Clothing is laden with meaning, but fashions do not become a part of the commercialised economic system until their meanings have been commodified and converted into commercial assets. Garment styles become commercial fashions when they pass through processes that transform them into products that appeal to buyers in consumer markets. Fashion industries are concerned not only with production of garments, but also with the creation and exploitation of the meanings embedded in and surrounding garments.

Following Allen (2000), this chapter is concerned with identifying the various powers involved in the production and economic control of the symbolic knowledges that constitute fashion. It explores the origins and status of the commercial fashion styles that circulate in the capitalist economy, interrogates their relation to the timing of fashion rhythms, and identifies the organisational and regulatory arrangements that enable fashion ideas to be converted into commercial assets. The chapter shows that the socio-spatial configuration of the ‘image spaces’ of fashion have restructured over the last twenty years to produce a transnational fashion sector dominated by luxury goods conglomerates that are specialised in the management of the complex connections between meanings, commodities and value. It adopts a political economy approach to explore the historical development of the structures that produce elite fashion and to identify the institutional arrangements and processes that legitimate the style ideas that define ultimately commercial fashion trends.

The chapter’s first section explores the role of designers and their relationship to commodities, and describes how the differentiated sub-streams of fashion design accommodate divergent consumer tastes. It outlines the regulations relating to intellectual property that enable fashion ideas to be privatised and transformed into marketable commercial knowledge assets. Section Two describes the restructuring of fashion design houses and the corporatisation of elite fashion into a global luxury goods sector under the control of transnational corporations which are specialised in the commodification of ideas and the exploitation of intellectual property. Section Three
then exposes the spatial concentration of elite fashion and explores the significance of
the socially constituted fashion events that function to control the temporal rhythms of
fashion seasons. It identifies the elements of an elite fashion system comprising a
loosely connected conflagration of designers, fashion media, advertising and related
specialisations. Overall, by examining the intersections between symbolic, corporate
and social power, this chapter shows how fashion elites orchestrate simultaneously the
stylistic and temporal aspects of fashion processes at the global scale. Their efforts
produce a global landscape of fashion ideas—or fashionscape—which is a virtual space
with multiple sub-streams but an extensive, global scope.

4.1 Creating the Landscapes of Fashion

The processes of commercialising fashion begin with the application of designers’
knowledge to changing fashion styles. As fashion designers mark out a stylistic
identity, and as certain fashion ideas become associated with their names, the
landscapes of fashion become differentiated in a manner that facilitates the privatisation
of ideas. As designers inculcate style meanings into clothes they embed complex
knowledges into fabrics.

4.1.1 Fashion Design

Designers are engrossed in the minute detail of objects; they think about physical shapes
and the meanings that shapes and spaces convey. Their work creates a bridge between
the physical characteristics of garments, their social meanings, and the imaginations of
consumers as they ‘constantly draw and redraw, blur and obfuscate that line between
image and thing’ (Mitchell 2000:81). Design does not simply add meaning or semiotic
value to a pre-existing inert object. Rather, design workers apply skilled ‘techniques of
enchantment’ which saturate commodities with meanings that reflect cultural
knowledges (Molotch 2002). Fashion infuses commodities, giving their surfaces
‘depth’, and incorporates purposefully qualities that generate emotional responses in
consumers (Molotch 2002, Cassirer 1996[1953]). The timely application of design skill
has vast economic consequences, even for objects not generally considered fashionable.¹

The communication of style through its incorporation into objects requires a highly specialised and knowledge-intensive technical division of labour. Designers are a segment of the labour force that provides what Zukin (1991:260) calls a ‘critical infrastructure’ of knowledge intensive specialisations. To refine style knowledge, fashion design workers embedded themselves in milieux rich in style ideas. Through participation in fashion shows, exhibitions and social events, designers interact with other style professionals to develop and revise continually the cultural knowledges that stimulate their designs. At the same time, as ideas percolate, designers contribute collectively to the development of more general stylistic trends (McRobbie 1998). Fashion knowledge is a personal or embedded form of knowledge that is produced through practice (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995, Maskell and Malmberg 1999); fashion design’s context is lived social practice. Through multiple interactions, the creative inspiration for garment fashions routinely emerges from places, disciplines and activities external to the garment sector, through lateral, design-profession inter-linkages (McRobbie 1998). European fashion designers are frequently trained in the visual arts and architecture, disciplines that share clothing’s concern with the connections between body-spaces, social spaces and physical spaces.²

The work of designers is central to the generation of the ideas that become fashion styles, but the roles they perform can be comprehended from a variety of perspectives. In idealistic terms, after Kant (1987), designers represent an independent creative force, a type of ‘inward spiral’ of ideas (Maynard 1999:79). From a Jungian perspective, the designer is the interpreter of universal themes (Maramotti 2000), while a sociological perspective sees designers as socially embedded actors—expert agents—operating in a

¹ For example, a simple plastic waste bin by leading industrial designer Karim Rashid had such strong aesthetic appeal that it sold four million units (Sunday Age, 7/04/02: Sunday Life, 28).
² Many famous names of fashion—Balmain, Tom Ford, Gianfranco Ferré, Rabanne Paco, Gianni Versace, Sant’ Angelo—trained originally in architecture (O’Hara 1986, Stegemeyer 1996). This background is well suited to the task of creating layers of fashion meanings that permeate social spaces – thus Balmain described fashion as the ‘architecture of movement’ (Stegemeyer 1996). Grès, Louis Feraud, Gontcharova and Schemmler were artists before becoming fashion designers.
field of social relations or *habitus* (Bourdieu 1993).\(^3\) Accepted understandings of what such creative workers do also vary between cultures. A Kantian artistic view dominates in Europe, while in Asia the designer is more likely to be seen as a skilled interpreter (Hawkins 2001). This distinction produces differences between nations in valuations of originality, in degrees of concern about the artistic rights of creators, and therefore in the level to which nations are amenable to the protection of stylistic knowledges as intellectual property.

