Garde-Robes: A Study in Haute Couture Patronage

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ABSTRACT

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The exhibition *Rara Avis: Selections from the Iris Apfel Collection* at the Metropolitan Museum's Costume Institute in New York in 2005 signalled a shift in curatorial practices with personal collections of haute couture being the subject of museological investigation. While it is tempting to dismiss these types of exhibitions as celebrating material excess, they are culturally, historically and socially significant. There have been numerous exhibitions on fashion designers, but hardly any on the women who wear their creations, because they are often considered quotidian and aspirational. However, they are both the collectors and caretakers of their garments and the custodians of the legacy of haute couture. Moreover, these exhibitions emphasize the social implications of dressing, such as distinction or conformity. This thesis discusses the patterns and networks specific to the acquisition of haute couture, the liminal nature of these garments and the different curatorial strategies used to display them in the museum space. Indeed, couture gowns shift between functional yet luxurious everyday objects and technically virtuosic works of art. The personal collections of haute couture (or *garde-robes*) that I examine in this thesis are a source of creativity, material presence, cultural legacy for their owner and help them to construct and perform identities.

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I would also like to express my gratitude to the Fondation Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent in Paris, especially to head curator Mrs. Sandrine Tinturier for giving me access to the designer's archives and for allowing me a glimpse of Nan Kempner's couture collection. Thank you for your interest and enthusiasm for my subject, for providing me with a large part of my primary research and for facilitating my interview with Mrs. Dominique Deroche, who I would like to thank as well. Mrs. Deroche's knowledge of the system of haute couture and perspective on couture patrons were essential to my thesis. I thank her for taking the time to answer my questions.

Lastly, I want to thank my family for their support, encouragement and unconditional love; my friends for their patience and kindness; my employer and coworkers for their understanding; and my classmates for inspiring me for the past two years.

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Introduction

The 1999 exhibition *Garde-robes: intimités dévoilées, de Cléo de Mérode à…* held at the Musée de la mode et du textile in Paris, displayed the wardrobes of thirty-nine of the museum's donors. Both an homage to the contributors and a study of sartorial behaviours, *Garde-robes* revealed how significant clothes are in building one's identity.[1] Curator Pamela Golbin extracted garments from donors' "garde-robes" (closet or wardrobe) that are imposed or inspired by the image they wish to project and perform and thus embody their biography, reveal fragments of their identity and extend their material presence.[2] This implies that each element has a story and together, these form a larger narrative. In the exhibition catalogue, Golbin explains: "'La galerie des portraits' développe et expose la véritable problématique de la garde-robe en soulignant les singularités, les concordances, les spécificités de chaque donateur, en accentuant leur démarche, leur processus conscient ou inconscient, et en faisant surgir comme mobile majeur, un détonnant mélange d'affinités calculées et de désirs spontanés."[3] The way these women gathered garments to form personal collections and hereafter become the custodians of the legacy of haute couture not only raises questions about the importance of self-fashioning, but also about collecting and consuming as gendered activities.

To illustrate this idea, let us compare donations from Catherine Gille (French, b. 1946) and Sylvie Grumbach (French) that were on display in *Garde-robes*. The former included mini denim shorts (c.1968) [fig. 1], an Anne-Marie Beretta orange, yellow and black satin jacket (c.1975) and an orange jersey Arlette Beress jumpsuit (c.1968) [fig. 2].[4] Grumbach bequeathed a black sculptural Thierry Mugler jumpsuit (1979) [fig. 3] and an open-back, black jersey Alaïa dress (1982) [fig. 4] adorned with multiple zippers.[5] Gille spent her youth between Paris, Saint-Tropez and London during the 1960s and frequented

[1] Pamela Golbin, et al., *Garde-robes: intimités dévoilées, de Cléo de Mérode à…*, (Paris: Union Centrale des Arts Décoratifs, 1999) 11.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid, 12.
[4] Ibid, 142.
[5] Ibid, 164.

'hippie chic' spots such as the legendary boutique Biba.[6] Grumbach worked as a fashion publicist, for designers such as Emanuel Ungaro, Valentino and Vivienne Westwood. She was also a regular at clubs *Le 7* and *Palace* in Paris during the late 1970s and early 1980s.[7] Her wardrobe typifies the young urban professional working in fashion in the 1980s: edgy, aggressively sexy with a slight nod to menswear. Gille's clothes, on the other hand, show a cosmopolitan, creative and free-spirited young woman: a motley collection of disco, 1950s-inspired and hippie garments, all of which came in bright colours and a short hemline. Both wardrobes represent a part of their owner' s biography, their lifestyle, identity and social context.

Since the exhibition *Garde-robes*, many other museums have displayed private fashion collections, and more specifically haute couture. They are akin to exhibitions that feature private collections of fine art since they both ultimately reveal the collector's biography and personality, implicitly or explicitly. However, they remain marginal in comparison. The following examples are noteworthy: *1979-1999: Mouna Ayoub, parcours d'une collectionneuse* at the Musée de la mode de Marseille in 1999, *Rara Avis: Selections from the Iris Apfel Collection* at the Metropolitan Museum' s Costume Institute in New York in 2005, *Nan Kempner: American Chic* at the Costume Institute in 2006, *Nan Kempner: Une Américaine à Paris* at the Fondation Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent in Paris in 2007, *Daphne Guinness* at the Museum at FIT in New York in 2011 and *Roman d'une garde-robe: le chic d'une Parisienne de la Belle Époque aux années 30* at the Musée Carnavalet in 2013.[8]

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[6] Pamela Golbin, et al., *Garde-robes: intimités dévoilées, de Cléo de Mérode à…*, (Paris: Union Centrale des Arts Décoratifs, 1999) 142.
[7] Ibid, 164.
[8] *1979-1999: Mouna Ayoub, parcours d'une collectionneuse*, Musée de la mode de Marseille, Marseille, July 10 to November 28, 1999, curated by Maryline Vigouroux and Olivier Saillard; *Rara Avis: Selections from the Iris Apfel Collection*, Costume Institute, Metropolitan Museum, New York, September 13, 2005 to January 22, 2006, curated by Stephane Houy-Towner, Harold Koda and Iris Apfel; *Nan Kempner: American* Chic, Costume Institute, Metropolitan Museum, New York, December 12, 2006 to March 4, 2007, curated by Harold Koda; *Nan Kempner: Une Américaine à Paris*, Fondation Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent, Paris, May 16 to July 29, 2007, curated by Yves Saint Laurent and Pierre Bergé; *Daphne Guinness*, Museum at FIT, New York, September 16, 2011 to January 7, 2012, curated by Valerie Steele and Daphne Guinness; *Roman d'une garde-robe: le chic d'une Parisienne de la Belle Époque aux années 30*, Musée Galliera and Musée Carnavalet, Paris, October 17, 2013 to March 16, 2014, curated by Sophie Grossiord and Charlotte Lacour-Veyranne.

Such collections have gained museological and academic attention only recently, because their subject, haute couture, is a form of applied art.[9] These collections are considered of lesser status because they elicit notions of technical manual skills rather than intellectual genius and are associated with conspicuous consumption instead of the "masculinist ethos of highbrow moral elitism" of fine art collecting practices.[10] A couture garment is a liminal object that moves "between the rarefied realm of fine art and the mundane existence of everyday life."[11] It is both *collected* for its cultural significance and *worn* for its technical virtuosity, uniqueness and social standing. Couture patrons have an embodied experience with their acquisitions: a dress will become stained, wrinkled; its fabric loosened. The same dress is sometimes donated or loaned to a museum, where it is occasionally staged in an exhibition that uses modernist curatorial strategies where the garment is stripped of its context and function and transformed into a purely aesthetic object. Between applied and fine art, haute couture moves easily. Its liminal nature not only complicates the object itself, but so too the role of its wearer. She is at once, consumer, collector and patron. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a consumer is a person who purchases goods and services for personal use.[12] A collector, on the other hand, collects things of a specified type, professionally or as a hobby,[13] while a patron is an individual that gives financial or other support to a person, organization or cause.[14] Through my research, I have recognized that these roles are fluid and not mutually exclusive in the case of haute couture. In order to demonstrate the specific implications of each of these roles, I will consider my case studies in turn as consumers, collectors or

[9] The term applied art is used in distinction to fine art to describe the design process involved in making functional objects aesthetically pleasing, i.e. furniture, clothes, cars, appliances. From: *Oxford Dictionary of Art Online*, accessed August 6, 2015, http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095420946

[10] John Potvin and Alla Myzelev, "Introduction: the material of visual culture," *Material Cultures, 1740-1920*, eds. John Potvin and Alla Myzelev, (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2009) 7.

[11] Ibid, 1.

[12] "Consumer," *Oxford Dictionaries Online*, accessed October 29, 2014, http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/consumer

[13] "Collector," *Oxford Dictionaries Online*, accessed October 29, 2014, http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/collector

[14] "Patron," *Oxford Dictionaries Online*, accessed October 29, 2014, http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/patron

patrons. Historically regarded as three isolated functions, my thesis stresses the ways in which they can be connected.

To demonstrate the important, yet overlooked, role women have played in building and maintaining collections of both fine and applied art, I use notions of gender and collecting practices raised by Wanda M. Corn and Susan M. Pearce, to question the steadfast gender-aligned binary of male collectors and female consumers. My thesis is aligned with the works of scholars Penny Sparke, *As Long as It's Pink: The Sexual Politics of Taste* and Erika Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End*. Both texts bring consumption into a greater discourse on gender politics.[15] As it emerged with the rise of department stores and mass retailing in Western European urban centers in the late nineteenth century, women consumers were seen as manipulated.[16] Sparke and Rappaport both challenge the idea of women as passive consumers and suggest instead that by shopping women were acting outside of the masculine realm, in a "sphere of female autonomy, pleasure and creativity."[17] Indeed, in the case of fashion, female consumption has historically been considered frivolous and trivial. In fact, the "Protestant bourgeois and modernist ideal of self-restraint" plagues the consumption of luxury with ideas of morality and respectability.[18] Although I discuss nineteenth-century economist Thorstein Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption, I also consider excess as a source of creativity, material presence and cultural legacy through the writings of Olivier Assouly, Christopher J. Berry and John Potvin and Alla Myzelev. In order to study how objects of luxury - such as couture - are assessed as commodities, I attend to the notion of taste as a form of social distinction, as theorized by Pierre Bourdieu in "La Distinction" and "Haute couture et haute culture". This thesis maps out haute couture's different roles as product, collectible, subject of curatorial

[15] Penny Sparke, "Introduction: The Architect's Wife," *As Long As Its Pink: The Sexual Politics of Taste*, (Halifax: The Press of Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2010) xxiii.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Erika Rappaport, "Introduction: To Walk Alone in London," *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001) 3.
[18] John Potvin and Alla Myzelev, "Introduction: the material of visual culture," *Material Cultures, 1740-1920*, eds. John Potvin and Alla Myzelev, (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2009) 28.

investigation, amoral self-indulgence, emancipator and biographical element in order to reveal its complex nature and social and cultural significance.

Each of these roles is manifest in the *garde-robe* of my principal case study, New York City socialite and philanthropist Nan Kempner (1930-2005). Her impressive collection consisting of 3,000 items of clothing, of which one third is couture, was the subject of two separate exhibitions.[19] After her death in July 2005, the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art paid tribute to her memory with the exhibition *Nan Kempner: American Chic*. Since she was close friends with her favourite designer Yves Saint Laurent (she owned 376 pieces), he honoured her by organizing an exhibition with his partner, businessman Pierre Bergé, at the Fondation Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent, the house's archives and museum, titled *Nan Kempner: Une Américaine à Paris* in the summer of 2007. As a seasoned connoisseur and patron of couture, Kempner is an excellent example of the effort and thoroughness needed to assemble and maintain a couture collection. Her substantial *garde-robe* now forms part of the Metropolitan Museum's Costume Institute, the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco and the Fondation Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent collections.

An interview I conducted with Dominique Deroche, the former director of communications and press attaché for the house of Yves Saint Laurent from 1966 to 2002, and photocopies of the sketches of all of the 376 ensembles she has purchased from 1964 to 2002 form the basis of my analysis.[20] In order to support and nuance my findings, I will also refer to six other detailed examples of couture patrons whose collections were displayed in museum exhibitions: principal saleswoman at the couture house of Chéruit

[19] Metropolitan Museum of Art, "Press Release - Nan Kempner: American Chic," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, accessed October 30, 2014. http://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2006/nan-kempner.

[20] In June 2014, I had the opportunity to do research at the Fondation Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent in Paris. Head curator Sandrine Tinturier allowed me to look into her purchasing habits by providing a list of her 376 acquisitions from the house of Yves Saint Laurent, as well as photocopies of the sketches made by Saint Laurent for each of these garments. Tinturier also facilitated my interview with Dominique Deroche, whose functions included acting as a link between the house and the couture clients, which included Kempner. This rare opportunity was paramount in order to understand the relation between client and designer and the process of acquiring a couture garment.

from 1912 to 1923 Alice Alleaume (1881-1969), American interior decorator and textile and jewellery designer Iris Apfel (b. 1921), Lebanese businesswoman Mouna Ayoub (b. 1957), British artist and businesswoman Daphne Guinness (b. 1967) and former model Danielle Luquet de Saint-Germain. These, along with my primary case study, will help uncover how collections of haute couture can act as a tool for agency and self-fashioning, and, in turn, how women act as arbiters and custodians of the legacy of haute couture.

Chapter I: The Systems and Networks of Haute Couture

Since the term is often inaccurately used, it is essential to define and contextualize haute couture. It refers to designs produced by French houses (or *maisons*) that have been accredited by the *Chambre syndicale de la couture parisienne*. Originally founded in 1868 by the so-called "father of haute couture," Charles Frederick Worth (1825-1895)[21], the *Chambre* is an umbrella organization that supports couture houses and couturiers.[22] It has several mandates, such as the protection of its members against design piracy, promoting individual couturiers and dealing with buyers and the press.[23] In order to adhere to the *Chambre*, an aspiring couture house must fulfill a number of requirements. Fashion scholar and curator Alexandra Palmer details the *Chambre*' s initial criteria:

> At least twenty-five models had to be created in-house every spring and fall and a sample garment for each made to measure on a live mannequin. […] The collection was then to be presented on live mannequins in an 'appropriate' setting in the haute couture house, which had to be situated in Paris. The rules also covered the technical execution of the original models, the repetitions that were to be made in-house to clients' measurements, the number of fittings required and at what stage in the making, and the sale of the designs.[24]

Membership is reviewed annually by a jury that consists of administrators of the *Chambre* and professionals working in the textile industry.[25] The *Chambre* has been instrumental in establishing Paris as the center of fashion and supporting French *savoir-faire*. Indeed, houses have to employ at least fifteen dressmakers, known as the *petites-*

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[21] Charles Frederick Worth was dubbed the 'father of haute couture' as he was one of the first *couturiers* to create unique designs for specific clients while also presenting garments on live models at his salon from which clients could chose from. Born in England and working in Paris, he dominated the fashion scene in the latter half of the nineteenth century by aggressively promoting himself as not a mere *couturier*, but an artist and creative genius. Jessa Krick, "Charles Frederick Worth (1825-1895) and The House of Worth," *Metropolitan Museum*, accessed July 22, 2015. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/wrth/hd_wrth.htm
[22] Alexandra Palmer, "Introduction," *Couture & Commerce: The Transatlantic Fashion Trade in the 1950s*, (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press and Royal Ontario Museum, 2001) 13-14.
[23] Ibid, 14.
[24] Ibid, 15-16.
[25] Ibid, 15.

mains, to work full-time on the collections: "shoemakers, milliners, furriers, leather merchants, makers of buttons, belts, buckles, handbags, umbrellas; purveyors of ribbons and laces; hairdressers, embroiderers, jewellers."[26] Still active today, the *Chambre* has nonetheless modified its admission prerequisites, reflecting the global fashion market. Houses whose atelier is not located in Paris are now accepted as Corresponding Members (i.e. Giorgio Armani in Milan, Viktor & Rolf in Amsterdam).[27] In addition, the minimum number of garments created per collection has now gone up to thirty-five and must include outfits for both day and evening wear that will be presented during the Paris Couture Week (in January and July).[28] Finally, haute couture is exclusively made for women.[29] While men collect couture garments, such as designer Azzedine Alaïa and vintage fashion storeowner Didier Ludot, the experience of haute couture remains a female purview.

