American in spirit. Sports provide a stage on which a masculine identity is enacted. Hilfiger abstracts the symbolic media of sports to be used in his designs. In this way the brand’s association with sport is instrumental in connoting the Hilfiger lifestyle.

Hilfiger speaks about sportswear in a way which may call to mind images of sports activity, but does not always have a close association with the sport. He mentions the following items under the category of sportswear: varsity jackets, khakis, jeans, t-shirts, chinos, cowboy shirts, button-down shirts, bowling shirts, flannel shirts, sweaters, baseball caps, “penny loafers,” hiking boots, and sneakers. Hilfiger says that “Clothes are costumes. Everyday people put on what they want to be” (1997: 46). We are told how to dress, or what we need to have, if we want to “be” in a certain way. In relation to the button-down shirt Hilfiger issues a prescriptive: “For relaxed situations keep the collar buttoned and leave the top button undone” (1997: 73). Different contexts and different objectives call for different clothes. Hilfiger sorts this out for the reader: “Flannel shirts are always appropriate for being outdoors in the city or the country” (1997: 39). “Chinos and khakis are a must for any wardrobe” (1997: 66). “There was a time when wearing a T-shirt was a rebellious statement, a way of saying you were a no-nonsense, hardworking guy. Today it is every bit as athletic and sexy, but also the height of casual style” (1997: 63). “Jeans should look and feel faded and

comfortable, and be somewhat irreverent, like you don't have a regular job and don't care" (1997: 55). "Denim shirts and jackets say traditional American work wear, but at the same time they have a relaxed, Saturday flavor" (1997: 58).

Hilfiger says "I see everything through a pop-culture lens" (1997: 148).

Music is an important aspect of popular culture. For Hilfiger music can be: Motown, R&B, rock and roll, hip-hop, Frank Sinatra, and disco. Here are some examples of how he connects these types of music to a particular fashion sensibility: "So much of rock style as a concept comes from Motown. Each artist had a sleek signature sound and an image polished to a high gloss" (1997: 156). Speaking of John Lee Hooker, Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley and B.B. King, he says "The R&B stars wanted shine, sequins, glam; they wanted pointy-toed shoes" (1997: 150). As for hip-hop: "It all began as a result of the youth culture embracing and wearing status symbols, designer labels, and athletic names and weaving them into their testimony" (1997: 186). Hilfiger doesn't seem to look favorably on disco, which presents a kind of antisport philosophy :

When Studio 54 opened, it was a real buzz. Halston, Gucci, Fiorucci. Satin shirts and designer jeans. We went every night because we never knew what to expect and we didn't want to miss anything. It's hard to imagine now that people actually partied like that and were able to function the next day (1997: 184).

Of the clothes he says, "By the eighties, however, polyester was deemed gauche; synthetic microfibers were in. But that was just gilding the lily" (1987: 185). No doubt disco is taken to be inauthentic as a musical expression, generating in turn clothing that reflects this ethos.

Another element of popular culture is of course film and television. Hilfiger mentions westerns, classics, and some film titles: "The Graduate," and "The Endless Summer." As for television it is, "Leave it to Beaver," "The Mickey Mouse Club," "Mr. Rogers," "My Three Sons," and "Mission Impossible". Certain actors get special mention for epitomizing the suit style of an epoch: Cary Grant for 1940s "gangsters and heroes," Rock Hudson for 1950s "lean and modern," Dean Martin for 1960s "mods and continentals," John Travolta for 1970s "polyester leisure," Richard Gere for 1980s "designer tailoring," and John Faureau and Vince Vaughn for 1990s "redefined elegance" (1997: 94-95). Hilfiger deems particular actors and entire casts "sharp dressers." In order they are: the cast of the Man From Uncle, the cast of Mission Impossible, the cast of Reservoir Dogs, Sammy Davis, Jr., Sean Connery, Dean Martin, Frank Sinatra, Peter Lawford, Fred Astaire, Rod Serling, Jerry Lewis, and Tom Jones (1997: 160).

Places hold a significance in Tommy Hilfiger's conception of an idealized American world. Of course the West looms large, and is conceived of in terms of realness and manliness: "Western clothes have their own sense of style. Sometimes they're rough and rugged; sometimes they're dressed and all duded up" (1997: 33). The cowboy shirt really comes alive: "I look at cowboy shirts as treasures, the ones with pearl snaps and fringe, embroidery and piping, the real rodeo shirts" (1997: 31). Cape Cod and Nantucket also exert an influence on his imagination of an American lifestyle:

I go to Nantucket every summer with my family. It's a T-

shirt and chinos kind of place. I love the pastimes of New England: We ride bicycles, play tennis, go boating, and have clambakes and parties on the beach. It's all white picket fences, green grass, blue sky, beige sand. The combinations of these colors and the laid-back, sporty feeling of the lifestyle have been very inspiring to me (1997: 20).

The New England references allow Hilfiger to incorporate upper class elements to a style largely drawing on more inclusive middle class motifs. There are also the monuments which symbolize America: the Statue of Liberty, the Empire State Building, and Mount Rushmore. Hilfiger says, "Whenever I look at the Statue of Liberty, the Empire State Building, Mt. Rushmore, whenever I see a pair of blue jeans or a '65 Mustang, I realize that these are all icons that make me proud to be an American" (1997: 18). The service station and diner are singled out as true American places. "A service-station attendant wearing navy pants and a light-blue shirt stitched with his name conveys an honest masculinity" (1997: 97).

Hilfiger mentions several types of automobiles and vehicles, among them: the '65 Mustang, fifties cars, the Cadillac, and motorcycles. He says: "America is a car culture" (1997: 26) and "The jazzy styling of old cars is pure Americana . . ." (1997: 29). "The car," he tells us, "has always influenced fashion." "In the 1950s, everything was aerodynamic, from Elvis Presley's hair to the fins of the Cadillac" (1997: 28).

Hilfiger speaks of American consumer products and their logos with pride. Heinz, Coca-Cola, Ruffles, Lipton, and Hess get special mention. Hilfiger fondly recalls: "We ate all the American grocery store brands: Campbell's soup, Jiffy peanut butter . . . Ritz crackers, Ring Dings, Hostess Twinkies . . ." (1997:

4). And of a job in his youth: “I remember feeling very proud wearing my uniform with the big Hess logo on the back” (1997: 9). This pride in things American continued as he matured: “When I started to travel the world, I saw the fruits of American labor everywhere I went, the products and logos that are the trademarks of our industry and our culture” (1997: 19). Hilfiger’s America is an uncomplicated place.

There are certain types of people that Hilfiger wishes to call our attention to. They are workers who wear uniforms, military personnel (Navy, Army), cowboys, and Ivy League students. (In this particular book women do not yet fit prominently in Tommy Hilfiger’s conception of America. The women’s division starts in 1997.) “Anything having to do with NAVY is an emotional turn-on.” “I love aircraft carriers, sailors lined up, and American flags billowing in the wind” (1997: 82). The college man with his “. . . Ivy League look: chinos, madras, oxford cloth shirts. . . .” appealed to Hilfiger while growing up in Elmira, New York. “I wanted to look rich, and I wanted to look cool . . .”, he states (1997: 9).

It is perhaps significant to note that the only artist Hilfiger mentions is Norman Rockwell, the quintessential American artist. “Norman Rockwell’s imagery not only is very genuine, but also has a real sense of humor”, Hilfiger explains (1997: 22-23).

Green points out that in France an “unabashed pride” in French goods is connected with “the identification of those goods with a national character imbued with artistic sense” (1997: 108). The French discourse of fashion privileges the “individual” over the “masses,” “differentiation” over “imitation”

(1997: 116) and “art” over “industry”, she notes (1997: 111). In the late nineteenth century ready-to-wear men’s clothes were spoken of in moral terms—to “civilize” or “reform” the masses who did not possess the gentleman’s qualities (1997: 77). French academic Emile Levasseur in a turn of the nineteenth century investigation of the American worker noted with interest how American democracy had extended to clothing. He attributed standardization in clothing to classless society, but the price to be paid he thought, was “good taste” (1997: 109). This American democracy that Levasseur claims for clothing was first pointed out by another French scholar, Alexis de Toqueville, as the American commitment to egalitarianism versus a self presentation based on rank. The absence of an aristocratic ranking order manifested itself in everyday life where both the relatively wealthy and the working person interacted with great ease, according to Toqueville. In clothing this was manifested as an absence of blatant distinctions in style and form.

What kind of fashion discourse does Tommy Hilfiger contribute to? We have seen that he markets to the masses yet privileges a certain kind of elite individual with which such status seeking might identify—the wealthy New England white Protestant male (at least we see his image and read allusions to him even if we do not find him named). This is the prototype on which all else is based: his hip-hop styles, and his upscale new H Hilfiger line. In investigating Hilfiger’s text we find the articulation of an all-American discourse. One that embraces conformity—things that are familiar are comfortable and good—yet allows for individuality or democratic expression. Such is the nature of fashion:

the paradox of inclusiveness and exclusivity. The ideal American male that Hilfiger presents can have fun, listen to some rock and roll, be a hip-hop star, compete with other males in sports, fight in wars—everything we are told is really on the surface, he can be through fashion whoever he wants to be—but at the base perhaps he is a New England gentleman. Hilfiger's fashion discourse becomes one that strives to achieve a particular American ideal from a variety of practices and ideas.

Tommy Hilfiger Fashion as Social Representation

For Tommy Hilfiger, America provides a motif that can be used to create a coherent identity for his brand. As we have seen, certain aspects of American culture are privileged by Tommy Hilfiger, others are ignored. Hilfiger draws selectively from many possible themes, ideas, activities, places, personalities, etc. Broadway theater, Miami Beach, Disney World, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bill Cosby, Ernest Hemingway, George Washington, poker. These are recognizable features of the American cultural landscape *not* selected by Tommy Hilfiger in his book American Style. Hilfiger is a patron of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and has contributed to many New York institutions, he may indeed be a season subscriber to the New York City Ballet. However, these are not facets that figure into the representation of America that Hilfiger constructs. Rather, certain kinds of sports such as baseball, football, racing, and surfing, particular places like the American West, fifties cars, monuments such as the Statue of Liberty, institutions such as the Ivy League, the Army, the Navy—these are components drawn from the American cultural landscape that do have a

significance that Hilfiger wishes to identify with.

In selectively choosing certain elements of American life or of the American collective conscience, and citing them as points of interest and inspiration, Hilfiger is assembling what becomes a social representation, not only of America but of his brand.

Serge Moscovici takes Durkheim's notion of collective representations and defines it more precisely. While Durkheim spoke broadly of ideas, emotions, beliefs, and shared realities, Moscovici speaks of the structure and dynamics of what he calls social representations. Social representations are iconic and symbolic. They occupy a position between concepts which abstract meaning from the world and introduce an order, and percepts which reproduce the world in a meaningful way, he says (1984: 17). "All human interactions" says Moscovici, "whether they arise between two individuals, or between two groups, presuppose such representations" (1984: 12). Representations, be they of a scientific theory, a nation, an artifact, etc., create reality and common sense by embodying ideas that allow the unfamiliar—the abstract—to be categorized, and in doing so made familiar and concrete (1984: 19, 24, 27). "The act of representation is a means of transforming what disturbs, what threatens our universe . . ." (1984: 26). In this way the conclusion has primacy over the premise in social relations, argues Moscovici (1984: 27). Reality is predetermined by conventions. Even though interaction is taking place, agency, in terms of reflexivity, is constrained: "we see only that which underlying conventions allow us to see, and we remain unaware of these conventions" (1984: 8). Nevertheless, Moscovici acknowledges social

representations *themselves* are dynamic and are changed by people in interactional situations. “Individuals and groups create representations in the course of communication and co-operation. Representations, obviously, are not created by individuals in isolation. Once created, however, they lead a life of their own, circulate, merge, attract and repel each other, and give birth to new representations, while old ones die out” (1984: 13). Representations can occur as a result of everyday communication, contributing to what can be construed as “folk knowledge”, or they can be more strategically formulated. Moscovici points to “pedagogues, ideologues, popularizers of science or priests, that is the representatives of science, cultures and religion, whose task it is to create and transmit” representations. He goes on to say: “In the general evolution of society, these professions are destined to multiply, and their work will become more systematic and more explicit” (1984: 12). Here we have, then, people explicitly concerned with creating and disseminating a particular representation to a designated audience—infiltrating their consciousness, if you will. Such people will construct the representation in such a way that it will resonate with those to whom its message is directed. In the case of religion, for instance, Christianity can be cast in various ways, drawing on select themes and aspects of its ideology, taking on fundamentalist, liberal, radical, and other distinct formations. Root speaks of the ordinary products (ties, coffee cups, etc.) being sold in a museum catalogue. “Museum catalogues work so well because they evoke upper-class aesthetic codes, which attract the interest of the consumer”. People “worry about the quality of their taste”. A “valorized” artist whose work is displayed in the

museum and whose name and artwork is associated with products being sold by the museum allows the buyer to affiliate himself or herself with the “elite culture of fine art” (1996: 131).

We see that Hilfiger as cultural arbiter works to produce a coherent American identity—an ideal type. This identity he creates becomes associated with his name, bringing together select images under the brand, or in a shorthand form, under the Tommy Hilfiger logo. The identity of the brand, or the Hilfiger representation, is announced by various means. Advertisements use significant symbols referring back to the types of themes that comprise the representation. The product is positioned in a certain way in stores, with the aid of props such as banners and signage. The clothes and products themselves contain elements of the representation, for instance the flag-like logo. They may have style features that are direct references to a certain sport, such as rugby.

The most direct form of this representation will be presented at fashion shows so that the press and buyers will pick up the essential message of the collection. The runway provides a dynamic staging of the brand’s identity. What appears in stores may be modified to appeal to a wider range of consumers. Within the brand will be various shades of the overall or master representation. The Tommy line is geared to juniors, mostly to teenagers and young adults. The Tommy line, represented by the “T” logo with a star on either side, presents a more youthful, playful attitude. Often “Tommy” is written across shirts for young women, perhaps in pink sequins or with glitter. The H Hilfiger *collections*, on the other hand, is intended for a more mature, and well-to-do audience. This

line has the H Hilfiger label within the clothing. From the label itself one receives the message that the clothing fits within the Hilfiger brand, but occupies a distinct place, different from Tommy jeans, for example.

Kevin Roberts, CEO of Saatchi and Saatchi Worldwide relates what is meant by the concept of the representation to fashion in particular when he says: “All great brands are built when the equity of a brand—its personality, attributes—can be boiled into a sentence, a picture [and cast] in emotional terms, particularly in fashion” (Seckler, 2004: 10).

History and Structure of Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc.

The Tommy Hilfiger line of men’s clothing was launched in 1984, with the financial backing of Mohan Murjani. Hilfiger’s style builds on the democratic tradition of American sportswear, a style Hilfiger most often refers to as “classics with a twist”. At the same time Hilfiger’s brand incorporates elements of high social status. Hilfiger provides what one might call “affordable luxury”. With the 2004 launch of the H Hilfiger line, intended to elevate the status of the brand, this luxury is truly becoming more luxurious, and is becoming less affordable. This is in addition to Tommy Hilfiger Sportswear and the Tommy lines geared to a broader audience.

Unlike other American sportswear designers, Hilfiger began to use the marketing strategies of exclusive European designers as soon as he founded his company. He launched seasonal collections in couture-like fashion shows with superstar models, attained celebrity sponsorship, and opened flagship stores worldwide (Taylor, 2000: 133-135). Other designers arrived at this point only

after they had achieved considerable recognition and success—and they had a much more upscale product to offer. Their ready-to-wear lines gained appeal because of their established reputation, if not in couture fashion at least with an elite clientele. Hilfiger began presenting his line as if he had already made a public name for himself, using signs of exclusivity to establish prestige amongst a mass audience.

Ralph Lauren's success, beginning more than a decade earlier, no doubt served as an inspiration to Hilfiger. Lauren too was a self-made man. He began as a salesman with no design training, yet he became one of the richest men and best known designers in the United States. The world he created was based on an image of exclusivity. Perhaps Hilfiger, and Murjani, saw room in this world for someone with a more modern American take, and a more moderate price point.

According to *Women's Wear Daily's* most recent lists on designers ranked by consumer awareness, and men's brands in relation to the "brand's momentum", Tommy Hilfiger came in ahead of Ralph Lauren. Consumers ranked Calvin Klein number one, Hilfiger two, Lauren three, and Gucci four (*Women's Wear Daily*, 12/8/03, 66S). Tommy Hilfiger was the number one men's brand with consumers. Fifty seven point eight percent of men reported perceiving it as "in" or "hot", as did 66.2% of women. Abercrombie and Fitch was second, Fubu third, and Polo Ralph Lauren fourth (*Women's Wear Daily*, 12/9/03, 71S). Starting out with the odds stacked against him, Hilfiger rose to the top of the fashion industry. Today his competitors include Ralph Lauren, Calvin Klein, Donna Karan, Nautica, Liz Claiborne, and newcomers like Sean John,

Rocawear and FUBU.

Tommy Hilfiger's Background

Tommy Hilfiger seems to have come out of nowhere. Many in the press have billed him an overnight sensation, and some have criticized him for being more of a marketer than a designer. Although not known to the general public early in his career Hilfiger had indeed established himself as a designer and was well-known and highly regarded within the industry.

Tommy Hilfiger grew up in Elmira, New York, the second of nine children. His father was a jeweler and his mother a nurse (Kanner, 1986: 24). Tommy Hilfiger compares his upbringing to "Leave it to Beaver": a close community, "open and liberal" parents, and brothers and sisters who "teamed up together" (Hilfiger, 1997: 2). Hilfiger recounts a childhood which reflects a total immersion in the popular American culture of the 1950s and early 1960s. He identifies with American TV shows, movies, music, cars, brands, sports, styles and values--all of which seem to become milestones in his life. As a teenager in the mid to late 1960s he embraced the emerging culture: "sandals, bell bottoms, long hair", a way of being that his generally flexible parents did not accept (1997: 9). Tommy Hilfiger's receptiveness to elements of popular culture—he speaks of American grocery store brands such as Cambells, Coca Cola, and Hellman's, with the same reverence as American icons Roy Rogers and Ed Sullivan—prepares him for success in the branded, lifestyle oriented the fashion world (1997: 4). A world which he himself was instrumental in shaping.

At seventeen, a senior at Elmira Free Academy, Hilfiger and 2 friends

pitch in \$150 each to open a clothing store in Elmira (1997: 10, 14). The store starts out in a basement and is called “People’s Place” (Woodwall & Stansell, 2003: 330). Rent was \$50 per month (Rozhon, 12/26/04: 4). By 1972, after being in business for 3 years, People’s Place grew into a chain of 7 boutiques (Kanner, 1986: 27). The advertisement for the store is clever, a cutout of people attached at the hand like gingerbread men, with the central figure dressed in the mod attire of the time. The ad conveys unity and at the same time distinction. This ability to convey meaningful information in a parsimonious manner and to connect concepts to his clothing designs would serve Hilfiger well later, for example in his use of logos and other types of insignia.

The store primarily sold bell bottom jeans but as Hilfiger describes it, the decor, music, incense and candles were just as important (Hilfiger, 1997: 10). Tracie Rozhon mentions records and cigarette rolling papers amongst the items sold (Rozhon, 12/26/04: 4). Hilfiger is responsible for the creative end of the business, and he creates the right ambiance. Soon he wants more. He decides he should design the merchandise too. “I wanted the clothes to be cooler, so I began sketching my own ideas and found a manufacturer that could make apparel to my specifications” (Hilfiger, 1997: 10, 14).

In 1976 when Hilfiger was 25 he says he lost interest in the store, and it went bankrupt (Woodward and Stansell, 2003: 330). Hilfiger elaborates to the *New York Times*: ““My accountants said, ‘You have spent more than you have,’” Mr. Hilfiger recalled last week, ““and I said, ‘Why don’t you just go to the bank and borrow?’ And they said, ‘You’ve already done that.’” Rozhon states: “The

young man declared Chapter 11 and eventually sold the stores”, observing that this was a lesson in “failure as well as success” (Rozhon, 12/26/04: 4). Soon after Hilfiger married Susan, a designer, with whom he moved to New York. He started a company, Tommy Hill, and he and Susan designed the clothing together. The company went out of business after one year (Woodward and Stansell, 2003: 330). For several years Hilfiger freelanced as a clothing designer in New York City (Rozhon, 12/26/04: 4). In 1979 the couple began working for Jordache. Hilfiger said they were “out” after 2 months as the company did not understand their style (Hilfiger, 1997: 15; FIT, 1986: 2). Rozhon cites the year Hilfiger worked for Jordache as 1983 (Rozhon, 12/26/04: 4). It seems that Hilfiger worked for Jordache in 1979, and than again in 1983.

Hilfiger did freelance design work, and in 1981 started 20th Century Survival, with a partner. The company did \$8 million dollars in sales in its first year selling moderately priced women’s sportswear. In the Spring/Summer line in 1981 no piece was over \$55 (*Soho News*, May 6, 1981). In 1983 Hilfiger joined Click-Point where he continued to design women’s sportswear. *Women’s Wear Daily* states that Hilfiger “projects high spirits in his streetwise premier collection for early spring” (8/23/82: 14). In 1984 Hilfiger begins developing what will grow into the Tommy Hilfiger Corporation.

Segments of Business and Organizational Divisions

Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc. is engaged in three “segments” of business: wholesale, retail and licensing. The products produced under the corporation’s name include men’s sportswear and jeanswear, women’s casualwear and

jeanswear, and childrenswear, and through licensing agreements, “a broad array of related apparel, accessories, footwear, fragrance and home furnishings” (2004 Annual Report: 12; 10-K: 3).

In terms of the product, the company’s offerings can be divided into 3 categories: fashion which represents the smallest output (approximately 15%), core plus items which represent the bulk of output (approximately 55%), and are comprised of items which are updated each season, and “basics and core” items (approximately 30%) which do not change as readily and can be re-ordered according to demand. Within these three categories are a variety of divisions such as menswear, womenswear, and childrenswear each with their own subdivisions. The wholesale segment consists of products designed and outsourced by the corporation itself as well as products produced through licensing agreements for wholesale distribution. In most cases these products are designed in-house and manufactured by the licensees. Principal items are men’s sportswear and jeanswear, women’s casualwear, junior jeanswear and childrenswear.

The Tommy Hilfiger “masterbrand” was divided into four separate labels, each with its own logo: Tommy Jeans, Tommy (Flag) Hilfiger, Hilfiger, and H Hilfiger. Starting in late 2003, this configuration changed from four to three labels. Each line provides clothing for men and women. First, the four brand configuration will be discussed. Tommy Jeans is described as “fresh American casual”. The target consumer is age 17 (and the range is approximately 13-24 years old). According to marketing research conducted in May 2003, the

consumer for Tommy Jeans is “very image conscious”, concerned with “having the right brand”, and makes purchasing decisions based on “peer expectations”. This consumer is described as ethnically diverse. He or she wears “a lot of casual clothes—jeans, t-shirts, ‘hoodies’”. Tommy (Flag) Hilfiger is described as “fresh American essential”. The target consumer is 26 and ages range from 19-34 years old. Having the right brand is still important, but this consumer is defined more by his or her interest in comfort and quality. This person is “less ethnically diverse” and has a household income ranging from \$50,000-75,000+. The Hilfiger line is described as “fresh American luxe”. This consumer’s life is focused on “the good life”. He or she is a professional, age 35 (or ranging in age from about 28-49), wants to look good, and can afford to buy what he or she likes. Dressier items are sought after. Household income is \$75,000+ (NPD Fashionworld Study, May 2003). The H Hilfiger line, launched in Spring 2004, is directed toward consumers termed “pragmatic connoisseurs”. This person is likely to carry “the latest cell phone, an iPod, etc”, drive “a leased (not owned) BMW 3-series”, and indulge in various small luxuries, like a daily Starbucks latte. The line as it is described “fills a void in the better sportswear and careerwear space and adds cache to the brand that will pay out across the company’s product portfolio”. The label is described as follows:

1. Design: Sleek, sophisticated and modern
2. Materials: Luxurious, refined, distinctive
3. Details: Subtle, uncomplicated, perfect
4. Craftsmanship: Hand-tailoring, artisan techniques, the human touch

(company document, not dated).

According to one of the designers involved in meetings in June of 2004 to reconfigure the brand into three divisions, she states: “What happened is they divided the brand into three parts: Flag, Crest and T. Flag was more fashion. Crest was more basic or core styles and T was the jeans line.” She further elaborates, now mentioning the H line: “By splitting it up they are looking for different outlets: Flag would let’s say be Bloomingdales—upper tier, Crest would be mid tier, for instance J.C. Penny ,and H would be the fashion enterprise part in our own stores. That was the plan in June but it has probably changed.” She went on to explain how the design divisions were impacted. “They hired more people in sportswear, since that got split up into Flag and Crest. In Jeans there are three people that design.”

The three divisions that were eventually formed, and are reflected in the 2004 Annual Report are (in order of their listing): H Hilfiger, Tommy “Flag” Hilfiger, and T Tommy. H Hilfiger is described in this Report as “positioned at the upper end of the better apparel market, targeting the fashion conscious 30- to 45-year old consumer with sophisticated taste. The line is characterized by polished and refined dress-up styles in luxurious fabrics with understated detail.” Tommy “Flag” Hilfiger encompasses casual apparel under the red, white and blue “Flag” logo, and tailored apparel under the “Crest” logo. The “Crest” label or logo features a crowned lion surrounded by a circular laurel leaf pattern. Sportswear and activewear collections for men and women, and childrenswear collections are distributed under this label. The target consumer ages have

changed from what was mentioned-above, to the “25- to 45- year old consumer who embodies the preppy lifestyle.” This line is described as embracing “classics with a twist” and a “young at heart attitude”. The Tommy lines include Juniors and Young Men’s Jeans. This product is intended for “a trend-conscious consumer between the ages of 15 and 22.” It is a “younger and edgier” consumer (2004 Annual Report, 5). David F. Dyer, Chief Executive Officer and President says this of the Young Men’s Jeans Business:

In March 2004, we repositioned our U.S. Young Men’s Jeans business as a classic denim line comprised of core replenishment styles, complemented by seasonal key basic items. As a more focused line, our replenishment-based model will enable us to achieve significant savings compared to the costs of running a more fashion-oriented business (2004 Annual Report: 1).

A designer comments:

For jeans they’ll be doing different cuts of jeans in different washes and fabrics, and will fill up with t-shirts. The replenishing business means they’re looking for a deal with a major department store in the lower tier, like a Kohl’s or Sam’s Club to sell them the same styles over and over. So no fashion.

Menswear is the largest division of the wholesale business, although it is earning slightly less in revenue than womenswear. It is divided into two divisions: men’s sportswear and Tommy Jeans. The consumer in men’s sportswear tends to be between the ages of 18 and 35. Tommy Jeans, launched in 1995, targets a younger consumer, ages 12 to 19 (DataMonitor, 2003: 5). The new H Hilfiger line aims for a more sophisticated, dressier look, and consequently sets its sights on more mature men. Across the board, menswear has been

modified to offer “more traditional Tommy styling, minimized logos” and graphics that are reduced in size, so as to appeal to a “more sophisticated consumer” (Annual Report, 2003: 3). Licensed products for men include dress shirts, tailored clothes, neckwear, golf, footwear, small leather goods, and belts.

Womenswear is the second largest division of the wholesale business. It too has two divisions: women’s sportswear and Tommy Jeans Juniors. The target consumer for women’s sportswear is ages 18 through 35 while Tommy Jeans Junior is geared toward those of ages 12 through 19 (Datamonitor, 2003: 5). Within women’s one finds career clothing, the H Hilfiger line, Petites, and Tommy Hilfiger Woman, a plus size line. Offerings in athletic and sportswear were expanded in 2003 (Annual Report, 2003: 3). Licensed products in women’s include handbags, sunglasses, footwear, intimate apparel, jewelry, hosiery, and swim wear.

Childrenswear fits boys’ sizes 4-20 and girls’ sizes 4-16. Beginning in 1996 infants and toddlers clothing, shoes and socks are added to boyswear and children’s offerings are expanded to include sports bags, ophthalmic and sunglasses. In Holiday 2000 Tommy Hilfiger Layette was introduced. Facing competition from department stores’ private label brands, childrenswear has been striving to balance the “value/price proposition” and has been “exiting” from stores that are “less profitable” (Annual Report, 2003: 1).

Although the product is often described as youthful, and is certainly aimed at such a demographic, Hilfiger, describing it as a “global lifestyle brand” wishes for it to in fact transcend this and other categories. He states:

The Tommy Hilfiger brand is one of the world's most recognized brands, as our proprietary research shows and independent surveys confirm. The brand has broad appeal and relevance to many consumer groups, transcending age, gender, race and national boundaries. We intend to continue capitalizing on this strength (Annual Report, 2003: 5).

In each area of the wholesale apparel business, the company has been exiting from stores that are not profitable. It is also being conservative about the amount of merchandise it distributes so as not to saturate the market and as a result be faced with marked down merchandise, and a concurrent loss of prestige. On the retail front, stores that are not profitable have been closed.

Within each of the three divisions: women's, men's and children, there are sales, planning, merchandising and design divisions.

Wholesale

Products in this area are primarily sold through Tommy Hilfiger stores/boutiques or "fixtured areas" housed in department stores. These separate shops or floor spaces are set aside for Tommy Hilfiger products, and are arranged by the Tommy Hilfiger Corporation (10-K: 3). The environment is described as being "consistent with the company's image" (10-K: 7). Department store customers include the Federated Department Stores (including Macy's, Rich's, Bloomingdales and Burdines), May Department Stores (including Lord and Taylor, Hecht's and Foley's), Saks, Inc., Marshall Fields, Dillards, and many others. Shops and fixtured areas are described as encouraging a long term commitment with Tommy Hilfiger both with the department stores and with consumers in terms of recognition and loyalty (10-K: 7).

Merchandise coordinators are trained to educate salespeople about products and to prepare in-store displays as well as to report customer information back to the office (10-K: 8).

Wholesale sales have declined \$32,663,000 from fiscal 2003 to fiscal 2004 (net wholesale revenues for 2004 were \$1,387,570,000). The year before that, from 2002 to 2003, sales declined by \$20,655,000. Overall net revenue of \$1.9 billion for the fiscal year 2004 is essentially the same as the year before. David Dyer, Chief Executive Officer and President attributes net revenue losses in wholesale to over-distribution in the U.S. Young Men's Jeans, Junior Jeans and Childrenswear, he adds, "have been under considerable pressure as they continue to be impacted by the increasing polarization of their markets, with smaller, fashion-forward urban resources gaining market share at the high end and more moderate resources and private label capturing share at the other end of the spectrum". Dyer explains that he has been addressing this by exiting "less productive doors" and "developing models to build a more profitable, if smaller, U.S. business that can grow again from a solid base". Steps to "revitalize" and "reinvigorate" the brand are also mentioned (Annual Report, 2004: 1). The Hilfiger women's line is expected to "capture a share of the emerging higher end of the better women's market, a new category for us" (Annual Report, 2004: 2).

Retail

The retail business operates through two types of stores: specialty and outlet. Specialty stores are located throughout the world and "showcase the broad array of Tommy Hilfiger product". In 2003 there were 44 U.S. specialty stores.

Tommy Hilfiger has specialty stores that it operates in several countries. In Europe there are 11 specialty and 9 outlet stores owned by Tommy Hilfiger. There are 64 stores owned and operated by independent franchisees (2003 Annual Report, 2). Tommy Hilfiger products are sold in about 82 countries, through a variety of licensing and distribution agreements (tommy.com/info/divisions-international.jhtml). In Europe there are stores (most often several in each country) in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Russia, Spain, Turkey, U.K., and Ukraine. The Amsterdam office is the central office in Europe. In the Middle East there are stores in Israel and Kuwait. In Asia there are stores in China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, and Taiwan. In South America stores are located in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela. In Central America and the Caribbean there are stores in Aruba, Bahamas, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Panama, Puerto Rico, St. Maarten, St. Martin and U.S. Virgin Islands. There is a store in Australia. In North America there are stores in Mexico and in Canada, as well as in the United States (tommy.com).

Two of Hilfiger's large flagship stores, in Beverly Hills and on Bond Street in London were closed in 2000. The Rodeo Drive store, the largest unit on Rodeo Drive, opened in November 1997, proved too expensive. Hilfiger later described Rodeo Drive as "touristy" and "old" (Ellis, 5/3/00: 11). The ten year lease due to expire in 2006 was taken over by Brooks Brothers (Young, 4/4/03: 4). Between fiscal 2003 and 2004 thirty-seven U.S. specialty retail stores were

closed. As of March 2004 the Company operated 167 retail stores.

There are 140 outlet stores.

The Tommy.com website lists the following as “featured stores” that one can click on to view: Soho, Punta de Este, Uruguay, Fukuaka, Japan, St. Tropez, France and Dusseldorf, Germany.

Retail net revenue increased by \$20,645,000 from fiscal 2003 to fiscal 2004.

Licensing

The licensing segment of the business consists of operations aimed at licensing Tommy Hilfiger trademarks to manufacturers for approved products in specified regions. Royalties are paid to the Tommy Hilfiger Corporation.

Performance is monitored and evaluated.

The Tommy Hilfiger Golf Collection has been licensed to Oxford Industries since 1994. In addition to Tommy Hilfiger, “Oxford Industries markets and distributes labeled and branded men’s, women’s and children’s tailored clothing and sportswear for Nautica, Geoffrey Beane, Oscar de la Renta and Robert Stock.

Tommy Hilfiger Home with such products as bedding, towels, and shower curtains are produced by Revman Industries, and under a sublicensing agreement with Revman, some products such as pillows, are made by Springs Industries (Home Textiles Today, 4/15/02, 1) .