### 4.1.2 The Structuring of Style

As fashion designers produce new ranges each season, they draw on many sources of inspiration: costumes encountered on the streets, images gleaned from the mass media or trade journals, and the advice published on trade Internet sites. They draw on the history of fashion, on their own past designs, on the frameworks inherited from fashion experts, and on the designs of their competitors. Designers’ expert fashion knowledge enables them to evaluate, interpret and claim authorship of the ideas they harvest from these diverse sources. The development of networked technologies of cyberspace has increased the capacity of the design elite to collect ideas from many sites around the world; so communications technologies add a new layer to pre-existing inequities of fashion power and influence (see Kitchen 1998).\(^4\) Gilbert’s (2000:16-17) conclusion that designer elites imperialistically appropriate ideas in a ‘crass pillaging of stylistic tropes’ expresses their power over flows of ideas.

Most contemporary stylistic creations involve reaction, reinterpretation and redevelopment of styles from other times and places. Given clothing’s finite number of technical possibilities (collar shapes, skirt lengths and seams), originality derives from the application of skill to create recombinations and revisualisations which evoke different moods, or which redefine the relation between body and space. Only exceptional designers produce true innovations that reorient the fashion system: *Dior*,

\(^3\) The notion of *habitus* can be understood as embodied history.

\(^4\) Improvements in communications technology have increased massively the capacity of design professionals to collect fashion ideas. At the [www.style.com](http://www.style.com) Internet site, for example, it is possible to view ‘live’ street life and street fashions in cities across the world.
for example, is credited with transforming post-War dress practices through his revolutionary ‘New Look’.

Contemporary designers strive to integrate the basic elements of style in a way that demarcates a signature aesthetic. For each designer, each new season’s styles must differ from last year’s range but still retain elements that express across time a continually evolving designer identity. This process positions each designer in an established (though not fully codified) aesthetic relation to other fashion designers, both past and present. Bourdieu (1996) refers to this relation as a *prise de distance* (see also Braham 1996:135, Grenfell and Hardy 2003). Framing the stylistic differences between designers in a relational form—as a perceptual distance or spatial relation—generates a form of connection so that, as in other disciplinary fields, design influences can be mapped by reference to a constellation of central ideas (Zwicky 1992). The process of carving out unique spaces within a wider fashion landscape creates multiple, highly differentiated spaces of fashion.

Each designer’s position in fashionspace is marked by a unique approach to mining the junctions and edges of the disciplinary field. Signature styles link back to deeper ideological layers which stem from designers’ interpretations of the body’s insertion in social space (Zwicky 1992:384). Designers are recognised by their views on the position of the female body, of woman, of femininity, eroticism, and woman’s social role (Finkelstein 1996). For example, Wollen (1993:36) views Chanel’s designs as conjuring a modernist vision of the poised woman in control, and as having created ‘woman’ as a modernist body-object produced artificially by diet and exercise. Similarly, according to Helven (1985), Dior’s ‘feminine’ woman is bound in finery to the extent that a woman/victim can be seen in his hunched models. These examples reveal fashion designs as complexly and deeply reflective of social and ideological themes that appeal to a diverse range of audience sentiments. Table 4.1 provides a typology of the ideological themes that define the spatial relations between leading fashion designers. These are expressed directly in the features that designers

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5 Innovation is used here in the sense of an original discovery. However, the ‘New Look’ has also been attributed to Balmain. As with any discipline, the credit for discovery reflects disciplinary power relations (Latour and Woolgar 1979, Bourdieu 1988).

6 Accordingly, Coleridge (1988:281) notes that fashion journalists amuse themselves by constructing ‘family trees’ of influence that link sequences of fashion styles and their creators.
incorporate in garments – in their use of cut, colour, fabric and trims. The clean, elegant lines styles created by *Chanel*, for example, are sometimes referred to as ‘anti-fashion’ because they contain minimal embellishment. *Dior*’s ‘feminine’ look, on the other hand, which features full skirts, pinched waists and full colour, draws attention to curves rather than lines. Because of the links between the ‘look’ of garments and the ideologies they express, each designer and his/her designs can be ‘read’ in terms of their ideological commitments.

Table 4.1 The Spaces of Fashion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stylistic Approach</th>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Exponents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purists</td>
<td>Clean lines. Subtle. Elegant.</td>
<td>Chanel, Sonia Rykiel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realists</td>
<td>Commercialised. Designer interprets the needs of clients.</td>
<td>Perry Ellis, Ralph Lauren, Kenzo, Issey Miyake, Dolce e Gabbana, Armani</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eclectic Recyclers</td>
<td>‘Witty parodies’ of past fashions.</td>
<td>Yves St Laurent, Karl Lagerfeld, Oscar de la Renta.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deconstructionists</td>
<td>Layering and mixing styles.</td>
<td>Helmut Lang, Ann Demeulemeester, Dries Van Noten, Jil Sander, Joop, Jean Paul Gaultier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Producers of Spectacle</td>
<td>Shocking, unexpected, theatrical.</td>
<td>Schiaparelli, Adrian, John Galliano, Vivienne Westwood.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted and updated from Milbank (1985).