Haute couture differs from prêt-à-porter not only because it is entirely handmade, but its acquisition process is also quite unique. It is a time-consuming, "carefully orchestrated" enterprise that is "like a classical musical composition. It began with an overture, the presentation of the designs in a fashion show […] followed by a series of formalized movements within which the players each contribute to the sale. At the crescendo of the performance, the consumer, wearing the dress, [enters] society and [has] a public reception." [30] As a consequence of its strict etiquette and hermetic world, it is also remarkably elitist. Approximately two hundred women[31] have the possibility and means

[26] Alison Adburgham, "The Weather in the Salons," reprinted from *Harper's Bazaar* (June 1960), in Alison Adburgham, *View of Fashion*, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1966) 15 and Valerie Steele, "Haute Couture," *The Berg Companion to Fashion*, (New York: Berg Publishers, 2010) 393.
[27] Mathilde Gardin and Sophie Louet, "La haute couture, club très privé," *Le Point* (June 29, 2008), accessed March 4, 2015. http://www.lepoint.fr/actualites/2008-06-29/la-haute-couture-club-tres-prive/1037/0/256666
[28] Valerie Steele, "Haute Couture," *The Berg Companion to Fashion*, (New York: Berg Publishers, 2010) 393.
[29] Since its foundation, houses accredited by the *Chambre syndicale de la Haute Couture* have been creating clothing exclusively for women.
[30]Alexandra Palmer, "The Purchase of Haute Couture by Private Clients," *Couture & Commerce: The Transatlantic Fashion Trade in the 1950s*, (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press and Royal Ontario Museum, 2001) 41.
[31] These clients are "pas seulement l'élite américaine ou moyen-orientale. Il y a maintenant des Européennes, des Russes, des Indiennes, quelques Chinoise. […] l'exception française connait un nouvel

to purchase "the most expensive clothes money can buy" (with prices starting around €20,000 and sometimes exceeding six figures), according to director Margy Kinmonth in her BBC documentary *The Secret World of Haute Couture*.[32] Not unlike a private club, one cannot simply enter the haute couture salon. Social contacts are necessary.[33] The *entrée* is either inherited from a family member or gained by *nouveau riche* women with the help of a friend who is already a client of the house.[34] Daphne Guinness, for example, heiress of the Guinness fortune whose grandmother was very close to Hubert de Givenchy, has access to couture salons because of her family name.

Once welcomed into the haute couture "club", clients are invited to the fashion shows where seasonal designs are presented. For a novice, selecting potential purchases during a show is nothing short of impossible. As Guinness explains: "[models] walk past terribly quickly. And some of these [outfits] are very complicated. You have to be able to break them down very quickly in your head. And figure out what is going to work for you."[35] While this might seem hopeless to many, a couture veteran who is highly aware of her body, and true to her own personal style will easily spot potential purchases. Guinness is faithful to her gut feeling: "I know absolutely what will work and what won't. And I know precisely what I like and what I don't like."[36] This specific knowledge is acquired over many years of access to the couture "club." Although a client can make her selection then and there, she has to go through fittings before she can own the garment.[37]

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essor." Bruno Pavlovsky cited in Emmanuelle Serrière, "La cliente contemporaine," *Paris Haute Couture*, eds. Olivier Saillard and Anne Zazzo, (Paris: Skira Flammarion, 2012) 15.

[32] *The Secret World of Haute Couture,* directed by Margy Kinmonth, 2007, (London: BBC Four, 2007) DVD.

[33] Alexandra Palmer, "The Purchase of Haute Couture by Private Clients," *Couture & Commerce: The Transatlantic Fashion Trade in the 1950s*, (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press and Royal Ontario Museum, 2001) 41.

[34] Ibid, 42 and *The Secret World of Haute Couture,* directed by Margy Kinmonth, 2007, (London: BBC Four, 2007) DVD.

[35] *The Secret World of Haute Couture,* directed by Margy Kinmonth, 2007, (London: BBC Four, 2007) DVD.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Alexandra Palmer, "The Purchase of Haute Couture by Private Clients," *Couture & Commerce: The Transatlantic Fashion Trade in the 1950s*, (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press and Royal Ontario Museum, 2001) 41.

After the runway presentation, the designer goes on to prepare his next collection. He hands over the selling process to the *vendeuse*, a saleswoman who works in an haute couture house to sell the clothes to clients.[38] Although knowledge in fashion was important to be admitted to this position, high social skills were key. The *vendeuse* is the link between the designer, the client and the *petites mains*. Her role is to supervise fittings, request alterations through the atelier and record the changes made to the garment while making sure they respect the designer' s aesthetic. [39] She oversees the progress of the garment and makes sure the delivery deadline is met. *Vendeuses* often have one or more assistants, known as the *secondes*.[40] This selling process fosters a private relationship between the clients and *vendeuses.* Unfortunately, this relationship is difficult to research and document, since the houses guard the confidentiality of their clients very carefully.[41] Designer Karl Lagerfeld, who designs for Chanel, Fendi and his own prêt-à-porter line, stresses this point in Kinmonth's documentary: "[Clients] do not want to be mentioned. There are many rich [individuals] today, which the people [have no] idea who they are, how they look. And they don' t want people to know how they look and who they are, and where the money comes from. […] [I'm] like a doctor, it's a medical secret."[42] In general, *vendeuses* keep notebooks on clients where sales are dutifully recorded.[43] Because clients and *vendeuses* are exclusively women, "buying couture [is] a quintessentially feminine experience."[44]

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[38] Alexandra Palmer, "The Purchase of Haute Couture by Private Clients," *Couture & Commerce: The Transatlantic Fashion Trade in the 1950s*, (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press and Royal Ontario Museum, 2001) 43.
[39] Mary Brooks Picken and Dora Loues Miller, *Dressmakers of France: The Who, How and Why of French Couture*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956) 23.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Alexandra Palmer, "The Purchase of Haute Couture by Private Clients," *Couture & Commerce: The Transatlantic Fashion Trade in the 1950s*, (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press and Royal Ontario Museum, 2001) 44.
[42] *The Secret World of Haute Couture,* directed by Margy Kinmonth, 2007, (London: BBC Four, 2007) DVD.
[43] Alexandra Palmer, "The Purchase of Haute Couture by Private Clients," *Couture & Commerce: The Transatlantic Fashion Trade in the 1950s*, (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press and Royal Ontario Museum, 2001) 44.
[44] Ibid, 41.

Kempner bought many Yves Saint Laurent designs over four decades starting with his spring-summer collection in 1964, and was the couturier's first American client.[45] Dominique Deroche explains: "Elle achetait beaucoup, et tout le temps. Elle achetait des robes fortes, s'habillait très bien. [Étant très mince], les vêtements Saint Laurent tombaient très bien sur elle. Il adorait l'habiller. Après elle, beaucoup de femmes ont adopté le style Saint Laurent."[46] In fact, she introduced his designs to the United States, where many women whose husbands were oil tycoons and bankers coveted the sophistication associated with French couture in general, and more specifically with its *enfant terrible*, Saint Laurent. Kempner was a third-generation couture client and was able to maintain that habit thanks to her husband, banker and heir to the Loeb banking fortune Thomas Lenox Kempner whom she married in 1952.[47] She came "from a long line of clotheshorses" and had been exposed to fashion from a young age.[48] Her grandmother believed "a woman should have her own definite look, an aura about her," something she quickly developed.[49] According to Deroche, Kempner knew what suited her best and often made alterations to her purchases.

Indeed, what is seen on the runway is generally not what ends up on the wearer's body.[50] After the fashion show, a client makes an appointment with the house to make her

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[45] Over 38 years, Kempner has bought 376 ensembles from the house of Yves Saint Laurent: 64 from 1964 to 1969, 104 from 1970 to 1979, 101 from 1980 to 1989, 82 from 1990 to 1999 and 25 from 2000 to 2002. This includes a `prototype' dress (spring-summer 1994) that was offered at auction at Sotheby's in 1994 and bought by the Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent Fondation in 1995, a pantsuit and blouse ensemble that was never presented on the runway (spring-summer 1995) and a sable coat by YSL Fourrure (spring-summer 1997). On average, Kempner would buy from four to seven ensembles per season. Her favourite collection was clearly spring-summer 1968 (famous for its safari jacket and shorts smoking?), of which she bought fourteen pieces. She missed only one collection: fall-winter 1964-1965. Out of her 376 Saint Laurent ensembles, the Fondation now owns 206 (68 were donated by Kempner herself, and 138 were purchased by the Fondation).

[46] Dominique Deroche knew Nan Kempner very well and described her as one of Yves Saint Laurent's best client. Dominique Deroche (former director of communications and press attaché for the house of Yves Saint Laurent from 1966 to 2002) in discussion with the author, June 10th, 2014.

[47] Amy Larocca, "From the Well-Stuffed Closets of Mrs. Thomas L. Kempner," *New York Magazine*, (October 26, 2007) accessed June 11, 2015. http://nymag.com/fashion/features/25012/

[48] Alexandra Palmer, "The Purchase of Haute Couture by Private Clients," *Couture & Commerce: The Transatlantic Fashion Trade in the 1950s*, (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press and Royal Ontario Museum, 2001) 44.

[49] Ibid.

[50] *The Secret World of Haute Couture,* directed by Margy Kinmonth, 2007, (London: BBC Four, 2007) DVD.

selection for a first fitting.[51] Modifications and redesigns result from a collaborative effort between the *vendeuse* and the client. "This type of customizing, or redesigning, [stems] from the historical relationship between the tailor or dressmaker and the client before the advent of celebrity couturiers. The ability of a client to redesign is an aspect of haute couture that has been largely overlooked in favour of promoting the designer as artist and quintessential arbiter of taste."[52]

The overall purchasing process is lengthy and requires both a flexible schedule and financial means to plan fittings at the house's salon or atelier in Paris. At times, clothes are flown directly to very good clients so they can have fittings done at home.[53] Moreover, couture requires its clients to maintain a very lithe physique. If one is thin enough to fit into the dress that was worn on the runway, it is possible to have a 30% discount. Otherwise, a new dress must be made from scratch.[54] Given its high cost and intricate acquisition method, a couture garment is not only an important investment of money, but also of time. In fact, the "serious commitment of time" needed from both the client and the house is "one of the keys to the origins of couture mythology and helps to explain why a couture garment [is] believed to be priceless."[55]

The delayed acquisition process and involvement of the client heightens the significance of the garment. According to sociologist Georg Simmel: "the difficulty of acquisition, the sacrifice offered in exchange, is the unique constitutive element of value, of which

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[51] Alexandra Palmer, "The Purchase of Haute Couture by Private Clients," *Couture & Commerce: The Transatlantic Fashion Trade in the 1950s*, (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press and Royal Ontario Museum, 2001) 47.
[52] Ibid, 49. There is an important aspirational aspect to couture and fashion in general. The idea of 'trendsetter' will be further developed in chapter II with the Duchess of Devonshire in terms of inspiration for her peers and aspiration for the masses.
[53] *The Secret World of Haute Couture,* directed by Margy Kinmonth, 2007, (London: BBC Four, 2007) DVD.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Alexandra Palmer, "The Purchase of Haute Couture by Private Clients," *Couture & Commerce: The Transatlantic Fashion Trade in the 1950s*, (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press and Royal Ontario Museum, 2001) 47.

scarcity is the only external manifestation."[56] Thus, couture garments hold very high economic, cultural and social value. Consumers of such luxury goods distinguish themselves from others, as the worth given to their clothes, made possible by the structure of the fashion system, is significant and "considered a rare designer object that [confers] status on its wearer."[57] The symbolic, cultural and economic value of these garments is supported by couture houses and "validated today by museums, couture collectors and rising auction prices for these designs, as well as by the fact that many women who wore couture still have pieces in their wardrobe years later even though they will probably never wear them again."[58]

In his critique of consumer culture, *The System of Objects*, Jean Baudrillard argues that commodities are not consumed as material objects, but rather as signs. Thus, consuming is a "total idealist practice."[59] We consume signs such as distinction, belonging, modernity, youth, happiness, or power, for example. Because of its high value, couture is a sign of wealth and sophistication. It communicates its owner's social status, refinement and distinction. According to Baudrillard, if based on signs rather than objects, consumption responds to desires, not needs. Therefore, purchases are not always functional and cherished only temporarily, generating constant renewal. The latter is also fuelled by the "luxuriant growth of objects" and "ever-accelerating procession of generations of products, appliances and gadgets" that was made possible by the economic prosperity and the development of mass-produced objects in the 1950s and 1960s.[60] Desires grow exponentially as productions speeds up, and eventually result in material accumulation.

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[56] Cited in Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: commodities and the politics of value," *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective,* ed. Arjun Appadurai, (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1986) 13-15.
[57] Alexandra Palmer, "The Purchase of Haute Couture by Private Clients," *Couture & Commerce: The Transatlantic Fashion Trade in the 1950s*, (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press and Royal Ontario Museum, 2001) 55.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict, (London and New York: Verso, 2005) 221.
[60] Ibid, 1.