In 2002 the Tommy Hilfiger Corporation bought back Tommy Hilfiger Europe from the licensee (thereby decreasing royalties that fiscal year). An increase of 11.7% percent in revenue in fiscal 2003 is attributed to higher

licensing royalties (Annual Report, 2004: 14). A decrease in net revenue of \$240,000 occurred from fiscal 2003 to fiscal 2004.

The following is a list of products licensed to companies with expertise in their given fields:

Licensees 2004

Product	Licensee
Boys Blazers and Tailored	Alperin
Tailored Clothing	Hartmarx
Golf and Dress Shirts	Oxford
Trousers	Transapparrell
Women's Intimate Apparel	V. F. Corp.
Swimwear	Jantzen
Footwear	Stride Rite
Neckwear	Superba
Fragrance	Aramis
Socks	Mountain High
Belts	Swank
Sunglasses	Viva
Jewelry	Victoria & Co.
Watches	Movado
Home	Revman
Handbags and Small Leather Goods	Dickson

Below is a table showing the distribution of net revenue (in actual dollar amounts) across the three segments of the business, over the last three fiscal years (ending March 31). Also listed is a breakdown of net revenue in the three divisions of the wholesale segment.

Net Revenue by Segment

Segments	2004	2003	2002	2001
Wholesale	\$1,387,570,000	\$1,420,233,000	\$1,440,888,000	\$1,484,544,000
Retail	\$ 425,744,000	\$ 405,099,000	\$ 379,781,000	\$ 330,965,000
Licensing	\$ 62,483,000	\$ 62,723,000	\$ 56,052,000	\$ 65,426,000
Total	\$1,875,797,000	\$1,888,055,000	\$1,876,721,000	\$1,880,935,000

Net Revenue Wholesale Segment by Division

	2004	2003	2002	2001
Divisions				
Menswear	\$ 571,678,000	\$ 555,144,000	\$ 622,166,000	\$ 666,722,000
Womenswear	\$ 572,198,000	\$ 564,663,000	\$ 538,268,000	\$ 485,013,000
Childrenswear	\$ 243,694,000	\$ 300,426,000	\$ 280,454,000	\$ 332,809,000
Total	\$1,387,570,000	\$1,420,233,000	\$1,440,888,000	\$1,484,544,000

The company itself can be divided into seven departments or divisions, of which there is a President for each:

1. Retail Stores
2. Licensing
3. Women's
4. Men's
5. Children's
6. Production
7. Advertising and Marketing

International Scope

The Tommy Hilfiger Corporation is headquartered in Kowloon, Hong

Kong. This location houses the buying offices of the corporation. Its New York office, in Manhattan, Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc. is a wholly owned subsidiary. Menswear, womenswear, childrenswear, licensing, retail, marketing, public relations, human resources, executive, legal and other offices are located in New York. The Dayton, New Jersey office houses finance, accounting, distribution, MIS, etc.

Since 2002 when the Tommy Hilfiger Europe license was acquired by the Tommy Hilfiger Corporation, sales have been strong. In 2003 20 percent of total revenue came from Tommy Hilfiger Europe (Annual Report, 2003: 2). In 2004 this figure increased to 22% (2004 Pep Rally).

In 2004 India was added to the countries housing specialty stores, with stores in New Delhi and Bangalore. Men's sportswear and women's junior jeanswear is sold. In 2003 men's sportswear was launched in Australia. In 2002 women's sportswear, jeanswear and childrenswear was launched in Korea. Men's and boy's sportswear had been sold in Korea since 1995.

The company while experiencing double digit wholesale losses in the U.S., experienced overall double digits gains in Europe. Below is a breakdown of net revenue by geographical location (in actual dollars). Growth in revenue in the retail sector is expected to occur in fiscal 2005 based on new store openings in Europe, as well as Canada and the U.S. Twenty-five outlet and approximately six speciality stores are expected to be opened worldwide in fiscal 2005 (Annual Report, 2004: 14).

Net Revenue by Geographical Location

Location	2004	2003	2002	2001
U.S.	\$1,325,153,000	\$1,496,878,000	\$1,616,726,000	\$1,771,721,000
Europe	\$ 419,496,000	\$ 280,936,000	\$ 160,048,000	---
Canada	\$ 111,919,000	\$ 91,414,000	\$ 880,311,000	\$ 76,392,000
Other	\$ 19,229,000	\$ 18,827,000	\$ 19,636,000	\$ 32,822,000
Total	\$1,875,797,000	\$1,888,055,000	\$1,876,721,000	\$1,880,935,000

Displaying Products

The Tommy Hilfiger Corporation maintains showroom facilities and sales offices throughout the United States and Europe and Canada (10-K: 8). Tommy Hilfiger has acquired the entire building at 25 West 39th Street, an historic landmark, comprised of 16 floors. In the beginning all merchandise was displayed on one floor, the thirteenth floor. In 1994 Tommy Hilfiger purchased the building at 25 West 39th Street and renovated each floor to show products. Each floor features a showroom for a different division, and some floors share multiple licensed products (e.g. watches, fragrances, childrenswear). An entire floor featuring furniture and home furnishings was being assembled in November 2002. All products, those that are licensed and those manufactured by Tommy Hilfiger, are housed in the same location.

This horizontal integration of products into a system, where no one division is set apart—defined as more important or different—points to the lifestyle concept that Tommy Hilfiger is in the process of achieving. The company is not selling clothing alone, with a variety of sidelines, it is selling a larger concept

around which one can identify and distinguish oneself. In presenting itself as a unified product to buyers and to the public, primarily through its own stores which carry all of the Tommy Hilfiger merchandise, a coherent message is communicated. This is achieved in part by the use of various display techniques, props and signage. This central display of all Tommy Hilfiger products are unique, and provided buyers with a total experience in a way that competitors could not.

Consumer Base

The Tommy Hilfiger lifestyle is broad in scope as well as zeroing in on a particular segment or niche in the consumer market for particular products. Speaking of bedding and bath products which range from moderate to the more recent luxury category, Normand Savaria, Senior Vice President and General Manager of Tommy Hilfiger Home says: "Tommy appeals to all generations and lifestyles, so we have to address the upper end as well" (Slott, 2000: Home Textiles, 2). Tommy Hilfiger describes customers as ranging from "young urban street urchins" to "sophisticated, wealthy retirees" (Underwood & Abbott, 1996: Brandweek, 22).

Hilfiger acknowledges the precarious nature of appealing to such a broad customer base. When asked how long the two can co-exist and whether he thinks his time can go on forever, he states, stressing the need for continuity with innovation: "It could end. However, I think we have a strong enough base where if it does, I think we will still be a strong company. As you give the consumer new, exciting product at the right price point at the right quality, you won't lose

that customer” (Underwood & Abbott, 1996: Brandweek, 22).

Outlook

A strategy for growth in the U.S. has been to reposition the business on the one end to provide core replenishment styles (which are less expensive and less labor intensive for the Company), while at the other end producing higher priced, higher quality apparel. The later, through the H Hilfiger line, if successful, will generate interest and excitement which will extend to all products. Products such as handbags, shoes, dress shirts, and ties have begun to be licensed under the H Hilfiger label.

Acquisition of brands has long been discussed at Tommy Hilfiger and speculated about in the press. This strategy, as a means of “growth and diversification” is mentioned in the 2004 Annual Report (2).

History of the Tommy Hilfiger Corporation

In 1984 when Tommy Hilfiger was 33 years old he met Mohan Murjani of Murjani International Ltd. Murjani was the son of a wealthy Hong Kong manufacturer, B.K. Murjani, who had founded the Murjani Group in New York in 1930. By 1958 it had become one of the largest apparel production companies in the world (WWD, 2/27/04, 2). Mohan Murjani owned the license and was behind the promotion of Gloria Vanderbilt Jeans in the 1970s (DNR, 10/19/84, 2003; Woodward and Stensell: 330). Now he wanted to promote an up-and-coming American male designer who would design a line of clothing for his firm, and Tommy Hilfiger was his choice. In 1985 Murjani offered Hilfiger the chance to design a men’s wear collection bearing his name. The line featured 3 fashion

groups: nautical, safari, and workwear (*Daily News Record*, 10/19/84). This was in addition to Hilfiger's designing and supervising a team of designers for Murjani's Coca Cola clothing line, a licensing venture which brought in \$100 million dollars wholesale in its first year. Hilfiger comments that he put his full effort into the designing of Coca Cola clothes (FIT lecture, 1996, videotape). Murjani was able through his influence, and because of the desirability of Hilfiger's designs, to get Tommy Hilfiger's label into the department stores. First year wholesale sales in 1985 were \$5 million. Sales in 1986 jumped to \$16 million, and by 1988 they were \$25 million (*Women's Wear Daily*, 2/27/04: 2).

George Lois, chairman and creative director of Lois/GGK advertising led Tommy Hilfiger's ad campaign which began in February 1986. The campaign featured billboards, telephone booth posters, magazine ads, and a ten-second television commercial. Murjani invested \$2 million in advertising and \$20 million in opening Tommy Hilfiger boutiques, the first of which opened in 1985 on Columbus Avenue in New York City. His first ad, which appeared in Times Square in 1985, boldly stated: "The 4 Great American Designers for Men are: R- - - L- - - - -, P- - - - E- - - - -, C- - - - - K- - - - - and T- - - - H- - - - - -."

Displayed was Tommy Hilfiger's red, white and blue logo. Later ads stated "First there was Geoffrey Beene, Bill Blass and Stanley Blacker. Then Calvin Klein, Perry Ellis and Ralph Lauren. Today, it's Tommy" (*New York Magazine*, 1986:). Within weeks major newspapers were discussing the ads. "Johnny Carson and other notables" weighed in on the ads (Woodward and Stansell, 2003: 331).

Murjani describes the reaction:

“That created so much buzz”, Mr. Murjani said. “Everybody at every cocktail party was saying: ‘Who is T.H.?’” He paused. “Of course, the other three designers were very upset,” he said. “They consulted their lawyers, but there was nothing they could do. There were no logos, no flags, nothing. And after all, we were calling them great.”

The ads were also notable because they “featured words, logos, or Hilfiger’s face, and no image of clothes or models”. George Lois claimed in a March 1988 interview with *Marketing and Media Decisions* that he couldn’t make the clothes “look any better than anyone else’s” and so he went for “an idea”. (Woodward and Stansell, 2003: 331).

The brand began selling well. Elaine Underwood and John Abbott of Brandweek say that he “fulfilled the prophecy” by building his business “in the real world, putting in appearances in the heartland and reeling in mainstreamers who buy his clothes” (1996: 22). In 1986 sixty department stores were selling Tommy Hilfiger clothing, and there were 25 specialty shops. Retail sales were \$32 million, and in 1987 \$70 million (Woodward and Stansell, 2003: 331). In 1989 Hilfiger was selling clothing in Canada (Rozhon, 12/26/04: 4).

Hilfiger has been variously described as a great designer and/or a marketing genius. Fashion historian McDowell describes Hilfiger’s designs as “almost entirely” lacking in “new fashion ideas”. But he adds, “this is not necessarily a disadvantage in the youth market”. He continues to explain his point: “Originality is much less important than identifiable token stylistic gestures—young fashion followers not only read labels as if they were messages from a sartorial god, they also expect colours, shapes and design features to be

easily spotted on a dark night". Certainly the traditional red, white and blue colors, and the oversized Hilfiger logo found on some designs fit this particular requirement. McDowell attributes the attention Hilfiger garnered from youth to creative advertising. However, he states that no advertising "no matter how outrageous, will have an effect if the image—and the image of the product it represents—fails to strike a cord with the public or the fashion world" (2000: 484). Hilfiger's reworking of classic sportswear styles appealed to a young market, and to men in general who did not want clothing that radically departed from established norms of American fashion. He did not need to reinvent sportswear, only to add to it, providing certain desirable elements that might have been lacking. Austin Silver, fashion commentator for the website AskMen.com speaks of the necessity of innovation to keeping a brand strong:

Brand names such as Armani, Versace, Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfiger are probably here to stay. Do you know why? Because these designers are not willing to simply go with the flow; they continuously reinvent themselves in order to keep up with modernity.

Knowing when not to do something is part of the creative process. Says Silver (rather crudely):

These heavy-hitters refuse to follow fashion trends that don't fit their vision or corporate image. And it hasn't failed any of them yet; they have been able to pull off high-end fashion from one season to the next without a hitch.

Fashion names that have been around since we were swimming in our fathers' big nuts have endured simply because of their innovative designers and refusal to be thrown into a fit of passing fads (2004:

AskMen.com)

The reluctance of men as a whole to readily adopt trendy fashion, rather a tendency to stay with the more traditional and commonly accepted fashion in menswear, has been a feature that characterized menswear through the decades.

Tommy Hilfiger made the decision to serve a broad clientele. His sportswear styles would appeal to a mass audience: middle Americans, urban youth, and those attracted to name brand clothing both in the U.S. and abroad.

Woodward and Stansell note, “Though clever advertising turned Hilfiger from an unknown into a top selling designer, it was not only the mystique of the ads that accomplished this. The clothing was for the most part casual—khaki pants and a big polo shirt being the quintessential Hilfiger outfit” while Ralph Lauren’s style is described as “more staid” (2003: 331).

In the 2002 10-K report the company’s apparel is described as: “designed to combine classic American styling with unique details and fit to give time-honored basics a fresh and updated look for customers who desire high quality, designer clothes at competitive prices” (3). Importantly the clothes were able to beat the competition on the basis of price, and to expand the appeal to a wider and younger audience than Ralph Lauren’s, one for whom that label may have appeared somewhat “uptight” or more formal than might be preferred. Compared to Lauren’s clothing, Tommy Hilfiger clothing is described as having “more flippancy in the cut and colors”, allowing the consumer to feel he is getting something extra and something new, while still staying within the prestige conferring preppy category. In the mid-to later 1980s many offices started to

implement “casual Fridays”, making Hilfiger’s clothes appealing to working men and to a younger college and high school aged audience.

Marvin Traub, former chairman and chief executive of Bloomingdale’s attributes a great and lasting role to Hilfiger: “In the 1980s , the emerging talents were Tommy and Donna and Calvin and Ralph, and they were responsible for the growth of the American sportswear business” (Rozhon, 12/26/04: 4).

With the Hilfiger brand expanding in the late 1980s, Murjani International was not able to give it the attention it required. Rozhon explains that Murjani felt his “finances were being stretched”. In 1989 Silas Chou of the Hong Kong based Novel Enterprises, and Lawrence Stroll (who owned Polo/Ralph Lauren in Europe) buy a controlling interest in the company (Rozhon, 12/26/04: 4), calling it Tommy Hilfiger Co. Inc. Rights are bought back from Murjani International for less than \$10 million. With Chou’s connections and expertise in the Asian garment industry, Tommy Hilfiger was able to produce high quality goods at competitive prices. In 1992 the firm went public. The initial public offering was at \$15 a share which was within the span of a few months to increase to \$25 per share. “Hilfiger became a Wall Street darling”, and the company was able to use the influx of cash to expand in-store shops and establish outlet store to sell past-season’s styles at reduced prices (Woodward and Stansall, 2003: 331, Datamonitor, 2003: 7, WWD, 2/27/04, 2). In 1992 Hilfiger began selling in Japan (Rozhon, 12/26/04: 4).

Throughout the 1990s sales increased. About half the revenues were coming from three department store chains: Dillard’s, Federated and, May.

Hilfiger used the profits to open freestanding stores. The first outlet and specialty stores were opened in 1994. From 1994 to 1995 over 200 in-store men's boutiques were opened, bringing the total to nearly 500. Boys clothes from sizes 8 to 20 were added and shortly after sizes 4 to 7 were also made. (Woodward and Stansall, 2003: 331; Datamonitor, 2003: 7).

By 1994 famous people from President Clinton to the Prince of Wales to a variety of rock stars: Michael Jackson, Elton John, and Snoop Doggy Dog could be seen wearing Tommy Hilfiger clothing. The most interesting audience at this time was young, mostly black males, "hip ghetto kids" as Woodward and Stansell say. They wore "suburban", preppy Hilfiger clothes in large sizes and accessorized the clothing with sports gear. "Drooping pants from which Hilfiger logo underwear peeked out was one peculiar fashion." Hilfiger is reported to have noted this trend and responded by "giant" sizes, providing bigger and bolder logos, and using bright color combinations (Woodward and Stansall, 2003: 331).

The mid 1990s "urban phenomenon" was a time when inner city youth began buying designer clothing, particularly Tommy Hilfiger. Hilfiger's appeal was taken to another level with Snoop Doggy Dog's 1994 "endorsement" on Saturday Night Live (Woodward and Stansall, 2003: 332). He wore a Hilfiger rugby shirt.

In 1995 Hilfiger began to license his name to Superba, Hartmarx, Oxford and others, adding tailored clothing and dress shirts to its men's division, such as Cypress Apparel for robes and sleepwear, and to manufacturers for scarves, handkerchiefs, umbrellas, and golf clothing. Hilfiger opened 36 shops in

Japanese department stores, and launched in-store shops in Central and South America. In 1995 a line of men's fragrances, licensed to Aramis, were introduced. In 1996 "Tommy Girl" was introduced (licensed to Estee Lauder). Boyswear was extended to include infant and toddler clothing. In the summer of 1996, after much "stopping and stalling", a women's wear sportswear line aimed at the same market as men's wear—the "casual wear-to-work niche"—was presented. Women's wear was initially licensed to Pepe Jeans, owned by the chairman, Silas Chou. More than 400 department stores began to carry the line (2003: 332). In an interview with *Women's Wear Daily* chief executive office Joel J. Horowitz discusses the obstacles to developing a women's line:

When we added a boys' business to men's wear it was an easy piggyback, since sourcing and even the product was similar. With women's apparel, Tommy needs a whole separate design team and production team and distribution facility [because] women's is all shipped hanging, and men's is shipped flat-packed. It's a major undertaking, and it needs total management focus to make sure it's done right (Curan, 1995: wwd.com).

In 1996 Hilfiger was awarded the Menswear Designer of the Year award by the Council of Fashion Designer's of America. Hilfiger has won several honors. Parsons School of Design has selected him for their Designer of the Year Award, as did GQ magazine for their "Men of the Year" issue. In 1995 he was named the Menswear Designer of the Year by the Council of Fashion Designers of America. Also in 1995 he also received the VHI "From the Catwalk to the Sidewalk" award at their Annual Fashion and Music Awards. In November of 2002 GQ magazine selected Tommy Hilfiger as their International Designer of

the Year. Hilfiger was presented with the Future of America Award by D.A.R.E. (The Drug Abuse Resistance Education organization) for his philanthropic efforts for young people.

In 1996 the company began an expansion into the European market. A large London flagship store was in the works. Sales were strong in the U.S., Japan, Europe, and Central and South America. In 1997 Hilfiger begins selling his clothing in Europe. Tommy Hilfiger stores are opened in Beverly Hills, California and in London. In 1998 a junior's jeans division was introduced. During its first year it achieved a 5.2 percent market share in the junior jeans category. In 1999 it attained a 17.3 percent share (*Women's Wear Daily*, 4/3/00: 19; Woodward and Stansall, 2003: 332).

Throughout the 1990s men's wear remained the company's "staple". Casual Fridays at the office continued for most of the decade and about 20% of U.S. offices were casual everyday. In 1996 Hilfiger stocks reached at times the highest level of apparel stocks. In 1997 the *Daily News Record* reports that the big three, Polo Ralph Lauren, Tommy Hilfiger and Nautica, control nearly one half of the men's better sportswear sales in department stores. In terms of all categories of sportswear sales in department stores Ralph Lauren controls almost 29%, Hilfiger 27%, and Nautica 14%. Competitors trying to gain an advantage hope that their growing "sameness" will do them in (*Daily News Record*, 3/31/97: 27, 39, 6).

With this product and geographical expansion, in 1998 the company was able to acquire the Canadian licensee, Tommy Hilfiger Canada, and a portion of

Pepe Jeans, USA for \$1.15 billion. Many new divisions were launched beginning in 1996. Tommy Hilfiger Europe with men's sportswear and Tommy Hilfiger fragrance, a women's division with sportswear and the Tommy Girl fragrance, a jeans division jeans and junior's jeans and Tommy Hilfiger Retail with a Los Angeles and London Store. International operations expanded from Canada, Japan, Central and South America to Mexico and by 1997 to Europe. In 1998 and 1999: home furnishings, infant and toddlers, girls', handbags, bath and body products, cosmetics, and more fragrance offerings for men and women were added and products were sold in Hong Kong. Sales in 1998 "climbed to \$847 million and then skyrocketed to 1.63 billion just one year later" (Woodward and Stansall, 2003: 332). The company achieved an Internet presence with the launch of its website in 1999.

Hilfiger links his brand to celebrities by launching tours for the Rolling Stones, Lenny Kravitz and Brittany Spears. During this year Tommy Hilfiger stock prices reach an all time high of about \$40 per share.

In a February 1, 1999 article in *Women's Wear Daily*, Hilfiger's third quarter net earnings are described as soaring 58.8%. The success is attributed to "its red-hot women's wear. A financial analyst comments on the "huge" growth in women's, licensing, and international. "So far Tommy has been close to perfect". While men's sales rose 13.1%, women's rose 146% (Ryan, 1999: 2).

As Woodward and Stensall put it: "... Hilfiger's success would continue throughout the late 1990s before coming to an abrupt halt in 2000." Brands like Fubu began to dominate urban fashion while "Tommy's clothes fill bargain bins

at Bloomingdales and Macy's" (2003: 332). In 2001 Bloomingdale's, except for the 59th Street location in New York, stopped carrying Tommy Hilfiger menswear (2003: 333). Some in the company have said that Hilfiger went too far in urban fashion, neglecting the kind of preppy sportswear a wider audience preferred, and in doing so alienating this audience. Rozhon notes: "Mr. Hilfiger lost both the fickle urban customer—destined for Russell Simmons' Phat Farm and P. Diddy's Sean John labels—and many of the preppies who were his original customers" (Rozhon, 12/26/04: 4).

In 2000 more of a focus was placed on women's wear. "A slew of industry veterans" were hired "to get the division back on track". Women's golf and swim were added (Woodward and Stensall, 2003: 333). In 2000 the junior's business which had been doing well was folded into a new jeans division. This was attributed to cut-backs by department stores in juniors (Kletter, 2000: 12). In 2001 intimate apparel and plus-size clothing, Tommy Hilfiger "Woman", was added. The "Woman's" line is described as an extension of the existing sportswear line by people in the firm. Lauren Bush, niece of President George W. Bush was signed on to model. In June of 2001 sales in women's and junior's sportswear and jeans exceeded company forecasts (2003: 333).

Expansion continued in 2000 with retail stores in Argentina and Uruguay. In November 2001 the Tommy Hilfiger store in Soho, an 11,500 square foot space on 372 West Broadway opened. The location was said to be chosen because of the neighborhood's "youth, international and global" presence. Hilfiger describes the store merchandise as a little more special and expensive

then what one may find in a department store. Gary Sheinbaum, the president of retail says: “The important thing is its still all-American and it’s still classic. And from the whole brand image—the presentation, the visuals—we can show the total lifestyle, while that’s a little more difficult in department stores” (Larson, 11/28/01, 10). In 2001 stores were opened in Moscow and Saudia Arabia, among other places (DataMonitor, 2003: 7). In 2001 Tommy Hilfiger became the highest paid apparel executive in the industry. At the same time, the Beverly Hills and London stores were closed.

In 2002 Stroll and Chou leave the company, selling their stock, and resigning from the board (Rozhon, 12/26/04: 4). In fiscal 2002, “overall sales declined slightly, while net income increased by 2.7 percent to 134.5 million” (2003: 333). During this fiscal year, a loss of \$513 million was posted. After this a former licensee in Europe was acquired and performance improved (Women’s Wear Daily, 12/8/03: 83S). Sales were 1.89 billion the next year, ending March 31, 2003, up from 1.88 billion the year before. The net loss is attributed in part to “an accounting change” related to special charges in closing stores (WWD, 6/23/03, 68S). Woodward and Stensall note that while “impressive growth had slowed dramatically from the 1990s, the company remained a popular and well-known brand” . During this year sponsorship rights to the Jones Beach Theater in Long Island were purchased, and Tommy Hilfiger sponsored the Tommy Hilfiger Freedom America yacht for the nine month “Alone Around” endurance race in New York City (2003: 333).

Fiscal 2003 was described as “one of the most difficult retail

environments we have seen". The company reports attributes its ability to do well to its standing as a global lifestyle brand. Joel J. Horowitz states:

Tommy Hilfiger is one of a very few companies that has successfully translated its consumer appeal from menswear to a broad array of products, including womenswear, childrenswear, home products, fragrances and many other product categories. Moreover, Tommy designs, markets and distributes the vast majority of its apparel products in-house.

Sales in the Tommy Hilfiger Toiletries division of the Estee Lauder Companies had dipped by as much as 30 percent in recent years, say industry sources (Cosmetics International, 2004: 1). In order to improve sales Tommy Hilfiger has signed on, in a \$6 million contract, popular singer/actress Beyonce Knowles to be the "new face of Tommy Hilfiger". The fragrance, "True Star", had its debut in September 2004 in the U.S., and worldwide in October. It is sold at department stores where the Tommy Hilfiger brand is currently sold, at \$45 for 1.7 ounces of eau de parfum and \$60 per bottle for a 3.4 ounce bottle. The line will also include body lotion and shower gel. Knowles' image will be shown on TV, in print ads, and on the outer packaging of the fragrance. Knowles will also make personal appearances. Fifteen million is expected to be spent in marketing (Cosmetics International, 2004: 1).

At the 2004 company pep rally the True Star commercial in which Knowles sings "I'm Wishing On A Star" was shown. Hilfiger expressed enthusiasm at having Beyonce represent Tommy Hilfiger and he told employees of her enthusiasm for Tommy Hilfiger. He said (approximately):

Beyonce chose us because she believes in us. She remembers us, that we gave her a start when she was 16 years old and with Destiny's Child. They performed for the Tommy Hilfiger show at Macy's—and they overshadowed the show. I had never heard of them before but my bother Andy told me they were great and that the three girls were very pretty and looked like the Supremes. Since then Beyonce went out on her own and she is very hot now. She wants to be identified with Tommy Hilfiger.

The quarterly report, posted on February 4, 2004 “exceeded Wall Street’s expectations” (WWD, 4/6/04: 11). At the 2004 company pep rally both Joe Scirocco, the chief financial officer, and Tommy Hilfiger, attributed this success to strong sales in Europe, representing 22% of total sales. More needed to be done to bring up the U.S. numbers and the various initiatives that were underway were discussed. The U.S. strategy will now be to pull back the reigns. Too much merchandise was sent out to stores and what didn’t sell was discounted. This was harmful to the brand image. The H Hilfiger launch is expected by the company to be their most successful product launch, and the Fall 2004 product and the David Bowie and Iman ads, are expected to surpass last season.

Hilfiger has joined forces once again with Mohan Murjani’s Murjani Group, this time to sell apparel and other products in freestanding stores throughout India, beginning in Spring 2004. Hilfiger junior jeanswear collection, men’s sportswear and men’s jeanswear will be sold. Managing director of the Murjani Group, Vijay Murjani says he is proud to launch the first major designer brand in India (WWD, 2/27/04, 2). Hilfiger is the first American designer to launch a clothing line in India (Company Newsletter, Summer 2004). Hilfiger

comments that he is committed “toward offering the complete Tommy Hilfiger lifestyle to the Indian consumer”, and he adds: “I look forward to making our products available in this dynamic marketplace” (*Women’s Wear Daily*, 2/27/04: 2).

In the beginning of March 2004 the new junior jeans line shipped to stores in June 2004 had a price increase of \$10, now retailing for \$49, \$59 and \$69. “Fabrics and detailing have been upgraded”. A new brand insignia, a “T”, is “subtly” stitched into a line that flows across the rear pockets. The upgrade reflects retailers’ choice to drive up profits by raising ticket prices.

In Fall 2004 a new H footwear line for men and women will be sold exclusively in Federated Department Stores. They will be released to the rest of the market in Spring 2005. Coach’s former footwear designer, Yoriko Powell was hired to oversee H footwear design. The H Hilfiger footwear line is described as “affordable luxury”. The license is held by Stride Rite Corporation. They also hold the license for Tommy Hilfiger Shoes. Men’s styles are in the price range of \$150 to \$235 and women’s, \$110 to \$230. Women’s shoes are made in Brazil and men’s in Italy (*Footwear News*, 4/26/04: 26).

The Fall 2004 H Hilfiger campaign, which Hilfiger promises to be exceptional, features Iman and David Bowie. For women the look is described by Hilfiger as “motorcycle chic”. A biker look with a luxurious twist. Menswear will feature traditional British style tailoring with eccentric detailing such as pick stitching, subtle color striping and unexpected linings. Hilfiger comments in the March 2004 issue of *Elle* magazine, referring to David Bowie and Iman:

they're ageless. And they're a mixed race couple. I believe the future is about the mixing of ethnicities. Nothing's about black and white anymore.

Hilfiger has in the past been successful with a formula that pulls in various aspects from American and popular culture and creates something new—rough athletic hip hop meets the crisp look of the yacht club. Hilfiger states: “I don’t believe fashion stands alone, it’s pop culture, music, art . . . all of it. Fashion is not separate” (3/04).

On December 13, 2004 the company announced it had acquired Lagerfeld Gallery, encompassing the Karl Lagerfeld trademark and Lagerfeld brand women’s, men’s and accessories lines. Lisa Lockwood of *Women’s Wear Daily* announces: “Karl Lagerfeld has a surprising new parent—and it’s none other than Tommy Hilfiger” (12/13/04: 1). This is a new path for Tommy Hilfiger. For a long time talks of buying a company and transforming Hilfiger into a multibrand company were underway. This intensified under the direction of President and Chief Executive Officer, David Dyer. The match makes sense for Lagerfeld who is quoted as saying: “I’m known for designing Chanel, and I can’t juggle three balls at the same time” (Lockwood, 12/14/04: 2). Lagerfeld after a successful experiment selling his clothing at H&M said he realized his labels had mass distribution potential. He sees Hilfiger as the corporation best able to build his megabrand. Hilfiger will initiate a global expansion effort opening retail stores worldwide in select markets. Hilfiger will take over the Lagerfeld Gallery stores in Paris and Monaco (Lockwood: 12/13/04: 1).

Structure of the Firm

Roseabeth Moss Kanter's (1977) five year ethnographic study of an organization looks at how a certain kind of employee is "manufactured" and roles, for example, managers and secretaries, are "produced". Her methodological approach and her argument is structural. The macro-sociological approach to studying organizations tends to focus on variables such as size, technology, formalization and environment to explain organizational outcomes. Weber in outlining bureaucracy allows us to see that hierarchies of authority and rule-based systems regulate patterns of interaction and decision-making. The form interaction takes is imposed on the individual by the organization. The corporate structure determines such things as who can talk to whom, and who makes what kind of decisions, and is a key component in the success of company. Richard H. Hall argues that individualistic approaches are insufficient when it comes to explaining organizational life. When one enters an organization, he or she is confronted with a system of norms and expectations. The organization, he argues, can account for "most if not all of the variation in behavior" (1972/1996: 33). "Behavior in organizations is organizationally, rather than individually or interactionally, based", he says (1972/1996: 37).

In this section the focus will be on structural aspects of the organization. In the next chapter, dealing with the more subjective topic of organizational culture, it will be possible to see how structural aspects contribute to the day-to-day operations and to the experience of working at Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc.

Executive Leadership

The following five individuals serve on the Executive Board. Joel J. Horowitz has been a Director since 1992, Chief executive since 1994, and President since 1995. As of February 2003 he was named Chairman. He has been with the company since its inception. The *Wall Street Journal* reports that he will step down in 2004 with the expiration of his contract but will continue to serve as a director. Mr. Horowitz describes this change as a “natural evolution of the business after 20 years.” Silas Chou, Chairman since 1989, left the company at the end of 2002 to develop a luxury based company in London. Such an “orderly plan” is described as “striking in an industry not known for graceful transitions” (Rozhon, 6/13/03: C1). It was decided on Monday, April 5, 2004 that Horowitz would stay on as Chairman at least through March 31, 2005 (*Women’s Wear Daily*, 4/6/04: 11). In August 2003 Lands’ End Chief, David Dyer, became President and CEO, succeeding Horowitz. He is also a Director. Thomas J. Hilfiger (as his name officially appears on the executive board listing) will remain Principal Designer in accordance with his lifelong contract, as well as Honorary Chairman. Joel H. Newman is Chief Operating Officer. He was named Chief Financial And Administrative Officer in July 2000 (Reuters, 7/5/00). In some company organizational charts and in the annual reports Newman is listed as Executive Vice President Finance and Operations and Assistant Secretary. Dyer says of Horowitz: “During Joel’s tenure as president and CEO, Tommy Hilfiger grew to become one of the world’s most successful lifestyle brands. We are fortunate to continue to have the benefit of his expertise and experience as we

lead the company forward” (*Women’s Wear Daily*, 4/6/04: 11). Arthur Bargonetti, a senior manager, is Senior Vice President of Operations. Peter Connolly is President of Global Marketing and Communications. Lynn Shanahan is Group President of U.S. Wholesale. Chris Nakatani is President of Retail Development. Gary Sheinbaum is President of Retail. Joanne Bies is President of Production. Howard Starr is President Canada, and Fred Gehring is CEO Europe. Allan Zwerner is President of Children’s. David McTague is President of Men’s H Hilfiger and Tommy Jeans. Christa Michaelaros is President of Women’s Sportswear, Junior Jeans and Women’s H Hilfiger. Guy Vickers is Vice President of Community Affairs. Howard Shapiro was Executive Vice President, Administrative Services and Human Resources until resigning in April 2004. He has been replaced by Theo Killeon. Joseph Scirocco is Chief Financial Officer, Senior Vice President and Treasurer.

