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A

**DESIGN AND THE INDUSTRIAL ARTS IN AMERICA, 1894-1940:  
AN INQUIRY INTO FASHION DESIGN AND ART AND INDUSTRY**

by

**MARY DONAHUE**

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

2001

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Art History in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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**Abstract****DESIGN AND THE INDUSTRIAL ARTS IN AMERICA, 1894-1940:  
AN INQUIRY INTO FASHION DESIGN AND ART AND INDUSTRY**

**By  
Mary Donahue**

**Advisor: Marlene Park**

**This dissertation explores design and manufacturing in America through the lens of the industrial arts. It concentrates on fashion design in New York City during the formative years of the fashion design profession and women's ready-to-wear industry from 1894 to 1940. For modern design historians industrial manufacturing and conception versus making are crucial to definitions of design, and significant within this context is "industrial design", a term that arose in the late 1920s and is tied to machines, advances in mass production and design creativity.**

**By investigating the institutions, theories of mass production, and vocational and marketing practices associated with fashion design, the dissertation argues that the present understanding that frames design in terms of manufacturing and conception is historically incomplete and thoroughly tied to ideologies of technology and gender. During a period of accelerated mechanization from the 1850s to 1940, the term "industrial art" gained currency to describe useful objects that were made by hand, machines or a combination of the two, and fashion design was important therein. This terminology and the related phrase, "art and industry", designated the process of bringing "good"**

design to bear on mass produced items, as undertaken in educational programs, museums, and societies of manufacturers and designers.

Through a study of the museums (The American Museum of Natural History, Brooklyn Museum and Metropolitan Museum of Art), schools (Cooper Union, Pratt Institute and Parsons School of Design), societies (The Fashion Group) and ideas (Elizabeth Hawes) that propelled garment making from the realm of dressmaking with its connotations of handiwork and domesticity to a practice of design, this study enables a more complete understanding of this period of design and industrial history, and offers the opportunity to consider the shifting meanings and values assigned to the concepts of “design” and “designer” in American scholarship. The dissertation also reveals attitudes about machines, technology, and modernism, as well as the social roles of women and men, underlying the cleavage between the design and industrial arts and definitions of design in America that persist to this day.

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## INTRODUCTION

The art that enters into life in an age of machinery is industrial art. It is utility and beauty in the home, the workshop, and the street. Our times are different from former times because we have created wonderful machines that spare the hand while they permit the mind to play over vastly increased production (Herbert J. Spinden, 1919).<sup>1</sup>

In the early twentieth century, design for manufacture became a consuming interest in Europe and America, especially during the inter war years, with the promise of a new age largely devoid of hand-work. The above statement of Herbert J. Spinden about the 1919 exhibition of American textiles and costume design, which he helped organize at New York's American Museum of Natural History, reiterates the prevalent delight in the wide availability of beautiful, useful objects due to progress in machine technology.

For modern design historians, design is frequently synonymous with machines, mass production, standardization, widespread consumption, and advances in science and technology as well as artistic form. In their terminology, the designer is one who conceptualizes, but is not the maker.<sup>2</sup> However, it was not until the 1940s that strong distinctions were made between the hand and machine-made and the term "design" became firmly established.<sup>3</sup>

In the mid-nineteenth century, the term "art and industry" gained currency to refer to products created by machine technology, but it also referred to handicrafts.<sup>4</sup> Under this heading, utilitarian objects from furniture to apparel were called industrial art or applied art, and the creator and maker of form and decoration was variously named the "industrial artist designer", "industrial artist", "artist designer", "applied artist", "costume designer" or "designer".<sup>5</sup> As a concept,



art and industry grew out of the Industrial Revolution of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and developed in accordance with manufacturers' interest in giving their products "artistic" form in order to improve sales.

This dissertation will examine design and manufacturing in America through the lens of the industrial arts. It concentrates on fashion design in New York, the center of the women's garment industry during the formative years. Those years began in 1894, when formalized education was initiated to meet the demands of an expanding womenswear industry and ended in 1940, when the lack of French designs during World War II led to renewed interest in American fashion designers.

The design of women's clothing was so important within the context of art and industry that in the second edition of her pioneering textbook, Costume Design and Illustration (1932), the American fashion designer, Ethel Traphagen, wrote:

The great industrial art of Garment Making is second only to the Steel Industry, and to quote Miss Florence Levy, "Drawing is the foundation of all manufacture. Whether it is the making of a tiny screw or a public building, a letterhead, or a piece of brocade, 'the man behind the pencil' is as important in the industrial struggle as the 'man behind the gun' in military war."<sup>6</sup>

I will approach the study of fashion design from three perspectives: that of the institutions - the schools, museums and industrial art societies that framed fashion design as an industrial art; that of a fashion designer who theorized design and training for the mass production of ready-to-wear; and through the

perceptions about fashion design established through formalized education, vocational literature, and marketing practices.

In the 1890s the foundations were laid upon which American fashion design was built. Institutions were founded in response to the expanded production of women's ready-made clothing. These institutions established women's dress as a practice of design: industrial art societies and training programs in art and trade schools, state colleges and normal schools were set up to accentuate the conceptual, artistic, and technical processes realized in a garment; and museums oriented collections and developed exhibitions and educational programs around these notions. Against this backdrop, the practice of fashion design was feminized and professionalized, and the mass production and marketing of women's ready-to-wear became burning issues.

I am interested in how educational programs, industrial art societies and museums functioned to shape an identity for American fashion design and designers, and defined American fashion design. I am interested in the intersection of Americanness, mass production, and modernity in concepts of fashion design. I am concerned with theories of ready-to-wear design and pedagogies for the training of ready-to-wear designers. The role that women played in establishing the parameters of American fashion design, as well as the perceptions and images disseminated through educational and social discourse to feminize fashion design are also important to my work.

For all these reasons, I will place little significance on style and more importance on the structures, theories, and ideologies underlying the

development of the field of fashion design, as well as the identity created for it and its practitioners. In this way, I will demonstrate how the industrial arts participated in and shaped the design culture of the inter war period and came to be ignored by design historians.

This dissertation attempts to provide a new framework for an understanding of the development of American design in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It will bring to light long-hidden documents and images, and reveal American perceptions and assumptions about advanced technology from the 1890s to 1940 still affecting beliefs integral to the practice and study of design to this day. It will show how attitudes toward science, technology, gender, and modernism shaped definitions of design in America during these years, and contributed in compelling ways to the omission of the industrial arts from the canon of design. This study will reevaluate and expand the category of design to bridge the gap between the industrial arts and industrial design (a term that arose in the late 1920s and is tied to machines, new consumer products, advances in mass production, streamlining, and modernism). This will enable a more complete and accurate understanding of this period of design history, and offer the opportunity to consider the shifting meanings and values assigned to the concept of design and conceptualizations of the “designer” that continue to inform the scholarship on American design.

This dissertation also expands the discourse on American fashion design prior to 1940. It exposes much about how art and industry affected the development of a modern American style, and sheds light on the fashion

designers who contributed to the process. This study offers a new understanding of 1930s fashion through the lens of the designer, Elizabeth Hawes, in terms of her theory and practice of ready-to-wear design and efforts in educating designers for this area of production. Hawes was also important in the historic rise of the celebrity fashion designer in connection with advertising promotions, a development that this study will track for the first time. This dissertation also represents the first study of fashion design education, and its role in structuring a female profession and providing definitions of American womanhood. Ultimately, this dissertation expands the understanding of the perceived tie between fashion design and femininity.

Although a considerable amount has been published on design and the industrial arts in early twentieth-century England and Germany,<sup>7</sup> and with the development of the academic discipline of design history in the 1960s, scholarly interest in American design has burgeoned,<sup>8</sup> there are few scholarly studies of the American industrial arts. Historians of American design tend to favor industrial design and its linkage with modernism, machines, advances in mass production, and streamlining.

Indeed the current definition of twentieth-century American design largely revolves around industrial designers, such as Henry Dreyfuss, Raymond Loewy, and Walter Dorwin Teague whose heyday was the 1930s. There is, for example, Jeffrey Meikle's Twentieth Century Limited: Industrial Design in America, 1925-1939 (1979), The Machine Age In America 1918-1941 (1986) by Richard Guy Wilson, Dianne H. Pilgrim and Dickran Tashjian, and Penny Sparke, An

Introduction to Design and Culture in the Twentieth Century (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986).<sup>9</sup> Because of this bias, important histories of American design have been lost.

Arthur Pulos' American Design Ethic, A History of Industrial Design to 1940 (1983) is a noteworthy contribution to the industrial arts.<sup>10</sup> As the title suggests, Pulos links industrial art and industrial design under the heading of "industrial design", and provides an in depth examination of the development of art and production from the colonial period to the advent of World War II, including a description of the societies and exhibitions that supported it. This book is invaluable for anyone studying American design, despite the fact that it concentrates on the period prior to industrial design and fails to consider fashion design, treating the 1920s as a bridge into 1930s industrial design.

After Pulos nothing substantial was written on the industrial arts until there was a more theoretical approach in design and art scholarship. Recently Craft in the Machine Age: The History of Twentieth-Century American Craft, 1920 – 1945 (1996), edited by Janet Kardon, fleshed out the scope of the industrial arts in the period I want to consider, albeit emphasizing the hand as opposed to machine-made.<sup>11</sup> Likewise Women Designers in the USA, 1900-2000: Diversity and Difference (2000), edited by Pat Kirkham, expanded the category of American design, embracing in its purview hand-made objects, including textiles and garments.<sup>12</sup> But while the issues central to this study overlap with my research, Kirkham's work looks at fashion design mainly in the 1940s, and when it does consider the 1930s, it does so in relation to Hollywood and custom design,

whereas I stress mass production from the 1910s through the 1930s. Apart from these texts, the literature virtually ignores the American industrial arts, and none of it examines the design world that I propose to study.

Fashion design remains the least represented of the industrial arts in an ill-represented field. While the scholarship on fashion design has grown immensely with the advent of feminist theory and criticism, the manufacturing side of fashion design remains neglected.<sup>13</sup> Even costume historians, who have done the most to augment the study of American fashion design, tend to downplay this role. They focus, instead, on style, technique, fabrication, and designers, emphasizing the period after the 1930s as the time of the rise of American fashion. An important contribution is Richard Martin's American Ingenuity, Sportswear 1930s–1970s.<sup>14</sup> Although Martin treats the achievements of the originators of American sportswear basically beginning with the 1940s, American Ingenuity is a helpful reference source, as is Caroline Milbank's, New York Fashion: The Evolution of American Style (1989).<sup>15</sup> Milbank maps a history of couture and ready-to-wear designers from the 1850s through the 1980s and does include manufacturers, mainly in terms of chronology and style.

Recently art and architectural historians have begun to examine clothing, setting the stage for my work. As a whole, these studies treat garments designed by artists, architects, interior designers, and in some instances, fashion designers, and indicate a new direction in art scholarship, but they do not discuss American fashion or the parameters of my study. See for example, "Clothing as Subject," edited by Nina Felshin in Art Journal (1995); Mark Wigley, White Walls

Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture (1995); and Architecture In Fashion edited by Deborah Fausch, Paulette Singley, Rodolphe El-Khoury, and Zvi Efrat (1994).<sup>16</sup>

Part One of the dissertation, "Institutional Frameworks For Fashion As Design," examines the institutions that established garment making as a design art, and created an identity for American fashion and its designers. I have divided this part into three chapters. Chapter one treats the educational programs founded to train fashion designers, Chapter 2 examines the museums involved in fashion design, and Chapter 3 discusses the related work of an industrial art society.

An examination of the way fashion design was understood and practiced in America in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries reveals that fashion design was stereotyped as a woman's profession through its association with the female domestic tasks of sewing and making clothing, and ultimately, distanced from modernism, and by the same token, industrial design, through its connection with handicrafts, ornamentation, and historicism. The gendering of the fashion design profession is a thread running through the dissertation, as is design education, but Chapter 1 focuses on three institutions pioneering in fashion design education in New York: Pratt Institute in Brooklyn (1894), Cooper Union (1910s), and The New York School of Fine and Applied Art (1906).

Design education, which was crucial to art and industry, stood at the base of the gender divide in the American design world. I will show how fashion designers were perceived within an ideological debate about what kind of

industrial art training and career path was appropriate for men and women, and reveal how attitudes toward technology fueled the debate. In this way, I will expose the social construction of the phenomenon of the American fashion designer and reveal the core perceptions and mechanisms that created and spread the idea of the American fashion designer as female.

Recently, scholars have begun to examine design education and gender issues in America, setting the pace for my work. These include a study of the Rhode Island School of Design, "Educating American Designers for Industry, 1853-1903" (1995), by Nancy Austin and Sarah Allaback's " 'Better than silver and gold': Design schools for women in America, 1848-1860" (1998).<sup>17</sup> Especially valuable is Marjorie Jones' dissertation entitled, "A History of The Parsons School of Design, 1896-1966" (1968), which outlines the general developments in the fashion design curriculum at The New York School of Fine and Applied Art.<sup>18</sup>

I will trace a history of fashion design education at Pratt Institute, Cooper Union, and The New York School of Fine and Applied Art. Taken together, these schools represent the development of ideas about the conception and training of an "American" fashion designer, as they evolved from the beginning of fashion design education in the 1890s to their final form in the 1930s. This study demonstrates how the instruction instituted for fashion design depended on the tradition of dressmaking with its domestic connotations, which the new industrial profession was intended to replace. I will consider how educational philosophies of manual training posited different career paths for boys and girls, revolving



around machine work versus sewing, cooking, and making clothing, and how this influenced the policies and curriculum at Pratt Institute where, in 1894, “costume design” was initiated in a drawing course in the Dressmaking curriculum. This is the earliest known fashion design program in New York, and coincided with expansions in the women’s ready-to-wear industry.

Drawing was at the heart of industrial education, and the force that drove fashion design at Pratt. But drawing also formed an integral part of the Dressmaking curriculum, out of which the new discipline derived. I will connect the dressmaking and costume design pedagogies at Pratt in order to tie together the new design education, professional dressmaking, which was a female occupation involving a high level of technical skill, and the traditional female domestic labor of sewing and making clothes. By 1910, Pratt had established the conventions still associated with fashion design education – that is - a combination of drawing and garment construction.

I will contrast this with the situation at Cooper Union and The New York School of Fine and Applied Art where fashion design became part of the curriculum around 1910. This illustrates the transition from the dressmaking model of the nineteenth century to the twentieth-century fashion designer who conceptualized on paper, and the reversal back to garment making. Although the professional dressmaker herself became outdated by the ready-to-wear industry, the same industry created a new space where women could operate as designers. Yet, it is not without a certain irony that we see these two schools introduce the technical side of clothing design under the impetus of the garment

industry, which balked at the sketch as appropriate training for designing apparel. Throughout my discussion, I will consider how these institutions, like Pratt, constructed a female space for the study of fashion design, despite the fact that they were not directly guided by the principles of manual training.

Chapter 2 considers fashion design in relation to museums. Scholars have long recognized the importance of examining design through museum exhibitions and the societies formed by artists, designers, and business individuals to represent their concerns in an art and industry context. In addition to Pulos, a notable example is Craft in the Machine Age: The History of Twentieth-Century American Craft, 1920-1945 (1996), edited by Janet Kardon.<sup>19</sup> While focusing on the unique handmade object, this book lists art and industry organizations, educational institutions, and museum exhibitions. There are also several articles and minor references to the industrial art exhibitions held by museums, but when discussing early twentieth-century design, these studies tend to concentrate on style and the exhibitions dedicated to industrial design.

There are two important exceptions, which, like my work, examine New York Museums and the garment trade. In Land of Desire: Merchants, Power and the Rise of a New American Culture, William Leach looks at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art and The American Museum of Natural History in this context.<sup>20</sup> A recent Masters Thesis, "The Road To Beauty: Stewart Culin and the American Textile and Clothing Industries," (1999) by Freya Van Saum marks an important inquiry into the garment and textile industries in terms of Stewart Culin, curator of the Brooklyn Museum of Art from 1903 to

1928.<sup>21</sup> But whereas Leach focuses on consumer culture and Van Saum is interested in Culin's career in collecting and exhibiting objects with the fashion design community in mind, I will concentrate on these institutions within the wider scope of art and industry.

In Chapter 2, I consider the links forged between museums and businesses related to fashion design in New York – that is - the garment industry, retail manufacturers, and retail establishments, in an attempt to further the fashion industry and develop an American fashion design. First I discuss the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which acted decisively in the 1880s in the belief that art and industry should join together, yet not in relation to the garment trade. I examine the benefits to be gained by museums in league with industry, and the introduction of wide sweeping policies and activities in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the conviction that art and industry should unite. The European influence on philosophies of acquisition and exhibition are examined as well.

Beginning in the 1910s, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The American Museum of Natural History, and The Brooklyn Museum of Art made alliances with manufacturers of women's ready-to-wear, and the extended world of fashion linked with department stores and the press. I examine closely the rationale for using the collections to provide a basis for an American fashion design as opposed to referencing European patterns. The idea was that an American fashion would be the outcome of American creativity inspired by American museum collections and be produced in American factories in materials manufactured in America.

Because the condition of the designer and manufacturer of women's clothing is important to an understanding of the relevance of museums in shaping a definition of American fashion, it is necessary to briefly trace a history of the womenswear industry, the training of designers, and of the fashion press. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, both the mass production sector of the women's garment industry and the profession of fashion designer were in nascent stages.<sup>22</sup> Through the museums we had the same opportunity as European designers and manufacturers.

The study of museums is also important for showing that mass production and the machine played a significant role in fashion design, and thereby the industrial arts. It is true that the garment industry never equaled the level of standardization and assembly-line high volume production achieved by consumer items like cars and toasters associated with industrial design. Rather, it based production on the rapid proliferation of styles, and the individually-operated sewing machine, first introduced in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>23</sup>

The reality is that the only thing that separates industrial design and industrial art in the area of mass production is a matter of degree. Ready-to-wear garments reached a mass market well before 1930, and utilized a variety of "new" machines such as the steam-powered cutting machine (1870s), electrically-powered rotary knife (1890s), and sundry improvements on sewing machines. Such an understanding must expand the definition of design to consider the shifting meanings attached to the machine and its role in art and industry. By exploring the relationship between museums and garment

manufacturers, we can better understand the role of mass production and the machine in fashion design. Through this we may come to see industrial design and large scale output, standardized products, and new modes of production as but one aspect of the development of design in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

All three museums had substantial programs directed by specific individuals, not only intended to provide design sources, but to inculcate thinking about what comprised a unique American fashion. I will examine the projects instituted in the 1910s by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, ultimately under the direction of Richard Bach, the Brooklyn Museum of Art's, Stewart Culin, and in particular the work of M.D.C. Crawford, who was on the editorial staff of the garment trade's magazine, Women's Wear, and employed part time as a lecturer on Peruvian textiles at The American Museum of Natural History. Crawford wrote extensively about the creation of American textile and dress design in association with museum collections.<sup>24</sup>

Finally I will examine the exhibitions aimed at introducing American industrial arts to the public and the trades, and catalog the contributing fashion designers and garment manufacturers. Mapping such a history will demonstrate the way in which museums defined American fashion design in terms of American creativity, materials, and manufacture. It reveals exhibition policies and how fashion design was displayed at an emergent moment in its history, as well as identifies individuals who were significant in this respect. For example, one of America's most well-known fashion designers, Ethel Traphagen, who built a career in educating fashion designers, took part in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's industrial art exhibitions.

Chapter 3 examines an industrial art society - The Fashion Group - that furthered fashion design during the 1930s. Along with museums, societies formed by business and design professionals popularized and diffused American design in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Fashion Group was a professional society initiated in 1928, and formally organized in 1931 to represent women in the fashion fields from apparel to journalism.<sup>25</sup>

An unpublished dissertation entitled, "Altered Forever: A Women's Elite and the Transformation of American Fashion Work and Culture, 1930-1955" (1990), by Victoria Chipman Billings inspired my work a great deal. As a sociologist, Billings concentrates on The Fashion Group as a significant force of female power and influence in the 1930s fashion world.

I am interested in how The Fashion Group functioned as an institution to advance American fashion design in the context of art and industry. The chapter begins with the rise of The Fashion Group against the backdrop of related societies organized in light of the industrial arts, which were central to The Fashion Group's self-conception and reason for being. In order to fully understand how The Fashion Group developed, it is necessary to outline the history of its founding and identify the influential women of the fashion community in its ranks, among them Edna Woolman Chase, editor of Vogue; Dorothy Shaver, vice president of Lord & Taylor; and Elizabeth Hawes, fashion designer.

Equally important is to note the period's interest in science and technology. In the garment industry, this was characterized by a stress on man-made dress fabrics, and a demand for designers who could unite the mechanical and artistic

side of production in conjunction with increases in style variety in the ready-to-wear market. This is contrasted with the museum focus on past art as a source of American fashion.

It is also crucial to consider The Fashion Group within the “American Designer Movement”, as it was called at the time. Initiated in 1932 by New York retailers and manufacturers, this commercial promotion of American fashion, principally ready-to-wear, spread public awareness of specific designers, such as Elizabeth Hawes. This was a key development that later chapters will refer to again in relationship to the celebrity fashion designer and the advertising promotions that constructed the image of the American fashion designer as woman.

The Fashion Group’s ventures into exhibitions, fashion shows, and design education are treated as a whole. In particular, I will consider a series of fashion shows called, “Fashion Futures”, which introduced American designers to women across the country. I will also focus on the training seminars of 1935 to 1938, in addition to the research conducted to determine the proper requirements for designers in the garment industry. The lively debate about the best training for ready-to-wear designers, which adds significance to The Fashion Group’s efforts, receives consideration.

Next I will look at the exchanges between The Fashion Group and the Art Center which, in 1931, became known by the additional name, the National Alliance of Art and Industry.<sup>26</sup> As an industrial art society, The Fashion Group maintained affiliations with numerous organizations and individuals who were committed to art

and industry. This facet of The Fashion Group's activity is important to study for two reasons.

First, this intersection reveals fashion design in the wider context of design, especially industrial design. An underlying theme of my dissertation is to demonstrate the intersection of fashion design and industrial design, showing that, in actuality, there were more links than disparities between the industrial arts and industrial design. This connection will run through my study, but will form the focal point of an inquiry into The Fashion Group's interaction with the industrial art society, the Art Center.

Second, such a study expands the view of women who contributed to American art and culture during the first half of the century. It departs from the model of the leisured woman who advanced the fine arts to stress the cooperation between well-to-do and mostly middle-class working women whose professional networking provided a base of support for American design and mass production. One of the reasons why The Fashion Group and the Art Center were so connected is because of the network of women who patronized American art and design. Two scholarly sources addressing women's art patronage which paved the way for my work are Kathleen McCarthy's Women's Culture: American Philanthropy and Art, 1890-1930 (1991), and John Angeline's unpublished dissertation, "Reassessing Modernism: Katherine S. Drier and The Societe Anonyme" (1999).<sup>27</sup>



My examination begins with a history of the Art Center whose roots are traced to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century through Helen Ripley Hitchcock, who took up the vocational concerns of artists and designers. With the aid of other well-to-do women, Hitchcock helped to found the successive societies, such as the Art Alliance of America (1914), that developed into the Art Center (1920) to serve as an umbrella organization for seven organizations, including the American Institute of Graphic Arts.

I will trace the intricate ties between The Fashion Group and the Art Center which were so important for providing a nexus between fashion design and industrial design. Because The Fashion Group no doubt played a leading role, I will stress the fashion show of American ready-to-wear held in conjunction with a 1934 exhibition of industrial design sponsored by The National Alliance of Art and Industry.

Lastly, I will explore The Fashion Group's function as a catalyst for its members. This organization supported the work of the women who made up its ranks, by providing a forum for networking and the articulation of ideas. The Board of Governors, where many views related to fashion design were played out, represents a behind-the-scenes buttress system.

I will discuss the individuals and activities related to the great art and industry event at the decade's end: the 1939 New York World's Fair. Scholars generally examine *The World of Tomorrow* in terms of industrial designers who shaped the physical space.<sup>28</sup> I will focus on the fashion events organized by the Fashion Executives, Marcia Connor, and Mary Lewis, and enhanced by Alice

Hughes, a syndicated fashion columnist. These women organized many affairs that revolved around American fashion, such as The Cotton Show of May, 1939.

I will examine Hughes' involvement with the fair in some length in order to integrate fashion design and industrial design squarely in a fashion context. In June 1938, Hughes's syndicated column, "Woman's New York", ran the headline, "Miss Hughes Defies Industrial Designers To Explain Choice In Clothes."<sup>29</sup> Eight months later, Egmont Erens, Donald Deskey, Henry Dreyfuss, and Raymond Loewy, among others, appeared in Vogue, along with their fashions of the future.<sup>30</sup> Although the magazine took credit, when maybe Hughes was responsible for inviting the industrial designers to the fair, these facts are important for showing how fashion design and industrial design were entwined during these years. I will analyze the work submitted by the industrial designers in comparison to Hawes' radical treatment of the future.

Part Two of the dissertation, "Mass Production: 'Elizabeth Hawes. . . Designer For Millions'," considers fashion design in relation to the ideas and activities of the American fashion designer, Elizabeth Hawes (1903-1971).<sup>31</sup> The purpose of the study is to stress the importance of ready-to-wear design in the 1930s, and fashion design's participation in a history of ideas about mass production and the machine.

During the 1930s, Hawes was at the center of discussions about American ready-to-wear design, and is responsible for the earliest known coherent theory about design for mass production that brought together the designer, consumer, and manufacturer in the area of women's clothes. Hawes had ideas about design

for the masses at a time when there was an accelerated demand for good design in ready-to-wear. Operating a business in New York City, she was a pioneering figure who occupied the world of custom and ready-to-wear design, and was outspoken about the role and education of the fashion designer in industry. Hawes was also an influential member of The Fashion Group, wherein she assumed a leadership role in the training of fashion designers.

Hawes is well represented in studies of American fashion such as Caroline Milbank's New York Fashion (1989), Women of Fashion (1991) by Valerie Steele, and American Ingenuity: Sportswear, 1930s-1970s (1998) by Richard Martin.<sup>32</sup> Three studies are devoted specifically to Hawes. Bettina Berch wrote a biography entitled, Radical By Design (1988), which derived from the author's background as an economist, and largely focuses on Hawes' left-leaning politics.<sup>33</sup>

Most important to my work are two Masters Theses. In "Elizabeth Hawes: A Pioneer in the American Designer Movement" (1981), Carol Potter provides an analysis of Hawes' style, and outlines her activity in the ready-to-wear market, situating Hawes' interest in mass production in the context of European modernism, loosely defined as the Bauhaus.<sup>34</sup> Whereas Berch notes the impact on Hawes' couture style by Alexander Calder, Isamu Noguchi, and Juan Miro, whom Hawes met while in Paris from 1926 to 1928, Potter stresses the influence of Pablo Picasso, Paul Klee, and Surrealism. Jennie Choi's "Elizabeth Hawes: Maverick of American Clothing Design" (1998) adds to the understanding of Hawes' penchant for self-promotion and engagement with developments in

modern architecture and design.<sup>35</sup> While remaining invaluable reference sources, this literature stands in need of revision, and none of it devotes a full consideration of Hawes in the terms I have chosen to examine.

In addition, current discussions about Hawes in relation to ready-to-wear and mass production revolve around Fashion Is Spinach (1938), Hawes' critique of New York's ready-to-wear industry.<sup>36</sup> My dissertation looks at the extensive holdings at The Brooklyn Museum of Art. Had it not been for Hawes' decision, or that of a colleague, to keep records of her activities, little would be known about the range of her philosophy about design for the masses. Entrusted to the Museum Library in the early 1940s, this documentation from newspapers and magazines, in and out of the fashion press, furnishes, along with the evidence of The Fashion Group archives, and Hawes' writings, a more complete picture of her design theory and practice than the present understanding allows.

I have divided my study of Hawes into two chapters. Spanning the years 1928 to 1934, Chapter 4 explores the initial stages and implementation of Hawes' idea to reorganize the womenswear industry for the purpose of coordinating good design and mass production. Hawes wanted to make beautiful clothes available to all American women. In a series of interviews and writings, beginning in 1932, she articulated the rudiments of a plan to forge cooperation among designers, consumers, and garment and textile manufacturers. Although the Bauhaus was important as a filter for her ideas, the influence of European modernism through her 1931 connection with Contempora Inc., an organization of designers and architects that had ties with the German industrial art society,

the Werkbund, and was committed to mass production, directly expanded her thinking about design for the masses.

However, Hawes was very much a part of the American fashion scene, which was then oriented toward ready-to-wear, and this, coupled with her experience in the ready-to-wear market, were decisive in the development of her thought. Indeed, as early as 1928, when she returned from Paris to New York, Hawes planned to find work in the wholesale field, but unable to do so, set up a custom salon, instead, and from 1932 to 1937, contracted with department stores and manufacturers.

At the same time, Hawes belonged to the world of custom design. With professional training in dressmaking at Bergdorf Goodman, her theory about ready-to-wear drew from her salon practice. For example, she believed in applying the advice gained from her individual clientele to the mass market. From the French couture, with which she became familiar during a season with Nicole Groult in Paris, she borrowed the cooperative relationship between designers and textile houses.<sup>37</sup>

This chapter will also take into account Hawes' ready-to-wear designs produced under contract for manufacturers and draw a connection, evident in Hawes' writings, between them and her custom designs. This will illustrate how Hawes applied her theories about mass production, relying largely on modern art, design, and architecture to provide an aesthetic for her style. I will analyze how she integrated Art Deco architecture, abstraction, late Cubism, and

biomorphic Surrealism through Pablo Picasso and Alexander Calder into her work.

To date, Potter has done the most toward linking Hawes with modern art, especially Picasso and abstraction, but she fails to take into account Hawes' ready-to-wear designs and doesn't particularize the influences at work. Hawes' use of art in advertisements and promotional campaigns, likewise, attests to her belief in uniting her custom and ready-to-wear collections. In addition to invoking modern artists, like Isamu Noguchi, Hawes' marketing strategies incorporated past "masters", such as Raphael.

Chapter 5 focuses on the years from 1934 to 1940 to consider a pivotal influence on Hawes' thinking and practice with respect to mass production. The plan to forge cooperation among fashion designers, consumers, and manufacturers received final form under the impetus of the Soviet garment industry, which was undergoing rapid development when she visited Moscow in 1935. In this setting, Hawes reaffirmed her position, and added the notion of experienced designers working together as a group, with the important stipulation of setting guidelines for production.

With the radical "socialism" informing her concepts militating against their implementation in American industry, Hawes put her plans into action by designing a wholesale line produced under her own direction. This 1938 collection, unknown until now, illustrates a theory put into practice, and indicates Hawes' continuing engagement with the latest trends in art and design. During the same period, she stopped designing for manufacturers, being disillusioned by the lack of creative

opportunity, and published Fashion Is Spinach (1938), a book that has become pivotal to discussions about Hawes and mass production. I will reconsider this supposedly scathing criticism of the garment industry in light of the theories and designs that preceded it.

Finally, Hawes' efforts to educate designers for mass production, and her legacy will be examined. Beginning with her own training in fashion design, this section looks closely at the way in which Hawes approached the problem of preparing designers for the ready-to-wear market. As a designer, Hawes developed a strong reputation, and received frequent invitations to represent fashion design at career conferences, art and design schools, and professional venues, where she advanced her views about education, and influenced aspiring designers.

In fact, it was to the question of proper instruction in fashion design that she aimed her book, Why Is a Dress? (1942).<sup>38</sup> While the education of fashion designers had special relevance for Hawes, it also highlights a topical issue of the day, and her view will be analyzed in terms of the curriculum established by design and trade schools. Through a survey of the assistants, apprentices, and students that came under her purview, the last section concentrates on Hawes' legacy.

Part Three of the dissertation, "Perceptions About A Profession: Feminizing Fashion Design," treats the feminization of the fashion design profession in the 1930s. Building on the understanding of the gendered nature of fashion design education, this study seeks to explain why the industrial arts and fashion design have heretofore been unacceptable to historians of American design.<sup>39</sup> It intends to demonstrate through an examination of career literature

and advertising methods how the hierarchy of design, separating the industrial arts from industrial design and distancing fashion design from the industrial arts, is embedded in stereotypes of femininity and masculinity based on the perceived superiority of modernism, rational thought, science, and technology, ultimately related to cultural assumptions about the social roles of men and women regarding machines.

In Chapter 6, I examine the 1930s vocational literature written by women for women, shaping conceptions about what was and was not appropriate for women to design. This literature indicates the continuation of the separation, begun in the 1890s, along sexual lines that geared women toward fashion design in industrial art occupations. During this period, career literature as well as new commercial strategies perpetuated the feminization of the fashion design profession.<sup>40</sup> However, science, rather than theories about manual training, now supported the association between women and garment making, and men and machines.

This chapter also looks at the rise of the celebrity fashion designer which, similarly, reinforced the perception that the American fashion designer was female. During these years, more and more businesses marketed their products through endorsements by famous people. Drawing on the publicity generated by the American Designer Movement, advertisers wanted to be identified with the nation's fashion designers.

I will discuss the example of Hawes, focusing on both her own marketing strategy, and her popularity with advertisers, for whom she endorsed products



from cigarettes to cars. So famous was Hawes that she was referenced in the popular culture of poems, and even invited to appear on the radio. This study indicates how the visibility of named fashion designers ingrained the female persona of the American fashion designer into the public consciousness.

Chapter 7 considers the significance attached to fashion design in the 1930s, and its ultimate eclipse in a segment of the design world by industrial design. It begins with a discussion of how the commercial image of the American fashion designer conveyed important symbolic meaning, and gave significance to the task of designing women's clothes. Capitalizing on the supposed kinship between the woman designer and her female customer, department store promotions and related advertisements made fashion designers into symbols of American womanhood. The idea was to sell designs by American women to American women based on a shared lifestyle and body type seen as characteristically American. This credited fashion designers with the important work of clothing the nation's women.

I will concentrate on the idea of a typical, American, female body that shaped a definition of American womanhood through the persona of the female fashion designer. Important considerations in my study are how conceptualizations of fashion designers and the social values attached to their work constructed definitions of American femininity. Several scholars have written about representations of American womanhood in the nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries. Among them are Martha Banta's Imaging American Women: Idea and Ideals in Cultural History (1987), and Angels of Art: Women

and Art in American Society, 1876-1914 (1996) by Bailey Van Hook.<sup>41</sup> This body of work provides a substantial contribution to the study of the social construction of American femininity in illustration, sculpture, and painting, and largely influenced my thinking.

In contrast to these scholars, my study involves consumer culture, technology, and design. During the 1930s, advertisements and marketing promotions spawned the rise of the celebrity fashion designer, and created a role for ready-to-wear designers, which centered around the perceived lifestyle and body type of American women. I will link these notions about an American female body to nineteenth-century ideals of American femininity, such as the Gibson Girl, in connection with the pseudo-science of Eugenics, as Banta suggests.

I will trace this physical appearance, evident in advertisements and fashion discourse, to turn-of-the-century icons of the "American Girl". The slender long-legged figure of icons like the Gibson Girl also inspired fashion drawing and sizing in the womenswear industry, thereby affecting real women's bodies. The tall willowy frame of the "American Girl", similarly, impacted descriptions of women fashion designers, such as Muriel King. I will place these developments in the context of Eugenics, and examine the persistence of the "science" of heredity throughout the 1930s, by virtue of the garments for the future submitted by industrial designers to the New York World's Fair.

Finally, this chapter will consider the sexual divide in the 1930s design world, and the fascination with industrial design that set the pace for subsequent

histories of American design. By the middle of the decade, fashion design and industrial design represented two gender specific professions that were on the receiving end of considerable attention. I will focus on examples of the rhetoric that structured the industrial designer as masculine. I will tie this to the nineteenth-century philosophy of manual training and the related assumption of men's ability to deal with universals through abstract thought. Just as the former directed boys toward machine shop and women toward sewing, so industrial design was characterized in terms of "hard" design, associating it with machines and a factory setting. Industrial design was considered to be off limits to women, who should aspire to "soft" design, involving textiles, wallpaper, and clothing, being basically barred from working with materials in a factory.

One of the reasons why the industrial arts are a neglected topic is because the canon of 1930s American design owes much of its direction to a book written by Martha and Sheldon Cheney during the heyday of industrial design: Art and the Machine: An Account of Industrial Design in 20<sup>th</sup>-century America (1936).<sup>42</sup> In the book, which current scholars generally cite, the Cheneys introduce an approach that sets the machine technology and science associated with industrial design over the industrial arts, including fashion. The Cheneys did not invent the sexual division of labor or the hierarchy of design, but the celebration of the male industrial designer, and of streamlining as a sign of American scientific progress went a long way toward producing the dominance of a particular kind of design and designer in the histories of 1920s and 1930s American design.

I want to suggest that when we recreate the historical picture, we may come to find that industrial design was only one side of a many-faceted situation. Even though the Cheneys and subsequent scholars prioritize industrial design, like industrial designers, fashion designers were inscribed with national symbolic meaning. When we consider how ready-to-wear was regarded as emblematic of advances in American science and technology, we may realize that the term “design” is more fluid than permitted by present understandings.

By drawing connections between fashion design and industrial design, I do not propose to limit the purview of design to a discussion of advanced mechanization. I agree with Cheryl Buckley that this would in effect write out work that is primarily contributed by women. In “Made in Patriarchy: Toward a Feminist Analysis of Women and Design,” (1986), Buckley challenges the design canon that sees design only in terms of the machine, designating women’s design in domestic fields or textiles, for example, as “nondesign”.<sup>43</sup>

I suggest that we consider a definition of design from the vantage point of the institutions set up in response to art and industry, as opposed to a high level of standardization and mass production. To examine design schools, museums, and industrial art societies, as some scholars do, would take into account fields inclusive of women and men, such as fashion design. This would also acknowledge the technological changes linked with machines that launched a mass consumer market and led to the intersection of art and production.

I want to also suggest that we place a value on the technical side of design. The narrative of the industrial designer, recorded by the Cheneys,

separates the designer from the act of making per se. But I agree with the Cheneys that drawing alone does not a designer make: one has to know something about process. Buckley identified the bias that sets the “genius” European male fashion designer apart from the womanly pursuits of sewing, by accentuating the cerebral activity of design along with business and marketing skills. I like what American garment manufacturers said in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century - that is - to call yourself a fashion designer, you need to know how a garment is put together.

Paradoxically, the cultural assumption that women are naturally suited to sewing and making clothes, which helped to feminize fashion design, contributed to the perception that men who enter the field are effeminate. In the postscript to the dissertation, I will show through an examination of the popular culture of Hollywood films how the paradigm of fashion design shifted after World War II. The “gay” man then came to dominate the popular understanding of the American fashion designer, while supporting the notion of the superiority of science and rationality.

## Notes For Introduction

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<sup>1</sup> Herbert J. Spinden, Exhibition of Industrial Art in Textiles and Costumes (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1919), 17-18.

<sup>2</sup> See Richard Buchanan and Victor Margolin, eds. Discovering Design: Exploration in Design Studies (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995); Mike Cooley, "From Brunelleschi to Cad-Cam," in Design After Modernism, ed. John Thackara (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988), 197-207; Adrian Forty, Objects of Desire, Design and Society Since 1750 (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), 29-41.

<sup>3</sup> Pat Kirkham, ed. Women Designers in the USA, 1900-2000: Diversity and Difference (New Haven: Yale University, 2000), 77.

<sup>4</sup> See The U.S. Department of the Interior Bureau of Education, Art and Industry, Education in the Industrial and Fine Arts in the United States, 4 vols., ed. Isaac Edwards Clarke (Wash. DC: Government Printing Office, 1885-1898). Herbert J. Spinden, Exhibition of Industrial Art in Textiles and Costumes (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1919), 17-18.

<sup>5</sup> Until the 1950s, when the term, "fashion design", came into regular use, designations particular to this area of the industrial arts included "costume designer", "costume artist", "clothing designer", "dressmaker", and "garment maker". Unless referring to a specific historic context, I will use the term, "fashion design", since from the critical standpoint of professional training and orientation, there is today no difference from the past understanding.

<sup>6</sup> This quotation appears in the preface to the second edition of a textbook by Ethel Traphagen (1882-1963), Costume Design and Illustration, (reprint, New York: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 1932), unpaginated. The first edition was published in 1918 by the same house. Like Traphagen, Florence Levy (1870-1947) was a pioneer educator in the industrial arts in New York whose accomplishments included among various writings and exhibitions, Art Education in the City of New York (New York: School Art League of New York, 1938).

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Reyner Banham, Theory and Design in the First Machine Age, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996), 68-78; Lucius Burckhardt, The Werkbund: History and Ideology 1907-1933 (New York: Barrons Educational Series, 1980); Joan Campbell, The German Werkbund: The Politics of Reform in the Applied Arts (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

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- <sup>8</sup> See Victor Margolin, "A Decade of Design History in the United States 1977-1987," Journal of Design History no. 1 (1988): 51-72, and Clive Dilnot, "The State of Design History, Part I: Mapping the Field" and "The State of Design History, Part II: Problems and Possibilities" in Design Discourse ed. Victor Margolin (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 213-250.
- <sup>9</sup> Jeffrey Meikle, Twentieth Century Limited: Industrial Design in America, 1925-1939 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979); Penny Sparke, An Introduction to Design and Culture in the Twentieth Century (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986); Richard Guy Wilson, Dianne H. Pilgrim, and Dickran Tashjian, The Machine Age in America 1918-1941 (New York: The Brooklyn Museum and Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1986).
- <sup>10</sup> Arthur Pulos, American Design Ethic, A History of Industrial Design to 1940 (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1983).
- <sup>11</sup> Janet Kardon, ed. Craft in the Machine Age: The History of Twentieth-Century American Craft, 1920-1945 (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. and the American Craft Museum, 1996).
- <sup>12</sup> Kirkham, ed. Women Designers in the USA.
- <sup>13</sup> For a broad overview of developments in ready-to-wear in the states and England see Christopher Breward, The Culture of Fashion (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 181-225; Elizabeth Wilson, Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity (London: Virago, 1985).
- <sup>14</sup> Richard Martin, American Ingenuity Sportswear 1930s-1970s (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998).
- <sup>15</sup> Caroline Rennolds Milbank, New York Fashion: The Evolution of American Style (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1989). For a comparative study of the development of ready-to-wear in terms of labor in the states and in France see Jessica Daves, Ready-Made Miracle (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1967).
- <sup>16</sup> Nina Felshin, ed. "Clothing as Subject," Art Journal (Spring 1995); Mark Wigley, White Walls Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995); and Deborah Fausch, Paulette Singley, Rodolphe El-Khoury, and Zvi Efrat eds., Architecture In Fashion (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1994). See also Werner Schweiger, Wiener Werstätte: Design in Vienna, 1903-1932 (New York: Abbeyville, 1984) and Vienna Künstlerhaus, Traum und Wirklichkeit: Wien, 1870-1930 (Vienna, 1985).
- <sup>17</sup> Nancy Austin, "Educating American Designers for Industry, 1853-1903," in The Cultivation of Artists in Nineteenth-Century America, eds, Giorgia Brady Barnhill,

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Diana Korzenik, and Caroline F. Sloat (Worcester, Mass: American Antiquarian Society, 1997), 187-207; Sarah Allaback, " 'Better than silver and gold': Design schools for women in America, 1848-1860," Journal of Women's History (Spring 1998): 88-107. For an examination of the Philadelphia School of Design for women, see F. Graeme Chalmers, Women in the Nineteenth-Century Art World: Schools of Art and Design for Women in London and Philadelphia (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1998).

<sup>18</sup> Marjorie Jones, "A History of The Parsons School of Design, 1896-1966" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1968).

<sup>19</sup> Kardon, ed. Craft in the Machine Age.

<sup>20</sup> Leach, William. Land of Desire: Merchants, Power and the Rise of a new American Culture (New York: Vintage Books) 1994.

<sup>21</sup> Freya Van Saum, "The Road To Beauty: Stewart Culin and the American Textile and Clothing Industries" (Masters thesis, The Bard Graduate Center For Studies in the Decorative Arts, Design, and Culture, 1999).

<sup>22</sup> The most cited work on the development of the New York garment industry remains Louis Levine, A History of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (New York: B.W. Huebsch, Inc., 1924). See also Roy Helfgott, "Women's and Children's Apparel" in Made in New York: Case Studies in Metropolitan Manufacturing, ed. Max Hall (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1959), 19-134; and Helen E. Meiklejohn, "Dresses – The Impact of Fashion on a Business" in Price and Price Policies, ed. Walton Hamilton (New York: McGraw Hill, 1938), 299-365.

<sup>23</sup> See Ellen Leopold, "The Manufacturing of the Fashion System," in Chic Thrills, A Fashion Reader, eds. Juliet Ash and Elizabeth Wilson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 101-117.

<sup>24</sup> About Women's Wear, in the 1930s, the trade magazine became known as Women's Wear Daily. Hereafter this study will use the initials WWD in endnotes and bibliography, while using the appropriate historic title in the text. For background see Katie Kelly, The Wonderful World of Women's Wear Daily (New York: Saturday Review press, 1972).

<sup>25</sup> The Fashion Group remains centered in New York City where its membership now includes men as well as women.

<sup>26</sup> In his study of industrial art societies, Pulos wrongly asserts that the National Alliance of Art and Industry spawned the Art Center and that an Industrial Arts Council was formed in 1920. Both the National Alliance of Art and Industry and



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the Industrial Arts Council were outgrowths of the Art Center and were initiated in 1931. See American Design Ethic, 293-294.

<sup>27</sup> John Angeline, "Reassessing Modernism: Katherine S. Drier and The Societe Anonyme" (Ph.D. diss., The Graduate School of The City University of New York, 1999); Kathleen McCarthy, Women's Culture: American Philanthropy and Art, 1890-1930 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Wilson, The Machine Age in America and Meikle, Twentieth Century Limited, 189-210.

<sup>29</sup> Alice Hughes, "Miss Hughes Defies Industrial Designers To Explain Choice In Clothes," Oakland (CA.) Post- Enquirer, 9 June 1938.

<sup>30</sup> "Vogue Presents Fashions of the Future – on 9 following pages Costumes by 9 leading industrial designers," Vogue (February 1, 1939): 71-72, 137-146.

<sup>31</sup> The phrase, "Elizabeth Hawes. . . Designer for Millions," derives from the title of an article in a trade journal for home economists by Joan Gardner, Forecast (February, 1938): 57.

<sup>32</sup> Martin, American Ingenuity, 11-13, 87-88; Milbank, New York Fashion, 100,102, 118, 121-123, 153; Valerie Steele, Women of Fashion: 20th Century Designers (New York: Rizzoli, 1991) 90-95.

<sup>33</sup> Bettina Berch, Radical by Design: The Life and Style of Elizabeth Hawes (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1988).

<sup>34</sup> Carol Potter, "Elizabeth Hawes: A Pioneer in the American Designer Movement" (Masters thesis, Parsons School of Design/ Cooper-Hewitt National Museum of Design, 1981).

<sup>35</sup> Jennie Choi, "Elizabeth Hawes: Maverick of American Clothing Design" (Masters thesis, The Bard Graduate Center For Studies in the Decorative Arts, Design, and Culture, 1998).

<sup>36</sup> Elizabeth Hawes, Fashion Is Spinach (New York: Random House, 1938).

<sup>37</sup> Nicole Groult (b.1887) was the sister of the well-known couturier, Paul Poiret. See Paul Poiret et Nicole Groult: maitres de la mode Art Deco (Paris: Musee de la Mode et du Costume, Palais Galliera, 1986).

<sup>38</sup> Hawes, Why Is a Dress? (New York: The Viking Press, 1942).

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<sup>39</sup> My attempt to redefine the parameters of American design should be seen as part of a general reassessment in design studies. See Buchanan and Margolin, eds. Discovering Design; Jeffrey Meikle, "Material Virtues: on the Ideal and the Real in Design History," Journal of Design History 11, no. 3 (1998): 191-199. Penny Sparke. As Long As It's Pink: The Sexual Politics of Taste (London) 1995.

<sup>40</sup> For a history of 1920s and 1930s developments in marketing and advertising see Michele H. Bogart, Artists, Advertising, and the Borders of Art (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Stuart Ewen, Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture (New York: McGraw Hill, 1976); *Ibid.* and Elizabeth Ewen, Channels of Desire: Mass Images and the Shaping of American Consciousness (New York: McGraw Hill, 1982); T. J. Jackson Lears, Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America (New York: Basic Books, 1994); Roland Marchand, Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940 (Berkeley: University of California press, 1985).

<sup>41</sup> Martha Banta, Imaging American Women: Idea and Ideals in Cultural History (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987); Bailey Van Hook, Angels of Art: Women and Art in American Society, 1876-1914 (University Park, Penn: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).

<sup>42</sup> Sheldon Cheney and Martha Candler Cheney, Art and The Machine: An Account of Industrial Design in 20<sup>th</sup>-century America (New York: Whittlesey House, 1936). For a feminist analysis of the canon of graphic design history see Martha Scotford Lange, "Is There a Canon of Graphic Design History? Meet Saints Adolphe, Henri, Herbert, Josef, Laszlo, and Piet," Journal of Graphic Design 11, no. 2 (1991): 3, 5, 9. For women's history in American graphic design see Ellen Mazur Thomson, "Alms for Oblivion: The History of Women in Early American Graphic Design' in Design History: An Anthology ed. by Dennis Doordan (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995), 63-85; *Ibid.*, The Origins of Graphic Design in America 1870-1920 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

<sup>43</sup> Buckley, Cheryl Buckley, "Made in Patriarchy: Toward a Feminist Analysis of Women and Design," Design Issues 3, no. 2 (1986): 3-14.

**PART ONE**  
**INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS FOR FASHION AS DESIGN**

## Chapter 1

## EDUCATING FASHION DESIGNERS: AN EXERCISE IN FEMININITY

Opportunities for women are everywhere. . . Perhaps you would like to be a nurse, or a secretary, a costume designer, or an interior decorator, a landscape architect or a domestic scientist, or any one of a number of things. Go to a vocational school. Develop your talent. Train it (Harper's, 1917).<sup>1</sup>

In The Subversive Stitch (1989), the art historian, Rozika Parker, demonstrates that the long-standing institutionalization of sewing and embroidery as women's tasks created a stereotype of femininity centering around the needle.<sup>2</sup> The introduction of the mass production of women's clothing and subsequent fashion design profession did not alter this. When, in the late 19th century, fashion design was "invented" as an artistic practice with institutions and conventions, there were perceptions about women and their role in making clothing that affected attitudes about the training of designers of girl's and women's apparel. Established hand in hand with an expanding womenswear industry, a fashion design education was conceived as essentially feminine.

Programs specializing in "the great industrial art of garment making" started fashion design on its career, and were organized along gender lines.<sup>3</sup> In contrast to on-the-job training, available to both men and women, the "new" designer would possess a combination of "art" and dressmaking knowledge, and would, more often than not, be a woman. Such programs in art and trade schools catered to girls, had almost exclusively female students, and focused on women's and children's garments. Mostly women comprised the faculty, and instruction was frequently segregated into departments designated for women.

The 1890s were formative years in the new design education. In New York, as elsewhere in the country, it developed in tandem with the growing women's ready-to-wear industry. During this period, the manufacturing of women's garments, which took place in retail and wholesale establishments, expanded from cloaks and suits to include shirtwaists and lingerie, followed in 1900 with the production of dresses.<sup>4</sup> Although ready-mades were available throughout the nineteenth century, an industry producing garments in quantity apparently began in the 1850s, but was limited to loosely fitting outer wear such as cloaks.<sup>5</sup> This was followed in the 1860s by suits for day wear. In the 1890s, shirtwaists and lingerie were manufactured, and in 1910, dresses began to replace cloaks and suits as the most important branch of women's clothing.<sup>6</sup>

Evolving in two distinct phases, the earliest fashion design programs were founded to train designers for the wholesale and retail garment trade in the area of mass production, as well as for custom dressmaker establishments; both ready-to-wear and custom design were considered industrial arts at the time. These included Pratt Institute in Brooklyn (1887) and the New York School of Design (American School of Design) (1896).

Although preparing women for professional occupations outside the home, the first formal training in fashion design had ties with domesticity. The philosophies of Domestic Science and Manual Training provided the initial impetus, and shaped a segregated education with girls slated for cooking and dressmaking and boys for mechanics, occupations for which each sex was deemed naturally suited. The idea was that a girl's natural vocation entailed lightweight tasks related to the home.

These educational models reconfigured stereotypes of masculinity and femininity, based on biological factors, in conformity with increasing industrialization, directing women toward the garment and millinery trade in high-priced wholesale manufactures and dressmaking salons. Backed up by educational theories, this division of spaces and practices helped define the idea of the fashion designer as an extension of the feminine nature; women were simply not expected to have the abilities of men in design, mechanics and engineering.

The second and most active stage took place between 1905 and 1925. The stress on style variety, and the interruption of the market for Parisian designs due to the war influenced a rapid increase in fashion design offerings, in addition to changes in existing programs. The growing gap between custom and mass produced garments, likewise, created a new space in which women could operate. Among the new educators were The New York School (1906) which came to be called, The New York School of Fine and Applied Art (1909-1941), (originally, The Chase School (1896-1898) and today, The New School, Parsons School of Design); Cooper Union (1910s); the Fashion Academy, Inc. (1912); Metropolitan Art School (1919), Brown's Salon Studios; the Traphagen School of Fashion (1923); and Grand Central School of Art (1924).

These programs did not make any significant inroads into the structure of fashion design education. Rather, they reinforced prevalent assumptions about women's work by maintaining a separate path of career study for girls, even though the influence of manual training had declined. Through fashion editorials and educational directories in women's magazines such as Vogue and Harper's

Bazaar, readers were encouraged to consider training in apparel design. Under the heading, "Opportunities for Women," a 1917 Harper's Bazaar states:

Perhaps you would like to be a nurse, or a secretary, a costume designer, or an interior decorator, a landscape architect or a domestic scientist, or any one of a number of things. Go to a vocational school. Develop your talent. Train it.<sup>7</sup>

Such schools did, however, help to transform the domestic artist of the 19<sup>th</sup> century into the fashion designer of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, solidifying the criteria for the collaboration of art and industry. Traditionally, the first response was to place an emphasis on drawing, but by the end of the 1930s, leading institutions required a foundation in garment making. Still the theory and practice of fashion design that evolved in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, while breaking new ground in design for mass production by permanently pairing "design" and "dressmaking," perpetuated tradition through association with women's domestic pursuit of sewing apparel.

Most of the original fashion design programs are only vaguely known through references and descriptions in contemporary career literature, women's magazines, and studies of industrial art such as Charles R. Richards' 1922 Art In Industry, Costume Design as an Occupation (1936), jointly published by The Federated Council on Art Education and the Institute of Women's Professional Relations, and Florence Levy's Art Education in the City of New York (1938).<sup>8</sup> This study examines three New York schools whose records are relatively intact: Pratt Institute, The New York School (The New York School of Fine and Applied Art), and Cooper Union.

The first two institutions stand as monuments to fashion design education as it emerged in the center of the garment industry, and their programs remain unabated. If Pratt, where fashion design was initiated in the 1890s, formulated first principles in the new education, The New York School elaborated its twentieth-century meaning. The curriculum at Cooper Union, in existence from the 1910s to 1945, bridged the divide between the two centuries, highlighting the various models and different notions of fashion design that each entailed.

The following study of these schools, based on trustees reports, school catalogs, and student records, is oriented toward issues of gender and examines links with domesticity and dressmaking in the training of fashion designers. It appears that fashion design did not initially exist as a separate program. Instead, early efforts toward fashion design were made in dressmaking courses. The educational track developed in two major directions which ultimately converged: a two-dimensional design on paper; and a three-dimensional design in draping and garment construction.