This limiting understanding of consumption was the main criticism of the exhibition *Nan Kempner: American Chic* held at the Metropolitan Museum's Costume Institute in New York in 2006. Head curator Harold Koda almost entirely recreated Kempner's closet, which was her children's converted bedrooms, in the museum's galleries.[61] "Stacks of 362 sweaters, and 354 jackets; shelves for feathered fedoras, brimmed straws and other hats; and larger displays for Saint Laurents, Valentinos, Balmains, and Gaultiers, some 3,000 garments and accessories and all."[62] Now accessible to public scrutiny, her substantial *garde-robe* was considered problematic in review of the exhibitions.[63] Considered a "gluttonous array of sartorial splendor" at best, and "a completely frivolous show about a very silly person" at worst, some wondered if the exhibition was simply a celebration of consumption.[64] While Koda argued that it provided a rare opportunity to look into the wardrobe of a true fashion aficionado with the means to purchase designer prêt-à-porter and couture clothes, the *Washington Post*'s fashion critic Robin Givhan wrote that the show is "akin to snooping through someone's especially nice closet: entertaining, but not especially edifying."[65]

American Chic divided Kempner's *garde-robe* thematically. Day dresses, evening gowns, jackets and pantsuits were grouped together in large glass encasings on opalescent mannequins. Fur coats, hats and knits were grouped in a winter section [fig. 5], and swimwear, caftans and a hot pink large straw hat were in a summer section [fig. 6]. A rack of jackets was used as a background for a mannequin seated on the ground wearing a gown tiered with swaths of frothy pale pink chiffon and lavender tulle [fig. 7]. Photographs of Kempner's closet (racks of jacket, stacks of sweaters, a pile of jewellery and shoes) by Levi Brown were used as wallpaper at the entrance of the exhibition [fig.

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[61] Cathy Horyn, "A Woman Who Wore Couture Like a Second Skin," *New York Times*, (December 14, 2006) G1.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Linda Yablonsky, "Socialite Nan Kempner's Closet is Aired at Metropolitan Museum," *Bloomberg News*, (December 15, 2006), accessed June 11, 2015. http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=aSlFs1SBNZpk
[65] Robin Givhan, "Museum Peeks Into A Socialite's Closet," *Washington Post*, (December 15, 2006) accessed June 11, 2015. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/12/14/AR2006121401747.html

8]. Visitors were greeted by two mannequins wearing similar billowy, white blouses. One had a long, black skirt and black heals, the other, a pair of blue jeans and red moccasins [fig. 9]. The two mannequins embodied Kempner's inclination for mixing couture with prêt-à-porter and pieces from different decades and designers, which was described in the wall text.[66]

Frequently labelled as a clotheshorse, Kempner owned a number of clothing items that could be considered excessive. Moreover, her collection reaffirms "the capitalist mandate of consumption in seriality."[67] It was not rare to find the same item declined in different colors in her *garde-robe*. However, following Potvin and Myzelev, I suggest that excess "can be a mode of empowerment, possibility and creativity" for female collectors such as Nan Kempner.[68] While the exhibition *Nan Kempner: American Chic* was criticized for being "more like a showroom at Bergdorf's" it was still significant. Indeed, there have been numerous exhibitions on fashion designers, but hardly any on the women who wear their creations and who are the collectors and caretakers of their garments. Curator and director of the Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology Valerie Steele argues that these women "not only inspire in turn the fashion designer and validate their clothes, but actually create a look that affect the way other people dress and/or think about dressing."[69] *American Chic* showed the *garde-robe* of a clothes fiend, but not a victim of fashion.[70] It also revealed that her fashion choices were much less frivolous than what her social status might have suggested: other than a dramatic yellow silk faille evening coat (1983-1984) by Yves Saint Laurent [fig. 10], her outfits weren't extravagant.[71] Reviews were especially unforgiving because the exhibition was framed by a discourse about the wearer rather that the designer. To obtain validity in a museum space, fashion exhibitions

[66] Linda Yablonsky, "Socialite Nan Kempner's Closet is Aired at Metropolitan Museum," *Bloomberg News*, (December 15, 2006), accessed June 11, 2015. http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=aSlFs1SBNZpk
[67] John Potvin and Alla Myzelev, "Introduction: the material of visual culture," *Material Cultures, 1740-1920*, eds. John Potvin and Alla Myzelev, (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2009) 16.
[68] Ibid, 15.
[69] Valerie Steele, *Daphne Guinness*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011) 2.
[70] Linda Yablonsky, "Socialite Nan Kempner's Closet is Aired at Metropolitan Museum," *Bloomberg News*, (December 15, 2006), accessed June 11, 2015. http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=aSlFs1SBNZpk
[71] Ibid.

are often monographic retrospectives celebrating the creative genius of couturiers, such as *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* at the Costume Institute in 2011 and *Giorgio Armani: A Retrospective* at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York in 2000.[72] Because they capitalize on the celebrity status of their subjects and materialize conspicuous consumption, exhibitions that showcase couture patrons' collections are often regarded with scepticism. They also elicit an aspirational approach to fashion, and because visitors experience dressing on a daily basis, are often deemed too quotidian.

Sociologist Mike Featherstone deconstructs consumer culture into three main perspectives that can be directly applied to the consumption of couture. First, mass production has created an "accumulation of material culture in the form of consumer goods and sites for purchases and consumption."[73] Leisure and consumption activities thus became increasingly popular as we can see with couture collector's *garde-robes*. Second, the satisfaction brought by a commodity depends on its "socially structured access in a zero-sum game" in which a participant's gain is matched by the loss of the other participant.[74] Thus, there are two different ways in which people can use goods: to create social bonds or engender a sense of distinction. When one acquires a commodity, one distinguishes themselves from others who do not own said commodity and is socially associated with those who do. Consumption of couture is structured as a zero-sum game. When one acquires a couture garment (+1), everyone else is denied access to that garment (-1) because it is unique. The idea of possessing an item no one else can is a motivation shared by many clients interviewed by Kinmonth. Featherstone's third perspective is that consumption "variously generates direct bodily excitement and aesthetic pleasures."[75] Another frequently repeated answer amongst interviewees is that

[72] *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Costume Institute, New York, May 4 to August 7, 2011, curated by Andrew Bolton and Harold Koda; *Giorgio Armani: A Retrospective*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, October 20, 2000 to January 17, 2001, curated by Germano Celant and Harold Koda.
[73] Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, (London: Sage, 1991) 13.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid.

couture simply "doesn't feel like anything else, it is moulded to your body."[76] More than a mere result of production, consumption has become a culture in post-industrial Western societies, according to Featherstone.[77] However, dressing in haute couture is not a basic need, nor is it necessary to be fashionable. It is not a "regular" type of consumption. It is a deliberate choice.[78] It has economic, cultural and social significations. Despite its association with embodied experiences and pleasures, consuming couture is not entirely devoid of politics, which will be discussed further in the following chapter. [79]

[76] *The Secret World of Haute Couture,* directed by Margy Kinmonth, 2007, (London: BBC Four, 2007) DVD.
[77] Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, (London: Sage, 1991) 13.
[78] Emmanuelle Serrière, "La cliente contemporaine," *Paris Haute Couture*, eds. Olivier Saillard and Anne Zazzo, (Paris: Skira Flammarion, 2012) 15.
[79] Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, (London: Sage, 1991) 13.

Chapter II: Luxury, Ostentation and Morality

While many scholars, such as Featherstone, believe that commerce is a socially and culturally telling activity, others still stigmatize and dismiss it as frivolous or simply immoral. In *The System of Objects*, Baudrillard writes that needs are not innate, but constructed. Thus, our desires are irrational.[80] Moreover, he argues that commodities are highly prized, but cherished only temporarily, generating constant renewal and eventually, waste. Oscar Wilde once declared that "fashion is merely a form of ugliness so unbearable that it has to altered every six months."[81] Both Wilde and Baudrillard advance an unfavourable and simplistic view of fashion. In fact, women have a different way of appreciating and using fashion. They keep clothes over many years, repair or alter them to fit their changing bodies. Thus, their garments aren' t "in fashion" in the strict sense of the term. Female consumption was nonetheless regarded as questionable. Palmer argues that:

> It was feared that the rise of female consumers and the development of seductive new boutiques 'would lead to women's moral corruption, as if the lust for hats would provoke more dangerous desires…[Some] contemporaries were concerned that these sanctuaries of frivolity would lead to uniquely pernicious character flaw, bad taste.' […] By the late nineteenth century, the female retailer or saleswoman was seen as the temptress of the female consumer, who was viewed as riddled with uncontrollable urges and usually hysterical. This notion still lingers today, and is profoundly associated with luxury goods such as haute couture. The myth is a far cry from the controlled and judicious decision that actually framed most female consumption.[82]

Luxury was regarded as a threat to one' s respectability. The concept of respectability emerged simultaneously with the notion of modern European nationalism during the late

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[80] Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict, (London and New York: Verso, 2005) 8.
[81] Oscar Wilde, "The Philosophy of Dress, " *New York Tribune*, April 19, 1885, 9.
[82] Alexandra Palmer, "The Purchase of Haute Couture by Private Clients," *Couture & Commerce: The Transatlantic Fashion Trade in the 1950s*, (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press and Royal Ontario Museum, 2001) 41-42.

eighteenth century, and was defined as "decent and correct manners and morals."[83] What determined the decency and correctness of these behaviours was the fundamental distinction between normal and abnormal. By the early nineteenth century, certain manners were recognized as respectable and models of normalcy were established throughout Western Europe.[84] For example, "the manly Englishman or German showed the restraint and self-control" proper to Protestant ideals, which was revived at the time through Pietism and Evangelicalism in Germany and England respectively.[85] Manliness meant being free of sexual impulses and sublimating them "into leadership of society."[86] Based on the ideals of knighthood and the Greek revival, these characteristics defined manliness and ultimately influenced womanhood.[87] "Man was active and woman passive, and the two roles must not be confused."[88] While masculinity was seen as the foundation of nationalism and respectability in society, women were both seen as guardians of morality and accused of "shallowness and frivolity."[89] To counter this, they were expected to embody virtue, beauty and decorum.[90] As a national symbol, women exemplified respectability:

> Germania was often depicted with a medieval castle above her head, draped in long robes, looking backward into the past, while Britannia, dressed in armour, evoked antiquity. Both were usually seated. If Marianne was scantily dressed during the French Revolution and again in 1830 leading the mob in Delacroix's famous painting, as soon as she became a national symbol she covered herself in chaste and acceptable fashion. Family ideal and public symbol reinforced one another.[91]

First partially, then fully clothed, Marianne was a symbol of the Revolution itself: France gaining respectability by eliminating its indulgent and immoral enemies, the

[83] George L. Mosse, "Introduction: Nationalism and Respectability," *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe*, (New York: Howard Fertig, 1985) 1.
[84] Ibid, 13.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid, 17
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid, 18.

aristocracy.[92] The idea of the "respectable woman" was prodded by the domestic ideal.[93] Through religious weddings, patriarchal nuclear families were created, and thanks to the division of labour, men went out for work, while women stayed home to tend to the family nest.[94] This ideology permeated the middle class well into the 1950s, when the "separation of the spheres" kept women relegated to the domestic realm, and men in the "world of work, progress, technology, and utility."[95]

Respectability is a strong deterrent to luxury. Indeed, material indulgence has long been synonymous with loose morals and weak character, starting with Plato. In his essay "De la vertu à l' opulence: La construction libérale du luxe," Christopher J. Berry argues in favour of luxury by placing it in relation to poverty, necessity and morality. It becomes a vice when juxtaposed with poverty, and source of pleasure with necessity. For example: "Dans la perspective morale de la frugalité, prendre cette tranche de gâteau supplémentaire constitue une indulgence luxueuse, un manque délétère de résolution de la part de celui qui se plie au désir, laissant entrevoir un défaut de caractère."[96] This suggests that needs are purposeful and reflective while desires are frivolous. However, Berry argues that desire is the motor of human action and a fundamental part of human nature.

The Cartesian mind-body split is at the root of the stigma of luxury, according to Berry, and it can be found in both philosophical and religious texts. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle describes the man as master of himself as one that acts according to his choices, not his desires. He must aim for *eudaimonia*, the "fin parfaite et suffisante."[97] His life is filled with only necessary things, and has natural desires, which are limited. The

[92] George L. Mosse, "Introduction: Nationalism and Respectability," *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe*, (New York: Howard Fertig, 1985) 7.
[93] Ibid, 18.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Penny Sparke, "Introduction: The Architect' s Wife," *As Long As Its Pink: The Sexual Politics of Taste*, (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2010) xxi.
[96] Christopher J. Berry, "De la vertu à l'opulence: la construction libérale du luxe," *Le Luxe: Essais sur la fabrication de l'ostentation*, ed. Olivier Assouly, trans. Florence Schneider, (Paris: Institut Français de la Mode, 2011) 69.
[97] Ibid, 72.

"poursuite excessive des plaisirs corporels est la marque de l'intempérant."[98] Within this logic, eating without hunger is a sign of imperfection. Moreover, in Cicero's *De Officiis*, it is argued that a life of sobriety and austerity is honest and has value, while a life of luxury is corrupted and shameful.[99] Men who live a life of luxury are considered to become softer, thus more effeminate.[100] The Christian doctrine subscribes to this conception. On one side, there is the ascetic life dedicated to the observation of God, and on the other, a mundane life that obeys the body's every desire[101] Femininity and frivolity have long been associated with luxury, in opposition to courage, restraint and masculinity. However, in his defense of luxury, Berry revaluates virtues and declares that society "softened" by luxury has less cruel wars and is synonymous with industry and knowledge.[102] For Berry, "l'opulence et la liberté sont les deux plus grands bienfaits que l'homme puisse connaitre."[103]

It is perhaps a bit ironic how contemporary consumption is almost entirely driven by the luxury industry after its portrayal as the downfall of "morality and social order."[104] Featherstone argues, "Today we increasingly live in a global consumer culture which celebrates the visibility of luxury."[105] The latter has become pervasive in media, such as magazines, advertisement, the Internet and television. But if luxury is democratized, is it still luxury? Indeed, a great deal of its power lies in its social exclusivity. In court societies, luxurious items were regulated in order to distinguish the royalty from aristocrats and commoners. Sumptuary laws made the use of certain fabrics, colours and types of clothing illegal for the plebes and the nobility.[106] The eventual rise of a wealthy

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[98] Christopher J. Berry, "De la vertu à l'opulence: la construction libérale du luxe," *Le Luxe: Essais sur la fabrication de l'ostentation*, ed. Olivier Assouly, trans. Florence Schneider, (Paris: Institut Français de la Mode, 2011) 72.
[99] Ibid, 73.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid, 75.
[103] Adam Smith, cited in Christopher J. Berry, "De la vertu à l'opulence: la construction libérale du luxe," *Le Luxe: Essais sur la fabrication de l'ostentation*, ed. Olivier Assouly, trans. Florence Schneider, (Paris: Institut Français de la Mode, 2011) 78.
[104] Mike Featherstone, "Luxury, Consumer Culture and Sumptuary Dynamics," *Luxury* 1:1, (September 2014) 47.
[105] Ibid, 50.
[106] Ibid.

bourgeoisie challenged the enforcement of these laws and initiated the democratization of luxury. This new merchant class mimicked the court fashions and "developed their own cultures and as trade intermediaries were at the centre of the provision of new exotic goods, fashions and styles."[107]

The democratization of luxury was confirmed in the late nineteenth century and onward, with the increased availability of images and new spaces, such as shopping malls, that increased the opportunities for viewing and manipulating luxury objects. [108] These two elements "enhance the sense of [luxury's] immediacy, intensity and desirability."[109] Recently, designer outlet stores offer a new shopping experience in which consumers can buy jewellery, clothing and other accessories at discount prices.[110] However, the issue with the democratization of luxury is that there is a danger of inappropriate use of the object. Indeed, "a good deal more work is needed to learn how to use luxuries, to integrate them into accustomed networks of people and things."[111]

Since the 1980s, as markets became saturated, many companies started to rely on and deploy as much aesthetic artifice as possible to stimulate or maintain consumption, since taste dictates most purchases.[112] This is what Olivier Assouly defines as aesthetic capitalism, the industrial mobilization of consumers' tastes. During the development of advertising in the second half of the twentieth century, affect and pleasure started to be targeted rather than rationality and functionality.[113] Moreover, the birth of marketing combined with the ennobling of minor media, such as television and fashion, led to the rationalization of mass-production.[114] This resulted in superfluous, rather than utilitarian consumption. Fashion and design are especially symptomatic of aesthetic capitalism.