Dyer is described as a “seasoned apparel executive who is well-regarded on Wall Street and is expected to complement Tommy Hilfiger himself” (Agins and Lublin, 2003: B1, B6). There have been several reports in the press lately about Tommy Hilfiger’s need to “revive” what is said to be a “mature” brand (Rozhon, 6/13/03: C1). Industry analysts have proposed solutions: either a takeover, or acquisitions. A takeover by Jones Apparel was discussed in Spring 2003 and had subsequently been dismissed (Rozhon, 6/18/03: C16).

Some analysts recommended a period of adjustment after hiring a new CEO and before any new acquisitions while other believe both should be done as soon as possible. In 2003 Horowitz announced that the company was planning

an acquisition. Possible acquisitions mentioned were the Sweetface Fashion Company, owned by Jennifer Lopez and Andy Hilfiger, Tommy Hilfiger's brother, or Theory. Calvin Klein, Rocawear and other brands were considered. In the 2003 Annual Report it is stated: "The Board of Directors has also decided to aggressively seek opportunities to further diversify our revenue and earnings base. This includes the potential acquisition of additional brands that offer growth opportunities to build long-term shareholder value through the development of a multi-brand, multi-channel business strategy." The Karl Lagerfeld acquisition provides all of this and the added benefit of association with the Lagerfeld name, synonymous with high fashion, glamour and wealth.

Chapter 5 – Charisma

Tommy Hilfiger as Charismatic Leader

Many factors contributed to the emergence of the Tommy Hilfiger Corporation and its growth into a profitable global business. It is, additionally, a major player in the promotion of popular culture, not only in American society, but also in many other parts of the world. Areas outside of the West become sites for consumption of products bespeaking an American identity, many of them purveyed by Tommy Hilfiger. The charismatic power of Tommy Hilfiger himself—a carefully cultivated power which extends not only to his persona and interpersonal interactions but to his products is largely responsible for this.

Rakesh Khurana speaks of the extraordinary and “blind” faith executives place in finding a CEO who can put a company on course. This is tied to a belief that the CEO is “individually responsible for the firm’s financial performance” (2002: 67). When performance declines, says Khurana, the CEO is blamed and a search for a new CEO is likely to begin. More important than knowledge about and experience in the company—for this recruitment can be done in the firm—is the belief that a charismatic individual, someone regarded as a “star”, who has headed a successful company, will turn the company around (2002: 20-21). By studying how various firms made their decisions to replace and hire new CEOs, Khurana concludes that the process is largely irrational. A “charismatic” CEO’s skills, abilities and industry-experience are often not a good match for the company, nor is the prior CEO entirely responsible for its shortcomings. Yet, the belief in the

primacy of charisma is so strong practical knowledge may be overlooked, even within the context of rational bureaucracy.

Khurana accounts for this anomaly based on a shifting market economy. He points out that during the era of managerial capitalism, when government regulated many industries and a few large companies were dominant in their market, corporations were run by bureaucratic, highly conformist managers. With a shift from manufacturing to services, and technological advances and global competition in the 1970s and early 1980s, a new type of manager emerged (2002: 68). As Khurana describes it:

The new corporate leadership that began emerging in the 1980s was in many ways a throwback to the swashbuckling Robber Barons of the late nineteenth century. This group, however, tended to be more public-relations savvy and psychologically attuned to the zeitgeist, thus avoiding being vilified as the Robber Barons had been. The new CEOs were portrayed as entrepreneurial. Like Steve Jobs and Bill Gates, they founded new companies. Or like Jack Welch and Lou Gerstner, they rejuvenated old-line firms. The new members of the business elite were no longer defined as professional managers but instead as *leaders*, whose ability to lead consisted in their personal characteristics or, more simply, their charisma (2002: 69).

Jay A. Conger draws a similar picture regarding leadership. This “new breed” of industry leaders care about “contributions to society, about revitalizing industry, about creating meaningful products and services” while the “industry barons” were consumed by “visions of personal aggrandizement” (1991: xiii). The charismatic leader is especially important in “times of great uncertainty and upheaval” whether in the organization itself or in the overall business environment. Charismatic leaders are by vocation “risk takers” with an ability to

sense “strategic opportunity” (1991: 8).

This new type of leader seems particularly suited to global capitalism. Oversight not only of one’s own corporation—perhaps spread over the globe—but of competitors’ moves, industry trends, consumer tastes, and the economic climate, calls for a visionary person able to assimilate various strands of knowledge. It is argued that particularly in the fashion industry—with its own unique set of configurations—is such a leader required.

Max Weber defines charisma, an extraordinary quality that confers a unique, magical power on an individual, as a type of authority. Previously the term had been used to describe a magical or religious energy. Reinhard Bendix says of charismatic authority that it is “a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities” (1960/1977: 88 fn 15). In theology it has been defined as a divine grace bestowed on man by God (MacRae, 1974: 3). In the context of discussing modern bureaucracy Weber compared the rational, legal bureaucratic authority in the modern world to charismatic and traditional authority. Bendix states that Weber’s view of history is that it “alternates between the charisma of the great men and the routinization of bureaucracy” (1960/1977: 326).

Charismatic authority, as Weber describes it, exists apart from any institution, it is a property of a particular individual who has the power to gain adherence from others and lead them. Weber uses Jesus Christ as an example. This type of authority can be compared to traditional authority, the dominant

mode for most of history. Traditional authority is based on established systems or institutions: e.g. monarchy, the Church. An individual inherits a position of authority (say in the caste system amongst a Brahmin priesthood) or it is ritually bestowed upon him or her, not because of any individual qualifications but because of his status. Charismatic authority is created by an individual; it begins and ends with the person at hand unless it is routinized in various practices of an organization. In this way charisma is stabilized and can continue even after the charismatic individual is no longer present. It may also be present in modern societies alongside the legal norms of bureaucracy. An example Weber uses is the development of the Catholic Church. Jesus Christ himself is deified and some elements of his charisma are passed down through the authority of the pope, and in the consecration of priests, for example. The institution becomes the bearer of charismatic authority, acting on Jesus Christ's behalf by interpreting and promoting his teachings, offering sacraments, etc. A living, divine inspiration, is replaced then by rituals and administrative practices. Other churches emerged, each claiming to have some right—or exclusive rights, i.e. being the “one true church of Christ”—to Jesus Christ's charisma.

Conger describes charisma as a *leadership style*. In isolating characteristics that can distinguish charismatic leaders he finds that they are to varying degrees creative, unconventional, have an unusual ability to see opportunity, and are able to inspire others (1991: 17-19). Traditional leaders, by contrast, tend to be low-risk takers and are pragmatic (1991: 17). Conger acknowledges the importance of factors outside the individual in defining

charisma. Conger argues that certain behaviors are perceived as charismatic and these perceptions are shared by a culture. In a different context a “charismatic” individual may be seen as deviant, not as a gifted person, and may not be able to attain any influence (1991: 22-23).

Robert Perinbanayagam argues that Weber’s notion of charismatic leadership needs to be expanded into a consideration of it as a dialectical and interactive process, thus incorporating the positions of Hegel, Marx and Mead (1971: 388). Charisma is dialectical in that it moves in a certain direction in relation to the larger context rather than being fixed and constant. If it were seen, conversely, as a personality trait or as a gift in the religious sense, it would be inherent in the individual and not subject to contingencies. It could easily overpower these obstacles to attain an almost predetermined end. Certainly people may believe that this is the case, causing them to put an inordinate amount of hope in the charismatic person. The interactive aspect, however, is a further mediating force (in addition to the overall context which includes specifically structural variables), in this case specifically social and interpersonal. It has the effect of bringing out or suppressing charisma to varying degrees, and directing it accordingly.

Perinbanayagam applies the strategies of Erving Goffman and Kenneth Burke to the study of charisma. He proposes that charisma is “created by symbolic processes” which “involve appropriate presentation of selves” along with the “management” of “identities” and the “manipulation of instruments and strategies of a rhetorical nature.” As charisma is an interactive endeavor, the

audience plays a role as “responsive”, “indifferent” or something in between.

This responsiveness can sustain or thwart the charismatic individual (1971: 390-391).

Perinbanayagam presents the case of Gandhi, and in doing so investigates how his charismatic authority was acquired, cultivated, sustained, and ultimately extinguished (1971: 391). Gandhi took on the persona of a holy man, an identity that would resonate with the Hindu majority. His new manner of dress, comportment, rhetoric and lifestyle supported this otherworldly self. Perinbanayagam refers to these manifestations as “symbolic productions” (1971: 393). Through such actions as fasting for Hindu-Muslim unity, Gandhi “increased his power and validated his identity” (1971: 393-394). Gandhi’s charisma was not “within him” in the sense of being a personality trait or a divine gift. He used relevant symbols and *became* charismatic, in part because he was embraced by a majority of people. At the same time, Gandhi developed a “counter-charisma” amongst those Muslims and fundamentalist Hindus who were not willing to make the concessions he proposed, ultimately dying at the hand of a member of the latter group (1971: 395-396).

Incorporating the dialectical position with regard to charisma helps us account for the drive sometimes noted in charismatic leaders.¹⁷ Charisma takes on an imperative to move forward, to be expressed. It is not easily extinguished, if only because it is adaptive. In some sense it can be said to have an energy of its own, if not a specific purpose. Most people, no matter how much they may wish

¹⁷ It also accounts for the divergent directions that charisma can take.

to attain it, cannot. The way charisma is expressed or the uses it is put to, depend on the historical and socio-cultural climate—a charismatic person in one culture or era will act in a very different style than someone from another circumstance just as his or her goals will vary depending on the nature of the industry he or she is engaged in. Certainly charisma also depends on interactive factors; the conditions met on the ground so to say, in face-to-face encounters, and interpersonal transactions. A cool reception from key individuals may point the charismatic person in a very different direction than he or she might otherwise have intended. And, if there is a lack of support he or she will eventually cease to be charismatic for all effects and purposes. Charisma is also dependent on a person's ability to manipulate symbols and to use them to cultivate an image that resonates well with the targeted audience, and with others perhaps outside of his or her immediate scope. At the same time, charisma is elusive, it must be worked at for it to be sustained.

Elton Mayo, discussing authority, speaks to the issue of charisma needing to be upheld:

The person who exercises so-called authority is placed at an important point in the line of communication—from below upwards, from above down, if one thinks in terms of an organization chart. It is his business to facilitate a balanced relation between various parts of the organization, so that the avowed purpose for which the whole exists may be conveniently and continuously fulfilled. If he is unsuccessful in this, he will have no actual authority in the organization—however important his title.

An “approximate definition of authority” Mayo says, referring to Chester

I. Bernard's discussion of authority in The Functions of the Executive (1938) is that it:

is the characteristic of a common (order) in a formal organization by virtue of which it is accepted by a contributor or "member" of the organization as governing the action he contributes . . . Under this definition the decision as to whether an order has authority or not lies with the persons to whom it is addressed, and does not reside in "persons of authority" or those who issue these orders (1945: 49-50).

Authority, we see, must be received as such. Charismatic leaders effectively convey their authority.

The literature on charisma within organizational sociology tends to look at it as an institutionalized practice reflected in structures and authority-based relations. This concept can be expanded on three fronts. An investigation of charisma should include the means used to establish charisma: practices, performance, signs, skills, etc. Charisma will be possessed by an individual or individuals even if it is routinized in practices and structures. These practices are performed by certain people and not others, and structures are upheld through collective actions. The support of those surrounding the charismatic individual thereby contributing to the emergence and continuation of this leadership style must also be considered. In addition to a focus on leadership one should, within a business context, consider the implications of charisma on product development and design, as well as its conveyance to the public as a means of defining the brand. In order for the product to be successful, a type of charismatic authority must extend to the brand.

Charismatic Leadership in the Fashion Industry

Having a charismatic leader, usually in the form of a principal designer (often the founder of the company) or in some cases a chief executive, is imperative in a company that creates fashion and must sell an image. The fashion industry is by nature dynamic and highly competitive. Individual firms must at once have a guiding vision and be flexible. Many firms fail due to an inability to maintain a vision: their product becomes too diffuse and loses its identity.

Consumers cease to see anything distinctive in the brand and may just as well buy something else. Tracie Rozhon and Ruth La Ferla observe that several fashion firms are looking to their archives instead of creating entirely new designs. They comment that “it is a way of restoring an identity when so much merchandise is look-alike and customers are telling pollsters they cannot tell one store from another in the mall” (2003: C1-C2). Others firms, that have attained success with a certain formula, fail to innovate and become stagnant. With the exception of some classics such as the polo shirt, most items will sooner than later fall out of fashion. Even purveyors of basic fashions like Old Navy run into problems if they fail to innovate from one season to the next.

Maintaining a balance requires the leadership of a visionary person who can negotiate between the aesthetic, cultural and commercial spheres, formulating strategies to move the company in a profitable direction. In order to do this the leader must accomplish three tasks. He or she must hold the trust of those who work with him or her. Without a belief in the validity of the principal designer’s judgment, and a real consensus about which path to take, the concerns of various

individuals may be brought into competition with one another. One designer may use his or her influence to push forward certain designs, the marketing department may insist on more of the same based on past success, etc. The principal designer has access to the full scope of information available in the firm while the expertise of most others is limited to his or her division, and associated areas in which that division is involved. It takes a charismatic individual to unify the firm. He or she must create an environment where unity is the expectation. This is achieved by his or her decisions having priority, and being final, while at the same time allowing for the incorporation of the ideas and innovations of others in the firm. If the latter is not accomplished creative autonomy can be stifled leading to frustrations.

The principal designer's identity is represented by the firm. The charisma of the firm's leader must extend to the firm and its representatives so as to gain the confidence of those on the outside: both those who will judge the organization's creations and retailers who will sell the brand. In most cases only a few important editors and retailers will come into contact with the firm's leader. Most people responsible for promoting the brand will encounter intermediaries. It is important that the firm establish a reputation that extends beyond the personal characteristics of its leader. Ultimately, a form of charisma must reach the public if they are to be persuaded, in large numbers, to buy the company's products.

Tommy Hilfiger: Constructing Charisma

Hilfiger and those surrounding him use various means to construct and

promote a charismatic identity. Hilfiger began his career in the fashion industry, with the intent of building a marketable identity. Hilfiger provides information on his entry into the world of fashion in a videotaped talk he gave at the Fashion Institute of Technology, State University of New York, in 1996. From the narrative itself, which highlights key moments, disappointments, and fortuitous mistakes, all of which made his success possible, we find evidence of a charismatic construction. Hilfiger could have told the story in any number of ways, but he tells it as a heroic tale, leaving out extraneous facts and details—the nuts and bolts, the daily grind, the boring aspects. The listener is engaged by the turns and twists, and their outcomes. Hilfiger is completely at ease when discussing his life, and displays a boyish charm. He seems surprised at his own achievements at times, drawing the audience in and making them partial to him. At the same time he remains in command: ever sharp, poised and articulate. Listening to him, one can't imagine him not succeeding, however much the odds were in fact stacked against him. For every such success, we know that countless others failed. One wants him to succeed, telling as he so skillfully does, a heroic narrative of a simple man who makes it big. The following information is taken from Hilfiger's narrative.

Elmira, New York is obviously not the place to start out in fashion. Hilfiger nevertheless found a niche. The area surrounding Elmira was home to many colleges. With his initial profits from the sale of bell bottom jeans in he opened boutiques on several college campuses. Hilfiger was able to accurately read the culture--hence his choice of starting with bell bottoms and not some

other item which might have generated little in the way of consumer interest, and sales. As he describes it, after the 1960s informality became the rule, and sportswear was very marketable. The college connection provided an audience eager for the latest fashions, and Hilfiger provided a comfortable ambiance in his boutiques. Hilfiger increased his prestige, and thereby the interest in his merchandise, by dressing rising rock stars Mick Jagger, David Bowie and others. He realized that to create a name for himself he had to draw others in--to build his charisma.

Early success no doubt propelled Hilfiger toward more lofty goals. He became interested in designing clothing for stores. Hilfiger sold the boutiques, and in 1977 he developed his own collection, called Tommy Hill. Hilfiger came to Bloomingdale's with shirts that he designed and had made by a manufacturer. At the time Calvin Klein and Ralph Lauren were amongst the important designers that Bloomingdale's stocked. The buyer decided to buy Hilfiger's entire inventory. One year later Hilfiger had merchandise in Macy's, Saks Fifth Avenue, and other stores. For about ten years Hilfiger continued to concentrate on retail. Hilfiger put in his time; this was not an overnight success story. The quality of Hilfiger's designs was by all means the initial factor in their being adopted by the department stores. He had no connections to draw on. Moving the business to the next level required a certain ability on Hilfiger's part to draw people in and to convince them that his products would be favorably received.

Hilfiger's first full-time position in the industry was with Jordache. Hilfiger was hired to do a collection for them in Hong Kong. This seems quite an

unusual way to begin on a first job. Hilfiger had by this time, though, amassed impressive credentials. His products were sold in major department stores and the sales figures bore out the desirability of his clothing. This enabled Hilfiger to approach Jordache, something he could not have done prior to his retail experience, since he was at a disadvantage in not having any formal design credentials.

Hilfiger made a mistake which was to be fortuitous. Perhaps only someone who was extremely driven could make such a mistake. He went beyond what he was asked to do at Jordache or from another point of view, didn't do what he was asked. He designed not only jeans but a whole collection. He was fired. And, his People's Place stores had gone bankrupt.

The next chapter in Hilfiger's career involved freelance work. Before embarking on this path he tried to start something on his own. Hilfiger hired some FIT graduates to make patterns and samples of his designs. Working on his own without sufficient capital to set up a business proved too difficult. Hilfiger decided to design for established firms within the industry. Hilfiger describes becoming known in the "inner circle of the industry". It is at this point in his career that we clearly see a systematic and active construction of charisma. Hilfiger insisted on having his name attached to the label of the clothing he designed. Hilfiger's freelancing consisted of working for firms that had facilities in place: factories/production, sales, distribution, accounting—all they lacked was, as he puts it, "good design". He explains to his audience of aspiring fashion design students that there are many companies like this, and they are in need of

help on the design front at all times. Hilfiger said many designers insisted on being paid for designing a collection before they showed their designs. This strategy didn't work for Hilfiger. He says he spent a lot of time walking around, and his designs remained unseen. He knew he had to change strategies.

Confident that his designs were good, he switched gears and showed his designs first. As companies were always willing to look at new design ideas (perhaps even to take them without retaining the designer's services) this was a surer way for him to get his foot in the door. When Hilfiger was offered a certain amount of money—he quotes a figure of \$5,000—to design line of clothing, he right away countered the offer, asking for \$3,000. This in exchange for his name being put on the clothing label. Happy to save a substantial amount of money for designs they already wanted to buy, firms agreed to his terms. As such, Hilfiger was designing the kinds of clothes he wanted to design. Assigning his name to these clothes was a way to achieve name recognition, and to begin to associate that name with certain kinds of products. This was the only way Hilfiger could get his name on labels. He identified a goal and found the most parsimonious solution. Hilfiger had begun creating his brand while still on someone else's payroll. Hilfiger states in this regard: “that had more value to me than money”. Indeed it was a form of investment.

During his freelance period Hilfiger mentions becoming friends with Perry Ellis. Perry Ellis wanted him to be “his right arm”, Hilfiger says. The same was to happen with Calvin Klein. Hilfiger describes being ready to sign a contract which would make him the designer for what was to become CK Sport.

He declined Perry Ellis' offer in favor of Klein's. Before signing with Klein, Hilfiger was told by "someone" not to take the job. That person encouraged him to do it on his own. "How", Hilfiger asked, "without money and facilities?" Hilfiger was introduced by this unnamed person to Mohan Murjani who had been producing Gloria Vanderbilt Jeans. Hilfiger joked about not wanting to work for Gloria Vanderbilt, he said he'd "rather work for Calvin". Murjani surprised him by saying he wanted to back a new young American male designer, and had selected him. Hilfiger says he "thought it was a dream come true". In exchange for backing him in his own work, Murjani wanted him to design Coca Cola clothes, a line primarily of jeans and tee-shirts bearing the Coca Cola logo. Hilfiger expressed not being "thrilled" about the Coca Cola aspect, but accepted the offer. The terms Murjani offered, which included financial backing, were more satisfactory in the long run than they would have been working for Klein. Hilfiger says he decided to put all his effort into the project, designing the kinds of updated sportswear he liked, and not thinking of the line as Coca Cola clothing. He designed rugby shirts, and other casual wear. "Overnight", he says, the business was a \$250 million dollar business. Hilfiger was learning on the job, he said; later he could apply Coca Cola's insight as an American icon to his own brand.

Meanwhile, in 1984 Hilfiger shipped his own first collection to department stores where he says it did well. Murjani gave Hilfiger \$10 million dollars for an advertising campaign. Here we find another instance of Hilfiger's constructing a personal charisma, although he attributes the idea to Murjani.

George Lois, the pioneering advertising executive, was asked to develop “gutsy” and “unique” ads. As Hilfiger describes it, Lois asked Murjani to describe Hilfiger, someone unbeknownst to the public. Murjani having full confidence in Hilfiger is to have said: “First there was Oscar de la Renta . . . next Calvin Klein, Ralph Lauren, Perry Ellis, next is Tommy Hilfiger”. Hilfiger says that Lois used this verbatim in an ad which was to appear on billboards and in magazines. Hilfiger states that he felt running the ad was “too embarrassing”, but Murjani insisted. Lois assured Hilfiger that this was the way to go, and so he agreed. The week after, the trade publications *Women’s Wear Daily*, *Daily News Record*, and the TV show Good Morning America, among others, wanted to know who this Tommy Hilfiger was. Hilfiger was widely criticized, and ridiculed. Some said he was not a designer because he hadn’t been to design school, others said his designs were not original. Hilfiger was invited on many news shows where he had the chance to explain his philosophy: “classic clothes with a twist”. It was a simple message used still in ads today that was easily gotten across to millions of viewers. The objective was met. An unknown had created the conditions—via a short cut—that enabled him to become known.

Getting started, Hilfiger says that he “surrounded” himself with “great people in fashion” on the one hand, plus “accountants, lawyers and great business people” on the other. As for the technical aspects of fashion, he said he learned as he went along from those who had design and other types of specialized training.

The same story is condensed in the 2004 company newsletter (in an article detailing Hilfiger’s India trip to open two stores):

The year was 1985 when Mohan Murjani, owner of many well-known brands such as Gloria Vanderbilt and Coca Cola Clothing Company, had a meeting with a young man to discuss fashion. After meeting for one hour, having not yet seen any of the young man's designs or sketches, Mohan decided to fully invest in the man's creative vision and start a line of clothing under his unusual name . . . Tommy Hilfiger. Nineteen years later, Tommy returned the favor by helping Mohan and his son Vijay launch the Tommy Hilfiger brand in India with a seven day tour across the country.

Here we see a triumphant Hilfiger, rising over the years to the point at which he could help his once benefactor. In this narrative the reader is left with the impression that Hilfiger appealed to Murjani solely on the basis of his charisma, the latter having never even seen his work—all within the course of a one hour meeting. Murjani explains events in a more matter of fact way in a *New York Times* article, leading us to believe that a certain amount of rational planning led up to his decision. However, Murjani highlights the importance of Hilfiger's charisma as being the determining factor in his choice:

Mr. Murjani had decided to start a men's jeans business but wanted the company to have a different name, a man's name. 'I was looking for a men's designer' he said recently, 'and one day someone called and said he wanted me to meet Tommy Hilfiger, a freelance designer looking for a job.' At the time, in 1984, Mr. Hilfiger was working for a company that was making jeans in India, 'and he would ride on a bicycle, just like a local Indian' when he was there, said Mr. Murjani who is Indian. They bonded and Mr. Murjani said he immediately offered him the job—and insisted on using Hilfiger's name for the label (Rozhon, 12/26/04: 4).

Knowing Hilfiger for many years, Murjani comments on his character:

“‘He’s like my brother,’ he said last week, just as he left for India. ‘I adore him. He is one of the nicest human beings I know’” (Rozhon, 12/26/04: 4).

The same influence seems to have been at play when Marvin Traub, former chairman and chief executive at Bloomingdale’s decided to carry Tommy Hilfiger’s line: “‘When Tommy first started, he was struggling, he was with Mohan Murjani, but he couldn’t get into Magic, a major men’s trade show, so he had to show in a motel room,’ Mr. Traub recalled. ‘I went up—and it was a shabby motel, with the springs poking up out of the sofa—and after meeting him, we created a whole shop for him at Bloomingdale’s’” Traub adds: “Tommy had a certain amount of personal charm and a lot of drive and energy” (Rozhon, 12/26/04: 4). Underlying this decision must have been a belief that the product would sell, yet Traub too chooses to highlight Hilfiger’s personality. Perhaps Hilfiger’s charisma was the ingredient necessary to cement the deal, compensating for whatever doubt Traub may have initially felt.

The company newsletter is an important means of building and managing Hilfiger’s charisma amongst employees, providing carefully constructed details of his activities to which most may not have had direct access. For instance, one is told in the above mentioned article about Hilfiger’s New Delhi experience: “As Tommy came out to take his final bow he was welcomed with a standing ovation from more than 400 people, all incredibly enthusiastic to greet the first American designer to launch in India. After the show, the runway turned into a dance floor where guests celebrated the launch into the wee hours of the morning.” Hilfiger’s achievements are often accounted in a heroic way. Hilfiger is referred to as a

“hero” and as “star”, in this same article. Hilfiger’s reception in Bangalore is described in this way:

Welcomed by Indian dancers with drums and a full red carpet treatment, it was a truly “rock star” worthy entrance. Energy rose as photographers competed for a glimpse of the man behind the famous label. The press was eager to get the first look at the new fashions only heard about, but not yet seen. That evening, a festive Indian crowd gathered to celebrate and toast Tommy at the ultra-cool F-Bar. Guests danced through the night in honor of Tommy’s collection. . . . Tommy received a hero’s welcome into a country he loves so much! He stayed until he signed autographs for all 50 members of the staff and took pictures with each and every one of them.

In addition to the company newsletter there is a monthly publication distributed via email to employees entitled “Tommy Marketing Monthly”. Employees receive a Memo with the attached document, complete with color photos, that can be printed out. This document is an important instrument in building and maintaining Hilfiger’s charisma within the company. The document, usually a page or two, shows a broad range of celebrities wearing Tommy Hilfiger clothing. The celebrities are shown at various venues (e.g. at a Knicks game, the Sundance Film Festival, a party for Ford Models), and below the photos are captions. Celebrities are often described as “fans of Tommy” or as “flaunting Tommy” (January 2004) or in the case of rapper Ahmir Questlove of Roots as “showing his love for Tommy” by wearing his clothing (February 2004). I’ve observed employees in Licensing chatting about the latest issue much in the way people might read a celebrity gossip magazine.

Routinization of Charisma: Administrative Structures

Max Weber's work on routinization of charisma can be applied to the case of the Tommy Hilfiger Corporation. Administrative structures were established and practices put into place so as to carry forward the innovative vision of Tommy Hilfiger in a rationalized, orderly way.

In asking how organizations achieve compliance from employees at different levels along the hierarchy, Etzioni finds that power in the form of coercion is usually applied to "lower participants" while at the upper levels control takes a normative form. Charisma is defined in this context as the ability of actors to exercise a diffuse and intense normative influence (1961: 203). The more normative power is relied on, the greater the need for charisma (1961: 210). The structure of Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc. seems to most closely resemble the T-type of corporate organization where decisions about how activities are carried out ("means") are made by middle ranks, and decisions about directions ("ends") are concentrated at the top (1961: 214). In such structures, Etzioni points out, charisma need only be present at the top since "lower participants" are supervised by "lower elites" whom they need not identify with. "Lower participants" rarely come into contact with the "top elite" who are thus able to sustain charisma (1961: 215). However, as designers and other non-executives working at Tommy Hilfiger are not engaged in manual labor under strict supervision of line managers—as might be the case in a manufacturing plant—each employee must be motivated and infused with a sense of moral purpose through an identification with Tommy Hilfiger's goals and ideals. Normative influence is key to creative

enterprises. This is accomplished in part by a diffusion of Hilfiger's charisma in various divisions of the firm. Individual heads of departments reflect Hilfiger's ideals and speak on his behalf. Hilfiger's charisma within the firm is based on communication, interaction and visibility. Much of this is routinized, or happens in a planned manner.

Hilfiger himself maintains contact with employees if not always directly, then through announcements in the company newsletter, and Memoranda. A regular calendar of meetings has been established so that design, marketing, and production happen according to a set time line. In this way "inspiration" happens at a particular time, at a definite pace, within a variety of predetermined boundaries. Concepts must turn into prototypes, and prototypes must be finalized and produced in certain quantities within the parameters of a schedule which remains relatively constant from season to season. During these meetings individual designers, design teams, and individuals representing various divisions have a chance to present their ideas to Hilfiger and to each other. Ultimately it is Tommy Hilfiger's determination that will shape the direction designs take.

"Pure" Charisma: Normative Influence of Tommy Hilfiger

At Tommy Hilfiger USA Inc. charisma has not been entirely routinized. Tommy Hilfiger heads the firm and he continues to exert a "pure", "achieved" form of personal charisma. Again, in a business where change is a constant and the product to be made and sold is largely dependent on image, a visionary leader who can direct and inspire a large workforce is needed. This "live" form of charisma transmitted interpersonally by Hilfiger occurs in a variety of ways.

It is important to note that certain types of employees are selected—those who are thought to be receptive to “Tommy” and themselves in line with his value system. A previous employee, a fashion designer, notes that Hilfiger plays an important role in the process of employee selection. He praises the quality of the designers he worked with. “They were phenomenal people”, he says.

We had ghetto girls, New England preppies, there was a guy from Guyana. A diversity of people, yet we had a lot in common. We had the same values.

He further states: “Tommy has an instinct for selecting good people.”

He sets the tone. You can’t last there if you are not a certain type of person. Ralph has very different people.

This designer explains that Tommy gave him his start. He loved fashion but he “didn’t know a knit from a woven”, and that’s not something you can ask someone, he explains. His degree was in physics. He fondly recalled that had it not been for Hilfiger he would have not have been able to get his foot in the door in the fashion industry.

While Hilfiger does not have a hand in selecting every designer, others, particularly those in Human Resources, are charged with this responsibility.

Hilfiger is present at many meetings and official occasions where some or in certain cases all employees are present, at least in the New York office. Susan an administrative assistant discussed an event referred to as a “pep rally” held in Cranbury, New Jersey in the summer of 2002. She stated:

Tommy and Joel got up and spoke. Then we had a fashion show done by coworkers. Lynn [the President of Licensing] was in it last year. After

that there was a barbeque. It was a lot of fun and motivational. I'd walk away feeling proud to work for Tommy.

Clearly, Tommy Hilfiger and Joel Horowitz, the Chairman, use this occasion to build unity amongst employees. The purpose of the event is not in any way hidden; it is openly referred to as a pep rally by employees. Susan enthusiastically describes the Christmas party:

Last year it was a 70s theme. Tommy walked around and did his peace sign. He was wearing tie dye. There was a cocktail hour. Joel walked around, was very personable. Then there was dinner, and later dancing. Afterwards they car serviced everyone home. It's a really nice event.

The moves of Hilfiger and Horowitz are carefully taken in by Susan and are recounted some months later in an appreciative tone. There is a feeling that Hilfiger and the firm in general have extended themselves to employees and through these gestures—being friendly and sending people home by car—these actions express an appreciation for the employees as individuals.

At the 2004 pep rally one of the executives commented to the audience that “we are all a part of Tommy.” The charisma of Tommy Hilfiger extends to those who are members of the corporation. Another executive commented, just as he was about to introduce Hilfiger, “without him we are all just comma Inc.”. These comments attest to the need for a continuous, live form of charisma. The products that everyone is charged with creating and promoting refer back to Hilfiger, and need to be infused with his spirit. Others may be important, but Hilfiger is essential.

Hilfiger is referred to as “Tommy”, and he addresses employees on a first name basis. This practice sets the tone for the collegial environment that many employees describe. He maintains casual, informal contact with designers and others at the company, often stopping by someone’s office unexpectedly to see how things are going. On one occasion during my observation, Hilfiger walked into the men’s sweaters designers’ office and stood there for a minute or two while on his cell phone. He smiled at those in the room and walked away. This action was a casual communication which served as a reinforcement of Hilfiger’s presence. It required little effort on Hilfiger’s part but appeared significant to the designers. “Wow, you got to see Tommy” one person commented. Another stated, “I wish I had a refrigerator so I could offer him something to drink”. Carl, a design director compared Tommy Hilfiger to his previous employer, Ralph Lauren. Carl’s description tells us how different two charismatic leaders--both of whom command respect, albeit of a different kind--can be. “Tommy is very un-Ralph” he states. He continued to say that he was “not knocking Ralph”. He thought Lauren was a “very intelligent man” but “elitist and snobby”. He explains that he expected everyone to treat him like the “King of England.” “When he walked in a room everything stopped.” He continued to say that “This goes right through--his employees act as he does.” On the other hand, he said, “Tommy comes in and sits on the floor with his hand made suit and talks shop.” Carl says:

Tommy knows what he is doing. He knows fabric, design. He’s a brilliant guy who just happens to be a normal guy.

Carl recounted the experience he had on his first day. He met Hilfiger and described him as seeming to pay attention to what he was saying. "And the next time he saw me he remembered my name". This seemed to make quite an impression on Carl; the emotion was evident in his voice and facial expressions. The implication here is that there is more to Tommy than his hand made suit, whereas for "Ralph" perhaps the charm resides on the surface and compensates for a lack of genuine character. Many employees conceive of Tommy Hilfiger as the polar opposite of Ralph Lauren. One employee speculates "At Polo you probably have to have these white names like Miffy. And if you don't have one they legally change your name!" She goes on to say that Tommy Hilfiger has a "more friendly laid back atmosphere." Although she never worked at Ralph Lauren she said she knew employees at Tommy Hilfiger who did. She stated: "Ralph seems uptight. Too caught up in this Hampton's lifestyle, either WASP or JAP, all the way."