The stylistic range of fashion design changes, over time, with broader social and design trends. This reflects, in Bourdieu’s (1993) terms, each artist’s embeddedness in a contemporary *habitus*. In the 1960s, the axes of fashion might have been drawn as a tension between *Dior*’s constrained femininity and *Balenciaga*’s architectural approach in one dimension; and between *Chanel*’s understated elegance and *Schiaparelli*’s extravagance on another. By the late 1990s, and reflecting the ascendancy of post-modern sentiments, the stylistic repertoire ranged from *Versace*’s sensualism to *Rei Kawakubo*’s minimalism and *Helmut Lang*’s deconstructions, and from *Prada*’s tight controlled silhouettes to *John Galliano* or *Vivienne Westwood*’s striking spectacle (Figure 4.1). The styles created by elite designers —the sorts of meanings that they
incorporate into clothes—express and position their work in a body of knowledge within a visual discipline that is interconnected with contemporary social conditions and social theories.

Figure 4.1 Competing Styles in Fashionspace
Source: Based on Millbank (1985).

Design-based differentiation, framed in relational terms, positions each designer and each designer’s ideas in relation to fashion’s history and its stocks of knowledge: knowledge that is explicit, codified and publicly accessible. Contemporary elite designers differentiate to carve out bounded spaces of style. These identify particular style elements as authored by the designer with whom they are commonly associated. Authorship hinges on the dialectic of knowledge (connaissance) and recognition (reconnaissance) (Bourdieu 1993).

4.1.3 Fashion as Intellectual Property

The commercialisation of fashion knowledge in the capitalist economy requires the transformation of fashion ideas into private property. Even if multiple fashion trends arise from and through local social practices (Craik 1994), the original fashion ideas that arise spontaneously and circulate in local communities can be accessed readily, free of charge, by design professionals and converted, by virtue of the structure of regulations
governing intellectual property, into private property (Jessop 2000). As designers selectively incorporate ideas and convert them into knowledge assets and intellectual property, they effectively ‘capture the commons’ (Jessop 2000, Davis 1992, McRobbie 1998). For the purpose of understanding the mass production of fashion garments, the origin of fashion ideas per se is less important than processes that convert ‘original’ ideas into commercial assets that circulate in the market economy.

The principal means of enclosing fashion ideas is through intellectual property regulations designed to ensure that creators profit from their creative work. Intellectual property rights (IPRs) refer to ideas, inventions and creative expressions on which societies are willing to bestow the status of property (David 1993). IPRs enable the owners of intellectual property to restrict access to their ideas, and provide them with the sole right to exploit their ideas commercially.7 Design-based businesses could not operate without laws to limit the unauthorised transmission of stylistic knowledges which protect their creative advantage ‘in a way that is fixed, transparent, and amenable to commercial analysis’ (Pike 2001:17). From a regulatory perspective, the protection of design knowledge rectifies a market failure and promotes innovation (OECD 1989:11). Forms of intellectual property protection relevant to the fashion and garment production sectors include:

(i) Patents that protect inventions and other significant innovations by giving creators the sole right to the exploitation of an invention for a specified period of time. Patents protect truly original ideas, but because originality is rare in fashion, and because the registration of patents involves stringent and time-consuming assessment processes, patents are uncommon in the fashion industries.8

(ii) Copyright, on the other hand, does not protect an idea, but does protect its expression in written, musical or artistic works. In clothing, copyright applies to two-dimensional drawings and sketches of garments, to the specification sheets and patterns used in production, to the wording and styling of the packaging that accompanies garments in the marketplace, and to the pictures and text in the pages of fashion magazines. Although copyright is automatically applied to new works,

7 In Australia, the relevant legislation is: Copyright Act 1968, Patent Act 1990, Designs Act 2001 and Trade Marks Act 1995. In addition, intellectual property is expressly exempted from the competition principles set down in the Trade Practices Act 1974 (s.51.1).

8 Exceptions are inventions such as zippers and velco.
it has a low criterion of originality – any work that is not copied is protected by copyright. Copyright protection increases the value of an artistic work and promotes originality (Landes and Posner 1989). Higher levels of copyright protection increase the profitability of new works but at the same time increase the restraints on borrowing ideas.

(iii) ‘Design Rights’ protect the visual appearance of three-dimensional creations such as garments. They are intended to prevent outsiders from free riding on the creativity contained in a design. The United Kingdom’s pioneering 1988 Design Right legislation protected original designs by identifying as a copy any ‘substantially similar’ design. The legislation prohibited the reproduction of designs that, while not technically being copies, appear aesthetically to be the same (Lane-Rowley 1997:46). Under this law, designs are protected, in whole or part, for 10 to 15 years. Practical difficulties remain: assessments of design qualities are based on notions of novelty and originality, neither of which are fully codifiable and both of which are difficult to assess in the context of fashion styling. In Australia, the design registration process takes at least six months, making it an impractical form of protection for fashion producers except in the case of more perennial styles.

(iv) Trademarks protect the distinctive symbols associated with products, brands or firms. They may or may not allude to the design aspects of a commodity: often they protect a slogan or graphic. Powerful symbols like Nike’s ‘swoosh’ and its slogan ‘Just Do It’ are more prominent in the market than the shoes they represent (Goldman and Papson 1998). Trademarks must be registered and must not duplicate an existing mark. They provide universal protection even against unintentional copying. The best-known characteristics of trademarks are their capacity to reduce consumer search costs and signify quality (Landes and Posner 1989, but see Chapter 8). Legal protection of designer firms was increased in the United Kingdom in 1994 by the ‘deregulation’ of its Trade Marks Act, which enabled trade marks to be considered for accounting purposes as tangible property (Pickering 1998:16).