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[107] Mike Featherstone, "Luxury, Consumer Culture and Sumptuary Dynamics," *Luxury* 1:1, (September 2014) 51.
[108] Ibid, 51-52.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid, 53.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Olivier Assouly, *Le capitalisme esthétique: Essai sur l'industrialisation du goût*. (Paris: Cerf, 2008) 12.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid, 115.

Their ephemeral and cyclical nature reduce "la durée de vie d'un objet et [fait] en sorte que les valeurs d'usage des marchandises se transforment en valeur d'échange."[115]

But what contributed to the establishment of aesthetic capitalism? The rise of the bourgeoisie in the late eighteenth century in Europe was one of the steps of this economic conversion. Economic rather than aristocratic values were in favour.[116] Good taste was no longer solely dedicated to the action of appreciating and judging, but also to the "désir de possession et de jouissance matérielle, ainsi qu'avec une volonté de s'enrichir."[117] Good taste was socially transformed as it lost its political power and gained material importance. Indeed, "la richesse consiste moins à combler des besoins qu'à répondre aux désirs."[118] Stimulated by exploiting and titillating the public's taste, aesthetic capitalism brings an empty promise of hedonistic emancipation from social and financial constraints. In fact, "au sein du capitalisme esthétique, chaque individu devient le sujet de sa jouissance, à lui-même son esclave, selon la même raison qui l'a motivé à se libérer."[119] However, Assouly argues that capitalism, aesthetic or not, is not only a profit-maker, but "une science morale, dans la mesure même où la régénération de la valeur se déroule en dehors du marché."[120]

Capitalism has evolved into a combination of ownership and experience. Assouly structures this transition in three steps: first with the development of industrial design and serial production; second, "la satisfaction et l'exploitation des appétits esthétiques des masses" with the growth of the cultural industry and third is the utilization of intangible goods and the experience economy.[121] Aesthetic capitalism in its current form focuses much more on sensations rather than consumer goods.[122] For example, fashion's marketing strategies rely on the glamorous imagery in printed media and lavish

[115] Olivier Assouly, *Le capitalisme esthétique: Essai sur l'industrialisation du goût*. (Paris: Cerf, 2008) 126.
[116] Ibid, 39.
[117] Ibid, 29.
[118] Ibid, 51.
[119] Ibid, 188.
[120] Ibid, 167.
[121] Ibid, 146.
[122] Ibid, 147.

spectacles of runway shows to capture the consumers' sensitivity instead of their material needs.

Because it is cyclical and changes every six months, fashion guarantees a constant renewal of desire. Only very wealthy members of society can afford to be truly fashionable, in the strictest sense of the term. This need to live up to the "accredited standard of taste and reputability," or failure to "keep up with the Joneses," is socially motivated and results in conspicuous consumption as defined by nineteenth century theorist and economist Thorstein Veblen.[123] According to him, once someone has achieved a place in the upper social class, he or she must cultivate a sense of taste and acquire certain goods that put in evidence their wealth and power.[124] Thus, clothing is used to display a wearer's high social status and refinement "rather than for the protection of the person."[125] A fashionable wardrobe shows "that the wearer can afford to consume freely and uneconomically."[126] It is a "sign" of wealth.

There is also an inherent hierarchy within the notion of conspicuous consumption. For example, buying a BMW car instead of a Honda is socially acceptable unlike buying a Chanel haute couture tweed vest rather than an H&M one. One is seen as a functional purchase, while the other is a mere "waste of money". The notion of wastefulness and frivolity has been historically attributed to fashion and its clients. The Protestant ideal of self-restraint chastised female consumers, who would eventually bring their husbands' to their financial demise if they weren't advised against excessive spending. However, the reality of couture patrons is quite different. Couture garments are worn multiple times and over several years; contrary to public opinion they are generally never worn just once and discarded. Indeed, couture donated to the Royal Ontario Museum, for example, shows marks of alterations, proving that women often kept and wore the garments over a long period of time, making slight changes to it, according to changing fashion, weight,

[123] Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) 112.
[124] Ibid, 53.
[125] Ibid, 111.
[126] Ibid, 112-113.

height and age.[127] In Kinmonth's documentary many women reveal that they keep all of their couture clothes and rotate between them for various social events.[128] Some of them keep track of when and where they wore each of their ensembles with labels attached to the hanger.[129] In the *System of Objects*, Baudrillard argues that every acquisition and purchase has a social significance and says something about its owner. Indeed, a variety of objects come together in order to create a composite impression of a person's identity, and they are chosen for a variety of reasons. One might even argue that a person who doesn't consider fashion important will dress in such a way to communicate this attitude. Objects that help form this composite impression come in a wide variety and are part of a valuation system that is understood in gendered terms. Some objects are elevated, while others diminished in this valuation system, such as the expensive car versus the expensive vest as previously discussed.

[127] Alexandra Palmer, *Couture & Commerce: The Transatlantic Fashion Trade in the 1950s*, (Toronto and Vancouver: ROM Publications and UBC Press, 2001) 5.
[128] *The Secret World of Haute Couture,* directed by Margy Kinmonth, 2007, (London: BBC Four, 2007) DVD.
[129] Ibid.

Chapter III: *Rive droite / Rive gauche*

Someone who used fashion as a tool of emancipation and agency was the Duchess of Devonshire, Georgiana Cavendish (1757-1806). Born to John Spencer and his wife Margaret Georgiana Poyntz (later Earl and Countess Spencer), she married William Cavendish, 5th Duke of Devonshire in 1774.[130] "Aristocratic life in the eighteenth century had little in the way of privacy: almost every activity took place before an audience of servants. Rank determined behaviour, and the social pressure on Georgiana to remain 'within character' was intense. She was now the wife of one of the most powerful men in the country."[131] However, her distant husband and his unwelcoming family made her position less than secure.[132] Nevertheless, her natural charm and gregarious personality made her instantly popular in social events.[133] Quickly, her taste for parties grew, where "her recklessness entranced society even as it caused disapproval. Whatever she wore became instantly fashionable."[134] For example, she once wore a four feet long ostrich feather in her hair that was offered by Lord Stormont, the British ambassador in Paris.[135] Despite the rarity and high price of these 'nodding plumes,' they quickly became the most fashionable item a lady could own at the time.[136]

The Duchess used fashion as a way to gain popularity and to secure her place within aristocracy. It gave her political influence, cultural respect, social status and celebrity. Her role as arbiter of taste was articulated on two different levels: for her peers, she was an influencer and for the masses, she was an ideal one aspired to. Throughout history, fashion has been one of the rare areas where women have had access to cultural and even economic agency. This is documented in Mary Lynn Stewart's *Dressing Modern*

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[130] Amanda Foreman, "Debutante," *Georgiana, Duchess of* Devonshire, (New York: Random House, 1998) 20.
[131] Ibid, 24.
[132] Ibid, 29.
[133] Ibid, 34.
[134] Ibid, 36.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Ibid.

Frenchwomen: Marketing Haute Couture, 1919-1939 in which she studies how fashion has been instrumental in creating the modern French woman. In fact, she reveals how the relation between designer and client was, and still is, one of collaboration.[137] The popular belief that gay male couturiers dictate to their hapless female consumers and don't understand their bodies is false, as women are in control throughout the fitting and consuming process.[138] Rather than simply coming from the mind of the genius-designer, fashion emerges from the complicated relationship between *couturier* and client.

After the First World War, as Stewart explains, while disseminating images of fashion, magazines educated women on how to wear certain garments and use them to present different personas. Women thus negotiated their identities and their transition into modernity partly with fashion. Stewart insists on this point: women were entirely in charge of how they dressed, not men. Over time, magazines started conveying images of the "ideal" reader: an independent, athletic and non-maternal woman engaged in active leisures, shown alone or with other women, but never with men. These women were displayed on the cover of publications such as *Femina* and *Vogue*. This reflected the modern conception of the autonomous women that resisted the state pressure to have and raise many children before and during the Great War. However, this modern and independent Frenchwoman was in part a commercial and cultural construct created and circulated by the fashion press and advertisers.[139] Despite the physical freedom brought by the new uncorseted silhouette and the opportunity it gave women to be active compared to the corsets and full skirts of the Belle Époque, women's emancipation was limited to economic and physical, not political activities.[140]

Despite the demise of sumptuary laws, one can still identify someone's social class by observing their choice in fashion, according to Pierre Bourdieu. He describes the frame of

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[137] Mary Lynn Stewart, *Dressing Modern Frenchwomen: Marketing Haute Couture, 1919-1939*, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008) xii.
[138] For example, Kempner once requested that a Spring-Summer 1972 navy blue pleated crepe dress be separated into a top and skirt, to wear independently [fig. 11].
[139] Mary Lynn Stewart, *Dressing Modern Frenchwomen: Marketing Haute Couture, 1919-1939*, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008) xii.
[140] Ibid, 157.

production of haute couture as a system in which individuals and institutions are in competition for the same issue (dominance). The hierarchy of this system is simple: the dominants are the ones that have the power to produce rare objects thanks to their *griffe* (brand, signature), which is often the most expensive one.[141] In order to assert their hierarchical superiority, dominants (or ancients, Bourdieu's term) use strategies of conservation that allow them to benefit from a previously accumulated capital.[142] The dominated (new entrants), on the other hand, employ strategies of subversion that entail a redefinition or revolution of the principles of production and appreciation of the product.[143] This also implies a devaluation of the dominant's capital. This is what he characterizes as the *rive droite*/*rive gauche* opposition. For example, *rive droite* would be Chanel, the successful couture and prêt-à-porter house for over a century that is synonymous with terms such as *Parisian chic* and timeless elegance, and *rive gauche* is Céline, a prêt-à-porter house founded in 1946 known for its crisp minimalist designs and handbags. When entering the haute couture system, the *rive gauche* couturier attempts to change the principle of the game, but never the game itself, which would result in exclusion. The *rive gauche* couturier often strives for a *tabula rasa*, a dramatically different definition of fashion than what the dominants propose. The internal competition thus results in partial revolutions, where hierarchy is questioned, but never the system itself. One example of a partial revolution is Courrèges. French couturier André Courrèges (b. 1923) made fashion history in 1965, by redefining the female silhouette with A-line mini-dresses that would erase the waist, hips and breasts while revealing almost the entirety of the leg.[144] For Bourdieu, the Courrèges revolution was successful because it transcended fashion. His revolution connected to something bigger, outside of the system of fashion: the sexual revolution and second-wave feminism of the 1960s. To be considered revolutionary, a change in the couture system cannot *only* be about fashion, according to Bourdieu. Indeed, his view on fashion is sceptical at best. However he does

[141] Pierre Bourdieu, "Haute couture et haute culture," *Questions de sociologie*, (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1984) 197.
[142] Ibid, 198.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Palais Galliera, "Dress, Courrèges," *Palais Galleria*, accessed June 18, 2015. http://www.palaisgalliera.paris.fr/fr/node/1248

see it was a tool to position individual couture clients within the fashion system. What group (*rive droite* or *rive gauche*) a client favours can say a lot about them. Does she encourage subversive designs or more conservative garments?

The cyclical aspect of the fashion system and haute couture fosters social tensions. This is what Bourdieu calls the "lutte de concurrence", the continual struggle between classes for a determined item or concept.[145] Once again, this distinguishes old from new money. One class owns something, then the other catches up to it, and so on and so forth. To be *in fashion* is to own *the latest différence.* When an item has made its way through all the classes, it looses its distinctive power, its value, and we must start over again.[146] This principle lies at the heart of the fashion system. Thus, class is a determinant of fashion and taste. Individuals from the upper social classes have the financial means to acquire the latest *différence* and access to knowledge as to how to recognize and properly use it.[147] The notion of *différence* was furthered by Bourdieu in one of his most influential works, *La Distinction* in which he elaborates a theory of taste and lifestyle through a sociological perspective. According to Bourdieu, taste is a marker of class, as inclinations for certain styles of music, hobbies, food and even hairstyles are predetermined by one's *habitus* and guide them to their appropriate position in society.[148] Bourdieu's *habitus* is defined as a "loi immanente, déposée en chaque agent par la prime éducation, qui est la condition non seulement de la concertation des pratiques mais aussi des pratiques de concertation, puisque les redressements et les ajustements consciemment opérés par les agents eux-mêmes supposent la maîtrise d'un code commun et que les entreprises de mobilisation collective ne peuvent réussir sans un minimum de concordance entre l'habitus des agents mobilisateurs (e.g. prophète, chef de parti, etc.) et les dispositions de ceux dont ils s'efforcent d'exprimer les aspirations."[149] It is a rule and guide shared by a

[145] Pierre Bourdieu, "Haute couture et haute culture," *Questions de sociologie*, (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1984) 201.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Mike Featherstone, "Luxury, Consumer Culture and Sumptuary Dynamics," *Luxury* 1:1, (September 2014) 48.
[148] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984) 6.
[149] Pierre Bourdieu, *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique*, (Paris : Éditions Le Seuil, 2000) 272.

social group that is acquired at home, through schooling, institutions and the experiences of everyday life. The *habitus* creates and structures taste, and within this *habitus*, the "agents mobilisateurs" are granted authority to dictate "good taste". Moreover, the "working-class 'aesthetic' is a dominated aesthetic, which is constantly obliged to define itself in terms of the dominant aesthetics."[150] Taste is an example of cultural hegemony and an important instrument of domination.[151] Thus, cultural capital, along with social and economic capital determines social classes.

