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Regina Lee Blaszczyk and Véronique Pouillard, eds. *European Fashion: The Creation of a Global Industry*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018. xxi + 319 pp. Figures, tables, notes, bibliography and index. £20.00 (pb). ISBN 978-1-5261-2210-0.

Review by Nancy Deihl, New York University.

It is a measure of the maturation of fashion studies that new books increasingly acknowledge the complex, multi-disciplinary nature of the field. Fashion can be approached through material culture, biography, sociological inquiry, visual studies, economics, or performance, to name a few possibilities. But even though the phrase “fashion industry” is familiar, the “industry” aspect of this global phenomenon has received surprisingly little critical academic attention. This much-needed edited collection offers focused, authoritative chapters based on the case study model used in business history, with the crucial additional consideration of cultural analysis. It joins other volumes in Manchester’s *Studies in Design*, a series of single-author books and edited collections that consider their subjects, ranging from eighteenth-century British chinoiserie to corporate landscape, in cultural context.

Since the beginning of industrial clothing production, discourse about fashion as an aspect of modern life has often focused upon high style and the designer system, arguing for the caprices of prominent (usually French) designers as the source of stylistic evolution. Thorstein Veblen and Georg Simmel, commenting on fashion at the turn of the twentieth century, described a trickle-down flow of influence from haute couture to low-priced retail, with new fashions initiated when a style became too popular and established at the mainstream level. The narrative of fashion has often been understood as a story of fascinating characters and dramatic relationships: the designer as creative genius; the “fashion icon,” an aristocrat, socialite, or celebrity with extraordinary taste; the tension between unique high fashion and mass-market knock-offs. This impression is supported by popular publications, film, and crowd-pleasing museum exhibitions highlighting the so-called Great Designers and their elite clientele. Regina Lee Blaszczyk and Véronique Pouillard’s book breaks through this image of fashion—traversing the gilded salons to access hidden offices and ateliers—to acknowledge “the inner workings of innovation in the fashion industry” (p. 11). This collection “pull[s] back the curtain” (p. 27) for the reader to consider not just high design and elite consumption but the influence of politics and economics, the importance of branding, marketing, retailing, and finance.

Blaszczyk, professor of business history at the University of Leeds, has published widely on many facets of the fashion industry including color, forecasting, and consumption. Pouillard, associate professor in the history of modern Europe at the University of Oslo, publishes on business history with a specialty in fashion and related activities. Chapter contributors are from a range of backgrounds and academic disciplines including business management and history, economics, technology, and decorative arts. In addition to expected sources (the fashion press, interviews with designers), the authors have included commentary from industry personnel, and plumbed company archives, trade association records, and internal publications to produce impressive, readable, well-researched case studies on a variety of topics. Throughout the book, graphs, tables, and organizational charts are valuable additions to the text. In fact,

graphic presentations of financial and chronological data may surprise some readers used to fashion texts punctuated solely by photos and illustrations.

According to the editors, the “story began in the fading glory of haute couture and ends with the vibrant world of fashion for everyone” (p. 27) and the organization of the book reflects that evolution. Chapters are grouped into three sections: “Reinventing Paris fashion,” “International connections and the role of retailers,” and “European fashion on the periphery.” The first chapter, written by the editors and aptly titled “Fashion as enterprise,” functions as an introduction to the project and explains its structure. “Reinventing Paris fashion” acknowledges the capital’s changing role. Prior to the Second World War, and again in the postwar period, design direction was set by Paris but manufacturing (other than haute couture) took place in a variety of locations. New York City’s Seventh Avenue was especially important because of the size of the American market. Since the 1970s, Paris has evolved into a center of brand innovation and management. The third chapter, written by Pierre-Yves Donzé and Ben Wubs on Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton (LVMH) presents a data-driven analysis of successful brand “storytelling” by the luxury conglomerate (at the time of publication the largest such group in the world). LVMH’s annual reports, which are far from dry financial documents of interest only to shareholders, served as primary sources. This chapter looks at the company in terms of several prevailing theories of luxury management, embodying the aim of the book to “blend theoretical and critical approaches with empirical studies” (p. 27).

Another chapter in the section deals with the recent “sleeping beauty” phenomenon—the “reawakening” of dormant heritage brands—in terms of Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital. The chapter author, business historian Johanna Zanon, argues that Bourdieu’s notion can explain the value of such brands, that their original reputation generated lasting prestige, “stored potential” (p. 87) burnishing the enterprise like a patina even through the years of dormancy. As Zanon makes clear, the fairytale metaphor is challenged by the hard facts of the process. The first sleeping beauties revitalized by father and son entrepreneurs Guy and Arnaud de Lummen were Parisian haute couture brands including Vionnet, an esteemed couture house established in 1912 that closed in 1939 with the retirement of founder Madeleine Vionnet. During its peak years, the House of Vionnet was a favorite of best-dressed women worldwide and the designer was famous for her expertise in creating body-hugging bias cut evening dresses inspired by classical antiquity. Beginning in the late 1980s, the Lummens invested in prestigious brands from fashion history, a process that entailed both purchase of legal rights but also knowledge acquisition in order to relaunch the brands with products related in some way to the brands’ heritage. Arnaud de Lummen’s research into the reputation, aesthetic, and clientele of Vionnet was crucial to the success of the project, exemplifying how “[e]ntrepreneurs curate the history of the brand by selecting the relevant historical elements that support their revivalist strategy” (p. 87). The notion of heritage appears at several points in the book, including in the LVMH case and later in a chapter on Indian fashion. It proves to be a slippery concept; “heritage” stories can be created as part of corporate myth making but are valuable in millennial marketing, which often emphasizes backstory to potential customers.