The degree of protection provided by intellectual property regulation differs between places, and this has implications for the industrial structure, industrial organisation and the locations of fashion design and clothing production activities. In the United States, as the outcome of its corporate history, the moral right of an originator to assert
authorship does not necessarily accompany copyright. Therefore, in contrast to the situation in Europe, copyright in the United States is identifiable as a corporate rather than personal asset.\(^9\) In addition, the United States has no Design Right law to protect garment designs that are already in the public sphere. The greater protection of authorship in Europe compared to the United States encourages the location of design-oriented firms in Europe. Many countries in Asia have weak protection and weak enforcement of creative intellectual property, which makes them attractive sites for imitators and plagiarisers (Pickering 1998, Hawkins 2001).\(^10\) Design right legislation, as a specific fashion-oriented industry policy initiative, has been instrumental in nurturing the fashion and design industries in the United Kingdom and France (Lane-Rowley 1997, Storper and Salais 1997).

The presence of intellectual property protection alters significantly the nature of commodities, since IPRs give owners the right to determine what happens to commodities containing their intellectual property after they are sold in the market (Boldrin and Levine 2002). Under IPR protection, the symbolic or knowledge-rich content of a commodity remains the property of its designated legal owner, which means that IPRs confer rights that extend a firm’s commercial interest in a commodity or service beyond the momentary transaction of exchange at a point of sale. This quality renders the trade in idea-laden commodities both qualitatively and quantitatively different to trade in generic commodities.\(^11\)

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\(^9\) When the United States acceded to the international copyright agreement (the Berne Treaty) in 1989, the US motion picture industry opposed the adoption its ‘European’ copyright rules, since they feared that scriptwriters and other authors would disrupt the movie production structure. Congress resolved in favour of industry interests. In the US, copyright might be owned not by the person who wrote a text or script, but by the entity in a position to exploit it commercially (Matthews 2002, see also Bettig 1996).

\(^10\) Australia’s Bureau of Industry Economics recommended in 1995 that Australia take a relaxed attitude to global intellectual property regulation, with a view to maximising flows of ideas into Australia (BIE 1995).

\(^11\) Contrast Sayer and Walker’s (1992) argument that intangible, knowledge-based products are similar to other commodities because they are produced within capitalist relations of production.
4.2 The Restructuring of Elite Design

Historically, Parisienne *Haute Couture* designers have been the international focal point of fashion inspiration (Anspach 1967, Hollander 1993, Wilson 1987, Davis 1992). Strictly, the term *Haute Couture* applies only to the small group of designers who are members of the trade association *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne* (Perna 1987:56). Originally, members of this elite were made-to-measure dressmakers who operated their own *Haute Couture* fashion houses and produced original designs for socially elite individual clients. That group contracted from 21 designers to 12 between 1992 and 2000 (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 *Haute Couture*, Circa 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>House</th>
<th>Year Founded</th>
<th>House</th>
<th>Year Founded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charles Worth</td>
<td>1858</td>
<td>Pierre Cardin</td>
<td>1948</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guy Laroche</td>
<td>1856</td>
<td>Louis Féraud*</td>
<td>1953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeanne Lanvin</td>
<td>1888</td>
<td>Ted Lapidus*</td>
<td>1959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chanel*</td>
<td>1909</td>
<td>Yves Saint Laurent*</td>
<td>1962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean Patou</td>
<td>1919</td>
<td>Emmanuel Ungaro*</td>
<td>1965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nina Ricci</td>
<td>1932</td>
<td>Torrente*</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carven</td>
<td>1937</td>
<td>Jean-Louis Sherrer*</td>
<td>1971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grès</td>
<td>1942</td>
<td>Hanae Mori*</td>
<td>1977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Dior*</td>
<td>1946</td>
<td>Lacoanet Hémant</td>
<td>1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pierre Balmain*</td>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Christian Lacroix*</td>
<td>1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cacharel</td>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Serge Lepage</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hubert de Givenchy*</td>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Per Spook</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * denotes 2000 members of the *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne*.

*Haute Couture* creations are ‘worn art’ available only to the super-rich, and to celebrities, film stars and sporting stars. Such creations are priced to reflect their luxury and exclusivity. In 1999, a made-to-order dress by *Lacroix*, for example, sold for between $US15,000 and $US30,000 (Steele 2000). *Haute Couture* designers—such as *Chanel*, *Dior*, and *Yves St Laurent*—were the unquestioned authorities of fashion style until the mid 1960s (Davis 1992). However, with democratisation in Europe and the collapse of the remnants of aristocracy after World War I, the numbers of women able or willing to buy *Haute Couture* garments fell progressively until, by the 1960s, elite
design houses were no longer commercially viable (Lipovetsky 1994). Their subsequent re-organisation proceeded in three distinct phases: first, *Haute Couture’s* expansion into licensing activity; secondly, its integration with an Italian-based mass production sector; and finally its incorporation into an emerging luxury goods sector.

4.2.1 *Expansion into Licensing*

As costume orders declined, *Haute Couture* firms survived by marketing an affordable serve of luxury in the form of signature perfumes (*parfum du couturier*) or accessories (such as handbags, hats, and gloves). Perfumes complement and counterbalance the incessantly changing rhythms of fashion with the permanence of a fragrance. By 1990, most *Haute Couture* houses were associated with a perfume, usually produced by a transnational cosmetics (chemicals) corporation, such as Unilever, L’Oreal or Estée Lauder (Langmead 2001). Fashion designers’ integration into the beauty industries was materialised through licensing agreements.