The company norm of calling Tommy Hilfiger "Tommy" creates amongst employees, perhaps principally those who rarely if ever have contact with him, the feeling that they know him. In my conversations with some employees I've detected a distinct enjoyment in the saying of "Tommy". Instead of saying "him" after saying "Tommy" two or three times, a very new employee, for example, repeated his name every single time she spoke of him so that in a span of five minutes one felt as if they were hearing "Tommy, Tommy, Tommy, Tommy" (with a certain flourish added) and little else.

Charismatic authority of a normative type must be upheld in day-to-day

encounters and interpersonal transactions. Hilfiger's ability to interface with leaders in the firm, who in turn are charged with charismatic authority in their divisions, establishes a common purpose. Hilfiger's knowledge of all facets of the business provides a linkage between various divisions. Hilfiger's charisma must be supported by those who work in the firm. By relating to him in a certain way they contribute to the legitimacy of his leadership. On the one hand there is an understanding that a certain type of deference is expected. This will differ from firm to firm and one must learn through example and experience how to relate to Hilfiger and others within this particular firm. A person who worked in public relations for both Donna Karan and Oscar de la Renta said that she could not speak to Karan unless Karan initiated the conversation—silence was expected when she entered the office. At Oscar de la Renta she was surprised to find that de la Renta enjoyed and expected casual conversation. While riding in the elevator with de la Renta she remained silent pretending not to notice him as she had always done with Karan. He asked her name and inquired about what she did in the company. She nervously responded. The next time she saw him she initiated a conversation. He seemed very happy to chat as they walked down the hall together. This took some getting used to, she said, as his attitude was so different from her previous employer's. Eventually she said it became very normal to talk to him in an informal manner when their paths crossed.

Fashion firms more than other enterprises may require an active and ongoing form of charisma, in this case mainly provided by a master designer, to initiate the creative process and to maintain a sense of coherence. The nature of

the work and its connection to popular culture: the music world, celebrity, modeling, etc. goes far in creating charisma, a luxury the senior partner in a law firm does not enjoy. It also attracts a certain kind of person (at least in many positions within the firm); one who wants to be engaged in the world of fashion and is therefore susceptible to its enticements.

Hilfiger's selection of a "theme" becomes a catalyst around which designers and others begin to organize their activities. His continual involvement in the design process and his "editing" the work of designers allows him to sustain his charisma. Carl describes the level of Hilfiger's involvement, and the depth of his knowledge. Hilfiger is involved in all aspects of the business, and possesses a depth of knowledge that other designers do not. He states: "Tommy works on the inside and outside so he goes back and forth, returning after he's had talks to make changes." Carl says that the "production world" has to be flexible.

A designer may have a month and a half to create something. If there's a change the cushion is lost. It still has to be ready in a month and a half. One would have to make adjustments.

Hilfiger's charisma must in part be attributed to the power he holds in the organization. He is after all the "boss" and derives a certain respect based on the office he holds. However, we can detect a respect or regard that extends beyond this. Designers and others in the firm are not representing themselves as people who are just working for a pay check might. Carl seems willing to accept the stresses and strains he is put through by attributing them to Hilfiger's greater knowledge of what is required. It is possible to be resentful, to "take it

personally” when one is asked to start all over again. Rather, Carl believes that Hilfiger’s decision is right and proceeds accordingly. Of course, there may in fact be no other option but one could at least express a feeling a pressure or disappointment or disguised resentment which was not the case in this conversation. For example, one could say “At the end of the day I have such a headache. And then your work just ends up in the trash”. This would convey an underlying hostility, a feeling of being “put upon”. This generally did not occur.

Routinization of Charisma of the Brand

As we have seen, the individual charisma of Tommy Hilfiger becomes routinized in the administrative practices and procedures of the firm while at the same time continuing to be enacted by Hilfiger himself. This sets the tone for policies and for the types of interpersonal interactions that are acceptable in the firm. This charisma is also extended to the products bearing the Tommy Hilfiger name or logo.

The leadership and teachings of Jesus Christ defines the practice of Christianity and later the institution of the Church. The products, if you will, of this institution: sacraments, benedictions, holy oil, etc. are infused with Jesus Christ’s charisma so that long after he is gone they can be said to embody his presence. The institution of the church confers charisma on these objects by consecrating them (Bendix, 1977: 313). In fashion the artfully constructed charisma of the designer is transmuted, for example to the “House of Dior”, etc. and the products of such designers continue to carry charisma even if they are mass produced or made by licensees. There is of course a saturation point of

which every company must be aware. When one encounters cheaply manufactured merchandise, say Pierre Cardin toe nail clippers, the name begins to lose credibility. Of course to some consumers the product *gains* credibility and becomes more desirable than the same clipper without the designer's name. Pierre Cardin's charisma is called into question only by those who can appreciate what the name used to stand for, or who have a sense that it has been cheapened, just as in religious circles the improper enactment of a ritual may cause some to see it as compromised or even invalidated. Since a name has a resonance with people there is the temptation to exploit it. The result is usually a short term financial gain. Calvin Klein was involved in a law suit with Warnaco, a licensee, whom he claimed sullied the brand by selling it in J.C. Penney and other even less prestigious stores. Warnaco wanted to increase sales and knew they could cash in with the Calvin Klein name. Klein saw this as an irresponsible move and sought to buy back the license so that he could manage his name in a way that he saw befitting. Halston, beginning to sell a line of lower-priced fashion at J.C. Penney found that more exclusive department stores pulled the line from their stores because of its association with J.C. Penney.

Counterfeiters capitalize on the charisma of a particular brand realizing that there is a market willing to pay high prices for the status the product will bring. People buy counterfeit items fully realizing that they are not the genuine product in the belief that others will take them to be authentic, and perhaps additionally because they cannot afford the actual item or prefer to save money. Counterfeiting and presenting such items as real can be viewed as an

unsanctioned use of the charisma of the product. Licensing products to be made by various manufacturers is a sanctioned use of the brand's charisma. Licensing is a carefully controlled practice which enables the brand to get an exposure that it could not achieve on its own. This added exposure should reflect positively, and at the same time generate additional revenue for the brand, with less expenditure and investment of resources on the part of the firm. If executed properly it can be a winning endeavor.

One might equate Hilfiger's building his initial talent or "gift" for design not only into a global corporation but a lifestyle brand with a prophet's adherents being organized into a formal congregation, in this case on a mass scale.

Product Development: Building a Lifestyle Brand

Creating a lifestyle brand involves creating a brand identity, infused with symbolic meaning, sustained across a range of products, and conveyed through effective means to the public.

The Finnish firm Marimekko was one of the earliest to pursue a lifestyle approach to fashion. Founded in 1951 by Armi Ratia, the Marimekko (in English "Mary's dress") style conveyed a modernist attitude paralleling developments in Finnish art and architecture. Fabrics featured abstract patterns in bold colors. Designs were informal with simple lines. In the mid 1950s and early 1960s Marimekko fashions gained international acclaim and the aesthetic was applied to architecture and interior design. The design concept grew into a philosophy that would encompass a lifestyle. Other companies would plan such a trajectory from the start, notably Ralph Lauren, taking full advantage of modern communication.

The H Hilfiger line, launched exclusively in 55 Federated Department Stores in February 2004, provides an opportunity to look at how Tommy Hilfiger infuses a product with charisma. The company relies on networks it has forged or will forge with employees, retailers, radio and tv personalities, celebrities, and publications to reach the targeted audience, which includes those in the fashion industry. The advertising strategy, according to company documents, focuses on “making a big impact right out of the gate”. The impact is to be “upscale, consistent, and aspirational”. The line is described as “a mature, dressy side of Hilfiger that hasn’t ever been presented to the public”. The company intends for the H Hilfiger line to be a “pinnacle line” that will “set the tone to elevate the Tommy Hilfiger brand.” It is described as the “one of the most important business launches in our company’s history”, and was described at the 2004 company pep rally by Hilfiger as the most successful launch ever. The launch involves retail events, public relations, on-line activities, and advertising. Apparel and licensed products will be included. Below are some techniques specified for the various facets of the launch, providing insight into the Company’s perception of the process described as infusing the brand with charisma.

In an announcement to employees entitled “Create Awareness of the New Collection!”, key words are given in point form to explain the H Hilfiger line: “clean, sophisticated, modern, details, style, fresh”. Employees receive a dark blue folder with the H Hilfiger logo. Enclosed is a press release, an overview of the launch, a 2004 launch calendar, and examples of advertisements. Employees are educated as to the meanings they are to convey to others by this, and by an

“employee education program” arranged by the public relations department.

Retail events include a “Tommy tour” of Federated Stores in mid-March to mid-April 2004, television personality Lloyd Boston’s style seminars, Federated charity shopping events, shop openings, and magazine events. In March and April Hilfiger will tour the “top 6 doors”. Twelve “H Collection style seminars” will be hosted by NBC’s style contributor, and author, Lloyd Boston. Specific directions are outlined for how the stores should be set up for Hilfiger’s appearance: “Store signage specific to the appearance must appear in all doors within a 25 mile radius of the appearance door (at all major store entrances, escalator banks and other major, internal, pedestrian thoroughfares) for a period encompassing the weekend immediately prior to the public appearance date.” An “H” stage floor plan specifies exactly how the stage should be arranged, height of podium, microphone, signage, etc. A presentation by the events team to the Federated team will brief them on “tour concept, tour requirements” and will “excite them.” “Dedicated sales associates” will be placed in H Collection shops.

Public relations, described in one document as “the Tommy Hilfiger public relations machine”, plans fashion shows in February, editorial coverage from February through December, and celebrity dressing from February through December. “A national public relations campaign is in place to showcase the brand at launch and throughout the year both nationally and locally around retail fashion shows, VIP parties hosted by Tommy, exclusive in-store events, fashion seminars, celebrity wardrobing and more.” The main fashion show is a February 2004 fashion runway show at Bryant Park in New York. This is described as

“critical to establish and maintain the brand’s cool factor.” The Spring 2004 Race to Erase MS fashion show will showcase celebrity models on the runway.

On-line activities are planned for the H Hilfiger website from mid-February through December; email “blasts” will be sent from May through December, and an online trunk show in September.

Advertising contains several components. Direct mailing to 750,000 consumers is to be sent in March 2004 by retailers: Macy’s East, West, Burdines, Rich’s, Lazarus, Goldsmith’s and Bon. “In March, every door will be supported with a high-impact direct mail piece that communicates the H Collection lifestyle to high-volume store customers and tells them where it is available.” National and regional advertising appears between March 14 and May of 2004. The objectives stated are:

1. Create an awareness of the new collection.
2. Establish the H Collection brand personality as the department store resource for modern, luxe, office-to-eveningwear for men and women.
3. Differentiate it from competitive product as well as other business silos under the Tommy Hilfiger corporate umbrella.

Newspaper ads will be launched in 30 papers with a “retailer tagged” spread. Some of the newspapers and their retail sponsors are, for example, the *Los Angeles Times*/Macy’s, *Boston Globe*/Macy’s, *Idaho Statesman*/Bon-Macy’s. Total pages will be sixty. Catalogues are sent out in May. Advertisements will be taken out in 12 top fashion magazines. They will consist of “high impact inserts”. There will be 5 versions released per season. This is expected to reach

40% of the “target audience”. Trade ads will be taken out in *Women’s Wear Daily*, *Daily News Record*, and *Variety*. In March 2004 these publications will feature a “cover wrap” ad.

Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc. will work with Infinity Radio and with stations outside of their network. The radio budget is \$850,000. The target for the radio launch is the 25-44 year old department store shopper earning \$50,000+. In another company document the target consumer is described as “professional men and women 28-49”. Key points that the partnership will achieve are specified:

- Will create excitement
- Drive qualified attendees to Tommy Hilfiger fashion shows
- Activate DJ zealots as product endorsers
- Amplify message in key markets.

The radio launch, to air during “morning and evening drive times” begins with clothing being sent to various radio disc jockeys. The plan is to “tap into popular radio talent”. There will be DJ “live reads” by DJs selected based on “fit with the brand.” The live reads are described in this way: “Select DJs will act as zealots. . . . Everyday the DJ will build excitement and drive attendees to the fashion show through daily on-air stunts.” The stunts will vary by market. Howard Stern, for instance, will do 5 live reads for the New York market. VIP ticket giveaways will be given for after fashion show parties. “Promos” will encourage all listeners to attend the fashion show. The radio announcements will “clearly communicate a sense of newness, sophistication and elegance in brand offering through impactful H Hilfiger recorded ‘branding’ spots.” This should “create buzz and excitement around Tommy appearances through a combination

of promotional spots and on-air DJ mention/interaction". There will be 60 second pre-recorded brand and promotional spots, up to 43 in one week.

The following is a breakdown of how DJ zealots are to act as product endorsers, building up momentum for Hilfiger and for the brand.

Day 1.

- DJ receives a gift package with a personal invitation to the show. – DJ expresses excitement and honor about receiving a personal invite.
- DJ says that he/she wishes he/she could bring lots of friends and listeners to see the "sharp new clothes".

Day 2.

- DJ gets the new news. The show is open to the public and listeners can register on-line to win VIP tickets.
- DJ expresses that this is an "especially exciting event. Tommy Hilfiger himself is bringing his New York City fashion show to our city."

Day 3.

- DJ says opportunities are getting better with WXXX [radio station] and Hilfiger. There will also be grand prizes and a trip to NYC for the show and a shopping spree.

Day 4.

- "Surprise! Tommy himself is on the line. He heard the DJ talking about the show and wants to put her/him on the personal guest list."

Day 5.

- DJ dons new clothes and can't stop talking about how fashionable he/she feels. Grand prize winner is announced.

Follow up reports by DJs.

Radio ads.

In an article appearing in the June 2004 issue of *W* magazine a Hilfiger

appearance is described from the perspective of a consumer:

It's a perfect mid-spring day in Miami . . . But just inside the glass doors of the Aventura Mall, the scene is a bit less serene. For starters, there's a ponytailed preteen in hand-over-mouth hysterics. "Oh my God, Mom. It's him!" she shrieks into her cell phone. "I don't know what he's doing. He's shopping. I can't go up to him. I'm scared."

Sophie Olmsted spent two days on the road with Hilfiger. We are told that this scenario is familiar. Tommy is "at his best in the retail trenches". "Out among the shopping public he's a star". Before each show he "addresses an assembled group of Macy's sales staff" in a "candid" manner. Olmsted describes the executive crew accompanying Tommy in his private jet with the H logo painted on the side. A bodyguard is also in attendance (Mistry, 2004: 52). The celebrities are described as "not quite-A list", are specific to the area, e.g. in Miami, Jon Secada and Carlos Ponce. They are able to "get the crowd going" she says (2004: 53).

From Olmsted's description we can select several elements used to establish Hilfiger's charisma on this particular expedition. There is the logoed private jet which announces Hilfiger's presence. When Hilfiger emerges from this jet or makes an entrance he is accompanied by his bodyguard and a "swarm of executives" (2004: 53). Celebrities accompany him on stage. As we know, the areas in which Hilfiger is to appear have been appropriately staged and choreographed. In terms of his interpersonal presentation, Olmsted describes Hilfiger as "remarkably natural in front of the camera" and says that he has "perfected the sound bite". "Words flow easily", she says. He "waves

animatedly” and has a “high wattage smile” (2004: 55).

Sustaining a Brand Identity

In an article in *New York Magazine*, in the summer of 2000, Simon Dumenco argues that Tommy Hilfiger has lost its brand identity. Unlike the expectable from such competitors as Abercrombie & Fitch—“homoerotic soft-core porn”, Calvin Klein—“edgy pop culture icons as spokesmodels, Quicksilver—“partying surfer dudes”, Tommy Hilfiger “seems strangely out of focus”, observes Dumenco. He says the “nineties teen-pop-culture explosion” that made Tommy Hilfiger famous is a “psychographic bull market that was destined to run its course”. The urban style made the clothing appealing to the mainstream but the mainstream itself presents no allure (2000, online). From another perspective, Tommy Hilfiger alienated a major group that in the past had been loyal—“free-spending boomers” when he “went ghetto”. With the “rap crowd” gone, he is said to be again focusing on this customer. Bloomingdale’s CEO Michael Gould states: “Obviously, Tommy went too extreme into a narrow portion of the business. I think it may have scared off a whole lot of other customers.” According to a Wall Street analyst Tommy Hilfiger went from an A-plus to an F-minus, and is now going back to a B, which is still “a hell of a business” (*New York Magazine*: 2/12/01).

The H Hilfiger line uses a strategy which aims at streamlining the brand. The campaign featuring David Bowie and Iman is said to have everything Hilfiger is looking for to “represent the brand”. The husband and wife team, he a musician and she a former supermodel, combine “music, style, elegance,

creativity, sophistication” (Press Release, 11/23/03). Seen as the “pinnacle line”, it’s hoped the high quality and style of this product will trickle down to define all other products. It may not bring in as much money as other lines, but it will, if successful, confer prestige.

We see by the various strategies the company uses to promote the H Hilfiger line, that infusing a brand with charisma requires that Hilfiger’s own charisma be sustained, and that the brand itself be presented in ways which will keep it alive. Whereas relics or sacred objects maintain a charisma with no further action on the part of the object to which they are connected, and with perhaps minimal effort on the part of those charged with their safekeeping, fashion items must be reconfigured and repositioned in their own right while retaining a connection with a brand that itself continues to make itself significant to its audience. Charisma, then, as it is with the charismatic individual himself or herself, is never entirely routinized in the brand or in particular products. It has to be renewed, by one means or another, again and again.

Tommy Hilfiger as Cultural Arbiter

A cultural arbiter can be defined--to repeat what was said earlier, as an individual who has the ability to define and therefore determine tastes for others. Such persons need not be highly visible or necessarily charismatic. A poet or writer for instance may through his or her work set a particular agenda without any direct contact with the readership. This is very different from the celebrity, another type of cultural arbiter. A fashion designer is a particular kind of cultural arbiter. He or she is on the one hand an authority on matters of self-presentation,

lifestyle and social and cultural trends. On the other hand he or she uses cultural knowledge and creative abilities to create a direction others will want to follow.

Olmsted speaks of the designer, Hilfiger, who has promoted the “jeans-and-T-shirts lifestyle” now aiming at dressing up things. The timing is perfect, she notes, Jay-Z is rapping in his hit song “What More Can I Say” about “trading up” his own wardrobe (Mistry, 2004: 52). A year earlier, Thomas Cunningham of the *Daily News Record* says of Tommy Hilfiger that it’s “the first big brand to make a serious run at the rapidly developing premium sportswear category.” The President of Menswear, David McTague states: “There’s nothing in this segment in department stores right now. There are people at higher price points, but there’s nobody where we’re going” (2003: 1). Hilfiger recognized the moment but from a cultural (consumers being receptive to dressing up) and business perspective (where he as a brand could fit in), and used elements of popular culture (David Bowie and his wife Iman) to promote his products.

The average customer may not have a clear picture in mind of the designers he or she prefers. Instead he or she may gravitate toward a certain range of clothing. And many fashion firms like Bebe or Diesel do not have single designers representing their brand. Put simply, the task of the designer or brand is to create an association between the name and a certain style and orientation so that people will pair the two, thus selecting one product over another. The more a designer or brand can be seen in ways that cause one to make positive associations, the stronger the identity becomes. Much effort and detailed planning goes behind this.

In order for the Tommy Hilfiger line of products to hold any significance for the public—let alone to convey a particular lifestyle—Hilfiger had to attain a certain degree of prestige in the eyes of those who confer status: fashion editors, celebrities, etc. As we have seen, Hilfiger relied much less on this than other designers. He created his own publicity and starting to win over the public in this way, all the while gaining media exposure.

Hilfiger, as master designer, imparts a persona on the products the company produces and is seen as their creator. Hilfiger's persona grows out of his own interests, commitments and talents. He decides to embrace certain motifs and in doing so rejects others. Hilfiger states: "We started out being classic and it suited my tastes. But I also like music, I like sports . . ." (Underwood & Abbott, 1996: 22). As a designer attains more prestige, he or she comes to be seen as a cultural arbiter, one who is able to impart his or her sense of style to a broad range of issues. The lifestyle concept requires the vision of a person who can interpret cultural trends within a certain framework. For Hilfiger this framework has been Americanism. He draws on themes both traditional and contemporary—the frontier, sports, film—that have resonance with not only an American audience but those abroad who aspire to the ideals that these themes bespeak. Individuals, compelled as they are to announce a certain identity, look for direction and those who wish to be cultural arbiters position themselves to provide such direction.

Tommy Hilfiger is asked by *Brandweek*: "Some men wear Tommy head-to-toe. Why do people buy into brand lifestyles?"

He responds:

I think it has a lot to do with the confidence they have in either the designer or the product line. I think it has to do with price point. Some people view themselves as being in a certain price area. Climate has a lot to do with it. Certain people think that certain clothes are more suitable for where they live.

Also, we started out being very preppy, so a lot of men throughout the U.S. feel comfortable wearing that look. It's something they were brought up with . . . from the grandfather, to the father, to the son.

People get locked into these styles and they don't want to change. But maybe they feel that oxford shirt and those chino pants are a little bit cumbersome and they'll try something else. The same chino pants, but they want something new, fresh, relaxed" (Underwood and Abbott, 1996: 22).

Hilfiger points out quite pragmatically the importance of price. One is not likely to develop a "confidence" in Giorgio Armani if his finances cannot support such a dedication.

One's location is also important, points out Hilfiger. Winter fashions in Miami, Florida call for a different style than would be worn in the mid-West. Hilfiger is sensitive to the differences in various markets and adjusts the clothing line, and the ways in which he promotes it, accordingly. In addition to location we might add lifestyle. The wardrobe of a retiree, student, businessman, and professor, and mechanic call for different attire. Some individuals may rely heavily on sportswear, and on a certain type of sportswear, while for others

sportswear may be quite an incidental part of the wardrobe.

Finally, Hilfiger mentions tradition as a reason that some men select his brand. His preppy look appealed to many men whose fathers and grandfathers dressed in a similar way, he tells us. Hilfiger builds on this American tradition, updating it and offering it as something new for the contemporary man. Above all, the designer as cultural arbiter must understand the social psychology of the audience he or she hopes to captivate. Hilfiger provides a level of comfort and security to men who want to remain within the acceptable mainstream but turns these basic items into fashionable clothing.

Being a cultural arbiter requires remaining in the public eye; at least in sight of those one hopes to influence. Hilfiger has been skilled at this and has often done so in an over the top way. It may not be surprising to learn that he has found a new vehicle in the popular culture which will give him the largest possible audience—the American television public and many viewers abroad.¹⁸ In April 2005 Hilfiger will begin starring on his own reality TV show, “The Cut”. In this show Hilfiger will select from many hopefuls who for the duration of the show will live together in New York and be given various fashion challenges, a designer who will design a collection in his or her own name under the Tommy Hilfiger label. As reality TV shows command an impressive viewership, are the subject of conversation in many homes, offices, classrooms, and are discussed in various media outlets, this forum will provide Hilfiger with a maximum exposure,

¹⁸ Hilfiger has also appeared on “Rich Girls” a reality TV show starring his daughter Ali.

allowing him to build on his charismatic identity as he sees fit. The public will be invited into the company and will see Hilfiger at work. His personality, how he relates to those around him, his likes and dislikes, will be strategically revealed to an audience eager to be entertained and informed. Before this, the public would only have glimpses, at best of Hilfiger as a person. After the airing of “The Cut”, a coherent picture of Hilfiger will be formed in the minds of millions of viewers.

Hilfiger has embarked on another opportunity not only to build his charisma and that of his brand but to increase the scope of the brand and bring in additional revenue. Hilfiger has acquired Karl Lagerfeld’s trademarks: Karl Lagerfeld, Lagerfeld Gallery, KL and Lagerfeld. The transaction was reported on December 13, 2004. The Lagerfeld association will certainly add prestige to the Tommy Hilfiger name, while allowing Lagerfeld to expand through licensing on a global level. Lagerfeld is described in this way in *Women’s Wear Daily*:

“Arguably one of the most prolific and talented designers in the world, Lagerfeld designs eight collections a year for Chanel, Fendi and his own Lagerfeld Gallery, and how he does it remains one of fashion’s biggest mysteries.” The mystery refers to Lagerfeld’s secrecy in business dealings, and his desire to remain personally in control of matters. Lisa Lockwood goes on to say:

The Hilfiger deal is unrelated to Lagerfeld’s contacts with Chanel and Fendi. Lagerfeld’s employment contract with Chanel—where he’s been designing for 2 years—is said to be indefinite and for millions of dollar a year. Chanel’s fashions and fragrances are believed to generate revenues of more than \$2 billion per year.

Whether or not the deal is actually related to Lagerfeld's contacts with Chanel and Fendi, the Hilfiger name will be related to these entities and what they represent in the eyes of the public. Lagerfeld brings a cultural capital—an affiliation with high fashion and European sophistication—to Hilfiger's American brand. It remains to be seen how much the Tommy Hilfiger Corporation will make of this association. It is possible that it intends to remain largely behind the scenes, however the possibility for associating the Hilfiger name with Lagerfeld in various ways exists. The December 13, 2004 press release clearly states the company's recognition of the symbolic value the partnership represents. "Their union is expected to draw upon the reputation of Mr. Lagerfeld as one of the world's most successful and visible fashion designers. . .". David Dyer, President and CEO, states: "The Karl Lagerfeld name has tremendous cachet. We believe this opportunity will provide an exciting, new growth platform within the upscale apparel segment and compliment our existing business." Tommy Hilfiger adds: "Karl is a true inspiration. Designing for the world's most prestigious collections he has continuously set the benchmark for style, creativity and sophistication" (Press release 12/13/04, tommy.com).

Positions in the fashion industry, fashion design, marketing, licensing, and related areas, require a full investment of one's creative energies, and a level of dedication that entails sacrifices in one's personal life. To bring success to the company, employees working in such capacities must have a deep commitment to the visions and goals of the company. In a large designer fashion firm all products that employees are involved in creating, particularly those who work in fashion design, bear the name of one individual, or in some cases a company name. Employees must be in touch with the meaning of the brand—often closely tied to the persona of its principal designer--and indeed must identify with the brand. A

special type of leader is required, one who not only sells himself or herself to the public through the brand's representation, but who can in effect sell himself or herself to his or her own employees. Heading a major corporation with a global reach, in a highly competitive and seasonal industry, requires a bureaucratic form of administration. Yet it is not possible to contain fashion design, a dynamic enterprise built on innovation, into rigid bureaucratic boundaries. To foster creativity on an ongoing basis, Hilfiger must inspire and draw designers and others into his vision--a vision that is itself created through a collaborative process--so that in the end the product lines that result appear to be designed by only one person--Tommy Hilfiger. Many others in the firm will take what the designers have created and will present these garments, accessories and other products as a coherent package. In order for Hilfiger to operate effectively on so many fronts, various techniques are used to create a "live" form of charisma in his leadership in the firm (such as making impromptu appearances, chatting with employees, etc.). Hilfiger also carefully orchestrates events and processes where his charisma, both routinized and pure may be transmitted, for example at pep rallies, company events, and through the company newsletter and other interoffice documents. It is also necessary that Hilfiger transfer his charisma to leaders of various divisions within the company so that these individuals are accepted as legitimately embodying his ideals, and as capable of making decisions in line with his vision.

Chapter 6 -- Corporate Culture

Internal Sources

Surveying the field of organizational culture Harrison M. Trice and Janice M. Beyer define cultures as “systems of abstract, unseen, emotionally charged meaning that organize and maintain beliefs about how to manage physical and social needs.” While Trice and Beyer acknowledge that there are cultural forms within organizations, some of which have a physical presence, they wish to separate culture from social structure and so stress the ideological aspects of culture (1993: 20). It is possible to look at culture as having both material and non-material aspects, each informing the other. Material components of culture include the physical artifacts of a people; such things as clothing, jewelry, and ritual objects. Non-material culture refers to abstract phenomena such as ideals, values, beliefs and practices. Just as a society like the United States has a distinctive culture that sets it apart from another society, such as China, so too do organizations. Manufacturing work is very different from work in information technology. People in the manufacturing fields will manipulate very different types of material and non-material cultural forms, and like people of a particular culture will differ in the statuses they occupy, the roles they play, and the degree of autonomy they have within their organizations. These variables will differ both between and within organizations.

Particular firms have their individual cultures while at the same time sharing certain commonalities with other firms in a similar field. As auto manufacturing plants are engaged in the same type of pursuit, their material and non-material cultures—for example, managerial practices--should converge in many ways. However, a particular status, such as a chief executive officer in a

retail enterprise, may have much in common with someone of this status in an information technology company, despite the different cultural fields in which each person operates. The tasks performed by a person in a mailroom of a public hospital might not seem very different than those of a person working in the mailroom of a financial institution.

What then is the importance of organizational culture? It becomes clear that the objective in creating, sustaining, and directing an organizational culture, from the perspective of those who are committed to its success, is to bind people together by providing them with a common purpose. This helps to achieve the organization's mission. The mission necessarily transcends individual status boundaries and personal objectives. If employees feel themselves a part of something larger, that their activities are contributing to something greater, they should be performed with more enthusiasm, and should also provide a degree of personal satisfaction. Chief executive officers don't necessarily identify with other CEOs, they are, if in the same industry, expected to compete against each other on behalf of their company's interests. Nevertheless, there may be certain forums—industry related or personal (charity work, boards, clubs, professional associations, seminars)—in which they may interact with others of the same status. This kind of interchange tends to be limited to those professions occupying the upper echelons of corporate and professional life, except perhaps insofar as unions have a strong presence in some occupations. Mailroom clerks generally don't feel a sense of unity (or class consciousness) with mailroom clerks in other companies, they tend rather to identify with coworkers. Organizational culture can act as a cohesive force. This is as important for the employee as it is for the company. As the majority of one's career and time is spent within the organization, an organizational culture one feels comfortable in and identifies

with makes life that much more rewarding. If one's organizational life is less than satisfying, or if it is unpleasant, the general well-being of the person will be affected.

In a study of the engineering division of a high technology corporation, Gideon Kunda finds that employees are willing to work long hours and make personal sacrifices because they are driven by an internal commitment to the corporation via its culture (1992: 352, 356).

Many years earlier, in a series of clinical observations and experiments in industry, those researchers who came to be known as the human relations school promoted a type of administration sensitive to the social, interpersonal and psychological needs of its workers. Elton Mayo of the Industrial Research Department at Harvard University criticizes American society, industry, and the modern world in general for its stress on "material effectiveness" but oversight when it comes to creating solidarity (1945: 9). American society in particular sets a precedent for business in its focus on the individual. In a series of studies, Mayo points out, the importance of social factors is demonstrated. Employees, he and others found, were attended to in terms of technical training but not in the fostering of social skills (1945: 32). The latter is fundamental both to companies and their employees as "the desire to stand well with one's fellows" he finds, "easily outweighs the merely individual interest" (1945: 43). Mayo discusses, for example, the reasons behind a mill workers' turnover rate of approximately 250% falling to 5 or 6% several years later. A "horde of solitaires" was transformed into a "social group" when rest periods were instituted and placed in control of the workers. This interaction amongst workers led to solidarity which in turn made the job more satisfactory, the workers more productive, and the turnover rate far lower (1945: 59-67). Furthermore, the president's giving control to the

workers secured an “eager and spontaneous loyalty” amongst the workers (1945: 68).

In the Western Electric Company study, carried out by the same research department, Mayo describes “six individuals becoming a team”, a team that “gave itself wholeheartedly and spontaneously to cooperation in the experiment”. A feeling of being united, of being taken interest in by the company and the researchers, led workers to believe they were working under less pressure than before (1945: 72-73). Mayo speaks of the importance of “emotional release” amongst workers. Researchers provided just such an outlet. Simply talking through a problem—for example a long held resentment for being slighted by a supervisor--often led to a change in work attitudes and a subsequent increase in productivity (1945: 77). Mayo stressed the importance to companies of fostering group collaboration, referring to this form of spontaneous cooperation as “teamwork”. In the absence of teamwork “social chaos” in the form of “absenteeism, labor turnover, ‘wildcat’ strikes”, etc. may ensue (1945: 10). The organization must be sensitive to group dynamics and take an active role in its direction. Mayo points to cases in which individuals refused or avoided promotion rather than being separated from the group. Just as destructive sentiments may arise in the family, in neighborhoods or in nations, they may arise in industry, and need to be dealt with. What is destructive to the company may be preferable to an employee or a group of employees (i.e. a division), so special attention must be taken to see a situation from multiple perspectives.

The human relations school has been criticized for promoting the interests of organizations rather than those primarily of the worker. Clearly the organization’s culture can be used as a tool to undermine what might be in the best interest of employees. Laurie Graham (1993) found in her study of a

Japanese auto transplant that the team culture prevented employees from unionizing and otherwise manipulated them so as to gain their cooperation. Whether one sides with corporate or with employee interest depends largely on one's agenda. Nevertheless, one can say that if an organization is effectively operating, people in different positions and departments of the organization should feel a connection with each other and with the goals of the organization. Ideally there should be a collective consciousness, just as there should be for a society to operate effectively. What the content of this consciousness is, of course is open to criticism.

All organizations fall short in some ways of the ideal of a collective purpose (while some may go overboard). There may be hostilities and jealousies within and between divisions, indifference on the part of some employees, irrationality, and perhaps even malice. Such problems have the potential to derail the effectiveness of the organization; at least in certain areas of its operation, if not in the organization as a whole. The organization's culture will reflect these dysfunctional aspects, just as it will unifying forces.