### I. The Nineteenth Century: Pratt Institute in Brooklyn

A Brooklyn manufacturer, Charles Pratt, founded Pratt Institute in 1887 as a trade school for the economically disadvantaged. Based on its charter, Pratt sought to provide men and women the means to support themselves in art or manufacture in such areas as "...mercantile, mechanical, mining and manufacturing,...architecture, painting, decorating, music, book-keeping, stenography, type-writing and kindred industries."<sup>9</sup>



When Pratt opened its doors, fashion design was not yet a specific discipline. When it did emerge, it came from a drawing course that formed part of the dressmaking curriculum in the Women's Department. Although Pratt promised both sexes the chance for gainful employment outside the home, there existed from the start a divided educational track, as well as a domestic orientation for female students. According to the 1897-1898 decennial catalog, the first department instituted in 1887 was the Art Department, followed in 1888 by the Women's Department, the Regular Course which became the High School, and what amounted to a men's department - the Department of Mechanic arts, among others.<sup>10</sup>

The Women's Department underwent several name changes reflecting curriculum emphases and educational trends, while retaining the fundamental designation as a female space, and implications of domesticity. Until the 1960s, the department was rooted in the philosophy of Domestic Science and Home Economics. These terms reflect the attempt to apply a systematic and scientific method to housework, involving food preparation, cleaning, hygiene, nursing the sick, and making clothes. Related to germ theory and the so-called "crisis" of the American home, wherein women were perceived as having too much time on their hands, Ellen Richards is credited with founding the science of homemaking. According to her:

It is not a profound knowledge of any one or a dozen sciences which women need, so much as an attitude of mind which leads them to a suspension of judgement on new subjects, and to that interest in the present progress of science which causes them to call in the help of the expert, which impels them to ask, 'Can I do better than I am doing?' 'Is there any device which I might use?' 'Is my house right as to its sanitary arrangement?' 'Is my food the best possible?' 'Have I chosen the right colors and the best materials for

my clothing?' 'Am I making the best use of my time?'<sup>11</sup>

The first catalog of 1888 designated the Women's Department as the Department of Domestic Science, and included dressmaking and cooking at the core of the curriculum. In 1892-1893, this became the Department of Domestic Art and Science, which, in the next year, split into the Department of Domestic Art, offering dressmaking, and the Department of Domestic Science, which taught cooking. These two sections reunited in 1910 to form the School of Household Science and Art which lasted through the 1950s. Since these designations reflected no difference when it came to fashion design, the encompassing term, "Women's Department", will be used.

The 1888 catalog made clear the two-pronged mission of the Women's Department to train women for work inside and outside the home, with an obvious orientation toward traditional women's pursuits and the domestic environment [Fig. 1]. The curriculum revolved around those areas of science and art related to "good housekeeping and home-making," to teach in a practical and at the same time ideal way, those useful and ornamental arts which, as the charter declares:

have reference to matters of household economy and home management, the preparation of clothing, useful and ornamental, of economic and wholesome foods; and to give such instruction in sanitary laws and the laws of hygiene as shall tend to secure comfortable and healthy homes at the least expense, and also a careful regard for bodily health.<sup>12</sup>

In addition, the department intended:

to train those who desire to support themselves by these branches of industry, and to educate women to become skillful in whatever branch of industry they choose, be it house-keeping, cooking, sewing, dress-making or millinery.<sup>13</sup>

Within ten years of Pratt's inauguration, a program in fashion design was underway, aided by the Art Department. Although in a state of flux, the structure put in place remains intact today - that is - a mix of two and three dimensional design – drawing, draping and garment construction - oriented toward mass production.

In 1894, fashion design was initiated in a drawing course in the dressmaking curriculum of the Domestic Art Department. Although not listed among the formal offerings of sewing, dressmaking, millinery, drawing, physical culture, teacher training, and general courses in domestic science and art, the term, "costume design", appeared in the 1894-1895 catalog, and was distinguished from dressmaking and millinery: "The course in drawing and costume design may be undertaken apart from the courses in dressmaking and millinery."<sup>14</sup>

Before the decade's end, fashion design had its own identity in the Domestic Art Department. The 1898-1899 catalog listed a "Special Course" in costume design slated for "designers and illustrators of costume, while retaining a costume design course in the dressmaking program."<sup>15</sup> Based upon drawing, namely the fashion sketch, the course for costume designers and illustrators was identical to the drawing course for dressmakers from which it derived. Both courses belonged to the curriculum of the Women's Department, but came under the direction of the Art Department.<sup>16</sup>

The "special" course in fashion design gradually expanded and developed its own curriculum. In 1905, the first of key pedagogical decisions was made

regarding the teaching and orientation of the subject. This was to accentuate the creative process expressed in design by separating it from the artistic copying of garments on paper – that is - “costume illustration” which was moved to the Art Department.<sup>17</sup>

In 1907, emphasis began to be placed on garment construction, involving considerable technical skills. The heading, “Dress Design and Pattern Drafting,” replaced “Costume Design” as a category in the department’s course listings.<sup>18</sup> Although from the start, aspiring fashion designers had to possess “practical knowledge” of dressmaking and millinery, the inclusion of formal instruction in the design and making of “dress patterns” and “crinoline models” represents an increased concern for the practicalities of putting together a garment, which, by 1910, had to be preceded by ability equivalent to one year’s training in a trade school.<sup>19</sup> According to Pratt’s curriculum, this entailed drafting patterns, cutting, fitting, and sewing by hand and machine.

In her study of the dressmaking profession, Wendy Gamber discusses the high degree of skill required in making a pattern by cutting fabric.<sup>20</sup> She refers to costume historian, Claudia Kidwell’s term, “pin-to-the-form,” by which method a dressmaker made a pattern by draping and pinning paper or inexpensive fabric like muslin or cambric directly on a client.<sup>21</sup> After insuring fit, the dressmaker cut the material forming the garment. This was very different from and more skillful than putting together pieces of cloth cut from standardized patterns. Draping and cutting a pattern was also a way of designing with material, as Gamber notes.

This interest in draping and garment construction signals a mindset that perceived fashion design and dressmaking as inextricably linked. The

combination of drawing, draping, and technical skills redefined the concept of fashion design as only the product of creative imagination, and came to characterize the curriculum at Pratt and design schools everywhere. In short, the new industrial art was indebted to dressmaking, coming out of a drawing course for dressmakers, as it did, and incorporating draping, pattern drafting, and sewing as crucial elements.

Two books on fashion design and illustration written by instructors at Cooper Union provide a window into the dual approach to fashion design. Ethel Traphagen's influential book, Costume Design and Costume Illustration, appeared in 1918 and again in 1932.<sup>22</sup> It concerns fashion design in two dimensions, a conceptual process that receives expression in a drawing. One of the first writers on the teaching of fashion design, while still at Cooper Union, Traphagen started her own fashion school, which endured through the 1980s. The preface to the book's first edition states that in costume design:

one must consider the judging of color, and all that this includes by way of harmonies, contrasts, areas, etc.; the relation of spaces; proper proportions; and the beauty and effect of line, balance and scale arrangements for the production of a design that is dignified, fanciful, frivolous, dainty, formal, or subtle, to express the designer's conception of the purpose of the costume, and its suitability to the wearer and occasion.<sup>23</sup>

In 1940, Ruth Hutton published Dress Designing For A Smart Career. Aside from this how-to-manual, little is known about the author, except that she taught at The New York School of Fine and Applied Art before joining the faculty at Cooper Union where she taught fashion illustration. It was the same year that cutting and draping were introduced.

In her book, Hutton examines both drawing and draping, giving insight into requirements for designing for mass production versus custom made. She indicates that the custom houses favored drawings of a complete garment, whereas the mass production sector of industry preferred sketches of details.

Hutton says:

It is very helpful for a dress designer to know how to make a finished sketch of an original idea in color, showing all of the dressmaking details such as darts, seams, tucks, and so on and indicating whether the material should be cut on the bias or straight of the goods...Custom-made houses sometimes favor the finished drawing. Companies working on a quantity basis make frequent use of the less finished drawing, or croquis, in which emphasis is placed on garment detail...It is important for the designer to have a knowledge of anatomy because she is always working, by means of a sketch or materials, with the human form.<sup>24</sup>

Hutton says further:

There are two approaches to dress designing: one way is to work out the idea directly in muslin or dress material on a dress form, or to draft on a flat surface; another way is to visualize the idea by means of a finished drawing, then drape the pattern in muslin. These two methods often overlap, but whichever approach seems most natural to you is the one to develop. The designer who only works in materials and is unable to draw often finds it necessary to hire a sketcher.<sup>25</sup>

Hutton writes that drafting on a flat surface "...is used more often by manufacturers who sell in quantity, although draping on the form or figure is also used. This method, however, is used more by expensive custom-made or dressmaking houses."<sup>26</sup>

Although the disciplines of dressmaking and fashion design shared drawing and practical dressmaking, they were different in outlook, concentration, and occupational orientation. The former focused on technique and the latter on creativity. The curriculum geared dressmakers toward home sewing and

professional dressmaking establishments, and slated costume designers for retail and wholesale fields which involved mass production.

Fashion design was also more related to drawing than was dressmaking. Fashion design, considered the art side of dressmaking, was first conceived in terms of two dimensions - of sketching on a flat surface an image of something three dimensional. The stress on drawing represents a shift away from handicrafts and their domestic characterization, and a move toward mass production and the machine.

Drawing was at the heart of industrial education, as it was formulated during the 19th century.<sup>27</sup> Drawing was considered essential to artistic and industrial production. Educators believed that it promoted visual and manual coordination and that geometric, model, mechanical, and architectural drawing, rather than picture drawing, would result in better artists, engineers, mechanics, architects, and designers. The Art Department at Pratt, which taught drawing, was the first one opened. The 1888 department catalog outlines the basic attitude relative to design:

Drawing is fundamental; it is the basis of all the constructive industries, all pictorial art and decorative design. It is the language by which a true idea of the form, the appearance, and the decoration of an object is conveyed from one person to another. It is the one universal language, and its importance to the designer and artisan is only comparable with reading and writing. Its applications are various and almost innumerable; but the subject considered as a whole, may be regarded as embracing three divisions, which include all the constructive, representative, and decorative arts...<sup>28</sup>

In contrast, dressmaking had associations with domestic hand work.<sup>29</sup> The linkage between women and garment making has a long history, involving training in needlework and sewing, transmitted to daughters by mothers or other

members of the female sex in the home or family. Until the early decades of this century, and sporadically, thereafter, women were responsible for dressing themselves and their children, through their own talents, or those of a professional dressmaker. Clothes, and how they were made, formed a part of an average girl's upbringing that was not restricted to hours of instruction, but was included in play. Along with miniature stoves, washing machines, and carpet sweepers, toy sewing machines enabled girls to develop future skills by enabling them to make and sew doll clothes.

At Pratt, aspiring dressmakers, geared toward home sewing, or professional dressmaking establishments, gained a high level of technical expertise. A thorough grounding in sewing and garment construction formed the backbone of the Dressmaking curriculum. The program was divided into areas of increasing complexity, moving from cutting and measuring, to fitting and sewing various kinds of apparel such as walking skirts, evening dresses, and jackets. In order to even enter the program, a student had to possess a significant measure of skill.

When mapping a history of the feminizing of fashion design, the common ground between dressmaking and fashion design is more significant than differences. Although the latter was regarded as the creative expression of garment making, there was a theoretical, design, artistic, and creative aspect to dressmaking, in particular in the trade, that set the stage for the early history of fashion design. Gamber's examination of the dressmaking profession exposed the period's dual viewpoint regarding this occupation as an artistic or technical



practice.<sup>30</sup> Within the context of costume design, educators placed emphasis on the mechanical side of dressmaking.

Before the inception of fashion design at Pratt, the dressmaking curriculum had a design and drawing component. The first catalog of 1888 mentions good taste and artistic elements in dressmaking. Two years later, the term "design" appears along with references to creativity, and is described as the outcome of a combination of principles involving hygiene, art, and fabrics:

talks are given on hygiene, the selection of fabrics, and form and harmony of color in dress, in order that the pupil may gain a knowledge of design, and the ability to originate and make tasteful garments.<sup>31</sup>

The ideals of Dress Reform informed these design principles.<sup>32</sup> Beginning in the 1870s, concerns about disease, and dangers to health caused by dragging trains and inadequate warmth made hygiene a strong point in the stand against fashionable garments. Clothes should conform to the natural curves of the body and allow movement. By 1880, the drive for dress reform engaged educators, health hygienists, scientists, and women's radical groups.

At Pratt, Dress Reform ideals relating to health and the body were incorporated into lectures as basic to artistic dress. During the 1894-1895 school year, Mrs. Emily M. Bishop gave three lectures, "The Body, its Education, and its Relation to Dress;" "Different Dress for Different People;" and "The Dress Beautiful, not Expensive" which were "...illustrated by textiles and by garments and dresses designed by herself for different occasions."<sup>33</sup> Dr. Eliza D. Mosher lectured about "Healthful Dress," and Miss Celia Waern on "Beauty in Dress" under the joint sponsorship of the Department of Domestic Science and the

Brooklyn Institute.<sup>34</sup> Literature on hygienic and artistic costume was also in the school library and students were directed to make use of it.<sup>35</sup>

At the same time, drawing became an aspect of dressmaking. Mastery of technical skill was not the goal, as the 1895-1896 catalog notes.<sup>36</sup> Rather, the course in drawing "...cultivates the taste and is found most helpful and suggestive in home decoration, as well as in the selection of wearing apparel." The principal aim was to give students a forum for sketching their own "models," as well as to train the eye and hand.

Drawing first appeared in the catalog in Fall, 1890, but may have been introduced the previous year. In Summer, 1889, Harriet S. Sackett, Director of the Women's Department, traveled to Europe to examine art and industrial education for girls in Germany, England, France, Belgium, and elsewhere on the continent. Her correspondence with Charles Pratt refers to changes in her department that this trip was expected to influence. In a letter of July, 1889, Sackett says, "...We bought some things in Paris which I think will be very valuable to our department. First some good simple casts for our girls to learn the elements of drawing..."<sup>37</sup>

The drawing course in dressmaking expanded over time in tandem with the evolution of the new discipline of Costume Design. The initial 1890 course for dressmakers involved pencil sketches and colored drawings of dresses.<sup>38</sup> This evolved by 1892-1893 to include "...the study of drapery and cylindrical objects, problems in design, use of watercolor, and the study of the human form".<sup>39</sup> For the next two years, drawing was optional, but, in 1894, the same year that

Costume Design was inaugurated, drawing again became mandatory, "...experience having proved its value in addition to practical dressmaking."<sup>40</sup>

The 1894-1895 catalog refers to the course in a much more detailed manner. Now it included brushwork, pen-and-ink, designing gowns, and the study of historic costume. The catalog describes a room:

especially equipped for the purpose, with models of geometric solids and of vase forms, casts of ornament and of the figure, and photographs of famous statues and paintings. For the drawing of the gowns and hats, the department supplies models which express beauty of form and color.<sup>41</sup>

Keep in mind that the drawing course for dressmakers was the same track of study followed by students in Costume Design, although the latter program branched into its own path. The 1901-1902 catalog outlined a three-year program in Costume Design. The first two years were undertaken in the Art Department where instruction entailed "...cast drawing from ornament and the antique, free hand perspective, color, life and portrait drawing, sketching from the figure, composition, design, and the history of art."<sup>42</sup> Part of the second and all of the third year were devoted to a "special study of Costume Design" in the Women's Department, which was identical to the course for dressmakers described above.<sup>43</sup> So, what later became expressed on a flat surface as design and creativity (costume design) was first considered directly in terms of a garment (dressmaking) - "form and harmony of color;" "the ability to originate."<sup>44</sup>

Clearly, dressmaking was something infinitely more than technical. It involved design, creativity, knowledge of materials, and theory, in addition to practical skills. In other words, the sketch began its career in the industrial art of garment making with the introduction of drawing into a dressmaking curriculum,

after which it became fundamental to "Costume Design". In this way, the sketch possessed ties with the female domain of dressmaking and domesticity before the "modern" discipline of fashion design appropriated it.

In her 1938 study of the dress industry, "Dresses - The Impact of Fashion on a Business," Helen Everett Meiklejohn nostalgically considered the creative design aspect of dressmaking:

The conversion of dressmaking from domestic occupation to industry has happened within the lifetime of women who are now forty. At the beginning of the century almost every woman was her own dressmaker. She bought piece goods and patterns, chose the trimmings, and, with the possible aid of a "style book," exercised an enormous amount of ingenuity and imagination in planning and designing.<sup>45</sup>

Another aspect of gender analysis in the education of fashion designers concerns domestic versus professional training. The Pratt department supporting fashion design was a space given over to women, where, initially, home was the focus, with training for the trade providing a secondary emphasis. As late as 1901, the language of domesticity and feminine department resounds in the catalog's opening statement:

This Department provides comprehensive and systematic courses of study in those branches which are related to healthful and appropriate clothing of the body, and to household decoration.

The laws of nature as interpreted by science and art are also studied in their bearing upon the physical development and clothing of the human body. Such study leads to more healthful living, and to the cultivation of good taste and wise economy, and supplements the education usually gained in school life.<sup>46</sup>

Still, the work place was a factor from the beginning, and dressmaking was identified with labor inside and outside the home. From the turn of the

century through the 1910s, department catalogs showed an increase in space and text devoted to "professional training," so, that, by 1907, full-time technical courses for "business" were prioritized over part-time offerings for domestic use.<sup>47</sup> The stated purpose was to train - in this order - teachers, technical workers, and women for the home. In September, 1908 a dressmaking establishment where students could gain practical trade experience was opened on campus.<sup>48</sup>

Not only was the career orientation of the department transformed, but costume design was reconceived. The 1905 break from costume illustration, and subsequent attention to dressmaking skills paralleled the overall shift in work goals. In 1898, costume design was promoted in general terms by training illustrators or designers of costumes. In 1907, the newly-named course in "Dress Design and Pattern Drafting," listed under the "Full Time Technical Courses For Trade Use," aimed at preparing students to become more specifically "technical workers in the costume field."<sup>49</sup> The course description stated:

Costume sketchers for dressmaking establishments, and for factories making shirt-waists, shirt-waist suits, negligees, etc., designers and makers of dress patterns and crinoline models, and of embroidery patterns for dress decoration.<sup>50</sup>

At the same time, there was an appeal to men to study costume design and millinery. According to the 1905-1906 catalog, "...men as well as women [are] admitted to costume design and millinery classes," although nothing suggests a shift in population.<sup>51</sup> Throughout the 1930s, photographs in school catalogs fail to reveal the presence of men in dressmaking and costume design studios. One exception is a photograph documenting the school's participation in

a 1908 exhibition of industrial art in Chicago, which depicts one male student in a dressmaking class.<sup>52</sup>

Because the department remained organized around traditional womanly pursuits, it maintained a domestic context for fashion design, despite the new found stress on trade employment. The School of Household Science and Arts, which, in 1910, superseded the Department of Domestic Art, retained in its very name connotations of female domestic work. This department combined Domestic Art and Domestic Science courses, so that a student enrolled in the program could aspire to become a dressmaker, milliner, costume designer, dietician, matron, or housekeeper.

Although fashion design at Pratt can be seen through the lens of the Women's Department, traditional female pursuits, and domesticity, wider developments in art education and industrial art training place the gender situation within a broader context. With the introduction of manual training into public schools in the 1880s, educators preoccupied themselves with questions about curriculum, including the issue of separate paths of study for boys and girls.

Scholars agree that the Russians influenced the Americans toward the direction of manual training.<sup>53</sup> At the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876, John D. Runkle, President of MIT was struck by an exhibit of woodwork and metalwork produced in the Imperial School at Moscow. For Runkle these objects stood for the possibility of fostering mental discipline in children along with training students for work in industry. This led to the founding of a manual

training high school, and the growth of an influential model of education that reverberates today.

Known as the Manual Training Movement, along with the philosophy of Domestic Science, this kind of education fostered the institutionalization of domestic skills for girls and mechanical skills for boys through basic divisions in industrial art courses, and paved the way for separate spheres in industrial activity. The Regular Course (Technical High School) established in 1888 reveals the nature of manual training at Pratt, and the degree of sexual differentiation operating in these courses. It is worth examining for the insight it gives into the school's educational philosophy, as well as the wider picture of education and its application to the structure of fashion design training.

The program offered a three-year course for both sexes aimed at preparing boys and girls for the tasks of life, be they professional, industrial, or business. Students would be firmly prepared to pursue advanced technical, scientific schooling. The curriculum provided a full range of academic subjects from chemistry to English, in addition to "systematic" courses in drawing, and diverse kinds of manual work.

As the 1890-1891 catalog indicates, boys and girls took the same academic courses, but manual training was completely different throughout the duration, and drawing differed beginning in the second half of the second year.<sup>54</sup> The manual training and drawing courses directed girls toward artistic decoration, neatness, detail work, and light weight tasks related to the home.

The gender difference hinged upon sewing and dressmaking versus foundry and machine work. Manual work for girls came under the Women's

Department, and direction for boys came from the Department of Mechanic Art. Although they shared such courses as wood carving, girls received instruction in sewing, hygiene, and home nursing in the first year, millinery and dress-making in the second term, followed in the last year by cooking and dress-making. Meanwhile, boys were occupied with construction, joinery, forging, welding, and tin-smithing.

When it came to drawing, it was the mechanical kind that spelled out the difference between the sexes. Girls began to be excluded from this type of work when the subject matter was machines. For example, the sexes shared free-hand drawing, architectural drawing, and sketching the effects of light and shade, but the drawing of machine parts - pulleys, screws, forms of gear teeth - belonged to the boys. This approach to education entailed an exercise in constructing femininity and masculinity. The separate curriculum graduated students specialized in careers embedded in perceived sexual difference.

The different requirements for girls and boys in manual training in elementary public schools was then a topic of debate in educational circles. The proper course work, including sewing, and the means to implement it were key concerns. In a paper delivered at an 1895 New York teachers' conference tellingly entitled, "Should Boys and Girls Be Given the Same Kind of Work in Manual Training," Maximilian P. E. Grozmann, Superintendent of the Workingman's School in New York City, spelled out the "natural" aptitudes of each sex.<sup>55</sup> Acknowledging the impossibility of being certain about the difference between boys and girls concerning education in the industrial arts, he observed that attention had been devoted to this and the "...more general sexual problem



of sexual differentiation," but that a solution remained in a nascent stage. Drawing from his own experience of the earliest grades in modeling, paper work, and sewing, he concluded:

the work of the boy is stronger, firmer, more practical: my theory is that they possess a better appreciation of shape and purpose and that they show more originality. The girls, however, do neater work, more accurate in details, more artistic or more decorative, while they are less constructive and somewhat weaker in execution.

All this proved to Grozmann that a "differentiation of aptitudes" existed even among young children. He identified the reason for these findings in terms of differing interests and physical strengths. How was all this to be applied to the manual training curriculum? Girls should be assigned "simple hammering and artistic wood-carving" in light weight materials, whereas the heavier carpentry should be undertaken by boys. Indeed, sewing and the domestic arts, in general, according to Grozmann, should essentially be the work of girls. This is because the home constitutes the main area of interest for women and the domestic arts require less physical strength than shopwork. Boys, in comparison:

especially the older ones, take very little interest in work which does not require the application of their full strength. Nevertheless, they should not be excluded from sewing. In the lowest two grades at least, as you have seen, the interest of the boys in this work is indeed equal to that of the girls.

Mary Schenck Woolman presented a paper at the same conference entitled, "Sewing in the Primary School," which challenged the view that girls were more accurate in details and naturally suited for sewing.<sup>56</sup> From her standpoint, sewing appealed to boys and girls, for one reason - they see their mother doing it, and "immediately" want to sew too. For Woolman, both sexes

had difficulty in learning to sew after a certain age, their hands lacking the "necessary suppleness and dexterity" of first graders.

## II. The Twentieth Century: Cooper Union and The New York School of Art (1898-1909)/The New York School of Fine and Applied Art (1909-1941)

In keeping with nineteenth-century educational philosophies, Cooper Union also arranged a segregated curriculum for the teaching of fashion design. However, this school provides another model for a study of the gendering of the profession. Although fashion design began in a woman's space, it was unrelated to dressmaking for the first thirty years of its existence at Cooper Union.

Founded by a wealthy industrialist, Peter Cooper, Cooper Union was dedicated to "...the union of art and science in their application to the useful purposes of life."<sup>57</sup> In 1859, two years after the building was completed, Cooper Union incorporated The New York School of Design for Women, designating it, The Woman's Art School of New York.<sup>58</sup> The New York School of Design for Women was the first school of industrial art education for women in the city, opening in 1852 at 436 Broadway. It was the third institution in the country organized to prepare women for industrial opportunities, following the Franklin Institute of Design for Women in Philadelphia (1850), and the New England School of Design in Boston (1851). The trustees placed the women's department under the direction of an advisory board comprised of "Lady Managers."

There are no records of the introduction of fashion design and illustration at Cooper Union, but what remains offers insight into the origin and nature of the program. When the Woman's Art School was opened, the subject was not yet offered. According to the 1860 annual report of the trustees, The School of Design for Females will:

...prepare females to become teachers of drawing and painting and to enable them to earn a livelihood by engraving. Pupils will be received into industrial classes without charge...Wood engraving, drawing from models, oil painting and water coloring were among the courses offered. . .<sup>59</sup>

In contrast, architectural free-hand and mechanical drawing, including the drawing of furniture and courses for the "improvement of mechanics and mechanic's apprentices," were offered in the evening for men.<sup>60</sup>

The 1888 report of the Principal of the Woman's Art School indicates an interest in the domestic sciences, pointing toward the direction of a fashion design education. Therein, Susan N. Carter records a field opened to "our" students by the Industrial Education Association:

At the Industrial College, in University Place, about 20 of our scholars are learning Normal Courses in cooking and sewing, in addition to learning to draw at the Cooper Union; and these three branches in combination will enable them to obtain positions in schools which could not afford to support simply a drawing teacher. There are many more of these positions, I am told, than there are teachers to fill them...<sup>61</sup>

From then until 1920, records are scanty, but the 1920 Woman's Art School catalog lists Ethel H. Traphagen as the sole instructor of a course in "Costume Design and Illustration."<sup>62</sup> According to Clay Lancaster, Traphagen was already teaching at Cooper Union in 1913, the year when she won a prize for designing an "American" evening dress in a contest sponsored by The New

York Times.<sup>63</sup> However, this date seems dubious, and might be confused with the fact that Traphagen was associated with the early history of costume design at the New York Evening School of Industrial Art, which was established in 1913.<sup>64</sup> In an article in the garment industry's daily trade paper dated October 8, 1919, Women's Wear, editor, M.D.C. Crawford, mentioned Traphagen as being a lecturer for Cooper Union.<sup>65</sup>

Trained in art at the Art Students League, Cooper Union, the National Academy of Design, and the Robert Henri School, Traphagen developed a significant reputation in the burgeoning field of fashion design.<sup>66</sup> She designed for such upscale New York houses as Thurn, Hickson and Bendel, helping to shape the rise of American fashion culture prior to and after World War I. In addition to writing a textbook on costume design and illustration as early as 1918, and being the first costume designer to appear in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's industrial art exhibitions, Traphagen was on the staff of Dress Magazine, the predecessor of Vanity Fair, and the Ladies' Home Journal. She edited and published Fashion Digest, founded in 1937. In 1923, she opened a fashion design school which operated for more than forty years.

Whenever it became a program, the study of fashion design came into being in the designated female space of the Woman's Art School. Although this merged in 1933 with the rest of Cooper Union to become the Day Art School, fashion design continued to be taught in a gendered environment for the bulk of its thirty or more year existence. The exception was a brief four years in the Art Department, 1936 to 1940, and two years of autonomy, 1943 to 1945. Otherwise, fashion design was associated with traditional women's work. In 1940, it appeared in the Crafts

curriculum along with weaving, and textile and fabric design, and the next year was listed under the Decorative Arts. Fashion design seems to have become a department in 1943, but, by 1945, Cooper Union had abandoned the subject.

Although a space specific to women was discontinued, there was always a strong female presence. When in 1933, the Woman's Art School turned into the Day Art School, both men and women were accepted, at least in theory. But women comprised the fashion design faculty, as they did in the department of Craft and Decorative Arts where for a time the discipline shared a place. Despite the presence of women, it was not until 1938, some fifteen years after fashion design began to be taught, that designing in material and garment construction were included in the curriculum. Previously, the sketch was all important:

Costume Design - Stressing the basic line. Historic costume research and adaptation. Visits to museums. Lecture; Cutting and draping - Elementary and advanced practice in cutting and draping patterns in muslin from sketches of original designs. Designs completed in actual materials for Fashion Show. Outside contacts and cooperation in the clothes manufacturing fields.<sup>67</sup>

In sum, Cooper Union carried in its structure the legacy of nineteenth-century theories about separated education for men and women, while departing from conventional womanly pursuits. This institution bridged the gap between tradition and modernity in its approach to fashion design. As in other programs initiated in the early decades of the twentieth century, the fashion sketch was adopted, corresponding precisely to the training for industry agreed upon among educators since the previous age. Draping and garment construction were added, but very late in date, and never formed a substantial part of the curriculum.

Something similar occurred at The New York School of Art (1898-1909) and its successor, the New York School of Fine and Applied Art (1909-1941). This institution originated from an art school founded in 1896 by William Merritt Chase whose program consisted of painting and drawing. In 1904, when as the 1925-1926 school catalog says "...our national 'Design Movement,' so-called, had begun to take form," Frank Alvah Parsons joined the faculty in order to establish a design curriculum.<sup>68</sup> A Department of Crafts and Costume Design is first recorded in the 1907-1908 catalog along with four other new departments informed by the design orientation: Drawing and Painting, Normal Training, Interior Decoration and House Furnishings, and Textile and Wall Paper Designing. By 1912, Costume Design formed an autonomous department.

At first, the school treated the subject in two dimensions. Like Cooper Union, it taught students through drawing, based on the study of the figure. However, in 1915, and again, in 1920, designing in materials was introduced: "...design and draping with actual materials will be introduced as a required sequel to the creation of design."<sup>69</sup>

A dressmaking model became firmly established in the inter-war period. The 1922-1923 catalog listed a course in "...dress construction and the making of simple clothes, to insure facility in handling materials".<sup>70</sup> The next year provided instruction in:

learning to design to meet a selling price...and the practical training which leads to designing models in muslin and developing a limited number of these designs in actual materials, with accessory work which teaches the essentials of work-room routine and management. This work is progressive and the third year is intensive on the practical, material side.<sup>71</sup>

Among the subjects treated were:

Anatomy in Muslin; Sketching with Scissors; the Meaning of Line in Clothes; Light and Shade in Materials; Proportion, the All-Important; Architecture of Costume Design; Taste, the Undeveloped Sense in Costume, and How to Relate and Connect these with Industry; Designing to Meet a Selling Price; Work-room Management; Running a Stockroom; Work of a helper, finisher, assistant draper, draper, fitter, assistants, designer, etc.<sup>72</sup>

The year 1925 marks the time when "Costume Design and Costume Construction" formed a department, but despite this, garment construction was not permanently linked with design until the end of the 1930s. Before then, the offerings were sporadic and varied with students selecting a concentration in either two or three-dimensional design. For example, although students typically shared beginning work in designing on paper (and in costume illustration), in 1925-1926, the Department of Costume Design and Costume Construction had a track in dress construction, and another in costume design and costume illustration. The following year, the two tracks were combined in the first year, and then split into a specialty. (Costume illustration remained in the curriculum until forming its own discipline in 1954.)

The example of the New York School of Fine and Applied Art reveals the paradigm of the modern fashion designer. Different priorities and different conditions in the production of womenswear distinguished it from its nineteenth-century predecessor. Indeed, the institution projected an aura of being up-to-date, making Pratt and even Cooper Union seem old fashioned in comparison. The curriculum did not develop in an environment singled out as female by its very name. Early on, it had a department devoted solely to fashion design, which boasted an occasional male instructor, such as Robert Kalloch, Travis Banton,

and Louis M. Pinkney.<sup>73</sup> The pages of the school's catalog expressed developments in modern typography and art, and school advertising stood out profoundly. The institution self-consciously tapped into current events and tendencies, capitalizing on them for marketing purposes. The phrase, "Prepare for Industrial Efficiency," which appeared in Harper's school directory, promotes a sensibility very unlike the designation, "School of Household Science and Arts".<sup>74</sup> The stress on marketing manifested rising consumerism, and also Frank Alvah Parsons' professional outlook. Not the least of his accomplishments were several books about advertising, as well as a history of dress.<sup>75</sup>

When Pratt opened its doors, the mass production of women's attire was still in evolution, and the dressmaking profession and custom garment represented significant factors in the trade.<sup>76</sup> By the 1910s, style variety had developed as the force driving the garment industry, and by 1930, ready-to-wear had all but eliminated the dressmaking trade.<sup>77</sup> The situation required a new kind of worker, one who did not emanate from the technical side of garment production, but served the demand for variety that planned obsolescence dictates. Yes, the fashion sketch came to the fore at the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but in light of the consumption habits of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it assumes significance as the creative medium in the endless supply of new styles. In such a setting and outlook, the fashion design profession began its modern career.

By the end of the 1930s, the New York School of Fine and Applied Art ultimately utilized a two-pronged approach to fashion design that remains typical of art and design schools today. This set of circumstances represents a redefinition of the profession and the application of new meaning to practical



garment making. The same period that witnessed the development of style variation and the dominance of the sketch saw expertise in the mechanical aspects of clothing become an indispensable part of a fashion designer's education. This was one consequence of a widespread reassessment, prompted by manufacturers, of the curriculum, resulting in technique, as well as creativity to be increasingly seen as a necessary component of every fashion designer.

In his 1922 study of industrial art, Richards had identified the dissatisfaction felt by manufacturers regarding the perceived failure of fashion design programs to consider processes of production.<sup>78</sup> At the heart of the problem lurked the inability of school-room learning – that is – the fashion sketch, to adapt to the mechanical requirements of putting together an article of clothing. The incorporation of garment construction on the part of the New York School of Fine and Applied Art and Cooper Union should be seen against this background. In connection with Richards' book, Frank Alvah Parsons had served on a committee delegated to study the design work done in leading art schools, testifying to his awareness of the issues.<sup>79</sup> According to the 1915-1916 catalog of the New York School of Fine and Applied Art, the aim of inaugurating draping as a subject was to establish ..."practical correlation with some of New York's best houses".<sup>80</sup> At the same time, the school initiated visits from professionals in the trade.<sup>81</sup>

Clearly, the recognition that the design of a garment could not effectively be divorced from the process of making entailed a reversal of attitudes back toward the dressmaking profession and skills that the new industry aimed intentionally to replace. The realignment of the new "industrial art of garment

making”, to borrow a phrase of Traphagen,<sup>82</sup> with conventional women’s work left largely unchanged a belief in woman’s natural affinity for making clothes, while creating a new stereotype of female labor in terms of the machine.

In this light, it is, perhaps, unsurprising that traditional assumptions about women and their relationship to sewing and technology also affected the structure of the New York School of Fine and Applied Art. If not a deliberate policy of separate education, fashion design began its career in the Craft curriculum where it remained for six years. This blending of clothing and crafts is highly evocative of domestic handiwork. Despite masculine activity, women dominated the teaching staff; three leading faculty members from the 1910s through the 1930s were Zerelda Rains, Grace Fuller, and Elsie Brown Barnes.<sup>83</sup>

Records of graduates reveal only a handful of male students from the school’s founding until the late 1940s.<sup>84</sup> Francis J. Geck, who in the early 1920s studied stage design, recalled a required sewing class which came under the direction of the costume design program.<sup>85</sup> Of eighteen females, he and Adrian, who later became famous as a Hollywood designer, were the only men.

The conflict between the educational and business spheres that reared its head in the 1920s spilled into the 1930s. Hawes, for example, engaged the issue in Fashion Is Spinach. She thought a designer should know how to cut, drape, and sew. Her experience in ready-to-wear had taught her that manufacturers were skeptical and derisive of design on paper, and, she believed, rightly so:

No one should dare to design anything he can't make himself. The craftsmen in the wholesale businesses in America have acquired a complete disrespect for a certain kind of people who call themselves designers and are only sketchers.<sup>86</sup>

In scarcely more than a decade later, the fashion designer and educator, Gertrude Cain, captured the sentiment in hilarious illustrations in The American Way of Designing (1950). In the chapter outlining the talent and the training required for a fashion design career, a student shows a design sketch to a colleague in order to demonstrate the problems in translating a drawing into a garment: "The teacher just said I should show some seams - or learn how to knit!"<sup>87</sup> [Fig. 2]. The chapter entitled, "The Factory and the Designing Room," opens with a depiction of a "machinist" faced with a designer's sketch: "You say you want a machine to do what?"<sup>88</sup> [Fig. 3].

## Notes For Chapter 1

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<sup>1</sup> "Schools," Harpers (December 1917): 26.

<sup>2</sup> Rozika Parker, The Subversive Stitch, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc., 1989).

<sup>3</sup> Traphagen, Costume Design and Illustration (1932), unpaginated.

<sup>4</sup> The history of women's ready-to-wear developed in two main directions: retail businesses, such as department stores, and wholesale manufacturing. The first report on a women's clothing industry does not appear until the 1860 Census. Evidence for its earlier existence derives from department store catalogs and contemporary accounts. For an overview of the beginning of retail and the high end of wholesale production see Milbank, New York Fashion, 16-32. For the early history of the low end of wholesale manufacturing see Levine, A History of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, 7-17; 99-104; 144-146. For information about the monetary and economic growth of production see Helfgott, "Women's and Children's Apparel," 48-54. For a discussion from the point of view of department stores see Booton Herndon, Bergdorf's on the Plaza: The Story of Bergdorf Goodman and a Half Century of American Fashion (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956); Bernice Fitz-Gibbon, Macy's, Gimbel's and Me (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1951). For a comprehensive view see Sarah Johnson, "Two-Dimensional Woman: Department Store Production, Distribution and Consumption of American Women's Clothing, 1865-1900," Ph.D. diss, University of Brighton, UK, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> The term "ready-made" refers to a pre-made garment to be altered for fit by the wearer. This type of clothing preceded the mass production of ready-mades to be known as ready-to-wear. For a history of ready-mades see Philippe Perrot, Fashioning the bourgeoisie, a history of clothing in the nineteenth century, trans. Richard Bienvenu (Princeton: Princeton University Press: 1994), 36-57; Beverly Lemire, "Redressing the History of the Clothing Trade in England: Ready-made Clothing, Guilds, and Women Workers, 1650-1800," Dress 21 (1994): 61-78.

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed account of the dress industry see Meiklejohn, "Dresses," 299-365.

<sup>7</sup> "Schools," Harpers (December 1917): 26.

<sup>8</sup> Charles R. Richards, Art In Industry, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922), 251-306; Mrs. Woodhouse, Costume Design as an Occupation (New York: The Federated Council on Art Education and the Institute of Women's Professional Relations, 1936), 42-57; Florence Levy, Art Education in the City of New York (New York: School Art league of New York, 1938), 44-121. Women's magazines such as

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Vogue and Harpers devoted a section to school directories.

<sup>9</sup> Margaret Latimer, "Field of Influence: A Centennial History of Pratt Institute," 1988, p. 39, Archives of Pratt Institute Library (hereafter cited as API).

<sup>10</sup> Pratt Institute Course Catalog, 1897-1898, unpaginated (hereafter cited as PIC), API.

<sup>11</sup> Ellen Richards quoted in Caroline Hunt, The Life of Ellen H. Richards, (Washington, D.C.: The American Home Economics Association, 1958), 141. See Catharine E. Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, The American Woman's Home: or, Principles of Domestic Science, Being A Guide to the Formation and Maintenance of Economical, Healthful, Beautiful and Christian Homes (1869; reprint, Watkins Glen, NY: Library of Victorian Culture, 1979). For a scholarly analysis of the philosophy of Domestic Science and Home Economics see Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English, For Her Own Good (New York: Anchor Books, 1978; reprint 1978), 141-183.

<sup>12</sup> PIC, 1888-1889, unpaginated.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 1894-1895, 51.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 1898-1899, 38.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 1894-1895, 60.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 1905-1906, unpaginated.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 1907-1908, 42.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 1894-1895, 61; Ibid., 1910-1911, 71.

<sup>20</sup> Gamber, The Female Economy: The Millinery and Dressmaking Trades, 1860-1930 (Urbana: University of Illinois press, 1997), 129-132. I would also like to thank Sarah Johnson for our discussions.

<sup>21</sup> See Claudia Kidwell and Margaret C. Christman, Suiting Everyone: The Democratization of Clothing in America (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1974).

<sup>22</sup> For a discussion concerning Traphagen and her role as educator see p. 77-78 below.

<sup>23</sup> Traphagen, Costume Design, unpaginated.

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<sup>24</sup> Ruth Hutton, Dress Designing For A Smart Career (Home Institute, Inc., 1940), 4.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>27</sup> See Arthur D. Efland, A History of Art Education (New York: Teachers College Press, 1990), 92-11; David Brett, "Drawing and the Ideology of Industrialization," in Design History: An Anthology, ed. Dennis P. Doordan (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995), 3-16.

<sup>28</sup> PIC, 1888, unpaginated.

<sup>29</sup> For a 19<sup>th</sup> century perspective see Timothy Shay Arthur, Advice to Young Ladies on Their Duties and Conduct in Life (Boston: Abel Tompkins, 1849); Catharine E. Beecher, A Treatise on Domestic Economy, for the use of Young Ladies at Home, and at School, 2nd ed. (Boston: Thomas H. Webb, 1842). For a critical analysis of women and domesticity see Harvey Green, Light of the Home (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), 48-52; Nancy Page Fernandez, "If a Woman Had Taste. . .: Home Sewing and the Making of Fashion, 1850-1910," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Irvine, 1987).

<sup>30</sup> Gamber, The Female Economy, 133.

<sup>32</sup> See Mary Stella Newton, Health, Art and Reason (London: John Murray, 1974); Mary Frances Drake and Josette H. Rabun, "Warmth In Clothing: A Victorian Perspective," Dress, The Journal of the Costume Society of America 9 (1983): 24-31; Patricia Cunningham, "Annie Jenness Miller and Mabel Jenness: Promoters of Physical Culture and Correct Dress," Ibid., 16 (1990): 49-61; Wilson, Adorned in Dreams, 208-227.

<sup>33</sup> PIC, 1895-1896, 54.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>37</sup> Harriet S. Sackett to Charles Pratt, 5 July 1889, Harriet S. Sackett Papers, API.

<sup>38</sup> PIC, 1890-1891, 48.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 1892-1893, 35.

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 1894-1895, 60.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 1901-1902, 40.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 1890-1891, 48.

<sup>45</sup> Meiklejohn, "Dresses," 311.

<sup>46</sup> PIC, 1901-1902, 33.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 1907-1908, 42.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 1907-1908, 53.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 1905-1906, 44.

<sup>52</sup> The Chicago Industrial Education Committee with the Annual Meeting of the National Society for the Promotion of Industrial Education under the Direction of Charles H. Morse of the Massachusetts Commission on Industrial Education, Chicago Exhibition of Industrial Schools (The State Board of Publication, 1908), 63.

<sup>53</sup> See Adolphe E. Meyer, An Educational History of the American People (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, Inc., 1992) 237; Efland, A History of Art Education, 165-166; M. Lazerson and W.N. Grubb, American education and vocationalism: A documentary history, 1870-1890 (New York: teachers College Press, 1974); Lewis Flint Anderson, History of Manual and Industrial School Education (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1926).

<sup>54</sup> PIC, 1890-1891, 14-25.

<sup>55</sup> Maximilian P. E. Grozmann "Should Boys and Girls Be Given the Same Kind of Work in Manual Training," (1895) quoted in Clarke, Art and Industry, vol. 3, Industrial and Technical Training in Voluntary Associations and Endowed Institutions, 1097-1098.

<sup>56</sup> Mary Schenck Woolman, "Sewing in the Primary School," quoted in Clarke, Art and Industry, vol.3, 1100.

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<sup>57</sup> Peter Cooper, Charter, Trust Deed, and By-Laws of the Cooper Union (New York: Wm. C. Bryant and Co., 1859) quoted in Allaback, "Better than silver and gold," 93.

<sup>58</sup> For a discussion of this matter and the early history of women's design school see Allaback, "Better than silver and gold," 88-107; Margaret Haller, "A New Profession for Women," At Cooper Union 12 (1978): 4-6.

<sup>59</sup> Trustees Report, 1860, Annual Trustees Reports, Archives at Cooper Union Library (hereafter cited as CUL).

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Susan N. Carter to Trustees, 1888, CUL.

<sup>62</sup> Cooper Union, Woman's Art School Catalog, 1920 (hereafter cited as CUC), p.16, CUL.

<sup>63</sup> Clay Lancaster, The Japanese Influence in America (New York: Walton H. Rawls, 1963), 233.

<sup>64</sup> "Taught Famous U. S. Designers Fashion Experts Ethel Traphagen Dies," New York Herald Tribune 30 April 1963.

<sup>65</sup> M.D.C.Crawford, "John Crompton Lauds Cooperation Between American Industries and Museums – Brooklyn Teachers' Association's Lectures on Costume Design to Be Public," WWD, 8 October 1919, Culin Archival Collection, General Correspondence, 1.4.004, Brooklyn Museum Library (hereafter cited as CAC).

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> CUC, 1938, 24.

<sup>68</sup> New York School of Fine and Applied Art School Catalog, 1925-1926 (hereafter cited as NYSFA), p.3, Archives at Parson School of Design Library (hereafter cited as APSD). See also Jones, A History of Parsons.

<sup>69</sup> NYSFA, 1915-1916, 20.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 1922-1923, 19.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 1923-1924, 19-20.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>73</sup> Both Banton (1894-1958) and Kalloch (b. 1893) made careers designing for



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Hollywood. See Leese, Costume Design in the Movies, 26-28; 63-24.

<sup>74</sup> See Schools, Harpers (September - November, 1917).

<sup>75</sup> For a discussion of this matter see p. 61-63 above. See Frank Alvah Parsons, The Principles of Advertising Arrangement (New York: The Prang Co., 1912); The Principles of Advertising (New York: Ronald Press Co., 1920); The Art of Dress (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran and Company Inc., 1928).

<sup>76</sup> For a discussion of this matter see p. 67-69 above.

<sup>77</sup> For more on this topic see p. 103 above.

<sup>78</sup> The chapter on costumes treats the issues of training and production in Richards, Art In Industry, 11-47.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.* NYSFA, 1915-1916, 6.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> Traphagen, Costume Design, unpaginated.

<sup>83</sup> As of now nothing more is known about these women, but I plan to research this topic in the future.

<sup>84</sup> NYSFA, Lists of Graduates, 1926-1950, APSD.

<sup>85</sup> Costume Designs of Francis J. Geck, APSD.

<sup>86</sup> Hawes, Fashion is Spinach, 200.

<sup>87</sup> Gertrude Cain, The American Way of Designing (New York: Fairfield Publications, Inc., 1950), unpaginated.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

## Chapter 2

### FASHION DESIGN AND MUSEUMS, 1909-1928

The museum of industrial art `...is concerned with the products of industry, but only in so far as art is a distinctive element in their production' (Charles Richards, 1927)<sup>1</sup>

Instead of the usual method of importing modern foreign costumes [themselves based, generally, on foreign museum collections], our designers, familiar with the practical needs of today, have gone direct to original documents for their inspiration. The work, therefore, marks one of the most important movements in the development of a truly American type of industrial art. Last year I described in the Journal a similar development among the fabric designers of the city...Not a day passes but I see some textile design either worn in a garment or on display in a shop window that owes its origin to museum inspiration. Thus the Museum has been responsible not only for commercial prosperity but also, by the character of the designs, for an improvement in national taste (M.D.C. Crawford, 1918).<sup>2</sup>

In the 1880s, The Metropolitan Museum of Art rallied behind art and industry, determined to develop an American design in the nation's and the museum's self-interest, although not yet in terms of the garment trade. Forty years later, when the museum's broader mission included fashion design, Richard Bach, appointed associate curator for industrial art in 1918, wrote that collecting and displaying good design was useful to museums. In a 1921 article published in a professional museum journal, entitled, "Museums and the Trades," he stated that ". . .boosting American industrial art through museum activity" not only economically advanced the nation, but could also benefit the institutions which furthered it:

Trustees are business men – do they make it possible for their own museums to help business men? Good designs mean sales, sales mean money, money may mean business support of museums. Do we need it?<sup>3</sup>

It may be surprising to learn that The Metropolitan Museum of Art's mission to support art and industry was stated in its charter: "...For the purpose of...encouraging and developing...the application of arts to manufacture and practical life."<sup>4</sup> The museum building erected in Central Park in 1880 singled out a space for the products of industry.<sup>5</sup> At the opening ceremony, a sign indicated that the large hall on the lower floor would be devoted to the collection of industrial art. The intention was to obtain and exhibit objects showing the progress and methods of manufactures from the raw materials to completion. From 1880 to 1892, the museum conducted an Industrial Art School and offered a range of courses such as woodwork, metalwork, drawing, design, plumbing, and carriage drafting in spaces either rented or donated by benefactors.

In the 1910s and 1920s, "industrial art" became a topical issue in American museum circles and resulted in the introduction of new policies. Professional articles and lectures widely discussed the purpose and organization of museum space devoted to this class of objects. Two books by Charles R. Richards, who had a distinguished career in the industrial arts, dramatize the interest: The Industrial Museum (1925), and Industrial Art and The Museum (1927).<sup>6</sup> A previous volume, Art In Industry (1922), written when Richards was associated with the New York Department of Education, also demonstrates the period's preoccupation. <sup>7</sup>

In Industrial Art and The Museum, Richards identifies the museum of industrial art as one "...that is concerned with the products of industry, but only in so far as art is a distinctive element in their production."<sup>8</sup> Here he differentiates from

industrial museums treating science, agriculture, industry, and transportation, subjects he had explored in his earlier study.

In defining the industrial art museum, Richards provides a contemporary definition of “industrial art”. Typically he interchanges the term, “industrial art”, with “applied” art to refer to hand and machine-made objects of use. For Richards there was no difference between objects from the past and present wherein “...the effort has been made to introduce the element of beauty.”<sup>9</sup> In this sense, historic dress, furniture, textiles, dinnerware, and the like were considered industrial art and housed in art museums along with paintings and sculptures. For purposes of display, the tendency was to bring together furnishings from a period, as in the case of the “Philadelphia Room” in The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s American wing.

Richards based his study on European models, while offering an overview and advice concerning museum methods in America. Unlike America, where there were no institutions exclusive to the aims of commerce and art, by the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, museums across the Atlantic accommodated the products of industry, setting them aside from the fine arts, and taking as an example the first public design museum in Europe, South Kensington Museum, which opened in 1852.<sup>10</sup> This choice marks an important indicator of a mindset that elevated the fruits of commerce, and encouraged the use of historic handmade objects as prototypes for modern industry. The education of public taste with a view toward creating consumers for a nation’s manufactures was also a function of European industrial art museums.

Taking cues from Europe, museum administrators resolved to bring “artistic” resources to the American design community, and inaugurated a regime of exhibitions and educational programs in which historic examples of industrial art played a crucial role.<sup>11</sup> The purpose of the stress on useful objects was to provide models and guidance for designers and craftsmen, as well as the wider business community of salespeople, buyers, manufacturers, and retailers. Especially pertinent to New York museums were exhibitions of contemporary industrial art. The aim was not only to inspire the commercial world, but to acquaint the buying public with the products of the country’s manufacturers and designers.

The burst of interest in American design owed much to the outbreak of World War I and the fear that the country would be cut off from the European market. This chapter looks closely at how the women’s garment industry anticipated the loss of Parisian designs, and joined with museums to fill the gap by cultivating native talent and productivity with a view to making styles independent of Paris, contributing to the conception of a modern American fashion and the professionalization of the American fashion designer.<sup>12</sup>

### I. Museums and the Women’s Garment Industry

In the 1910s and 1920s, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Brooklyn Museum of Art, and The American Museum of Natural History fostered a relationship with the women’s garment industry, ensuring a nurturing environment for designers, manufacturers and the extended fashion community.<sup>13</sup> The main

impetus began in 1917 when the war threatened access to French products, albeit the threat never materialized and Parisian designs continued to be imported.

The goal was nothing less than to develop the country's fashion design potential, using the collections as inspiration for styles and fabrications as opposed to Paris. Taken together the collections involved costumes, textiles, furniture, and sundry items, ranging in scope from North American plains Indians to eighteenth-century French dress. Both The Brooklyn Museum and The American Museum of Natural History housed large groupings of nonwestern objects from the Americas and Asia, whereas European art dominated The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

As a concept, the Americanization of fashion was inextricably linked with the mass production of womenswear and style ideas dependant on American creativity, materials, and technology. Predicated on the collections housed in American museums, emphasis was placed on apparel designed by Americans and produced in American factories with American manufactured materials. Herein lies the key to a definition of American fashion that looked to the nation's museums as a remedy for solving problems of style and design. What emerged was a truly American fashion design inspired by American museum collections.<sup>14</sup>

Although custom houses no doubt benefited, the available records shed light on the wholesale manufacturers and designers representing the mass production sector of the womenswear industry (coats, dresses, blouses and suits) who avidly took advantage of curatorial expertise, collections, and professional training granted by museums. The manufacturers included J. Rapoport & Co., E.J. Wile & Co., Blanck and Co., Harry Collins, B.C. Faulkner, and J. Wise Company.<sup>15</sup> Designers

who participated were Max Meyer of A. Beller & Co., Jessie Franklin Turner of Bonwit Teller & Co., Edward L. Mayer, Mary Walls of John Wanamaker's department store and Winifred Warren. Equally important were the textile manufacturers such as H.R. Mallinson & Co. and the Cheney Bros., and their designers, who maintained connections with these museums and who supported the garment industry through dress fabrics.

The museum alliance with the garment industry was crucial in Americanizing fashion, coming as it did when the mass production of womenswear and the fashion design profession were in nascent stages, and the status of fashion designers, manufacturers, and their products was overshadowed by Paris, even in the trade.<sup>16</sup> The vision of an American fashion stood at the forefront of an emerging womenswear industry, insofar as the design process and profession of designer were concerned.

At the time, the women's garment industry, comprised of wholesale and retail establishments, was relatively new and undergoing rapid changes. The ready-to-wear industry was fast expanding in size and scope to the demise of custom apparel.<sup>17</sup> By 1920, although custom garments continued to be made in fine department stores and dressmaking salons, the womenswear industry manufactured all manner of apparel and required good designers.<sup>18</sup>

However, the current stress on formal training was not yet firmly established. The task of fashion design and the profession of fashion designer were in formation. Designing could involve sketching, draping (designing with fabric directly on a model), and pattern making in combination or alone. In the cloak and suit

industry, the “designer” was the cutter or the pattern maker.<sup>19</sup> In this industry, possibly, the owner dictated the style carried out by the pattern maker and cutter. It was generally men who received training in industry. Women attended fashion design programs, where they concentrated on women's clothes, and were geared toward the high end of business in custom houses, department store salons, and wholesale manufacturing of dresses. The earliest known costume design programs were initiated in the 1890s, such as Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, but were not widespread or strong components of the training afforded designers until the 1910s and 1920s.<sup>20</sup>

Harnessing the capabilities of the garment and textile industries and educating designers was one thing, but the public perception of American fashion posed a more compelling problem for the industry's success. In order to develop an American fashion, the glorified image of Parisian couture had to be abandoned. Despite the fact that the French influence was not all encompassing, the American fashion press and advertising marketed Paris as the embodiment of all that was beautiful.