Licensing activity soon extended from perfumes to other products. In licensing agreements, designers sold the right to use their name and reputation under agreed conditions. Table 4.3 lists licences of American clothier *Ralph Lauren* to demonstrate the breadth of such agreements. Some licenses awarded manufacturing firms or retailers the exclusive right to manufacture and market a designer’s styles in a particular market, while others permit the designer’s name to be attached to objects that have no pre-existing association with the designer. By the mid 1960s, many elite design firms had also entered into licensing agreements with clothing manufacturers for the production of ready-to-wear garments, especially in overseas markets. Licenses covering

12 The ever-changing fashions of *Haute Couture* extend the product lives of associated perfumes. According to Jacques Helleu, Artistic Director at *Chanel*, “You have to be very careful of linking [perfumes] to a specific time ... The trick is to keep it timeless’ (quoted in Langmead 2001). Women wear the same perfume for long periods of time, often the duration of a relationship.

13 *Christian Dior* pioneered product licensing. His 1948 agreement that allowed Prestige nylons to use his name was not only the first major non-perfume licence agreement, but it was the first to base payments on a percentage of wholesale volume rather than a flat rate (Corrigan 1988).

14 The significance of ready-to-wear is held over to Chapter 5, where it is discussed in the context of mass-produced fashions.
geographically-defined market regions give overseas firms the right to manufacture and adapt European designs to their nation’s sizes and tastes. They became a major source of revenue for design houses in the 1980s, the years of global trade restrictions under the Multi-fibre Arrangement (Chapter 7), when tariffs and quotas limited design firms’ capacity to export finished garments into foreign markets. Designers like Ungaro, Pierre Cardin and Yves Saint Laurent entered into multiple market-based licensing arrangements, mainly with Department Stores in Japan and the United States.

Table 4.3 Ralph Lauren Licences, circa 1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product/Territory</th>
<th>Licensee</th>
<th>Market Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fragrances</td>
<td>Cosmair Inc.</td>
<td>$125 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s wear</td>
<td>Bidermann Industries (USA)</td>
<td>$100 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaps by RL</td>
<td>Greif Cos, an division of Genesco Inc.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ties</td>
<td>CF Hathaway, a division of Warnaco</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luggage</td>
<td>Wathne Ltd.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leather Goods</td>
<td>Campaign Inc.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Footwear</td>
<td>Baher-Benjes Inc.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scarves</td>
<td>The Echo Design Group</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Furs</td>
<td>Birger Christensen Inc.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosiery</td>
<td>Hot Sox Co. Inc.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polo for Boys</td>
<td>Calvin Clothing, division of Palm Beach Inc</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swimwear</td>
<td>Trylone Robe Co, Inc.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Club</td>
<td>Greif Cos, an division of Genesco Inc.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eyeglasses</td>
<td>Optique du Monde Ltd</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>Seibu Department Stores</td>
<td>$45 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Polo/Ralph Lauren Europe</td>
<td>$25 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Polo/Ralph Lauren Canada</td>
<td>$15 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Polo/Ralph Lauren Mexico</td>
<td>$4 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: Market Vale is the price paid by the licencee.

In the early days of licensing, design houses treated their licenses as cash generating mechanisms that were peripheral to the core business of fashion design.
They took little interest in the activities of their licensees.\textsuperscript{15} Licensing activity became ‘indiscriminate’ by the late 1980s (Coleridge 1988). \textit{Pierre Cardin}, for example, in the late 1980s had issued more than 800 licenses spread over 94 countries. By 1999, the \textit{Pierre Cardin} merchandising label earned over \$US 1 billion, and the fortunes of ‘\textit{Pierre Cardin}’ indirectly affected the lives of 160,000 workers in 580 factories worldwide (Agins 1999:30). \textit{Yves Saint Laurent} in the late 1980s had awarded 211 licenses which together generated \$US 125 million turnover (Agins 1999:35): over \$US 1 million in royalties came from cigarette sales alone (Coleridge 1988). The name of Italian designer \textit{Gucci} was applied to some 22,000 different products by 1980 (Moore \textit{et al} 2000:933). In this process, designers became known as brand names.\textsuperscript{16}

By converting style-based status and recognition into a tangible form, licensing provided an extraordinarily lucrative business strategy. It delivered to elite designers a fee of between 5% and 8% on sales for minimal direct outlays of money capital (although some made large investments in reproducing their elite status through celebrity lifestyles). By the late 1970s, made-to-measure \textit{Haute Couture} constituted less than 10% of the sales of most \textit{Haute Couture} firms and the \textit{Haute Couture} division of such firms generally operated at a loss (Crane 1997). By the late 1990s, most elite designers had ceased made-to-measure garment production (Agins 1999).\textsuperscript{17}

In retrospect, indiscriminate merchandising undermined designers’ elite status and jeopardised the value of the intangible capital contained in their names.\textsuperscript{18} Nonetheless, the proliferation of elite designer licensing expressed and encouraged a shift in the

\textsuperscript{15} Thus, \textit{Emanuel Ungaro} designs, which occupied an exclusive market position in Europe, became the inauspicious house brand of Takashimaya department stores in Japan (Agins 1999).

\textsuperscript{16} In this context, trademarks do not necessarily signify quality. Pickering (1998:14 fn.109) makes the distinction between a trade mark used as a brand identifier ‘to indicate that goods, in connection with which the trade mark is used, are the responsibility of the particular manufacturer’, and the use of a trademark in merchandising, where it ‘decorate(s) or otherwise embellishes goods which may have no other connection with the proprietor of the trade mark’.

\textsuperscript{17} By 1999 only 2000 ‘rich, anorexic women’ purchased \textit{Haute Couture} garments, and only about 200 purchased them regularly (Laushway 2000).