Bourdieu classifies social agents inside a Cartesian coordinate system whose y axis represents the total volume of capital an agent possesses (social, cultural and economic) and x axis represents the amount of cultural capital an agent owns in direct opposition to economic capital (the more cultural capital one owns, the less he owns economic capital) [fig. 12].[152] However, one could argue that cultural capital, by appearing independent of economic concerns, is understood as superior and thus implies a greater yet indirect amount of economic capital. Bourdieu places the 'artist' in the upper left quadrant of his graph, which means they have a high level of cultural capital, a low level of economic capital and a high level of combined capital.[153] Elements of their *habitus* include Warhol, Left-Bank galleries, avant-garde festivals and voting left.[154] In the opposing quadrant, in the lower-right section of the graph, the craftsmen have a low level of combined capital, low level of cultural capital but a high level of economic capital.[155] Pernod, *pétanque*, Aznavour, and voting right are part of the craftsmen's *habitus*, according to Bourdieu.[156] This system categorizes individuals by types, tribes. But it is also a site where agents struggle for distinction. Caught between two contradictory intentions, an agent will aim to distinguish himself within his quadrant. However, one can be isolated from its quadrant if too distinct, as his peers will not recognize him. Thus, distinction is a subtle

[150] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984) 41
[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid, 128-129.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Ibid.

adjustment between difference and conformity. Style and clothing are ways taste can be constructed and distinction can be expressed. As once did sumptuary laws, the exclusivity and high price of haute couture help maintain a hierarchical social order by excluding agents of lower social class with lesser means. Women who have enough economic power to wear couture distinguish themselves by keeping economic necessity at a distance and owning the latest *différence*. Because the couture network is especially difficult to access, as explained in chapter I, Kempner's collection distinguishes her greatly not only from the masses, but also from her peers as she was known for her sense of style (she was considered the only chic American woman by Vogue editor in chief from 1962 to 1971 Diana Vreeland (1903-1989)) and due to the sheer quantity of couture she owned.[157]

[157] Hamish Bowles, "Nan Kempner," *Nan Kempner: une Américaine à Paris*, ed. Pierre Bergé, (Paris: Fondation Pierre Bergé - Yves Saint Laurent, 2007) 104.

Chapter IV: The 'Thrill' of the Couture Chase

In 2005, the Costume Institute showcased *Rara Avis: Selections from the Iris Apfel Collection*. It displayed eighty ensembles styled by interior decorator and textile and jewellery designer Iris Apfel, as she would have worn them.[158] True to her own style, the mannequins wore a mixture of haute couture, prêt-à-porter, flea market finds, 'junk' jewellery, antique accessories from around the world and her signature round spectacles. Curator Harold Koda grouped the 'Irises' together in loose thematic sections rather than chronologically or by provenance. The sections were titled "South, West and North", "At the Shows", "Entrances and Exits", "Distant Places, Other Times" and "Into the Night." Compared to *Nan Kempner: American Chic*, the exhibition that was held one year later at the Costume Institute, *Rara Avis* was considered a much more successful attempt in showcasing a single person's wardrobe and celebrating their individual style in exhibition reviews. One of the elements that might have positively influenced them was Apfel's biography: she is an active designer while Kempner was a socialite. Age also comes into play. A self-proclaimed "geriatric starlet", Apfel has been the focus of media attention ever since *Rara Avis* with the popularity of projects such as *Advanced Style,* a blog created by Ari Seth Cohen in August 2008 that showcases photographs of stylish women over 60, so successful it spawned an eponymous coffee table book in 2012 and a documentary in 2014.[159]

In her review of *American Chic*, *Washington Post* fashion critic Robin Givhan argued that it was a much less effective than the previous exhibition, *Rara Avis*:

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[158] Metropolitan Museum, "Press Release - *Rara Avis: Selections from the Iris Barrel Apfel Collection*," *Metropolitan Museum of Art Online*, accessed October 30, 2014, http://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2005/iris-barrel-apfel

[159] Megan Conner, "Iris Apfel: People Like Me Because I'm Different," *The Guardian*, July 19, 2015, accessed August 12, 2015. http://www.theguardian.com/global/2015/jul/19/iris-apfel-interview-designer-fashion-film

> It was an extraordinary examination of the way in which Apfel applied her eccentric sense of style to flea market finds, ethnic costumes and couture to transform them into her own unique creations. It was a celebration of creativity, as well as a look at how fashion can serve as building block to self-invention.[160]

The overall effect of the exhibition was both cosmopolitan and eclectic, since Apfel has travelled around the world to select unique pieces to complete her collection. She claims: "I never buy anything because it' s valuable. I have to get a physical reaction, a *coup de foudre*. I never plan what I need for each season. Eventually it all comes together. I enjoy the thrill of the chase, the discovery and the endless search."[161] This "thrill of the chase" is a dominant characteristic of many collectors' practice.

In their essay "Of Mice and Men: Gender Identity in Collecting" Russell W. Belk and Melanie Wallendorf argue that a collector with a determined aim can tirelessly track down the missing object. Indeed, a collection can further a need for personal completion and perfection.[162] It can hasten the strive for the ideal self. Through their collections, collectors often seek acclaim for their work in assembling them, and gratitude from society for donating or loaning them to museums.[163] Thus, collecting is "a means of achieving and expressing identity."[164] Gender is one of the significant ways in which identity is constructed, thus it also plays a role in collecting. "Aggressive and material ambition" are necessary for grand scale collecting, characteristics stereotypically attributed to men and to their historical economic position and access to education. Women collectors are considered manly, as they show unusual signs of competitiveness. Historically, women have been associated with the act of purchasing clothing and objects for decorative purposes and for the sheer pleasure of buying. The types of objects collected are also gendered. According to scholars like Paul A. Witty and Louis H. Hertz,

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[160] Robin Givhan, "Museum Peeks Into A Socialite' s Closet," *Washington Post*, (December 15, 2006) accessed June 11, 2015. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/12/14/AR2006121401747.html
[161] Eric Boman, *Rare Bird of Fashion: The Irreverent Iris Apfel*, (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2007) 35.
[162] Russell W. Belk and Melanie Wallendorf, "Of Mice and Men: Gender Identity in Collecting," *Interpreting Objects and Collections,* ed. Susan M. Pearce, (London and New York: Routledge, 1994) 240.
[163] Ibid, 241.
[164] Ibid.

masculine objects are: clocks, stamps, coins, guns, antiques, automobiles, etc.[165] Objects considered feminine are: animal replicas, dishes, silverware, jewellery, dolls, etc.[166] Men have " a vision for their collection, and [view] their collection as an ensemble with a philosophy behind it."[167] This nourishes the gender-aligned paradigm of female consumers and male collectors. Belk and Wallendorf further this thought by arguing that stereotypically masculine traits, such as aggressivity, competitiveness and seriousness were traditionally considered helpful when acquiring objects for a collection.[168] Thus, women were better fitted to curate and maintain collections, as they were historically associated with the care of the domestic space and nurturance of the family.[169] Ultimately, women collectors are often represented as "individual eccentrics or as domineering women whose personalities get more attention than does the fact that they [spend] years of their lives trying to shape the cultural life in their cities."[170]

In the case of couture collections, the object itself is gendered. The distinction between fine and decorative or applied arts appeared during the Renaissance and by the end of the 18th century, the latter was considered feminine and feminizing.[171] Potvin and Myzelev highlight the ambiguity of applied art objects as they are theoretically part of the everyday, but once collected, gain a higher status and loose their initial function.[172] Since it supposedly solicited more technical manual skills than intellectual genius, the acquisition of applied art pieces were considered conspicuous consumption, in opposition to the "masculinist ethos of highbrow moral elitism" associated to fine art collecting practices.[173] Thus, collections of craft, fashion and decorative art are considered of lesser status than their fine art homologues because although they are abstracted and taken out

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[165] Russell W. Belk and Melanie Wallendorf, "Of Mice and Men: Gender Identity in Collecting," *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, ed. Susan M. Pearce, (London and New York: Routledge, 1994) 242.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Ibid, 241.
[168] Ibid, 242.
[169] Ibid.
[170] Wanda M. Corn, "Art Matronage in Post-Victorian America," *Cultural Leadership in America: Art Matronage and Patronage*, ed. Wanda M. Corn et al., (Boston: The Trustees of the Isabella Stewart Museum, 1997) 12.
[171] John Potvin and Alla Myzelev, "Introduction: the material of visual culture," *Material Cultures, 1740-1920*, eds. John Potvin and Alla Myzelev, (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2009) 5.
[172] Ibid, 2.
[173] Ibid, 7.

of their original context, their function is all too close and visible. While these collections indeed "reaffirm the capitalist mandate of consumption in seriality," they also "beg to be chastised" for transforming functional objects into aesthetic ones.[174]

In the case of collections of haute couture, the function of the garments is not only too close, but it is still operative. Their owners both *consume* and *collect* couture, which are terms that have long been considered contradictory. Because it is both a piece of functional clothing and a work of artistic and technical genius, couture problematizes the high versus low art dichotomy. It moves from fine art to the everyday realm. Couture garments are unique, hand-made objects, created by a single 'artist genius'. They also undergo a process of collaboration during fittings, which is contradictory to the idea of artistic genius. If the client requests a dress to be separated into a skirt and top, is it still a Saint Laurent? Does it loose cultural significance? Although they are very different objects with different purposes, if a couture gown created by both the designer and client is to be compared to a commissioned Flemish Renaissance altarpiece, it would bring to light the issue of authorship. The painter creates the work of art. But it is the patron, not the painter, that decides how much lapis lazuli or gold leaves are to be used, or which saint should be portrayed.[175] Without the patron, the altarpiece would have never existed and the artist would be out of work. This is the same with haute couture.

Haute couture is a messy subject - that becomes literally 'messy' with stitches and alterations after fittings. It truly embodies the tension between fine and applied art. On one hand, we have the cerebral 'artist-genius' who draws the garments that will be made by his or her *petites mains*, and on the other, the embodied experience and collaborative process of fittings. Because fashion is big business, revealing the process of fittings and the labour involved erases the 'magical', aspirational aspect from it. Ultimately, it's the patron that will decide if the collar is taken out, the sleeves shortened or the hips taken in. She can also choose from a selection of fabrics, colors, prints and a variety of details such

[174] John Potvin and Alla Myzelev, "Introduction: the material of visual culture," *Material Cultures, 1740-1920*, eds. John Potvin and Alla Myzelev, (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2009) 16.
[175] Anne D'Alleva, "Art's Contexts," *Methods & Theories of Art History - Second Edition*, (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2012) 54.

as buttons and other embellishments. In her documentary, Kinmonth notes that "as a [couture] 'club member', it is not enough to wear the clothes, you have to really appreciate how they have been made. It's part of the club subculture. To [clients], [it] is a wearable art form, and [they] are patrons. It is worth every penny."[176] These women are not only the collectors, patrons and caretakers of their garments, but also arbiters and protectors of the legacy of haute couture. "It was once a booming industry. Just after the [Second World] war 46,000 people were employed in it."[177] The current number of couture workers has now decreased to approximately 4,500, because of mass produced, factory-made clothes. Ever since prêt-à-porter has become the norm through all social classes, there are only a handful of functioning ateliers left. "Skilled artisans are now hanging on by a thread."[178] Designers are essential to keep this art form alive. But without patrons to support them, the industry is destined to extinction. Maintaining relevance is an issue all individuals creating non-mass produced objects, such as craft, struggle with.

[176] *The Secret World of Haute Couture,* directed by Margy Kinmonth, 2007, (London: BBC Four, 2007) DVD.
[177] Ibid.
[178] Ibid.

Chapter V: Kempner and Saint Laurent

> La cliente fait partie du patrimoine d'une maison de couture, au même titre que ses créations vestimentaires…Elle est même devenue depuis un personnage de l'histoire de la marque, de sa légende, la renforçant par son existence dans un effet de réel bienvenu. La cliente atteste la saga d'une maison, comme une archive, et enrichit le patrimoine de son nom, et parfois de ses dons.[179]

Kempner' s collection was her cultural legacy, and by extension it was also Saint Laurent' s and the tradition of haute couture as a whole. Before the Fondation Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent was founded in 2002, the couturier's house manifested a willingness to archive past collection's ephemera in an organized and deliberate manner.[180] Sketches, sale logs, runway breakdowns and many other documents became historical objects, bearing the legacy of the house. Saint Laurent was one of the first houses to archive its creations. Still a recent phenomenon, many other designers are considering the addition of "un intérêt culturel."[181] According to fashion scholars Morgan Jan and Anne Zazzo, in the future "Les maison développeront leur marketing en ce sens. De fait, elles s'efforceront toujours davantage de mettre leur passé en récit et en scène, d'autant plus que la couture se vit depuis les années 1960 comme une survivance, entretient une nostalgie et s'affiche plus récemment comme un conservatoire de savoir-faire."[182]

Clients and their estate feed this patrimonial movement. After her death in 2005, Kempner's husband made a donation to the Fondation that included many of the house's most iconic looks: the S*moking* and the S*aharienne*.[183] Her collection consisted of "controlled day looks and quietly seductive evening clothes, with occasional firework

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[179] Morgan Jan and Anne Zazzo, "La cliente et le patrimoine," *Paris Haute Couture*, eds. Olivier Saillard and Anne Zazzo, (Paris: Skira Flammarion, 2012) 246.
[180] Ibid.
[181] Ibid.
[182] Ibid.
[183] Ibid.

flashes of extravagance."[184] Her taste for clothes was ignited by her grandmother and couture was part of her *habitus*, like many women of the upper class. As Kempner recalled: "[She] started me out when I was very small. Spoiled me and ordered me lots of clothes, and I'm afraid one gets the habit."[185] While carefully maintaining her personal style, Kempner assembled a mammoth collection over the years thanks to her financial means and dedication. She bought variations of tailored suits, crisp day dresses and evening gowns that were "generally sinuous and columnar and artfully cut and draped to reveal the body."[186] Harold Koda, curator of the Costume Institute, noted that in her collection

> The rigorous refinement of the haute couture was mediated by the informal strategies of American sportswear. While her taste was decidedly Francophile, by conveying a less rigid and prescribed version of elegance, Mrs. Kempner infused chic, that French concept of fashionable stylishness, with her own distinctly American inflection.[187]

In *Selling Culture: Bloomingdale's, Diana Vreeland, and the New Aristocracy of Taste in Reagan's America*, Debora Silverman writes about the aristocratic revival of the 1980s in the United States and its fascination with Francophilia.[188] Between 1981 and 1983, the Costume Institute staged three French exhibitions curated by then-head curator Diana Vreeland: *The Eighteenth Century Woman*, *La Belle Époque* and *Twenty-Five Years of Yves Saint Laurent*. Each of these exhibitions were extravagant displays that represented scenes of the opulent lives of each era' s respective elite and "presented evidence of the 'power of women' in ways more akin to a reassuring 1980s Reaganite fantasy: the influence of women on men through their appearance and seductive behaviour."[189]

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[184] Morgan Jan and Anne Zazzo, "La cliente et le patrimoine," *Paris Haute Couture*, eds. Olivier Saillard and Anne Zazzo, (Paris: Skira Flammarion, 2012) 246.
[185] Hamish Bowles, "Nan Kempner," *Nan Kempner: une Américaine à Paris*, ed. Pierre Bergé, (Paris: Fondation Pierre Bergé - Yves Saint Laurent, 2007) 105.
[186] Ibid.
[187] Ibid, 106
[188] Debora Silverman, "Fabrication and Francophilia: The Fêtes de France at the Met and Bloomingdale' s," *Selling Culture: Bloomingdale's, Diana Vreeland, and the New Aristocracy of Taste in Reagan's America*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986) 50.
[189] Ibid, 63.