The French influence was strong, as a design source, but varied.<sup>21</sup> Garments produced in the low end of the market, which supplied the majority of women, often bore little resemblance to the French model, which served as inspiration. In order to accommodate middle and working-class consumers, manufacturers altered in trim, color, and fabrication the designs purchased from Paris.



The 1915 and 1916 United States labor bulletins shed light on the design process in the cloak and suit industry. Accordingly, the designer, who was "the first person" involved in the process of manufacturing garments, designs a single foundation pattern for each of the styles or lines being proposed for production.<sup>22</sup> Sometimes the standard pattern holds over from season to season with no substantial alterations:

It is to be understood that from a single satisfactory standard pattern, as described, the designer usually develops a number of variant styles. This is accomplished by designing for use with a suitable body pattern two or more forms of sleeve, collar, lapel, pocket, etc., and also by different uses and combinations of trimmings.<sup>23</sup>

Many high-priced wholesale and custom houses imported Parisian garments or copied famous French couturiers. Some, like Thurn in New York, even put Paris labels in their garments on the theory that American women regarded French clothes as superior. A handful of wholesale manufacturers, such as Max Meyer & Co, created original garments and used their own labels.<sup>24</sup> Many of the latter worked in league with museums, as this chapter shows.

Although museums were key in supporting American fashion and aligned themselves publicly with local designers during the 1910s and 1920s, they were not alone in this endeavor. They participated in a growing interest in American-made clothes and subsequent rise in importance of fashion designers and garment manufacturers. It was during these years that programs specializing in costume design burgeoned and set the designated task of fashion designer on its professional path. Retailers and the fashion press began to refer in positive terms to the nation's ready-to-wear. For example, in 1911, Saks & Company advertised

clothes from two continents.<sup>25</sup> The following year, The New York Times sponsored an American fashion design contest and announced the winners in the February 23, 1913 issue: Ethel Traphagen, Ruth Turner Wilcox, and Irma Campbell.<sup>26</sup>

Around the same time, American frocks appeared in a series of thirty one fashion films released by the Pathe Company.<sup>27</sup> These "shorts," made to accompany feature films, were directed by Florence Rose, fashion columnist for The New York Evening Mail. By celebrating American clothes, "Florence Rose Fashions" departed from the French modes which the fashion newsreels had promoted since inception around 1910. The American fashion shorts, debuting in 1917, tied-in with articles in leading newspapers, which together with the films indicate the wide interest in the country's own fashion design in the early decades of the twentieth century.

In light of this brief history, we come to understand how significant the institutional support of museums would be for providing garment manufacturers and designers the means to break from the French influence and establish something uniquely American.<sup>28</sup> Through exhibitions and educational programs, they bolstered industry, permitting the development of dress fabrics and styles independent of Paris, and gave identity to designers, manufacturers, and American-made clothes, at a time when the structure of the fashion industry failed to permit such recognition.

## II. Educational Programs And American Fashion Design

The museum effort to connect with the garment trade first took place in the area of education, when The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The American Museum of Natural History, and The Brooklyn Museum of Art opened up their collections,

provided consultation, and established study rooms and lecture programs to provide artistic possibilities exclusive of contemporary Parisian fashion. According to the evidence of museum bulletins, exhibition catalogs, and professional journals, The Metropolitan Museum of Art set the pace, engaging manufacturers in general in 1907. Two years later, it oriented itself toward the garment industry by opening the Textile Study Room devoted to lace and textiles where designers.<sup>29</sup> In 1917, rooms were established for the study of prints and Egyptian art, and in 1919, a space was provided for "Far Eastern" art, where objects could be studied at close range. A "Copyist's Room" was set up for in depth observation of works taken from the galleries.

None of these rooms were specifically set aside for the garment trade. Professionals from a variety of design fields in addition to design students, teachers, and merchandisers could take advantage of the experts in clothing, advertising, jewelry, furnishings, package design, and decorative arts that were kept on staff to offer advice. A 1918 photograph reveals the design activity in the Textile Study Room where a member of the museum staff consults with a woman about a piece of fabric, while in the background another woman examines a garment.

In 1914, the museum inaugurated another phase of outreach in the form of lectures and courses under the direction of the Department of Educational Work. In addition to the study rooms, these programs served the general concerns of business, and early on apparel played an important role. For example, in Spring, 1915, five of the six lectures ". . .designed to meet the needs of buyers, salespeople

and students of design” were related to clothing, specifically Egyptian, Greek and Japanese “costume,” and lace.<sup>30</sup> Beginning in 1917, Grace Cornell of Teachers College of Columbia University, herself a designer, oversaw these courses, and the next year, the museum created the Industrial Arts Division, naming Richard Bach as director.<sup>31</sup> In this position, Bach visited factories, design studios, and craftspeople in order to interpret the museum holdings for designers and manufacturers.

It appears that The American Museum of Natural History was the second to develop ties with the garment industry. Unlike The Metropolitan Museum of Art, which took an eclectic approach toward industrial art, this institution concentrated especially on fashion and textile design. Such a posture was largely due to M.D.C. Crawford, who directed the museum's industrial art activities. Crawford, a Research Associate in Textiles in the museum's Department of History, was also a design and research editor for the garment industry's influential trade paper, Women's Wear.<sup>32</sup> For his part, Crawford credited the paper's publisher, E.W. Fairchild, with the notion of seeking ideas “...in design and texture and silhouette” from museums during the war: “I took this problem up with the American Museum of Natural History and The Brooklyn Museum of Art. I explained the needs of the industry and the ways of designers. I outlined the nature of the emergency.”<sup>33</sup> The year was 1916 and the war in Europe threatened Paris.

Based on the museum's journal, by Spring, 1917, The American Museum of Natural History had set up educational opportunities in lectures and

workshops to supply the design needs of the garment and textile industry, and Crawford was earnestly promoting the cooperation of the museum, designers, and manufacturers. In fact, through Crawford, we come to appreciate the role of textile design and mass production in the conception of a modern American fashion, as well as fashion's place in a history of design.

In a series of articles, Crawford elucidated the institution's philosophy of education, and a record of its achievement. The first example, "Creative Textiles and the American Museum" (1917), relates how the ready-to-wear industry, similar to silk and cotton manufacturers, looked to the museum for direction. The "costumers" who came included J. Rapoport & Co., E.J. Wile & Co., and A. Beller & Co.<sup>34</sup>

The second article, "Museum Documents and Modern Costume" (1918), describes the interaction of the museum and design community. It treats the educational benefit for students and teachers of costume design. A dress by Ruth Wilmot, costume design instructor at Teacher's College, Columbia University, receives mention, along with a group of her advanced students who created garments in form and decoration "...suggested by a study of specimens" in the Museum: "The success of Miss Wilmot's work is attested by the fact that most of these garments have found ready sale among professional designers"<sup>35</sup> [Fig. 4].

Finally, the article provides a sense of the exchange between the museum and wider fashion community. The garments represented in its pages grew out of a campaign for the betterment of American commercial design in fabrics and clothes undertaken over a period of three years by Women's Wear. Crawford

acknowledges the debt that he owed the museum collections and library in his position as design editor for the magazine. Likewise, "...the debt the American costume and fabric industries owe to the American Museum of Natural History is immense."<sup>36</sup>

Taking his cues from the diverse Asian, African, and Native American objects in The American Museum of Natural History, it was Crawford who articulated a theory of American fashion that brought together the designer, fabrication, and production, a concept based on using the nation's museums as a source of style and design. In two articles published in the museum's journal, he identified the advantages for designers and manufacturers of research in American museums. According to Crawford, the textiles, garments, furniture, and decorative objects would provide a valid source for a national fashion based on machines. In "Creative Textiles and the American Museum" (1917), he wrote that the "Primitive" American art collection and the art of China, the Phillipines and South Sea Islands would "...serve as a basis for our own distinctive decorative arts."<sup>37</sup>

The article entitled, "Museum Documents and Modern Costume" (1918), discusses the results of collaboration between the industry and museum collections in terms of the style and material of women's garments. It describes a coat as an "...automobile wrap in pongee silk, practically an exact copy of a Korean grass linen garment"<sup>38</sup> [Fig. 5]. The back panel of another coat was inspired by the Chinese collections, and its "...lining is an imitation in silk of South Sea Island tapa cloth"<sup>39</sup> [Fig. 6]. The designers, Max Meyer of A. Beller & Co., Jessie Franklin Turner of Bonwit Teller & Co., Edward L. Mayer, and Mary Walls of John Wanamaker's

participated in the collaboration [Fig. 7 & 8]. For Crawford, these coats, dresses, and suits served:

as a practical demonstration of a very important development in the costume industry of America...These garments represent the first fruits of what I may term 'creative research' by the American costume industry.<sup>40</sup>

In the article, Crawford also explains why cooperation with the museum would induce a national style. This articulation is important for expressing a formative theory of American fashion design in the context of art and industry:

Instead of the usual method of importing modern foreign costumes (themselves based, generally, on foreign museum collections), our designers, familiar with the practical needs of today, have gone direct to original documents for their inspiration. The work, therefore, marks one of the most important movements in the development of a truly American type of industrial art. Last year I described in the *Journal* a similar development among the fabric designers of the city...Not a day passes but I see some textile design either worn in a garment or on display in a shop window that owes its origin to museum inspiration. Thus the Museum has been responsible not only for commercial prosperity but also, by the character of the designs, for an improvement in national taste.<sup>41</sup>

Similarly, The Brooklyn Museum of Art focused on the garment and textile industry. Taken together, exhibition catalogs, departmental reports, Museum quarterlies, and the fashion press reveal this history. The initial impetus came from Stewart Culin, who, as curator of the ethnological collection from 1903 to 1928, took a special interest in fashion design. So engaged was Culin with women's clothes and dress fabrics, that he developed a reputation for revolutionizing the "costume industry in America," as a 1922 article in *Women's Wear* observes.<sup>42</sup> According to the same article, Culin chose costume as a specialty "...because in all the

material existence of mankind costume occupies the constant center of interest."<sup>43</sup>

It was in 1918 that Culin created a study room for designers, although, from his account, as early as 1909, he had collected objects with a desire to aid the garment industry. With the help of M.D.C. Crawford, "large number of artists" associated with leading costume and textile manufacturers visited the study room where they examined such items as East Indian textiles; among them were Mary Walls of Wanamakers Department Store, Max Meyer of A. Beller & Company, Jessie Franklin Turner of Bonwit, Teller & Company, and Edward L. Meyer.<sup>44</sup> In addition, the museum lent costumes and textiles to department stores for window displays, and to manufacturers and Women's Wear for models [Fig. 9]. A letter to Culin from the A. Beller & Co. indicates the extent of the connection: "Gentlemen: I am sending you by bearer two packages containing the following costumes."<sup>45</sup>

The museum's educational programs also supported fashion design through lectures, outreach to design schools, and student exhibitions. By 1922, Culin had established ties with Pratt Institute, lending objects for an exhibition for the benefit of costume design students. The 1924 departmental report records Pratt students working at the museum "under the Curator's advice and instruction."<sup>46</sup> Culin also lectured that year in a costume design course, and exhibited "...pictures by art students of Pratt Institute inspired by Oriental collections" from the museum. He also arranged thirteen sessions devoted to the study of "Oriental" and "peasant"



garments for students of Pratt Institute and the New York School of Fine and Applied Art.<sup>47</sup>

The first reference to a lecture series occurs in the 1926 Museum Quarterly where, included in the fall lecture program, is a "...series of familiar conferences by Stewart Culin on the origin and significance of certain common things as illustrated in the Ethnological Department of the Museum."<sup>48</sup> This involved ten lectures on aspects of costume, ranging from Chinese to European peasant garments. An additional four talks on costume were scheduled, as well to be delivered by a "Miss Esther Singleton, the well-known art critic."<sup>49</sup> These activities appealed to sales people and buyers of fashion, as indicated by a letter Culin received from the training director of Abraham Straus, Inc. department store.<sup>50</sup> Culin resigned two years later in October, 1928, and the lectures halted.<sup>51</sup>

However, two women, respectively associated with the Decorative Arts Department and the Education Division, assumed leadership of the industrial art program in the 1930s, and carried on Culin's legacy. In Fall 1930, Elizabeth Haynes, Assistant Curator of Decorative Arts, whose responsibilities included eighteenth and nineteenth-century European costumes, began a two-year series of lectures on costume and textile design, which were open to members and the public; guest lecturers included well-known fashion designers and educators, such as Ethel Traphagen and Henrietta Harmon.<sup>52</sup> The 1935 Museum Quarterly refers to Isabel Spaulding of the Education Division in connection with lectures on the history of costumes to large audiences of "dress design" students.<sup>53</sup> Again, in 1936,

Spaulding conducted together with Haynes a course on industrial art to satisfy the “new” interest in the subject.<sup>54</sup>

### III. Exhibiting American Fashion Design

Along with educational programs, exhibitions showcasing costume design typified the institutional support of the women’s garment industry and fashion community undertaken by museums. Such exhibitions began in 1918, continuing through the mid 1920s. The Brooklyn Museum of Art held two important shows in the 1930s, and made a brief impact during World War II, but the 1920s marked the height of activity until after the war.

The first industrial art exhibitions were active agents in defining American fashion and constructing an identity for manufacturers and designers of women’s apparel. From their position as purveyors of taste, museums conferred upon garment design the prestige of art, legitimating new directions. Although the exhibition policies differed, these institutions, as a whole, guided expectations about what constituted American fashion and the profession of fashion designer. By accentuating fabrication and the mechanics of making, the creation of women’s attire was singled out as a process of design and technique. The stress on textiles and dress fabrics cultivated an association between American fashion design and the country’s textile industry and manufacturing potential. The exhibitions also served to elevate the status of the garment industry and its representatives. Installation photographs reveal the labeling practices, and

together with catalogs and exhibition check lists indicate a policy of naming individual designers and manufacturers.<sup>55</sup>

The Metropolitan Museum of Art organized numerous exhibitions that benefited the garment industry through displays of historic costumes, textiles, and decorative objects, but between 1917 and 1940, the Department of Industrial Relations mounted a series of fifteen exhibitions, under Richard Bach's direction, directly informed by the museum's mandate to aid the business community and further contemporary American design. The first four of these exhibitions (1917, 1918, 1921, 1922) were entitled, "Exhibitions of Work by Manufacturers and Designers," and the latter were called, "American Industrial Art." From 1918 through 1923, six of these exhibitions featured fashion design in the form of sketches and garments. Other categories of design included furniture, wall paper, jewelry, lighting fixtures, carpets, ceramics, and textiles [Fig. 10].

The museum mainly strove to emphasize the practical and educational value of the collections to manufacturers and designers. For this reason, the exhibitions focused on contemporary designs that were "copies, adaptations and variations or inspirations" of the collections. In 1920, the museum introduced the practice of listing sources on labels, so, a viewer might see, for instance, "Embroidered crests assisted in the design of American sport skirts."<sup>56</sup> A photograph of the 1920 exhibition reveals sketches of contemporary fashion designs juxtaposed with drawings of eighteenth-century European garments and Buddah statues [Fig. 11].

For reasons that remain unclear, in 1924, the year when fashion design ceased to be represented, the museum switched its emphasis. In his writings, Bach described the change. Exhibitions would no longer be limited to objects based on museum study, but would demonstrate:

...the best current work of the invited industries, lack of gallery space unfortunately making it impossible to extend the same policy to a broader field as of graphic art, costume, ecclesiastical art, etc..<sup>57</sup>

Simultaneously, emphasis was placed on “quantity” production. Although designs associated with “multiples” such as clothing, laces, silver, and rugs had previously been displayed, central to the new policy was the design that was made in a factory or workshop, stressing the value of machine production.<sup>58</sup> Again, the 1931 catalog refers to the “noticeable” absence of “...costume, the graphic arts, and jewelry,” with the rejoinder that these arts are “adequately” represented in the city, or will be treated separately at a later date.<sup>59</sup>

No known garments or sketches are extant, but exhibition catalogs, installation photographs, and museum bulletins tell us something about how fashion design functioned in these exhibitions. Such records shed light on participating designers, and the nature and arrangement of objects. It appears that fashion sketches, as opposed to garments, predominated, and were prominently displayed in glass cases, on walls, and movable partitions [Figs. 12 & 13]. The featured designs were intended for day and evening wear.

The first exhibition to include fashion design took place in 1918. Along with examples of lace, embroideries, dishes, toys, glassware, woven textiles, jewelry and furniture, this exhibition presented the work of Ethel Traphahen, who had won

a prize for best American fashion in a 1912 contest sponsored by The New York Times, and was establishing a reputation as a teacher as well as practitioner of costume design. Her sketches and garments appeared in three consecutive exhibitions<sup>60</sup> [Fig. 14].

From 1919 through 1923, the museum exhibited the work of Ethel Fox (1919), Ethel Armstead (1920-1921), Helma Boeker (1921), Ruth Reeves (1921-1923), Mrs. Matilda Walle' (1920), and Ethel L. Wilson (1921). Aside from Traphagen, only Reeves is known today through her work as a textile designer and sketch artist for Women's Wear.<sup>61</sup> Over the course of the years, a design school - the Fashion Academy (1919), and two papers - The New York World (1921) and Women's Wear (1920, 1922-1923) were also represented.

The installation photographs reveal aspects of the fashion sketches, although not on the level of fabric and trim. In silhouette (line) and style, these suggest a contemporary French influence<sup>62</sup> [Figs. 15 & 16]. However, not only were the designs created with American materials in mind, but above all they depended on elements of trim, construction, and color based on the museum's collections, as mandated by the museum's policy. A closer examination might also demonstrate a break from the prevailing French line. A 1926 article in the museum's bulletin suggests this when saying:

Thus we know of the costume designer who spent her time at the Museum seated alone in a gallery of Near Eastern art. She made no notes, she went to no other galleries, she simply 'exposed' herself to the influence of graceful line and gentle color, knowing her own receptivity to such effects. The result was a whole series of models recalling in form nothing she had seen at the Museum, yet subtly registering in color key and in certain treatments of line the effect of the 'exposure.'<sup>63</sup>

In November, 1919, The American Museum of Natural History opened its doors to an "Exhibition of Industrial Art in Textiles and Costumes," which ran from November 12<sup>th</sup> to December 1st. As set forth in the accompanying catalog, there was a four-fold purpose in mounting the show.<sup>64</sup> The first was to make public ". . . recent splendid advances in the industrial decorative art of the United States, especially in textiles and costumes." The second sought to demonstrate how these advancements were accomplished through technical training required for "mechanical reproduction," and the influence of "applied art" found in and outside the museum. Another point was to stress the "...social and commercial value of a national art that shall express everyday, practical ideas of use and beauty for the American people." The exhibition also aimed at encouraging the training of "highly skilled workers" in public and private schools for the benefit of American industry.

In scope and concept, this exhibition led the way in the presentation of fashion design in a museum setting. Although this was the sole exhibition mounted by The American Museum of Natural History, its significance cannot be overestimated. Not only was it remarkable for the number and range of contemporary examples of costumes and related objects, but for its attention to techniques of production. According to the catalog, the exhibition was divided into three parts: costumes, textiles, and "mechanical processes."<sup>65</sup> Installation photographs and portions of the catalog, which appeared in the December issue of the museum's journal, indicate a display of machinery, demonstrating the various phases and types of textile production.<sup>66</sup> Crawford and Culin collaborated in

organizing the show along with representatives of the garment industry: David Aaron, Max Meyer, and designer, Jessie Franklin Turner.<sup>67</sup>

Drawing from its collections, the museum presented the early history of the loom and other textile machines and processes, concluding with the power driven Jacquard loom for weaving silk. The printing of textile decoration with blocks was also illustrated with a contemporary example provided by Marshall Field and Company. An examination of textiles from plant to finished product formed another part of the processes in textile production, represented through a display of cotton.

The thirty-four displays that comprised the non-technical section focused on women's dress and accessories. The catalog begins with "Costumes" which accounted for seven presentations: cloaks and suits, A. Beller & Co.; Blanck and Co., costumes, Harry Collins; blouses, B.C. Faulkner; furs, Otto Kahn; tea gowns and negligees, Winifred Warren; and children's and misses dresses, J. Wise Company [Figs. 17, 18 & 19]. Women's Wear also submitted costume designs in the form of sketches.

While these exhibits concentrated on apparel, others involved dress accessories, trim, and fabric. Displays of textiles included bolts of fabric which were either draped or rolled and placed on tables, walls or shelves, as seen in H. R. Mallinson & Co.'s installation of dress silks. Other exhibits showed textiles through finished garments, among them Bonwit Teller & Co., and a body of work by textile designers, Ruth Reeves, Martha Ryther, Hazel Slaughter, and Mary Tannahil [Fig. 20].

The essay and photographs that were published in the museum's journal reveal the exhibition's intent to create a national, modern art through the international collection of textiles, costumes, pottery, and decorative objects. The display of contemporary costumes, fabrics, and fashion accessories together with Persian, Coptic, Siberian, American Plains Indian, and Philippine sources, and the like clearly illustrated the point [Figs. 21 & 22].

The 1919 exhibition marked the end of significant activity in art and industry on the part of The American Museum of Natural History. Undoubtedly, this was due to the fact that Crawford resigned his post.<sup>68</sup> However, he continued to further the link between museums and the garment trade, fostering his professional partnership with Culin at The Brooklyn Museum of Art.

For his part, Culin divided his attention between his own institution and other industrial art venues both in and outside New York, and took a two-pronged approach to exhibitions. Between 1919 and 1928, he curated a series of thirty or more shows, featuring either his ethnographic collections, or contemporary designs in combination with the objects of museum inspiration. This provides a model very different from The Metropolitan Museum of Art, which always exhibited current fashion designs.

The earliest exhibitions took place outside the museum. The department report of October, 1919 states that in concert with Women's Wear:

....an exhibit consisting of fourteen framed panels on which were mounted framed pictures, drawings and fabrics designed from collections in the Department were sent to the St. Louis Exposition of Industrial Art.<sup>69</sup>



The “drawings” no doubt included garments, because the sketch was typical of fashion design representation. In 1920, the museum lent “costumes” to an exhibition staged by the Retail Milliners’s Association at New York’s Hotel Astor.<sup>70</sup> In 1921, it participated in several external exhibitions, the most significant being the Cotton Machinery Show in South Carolina, and the International Silk Exhibition at the Grand Central Palace in New York to which it lent “Oriental” costumes and textiles.<sup>71</sup> Except for the 1919 exhibition at The American Museum of Natural History, there is little substantial documentation.

More information exists about the in-house exhibitions dated from 1921 to 1928. During this time, the museum introduced to the fashion community a range of nonwestern objects acquired by Culin in his capacity as curator of the ethnological collection.<sup>72</sup> From all accounts, three exhibitions in particular proved exceedingly influential, spawning a variety of designs produced for the garment and dress fabric market.

The first exhibition related to fashion design took place in 1921. According to museum documents, the costumes, textiles, dolls, and painted furniture from Central Europe (Czechoslovakia, Romania, Hungary and Montenegro) “...attracted wide-spread attention and was visited daily by large numbers of artists and designers who were interested in the designs of the textiles and costumes.”<sup>73</sup>

Likewise, the Brooklyn Museum Quarterly of April, 1922 observes that:

Costume designers are already reaping the results of the collection of peasant material made last summer in Central Europe. A group of Oriental and European hats was loaned to the Fashion Hat Company, New York; another of Oriental and European costumes to the Pratt Institute for the benefit of its classes in costume designing.<sup>74</sup>

In 1923, the museum mounted two in-house shows. The first consisted of costumes, textiles, and ceramics from Hungary, Persia, Albania, Russia and India, to name a few, along with contemporary objects influenced by them:

The immediate object of the exhibition was the enrichment and stimulation of taste in industrial design and its possibilities were directly illustrated by costumes, blankets, embroideries and other textiles inspired by the specimens shown, all contributed by a number of American manufacturers who displayed in this way their appreciation of the Museum's efforts.<sup>75</sup>

The second exhibition featured wood and ivory sculpture, metal work and textiles from the Belgian Congo, along with "pictures, costumes and textiles immediately inspired by [them]..."<sup>76</sup> The 1923 departmental report discusses the "Negro Art's" vast influence on textile design represented by the creation of a popular "new" fabric called "Congo Cloth"<sup>77</sup> [Fig. 23].

During the same period, the museum participated in five major exhibitions outside the institution.<sup>78</sup> This included an exhibit of peasant costumes, the International Silk Exhibition, the International Fur Exposition, and The Arts of the American Indian in association with Women's Wear and the Eastern Association of Indian Affairs, all conducted at the Grand Central Palace [Fig. 24].<sup>79</sup> There was also "The History of the Art of Cotton" presented in New York and other major American cities under the National Association of Cotton Manufacturers' sponsorship.

Like The Metropolitan of Art and The American Museum of Natural History, The Brooklyn Museum made significant inroads in establishing the identity of American designers and manufacturers of women's garments. There is no way to judge the effects on the American female consumer. Rather, these institutions catered to the business community, and broke ground in educating the trade about

the nation's design and manufacturing potential in terms of garments and dress fabrics. A sampling of the designers and manufacturers listed in the Brooklyn Museum's industrial art catalogs includes A. Beller & Co., Edward L. Mayer, Inc., Jessie Franklin Turner, associated with Bonwit Teller & Co., and Miriam Bouslugue, who designed for the upscale wholesale house, Joseph.

Further evidence of the extent and spread of the impact that museums made on the women's garment manufacturing and retail trade derives from an article by Crawford in Arts & Decoration (June, 1923).<sup>80</sup> This discusses the Brooklyn Museum's exhibition of "Primitive Negro Art". In a separate section under the heading, "Dress Decoration Inspired by Native African Art," the same magazine illustrated four examples of the exhibition's influence on fabric manufacturers, department stores, and fashion designers.<sup>81</sup>

After Culin retired in 1928, the exhibition orientation altered, but did not cease.<sup>82</sup> Instead of focusing on the garment industry, the museum widened its scope, and only two major shows directly pertinent to fashion are recorded during the 1930s. One example is a 1934 exhibition on the history of silk, blending contemporary and historic garments and textiles, in keeping with the tradition set by Culin.<sup>83</sup> In 1940, the German occupation of Paris ushered in a new phase in the history of the garment industry and The Brooklyn Museum of Art. The Industrial Division was then established, and exhibitions and activities relative to fashion design stepped up.<sup>84</sup>

As for The Metropolitan Museum of Art, it was not until the postwar period that it strengthened connections with womenswear designers and manufacturers.

In 1945, the Costume Institute was opened as an outgrowth of The Museum of Costume Art. Housed initially at Rockefeller Center, the latter had served the needs of New York's theatre and fashion design community since the late 1930s.<sup>85</sup>

## Notes For Chapter 2

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<sup>1</sup> Charles R. Richards, Industrial Art and the Museum (New York: The Macmillen Company, 1927), v.

<sup>2</sup> Crawford, "Museums Documents and Modern Costume," The American Museum Journal 18, no. 4 (1918): 288 (hereafter cited as AMJ).

<sup>3</sup> Richard Bach, "Museums and The Trades," Museum Work 4 (1921): 61 (hereafter cited as MW).

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's mission see Bach, "Museum Service To The Art Industries," The Metropolitan Museum of Art 3 (1927): 3-4. For a critical examination of the founding of the museum see Carol Duncan, Civilizing Rituals, 48-7. For further background see Calvin Tomkins, Merchants and Masterpieces (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., INC., 1970). See also Leo Lerman, The Museum: One Hundred Years and The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York: Viking Press, 1969), commissioned by the museum to mark its centennial celebration.

<sup>5</sup> A history of the early plans and developments concerning industrial art and the museum are discussed by Winifred Howe, A History of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, vol. 1 (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1912), 9-10, 200-206. Regarding the museum's industrial art school (1880-1892), Howe notes that the museum rented rooms on the third floor of a building at 31 Union Square on the north west corner of Broadway and 16<sup>th</sup> street and set up classes in January, 1880. In 1881 the school moved to First Avenue between 67<sup>th</sup> and 68<sup>th</sup> street where it remained for three years after which it relocated to 214 and 216 East 34<sup>th</sup> street.

<sup>6</sup> Richards, The Industrial Museum (New York: The Macmillen Company, 1925); Industrial Art and the Museum (New York: The Macmillen Company, 1927). In the 1890s, Richards was the director of the Department of Mechanic Arts at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn; in the 1910s and early 1920s, he served as the director of the Cooper Union. He also served as Director of Industrial Arts of the New York General Education Board, and beginning in the mid 1920s, he held the positions of director and vice-president of the American Association of Museums. In 1930, he was executive vice-president of the New York Museum of Science and Industry.

<sup>7</sup> Richards, Art In Industry (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922). This book resulted from a study, begun in 1920, of the state of industrial arts education in the states and abroad. The National Society for Vocational Education administered the study with grants from the General Education Board of the federal government and the University of the State of New York. For a discussion of the importance of the study see Pulos, American Design Ethic, 270-272.

<sup>8</sup> Richards, Industrial Art, v.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, v, 58.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 10, 12, 54. The first public design museum in Europe, the South Kensington Museum (now the Victoria and Albert Museum), opened in 1852. See Lyndel Saunders King, The Industrialization of Taste: Victorian England and the Art Union of London (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1982). For a history of design museums in Germany see Barbara Mundt, Die deutschen Kunstgewerbemuseen im 19. Jahrhundert (Munich: Prestel, 1974). For an overview of the history of European museums and design see Mitchell Schwarzer, "The Design Prototype as Artistic Boundary: The Debate on History and Industry in Central European Applied Arts Museums, 1860-1900," in Design History: An Anthology ed. by Dennis P. Doordan (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995), 185-200.

<sup>11</sup> For a contemporary overview by Bach see "Museum Service To The Art Industries," 1-18; "Design in the Industrial Arts: Where do the Museums Stand?," MW 2 (1920): 174-178; *Ibid.*, "Museums and The Industrial World," The Metropolitan Museum of Art 3 (1926): 1-8. For a critical discussion see Leach, Land of Desire, 164-173; Jay Cantor, "Art and Industry: Reflections on the Role of the American Museum" in Encouraging Innovation in the Decorative Arts, ed. Ian M. G. Quinby and Polly Ann Earl, 1973 Winterthur Conference Report, 332-54; and Neil Harris, "Museums, Merchandising and Popular Taste: The Struggle For Influence," in Material Culture and the Study of American Life, ed. Quinby, (New York: Putnam, 1978), 140-174.

<sup>12</sup> For the museum perspective see Bach, "Mobilizing the Art Industries," American Magazine of Art, 9 August 1918, 412-418; (Unsigned), "Manufacturers, Designers and Museums," Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art 9 (August 1918): 26 (hereafter cited as MMAB); Richards, "What the Designer Wants From the Museum of Art," MW 6 (1923): 51-54. From the standpoint of industry see Horace Bushnell Cheney, "Art In Cooperation With Industry," MW 2 (1920): 178-181. For industry's standpoint see M. D. C. Crawford, The Ways of Fashion (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1941), 273-274; Milbank, New York Fashion, 52. Design school also responded to the threat of the loss of French models. For example, the catalogs of The New York School of Fine and Applied Art stressed the task of Americanizing fashion in the training of "costume" designers.

<sup>13</sup> New Jersey's Newark Museum under the direction of John Cotton Dana was also active during these years in showing garments and textiles in connection with art and industry, although not American, but German. See Leach, Land of Desire, 166-168; Matilda McQuaid, Lilly Reich, Designer and Architect (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1996), 13-18; Karl Meyer, The Art Museum: Power, Money and Ethics (New York: William Morrow and Co., Inc., 1979), 36.

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<sup>14</sup> Milbank identified an American style in terms of the “homegrown, homespun and home-sewn clothes” favored as a patriotic gesture of independence after the Revolutionary War. My study concerns freedom from the French influence, the origin of which marks the development of twentieth-century fashion. See also Patricia Cunningham and Susan Voso Lab ed., Dress in American Culture (New York: Popular Press, 1993).

<sup>15</sup> For a discussion about pioneering upscale wholesale manufacturers in New York see Crawford, Ways of Fashion, 90-115. In discussing the period from 1900 to 1930, Milbank refers sporadically to well-known manufacturers of women’s clothes; see New York Fashion, 46-98. See also Grace D. Ely ed., American Fashion Designers (New York: Personnel Group, National Retail Dry Goods Association, 1935).

<sup>16</sup> For further information concerning the state of manufacturing see Helfgott, “Women’s and Children’s Apparel,” 47-60. For a discussion of the status of designers and manufacturers see Milbank, *Ibid.*, 46-98.

<sup>17</sup> See p. 47-48.

<sup>18</sup> Levine, A History of the Garment Workers’ Union, 16.

<sup>19</sup> Richards, Art in Industry, 29. See also Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics Bulletin no. 147, 111-128 (1915) in Levine, A History of the Garment Workers’ Union, 523-525.

<sup>20</sup> For a detailed discussion of this matter see Chapter 1.

<sup>21</sup> See Jeannette Jarnow and Miriam Guerreiro, Inside the Fashion Business, 5<sup>th</sup> edition (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1991).

<sup>22</sup> Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics Bulletin no. 147, 111-128 (1915) in Levine, A History of the Garment Workers’ Union, 523-525.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 525.

<sup>24</sup> Milbank, New York Fashion, 59.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>26</sup> “American Fashions for American Women,” The New York Times, 23 February 1913, American Fashions section.

<sup>27</sup> Elizabeth Lee, Costume Design in the Movies (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1991), 11-12.

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<sup>28</sup> For the counterpart in American art see Matthew Baigell "American Art and National Identity: The 1920s," Arts Magazine 61 (February 1987): 48-55. For a discussion of nationalism and design see Sparke, An Introduction to Design, 79-93. The linkage between national identity, the industrial arts and modernism is an underlying theme of Troy, Modernism and the Decorative Arts in France.

<sup>29</sup> Beginning in the 1910s, the museum bulletin provided up-to-date coverage of the policies and activities pertinent to the business and design community. See also Bach, "Museums and The Trades," MW 4 (1921): 58. For a later discussion on the study rooms and art and industry see Howe, A History of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, vol. 2 (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1946), 181-198. For a more current discussion concerning the textile study room see Philippe de Montebello, introduction to "Textiles in The Metropolitan Museum of Art," MMAB 63, no. 3 (Winter, 1995): 5-6.

<sup>30</sup> The Metropolitan Museum of Art, "Lectures For Salespeople," MMAB 10, no. 1 (Jan. 1915):33. The museum bulletin devoted several issues to the topic of education in art and industry, and under the heading, "Notes," included in each issue a list of related events and information. For early examples see The Metropolitan Museum, "Our Educational Number," MMAB 11, no. 9 (Sept. 1916): 188-197; "Devoted to Educational Work in Museums," MMAB 12, no. 9 (Sept. 1917): 182-194.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 12, no. 3 (Mar. 1917): 72; Ibid., 13, no. 1 (Jan. 1918): 208.

<sup>32</sup> For background on Crawford see Lauren D. Whitley, "Morris De Camp Crawford and American Textile Design; 1916-1921," (Masters thesis, State University of New York, Fashion Institute of Technology, 1994). Crawford discusses his involvement with Women's Wear, museums, and industrial art in Ways of Fashion, 269-287. His column was entitled "Design Department". See also Leach, Land of Desire, 164-166.

<sup>33</sup> Crawford, Ways of Fashion, 273.

<sup>34</sup> Crawford, "Creative Textiles and the American Museum," AMJ 18, no. 4, (April 1917): 257. Of the wholesale manufacturers mentioned by Crawford, only A. Beller & Co., founded in 1890, is remembered today. This house specialized in women's coats and suits, as noted by Milbank, New York Fashion, 64, 96, 126.

<sup>35</sup> Crawford, "Museum Documents," 288.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 286.



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<sup>37</sup> Crawford, "Creative Textiles and The American Museum," AMJ 18, no. 4 (1917): 253.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., "Museum Documents," 294.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 295.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 286.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 288.

<sup>42</sup> Crawford, "Constructive Work by Brooklyn Museum Recognized," WWD, 4 April 1922, Culin Archival Collection, General Correspondence, 1.4.032, Brooklyn Museum Library (hereafter cited as CAC). For background on Culin see Van Saum, "The Road To Beauty," 11-18.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Department of Ethnology Reports, October 1918, CAC, 3.2.001. For Crawford's account of his relationship with Culin see The Brooklyn Museum and The Decorative Arts Industries (1948): unpaginated.

<sup>45</sup> A. Beller & Co. to Stewart Culin, 8 October 1919, CAC, General Correspondence, 1.4.004. In Ways of Fashion, 274-275, Crawford recorded his conversation with the fashion designer, Jessie Franklin Turner, who spoke highly of Culin: "I owe much to the museums in this city. But I owe more to Stewart Culin than any other man I ever knew. He taught me the basic silhouettes of the Orient, and the nature and scope of ornament and color. Often when I am designing, I find myself doing some unusual and beautiful thing and suddenly remember that he had called it to my attention in some treasure in the Brooklyn Museum. He was a great teacher in that he created the desire to learn. I still go to the Brooklyn Museum and still find a vast inspiration in its collections." See also Van Saum, "The Road To Beauty," 54-56.

<sup>46</sup> Department of Ethnology Reports, March 1924, CAC, 3.2.002.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., undated. For an example of Culin's work with fashion design students see the reprint of a lecture that he presented on Feb. 5, 1924 before the evening classes of Pratt and The School of Fine and Applied Art entitled, "Creation in Art, An introductory lecture in a course on Costume Design," in Brooklyn Museum Quarterly 11, no. 3 (July 1924): 91-100 (hereafter cited as BMQ).

<sup>48</sup> The Brooklyn Museum, BMQ 13, no. 4 (Oct. 1926): 143.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 14, no. 4 (Oct. 1927): 145.

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<sup>50</sup> Training Director, Abraham & Straus, Inc., to Stewart Culin, 8 October 1926, CAC, General Correspondence, 1.4.119.

<sup>51</sup> After Culin's death Dr. Herbert Spinden from the American Museum of Natural History took Culin's position as curator of the Ethnographic Department. In "The Road to Beauty," Van Saun notes that Spinden was not committed to helping designers, 58.

<sup>52</sup> The Brooklyn Museum, "Progress of The Educational Department," BMQ 17, no. 4 (Oct. 1930): 147-148; *Ibid.*, 18, no. 1 (Jan. 1931): 4-5.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, "Education in the Museum," BMQ 23, no. 1 (Jan. 1936): 44.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>55</sup> Whereas the exhibition catalogs of all three museums identify costume and textile designers by name in addition to manufacturers, less is known about exhibition labels. In "Exhibition of Work by Manufacturers and Designers," MMAB 17 (Feb. 1922): 33, Bach discusses the inclusion of designers on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's exhibition labels which first occurred in 1922.

<sup>56</sup> Bach, "Design in the Industrial Arts," 177.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, "Museum Service to The Art Industries," 6.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, "Exhibition of Work by Manufacturers and Designers," 32.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, "Contemporary American Industrial Art," Contemporary American Industrial Art, Twelfth Exhibition (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1931), unpaginated.

<sup>60</sup> In the checklist for the 1918 exhibition, Traphagen is the sole designer listed under "Designs and Costumes." In subsequent catalogs, the category for costume design is fluid. For example, in 1919, Traphagen and her colleagues appear under the heading, "Designs and Drawings". In 1920 a separate listing appears entitled, "Costume Designs".

<sup>61</sup> For more on Reeves see Mary Schoeser, "Textiles, Surface, Structure, and Serial Production," in Craft in the Machine Age, 11-118; Whitney Blausen, "Textiles Designed by Ruth Reeves" (Masters thesis, State University of New York, Fashion Institute of Technology, 1992). For a contemporary account see Harry V. Anderson, "Ruth Reeves," Design 37 (March 1936): 23-31.

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- <sup>62</sup> See Phyllis Tortora and Keith Eubank, A Survey of Historic Costume (New York: Fairchild Publications, 1989), 280-282; Francoise Boucher, 2,000 Years of Fashion (expanded edition, New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1987), 411-415.
- <sup>63</sup> The Metropolitan Museum, "Our Educational Number," 210.
- <sup>64</sup> Spinden, Exhibition of Industrial Art, 3. In "The Road to Beauty," Van Saum also provides an over view of the exhibition, p. 22-24.
- <sup>65</sup> Spinden, Exhibition of industrial Art, 5.
- <sup>66</sup> Ibid., "Creating a National Art," AMJ 19, no. 6 (Dec. 1919): 622-654.
- <sup>67</sup> For more on the fashion designer, Jessie Franklin Turner, see Milbank, New York Fashion, p. 86, 100.
- <sup>68</sup> Whitley, "Morris De Camp Crawford," 16.
- <sup>69</sup> Department of Ethnology Reports, October 1919, CAC, 3.2.001.
- <sup>70</sup> Ibid., February 1920.
- <sup>71</sup> Ibid., 1921. For details on the silk exposition see Crawford, "Modern Silks: The First International Silk Exposition at the Grand Central Palace," Arts & Decoration 14 (February 1921): 279.
- <sup>72</sup> See Deirdre Lawrence, "Culin, Collector and Documenter of the World He Saw," Orientalism 20 no. 7 (1989): 20-27.
- <sup>73</sup> General Correspondence 5 April 1922, CAC, 1.4.032.
- <sup>74</sup> The Brooklyn Museum, BMQ 9, no. 2 (April 1922): 116.
- <sup>75</sup> Department of Ethnology Reports, 1923, CAC, 3.2.002.
- <sup>76</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>77</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>78</sup> Department of Ethnology Reports, 1923, CAC, 3.2.002.
- <sup>79</sup> On the 1925 exhibition of Native American Art see Diana Fane, Ira Jacknis and Lisa M. Breen, Objects of Myth and Memory, American Indian Art at the Brooklyn Museum (The Brooklyn Museum in association with University of Washington Press, 1991).

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<sup>80</sup> Crawford, "The Art of the Boshongo Craftsmen," Arts & Decoration (June 1923): 28-29, 54, 60;

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, "Dress Decoration Inspired by Native African Art," 52.

<sup>82</sup> The last exhibition associated with Culin took place in 1928 the year of his resignation. See Department of Ethnology Reports, April, 1928, CAC, 3.2.002.

<sup>83</sup> The Brooklyn Museum, "The Silk Parade," BMQ 21, no. 4 (October 1934): 94. Although only two major shows relative to fashion design occurred in the 1930s, the museum continued its outreach to professional and student fashion designers, and small showings of select items were held with their interests in mind. Meanwhile the garments and textiles that formed a part of the Decorative Arts collection, along with the Central European objects brought together by Culin, became incorporated into a newly created Textile Division. In 1937 the Brooklyn Museum Quarterly began to list Louise W. Chase as Acting Curator for the Textile Division and the Division of Industrial Art. The latter department is also referred to in terms of the 1936 "annual industrial art" entitled "Rayon and Synthetic Yarn Industry," but receives no further mention. See The Brooklyn Museum, "News Notes," BMQ 24, no. 1 (January 1937): 26.

<sup>84</sup> See Mary S. Dorward, "Library of Original Fashion Sketches," Special Libraries (September, 1944): 380-382.

<sup>85</sup> Irene Lewisohn is credited with founding a costume museum for the benefit of the theatre community and needle trades. In 1937 the museum opened its doors in Rockefeller Center. See Crawford, Ways of Fashion, 282-282. For an account of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in connection with the costume museum and the design community during and after World War II see Martin, American Ingenuity, 9-14. For a discussion about American fashion design during the war see Sandra Stansbery Buckland, "Promoting American Fashion, 1940 Through 1945: From Understudy to Star," (Ph.D. diss., The Ohio State University, 1996). For details on the Parisian couture during and immediately after the war see Lou Taylor, "Paris Couture, 1940-1944," in Chic Thrills, 127-144.

## Chapter 3

## THE FASHION GROUP: AN INDUSTRIAL ART SOCIETY, 1928-1940

...to advance the principles of applied art in industry and to foster good taste in fashion; to encourage the cooperation of those engaged in conceiving, designing and executing fashions; and, through proper education and the dissemination of useful information, to inspire a keener interest in fashions, to the end that those engaged in the field of fashion may better serve themselves and the public at large (The Fashion Group Constitution, 1936).<sup>1</sup>

Another kind of institution established to further art and industry is represented by the societies, organizations, and associations composed of artists, designers, and members of the business community seeking to advance their concerns in an industrial setting.<sup>2</sup> The memberships, which were often interrelated, stood for a wide range of interests from the commercial and design points of view.

There is, for example, the Architectural League of New York, which was founded in 1880 to represent professions related to architecture.<sup>3</sup> Members came from the areas of furniture and fixture design, sculpture and painting, as well as from the business sector. Annual exhibitions provided a key forum for spreading new ideas. In 1920 an award was established to recognize and promote the significance of good design in mass production, in particular, the place of the machine in producing beautiful objects in quantity.

The Art-In-Trades Club was founded in New York in 1906. This organization brought together interior decorators, manufacturers and designers of decorative furnishings, textiles, furniture, and fixtures, as well as designers and craftsmen in such areas as leather, wood, and metals. In his 1922 study of

art in industry, Richards stated that the membership aimed at a "practical study of art in trades," and advised and encouraged each other to their mutual benefit.<sup>4</sup>

The Industrial Arts Council stood for seventeen New York industries, including the garment trade. A 1922 article entitled, "Training Required For The Industrial Arts," by Florence N. Levy, a pioneer in industrial art education, indicates that, in 1919, representatives from areas as diverse as furniture, interior decoration, silk, toys, glass, and wall paper, in addition to dress and millinery formed an association.<sup>5</sup> Along with Levy, the Council, located at 599 Fifth Avenue, played a leading role in a study of the requirements for training in the industrial arts. Except for this, nothing more is known about The Industrial Arts Council.

Toward the end of the 1920s, women in the fashion industries took an active interest in founding a professional organization solely for women, embracing the fields of design, journalism, retail, and education.<sup>6</sup> The museum involvement in fashion design had by then subsided, and during the 1930s, what came to be called "The Fashion Group" led in the advancement of American fashion.

This chapter focuses on The Fashion Group as an institution of art and industry that shaped American fashion design during the 1930s. It examines the chief means utilized to promote American fashion design through exhibitions, education, exchanges with likeminded organizations, and as a springboard for the activities of the members.

The following statement from the organization's constitution, adopted in

1936, reveals how much such terms dictated the purpose of the group and how the membership conceived its role:

...to advance the principles of applied art in industry and to foster good taste in fashion; to encourage the cooperation of those engaged in conceiving, designing and executing fashions; and, through proper education and the dissemination of useful information, to inspire a keener interest in fashions, to the end that those engaged in the field of fashion may better serve themselves and the public at large.<sup>7</sup>

### I. The Fashion Group as Industrial Art Society

As an industrial art society, The Fashion Group must first be considered in the context of the women who made up its ranks and in terms of the fashion industry against which its pivotal role in furthering American fashion design evolved. One founding story is that The Fashion Group began with a suggestion for a club for out-of-town women in fashion to meet and discover what was happening in New York.<sup>8</sup> The year was 1928. The organization may also be traced to a 1929 meeting of women interested in "...reporting, promotion and designing of fashion merchandise."<sup>9</sup>

Another view holds that The Fashion Group emerged from a group of stylists attempting to separate from the National Retail and Dry Goods Association in 1930. During the 1930s, all kinds of design came under the rubric of fashion and of the "stylist" who beautified merchandise to augment customer appeal. In general, "styling" was a marketing concept that involved a rapid turn over in appearance for saleability.<sup>10</sup> Estelle Hamburger, an early member of The Fashion Group, wrote that stylists gave "...the impetus of fashion to every article under the roof of a store, and

the shopping public became converted to style."<sup>11</sup> She recalled 1929 as the year of:

...the invasion of the stylists into retailing. They sprang up overnight, arbiters of color in pots and pans, authorities on the borders of towels and bath mats, mentors of the patterns on dishes and the shapes of glassware. They brought style into the kitchen, the bathroom, the den and the nursery.<sup>12</sup>

Several preliminary, organizational meetings took place until a president was appointed in February, 1931, thus formalizing the intent to establish a society.

As an organization, The Fashion Group possessed a wide sphere of influence. Within ten years of its founding, it had attained national and international status.<sup>13</sup> By 1938, the ranks had swelled to approximately a thousand women who came from most of the large American cities, in addition to Paris and London. Its purview extended to apparel, accessories, beauty, and the home, embracing a community of professionals in "...advertising, cosmetics, department stores, display, fashion design, illustration, industrial design, interior decorating, magazine, manufacturing, newspaper, photography, promotion and publicity," and those who supported the fashion industry through research, finance and education, such as the field of home economics.<sup>14</sup>

Founding and charter members were among the most sophisticated and accomplished women to be found in the country. Many had longstanding reputations as leaders in the fashion industry, and were central to the workings of the fashion system, holding positions of enormous consequence and importance. An example is Marion Taylor, the first president, who pioneered in the advertising field [Fig. 25]. Other influential members were Elizabeth Arden and Helena Rubenstein, cosmetic experts; Helen Hughes Dulany, industrial designer;



Eleanor Lambert, publicist; Eleanor LeMaire, interior decorator; Wynn Richards, fashion photographer. Eleanor Roosevelt, then wife of New York State's governor, and spokesperson for the ILGWU, the garment industry's union, sat on the Advisory Board.<sup>15</sup>

Although The Fashion Group was devoted to all kinds of design, fashion design occupied a key position in its agenda. During the 1930s, this association of professional women personified the conjunction of fashion design and art and industry. It was composed of women who set the pace and established guidelines governing women's dress and accessories. This included Edna Woolman Chase, editor, Vogue Magazine; Julia Coburn, editor, Ladies Home Journal; Tobie Collier Davis, director of a fashion consulting firm; Estelle Hamburger, vice president of Jay Thorpe, Inc.; Alice Hughes, journalist for World Telegram; Mary Lewis, vice president of Best & Co.; Winifred J. Ovitte, Women's Wear Daily; Mary Brooks Picken, advertising; Virginia Pope, journalist, The New York Times; Dorothy Shaver, vice president of Lord & Taylor; Carmel Snow, editor, Harper's Bazaar<sup>16</sup> [Fig. 26].

Whereas Paris held top priority with respect to fashion design, it was countered by a genuine view toward furthering American creations. As a whole, The Fashion Group saw American apparel as a site where art and commerce could come together, and actively supported designs, designers, manufacturers, and retailers associated with the garment and textile industries. The fact that leading American fashion designers belonged to the organization testifies to this. Indeed, The Fashion Group was among the first to represent the creative and

professional interests of womenswear designers in an industrial setting. A host of influential figures, some of whom are little remembered outside the industry, joined The Fashion Group during the 1930s: custom - Elizabeth Hawes and Muriel King; ready-to-wear - Grace Arcuri, Eve Bennet, Jo Copeland, Helen Cookman, Lily Dache, Edith Davied, Kiviette, Margot de Bruyn Kops, Josette de Lima, Claire McCardell, Molly Parnis, Clare Potter, Natalie Renke, Adele Simpson, Alice Smith, Sally Victor, Emmy Wylie, Glory Vilag; Hollywood - Edith Head.<sup>17</sup>

Because Hawes is significant to this study, it is important to note her history with The Fashion Group. No documentation exists of her entry into the society, but an outline of her activity can be sketched from the available records. Drawing from The Fashion Group Bulletin, and the minutes of luncheon and board meetings, she belonged to the organization by 1935, if not before. These sources record her participation in the group's activities as early as February, 1933, when she served on a panel regarding Hollywood's role in fashion design, and identify her as a member in 1935. As part of her contribution to The Fashion Group, Hawes served as vice president for two years, from February, 1937 until resigning from the organization in February, 1939.<sup>18</sup>

What made the Fashion Group's activities different from the work undertaken by museums was the stress during the 1930s on science and technology, contributing to its designation as the machine age. When it came to fashion design, emphasis was increasingly placed on ready-to-wear and the appropriate training for this area of production. As a result, ready-to-wear

designers grew in importance. Esteem for the creators, rather than producers, of women's apparel had accelerated during the immediate post war years, but it was in the 1930s that the designer achieved popular recognition, eclipsing the manufacturer in interest and awareness.<sup>19</sup>

The rise in demand for ready-to-wear designers represents a crucial development in American art and industry. It spells out a desire for improved quality in garment making, specifically, a need for more coordination between art and mass production. In a word, improved quality necessitated better designers.

In his 1922 report of the nation's industrial arts, Richards had identified a general "...demand for...better designers".<sup>20</sup> According to him, "better" designers were required to capture an overseas market after the war. Richards maintained there were strong economic reasons for developing a national art, which would be the "art of the machine."<sup>21</sup> Presumably, the products of America's art industries would eliminate the high price of purchasing European products and designs, and "...command the world market because of their artistic value."<sup>22</sup>

The increase in style variety in an already style conscious industry also enhanced the enthusiasm for ready-to-wear designers. By 1914, garment manufacturers had identified a trend toward more style variation,<sup>23</sup> however, the tendency became pronounced after the war, accelerating in the 1920s.<sup>24</sup>

From the standpoint of style variation, apparel design became a job requiring artistic and technical skill. In the 1930s, a manufacturer of upscale wholesale dresses, Maurice Rentner, remembered the "...need for a more professional treatment of style."<sup>25</sup> "Style," he said, became the predominant

consideration in women's ready-to-wear around 1917.<sup>26</sup> He related it to the kind of designing done by women who became active in fashion during the war: "This new designing was zestful and colorful. It denoted an instinct for better dressing. It bespoke the enthusiasm and the good taste of its originators."<sup>27</sup>

A technical method of designing occurred most often in the low end of mass production. The 1915 United States Bureau of Labor Statistics Bulletin describes this approach in the cloak and suit trade where the main requirement was:

that a garment hang and fit properly and the designer must have an understanding of the work of all branches of the business and himself be a skilled mechanic, as otherwise he could not hope for success in designing garments that can be manufactured practically and economically.<sup>28</sup>

The new brand of designer was expected to bring together art and production. According to Rentner, 1927 was the year when art and technical skill, as well as "...an understanding of marketing and other problems of business conduct. . ." were necessities in the trade.<sup>29</sup> Within this context, a number of highly competent designers, primarily women, secured reputations in ready-to-wear. By the late 1920s, these women, and a handful of men, became increasingly known in the trade and to the public, among them Helen Cookman, Elizabeth Hawes, Clare Potter, and Nettie Rosenstein.<sup>30</sup>

It was the American Designer Movement, as it was called at the time, that was largely responsible for bringing ready-to-wear designers to the attention of a wide public audience. Initiated in 1932 in order to spur sales in a depression economy, promotions by retailers and manufacturers of "American Designs by American Designers" created popular awareness of the country's design talent.

This furthered an interest in ready-to-wear garments, in addition to fueling the rise of the named fashion designer.