\textsuperscript{18} Indiscriminate branding may well have represented an exit strategy designed to generate maximum short-term revenue for failing \textit{Haute Couture} businesses. Designers perhaps did not anticipate the restructuring and incorporation of their businesses into the emerging global luxury goods sector.
character of consumer goods industries during the 1970s and 1980s, regrouping commodities into clusters based around common marketing (brand) strategies rather than material qualities or production technologies. Since licensing commodifies elite designers’ reputations, its viability depends on continued public recognition of designers’ names and the maintenance of designers’ elite status in the public arena, through the media and through events that create media interest. In that context, elite fashion can be considered as a part of the entertainment industry.

4.2.2 Restructuring of the Elite Garment Production

At the same time as designers expanded their licensing activity, their relationship to the world’s clothing production industries changed with the introduction of ‘ready-to-wear’ versions of their designs. The consequent commercialisation of the elite sector accompanied the development of mass production-oriented forms of workplace organisation in the garment production industries. It also reflected the changing global position of European textiles firms as Asian producers entered the market, the reconstruction of Europe after World War II, and the growth of the United States’ and other international markets.

One of the first Parisian designers to produce a ready-to-wear range, Jacques Fath, did so through an alliance with French textiles magnate Jean Prouvost (part owner of Marie Claire). Their aim was to mass manufacture garments in America using French design, French cloth and United States’ mass production methods. The emergence of designer ready-to-wear thus reflected an organised attempt by European textiles interests to maintain and expand their position in the United States’ market in the face of competition from emerging Asian businesses (see Chapter 7).

The introduction of ready-to-wear fashion by elite designers was also connected with the emergence in the 1950s and 1960s of an Italian clothing production sector oriented to the United States’ market. The simultaneous organisational and geographical restructuring of elite fashion into a mass production industry reflected the changing geo-politics of Europe’s post-War reconstruction, American involvement in Italy under the Marshall Plan, and refinements to the technologies of mass production. After the World War II, Paris had struggled to maintain its fashion leadership: it had lost, temporarily, its allure as city of romance and fashion. Moreover, Parisian design was at that time considered stale and over-priced (Coleridge 1988). Fashion interest
was attracted to Italy, where American costume designers working in Italo-American romance movies codified Roman street styles into a ‘Roman’ fashion look.\textsuperscript{19} As America’s youth became interested in Italy through the cinema (partly reflecting flows of Italian migrants into the United States), Department store buyers ‘discovered’ Italian style (White 2000, Breward 2002).

The Italian garment production industry in the 1960s developed with a conscious eye to the demands of the American market, but it also referred to the authority of French design. Italians preferred the more ‘architectural’ of the French designers (such as Balenciaga), but rather than simply copying Paris styles, their revisions commercialised the styles and transformed them into lighter, simpler and more ‘street-friendly’ effects (White 2000). Italy democratised fashion: from its inception, Italy’s independent fashion design capacity was eclectic and market-oriented. In contrast to the situation in France, where fashion designers’ were drawn from artistic backgrounds, Italian design emerged from the industrial sector where it was influenced by industrial design values. Italian designers Cerruti and Ferragamo, for example, were manufacturers before they became designers (Colerige 1988). To overgeneralise, industrial design differs from artistic design because it considers efficiencies in materials and labour inputs as intrinsic to and inseparable from the design process. The emerging Italian Modellesti industry was centred in Milan and Turin, where textiles firms (like Marzotto and Confor) worked closely with clothing manufacturers and designers. The regulatory framework of Italy’s 1971 High Fashion Industry Accord formalised these inter-firm alliances and institutionalised inter-sectoral cooperation.

The Italian industry exploited the international reputations of Paris designers. Leading this innovation was the manufacturer Gruppo Finaziario Tessile (Gruppo GFT), which contracted French designers as its clients by enticing them with exclusive rights to the use of selected (Italian) fabrics.\textsuperscript{20} This connection locked design, manufacture and fabric together in a structure framed by the protection of the intellectual property contained in fashion designs and unique fabrics. By the late 1980s many leading French labels, including Ungaro, Dior, Lacriox, Sonia Rykel, Montana and Jean Paul Gaultier were made in Italy (Coleridge 1988, Agins 1999). By that time, Gruppo GFT

\textsuperscript{19} The costumes in the movies Three Coins in Fountain (1954) and Roman Holiday (1953) typify this look.

\textsuperscript{20} The French textiles sector was languishing at the time (Underhill 1999).
comprised more than 40 factories making clothing in thousands of different designs for 60 designer labels (Coleridge 1988). Gruppo GFT’s revenues grew from US $ 380 million in 1983 to more than US $1 billion in 1999.21 This history suggests that the Italian manufacturers, rather than French designers, were the inspiration behind the growth of ready-to-wear designer fashion.

Gruppo GFT is credited with first harnessing the marketing appeal of French design labels to American preferences (Howard 1991:47). In Howard’s view, however, the impetus for this re-orientation did not come from Paris or from Milan, but rather from the American managers in Gruppo GFT’s United States’ subsidiary, whose monitoring of fashion trends in the United States provided the market information on which GFT based its reinterpretations of Paris designs. Howard (1991) contends that French designer labels were at that time regarded as little more than the marketing tags attached to Gruppo GFT’s in-house design capacity.