Following the closing of Vreeland's exhibition *La Belle Époque* in September 1983, the high-end department store Bloomingdale's held the "Fête de France."[190]

> The splendid Met array of accessories and couturiers outfits that had embellished eighteenth and nineteenth century aristocratic French women, turning them into elaborate *objets d'art*, were now reprocessed, in consumer volume, for trendy New York shoppers. The alliance between museum exhibition and commercial exploitation manifested in the *chinoiseries* of 1980-81 was now transposed to elite Francophilia.[191]

The store's Lexington Avenue facade was remodelled (by French designers) to mimic a Parisian building, with the "atmosphere of shops, galleries, salons and bistros."[192] Inside, products from France were celebrated, and their makers were present for various demonstrations. There were "chefs, designer couturiers, lace makers, embroiderers, textile engravers, glass blowers, silversmiths, interior decorators and furniture craftsmen."[193] Historically, Francophilia has been associated with the philosophy of the Enlightenment during and after the French Revolution. It is a celebration of the 'liberty, equality, fraternity' credo rather than Baccarat crystal paperweights or Christofle silverware, "accoutrements of aristocratic privilege."[194] The brochure announced: "see, hear, taste and feel the sophistication of Paris or the charm of an inn in France of the past, present and future."[195] Bloomingdale's promise was that New York buyers could bring a bit of that *cachet français* home.

Women such as Kempner had the means to not only have French craft products in the couple's Park Avenue apartment, but also wear French haute couture. An element of rare sophistication, couture conveys a sense of 'Parisian chic' that foreigners often buy into. This has been traced back to after the First World War by Stewart, when advertisers in

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[190] Debora Silverman, "Fabrication and Francophilia: The Fêtes de France at the Met and Bloomingdale's," *Selling Culture: Bloomingdale's, Diana Vreeland, and the New Aristocracy of Taste in Reagan's America*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986) 78.
[191] Ibid.
[192] Ibid.
[193] Ibid.
[194] Ibid, 80-81.
[195] Ibid, 79.

the fashion press contributed to the construction of "the image of the modern Frenchwoman."[196] In order to stimulate international demand, society magazines, such as *Vogue*, would praise Parisian couture.[197] The coverage of Paris was so thorough and extensive in comparison to the small quips accorded to a few provincial cities, that the magazines "seem to address Parisiennes alone."[198] Paris was presented "as a privileged site for fashion consumption" and Parisiennes "as style setters to be emulated."[199] Although this was a social and commercial construction mainly aimed at 'saving' haute couture, the trope of the chic Parisian woman is an idea, a dream, a distinction that people buy into and aspire to.

Kempner was definitely the 'American in Paris.' Her personal collection was a mix of Parisienne chic and American tomboy clothes, which she kept for decades. At first, she simply recycled them from one season to the next, but later she recognized their artistic and social significance.[200] "A designer is as much of an artist as an author, painter, or architect. Fashion design is, after all, architecture for the body" she once said.[201] Repetitions and similarities in her collection reveal that it was carefully assembled with pieces that worked together.[202] She would often mix European and American designs with clothes dating from the 1960s to the early 2000s, which was an "inventively personal approach to couture predicated on the ready-to-wear idea of separates."[203]

At Saint Laurent Kempner worked with *première vendeuse* Sylviane Hodgkinson and later Virginie Laubie. After the runway shows - where Dominique Deroche always had her seated front row - she was quick to reserve the "presentation prototypes" she liked, since she was very svelte, even though Saint Laurent would sometimes hold back certain

[196] Mary Lynn Stewart, "The Politics of Modern Fashion," *Dressing Modern Frenchwomen: Marketing Haute Couture, 1919-1939*, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008) 158.
[197] Ibid, 159.
[198] Ibid.
[199] Ibid.
[200] Hamish Bowles, "Nan Kempner," *Nan Kempner: une Américaine à Paris*, ed. Pierre Bergé, (Paris: Fondation Pierre Bergé - Yves Saint Laurent, 2007) 106.
[201] Ibid.
[202] Ibid.
[203] Ibid.

pieces to build his archive for the future Fondation.[204] When she would buy a piece, her interventions were "subtle and pragmatic."[205] At times, the studio offered three or four alternative colours for certain clothes.[206] She occasionally changed a print for a solid tone.[207] Her "precise, discriminating eye" eventually lead her to work as a fashion editor for *Harper's Bazaar* and as a correspondent for French *Vogue*.[208] These positions, in turn, added certain validity to her collection, working in the fashion industry.

[204] Hamish Bowles, "Nan Kempner," *Nan Kempner: une Américaine à Paris*, ed. Pierre Bergé, (Paris: Fondation Pierre Bergé - Yves Saint Laurent, 2007) 106.
[205] Ibid.
[206] Ibid.
[207] Ibid.
[208] Ibid, 107

Chapter VI: Garde-Robes on Display

With 362 sweaters, 354 jackets, shelves full of hats, racks of pants and gowns, the exhibition *Nan Kempner: American Chic* held at the Costume Institute in 2006 was an accurate portrait of a fashion devotee.[209] While the exhibition highlighted a few pieces from Saint Laurent and Madame Grès, it fell short at discussing the cultural significance of the designers, the client and the relationship between both. Viewers were said to be distracted by the "candy-shop display of sweaters and jackets."[210] A second exhibition focused on her *garde-robe*, *Nan Kempner: Une Américaine à Paris* at the Fondation Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent in 2007. It was much more modest (it only displayed 77 pieces) and its design, conceived by architect Christophe Martin, was simple. Mannequins were arranged in two sections (evening and day wear) and were placed in various poses along a white 'runway' [fig. 13]. Quotes from Kempner were printed in white on the brown walls [fig. 14]. The entrance had a single mannequin (wearing a 1968 velvet and feather black dress) and the house's logo (superposed Y, S and L) in a nook that was covered with Saint Laurent sketches [fig. 13].

Rather than simply showing her collection, *Une Américaine à Paris* revealed her relation with Saint Laurent, as friend, muse and collaborator.[211] In addition to the iconic looks, such as the *Smoking* [fig. 16] and the *Saharienne* [fig. 17], her alteration sheets, book of orders, a photograph of a mannequin of her measurements in the designer's atelier [fig. 18], photographs of Kempner wearing Saint Laurent in various settings [fig. 19] and the chair in which she sat at every show were on display.[212] This allowed the visitor a glimpse into the mysterious world of haute couture fittings as the exhibition showed couture as process rather than simply image or sign. This was especially significant as

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[209] Cathy Horyn, "A Woman Who Wore Couture Like a Second Skin," *New York Times*, (December 14, 2006) G1.
[210] Ibid.
[211] Fondation Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent, *Nan Kempner: Une Américaine à Paris*, (Paris: Fondation Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent, 2007) 12.
[212] Ibid.

visitors with no previous knowledge or background in haute couture are unlikely to be aware of the collaborative work behind fittings. Rather than displaying garments as if they are purely aesthetic objects, uncovering the opaque and elitist system of couture is a much more productive way of curating fashion exhibitions.

A recent example of this type of museological investigation is the 2014 exhibition *Roman d'une garde-robe: le chic d'une Parisienne de la Belle Époque aux Années 30* held at the Palais Galliera and Musée Carnavalet. On display were the wardrobes of Alice Alleaume (1881-1969), her mother Adèle and older sister Hortense, dating from 1830 to 1930.[213] Focusing on Alice - who was the principal saleswomen at the couture house of Chéruit from 1912 to 1923 - curators Sophie Grossiord and Charlotte Lacour-Veyranne tell the story of a fashion insider.[214] Through the jersey swimsuit [fig. 20], the tubular Charles Worth gown [fig. 21] and other Jeanne Lanvin evening dresses [fig. 22], the exhibition "révèle une femme active et moderne, à la personnalité affirmée et aux goûts très arrêtés."[215] The garments were displayed in chronological order in large glass encasements along with historical documents such as her sales notebooks, revealing yet again, a mysterious and often confidential element of the couture transaction.

Similarly, the exhibition *Mode, Passion et Collection: Le Regard d'une Femme* organized by the Musée d'art et d'histoire de Genève in 2003 presented a history of fashion from the 1960s to late 1990s through the eye of Danielle Luquet de Saint Germain.[216] At nineteen, she became Saint Laurent's *mannequin cabine*[217] starting a near life-long career in

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[213] *Roman d'une garde-robe: le chic d'une Parisienne de la Belle Époque aux Années 30*, Palais Galliera and Musée Carnavalet, October 17, 2013 to March 16, 2014. Curated by Sophie Grossiord and Charlotte Lacour-Veyranne.
[214] Djurdja Bartlett, "Glitz and Restraint - Paris *Haute Couture* on Display," *Fashion Theory* 18:4 (September 2014), 441.
[215] Sophie Grossiord et al., *Roman d'une garde-robe: le chic d'une Parisienne de la Belle Époque aux Années 30*, (Paris: Paris Musée, 2013) 220, 223, 216, 27.
[216] *Mode, Passion et Collection: Le Regard d'une Femme*, Musée d'art et d'histoire de Genève, October 2, 2003 to March 7, 2004. Curated by Alexandre Fiette.
[217] A *mannequin cabine* is a fitting model "dont dispose le couturier pour l'élaboration de sa collection lors des séances de pose au studio, ainsi que pour la présentation des modèles à la presse, aux acheteurs et aux clientes" in Alexandre Fiette, "Danielle Luquet de Saint Germain, Esquisse d'une portrait par la mode, la passion et la collection," *Mode, Passion et Collection: Le Regards d'une Femme*, (Paris and Geneva: Somology éditions d'art and Musées d'Art et d'Histoire, 2003) 27.

fashion. Despite the long and silent fitting sessions, Luquet quickly understood the cultural significance of the designs Saint Laurent would build on her: his first pantsuit and the Smoking-short with its scandalous transparent blouse.[218] In turn, she became his muse: "J'étais arrivée un matin en même temps qu'Yves Saint Laurent, vêtue d'un pantalon et d'un trench-coat d'homme acheté *Aux Dames de France*. Lorsque, l'après-midi après la présentation aux clientes, je suis montée au studio, il m'a demandé si je pouvais mettre mes vêtements à sa disposition afin qu'il s'en inspire."[219] Years later, she met the young designer Claude Montana, who she helped to launch and supported his career.[220] While she owned pieces from many designers (Lanvin, Roland Chakkal, Philippe Guibourgé among others) the focus of the exhibition remains on those two couturiers. Consisting mainly of evening wear, the exhibition perfectly illustrates head curator of the Fondation Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent Sandrine Tinturrier's statement during my visit to the archives: women's donations to museums often represent 'moments' in their lives when they had a professional or social position that required them to participate in many mundane events.

In 1999, the Musée de la Mode de Marseille had the collection of Lebanese businesswoman Mouna Ayoub (b. 1957) displayed in and eponymous exhibition *Mouna Ayoub, parcours d'une collectionneuse*.[221] Ayoub is the exception that confirms the rule: she never wears the clothes from her collection. Similarly to a fine art collector, she buys pieces for the shear pleasure of owning them. Curator Maryline Vigouroux showcased 120 out of her 1,125 haute couture ensembles including spectacular evening gowns by Karl Lagerfeld for Chanel, John Galliano for Christian Dior, Jean Paul Gaultier and Yves Saint Laurent.[222] Glamorous to the extreme or slightly outlandish, Ayoub's choices are not restricted to size, social calendar or even personal style. While she does wear haute

[218] Alexandre Fiette, "Danielle Luquet de Saint Germain, Esquisse d'une portrait par la mode, la passion et la collection," *Mode, Passion et Collection: Le Regards d'une Femme*, (Paris and Geneva: Somology éditions d'art and Musées d'Art et d'Histoire, 2003) 11.
[219] Ibid, 12.
[220] Ibid, 13.
[221] *Mouna Ayoub, parcours d'une collectionneuse 1979-1999*, Musée de la Mode de Marseille, July 10, 1999 to November 28, 1999, curated by Maryline Vigouroux.
[222] Maryline Vigouroux, "Mouna Ayoub, ambassadrice de la Haute Couture," *Mouna Ayoub, parcours d'une collectionneuse 1979-1999*, (Marseille: Musée de la Mode de Marseille, 1999) 2.

couture but only started doing so in 1996, she keeps both endeavours separate.[223] Before exhibiting her clothes and eventually auctioning them off,[224] "elle les nettoie, les recoud, les bourre de papier de soie et si quelque mauvais pli vient troubler le drapé, renvoie prestement l'être cher aux atelier qui l'ont fait naître."[225] Ayoub' s collecting strategy is simply to select garments that are significant in the history of fashion and that show "le tour de force qui change un rouleau de tissu en une chose aussi merveilleuse."[226] The exhibition at the Musée de la mode de Marseille was the first step in finding a museum for her collection. She is looking for "un château près de Paris où installer sa collection dans le plus absolu confort."[227]

These exhibitions opened the doors of very different *garde-robes* that are, in their own way, curated by their owners. On one hand, collecting always says something about the collector according to Baudrillard, since "what you really collect is always yourself,"[228] while on the other, clothing can be a tool for constructing and performing identities. Sheila Heti, Heidi Julavits and Leanne Shapton explore how the clothes we put on everyday shape our lives. With a survey composed of more than fifty questions, the three editors questioned 639 women - including Cindy Sherman, Lena Dunham, and Miranda July to name a few - to explore how they approach their daily ritual of getting dressed.[229] Their answers come in the form of photographs, interviews, testimonies and illustrations. More akin to an artistic project than a conventional academic book, *Women in Clothes* offers a great insight into how women from different nationalities, age groups, religions,

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[223] Maryline Vigouroux, "Mouna Ayoub, ambassadrice de la Haute Couture," *Mouna Ayoub, parcours d'une collectionneuse 1979-1999*, (Marseille: Musée de la Mode de Marseille, 1999) 4.
[224] She sold 3,000 items of her collection January 30, 2015 at Cornette de Saint Cyr to help finance the exhibition *Déboutonner la Mode* at the Arts Décoratifs museum in Paris that started February 10, 2015. Sylvie Chayette, "Mouna Ayoub vend 3000 pièces de sa collection de mode," *Le Monde* (January 30, 2015) accessed March 12, 2015. http://www.lemonde.fr/m-styles/article/2015/01/30/mouna-ayoub-vend-3-000-pieces-de-sa-collection-de-mode_4566938_4497319.html
[225] Maryline Vigouroux, "Mouna Ayoub, ambassadrice de la Haute Couture," *Mouna Ayoub, parcours d'une collectionneuse 1979-1999*, (Marseille: Musée de la Mode de Marseille, 1999) 4.
[226] Ibid.
[227] Ibid.
[228] Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict, (London & New York: Verso, 2005) 91.
[229] A total of 85 questions including *With whom do you talk about clothes? - Do you have taste or style? Which one is more important? What do these words mean to you? - What are you trying to achieve when you dress? - What are your closets and drawers like? Do you keep things neat, etc? - Do you have any shopping rules? - Tell sabot something in your closet that you keep but never wear.*

social classes, either famous or anonymous, see the act of dressing. Ultimately, most of these women don't follow a prescribed notion of style but rather use their clothes to express individuality. Julavits argues: "style, I also learned, is not about strictly copying others, because style is not transferable."[230] Many of the women interviewed admitted to being inspired by the way the women they see in the streets dress.[231] In the introduction, Julavits admits: "I don't check out men on the streets. I check out women. I am always checking women because I love stories and women in clothes tell stories. For years I watched other women to learn how I might someday be a woman with a story."[232] Emulating someone else's style comes from wanting to communicate the same things that person is communicating, assuming there is a common language of fashion, which has been debated by scholars such as Fred Davis and Roland Barthes. Emulation is also symptomatic of the paradoxical combination of desires of individuality and belonging.