Members of an organization have a role in creating the organization's culture. Their purposes may well be different from those of the organizational elite. "Culture" is not in the exclusive purview of the leaders any more than it is in the hands of the elite in a society, however much they may shape the "dominant discourse". However, as culture is an instrument of control, there will be checks and balances in place so that for the most part it will serve the interests of the company, and not those of individual employees. The trick, so to say, is incorporating the needs of members so that they will be willing participants in organizational goals—the organization's objectives becoming their own objectives.

The organization's culture is the core of the company. Strategic goals will be formulated in response to the firm's ideology and small everyday transactions between employees, both official and informal, will reflect the culture in which they unfold. In a global sense, the organization's culture will be shaped by its founder's objectives and persona, and by the tenor of current leadership. It will tend to remain constant even as employees may change. This reality often creates an environment where any individual, whether at the bottom or top of the hierarchy, is potentially expendable.

Philip Selznick has argued that knowledge of the formal structure alone is insufficient in understanding an organization. "Non-rational" dimensions must also be considered as they lead to certain commitments and strategies. While some organizational scholars emphasize the structural features of organizations such as size, technology, formalization or environment, those who take an interpretive approach tend to see communication as a fundamental way in which organizational cultures are created and sustained (Weick, 1983: 14). The common values members have--or that the company wishes to instill in members--are revealed through the way various activities are set up and play out, by the way employees relate to one another, and by the discussions they have.

Ernest G. Bormann describes what he sees as the "important components" of an organization's culture: "shared norms, reminiscences, stories, rites and rituals." Together these provide members with what he calls "a unique symbolic common ground" (1982: 100). This state where members share common sentiments, emotional involvement, and a commitment to symbols, he terms "symbolic convergence" (1982: 102). This notion can be compared to the material and non-material aspects of culture that members recognize as unique to their way of being. For the researcher, these symbolic media--the office

Christmas party, a conversation, advertisements, company newsletters, an executive meeting--provide data for understanding the unique culture of a particular organization.

An organization's culture has the potential, in its more extreme forms, to subsume the individual. Robert Jackall (1988) in his study of corporate CEOs and executives demonstrates how modern American corporations are more apt to resemble patrimonial fiefdoms than the rational and efficient "ideal type" bureaucracies that Weber spoke about. The corporate climate is set by the CEO. He is "king", "his word is law", and his "whims" are taken as "commands," argues Jackall (1988: 21). The CEO's ideals and interests become immensely important to those whose success rests on garnering his favor. Jackall found that each major division of Weft, a textile company, reflected the personality of its leader: hard driving, intense or cool (1988: 161). Jackall describes "Skipper", the CEO of Covenant Corporation. Skipper was known to choose favorites and to suddenly drop them when his interest turned to someone new. The nautical interests of this CEO trickled down the hierarchy so that nautical terms were used by employees in their daily conversations, even when he was not present (1988: 22). It was as if, to use a more extreme and decidedly negative case involving the Nazi camp guard, "victims" identified with their "aggressors", imitating their behavior and internalizing their values.¹⁹

In a psychodynamic theory of organizations, Howard S. Schwartz describes a common "organization ideal" in which individuals "unwilling to face their imperfect selves" compensate by "projecting their hidden grandiosity onto the organization". They come to believe that "the organization and its leaders are

¹⁹Bruno Bettelheim (1943) observed such behavior during his time in Nazi concentration camps.

perfect.” In such a culture, members hold one another in contempt says Larry Hirschhorn, commenting on Schwartz’s work (1993: 75). The spontaneous, troublesome self is repudiated and substituted for the organization, a situation that can occur under conditions of totalitarianism (Schwartz, 1993: 241). In the totalitarian work environment, there is no place for the self-conscious individual. The organization is designed around the narcissism of a “guru”. The function of employees is to serve the guru’s fantasy. This can be particularly challenging when, as in one organization where Schwartz describes the members of the design team, “the show that the guru was running was one in which they were autonomous, self-determining agents” (1993: 248).

Kunda finds that even in cult-like environments where there is a blurring between self and organization, members nevertheless “claim the right to control the extent and degree to which they embrace a role”. This sense of autonomy is accomplished by strategies involving distancing the self: dispute, cynicism and irony, for example (1992: 367-368). This is similar to the tactics that Graham (1993) finds that employees in a Japanese auto transplant utilize when faced with cultural practices that hold little or no meaning for them. Forms of protest ranged from mild: secretly making fun of the company’s philosophy, to severe: shutting down operations.

Fashion firms have the potential of becoming totalitarian organizations or fiefdoms, headed as they often are by a chief designer whose name the firm and its products bear, and whose ego may well be inflated. Some employees at Ralph Lauren and Calvin Klein have described their work environments in such a manner. Jeffrey Banks, a designer that Lauren took under his wing is described by Gross as “desperate to please.” In Lauren, he is said to have found a “father figure”. Gross quotes Banks. “When it works” he says:

Ralph has a great sense of humor, a great laugh, he's effusive and you feel like the sun shines on you. The flip side is that when he's displeased, he can make you feel *this big* by the way he denigrates you. It's the most brutal, awful thing to make a mistake. He's not spiteful, he doesn't realize he's doing it, but you're devastated. It's about control, definitely. It's about having that vision and not letting anyone or anything get in your way (2003: 132).

If we accept Bank's definition of Lauren's personality, we see the need for Bank's complementary role in the organization--and how dysfunction may be fostered. Competition between people vying for the attention and favor of this type of leader tends to become fierce and even pathological. A designer from a competing firm describes the environment at Ralph Lauren as "all backstabbing and catfighting". Discussing an employee close to Lauren who "disappeared overnight", Shari Sant, a former fit model and favorite of Lauren, for whom a high profile job was created, says: "It was really weird; none of us really knew why." She continues: "He'd get paranoiac about people who were close to him. People would plant seeds in his mind." Gross contends that Lauren encouraged employees to be critical of one another: "What do you think of so and so?" one executive recalls him asking. He might then reply: "I don't think she shares our taste level", creating an alliance by excluding the other person (2003: 262).

A designer recalls her first job at Nicole Miller. "It was a harsh environment" she said. She literally marked off each day on the calendar, intending to stay 6 months before looking for another job. She explained that the gossiping was constant. People gained satisfaction from tormenting others, she said. She added: "I would get blamed for things that were not my fault because someone above me who made a mistake said that I did it". She said that her manager often would delay doing something: "she'd just let things go." Because

various deadlines were not met, samples would not be ready on time, and Miller finding this out would be furious. "I was the one to get blamed even though I did my part." She continued saying: "what could I do, say my manager was lying?" She agreed that the general climate was one in which people were competing to get recognition from Miller, and were willing to use others as scapegoats in order to stay in her favor.

A senior designer at Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc. who began her career at Ralph Lauren states, without further elaboration, when asked if she liked working there: "If you were a socialite type you'd get along very well there."

At Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc. this type of competitiveness and exclusivity is largely avoided as Hilfiger projects an egalitarian image, and promotes the ideal of the workplace as a community. Therefore, he is not searching for favorites who will bolster his self-concept, and further his ideals at the expense of others. He conveys his expectation that all will work together to achieve goals. Employees are not rewarded based on individual merit but are praised for the work they do as part of a team or division. Certainly one can be fired, but it will not be for being a team player, or for angering Hilfiger, rather it will be for "restructuring" or other reasons related to the division's own politics.

The leader's personality, the corporate ideology, and the identity a firm takes on is especially important in an industry where the image projected contributes to the desirability of the products sold, as is the case at the Tommy Hilfiger Corporation. The charisma of Tommy Hilfiger, and other executives of the firm, is instrumental in setting a positive tone. Advertising executive George Lois says in an interview: "It's not only important to develop great advertising to reach new customers, but it's equally important to reach existing customers and

employees. They need to be reassured they're dealing with a winner" (Lamons, 1996). At Tommy Hilfiger, no matter what the function of a particular employee might be, each is engaged in the larger task of promoting the Tommy Hilfiger name. To be effective in their work they must to some degree believe in the product. This is less so (from the point of view of necessity) for those engaged in routine administrative work—for example bookkeeping--than it is for those engaged in creative endeavors or work that involves meeting clients or customers. Such work truly requires conveying the spirit of the company. However, it is in the interest of the company to motivate each and every employee so that the goals and ideology of the company become personally meaningful.

The 2004 pep rally, a company activity where employees are entertained and encouraged to do more for the company, featured a company fashion show. Three people from each division could participate in the show. Employees rehearsed for the show and during the show walked down the runway in Madison Square Garden, complete with professional lighting, two giant screens featuring the "models", and the music of a live band performing on stage. It gave a chance for some people to really live out a fantasy, judging by the enthusiasm with which many employees played the role of a Tommy Hilfiger model. Sitting behind me were three young women who seemed to cheer the loudest of anyone in the audience, screaming out the name of employees they knew (which were plentiful) as they walked the runway. After the show I asked what department they were from. "We're from the Dayton office" they said. As mentioned before, Dayton, New Jersey houses accounting, finance and other such administrative offices. According to one New York employee, the Dayton office has "a strong, genuine team spirit." She explained that they are extremely proud of working for Tommy Hilfiger. She recounted an experience she had at Dayton while at the company

cafeteria. Employees wanted to hear about the New York office and to know if she knew or had recently seen Tommy Hilfiger. Another employee mentions in an email in response to my asking her if she agreed with the above observation that her fellow employee made about the Dayton employees:

I agree on the NJ comment, last year I did that walk for the Susan Komen Foundation in Central Park, and we all had to walk with a big group (with big logo t-shirts on) and I met a bunch of NJ employees, and they were very eager to hear about the NY office and how often we see TH and stuff, it was kinda weird. They enjoyed that people knew they worked for TH and wanted everyone to see the t-shirts. They're surely dedicated and very proud to work here. Some people do treat this place as a lifestyle and not just a job and that is good I'd say.

Steven P. Feldman writes about an important function that organizational culture serves, which is particularly so in creative industries. The organizational culture, which he defines as a “set of meanings” including “norms, roles, plans, ideals, and ideas” can be used, he says, to stimulate innovation (1993: 85). In an organization, Feldman argues, members share “a collective predisposition” that leads them to “understand events, react to situations, and solve problems in certain ways”. Feldman discusses how John Smith, founder of Smith Electronics²⁰ and “center” of the “work culture” in effect discouraged innovation based on his “self-motivated” management style. Smith is described as “inner-directed”. His strong sense of purpose in creating a secure workplace for employees and dedication to producing high quality products caused others around him to become followers (1993: 89). Feldman describes Smith’s idealism as leading to an internal focus on product engineering and lack of attention to “market dynamics and customer needs” (1993: 89-90). Such a mistake would not

²⁰ Both pseudonyms.

bode well in the fashion industry.

The organizational culture has been routinized to some extent. We find formal recurring structures in which ideals are transmitted and regulated. There is for example in every company a dress code. This requirement comes to be taken for granted by most employees but nonetheless plays an important regulatory role. There may be a different code for executives than for middle managers, and yet another requirement for administrative personnel. This distinction may create and sustain hierarchical boundaries. Differences in dress, whether they are formally directed or informally picked up by employees, may define the identity of one division in relation to all other divisions. Each company will have certain events such as picnics and Christmas parties which allow for informal socialization while at the same time reenforcing the goals of the organization. Companies may be engaged in fundraising or community service activities in which employees may participate thereby reinforcing a collective identity. Perhaps there may even be more overt ways of socializing employees such as pep rallies, and intensive training “boot camp” programs. Other examples of formal structures set up to instill the values of the organization are company newsletters, meetings, and seminars.

Formal structures represent the officially sanctioned aspects of organizational culture while informal structures point to adaptations that members make to the formal structure, or elements they themselves may incorporate into the culture. For example, certain aspects of the work environment such as office furniture and office supplies are approved and selected by the company or by individuals for themselves insofar as they are given such authority by the company. The arrangement of certain items on one’s desk and the addition of personal items reflects an informal aspect of the organizational material culture.

The boundaries are not fixed between formal and informal, material and abstract. The choice of a certain desk for a given category of employee by the company reflects structural arrangements as well as abstract ideological phenomena, even though it takes on a material form. Similarly, the individual's choice of arrangement of official and personal items reflect his or her understanding of the organizational culture, and conveys this to others.

Setting the Stage: The Work Environment at Tommy Hilfiger

A sign hangs above the door to the design studio at Chanel's headquarters in Paris that reads: "Creation is not a democratic process". Karl Lagerfeld, Chanel's designer, maintains an almost complete control over the designs. "Singlehandedly, he creates eight or nine collections a year for Chanel and personally photographs its fashion ads, while participating in a range of commercial decisions" (Rohwedder, 10/13/03: B1). Those designers who do assist Lagerfeld do so only according to his strict specifications, not taking any initiative on their own. Should anyone forget the hierarchical arrangements at Chanel, the hanging sign is literally there to remind them. There are no such definite pronouncements at Tommy Hilfiger, but one can in more subtle ways get a sense that this is an unusually democratic environment, so far as corporate fashion houses are concerned. On December 13, 2004 the company announced that it had bought Lagerfeld Gallery and the rights to the Lagerfeld name. It will be interesting to see how the two organizations work together. Hilfiger comments that his design team will work under Lagerfeld's direction and Lagerfeld stresses that he will retain creative control while Hilfiger will manage the business aspect (Rozhon, 12/26/04: 4, Lockwood, 12/14/04: 2).

When one exits the elevator on any floor in any of the buildings there is a

lobby area where a visitor must pick up a phone to call on the person he or she has an appointment with. (Employees can enter with the use of a key card.) The listing is alphabetical by *first name*, with the first letter of the name printed in a bold red letter (one of the Tommy Hilfiger signature colors). The same first name system is followed in the company directory used by employees. One has to get used to looking up “Bob” and then look through the many “Bobs” before finding Bob Reynolds. It is not the most efficient way to set up a directory but it does convey a clear message. The company pointedly goes against conventions of formality. This doesn’t mean everyone is equal. Certainly some people are recognized to be more important than others, their calls are always put through right away, meetings are arranged and rearranged at their convenience, and importantly they are compensated for their time more handsomely than others. The first name basis, however, serves as a reminder that everyone is involved in a common enterprise, and that the mode of operation is collegiality.

The Configuration of Space at Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc.

There were four buildings in New York City, three on West 39th Street and one across from the New York Research Library on 5th Avenue between 40th and 41st Street. On May 14, 2004 employees moved from the two leased buildings at 32 and 42 West 39th Street into the building on 485 Fifth Avenue.

The space that designers work in is configured differently than those who work in other divisions such as licensing or marketing, with the exception of those designers holding executive vice president positions. In the case of designers supervising a division, their offices are much like the offices of other division heads, a large “corner” office with a conference table. One such office, housing the Executive Vice President of Women’s Licensed Design, located at

Fifth Avenue, features large windows on one wall overlooking the New York Public Library building. The office is large, with a conference table for six persons. The walls of the office along two sides are covered in a white bulletin board material so as to be able to have items such as pictures and clothing tacked up. In one corner hangs a tank top shirt.

Designers in a particular division, for instance men's sportswear, share an office. I will describe the configuration as it was on October 9, 2003, during a day I spent observing the designers at work, and how it is configured differently in June 2004.

Three designers share this office, Carl, the director of men's sweaters, men's sportswear, and senior designers Loretta and Karina, both of whom design men's sweaters. "Desks" take the form of a platform that wraps around two walls of the room. There is a large, tall work table in the center of the office with stools. The walls, shelves, desks, tables, chairs, tops of cabinets, and the floor are completely covered with objects. There are clothes on the chairs, on the center work table, and stacked on the floor. Above the cabinets there are about 100 large spools of yarn lined up. Perhaps more interesting than all the work-related items are the multitude of personal items. Karina's area is the most decorated section of the office. A jeweled princess crown tops her computer. Family photos, a strip of photos taken in a photo booth, computer art, and funny news clippings are among the items displayed on the white cabinets that stretch the length of the wall. Just above the desk are numerous kitsch items—a plastic fish mounted on a wooden block, a Jesus action figure near an ad of a guy in underwear, some stuffed animals, and a variety of trinkets. Carl and Loretta's areas were a lot less animated but also displayed many personal items such as photos, various objects, and books.

The office atmosphere was very casual. While each person worked at his or her computer, they chatted on and off. The conversation ranged from Krispy Creme donuts (now at Harrod's someone observed) to the Immaculate Conception. Everyone weighed in on how to improve sewing machines so that material wouldn't bunch up on one side. The talk was meant to pass the time and to keep communication going as each person worked independently. At one point, after some comments were made about wayward priests, a voice could be heard that said, in an ominous tone: "you are all going to burn in hell." It was Mark from the next office. There is a foot long opening just below the ceiling between this and the adjoining office which allows for conversations to occur. Several times during the afternoon there were humorous exchanges between Mark and Carl. Mark seemed to be alone in his adjacent office and would every so often say something to which others would respond.

I had a chance to speak to Karina about her work area. She said their office was a lot more fun than most, and that's why people enjoyed coming by. "They like to hang out here because they feel comfortable" she said, never taking individual credit for her own area. Indeed she had a visitor stop by during the time I was there.

Carl showed me the design boards on the opposite wall from Karina. This was the serious wall (except for one or two postings in the far corner near his desk). The design boards had computer generated images of sweaters. Across the top of each of these the month and season was written.

The designers spoke about how different other companies were in terms of office arrangement issues. Carl talked about Calvin Klein. I mentioned that in the book I had read there were very strict regulations at Calvin Klein concerning

what employees could have on their desks. He said he had heard the same type of thing, and knew that the general atmosphere was restrictive. All agreed that the atmosphere at Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc. was just the opposite. "We are allowed to be who we are", Carl stated. Loretta said that Hugo Boss was very much like Calvin Klein. Only white flowers were allowed in the offices. Employees, depending on their level, had to wear certain kinds of clothes from his line, and they had to drive black cars. Everything was black and white. No one could say hello unless spoken to first.

Some months later Karina left the company. An assistant designer was hired in her place. The office decor became much more moderate, her workspace remaining pretty much empty of decoration. In March 2004, Carl was fired based on a restructuring of that department. The division seems a lot less lively as work has been consolidated. No one was hired to take his place, his work area remained completely bare.

Some people in the buildings have their own offices, sometimes with a separate conference or meeting area within the office. Some offices are more expensively furnished than others. Those employees without private offices are located close to the offices of those they work for, in cubicles of varying sizes. This indicates hierarchical arrangements but is also related to the type of work individuals perform. For example, those with offices have greater responsibilities and must have a private space in order to meet people from inside and outside the organization. Their offices are decorated with framed photos from various ad campaigns, as are the reception areas and the outer walls on each floor. Much of the artwork depicts people engaged in some amusing activity—at the beach, outdoors, etc. Even though these advertisements were created for the public, placing them in the office leads one to expect a somewhat pleasant, relaxed work

environment.

In addition to company binders, assorted files and papers, and whatever may be necessary for that individual to perform his or her work related role-- items of clothing, swatches of material, bottles of fragrance, magazines, reference books--one is likely to find family photos, decorative objects, and reading material of personal interest in individual offices/cubicles. The cubicles do not feature any decorative photographs supplied by the company. Each individual cubicle is decorated by the individual working in this space, often personal photos, calendars, greeting cards/postcards and the like are displayed. Each person has a telephone and a computer at his or her desk, some have their own printers (and perhaps a fax machine) and others share these items with others in their department. The office furniture differs somewhat from floor to floor and in different offices and buildings but tends to be white, the carpeting is grey, and for example in the older location at 42 West 39th Street, the ceilings are high with track lighting.

Employees are often seen eating at their desk. Desks are not uniformly neat. Some people have very few things on their desks and keep them very tidy, others tend to have stacks of papers and folders, perhaps even a look of disarray. There does not seem to be any regulation, certainly not of the type that purportedly occurred at Calvin Klein.

Employees are often seen stopping by coworkers desks for a few minutes of informal talk, mostly in the context of conducting business. Just before the move from 42 West 39th Street, two employees expressed that they were disappointed about the new space. One said she expected it to be more open but instead it was "too boxed in". Another said: "I thought it would be a pit, where

we'd all be together in one space." She continued to say "it was a lot of small cubicles". Trice and Beyer point to studies of office space where it was found that open settings are indicative to employees of egalitarianism and are for this reason more favored by those who would like to diminish status differences, namely lower level employees, while higher status employees view such arrangements as a loss of privacy and of symbolic status (1993: 88-89). I added that maybe the space could be rearranged somewhat. She shrugged and said "I don't know" as she walked away. Other employees expressed a wait and see attitude. They didn't seem to know what to expect and didn't seem particularly concerned. Clearly many things that happen in organizations are decided by those in higher positions and are not seen as negotiable. These responses indicated a resignation and in other cases simply a willingness to adjust to the conditions provided.

Each floor has a kitchen with refrigerator and microwave. A dispenser which makes coffee and hot chocolate, and has hot water, is also provided for employees as is a juice and soda dispenser. The women's bathroom provides complimentary feminine hygiene products for women. Many offices provide these small courtesies for employees, and many do not. The choice to do so conveys a sense of hospitality.

The executive offices are located in the main building on 25 West 39th Street. Companies where hierarchy is highly valued will have separate dining and bathrooms. Some people have parking privileges. One employee mentioned that when she first started nine years ago she could park her car in the garage. As the company grew it became a place reserved only for higher level employees. "I understand", she said. "There were a lot less people then." An employee who had a friend who worked at the firm twelve years ago stated: "It used to be much

more congenial than it is. Don't get me wrong, it still is fine. But we can't ride the elevator with Tommy. He has his own elevator, and he is always with a bodyguard. We see him and all but before he was hanging out. Designers used to be in on all the meetings, now only the design vp's are in on the meetings."

Another designer noted: "Ten years ago, before I was here things were very different in terms of design. After the designers presented their ideas everyone at the meeting would stand up and clap, including Tommy." Now, he said, "They are ready to hammer us down. This is due to a change in the economy. When the economy was better, designers were stars, celebrities in the company." Here, we see a desire to explain what may be a relatively less congenial atmosphere with an external cause, and not a lack of good will on the part of Hilfiger or the upper management.

A sense of hierarchy was conveyed at the pep rally with the first few rows on the left hand side reserved for the company's executives. Other people seemed to arrange themselves in seats without any direction. It was somehow known that all the executives would be sitting there. Directly across, in the right front, seats appeared to be available to anyone.

I noticed a desire amongst many employees to uphold the idea that the Tommy Hilfiger Corporation is a community or a family, instead of expressions of criticism or resentment. Care is taken to explain information that would contradict this, so as not to disrupt the overall belief system. Hierarchy is often not experienced or spoken about as an indication of inequality or as antithetical to the interests of employees. One designer expressed no longer being included in creative meetings with Hilfiger as a benevolence on the part of the leadership. Tommy had trouble critiquing the work of designers while they were there, so only his supervisor attended meetings now.

Hilfiger's handmade clothing, the exquisite shoes he wore one day that some young women commented on, his office, etc. are points of interest. One employee commented: "You have to see Tommy's office, it is so big and beautifully set up. I got to take a peak in there once." A designer commented: "His office tastefully mixes dark wood paneling with Americana. It's very impressive. There's Mick Jagger's guitar in one corner, an Andy Warhol in the next." Executive privileges: being able to leave early at times, vacations associated with business, etc. tended to be met with an expression of happiness for that person: "he/she deserves it, he/she works so hard, does so much here/for us". Comments of this type were overheard in conversations.

Certainly some of this can be attributed to decorum. There is an expectation between fellow employees that a certain level of politeness be upheld. Even if one hates one's boss it is not considered appropriate, nor is it wise, to publicize this. In the last analysis it is likely to reflect badly on the individual himself or herself, more so than the negative comments might on one's supervisor or co-worker. Between people who hold each other in confidence such feelings may be exchanged without fear. There was a notable exception to this decorum at the pep rally. One disgruntled employee will be discussed later in this chapter in the section on the pep rally. Some comments from employees did point to some resentment of the hierarchy—particularly in relation to creative decisions imposed from above on designers. This issue will be reexamined in the section on the creative process in chapter 7.

Orientation

The maintenance and transmission of the Hilfiger corporate culture begins with the orientation seminar given to new employees. The orientation session can

be seen as an initiation ritual. The official documents given to employees, such as the employee manual, reflect the aspirations of the organization. From such documents newcomers begin to encode meanings and expectations as they are understood by the organization (Putnam and Pacanowky, 1987: 66, 68) At Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc. I was surprised to find that it took on a bureaucratic tone. Here, employees learned about the general details of employment--what is required of him or her, and what Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc. provides in return. More specific information on how an employee is to perform his or her role is left to the department that he or she will be joining. Most people have commented that this information is learned informally--you are literally "thrown in" to a department, and into your new role, where you "learn as you go". I was told by a long time employee that in the past employees who dealt with the public (such as merchandisers) would undergo an orientation course known as "Tommy University".

The orientation session is led by a person in Human Resources and covers topics such as employee benefits. These sessions are held every Monday at 11:00AM. "And then it's hands-on" says Lori, the manager of human resources. If there is a need for specialized training, for example computer training, that person will be sent for appropriate training.

I attended an employee orientation on June 23, 2003. Three new employees were present, and some new employees who were scheduled to attend did not appear. The session was conducted by Cynthia. During the orientation session employees are given an employee manual, in the form of a large binder, as well as information specific to benefits. Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc. provides a generous benefits package comprised principally of medical, dental, short term and long term disability, and life insurance for the employee and his or her

family.

Cynthia began by saying that employee medical coverage provided by United Health Care “starts on day one”. She informed the new employees that if they needed to they could go to the doctor or fill a prescription today. Many companies require a period of three months before benefits are awarded. The new employees (by their expressions) seemed very impressed with these benefits, as did Cynthia who conveyed in her offhand remark about receiving medical care today that Tommy Hilfiger was a caring place to work.

The medical benefits were followed by mention of the company’s 401K plan. After one year employees may enroll in a 401K plan, the contribution of which Tommy Hilfiger will match at 50 cents to the dollar.

The area that drew the most interest was not the medical or other benefits, but the employee shopping discount. All three candidates—one much more than the other two—asked questions. Each employee is entitled to a 50% discount by showing his or her company issued identification card at Tommy Hilfiger retail and specialty stores. Cynthia clarified that this was on both regular and sale merchandise. Employees receive a 70% discount (from the retail price) at the Employee Store, then located in the Tommy Hilfiger offices on 32 West 39th Street. This store is open from 12:00 - 6:00PM, Monday through Friday, employees were told. All purchases must be made by credit card or check. The items in this store are intended only for the employee. One cannot bring family or friends, and one is not supposed to buy items for others. However, one can buy merchandise of any kind (i.e. for the other gender) if it has been marked down. Employees can also shop on the website, with all merchandise available for 70% off the retail price. They are allowed to buy gifts from the website. One

of the new employees asked how the website was setup. She wanted to know if she could search by style number so that she could get 70% off an item she was only entitled to get 50% off of if she bought it in a store. Items that were listed according to their wholesale price would be 35% off and licensed items received a 50% discount. Someone asked about the outlet stores and was told that the discount would be 35% off of the retail price. Cynthia seemed completely at ease discussing these issues, and did not in any way seem motivated to move on to “more important” topics. Being able to shop for Tommy Hilfiger items at discount prices is no doubt one of the important motivations (or “perks”) that employees may have in mind when deciding to seek employment in this firm.

After discussing shopping benefits, and asking if there were any more questions, Cynthia returned to a discussion of more traditional benefits. Employees receive 3 weeks of vacation, accrued at 1.25 days per month. This year employees were told they’d have 7.5 vacation days and next year 15 days. The first vacation day could be taken after working 90 days. Employees have 3 personal days each year. “Summer Fridays” begin after Memorial Day. Employees work half days but are told to contact their individual departments for specific details.

Cynthia mentioned a new benefit, the flexible spending account. It is a tax deferred savings plan that employees can use for expenses such as day care or summer camp for the children. Money saved in this account needs to be used by the end of the year. She said “Tommy is very happy about this”. Employees invariably refer to Tommy Hilfiger as “Tommy”. In referring to him in this way Cynthia transmitted this to the new employees while at the same time associating him personally with a program that might be looked upon favorably by the new employees. Cynthia referred to the parking and mass transit benefit as a flexible

spending account as well. "Money is taken out before taxes so you end up saving quite a bit on transportation costs", she explained.

Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc. provides emergency day care for employees. This service is provided by the Lipton Corporation. Each employee is entitled to 10 days of free service. Infants and children through 16 years of age are covered. According to the age of the child, activities such as arts and crafts and outings are provided. A new employee comments: "We had this same program at Liz Claiborne but we had to pay \$15 per day." If an employee decides to adopt a child, \$5,000 is contributed by the company toward the expenses.

Employees who refer someone else who is hired at Hilfiger receive a bonus paid in two installments. The bonus for someone hired at the associate level is \$750, for a managerial employee one receives \$1,250 and for a director, \$2,000.

Cynthia finished the presentation with a discussion of security issues, for example: how and where one was to get their access card.

I asked the question of whether or not there was a dress code. This had not been mentioned. Cynthia said that the dress code was "business casual." For sales people she said, "Tommy Hilfiger is required". The design people "can dress more funky", she said.

Formal and Informal Dress Code

The employee manual is vague as to any specific standard:

Dress, grooming, and personal cleanliness standards contribute to the morale of all employees and affect the business image Tommy Hilfiger U.S.A., Inc. presents to customers and visitors.

During business hours, employees are expected to

present a clean and neat appearance and to dress according to the requirements of their position.

Consult your supervisor or department head if you have any questions as to what constitutes appropriate attire.

Employees at Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc. wear Tommy Hilfiger clothing, or clothing that is Tommy Hilfiger-like in appearance. Nothing that is obviously from another designer is worn, several employees note. For example one wouldn't wear clothing bearing the logo of another designer or brand. This unwritten rule does not seem to be enforced in any way and doesn't seem to be taken too seriously as I have noticed people in clothing, and certainly with accessories, that could be identified as belonging to another designer or company. People are not in any way afraid, whereas some employees have said at other firms they would be taken to task for wearing an inappropriate garment. One woman in Licensing stated: "At Ralph Lauren you wouldn't dare wear something from Tommy Hilfiger, God forbid! You'd be sent home, or fired." When asked about Tommy Hilfiger she stated, "Well I wouldn't wear something from Ralph Lauren but if I did I don't think that anyone would say anything." Self-regulation versus an authoritarian regime seems to characterize the atmosphere at Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc.

It is unlikely that someone whose style of dress was noticeably out of sync with the Tommy Hilfiger style--let's say punk--would even be hired. If they were, there would be indirect pressures and eventually actual dictates from their division that would no doubt compel them to change their appearance. Janou Pakter, an executive recruiter for various firms in New York describes why one of her candidates, a frontrunner for a \$500,000 plus position, didn't get the offer.

The president of the company wore khakis and sneakers to the office everyday, and other executives were similarly dressed down. The candidate, for each interview and visit, persisted in wearing clothes suitable for a Wall Street firm. Based on his self-presentation, the company doubted the candidate's ability to successfully handle marketing matters for the company (Maher, 2003: D6).

The mode of dress tends to be more on the casual than on the business side for most employees. This varies somewhat depending on position and whether or not an employee has contact with clients. Fridays are dress down days, the one day employees are allowed to wear jeans. Tommy Hilfiger, however, can be seen on most days in a tailored European suit. Robin Finn in an interview with Tommy Hilfiger for *The New York Times* states:

His career threads are bespoke and imported: all of his suits, like this dapper number with a vertical white stripe that matches his Oxford shirt, are made by a London tailor. He may dress the masses, but you won't ever (outside of photo ops) catch the designer wearing a rugby jersey with his first or last name emblazoned on it.

The level of formality in dress may be an informal means of separation between certain executives and other employees who follow a more relaxed dress code. Executives, predominantly male, tend to wear suits while other male employees are more likely to be seen in slacks and a woven shirt. There is not much difference between women, executive level or otherwise. Clothing tends to change based on the activities the individual has that day. For those who work in marketing, PR and merchandising it is more dressy.

Designers tend to be the most creative dressers, displaying a more individual style in the arrangement of their attire. Designers in Licensing Design tend to dress more conservatively when compared to designers in Sportswear.

They may have to meet licensees and as such must consider their appearance in relation to the licensee's orientation. The clothing of the designers in Licensing tends more toward Tommy Hilfiger clothing while the designers in Sportswear are more likely to be seen in the clothing of upcoming young designers or in clothing that conveys a much bolder message. In sportswear different forms of expression are encouraged, while in licensed design, by nature of the work, creativity is somewhat more tempered. One group is interacting with licensees and is operating more on a corporate basis, while the other is actively working to infuse new ideas into Tommy Hilfiger designs and thus probably feels somewhat more leeway in terms of dress.

Personal Appearance

There is no shortage of attractive people at Tommy Hilfiger; some employees look like they could step into a Tommy Hilfiger ad if need be. Although personal appearance, style and demeanor are related to success in many very different industries, they are especially significant factors in the fashion world.

Personal appearance transitions very easily into matters of race and ethnicity. According to a former fashion designer, now a consultant and a professor of menswear design, when levels of talent and experience are relatively equal, the person with the appearance and background most in line with the image the company is trying to convey, is the one to get the job. This person goes on to say that in certain jobs where technical skills are not essential, a person with a certain appearance, and often someone from a certain race and/or ethnicity, may be sought. He explains that racism is usually tempered by class. As far as certain companies are concerned, if you are African American, but went to boarding

school or have an Ivy League education, and/or you vacation in the right places, you will be acceptable. Recently there have been allegations, substantiated by former managers, that Abercrombie and Fitch practiced discrimination based on race at its retail establishments. African American and Asian employees were placed in “backstage” positions, while white employees, who also tended to be attractive, occupied highly visible positions on the sales floor.