The chapters grouped in the second section, “International connections and the role of retailers,” shine light on the often hidden role of fashion professionals such as buyers, merchandise managers, and fashion directors in disseminating style. Internal memos, newsletters, even letters and telegrams from executives on buying trips are integrated into the texts and enhance the case studies. In-depth research reveals the two-way flow of influence in selling fashion. In addition to serving as tastemakers, these hardworking, well-traveled fashion professionals also had to read, interpret, and on occasion simply cave in to consumer preferences. Florence Brachet Champsaur’s chapter on Galeries Lafayette’s 1953 fair “La fleur de la production italienne”, a special promotion at the Paris department store, provides a pendant to Blaszczyk’s work on Filene’s of Boston. Both highlight behind-the-scenes efforts by fashion professionals to determine their markets, search out exciting goods in an increasingly crowded marketplace and, in sum, maintain shopping as an exciting and relevant experience. After World War II, French retail executives made reconnaissance trips to stores across the United States to see how American institutions managed a more

diverse retail landscape where department stores had to coexist with other modes of shopping including self-service stores and shopping malls. Galeries Lafayette executives were not convinced that American models provided a solution, but an increased emphasis on merchandising and special events was deemed one of the successful strategies. Champsaur's chapter shows how postwar commitment to European cooperation vied with protectionist instincts as French manufacturers reacted to the promotion of Italian products with unease. Galeries Lafayette in turn scheduled a "Festival of French Design" the following year.

Blaszczyk's chapter recounts the impressive history of Filene's, Boston's foremost destination for apparel for over 100 years. During the 1950s, the store's buyers attempted to deal with growing market segmentation and discovered their enthusiasm for European elegance was a mismatch with consumer demand for informality and easy-care options. These objections especially came from women who (contrary to prevailing perceptions of the decade) increasingly worked outside the home. As Blaszczyk asserts, "some career women felt that stores and designers who tried to reshape their tastes were just plain impertinent" (p. 190).

While France and Italy and their relationships with other markets are covered in several chapters, the book—true to the promise embedded in its subtitle—also goes further afield with case studies focused on Sweden (via H&M), Scotland (tweed), Japan (denim and jeans), and India ("ethical" marketing in luxury). The final chapter illustrates particularly well the organizing concept of the third section, "European fashion on the periphery." Author Wessie Ling, a cultural historian and artist, examines the surprising, international trajectory of a familiar artifact: a low-cost woven polyethylene utility bag available in stripes and plaids and used for hauling everyday goods. According to the author it was originally used in Hong Kong (p. 285), but is now seen around the world and known by various regional names including "Red-White-Blue" in Hong Kong; "Chinatown tote" in the U.S.; "Bangladeshi bag" in England; and "Ghana must go bag" in Nigeria and Ghana (p. 284). Significantly, many of these nicknames refer to migrants and migration. Despite this humble context, the Red-White-Blue was served up by the high-fashion house Louis Vuitton in its 2007 spring-summer collection. The expensive Vuitton version, made of woven leather and imprinted with a conspicuous logo, was not the first high-fashion use of the vernacular bag—it has inspired Comme des Garçons and Helmut Lang, among others—but given the active contemporary conversation about appropriation in fashion, it generated tremendous publicity and controversy. As Ling notes, "[t]here was a certain irony in Vuitton copying cheap Chinese produce to be sold under their label for large sums of money, given the countless counterfeit Vuitton handbags for sale on the Chinese black market" (p. 294). This chapter demonstrates the overturning of the trickle-down model explained by Veblen and Simmel in their analysis of modern fashion, a model that was indeed in place for the first half of the twentieth century. European fashion per se plays only a small role in the scenario outlined in Ling's chapter; it is the end point in the Red-White-Blue journey rather than the apex of influence.

Books such as this are important in deepening the field of fashion studies and widening its focus. In their introductory chapter, the editors propose three "geographic ensembles"—European, transatlantic, and global—that are "fundamental to understanding the functions of fashion as a business" (p. 27). In the context of this proposition, the story of Red-White-Blue sums up the status of European fashion in the early twenty-first century. No longer a monolith or the font of all fashion knowledge, like other global industries, it contends with and adapts to the development and availability of materials, geographic and cultural borders, and the budgets and aesthetics of populations on the move.

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