As other firms emulated GFT’s success, the Italian manufacturing sector grew to specialise in the commercialisation of elite styles for the mass market. Effectively, this extended the depth and range of commodity garments infused with both design quality and elite ‘designer’ status. Italian garment manufacturers pioneered Europe’s entry into internationally oriented clothing production by combining mass-production methods with a high level of product differentiation and ‘flexibly specialised’ production technologies that exploited Italy’s low wages and its post-World War II dependence on the United States market. Therefore, the ‘miracle’ of northern Italian flexibly specialised garment production relied on three external elements – Parisian design knowledge and status in the market, knowledge of consumer preferences in the United States, and systematic translation of that knowledge into design modifications that captured consumer interest. The garment-oriented industrial districts of Northern Italy relied on their access to external markets as well as their internal control of the labour process.

Effectively, the Italy-US-France axis created a disintegrated international network which positioned Northern Italy as a node in an internationalising garment production system based on the exploitation of fashion and the emotions associated with fashion. In the earlier licensing structure, ideas were exported from Paris to

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manufacturers in the United States and other markets. In the *Modellesti* formation, ideas are captured in Paris and Milan, incorporated into commodities, and then exported to other markets as finished products (Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2 The Internationalisation of the Elite Sector

In a further innovation, Italian garment businesses were the first fashion producers to comprehend how the fashion media, Hollywood movies, celebrities and elite designers exert power over consumer desires. Firms like GFT brought the media under industry control by demanding favourable advertorial content in proportion to their advertising expenditures and by imposing rules that limited the capacity of fashion editors to ‘mix-and-match’ from different designer’s collections. According to Coleridge (1988:210-211), their systematic management of how products appeared in the fashion media represented a ‘conspiracy of insider-dealing’ that shattered the independence of fashion magazines to the extent that they ‘no longer reflect [the editor’s] taste and choice, only the merchandising strategy of the advertiser’.

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22 This power shift, he contends, undermined the standards of fashion journalism, since it obliged journalists to repeat clichéd marketing tags: for example, *Versace* as ‘sensual Italian classicism’ and *Armani* as ‘face of Italian modernism’.
To conclude: this period of restructuring saw a shift in the balance of power in the elite garment sector. The ‘names’ of Paris’ elite designers were prized for their marketing appeal, but their design authority was undermined by Italian expertise in mass production-oriented design and Italian harnessing of the technologies of market research to develop knowledge of consumer wants. The balance of fashion power also tilted from the media to producers’ control of the media.

*Haute Couture* design houses responded to the Italian challenge by recruiting into their ranks the new generation’s *avant-garde* of commercially orientated young designers such as Issey Miyake, Kenzo, Karl Lagerfeld, Michael Kors, and Jil Sander (Griffiths 2000). By the turn of the twenty-first century, elite fashion businesses comprised former *Haute Couture* houses and many newer firms. Its more commercial orientation has diluted the long-standing division between *Couture* and street clothing (Craik 1994:60, Crane 1997). Elite status can no longer be identified solely by membership of the *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne*; it requires that the designer be recognised publicly as producing designs that display independent creative skill or artistic value.\(^{23}\)

Thus, despite their deepening association with mass production, elite designers have maintained a status derived from their stocks of symbolic power. The experience of mass production demonstrates that in the fashion sector, it is necessary to control design qualities, the processes that bring public recognition and status, and the processes that create consumer interest in fashion design.

### 4.2.3 Corporatisation of the Luxury Goods Sector

The existence of fashion knowledge as intellectual property creates commercial opportunities. Over time, the elite design sector has transformed from its original focus on artistry in individual clothing design, to expand into activities that exploit, through licensing, the intellectual property created at the intersection of design expertise and public recognition. Trading in designers’ reputations and status has led ultimately to the incorporation of elite fashion into transnational firms that are expert in the control of intangible knowledge assets. This development reflects an increasing awareness of the

\(^{23}\) Despite a large investment, the US street-wear firm *Tommy Hilfiger* failed recently in a bid to gain elite recognition: *Hilfiger* designs are not recognised as having independent artistic merit.
power and commercial value of knowledge assets protected by intellectual property rights.

While fashion designers are rich in cultural capital and symbolic power, they seldom hold equivalent stocks of economic power. Their role in the global fashion system cannot be understood in isolation from the fields of economic power and the organisational arrangements that sustain them economically. Through licensing, *Couture* houses became tied to corporate allies through a variety of contractual arrangements (Davis 1992:141). As licensing activity increased in volume and value, its management demands exceeded the organisational capacities and business acumen of stand-alone design houses (Agins 1999). New organisational forms emerged to manage the exploitation of designers’ style knowledge and reputation. As a result, restructuring and consolidation in the elite fashion and luxury goods sector over the last 20 years has drawn major designer fashion houses under the corporate umbrellas of luxury goods firms that provide the legal, financial, accounting and marketing skills necessary to sustain the business of fashion and the reputations of fashion designers. This process has delivered control of elite fashion to a small number of transnational corporations; firms that specialise in the commodification of meaning and in the control of intellectual property (Table 4.4).

Four firms worldwide—LVMH (Moet Hennessy Louis Vuitton), Gucci, Richemont and Prada—now dominate the luxury goods markets for personal adornments such as cosmetics, clothing, watches and jewellery. These firms control the circulation of symbolic knowledges by selectively transforming the knowledge of individual fashion designers to commercial ends (see Howells 2000:61). They are specialised in the art of interweaving the different types of intellectual property protection in different national jurisdictions into a global fabric. Their work creates designer-based virtual monopolies over commercial fashion knowledges in a process that transforms designer names into brand names, and then extends the penetration of designer brands across multiple luxury products while simultaneously growing the value of the ‘name’ as a capital stock.