An African American woman who interned at Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc. some years ago mentioned seeing the trailer to the new *Stepford Wives* film. “It seemed to me that they could walk right out of the film and into the workplace.” She continued, “I felt the women I worked with were blond, blue eyed clones or something who all shared the same ideology.” When I asked her what this ideology was she didn’t seem able to say anything specific. She said, “This includes just about everyone in the workplace from merchandisers to marketing. Since you are there you should be able to judge the accuracy.” She mentioned that Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc. was a member of the Black Retail Action Group which supports and encourages the hiring of minorities in the fashion industry. She mentioned that they really don’t know why Hilfiger is a member when he hires so few minorities.

Visits to Tommy Hilfiger retail stores revealed that there was a diversity of race and ethnicity amongst employees one encountered: sometimes a majority of the retail employees were African American. Not surprisingly, no one was heavy or unattractive in appearance. This is not an industry which looks favorably on larger-sized people or looks that fall outside the norm of general attractiveness. Perhaps there is also a self-selection process in play so that companies are most often not put into the position of rejecting someone on these grounds. At the company pep rally one could see quite a few African American

employees, both in the runway show and in the audience. Several upper level and executive employees are African American.

The comment about some employees being “clones” and the comparison to the *Stepford Wives* is of interest as this person is not the first to have brought it up. Designers at Tommy Hilfiger tend to see their relationship to fashion as critical and professional. Sometimes they tend to view some of the other employees as what one might call “groupies”, young women who are “crazy over having the right purse or shoes”, as one designer pointed out. The designers tend to see little substance in employees like this, one designer having compared this type of employee with the Stepford wives. “Some people are totally concerned with their appearance and being a Tommy person, there is no interest outside of that. Kind of like the Stepford wives scenario. I’m really proud of working here and I wear the clothes and all but it is not the only thing in my life.” Another designer mentioned “don’t be surprised if some people you speak to don’t understand multi-syllable words.”

The Company Store

For several years Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc. employees could shop in the Tommy Hilfiger Company Store. Its last day of operation was December 31, 2003. Located on the 9th floor of the 32 West 39th Street building, the store occupied a relatively large space with dressing rooms. This store, reserved solely for Tommy Hilfiger employees, carried merchandise that could be purchased for 70% less than the retail price. Employees needed a key pass to enter and had to give the last four digits of their social security number to the cashier upon making a purchase. Employees were only allowed to buy clothing corresponding to their gender, as the purpose of the store was to provide clothing for employees.

Clothing that had been marked down could be purchased for anyone. In this case a more important objective was to move merchandise out of the store. Store hours were Monday through Friday from 12:00-6:00 P.M. Given that most employees seem to still be working at 6:00PM, a visit to the store appears to constitute an acceptable break. The busiest time was about 3:00PM on a Friday. Employees, more often than not female, were often seen shopping together in pairs. The shopping trip was both a social and a work-related occasion. People often discussed business while chatting about the items on display. Sometimes people from other departments were encountered and a discussion about some pending issue was undertaken, a followup talk arranged, or a decision taken right then and there. Sometimes employees who didn't know one another would casually ask for fashion advice, never moving beyond this level of conversation.

The company store, then, was a shared space where people could interact freely, leaving their official statuses behind. It also served as a place where they could share a collective sense of belonging to the same company, and indeed a sense of privilege as this merchandise was accessible only to these individuals.

In mid-December 2003 two employees were observed discussing the closing of the store. "I'm so used to coming here to wind down, I don't know what I'll do when it closes" said one. I asked an employee why it would be closing and she explained that it was because the lease in the building was expiring and all offices would be moving out. She didn't think a new employee store would be opening, commenting that there probably was not enough space for it. "Did anyone say anything about it?", I asked. "No, we heard about it and then just got a notice that it was closing, period." Several weeks after the store closed I asked an employee how she felt about the store closing. There was some

resentment in her reply: "It's terrible. Well, now I just go shopping in other stores when I have some time during the week. I'm not buying as much of our stuff as I used to." Her response revealed a feeling that the company had taken something away from her, and now she, via her purchasing power, was being less loyal to the company.

Company Events

If we accept that organizational life is constituted through communication as Putnam and Pacanowsky (1987: 59) argue, events organized by the company to achieve a certain objective should be key ways in which such objectives can be achieved. They bring people together in a structured manner, and, as they are planned in advance they can be highly orchestrated.

Human Resources amongst its many other responsibilities organizes company events. The yearly events consist of a Christmas party, and a company outing taking the form of a "pep rally" to Cranberry, New Jersey. This later event which usually takes place in the summer and is accompanied by a picnic. The Christmas party and company outing did not take place in December 2002 and during the summer of 2003 as the company has been experiencing "hard times". Sonia Dickson explained that a decision was made to give people their bonuses and to forego the parties. The party and outing schedule resumed in 2003 and 2004.

Pep Rally

A pep rally was held on September 5, 2003. An employee of several years described the pep rally as "boring". She explained that she'd been to a few and it was "pretty much the same thing every year". She continued: "It was really, really fun at the beginning, when I first started, but eventually you know

exactly what to expect. What's the fun of that?" For this person at least, something that is supposed to be reinvigorating has deteriorated into something routine. Another employee expressed quite a very different view: "Oh, I love the pep rally. You go and hear Tommy, and you learn so much from him. It is always a lot of fun. And you get to be with all the people in the company that you don't see too much otherwise."

Regarding the June 15, 2004 pep rally held at Madison Square Garden, a new employee who had been looking forward to her first pep rally summed it up this way in an email:

That was my first Pep Rally, though, and it was so much fun! First of all, food equals good and free food equals better, so I was a pretty happy customer from the get-up. But then all those performances! The music. Fashion show. How cool was that?! It made me want to be a rock-star. Or, at least, dress like one.

Someone else commented, more critically:

I saw some giddy ladies on the elevator talking about Tommy. They were delighted. There's some propaganda to this, the way we kept hearing about our bonuses, and how we must do more now. Every company has this at some level but no where else did I have an actual pep rally devoted to it.

At the pep rally itself I must have been standing next to the most disgruntled employee in the entire company. He was waiting ahead of me on the concession line. He complained about the air conditioning not being strong enough, he thought this was "really cheap", having to wait on line for food. "I bet there's not anything left by the time we get up there", he said to anyone who would listen. "Why does it have to be done this way?" He went on and on about

what a waste of time this was. "I've got work to do, I don't need this. So I'll have to work later. Thanks a lot." Eventually he said to me, "I'm happy about the bonus though, that's the only good thing. Did you see yours yet?" I told him I didn't get one and said I was not really an employee. I explained to him about my project. He said something to the effect of: "Get away from me. You don't know me, you've never seen me." Employees that were around him did not respond in any way, but seemed mildly annoyed, trying not to pay attention to him. I heard two people say later: "Who else does this? This is so nice. Some people are just miserable." The general agreement was that he was cranky and unreasonable, and out of line.

The pep rally began at 12:45pm. The concession stands were serving "theater snacks" to employees: hotdogs, nachos, chips, popcorn, candy and beverages. After having snacks employees were asked to enter the arena. The host was Peter Connolly, the President of marketing. Employees were shown a video introduced by Peter Connolly highlighting all the accomplishments of the firm over the year. The first title to flash was: "Tommy Hilfiger Storms the World" written as a newspaper headline. Excerpts from interviews, magazine covers and stories flashed.

David Dyer the President and Chief Executive Officer spoke about the company and about the employee bonus. He joked about being the last one to know about the bonus. He made some comments about all the activities at area ATM machines today. The bonus was the result of a goal set forth last year, being reached. Every full-time employee got a bonus. The bonus amounted to about 10% of an employee's yearly salary, but varied slightly based on departmental accomplishment. This year, we were told, we will have to work very hard in each and every division to get to the whole bonus. So far about 50%

of the bonus has been achieved.

Tommy Hilfiger was introduced by Dyer, with statements such as: “without Tommy Hilfiger we’d be just comma Inc.”; “we are all a part of Tommy”; “this is the man responsible for all the good things we have”; and “he is the creative design genius whose name we all go by”. Hilfiger spoke of the bonus and of how each and every employee deserved the bonus for their contribution to the firm. He also asked people to do all that they could to sell the product, to keep expenses at a minimum, and to meet goals set forth that had been outlined at the pep rally. He spoke of the successes and what needed to be done to improve various areas. The European people were singled out for their work. Tommy Hilfiger Europe grew impressively over the year, he stated. Hilfiger said: “If you see a Tommy Hilfiger Europe person, I want you to go up to that person and personally thank him or her because they are doing a terrific job for us.”

Hilfiger spoke of the Employee Satisfaction Survey, “this is my favorite topic”, he said. He assured employees that “we have heard you” and will do what needs to be done to make this an even better place to work. Hilfiger said a rather curious thing as he spoke of the Employee Satisfaction Survey. He said he would like to brand all of the employees with the Tommy Hilfiger philosophy. For a moment he seemed a little unsure as he was saying this. There was a slight hesitation.

Hilfiger spoke of upcoming events and initiatives. “Beyonce chose us because she believes in us”, he stated. He explained that she “remembers us”, that we gave her a start when she was 16 yrs. old and in Destiny’s Child. “They performed for the Tommy Hilfiger show at Macy’s—and overshadowed the fashion show. I never heard of them but my brother told me they were great and

the 3 girls were very pretty and looked like the Supremes.” He explained that he was always interested in the connection between fashion and music. He recalled winning the VH1 and Vogue fashion designer awards. Ten years ago, on this very stage, he noted.

After he spoke, he exited the stage to a long standing ovation by employees. He did not return. The finale was the Tommy Hilfiger employee fashion show and the reappearance of the two employees who had won the Lloyd Boston beauty and fashion “makeover”. A band, and a new rapper, that Hilfiger described as “up and coming”, and 3 others who performed with him, provided the entertainment.

Christmas Party

The 2003 Christmas party was held at a New York City nightclub in early December. One employee said that the best thing about the party was “meeting so many people you’ve never met before.” She described it as a “hot, club-like atmosphere”. An employee commented: “It’s the highlight of the year, seeing what Tommy will do. We get to enjoy ourselves and not think about work. I talk to people I haven’t really talked to all year. And you get say hello to Tommy and lots of important people in the company.” One designer stated: “Well everyone gets drunk so it’s like other office parties in that way. But since Tommy does it, it is over the top, something to really enjoy and be glad you are here.” Another employee described it this way: “You have Christmas parties at every company and then you have the kind of parties Tommy gives. There’s something special, very exciting because that is just the way he is.” An administrative assistant commented about the 2002 Christmas party and the actions of Tommy Hilfiger and an executive at the firm:

Last year it was a 70s theme. Tommy walked around and did his peace sign. He was wearing tie dye. There was a cocktail hour. Joel walked around, was very personable. Then there was dinner, and later dancing. Afterwards they car serviced everyone home. It's a really nice event.

Divisional Holiday Parties

Each division may have its own parties. I was invited to attend the divisional party of the Licensing department, held in the showroom on the 15th floor of 25 West 39th Street in December 2003, one week after the Christmas party. It was attended by all in licensing. The executive assistant of the president organized the event, ordering several trays of assorted Italian dishes. He spent most of the morning shopping for Christmas decorations, sorting through old items, and decorating the room. He was very conscientious about what did and did not look appropriate. Certain decorations were immediately discarded. When the decoration was finished he took pride in how his supervisor would view the result explaining that she was very particular, and only would be satisfied with the best quality. For desert there were cupcakes and cookies from an upscale bakery. Some employees talked at the buffet and others were seated in an adjoining conference room. It was an informal event with no speech given by the president of licensing. The event lasted a little more than one hour. Employees generally could be heard discussing work matters but in a light, causal way.

Organizational Discourse

Language is the medium through which ideas, policies, directives, actions, and communication in general is achieved. David Grant, Tom Keenoy, and Cliff Oswick state: "Language, talk, stories and conversations are the very stuff of organizational interaction and, of course, discourse is an inevitable feature

of social life in general” (1998: 2) . D. K. Mumby and R. Clair go further perhaps, and say that “organizations exist only insofar as their members create them through discourse” (1997: 181). Whatever forms of discourse a researcher may study adds to an understanding of how an organization is structured, and the composition of its underlying culture.

Loretta, a designer, in the course of discussing her adaptation to the culture of Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc. mentioned that there were certain words that were “particular to” Tommy Hilfiger, such as “dotting” and “adoption”. She mentioned that a friend who worked at the Gap, who used to work for Tommy Hilfiger, started to talk very differently. “Her way of speaking totally changed”, she observed. At a gathering, the group started to laugh at her she said because of the new “Gap” terms she was using. Loretta pointed out that each organization had its own distinctive culture. She mentioned Abercrombie and Fitch, and in particular Nike. She knew designers who work or had worked at both places.

The Nike complex is located in Oregon. They are the only ones out there so people who work for Nike do everything together. There is a school for their kids. There is a state of the art gym and everyone goes there, all the time.

What people at Tommy Hilfiger call the “concept board” is elsewhere called a “mood” or “inspiration” board. At some companies, designers collect their ideas and inspirations for designs in scrapbooks (Ferla, 2004: 1, 6).

Yiannis Gabriel discusses various ways in which stories have been studied in organizations: as elements of symbolism and culture, as expressions of unconscious wishes and fantasies, as vehicles for organizational communication and learning, as expressions of political domination and opposition, as dramatic performances, as occasions for emotional discharge, or as narrative structures. It

is widely agreed, he says “that stories create, sustain, fashion and test meanings” and are part of the “sense making process” in organizations (1998: 85). Gabriel argues that organizations possess a “living folklore” which can give us “valuable insights on the nature of organizations, the power relations within them and the experiences of their members”. In a study Gabriel asked interviewees to tell him stories about the organization rather than using what he calls a “fly-on-the-wall” approach of collecting data. He found that individuals immediately understood this as a separate type of discourse, some saying their organizations were story free—all about work and nothing else—and others telling rich narratives, filled with symbolism (1998: 97). Gabriel sees organizational stories as folklore—stories with a plot, a central hero, characters, and a storyline. Slang, jokes and idiosyncracies are often a part of folklore. Such stories rarely have the “depth and complexity” of myths, says Gabriel.

Bormann elaborates on how members of an organization come to share a common consciousness through different types of communication. Members share what he terms “group fantasies.” Events are dramatized and word play is used (1987: 103). This type of communication can be observed amongst designers at Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc. as they collectively try to envision the next collection, drawing on a common theme and recalling ideas that resonated well in the past. “Scripts” that members return to can be categorized according to type. For instance Bormann speaks of the “Horatio Alger” story used to describe the ability members have to rise in a company (1987: 110). A “fantasy type” at Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc. is “Tommy Hilfiger is one of us.” It is not a “fantasy” in the sense of having no truth; it becomes a means of ordering information. Members interpret events according to some schema. When Tommy Hilfiger passes by and says a few words it is likely to be interpreted by employees as an

indication that he is in touch with and identifies with employees. This fits in with the kinds of impressions members share. In another company such behavior might be interpreted as disingenuous: "The boss looking for a favor". Many fantasies together can form a "rhetorical vision" or "master analogy" (1987: 114). For example, the overall feeling about the company, formed from "fantasy types" like "Tommy Hilfiger is one of us" and "We all work together as a team" is "Our company is a big family". An "organizational saga" is comprised from "shared fantasies, rhetorical visions, narratives of achievement, events, goals, ideal states" (1987: 115). It answers the questions:

What kind of an organization are we? What
kind of people are members of our
organization? What do we do? What is our
purpose? What exploits are we proud of?
Why are we admirable? What great things
do we plan to do in the future? (1987: 116)

Since the saga emphasizes common symbolic ground it is often found in company statements, brochures or bulletins. Some sagas, such as these, are meant for public consumption, others may only be used internally. Bormann points out that if different divisions have contradictory sagas one can anticipate battles (1987: 116-117).

Some formal communications are controlled by upper management explains Bormann, such as messages found in quarterly reports, mission statements, and other formal documents. Members develop their own forms of communication. Members may accept fantasy themes originating from management, and they may also be "ignored, rejected, ridiculed" (1987: 113). Miriam Salzer-Mörling referring to managerial attempts to overpower other voices with a dominant saga (1998: 115) states: "pre-defined meanings from the top are interpreted, rejected or adopted" (1998: 117). The fact that they can be

rejected or in some way challenged points to the existence of a master narrative to which employees are expected to subscribe, and to a degree of agency remaining on the part of the employee. Countering a master narrative, or participating in a counterhegemonic discourse, involves careful balancing. One must know when and to whom to reveal oppositional convictions, and when to conceal them, speaking instead the party line.

Core Norms and Values

Employees in various divisions have discussed what is like to work at Tommy Hilfiger, often comparing it to other places. By looking at their descriptions it is possible to uncover core norms and values defining the Tommy Hilfiger organization culture as well as differences between divisions.

Lori, the manager of human resources worked for Polo Ralph Lauren for 4 years, and compares the two environments. “Here, the atmosphere is collegiate, and familial”, Polo Ralph Lauren was “much more Madison Avenue”. She described it as very internally competitive, the game being: “trying to get closer to Ralph.” The environment at Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc. is cooperative and team oriented, she says. “This is across the board”, she notes. “You never could be secure at Polo Ralph Lauren.”

In many fashion firms a familial atmosphere would not describe the organizational culture. The fashion industry tends to have a cut-throat reputation. By contrast, according to several employees there is a concerted effort to create a warm, supportive atmosphere. Tommy Hilfiger’s very long acknowledgment page for his book “All American: A Style Book by Tommy Hilfiger mentions people who have helped him since the beginning of his career, and even earlier. As for the employees he says that they have “become part of my family.” This

sentiment has been expressed by the employees at the firm, and is evident in many interactions that have been observed.

Kimberly, an administrative assistant says, in reference to Hilfiger: "It is a good sign that so many of his family members work here." When I asked about this she mentioned in addition to his sister Ginny, Joseph who manages the corporate closet²¹, and Sue who works with Ginny. She said there are a lot more people whose names she couldn't remember offhand. "Sometimes I'd meet someone and think how nice that person was, later someone would say 'oh that's Tommy's cousin' and I'd think wow, he was nice." She continued: "All of them are very nice and they don't act as if they are special." She concluded by saying: "This makes the company feel more familyish. People want to contribute to the company because of this." She expected that the atmosphere was very different at other fashion firms although she had never worked at another such organization. She describes the working atmosphere at Tommy Hilfiger, where a typical work day for her is 10 ½ hours. "I don't feel drained. I don't feel like life's being sucked away from me. At my last job at Us Weekly no one stayed more than one year." When she is not busy she logs onto the fashion website Tommy Hilfiger subscribes to. "I've looked at every fashion show for Fall 2004 in New York, Milan, Paris" she states. She printed out what she thought would be interesting and gave this information to the designers. She stated that she "knows what Tommy things are but she is not sure how far she can stretch it." Sometimes she will give something to a designer and he or she will tell her "why this is not Tommy" or "why we can't do this". So she's "learning all the time." She gives jewelry and handbag designs to the appropriate designers, and they give her feedback. In this way she is learning about the kind of work designers do, a field

²¹ A room housing fabrics, books, vintage objects and other sources of inspiration for designers.

she herself is interested in. Sometimes she will like a design but a designer will say that “that’s not something we could do”. “I love to spend my time learning about Tommy, and fashion, when I am not busy doing work for someone.”

This attitude found in many employees, fostered by Tommy Hilfiger, seems to reflect the way executives and others in leadership positions relate to those in their division, as well as the way in which people at all levels seem to relate to each other. This, of course occurs, in a very high pressure environment which demands complete dedication. It points to the particular appeal that working at a fashion firm has for people who are interested in this area. Kimberly is not a designer, she is what one might call a secretary. Yet, she feels she can partake in the creative activities of the company, at least in her free time. No doubt this feeling of being involved in a glamorous enterprise adds a greater sense of purpose to all the work that she does.

Carl, a design director in men’s sportswear, compared the work environments of Tommy Hilfiger with Perry Ellis. He said that Perry Ellis was especially concerned about and protective of design for fear that things might be copied. Even those who worked in the company in other divisions could not gain access or know what was happening in the design department. “You had to be buzzed in. No one got in and out without permission.” He added: “It is so not like that here. You got in, for example. That couldn’t happen at Perry Ellis.” He continued: “We all share things. Everyone is working together. That’s the feeling. Otherwise, it was fun to work at Perry Ellis. It was like a circus.” Most employees when talking about the firm told stories or used “scripts” or “fantasy types” that together can be taken to form a “master analogy” of collegiality, teamwork and a sense of belonging and being cared about.

External Sources

The organizational culture is not only an internal, self-generating phenomena but is shaped by external forces. All firms are subject to market factors whether they be changes in technology, consumer tastes, the activities of competitors, the economy, etc. Firms in a particular industry will share similar structures and practices and perhaps even cultures, adapting as they must to similar external conditions.

Many organizations, from institutions of higher learning to manufacturers of paper products, are no longer offering lifelong careers to their employees. Peter Cappelli argues that the “once familiar” American employment system where one could count on a career for life has been replaced with temporary staffing, short term contracts, and outsourcing (1999: viii). Where once employees were “buffered” from market pressures, they are now beholden to the market’s logic (1999: ix-1). Cappelli doesn’t investigate the impact this has on organizational culture per se, but from the structural and management changes he outlines, one can make inferences about how the an organization’s culture will be effected.

The model of the past, Cappelli tells us, as discussed in William Foote Whyte’s “The Organization Man”, was one in which employees entered into a “psychological contract”, exchanging loyalty and a commitment to the firm for career security and upward mobility within the firm (1999: 66). He illustrates the situation at IBM, the US company most associated with lifetime employment (starting in the 1950s). Employees were provided with “a training regime that never ended”. This investment in an employee occurred at a time when there were few competitors in the mainframe computer market (1999: 70). Promotion

occurred from within, and employees were moved from one position to another for which they were trained, rather than a knowledgeable outsider being brought in to the company (1999: 72). At IBM all this changed quite dramatically in 1985-1986 with personal computers beginning to displace the mainframe systems. The first layoffs occurred in 1994 (1999: 73). With the pace at which new technology was being introduced and the rapidity with which IBM had to respond, it was no longer possible to develop skills over time within the company. It was necessary to bring in--and dispense with--new talent on an as needed basis (1999: 74). This fracture in loyalty paralleled a great demand for IBM trained employees by the new competing firms.

Cappelli provides us with a picture of the employee side as well: "The lifetime job security and other human resource investments designed to build commitment and retain employees apparently mattered little once headhunters arrived and the pull of the market took over" (1999: 73). "And when IBM's stock price fell, reducing the value of employee stock incentives, employee attachment to the company evaporated" (1999: 73-74). This points to a little investigated area: the impermanence and perhaps the superficiality of the strength of an organization's culture. Once someone is away from its grip, or has begun to look in another direction, its ties are easily loosened. For many employees it may never be fully absorbed. Individuals may play a role without ever having actually internalized the culture's imperatives.

The new model of employer-employee relations is market driven. Yet, organizations still demand high levels of performance and commitment. Cappelli explains how this still occurs. Employees may still be motivated to perform well in their jobs because of the immediate rewards they may receive and because they see their accomplishments as a means to obtain a better job elsewhere.

The reality that one may be replaced, challenges the dominant discourse of teamwork upheld at Tommy Hilfiger. Evidence of this was found amongst the designers at Tommy Hilfiger, those most likely to be fired. One designer who very much likes her work, and said she hopes to be here for at least a few more years, stated:

I don't know how long I'm going to be here.
Anything could happen. One thing I know is that I
will bring what I learned here wherever I go. So
even if it doesn't work out for me here, I'm not lost.

A designer who has been here for 1 ½ years and had an art oriented education says:

Here it is very commercial. I came in with a
portfolio that many people thought was over the
top. But I've proven I can do both kinds of work.

Another designer states the transferability of "Tommy" skills:

I know from here I can go many places. Tommy is
respected and known all over the world. To be
hired by Tommy is a honor, and designers who've
been at Tommy have doors opening for them.

She mentions that she frequently gets calls from head hunters offering her jobs elsewhere. In the context of this conversation she mentions that Tommy Hilfiger is very fair with designers. Of course they make decisions based on "the bottom line", she says but they also provide 3 months severance for those designers who are fired. During this time you are asked in return, as part of a non-compete agreement, to not begin working with another firm.

Several designers owe their current jobs to friends who've brought them into the corporation. Designers speak of the fashion design world as being a small world where everyone knows everyone else.

Everything happens through connections. Even if you get the job through an ad its because someone knows you through someone else.

A designer spoke of someone who was fired:

We all liked her and knew her work. Even if she didn't get a good recommendation she didn't need one, all of us knew people who we could refer her to. It's not like they are that way here but even if someone leaves on bad terms it doesn't mean their career is over.

The designers seem to have created their own informal professional culture which buffers them against the contingencies of an industry that can be harsh. Perhaps because they see themselves as professionals, and feel in demand by other firms, they display less of what they may see as the "starry-eyed" idealism of employees in other lines of work at the firm. Nevertheless, they tend to see Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc. as a kind of oasis, a place they favorably speak of, and compare favorably to much less egalitarian fashion firms they've heard about or worked for in the past. Having a certain amount of control in their own futures, recognizing that many firms provide an environment that is not only insecure but unpleasant on a daily basis, and benefitting from but not being entirely dependent on Tommy Hilfiger, seems to allow the designers to come to terms with what otherwise might be seen as a contradiction to the narrative of collegiality and supportiveness.

Chapter 7 – The Creative Process

Lucien Goldmann's Durkheimian approach to creativity holds that the cultural sphere, whether it be literature, or art or even fashion design, is informed by the world view present amongst the social group in question. The cultural and artistic works of creative individuals, he says, would not emerge unless they corresponded to "fundamental elements" of the *conscience collective*. Although closely linked, such works are never simply a reflection of the *conscience collective* (Goldmann, 1973b: 115, 119). The designer, for example, must modify ideas in accordance with his or her own vision. Goldmann does not detail how such a process might unfold in terms of creative production within an organizational setting, but his theory can be used to explore the origins of creative ideas, and the negotiations and indeed compensations that must be made by fashion designers.

Fashion designers most often work within culture producing organizations, increasingly in powerful corporate entities. Designers function as "creators of culture" who earn a living by "creating or manipulating symbols" (Zollars and Cantor, 1993: 3). Cheryl L. Zollars and Muriel Goldsman Cantor say that in the past sociologists have been guilty of seeing culture producers, particularly the artist, as somehow operating outside society. The artist was looking from the outside in, or he or she was simply following a personal vision. We see this romanticism in the popular imagination too, with artists and those associated with art, such as the architect or fashion designer, envisioned as someone who transcends the mundane world of social and cultural forces. On the other hand, those studying mass media and other forms of popular culture tend to see practitioners as "technicians" suppressing their creative ideals to reflect the views of the dominant class (Zollars and Cantor, 1993: 3-4). To use another

example, the political right sees individuals responsible for interpreting and representing the culture as pressed into the service of a liberal agenda, while the political left holds that these same practitioners must promote the interests of free market capitalism, all the while obscuring this fact. In either case, individual freedom of expression is suppressed. The production of culture perspective has come to view the individual creator “as a part of an interconnected system consisting of organizations, occupational norms and values, and legal and cultural constraints and enhancements”, state Zollars and Cantor (1993: 3-4). To this we might add the role of the individual in determining the direction creative decisions take.

Roseanne Martorella in an organizational study of opera shows that the form opera takes (the choice of opera, musical style, casting decisions, etc.) is contingent on economic considerations rather than solely with the integrity of the art form (1982: 42). In a study about dance, McNeely argues that as sources of patronage increasingly derive funds from the private sector, the choreographer has less of a role in creative decisions, and more often than not is curtailed by finance personnel in expressive reinterpretations of established works (McNeely, 1993: in Zollars). Clearly, the *conscience collective*, is mined insofar as it provides monetary returns. Perhaps in some instances this involves a reduction to a least common denominator.

In a fashion firm, commercial interests both inspire and temper a creative vision, just as they do in artistic/cultural pursuits. Juliet Ash and Lee Wright, for example, point out that British designers who are trained in the art school model, are “regularly derided by managerial elites for being too adventurous” and their work therefore “commercially unsound” (1988: 2).

Cameron Ford, in summarizing research on creativity and innovation explains that it has taken two separate directions. Innovation research focuses on the macro organizational and industrial level, on hierarchies and markets, while creativity research is limited almost exclusively to psychology, with a concentration on individual level variables and group dynamics. Cameron argues that a productive stance would be to look at the role of creativity across the innovation process—the interaction of fields and domains (1996: 1112-1113). Within the organizational domain two factors contribute to creative actions and innovation: absorptive capacity and disposition toward risk. Absorptive capacity is an organization's ability to recognize the value of new information. Without this capacity an organization would get locked into familiar ways of doing things and will miss "emerging opportunities" (1996: 1128). Disposition toward risk is an ability to balance the possibility of failure with the cost of missed opportunities when making judgments (1996: 1129). Those involved in creative activity must be able to think across various "levels of domains": divisions within the company, consumers, markets, regulatory commissions, etc. (1996: 1132). Cameron develops what he calls a "multiple domain theory of creative action" which investigates how various factors influence the decisions of the creative individual or team (1996: 1134).

Richard Woodman and colleagues investigate the factors that contribute to the development of new products, services, ideas, etc. within organizations by utilizing the existing research on innovation and creativity (1993: 293). They expand an interactionist model of creativity, developed by Woodman and Schoenfeldt (1989) to address the complex interaction between individuals and situations within organizations. The creative situation is a "complex mosaic of individual, group, and organizational characteristics" (Woodman, 1993: 310).

Antecedent factors that contribute to an individual's creativity such as personality traits, cognitive abilities, motivation, and knowledge/expertise may in no small part be responsible for bringing him or her into the organizational environment (1993: 297). There are certain qualities and skills a designer must bring to his or her vocation, and these attributes will unfold in different ways depending on the particular organizational setting. Woodman et al. see group creativity as a function of individual creativity while also encompassing group dynamics such as leadership, size, cohesiveness, norms, and diversity, and contextual or organizational characteristics such as cultural influences, resource availability, organizational mission and strategy, reward policies, structure and technology (1993: 296, 310). They propose various hypotheses that may be tested in empirical settings. For example, they expect that individual creativity will increase when group norms promote sharing, and decrease under situations that require high levels of conformity. Furthermore, "Group creative performance will be increased by the use of highly participative structures and cultures" (1993: 312-313).

Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell point out that organizations in the same line of business that constitute a field are characterized by isomorphism of structure and practice, rather than by variation. In terms of innovation, a new idea or design, for example, does not remain for long in the province of one organization, it is quickly adopted by others in the field. Summarizing Schelling (1978: 14) they state: "Organizations respond to an environment that consists of other organizations responding to their environment, which consists of organizations responding to an environment of organizations' environments" (1991: 65). This is particularly relevant to the fashion industry where style trends quickly become industry-wide, though they may be variously interpreted.

Isomorphism at the product level is a result of the demands created by the environment all firms operate in. However, to remain competitive firms must move from imitation to innovation so as to distinguish themselves from one another. This may be achieved by interpreting a trend in a way that supports the established image of the brand, and meets the expectations of the consumer base. Responsiveness to the external environment in organizationally specific ways seems to be the force that drives fashion to change on an industry level. At the structural level of isomorphism, one firm in a field may operate very much like another firm of a similar scale in terms of technologies and procedures that have proven efficient (e.g. flexible production schemes).

Nancy F. Koehn (2001) profiles six consumer enterprises--included are Estée Lauder and Starbucks--and their leaders, demonstrating the interplay between a creative vision, an understanding of the socioeconomic situation and of consumers, and the ability to manufacture, deliver, and market products in innovative ways. In James C. Collins and Jerry I. Porras' Built to Last we learn why "visionary" companies like Wal-Mart succeed while comparable companies, in this case Ames, fail. A main distinction between the companies studied is that they are less driven by and comprised around a great idea or product than they are by a total dedication to the success of the company. At Wal-Mart, the management and authority structure, products sold, distribution and promotion strategies, etc. are all shaped by what brings financial success. Adaptability in terms of both organizational structure, practices, and what is produced and how, allowed Wal-Mart and other successful companies to continue to expand and to succeed (1994/1997: 28, 36-37)²². In the fashion industry, people are quickly let go, divisions reorganized, and subcontractors changed, in response to market

²² And to that we might add strategies that enabled them to obliterate the competition.

conditions (sales, labor issues, etc.), and how well the firm is doing in various segments of its business. Those firms that survive and prosper become adept at such balancing, making it harder for new firms to enter the playing field.

Translation of Ideas into Products in Fashion Design

In order to understand the special role of designers, those who actually create the new products, one might refer to Arnold Hauser's consideration of artists. The early Renaissance artist's studio was still modeled on the guild system of the Middle Ages. Until the late 15th century artistic labor was a collective enterprise. Artistic creation involved the participation of assistants, pupils and apprentices of the master artist (1985: 54-55). The artist had not yet achieved "the expression of an individual personality" as he or she would after Michelangelo (1985: 55, 59).

This model seems akin to the social organization of the design process at Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc., with Hilfiger being the equivalent of the master artist. In response to a reporter's noting that Hilfiger has been criticized for not designing "every stitch of his collection", Hilfiger states: "I can't thread a needle, but I know what I want, and I do not have a problem articulating it." He continues:

If you look at Ralph Lauren and the other successful designers, we all work the same way. It's no secret. We basically download our ideas on other people (Finn, 2001: D2).