This is further explained by Fred Davis who argues that fashion plays a crucial role in the shaping and performance of one' s identity.[233] Clothes can "make clear reference to who we are and wish to be taken as while alternatively or simultaneously evoking an aura that 'merely suggests' more than it can (or intends to) state precisely."[234] They can achieve "social differentiation and social integration."[235] However, clothes - fabric, color, pattern, silhouette - and their meaning depend on their context.[236] The *signified* of a garment "is highly differentiated in terms of taste, social identity, and persons' access to the symbolic wares of a society."[237] Indeed, "it is precisely the differentiated, socially stratified character of modern society that fuels the motor of fashion and serves as the backdrop against which its movement are enacted."[238] However, it is still extremely difficult to

[230] Sheila Heti, et al., "Introduction," *Women in Clothes*, eds. Sheila Heti, Heidi Julavits and Leanne Shapton, (New York: Blue Rider Press, 2014) 8.
[231] Ann Ireland, et al., "Women Looking at Women," *Women in Clothes*, eds. Sheila Heti, Heidi Julavits and Leanne Shapton, (New York: Blue Rider Press, 2014) 17.
[232] Heidi Julavits, "Introduction," *Women in Clothes*, eds. Sheila Heti, Heidi Julavits and Leanne Shapton, (New York: Blue Rider Press, 2014) 6.
[233] Fred Davis, *Fashion, Culture and Identity*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992) 3.
[234] Ibid.
[235] Ibid, 4.
[236] Ibid, 5.
[237] Ibid, 9.
[238] Ibid.

understand the different meanings of fashion, because it is ephemeral and cyclical. Since it changes every season, establishing a clear code of the meaning of Western dress is considerably difficult.[239] Moreover, the system of codes cannot be universal. In fact, "it is hard to get people in general to interpret the same clothing symbols in the same way; in semiotic terminology, the clothing sign's signifier-signified relationship is quite unstable."[240] Not only is the system unstable, but also the social identities communicated by it are constantly changing.[241] Roland Barthes furthered the idea of a communication system of fashion by arguing that clothing is both "display and mask" and there seems to be an infinite and circular exchange from the wearer to the group" and vice-versa.[242] Consequently, clothing is "less an index (or symptom) but more a form of communication."[243] Thus, exhibitions such as the ones previously mentioned communicate the wearer' s identity (a couture *vendeuse* with an insightful knowledge of fashion, a designer' s model and muse with a busy social calendar and a business woman who admires the prowess of couture) to the group of visitors who in turn, aspire to the sophisticated, refined, creative and wealthy image these women project.

[239] Fred Davis, *Fashion, Culture and Identity*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992) 6.
[240] Ibid, 9.
[241] Ibid, 17.
[242] Roland Barthes, "Language and Clothing," *The Language of Fashion*, (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2013) 25.
[243] Ibid.

Conclusion

Private couture collections are complex assortments of objects. Couture illustrates plainly the tension between fine and applied art, as it itself moves between both. It can be both a unique, hand-crafted piece of technical virtuosity envisioned by an artist-designer displayed under glass in a museum gallery, and a spectacular custom gown a woman lives and dances in at charity balls and parties. Couture offers both a transcendental and an embodied experience of clothing. Clients and patrons can also be collectors. In fact, many women who purchase couture in order to wear it also conserve them in the best conditions possible, in order to donate them to museums. Tuscan art collector Cecilia Matteucci Lavarini for example, wants her collection to become available to a greater public: "My collection is my self-portrait, not the having, but the being, it is a lonely full-time job always done thinking of a destination - the museum."[244] She has made a number of donations to the Palazzo Pitti's Galleria Del Costume.[245]

Artist and businesswoman Daphne Guinness also donated part of her collection to the Museum at FIT.[246] Another section of her collection was auctioned off at Christie' s in June 2012 to benefit the Isabella Blow Foundation, which supports aspiring art and fashion students and research in the fields of depression and mental health.[247] These women's collections are for textile, costume, fashion and even fine art museums, a priceless donation that can help in building permanent collections. More and more auction houses hold couture and fashion sales, such as Sotheby's "Rencontres couture à Paris: de la collection Didier Ludot" held in Paris on 8 July 2015. Couture garments are

[244] Quoted in Alessandro Guasti, "Cecilia Matteucci Lavarini," *Donne Protagoniste nel Novecento*, ed. Caterina Chiarelli, (Livorno: Sillabe, 2013) 87.
[245] Alessandro Guasti, "Cecilia Matteucci Lavarini," *Donne Protagoniste nel Novecento*, ed. Caterina Chiarelli, (Livorno: Sillabe, 2013) 87.
[246] Valerie Steele, *Daphne Guinness*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011) 3.
[247] Christie' s, "The Daphne Guinness Collection," *Christie's Online*, June 27, 2012, web, accessed October 30, 2014 http://www.christies.com/sales/daphne-guinness-collection-london-june-2012/

becoming inaccessible for museums. Avid collectors frequently outbid them.[248] Haute couture and its acquisition process are unlike any other clothing experience. One must gain access to a couture salon through family or fortune. In both cases, one must be wealthy (couture garments start around $28,000 CAD), have a high social status, a good knowledge of luxury goods and their uses, a flexible schedule, a lithe physique and a place to stay in Paris to visit the designer's ateliers and see their shows at Couture Week. The membership to the couture network is demanding, and only approximately two hundred women in the world are part of it. And they are all truly passionate about fashion according to the ladies interviewed by Kinmonth.[249]

Guinness sees haute couture as an art form worthy of and needing support as much as painting or sculpture, according to the curator Valerie Steele.[250] In the catalogue that accompanied the exhibition of her collection at the Museum at FIT in 2012, Guinness' father Jonathan Guinness writes how when accompanying his daughter to a fitting in Paris, he realized that the couturières all knew her, and that she showed a great sensibility and understanding of the craft, being the occasional designer herself. This reveals how she is interested in the collaborative aspect of haute couture. Steele explains that

> [she] is also very conscious of the many skilled craftspeople whose work contributes to the final dress. She has said that `The thing about couture, unlike prêt-à-porter clothing, is that you actually have to engage with the process and repeatedly go for fittings.' The process also allows her to contribute her own ideas, and she loved nothing more than creative collaboration. But she is also willing to wear a designer's most outrageous creations, unlike most couture clients who prefer to tone things down.[251]

Indeed, the final couture garment that will be worn by the client is the result of a collaborative effort between the client, the designer, the *vendeuse* and the atelier's *petites*

[248] Valerie Steele, *Daphne Guinness*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011) 45.
[249] *The Secret World of Haute Couture,* directed by Margy Kinmonth, 2007, (London: BBC Four, 2007) DVD.
[250] Valerie Steele, *Daphne Guinness*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011) 45.
[251] Ibid.

mains. While the couturier did create the original garment, the ability and agency of a client to redesign an aspect of it cannot be overlooked. This creates an embodied experience with one's clothing. While this may seem like an oxymoron, couture clients *know* their body and *how* things will fit them like no other. To be able to select an ensemble during a fashion show where models walk down the runway quickly, while music is blasting and people around are exchanging the latest gossip, one must have a deep understanding of how a garment is constructed and be highly aware of their physiognomy. Their *garde-robes*, or couture collections, are a testament to this.

Historically, self-restraint and respectability has plagued women's *garde-robes*.[252] Female consuming was often regarded with suspicion, even more so when associated with frivolous and ephemeral purchases such as fashion. However, the collections of couture these women have gathered over the year offer an unprecedented view of the evolution of aristocratic and bourgeois women' s conditions. Legal, economic and political emancipations from the last two centuries were crucial to facilitate collecting. Historically marginal, upper class women were excluded from public life and restricted to the familial and domestic spheres. Moreover, a gender gap associated women with consumption and decoration and men with creation and collecting.

More than acquiring the most expensive clothes money can buy, the women I study have been carefully selecting significant pieces in the history of fashion that they store and maintain in top condition. They are not only the collectors and caretakers of their garments, but also arbiters and custodians of the legacy of haute couture and creativity. These unique pieces are often donated to museums to help build fashion and costume collections. Museumgoers continue to demonstrate an increasing enthusiasm towards fashion exhibitions. Thanks to the work of the Kempners, the Apfels, and the Guinnesses of this world, people can study and understand the works of many couturiers and their *petites mains*.

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[252] John Potvin and Alla Myzelev, "Introduction: the material of visual culture," *Material Cultures, 1740-1920*, eds. John Potvin and Alla Myzelev, (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2009) 28.

"Obviously, this is not a volume business." says Sydney Toledano, the president of Christian Dior, when discussing the haute couture Spring-Summer 2006 collection. "We talk to very specific customers. We are going to take ideas from parts of it: the jacket, an embroidery."[253] In truth, haute couture does not yield much profit to a label. However, it is used as a marketing strategy to push other more affordable products: perfume, leather goods, underwear and makeup. In that sense, the fashion system is similar to a pyramid. Haute couture is on top and inspires ready-to-wear and mass-produced clothes. "Fashion moves, migrates, travels particularly within an international and global culture."[254] A garment goes through multiple steps before reaching its wearer: inspiration, design, creation, dissemination, retail and consumption. At times, garments end up in museums because of their historical and cultural relevance, but also because their owners are important agents in the field of cultural production, as Bourdieu would argue. Not only do these women have the means to purchase couture, but they also have the social standing to present an aspirational image and act as arbiters of taste, which are some of the reasons why their collections are accepted into museums.

However, not all curatorial strategies are productive in understanding fashion in the museum space. Exhibitions where garments are shown *en masse,* without much contextualisation, or simply as beautiful objects to be admired in detached contemplation overlook the social and cultural importance of clothes and leave the experience of dressing lost in translation. The exhibitions that displayed the *garde-robes* of Iris Apfel, Alice Alleaume, Danielle Luquet de Saint-Germain, Mouna Ayoub and Nan Kempner at the Fondation Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent, are much more productive. They show the disposition, motivation and strategy behind the selection of a garment and how it integrates the dressing routine. They reveal a great deal about the couture system and network, the relation between client, *vendeuse* and designer, the collaborative freedom the wearer has and how she uses and appreciates fashion beyond the six-month cycle that

[253] *The Secret World of Haute Couture,* directed by Margy Kinmonth, 2007, (London: BBC Four, 2007) DVD.
[254] John Potvin, "Introduction: Inserting Fashion Into Space," *The Places and Spaces of Fashion, 1800-2007*, ed. John Potvin (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2009) 3.

is a common misconception. The *garde-robe* raises questions about the importance of self-fashioning, the social construction of taste and also about collecting and consuming as gendered activities. While most couture *garde-robes* remain closed to the public's eye, their owners have nonetheless made immense contributions to the world of couture, and fashion history in general with their patronage.

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FIGURES

Figure 1. Catherine Gille's denim shorts (c.1968), donated to the collection of the Musée de la mode et du textile, Paris. Source: Pamela Golbin, et al., Garde-robes: intimités dévoilées, de Cléo de Mérode à…(Paris: Union Centrale des Arts Décoratifs, 1999) 143.

Figure 2. Catherine Gille's donation to the collection of the Musée de la mode et du textile, Paris: a) jacket, Anne-Marie Beretta for Ramosport, synthetic fibres and satin, c.1975; b) jumpsuit, Arlette Beress, synthetic fibres, jersey, c.1968. Source: Pamela

Golbin, et al., Garde-robes: intimités dévoilées, de Cléo de Mérode à…(Paris: Union Centrale des Arts Décoratifs, 1999) 145.

Figure 3. Sylvie Grumbach's Thierry Mugler jumpsuit (1979), donated to the collection of the Musée de la mode et du textile, Paris. Source: Pamela Golbin, et al., Garde-robes: intimités dévoilées, de Cléo de Mérode à…(Paris: Union Centrale des Arts Décoratifs, 1999) 165.

Figure 4. Sylvie Grumbach's Alaïa cotton and jersey dress (spring-summer 1982), donated to the collection of the Musée de la mode et du textile, Paris. Source: Pamela Golbin, et al., Garde-robes: intimités dévoilées, de Cléo de Mérode à…(Paris: Union Centrale des Arts Décoratifs, 1999) 167.

Figure 5. Exhibition view of *Nan Kempner: American Chic*, Costume Institute, Metropolitan Museum, New York, December 12, 2006 to March 4, 2007, curated by Harold Koda. Photo: Peter Kramer. Source: "Nan Kempner's American Chic Exhibition at the MET's Costume Institute," *Zimbio*, accessed July 24, 2015. http://www.zimbio.com/pictures/Ax6qnHGXEz6/Nan+Kempner+American+Chic+Exhibition+MET+Costume

Figure 6. Exhibition view of *Nan Kempner: American Chic*, Costume Institute, Metropolitan Museum, New York, December 12, 2006 to March 4, 2007, curated by Harold Koda. Photo: Peter Kramer. Source: "Nan Kempner's American Chic Exhibition at the MET's Costume Institute," *Zimbio*, accessed July 24, 2015. http://www.zimbio.com/pictures/Ax6qnHGXEz6/Nan+Kempner+American+Chic+Exhibition+MET+Costume

Figure 7. Exhibition view of *Nan Kempner: American Chic*, Costume Institute, Metropolitan Museum, New York, December 12, 2006 to March 4, 2007, curated by Harold Koda. Photo: Peter Kramer. Source: "Nan Kempner's American Chic Exhibition at the MET's Costume Institute," *Zimbio*, accessed July 24, 2015.

http://www.zimbio.com/pictures/Ax6qnHGXEz6/Nan+Kempner+American+Chic+Exhibition+MET+Costume

Figure 8. Photographs of Nan Kempner' s jackets, sweaters and shoes that we used as wallpaper in the exhibition Nan Kempner: American Chic at the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 2006. Photo: Levi Brown. Source: Amy Larocca, "From the Well-Stuffed Closets of Mrs. Thomas L. Kempner," *New York Magazine*, (October 26, 2007) accessed June 11, 2015. http://nymag.com/fashion/features/25012/

Figure 9. Exhibition view of *Nan Kempner: American Chic*, Costume Institute, Metropolitan Museum, New York, December 12, 2006 to March 4, 2007, curated by Harold Koda. Photo: Peter Kramer. Source: "Nan Kempner' s American Chic Exhibition at the MET' s Costume Institute," *Zimbio*, accessed July 24, 2015. http://www.zimbio.com/pictures/Ax6qnHGXEz6/Nan+Kempner+American+Chic+Exhibition+MET+Costume

Figure 10. Nan Kempner' s yellow silk faille evening coat (1983-1984) by Yves Saint Laurent seen in the exhibition *Nan Kempner: American Chic*, Costume Institute, Metropolitan Museum, New York, December 12, 2006 to March 4, 2007, curated by Harold Koda. Photo: Levi Brown. Source: Amy Larocca, "From the Well-Stuffed Closets of Mrs. Thomas L. Kempner," *New York Magazine*, (October 26, 2007) accessed June 11, 2015. http://nymag.com/fashion/features/25012/

Figure 11. Sketch of navy blue pleated crepe dress by Yves Saint Laurent, spring-summer 1972, requested to be separated into a top and skirt by Nan Kempner. Photo: author's own. Source: courtesy of the Fondation Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent.