Dorothy Shaver, vice president of Lord & Taylor and a leading figure in The Fashion Group, began the campaign in March, 1932, receiving wide coverage in the trade and public press. Her promotion was well orchestrated. She named three womenswear designers, Annette Simpson, Elizabeth Hawes, and Edith Marie Reuss, in the store's advertisements, and showed their fashions in Fifth Avenue windows and special areas in the store accompanied by their photograph. Hawes was represented by a checked dress featured with a dark coat, called "City Child." Priced at \$10.17, the outfit was available in the Young New Yorker shop. The report in Women's Wear Daily was typical:

American Designers Feted at Publicity Luncheon Given by Lord & Taylor Executive. Annette Simpson, Elizabeth Hawes, Edith Marie Reuss Designs Presented by Miss Dorothy Shaver to large group of guests from Art and Press Circle - Store Plans Important Promotion of American Designs...guests include museum staffs and art associations...<sup>31</sup>

Shaver's action prompted the American Designer Movement, and department stores and manufacturers around the country followed Lord & Taylor's lead.<sup>32</sup> In New York, Best & Co., Altman's, Gimbles, and Macy's all followed suit. In Chicago, Marshall Field & Co. hosted Elizabeth Hawes and Muriel King, while Eisenberg & Sons Manufacturers promoted in-house designer, Irina Kirby. Consequently, the status of apparel designers was improved, and fashion designers began to be taken more seriously, and took themselves very seriously. A 1933 article in Fortune magazine, "The Dressmakers of the U.S.,"

gives an example of the kind of coverage that followed Shaver's endorsement, along with a sense of the business community's response to it:

In March 1932, the Manhattan retail establishment of Lord & Taylor made history. It bought and paid cash for space in the daily papers to advertise fine dresses designed in America. It was no news to the trade that fine dresses were designed in America. In fact, Best had quietly featured them in 1929. But it was sensational that anyone should base a strong campaign on them. A generation of shop girls had been trained to ignore American designs, to talk everlastingly of Paris, Paris, Paris. For who could sell a dress admittedly designed by an "American"? The answer was quickly given. Lord & Taylor could. So other Fifth Avenue shops - Best's, Altman's, Russek's, to name three - followed the Lord & Taylor lead.<sup>33</sup>

Shortly after Lord & Taylor's promotion, fashion designers took the initiative in promoting themselves. The New York Sun of July, 1932 describes two fashion shows staged to prove to manufacturers that original designs for women's wear were as abundant in this country as in Europe. On June 13th of that year, manufacturers paid \$200 apiece to see creations by Kiviette, Charles Le Marie, and Annette Simpson. In July, reportedly, the largest showing ever of American designers was staged in the grand ballroom of the Plaza Hotel. Several hundred people attended the presentation of fall fashions "...designed by Americans, with American manufactured materials on American models."<sup>34</sup>

The Fashion Group evolved against this background. As supporters of American-ready-to-wear, this society helped to establish the technology of mass production as the embodiment of fashion design in America. Museums had led in laying the ground work for a concept of American fashion and in framing an identity for designers and manufacturers, but The Fashion Group advanced the

ready-to-wear designer and the off-the-rack garment produced in volume, as quintessentially American.

## II. Fashion Design Promotions and Education

Taken together, The Fashion Group's initiatives in presenting American fashion and educating fashion designers represent a joint effort to support the nation's apparel industries. An examination of these two poles of The Fashion Group's activity is a way to explore how an industrial art society instituted fashion as design by carving out a role for the ready-to-wear garment and designer.

The Fashion Group's first recorded effort to showcase American fashion design was an exhibition devoted to progress in the American fashion industry, entitled, "Exhibition of Fashions and Home Furnishings in Contemporary Man-Made Fibers and Plastics", which took place in April, 1934, at Rockefeller Center, the building chosen the prior year as permanent headquarters.<sup>35</sup> After occupying offices donated by Harper's Bazaar and Women's Wear Daily, The Fashion Group had leased space for a clubroom and exhibition room on the seventh floor of 30 Rockefeller Plaza. Completed in 1932, Rockefeller Centre became a source of identity for its owners and occupants. The soaring masses of its architecture stood for machine progress and completely embodied the society's industrial spirit.

No known photographs survive, but The Fashion Group Bulletin, trade papers, and fashion journalists discussed the exhibition and its merits. Prior to the opening, The Fashion Group Bulletin expressed the hope "...that this our first

professional effort in the field of exhibitions may be widely credited and publicized."<sup>36</sup> The event, which ran for one month, proved successful by any standards. April's bulletin stated that 14,800 had attended the exhibit in The Fashion Group gallery.<sup>37</sup>

In keeping with the current interest in science and technology, the show's thrust was directed toward science through "scientifically" created fabrics. The exhibition emphasized the Americanness of workers, designers, and businesses, and the creation of American fashion achieved through the efforts of American manufacturing in the production of chemically produced materials.

The New York Journal of Commerce headlined the fact that the yarn producers in the exhibit featured the latest in synthetic yarn products.<sup>38</sup> These included Dupont Rayon, The Viscose Co., Tennessee-Eastman, and American Enka. The description that the trade paper published indicates an enormous exhibit of yarns and finished textiles at the entrance called, "The Alliance of Science and Art." At the center of the presentation, demonstrating the phases and types of textile production, was a "...cascade fountain of white synthetic yarns, spectacularly lighted."<sup>39</sup> Displays of draped taffeta completed the exhibit.

"Fashion Right", as The Fashion Bulletin called it, organized the "scientifically" created clothes into twenty-five or so tableaux.<sup>40</sup> The different types of garments, representing trends in women's apparel, aimed at illustrating contemporary occasions and moments in modern living such as "A Dinner Party", "Gymnasiums for Chic", and "A Rainy Day".<sup>41</sup> The formal wear, bathing suits, and garments for sports, travel, business, and daytime wear were juxtaposed with



new designs in furniture and household appliances. Trade and fashion magazines also held exhibits, including Harper's Bazaar, Vogue, Good Housekeeping, and The Dry Goods Economist.

Although The Fashion Group utilized exhibitions, the fashion show became its major forum for presenting womenswear designed and made in America. This was very different from the approach employed by museums; nevertheless, the two methods possessed common features. For example, dress fabrics in addition to clothing had importance. Likewise, the aim was to nurture creativity and educate the trade, as well as cultivate consumer taste for the nation's design potential.

In 1935, The Fashion Group initiated a series of fashion shows entitled, "Fashion Futures", that made possible the widespread advancement of American fashion design by giving wholesale and retail designers the chance to determine what women throughout the country would wear. As fashion leaders, with chapters in major cities, the society's enthusiasm was picked up and spread to virtually thousands of American women. Fashion Futures replaced the Fashion Forecast Conference, which The Fashion Group had organized in 1933, and which had shown only French styles.<sup>42</sup> The inclusion of ready-to-wear raised the status of mass produced garments and their designers.

Two Fashion Futures occurred in the 1930s to wide coverage in the trade papers and fashion press. The intended audience was the fashion trade comprised of journalists, retailers, manufacturers, merchandisers, and advertisers. The initial presentation in Fall, 1935 took place at the Hotel Astor

before an impressive audience of 1, 207.<sup>43</sup> The New York Journal of Commerce described the group of major "fashionists" from Lord & Taylor, Best & Co. Stern Brothers, Harper's Bazaar, Ladies Home Journal, The Associated Dry Goods Association, and Vogue, to name a few, who hailed "...from every part of the country."<sup>44</sup>

Although the first Fashion Futures did present European models by major figures such as Chanel, Lelong, Patou, and Schiaparelli, it challenged French dominance by prominently featuring American designers.<sup>45</sup> Divided into New York and Hollywood sections, these designers were represented by one garment apiece. Among the former, which involved ready-to-wear and custom designers, were Hawes, Cookman, Barnes, Potter, Kiviette, and King. The latter included Warner Brothers' Orry Kelly, Paramount's Travis Banton, and MGM's Adrian.

The second Fashion Futures in Fall, 1937 displayed only styles "made in the USA."<sup>46</sup> "As it is the first time leading fashionists of the country have turned the brilliant spotlight of their approval exclusively on home talent, gongs really should ring and trumpets let out a blast," wrote Jeanette of The Detroit Free Press, who visited New York while preparations were underway.<sup>47</sup>

According to The New York Evening Journal, the objective of the "American Edition" of Fashion Futures was to show the achievements, trends, and versatility of American designers and manufacturers.<sup>48</sup> Reportedly, there were 1,600 guests at the Waldorf Astoria where \$500,000 worth of clothes were shown. The show was organized around the themes, "America dresses the millions", "America makes to order", and "Hollywood". The same designers who

participated in the first Fashion Futures exhibited models. Some measure of the show's sphere of influence can be judged by the fact that twenty-five out-of-town fashion editors were reported in attendance.

At the time, Fashion Futures was regarded as trend-setting, not just in terms of its American orientation, but also in format. An illuminating observation by journalist, Mary Morris, appeared in The Detroit News. She noted that "...fashion history was made and a new pattern set for fashion shows," because of the staging. There was no pirouetting, no sermons about garments.<sup>49</sup> Instead, fashions moved quickly as models:

...frisked, danced and raced by...to the voice of Arthur Boran of the March of Time. Rather than talking about fashion, he commented...mind you...on...American events, habits and play places... resulting in a drama of...the American woman's mood of going places, doing things and looking smart.<sup>50</sup>

The Fashion Group's involvement in fashion design education closely parallels the presentations of American clothing. Each is highly symptomatic of art and industry. As an industrial art society, The Fashion Group played an active role in preparing designers for the garment trade. The most concentrated effort occurred between 1935 and 1938 - the same period as Fashion Futures - representing a serious attempt to be engaged in developing American fashion design.

Whereas the educational work of museums had focused on the creative side of apparel design with a view toward historic objects of art, The Fashion Group concentrated on guidelines for mass production. There is evidence that, during the 1930s, garment manufacturers were dissatisfied with the training

provided by formalized programs in fashion design.<sup>51</sup> The issue revolved around the failure of the sketch to prepare students to design in the mass production sector of industry. Even though the present curriculum of pattern making, garment construction, and instruction by working professionals was then available in leading schools, from the standpoint of manufacturers, this proved inadequate to problems of cost, mechanics, and fabrication encountered with more than one-of-a-kind design. Within this frame of reference, The Fashion Group's participation in fashion design education functioned on a number of levels: it strengthened the groundwork underlying the training of fashion designers for industry, made important inroads in establishing an awareness about this side of training, and cultivated an environment that fostered the development of ready-to-wear designers.

The organization accomplished the task in a fivefold manner. First, it acted as a focal point or forum, which enabled designers, retailers, manufacturers, and educators to meet and discuss issues and strategies germane to education. For example, a placement bureau advised educational institutions on the curriculum for various areas of fashion work, including apparel design.<sup>52</sup>

The Fashion Group also enlisted professional designers as instructors in a series of training programs, three of which were held between 1935 and 1938. The initiative was not devoted exclusively to fashion design. Lectures were also organized around the topics of merchandising, display, cosmetics, home furnishings, newspaper and magazine work, and publicity. A book that grew out of the project states that the goal was to provide "...the opportunity for people

interested in learning the fashion business to hear how the fashion world works from those actively and importantly engaged in fashion work."<sup>53</sup>

Little is known about the initial 1935 training course. Two Fashion Group Bulletins refer to it, but fail to elaborate.<sup>54</sup> In 1936, Hawes played a prominent role by chairing the session involving fashion design which, in addition to industrial and textile design, treated custom and ready-to-wear clothing. Helen Cookman, designer and director of Hampton Coats, spoke about ready-to-wear, while Margaret Macy of Bergdorf-Goodman's department store represented custom design. In an opening statement, Hawes addressed designers in industry, declaring that they were "...caught between the full expression of their creativeness and the manufacturers' hesitation to experiment."<sup>55</sup>

The 1937 vocational program formed the basis for The Fashion Group's book, How The Fashion World Works (1938). The chapter headings indicate a switch from the previous year's agenda and a concentration on manufacturing. There is no topic devoted to custom work, only a section about wholesale design by the ready-to-wear designer, Margot Kops. This book set the pace for future publications which the organization devoted to vocations in the fashion profession.<sup>56</sup>

In fact, the women associated with The Fashion Group authored the numerous articles and books published during the 1930s about American fashion, including the earliest essays devoted to the country's garment designers. Members contributed most of the writing to American Fashion Designers (1935), which characterized itself as representing the first known attempt to bring

together "...all recent information pertaining to the subject of American fashion designers and the trend toward greater recognition of American designed fashion."<sup>57</sup> Among them are the introductory article by Helen Cornelius (Associate Editor, Director of Fashion Services, Harper's Bazaar) tracing the history of the American Designer Movement; Dorothy Shaver's (Vice-President, Lord & Taylor) description of her marketing campaign to support American fashion designers; Kathleen Howard's (International Fashion Authority) report on Hollywood designers; and Julia Coburn's (Fashion Editor, Ladies' Home Journal) article about a career in fashion design.

The Fashion Group did not limit its engagement with the training of fashion designers to these formal courses, but embraced formats such as division meetings. In 1937, for example, Hawes entertained members and guests of the Fashion Handcraft Division at her salon where she illustrated her methods of designing.<sup>58</sup>

In an attempt to acquaint aspiring designers with professional requirements, individual members also made direct contacts with manufacturers. Spring of 1935 found four of the membership coordinating their efforts.<sup>59</sup> Virginia Pope, fashion editor of The New York Times, took a group of Vassar students through the workrooms of three New York wholesale houses where they spoke with designers Potter and Vilag. Afterwards, at a luncheon arranged by Pope, Hawes discussed her ideas about training and fashion design.

The Fashion Group's enthusiasm for the ready-to-wear industry affected emerging designers. In 1935, ten young women received their first public debut

at a Fashion Group press lunch, including Grace Arcuri of Herbert Kohn Co., Josette de Lima of David Goodstein, Margo Kops of Junior League Dresses, Vera Maxwell of Adler & Adler, Claire McCardell of Townley Frocks, and Ruth Payne of Starmaid, who were touted by the membership as the next Elizabeth Haweses and Muriel Kings.<sup>60</sup> All developed formidable reputations, but primarily Maxwell and McCardell are remembered today.

In 1938, The Fashion Group undertook an ambitious plan regarding education and ready-to-wear design. A "Committee on Training Standards for Fashion Designers" was formed "...to find the real training which must be given a young person who wishes to design in the fashion field."<sup>61</sup> In addition to Hawes, who acted as chair, Hildegard Fillmore, Ruth Kerr, Fifi Klein, Esther Lyman, Margot Kops, Virginia Pope, Hope Skillman, Ethel Smith and Sally Victor were involved in the project.

The directive focused on manufacturers and schools. The committee prepared a three-pronged questionnaire concentrating on the interest of manufacturers in designers and the number of designers that could be used; the educational background thought advisable or necessary; and the craft training required to design a dress or whatever in a manufacturing plant.

The idea was to tabulate the findings and make them available in a text book for prospective designers, training schools, and manufacturers.<sup>62</sup> The job of distributing 2,000 questionnaires to eight major industries, ranging from the apparel field to fabrics and accessories, was completed by the following May,

when plans continued for a manual of "inestimable value" for schools and colleges as well as the fashion industry.<sup>63</sup>

Unfortunately, The Fashion Group never published the results of the study. The Board of Governors debated whether the findings should be printed as planned or handled in a "more dynamic way," but apparently gave support to a "crusading attitude" versus an "academic" approach.<sup>64</sup> A letter written by Hughes to the executive secretary, Ethel Kremer, contains a significant piece of the research, indicating the areas where designers could be utilized. This letter makes clear the need for designers:

90% and more of American-Manufactured clothes are sold at \$10.75 and under, and that the number of houses within those low ranges which employ designers can literally be counted on one's two hands. In a word, 90% of American clothes are adapted, copied or just made somehow - without benefit of designers. The individual designer seems swallowed up by the volume octopus, which utilizes designers for 2% of American-Made clothes selling for \$29.50 and upward. The 8% in between may or may not have designers. The 90% below have almost none.<sup>65</sup>

Although no longer active in The Fashion Group when the questionnaire was completed, in Why Is A Dress (1942), a book concerning the education of fashion designers, Hawes referred to the study. In discussing the qualifications for apprentice designers, she wrote that "...manufacturers agreed that they could not recommend any type of formal training for future designers; the best kind of education would be found in the work room of a manufacturing plant."<sup>66</sup>

### III. Associations and Exchanges

As an industrial art society, The Fashion Group interrelated with numerous societies, organizations, and individuals dedicated to the advancement of



American design. From the beginning, it was widely connected and influential in the context of art and industry, hosting at its luncheons individuals such as Director of Industrial Relations at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Richard Bach, (who spoke on "The Psychology of Production" Jan. 20, 1932); the architect of the American Radiator Building, Raymond Hood, (whose topic was "Modern Trends in Architecture" October 31, 1933); and industrial designer, Henry Dreyfuss (who lectured on "Who Insists on Good Design" July, 1935).<sup>67</sup> Such interaction hallmarks the institutional work undertaken by industrial art societies. The active exchange of ideas, shared activities, and mutual support of members made possible the establishment of fashion as design.

The association between The Fashion Group and the Art Center, which, in 1931, became known by the additional name, National Alliance of Art and Industry, provides a representative case study. As indicated by their combined monthly bulletins, this relationship hinged upon related concerns and professional connections. The memberships traveled in similar circles and were familiar with and supportive of each other's activities.

An examination of the alliance between these societies reveals fashion's role in the wider context of design, especially industrial design, which rose to prominence during the 1930s.<sup>68</sup> This inquiry also reveals something about the networking among professional and well-to-do women then concerned with art, design, and community. It demonstrates that the patronage and support of an "American" art was not limited to the exclusive fine art object and the concept of

the artist, but embraced commercial and mass-produced items of everyday use and the profession of the designer.

The Art Center developed out of several successive societies linked with art and industry since the late 19th century. Formed to address the vocational concerns of artists and designers, The Art Alliance of America (1914) was the most immediate precursor.<sup>69</sup> Established in 1920, the Art Center served as an umbrella association for groups of artists and designers. According to its bulletin, the objective was to further "...the decorative crafts and industrial and graphic arts of America."<sup>70</sup> The membership, numbering over three thousand in the early 1920s, derived from seven "cooperating" societies: American Institute of Graphic Arts, Art Alliance of America, Art Directors Club, New York Society of Craftsmen, Pictorial Photographers of America, Society of Illustrators, and The Stowaways.

To foster the advancement of members, the Art Center maintained six exhibition galleries, a placement bureau, and a department that advised and directed artists, designers, and students. It promoted education, as well as a creative and supportive environment, offering exhibitions, conferences, lectures, and instruction in design and handicrafts. Some of the most prominent artists, designers, curators, and art patrons of the period were associated with the organization. These included Richard Bach, Alfred H. Barr Jr., M.C.D. Crawford, John Cotton Dana, Charles Dana Gibson, Cass Gilbert, Mrs. John D. Rockefeller Jr., and Mrs. Harry Payne Whitney.

Helen Sargent Hitchcock, mostly unknown today, looms large in the Art Center's history [Fig. 27]. She may have been the focal point around which the

women of The Fashion Group gravitated in dealing with the Art Center. Hitchcock belonged to the network formed by professional women and those who built careers of service to art and community welfare. In 1930, Helen Appleton Read, assistant director of the Art Alliance of America from 1924 to 1929, credited Hitchcock as one of the earliest to believe in "...the potentialities of American design and feeling assured that American industry would eventually and inevitably patronize American talent if the contacts were made..."<sup>71</sup>

According to her own account, Hitchcock had been passionate, since the turn of the century, about the vocational concerns of artists, envisioning gainful employment for them in the business world.<sup>72</sup> In 1898, while studying at the Art Student's League, she created the Art Worker's Club for Women for the benefit of artists' models. With the cooperation of Emily V. Hammond, among others, this expanded, in the early 1910s, into the Vocational League for Art Workers, housed at 45 E. 42nd Street which, in 1914, turned into the Art Alliance of America. Governed by a board of directors, Hitchcock served as first vice president.

Exhibitions were important to Hitchcock's vision, and early on the Art Alliance's galleries held exhibitions crucial to the history of art and industry and to fashion design. From 1916 to 1920, the organization sponsored some of New York's first industrial art exhibitions, which were also the first presentations of textiles designed for industry, including fabrics for women's apparel.<sup>73</sup> The initiative came from M.C.D. Crawford and Richard Bach, organizers of industrial

art functions, respectively, at the American Museum of Natural History and The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The interest in exhibitions prompted a need for more space. In 1917, a house was rented on East 47<sup>th</sup> Street, where Florence Levy, the well-known art educator and journalist, managed the galleries. The need for expansion to house a "Co-operative Art Building," led three years later to new spaces at 65-67 East 56th Street, and incorporation under the name, "Art Center" [Fig. 28].

The Art Center encouraged the design and production of both hand and machine made objects, but by the 1930s, the organization focused on the mass production of inexpensive, quality products. The shift took place in the late 1920s, beginning with the expansion of the Placement Service to include the Design Advisory.<sup>74</sup> The new agency catered to professional designers, art directors, and design consultants from various fields in the applied arts, while still helping student designers make contacts with industry.

In 1931, a "new activities organization" became incorporated as the "Art and Industry Alliance."<sup>75</sup> From then on, the Art Center became known by the additional title, "National Alliance of Art and Industry," whose stated purpose was "...to foster art in industry" and whose "...Board of Directors will represent the three vital interests - Artist, Producer and Consumer."<sup>76</sup> The new regime quickly undertook to establish the Industrial Institute, which offered lectures and conferences on topics such as styling, design, and merchandising, based on the premise that:

It is increasingly evident that some form of directed co-operation is necessary to insure this country's leadership in style and design. Trade

associations have been slow in their action and our manufacturers have failed to produce an organization that expresses our national character or voices our national needs in design. The fact that there is no organization giving an authoritative status to American production influences industrialists to turn elsewhere for leadership. The Institute believes that the exchange of ideas through lectures and round table conferences will coordinate thought and build up the confidence of the individuals and, in the end, make for a concensus of opinion and permanent leadership.<sup>77</sup>

An investigation of the memberships and affiliations of The Fashion Group and the Art Center reveals the depth of their connection. One has only to think about the fact that, in 1928, the very year that she helped spawn The Fashion Group, Edna Woolman Chase sat on the Art Center's board.<sup>78</sup> In that capacity, she was instrumental in starting an advisory service for manufacturers which eventually became the Design Advisory Service. Addressing the designer's role in an industrial context, this service was symptomatic of the Art Center's decisive shift toward machine design.

Similarly, in the same year that she became The Fashion Group's first president, Marion Taylor spoke about "Good taste Pays - Now and Always" at the Center's series on advertising art.<sup>79</sup> The evening's topic, "Does America Want Good Design," included The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Richard Bach in a lecture entitled, "Keep Art in Industry at Work." Taylor had presented a lecture earlier that year about "Merchandising and Its Problems," which was later published in a pamphlet. Again, in early 1932, Taylor led the round table discussion in a session sponsored by the Industrial Institute in which Woolman Chase discussed styling.<sup>80</sup> Likewise, in 1931, Mary Lewis of Best & Company

lectured at the newly formed Industrial Art Institute on the subject of "Design and the Salesman."<sup>81</sup>

It appears that, in 1934, The Fashion Group collaborated with the National Alliance of Art and Industry in the fashion design component of an industrial art exhibition. There are no records documenting The Fashion Group's official participation, but the membership certainly advised in the planning and development of the fashion show held under the National Alliance's auspices. It took place at the same location - Rockefeller Center –and at the same time as The Fashion Group's own exhibition, "Fashion Right", and like "Fashion Right", the theme of the "Industrial Arts Exposition" stressed American machine production and scientific know-how through the work of American manufacturers and designers. During the showing of American apparel, The Fashion Group's Dorothy Shaver of Lord & Taylor spoke about the public's reaction to American designed clothes, and four of the seven featured designers were associated with the organization: Elizabeth Hawes, Helen Cookman, Edith Davied, and Sally Victor. In addition, industrial designers who had helped to organize the industrial arts exhibition were guests of honor at a Fashion Group luncheon during the following month: Donald Deskey, Gilbert Rohde, and Russel Wright. Industrial designers whose work appeared in the exhibition were also present: Raymond Loewy, Marguerita Mergentime, and Marianna Von Allesch.<sup>82</sup>

Lucian Bernhard, who designed a variety of Bauhaus related sans-serif types during these years, designed the cover of the catalog that accompanied the National Alliance's "Industrial Arts Exposition". The graphics are clear and

bold in a sans-serif type combining red, black and white. Stripped of all extraneous lines, the graphics reflect the streamlining associated with industrial design in these years. Based on the catalog, the range of household and consumer products was enormous.<sup>83</sup> There were 123 designers and 19 business concerns represented, and 745 objects on view, including a prefabricated house. The New York World Telegram, carrying the headline, "Czars of Decor Emerging. Identities and Individualities of Designers Increasingly Appreciated," described the show as

...the first comprehensive and selective industrial design exposition to be held in America...Among the features will be a retrospective exhibit showing the production of several designers over a period of years, thus establishing identities."<sup>84</sup>

According to the trade press, the presentation of clothing on April 18, 1934 was favorably received, drawing a crowd that was twice the capacity of the showroom.<sup>85</sup> In contrast to "Fashion Right", a fashion show took the place of fixed displays, and emphasis was placed on designs for mass production. Along with "volume styles" and "volume production," there was a focus on "...selections of fabrics and the increased availability of American fabrics for style development."<sup>86</sup> The show revolved around spring and summer garments of over sixty items, including corsets, negligees, beach clothes and day and evening fashions, while stressing sports and tailored town clothes.

Several designers served as their own model and spokesperson.<sup>87</sup> Hawes, for instance, discussed American fashion after showing her sports wear collection. Gladys Parker modeled her own evening dresses, and Vida Moore showed and explained her shoe fashions. Helen Cookman (tailored coats and

suits), Edith Davied (negligees), and Alice Dowd (Warner Brothers corsets) were also present. Hats by Sally Victor and John Frederick were likewise represented. Although no pictures survive, the garments no doubt resembled the designers' current lines. Hawes, for example, probably showed examples of the sports wear that she designed for Lord and Taylor during the same season [Fig. 29].

#### IV. The Fashion Group As Catalyst

In 1939, perhaps, the most significant art and industry event of the decade occurred at the New York World's Fair. Like the "Century of Progress" before it, the "World of Tomorrow" promised a machine-made future and the hope of progress through the latest in science and technology.<sup>88</sup> Underwritten by huge corporations, American production, consumption, and business converged in the fair, with the objective of providing a window onto the future under the influence of science. The theme, "Building the World of Tomorrow," materialized through the work of industrial designers assisted by painters, architects, and sculptors who were responsible for the design of the many buildings necessary for the fair's operation - mainly exhibition halls and administration centers.<sup>89</sup> The list of designers included Norman Bel Geddes, Raymond Loewy, Henry Dreyfuss and Walter Dorwin Teague.

If industrial designers created the physical environment, there were fashion experts charting the course of the fashion segment. The Fashion Executive formed the backbone of the fashion activities, which centered around



fashion shows, workshops, and continuous exhibits. The two women, Marcia Conner and Mary Lewis, who assumed this leadership position, belonged to The Fashion Group. In addition to these significant figures, there were other members whose roles proved crucial to the fair's fashion events.

An examination of the interaction between these women and The Fashion Group's governing body demonstrates how an industrial art society furthered the development of American fashion design by acting as a catalyst for its members. The organization provided an environment that nurtured ideas and offered advice for the professional endeavors of the women who made up its ranks. Although the organization was not always in agreement, it created a forum for the lively discussion and exchange of views. Members relied upon each other for encouragement and support. In this way, The Fashion Group helped to crystallize the plans that led to the projects that shaped the direction of American design.

This examination also sheds light on the role of American fashion design in the 1939 World's Fair. It considers the way in which this aspect of the nation's industrial production functioned as an expression of the future. This study reveals how the fashion shows, garments, and events set up to showcase textile manufacturers and retail establishments related to the theme of American scientific and technological progress, not only from the viewpoint of professions in fashion design, but from the standpoint of industrial designers who created women's garments for the fair.

The major forums for fashion took place in two different spaces. A map in the 1939 official guide book refers to a building under the category, "Community Interests," as the Hall of Special Events, also known as the Hall of Fashion or the Textiles Building.<sup>90</sup> It was located, appropriately enough, on "Petticoat Lane" near Bowling Green Square. In 1940, the fashion center moved to become the focal exhibit for the Production and Distribution Zone where the "World of Fashion" pavilion replaced the Hall of Consumers in an attempt to increase failing attendance in the industrial zone.<sup>91</sup>

Marcia Connor, an early member of The Fashion Group, became the first to assume the role of Fashion Executive, followed in 1940 by Mary Lewis of Best & Company. Typical of fashion design in an art and industry context, fabrics produced in American factories were central to the fashion segments, and associations of textile manufacturers sponsored major events.

Under Connor's direction, a fashion exhibition opened in October, 1937 to the press and a select group of invited guests.<sup>92</sup> Held in the Rotunda of the Administration Building, it formed part of the fair's first focal exhibits, which included a display of "Chemicals" by Louis Skidmore, one on "Paints" by Loewy, one on "Clocks" by Teague, and another on "Fabrics" by Dreyfuss. In the latter, there were five mannequins in evening gowns matching the "progressive" shades of copper velvet drapery designed by Dreyfuss. Designers from Bonwit Teller, Bergdorf Goodman, Saks Fifth Avenue, Jay Thorpe and Henri Bendel created the original garments.

Two notable shows of American fashion occurred during Connor's directorship. One took place in May, 1939, marking New York's observance of National Cotton Week.<sup>93</sup> The first style show to be given in the Court of Peace, it promised to exhibit more than fifty items for women and children, many created for the occasion. At least two designers associated with The Fashion Group participated, namely, Muriel King and Claire McCardell.<sup>94</sup> McCardell, who was designing for Hattie Carnegie at the time, took first prize in the competition.<sup>95</sup> Although Hawes was no longer a member, she was among the featured designers. She showed "Daily Worker," described by The Journal of Commerce as a summer dress of navy and blue cotton.<sup>96</sup>

In September, 1939, a show sponsored by the National Advisory Committee on Women's Participation in the Fair was held in league with the International Silk Guild. Women's Wear Daily explained "Antiques of Tomorrow" as follows:

New York top dressmakers believing that future generations too will love the beautiful things that come down to them from this era, yesterday presented a fashion show of the "Antiques of Tomorrow" at the committee's building at the World's Fair after a luncheon to which over a hundred guests were invited.<sup>97</sup>

The International Silk Guild assembled fashions of day and evening wear, along with exhibits of furniture, fabrics, glass, silver, and jewels. Women's Wear Daily wrote: "The idea is an interesting one for retailers across the country to consider - selecting the finest examples of current merchandise for promotion on this basis."<sup>98</sup>

When it came to designers, the trade and fashion press gave Hawes special consideration. According to these sources, she was represented by two garments: a navy, silk crepe daytime dress with a blouse and full skirt;<sup>99</sup> and an evening gown of "spinach" green and beige silk with diagonal stripes, which The Cleveland News described as "...a striped dress, godmother of clothes...the stripes run a number of different ways and match when they meet. No easy task as any dressmaker knows."<sup>100</sup>

In 1940, Mary Lewis of Best & Company took over as Fashion Executive by appointment of the World's Fair on Fashion Concessions. By then, the fashion center had moved from its original location on Petticoat Lane to form the focal exhibit for the Production and Distribution Zone wherein "...the whole field of fashion is spread before you, from the basic materials to the creations of our native geniuses, including the ones who mount vegetable gardens on your hat and make you like it."<sup>101</sup>

In her vision for the fair, Lewis sought The Fashion Group's help. She had in mind a continuous fashion show located in a restaurant in the Fashion Building. The committee, organized to discuss her ideas, presented its results at a Board of Governor's meeting. One suggestion concerned a permanent exhibit of American fashion under The Fashion Group's name - "something symbolic".<sup>102</sup> The Board rejected this notion in favor of the chance to work with the Museum of Modern Art on an exhibition which "...would bring fashion up to the plane of art. This would have an impress that would have character and lasting value."<sup>103</sup> Another proposal called for a film "...showing personalities, how American

fashion is made, etc."<sup>104</sup> This suggestion mushroomed into an idea for a film on the fashion industry to be produced at a later date by the March of Time.

Whereas the committee's proposals never materialized, a description of what actually occurred under Lewis' leadership appeared in the May 15, 1940 issue of Vogue:

These are new in the industrial area ... There is the elliptical World of Fashion Building, full of mannequins lounging around in beautiful clothes, full of exposition shows on textiles, with one of its fresh ideas a typical American department store restaurant. Mary Lewis has directed the whole project.<sup>105</sup>

More precisely, the Worlds Fair Daily of October 26, 1940 listed under the heading of special events: "...afternoon frocks and sportswear by young American designers presented by Chic patterns at the World of Fashion Theatre." The designs were scheduled to be on view four times during the afternoon and early evening.<sup>106</sup>

Alice Hughes, who wrote an influential fashion column for The New York American and a syndicated column called "Woman's New York," also requested assistance from The Fashion Group for her project. She wanted support for a series of lectures involving "...the whole gamut of women's interests..." from clothes to cosmetics.<sup>107</sup> Basically, because the organization would be competing with its own membership by appealing directly to the consumer, Hughes' request was rejected.

Along with the fashion lectures, there may have been another aspect to Hughes' participation in the fair. It is tempting to think that she had a hand in orchestrating the 1939 presentation of dresses for the future designed by nine

industrial designers: Egmont Erens, Donald Deskey, Henry Dreyfuss, Raymond Loewy, Joseph B. Platt, Gilbert Rohde, George Sakier, Walter Dorwin Teague, and Russel Wright.

The fashion magazine, Vogue, credited itself for the participation of industrial designers in the fair's fashion events. In the February 1939 issue, an article devoted to the futuristic costumes explains that the Fair approached the magazine to provide material for the "Fashions of Tomorrow". After insisting that fashion designers of today "...live too much in the present...Their genius lies in the quick response to the fluctuations of contemporary taste..." Vogue suggested the "...Industrial Designers of this country - men who shape our destinies and our kitchen sinks..." as best suited for the task, and "...All accepted very graciously."<sup>108</sup>

However, six months earlier, Hughes had challenged some of the same men to design women's clothes. On June 9, 1938, her column, "Woman's New York," ran the headline, "Miss Hughes Defies Industrial Designers to Explain Choice In Clothes". The article proceeds to describe a recent party at Dreyfuss' penthouse attended by the journalist and a "posse" of industrial designers. Hughes was a friend of Jeanne Loewy, and familiar with her husband, Raymond, and other industrial designers, such as Teague and Deskey, who made up the crowd at Dreyfuss' that day. Beginning with an account of the successes and talents of industrial designers, their "...endless arguments over functional design..." and seeming belief "...they can do anything - anything at all..." the column then addresses the issue of women's clothing and the industrial designer:

Take the crowd of creators at Henry's party the other afternoon. They all agreed on one thing - that they could design women's clothes as well as any Schiaparelli, Vionnet, Clair Potter or Elizabeth Hawes. Well, a few of us girls called them on that one, sharply, and challenged them to sew up or shut up. So maybe these cocky men will produce something. One thing I am certain of, and that is that practically all of these talented gents are married and that they insist on helping choose their wives' wardrobes. Thus the shoe slips on the other foot, for most of us style-loafers stick our fingers into our men's dress problems, and often get them well smacked. Of all the creative minds in New York, the industrial designers are by far the proudest and most confident. All right big shots -let's see your clothes.<sup>109</sup>

Perhaps this dare underlay the Fair's invitation to Vogue. There was hardly a fashion event that was untouched by the Fashion Executive, and the habit of discussing ideas in The Fashion Group makes it possible that the competitive spirit behind Hughes' column stimulated a project for the World of Tomorrow.

The futuristic designs of the industrial designers are known through illustrations and descriptions published in Vogue, as stated above. All the contributors created garments for next century's woman, except for Rohde. In describing Rohde's jumpsuit for tomorrow's man, the Machine Age in America catalog properly references Buck Rogers and the realm of science fiction<sup>110</sup>. As for the women's garments, the same could be said. The pajama-like clothing and accessories, like Wright's electric headlight, evoke a series of associations with science, high technology, and extraterrestrial life [Fig. 30].

However, there is not just a sense of a "fictional" future perceived in terms of outer space. Rather, abundant signs of traditional femininity lurk everywhere from Teague's see-through evening gown to Aren's high-heeled glass and lucite wedgies [Figs. 31 & 32]. In clothes that admittedly aim at being decorative, "...I

have high hopes that the-not-too-far-in-the-distant-future lady will want to turn into a beautiful doll at night"...., as Dreyfuss says, emphasis on leisure activities, in contrast to the work place, arouses notions about women's roles that are ultimately conventional.<sup>111</sup>

One exception is Loewy's "All-Hour Dress" which resembles clothing actually worn by 1930s women and performs a practical service in being suitable for various activities, although not oriented toward a professional career [Fig. 33]. Platt's electrically heated coat equally offers a contemporary and functional value [Fig. 34].

Hawes' contribution to the fair makes all these designs seem superfluous in comparison. In summer, 1939, she exhibited the most radical, practical, and plausible expression of the future in a trouser and jacket combination to be worn "tomorrow" on the street - "today" in the country.<sup>112</sup> Made of linen-like silk with matching tunic and silk blouse, the novelty of the design must have seized the press. Papers across the country showed a photograph of a model posed in "Knickerbocker News" with the caption:

Todays Evening Clothes are Street Clothes of Tomorrow; The clothes of "today" are designed with not only style as a feature but also with an eye to comfort and very much of an eye to the future. The clothes here were all seen at the World's Fair and follow the trend of the World of Tomorrow.<sup>113</sup>

The public wearing of pants was then unacceptable for women, especially in an urban environment, and Hawes was generating attention confronting this dictum.<sup>114</sup> In April, she had appeared as the main speaker before members of the Pratt Institute Costume Design Alumnae Association wearing short, dark, narrow



trousers to the audience's amazement. According to the report in The New York Sun, "...Realizing that the women were somewhat startled by her costume....,"

Hawes explained her dress:

Our women eventually will wear trousers, at least for work. I don't know how soon this will be, but I think not before the next war. The conviction that women are not built to wear trousers is all foolishness. Just as many men have fat tummies and broad waistlines.<sup>115</sup>

Illustrations published in Women's Wear Daily of Hawes' 1939 Spring collection showed an example of her "town-trouser" outfits [Fig 35]. Similar to "Knickerbocker News," this design included dress-length pants worn with a tunic. Along with the caption, "Hawes Predicts Trousers for Town," the accompanying text reiterates the revolutionary use of trousers "...for shopping or for business women."<sup>116</sup>

## Notes For Chapter 3

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<sup>1</sup> The Fashion Group Inc. Constitution and By-Laws, 1936, p.3, The Fashion Group Archives, The Fashion Group, New York (hereafter cited as FGA).

<sup>2</sup> Francis D. Klingender's seminal study Art and the Industrial Revolution (1947; rev. and extended by Arthur Elton, 1968; reprint, New York: Schocken Books, 1970) contains the best-known discussion defining the hallmarks of an industrial art society, in this case the Lunar Society initiated in 1760 in England. Albert Boime also offers a rich discussion of the art associations formed in England in response to developments in manufacturing in A Social History of Modern Art, vol. 1, Art in an Age of Revolution 1750-1800 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 185-213.

<sup>3</sup> Richards in Art in Industry (461-677) provides examples of industrial art societies, including the Architectural League of New York and the following Art-In-Trades Club, under the heading "Agencies Furthering the Situation in New York City and Chicago."

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 47. For a more detailed discussion about the Art-In-Trades Club see Pulos, American Design Ethic, 264-265; 298-299.

<sup>5</sup> Levy, "Training Required for the Industrial Arts," The Architectural Record (April 1922); reprint, New York: Committee on Commercial Education of the Chamber of Commerce of The State of New York and The Industrial Arts Council, 1922, unpaginated.

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Adams, "We Record Our Memories of How the Fashion Group Started," The Fashion Group Bulletin, February 1941, The Fashion Group Papers, Special Collections, New York Public Library (hereafter cited as FG, NYPL).

<sup>7</sup> The Fashion Group Inc. Constitution and By-Laws, p.3.

<sup>8</sup> FGB, February 1941.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> It was in such a setting that the "industrial designer" rose to meet the challenge of overproduction through a constant turnover in style. See Meikle, Twentieth Century Limited, 8-18; David Gartman, "Harley Earl and the Art and Color Section: The Birth of Styling at General Motors," in Design History, 122-144.

<sup>11</sup> Estelle Hamburger, It's a Woman's Business (New York:

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Vanguard Press, 1939), 255.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 256.

<sup>13</sup> Margaretta Stevenson, ed. How The Fashion World Works (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1938), xi.

<sup>14</sup> FGB, March 1933.

<sup>15</sup> Membership information derived from FBG, membership lists from the organization's archives, and archivist, Lenore Benson.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., See especially FGB, January 1936, p. 6.

<sup>18</sup> The Fashion Group Luncheon (TS)(hereafter cited as FGL), March 1933, FG, NYPL; FGB, April 1935. See also undated Minutes of The Board of Governors' Meeting (TS) which state, "The following members are recommended to serve from February 1939 to February 1941 to take the place of Miss Hawes...", FGA.

<sup>19</sup> For a detailed discussion of this matter see p. 319--330 below.

<sup>20</sup> Richards, Art In Industry, 26.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 474.

<sup>23</sup> Nancy L. Green, Ready-To-Wear and Ready-To-Work (Durham & London: Duke University press, 1997), 41.

<sup>24</sup> Leopold, "The Manufacture of the Fashion System," 115. For a history of style obsolescence in the New York womenswear industry in the 1910s and 1920s see Leopold, 107-113. For another view on styling and the fashion industry see Susan Stresser, Waste and Want: A Social History of Trash (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1999).

<sup>25</sup> Maurice Rentner, "Wholesale Designers," in American Fashion Designers, ed. Grace D. Ely (New York: Personnel Group, National Retail Dry Goods Association, 1935), 20.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>28</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics in Levine A History of the Garment Workers' Union, 524-525; See also Green, Ready-to-Wear, 25, 57.

<sup>29</sup> Rentner, "Wholesale Designers," 20.

<sup>30</sup> For contemporary biographical information about these American fashion designers see Ely, American Fashion Designers, 9-18, 22-34.

<sup>31</sup> "American Designers Feted at Publicity Luncheon Given By Lord & Taylor Executive," WWD, 10 March 1932. See also Dorothy Shaver, "American Designed Fashions – How They Grew," Executive Service Bulletin (Policy Holders Service Bureau, Metropolitan Life Insurance Co., New York (July 1933; Ely, American Fashion Designers; Potter, "Elizabeth Hawes, 22-31.

<sup>32</sup> Milbank, New York Fashion, 121.

<sup>33</sup> Fortune, "The Dressmakers of the U.S.," 8, no. 6 (Dec. 1933): 37.

<sup>34</sup> Kay Thomas, "American Designers' Movement Gains Momentum with Show of Models," The New York Sun July, 1932, News and Views of Interest to Women section.

<sup>35</sup> FGB, March, 1934.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, January.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, April.

<sup>38</sup> "Fashions and Home Furnishings in Contemporary Man-Made Materials," New York Journal of Commerce (March, 30 1934), Hawes SB, 1.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> FGB, March 1934.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*; Kay Daniels, "Group Exhibit 'Man-Made' Fabrics," New York Evening Journal, 3 April 1934.

<sup>42</sup> FGL, September 1933. Other fashion-related groups such as the Custom Tailor's Club, the Retail Millinery Association, and the Fashion Guild staged showings of American fashion, but not enough research is yet available to determine the status of these societies in relation to the larger aims of art and industry. The Fashion Group presented a Fashion Futures in 1941, but this represents an effort to support American fashion in face of world war II, and so

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introduces another phase in the history of The Fashion Group and American design. See Buckland, "Promoting American Fashion," 86-95; 121-123; The Fashion Group with the collaboration of The Fashion Originator's Guild, New York's Fashion Futures (New York: Cosmopolitan, Inc., 1940).

<sup>43</sup> FGB, October 1935.

<sup>44</sup> New York Journal of Commerce (September 6, 1935), Hawes SB, 1.

<sup>45</sup> Hughes, "Styles For Future On View," New York American, 12 September 1935.

<sup>46</sup> WWD, 23 November 1937, Hawes SB, 1.

<sup>47</sup> Jeanette, "American Designs to be honored by Fashion Group," The Detroit Free Press, 13 September 1937.

<sup>48</sup> The New York Evening Journal, 22 November 1937, Hawes SB, 2.

<sup>49</sup> Mary Morris, "Fashion Future's Field Day of Experts Sets New Pace In Stagecraft," The Detroit News, 28 November 1937.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> For a discussion on this matter see p. 85-86.

<sup>52</sup> FG Constitution, FGA.

<sup>53</sup> Stevenson, How The Fashion World Works, xi.

<sup>54</sup> FGB, December 1935; Ibid., May 1937.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., April 1936, p.5.

<sup>56</sup> See Bernice Gertrude, Keys to A Fashion Career (New York: McGraw Hill, 1946); Olive P. Gately ed., Your Future in the Fashion World (New York: Popular Library, 1962); Stephanie Cartwright and others, Your Future in Fashion Design (New York: R. Rosen Press, 1966).

<sup>57</sup> Ely, American Fashion Designers, unpaginated. For more about the Fashion Group's membership and careers in fashion design see p. 311-317 below.

<sup>58</sup> FGB, May 1937.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., April 1935, p.7.

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, March 1936.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, September 1938, p.7.

<sup>62</sup> Detroit News, 20 September 1938, Elizabeth Hawes Scrapbook Collection, Out of Town, A-L and M-Z, 1932-1939, Brooklyn Museum Library (hereafter cited as Hawes SB, 3. EH, 1928-1940. The article quotes Hawes as saying that The Fashion Group planned to compile a textbook for young designers and to get the cooperation of manufacturers in training apprentices.

<sup>63</sup> FGB, May 1939.

<sup>64</sup> Minutes Board of Governors (TS), 17 May 1940.

<sup>65</sup> Hughes to Kremer, 15 May 1940, FGA.

<sup>66</sup> Hawes, Why Is A Dress, 87.

<sup>67</sup> See FGL (TS) 20 January 1932; *Ibid.*, 31 October 1933; FGB, July 1935, p.3.

<sup>68</sup> For a discussion about the rise of industrial design see Meikle, Twentieth Century Limited, 39-67; Pulos, American Design Ethic, 316-419.

<sup>69</sup> For a contemporary account of the founding of the Art Alliance of America see "The Art Alliance of America," Arts and Decoration (November 1914): 4-5.

<sup>70</sup> For a contemporary account of the Art Center's history, marking its tenth anniversary, see Bulletin of the Art Center (hereafter cited as BAC) 8, no. 8 (May 1930): 95-106. See also Richards, Art In Industry, 465.

<sup>71</sup> Helen Appleton Read, "The Art Alliance of America," BAC 8, no. 8 (May 1930): 108. "Hitchcock" was Helen Sanborn Sargent's married name (also Mrs. Ripley Hitchcock). See Who's Who in America, vol. 10-14 (Chicago: Marquis Who's Who, inc., 1918-1927); Durwood Howes ed., American Women, 1935-1940, a composite biographical dictionary (Los Angeles: Richard Blank Publishing Company, 1940).

<sup>72</sup> Helen Sargent Hitchcock, "The Origin And Development Of The Art Center," BAC 8, no.8 (May 1930): 95.

<sup>73</sup> See Schoeser, "Textiles," 110-111.

<sup>74</sup> Harriet E. Brewer, "Art Alliance of America," BAC 9, No. 7 (April 1931): 106, 110.

<sup>75</sup> Harry A. Groesbeck Jr., "Art Center Changes," BAC 9, no. 9 (November-

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December 1931): 132.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> "The Industrial Institute," BAC, 9, no. 6 (March 1931): 83.

<sup>78</sup> Brewer, "Art Alliance of America," 106.

<sup>79</sup> "Art and Industry Alliance," BAC 9, no. 9 (November-December 1931): 134.

<sup>80</sup> FGB, February 1932.

<sup>81</sup> BAC (March 1931): unpaginated.

<sup>82</sup> FGL (TS), 1 May 1934. The Fashion Group developed strong ties with industrial designers. Rohde hosted the Home Furnishings section of the Fashion Group at his studio in April 1935, lecturing on the virtues of wood veneers for commercial production as seen in FGB, May 1935, p. 8. In summer 1935, Dreyfuss lectured about good design at a luncheon meeting, *Ibid.*, July 1935, p.3. In October of that year, Loewy spoke to members of the Design and Display section held in his studio, *Ibid.*, November 1935, p. 7.

<sup>83</sup> National Alliance of Art and Industry, Industrial Arts Exposition 1934, (New York, 1934), unpaginated. See also Pulos, American Design Ethic, 357.

<sup>84</sup> "Czars of Décor Emerging. Identities and Individualities of Designers Increasingly Appreciated," New York World Telegram, 10 March 1934.

<sup>85</sup> " 'Volume Styles' by American Designers Feature of Art Show," WWD, 19 April 1934.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> Hughes, "American Designer's Show held at Rockefeller Centre under the auspices of National Alliance of Art and Industry," New York American, 20 April 1934; "U.S. Designers Stage Show of Own Fashions; New Styles Exhibited at Rockefeller Centre," New York Herald Tribune, 19 April 1934; Kay Daniels, "Designers Feel Clothes Tell Own Merits," New York Journal, 21 April 1934.

<sup>88</sup> See Rosemarie Haag Bletter, et al., Remembering the Future: The New York World's Fair from 1939 to 1964 (New York: Rizzoli and Queens Museum, 1989) and Bletter, "The World of Tomorrow: The Future with a Past," in High Styles: Twentieth-Century American Design (New York: Whitney Museum and Summit Books, 1985); Larry Zim, Mel Lerner and Herbert Rolfes, The World of Tomorrow: The 1939 World's Fair (New York: Harper and Row, 1988; The Queens Museum,

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Dawn of a New Day: The New York World's Fair 1939/1940 (New York: New York University Press, 1980); Harvey Green, "The Promise and Peril of High Technology," in Craft in the Machine Age, 36-45.

<sup>89</sup> See Meikle, Twentieth Century Limited, 153-158, 188-210; Smith, Making The Modern, 405-421; Marchand, "The Designers go to the Fair, I: Walter Dorwin Teague and the Professionalization of Corporate Industrial Exhibits, 1933-1940," and "The Designers go to the Fair, II: Norman Bel Geddes, the General Motors "Futurama," and the Visit-to-the-Factory Transformed," in Design History, 103-145.

<sup>90</sup> Official Guide Book: New York World's Fair 1939 (New York: Exposition Publications, 1939), 88. Various editions have different paginations, but there is no way to distinguish them. See also Richards Wurts and Others, The New York World's Fair 1939/1940 in 155 photographs (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1977), 81.

<sup>91</sup> Zim, World of Tomorrow, 69.

<sup>92</sup> FGB, October 1937, p. 7.

<sup>93</sup> See "Cotton Show at Fair, Saturday Afternoon, To Be Curtain Raiser on New York's Observance of National Cotton Week, May 22-27," WWD, 17 May 1939.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, "Cotton Show at Fair, It was the first style revue to be given in the Court of Peace," 22 May 1939.

<sup>95</sup> See Kohle Yohannan and Nancy Nolf, Claire McCardell: Redefining Modernism (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1998), 42.

<sup>96</sup> The Journal of Commerce, 20 May 1939, Hawes SB, 2. Hughes, "Miss Hughes Defies Industrial Designers."

<sup>97</sup> "Wide at Hip or Draped Types in 'Antiques of Tomorrow' Revue. New York Top Dressmakers Show Costumes at Fashion Show at World's Fair Under National Advisory Committee Sponsorship," WWD, 21 September 1939.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> Cleveland Plain Dealer, 16 October 1939, Hawes SB, 3.

<sup>100</sup> The New York Times, 21 September 1939, Hawes SB, 1; Cleveland News, 17 October 1939, Hawes SB, 3.

<sup>101</sup> Zim, World of Tomorrow, 69.



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- <sup>102</sup> Minutes Board of Governors (TS), 7 February 1940; *Ibid.*, 14 March 1940.
- <sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>105</sup> "These are new in the industrial area," Vogue (May 15, 1940): 45.
- <sup>106</sup> Worlds Fair Daily, no. 169, 26 October 1940. "Hawes Predicts Trousers for Town," WWD, 6 March 1939.
- <sup>107</sup> Minutes Board of Governors (TS), 14 March 1940.
- <sup>108</sup> "Vogue presents Fashions of the Future – on 9 following pages. Costumes by 9 leading industrial designers," Vogue (February 1, 1939): 71.
- <sup>109</sup> Hughes, "Miss Hughes Defies Industrial Designers."
- <sup>110</sup> Wilson, The Machine Age in America, 336.
- <sup>111</sup> "Vogue presents Fashions of the Future," 145.
- <sup>112</sup> Philadelphia Inquirer, 2 July 1939, Hawes SB, 3.
- <sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>114</sup> For a discussion about American women and trousers see Sara Berry, Screen Style, Fashion and Femininity in 1930s Hollywood (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 142-182; Kate Luck, "Trouble in Eden, Trouble with Eve: Women, Trousers and Utopian Socialism in Nineteenth-Century America," in Chick Thrills, 200-212; Steele, "Dressing For Work," in Men and Women: Dressing the Part, ed. by Claudia Brush Kidwell and Valerie Steele (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), 64-91.
- <sup>115</sup> The New York Sun, 2 April 1939, Hawes SB, 2.
- <sup>116</sup> "Hawes Predicts Trousers for Town," WWD, 6 March 1939.

**PART TWO**

**MASS PRODUCTION: 'ELIZABETH HAWES . . . DESIGNER FOR MILLIONS'**

## Chapter 4

## TOWARDS MASS PRODUCING READY-TO-WEAR, 1928-1934

Hawes, whom her friends call 'Babe' or 'Lisa' is the 'enfant terrible' of American design. She shocks the quality dress houses by making her mad, modern clothes of anything that takes her fancy – suede, rope, canvas, or Bianchini silk. She shocks some of her best customers by refusing to admit them to her openings which she boasts are parties for herself and her friends. She shocked everybody by undertaking a medium-priced wholesale line while keeping her exclusive couturier trade (Fortune, 1933).<sup>1</sup>

She combines the American and Parisian methods of design by selling her models at retail at terrific prices and also – listen to this - selling models to manufacturers for reproduction at \$29.75, this being just one reason why she is termed fashion's enfant terrible (C. Oglesby, Fashion Careers American Style, 1935).<sup>2</sup>

Any study of fashion design and art and industry must consider mass production. The industrial art of garment making, which initially embraced custom and ready-to-wear apparel, increasingly rested upon mechanization. By the 1930s, two factors had crucially affected the womenswear industry: ready-to-wear clothing and style variation predicated a future based on volume output and standardization to the demise of custom design (professional dressmaking). As a result, there was an increasing demand for designers who could resolve the technical and artistic problems posed by bringing good design to bear on the mass production of women's ready-to-wear.<sup>3</sup>

One 1930s fashion designer who made a significant contribution in this respect was Elizabeth Hawes. Although she made her main living through her custom salon and private clientele, Hawes designed ready-to-wear for

manufacturing firms and department stores, but most significantly, she theorized design for mass production and guidelines for ready-to-wear designers, setting the pace for the individuals who came under her agency. This is what concerns us here. Hawes' insights provide a window into American art and industry, during a time when design solutions were sought for womenswear manufacturing, and what it meant to be a ready-to-wear designer was still being conceived.

For scholars and popular mythology, Fashion Is Spinach (1938) provides the main source for Hawes' stance on mass production.<sup>4</sup> Although the book, which made The New York Times' best-seller list, endorses good design through mass production, commentators typically focus on one point in this semi-autobiography, positioning Hawes as an iconoclast and rebel for her scathing criticism of Seventh Avenue's inefficiency and lack of artistic vision.<sup>5</sup> Never mind that contemporaries frequently found the book an entertaining and insightful look at the nature of women's ready-to-wear in America (she had her detractors, too).<sup>6</sup> In terms of machine technology, Hawes' reputation rests largely upon the dictum that, like spinach, the garment industry forces fashion upon consumers because it is good for them.

The current view regarding Hawes and mass production needs reconsideration. An in depth study indicates a more complex and favorable picture. Although Fashion Is Spinach dates toward the end of a decade of professional activity, it does not represent Hawes' total vision. Rather, it offers a partial view, and requires examination within a larger context of ideas and stimuli.

Hawes was primarily an idea person, open to insights and experiences. Over time and under a variety of influences, she modified her thinking about fashion for the masses. Far from her image as a rebel, Hawes worked within the parameters of contemporary design theory and production methods to define a role for designer, manufacturer, and consumer in the industrial production of women's garments. She was totally abreast of the issues of the time, and directed attention toward resolving the problem of providing every woman in America the benefit of good clothing.