Creativity, as Hilfiger views it, is a collaborative effort. At the Tommy Hilfiger Corporation and other such firms, collective works bearing the signature of the master designer are produced. The master designer provides direction, and designers, and others in various statuses, assist in the realization of a creative

vision. The more technical aspects of the labor, such as cutting and sewing, are done overseas, allowing the designers in New York to focus on the stylistic elements of design.

In a recent study, Harvey Molotch investigates the work performed by product or industrial designers by observing them in the workplace, and through interviews. Molotch finds two sources of creativity: the first concerns the designers as individuals. Their involvement in “theater, music or free thought movements” expands their “thinking repertoires.” Also, they demonstrate an ability to pick up on “cultural currents” (2003: 31). The second source of creativity occurs at the collective level. Designers work cooperatively to create “style boards” or “lifestyle boards” which picture the products and settings of the target group for which a product is created (2003: 45). This team arrangement is conducive to the task at hand. Molotch notes that designers work best under conditions of minimum bureaucratic control (2003: 42).

This description is very similar to the circumstance at Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc. Molotch’s empirical findings, Dana Cuff’s work on architects, Crane’s (1993) findings in her work on fashion design as an occupation, as well as my own findings at Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc. support Woodman et al.’s (1993) interactionist model of creativity which encompasses both individual and organizational level attributes, as well as Ford’s (1996) multiple domain theory. These issues will be discussed fully in the section specific to designers at Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc.

Cuff, a professor of architecture, remembers seeing the San Francisco skyline and believing, as many people might, that it was created by architects, each working independently in their “artist-like studios” (1991: 1). With

experience, and after conducting an ethnographic study of the profession, Cuff tells us that this is not the case. The realization of a given building is a collaborative effort involving many architects as well as “hordes of politicians, planners, clients, bankers, engineers, civic groups, corporate executives”—just to name a few of the key players. Similarly we could take a dress and name a different set of characters—perhaps even the occasional politician—that figure into its eventual form.²³

Cuff's study of architects situates architectural practice within a bureaucratic, organizational context and in doing so demonstrates a gap between the fine arts and theoretical training at schools of architecture (as well as the standards set by the professional association), and the realities an architect encounters once employed (1991: 44). The design process is described as emerging from “collective action”. It has a “social dimension”. Good design, Cuff says, emerges from groups (1991: 13). At the larger firms, tasks become very specialized with owners or partners retaining “all design responsibility” and specific tasks being delegated to particular architects. “The jobs of most architectural workers are less meaningful and more alienating; a small but powerful group of architects at the peak of the hierarchical pyramid take for themselves what they consider the most rewarding work” (1991: 49). “Few projects” says Cuff “have fewer than 10 people involved in the decision making (architects, engineers, interior designers, specialist consultants, construction managers, public agencies, and, of course, clients)” (1991: 77). Clients must give final approval to a project, giving non-professional outsiders a considerable amount of power in the creative process.

²³ All joking aside, the garment industry hangs on the balance of governmental trade regulations concerning quotas and duties, as well as labor regulations.

Crane provides us with a macro-level view of the profession of fashion designer from both secondary literature and the more than 100 interviews with designers that she conducted for the 1993 article. We do not get a sense from this data of what the career is like for the individual designer in each of these contexts. Do individual designers easily conform to the social and organizational, and indeed the national contexts they find themselves in? How does the designer who may see himself or herself as an artist, for instance, or who may have “counterhegemonic” ideals, adjust to commercially-oriented creative constraints? Another more complex question that arises from Crane’s work concerns the global economy of fashion, and whether the distinctions created by historical factors specific to a country become less important. These questions can be answered, to some extent, from the data I obtained from the designers at Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc.

Fashion Design at Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc.

Although the end result must look as if it were the creative work of one person, as one designer at the firm put it, Tommy Hilfiger certainly does not design the entire collection singlehandedly. Hilfiger is the master designer, and the public face of the firm, and as such oversees to varying degrees all its operations. Other designers supervise divisions, such as men’s design, and subdivisions, such as men’s knits or men’s sweaters, which each have their own supervisory structure. Those units must communicate with other units in the company, for example marketing. Each division, likewise, will have particular specializations and functions within itself. Given the interconnection between departments, the design process in its very essence encompasses both artistic and commercial emphases. Creativity, we might say, occurs within bureaucratic boundaries without entirely feeling the weight of those constraints.

Design at Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc., if we consider its practice, is modeled on the studio system, where the final “artistic” product is the result of a collaborative process. Each designer, to varying degrees depending on his or her influence, can be seen as a cultural arbiter, taking account of influences and ideas from the outside, and of his or her own, and recasting them in terms of the Tommy Hilfiger vision. This recasting or “editing” process as designers at Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc. refer to it, is carried out in conjunction with one’s supervisors and sometimes with Hilfiger himself.

We see in this process the melding of rational bureaucratic principles with the subjective phenomena of aesthetics and inspiration. An ideal type can be formulated to encapsulate this process at any large corporate fashion firm. A creative energy needs to be fostered amongst designers so that new ideas are produced. This is the lifeblood of the fashion industry. These ideas, eventually taking the form of garments, are moved forward by various administrative structures: personnel, schedules, procedures, policies, directives, etc. Without the creative work of designers, though, these structures are of little value.

The designer is expected to bring certain talents and abilities to his or her work, and to keep oneself abreast of new developments and trends in the fashion world and in general. There is both external and internal work that needs to be done. External work occurs outside of the organizational context and represents the designer’s own investment of time in activities that provide knowledge and inspiration, for example shopping/browsing the market, attending art and other exhibitions, traveling, reading periodicals and books, and seeing films. The designer as a professional sees this work as an investment in his or her own “cultural capital”, not merely as a service to the firm. As creative energy is the key to a successful enterprise, the firm itself will take certain steps to ensure

that the designer can fully develop his or her own potential. Providing a less bureaucratic environment is one way that creative, culture producing firms typically foster a freer work atmosphere. Having designers work in teams promotes the exchange of ideas and provides a sense of collegiality. It allows one to feel part of something larger and to experience, through relationships with others, a sense of accomplishment. Collaboration also serves to lessen the burden of strict deadlines, and other limitations imposed on the creative process.

Allowing a certain space for each person to express his or her own creative ideas is also necessary so that the collective work situation does not itself become oppressive. There must also be allowance for some time away from the intensity of one's work. Some companies allow time for shopping/browsing and have areas separate from one's work space such as libraries or rooms that house fabric, clothing, and objects of various kinds. Designers are able in this way to get away from their work, to solve problems, to find sources of inspiration, and ideally to return reinvigorated.

Neither one—creativity nor a structural arrangement--in enterprises of this scope could operate without the other. How they actually are managed and unfold in given firms will be somewhat different.

The creative process at Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc. encompasses the following general phases, differing somewhat depending on the division. Every phase runs according to a strict schedule or calendar, corresponding to five "seasons". The first phase is the concept phase. Division heads from each department come together for a Corporate Concept Meeting to hear Hilfiger's "loose idea." Sometimes the division heads themselves will present ideas, bringing along boards with pictures. At other times division heads may decide

ahead of time to present a unified idea. It can be a simple idea or it can be “theme driven,” for example related to the island of Mustique, where Hilfiger vacations. Ultimately, all divisions decide on a common theme. This theme can be seen as a very general organizing theme that will inform many specific products. The next phase, development, involves going back to the respective departments and working on designs. It is at this time that designers who did not fully participate in the decision-making process are consulted and have a chance to make their own suggestions on how the process should proceed. Actual garments are not made at this point, rather, color, fabrics, shapes and silhouettes are considered, and Hilfiger gives his approval. Once overall styles are decided on, more specific decisions are made about linings and other details. At a given time everyone included in this process comes together again and presents the sketches, fabrics, “design boards”, and sometimes samples, to Hilfiger. Meetings with merchandisers come next. A line plan is developed according to merchandisers’ orders. In the licensed divisions licensees are also shown designs from which they select. This is called “dotting”. Prototypes are made and a proto review is scheduled. Next, the “visual people” come in to talk about presentation of the clothing in the showroom and in retail stores. Marketing people are also called in, although they may first participate as early as the concept phase. At this point marketing begins to write stories to pitch products to editors. Specific fixtures and signage are developed for stores that will carry the products. At the proto review any final changes are made by Hilfiger. During “Market Week” retailers come in, pick out what they like, and place orders. Bulk orders take four months to produce in overseas factories.

Designers are at the front lines of the creative process. Without their skilled and inspired work there would be little for others in the company to do. In

the following section the creative process will be described, based on interviews with designers and others in various departments in the firm. Two divisions will be considered: men's licensed design and men's design. Once a discussion of each division is complete, a variety of questions and common themes will be addressed.

Lori, manager of human resources, explains the educational background of a designer hired to work at Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc. "For an entry level person we look for a Parsons, FIT, Cincinnati, or European design school graduate. In Europe, most designers come from Central Saint Martins". When asked if some designers have non-traditional backgrounds she replied: "In Juniors some people interned in design and we hired them because they had an appropriate eye, even though they had a liberal arts background." For already established designers educational background becomes less important. He or she is judged on prior employment experience. Loretta, a designer at Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc. explained her frustration with the interview process at most companies. You must interview with people who are not themselves designers. While the human resources person may be familiar with the job description they do not really understand the work in which designers are engaged, she explains.

For example, before I worked at Tommy I was interviewing at the Gap. The woman looked through my portfolio, all the while talking about her new baby. She went through it really quickly and said "You would be really great in our baby boy's division." I explained that I don't know anything about baby clothes. I mean, I could do it but I wouldn't want to. I told her I do men's. For her it was probably the same thing. She really ignored anything I had to say and said if something opened up in baby's she'd consider me. The problem is you have to get past this person in order to meet the person you'll be working with, who is a designer, and who can judge your work.

At Tommy Hilfiger this process seemed to work smoothly as Loretta was called back to interview with the person who would eventually be her direct supervisor.

The promotion structure for a designer begins with assistant designer, the level at which most new, young designers enter. The next designation is associate designer, followed by designer, design director, and senior design director, and vice president. Here is how one designer explained the promotion structure in an email correspondence when I mistakenly noted in my interview notes that I shared with her that she was an assistant designer.

Not to be a stickler . . . My position is senior designer (not assistant). In most companies you have either associate or senior designers . . . so title-wise they kind of overdo it here. Even the girl who is the sweater assistant is called an associate (which normally is a title you get after 2-3 years).

Lori explained that as each design team has its own culture, a newly hired designer has to learn everything on the job. A typical day as she describes it for a new designer involves a general design meeting, sketching, shopping the market in the afternoon, working with one's manager, looking at swatches of material, and for an entry level person cataloguing the swatches, putting together spec packages (specifications on how clothing is to be made, for the factories), a lot of emailing back and forth to Production regarding fabric orders, and the like.

The time a designer spends at Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc. is generally 3 to 4 years. When asked to explain why this is so, Lori (in Human Resources) mentioned that there are some "lifetime" people. "As these people at higher levels tend to stay a long time, people who come in at levels under them typically don't have anywhere to go for 5 years or more and so they leave", she states.

Two of the upper level designers interviewed, one a vice president of men's licensing design and the other a senior designer in the same division, were each there more than eight years. One designer stated:

Designers are easily replaceable and for us it is easy to find employment elsewhere. You never really have designers stay at any office for too long, it makes us less desirable for other employers. You kind of become a one trick pony. It was never said that Tommy was the be all and end all, it was implied though. When you get hired you get the sense of joining a family, and when someone leaves they worry what drove them to leave. It's funny, at Tommy quite a few people leave, take another job, then go back to Tommy.

Impact of External Forces: Market, Cultural

The creative process is influenced by factors outside the firm as well as by those within. Hilfiger's innovations and success in fashion are based largely on redefining the American style in sportswear initiated by other designers, and by continuing to build and reinterpret emerging trends. Hilfiger has often taken an idea, for example preppy fashions such as those designed by Ralph Lauren, and adapted it for new segments of the market. Hilfiger seems very comfortable with admitting that he borrows from others, and blends these ideas with his own inspirations. A *New York Magazine* reporter notes the crumpled bright-red Polo jacket in a "room filled with countless pieces of clothes" during a tour of Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc. An ex-Lauren employee is quoted as dismissively saying: "Ralph has an entire room devoted to Tommy's clothes." Tommy Hilfiger, introducing a junior sportswear designer winks saying: "She used to work for Gap. Before she came along, we used to steal her designs." Designer Nicole Miller is reported to commend Tommy Hilfiger for his candor. She says: "Tommy is the only designer who's come clean and said that he doesn't design

everything that carries his label. Designers want you to think they do everything, but it's impossible to design everything yourself." Hilfiger is at once admitting to be influenced by what other firms are doing, and receptive to the styles his own designers come up with based on their insights. Hilfiger has also acknowledged the importance of listening to the consumer and adapting designs to what customers want. This is done both informally, and strategically, through marketing research. Timothy Gunn, Associate Dean of Parsons' department of fashion design says Tommy Hilfiger's method changed the way fashion design is taught at Parsons. Business and marketing are being added to traditional design curriculum (2001:). As discussed, Hilfiger's role as cultural arbiter also encompasses an ability to assess the cultural mood and to provide fashions that people will not necessarily know they want but will be receptive to.

Men's Licensed Design Division

Structure

Licensing encompasses the following design divisions: men's, women's, underwear/sleepwear, and home. Lynn Shanahan, formerly president of Licensing, also oversees licensing operations, international licensing, retail services, visual communications, finance and e-commerce. As of December 1, 2004 the company announced that the scope of her responsibilities would be enlarged. Her new title is group president for U.S. wholesale. The U.S. wholesale business encompasses sales, merchandising, marketing, design, production and strategy (Press release, 12/1/04, tommy.com). Given the relatively stable structure of the licensed design division, the environment for designers is more predictable and therefore less stressful than that of sportswear. There are fewer designers, and they have been with Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc.

considerably longer than those in the sportswear division. Men's design has eleven full time designers on average, and women's ten.

The Men's Licensed Design division is led by Brad, senior vice president. Sharon Waldron, reporting directly to Shanahan, is the executive vice president of licensing, encompassing both licensing, design and operations. Sharon oversees all of domestic licensing, and has bi-weekly status meetings with the senior vice presidents of men's and women's licensing, the vice presidents of footwear and handbags, home, watches and jewelry, intimate apparel, women's robes/sleepwear, socks, men's and boy's tailored clothing, dress shirts and neckwear, sun and ophthalmic, golf, swim, jewelry, men's leather outerwear, belts and small leather goods, and the controller of licensing.

Brad participates in and supervises all design in his division. Margot, administrative assistant, works both with Brad and Sarah²⁴, senior vice president of women's design, as well as with the individual design directors and designers. She is responsible for scheduling meetings and coordinating other division activities. There are four senior design directors: Scott, Samantha, Barbara and Jon. Scott designs men's underwear, belts, watches, robes and sleepwear. Designer Sam works with him on socks, sleepwear, underwear and boy's swim wear. Grace is assistant designer. Samantha designs tailored clothing and jewelry. She works with associate designer Millie. Barbara designs golf clothing with assistance from Designers Tsu and Max. Jon designs men's footwear and is assisted by a design associate, Toby.

All the designers in Brad's division are considered a team, he says, and are themselves divided into four teams of roughly five designers each based on

²⁴ As of April 2004 Sarah has her own assistant, Kimberley.

area of specialization.

Margot, the administrative assistant, concurred with Lori (human resources manager): there is no special training process for designers, they are expected to “just jump in”. If a new designer is not “Tommyized”, that is, if he or she came from an environment very different in orientation, the initial adjustment could be a problem, she says. Brad also matter-of-factly mentions the Tommyized person as having an easier time.

According to several designers, industry-wide most designers tend to move from one company to another every four years, if not sooner. This is not generally due to dissatisfaction or lack of promotion (Lori from Human Resources however, mentioned this later issue as a key factor) but rather has to do with the desirability of gaining experience in as many different settings as possible. Sometimes, of course, a designer’s departure may have to do with being fired whether due to a dissatisfaction on the part of the company with the designer or because of restructuring, cut-backs or some other administrative decision. This happens less in licensed design than it does in sportswear. Margot, the administrative assistant, said of licensed design: “Brad and Sarah are great leaders and role models and have kept people for a long time.” Barbara, the senior design director in golf began in 1996 at the designer level, having before worked with Brad at J. Crew. Barbara expressed a great deal of satisfaction with her position, and said that she enjoyed working with Brad, and at Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc. It is because of Brad, she said, that she still has her position at the company. This statement implies that she perceives a high degree of instability for designers at other companies, and indeed even in other divisions of Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc. The average age of designers at Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc. seems to be about 30. Those in senior positions tend to be in their 30s, and some are in their

40s. It does not seem that any designers are much beyond their later 40s. A former designer now working at Polo Ralph Lauren says there are designers of all ages at Tommy Hilfiger and at other firms, and in fact quite a few are over 50 at Ralph Lauren. He says there isn't age discrimination in the fashion industry within fashion design. "Designers get burned out and move on. It is difficult to continue this work." He however states that he plans to always be a fashion designer. Describing his own departure from Tommy Hilfiger he said he left after four years. He felt as if he went as far as he could and wanted to move on. Perhaps there is a restlessness and an excitement about starting something new that accounts for the high degree of movement between jobs. When asked about designers returning to Tommy Hilfiger after they left to work elsewhere, he concurs that this is the case. He recalled it happened while he was there. He said this kind of thing happens much more at Tommy Hilfiger than it does at other firms. He attributed this to Tommy Hilfiger's character. He was just that kind of person, someone who would take a person back because they wanted to come back. In many firms there would be no such possibility.

Design Procedures

In licensed men's design, clothing is designed by the design teams on a seasonal basis with more than one season being worked on at a given time. During a meeting in November 2002, Brad explained that they were getting salesmen samples for 2003 and working on a concept for 2004. Unlike in the sportswear division, which follows the same basic schedule, there is a fixed calendar in terms of the presentation of "protos" (samples of clothing). Licensees and merchandisers from department stores come in to the design department to pick out the clothing that they want. This is called an "adoption meeting" or a "dot meeting." Dots are placed on the boards displaying protos. Each board

represents a group of clothing that can be ordered. Oxford Industries, the licensee for men's golf clothing, has a defined calendar which does not change. They will make their choices from the available designs on the designated date. It is in their interest to make the process as cost and time effective as possible so they are very unlikely to reject everything. Conversely, in the sportswear division there is no obligation on the part of merchandisers to buy. If the salesman samples are not "just right" they simply won't sell, explained Barbara.

Hilfiger himself is very involved in men's sportswear²⁵ and he makes changes all the time. Sometimes a design is substantially changed by Hilfiger, new fabrics are called for, etc. Putting a new design into production takes about three weeks. In addition, new fabrics may need to be purchased. All such changes represent an initial loss of time and money. For this reason the presentation date may change. Brad refers to the sportswear calendar as a "moving target." Barbara explained that in men's sportswear if clothing does not sell in the department store, it will be marked down. However, a proshop selling golf wear may keep the same merchandise for one year. Presumably, this loss on the part of the department store will adversely effect the amount of purchases they make for the next season. Barbara stated that her department was not as innovative. "They take the risks so here we're careful", she noted.

After speaking to several people in licensed design, the following outline of the creative process can be drawn. Margot summarized it in five steps starting with "shopping for concepts" and ending with "adoption meeting", while others, notably the president of licensing, included several other steps. The listing below is inclusive of all steps mentioned, and the descriptions reflect

²⁵ Hilfiger is especially interested and involved in menswear, and is more involved in Men's Design than in Men's Licensed design.

contributions from all interviewed. When differences in description occurred, they are noted. Everyone's experience of the process is different. Not everyone participates in every aspect, in which case they may see it as less complex. In conversation, people do not necessarily follow a linear progression and may jump to another area, losing track of the original topic.

Phases in the Design Process in Licensed Design

1. Concept Phase

Each phase occurs within a season. Brad describes the concept phase with the statement: "Tommy has a loose idea". For example, he may mention a film he saw and was very inspired by. This is followed by division heads from each design department bringing in boards to show him, based on his idea. Other times, the process may not start with Hilfiger. Sometimes a unified idea is presented. Or, division heads may present their own ideas one by one. Brad states, "The idea can be as simple as I feel people need a white shirt". Or it can be theme driven. He explains:

The Olympics is coming up. This will be an influence. We may have a nostalgic theme such as Chariots of Fire. Or a futuristic theme: Performance Athletics, more like Nike. All divisions decide on a commonality. Then we go back to work and come back for the detail phase.

Others mentioned phases in between the concept and detail phase. Barbara describes this phase as saying it "occurs before adoption". She says: "It is a quick flash of important color. A theme for that season." During another conversation Brad discussed the concept and other phases more broadly:

We work backwards. Something is shown in sketch form to Tommy. The overall big picture schemes are presented, for example early days in Aspen—a

ski theme for next holiday. The theme will be incorporated into all lines. Right now the values and feelings of a family in an Aspen or Sun Valley cabin. This will set the tone for colors, etc. Each division designs into what they need. For lingerie, snowflakes may not be appropriate. But parkas get a fur trimming, or Nordic look. Then, we will all regroup and show progress to Tommy.

2. Corporate Creative Concept Meeting

A head of each department attends this meeting. During this time a business plan is formulated. Brad, calling this meeting simply a “design meeting”, says that in the old days Joel Horowitz always accompanied Tommy (he is to retire in 2003). “Tommy gets across the big message. He might mention a 2 button collar band or using lycra in khakis. Joel might say: “I love the idea, but let’s test it first in a fashion group. Then we’ll incorporate it into basics so that we know it is doing well, and if it succeeds we’ll roll it out to all areas a season later.” Brad mentions that “the price-value equation is carefully looked at”.

3. Selection of a Theme

An overall theme and themes specific to divisions are selected. Margot gives an example:

Golf may pick a golf course, a place, a movie—to get inspiration and direction. Caddyshack is an example of a film as a theme. Brad selected a theme based on Gentleman’s Agreement—a black and white theme. Tommy selected Mod as the Fall 2003 theme—dressy casual. A year ago a theme was The Talented Mr. Ripley. It had a lot of great, preppy fashion that Tommy liked.

4. Concept Boards are Made

Although Brad spoke about the concept boards during the concept

phase Barbara, Margot, and the president of licensing mention them being made after a theme is selected. It seems that there may be a preliminary concept board, and a more final version once a theme has been set. Barbara describes the concept boards while taking me to see the area on the floor where the boards are stored. There is a large work space and against the walls of this area are the boards. They are about five feet tall and rectangular in shape. They have clothing tacked on, swatches of material, and pages from magazines. Each concept board represents a theme and has a title. Barbara states: "Each board represents a group of clothing that can be ordered. In one area are boards for the summer season, fall and holiday." A title on one reads: "A Place in the Sun." It has an Arizona theme and at the top a photo from Travel and Leisure featuring Arizona. The color scheme is shades of orange. Barbara indicated the creative process around deciding a theme was inspirational. "We look towards sportswear to find a common thread but don't want to be too similar." Barbara indicated that there was flexibility around a common theme, once it is decided, for various divisions. When asked about the turnaround time for a decision being made she replied:

We gather ideas over time. Sometimes something just comes together, other times the meeting in two weeks becomes the inspiration. We can be deadline driven. Oxford Industries has a definite calendar. It does not change. They want to be as cost and time effective as possible.

5. Protos

Barbara describes the protos as "developmental styles". They can later be put into the line. "They may or may not be the right fabrics but fabrics do need to be bought. If a change is made it represents a loss." She explains that Oxford likes to stay with a choice, "to leave it in the line as long as possible." Basics might live for two years before being changed, she says.

6. Proto Review Meeting

Before the proto review meeting Brad says, merchandisers give a “line plan”. We give them the overall concept and they say “We need x percentage of wovens to be delivered in December. He continues:

Golf is an important area in outerwear. And we have a huge southern door penetration [southern department stores], so the ski feeling needs to be tailored to Anywhere USA. Colors and fabrics need to be reinterpreted. Color palettes may stay the same, but fabric/garment weights will change.

The selected styles are “put into work.” “Once prototypes are developed the proto review meeting takes place”, says Brad.

7. Detail Phase

During this phase, concepts are refined says Shanahan. Brad referred to this stage earlier while discussing protos. Brad explains that issues such as what kind of lining to use, whether to use plaid as a trim, and if one button hole is to be done in red, are determined. Brad says: “Tommy is more involved in sportswear. For the jeans line they use a prototype as a tangible step with Tommy. If they are nervous about something they’ll show him a prototype.” Brad seems to say that at this point, for licensing design, there is little risk of Tommy coming in and saying that it’s all wrong.

8. Adoption Meeting

Brad spoke of a line plan established by merchandisers before the proto meeting takes place. Perhaps this is a more final stage preceded by a more general selection process that determined what went into production as a proto. Shanahan mentions it as after the detail phase. Margot explains the adoption meeting. “We call them dot meetings. Merchandisers and licensees come in to

dot what they want. They come in and dot the boards.” Margot explained that there is usually one meeting but there can be three as was the case recently when they couldn’t decide.”

9. Showroom

Brad mentions that visual people are consulted about how to show, for example, the Aspen idea in the showroom. The types of props that need to be used, etc. are decided upon. Then, the showroom is “rigged” and “open for market”. At this point orders are placed for wholesale and licensed products.

At this point, the designer’s contribution has ended. The next phases are sales/merchandising where merchandise coordinators visit stores with sales samples. Following this are production, advertising, public relations and distribution.

Sarah, the Senior Vice President of Women’s Licensed Design, spoke to me about how the creative process works in her area. Although I have not been able to look more fully into Women’s Licensed Design her comments provide us with a point of comparison and some more insight into the design process.

Sarah describes the creative process as one where she, Brad (the Vice President of Men’s Licensed Design) and Dominique, the Design Director for Women’s, and “other heads of divisions” will “brainstorm together to come up with ideas.” I asked her: “What the themes you come up with are generally based on?” She said: “We carry themes forward from the Spring. We start with what we have and work from there.” She continued: “On a set date we will meet with Tommy and go over what we have with him.” I asked how he generally responds once these ideas are set forth. “It’s a give and take. We need to be flexible because he may decide to take things in a very different direction.” When asked

for any example of a theme designers presented to him in the past, she replied: “It is not something definite, it may be a color story for instance.” I asked how much coordination there was between Licensing and the other divisions. Sarah explained that with the appointment of David Dyer (President and CEO) “it is a new day.” We are now “collectively corporate”, she says. She explained that Dyer has brought everyone together under one umbrella. She states: “Women’s and Men’s in all areas works together. There is now a synergy.” I asked how this unfolds in her division with the designers she worked with. She responded, showing how the Design Director acts as a liaison between corporate executives and those in the design room, and how she as a Vice President approves what is decided upon:

The design director sets the tone for her team. When she meets the team there is already a plan in place. But we use this for inspiration. For example in Intimates, Dominique is the Design Director and Audrey is the head designer, and she has an Assistant Designer. As a team they will decide on what to do and how to divide up tasks. Dominique pulls inspiration from what sportswear is doing. They go shopping. That can mean bringing back clothes or other items to look at. Audrey will put the designs through CAD [computer aided design]. They will present the work to me with a color palette. I’ll approve it and they’ll continue. The Assistant Designer will send out the specifications to be made once things have been finalized.

Men’s Sportswear Design Division

Structure

Men’s Design encompasses both Sportswear and Jeans. Eric is the Senior Vice President of Men’s Design and his assistant is Marnia. Kyle is the Design Director. During my first visits in summer 2003, Carl directed the design of sweaters, T-Shirts, and hats with the assistance of two designers, Karina and

Loretta. Sergio directed the design of outerwear, bottoms, and swim with the assistance of three designers. Kent directed the design of C-N-S knits (cut and sew knits). He had four designers working with him. Belinda directed the design of woven shirts and has four designers working with her. There are other individuals who assist in various ways, e.g. interns and a part-time designer. As of March 2004, Carl was let go and the division reorganized. Kent was given the position of overseeing both C-N-S knits and Carl's areas. A new person came in to replace Karina who left sometime before Carl. In June, Kent left the company, very shortly after the pep rally on June 15th, as did Loretta. Perhaps not coincidentally both designers left shortly after receiving their bonuses. After Kent's departure, Eric has been more closely overseeing the operations while looking for replacements. Freelance designers have been retained as an interim step. The division now seems to be in a state of imbalance. The information about the creative process below reflects interviews conducted before the last two departures in June 2004.

The promotion structure for designers is the same as it is in licensed design. As Loretta indicated, "title-wise they tend to overdo it here." Perhaps since turnover is more frequent, promotion is much quicker or titles assigned less meaningful than if designers were expected to make their career at Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc.

Designers in men's sportswear work on both sportswear and jeans. In terms of the divisions "fashion", "core" and "core plus", designers work on all categories. Items that will become sportswear or jeans are designed simultaneously, then they are "dropped where they are best suited". If a design is "irreverent", for example, it is put into Jeans. "Things are put into work in case" and are sorted out or assigned later, states Carl.

Design Procedures

The Tommy Hilfiger Production Calendar from 2003-2004 for Men's Sportswear is described by Carl as the most important document in the company. "We live by this" he said. On the calendar are fifty-three steps, starting with the "Creative Concept Meeting With Tommy" and ending with "Ship to Stores". Dates are listed for each step across five time periods, for example: Transition 2004, Spring 2004, Summer 2004, Fall 2004 and Holiday 2004. I asked him if dates change and he said that concepts and dates are always evolving. He expressed that "Tommy" was involved in all aspects of the business and often decided to change a design. "Tommy", he said "works on the inside and outside" so he "goes back and forth", returning after he's had "talks" to make changes. While the production world has to be flexible, some dates are set Carl states. The delivery and market dates are "cold, hard facts" that can't be changed. A designer may have a month and a half to create something. If there's a change, "the cushion" is lost. It still has to be ready in one month and a half. One has to make adjustments all the time. The problem with fashion, says Carl, is that all is "interpretive and subjective". People can come in and say "I don't like red" and then the whole line has to be changed. Or someone will say "I think the stripe is too thick" and you ask them "why" and they say "I don't know".

When I tried to ask Carl when Hilfiger was first consulted or provided direction to the designers he reiterated that "Tommy" is involved in the design process at all phases. "It's his job to keep things fresh" he said. "He's here all the time". Carl said that as the designers are developing the next season and group of clothes they are being reviewed with Tommy. "The development and review process is ongoing" he said. "Designers start off considering color. They may show Tommy a particular yarn". He gave an example of how Tommy might

be involved. “Last Friday, Tommy looked at some beginning concepts for summer.” During this beginning concept phase, designers are working with “stripes” and a “flow of colors”. The next stage involves a consideration of “clothing and silhouette”. Examples of clothing—photos or actual items—may be shown to Hilfiger. The silhouette is very important to Tommy, stresses Carl. Once this is decided upon, details such as button stitching are considered. When I asked if they begin working from a theme Carl explained again that they start with a color palette, patterns and stripes. Then they come around to a theme that works with what they’ve designed. “Everything has to fit together—one can’t have a bright yellow sweater if that doesn’t fit in with other items” he explained. The theme is important for the marketing and advertising people who he says “need a handle”. For example, if you speak to them about an island setting, “everything comes together”, otherwise there is “no point that unifies the individual pieces”. Designers don’t seem to need this kind of a theme structure, and I don’t think Carl would have mentioned it if I had not brought it up several times.

Once decisions have been finalized and products are designed, prototypes are made. Then, marketing is brought in and shown a theme. Carl describes the “Review” process.

Merchandising looks at what sold well and wants more of that. As designers we don’t want to do this. It is dangerous.

Carl explains that what they’ll be working on will be out one year later. He describes a point of contention: “People will already have it and won’t buy it again.” Merchandising will say “we need this year’s version of it”. This is where the “fight” happens, he says. Carl describes this as a “contrast in philosophy”.

“Merchandising’s philosophy is “new is great but this sold well so let’s do it again” but “Tommy wants what’s next”, he says. I asked if the fashion, core plus and core designations solve some of this tension. He seemed to say that it did, at least in part. Some things are fine for core, which is “less advanced”. However, “core is the biggest buy—the most visible.” Every store buys core. And, smaller stores may only buy core—they may not be able to afford fashion items. So, “core has to be pushed forward otherwise it looks as if we are putting out the same stuff.” In any case he explains that core is “less advanced” while fashion is “most advanced”. “Fashion represents the creative aspect.” He continues: “The key is to move forward with the customer while bringing new customers in. You want to spark new interest without alienating customers.”

I said to Carl that other designers had mentioned that they “shop the market”. I asked if he did that in his division.

We buy stuff. Eric is a true designer at heart.
He buys for technique, to study an item. That
is how we do it.

He brought something over to me and said: “we bought this because of the yarn they used.” He explained that they were interested in its texture and other properties. He continued:

To knock something off is sickening. It goes
against the design ethic. We don’t do that
here.

He points to an item on a board and explains “We bought that because of the embossing technique. We will send it to the factory to see if they could do something similar.” It is clear that Carl sees himself as a professional adhering to a definite code of ethics. Furthermore, he clearly identifies with the objectives of

the firm as embodied by his supervisor Eric, and of course Hilfiger.

Loretta gives her perspective on how the creative process works. She explains the process for me in a more stepwise manner beginning with input from the “merchandising sales people”. Carl, her supervisor, explained that merchandisers came into the picture after designs had not only been worked out but prototypes had been made (he appears to be looking at the larger seasonal picture). But Loretta states that the “higher ups” establish a theme and make the “big” decisions. Eric the Vice President of Design and Kyle, the Design Director, interface with Tommy Hilfiger and executives in other divisions. They communicate the decisions they have arrived at, and, Loretta continues:

What happens first is that design gets a SKU plan from the merchandising sales people, outlining how many garments are needed per month for the fall collection. This is based on what sold last year, and projections for the new year. It has all been worked out.

She explains, in another interview that:

Merchandisers will tell you their specific needs. They provide a guideline based on what is needed. Sometimes they will break down within a season how many garments were sold in a particular month.