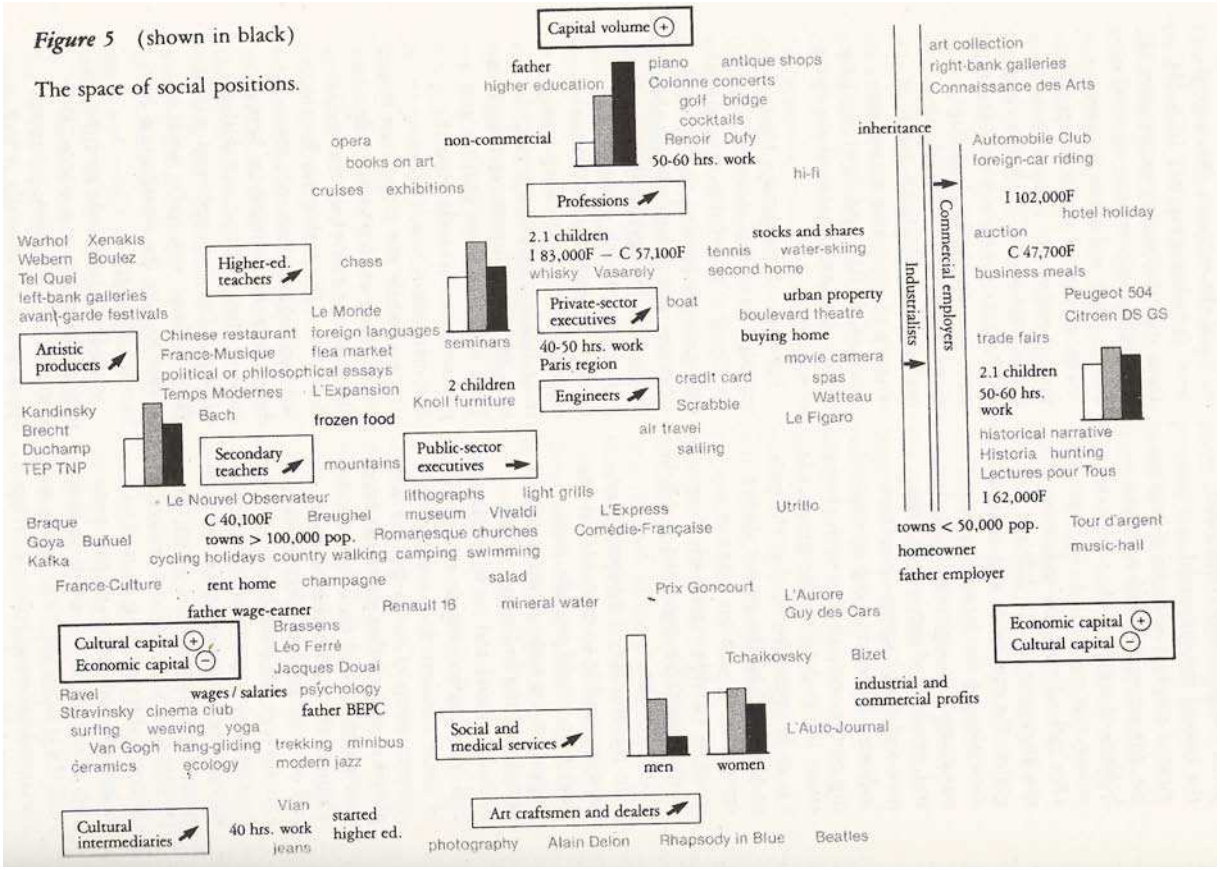

Figure 5 (shown in black)

The space of social positions.

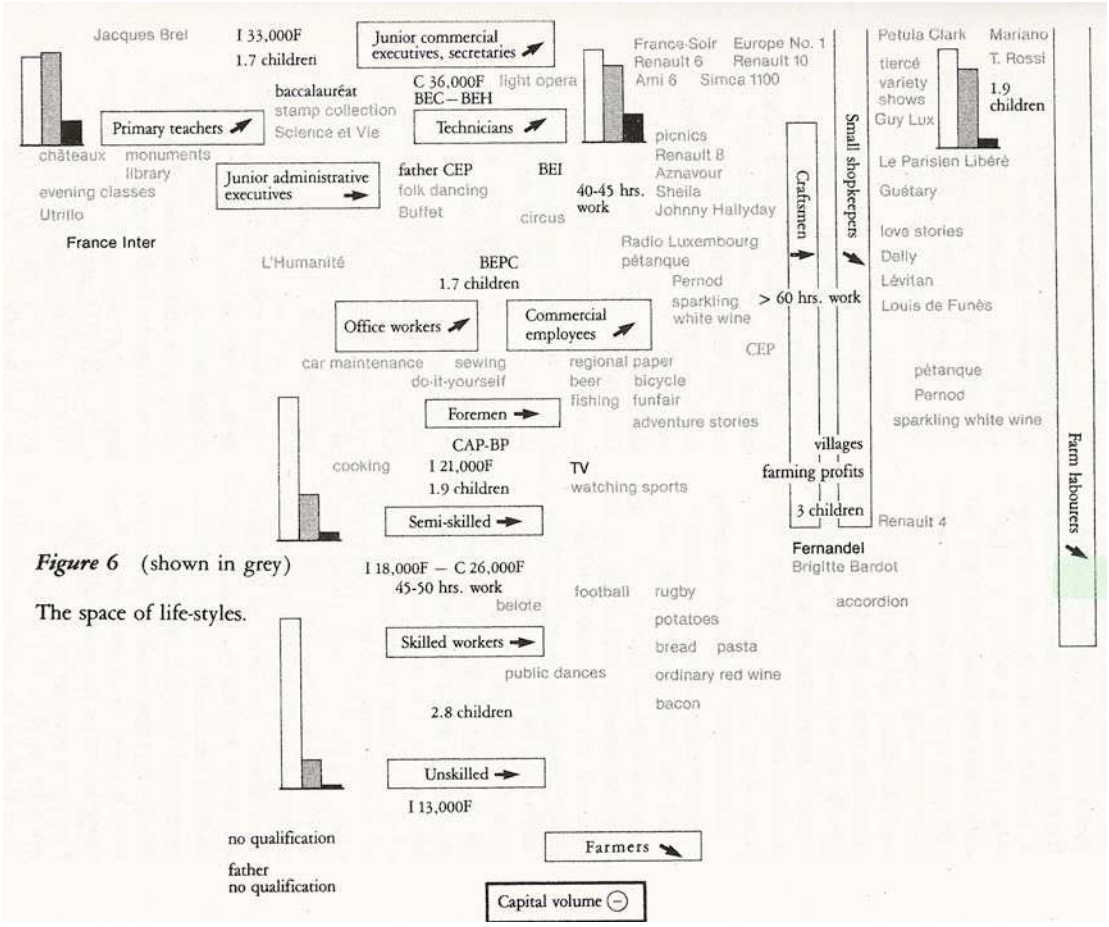

Figure 6 (shown in grey)

The space of life-styles.

Figure 12. Bourdieu's diagram from *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Trans. Richard Nice. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984. 128-129.

Figure 13. Exhibition view of *Nan Kempner: Une Américaine à Paris*, Fondation Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent, Paris, May 16, to July 29, 2007, curated by Pierre Bergé and Yves Saint Laurent. Photo: Christophe Martin. Source: "Nan Kempner, Une Américaine à Paris," *Christophe Martin Architectes*, accessed July 24, 2015. http://www.christophemartinarchitectes.com/christophemartinarchitectes.com/Expositions_Exhibitions/Pages/Nan_Kempner.html#5

Figure 14. Exhibition view of *Nan Kempner: Une Américaine à Paris*, Fondation Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent, Paris, May 16, to July 29, 2007, curated by Pierre Bergé and Yves Saint Laurent. Photo: Christophe Martin. Source: "Nan Kempner, Une Américaine à Paris," *Christophe Martin Architectes*, accessed July 24, 2015. http://www.christophemartinarchitectes.com/christophemartinarchitectes.com/Expositions_Exhibitions/Pages/Nan_Kempner.html#5

Figure 15. Exhibition view of *Nan Kempner: Une Américaine à Paris*, Fondation Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent, Paris, May 16, to July 29, 2007, curated by Pierre Bergé and Yves Saint Laurent. Photo: Christophe Martin. Source: "Nan Kempner, Une Américaine à Paris," *Christophe Martin Architectes*, accessed July 24, 2015. http://www.christophemartinarchitectes.com/christophemartinarchitectes.com/Expositions_Exhibitions/Pages/Nan_Kempner.html#5

Figure 16. Left: Le Smoking, Yves Saint Laurent, 1978. Photo: Olivier Pacteau and Carrie Solomon. Source: Fondation Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent. *Nan Kempner: Une*

Américaine à Paris. (Paris: Fondation Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent, 2007) 48. Right: sketch of Le Smoking, Yves Saint Laurent, 1978. Photo: author' s own. Source: courtesy of the Fondation Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent.

Figure 17. Left: beige gabardine Saharienne suit, Yves Saint Laurent, 1969. Photo: Olivier Pacteau and Carrie Solomon. Source: Fondation Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent. *Nan Kempner: Une Américaine à Paris*. (Paris: Fondation Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent, 2007) 28. Right: sketch of the Saharienne, Yves Saint Laurent, 1969. Photo: author' s own. Source: courtesy of the Fondation Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent.

Figure 18. Kempner's fitting mannequin in Saint Laurent's atelier. Source: Fondation Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent. *Nan Kempner: Une Américaine à Paris*. (Paris: Fondation Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent, 2007) 16.

Figure 19. Nan Kempner and Yves Saint Laurent after a runway show, 1975. Source: Fondation Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent. *Nan Kempner: Une Américaine à Paris*. (Paris: Fondation Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent, 2007) 17.

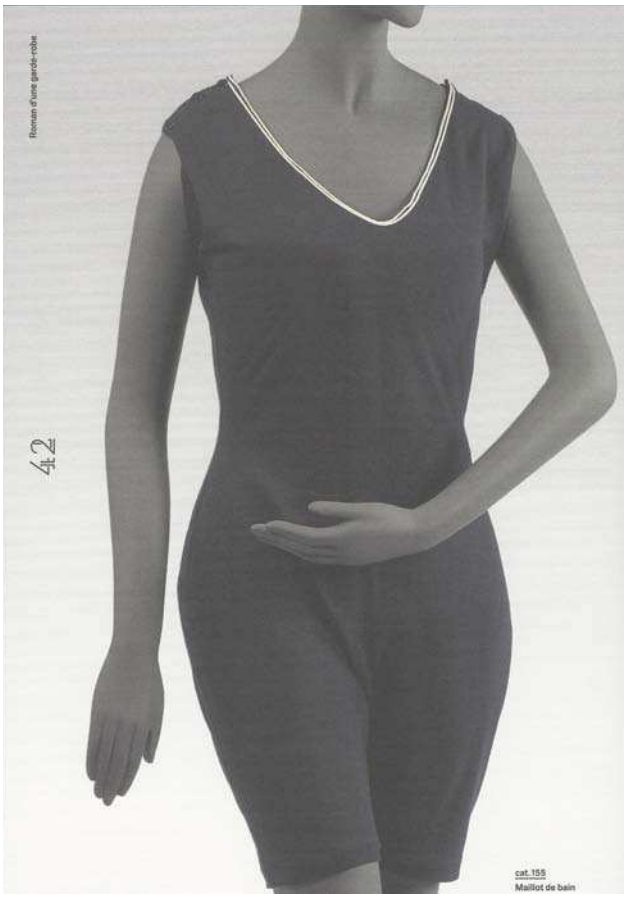

Figure 20. Alice Alleaume's navy blue jersey wool swimsuit (c.1920). Photo: Stéphane Piera/Musée Galiera/Roger-Viollet. Source: Grossiord, Sophie et al. *Roman d'une garde-robe: le chic d'une Parisienne de la Belle Époque aux Années 30*. (Paris: Paris Musée, 2013) 42.

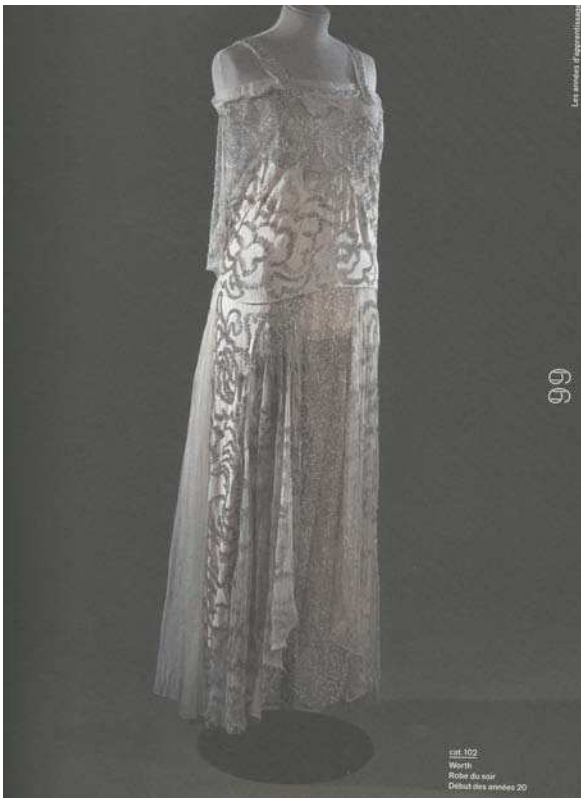

Figure 21. Alice Alleaume's Charles Frederic Worth ivory silk, tulle, metallic lace and embroidered evening dress (early 1920s). Photo: Stéphane Piera/Musée Galiera/Roger-Viollet. Source: Grossiord, Sophie et al. *Roman d'une garde-robe: le chic d'une Parisienne de la Belle Époque aux Années 30*. (Paris: Paris Musée, 2013) 99.