As a fashion designer, Hawes viewed mass production as the wave of the future. While style variation was a significant contemporary concern, she steered her efforts toward the organization of the garment industry.<sup>7</sup> Instead of an aesthetic governing the appearance of ready-to-wear clothes, she articulated a theory about the way in which designers, manufacturers, and consumers should work together. She envisioned nothing less than a restructuring of the womenswear industry on the basis of custom design. Simultaneously, her vision affected the look of her ready-to-wear garments. Hawes believed that all American women could have beautiful clothes, and her efforts to achieve this goal earned her a reputation as the "enfant terrible," as the above statements show.

### I. Early Influences

Several overlapping factors influenced the direction of Hawes' thinking about mass production. In discussing her upbringing and education, Bettina Berch,

Hawes' biographer, alludes to an explanation for the designer's interest in design for the masses. She outlines the left-wing perspective associated with Vassar in the 1920s, and the "socially concerned" economics, which affected Hawes' mindset about a fashion career.<sup>8</sup>

Hawes grew up in Ridgewood, New Jersey, and was reared conventionally for a young girl of middle-class status.<sup>9</sup> Like many young women of her background, she attended Vassar (1921-1925), as did her mother and sisters, where she majored in Economics. In Fashion Is Spinach, Hawes recalled a teacher's assurance that the world would benefit if good clothing were available to more than the-well-to-do.<sup>10</sup>

Although Vassar's "socialist" environment no doubt affected Hawes' attitude toward mass production, there were more potent forces at work, grounded in professional experience and connections. From 1928 to 1934, the time when Hawes first became acquainted with views about mass production and formulated a partial theory that took into account production, design and the consumer, the two major influences were European modernism and American art and industry. The former was essentially theoretical, and the latter gave Hawes practical experience in a specifically American context. Under this combined impetus, Hawes drew on her background in fashion design, bringing together the two distinct tendencies in her practice: personalized designs for individuals; and standardized designs for the mass market.

It appears that the earliest influence on Hawes' thinking came from American art and industry. The evidence derives from Hawes' account of her years

in Paris during the late 1920s. After graduation from Vassar, she went to Paris to hone her design skills. While designing and making her own clothes since the age of nine or ten,<sup>11</sup> Hawes' formal training in fashion design began during summer vacations from college. In 1923, she studied life drawing and sketching from museum collections at the New York School of Fine and Applied Art (Parsons School of Design), then apprenticed as an assistant dressmaker at Bergdorf Goodman's custom salon, where she acquired professional skills in dress construction by learning "...how expensive clothes were made to order."<sup>12</sup> This education was capped in Paris with three years in various fashion jobs as stylist, copyist, columnist, and assistant designer in the couture house of Nicole Groult.<sup>13</sup> For a season with Groult, who was the sister of couturier, Paul Poiret, she enhanced her design skills, and learned how to put together a collection.<sup>14</sup>

When in Paris, Amos Parrish, an influential New York promotion man, piqued Hawes' interest in mass production: "Why don't you come home to America to design? America needs designers."<sup>15</sup> Since the garment industry was undergoing a crisis brought about by increasing style variation, the demand for ready-to-wear designers had risen enormously. Meanwhile, Hawes herself had recognized the growing importance of mass production and its threat to couture. At first hand, she learned that American buyers regarded Parisian designs as unsuitable for their customers at home.<sup>16</sup> So, in 1928, when she returned from Paris to New York, Hawes was acutely aware of the opportunities that mass production presented, and sought work in the wholesale market, although to no avail:

I did not in any case return to New York with the faintest idea of setting up my own business. Amos Parrish told me America needed designers and I assumed I would find a place without much trouble.<sup>17</sup>

On the same subject, Hawes said:

I couldn't hope nor did I want to set up business under the old French system. It creaked. To an American it was anachronistic. There was something decayed about the whole of Paris.<sup>18</sup>

In 1928, Hawes opened a custom salon on West 56th Street in partnership with Rosemary Harden, both designing models.<sup>19</sup> Following Harden's departure in May, 1930, Hawes incorporated, and in 1933, opened a new salon on East 67<sup>th</sup> Street where, according to a contemporary source, a dress form in the window displayed a red, white, and blue ribbon, thus expressing her American identity.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, she took a pair of open scissors as her trademark [Fig. 36].

Within the thriving garment center of New York City, Hawes' awareness about mass production swiftly evolved into ideas. Her 1931 collaboration with Contempora Inc., International Service of Art To Industry, could have prompted her first serious appraisal of ready-to-wear design. Contempora was an association of designers and artists with an office and studios in New York.<sup>21</sup> Members included the director, Paul Lester Weiner, the designers, Bruno Paul, Lucian Bernhard, and Paul Poiret, and the artist, Rockwell Kent.

In the February, 1931 issue of Woman's Home Companion, Contempora offered a contest intended to give women a chance to express their views about recent style changes. Hawes contributed the winning dress among the six designs for dresses and silks. The magazine described them as "...all original creations of



Contempora, an organization of well-known artists devoted to the development of art in industry."<sup>22</sup>

A study of the entries reveals typical 1931 dress silhouettes and no shared aesthetic in the textile designs [Fig. 37]. From the viewpoint of the readership, style and color were main concerns that together offered practicality, simplicity, beauty, and suitability for any body type. A letter to Hawes from the magazine's Fashion Editor, Ethel Little, states:

I cannot tell you how interested our women have been in your dress. We had over 16,000 letters and almost 6,000 of them were for Promenade which is the name given to your design. I might add too that most of the women voted for the dress because they liked the style of the dress itself.<sup>23</sup>

Along with directions for ordering a pattern of "Promenade", the magazine's July issue contained the first and second prize-winning letters.<sup>24</sup> Mrs. A. M. Weesner of Nashville, Tennessee wrote, "...So, considering beauty, adaptability, utility and the good taste of simplicity my choice must be Promenade." From Washington D.C. Mrs. George Authier said, "...In my opinion Promenade is an all-occasion frock, easy to look at and easy to wear. As the elder Worth said of navy blue serge: It is altogether fool-proof."

In view of this contest, Hawes presumably shared goals with Contempora, and had first-hand exposure to a formalized thinking about mass production, which encouraged her to consider its implications for clothing design. Although a pattern of the winning entry was made available to the magazine's readers, as opposed to a prototype for industry, Contempora had an interest in mass production. Its sole exhibition in 1929 at the Art Center emphasized "quantity" production through

standardization.<sup>25</sup> The accompanying catalog reveals a belief in type forms demonstrated through a series of "harmonized rooms," which stressed Le Corbusier's ideas for "rational backgrounds for living, obtainable through mass production" for the average consumer.<sup>26</sup>

For *Contempora*, "typical forms" and "standardization" meant the suppression of the designer's individuality to the production of anonymous types. The exhibition catalog specifically states that "...No one of the designers has imposed a too definite personal style upon his units of decoration."<sup>27</sup> Contributing to the exhibition were *Contempora*'s director, Paul Lester Wiener, and Lucian Bernhard, Bruno Paul, Paul Poiret, Erich Mendelsohn, Rockwell Kent, Julius Klinger, Joseph Sinel, and Vally Wieselthier. In addition, well-known figures such as Norman Bel Geddes, John Cotton Dana, Lewis Mumford, and Frank Lloyd Wright served on organizing and advisory committees, as well as leading members of American commercial organizations, industrial firms, manufacturing establishments, and department stores.

Although Hawes probably gained an outlook about standardization from *Contempora*, she may already have formulated an opinion, since the issue was topical. In fact, it is more than possible that she brought *Contempora* together with Woman's Home Companion in the organization's only known effort in the area of clothing design. Her ties to the magazine predated the *Contempora* contest, having been the subject of an article, "Along Your Own Lines," in the October, 1930 issue.<sup>28</sup> This may indicate that Hawes and *Contempora* were thinking in a similar vein.

Nevertheless, what she got from the experience no doubt expanded her thinking, although how much she looked to *Contempora* for guidelines must remain speculation. The association with creative individuals who stood on the side of mass production must have sparked her artistic sense and led to a philosophy of design that formed the basis for a theory about designers, manufacturers, and customers in the production of ready-to-wear clothing. During this time, however, mass production, while a central tenet of *Contempora*, remained largely an abstraction for Hawes. Until she entered the wholesale field, the individual client of her couture business took priority over the vast majority of American women.

Hawes' involvement with *Contempora* is also significant in representing the direct influence of European modernism through individuals linked with the German *Werkbund*. Bruno Paul and Lucian Bernhard belonged to the early history of the industrial art society founded in 1907 to improve German production through an alliance of designers and manufacturers.<sup>29</sup> In its endeavors, the *Werkbund* represents important trends in German modernism prior to the founding of the Bauhaus (1919) in the form of geometric machine styles and standardization for mass production.

In light of the *Werkbund*'s linkage with the German garment industry close in time to the outbreak of World War I, it is not surprising that *Contempora* showed an interest in women's dress styles and fabrics. In particular, Lucian Bernhard, along with the designer Lilly Reich, spearheaded the *Werkbund*'s Association of the German Fashion Industry in organizing a 1915 exhibition with the goal of freeing Germany from the domination of "foreign" styles and eliminating Paris as a fashion

symbol. During the same period, the Werkbund also arranged two exhibitions, inclusive of clothing, which the Newark Museum hosted in 1912 and 1922.<sup>30</sup>

Costume historian, Carol Potter, who examined Hawes within the context of European modernism, traces Hawes' interest in mass production, as well as certain design motifs to the Bauhaus' influence. She attributes Hawes' "arrow/triangle" design to the Bauhaus instructor, Paul Klee, and to Constructivism, which affected the school's philosophy and aesthetic beginning in 1923 [Fig. 38].<sup>31</sup> Arrows composed mainly of triangles and lines typified Klee's painting style beginning in the 1920s, when he joined the faculty at the Bauhaus.

According to Potter, Hawes translated these arrows into triangular panels, often of gros-grain ribbon, incorporating them into the structure of a garment at the neck, waist, or slightly above, often in combination with a vertical stripe along the ..."center front seam of dresses and skirts, creating an arrow shape."<sup>32</sup> Potter says that this design was common to Hawes' work from 1935 to 1950, and uses it to prove "...the direct influence of the Bauhaus ideals in America, in both the 'fine' and decorative arts."<sup>33</sup>

Although the Bauhaus was influential in this country during the late 1920s and 1930s, it remains as a general backdrop to Hawes' development as a designer, whereas the link with *Contempora* reveals the particular mechanism by which European modernism affected her notions about mass production.<sup>34</sup> Potter seems right to assign the arrow motifs to Klee's arrow paintings, but this is very different from saying that the Bauhaus stood at the root of Hawes' ideas about design for the

masses. The collaboration with *Contempora* predates Hawes' arrow designs of 1935 to 1950 by several years. Potter takes too large a leap in this respect.

Also, just because Hawes admired Klee's art, it does not mean that she adopted his philosophy, even if it reflected Bauhaus thinking about design for the machine, which it did not. Potter connects Klee and Constructivism, which is where, although unstated, mass production wrongly enters her argument. Klee, who scholars loosely call an Expressionist, wanted little to do with the machine or with Constructivism, both of which became important in Bauhaus philosophy in 1923, when the school instituted a policy toward industry and away from handicrafts, stressing standardization in mass produced goods.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, Klee's painting style shows the Constructivist influence, but his thinking resoundingly does not. Klee's impact on Hawes, while important, also came after she had advanced ideas about ready-to-wear design, as will be seen.

However, while Klee did not play a role in the early years, when Hawes was developing an attitude about mass production, and nothing specific is traceable to the Bauhaus, the German school exerted a strong undercurrent that was, nonetheless, absorbed by Hawes. Around the time of her involvement with *Contempora*, she began to use terminology like "function" and "artist as engineer", which was common and central to progressive tendencies in design and architecture, especially as expressed by the Bauhaus and Constructivism.<sup>36</sup> Typically, for Hawes, these terms, which then bore various connotations, meant clothing appropriate for lifestyle and occasion.<sup>37</sup>

Another prevalent Bauhaus-related concept embraced by Hawes concerns a relationship between design and architecture.<sup>38</sup> She alluded to all these notions when saying:

Paris can no longer design for American women...for when you come right down to it, it is not Paris, but the skyscraper architects, and the subway engineers who design our clothes. Speakeasies, lunch counters, crowded department stores and business buildings have far more to do with dictating what the American women will wear than any French designer.<sup>39</sup>

Indeed, Hawes often referenced the New York environment and American women's lifestyle. Interviews quote her as basing her functionalist approach on the city's architecture and design. She modeled herself as a clothing designer after the skyscraper and subway engineers who characterized American urban life, especially New York where, she said, "...even the smartest woman...is always slipping in and out of taxis, rushing on foot up and down the Avenue, going into crowded department stores, riding in elevators, dancing on tiny night club dance floors."<sup>40</sup>

At the time, Hawes credited her husband, the sculptor, Ralph Jester, for getting her to "...think of clothes architecturally...We both believe in building clothes to fit the body, and not being scared off at curves. Anatomical clothes my husband calls them."<sup>41</sup> Significantly, when in Paris, Jester lived in Auteuil not far from the street of modern houses by Mallet-Stevens and Le-Corbusier.<sup>42</sup>

Looking back in the early 1940s Hawes recalled:

I learned from the architects who work on the principle of designing and building from the inside out - of letting the purposes for which a building is to be used decide the outer shape of that building...buildings must function for the people who use them...These architects decorate the buildings they

make as part of the whole design. . .The furniture and decoration should fuse with the building as a woman's clothes should fuse with the woman.<sup>43</sup>

She said further:

Did I get my ideas of functionalism and integral decoration for clothes from these architects? At least they helped me formulate and clarify my thoughts. My designing and my whole life has been richer for having known architects. I am at least partially indebted to them and their masters, Corbusier and the Bauhaus school in Germany for many of what I consider my best designs.<sup>44</sup>

Hawes' preoccupation with modernism was most acute at the beginning of her career when she worked as a custom designer; however, in March, 1932, she became active in ready-to-wear. The tone of her writings and interviews then shift in emphasis from architecture to mass production, with a concentration on the problem of accommodating good design to processes of production. The direct experience of designing for industry must have provided the practical background for an approach that ultimately combined custom and ready-to-wear, the two poles of Hawes' design practice.

In March, 1932 Hawes did her first ready-to-wear designs in connection with Lord & Taylor's promotion of American fashion, initiating the American Designer Movement.<sup>45</sup> Although custom work remained a major pursuit, the wholesale market occupied Hawes from that point in time until she closed her salon in 1940. Her work in this sphere took two well-known directions: from 1932 to 1937, she contracted to design for several apparel and accessory manufacturers; and from 1933 to 1940, she hired manufacturers to produce a sampling of ready-to-wear garments and accessories for her salon business.

However, during the course of these eight years, which comprised the bulk of her 1930s career, Hawes pursued wholesale designing more widely and diligently than scholars have recognized. Her spirit of resolve in relation to mass production is central and unmistakable. Without this sense of commitment and intensity, the thorough consideration of ready-to-wear design that she undertook would have been unthinkable. It is important to examine the extent of this commitment before outlining its impact on Hawes' thinking.

The first link with industry after Lord & Taylor was the sportswear firm of J.A. Livingston for whom Hawes created a collection which was shown in June 1933, as Potter notes.<sup>46</sup> The line of sportswear and daytime dresses was available in one store in a city with the wholesale prices ranging from \$10.50 to \$29.50. Among the locations where women could purchase an original Hawes garment were Filene's in Boston, Hudson's in Detroit, Carson Pirie Scott in Chicago, Best in Seattle and in Milwaukee, Emma Lange Inc..<sup>47</sup> After this Hawes designed accessories for the wholesale market of hats, gloves, and purses.<sup>48</sup>

The entry into ready-to-wear included Hawes' salon business. An advertisement appearing in the October, 1, 1933 issue of Town and Country indicates the addition of a "...few ready-made sport clothes" to her line.<sup>49</sup> Since she was then designing sportswear for J.A. Livingston Inc., Potter suggests that these garments were probably produced by and resembled the designs made for this firm. By this time, Hawes had moved her salon from the original location on West 56th Street to 21 East 67th Street which provided increased space for a workroom and showroom.



Hawes' participation in industry was deeper and more assertive than Potter describes. Not only did Hawes design more ready-to-wear in New York, she contracted outside of the city, adopted an aggressive marketing campaign in pursuit of wholesale and retail clients, and produced her own wholesale line that was sold in leading stores in New York and elsewhere in the country.

A few examples will serve to make the point. Immediately after the Lord & Taylor campaign, Hawes took steps to expand her business with Seventh Avenue. In April, 1932, exactly one month after the department store's promotion, The Conde Nast Publications Inc. released an advertising copy addressed to ready-to-wear buyers of stores and specialty shops, announcing that:

Elizabeth Hawes is a young American Designer who has arrived. Here are clothes that are really different. Stores and specialty shops will be interested to know that Miss Hawes will create original models for them on request which can be manufactured from her muslin pattern. Her wholesale plan is simply to sell the model - not to manufacture it. Hawes Inc.<sup>50</sup>

In 1934, Hawes issued a portfolio containing advertisements and fashion publicity intended to drum up business among manufacturers and retailers. No doubt, Otho J. Hicks, manager of her wholesale and retail business, who had "...established himself as an authority on the coordination of sales promotion and training in department stores," compiled the booklet for prospective clients.<sup>51</sup>

The portfolio shows a well-planned strategy of persuasion. It appeals to the glamour of Hollywood and stage stars for whom Hawes had designed clothes, like Katherine Hepburn, as a way of raising the designer's prestige. Art is also used to induce business from the trade. There is a photograph of Isamu Noguchi's aluminum head of Hawes accompanied by the caption [Fig. 39]:

The unique personality of Elizabeth Hawes has recently attracted attention - outside the fashion field - of the sculptor Noguchi, young, half-American son of Yone Noguchi, Japanese poet, who asked her to sit for him. His work is included in the collections of most of the leading American Museums - We suggest that you use a reproduction of it in your displays.<sup>52</sup>

Meanwhile, Hawes undertook several design projects. Still under contract with Lord & Taylor, she designed millinery for Filene's Department Store in Boston.<sup>53</sup> In 1933, she created a line of underwear for Enka Yarn and the Bethlehem Textile Co. under the name Lin Gees.<sup>54</sup> The following year, she designed fur coats for M. Cohen & Bros. Co. Inc. This collection consisted of ten styles in Hudson seal that differed in lines, lengths, and details. According to Women's Wear Daily, considerable fanfare attended the grouping:

Elaborate exploitation, in the form of display posters and direct mail brochures, prominently featuring the personality of Elizabeth Hawes, the name and trademark of M. Cohen & Bros. Co. Inc. and describing the fur as "A Hollander & Son Hudson Seal" gives publicity to these models which, according to Lawrence Cohen, will be exclusive with one retailer in each city.<sup>55</sup>

In 1933 and 1934, Hawes did, perhaps, her biggest body of ready-to-wear for Marshall Field & Co. Wholesale in Chicago. Women's Wear Daily of May, 1933 announced the commission to design a complete wardrobe of five dresses from cotton fabrics of their manufacture.<sup>56</sup> The next year, Hawes spent several days in Chicago in the studios of the company's silk dress manufacturing division where she developed ten designs for dresses executed in both silks and wools for the store's fall line of Young American Designers dresses.<sup>57</sup> In New York, the dresses were carried by Best & Company, B. Altman & Co., Bonwit Teller, and Abraham &

Strauss. The garments, "complete with Hawes-and scissors label," retailed for \$7.95 [Figs. 40 & 41].<sup>58</sup>

## II. Theorizing Ready-to-Wear

Filtered through this backdrop of modernism and American art and industry, Hawes formulated opinions and arrived at a philosophy about the role of designers, manufacturers, and consumers in the mass production of womenswear. Although it remained to be elaborated, a combination of four related elements formed the base of her theory that adapted custom methods to mass production: customer contact; style evolution; fabric experimentation; and the cooperation of fabric manufacturers.

For Hawes, the custom method, typical of professional dressmaking, involved individualized treatment in such areas as color and fit. It referred to the alteration of a model (design) in a designer's collection to suit a particular customer, not, as commonly understood, a design created with one woman in mind. The "made to order lady," to borrow a phrase from Hawes, receives personal treatment, not an exclusive design.<sup>59</sup>

Likewise, "style evolution" revolved around the individual contact with customers typical of custom design. In a 1931 interview, Hawes described the introduction of several new models into a salon collection of "in" styles which by the third year received a degree of acceptance by customers.<sup>60</sup> These became the basis for the new looks in her line, which in turn became generally accepted as fashionable. For this reason, Hawes gave any one fashion a seven year cycle,

three years to be introduced, and four years to run its course. So, style evolution involved a cycle of fashion totally dependant upon the consumer.

Similarly, the centrality of experimentation and a role for the fabric industry in a plan for garment making derived from a practice found in custom design. Whereas style evolution and personalized fit could be found in any custom salon, Hawes drew on the example of the French with respect to fabric manufacturers. In France it was the tradition of textile houses to freely supply the couture with fabric, providing designers with an opportunity to experiment.<sup>61</sup>

With the exception of "style evolution," which she articulated in a 1931 interview, the other features of what would become a theory about design for mass production received expression in writings and interviews only after Hawes' introduction to manufacturing. The earliest known reference linking custom design and mass production appeared just two months after her entry into the ready-to-wear market. An article of May, 1932 specifically refers to the consumer. It quotes Hawes as saying, "The wholesale designer has no direct contact with her market and I believe that this is one of the reasons for the poverty of good designing in this country."<sup>62</sup> The following year, a trade paper carried a related, but more directed statement: "...I have to keep in touch with customers. I get the feel from them for the wholesale end."<sup>63</sup>

During the same years, Hawes drew attention to the textile industries and experimentation. She conveys, through the title of an article published in summer, 1932, a glimpse into the issues: "Squalls Ahead, the fate of the American designers depends largely on the fabric manufacturer."<sup>64</sup> The article treats the necessity of

beautiful fabrics in the making of clothes, along with "experimenting" on the part of industry.

All this makes clear that American industry was vital to the development of Hawes' outlook about clothing design for the masses. Although several years passed before she organized her thinking into a coherent plan, her ideas evolved while she was working in an industrial setting. During this period, she met with obstacles that gave her pause. The criteria that Hawes cited – the lack of contact with customers and no allowance for error - she no doubt believed were impediments to good ready-to-wear design.

However, when Hawes entered the wholesale field with an expertise in design and dressmaking, she encountered unknown territory. She had no prior experience in production methods and lacked a technical background. The realm of production presented particular problems that fashion design schools have yet to resolve.<sup>65</sup> It was a topical issue of the times. Manufacturers and educators identified an enormous gulf between the factory and classroom instruction in sketching and garment construction. A typical situation encountered by inexperienced designers was to design a garment that in fabric or construction was too expensive to produce in quantity, or that required retooling a machine.

According to Hawes, there was often a spirit of cooperation on the part of manufacturers, but this was countered by a tendency to override her concepts about fabric, line, and color.<sup>66</sup> Later she would insist that aspiring designers receive training on Seventh Avenue, but her earliest solution relied on the familiar: the personalized approach of custom design and the supportive role of textile industries

based on the French couture. Taken together these became the archetype for a theory of ready-to-wear design.

The philosophy about mass production that Hawes adopted seems very “American,” attuned to the rise of consumer culture in the 1920s.<sup>67</sup> Unlike theories of European modernism which posited “types” imposed by designers, Hawes envisioned the consumer as an active agent in determining the appearance of a design.<sup>68</sup> Although a variety of available types offered a choice to the buyer, ultimately, in the case of European modernism, a designer dictated which models would constitute the standard forms.

The pivotal role of the dress consumer had a precedent in ready-to-wear design, and was also typical of dressmaking establishments where proprietor and customer worked closely together. Richard’s 1922 examination of how “designs are defined” in the wholesale industry revealed that in at least one case new designs were shown to a “committee of the leading customers” who selected the models for the next season.<sup>69</sup>

### III. Synthesizing Custom and Ready-to-Wear Design

This is what Hawes said she would do, but what did she do? What about the garments? What do they look like? Is there a correspondence between her theory and practice? And how would we know if she applied custom principles to ready-to-wear designs? After all, Hawes said that manufacturers tended to bypass her concepts.<sup>70</sup>

Hawes accomplished the blurring of the boundaries between custom and ready-to-wear fashion on the level of style. In terms of color, structure, and materials, there is evidence of a mixture between Hawes' custom and wholesale collections. During the period 1932 to 1935, crossover is considerable, although not in the sense that her theory leads us to believe. The assumption is that Hawes' salon customers influenced her direction in ready-to-wear. From this we understand that the custom designs preceded the wholesale lines, with the latter conforming to conventions derived from her salon practice. In fact, the reversal is also true, but not always and not in the same way.

The garments, sketches, advertisements, and fashion statements yield evidence that Hawes integrated her design practices through art, both sculpture and painting. There are two major interlocking tendencies at work. One involves Alexander Calder, the other, Pablo Picasso, artists grounded in abstraction. For her part, Hawes drew from the swirling rhythms and circular forms of Calder's wire sculptures and mobiles, and assimilated influences from Picasso's late 1920s Cubist style and organic Surrealism of the early 1930s.

Throughout the 1930s, Hawes associated with "modern" artists who became important colleagues in her work. In both Paris and New York, she traveled in circles that put her in contact with the most advanced currents in painting and sculpture. Her acquaintance with Calder, Noguchi, and Joan Miro', stemmed from her Paris years (1925–1928).<sup>71</sup>

According to Berch, Calder's mobiles gave Hawes "...ideas about how garments should move."<sup>72</sup> While this may be true, Calder's influence can be much

more particularized. The earliest hint of Calder is traceable to a hat and a blouse advertised in a June, 1932 *New Yorker*<sup>73</sup> [Fig. 42]. These designs for Lord & Taylor reveal Calder's pristine, circular geometry. Although in the treatment of the sleeves, the blouse recalls the curvilinearity of the other designs in the advertisement, typical of the *vogue*, the crisp sweeping arcs of organdie are unmistakably Calder in style and sensibility.

Much of what Hawes knew about Calder's work, she gained first hand. In his autobiography, Calder recalled that in 1929 he performed his circus in her New York salon.<sup>74</sup> The aspiring fashion designer appears among the smiling audience in a film depicting Calder perform his circus in his Paris studio.<sup>75</sup> According to an interview with the artist's grandson, during the 1930s, Hawes owned a sculpture by Calder reminiscent of the same half circle visible in her garments<sup>76</sup>. According to Berch, Calder designed a reclining work-chair for Hawes with a swivel arm to hold her typewriter.<sup>77</sup> A 1930s publicity photograph depicting Hawes at a circular desk with a typewriter supports this observation<sup>78</sup> [Fig. 43].

In June, 1933 a ready-to-wear dress for Best & Co. appeared in an advertisement in *Vogue*.<sup>79</sup> The curving lines of the collar derive from Calder, but the inset panel comes from Picasso [Fig. 44]. As Potter observes, a major tendency in Hawes' couture style from 1931 to 1936 derived from "Cubism" and "abstraction" through Picasso, namely, the incorporation of geometric panels - rectangles and triangles - into the structure of garments.<sup>80</sup>

The incorporation of geometric panels and the accompanying simplicity mark a major turn in Hawes' style. According to Potter's assessment of Hawes'



sketches, advertisements, and garments, the tendency toward simplicity signaled a switch from the designs of 1928 to 1932, which resembled Parisian styles by way of ruffles and bows. In 1930, there was a change under the French designer Vionnet's influence whose garments, Potter says showed "...very little extraneous decoration and relied on the line and cut of the dress as the single, purest form of decoration."<sup>81</sup> Nicole Groult, with whom Hawes apprenticed while in Paris, also affected a move toward simplicity of line.<sup>82</sup>

During the same period, Hawes assimilated influences from Picasso and geometric abstraction. Potter considers these influences in terms of "modernism" and "Cubism."<sup>83</sup> As a concept, she traces the geometric insets to a bathing suit designed in 1929. In 1930, Potter says further, Hawes created a design for a dress entitled, "Picasso," which set the stage for her trademark application of triangular panels.

Common to Hawes' work from 1931 to 1936, the "Picasso" design came in various arrangements in terms of color and inset<sup>84</sup> [Fig. 45]. A grey silk crepe dress at the Brooklyn Museum of Art has a pink panel in the front and a dark brown one in back. Certain examples of the Picasso design have stripes extending from the triangular inset down the center of the skirt. This is seen on a 1939 dress in the Brooklyn Museum of Art, which has an orange satin stripe inset along the center front seam. Other examples are gathered in front, conveying a similar impression [Fig. 46].

It should be stressed that Potter's analysis refers to Hawes' custom designs, and although she likens the "simple lines and abstract shapes" introduced in the

1930 "Picasso" dress to "Cubism" and "modernism", and assigns the triangular panels to Picasso, to whom the 1930 dress refers by name, she does not single out a work by the artist or define "Cubism".<sup>85</sup> For the "Picasso" design, Hawes drew from Picasso's Painter and Model (1928), or a related work.

This painting typifies the late Cubist tendency to favor color, geometry, bifurcation, curvilinearity, and more distinct imagery than found in the monochromatic, highly abstracted forms of late Analytic Cubism, while retaining its fragmentation and two-dimensionality.<sup>86</sup> A 1931 Hawes sketch in the Brooklyn Museum of Art depicts an early version of the "Picasso" dress.<sup>87</sup> Defined by an upright triangle set on a vertical stripe, the dress shows the same combination of shapes apparent in the painter's face in Picasso's painting. Art historian, Barbara Haskell, considers the Picasso painting to have been very influential to American artists beginning in 1934, as seen in Burgoyne Diller's work.<sup>88</sup>

In the body of work based on triangular insets and stripes, characteristic of Hawes' early 1930s couture, Picasso's Painter and Model became transformed. Hawes realized the potential in the Cubist dissection of figure and composition seeking direction from the painter depicted on the right side of the painting. Picasso's work and Hawes' frocks are both divided into two sections which respectively define the difference between the head and body of the painter, and the upper and lower portions of a dress. In the painting, this is achieved through a series of four horizontal lines. In the latter, the obverse direction of the triangles, juxtaposed tip to tip at the waist line, virtually bisect a garment.

Between 1932 and 1935, it appears that Hawes applied the radical bifurcation associated with the Picasso design only to her custom collections. Instead she integrated her custom and ready-to-wear through insets and color units. This is seen in the 1933 dress for Best & Co. and in a related design for a custom garment advertised in a theatre magazine in Fall of that year.<sup>89</sup> As in the dress for Best & Co., the design for the theatre actress, Margaret Barker, incorporated a round inset directly into the neck of the garment [Fig. 47].

The Barker dress led to a wholesale grouping. A photograph of Barker in the frock circulated in Hawes' publicity portfolio with the dual purpose of convincing manufacturers to hire Hawes and to acquaint them with techniques for selling her garments. The hand written statement indicating that this custom "Hawes" design was produced by wholesaler, J.A. Livingston of Seventh Avenue, is the selling point.<sup>90</sup>

During the very same season, Hawes did a sportswear collection for Livingston which likewise shows Calder's impact, but is very different from the Barker dress. Produced in November, 1933, Hawes' description in the trade and fashion press is revealing: "A "pinwheel" silhouette is expressed in circular collars, cuffs, skirts and jackets. There is sponsored too, a "pinwheel" scarf, usually of a brilliant contrasting color."<sup>91</sup>

An illustration in the trade paper The Breath of The Avenue indicates how indebted the grouping is to Calder [Fig. 48]. Here there is no inset. Rather, a collar with sharp regularity forms a half circle extending to the bust and shoulder line to create a dramatic effect that carries the dress' impact. A similar collar appears in a

day dress designed by Hawes in 1934 for Marshall Field & Co., which was sold at Best & Co. in New York [Fig. 40].

Since, unlike Calder, Picasso's influence initiated in a custom design, we may regard this as evidence that Hawes depended on her salon customers for directions in ready-to-wear, as her theory suggests, but at the same time combined and restated the two avenues of her practice. It appears that Hawes blended Picasso and Calder to cross-fertilize her fashions. We may, thus, regard Hawes as partially living up to her theory, converting styles favored by salon customers into ready-to-wear designs. We may also link Calder more readily with designs that were produced in volume, whereas Picasso was more related to couture.

Following Picasso's cue, Hawes also adopted color and form as design elements, juxtaposing different hues and shapes to carry an otherwise linear, abstract, flat composition. As described, the Barker dress, which was produced for an individual and in volume, combines rust wool and beige jersey with a hat in rust felt. Another manifestation of Picasso to appear in a Hawes ready-to wear is the triangular inset. The April 15, 1934 Vogue shows a variation of this design in the neck treatment of a sports dress designed for Lord and Taylor [Fig. 29].

Hawes also adapted Picasso's palette to the two poles of her practice. The following statement accompanied an advertising copy intended for trade distribution. It regards a 1933 collection for J.A. Livingston: "I believe in very brilliant colors, not the old bright red and greens but Bali turquoises and fuchias, combined, as the modern painters have, with dull rusts and greens."<sup>92</sup>

Even if the manufacturer failed to follow her direction, Hawes conceived the garments in these hues. The exact color combination appears in Picasso's Girl Before a Mirror (1932), with variations in related works such as Painter and Model (1928), as well as in the work of many contemporary painters, for this palette was common in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Hawes used the same colors for her salon clientele. The garment, as made for Barker, combines rust and beige. Several related examples survive at the Brooklyn Museum of Art.

Although we can talk about Picasso's influence in terms of late Cubism, it should be remembered that Surrealism was a dominant movement in art during the 1930s, and that scholars associate the organic quality and sense of reflection - painter, easel, model; girl and mirror - in Picasso's work from the period to this development.<sup>93</sup> In this sense, it is more accurate to think of Picasso's impact on Hawes in relation to biomorphic Surrealism than late Cubism.<sup>94</sup>

In the Picasso designs by Hawes, the Cubist stress on structure as seen in insets and bifurcation serves the organic lines of the body. The same effect that divides a dress in two creates fullness around the natural curve of hips and breasts. Triangle insets bisecting a bodice direct the observer's eye to each breast, while triangles near the waist point toward "naughty parts," as described by the costume historian, Patricia Mears.<sup>95</sup> While this reflects Surrealism's whimsy and sexual play, it likewise provides a commentary about the female body itself.

In the custom designs illustrated in a photograph of her salon in the business magazine, Fortune (1933), Hawes created even more simple and elegant frames for the body, grounded in geometric shapes and color blocks [Fig. 49]. The resulting

effect differentiates between limbs and torso, breasts and hips, while accentuating the roundness of the “feminine” figure. The Barker design, which was mass produced, conveys something similar.

A deeper examination of Hawes’ work reveals the impact of Miro’s Surrealist style.<sup>96</sup> A 1930 sketch for a dress betrays his influence during the same period that Hawes borrowed from Picasso. Presently in the Brooklyn Museum of Art, the bodice of a design called, “HobNob,” is an asymmetrical arrangement of a rectangle and three triangles in which the total effect - as is usual with Miro’ - is organic and whimsical, rather than geometric.<sup>97</sup> This treatment has an antecedent in a Hawes sketch from 1929.<sup>98</sup> Referring by name directly to Miro’, the triangular form on the dress in the sketch changes and flows as if produced by nature. Berch identifies Miro’s influence in the “arrows and squiggles” on certain vests and capes, no doubt custom garments.<sup>99</sup> Even these motifs appear in the fabric of a dress in the 1933 J.A. Livingston group, juxtaposed with a Calder collar [Fig. 48].

Potter identifies the influence of Surrealism in Hawes’ use of unusual fabrics such as cellophane, bed ticking, and upholstery fabrics, and her “witty absurdities” as seen in the “Broccoli” dress (1930).<sup>100</sup> This observation, while important, concerns custom designs. Nothing suggests that Hawes’ ready-to-wear was comparable.

Even so, Hawes’ appreciation for Surrealism in terms of her private clientele reveals much about how she adopted the movement’s playfulness and glee, as well as the fashion community’s response to it. For this reason, it is valuable to reiterate the following paragraph from a 1934 New Yorker:

In conspicuous. On the west side of Madison Avenue near Fifty-eighth Street, one bright day last week, there was seen a young woman in a chic black tulle'jur. She was walking alone, and didn't look as though she wanted to be conspicuous. As a matter of fact, she wasn't: practically nobody seemed to notice that the green boutonniere pinned on her jacket wasn't mignonette, as it should have been; practically nobody seemed to notice that it was broccoli instead.<sup>101</sup>

The line between Hawes' custom and wholesale designs is blurred in the body of work that takes inspiration from painting and sculpture. The art of Picasso and Calder, and the vocabulary of abstraction, Cubism, and Surrealism introduce into mass produced garments a range of practices having to do with custom design, and the reversal. Although Hawes was directly involved with developments in sculpture and painting, she took an interest in modern trends in architecture, interiors, and furniture designs. As early as her collaboration with Contempora, she used the language of modernism to voice opinions about functionalist design and the "artist as engineer", as noted above.<sup>102</sup>

In fact, Hawes drew from skyscraper architecture as did many New York designers. In the early 1930s, the Empire State Building, Rockefeller Centre, and the Chrysler Building were vivid new structures dominating the skyline.<sup>103</sup> Her preference for unusual combinations of fabrics and textures, as well as luxurious, shiny materials, like lame, paralleled the appearance of these Art Deco buildings. Likewise she adopted the new metal, aluminum, favored by "modern" architects and designers, to a functionalist idiom.<sup>104</sup> The Brooklyn Museum of Art owns several related gowns that date from this period [Fig. 50].

All this was noted at the time. In fall, 1931, The International Illustrated News stated:

Elizabeth Hawes Sees Skyscrapers as Fashion Sermons in Stone and is Inspired to Introduce Styles Modeled After Cloud-Piercing Giants. Do you see any relation between these charming gowns and the Empire State Building?...or Chrysler Building?<sup>105</sup>

According to the article, Hawes took her cues "...from the new architecture in its use of odd colors, rare woods, and metals combined in simple lines," as seen in "Sir Galahad" made of white chiffon over gold lace.<sup>106</sup> She was also showing a metal link belt that season, and experimenting with an

...evening wrap to be trimmed along the hems with aluminum mesh - a rustless material and extremely practical in a country where one must trail along muddy streets in search of a taxi.<sup>107</sup>

Two years later in Fall, 1933, The New York World Telegram gleefully reported:

What a thrill to greet the bracing morning air in a warm toned suit of rust tweed, contrasted with the very new velveteen blouse in navy blue...Elizabeth Hawes designed it...and added those smart aluminum buttons.<sup>108</sup>

By 1933, from the perspective of the architectural community, Hawes was established as a knowledgeable and respected designer. It formally recognized her through an invitation to speak before the members of the Architectural League of New York. According to the fashion journalist, Alice Hughes, Hawes explained to League members, in a lecture entitled, "Designing Modern American Clothes," "...the kinship between her fashions and their profession."<sup>109</sup>

Hawes also appreciated furniture and interior design, and was familiar with streamlining and machine art.<sup>110</sup> She decorated her new salon on East 67th Street, which opened in September, 1933, in the latest mode. A photograph reproduced in



a 1933 article in Fortune, entitled, "The Dressmakers of the U.S.," displays a stylish set of aluminum and glass furniture [Fig. 49]. According to Berch, Robert Josephy was the designer.<sup>111</sup>

Hawes counted among her closest friends the industrial photographers, Mary Morris Lawrence and Ralph Steiner.<sup>112</sup> Along with Paul Strand, Edward Weston, and Margaret Bourke-White, they photographed machines and America's industrial landscape.<sup>113</sup> Throughout the 1930s, Steiner collaborated with Hawes in publicity and advertising projects, spreading the word of her business.<sup>114</sup> One advertisement in a 1933 Town and Country (March 1, 1933) shows a woman in a Hawes gown lounging on - as is typical with machine art - a metal chair. A 1941 photograph by Lawrence depicts Hawes in a recliner which strongly resembles a 1928 chaise lounge designed by Charlotte Perriand and Le Corbusier.<sup>115</sup>

Hawes' interests, therefore, were hardly uniform and not confined to art. The question is did architecture and design influence her custom work, which in turn affected her approach to the wholesale market? The influence of New York's Art Deco architecture preceded her entry into wholesale designing, finding expression solely in her couture designs. However, the stress on color, form, and materials associated with modernist architecture and design no doubt contributed to the "abstract", color-field constructions featured in the two aspects of her practice. For example, contemporary chairs sported chromium-plated steel, leather, and fabric in bright combinations of colors.<sup>116</sup> Still, in general, from 1930 to 1935, Hawes' work seems more related to painting and sculpture than to architecture and design.

Not only did Hawes link her custom and ready-to-wear designs with art,

architecture, and design, the same was central to her marketing strategy, and immediately conferred upon her fashions the pedigree of art.<sup>117</sup> A 1932 series of advertisements in Town and Country virtually constructs her salon designs as objects of art through association with "masterpieces" by Raphael, Antonio Canova, Jacques-Louis David, and Auguste Rodin, as well as through a "modern" work by the rising star, Noguchi.

Referencing past "classics", the advertisements portray Hawes herself in a gown of her creation as a figure in a Renaissance painting or Neoclassical sculpture. In one instance, her pose recalls David's, Madame Racamier, and Canova's, Paulina Borghese as Venus [Fig. 51]. Another advertisement casts her in the role of a cherub in Raphael's Sistine Madonna [Fig. 52]. A third example by the name of "Thinking It Over" depicts Hawes in a posture drawn from Rodin's work of a similar name. Still, another advertisement presents, not Hawes, but Noguchi's sculpture, Miss Expanding Universe (1931) [Fig. 53]. Taken together, the sculpture and accompanying text make an intriguing connection between a work of art and the special treatment involved in custom design:

About clothes....Plaster ladies may be beautifully fitted and appropriately clothed in light and shadow. Some women try to achieve the same results by picking up little dresses here and there. Some women are dressed by Hawes. These are the women who know that there is no compromise. Their clothes must be made to order, and perfectly fitted, of course. They will wear only the most beautiful materials. They must have costumes exactly appropriate to their ages, figures, and environments...<sup>118</sup>

Another group of Town and Country advertisements dated 1935 formally relates to Calder and Picasso. As in Hawes' designs, two examples possess the circular forms, fragmentation, and arrangements employed by these artists, in

particular, Picasso's work devoted to the theme of painter and model<sup>119</sup> [Fig. 54 & 55].

Whereas all these advertisements pertained to individually made garments, Hawes also marketed clothing for the masses in terms of art, especially modern art. In an advertising copy for J.A. Livingston, Hawes communicated to the trade, and through them to her ready-to-wear customer, a link between her garments and the colors of "modern" painting, as stated above.<sup>120</sup>

As in the custom collection, so in ready-to-wear an important tie-in with modern art came through Noguchi. A photograph of Hawes' portrait by Noguchi circulated in the portfolio (1934) aimed at selling designs and advertising strategies for manufacturers and retailers. The portfolio recommended that a photograph of the Noguchi sculpture be used in displays.<sup>121</sup> Similarly, in a set of guidelines entitled, "Definite Suggestions For You In The Successful Promotion Of Elizabeth Hawes Clothes," Otho J. Hicks, who managed Hawes wholesale and retail business, encouraged retailers to use an "enlarged photo" of the bronze head to decorate the background of windows.<sup>122</sup>

In 1937, Noguchi collaborated with Hawes on a project for a textile manufacturer. The February, 1937 issue of Harper's Bazaar features a photograph labeled, "Noguchi's statue and Elizabeth Hawes' dress of Forstmann's fine woolen covert cloth"<sup>123</sup> [Fig. 56]. This relatively unknown work reflects the abstract style and plaster medium favored by Noguchi during this period. The photograph appears in an advertisement for "new spring prints" which are sold to the consumer by virtue of the plain Hawes gown. A related work by Noguchi appears in a similar

context in the same magazine [Fig. 57]. The piece, again for a textile manufacture, this time Skinner silk, depicts an evening gown by the American designer, Muriel King.

## Notes For Chapter 4

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<sup>1</sup> Fortune, "The Dressmaker's of the U.S.," 41.

<sup>2</sup> Catharine Oglesby, Fashion Careers American Style (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1935), 102.

<sup>3</sup> See p. 117-119 above.

<sup>4</sup> Fashion Is Spinach forms the basis of studies by Potter, Berch, and Choi concerning Hawes' attitude toward the garment industry. Steele's chapter dealing with Hawes opens with an account of Fashion Is Spinach and Hawes' rejection of the garment industry; see Women of Fashion, p. 90.

<sup>5</sup> A 1961 article by fashion columnist Sylvia Sheppard, specifically refers to Hawes as an iconoclast for challenging the status quo in fashion represented by the ready-to-wear industry. See "Fashion Iconoclast Calls For Daring," Los Angeles Times, 17 March 1961. A WWD article about the 1967 retrospective exhibition the retrospective of Hawes' and Gernreich opened with the statement, "Elizabeth Hawes is the great rebel of the thirties." See "In Retrospect," WWD, 29 March 1967.

<sup>6</sup> One example of the positive reaction is found in a trade paper, The Bulletin of the National Retail Dry Goods Association (April, 1938), which states: "No doubt it was good for Miss Hawes to write this book, and it is good for everybody to read it," Hawes SB 1.

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of style variation see p. 116-117 above.

<sup>8</sup> Berch, Radical By Design, 12. Hawes was clearly associated with socialist ideas and Berch identifies her as a left-wing intellectual, one who was "...not Communist enough for the Communists, but too critical for the liberals," 120. She discusses the FBI file on Hawes, apparently initiated in connection with an investigation into PM newspaper, which she determined conflated information about Hawes with another Elizabeth Hawes, who was engaged in communist and union activities in the South, 121-138.

<sup>9</sup> Hawes provides an account of her background in Fashion Is Spinach, 25-29. See also Hawes' biographer, Berch, Radical By Design, 7-13.

<sup>10</sup> Hawes, Fashion Is Spinach, 33.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

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<sup>13</sup> For a detailed discussion of Hawes' Paris years see Berch, Radical By Design, 14-41.

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of this matter see p. 276-279 below.

<sup>15</sup> Hawes, Fashion Is Spinach, 113. Amos Parrish edited the influential trade paper, The Breath of The Avenue. See Leach, Land of Desire, 311.

<sup>16</sup> Hawes, Fashion Is Spinach, 113.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>19</sup> Berch, Radical By Design, 43-46. Although Hawes is largely remembered for her womenswear collections, it is important to note that she produced a line of men's clothing. The designs appeared in a September, 1935 issue of The American Magazine, and were formally introduced in a fashion show in 1937. See Hawes, "Tailor, Beware," The American Magazine (September, 1935): 110-11. See also J.V.D. Carlyle, "Elizabeth Hawes Gives A Party," Town & Country (May, 1937): unpaginated. The bright colors, loose shirts, and baggy pants were unconventional, to say the least, and led to a book by the title, Men Can Take It (New York: Random House, 1939). See also Potter, "Elizabeth Hawes," 16-17; Berch, Radical By Design, 80-82.

<sup>20</sup> Oglesby, Fashion Careers, 101-102.

<sup>21</sup> According to the catalog published in connection with a 1929 exhibition at the Art Center, Contempora had offices at 16 West 49<sup>th</sup>, Street. Contempora Exposition of Art and Industry (New York: Art Center, 1929).

<sup>22</sup> "Can You Pick the Winner?," Woman's Home Companion (February, 1931): 124.

<sup>23</sup> Ethel Little to Elizabeth Hawes, 20 March 1931, Hawes SB, 1.

<sup>24</sup> "Promenade Wins," Woman's Home Companion (July, 1931): 72.

<sup>25</sup> For more on the Art Center see p. 166-174 above.

<sup>26</sup> Contempora Exposition of Art and Industry, unpaginated.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Alice Stetson Fletcher, "Along Your Own Lines," Woman's Home Companion

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(October, 1930): 92-93.

<sup>29</sup> On the Werkbund see Banham, Theory and Design in the First Machine Age, 68-78; Burckhardt, The Werkbund: History and Ideology 1907-1933; Campbell, The German Werkbund: The Politics of Reform in the Applied Arts. On theories of standardization and type-forms in terms of the Werkbund and designers like Peter Behrens and Bruno Paul (a member of *Contemporaria*), and in relation to the Bauhaus and to Le Corbusier see George H. Marcus, Functionalist Design: An Ongoing History (New York: Prestel, 1995), 67-94.

<sup>30</sup> For background on the exhibitions sponsored by the Werkbund in terms of the German fashion industry during the war period see McQuaid, Lilly Reich, 13-18. For a detailed discussion of the Werkbund in relation to the German garment industry and to reform dress see Wigley, White Walls, 135-153.

<sup>31</sup> Paul Klee was associated with the Bauhaus from 1921 to 1931. See Jeannine Fiedler and Peter Feierabend, eds. Bauhaus (Cologne: Konemann, 1999), 244-255; Frank Whitford, Bauhaus (1984); reprint, New York: Thames and Hudson, 1991), 90-94. See also Paul Klee, Paintings and Watercolors from the Bauhaus Years, 1921-1931 (Des Moines, Iowa: Des Moines Art Center, 1973).

<sup>32</sup> Potter, "Elizabeth Hawes," 59.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>34</sup> On the Bauhaus' influence on design in the states in the 1920s and 1930s see Rosemarie Haag Bletter, "The Myths of Modernism," in Craft in the Machine Age, ed. Janet Kardon, 46-51; Marcia Yockey Manhart, "Charting A New Educational Vision," in Craft in the Machine Age, ed. Janet Kardon, 65,69; Marcus, Functionalist Design, 115-126; Margret Kentgens-Craig, The Bauhaus and America: first contacts, 1919-1936 (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1999).

<sup>35</sup> About Constructivism and the Bauhaus see Whitford 123-135. In an uncited quotation, Whitford records Klee as saying to his students, "The machine's way of functioning is not bad, but life's way is something more. Life engenders and bears. When will a run-down machine have babies?" (132). See Jeannine Fiedler, ed. Bauhaus, 292-308; Paul Klee, The Inward Vision: Watercolors, Drawings, Writings (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1959); The Bauhaus: masters and students (New York: B. Friedman, 1988). For the origins of Constructivism see Christina Lodder, Russian Constructivism (1983) reprint; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). See p. 227-234 for Constructivism in Germany.

<sup>36</sup> On the Bauhaus and functionalism see Bletter, "The Myths of Modernism," 46-48; Susan Lambert, Design in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: Form Follows Function (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1993), 15-30; Ellen Lupton, "Design and Production in

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the Mechanical Age,” in Graphic Design in the Mechanical Age by Deborah Rothschild, Ellen Lupton and Darra Goldstein (New Haven: Yale University Press in conjunction with Williams College Museum, 1998), 51-81.

<sup>37</sup> Hawes, Why Is A Dress, 150.

<sup>38</sup> Although architecture was from the beginning a major aspect of Walter Gropius' plan for the Bauhaus, it remained minor in practice being only taught to fourth-year students. Painting, sculpture, craft and design comprised the main curriculum. See Bletter, “The Myths of Modernism,” 46; Jeannine Fiedler ed., Bauhaus, 552-577; William J. R. Curtis, Modern Architecture Since 1900 (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1983), 118-131.

<sup>39</sup> The Club and Social Review (October, 1931), Hawes SB, 1.

<sup>40</sup> Unidentified newspaper, 1931, Hawes SB, 1. A related article appeared in an unidentified newspaper article by Ruth Seinfel, “Europe may like Frills and Furbelows of Gay Nineties, But American Women Won't have them, Designer Predicts. Speakeasy Days have no use for Bicycle Styles. Skyscraper Architects and Subway Engineers are our real designers, Miss Hawes Declares,” Hawes SB, 1.

<sup>41</sup> Unknown newspaper, 1931, Hawes SB, 1.

<sup>42</sup> Town and Country (Oct. 1, 1932): 20.

<sup>43</sup> Hawes, Why Is A Dress, 150. See also Berch, Radical By Design, 56-57; Choi, “Elizabeth Hawes: Maverick,”

<sup>44</sup> Hawes, Why Is A Dress, 150. In Fashion Is Spinach, 156, Hawes notes that the German architect, Willy Muschenheim, re-decorated her 56<sup>th</sup> St. salon after Harden's departure in 1930. Choi's research links Muschenheim with the geometric Bauhaus style. See “Elizabeth Hawes: Maverick,” 49-53.

<sup>45</sup> For a discussion of this matter see p. 117-119 above.

<sup>46</sup> Potter, “Elizabeth Hawes,” 37-38.

<sup>47</sup> “What's Happening in the Stores,” Hearst Newspaper, press release, 25 August 1933, Hawes SB, 2.

<sup>48</sup> Potter, “Elizabeth Hawes,” 38-39.

<sup>49</sup> “We Can Now Treat Hawes Customers As They Deserve,” Town and Country (October, 1933): 62.



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- <sup>50</sup> The Conde Nast Publications Inc. advertising copy, April, 1932, Hawes SB, 1.
- <sup>51</sup> "Definite Suggestions For You In The Successful Promotion of Elizabeth Hawes Clothes," Hawes SB, Promotional Packet, p. 34. In "Elizabeth Hawes: Maverick," Choi refers to the sales portfolio, 61.
- <sup>52</sup> "The unique personality of Elizabeth Hawes has recently attracted attention," Hawes SB, Promotional Packet, p. 35-36.
- <sup>53</sup> "Model Hats by Elizabeth Hawes," Boston Herald, 21 July 1932.
- <sup>54</sup> "Retail Fashion Service," Harper's Bazaar (March, 1933): unpaginated.
- <sup>55</sup> WWD, 17 April 1934, Hawes SB, 1.
- <sup>56</sup> "Three Avenue Shops to Promote Fashions Designed by Americans. Models of Cottons From Marshall Field & Co. Wholesale, who commissioned Elizabeth Hawes to develop complete wardrobe," WWD, 11 May 1933.
- <sup>57</sup> "Field's Wholesale Honors Miss Hawes," WWD, 14 June 1934; "10 Hawes Designs in Field's Line," WWD, 26 June 1934.
- <sup>58</sup> These designs appeared in the Hawes advertising portfolio. Hawes SB, Promotional Packet, p. 25-26.
- <sup>59</sup> WWD, 24 July 1935, Hawes SB, 2. Hawes, Fashion Is Spinach, 2, 14-15.
- <sup>60</sup> Unidentified newspaper, 1931, Hawes SB, 1. Hawes reiterated the idea of style evolution in a later newspaper interview under the headline "American Fair Sex Different in Style Taste, Designer Says," The New York Daily Item, 10 March 1933.
- <sup>61</sup> Hawes, Why Is A Dress, 15, 25, 84-85; Boucher, 20,000 Years of Fashion, 386-389.
- <sup>62</sup> Unidentified magazine, May 1932, Hawes SB, 2.
- <sup>63</sup> The Breath of The Avenue (New York), 13 November 1933.
- <sup>64</sup> Hawes, "Squalls Ahead the fate of the American designers depends largely on the fabric manufacturer," unidentified magazine (July, 1932): 7, Hawes SB, 2.
- <sup>65</sup> For a discussion on this matter see Chapter 1. For Ford and mechanization see Smith, Making The Modern, 15-55. For a history of American manufacturing see O. Mayr and R. Post, eds., Yankee Enterprise: The Rise of The American System of

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Manufactures (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1981); David A. Hounshell, From the American System to Mass Production 1800-1932: The Development of Manufacturing Technology in the United States (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1984); Bernard Doray, From Taylorism to Fordism: A Rational Madness (1981), London: Free Association, 1988).

<sup>66</sup> Hawes, Fashion Is Spinach, 216-224; *Ibid.*, Why Is A Dress, 90-93.