Designers begin their creative work having to balance this information. Loretta seems to be more aware of this than Carl, who preferred to downplay the business end. She states:

You get price limits and you have to work within these boundaries. Factories will consider if it can be done at a particular price, with a particular yarn. You may choose a material and that material may not be available.

When she discusses the next step, how the creative process begins and unfolds, we can see that Carl tries to create an open ended, non-bureaucratic environment for the designers:

With Carl it is a free for all. Anybody who has an idea could sketch it up and pin it on the board. Sometimes we like to break it down that one designer does one month, etc.

Designers utilize computer aided design programs and in this way are able to work from existing templates or to create and edit designs more easily and quickly. On another occasion Loretta stated that she “sometimes does hand sketches but often does CAD”. She elaborates:

For example for a crew neck you can have a set in collar or a raglan. There are a few variations. I have a folder with styles. With these bodies I can start tweaking, filling in.

When asked about the mechanics of this process she explains that you need to know the basics of Illustrator to do this.

I usually go right to Illustrator. You may have an idea but when you see it you realize it is all wrong. This way you just click and change.

For each monthly group of garments that will comprise the fall collection, for example, the designers work together “editing” the sketches and other ideas they’ve come up with. She states:

We select yarns for their specific size and qualities and then ask for whatever stitch/gauge. This is how thick/heavy the garment is, by lack of better words. So you start with a thread and end up with a sweater.

Loretta explained that sometimes they will knit their own small sample, other

times they will send something to the factory to be made. She describes enjoying the creative choices she has:

You control the whole process. Whereas in wovens or cut and sew knits you have to pick the fabrics from books, with what the factory has available. You have to hope that something matches what you are looking for.

As the process moves along “the team” makes decisions about trim and color combinations. “After we edit, we’d show Eric who would edit, add, change further”, says Loretta. Eric tends to deal directly with Carl who then comes back and explains what Eric would like. With this new information the designers set about to make the final changes. This is in preparation for presentation to Hilfiger. This is how Loretta describes it in an email message:

And then we'd make the presentation boards for Tommy, which had computer sketches and bought garments, and pieces of sweaters we'd get knitted up. And then Tommy had to give it his blessing.

If Hilfiger doesn't approve of one particular garment or some aspect of the overall idea that is conveyed via the entire board (containing also garments from the outside) it is back to the drawing board, so to say. Once his approval has been given (or his “blessing” incurred) the “technical” part begins. A technical design person is called in. Loretta says:

We meet with the technical design person. They talk about fit, sleeve lengths, chest widths, etc. She has standard blocks. They may decide to have a tighter fit for a particular style. They never stray that much because the customer wants to have the same fit generally. If he is a medium he doesn't want that to change.

Once decisions about fit have been made “production packages with all

details necessary to get the garment made are worked out”. Carl describes this last stage as follows:

We put tech packs together. These are the specifications that are done in an enormous system called Isis. There is a large MIS department which manages this system. Each division will enter its own information. We put in design information, color, fit comments, etc. Merchandisers put in buy info. and production has their part to do.

After this it is off to the factories in Hong Kong. Work is “sourced” from this location to factories in various locations. Designers are in touch with the factories, or perhaps with a Hong Kong representative who interfaces with the factories, mostly via email or sometimes by phone. Loretta comments:

Recently, one week and a half ago, we sent Spring out. They sent back questions. The turnaround time for samples is three weeks. They are great. They are super fast. They listen to us and they communicate very well.

In various comments made by both Carl and Loretta one could get a sense of the skills designers bring to their work, and continue to develop, and how this informs their work. Loretta says she always knew she wanted to be a fashion designer. Since age seven she was drawing and making puppets. With her first allowance in 1980 when she was seven she bought *Vogue*. Sarah, the Vice President of Women’s Licensed Design describes the path that led her to fashion design.

I majored in sociology at Boston University but I knew I wanted to do something creative. I became a chef. Then I got into design. I started working for Ralph Lauren and then I came here.

Loretta describes her training as a graduate of the Academy of Fine Arts in

Holland:

I didn't want to go to a fashion school. I wanted to learn how to draw and how to think. I learned sculpting and painting too. I'm glad I took this route. Many designers have trouble with conceptual thinking.

She continues:

Some fashion schools are more business oriented—marketing and merchandising. Students think they know everything when they begin because they've done projects in school. My education was conceptually driven. It is the flip side of a more business oriented model—the artsy side. One learns to open up, to read philosophy, to look at art versus to look at the catwalk.

When I asked how this background relates to her work here she said. “You learn marketing when you are in a company.” She spoke of some designers as being “totally disconnected”:

They are overly confident and don't realize they have a lot to learn. You are not automatically a designer just because you finished a program. Especially here. It is not about you. You are part of a team. You have to work closely with merchandising and others. You must be able to leave your ego behind. You need to forget about your ego. Sometimes when you see something—an item of clothing—you can barely recognize the end result. So many people have contributed to what it becomes.

In this narrative Loretta comes to terms with perhaps not being able to use the skills she developed in school in the same way, responding as she must to the wishes of others whose perspectives are quite different. The link that makes the situation acceptable is the “team” aspect. She has communicated on several

occasions that she enjoys her work and that she and the others she works with always manage to enjoy themselves. Furthermore, she believes her skills are useful and allow her to see things in a deeper way than many others who lack her art background:

A good part of our work comes from being informed. One of the few ways you can be different from other designers is to be aware of the surroundings. The art school background really helps in this. It gives me something to refer back to.

Furthermore, she explains that there are opportunities for professional development provided by the firm. Designers are sent to shows. Loretta states:

We went to the Pitti Imagine yarn show in February in Florence. We go shopping, read magazines, and bring back samples. This show is twice per year: Spring/Summer and Fall/Winter. You see different cottons. Cottons that were not there last year. This gets me sparked. We collected swatches and looked at what high-end people do. We then start compiling all this.

From these last two comments we can see how the personal investment that she makes in herself, and the investment the company makes in designers by sending them outside is not seen as separate. Apparently though no time has been set aside for “shopping” even though that is a part of the creative process:

Also, I can sneak out and go shopping. You can use the internet now to find a lot. Lucky magazine [a magazine about shopping for women] is the bottom of the barrel but it takes care of what's out there.

Carl's educational background at the University of North Carolina was in business administration, economics and textile chemistry. After graduating he went to Parsons and studied illustration and fashion design. He saw his

background, combining business and design, as very suited to the work he does. When asked about sources of inspiration in his work he said, answering for the group:

We're pretty eclectic. We love Apple computers, industrial design. Each of us have our favorite designer. A favorite of mine is Paul Smith. I admire his consistency. Ralph Lauren is also consistent. If you like him now you will like him in five years.

Carl mentioned going to trade shows, and to the yarn show in Florence as a source of inspiration.

Some comments by Loretta and Carl show the interconnection between the work environment and the creative process. Referring to his previous employer, Ralph Lauren, whom he thought very intelligent but "elitist and snobby" he said:

There it was very competitive. We have nothing to gain from that. We're concerned with the good of our fellow designers. If people come from places where that was not the attitude they feel out of place and they change, or they leave.

Carl was quick to set me straight when I asked if they worked "in teams or individually". (He refers in the first sentence to the larger department of men's sportswear and later on to his own group):

Both. We get together when we have to compare items. We walk in and out of each other's offices. When a designer is working he or she will sit down and work individually. Then, we'll all get together as a group. I don't like the idea of 'team' being used as a label. We are a team because that's the way we are. Designers share ideas and are not in any way competitive. This can be very much the case in other companies where there's that

structure. You've got no choice but to be that way in that kind of company.

Loretta states in an email sent shortly after the first interview I had with her:

Also, something I did not mention y/day in regards to "office environment" for me, and many others I'm sure, it is all about the people you work with on a day to day basis that determines whether it's a good place to be. Meaning the "mechanics" of a design job are pretty much the same at any company, and our work is pretty much an office job with routines. But having fun with co-workers and not taking it too seriously :) are key. And I think we all went to art school for the freedom aspect... Because if it's all about working 12 hours a day and being cooped up in an office, I may as well have studied law or finance and at least make a lot of money and have no life!

These two narratives speak volumes about the importance of the group in a large corporation. Without the authentic connection that the team provides, sacrificing so much of one's life for salaries (starting at about \$50,000) that don't compare favorable to what one makes on Wall Street, for instance, could be called into question. The larger environment and Hilfiger's own persona plays a large part too but on a more emotional level one's work life is experienced through the connections one has in his or her immediate circle. So much so that when Carl was fired, Loretta left shortly afterwards, as did Kent who was shifted into his division as well as running his own.

During a visit in April 2004, while Loretta was still there, the atmosphere in the division seemed extremely serious, even somber. Loretta was clearly very sad and avoided talking about Carl except to say that she was "extremely disturbed" and "didn't know how" she was going to do things without

him, let alone handle the workload without him, and Karina (who had left before Carl). When asked why he was fired she said she really didn't know, it was a "reorganization" she said.

According to one designer in another division, freelance designers have been brought in and will have to be shown exactly what to do, or the factories will be told directly "we want this, change this". That can work for a season, says the designer, but not much more than that.

In August 2004 Eric, the Senior Vice President of Men's Design, and Kyle, the Design Director, was fired. One of the designers in another area said she does not know how the department is now being handled and did not feel that those still working in Men's Design had a clear sense of what was going on. She guessed that perhaps Eric and Kyle had blamed other designers for their own shortcomings but eventually it became clear to the executives that they were in fact the problem. When asked what Hilfiger's role in all this was, and how he might feel about this situation, she stated: "I think it has just gotten so big [the company] that it is no longer possible for him to grasp it all, and I feel sometimes he must box himself in because he can't possible manage everything personally." In retrospect, this designer felt that the firm would realize that firing Carl had been a mistake.

Clearly, in this division, there is a problem with organizational structure and culture. Only those at the top were able to carry on a continuous dialogue with leaders in other divisions. When there are only a few people in charge, the channels of communication can become obstructed for any number of reasons. The result is that those at the top of the executive hierarchy may not be really aware of what is going on in the design room. Real problems may not be

addressed, and solutions therefore cannot be tailored to solving what is actually amiss.

There is clearly no shortage of creative talent and enthusiasm amongst the designers, nor is there on the side of those involved in the business related aspects of the company. People at every level of the creative process should be consulted and included in decision-making, rather than relying on what seems to have become a top-down model. In Men's Design this situation seems to have been balanced by the strength of the connections between the design teams. In the future this strength should be recognized and cultivated, while at the same time integrating designers more fully into the company. Certainly something should be done to reduce the tensions between those who can roughly be divided into creative and business sides of the design process. Importantly designers should not feel the impending danger of being fired looming behind what they largely see as a collegial atmosphere. This causes people to turn inward, or toward each other for support, but works against the company. We see how important a simple nod from Hilfiger is, and how a perhaps inadvertent gesture is interpreted as a sign of involvement and concern. What would it mean to designers at levels below Carl's (a former Vice President), to be able to sit in on meetings or personally present ideas to Hilfiger on an occasional basis? Are the creative energies of the designers being harnessed? The company should encourage the talents and abilities designers bring to their work which foster creativity within the organization. For example, more time should be given for activities outside of the usual work routine which can provide inspiration. Additionally, the work environment should be more conducive to this eventuality.

Designers have adapted to less than ideal conditions, and given how treacherous the atmosphere is at other companies, most report being largely

satisfied with their positions. Certainly more could be done, with little cost--and much benefit--to those in executive positions and to the company at large.

Loretta told a story about a friend who no longer worked at the firm (either due to being fired or because she left, I am not sure).

She now works at a small firm that is not known to many people. She still uses her Tommy Hilfiger business card to gain access to the fabric shows in Paris. She then gets a badge made up that says "Tommy Hilfiger" because she said that people notice it and respond to her positively. When she wore the badge of her unknown company no one really paid attention to her or they looked at her as if she were not important.

We see here another level of distinction amongst designers, not at the level of actual fashion, but at the level of the Hilfiger badge as a marker of a desired professional identity.

Chapter 8 – Conclusion

In all organized human societies, clothing has been used to manifest identities and constitute social relations. Human beings appear to others not naked but with some form of adornment. These adornments are not arbitrarily chosen. Sometimes they are imposed on people on the basis of social and cultural significance, in other cases they are chosen by people for the purpose of projecting a certain identity. Clothing is a flexible form of adornment which allows different meanings to be created by variations in cut, shape, length, fabric and various other stylistic details.

The importance of clothing, and later fashion, not only as a prop in constructing an appearance but as an actual manifestation of social categories and their hierarchies has been approached in various ways by social theorists. Five main ways in which fashion has been dealt with in the sociological literature have been discussed: fashion as an instrument for creating and maintaining boundaries in society, fashion as an interactional process, fashion as a semiotic system, fashion as a capitalist tool, and fashion as postmodern text. The first category, representing a way scholars have understood the role of fashion in society is the most fundamental. It describes the reason fashion exists, and its primary purpose. Although we see historical and cultural differences when applying Simmel's and Bourdieu's theories to a contemporary American context, nevertheless signs of distinction and their use to legitimate power, authority or privilege remain a feature of all human societies. The second category refers to its actual use by people, and the possibility for various forms of interpretation, above and beyond what is marketed by various corporations, or as is defined by society. In the practice and performance of fashion then, we see responses ranging from forms of acceptance to forms of resistance. The semiotic approach focuses on the

structural details that are manifest in such visual or textual presentations. The ability to creatively respond to whatever agenda may be attached to fashion—to redefine symbols and the categories to which they are attached--must always be considered.

As fashion reaches a mass audience other changes in society have already occurred. Social regulations and customs which dictated how one was to appear loosen as a merchant class grows in influence, and later as a middle class establishes itself. When a system of dress no longer corresponds strictly to one's status, and when status is not exclusively ascribed, fashion develops. Once clothing becomes fashion, it moves toward becoming a major industry, its products produced on a global scale by large concerns such as the Tommy Hilfiger Corporation. Tommy Hilfiger came on the scene at a time when fashion for younger men at the middle-price range level was ripe for new ideas. Able to see an exciting and potentially lucrative area in sportswear in which he could innovate, and successful in harnessing the media on his behalf, Hilfiger quickly became one of the big players in the menswear industry. In doing so, Hilfiger had to be sensitive to the social and cultural climate, to combine this intuitive sense with his own design visions, and to translate these ideas into actual clothing designs. Hilfiger would have to take account of the production processes available to him so that his designs could be made overseas at a cost that would allow him to compete in the market. And of course he had to secure financing from venture capitalists who would be persuaded that such an endeavor would yield sufficient profit. Once the foundation was in place, Hilfiger would have to manufacture, deliver and market his products. Eventually he would broaden his offerings, reaching into areas well beyond menswear.

To thus succeed, this creative and business sense had to be

accompanied by charismatic leadership. This leadership allowed Hilfiger to attract talented others to him early on--to get them to see things from his perspective, and to manage a diverse workforce spread out across the globe. This charisma allows Hilfiger to secure a high level of regard from others, and a belief that these feelings are held in kind. Even when there are conflicts, Hilfiger manages to maintain an esteem amongst employees--if in no other way than as a valuable currency to be traded with future employers, and others in the industry. Hilfiger seems to have had a total dedication to succeeding--in any way that was possible.

The charismatic authority of Tommy Hilfiger pervaded the entire organization. As we have seen, Hilfiger provides a vision for the firm, inspires employees, and imparts charisma--a symbolic significance based on elements of his persona--on the products sold. Hilfiger uses various tangible and symbolic means to establish and maintain his charisma. Routinized practices within the firm, such as the company newsletter and company events, are designed in part to reinforce his status. Hilfiger also achieves a pure form of charisma through relationships and interpersonal interactions at meetings and company events. This latter form of charisma, I have argued, is particularly necessary in an industry where individuals are charged with creating and promoting the products of a particular individual. Hilfiger presented himself as a friendly and accessible figure to his employees and did not as many other principal designers in fashion firms, stand on ceremony. There was a systematic attempt to dissolve hierarchy and deal with employees on a more or less egalitarian basis. In a corporation of this size it is of course not possible to dissolve hierarchy but attempts in this direction are made, and these attempts or ideals, are recognized by employees. Hilfiger is almost uniformly described by employees as genuine and caring. He

appears to be held in admiration and in awe by many. The work environment, even by those who have pointed out problem areas, is described as collegial and accepting—not as divisive. This is especially evident when Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc. is compared to other firms in the industry where high levels of hostility and competitiveness characterize the organizational cultures. The result of constructing this egalitarian “ideal type” organizational culture is a high degree of loyalty and dedication.

Hilfiger uses his charisma to infuse the brand with a particular meaning, and to build and expand his offerings to an audience that will be receptive to his claims. This has been compared to the way in which sacraments, benedictions, etc. can be said to be infused with the spirit of the religious leader long after he/she is no longer present. In the fashion world, this is achieved by way of a designer logo or label stamped on reproductions of various designs approved by Hilfiger. Hilfiger’s charisma is extended through strategic licensing agreements. As such, Hilfiger has positioned himself in such a way to cover a variety of price points, licensing his name to specialists, while at the same time maintaining creative control over products bearing his name.

Clearly, Hilfiger does not achieve success on his own. He has surrounded himself with some of the most competent people in the fashion industry: designers and experts in various areas such as licensing, production, and marketing. Designers are an integral part of Hilfiger’s operations, and as such some time has been devoted to exploring their unique role. Following the European couturiers, only a few designers have been able to achieve recognition on their own, even though after the 1960s the fashion designer began to take on what can be described as celebrity status in the United States. Most designers work anonymously behind the label of a well-known designer, or name brand

corporate entity. As Crane and McRobbie have pointed out in their research on female designers, often this occurs at the expense of the designer's own agency, if not actual economic and emotional well-being.

Even as designers at this particular firm are somewhat constrained by bureaucratic boundaries, and elements of dysfunction are present in at least some divisions, I hope I have shown that they are also on the front lines of the creative process. The work designers do and the talents they bring to these endeavors qualifies them as artist-craftspersons, and as cultural arbiters in their own right. They shape and provide the articles of clothing that people use to define their identities in relation to relevant social categories. These fashion objects are subject to the gaze of a variety of people—fellow designers, members of the organization, potential buyers, the media, and eventually consumers. In undertaking these tasks the designer becomes a cultural arbiter, relating attributes of their designs—material, pattern, silhouette, color—to social indicators, and providing direction to the public on matters of taste and self-presentation. They both draw elements from the culture as well as contributing to the creation of new elements. They give shape and direction to society. Most designers be they the master or principal designer in a large corporation or the assistant designer working in a team of many other designers do not accomplish this task on their own. Fashion design is a collective endeavor requiring the contribution of many individuals. It is an occupational role played in a work-system that resembles in some ways, the guild-system of the Middle Ages. This work system was organized with a “master designer” and a number of “apprentices” in place.

Even though the creative vision of an individual designer is necessarily constricted by nature of their work, and by the corporations they work for, they find their work to be rewarding, and approach their career as a true vocation.

Designers are able, for the most part, to successfully adapt to the organizational environment they find themselves in and, to realistically assess the situation. In fact, designers use their careers as a means of building cultural capital, which can be transferred to other companies, when and if necessary. This cultural capital is reflected by the talents and the skills that they actively build and develop, as well as by the networks they establish with others in the profession, in the absence of any organization representing their interests.

Fashion remains, despite its democratic embrace, a vehicle which marks distinctions and displays class privilege, power, group membership, and personal expression. Therefore in some circles, Old Navy may convey status while in others the bar is set on Armani or Chanel. That individuals have agency is crucial not only to the emergence of fashion versus a more or less static system of clothing as “uniforms” but in providing alternatives to a situation where people are simply colonized subjects. Hilfiger, it can be argued, has provided in his brand an invitation to people far and wide--many of whom were below the radar of other fashion designers--to participate in a collective American identity which embraced the urban as well as the elite, as if they were not in fact so far apart. Perhaps he has in some ways moved beyond this audience, at least in his H Hilfiger line, but Hilfiger continues to speak to an all-embracing optimism that some people still see as the American dream. Certainly as movement between classes and/or (at least) individual choice between ways of expression are possible, fashion is a crucial means by which people negotiate their identities. For sociology, then, the work of the designer is certainly noteworthy.

All of this may not bode well for those who are interested in another type of agency—one that perhaps does not “buck the system” in a “very Polo, very John Varvatos way”, as one fashion writer happily puts it (Trebay, 2004: B10).

Lipovetsky argues that fashion may have insinuated itself to such a degree in society that *it* is the force moving democracy. Nevertheless, it is by all means not the only force. Through fashion we see the ways in which people struggle to redefine situations, and negotiate existing boundaries. Thus, in paying attention to fashion much can be learned about the human condition, as sociologists such as Simmel have told us, and through fashion we are provided a window to the state of society.

Chapter 9 – Methodology

This dissertation is a study of the social organization of the fashion design process at Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc. In order to understand how a firm in the fashion industry is structured, and how it integrates its creative function with its business interests, issues internal to the firm as well as outside of the firm must be addressed. Various methodologies, suited to the nature of the data to be collected, are employed.

To begin with, the firm needs to be situated in a larger historical, social, cultural and organizational context. I set out to look at fashion as it occurs in industry rather than looking at it primarily as a social psychological phenomena or as a collective behavior enacted by individuals and groups. Fashion as it is seen and used by people is of course connected to the way it is handled in the industry, so this must remain in the background while the industry's role, and in particular the role of one organization, remains in the foreground. Chapter 1 begins with a discussion of clothing, fashion, and industry, relating these three separate aspects to one another. The social significance and uses of clothing, how this is related to a system of fashion, and to fashion as an industry, are discussed. Understanding the significance of clothing and fashion in society involves an examination of the theoretical writings and empirical work on these topics. In considering the literature on fashion, I have primarily focused on the sociological perspective but have also drawn from historical sources, and from literature in other disciplines such as anthropology, philosophy and literature. Additionally, I have consulted the media: newspapers, magazines, and Internet websites, for example, to show how fashion and the fashion industry has been discussed, and is visually represented.

In the section on fashion as an industry, I consider how the furnishing of signs of distinction has become a global endeavor, requiring a complex and interconnected system of production, marketing and distribution. To illustrate this I have briefly highlighted several cases of firms engaged in the manufacturing and retail of apparel, as well as considering some of the research on the global fashion industry. I have tried, using the various theoretical approaches to the study of fashion, to explain how these firms are involved not only in the economic market but in the larger social and cultural endeavor of responding to and creating consumer demand.

In Chapter 2 I address the fashion designer, a personage that emerges to provide the new elite, and the growing middle classes (as well as those who aspire to these statuses), with fashion that allows them to distinguish themselves from some, and to identify with others. The designer's task is to draw on themes from the existing culture and to reconfigure these ideals and values in vestimentary form. I trace the history of the designer and look at the occupation of fashion design. I consider those who have studied fashion design and related occupations such as art, product design, and architecture, and those who have written about or commented on fashion designers, such as journalists and fashion designers themselves. From this data I describe the designer as artist and craftsman, and as a cultural arbiter—one whose standing allows him or her to “consecrate” certain objects, deeming them a means of attaining a certain lifestyle (Bourdieu, 1984: 6).

Chapter 3 deals with the emergence of a particularly American fashion industry. Here I look specifically at the social and cultural conditions that gave rise to the consumer revolution in the United States, and at the way industry responded in making ready-to-wear fashion a mass phenomena. I trace the history of men's and women's clothing production and its connection to the social

structure and culture of its time, from a domestic activity, to a cottage industry, and finally to an industrial manufacturing system. The innovations that occurred in technology and the development of cities, allowing for mass production and dissemination of fashion, would set the stage many decades later for Tommy Hilfiger's appearance. I consider some of the innovations introduced by predecessors, such as Ralph Lauren, that provided a basis on which Hilfiger could develop and market his own American fashion.

In Chapter 4 the Tommy Hilfiger Corporation is introduced. I begin by discussing the firm's products as manifestations of a coherent American identity. Fashion, like other elements of popular culture such as movies and music, indicate certain positions and orientations particular to a society. I show by analyzing texts written by Hilfiger to describe his own designs, the elements contained in his particular representation of America. Hilfiger's clothing and products initially appealed to young American men; a middle class audience with aspirations he felt had not adequately been met by other designers. Gradually his offerings expanded to encompass a wider audience: women, children, babies—and his appeal become global. Through licensing, advertising, and by establishing retail stores in major European, Asian and other world capitals, Hilfiger's American models and metaphors reached the broadest possible audience.

Up until this point it was not especially necessary to have gained entry to the firm. For the next section, dealing with the history and structure of the firm, it becomes necessary to step inside the firm, to observe the inner workings of the organization, and to get to know and talk to employees. The history of the firm is outlined, a narrative created by reference to articles from the trade and general press, from the firm's own archives, and from information gained from discussions and interviews with current employees. The structure of the firm is

evidenced by reference to organizational charts encompassing the organization as a whole, as well as those that are division specific, and by discussion and formal interviews with persons in various positions. Primary methods used in the firm, then, were interviewing, participant observation and archival research.

Before deciding on Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc. I sought entry to several large designer firms. I wrote to the principal designer or the CEO of about 35 companies. This method resulted in a few responses, notably by two companies. Neither offered the depth of access that Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc. eventually would. Neither were household names, though they were well-known women's wear firms. Interestingly, my letter to Tommy Hilfiger went unanswered. I had been particularly interested in this firm because of its unique contribution to American fashion, and Hilfiger's ability to transform himself from an unknown entity to a highly visible lifestyle brand. This transformation was built on strategic marketing, but also involved talent and vision, factors that would contribute to Hilfiger's leadership ability.

Intent on studying this firm, I decided to pursue my interest from another angle. The President of Licensing (now Group President for U.S. Wholesale) at Tommy Hilfiger belonged to one of the same organizations that I did. With this common connection I was able to contact her personally, and ask if I could meet her to discuss my interest in studying the firm. Lynn Shanahan was supportive from the beginning. Within a few weeks, after securing approval from the Chief Financial Officer and the Legal Department, and receiving a positive response from Tommy Hilfiger, Ms. Shanahan met with me to discuss the firm and my project. This was in March 2003. We formulated a list of people that I'd initially meet with and Ms. Shanahan began scheduling interviews. I was given clearance through the Human Resources Department to be admitted to the various buildings

in New York, and was given a key card and photo identification to gain access. I was given a desk in the Licensing Department, with a computer, an email account, and a telephone. At first I'd come in several times a week and look over various documents, for example the 10-K report, company newsletters, memos, announcements, etc. This arrangement was rather short-lived, perhaps lasting two months or so. A new full-time person was hired in Licensing and the space I was in was no longer available. I moved to another area, a common space in a cubicle, without its own telephone or computer. It had belonged to a former employee but was now used by several people as an extra work space, and for storage of files, samples, etc. Strategically, this new space was much better than the prior one. It placed me across from Ms. Shanahan's Executive Assistant and in view of everyone in Licensing. During my time there I got to know and was able to create a rapport with people in the Licensing Division. Being in the department allowed me to establish a presence as a member of the firm. This was greatly facilitated by my helping out Lynn and her Executive Assistant with various tasks when needed.

Generally I would come in once per week on my own, but during particularly busy times, or on occasions when extra help was needed, I would come in more often. When Ms. Shanahan's Executive Assistant transferred to another department, I filled in during the transition period. This allowed me to get to know people throughout the firm, or at least for them to have seen or spoken to me on the phone. Later, if I were to have an interview with a person I could mention that I had been working for Lynn, and that I was set up as an "intern" in the Licensing Division. This would create less of a tension than if I were coming in from the outside to conduct my project. Furthermore, I could contact people by telephone, email or interoffice mail from within the firm. This

factor alone, allowed me to be seen as an insider, not an outsider. Interviews could take place within a person's own work area. Of course being within the firm and be able to buzz myself in was far different than if were announced by the receptionist or escorted in by someone.

On several occasions Ms. Shanahan would use her influence to schedule appointments for me. Requests made directly by Ms. Shanahan would be met with a positive and enthusiastic response. I should mention that when I was asked to help with a particular project or when I filled in or assisted Ms. Shanahan's Executive Assistant, I was paid as an outside contractor.

Chapter 5 deals with Tommy Hilfiger as a charismatic leader. Being in the firm I began to see that employees identified strongly with Tommy Hilfiger. This is not surprising as Tommy Hilfiger's name appears on all of the products that employees at various levels are engaged in creating. The creative process which includes not only design but marketing, management, production, licensing, legal issues, etc. is by nature a collective endeavor. I began to understand that in this industry a special type of leader is necessary. One that can secure a great degree of cooperation and dedication from his or her staff. This is particularly important amongst employees involved in fashion design. They are after all charged with furthering Tommy Hilfiger's creative vision.

I discuss in this chapter research on bureaucracy and administrative management in organizations, and I try to connect this to artistic creation in the guild system where assistants, pupils and apprentices worked under the direction of a master artist. It is not possible to bend fashion design to fit neatly in a bureaucratic form of administration. Rational, bureaucratic principles are certainly applied in this fast paced, deadline driven industry, but what is needed to

foster creative inspiration is a “live” form of charisma. Hilfiger accomplishes this by engaging in spontaneous, interpersonal interactions with employees—dropping in to see what is going on in the design rooms for instance. Hilfiger also carefully constructs his charisma, and indeed it becomes routinized. He holds meetings, makes appearances at the pep rally, mingles with people at the Christmas party, issues memos, makes statements through the company newsletter, or has announcements of his latest activities and accomplishments circulated through other company documents. Even when charisma occurs in carefully orchestrated organizational practices like at the pep rally, it must appear natural and genuine. The message must be communicated that Hilfiger has a vision, can lead the company forward, and that he is counting on each person to contribute. An emotional connection must be made, his energy and enthusiasm transmitted and received by others. Being in the company I was able to attend certain events, such as the pep rally, and to see Hilfiger on some occasions within the organization interacting with others. It wasn’t possible to observe Hilfiger up close, to shadow him, as I would have liked. Much of my information was obtained from others—sometimes by chance—overhearing someone speaking about Hilfiger, or through conversations or interviews with employees. Hilfiger’s actions being interpreted as sincere and caring, and the awe that employees tend to hold him in, require to a certain extent that his presence not be an everyday, casual presence.

Hilfiger’s charisma must also extend to the brand so that the products carrying his name can be said to embody his presence, even when they are licensed to manufacturers. Hilfiger is thereby able to position himself as a lifestyle brand, covering a wide-range of merchandise at different price points. While his name is licensed to specialists in a variety of areas it is Hilfiger that

receives the attention. As such it is necessary that he maintain control over the products that bear his name. Tommy Hilfiger's visibility and his status as fashion designer allows him to be a cultural arbiter to the public, recommending directly through personal appearances or interviews, or through the product itself via the presence of the brand in the media and in stores, a certain way of life and of presenting oneself. I approached this aspect of his charisma by studying marketing plans and other company based information which discussed the strategic presentation of the brand.

Chapter 6 deals with the corporate culture of the firm. Hilfiger must sell himself, in effect, not only to the public but to his own employees. It is not enough to simply carry out one's assigned role within most positions in the company in this type of industry. As fashion design, production, marketing, and licensing are dynamic processes that require an investment of one's creative energies and a level of dedication that entails sacrifices in one's personal life, employees must have a deep commitment to the goals of the company. It is within the organizational context that such a solidarity is forged. The culture of the organization must foster unity as well as innovation. There are structures and processes within the organization that accomplish these necessary tasks. I observed that designers, for example, work in teams with a minimum of bureaucratic control. They are given a certain space in which to express creative ideas, and are allowed time away from their daily routine to attain some degree of rejuvenation and inspiration. The latter, after all must be brought into the company from outside, it cannot be simply generated from within. Within the divisions themselves a sense of common purpose is created. Each division has certain interests and goals. It is this, and the interpersonal relationships that emerge from working closely together, that create unity. The system to be

efficient is highly bureaucratized yet I have observed that there is a systematic attempt to dissolve hierarchy and to create an egalitarian environment. As a result the work environment is almost uniformly described as collegial and accepting while at the same time being highly demanding. To gain an understanding of the organizational culture I observed and participated in it to the extent possible, and discussed it with various people both informally and in structured interviews. I looked at organizational research and compared various findings to the situation encountered at Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc.

It was also necessary to consider the influence of outside factors on the organizational culture. Firms in a particular industry will share certain features, operating as they are in the same environment. The competitiveness of this industry, the innovations of other firms, market forces, etc. will all have an impact on the creative process. Relying mostly on accounts from designers interviewed concerning the impact of external industry forces, I was able to get a sense of how other environments in the industry compared to that at Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc. I also discussed an issue that had significant to them, and an impact on the subculture of designers, the issue of job security.

Chapter 7 looks at the creative process of fashion design at Tommy Hilfiger USA, Inc. This chapter required observation and interviewing of designers in addition to consideration of the literature dealing with creativity in the work place, and in artistic endeavors. I decided to focus primarily on two divisions, Men's Licensed Design and Men's Sportswear Design. I interviewed several designers from each division, some more than once. On various occasions I was able to observe the designers at work. I also interviewed at least one designer from Women's Licensed Design, Women Sportswear Design, and the new H Hilfiger division. These interviews provided additional insight, but did not

provide a full picture of the representative divisions. None of the interviews with the designers were tape recorded. I felt this would be too intrusive and may create too official a situation. Rather I loosely followed a questionnaire with about ten questions. I used this questionnaire as a basic outline but often deviated from it if the designer seemed to prefer to talk in a less structured format.

In summary, I believe my presence in the firm and ability to be taken as a member of that firm, although not as regular employee but as an intern, allowed me to conduct my research on a variety of fronts. It provided access to certain documents and the ability to observe, participate and interview people from various divisions. In this way, I may say that I was able to form an understanding of the firm in terms of its structure, functions, processes and culture.

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