<sup>67</sup> See Banham, Theory and Design, 72-78; Marcus, Functionalist Design, 67-93; Hawes, Why Is A Dress, 55-58; Sparke, An Introduction to Design, 108-123; Neil Harris, "The Drama of Consumer Desire in Yankee Enterprise: The Rise of The American System of Manufactures ed. by O. Mayr and R. Post (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1981), 189-228.

<sup>68</sup> For a discussion of this matter see p. 161-163 above.

<sup>69</sup> Richards, Art In Industry, 19.

<sup>70</sup> Hawes, Fashion Is Spinach, 216-224; *Ibid.*, Why Is A Dress, 90-93.

<sup>71</sup> Berch, Radical By Design, 34-36, 52.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>73</sup> "Lord & Taylor adopts more 'City Children' – American designed fashions in the young new yorkers shop," New Yorker (June 11, 1932): 3. These designs belonged to the second stage of Lord & Taylor's promotion of Hawes in Spring, 1932. The Calder influence is conspicuous in the design entitled "Sidewalk of New York," depicted on a woman seated at a table in the upper left corner.

<sup>74</sup> Alexander Calder, Calder: An Autobiography with Pictures (New York: Pantheon, 1966), 92, 101. The Alexander Calder Papers at the Archives of American Art at the Smithsonian contain a poster announcing Calder's circus at Hawes studio for the date of August 29, 1929. See also Marla Prather, Alexander Calder, 1898-1976 (New Haven: Yale University Press in connection with The National Gallery of Art, 1998).

<sup>75</sup> The Moving Art of Alexander Calder, prod. by Roger Sherman, Calder Foundation, film.

<sup>76</sup> Alexander S. C. Rower, telephone conversation with author, 18 July 1997. According to Rower, Hawes owned the fifth piece from the right.

<sup>77</sup> Berch, Radical By Design, 52.

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<sup>78</sup> "Elizabeth Hawes, America's Foremost Designer," (New York: W. Colston Leigh, Inc.), unpaginated.

<sup>79</sup> "In Town Too," Vogue (June 1, 1933): 57.

<sup>80</sup> Chou refers to this aspect of Hawes' work as "the diamond shape". See "Elizabeth Hawes: Maverick," 71.

<sup>81</sup> Potter, "Elizabeth Hawes," 61.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 50-51.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> I want to thank Patricia Mears, the assistant curator of the decorative arts at the Brooklyn Museum of Art for pointing out the necessity of determining what is meant by "cubism" in Hawes' work. For a discussion about the cubist influence on fashion see Richard Martin, Cubism and Fashion (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

<sup>86</sup> See Robert Rosenblum, Cubism and Twentieth Century Art (1959) revised ed., New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1976), 291-329.

<sup>87</sup> Hawes Sketches, Vol. 1, Box 84, Enclosure 2, Brooklyn Museum Library.

<sup>88</sup> Barbara Haskell, Burgoyne Diller (New York: Whitney Museum of Art, 1990), 98-99. I want to thank Thalia Vrachopoulos PhD. for bringing my attention to the impact of Picasso's paintings on 1930s American artists. See also Wilson, The Machine Age, 205-269; William Agee, The 1930s: Painting and Sculpture in America (New York: WMAA, 1968).

<sup>89</sup> "What The Well-Dressed Play Is Wearing," Stage (November, 1933) Hawes SB, Promotional Packet.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Trade Announcement for J. A. Livingston, November, 1933, Hawes SB, 2; Denver Post, 13 November 1933, Hawes SB, 3.

<sup>92</sup> Trade announcement for J.A. Livingston, Inc.;, The Breath of The Avenue (1933), Hawes SB, 2. Potter examines Hawes' use of color as a design element in terms of the psychology of the wearer which was a prevalent concept in the 1930s and in terms of "Quanta Color Theory" which Hawes discusses in It's Still Spinach

(Boston: Little, Brown, 1954), 15. See "Elizabeth Hawes," 53-56. However, Quatna Theory, invented by "Mr. Elcock", which posited a group of colors for a personality type was not a factor in the 1930s. Although the author was unable to discover details about Mr. Elcock, the Fashion Group Bulletin of March, 1943 discusses the "exciting method of color correlation," presented by Howard Clark, President of Quanta-color Associates to the home furnishings committee. Knowing how up-to-date the Fashion Group was, it seems likely that Quanta Color was then a new idea. Berch cites Hawes in connection with it in 1948. Berch, Radical By Design, 152.

<sup>93</sup> See Rosenblum, Cubism, 319-320; *ibid.*, "Picasso's Blond Muse: The Reign of Marie-Therese Walter, in Picasso and Portraiture: Representation and Transformation ed. by William Rubin (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1996), 337-383; H. H. Amason, History of Modern Art, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1986): 299-300. For the most comprehensive discussion of Girl Before a Mirror see Rubin, Picasso in the Collection of The Museum of Modern Art (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1972), 138-141. For the Surrealist impact in America see Julien Levy, Memoir of an Art Gallery (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1977); Exploring the Unknown: Surrealism in American Art: [exhibition] November 16, 1995 through January 27, 1996 (New York: Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, 1995); Martica Sawin, Surrealism in Exile and the Beginning of the New York School (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995); Dickran Tashjian, A Boatload of Madmen: Surrealism and the American Avant-Garde, 1920-1950 (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1995).

<sup>94</sup> In 1930 Hawes designed a dress for the actress Helen Hayes entitled, "Surreal", Hawes Sketches, Vol. 1, Box 84.

<sup>95</sup> I want to thank Patricia Mears for her discussion about Surrealism and Schiaparelli, which inspired my work. See Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco, "'Fiat Modes Pereat Ars' or, Surrealism and Fashion," in Art/Fashion ed. by Germano Celant (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1997); Richard Martin, Fashion And Surrealism (New York: Rizzoli, 1987); Mary Ann Caws, "An Erotics of Representation: Fashioning the Icon with Man Ray," in On Fashion ed. By Shari Benstock and Suzanne Ferriss (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 125-139; Mary Ann Caws, Rudolf Kuenzli and Gwen Raaberg ed., Surrealism and Women (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991).

<sup>96</sup> See J. Dupin, Miro' (New York, 1962); J.T. Soby, Joan Miro' (New York: MOMA, 1959).

<sup>97</sup> "HobNob," (1930), Hawes Sketches, Vol. 1, Box 84, Enclosure 1.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, "Miro'," (1929-1930).

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- <sup>99</sup> Berch, Radical By Design, 35.
- <sup>100</sup> Potter, "Elizabeth Hawes," 79.
- <sup>101</sup> "In conspicuous," New Yorker (May 19, 1934): 17, Hawes SB, 1.
- <sup>102</sup> See p. 161-164 above.
- <sup>103</sup> See Wilson, The Machine Age, 149-204; Cervin Robinson and Rosemarie Haag Bletter, Skyscraper Style: art deco, New York (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).
- <sup>104</sup> See Marcus, Functionalist Design, 94-114; Sparke, An Introduction to Design, 124-139; Dennis P. Doordan, "Promoting Aluminum: Designers and the American Aluminum Industry," in Design History, 158-164.
- <sup>105</sup> "Elizabeth Hawes Sees Skyscrapers as Fashion Sermons in Stone and is Inspired to Introduce Models After Cloud-Piercing Giants," The International Illustrated News, 1 October 1931.
- <sup>106</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>107</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>108</sup> The New York World Telegram, 25 Sept. 1933, Hawes SB, 1.
- <sup>109</sup> Hughes, New York American, February, 1933.
- <sup>110</sup> See Wilson, The Machine Age, 271-338. For an alternative view see Bletter, "The Myths of Modernism," 46-51.
- <sup>111</sup> Berch, Radical By Design, 49.
- <sup>112</sup> Ibid., 89. See also Choi, Elizabeth Hawes: Maverick," 18.
- <sup>113</sup> Along with William Van Dyke, Steiner photographed and directed the movie The City which appeared in the Science and Education pavilion at the 1933 Chicago World's Fair. One of his most famous photographs is Typewriter as Design (1921-1922). See Wilson, The Machine Age, 60, 72. For more on Steiner see Ralph Steiner, A Point of View (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University press, 1978). For more on the period see Karen Lucic, Charles Sheeler and the Cult of the Machine, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991).
- <sup>114</sup> Among other things, Steiner did a fifteen minute black and white silent film that was shown at the opening of Hawes' new salon in 1933, entitled, The Panther

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Woman of the Needle Trades. Presently in the film collection of The Museum of Modern Art, it stars Hawes and centers around major world events, climaxing with her birth. See Berch, Radical By Design, 7.

<sup>115</sup> I want to thank the design historian, Charles Sable for pointing this out to me. See also Marcus, Functionalist Design, 94.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 9-32. Concerning 1930s architecture, architectural historian, Mary Mcleod, discusses in connection with clothing the “new emphasis on texture, color” in contrast to the “reductive vocabulary of the Modern Movement in the 1920s”, see “Undressing Architecture: Fashion, Gender, and Modernity,” in Architecture In Fashion, 87; Richard Pommer, “Revising Modernist History: The Architecture of the 1920s and 1930s,” Art Journal (Summer 1983). For developments in design see J. Stewart Johnson, American Modern: 1925-1940. Design For A New Age (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. with the American Federation of Arts, 2000).

<sup>117</sup> In “Elizabeth Hawes: Maverick,” 62-64, Choi argues that in her ads Hawes wanted to distance her mass produced ready-to-wear from her custom garments, and refers to the small print at the bottom of an advertisement in the New Yorker of October 7, 1933, 47: “You can buy in various stores in the USA, Elizabeth Hawes ready-made clothes. They have that old Hawes touch and we are proud of them. We do not sell them or anything like them on 67<sup>th</sup> St, because we designed them for mass production.” For a discussion about Hawes in relation to her authorship of advertisements early in her career and the targeting of a college-educated clientele through the New Yorker see p. 12-21.

<sup>118</sup> “About Clothes,” Town and Country (October 1, 1932): 17. In her discussion of the advertisement it appears that Choi is unaware that the ‘Plaster lady’ represents or refers to an actual sculpture by Noguchi. See “Elizabeth Hawes: Maverick,” 84-85. In the Noguchi catalog raisonne, Nancy Groves lists only an aluminum sculpture (two copies) entitled “Miss Expanding Universe dated 1932. See “Isamu Noguchi: A Catalogue Raisonne of the Sculpture” (Ph.D. diss., The Graduate School of The City University of New York, 1983).

<sup>119</sup> “Pot Hat and Poncho Suit,” Town and Country (November, 1935): 107; Ibid., “Colours, magically blended,” December, 1935, 113.

<sup>120</sup> See p. 227 above.

<sup>121</sup> “Definite Suggestions For You In The Successful Promotion of Elizabeth Hawes Clothes,” Hawes SB, Promotional Packet, p. 34.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> “Coronation Prints,” Harper's Bazaar (February, 1937): 88. Choi refers to the

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Noguchi sculpture, but seems unaware that it is an unknown work. See Elizabeth Hawes: *Maverick*," 85.

## Chapter 5

### AN AMERICAN FASHION DESIGNER MEETS HER AMERICAN PUBLIC (Fortune, 1933)<sup>1</sup> 1934-1940

Between 1934 and 1940, Hawes solidified her views about fashion design and mass production. Responding to a trip to the Soviet Union, which considerably affected the formation of her ideas, she wrote and spoke prolifically about “good” design in garment making, while producing her own wholesale collection. In effect, Hawes became a spokesperson for the American fashion designer, paying particular attention to the role and education of ready-to-wear designers.

Hawes' achievements belong to the legacy of designers and manufacturers who paved the way in pioneering American fashion design in the 1910s and 1920s. Many of her contemporaries such as Clare Potter, Louise Barnes Gallagher, Jo Copeland, and Claire McCardell, likewise, worked out solutions for ready-to-wear design, and recorded their approaches to beautiful, functional, and affordable clothes for women.<sup>2</sup> However, no other fashion designer or journalist wrote so much, or so in depth about the American garment industry and the condition of the fashion designer. Hawes stands alone in this respect.

#### I. The Impact of the Soviet System of Garment Production

A trip to the Soviet Union in summer, 1935, marked a turning point in Hawes' thinking, resulting in a full blown theory about design for mass production. Although it would grow and develop over time, it was no coincidence that directly upon returning from Moscow, she enunciated a coherent proposal to improve the



condition of design in the womenswear industry. The time spent in the Soviet Union put her in touch with another approach to mass production, stimulating her to modify her perspective about ready-to-wear design. Under this influence, her project metamorphosed into something else, while retaining the basic ideal of the individual derived from the personalized methods of couture.

In her writings, Hawes acknowledged several reasons for going to the Soviet Union. In keeping with many 1930s "left-leaning" intellectuals, she wanted a look at the Soviet economy as an alternative to the one that had led to the depression, "...like many another questing soul, I wanted to go to the Soviet Union."<sup>3</sup> Another reason involved stage director, Joseph Losey, who was her traveling companion and future husband: "I went to Russia last summer, out of curiosity, and because I had heard the theatre was good."<sup>4</sup> Before proceeding, she arranged with the Soviet consul in New York to show her designs, and arrived in Moscow in June.<sup>5</sup>

Numerous newspapers and fashion presses recorded Hawes' experience, but two articles provide the most in depth account of the visit that exposed her to "...the dress trade and fashion business in Moscow," as Hawes herself put it.<sup>6</sup> One appeared in The New York Herald Tribune of July 17, 1935. The other, an essay by Hawes entitled, "Russian Women Want Clothes," was published in the February, 1936 issue of Harper's Bazaar.

According to these sources, Hawes associated with prominent figures in the Soviet fashion world, and became familiar with the structure of the Soviet system of industrial and custom clothing production. Under the direction of the Moscow Dress Trust, one of six such state organizations representing the wholesale manufacturing

of women's wear, she held a fashion show which introduced her to an audience of wholesale designers, dressmakers, heads of factories, theatre people, and the head of the Moscow Dress Trust<sup>7</sup> [Fig. 58]. After the presentation, she saw examples of clothes made in factories and by hand.<sup>8</sup>

The following weeks found Hawes learning about procedures in individual and factory garment making in clothing and textile factories, wholesale studios which sold designs to factories, and custom dressmaking establishments.<sup>9</sup> She also came in contact with the Commissariat of Education, who favored custom made apparel, and became acquainted with the editors of the fashion magazines representing the two poles of thought on the production of women's apparel.<sup>10</sup>

The visit to the Soviet Union exposed Hawes to a wealth of ideas about mass production, coinciding as it did with the government's attempt to upgrade and expand the clothing industry. During these years, conditions in garment manufacturing motivated changes initiated in order to bring good designs to the bulk of women. In Soviet Costume and Textiles, 1917-1945, the art historian, Tatiana Strizhenova, discusses the Soviet apparel industry.<sup>11</sup> She writes that in the early 1930s the low standard of clothes and footwear, and the state of the garment industry, which lagged seriously behind other areas of production, attracted the government's attention.

Institutes of Clothing or Design Houses were made responsible for radically improving the design and methods of production in factory-made clothes. Their role was partially performed by laboratories maintained by the Dress Trusts, such as the Moscow Trust that sponsored Hawes' fashion show. One experimental laboratory,

the Moskvoshvei (Moscow Garment), became the basis in 1934 for the Moscow House of Clothing Design to which Hawes alluded when she referred to "...wholesale ateliers which sold designs to factories."<sup>12</sup> The designers forming the backbone of this organization came from the area of dress design and theatre costuming.<sup>13</sup>

The main function of this Design House was teamwork between artists and designers. This directive accorded with ideas advanced about industrial designing in the years immediately after the revolution, but never fully realized in the production of clothing or textiles.<sup>14</sup> The Art Council, which included, along with designers, prominent personalities in the art world, was significant in this respect. According to the Moscow House of Design's first Director, Nadezhda Makarova Makarova, "...Council meetings turned into real artistic discussions, in which each item was debated from every angle. Such encounters were extremely helpful in putting dress designers on the right track."<sup>15</sup>

Because the Soviet industry was centralized under state-control, garment manufacturing and design studios presented a unified front. From this standpoint, the role of the Design House involved, according to Strizhenova, "...control over the performance of garment factories and the study of their potential for producing series of mass-consumption goods."<sup>16</sup>

The Soviet perspective on mass production must have inspired Hawes, and caused the crystallization of long-held ideas. Without losing sight of the principles of design for individuals, her subsequent writings and interviews expressed a deeply felt belief in industrial production. Over the course of the next few years, she

outlined steps that went hand in hand with the Soviet model of experimentation practiced in unison by a council of designers, artists, and manufacturers. She strengthened her position on the cooperative role of fabric houses, synchronized style evolution with mass production, and expanded her view on customer relations.

This much is evident in an interview in Women's Wear Daily, dated one month after her return from abroad. Addressing the question of improving womenswear design in New York, Hawes presented her program in a manifesto-like manner:

The wholesale garment industry should support a group of half a dozen individual dressmakers just for the purpose of working out the new ideas which wholesalers can take for mass production the following year. All a designer needs is an idea of style evolution, individuality in expressing details, and five interesting women to dress. Clothes should be designed for great numbers of people and by this method they could be produced in an immediately wearable, style-assured manner.<sup>17</sup>

Although on her own Hawes had arrived at some of the same conclusions, the core of the plan - a group of experienced designers working through ideas - voiced here for the first time - is equivalent to the Soviet idea of design laboratories comprised of designers and artists collaborating to improve factory clothing on the production and design side. Obviously, Hawes was no stranger to working with artists, and often incorporated art in her designs. But the Soviet example was very different, being more formalized and directed toward industrial work. Hawes called the Soviet laboratories "...wholesale ateliers whose function was to sell designs to factories."<sup>18</sup>

Another idea based on the Soviet model concerned the relationship between designers and manufacturers. The Soviets placed an emphasis on cooperation. Thus, Hawes envisioned manufacturers lending support to designers, deferring to them on aesthetic matters in the Soviet way.

In the article, Hawes stated that, in order for an experimental approach to be adopted by the American garment industry, fabric makers must be willing to provide manufacturers with smaller cuts of material to allow for waste, trial, and error.<sup>19</sup> What makes this statement different from that addressed earlier to the practice of French fabric houses is the fact that the Soviet example of supplying designers with material was applicable to factory production.

In a related article from the same period, Hawes described the level of coordination attempted by the Russians:

...But by autumn, Miss Hawes was told the Soviets expect to work out a scheme whereby the mills will produce in conjunction with the garment trade and designing schools under a centralized and more efficient organization.<sup>20</sup>

Another idea traceable to the Soviet example supported a custom approach to mass production by giving the consumer a major role in determining fashion. Hawes had long regarded the problem of industry to be a failure to determine the needs of customers in the direct manner of couture, but not until her return from Russia did she address the idea so forcibly, and in the specific terms of a program for manufacturers, based on the individual approach of couture designers. Since the early 1930s, when she had first articulated ideas about design, private dressmaking had been for her the testing-ground for the specific fashion trends which later received popular distribution, a notion about style evolution which she

solidified in the Soviet Union.<sup>21</sup> That Hawes encountered in the Moscow fashion authorities a similar interest in the clothing consumer is evident in the following excerpts from her writings:

The Soviet Dress Trust was basing its efforts as far as possible on a simple fact of life: The public should have what it wants, not what the Dress Trust decides it should want or might want, but what that public declares itself wanting.<sup>22</sup>

... when the women in the Soviet militia were invited to wear pants a large number offered to resign first. They do not wear pants. Nor do the trolley-car conductors, all of whom are women. The only women in Russia who go in for masculine attire are those who work on construction jobs or on machines where skirts would be actually dangerous... The attitude of the heads of the dress trusts on this matter is that if and when the women get ready to wear trousers, they will doubtless do it...<sup>23</sup>

The wholesale atelier which has been set up sells designs to the factories. New designs are shown in stores and parks. Votes are taken. Questionnaires are filled out. An effort is being made to give the women what they want with a view to working out a style suited to their physical types and lives.<sup>24</sup>

The emphatic and explicit nature of Hawes' statements upon her return from Moscow demonstrates that she became familiar with and strove to imitate the Soviet model of industrial clothing design, a method that had much in common with the personalized approach of couture. What began as observations gleaned during three years in American industry grew into a cohesive theory about ready-to-wear design which hinged upon three related factors: experimentation by twelve or so individual dressmakers with the support of the wholesale garment industry; consumer involvement; and coordination between fabric and clothing manufacturers.

## II. Realizing Plans

Hawes' assertive and liberating statements about women's fashions did not take root. For obvious social and economic reasons, it was unthinkable to reorient the American garment industry towards the Soviet system. Instead, the Russian experience found expression in her writings and designs. The year 1937 marks the initiation of a wholesale collection produced totally under her direction, along with the publication of two influential writings, assessing conditions for design, production, and consumption in the womenswear industry. During the same period, she ceased designing for Seventh Avenue, disenchanted with its methods, but not with mass production.<sup>25</sup>

In "The American Designer Has Not Yet Been Born," published in the Magazine of Art, Hawes defends the importance of designing for mass consumption, while at the same time arguing against current methods of production:

It seems to the writer (and designer) an obvious fact that the whole method used in designing wholesale clothes is upside-down. The clothes are designed exactly as if they were made to measure, and then produced by machines. It is exactly like making automobiles to resemble carriages.<sup>26</sup>

Although arguing against the use of couture methods in mass production, Hawes was not in fact reversing her opinion about an individual approach to ready-to-wear design. Rather, she was critiquing problems of fit, function, and beauty in machine-made clothes, reiterating a point first conveyed in the 1935 interview in Women's Wear Daily:

It is only a happy accident if a mass-produced dress fits its buyer...The American designer has not yet been born in the sense that no designer has yet been able - or enabled - to squarely and publicly face and conquer the problem of designing clothes in 1937 to be made by machines and sold in large quantities which meet the requirements of fit, use, and beauty which every woman has a right to demand. That is, of course, a problem that in other terms faces all designers today.<sup>27</sup>

During the same year, Hawes contracted with Random House to write a book about American fashion that would involve an account of her own experience in the business.<sup>28</sup> Published in March, 1938, Fashion Is Spinach became an instant best seller.<sup>29</sup> The title refers to everything Hawes did not like about the fashion scene. Berch observes that it derived from a well-known 1928 New Yorker cartoon by Carol Rose, where the mother says, "It's broccoli, dear," and the child answers, "I say it's spinach, and I say the hell with it."<sup>30</sup>

Likewise, fashion - read French modes - is "spinach," because it is forced upon American women on the pretense that it is good for them. Fashion is transitory, dealing only with appearance, whereas style, which has a basis in peoples' lives, can last up to seven years.<sup>31</sup> In a word, style concerns lifestyle and social values in opposition to fashion's prime goal of beauty. For Hawes, this translated into practical clothing suited to an active lifestyle.

A year after publication, Look Magazine ran a spread comparing Hawes to Hattie Carnegie, who operated a well-known specialty shop in New York. Summing up one of the big differences between fashion and style, the magazine stated: "Carnegie, 'She Emphasizes Femininity. Be Pretty;' Hawes, 'She Emphasizes Comfort. Be Comfortable.'"<sup>32</sup>



In Fashion Is Spinach, Hawes challenges the clothing industry's approach to design.<sup>33</sup> The lack of cooperation between a designer and manufacturer, often at the expense of good design, is a principle source of irritation. She notes that, when working for Seventh Avenue, she had often been told what and how to design, resulting in poor fit, unappealing color, and shoddy workmanship. However, the same duality that marked her thinking about mass production marks the book's dedication: "To Madeleine Vionnet the great creator of style in France and to the future designers of mass-produced clothing the world over."<sup>34</sup>

Hawes did not invent the idea of style as representative of the times. Rather, this notion was key to modernism, as articulated, for example, by the Bauhaus.<sup>35</sup> Fashion design's role per se in theorizing "style" as a design concept presents a fascinating counterpoint to modernism, as it evolved in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Despite the opposition that modern designers such as Henry van de Velde and Peter Behrens set up between style as enduring, and fashion as changing, epitomized by women's apparel, scholars now recognize the centrality of women's clothing and fashions to developments in modern architecture and design.<sup>36</sup>

Yet, this scholarship mainly treats architects, painters, and designers outside fashion design itself. As for professional fashion designers, what did they say about style? And could this have influenced other design practices? A brief overview of the picture suggests that fashion designers had an idea about a "classic" look that transcended "trendiness" which sounds very much like "style" versus fashion. Although much remains to be done, and no one person was responsible for the

concept of style in modern fashion design theory, Coco Chanel played an important role during the 1920s and 1930s, popularizing modern womenswear in terms of functionality and simplicity.<sup>37</sup> In a 1950s interview, Chanel said: "Style remains when fashion passes."<sup>38</sup>

Now, while Chanel was speaking years after the fact, her statements, along with Hawes', provide a point of departure into a study of the link between "style," fashion design, and the broader field of design, especially in light of recent scholarship which secures fashion's pivotal place in the history of modern design. As for Hawes, her background at Nicole Groult's Paris salon offers a rich site for examination. In the 1920s, Groult was married to the influential interior designer, Andre Groult, who decorated his wife's salon, and who traveled in the circle of Le Corbusier and Amedee Ozenfant.<sup>39</sup> The latter were committed to developing a modern French style, and were involved in architecture, painting and all manner of design, including clothing.<sup>40</sup> In fact, in 1918, Ozenfant worked in the dress business with Germaine Bongard, Nicole Groult's sister, likewise a dress designer.<sup>41</sup> Taken together, all this could have affected Hawes' thinking about the relationship between fashion design and style.

Also, in 1937, Hawes marshaled her resources to produce a wholesale group under her own direction. The significance of the collection is that it represents a relationship between her theory and practice of design for mass production, an aspiration that remained partially unsatisfied during the years on Seventh Avenue. For this collection, Hawes relied more completely on elements of her couture designs, and directed them toward a mass market in leading cities throughout the

country. Therein, Hawes realized her belief that all women, not just the well-to-do, could have beautiful, functional clothes.

In fact, Hawes utilized the linkage between her custom and ready-to-wear as a marketing tool to sell the wholesale line, as seen in a trade paper forecasting its completion: "the collection would only differ from her individually designed clothes in that they would be cut to size."<sup>42</sup> Each garment had a tag saying, "Elizabeth Hawes designed this dress for you to wear for years."<sup>43</sup> But it was not just a marketing strategy, because Hawes was committed to the specialized treatment that custom design encouraged.

In and out of the fashion world, the press carried news of the plan to expand her retail trade to include styles for wholesale selling, and these sources reveal important facts about the production and distribution process.<sup>44</sup> The collection of day and evening wear, consisting of "...some sixty suits and dresses...was...manufactured by a newly set up Hawes-owned factory," indicating that Hawes exercised control over production from the choice of fabrics and color to style considerations.<sup>45</sup> Twenty six "high speed specialty shops" and department stores retailed the group with only one store per city. In New York, the line would be shown exclusively at her salon.<sup>46</sup> According to one source, prices ranged from \$40 to \$90, unless accented with fur or other expensive materials; and another source said prices began at \$80.<sup>47</sup> With an understanding of the value of publicity, Hawes visited stores that carried the new clothing. Among those that introduced the line were Hultzer Brothers Company, Baltimore; Jays Inc., Boston; Halle Bros., Cleveland; Pogue's, Cincinnati; Battelstein's, Houston.<sup>48</sup>

No examples and very few illustrations are known to exist, but available records indicate that Hawes' custom designs did form the basis for the factory-made garments. Indeed, the fashion press doted on the comparison. The Breath of The Avenue said: "About the Hawes clothes. They are simple, functional, fine. Look like nothing under the sun but a Hawes."<sup>49</sup> After Hawes revealed the collection to the trade in July, 1938, Women's Wear Daily declared "...Hawes Adheres to Her Individual Style Themes," as seen in "...Distinctive colors and the wide-skirted silhouette which Elizabeth Hawes, dressmaker, has steadily endorsed" ...<sup>50</sup>

In late 1935, Hawes had introduced a new tendency in color, texture, and line into her custom collections, replacing the "shocking" combinations of fabrics, as in rope and suede, while retaining distinctive colors and insets.<sup>51</sup> This change is clearly evident in the subtly varying textures of failles and taffetas; in a different emphasis on structure – for example, a garment made of one hue; and in full skirts that enhance the female body. These features are illustrated in two advertisements in Town and Country and Vogue: "Colours magically blended in a jacket of copper lame' over a gown of gray crepe [Fig. 54]; for "more-or-less-at-home" in "metallic green changeable taffeta"<sup>52</sup> [Fig. 59]. Such qualities are also evident in two evening gowns currently in the collections of the Fashion Institute of Design and Technology and the Brooklyn Museum of Art, the former of green changeable taffeta (1937), and the latter of black taffeta over ivory faille.<sup>53</sup>

For the 1938 ready-to-wear group, Hawes indulged her new predilections to offer quality, elegance, and comfort. One example is an evening dress in red and

black “changeable taffeta” [Fig. 60]. An article in Women’s Wear Daily is instructive in describing the collection as:

Concrete examples of Elizabeth Hawes’ conception of ready-to-wear clothes as presented in her first wholesale collection of her own manufacture offer a logical sequel to her book, *Fashion Is Spinach...* Hawes concentrates on dresses and suits for daytime and frocks for evening, and in them she demonstrates her creed of fashion in terms of simple lines that emphasize full skirts, exceptional colors singly and in combination, and good fabrics. Those who are familiar with her style type in custom-made clothes will recognize the classic statement of modern dress, for this designer heeds no period influences.<sup>54</sup>

As a solution to problems of fit, the coat dress formed an important expression of Hawes’ integration of custom and wholesale designing. In the 1935 manifesto in Women’s Wear Daily, she had derided manufacturers’ attempts to obtain proper fit through belts and said that instead she would do “...dozens and dozens of coat dresses that did not look like maternity dresses...and that had adjustable waistlines and so would fit properly through the diaphragm and hips where most fitting problems occur.”<sup>55</sup> The coat dress was represented in blue-green with stripes of magenta on the skirt and bodice,<sup>56</sup> and in black faille for dinner wear.<sup>57</sup> The above mentioned evening gown provides another approach to sizing, namely the laces which adjust the fit of the bodice.<sup>58</sup>

This collection represents Hawes’ shift toward a more organic garment, under the influence of developments in design associated with biomorphic Surrealism. In the mid 1930s, “biomorphism”, defined as conforming to the body’s shape, played an influential role in American design.<sup>59</sup> This development, which marks the impact of the art movement, Surrealism, was clearly known to Hawes:

she had incorporated organic Surrealism through Picasso.<sup>60</sup> Now she did so through interior and furniture design.

What makes this body of work different is that it integrates, rather than, separates the body. The full skirts, responding to the curves of hips and stomach, attest to a departure from the Cubist fragmentation and geometry found in sculpture and painting. The tactile, shiny fabrics and all-over color treatments are more about structure than before, finding an echo in the design arts. Hawes did not abandon an interest in art. During this period, she drew from Klee's arrow paintings, as Potter states.<sup>61</sup> Still, it appears that her aesthetic owed more than before to architecture and design.

In putting her design theory into practice, Hawes accomplished a significant goal, but failed to actualize her desire to provide beautiful clothes for American women. The wholesale collection proved unsuccessful, and Hawes dissolved this end of her business in December, 1939, approximately a year after the line had appeared in stores for sale.<sup>62</sup> In her research, Choi discovered two advertisements in Women's Wear Daily dated November, 1938, urging retailers to consider Hawes' ready-to-wear, which she found curious in light of her view that Hawes was firmly against mass production.<sup>63</sup>

However, these advertisements indicate that Hawes was interested in designing a second line for the mass market, but obviously failed to generate business. Hawes' assessment about the situation was no doubt accurate. Looking back some two years later, she wrote that the "...business was no good - the clothes too expensive or too fullskirted or something."<sup>64</sup>

In January, 1940, Hawes closed her salon and reorganized the business, turning it over to former employees.<sup>65</sup> Hawes Customers Incorporated was then established at 2 West 56th Street, near the site of her original salon. In a book written for apparel designers entitled, Why Is A Dress (1942), Hawes indicates that she went out of business because couture was outdated and the future was in mass production. However, upon realizing "...I wouldn't have any place to get my Hawes clothes, I was quite upset, as I knew a number of my customers would be," so, she agreed to design for her "most ardent" customers who promised to give orders to cover expenses for one year.<sup>66</sup>

Although this train of events basically marked the end of Hawes' ready-to-wear career, during the year or so of its existence, it appears that Hawes Customers Incorporated effectively transferred a specifically Soviet idea to the design process. The organization operated in the experimental spirit reminiscent of the Moscow House of Design. An anonymous source from the period states that Hawes closed her custom salon announcing that she intended "...to open a 'small laboratory' where she planned to make clothes and accessories for a very limited number of women with the hope eventually of applying the designs for mass production."<sup>67</sup> According to Berch, the new shop was going to be run in consultation with the clientele.<sup>68</sup> Headlines, like "Rebellious Dressmaker To Close Exclusive Salon And Aim Her Ideas At The Millions Instead," accompanied the transition.<sup>69</sup>

In 1941, Hawes Customers Inc. closed its doors. In Why Is A Dress, Hawes expressed the opinion that the future lay in mass production, simply unattainable in her practice as it was.<sup>70</sup> When after the war, Hawes reestablished a salon for the

brief period of 1948-1949, she catered to a custom clientele, while continuing to think about the possibilities afforded American women through mass production.<sup>71</sup>

Richard Martin, former Director of the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, observed that in one area alone did Hawes prove prophetic:

...the very model of the two avenues that Hawes pursued would become the ready-to-wear and custom-order bifurcation that Halston followed to commercial downfall and that only in the 1980s and 1990s has been tracked to success.<sup>72</sup>

Unaware of Hawes' theory about mass production, Martin celebrates instead her negotiation between two fields of design. However, in light of new experiments in virtual fit through computerized measurements, Hawes' plan to apply the personalized treatment of custom design to ready-to-wear is well on the way to realization.

### III. Fashion Designers and the Machine

Hawes' determination to forge an appropriate design for the garment industry included a role for designers. Her effort to educate fashion designers for careers in industry can be seen in this context, and marks a compelling preoccupation that affords a view into the educational endeavors shaping the profession of fashion design outside the institutional realm of design schools and museums.

As early as 1932, when she entered the wholesale market, Hawes actively pursued an interest in the training of designers, which accelerated and altered in tandem with her increasing involvement in ready-to-wear design. The more familiar



Hawes became with industry, the more she entertained the question of what constituted adequate training for mass production. Including the research undertaken in connection with The Fashion Group, Hawes' work in the area of education assumed four major forms. Here, I will consider career conferences, an apprentice program, and her writings, omitting the work with The Fashion Group.<sup>73</sup>

Several factors influenced Hawes' attitude about design education, but it was mainly filtered through her own college education and background in fashion design. In Fashion Is Spinach and Why Is A Dress, Hawes discussed how she learned to design, sew, and construct garments. These skills resulted from a combination of domestic and professional training, providing a thorough grounding in dressmaking techniques.

At the age of nine or ten, Hawes began sewing her own apparel, and by twelve was making clothes for the children of her mother's friends.<sup>74</sup> This probably entailed sketches and patterns in the manner of the family's dressmaker. Throughout college, she designed and made apparel for herself and for friends, seeking inspiration from the French modes found in fashion magazines.<sup>75</sup>

During her college years, Hawes received formal instruction in design and garment making.<sup>76</sup> The former involved a course in "costume" design at The New York School of Fine and Applied Art (Parsons School of Design) based on life drawing and sketching museum collections. As an apprentice at Bergdorf Goodman's custom salon, she essentially ran errands, but had exposure to, and perhaps participated in the uniform practices typical of an upscale dressmaking establishment such as delicate sewing, fitting, drafting (sizing), complicated

constructions, and pattern making sometimes based on French models. She would also have observed draping, a method of designing directly in material, as well as design by sketching.<sup>77</sup>

At Nicole Groult's salon in Paris, which introduced the direct influence of the French couture, Hawes obtained practice in design processes, and furthered her knowledge of professional dressmaking. According to her own account, she concentrated on design: "I worked every known way that season, trying to find out how I best could develop my ideas."<sup>78</sup> This meant selecting fabric, sketching, draping, pattern making, and talking to the 'fitters' [premiereres] who carried out instructions.<sup>79</sup> Hawes reports that Groult relied on premiereres to realize her style ideas, because she could not cut a pattern or sketch.

The practical experience in design and dressmaking clearly made an impact. An examination of Hawes' garments reveals the complicated construction associated with the couture, and indicates an expertise in cutting and draping.<sup>80</sup> Eventually, Hawes settled on a design method inspired by Vionnet who cut patterns on a small dress form which her premiere turned into full size.<sup>81</sup>

When evaluating the influence of the French couture, it is important to remember that more or less uniform methods of design and dressmaking prevailed in "fine" establishments whether in Paris, London, or New York, and that Hawes acquired more than the rudiments of professional garment making and design in an American setting. To be sure, fine sewing is attributed to the Parisian couture, but draping, cutting, sketching, and such were conventional procedures, not particular to the French, as noted above.<sup>82</sup>

From American industry, Hawes stood to gain an understanding of processes of mass production.<sup>83</sup> This entailed negotiating problems of sizing and materials. In order to gain a degree of satisfaction, a designer learned how to think in terms of production costs, anticipating fabric allowances, and the refinements required for a design to be turned out in the hundreds, as opposed to an individual basis.

On the academic side, there was Hawes' college education. While studying Economics at Vassar, she came to appreciate the value of the liberal arts, including art history. In Fashion Is Spinach, she recalled taking courses in "French, Dutch, Italian and modern painting."<sup>84</sup> As a fashion designer, a knowledge of past and contemporary movements in painting and sculpture was clearly important to her outlook, and well informed the stance she took in establishing criteria for the training of ready-to-wear designers.

Between 1934 and 1940, Hawes became active in various projects and public lectures related to vocations. She had by then acquired a reputation as an expert, and was repeatedly invited to speak about fashion design at career conferences and design schools. While these invitations represent the pinnacle of the professional regard afforded Hawes, they also stand for Hawes' concern about fashion design as an occupation, as well as her intention to improve the standards of ready-to-wear design through a proper education.

In the 1930s, career counseling and vocational conferences were important forums for education in fashion design, and in general were a part of the recovery during the depression.<sup>85</sup> Lectures were organized with leading professionals

engaged to educate students and interested persons in employment opportunities and requirements. In summer, 1934, Hawes received a first invitation to advise on fashion in what was advertised as the "First Choosing-a-Career Conference for college students."<sup>86</sup> The conference, which received wide coverage, took place at the L. Bamberger & Co. Store in Newark, New Jersey where thirty-one "internationally known business and professional leaders" gathered to speak on career opportunities in their line of work, ranging from advertising to retailing and the automotive industry.<sup>87</sup> Seen as an experiment, it strove to teach students about leading professions and industries with the special aim of avoiding "floundering" on starting a career.

Two years later, Hawes played a leading role in a conference focused exclusively on art occupations in industry, under the direction of the Institute of Women's Professional Relations with the assistance of the American Woman's Association and the Department of Industrial Relations of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. This was the Institute's second such activity. The New York Times referred to the conference as an attempt "to study art jobs in industry":<sup>88</sup>

The administration has indicated hope that as many jobs as possible will be found for the unemployed in private industry, and research by the Institute during the last year has indicated that there are job opportunities in the field of art occupations in industry according to [the Institute's president] Mrs. Shouse.<sup>89</sup>

The event convened on Saturday, April 25, 1936 at the Clubhouse of the American Woman's Association on West 57th Street.<sup>90</sup> Aimed at students, deans, teachers, professionals, and interested persons, the agenda offered round table discussions about product design, fashion, architecture, floral decoration, lighting,

photography and textile design, among others. Hawes chaired the session on fashion which featured dressmaking, pattern, accessory, and manufacturing design in addition to shoes, hats, and the fashion press.

An exhibition of modern industrial design held in conjunction with the conference had opened two days earlier, showing the work of many of the conference leaders. Along with Hawes, the list of exhibitors included the interior decorator, Eleanor Le Maire, and industrial designers, Walter Dorwin Teague and Henry Dreyfuss. According to the press, the purpose of the exhibition was "...to give a visual picture to young people in colleges, universities and special schools of the type of work for which there is demand in private industry."<sup>91</sup>

These examples are important in showing Hawes' participation in the formalized arena of career conferences, but during the same period, she influenced students who wished to enter the field of art and design. In New York and elsewhere in the country, she addressed students who were preparing for careers in fashion design and illustration, and related fields in art. In 1934, for instance, several New York papers reported on her lecture in the costume design department at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn and in a home economics course at the Drexel Institute in Philadelphia.<sup>92</sup> She also received an invitation to speak at New York's Central High School of Needle Trades, for which occasion students created a brochure depicting Hawes' trademark of an open scissors.<sup>93</sup>

Hawes' public appearances included numerous other events and interviews wherein she showcased fashion design. A 1938 Fashion Group Bulletin indicates the range of her activities: "Hawes recently returned from a town in the midwest

where she gave fashion shows and talks before various women's clubs, stores and fashion clinics."<sup>94</sup>

As with mass production, so Hawes' perspective on the training of designers developed over time. Initially, she placed emphasis upon a college education, but came to stress the preparation of skills for industry. In 1932, for instance, when speaking to members of the Vassar College Club, she encouraged the entry of young college women into the field of design, asserting "...that the cultural background provided by a college education was essential to produce the best possible American styles."<sup>95</sup>

At a 1936 conference held by the Vocational Service for Juniors, she referred, in contrast, to mass production. Generally speaking, she advised the participants to study carefully as a basis for future careers, adding that "...I think I understand what goes on around me, and it helps me. If you would be a designer study your economics, sociology and psychology."<sup>96</sup> At the same time, she said, "...fashion designers should know the entire apparel industry thoroughly and understand the problems of cutting and other processes."<sup>97</sup>

In 1942, Hawes published Why Is A Dress which focused on "the subject of designing clothes," and expressed a deep conviction in mass production.<sup>98</sup> This book lacked the commercial success achieved by Fashion Is Spinach, no doubt because it was at press when the country entered World War II. Nevertheless, it remains pioneering in articulating the importance of a proper education for a fashion designer:

It doesn't matter how many bombs are bursting in air; if you want to design clothes, go ahead and train yourself for it. Only those whose determination is

great enough to carry them on through a bombing will succeed anyway. The important thing is to get a thorough training. There's no use trying to cheat. You won't get away with it. The time may not look very propitious for dress designers, but the times will change. The better the education everyone demands for himself, the quicker the times will change.

This book is dedicated to all those who are fighting for more and better education in the United States.<sup>99</sup>

Hawes leaves no doubt that mass production should be at the heart of this education:

I regret the enormous amount of time I spent learning the craft of dressmaking in Paris. This brings out my strongest prejudice. I believe that the day of made-to-order clothes is now over. It may come back, but not in our time. You will find this prejudice of mine springing up all through this book. I am now more interested in machine-made clothes than I am in those made by hand or made to order. I was, in my opinion, trained to the past in Paris and not for the future...As I learned more and more about mass production, I became more and more bored and disgusted with custom-made designing.<sup>100</sup>

With a view toward the difference between a technician and an artist, the book outlines three requirements for success as a fashion designer based on "...the psychology, the production, and the art of designing clothes."<sup>101</sup> Essentially, psychology concerns why and for whom a garment is made. Production refers to the skills used in making clothes by hand and in a factory, such as sewing, pattern making, cutting, and drafting (sizing). Not least of these is training in art, especially drawing and a study of the figure, in addition to knowledge of the history of art and costume. Hawes considered the combination of these factors a crucial part of the development of a designer. She recommended a trade school for sewing, self-study in art, and a factory apprenticeship, all subject to the student's individual taste

and situation: "When an artist expresses the social life of his time in terms of finished garments, the result is beautiful clothes."<sup>102</sup>

Acute as Hawes was to the issue of education, her approach offered little in the form of new solutions, and in fact was in step with design and trade schools. One exception was her proposal for an apprentice program. Toward the end of the 1930s, her ideas about fashion design and education crystallized into a plan for the establishment of apprenticeships that took industry into consideration. The roots of this approach stem from practices associated with professional dressmaking, but it was innovative to suggest a similar model for garment design relative to mass production.

An interview published in a 1938 New York Herald Tribune provides the details of Hawes' outlook.<sup>103</sup> Therein, she broaches the subject about which she felt "...violently - the preparation of other young women for the business and especially the apprentice system." Offering regret for failing to treat the subject of training in Fashion is Spinach, which was partially dedicated to designers for industry, Hawes reiterates that "...The apprentice system is to her so important that she is trying to help find some way to establish it on a larger scale in New York."

In the article, Hawes defines the ideal apprentice as a girl with selling experience, thorough knowledge of cutting and draping, and experience in industry - "the tougher the better."<sup>104</sup> The ability to do "pretty" drawings, along with a fondness for good clothes, did not suffice.<sup>105</sup> Despite the fact that they were hard to get, no girl could get a job with Hawes if she couldn't get one on Seventh Avenue. She needed to know that the luxury of a custom salon was not typical of a



designer's environment: "But when she has contact with life in the raw she can come here and learn a great deal if she keeps her eyes open while she is running errands."<sup>106</sup> This is how Hawes had learned as an apprentice.

Connections with the trade were then not uncommon in fashion design programs, but internships enabling students to form extended working relationships with professionals in design and manufacturing only became firmly established after World War II.<sup>107</sup> Hawes' ideas were groundbreaking in this respect, but otherwise coincided with philosophical trends in fashion design education.

Indeed, the practical training recommended by Hawes conformed with the curriculum of leading design programs such as The New York School of Fine and Applied Art and Pratt Institute where students combined sketching with garment construction. The significant difference is that Hawes insisted that her students have exposure to the wholesale market before coming to her for training. This was the way in which she sought to prepare a designer for a career in industry.

Hawes' apprentices were exposed to her working operation, which involved both ready-to-wear and couture. According to her own account, they made patterns based on original designs which they sketched or draped on models.<sup>108</sup> She critiqued their work every two weeks, after which she lectured, saying that "...dresses were not pictures: they were things that had to be wrought out of cloth, to be worn by women. Comfort and practicability were their first essentials."<sup>109</sup>

#### IV. Hawes' Legacy

Mass production is crucial to a study of fashion design in art and industry, and Hawes stands out as a major figure in her effort to correlate the garment

industry and design in the 1930s. Unrealized though the ideas were they display a serious attempt to reassess design solutions in this important area of manufacturing. Although none of her thinking about experimentation and a council of designers entered mass production, Hawes formulated an approach to the constraints against design from the perspective of the designer. Her plan for industry-wide production changes met with little success, but she theorized about mass production at a time when the training of designers for the garment industry, and the principles of ready-to wear design were still evolving.

Hawes' work with designers presents a different picture. Within the framework of career conferences, seminars, public appearances, and apprenticeships, in addition to her writings, she became a positive element in the design culture of the time which, without her, would have been less developed. Although, after the 1930s, she ceased to be a vital force in American fashion, her precepts and example produced reverberations through the mostly anonymous individuals who came under her sphere.<sup>110</sup>

Throughout her career, Hawes advised and encouraged aspiring creators of women's clothes. She positively affected the careers and attitudes of many seeking entry into apparel design, as well as seasoned professionals. Although failing to revolutionize design education in terms of industry, she was influential as an educator in this regard. As a result of her wide visibility, she spoke to vast numbers of students and professionals around the country. Everywhere she went, she excited the interest of practicing and would-be ready-to-wear designers.

Minka Augusta, who in the late 1930s attended courses in fashion illustration at the Modern School of Applied Art in Boston, provides insight into Hawes' encounters with design students. Recently, Augusta recalled that, in 1938 or 1939, when Hawes visited the costume design class, her "...enthusiasm, firmness, and intelligence about design" left a "deep impression."<sup>111</sup>

Hawes also made an impact in her own establishment where she functioned as a role model for the apprentices and assistants who designed for her. Some extent of the sphere of her influence comes across in a 1937 Women's Wear Daily which states that she had "...given much of her time and interest to developing dressmaker apprenticeships among young talented women. Already there is a nucleus of young talented designers who come from the Hawes dressmaking establishment."<sup>112</sup>

It would be informative to examine the careers of those who worked with Hawes, but to date there have been no studies in this area. What little is known about them derives from contemporary newspaper accounts. The interview in The New York Herald Tribune, which presented Hawes' proposal for a system of apprenticeship, included her own example. Accordingly, Hawes had a number of "really good" apprentices during the eight years of her business, and one young man who was a "really first class designer."<sup>113</sup>

Of the apprentices linked with Hawes' salon, one Anita Zeltner, a 1932 graduate of Sarah Lawrence, was among those who "...joined the design apprentices at Elizabeth Hawes, prominent young American style dictator."<sup>114</sup> A Jane Anne Mckee from Bronxville, New York, who attended Vassar, studied

draping and cutting, "...preparing for later work with Elizabeth Hawes foremost sports designer."<sup>115</sup> Dorothy Zabriskie also began as an apprentice with Hawes.<sup>116</sup>

In addition to apprentices, Hawes employed assistant designers who gained from the experience. This included Rosemary Harden, her first partner, who otherwise lacked training. In 1932, millinery designer, Mary Frost Mabon, worked with Hawes.<sup>117</sup> Trained in "French and Viennese customs and fashions," she studied at a Boston school of art and design before joining the staff at the salon. Her philosophy reflected Hawes' belief in taking inspiration from "...American faces and American surroundings and American life." Mabon probably designed the hats for custom and ready-to-wear distribution associated with Hawes during this time.

Later in the decade, a Miss Childe worked as Hawes' assistant. This information derives from an article in The Cleveland News which reported that Miss Childe accompanied Hawes to a Fashion Group party where the designer spoke about Fashion Is Spinach.<sup>118</sup> Likewise, a young man assisted in designing the 1937 wholesale line. In Why Is A Dress, Hawes referred to him, glowingly: "The most talented young designer who ever crossed my path...came to apprentice at my shop when he was seventeen."<sup>119</sup>

While little more is known of them, except that they were connected with Hawes, there is evidence of two other designers who collaborated with her. Virginia Vollard first designed with Hawes at her salon on 63rd Street.<sup>120</sup> In 1937, Vollard was operating her own shop where she was "...starting sensibly with models, sketches and suggestions for beautiful custom clothes, but with plenty of hand-picked ready-to-wear too."

During the same year, Jyra Jervey taught a course at Stephens College in Columbia, Missouri which aimed to increase personal effectiveness through good grooming and becoming clothes.<sup>121</sup> Before working with Hawes, she had been associated with the French couturier, Jean Patou. Jervey's approach to "effective" dress could easily be considered Hawes' influence. At a "clinic" for college girls held in conjunction with a college fashion show, she stressed that meaningful dress involved clothes that emphasize the wearer's best features, minimizing the poor ones. This concept is one that Hawes often reiterated when talking about women's fashion.

In addition to the group at her salon, Hawes affected an important emerging designer. Adrienne Livingston, who worked under her direction when Hawes was the featured designer for her father's firm, credited Hawes in her development as a sportswear designer. In a 1934 article - "Designers of Today and Tomorrow" - in Women's Wear Daily, which highlights Livingston, the twenty year old expresses gratitude toward Hawes, her "very good friend" for guidance and encouragement."<sup>122</sup>

## Notes For Chapter 5

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<sup>1</sup>This phrase derives from the caption underlying a photograph of Hawes' studio that appeared in a 1933 Fortune magazine article, entitled "Dressmakers of America," 41. The caption reads, "FINAL STAGE: AN AMERICAN FASHION MEETS ITS AMERICAN PUBLIC IN THE COLLECTION OF ELIZABETH HAWES."

<sup>2</sup> See Anne Fogarty, Wife Dressing: The Fine Art of Being a Well-dressed Wife (New York: Julian Messer, 1959); Louise Barnes Gallagher, Frills and Thrills: The Career of a Young Fashion Designer (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1940); Lois Gould, Mommy Dressing: A Love Story, After a Fashion (New York: Anchor Books, 1998); Claire McCardell, What Shall I wear? The What, Where, When and How Much of Fashion (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956); Beryl Williams, Fashion Is Our Business (New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1945).

<sup>3</sup> Hawes, Fashion Is Spinach, 291; Berch, Radical By Design, 63. The Bennet Cerf-Elizabeth Hawes correspondence in the Random House papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Collection, Columbia University Library contains information about Hawes' attitude toward her Soviet trip. Although no leftist, the Italian fashion designer Schiaparelli also traveled to the Soviet Union in the 1930s. See Shocking Life (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1954), 100-111. The fashion journalist and member of The Fashion Group, Alice Hughes also went to the Soviet Union during this time to observe the fashion situation.

<sup>4</sup> Hawes, "Russian Women Want Clothes," Harper's Bazaar (February, 1936): 74. For a discussion about Hawes and Joseph Losey, see Berch, Radical By Design, 65-66. For Losey's account of the trip see Michael Ciment, Conversations with Losey, (London: Methuen, 1985).

<sup>5</sup> Berch, Radical By Design, 65.

<sup>6</sup> "Fashion Expert Home Praising Soviet Women. Elizabeth Hawes Glad She Was Invited to Show 25 Gowns in Moscow," New York Herald Tribune, 17 July 1935; Hawes, "Russian Women," 74, 106, 108-109.

<sup>7</sup> Hawes, "Russian Women," 74, 106.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 108-109.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

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<sup>11</sup> Tatiana Strizhenova, Soviet Costume and Textiles 1917-1945 translated by Era Mozolkova (Moscow, Paris: Avant-Garde, 1991), 228, 233.

<sup>12</sup> Hawes, "Russian Women Want Clothes," 109.

<sup>13</sup> Strizhenova, Soviet Costume, 232.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-15, 33-69, -97-213; See Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, 145-154.

<sup>15</sup> Nadezhda Makarova Makarova, quoted in Strizhenova, Soviet Costume, 235.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

<sup>17</sup> Virginia Cotier, "Designers of Today and Tomorrow, Designers of Today and Tomorrow, Elizabeth Hawes, Who Needs No Introduction Bursts the Bubble of Design For America's Sake, and Gives This Country Back to the Wholesalers, Provided They'll Learn About Methods From Her – With Incidental Sidelights on Russia, the Theatre, and the Placing of the Waistline," *WWD*, 24 July 1935.

<sup>18</sup> Hawes, "Russian Women Want Clothes," 109.

<sup>19</sup> Cotier, "Designers of Today and Tomorrow, Elizabeth Hawes."

<sup>20</sup> *WWD*, 19 July 1935, Hawes SB, 2.

<sup>21</sup> For details about style evolution see p. 116-117 above.

<sup>22</sup> Hawes, Fashion is Spinach, 292.

<sup>23</sup> Hawes, "Russian Women Want Clothes," 108.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>25</sup> Potter, "Elizabeth Hawes," 83.

<sup>26</sup> Hawes, "The American Designer Has Not Yet Been Born," Magazine of Art 4, vol. 30 (April, 1937): 233.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> "Hawes has signed a contract with Random House about American fashions and styles which will include the story of the growth of her own business," *WWD*, 12 July, 1937. The Bennet Cerf-Elizabeth Hawes correspondence in the Random House papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Collection, Columbia University Library

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contains the publishing history of Fashion Is Spinach and information about Random House's promotional campaign.

<sup>29</sup> Choi discusses Fashion Is Spinach in "Elizabeth Hawes: Maverick," 45-49.

<sup>30</sup> Berch, Radical By Design, 73.

<sup>31</sup> Hawes, Fashion Is Spinach, 5-6.

<sup>32</sup> "Carnegie, 'She Emphasizes Femininity. Be Pretty,' Hawes, 'She Emphasizes Comfort. Be Comfortable,'" Look Magazine (July 4, 1939): unpaginated.

<sup>33</sup> Hawes, Fashion Is Spinach, 215-224.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, unpaginated.

<sup>35</sup> See p. 195, note no. 67 above.

<sup>36</sup> Wigley, White Walls, 67-76, 128-153.

<sup>37</sup> See Axel Madsen, Chanel, A Woman of Her Own (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1990); Valerie Steele, "Chanel in Context," Chic Thrills ed. by Juliet Ash and Elizabeth Wilson, 118-126.

<sup>38</sup> Chanel, Chanel, directed by Eila Hershon and Roberto Guerra, RM Arts, film.

<sup>39</sup> For a discussion of Nicole Groult and her husband in the context of modernism and the decorative arts see Troy, Modernism and the Decorative Arts of France, 117-118, 157; For a discussion of Ozenfant see Susan L. Ball, Ozenfant and Purism: The Evolution of a Style 1915-1930 (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981).

<sup>40</sup> For a discussion of Le Corbusier and Ozenfant Wigley, White Walls, 180-187; McLeod, "Undressing Architecture," 69-76.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>42</sup> "Designer Enters Wholesale," Washington DC Times, 29 December 1937.

<sup>43</sup> "Hawes presented her first wholesale collection to buyers this autumn," Cleveland Press, 12 August 1938.

<sup>44</sup> "Designer Enters Wholesale," Washington DC Times; "Hawes enters wholesale dress field this spring to be introduced next summer," Fabrics and Fashions, February 1938.



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<sup>45</sup> "From the 2<sup>nd</sup> story at East 60s," The Breath of The Avenue, 3 May 1938.

<sup>46</sup> Christian Science Monitor 3 August 1938, Hawes SB, 3.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*; "From the 2<sup>nd</sup> story at East 60s," The Breath of The Avenue.

<sup>48</sup> See Hawes SB, 3 for the out-of-town reports of Hawes' ready-to-wear line. For example, "Hawes will bring to Halle Bros. Store her recent collection of frocks," Cleveland Plain Dealer, 26 September 1938; "Pogue's Invites You to Meet Elizabeth Hawes, American Designer of Beautiful Clothes In the Gown Salon – Third Floor Today," Cincinnati Enquirer, 7 October 1938; "Noted New York stylist Guest of Battlestein's," Houston Chronicle, 18 October 1938.

<sup>49</sup> The Breath of The Avenue, Hawes SB, 2.

<sup>50</sup> "Hawes Adheres to Her Individual Style Themes in First Ready-to-Wear Clothes," WWD, 8 July 1938.

<sup>51</sup> Hawes' use of unusual combinations and materials is referred to in Fortune, "Dressmakers of the U.S.," 41. Also see Potter, "Elizabeth Hawes," 57-58.

<sup>52</sup> "Colours magically blended in a jacket of copper lame'," Town and Country (December, 1935): 113; "More-or-less-at-home," Vogue (March 15, 1936): 49.

<sup>53</sup> The Fashion Institute of Technology, accession number F69-156-1, c. 1935; Brooklyn Museum of Art, accession number 84.60, 81.9, 1937, donated by Elinor Gimble.

<sup>54</sup> "Wholesale showing for fall. Hawes' conception of ready-to-wear," WWD, 5 July 1938.

<sup>55</sup> Cotier, "Designers of Today and Tomorrow, Elizabeth Hawes."

<sup>56</sup> "Concrete examples of Elizabeth Hawes," WWD, 5 July 1938.

<sup>57</sup> WWD, 24 July 1938, Hawes SB, 2.

<sup>58</sup> For an account of lacing and other means by which 1930s American fashion designers dealt with proper fit see Martin, American Ingenuity, 18-50.

<sup>59</sup> See Bletter, "The Myths of Modernism," 51-52; Kate Carmel, "Against the Grain: Modern American Woodwork," in Craft in the Machine Age ed. by Kardon, 80-81; Johnson, American Modern, 151- 167; Wilson, The Machine Age, 50.

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<sup>60</sup> For a discussion on this matter see p. 182-183 above.

<sup>61</sup> Potter, "Elizabeth Hawes," 23, 42.

<sup>62</sup> "Voluntary Dissolutions. Elizabeth Hawes, Inc. New York, dress designers. By the company," New York News Record, 19 December 1939.

<sup>63</sup> Choi, "Elizabeth Hawes: Maverick," 66.

<sup>64</sup> Hawes, Why Is A Dress, 108.

<sup>65</sup> For details see Berch, Radical By Design, 85; Potter, "Elizabeth Hawes," 43-45.

<sup>66</sup> Hawes, Why Is A Dress, 5.

<sup>67</sup> Unidentified newspaper, Hawes SB, 2.

<sup>68</sup> Berch, Radical By Design, 85.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>70</sup> Hawes, Why Is A Dress, 2-4.

<sup>71</sup> For the fullest account of Hawes between and after the war see Berch, Radical By Design, 86-193. Hawes' 1948 collection involved garments named after artists, for example, "Paul Klee", "Renoir", "Degas," and "Vigee LeBrun".

<sup>72</sup> Martin, American Ingenuity, 88.

<sup>73</sup> For details about Hawes and The Fashion Group on this matter see p. 158-164 above.

<sup>74</sup> Hawes, Fashion Is Spinach, 28.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 30

<sup>77</sup> For a discussion on this matter see p. 57-60.

<sup>78</sup> Hawes, Fashion Is Spinach, 99. For a discussion of Hawes and Groult see Choi, "Elizabeth Hawes: Maverick," 6-9.

<sup>79</sup> Hawes, Fashion Is Spinach, 98.

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- <sup>80</sup> I want to thank the costume historian, Patricia Mears, for this observation.
- <sup>81</sup> Hawes, Fashion Is Spinach, 99. For more on Vionnet see Steele, Designing Women, 54-63.
- <sup>82</sup> See Richard Martin and Harold Koda (contributor), Haute Couture (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1996); Caroline Milbank, Couture, The Great Designers (New York: Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 1997).
- <sup>83</sup> Hawes, Why Is A Dress, 87-97.
- <sup>84</sup> Hawes, Fashion is Spinach, 222.
- <sup>85</sup> See Lois Scharf, To Work and to Wed: Female Employment, Feminism, and the Great Depression (Westport Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980); Marlene Park and Gerald E. Markowitz, Democratic Vistas: Post Offices and Public Art in the New Deal (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984); Anthony Badger, The New Deal: The Depression Years, 1939-1940 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989).
- <sup>86</sup> "First Choosing—a-Career Conference for college students," New York Herald Tribune. "First Choosing—a-Career Conference for college students," New York Herald Tribune, 29 April 1934. Numerous other papers announced the event see Daily News, 29 April 1934; New York Times, 29 April 1934; WWD 5 June 1934 in Hawes SB, 1.
- <sup>87</sup> "First Choosing—a-Career Conference for college students," New York Herald Tribune.
- <sup>88</sup> The New York Times, 29 March 1936, Hawes SB, 1.
- <sup>89</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>90</sup> Institute of Women's Professional Relations in cooperation with The American Woman's Association, Conference on Art Occupations in Industry, 25 April 1936; "Modern Design in Industry to be Shown," New York Evening Post, 14 April 1936.
- <sup>91</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>92</sup> See, for example, The New York Times, 8 March 1934; WWD, 30 April 1934; WWD, 25 April 1937 in Hawes SB, 2.
- <sup>93</sup> The brochure can be found in Hawes SB, 2.
- <sup>94</sup> FGB, November 1938.

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- <sup>95</sup> New York Herald Tribune, November 1932, Hawes SB, 1.
- <sup>96</sup> New York Evening Post, 25 June 1936, Hawes SB, 2.
- <sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, New York Herald Tribune, 26 June 1936.
- <sup>98</sup> Hawes, Why Is A Dress, 1. Choi discusses the book on its own terms, not in relation to what led up to it. See "Elizabeth Hawes: Maverick," 49-53.
- <sup>99</sup> Hawes, Why Is A Dress, v, vi.
- <sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 2, 3.
- <sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.
- <sup>102</sup> Hawes devoted chapters to custom design, mass production, and art.
- <sup>103</sup> Emma Bugbee, "Elizabeth Hawes Bars Spinach In Fashions of Her Own Design," New York Herald Tribune, 18 April 1938.
- <sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>105</sup> By "pretty drawings," Hawes alludes to the course in fashion design that she attended in summer, 1923 at the New York School of Fine and Applied Art. If she had investigated, Hawes would have discovered that sketching formed a single-course option only in the summer curriculum of the school's fashion design program.
- <sup>106</sup> Bugbee, "Elizabeth Hawes Bars Spinach".
- <sup>107</sup> The fashion journalist, Eleanor Lambert, credits the fashion designer, Ann Keagy, who directed the fashion design program at Parsons School of Design, with stepping up the linkage between the fashion industry and the school after the war. See Lambert, World of Fashion: people, places, resources (New York: R.R. Bowker Co., 1976), 270.
- <sup>108</sup> Bugbee, "Elizabeth Hawes Bars Spinach".
- <sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>110</sup> Hawes also influenced the fashion business at large. Milton S. Kastenbaum refers to Hawes' discussion on retail stores in Fashion Is Spinach in "Buying and Controlling Dresses in New York City Department Stores, Bachelor thesis, City College of the City of New York, 1939.

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- <sup>111</sup> Minka Augusta, interview by author, telephone, 1 October 1996.
- <sup>112</sup> WWD, 21 December 1937, Hawes SB, 2.
- <sup>113</sup> Bugbee, "Elizabeth Hawes Bars Spinach".
- <sup>114</sup> WWD, 14 September 1937, Hawes SB, 2
- <sup>115</sup> Birmingham Age Herald, 30 November 1937, Hawes SB, 3.
- <sup>116</sup> Hawes, Fashion Is Spinach, 191.
- <sup>117</sup> "Millinery Expert Now at Filene's," Boston Herald, 30 September 1932.
- <sup>118</sup> "Elizabeth Hawes came to the mike and spoke a piece saying a dress should last forever," The Cleveland News, Hawes SB, 3.
- <sup>119</sup> Hawes, Why Is A Dress, 109.
- <sup>120</sup> Cecile Gilmore, "Miss Volland, for a time designing with Elizabeth Hawes," New York Evening Post, 9 June 1937.
- <sup>121</sup> "Miss Jyra Jervy, Stylist and head of the clothing department of Stephens College Columbia, Mo. Will speak on Clothes the Expression of the Personality," Kansan, 24 November 1935.
- <sup>122</sup> Cotier, "Designers of Today and Tomorrow, Adrienne Livingston," WWD, 3 October 1934.

### PART THREE

#### PERCEPTIONS ABOUT A PROFESSION: FEMINIZING FASHION DESIGN IN THE THIRTIES

They know what the American woman wants, these girls who are pursuing the latest American profession – dress designing (Selma Robinson, Collier's, 1934).

## Chapter 6

'WE DESIGNING WOMEN'<sup>1</sup>

...designing clothes is without doubt the best of all careers for women who are fashion conscious, who have an impulse toward artistic creation and ambition to run their own show (New York Herald Tribune, 1936).<sup>2</sup>

But don't take my word for this. There have been a number of interesting tests made recently by psychologists and scientists. They have proved that women have senses more keenly attuned than men. Women see, smell, taste, even hear better than men. They are more sensitive to color and pressure than men are (C. Oglesby, Fashion Careers American Style, 1935).<sup>3</sup>

Miss Hattie Carnegie, whose smart gowns set the fashion for many of New York's most brilliant social affairs, says: "The new Dodge is a triumph of inspired styling. It has beauty...sleek design...and luxury!(Vogue, 1934)<sup>4</sup>

In the 1930s, the feminine characterization of fashion design that began with the founding of fashion design programs in the 1890s continued with important differences. The evidence of career literature and how-to-manuals supports the fact of woman's natural interest in clothing and talent for detail, and at the same time, indicates a split in the design world, reframing late nineteenth-century educational theories about the division between the sexes along the lines of science.

What largely distinguishes this decade from the previous thirty five years of fashion design history is the appearance and sustained public presence of American fashion design and the American fashion designer. In the context of the American Designer Movement, initiated in 1932 by Lord & Taylor's, Dorothy Shaver, the combined forces of advertising, department store promotions, and the press contributed to the widespread publicity that propelled American fashion

designers and their creations into the limelight.<sup>5</sup> In and out of fashion, newspapers, magazines, and trade journals praised the accomplishments of the nation's womenswear designers, reinvigorating the profession's feminine persona.

Whereas these practices brought designers, in general, to the public eye, they also spawned individual fame and celebrity. The celebrity fashion designer in America was shaped by the commercial circle of advertisers, public relations firms, department stores, and manufacturers appealing to the American consumer to buy items ranging from clothes to the family car. Such campaigns grew out of a policy of planned obsolescence which intensified during the 1920s, and prompted new commercial expressions that defined the fields of advertising and public relations, as known today.<sup>6</sup> Although women provided the main target audience, the aura surrounding fashion designers was not limited to a female clientele. Rather, the persona of the woman designer gained entry into American popular culture through the media of newspapers, film, fashion newsreels, radio, and verse.

### I. Vocational Literature

1930s occupational literature steered the female sex toward fashion design vocations. Women looking for work were slated for careers in a variety of fashion fields, including clothing design, advertising, and styling. According to William Leach's study of 1920s and 1930s American consumer culture, developments in department stores and the rise of consumerism led to jobs for women in fashion.<sup>7</sup> The philosophy supporting this phenomenon is reminiscent of the observations



made about girls in manual training courses – that is - women possessed a "natural" disposition for color, artistic decoration, detail, and sensitivity, and specific to apparel design, a given talent for sewing and a love for clothes.

Numerous articles and books written for women by women in the fashion professions articulated the association of women and fashion design. These publications presented fashion design as a new and lucrative female career. Selma Robinson's article "They Have Your Number" in Collier's (1934) refers to "...these girls who are pursuing the latest American profession - dress designing"<sup>8</sup> [Fig. 61]. In "How To Get Into The Fashion Business," a Harper's Bazaar article of August, 1939 reported that "....Designers, if their clothes sell brilliantly, may make \$10,000 to \$20,000".<sup>9</sup>

Julia Coburn, fashion editor of Ladies' Home Journal, wrote "So You Want To Be A Designer" for a 1935 issue.<sup>10</sup> Supposedly inspired by letters received from girls desiring to be fashion designers, Coburn's article identifies fashion design as a "fairly new" profession for "American girls." Some time ago, the author states, girls went into advertising in agencies and department stores if they wanted a business career. The job of stylist was next to appear for women. "...Designing I would call a newer profession. The designer as we know her today has come into being with the enormous rise of the ready-to-wear industry." Following this history of women's business opportunities, Coburn presents the results of interviews with nine women fashion designers, including Cookman, Hawes, Gladys Parker, and Emmy Wylie, providing advice on the preparation, training, and inspiration necessary for entry into and success in the field.

Catharine Oglesby, Associate Editor of the same magazine, authored two career books for women. The 1932 Business Opportunities For Women, published by Harper & Brothers, first appeared in Ladies' Home Journal.<sup>11</sup> It focuses on fifteen categories of jobs such as advertising, finance, government, and nutrition. The chapter on fashion opportunities begins with the designer, followed by the manufacturer and stylist.

In contrast to this broad approach, Oglesby devoted her 1935 book exclusively to fashion. Although the title, Fashion Careers American Style, fails to designate the female sex as the reader, the first page of chapter one makes this abundantly clear: There's no woman miner in America, no woman boilermaker, but according to the most recent United States census, women are holding every other classified job."<sup>12</sup> A review in the Boston Transcript of September 25, 1935 actually states that the book might be subtitled "Advice to the Growing Business Girl."<sup>13</sup>

The book contains chapters on "Apparel Fashions in the Making", "Jewelry Fashions and Cosmetics", "Industrial Design – Styling", "Fashions For Sale", "Fashions in Ink", "Editing the Fashion Press", and "Fashion Art". Importantly, fashion design is the first topic to be examined. Oglesby, similarly to Coburn, discusses the requirements of training and education based on interviews with prominent experts such as Vogue's, editor, Edna Woolman Chase.<sup>14</sup>

The book also describes a Fashion Group luncheon, (Oglesby, as well as Coburn, was a member) commenting on women at the speaker's table - Hawes the "enfant terrible" of the fashion world, and dispensing wisdom: "The first step into the fashion world is to become a member of this group, to meet and to know and to

work with these women who are its members."<sup>15</sup> Indicating her wide purview, Oglesby spoke about her book in Cleveland to an audience interested in vocational training that included members of the Board of Education.<sup>16</sup>

The Fashion Group's book, How The Fashion World Works, Fit Yourself For A Fashion Future (1938), was inspired by the organization's fashion training courses.<sup>17</sup> There are four chapters treating fashion sources, the designer and colorist, the stylist, and the merchandiser. The one involving clothing design examines the wholesale field through the work of Margot Kops McClintock, designer for Junior Town Frocks.

In the foreward, Lord & Taylor's Dorothy Shaver recommends the book to both young men and women desirous of a fashion profession. Yet, there is a keen sense of the female reader and career path. For example, the introduction celebrates both the new careers available to women in fashion, and the female pioneers who led the way.

At a Fashion Group training course, Helen Cookman, the designer and director of Hampton Coat Company Inc., had made a similar statement: "...designing clothes is without doubt the best of all careers for women who are fashion conscious, who have an impulse toward artistic creation and an ambition to run their own show."<sup>18</sup>

A belief in women's natural affinity for fashion, and, thereby, fashion design, was a combination permeating the fashion field, if not the culture at large. From the ability to identify the needs of customers to predicting new trends, women were perceived as natural to the business. Scientific support for this view comes across

in Oglesby's book on fashion careers. The author reports an interview with Dorothy Shaver, in which the vice-president of Lord & Taylor responds to an aspiring "fashionist's" query about the great number of women working in fashion; if the field, in effect, is "particularly cordial" to them.<sup>19</sup> In answering in the affirmative, Shaver is quoted as saying:

...Because fashion depends on slight change, women are more apt than men to be successful in it.

But don't take my word for this. There have been a number of interesting tests made recently by psychologists and scientists. They have proved that women have senses more keenly attuned than men. Women see, smell, taste, even hear better than men. They are more sensitive to color and pressure than men are.

Similar tests have proved that women are more emotional than men. This sensitiveness and emotionalism naturally makes women crave change - long for variety. They enjoy and react to new impressions. They have better memories, learn faster, and are more industrious.<sup>20</sup>

Shaver says also:

This extra sensitiveness helps women recognize the shadow and the shade that is fashion. A man would pick a light dress because it is light, but a woman would choose just the right shade of pink or blue - and that variation in shade makes fashion.

Woman's emotionalism makes her more aware of people than men are. She reacts to their thoughts, desires, more quickly. This characteristic serves her in the fashion world because fashion has human roots.<sup>21</sup>

Shaver adds that women are also better educators than men, and training people about new things is an important aspect of fashion.<sup>22</sup> Invoking recent market studies showing that women constitute the consumer at least eighty-five

percent of the time - or "thereabouts," she notes that the role of feminine fashion analyst has proven invaluable to business. In this capacity a woman's "...alert desire for facts and a keen sense of balance when it comes to weighing facts..." allows her to steer a direct course of action. This particular trait -"fact acquisitiveness" is another reason why women are so suited to fashion. They can balance the results of market studies and come to a knowledge of the consumer. This coupled with imagination adds to "...the hats she makes, the fabrics she designs, the dresses she selects, the advertising campaigns she writes."

To sum up Shaver's views, women are naturally suited to work in fashion because they are more sensitive than men to sight, smell, taste, hearing, touch, and color. Women are also more emotional and practical. They possess better relational skills, superior memories. They learn faster; are more industrious; crave change and variety; have imagination. The fact of being a woman makes one a perfect conduit for the needs of feminine customers. Most importantly this "extra sensitiveness" makes women prone to grasp the subtleties and nuances comprising fashion.

Kenneth Collins, vice president of Macy's, drew on these ideas in a speech presented at a Fashion Group luncheon in the Biltmore Hotel in September, 1938. Addressing the need for retailers to gauge fashion's tempo, Collins stated that most men in charge of stores selling clothes "now know" a "practical" method of doing so, which is to "...hire a trained, skilled, competent woman in the world of fashion; to give her all the authority necessary; and to let her make her own decisions as to the authenticity and the timing – the proper timing of fashions."<sup>23</sup> An

elaborate theatrical demonstrating the accuracy of these observations followed Collins' talk.

Another perceived link between women and fashion revolved around a passion for dress. The reviewer of Oglesby's book on fashion careers addresses the matter when sharing the opinion that the author was keenly aware that ninety-nine young girls out of one hundred were concerned only with clothes.<sup>24</sup> The reviewer writes that this is why most of Oglesby's book is about employment opportunities in that area.

The notion that clothing preoccupies women has a long history.<sup>25</sup> Nineteenth-century descriptions of American women record a perceived fascination with dress. According to Lois Banner, who examined concepts about femininity and beauty in America, most observers considered American women to adhere to fashion more passionately than women in any other country, and regarded their enthusiasm for dress as a "mania" and an "obsession."<sup>26</sup> She records that an etiquette writer noted that anyone writing about behavior inevitably singled out this nation as the place where "excessive dress" was so common that it was a "reproach."<sup>27</sup> An 1864 Harper's Weekly alludes to the issue in an illustration aptly entitled, "The Burning Question in Any Age" [Fig. 62]. Depicting two, fashionable young women absorbed in intense conversation, the caption reads:

A Real Trouble. Thought it was pretty horrid! Yes - and the Wretch said it was time that American Ladies of Taste made their own Fashions: and would you believe it, Papa sided with him, and Mamma and I became severely angry, and went to Bed.<sup>28</sup>

Perhaps, the most telling expose on the gender divide in fashion design

comes through the pages of a 1948 text book. Under the heading, "Preparing for a career as a designer in the dress industry, men in fashion jobs," author Kay Hardy writes:

In discussing the various possible fashion careers, the feminine pronoun has sometimes been used. This is only for the sake of consistency. Most of the fashion jobs are held by women, but many are held most satisfactorily by men. The average woman has more interest in clothes and is therefore more apt to pick a "clothes career." However, when a man shows interest in clothes, it is usually because of great ability or flair. He is therefore bound to be a success. In a costume class of thirty students, usually only one or two are boys; yet these boys often have been the ones to become famous and financially successful in a very short time.<sup>29</sup>

Around the same time, the fashion designer and educator, Gertrude Cain, portrayed the division of the sexes in a series of revealing illustrations in a book written for teachers and students of fashion design.<sup>30</sup> With only one exception, The American Way of Designing (1950) depicts the "fashion designer" as female. In contrast, the manufacturer, pattern cutter, salesman, and machinist are presented as male [Fig. 63].

## II. The Fashion Designer as Celebrity

During the 1930s, the "woman" designer was widely discussed and celebrated on all levels of American culture. This was the time of the rise of the celebrity fashion designer. The advertising and promotional campaigns that shaped the American Designer Movement gave unprecedented name recognition to women apparel designers. Formerly, fashion designers had received limited public attention, their representation confined to the rarefied world of museums and

the trade, along with sporadic mention in the fashion press, but new commercial trends in marketing and publicity propelled many into the limelight, catapulting them to fame.<sup>31</sup> The main objective in examining the recognition achieved by fashion designers is to demonstrate further how, in the 1930s, a female image dominated the public awareness of the profession.

Several examples illustrate the variety of forums and the extent of the preoccupation with the feminine that strengthened the stereotype of the lady fashion designer. In September, 1932, for instance, the trade magazine, Dresses, published Elizabeth Hawes' article, "We Designing Women"<sup>32</sup> [Fig. 64]. As in the title, so in the article, Hawes refers to the "American" designer in exclusively feminine terms.

Likewise, the fashion journalist, Selma Robinson, devoted an article in a 1934 issue of Collier's to "...these girls who are pursuing the latest American profession - dress designing."<sup>33</sup> She makes the sweeping characterization: "The American designer...Whatever it is that motivates her, it shows that the American designer is a bright, resourceful, daring and unprejudiced young woman."

In 1933, the magazine, Fortune, highlighted the rise of the American designer and the possibility of an American couture.<sup>34</sup> The title and lead-in statement, "The Dressmakers of the U.S....are very gifted ladies," identifies the profession in purely feminine terms. This is at odds with the nine men featured among the twenty eight designers to whom the article refers.<sup>35</sup> The stress on women asserts that the fashion designer possessed a feminine profile during these years.



Hollywood designers mark the exception, forming a unique category of interest which centers around men. The Fortune article actually sets aside a specific heading for their consideration. A 1935 publication of the National Retail Dry Goods Association entitled, American Fashion Designers, lists designers of retail, wholesale and Hollywood.<sup>36</sup> Typically, more women than men are included: of the fifteen retail designers, three are men; of the twenty three designers in the wholesale category, one is male. In contrast, the eight forming the Hollywood group includes only one woman, namely, Edith Head.

Hattie Carnegie, Helen Cookman, Elizabeth Hawes, Muriel King, Margot De Bruyn Kops, Sally Milgrim, Gladys Parker, Clare Potter, Nettie Rosenstein, and Adele Smithline are among the women who regularly captured the spotlight. Of these celebrated figures, Elizabeth Hawes, perhaps more than anyone, excited the enthusiasm of the press and the admiration of the fashion community. She achieved a celebrity status in popular culture. In effect, Hawes became the 1930s equivalent of Donna Karan, and would have starred on talk shows and game programs, if television had been an option. Her visibility went a long way toward creating the era's public image of the American fashion designer.

This study will focus on Hawes among several high profile figures in considering the aura surrounding the nation's fashion designers in the public arena. Riding on the wave of the newest in commercial trends, Hawes showed a keen sense of the value of marketing and publicity.<sup>37</sup> Throughout her career, she retained publicity and advertising agents, and often wrote her own advertisements. As early as 1931, she hired a press agent, Selma Robinson, who may have been

partially responsible for the attention that the New York press paid to her Paris showing of the first presentation of an American collection<sup>38</sup>. As Hawes said, "...Unfortunately, it was I, and not my clothes, that went onto the map in July, 1931."<sup>39</sup> Otho J. Hicks performed a similar function for her beginning in 1933, spearheading a press book to sell designs for wholesale production.<sup>40</sup> In 1935, the publicity campaign of advertisers, Donahue & Coe, targeted "women's quality publications," such as Vogue and Harper's Bazaar, and a selected list of New York newspapers, in promoting Hawes' Fall and Winter line.<sup>41</sup>

Hawes' personal and professional connections also generated publicity, beginning with her salon opening in 1928. Bettina Berch, Hawes' biographer, notes that the father of her first partner, Rosemary Harden, arranged for Frank Crowninshield, a leading figure in the New York fashion press, to emcee the opening.<sup>42</sup> Vogue and Vanity Fair, among other magazines and fashion figures, were also involved, including columnist, Alice Hughes, who became an admirer of Hawes' work and developed a close friendship with the designer. In Fashion Is Spinach, Hawes remarks that Hughes "was brought by someone" to her salon.<sup>43</sup> She also knew Lois Long, fashion editor of The New Yorker, for whom she had written a column while in Paris, and who supported Hawes through her reporting.<sup>44</sup> Further study would surely reveal a link between Hawes and the Woman's Home Companion which gave the emerging designer early exposure on a national level in the article, "Along Your Own Lines (1930)".<sup>45</sup>

Hawes' fashions even appeared twice on the cover of Ladies' Home Journal and in Pathe fashion films. Although the former did not mention her name, the

illustrator Norman Rockwell depicted the “modern” woman in a well-known Hawes jacket, indicating the extent of her visibility in 1932<sup>46</sup> [Fig. 65]. Two years later, Hawes contributed a dress and hat ensemble to the magazine’s cover, which was, presumably, recognizable by style, if not by name [Fig. 66]. Meanwhile, Pathe fashion films, which played to a wide audience around the country, featured Hawes’ designs, according to an account in Vogue.<sup>47</sup>

If all this went far in promoting the public persona of Hawes, so, too, did popular literature and verse. The poet, Phyllis McGinley, widely published in The New Yorker and Reader's Digest, and a household name in middle-class households, referred to Hawes in at least two poems. An undated work entitled “Leftward, Ho!” mentions Hattie Carnegie, as well as Hawes in the refrain “...Costumed by Carnegie or Hawes, And looking very pretty.”<sup>48</sup> “Dirge at the Milliner’s” appeared in The New Yorker in 1933, and addressed hats and Hawes at Easter time.<sup>49</sup>

O where are the hats of yesteryear  
 With crowns that suited the most austere  
 When flowers and bows were considered “arty,”  
 And a costume hat meant a costume party?

Ring out the tidings  
 of joy because  
 It's Easter time  
 At Elizabeth Hawes!  
 Fair and Warmer,  
 The paper says,  
 But how will I look  
 In a Turkish fez?

Henrietta Fort Holland, who also published in The New Yorker, wrote a poem about holidays at Grandma’s house which references the designer and her

logo.<sup>50</sup> Likewise, the novelist, Dawn Powell, referred to Hawes in her 1936 book by the name of Turn, Magic Wheel: "...she would be less a personage and more a person if dressed by Hawes or Bergdorf."<sup>51</sup>

In addition, Hawes received invitations to appear on the radio, which was the period's version of television, when it came to public entertainment and high profile. On September 7, 1939, Rudy Vallee's program on NBC featured her with stars such as Edward Everett Horton, Lou Holtz, and Carmen Miranda.<sup>52</sup> During the same year, she was a guest on a quiz show, a new kind of broadcast at the time.<sup>53</sup>

By 1934, Hawes was so popular that advertisers themselves wanted to be identified with her with or without her approval.<sup>54</sup> Like the fields of Public Relations and Marketing, advertisements stressing celebrity testimonials represented a recent tendency in sales, and Hawes' mark can be found on everything from cigarettes, liquor, and gum, to cars, patterns, soap, and watches.<sup>55</sup> Her involvement in product endorsement provides a record not only of how advertising used the fame of fashion designers to sell products, but also reinforced the image of woman as fashion designer.

For example, in 1934, Vogue magazine ran two advertisements, highlighting Hawes for its female readers. One stated "...A dinner without Apricot Liqueur is no dinner at all says Elizabeth Hawes."<sup>56</sup> The other, featuring two dresses designed by Hawes for Lord & Taylor, was captioned: "Lord & Taylor says, wash these silk frocks with IVORY FLAKES"<sup>57</sup> [Fig. 29]. The following year she was associated with a men's product [Fig. 67]. The advertisement for a wrist watch ran in Esquire:

Elizabeth Hawes, style expert and only American designer successfully to bring American styles to Paris, says of the Gruen Curvex: "I find it a fine,

mannish creation - in excellent taste, modern and simple.<sup>58</sup>

The enthusiasm for Hawes also affected cigarette companies. In Spring, 1935 Lucky Strike carried her endorsement, focusing on gloves as the selling point.<sup>59</sup> In 1939, she became affiliated with the R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Co.: "I find Camels are so soothing. Let up - Light up a Camel - a grand way to rest the nerves says famous American designer"<sup>60</sup> [Fig. 68]. Although Hawes was one of the most visible fashion designers, she was not alone in her appeal to advertisers. Both Chrysler and Dodge sold women new style concepts through top fashion designers. In the 1930s, the family car was a big consumer item, and family travel and vacations by car became increasingly advertised and targeted toward women. One example in a 1934 Vogue depicts the proprietor of an exclusive dress salon adorned in hat and fur along with the caption [Fig. 69]:

Miss Hattie Carnegie, whose smart gowns set the fashion for many of New York's most brilliant social affairs, says: "The new Dodge is a triumph of inspired styling. It has beauty...sleek design...and luxury!"<sup>61</sup>

In 1936, Chrysler developed a campaign around the theme, "Authorities on Beauty Agree Chrysler Tops 'Em All."<sup>62</sup> A promotional brochure showed Hawes, "famed stylist designer," leaning next to a Chrysler. The accompanying text quoted her as saying: "The design of the front of the new Chrysler is most attractive...and I'm particularly taken with the instrument panel. The wheel is smart...practical too."

Reporting on the campaign, the St. Louis Star Times stated that "Women's Opinion is Now Shaping Motor Car Style."<sup>63</sup> The paper discussed Elsie de Wolf's position as the new Chrysler stylist whose design for the car's interior garnered

favorable comments from women designers, artists, decorators, and fashion leaders, including Hawes. In 1939, Chrysler's advertisements continued to rely on the star quality associated with fashion design, introducing Carnegie and Sally Milgrim into its lineup<sup>64</sup>.

During the same period, the Wrigley Chewing Company addressed women consumers through fashion, beauty, and the glamour of Hollywood and Broadway. Promoting its product as an aid to beauty, a 1934 advertisement in Vogue states that chewing Double Mint Gum stimulated circulation leading to a clear complexion, and "beautiful contours of face and form": the "wonderful beauty treatment" relaxed tense lines.<sup>65</sup> In support of the text, the imagery plays upon the idea of beauty and doubleness contained in the product's name: two packages of gum parallel the barely concealed breasts of a glamorous model, serving as the visual expression of the "double" idea. A related advertisement in a trade magazine for home economists promises a recipe for charm, stressing healthy gums, digestion, and the "natural beauty exercise" of chewing daily which would retain youthful contours through the prevention of sagging<sup>66</sup>.

In 1937, Frances Hooper of Wrigley Chewing Gum came to New York from Chicago to establish a promotional idea around the fashions of Carnegie, Potter, Hawes, and King.<sup>67</sup> According to the New York Telegraph, the campaign grew out of a conversation between Wrigley's advertising executive and screen and stage stars such as Claudette Colbert, Sonja Henie, Joan Bennett, and Gloria Swanson. Under the headline, "Chewing Fad Hits Studios. Screen's Lovelies Take to Gum as Aid to Health and Contours of Face," the article discussed Double Mint's

advertisement and the "chewing gum marathon" in Hollywood and New York, crediting Paramount stars Dorothy Dayton and Laurie Lane with starting the fad:

I learned that the stars always were worried about keeping their facial muscles firm and elastic," he said. "We were planning a fashion series based on outstanding gowns worn by the stars, and I guess we are starting a fad.<sup>68</sup>

The trade magazine, Tide, covered the results of Hawes' deal with the gum company. The January, 1938 issue reported the "four tie-ups in one ad" for Wrigley's gum slated to appear in February's Red Book where it would reach thousands of American women.<sup>69</sup> Sponsored by the Frances Hopper Agency of Chicago, this advertisement involved not only gum, but a design by Hawes for a "Double Mint Dress" along with a Simplicity pattern for it [Fig. 70]. The advertisement also featured Broadway star, Joan Bennett, and "I Met My Love Again" (1938) produced by Walter Wanger. Typically, there was a promise to make the consumer "doubly lovely" by looking well and dressing well. The doubleness of the advertising slogan and gum packaging, which depicts a double pointed arrow, is suggested by Hawes' design of a stripe leading up the center of the skirt toward a triangle inset, as Potter notes.<sup>70</sup>

The ultimate seal demonstrating the popular image of the female fashion designer is found in the popular culture of film. In 1938, Fox Movietone Newsreel released All American Selections of America's Own Cotton, in which only women designers were represented. Hawes was included along with Cookman, King, Dorothy Cox, and Renee Montague, to name a few.<sup>71</sup>

## Notes For Chapter 6

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1. This phrase derives from the title of an article written by Hawes, "We Designing Women," Dresses (September, 1932): 7.
  2. New York Herald Tribune, 26 March 1936, Hawes SB, 1.
  3. Catharine Oglesby, Fashion Careers American Style (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1935), 49.
  4. "Inspired Styling," Vogue (April 15, 1934): unpaginated.
  5. For a discussion on the American Designer Movement see p. 149-152 above.
  6. Bogart, Artists, Advertising and the Borders of Art; Marchand, Advertising the American Dream; Cynthia Henthorn, "Commercial Fallout: The Image of Progress, The Culture of War, and The Feminine Consumer, 1939-1959." Ph.D. diss., The Graduate School of The City University of New York, 1997; T. J. Jackson Lears, Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America; *Ibid.*, "From Salvation to Self-Realization: Advertising and the Roots of Consumer Culture, 1880-1930," in The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980, ed. Richard W. Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 1-38.
  7. Leach, Land of Desire, 95-99. See William H. Chafe, The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles, 1920-1970 (London: Oxford University Press, 1972); Alice Kessler-Harris, Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).
  8. Robinson, "They Have Your Number," 24.
  9. "How To Get Into The Fashion Business," Harper's Bazaar (August, 1939): 51.
  10. Julia Coburn, "So You Want To Be A Designer," Ladies' Home Journal (March, 1935): 22-25, 79. The other designers mentioned by Coburn are Margot De Bruyn Kops, Adele Smithline, Grace Arcuri, and Ruth Payne.
  11. Oglesby, Business Opportunities For Women (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1932).
  12. Oglesby, Fashion Careers, 3.
  13. "Crashing the 'Fashion World' – Advice to Young Careerists," Boston Transcript, 25 September 1935.



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14. Oglesby, Fashion Careers, 81-85. Other experts included Dorothy Shaver, Elizabeth Arden, Margot De Bruyn Kops, and Clare Potter.
  15. *Ibid.*, 31,33
  16. FGB, December 1935, p.31-32.
  17. For a discussion of this matter see p. 158-163 above.
  18. New York Herald Tribune, 26 March 1936, Hawes SB, 1.
  19. Oglesby, Fashion Careers, 48.
  20. *Ibid.*, 48-49.
  21. *Ibid.*
  22. *Ibid.*, 50, 52, 53.
  23. Kenneth Collins, FGL (TS), 13 September 1938.
  24. "Crashing the `Fashion World'-Advice to Young Careerists," Boston Transcript.
  25. See Iris Marion Young, "Women Recovering Our Clothes," in On Fashion, edited by Shari Benstock and Suzanne Ferris (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 197-210.
  26. Lois W. Banner, American Beauty (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), 21.
  27. Abba Gould Woolson in Women in American Society (Boston: Roberts Bros., 1873), 104-105 cited in Banner, American Beauty, 21.
  28. "The Burning Question in Any Age," Harper's Weekly, 1864, reprinted in American Fashion Designers, unpaginated.
  29. Kay Hardy, Costume Design (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, Inc., 1948), 5.
  30. For more on Cain's book see p. 88 above.
  31. For a detailed discussion of this matter see Chapter 2.
  32. Hawes, "We Designing Women," 7-8.

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33. Robinson, "They Have Your Number," 24, 33.
34. Fortune, "The Dressmakers of the U.S.," 37-41, 140-142.
35. The men designers include Omar Kiam, Charles Armour, Adrian, Howard Greer, Bernard Newman, and manufacturer, Herbert Sondheim. See Howard Greer, Designing Male (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1949).
36. This publication brought together the current biographical information about American fashion designers. See Ely, American Fashion Designers, 7-43. For a discussion about Hollywood designers see David Chierichetti, Hollywood Costume Design (New York: Harmony Books, 1976); Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog, "Puffed Sleeves Before Teatime": Joan Crawford, Adrian, and Woman Audiences," Wide Angle 6, no. 4 (1985): 24-33; Howard Greer, Designing Male; Dale McMonathy, Hollywood Costume (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1976). On women designers see Edith Head and Paddy Calistro, Edith Head's Hollywood (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1983); Helen Rose, Just Make Them Beautiful: The Many Worlds of a Designing Woman (Santa Monica: Dennis-Landman Publishers, 1976).
37. Both Choi and Potter discuss Hawes' habit of writing her own ad copy, but do not account for her publicity agents and specific advertising campaigns. See Choi, "Elizabeth Hawes: Maverick," 12-21 and Potter, "Elizabeth Hawes."
38. Hawes, Fashion Is Spinach, 175.
39. Ibid.
40. For a discussion of the press book see p. 215 above.
41. The New York Times, 2 November 1935, EH, NYP; Printer's Ink 7 November 1935, Hawes SB, 1.
42. Berch, Radical By Design, 44. Hawes' circle of acquaintances from Vassar were important in furthering her early career. Hawes was introduced to Harden by a friend from Vassar, Virginia Vanderlip. For more about the Vassar connections see Berch pp. 14-15, 34, 40-45.
43. Hawes, Fashion Is Spinach, 137.
44. Berch, Radical By Design, 28-31.
45. For more on Hawes and Woman's Home Companion see p. above. Hawes also knew someone at Harper's Bazaar. See Fashion Is Spinach, 137.

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46. The "jacoat" as the jacket was called is discussed in Fashion Is Spinach, 190-193.
47. Vogue (February 1, 1933): 77.
48. Phyllis McGinley, "Leftward, Ho!" cited in Hawes SB, 1.
49. Ibid., "Dirge at the Milliner's," cited in The New Yorker (March 25, 1933), Hawes SB, 1.
50. Henrietta Ford Holland, cited in The New Yorker (December 1, 1936), Hawes SB, 1.
51. Dawn Powell, Turn, Magic Wheel (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1936), 87. I want to thank my friend, Terry Marcus, for this observation. Recently selected letters of Powell have been published. See Tim Page, ed. Selected Letters of Dawn Powell 1913-1965 (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1999).
52. New York Daily News, 8 September 1939, Hawes SB, 1.
53. New York Sun, 25 November 1939, Hawes SB, 1.
54. Companies apparently at times appropriated Hawes for their purposes, although there is not enough evidence to suggest that Hawes never involved herself in such endeavors. She certainly kept the advertisements with her endorsements in safe keeping, since they turned up in the scrapbooks that she presented to the Brooklyn Museum library. In Fashion Is Spinach (278-279) she comments on gloves that "turned up in a Lucky Strike ad" without notice. This testifies to her popular appeal. See Patrick Mahoney, "In and out of Style," Vassar Quarterly (Spring, 1986): 9.
55. See Marchand, Advertising the American Dream, 63-82.
56. ". . . A dinner without Apricot Liqueur is no dinner at all says Elizabeth Hawes," Vogue (1934): unpaginated.
57. "Lord & Taylor says, wash these silk frocks with IVORY FLAKES," Vogue (April 15, 1934): 117.
58. "Gruen creates Curvex astounding new wrist watch for men," Esquire (November 1935): unpaginated.
59. Mahoney, "In and out of Style," 9.

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60. R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, "Let up – Light up a Camel," Advertisement, 1939, Hawes SB, 1.
61. "Inspired Styling," Vogue (April 15, 1934): unpaginated.
62. Chrysler, "Authorities on Beauty Agree Chrysler Tops 'Em All," Advertising Brochure, November, 1936, Hawes SB, 1.
63. "Women's Opinion is Now Shaping Motor Car Style," St. Louis Star Times, 18 November 1936.
64. "There's a New Chrysler I simply must have!" Vogue (January 15, 1939): 92; "So-oo! . . . I'm a wonderful little wife!" Harpers Bazaar (June, 1939): 11.
65. "Glamorous Beauty, Double Mint Gum," Vogue (March 15, 1934): 92.
66. "Here is a Recipe for Charm, Chew refreshing Double Mint gum," Forecast, (February 1938): unpaginated.
67. New York Evening Journal, 22 November 1937, Hawes SB, 2.
68. New York Telegraph, 11 August 1938, Hawes SB, 2.
69. Tide (January 15, 1938), Hawes SB, 2.
70. Potter, "Elizabeth Hawes," 39-40.
71. New York Journal of Commerce (January 7, 1938), Hawes SB, 1.

## Chapter 7

**'AMERICAN DESIGNED FOR AMERICAN WOMEN'<sup>1</sup>  
SYMBOLIZING FASHION DESIGN; DEFINING FEMININITY**

She knows exactly what the American woman will wear because, you see, she is the American woman (Selma Robinson, Collier's, 1934).<sup>2</sup>

Claire McCardell. ...she looks exactly like...The Typical American Girl - whom you never saw, but read about in print...Her figure is long and lithe, her legs are long and lovely (Vogue, 1941).<sup>3</sup>

In the 1930s, the promotions and advertisements that introduced ready-to-wear designers to their public during the heyday of the American Designer Movement constructed an icon of femininity based on the perceived lifestyle and body type of American women. Such commercial ventures urged American female consumers to buy clothes designed by American female designers, whom, being women and Americans, had direct knowledge of their habits and figures. The Americanness of women fashion designers and of their creations functioned as marketing tools to sell ready-to-wear garments in competition with the French couture, as the phrase, "American designed for American women," suggests<sup>4</sup>.

Although the lifestyle of American women was an important aspect of marketing promotions, I suggest that the notion of a distinctly "American" woman with a specific bodily look, although less pronounced in fashion discourse, was extremely pertinent to the marketing and production of women's ready-to-wear fashion, and to the feminine construction of fashion design, as it evolved in the 1930s.<sup>5</sup> The idea of a typical American woman with a characteristic set of proportions also demonstrates how fashion design defined American femininity

during these years. Such thinking indicates the persistence of late nineteenth-century concepts about a national female identity, and their not inconsiderable impact on fashion design in the 1930s.

An examination of 1930s fashion discourse and practices reveals the presence of an American feminine icon that can be linked with the tall, willowy frame personified by the “Gibson girl” of the 1890s, the creation of the illustrator Charles Dana Gibson<sup>6</sup> [Fig. 71]. As emblematic of a “truly” American female, scholars have noted the Gibson girl’s influence on fashion merchandising and on newspaper and magazine illustration until after World War I, but the legacy of the girl’s slim, long-legged figure remained relevant to American fashion culture for the next four decades, if not longer.<sup>7</sup> Beginning in the 1930s, the Gibson girl’s signature height and litheness were alluded to in the commercial promotions of women’s ready-to-wear, and informed descriptions of ready-to-wear designers. These attributes of the girl’s bodily appearance also affected fashion drawing, dress forms, and sizing in the ready-to-wear industry, where they touched the real bodies of American women.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the typing of the American girl, dramatized by the Gibson girl, drew from the pseudo-scientific principles of eugenics, which stemmed from the science of heredity. Eugenicists, who came to the fore in the 1880s, often linked racial and national identities in order to establish a hierarchy based on physical types.<sup>8</sup> In this sense, the Gibson girl’s long limbs represented the racial and moral superiority of Americans.

The use of the American female body type in 1930s fashion marketing

participated in the eugenics mentality and is evident in discussions about the fashions for the future created by industrial designers for the 1939 World's Fair.<sup>9</sup> The dynamic equation of female fashion designers, apparel, and body type may, indeed, have been a vehicle of eugenics and of commerce, but I would argue that through this combination, women fashion designers, especially of ready-to-wear, became symbolic of a national feminine ideal in their own right.

The emphasis in fashion marketing on ready-to-wear fashion, instead of custom-made garments, is also critical to the image attached to 1930s fashion designers. This concentration established a linkage between women's apparel and developments in science and technology, precisely, increases in the production of machine-made clothes and synthetic dress fabrics.

The symbolic importance ascribed to women fashion designers is also significant for demonstrating the crucial role played by fashion design during this time. This phenomenon coincided with the rise of industrial design, which became extremely popular in relation to streamlining as a sign of American scientific and technological progress. Until now design historians have defined the period largely in these terms. The fashion designers who were much commented about at the time and were also defined in a symbolic realm need to find a place in the narrative currently reserved for industrial design.

The centrality of industrial design in histories of American design has its roots in the gender divide that marked the 1930s design world. In actuality, fashion design and industrial design represented two distinct poles in design, and both were heavily promoted. In a reorientation of the nineteenth-century philosophy of

manual training, the former, unsurprisingly, formed the frilly, feminine side, and the latter stood for the rational machine-world of the masculine. The appearance in 1949 of Raymond Loewy's portrait on the cover of Time magazine has long been taken to show the extent to which industrial design had entered the public awareness.<sup>10</sup> If seen in context, it also signals the gendering of design. Two years prior, the magazine's cover had depicted the fashion designer Sophie Gimble of Saks Fifth Avenue<sup>11</sup> [Fig.72].

### I. The American Female Body

During the 1930s, fashion discourse invested women designers with the role of providing symbols of American womanhood. The duty of the fashion designer was to dress the women of the country, to mirror the habits and the appearance of the "American" woman. An ideal was set up to convey the national female lifestyle and look, which revolved around activity on the one hand, and a bodily type on the other.

The driving force behind this construction was the vast commercial enterprise of selling American clothes to American women. By capitalizing on the female sex of fashion designers, merchandisers aimed at convincing women consumers that the nation's designers knew best how to dress them. Being female and American, women designers best understood their lifestyle and needs: "She knows exactly what the American woman will wear because, you see, she is the American woman," wrote fashion journalist, Selma Robinson<sup>12</sup>.



This impulse surfaced in the fashion press, advertising, and in Hawes' writings. An item in the World-Telegram of April 13, 1932, covering Lord & Taylor's promotion of Elizabeth Hawes, Annette Simpson and Edith Reuss states:

The dominant note of the display was the 'Americanism' of the designing, a trend which merchandise executives said would be a new means of stimulating business in the dress industry.

'We still doff our hats to Paris,' Miss Shaver said at the luncheon. 'Paris gave us our inspiration, and still does. But we believe that there must be clothes which are intrinsically American, and that only the American designer can create them. That is why we turn today to commend the spirit and the enterprise of these young New York women who are working so successfully to create an American style.'<sup>13</sup>

Another instance of the commercial perspective comes across in a press report regarding Lord & Taylor's and Macy's sponsorship of American fashions. The article opens by stating that the stores "Play Up American Designed Apparel."<sup>14</sup> Part of Lord & Taylor's original ad, reprinted therein, bears repeating. It refers to the new clothes:

for the American woman as created by three young American designers...Lord & Taylor, ever eager to sponsor a new idea, recognized in the work of three young designers [Annette Simpson, Elizabeth Hawes, and Edith Marie Reuss] a new expression in clothes created for the American woman. Clothes that understand American life, as she lives it...

These young women began designing clothes for their acquaintances, typical American girls ...In presenting these collections we believe that you will discover a new satisfaction in buying and wearing clothes that understand you.<sup>15</sup>

Hawes expressed a similar view. The World Telegram quoted her comments about the success of rising American designers:

The fact that models made in New York were originated by women who live

their lives under identical conditions with their customers is the secret of this sudden recognition, Miss Hawes said today ...It takes someone who sees eye to eye with a woman to know how to dress her.<sup>16</sup>

One cannot overemphasize the lengths to which sellers of women's garments went in order to define the female designer in terms of American femininity and national life. Consider the advertising of Chicago manufacturer, Eisenberg & Sons. The promotion in Vogue of in-house designer, Irma Kirby, is striking in this respect [Fig. 73]:

American designed for American women. For American women by Irma Kirby. Irma Kirby, eminent designer of fashionable clothes for American women, is not a transplantation. She belongs to America studying and living in the very heart of the nation. Her viewpoint is entirely motivated by a deep rooted understanding of our society and all the arts. She is never influenced by Europe - originality is the very essence of her work and her objective is a smart, comfortable and flattering effect...<sup>17</sup>

Seima Robinson's recorded remarks about a fashion show that she conducted during the National Alliance of Art and Industry's 1934 exhibition of American design sums up the situation: Our young native designers, being typical American women themselves, know the demands of American life...<sup>18</sup> Or, as stated above, "...She knows exactly what the American woman will wear because, you see, she is the American woman."<sup>19</sup>

1930s fashion discourse also associated women fashion designers with the appearance of American women. Female consumers were sent the potent message that their American looks could be translated into American clothes. A 1932 issue of the Boston Herald, for instance, reported a visit to Filene's department store by Mary Frost Mabon, a millinery designer associated with Hawes, "...Our hats," says Mrs. Mabon, "...are designed for American faces and

American surroundings and American life, which of course only Americans ever entirely understand."<sup>20</sup> Similarly, cosmetician, Helena Rubenstein, advertised makeup designed precisely for "American" complexions [Fig. 74]<sup>21</sup>.

However, despite references to faces, the body was at the core of discussions about the physical look of American females, and commentaries defined their figures in two ways, the "individual" and the "typical." A 1933 article in September's The New York Journal entitled, "True To Type," conveys the former:

...when the American woman herself finds out just what kind of an animal she really is - then we'll have stopped dithering around and begin to look like a homogeneous race of individually well-dressed ladies.<sup>22</sup>

In contrast, to speak of the typical was to speak of something not French. The commercial motivation behind the American Designer Movement aimed at establishing American fashion in competition with Parisian styles. Advertising, consequently, promoted the idea of women, characteristic of America, with particular habits and figures, for whom French designers lacked the ability to create models for mass production. Women in France, it followed, who looked and behaved differently from women here, were the proper source of inspiration for the French designer.

A Vogue advertisement of March, 1934, endorsing Irma Kirby, exemplifies this marketing strategy:

The growing influence of this designer is the most important style news of the day. Her native understanding of American life, American climate and American society is of course her inspiration and advantage. Tastes of American women change so rapidly that continental designers off the ground cannot follow...<sup>23</sup>

What did the typical American female body look like? What constituted a

distinctly American type? As Hawes said, "...American women have different figures from European women too. American women are taller for one thing. French women are soft and round and they flutter."<sup>24</sup>

In a 1937 article entitled, "The American Designer Has Not Yet Been Born," Hawes reiterated a belief in the unique physical type of American women.<sup>25</sup> At first, she singled out upper middle class and well-to-do women as those who are "...not in general proportioned like French women." Later she included the wider population, "...We are taller and thinner for the most part. So French designers often don't answer the demand either in line or usefulness."

These remarks identify the two most salient factors in the 1930s discussion of the American female body in fashion: tall and thin. Whether or not American women were actually taller and more slender than French women, at the foundation of this description is a set of ideal proportions defining an icon of American femininity, and this ideal influenced clothing design by way of designers, makers of dress forms, and manufacturers. An ideal rather than real estimation of the average and typical American woman set the standard for mass production in an important segment of the garment industry. A mythical, tall, thin woman determined the dress proportions utilized by manufacturers of Misses' garments (females over the age of ten) which accounted for one of the two main divisions of the womenswear industry.

A 1942 Harper's Bazaar article, treating the results of a 1939 study of sizing in the womenswear industry, discussed the departure from "real" figures. According to "The Government Measures Women" by Winifred Raushenbush, the

best American designing was in the Misses' size range for a figure five feet six, one hundred sixteen pounds with a thirty four inch bust, thirty five inch hips and twenty four inch waist.<sup>26</sup> Raushenbush writes that "...Women who have these proportions live in a clothes paradise because the most ravishing ready-made clothes in America fit them perfectly without alterations."

In terms of height and weight, these proportions differed radically from the government study of women's measurements to standardize sizes in the garment industry, as Raushenbush notes.<sup>27</sup> According to the study, conducted by a WPA project, the average American woman ranged in height from five feet one to five feet four inches and weighed from one hundred and ten to one hundred and forty-four pounds. The government numbers showed that only two million women in America had the figures used in the Misses size range, whereas thirty eight million were thinner, taller, shorter or heavier.

The use of average measurements involving some notion of an ideal type was a common practice in the garment business. For example, the makers of dress forms generally based their proportions on what they considered to be typical of the average woman's figure, and sold these forms to manufacturers and designers.<sup>28</sup> According to Raushenbush, sometimes manufacturers had their own "...special knowledge of feminine anatomy," and instructed designers to alter the proportions to suit them.<sup>29</sup>

Another way in which the tall, slender ideal of femininity affected garment making and design was through the education of fashion designers. Early on, fashion drawing consisted of idealizing the female figure. Spanning the years from

1918 to 1940, text books written by the fashion designers and educators, Ethel Traphagen and Ruth Hutton, reveal conventions about height and weight governing the treatment of the clothed female form in fashion work still in use today.

In Costume Design and Illustration (1918), Traphagen begins the first chapter with a lesson about sketching the human body and the clothed figure, "...which should never be taken for the actual figure, whose structure is completely different."<sup>30</sup> This requires making a form "...on which to sketch or design a dress... which ...like the forms in store windows... should be made ...to enhance the good lines of the garment."

The chapter on sketching without a model discusses setting up a well-proportioned figure which differs some from most anatomies "...because we are constructing a figure to use in fashion work, where slimness is the chief requirement."<sup>31</sup> Using the head as the basic unit of measure, Traphagen projects a figure that stands seven and a half heads in height [Fig. 75].

Hutton's book, Dress Designing for a Smart Career (1940), offers the same set of instructions, with the significant addition of further elongating the figure [Fig. 76]. Under the heading, "Figure Construction," she offers the following advice to aspiring designers and illustrators:

When making a sketch the figure is slightly exaggerated in length, because a taller figure gives a more graceful effect...The head from the top of the skull to the chin is invariably used as a basic measurement when constructing a figure. Whereas the human figure averages from 6 1/2 to 7 heads tall, the fashion figure is exaggerated in length from 8 to 9 heads for greater grace of line. For proportion the figure is elongated equally, the legs slightly longer, the head smaller in proportion to the body as a whole. We shall construct a 9-head figure.<sup>32</sup>

The method of using the head as a yard stick for determining the measurement of the human form derives from proportional systems invented over time by artists in the construction of paintings and statues. As opposed to actual measurements, these systems comprise rules and formulas for creating idealized types. Books dealing with the history and development of proportions in art were widely available and recommended reading for fashion design students, who were expected to have a knowledge of anatomy. Harry Simons, a writer, teacher, and designer, who studied measurements for ready-to-wear manufacturing, devoted an entire chapter to the topic in his 1933 book about sizing in mass production, The Science of Human Proportions: A Survey of The Growth and Development of the Normal and Abnormal Human Being.<sup>33</sup> At the time, Simons directed the Garment Technical Institute, founded in 1911, where instruction was offered in designing, drafting, and grading women's, girl's, boy's and menswear.

The question is why did American designers, form makers, and manufacturers of women's ready-to-wear pay homage in the 1930s to an idealized form instead of real women? And why did slim, tall proportions capture their imagination, aside from the fact that, since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a fashionable figure was more and more a slender one, for men and women alike? In the 1910s, a virtually straight silhouette came into vogue for women, replacing the S-curve associated with the Gibson girl's particular kind of narrowness.<sup>34</sup>

Even in menswear, which had statistics on the human body, manufacturers relied on an ideal type. According to Simons, past artistic rules and formulas for depicting an ideal form were "...the fundamentals that form a background for

computing heights and location of various sectional garments, which can be used with good results by the garment designers in the production of model sizes."<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, the manufacturer, cutter, and designer studied sizing, amassing a considerable body of scientific data about the "...average build and measurement of man."<sup>36</sup>

In comparison, the womenswear industry downplayed the study of the body. Simons observed that it cost more to alter fashionable elements than to slightly modify the size and length of a garment. Still, the women's field deemed "style" as the significant factor: "For this reason no particular effort has been made to do the necessary research work to obtain a dependable list of proportions."<sup>37</sup>

## II. 'Glorifying the American Girl'<sup>38</sup>

The ideal American female figure -- tallish and slender -- favored in fashion design circles during the 1930s owed much to an earlier conception of American womanhood. This slim physique had antecedents in a series of successive icons of the "American" girl, dating to the 19th century. These symbols of American womanhood grew in tandem with the emergence and development of fashion design programs in conjunction with expansions in the women's apparel industry.<sup>39</sup>

In Imaging American Women: Idea and Ideals in Cultural History, literary historian Martha Banta sets forth a history of the typing of American women. She notes that the classifications "woman" and "American" came together in an unprecedented manner during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when it



became a part of a large conversation circulating in popular literature, illustration, and fashion periodicals. According to Banta, from 1876 to 1918, Americans "...were tutored to see objects and persons in the form of generalized types - especially the types of women equated with American principles."<sup>40</sup>

What is involved here is the pronounced treatment of female imagery founded on ideas not facts.<sup>41</sup> Makers of types recognized they were dealing with ideals not reality. Neither artists nor commentators on the American woman attempted to depict concrete images, but rather, generalizations intended to carry symbolic meaning. This duality of the real and symbolic also affected industrial art drawing, which was introduced through public education, beginning in grade school, and entered into the course work of art, design and trade schools.<sup>42</sup>

The making of types is evident in the fashion drawing curriculum instituted at Pratt, and is set forth in Traphagen's text book on costume design and illustration. The method of two-dimensional design taught to fashion design students was based on geometry and the simplification of form. In describing the drawing course for dressmakers, the 1892-1893 Pratt catalog refers to "...the study of drapery and cylindrical objects."<sup>43</sup> The 1894-1895 catalog outlines the drawing course for dressmakers and costume designers which includes "...work with models of geometric solids..." in addition to "...vase forms, casts of ornament and of the figure, and photographs of famous statues and paintings."<sup>44</sup> Traphagen, likewise, advises students to use a triangle, an oval, and lines in constructing a form for a garment, as well as a figure without a model.<sup>45</sup>

In the 1910s, "Dynamic Symmetry" added a new twist to the geometric ideal in fashion drawing. In contrast to the static symmetry favored earlier, at the heart of dynamic symmetry were patterns that shape growth in people, shells, and plants. Discovered around 1903 by Jay Hambidge, art teacher and lecturer, this approach depended on design in a search for "pure" form.<sup>46</sup> Although there was a source in nature, objects were still seen through a geometrical framework.

In 1919, The New York School of Fine and Applied Arts introduced dynamic symmetry into life courses. At first offered as an elective for fashion design students, from 1925 to 1935, it formed the basis, along with museum research or material, for design in the costume design curriculum. According to the 1928-1929 catalog:

The theory of Dynamic Symmetry, exploited by the ancient Greeks, and recovered by Jay Hambidge, is nature's own key to design and composition as practiced by our classic ancestors, upon whose results we base our civilization.<sup>47</sup>

Banta suggests that this abstracting tendency informed the tall women depicted in late nineteenth-century American art and illustration toward the creation of a female type. She cites the example of the painters John Singer Sargent and Thomas Wilmer Dewing, and especially, the illustrators Charles Dana Gibson and Howard Chandler Christy who, in the 1890s and 1910s, popularized the "divinely tall" figure in a type known as the "American girl"<sup>48</sup> [Fig. 71 & 77]. During these years, the Gibson Girl, the earliest and most renowned expression of the type, along with the Beautiful Charmer, the New England Girl, the Outdoor Girl, and the

New Woman came to define the appearance of American femaleness in terms of an attenuated body.<sup>49</sup>

It is not that the girl's physique alone was her trademark. Rather, contemporaries and subsequent scholars stressed her independence, youthfulness, and spontaneity, which marked her style as modern.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, in late nineteenth-century art circles, this figure type connoted femininity, as Banta notes.<sup>51</sup> She describes the ideas of the artist William Ordway Partridge, who attempted to establish principles of proportion in sculpture. Drawing on academic precedent, Partridge observed the difference between the "softness and grace" of the Venus de Medici, and the majesty of the Venus de Milo.<sup>52</sup> Whereas the latter's "magisterial dignity" symbolized masculinity, the former's softness and grace, resulted, Partridge said, from the elongation of the torso, which he associated with femininity.<sup>53</sup>

Widely popular at the turn of the century, the American girl's lionesque figure represents an iconic form, whose symbolic force was felt into the 1930s. There has to be a way to explain the fact that 1930s form makers, manufacturers, and designers were drawn to tall, slender proportions that shared more with the imaginary Gibson girl than real American women. The precedent of European fashion illustration, with its assortment of stretched out bodies, certainly had an impact.<sup>54</sup>

I would argue that coming so close in time to the origins of the fashion design program at Pratt, the tall form of the American icon must have influenced the drawing course required by designers and dressmakers, and been transmitted to

the garment industry through sketches and patterns. Those preparing models for custom work or mass production must have had it in mind. Eventually, this stretched-out body became absorbed by a developing fashion theory, and conceptualized as a way to make a frock look good on paper. This much was recorded, perhaps, for the very first time, in Traphagen's 1918 text book on costume design, as noted above.

In the 1930s, fashion discourse created a new version of this venerable ideal, in effect, imbuing American fashion and its designers with the mystique of the "American girl". Although the fashion world had earlier capitalized on American types, using, for example, the image of the Gibson girl to sell products ranging from wall paper to clothes, in the 1930s, the girl became associated with American fashion design per se, and with the woman designer, who "naturally" knew what to create because she was an American woman<sup>55</sup>. One of the first books written about the rise of American fashion designers describes Muriel King as typically American, because she was tall and slender.<sup>56</sup> Likewise, a 1941 *Vogue* wrote about Claire McCardell that "...she looks exactly like...The Typical American Girl - whom you never saw, but read about in print...Her figure is long and lithe, her legs are long and lovely".<sup>57</sup>

During the 1930s, fashion discourse singled out women fashion designers, especially ready-to-wear designers, on the basis of their sex, and constructed a persona that made them responsible for dressing American women. The association between ready-to-wear and female designers was good publicity, because it linked mass-produced womenswear with fit and function in competition

with custom attire. This combination created an image of advancement in American machine technology coupled with scientific progress in terms of synthetic dress fabrics, such as rayon. The claim that there was a typical American female figure was an important part of the equation, and resulted in elevating women fashion designers to the level of national symbols of femininity through their instinctive ability to understand what American women wanted. All this means that, as icons of American womanhood, female fashion designers were tied with symbolic meaning and advances in science and technology.

### III. The Ideology of Eugenics

More than symbols of national femininity, the typing of the American woman and thereby, fashion design, had an ideological side. Banta situates the idea of types in a variety of contexts, most importantly, eugenics. Coined in 1883, the term, “eugenics”, referred to individuals born endowed with noble qualities.<sup>58</sup> Eugenecists, typically, believed that modern science, especially the science of heredity, was the path to improving the quality of the human species, and often equated racial and national identity. For example, Eugenecists, among others, blamed the influx of immigrants from Eastern and central Europe in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries for causing the racial degeneration of America.

Banta believes that this kind of thinking fostered a desire to create a unifying vision of Americaness, which, in turn, influenced the invention of American types.<sup>59</sup> From a eugenics' perspective, the tallness of the American girl stood for racial

superiority; in a word, height symbolized moral stature. The work of Howard Chandler Christy, who popularized images of the American girl, clearly reveals a eugenics' sensibility, as Banta observes. In a 1906 book, entitled, The American Girl, Christy wrote that the girl has "...successfully appropriated to herself the best qualities from all the different races to which she owed her origins."<sup>60</sup> These races were Anglo European, or Northern European, which Christy reluctantly extended to include the Irish.

In American Beauty, Banner also discusses eugenics in terms of American feminine ideals.<sup>61</sup> She links the ideals of health and morality prevalent in American popular culture during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to the notion of womanly beauty, traceable in part to eugenics and social darwinism. She notes that in the 1920s, a stress on woman's physical appearance superceded such interests in keeping with rising commercialism.

In a study of 1930s men's dress reform in England, the design historian, Barbara Burman, identifies a direct link between eugenics and fashion design. Essentially, the idea was that health and hygiene in dress would improve the health of the race.<sup>62</sup> Burman notes a related view in Flugel's influential book of the same period, The Psychology of Clothes (1930):

The new science of eugenics, emphasizing the importance of sexual selection for future human welfare adds its own argument to those of hygiene and aesthetics, and demands that we should duly value the body, if not for our own sake, at least for the sake of future generations.<sup>63</sup>

Although the typing of the American girl offers a valuable site from which to consider fashion design in relation to eugenics, the area ripe for such a study is

sizing in mass production. Sizing was part of a search for averages undertaken in pursuit of rational planning in manufacturing. In this manner, garment designing tapped into a body of interrelated "scientific" literature informed by medicine, anthropology, and eugenics.

An example is Simons' 1933 book, The Science of Human Proportions. Subtitled "A Survey of the Growth and Development of the Normal and Abnormal Human Being," this book about sizing in ready-to-wear explicitly alludes to eugenics. It includes chapters entitled, "General Characteristics of the Various Races and Abnormal Types" and "Comparative Anatomy and Heredity." The bibliography lists titles such as Evolution of Man (1923), Pedigree of the Human Race (1926) by Harris Hawthorne Wilder, and Inheritance of Stature (1917) by C.B. Davenport, the "father" of the Eugenics' Movement.

A related study is W.H. Sheldon's The Varieties of Human Physique (1940). Raushenbush refers to Sheldon's book in her aforementioned article about sizing in womenswear, calling it a "technical aid" to fashion designers, along with the statistics found in the government study.<sup>64</sup> According to Sheldon, in an effort to "systematize the science of human behavior" – Psychology, he developed a method to classify the "behaving structure" - the body.<sup>65</sup> His bibliography cites two books by Davenport along with an annotated account of Davenport's Body build its development and inheritance.<sup>66</sup> The main way that Sheldon's work would benefit fashion designers, writes Raushenbush, is that, based on photographs of college students, which he grouped into types, Sheldon obtained:

...accurate anthropomorphic data of the same character as that collected by the government...Once his photographs of feminine types are completed, the designer will be able to visualize the customer without difficulty.<sup>67</sup>

Anthropometry, which formed the basis for the government's approach to sizing women's ready-to-wear, was a scientific technique for measuring the human body used by physicians and anthropologists.<sup>68</sup> The term was widely used during the 1930s in design circles, where designers sought to create functional and standardized objects for mass production. For instance, the industrial designer Raymond Lowey, speaking about the comfort feature of design before a Fashion Group workshop, said: "Measurements of Mr. and Mrs. Average Citizen are obtained from medical colleges and chair patterns designed accordingly."<sup>69</sup>

Perhaps the best illustration of the ideological trajectory of the science of heredity and fashion design can be found in the pages of February's 1939 Vogue. Here fashion, women's measurements, genetic engineering, and industrial design join together in the context of the scientific progress promised by the New York World's Fair. The article, "To-Morrow's Daughter," expresses the alarmingly prophetic view:

...To-morrow's American woman may be the result of formula - the tilt of her eyes, the curve of her chin, the shade of her hair ordered like crackers from the grocer. She may be gentle, sympathetic, understanding - because of a determinable combination of genes.<sup>70</sup>

Another article centers on the fashions for the future created by industrial designers under Vogue's sponsorship. Accordingly, two designers advanced claims directly linking genetics and the stature of women. George Sakier said, "...The woman of the future will be tall and slim and lovely: she will be bred to it - for the



delectation of the community and her own happiness."<sup>71</sup> Similarly, Donald Deskey stated:

Tomorrow's woman...Medical Science will have made her body Perfect. She'll never know obesity, emaciation, superfluous hair, or a bad complexion - thanks to a controlled diet, controlled basal metabolism. Her height will be increased, her eyelashes lengthened - with some X-hormone.<sup>72</sup>

After the war, Lord & Taylor's Dorothy Shaver reinvigorated the marketing strategy of the American Designer Movement in an effort to sway female buying habits potentially threatened by a resurgent French couture. Beginning in January, 1945, she introduced the term, "The American Look," in a series of ten advertisements in New York newspapers revolving around the nation's designers.<sup>73</sup> The designation caught on rapidly to become the most influential "style trend" of the season.

Unlike the 1930s, Shaver's promotional advertisements did not stress female designers. Instead, they focused on the American look, but not without a dose of eugenics. A May 1945 issue of Life, discussing Shaver's viewpoint, explains that ". . .The American Look is, therefore, an authentic national characteristic, a creation of the American way of life." Comprised "of many things," the "look" involved qualities such as good grooming, simplicity, naturalness, and glamour. However the "...No. 1 component of "The American Look", according to Miss Shaver, is "...that certain kind of American figure - long-legged, broad-shouldered, slim-waisted, high-bosomed"<sup>74</sup> [Fig. 78].

The Life article attributes these features of the female appearance to economic and psychological factors such as diet, hygiene, and the free lifestyle

ensured by American democracy. Thus, the height implied in "long legged" can be seen as a consequence of good diet and health. In fact, according to the article, "...The American girl is growing taller and most of the additional length seems to go to her legs."<sup>75</sup>

Still, the legacy of eugenics lingered. Writing about the "look" in terms of U.S. servicemen, the magazine states:

In this most immense of wars Americans have involuntarily absorbed such a knowledge of people and races as would never have come their way in peace-time years. Naturally the GI's interest in racial strains involves girls. They have seen and evaluated the relative endowments of English girls, French girls, Australian girls, Polynesian girls. They have found some to be beautiful, some pretty, some exotic. But none of them look like American girls and the GI has come to appreciate and miss, with a deep and genuine poignance, the look that sets American girls apart from those of all other lands.<sup>76</sup>

The article continues:

Although the U.S. has not, perhaps, evolved girls of more surpassing beauty, it appears to roving GIs that quantitatively there are more attractive women on their home shores than anywhere else on earth. For all the racial streams of America, its girls have somehow acquired an unmistakable American look that has become as much a part of the national scene as the corner drugstore or the Mississippi River.<sup>77</sup>

#### IV. Femininity Versus Masculinity in Design

In the 1930s, the discourse about "lady" fashion designers constructed a definition of femininity which formed one side of a polemical juxtaposition that structured the design world. By midpoint in the decade, fashion design and industrial design signified two gender-specific professions. Both had emerged in the public arena to a captivated audience, and each piqued attention as a new and

lucrative industrial profession. Fashion design evoked an image of softness and domesticity, whereas industrial design brought to mind toughness and the machine, stereotypes induced by an educational model that arose within the 1880s Manual Training Movement.<sup>78</sup>

Oglesby's Fashion Careers American Style (1935) sums up the gender debate surrounding these two professions. Her book proposes a rather meager role for women in industrial design. She observes that the tendency in the profession was against girls; that an important designer had told her, that, if she were twenty and wanted to be an industrial designer, she should change her sex.<sup>79</sup>

According to Oglesby, several of the more productive areas in industrial design, furniture, for example, were actually closed to girls. Jobs unsuited for them involved hard materials, such as ceramics, glassware, and lighting fixtures, because "...For a woman, especially, that word hard has a double meaning.<sup>80</sup> The tide is against you." You can attend classes and sketch designs for silver, furniture and all kinds of metal work, but you can't get into a factory and learn about your materials there -

...Not in America. Not anywhere since the Bauhaus was closed. Furthermore, women have a bad name as draftsmen, the first step in hard design. Public opinion is against them. Of course that opinion is predominately male, which may be one reason for its being so emphatically negative. But it is reasonable to suppose, even if you're the most ardent of feminists, that this masculine opinion would not be so unanimous without some reason.<sup>81</sup>

Under certain circumstances, it was possible for women to break into the masculine side of industrial design. The study of furniture illustration could prepare them to enter the field of furniture.<sup>82</sup> On the other hand, soft materials such as

textiles, wallpaper, or rugs provided more opportunities:

When you choose to work in soft materials the route is easier - for women especially ...Men are willing to listen to a woman when she speaks on color, weave, design. It's woman's work, they say. The tide is in her favor.<sup>83</sup>

A career book for boys published close in time to the rise of industrial design demonstrates the machine's continuing impact in the construction of masculinity. In The Boy and His Vocation (1925), John Irving Sowers, a director of vocational education, points readers toward occupations where mechanics and "hard" industry played leading roles.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, the book could well have the title, "Mechanics and the Making of the Man."

The chapter on choosing a vocation, for instance, recommends The Iron Man in Industry and Resources and Industries of the U.S. for additional reading. An illustration, accompanying Chapter One, entitled, "The Boy On the Fence", depicts a young boy who "...is awake to the necessity of deciding for himself upon an aim in life" [Fig. 79]. With his elementary school visible in the distance, a sign post emphasizes possibilities in Mechanics, Business, Agriculture, and the Professions. In another illustration, a boy overlooks an urban seaport alive with machines [Fig. 80]. The caption says, "...Opportunity beats a regular anvil chorus on your door all day and waits for you around the corner with a stuffed club."

The model of men's relationship with the machine, traceable to late nineteenth-century developments in manual training, rested on the assumption of men's ability to deal in universals through abstract thought. In an 1874 address to the State Teachers' Association in Pennsylvania, educator George Woods, alluded to this when discussing drawing:

in its higher forms of geometric, model, mechanical and architectural. It is not mere picture drawing of which I speak, but something higher and more useful. As a result of this study, we shall have better artists, engineers, mechanics, architects and designers.<sup>85</sup>

The same attitude informed Martha and Sheldon Cheney's influential book written in the 1930s: Art and the Machine (1936). In one of the first books to explain the emergence of industrial design, the Cheneys present the industrial designer in terms of mathematics, engineering, science, factory technology, modern art, and abstract, universal values, making the industrial arts seem primitive in comparison. Written at a time when the accomplishments of industrial designers were being promoted as a sign of American progress in art and industry, the book celebrates the machine technology and science associated with industrial design, and sets it over the industrial arts, identifying the industrial designer as the true proponent of the machine age.

For the Cheneys, industrial design designates a field where a conceptual and problem-solving attitude is linked with advances in machine technology and mass production. The industrial designer orients himself toward the creation of form in three dimensions, in order to provide an appearance for a range of new and improved machines and consumer items such as airplanes, refrigerators, pencil sharpeners, and dishes. With backgrounds, for example, in theatre design and advertising, industrial designers break from the educational track associated with the industrial arts. Rather than channeling creativity toward decoration to be expressed through drawing, and in many instances, technique, to be an industrial designer is to underplay the technical side of design, and accentuate the

conceptual and commercial aspects, relying on a staff of experts in architecture, engineering, sales marketing, and model making:

But the industrial designer's credo is the antithesis of what was widely and generally accepted by nineteenth-century manufacturers as basic to 'industrial art.' It is derived from sources independent of applied design, as the term is still widely employed throughout centers of industry and merchandising. The new figure sees all past effort to adorn the still crude machines and their often cruder output as representing a misunderstanding of what art essentially is and as a falsification of machine function. Two-dimensional art is not properly applied to three-dimensional products in the industrial design field. This means that the industrial designer's practice has little in common with that of his contemporaries in such fields as illustration and fashion design as it has with periods and traditional styles.<sup>86</sup>

The Cheneys attach great importance to the industrial designers' use of abstract modern art to develop a machine aesthetic symbolic of the age. The book is dominated by a succession of images of geometric, streamlined objects, and went far in establishing the perception of "Streamline as Symbol", which the authors link with the height in science, technology, and rational thought. According to the Cheneys, "...The streamline as a scientific fact is embodied in the airplane."<sup>87</sup> It is "...an aesthetic style mark and a symbol of twentieth-century machine-age speed, precision, and efficiency..." The emphasis on industrial design underlying Art and The Machine, thus, indicates a preference for the masculine and by the same token technology, science, abstraction, rationalism, and the modern.

The industrial arts, in comparison, are characterized as feminine and draw inspiration from historic forms to be hopelessly mired in the past. As the Cheneys wrote:

And because we still have some of the old conception of "the eye's necessity for ornament," we have gasoline stations that are Greek temples in miniature, crimson colored to increase their visibility for the motorist. The

machine was thus misused, masked, falsely frilled out with feminine and regal ornament, through its first century of contact with 'art'; and machined industry was given a bad name wherever artists congregated – before anyone realized that the potentialities of a typical new art were hidden in the marvels of the engine itself. But the early confusion and the later vision need not be considered reason for discrediting handicraft, on its own ground, as a continuing activity.<sup>88</sup>

Subsequent scholars picked up and spread the Cheneys' enthusiasm for industrial design. The omission of the industrial arts and fashion design from a history of American design in the current canon takes its cues from these writers. Art And The Machine is regularly cited in studies of 1930s American design, and industrial design forms the basis for a history of early twentieth-century American design in most surveys and in a range of scholarly texts.<sup>89</sup>

The Cheneys were not alone in their admiration for industrial design. The Museum of Modern Art helped to establish its reputation through a 1934 exhibition entitled, Machine Art, which, similarly, enters into the academic conversation, but the current understanding of 1930s American design as industrial design, and the selection of works and designers comprising the canon in most surveys and advanced studies is largely indebted to the Cheneys.<sup>90</sup> An important and dominant strain of design in America has then been consistently oriented away from the industrial arts and directed toward industrial design and its connotations.

We can understand the 1930s fascination with industrial design, but with non-modernist inquiries now deemed worthy in art and design scholarship, we recognize that the picture was more complex than the Cheneys describe, and bearing in mind that the Cheneys' attitude was founded on cherished ideas about

men and machinery, we come to understand that this couple tells us as much about beliefs that ensured men's dominion in industrial design, as about actuality.

This awareness does not alter the fact that 1930s female fashion designers, while active in technology, were affected by the design hierarchy and concomitant assumption that making clothing is natural to women and a labor related to female relationships in the home. References to this supposition appeared in descriptions of leading figures popularized by the American Designer Movement, and only discussed women designers in these terms.

A book published in 1935 by the National Retail and Drygoods Association entitled, American Fashion Designers, which brought together current information about contemporary figures, provides an example. Accordingly, Elizabeth Hawes made her own clothes as a child, and dressed and sold Kewpie dolls.<sup>91</sup> Nettie Rosenstein came about her career "quite naturally" since she designed and made her own clothes too.<sup>92</sup> Adele Simpson was another designer who "even as a child" made clothes for herself and her sisters, and there was Shirley Barker who attended Pratt "...where she could indulge her hobbies of sketching and sewing."<sup>93</sup> On the other hand, Hattie Carnegie "...would be unable to cut a pattern if she tried and has never sewed a stitch in her life".<sup>94</sup> Muriel King "...knows little about the mysteries of cutting and draping and does not sew...".<sup>95</sup>

During the same year, Julia Coburn referred to female domestic relationships in an article in the Ladies' Home Journal, entitled, "So You Want to be a Designer."<sup>96</sup> Thus, while Gladys Parker learned to sketch in art school, she learned about sewing from her grandmother; and Dorine Abrade arrived at



designing “honestly,” because her mother and grandmother were designers. In fact, “...When she was a little girl...she began by making doll clothes...just like you,” future designers. All this confirms the perpetuation of a feminine stereotype linked with the origins of fashion design.

Nevertheless, keeping in mind the stereotypes at work, being a fashion designer was considered a worthwhile occupation, and had positive social significance for women, aside from providing a living. By virtue of their sex, 1930s discourse gave fashion designers the role of defining symbols of American femininity. Whereas the industrial designer stood for machine progress through streamlining, symbolizing American masculinity through rational thinking, high technology, and science, ready-to-wear designers represented advances in the garment industry and the alternate universe of women.

In the past, the profession of dressmaking had been a prized activity for women, but later it was the fashion designer who became inscribed with national symbolic value. There is a crucial difference between the social recognition afforded dressmaking in nineteenth-century how-to-manuals and etiquette books, and the widespread dissemination of fashion design through media publicity in the early twentieth century. At the same time there is something intensely positive about how dressmaking, like fashion design, influences in endless ways how one walks through the world, to borrow Elaine Scarry’s phrase.<sup>97</sup>

## Notes For Chapter 7

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<sup>1</sup> "American Designed For American Women," Vogue (April 1, 1934): 16. This phrase formed the lead-in statement to a series of ads that appeared in Vogue in 1934 sponsored by Eisenberg & Sons Makers of Chicago to promote in-house designer Irma Kirby.

2. Robinson, "They have your Number," 21.

3. Vogue (March, 1941).

4. "American Designed For American Women," Vogue (April 1, 1934): 16.

5. For the relevance of lifestyle to the rhetoric surrounding American fashion designers see Martin, American Ingenuity; *ibid.*, All-American: A Sportswear Tradition. The tie between lifestyle and American fashion designers is aptly expressed in the phrase "Typically American," Claire McCardell's clothes are solutions to the various problems of everyday living." See Williams Epstein Beryl, Fashion Is Our Business (New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1945), 71.

6. See The Gibson Book: A Collection of the Published Works of Charles Dana Gibson, 2 vols. (New York: Scribner, 1906); Charles Dana Gibson, The Gibson Girl and her America: the best drawings. Selected by Edmond Vincent Gillon, Jr. (New York: Dover Publications, 1969).

7. Wilson, Adorned In Dreams, 78, 157; Jennifer Craik, The Face of Fashion, Cultural Studies in Fashion (New York: Routledge, 1994), 73-75.

8. See Daniel J. Kevles, In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985; reprint, 1995), 3-96.

9. For a discussion on the matter of eugenics and the fashions for the future by industrial designers see p. 361-362 below.

10. Time (October 31, 1949). The caption reads, "He streamlines the sales curve."

11. *Ibid.*, September 15, 1947. The caption reads, "Who wants the New Look?"

12. Robinson, "They have your Number," 21.

13. World-Telegram, 13 April 13 1932, Hawes SB, 1.

14. "Play Up American Designed Apparel," WWD, 15 March 1932.

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15. Ibid.
  16. "American Designers Win," World Telegram, April 1932.
  17. "American Designed For American Women," Vogue (April 1, 1934): 16.
  18. "American Designs To Be Exhibited at Rockefeller Centre; Display of Volume Styles by U.S. Designers to be Shown in conjunction with Industrial Arts Exhibit," WWD, 17 April 1934. For a discussion concerning this matter see p. 126-129 above.
  19. Robinson, "They have your Number," 21.
  20. "Millinery Expert Now at Filene's," Boston Herald 30 September 1932.
  21. "new face powder created especially for american complexions," Harper's Bazaar (February, 1939): unpaginated.
  22. Gilbert Seldes, "True to Type. Famous Designer Raps Men's Ideas on Clothes," New York Journal, 28 September 1933.
  23. "American Designed For American Women," Vogue (March 1, 1934): 16.
  24. Because of its placement in the Hawes scrapbook, this quote in an unnamed, undated newspaper article can be dated to 1932 close in time to the American Designer Movement, Hawes SB, 1.
  25. Hawes, "The American Designer Has Not Yet Been Born," Magazine of Art (April, 1937): 231
  26. Winifred Raushenbush, "The Government Measures Women," Harper's Bazaar (March 15, 1942): 73. Women's Measurements For Garment and Pattern Construction, U.S. Department of Agriculture Miscellaneous Publication No. 454 was based on 58 measurements of 14, 698 white women in connection with colleges and universities such as Pennsylvania State College and the University of North Carolina.
  27. Raushenbush, "The Government Measures Women," 73.
  28. Ibid., 78. Raushenbush's observations are supported by Bruno Ferri, President of Wolf Form Co., interview by author, 10 July 1997. Also see Disher, American Factory Production (London: Devereaux Publications LTD, 1947), 201-208; Patti Palmer and Marta Alto, Fit For Real People (Portland, Oregon: Palmer/Pletsch Publishing, 1998), 11-13.

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29. Raushenbush, "The Government Measures Women," 78. See Disher, American Factory Production, 197-220; Palmer, Fit For Real People, 14.
30. Traphagen, Costume Design and Illustration (1918), 1r.
31. *Ibid.*, 13.
32. Hutton, Dress Designing, 20.
33. Harry Simons, The Science of Human Proportions: A Survey of The Growth and Development of the Normal and Abnormal Human Being (New York: Clothing Designer Co., Inc., 1933). This book contains an extensive bibliography that includes books about anatomy, and art and standard proportions, such as Arthur Thomson, Anatomy For Art Students (New York: Macmillan Co., 1896); T. S. Moore, "Idea of a Canon of Proportion For The Human Figure," Burlington Magazine 5 (1904): 475-481; G. Shadow, Sculptor and Art Student's Guide to the Proportions of the Human Form With Measurements in Feet and Inches of Full-Grown Figures of Both Sexes and of Various Ages (London: Chapman & Hall Ltd., 1883).
34. See Steele, Fashion and Eroticism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 226; Barbara Burman Baines, Fashion Revivals From the Elizabethan Age to the Present Day (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1981), 54-59.
35. Simons, The Science of Human Proportions, 247.
36. *Ibid.*, 246.
37. *Ibid.*
38. This phrase derives from the title of a 1929 film and testifies to the popularity of the notion of an "American" kind of femininity in the period between the wars. See Millard Webb, director, Glorifying the American Girl, Paramount, 1929, film. Also the "Miss America" pageants began in 1921.
39. For a detailed discussion of this matter see chapter 5.
40. Martha Banta, Imaging American Women: Idea and Ideals in Cultural History (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), xxix.
41. For a discussion of this matter with respect to women and American painting and illustration from 1876 to 1914 see Van Hook, Angels of Art, especially pages 133-209.

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42. Banta, Imaging American Women, xxix.
  43. PIC, 1892-1893, 60.
  44. Ibid., 1894-1895, 61.
  45. Traphagen, Costume Design and Illustration (1918 and 1932), 1-2.
  46. Jay Hambidge, Dynamic Symmetry; The Greek Vase (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1920), Dynammic Symmetry In Composition As Used By The Artist (New York: Bretano's, 1923), The Elements of Dynamic Symmetry (New York: Bretano's, 1926). See Banta, Imaging American Women, 201.
  47. NYSFA, 1928-1929, 4.
  48. Banta, Imaging American Women, p. 498. See also Susan Hobbs, "Thomas Wiler Dewing: The Early Years, 1851-1885," American Art Journal 13 (Spring 1981): 4-35; Howard Chandler Christy, The American Girl (1906; reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1976).
  49. Banta Imaging American Women, 503.
  50. Craik, The Face of Fashion, 73-75.
  51. Banta, Imaging American Women, 501.
  52. William Ordway Partridge, Technique of Sculpture (Boston: Ginn, 1895) as quoted in Banta, Imaging American Women, 501.
  53. Ibid.
  54. For a discussion about fashion illustration see Steele, Paris Fashion (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 99-132.
  55. The idea of an American type, personified as female, was so pervasive that it even influenced the design of an iron. For more than thirty years, American Electrical Heater Company of Detroit manufactured an iron by the name of "American Beauty". See Pulos, American Design Ethic, 232.
  56. Ely, American Fashion Designers, 15.
  57. Vogue (1941):
  58. For eugenics in relation to American art see Van Hook, Angels of Art, 206-207. On eugenics and late 19<sup>th</sup> century European art see Bram Dijkstra, Idols of

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59. Banta, Imaging American Women

60. Christy, The American Girl, 25.

61. Banner, American Beauty, 204-206.

62. Barbara Burman, "Better and Brighter Clothes: The Men's Dress Reform Party, 1929-1940," Journal of Design History 8, no. 4 (1995): 286-287. For a related discussion about advertising, the body, and consumerism in terms of the ideology of Italian Fascism during the 1930s see Karen Pinkus, Bodily Regimes, Italian Advertising Under Fascism (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1995).

63. J. C. Flugel, The Psychology of Clothes (1930; reprint, New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 1969), 223, quoted in Burman, "Better and Brighter Clothes," 287.

64. Raushenbush, "The Government Measures Women," 78.

65. W.H. Sheldon, The Varieties of Human Physique: An Introduction to Constitutional Psychology (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1940), xi.

66. C.B. Davenport, The height-weight index of build (Amer. J. phys. Anthropol., 1920); Davenport and Love, A.G., Army Anthropology (Washington: Medical Department of the United States Army in the World War, 1921); Davenport, Body build its development and inheritance (Carnegie Institute of Washington Publication 329, 1923).

67. Raushenbush, "The Government Measures Women," 78. A copy of Sheldon's book can, in fact, be found in the library of The New York Fashion Institute of Technology.

68. Ibid.

69. Lowey spoke at a Fashion Group workshop in October, 1935 as cited in FGB, November 1935. The study of the body was crucial to industrial America in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in terms of workers as well as design. See Frederick Winslow Taylor, Scientific Management: Comprising Shop Management: The Principles of Scientific Management: The Testimony Before the Special House Committee (New York, 1947); Mary McLeod, "Architecture or Revolution: Taylorism, Technocracy, And Social Change," Art Journal 43 (Summer 1983): 132-147; Martha Banta,

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**Taylored Lives: Narrative Productions in the Age of Taylor, Veblen, and Ford** (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993) especially p.272-303 which treats women's dress patterns, sizing, and product design. See also Henry Dreyfuss, **The Measure of Man: Human Factors in Design** (New York, 1959).

70. "To-Morrow's Daughter," **Vogue** (February 1, 1939): 61.

71. "Vogue presents Fashions of the Future," **Ibid.**, 144.

72. **Ibid.**, 137.

73. Two examples of the headlines in the press indicate the nature of Shaver's campaign. "'American Look' Ads Planned by Lord & Taylor," **WWD**, 12 January 1945; Hughes, "'The American Look' Is Important Style Trend," **Dallas The Times Herald**, 17 January 1945.

74. "What Is The American Look? It Is Made Of Many Things," **Life** (May 21, 1945):

88. I want to thank Sarah Johnson, Associate Chair of Liberal Arts at Parsons School of Design, for sending me this article and for our discussions.

75. **Ibid.**, 91.

76. **Ibid.**, 87.

77. **Ibid.**

78. For the gender divide in terms of 1930s American art see Barbara Melosh, **Engendering Culture: Manhood and Womanhood in New Deal Public Art and Theatre** (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991).

79. Oglesby, **Fashion Careers**, 137-138.

80. **Ibid.**, 139.

81. **Ibid.**, 140.

82. **Ibid.**, 141.

83. **Ibid.**, 142.

84. John Irving Sowers, **The Boy and His Vocation** (Peoria, Illinois: The Manual Art Press, 1925).

85. George Woods, "The Nation That Neglects Technical Training of Youth Must Be Content To Fall Behind," (1874) quoted in Clarke, **Art and Industry**, vol. 3, 739.

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86. Cheney, Art and the Machine, 4.
87. *Ibid.*, 97.
88. *Ibid.*, 47-48. For a traditional narrative concerning ornament and decoration see E. H. Gombrich, The sense of order: a study in the psychology of decorative art (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979). For a critical discussion of the "decorative" in terms of expressionism and primitivism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century see Gill Perry, "Primitivism and the 'Modern'," in Primitivism, Cubism, Abstraction by Charles Harrison, Francis Frascina, and Gill Perry (New Haven: Yale University Press: 1993), 46-85. For a discussion about the femininization of decoration in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century see Norma Brode, "Miriam Shapiro and "Femmage": Reflections on the Conflict Between Decoration and Abstraction in Twentieth-Century Art," Arts Magazine (February, 1980): 83-87.
89. See, for example, Meikle, Twentieth Century Limited; Pulos, American Design Ethic; Smith, Making The Modern; Sparke, An Introduction to Design and Culture.
90. Museum of Modern Art, Machine Art (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1934). See "Exhibitions of Industrial Design at the Museum of Modern Art," MOMA Bulletin 14 (Fall, 1946): 4-12; Smith, Making The Modern, 385-404; Marcus, Functionalist Design, 115-126.
91. Ely, American Fashion Designers, 12.
92. *Ibid.*, 32.
93. *Ibid.*, 23.
94. *Ibid.*, 9.
95. *Ibid.*, 15.
96. Coburn, "So You Want to be a Designer," 22, 24.
97. Elaine Scarry, On Beauty and Being Just (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 15.



## Postscript

### GIRLY GUYS AND FASHION DESIGN

While the femininity of fashion design remains a powerful force in America, the image of the American fashion designer, once the province of women, is now in the hands of men. The fashion historian, Valerie Steele, framed her recent study of female fashion designers with the introductory phrase: "Men Do Dominate".<sup>1</sup> Setting the tone for her work, which demonstrates women's activity in fashion design between the wars, she followed this statement with commentaries by other fashion writers:

It's true: Men do dominate women's fashion. A recent study found that approximately 65 percent of famous twentieth-century fashion designers have been male, and only 35 percent female. Admittedly, the number of women appears to be growing: The 1988 edition of Who's Who in Fashion lists 42 percent female and 58 percent male designers.<sup>2</sup>

But it remains true that almost all the big names are male: Calvin, Ralph, and Oscar in America, Yves, Karl, and Giorgio in Europe. A recent poll in W asking 'top international designers to name their favorite colleagues' produced a scorecard of twenty-one designers, only two of whom (Vivienne Westwood and Donna Karan) were women.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, fashion headlines increasingly proclaim that a new generation of 'designing women' is 'closing the gender gap.'<sup>4</sup>

Never before have women designers been so powerful. From Japan's Rei Kawakubo to Donna Karan in the United States and England's saucy Vivienne Westwood - it's women now who are offering the challenge, provocation, and innovation to push fashion forward....<sup>5</sup>

If these statements were to be believed, one could easily come away with the view that women never reigned supreme in fashion design in contrast to what Steele and other fashion historians have long recognized. In American and Parisian

fashion, women such as Coco Chanel, Vionnet, Shiaparelli, Muriel King, and Elizabeth Hawes held priority during the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>6</sup>

However, while fashion historians have examined the ubiquitous presence of women in American fashion design between the wars, scholars have typically ignored the historical roots of this activity. If we look closely at the structure of fashion design education and at cultural assumptions about femininity and masculinity with respect to industry, science, and technology, we arrive at concrete explanations for women's participation in American fashion design. Again, if we examine closely the context of American consumer culture, we come to appreciate how an image of the American fashion designer as woman was constructed and spread on a historical level.

In this light, the above quotations assume new meaning. If they were to be believed, one could think that in America fashion design was not initiated and developed as a female occupation, and that women never dominated the field in the popular imagination. While there is an effort to stress the rising importance of female designers, there is no acknowledgement that women once maintained a hold on the profession. Nor is there any recognition that the school rooms that offered instruction were frequented and directed by women, and that it was women who formed the first public perception of what constituted an American fashion designer. These statements demonstrate, instead, that men take precedence in the popular awareness.

Still, fashion design's feminine characterization has not been altered. Deemed a woman's pursuit, men interested in a fashion design career are

considered effeminate, and the field is typified as “gay”. A 1990 article quotes the late designer, Rudi Gemreich, as saying that “everybody” in the business of fashion was gay.<sup>7</sup> When asked if he meant that all fashion designers were gay, Gemreich answered, “All the good ones. I mean the men.”<sup>8</sup>

From the vantage point of the image of the American fashion designer, which rests at the heart of this study, we are required to question whether the association of men, fashion design, and unmanliness developed along with fashion design education. If so, references to these notions were no doubt coded. The fact that 1930s fashion discourse singled out Hollywood creators in the rare instances that it discussed men designers becomes an important part of the equation, since the glitz and glamour identified with the movie capital also defined femininity in relation to men.<sup>9</sup>

Writing about interior design, Peter McNeill, demonstrated how, in the 1930s, people began to think about the field in masculine terms, replacing the image of the “lady” decorator with the stereotype of the gay decorator. As in fashion design, interior design revolved around women, defined notions of femininity, and was often typified “...as an extension of women's natures, directly compared to the female compulsion to colour-blend complexion and costume,” in opposition to rational thought.<sup>10</sup>

Although, from the start, women dominated perceptions about the American fashion designer, towards the end of the 1930s, fashion journalists began to challenge their priority status. For example, Alice Hughes' column in a 1937 New Orleans paper is captioned, “Designing Men. Women Lead as Creators of Styles.

Many Men Are Still Among the Best Designers."<sup>11</sup> In the article, Hughes refers to Charles Le Maire, Charles Armour, and William Bloom. A related article by Sarah Lewis appeared in a Buffalo paper. Under the title, "Men Designers Become Leaders In Fashion World", Lewis touts the accomplishments of John Massimo, Mel Davidow, and Vincent Coppola:

Somehow the women designers in this country have rather stolen the thunder from their masculine colleagues. The names of Sally Milgrim, Muriel King, Elizabeth Hawes and Hattie Carnegie are forever being tossed from one bridge table to another. But of the men one hears relatively little. Charles Cooper, for instance, is responsible for some of those terribly smooth ensembles for which you inevitably tumble.<sup>12</sup>

However, until men's participation in art and design schools accelerated after World War II, there was little conflict about the feminine image of fashion design. Men had always been active in the field, if not in educational settings. According to a 1941 essay by Grace W. Ripley of Rhode Island School of Design, men designed shoes, gloves, women's dresses, dress accessories, and jewelry.<sup>13</sup>

But despite this, it was the post war period that first saw significant numbers of men enter Pratt Institute and Parsons School of Design (formerly the New York School of Fine and Applied Arts) in order to undertake formal study.<sup>14</sup> In fact, in 1949, more men than women graduated from Parsons' program. While this ratio didn't last, and women, as before, maintained the majority, the gender population in fashion design schools changed dramatically following the war.

The gay code also underwent transition. The author of a 1948 costume design text book, Kay Hardy, uses the word "flair", barely disguised gay stereotyping, to describe the rare male fashion designer. Under the heading,

“Preparing for a career as a designer in the dress industry, men in fashion jobs,” she says:

Most of the fashion jobs are held by women, but many are held most satisfactorily by men. The average woman has more interest in clothes and is therefore more apt to pick a “clothes career.” However, when a man shows interest in clothes, it is usually because of great ability or flair. He is therefore bound to be a success.<sup>15</sup>

It was in the postwar years that gay men eclipsed women in the popular image of the American fashion designer, as Hardy’s work suggests. A noticeable shift in the paradigm is traceable in the mass culture of Hollywood film. From 1947 to 1961, a series of movies cast the lead female role as an American fashion designer: Daisy Kenyon (1947), Joan Crawford; I Can Get It For You Wholesale (1951), Susan Hayward; There’s Always Tomorrow (1956), Barbara Stanwyck; Designing Woman (1956), Lauren Bacall; Back Street (1961), Susan Hayward.<sup>16</sup> There is also Vertigo (1958) in which the fashion designer, played by Barbara Bel Geddes, assumes the secondary female role.<sup>17</sup>

Although women, these fashion designers act like men. With the exception of Bel Geddes, all are immediately recognizable as part of a screen tradition involving masculinized images of women. Sexual independence, assertion, self-confidence, and brashness are key elements in this construction.<sup>18</sup> According to Martin Quinn-Meyer, another sign of a masculine orientation is the failure of Stanwyck and Bel Geddes to get the man.<sup>19</sup>

This manly ideal of femininity contrasts with the screen’s previous treatment of American fashion designers. Writing about 1930s Hollywood, the film historian, Sarah Barry, indicates that the movie capital did represent American fashion

designers during the 1930s and that women assumed the role, for example, Bette Davis in Fashions of 1934 and Kay Francis in Street of Women (1932)<sup>20</sup>. Although these movies deal with up-to-date issues of mass production and the rising importance of American fashion designers, the fashion designers are conventionally feminine. Davis, eventually, joined the ranks of the masculine types, but the film historian, Molly Haskell, observes that before then she played “. . .the breezy, good-sport pal, and it was not until the late thirties and forties that her vast neurotic potential was uncovered.”<sup>21</sup>

With the contradictory image of the man/woman star persona, the perceived character of the American fashion designer begins to alter with men becoming dominant. The change occurred hand in hand with women's return to the home in a postwar society. Women's fall from the pinnacle of fashion design stardom coincided with another dramatic shift in the American consciousness – the effort after World War II to convince women to return to domesticity in order to clear the workplace for returning veterans.<sup>22</sup> Through these movies, female viewers received the message that home and family were desirable, a very different emphasis from women's wartime role in industry.<sup>23</sup> Rather than careers, these films revolve around love.

In accord with the new stress on domesticity, Vertigo's director, Alfred Hitchcock, cast the fashion designer opposite an upper middle class housewife, played by Kim Novak, around whom the film turns.<sup>24</sup> In contrast to the dowdy, hard working Bel Geddes, the glamorous Novak is a woman of leisure. Not coincidentally, Bel Geddes creates underwear, representing the low end of the

market, instead of the prestigious dress business.<sup>25</sup> The diminished status of the woman designer that this depiction portrays is reinforced by the crude salesgirl who works in the retail side of fashion, and who, also played by Novak, functions as the opposite extreme of femaleness from the glamorized housewife.

Similarly, Susan Hayward's love for a married man animates Back Street, despite her ambition.<sup>26</sup> Ten years prior, her desire to succeed as a designer was at the heart of I Can Get It For You Wholesale<sup>27</sup> [Fig. 81]. The later film reveals a much softened Hayward whose suffering over a married man, who actually dies in the film, overpowers the strength of her professional commitment.

In Back Street, released in 1961, the gay male came to signify American fashion design in a complete reversal of the historic situation. In this last of the known postwar films focusing on the American woman fashion designer, Hayward begins her career in the New York salon of a male designer, whose flamboyance and curtness are traits stereotypically linked with homosexuality. Characterized as Italian with offices in Paris and Rome in addition to New York, the script situates the "girly" guy, played by Reginald Gardiner, strategically in the center of American fashion where his discriminating taste presides over the wardrobes of his American clients. This movie, which witnessed a successful, but love smitten Hayward, marks the open substitution of the gay male for woman in the popular awareness.<sup>28</sup>

Although homosexual men acquired dominion over the image of the American fashion designer, the gendered discourse that structured fashion design since its origin was retained. Whereas the earlier contrasts had been between sewing and mechanics, or fashion design and industrial design, the later opposition

was between male and female fashion designers. In a debate turned inward, conventional ideas about femininity and masculinity are perpetuated at women's expense.

The model of men's superior ability to deal in universals through abstract thought, which stems from the 1880s Manual Training Movement, affects today's perceptions. When explaining, for example, why men dominate fashion design, the fashion designer, Oscar de la Renta, offered the view that women designers tend to be less "...objective than men designers, because the women design first and foremost for themselves."<sup>29</sup> According to fashion historian, Valerie Steele, this explanation for male dominance is very commonly believed. She cites fashion journalist, Sharon Lee Tate, who suggests that men are more successful because they do not impose their "...personal design restrictions on their product."<sup>30</sup>

During the 1930s, women designing garments in America, especially women's ready-to-wear, had widespread prestige and authority. Commercial publicity represented them as both symbol and instrument of American femininity. Their very nature, it was said, best suited the role of dressing the nation's women, making their design activity a product of their sex. Stereotypical as this notion may be, this expression of consumerism had significant implications for elevating the status of women in fashion design. Although by endorsing the traditional female pursuit of making clothing, advertising reinforced women's position in the sexual division of labor, it also encouraged appreciation for women's design achievements in the area of female attire.

Men's ascendancy into fashion design eroded this cultural role. The



enormity of the cleavage comes through in on-the-street interviews conducted in the late 1980s by Dianne T. Meranus.<sup>31</sup> Accordingly, many people regard designs by men to be more “flattering” to women, either because “men know how they like women to look” or because “men don’t like the way women look, so they work at changing their appearance.” Other views posit that “Women dress to please men” and thus prefer a male designer, whose “taste and expertise [they] respect...more than a woman’s.”

## Notes For Postscript

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1. Steele, Women of Fashion, 9. See also *Ibid.*, Paris Fashion, 245-260.
  2. Dianne T. Meranus, "Fashion Design: Men Do Dominate," The F.I.T. Review (Spring, 1989): 18-21, quoted in Steele, Women of Fashion, 9.
  3. "Designers on Designers," W (November 27-December 4, 1989): 83, quoted in Steele, Women of Fashion, 9.
  4. June Weir, "Closing the Gender Gap," The New York Times Magazine (June 30, 1985): 44, quoted in Steele, Women of Fashion, 9.
  5. Rebecca Voight, "Scene Dining," Accent, The Magazine of Paris Style, published in conjunction with Paris Passion: The Magazine of the French Capital (November, December, 1987): 28, quoted in Steele, Women of Fashion, 9.
  6. See Evans, Women and Fashion; Martin, American Ingenuity; Tomerlin, ed., American Fashion; H.W. Yoxall, A Fashion of Life (New York: Taplinger, 1967)
  7. The Advocate: The National Gay Newsmagazine (1990) quoted in Steele, Women of Fashion, 213.
  8. *Ibid.* For a discussion about the presence of gay men in fashion design and the impact of the AIDS epidemic see Steele, Women of Fashion, 213.
  9. For a discussion of this matter see p. 321 above.
  10. Peter McNeill, "Designing Women: Gender, Sexuality and the Interior Decorator," Art History 17, no. 4 (December, 1994): 631.
  11. Hughes, "Designing Men. Women Lead as Creators of Styles. Many Men Are Still Among the Best Designers," New Orleans Item, 6 July 1937.
  12. Sarah Lewis, "Men Designers Become Leaders In Fashion World," Hawes SB, 2.
  13. Grace W. Ripley, "Art in Dress," in Art in American Life and Education, The Fortieth Yearbook of the National Society For the Study of Education, edited by Guy Montrose Whipple (Norwood, Mass.: Plimpton Press, 1941), 11.
  14. NYSFA, Lists of Graduates, 1926-1960; PIC, 1888-1970.
  15. Hardy, Costume Design, 5.

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16. Daisy Kenyon, Dir. Otto Preminger, Fox, 1947. See Molly Haskell From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies (second edition, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 167-168. I Can Get It For You Wholesale, dir. Michael Gordon, 1951; There's Always Tomorrow, Dir. Douglas Sirk, Universal, 1955; Designing Woman, Dir. Vincente Minnelli, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures, 1956; Back Street, Dir. David Miller, Universal Pictures, 1961.

17. Vertigo, Dir. Alfred Hitchcock, Paramount, 1958.

18. See Haskell, From Reverence to Rape, 153-188. See also Annette Kuhn, The Power of the Image. Essays on Representation and Sexuality (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985).

19. I want to thank Martin Quinn-Meyer for this observation. For a discussion about There's Always Tomorrow see Haskell, From Reverence to Rape, 272-274, 321.

20. Fashions of 1934, Dir. William Dieterle, Warner Bros., 1934; Street of Women, Dir. Archie Mayo, Warner Bros., 1932. Berry, Screen Style, 47-93. For more about fashion design and Hollywood film in the 1930s see Herzog, "Powder Puff Promotion: The Fashion Show-in-the-Film," in Fabrications, 134-159.

21. Haskell, From Reverence to Rape, 140.

22. See Margaret Randolph Higonnet, Behind the Lines: Gender, and the Two World Wars (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Elaine Tyler May, Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War (New York: Harper Collins Basic Books, 1987); Lary May, ed., Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

23. See Kenneth Paul O'Brien and Lynn Hudson Parsons, ed., The Home-Front War: WW II and the American Society (Westport Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1995); Karen Anderson, Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women During World War II (Westport Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981); Christine Gledhill, ed., Home Is Where The Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film, (London: British Film Institute, 1987); Maureen Honey, Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender and Propaganda During World War II (Amherst: University of Massachussts Press, 1984); Freida S. Miller, "What's Become of Rosie the Riveter?" The New York Times Magazine (May 5, 1947): 21, 47-48. Hawes, Wenches with Wrenches; Eva Lapin, Mothers in Overalls, (New York: Workers Library Publishers, 1943); Maureen Turim, "Designing Women: The Emergence of the New Sweetheart Line," in Fabrications, 212-228.

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24. For background on the film see Francois Truffaut with Helen G. Scott, Hitchcock (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), 183-188; Dan Aulier, Vertigo: The Making of a Hitchcock Classic (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).
25. I want to thank Martin Quinn-Meyer for this observation.
26. For a history of the film see Haskell, From Reverence to Rape, 162-163, 172-174. See also Beverly Linet, Susan Hayward, Portrait of a Survivor (New York: Atheneum, 1980).
27. The film, I Can Get It For You Wholesale, is loosely based on a 1937 novel of the same name by Jerome Weidman concerning a Harry Bogen who worked in New York's garment district on Seventh Avenue.
28. I would like to thank Jonathan Lang for the term "girly guy" and for our discussions. See Richard Dyer, ed., Gays and Film (New York: Zoetrope, 1984); Vito Russo, The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies (New York: Harper & Row, 1981); Andrew Perchuck and Helaine Posner, ed., The Masculine Masquerade: Masculinity and Representation (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995); David Ehrenstein, Open Secret, Gay Hollywood 1928-2000 (New York: William Morrow & Company Inc., 1998); William J. Mann, Wisecracker: The Life and Times of William Haines, Hollywood's First Openly Gay Star (New York: Viking, 1998).
29. Barbaralee Diamondstein, Fashion: The Inside Story (New York: Rizzoli, 1985), 61, quoted in Steele, Women of Fashion, 10.
30. Sharon Lee Tate, Inside Fashion Design (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), 49, quoted in Steele, Women of Fashion, 11.
31. Meranus, "Fashion Design: Men Do Dominate," 21, quoted in Steele, Women of Fashion, 10.

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