For luxury goods firms, holding a portfolio of designers/brands disarticulates the fortunes of the firm from the popularity of any single designer. This distributes fashion’s risks of consumer rejection across a broader field. It also repositions fashion in economic space by incorporating it with other culturally oriented, ‘positional’ products that rely on design expertise, the management of brand image, and the
maintenance of brand value. The resulting concentration of economic power implies that a relatively small number of business executives are now in a position to exert a commanding influence over the global fashion direction (see Bettig 1996).

Table 4.4 Consolidation of Elite Fashion Firms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Firm</th>
<th>Head Office</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Brand Acquisitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gucci (François Pinault, France)</td>
<td>Milan</td>
<td>Turnover in 2000: $US 2.3 billion Listed New York and Amsterdam.</td>
<td>Gucci, Yves St.Laurent Rive Gauche (ready-to-wear only), Sergio Rossi, Bourcheron, Alexander McQueen, Bedat &amp; Co, Bottega Veneta, Stella McCartney, Balenciaga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richemont (Rupert family, South Africa)</td>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>Turnover in 2000: 3.6 billion euros.</td>
<td>Chloe, Cartier, Van Cleff &amp; Arpels, Piaget, Baume &amp; Mercier, Montblanc, Jaeger-le Coutre, Alfred Dunhill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prada (family, Italy)</td>
<td>Milan</td>
<td>Turnover in 2000: $US 1.5 billion. Soon to be listed.</td>
<td>Prada, Mui Mui, Helmut Lang AG, Jil Sander AG, Church's</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salvatore Ferragamo</td>
<td>Milan</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Salvatore Ferragamo, Emmanuel Ungaro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AEFFE (Italy)</td>
<td>Milan</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>Alberta Ferretti, Moschino, Ozbek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hermes (France)</td>
<td>Paris</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>Hermes, Jean-Paul Gaultier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L’Oreal (France)</td>
<td>Paris</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>Giorgio Armani, Ralph Lauren</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The restructuring process has increased the degree of commercialisation of elite fashion by forging a more conscious link between the elite designers, fashion conglomerates and the fashion media that relies on their output – marking, in Agins (1999) view, the ‘end of fashion’ as a creative art form. For luxury conglomerates, fashion is a capital-intensive business that relies on public recognition of designers’
status. As publicly traded companies with a responsibility to shareholders, there is not a high likelihood of these firms ‘gambling on a fashion whim’ (Agins 1999:14). Rather, their strategies are focused on maintaining brand value and minimising the uncertainties of the fashion market.24

The nature of luxury goods firms has changed with greater understanding of and emphasis on the control and protection of knowledge assets. By 2000, fashion designers’ identities were rarely sold as mere ‘tags’ to commodities. Instead, when elite designers enter licensing agreements, licensees are obligated contractually to use designers ‘names’ in a manner consistent with the designer’s overall image and reputation. Luxury goods firms actively enforce their intellectual property rights to control the way that their name is used.25 In this process, products such as perfumes have been pulled back under the direct control of luxury conglomerates.26

4.2.4 Globalisation of Luxury Goods Sector

International luxury firms use the interconnections of the fashion system to promote ‘global’ products targeted to high-income consumers. Elite firms have become internationalised luxury goods retailers, which market luxury goods through ‘flagship’ stores located in the exclusive shopping precincts of major cities, in international airport terminals, and in tourist enclaves.27 Table 4.5 shows that luxury goods markets spread across the world and that a high proportion of sales are made in places other than

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24 In 2002, after the events of September 11, 2001, the stock market’s enthusiasm for luxury goods stocks waned, resulting in Prada having to alter its market capitalisation strategy. Analysts believe currently that September 11 marked the death of conspicuous consumption by the rich. Accordingly, in 2002, elite fashion has adopted a ‘no logo’ trend. Product recognition now depends more than ever on consumers’ pre-existing product knowledge and the ‘readability’ of the aesthetic character of garments.

25 For example, in 1998 Calvin Klein took legal action against its licensee Warnaco for allegedly ‘diluting’ the quality of the brand by selling through discount retailers.

26 Perfumes that bear elite names are labelled as ‘Made by’ the luxury goods firm, in Paris, rather than being ‘Made by’ a cosmetics firm.

27 As the ‘non-places of super-modernity’ detached from everyday reality and stocked with affluent travellers, airports have become a prime site for the consumption of luxury objects (Augé 1995).
Europe and the Americas. Although the flagship stores of elite brands generally lose money (Fernie and Moore 1998), they raise brand awareness, brand status and brand value in the public eye, which increases the value of designers’ intellectual property, which in turn increases the prices that can be charged for licenses and associated prestige goods. The high cost of reproducing elite status creates significant barriers that discourage new players entering the luxury sector.\textsuperscript{28}

Globally, the luxury goods conglomerates make higher than average profits. Worldwide sales of luxury branded goods (clothing, footwear, perfume, luggage, eyewear and some other personal items) amounted to $US 26 billion in 1992 and $US 32 billion in 1996 (Merrill Lynch 1996, cited in Fernie and Moore 1998:369).\textsuperscript{29} The luxury sector’s sustained growth of 8-12\% per annum through the 1990s exceeded the performance of many more traditional sectors. However, much of that growth came from licensing rather than from sales of garments: in 1998, for example, garments accounted for only 1\% of sales of \textit{LMVH}, 12\% at \textit{Gucci}, 14.5\% at \textit{Hermes}, and 25\% at \textit{Fendi} (Australian Financial Review 14/10/99:28).

Table 4.5 Markets for Luxury Goods (\%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brand</th>
<th>Europe (% of Sales)</th>
<th>Americas (% of Sales)</th>
<th>Other (% of Sales)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Armani</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgari</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burberry</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferragamo</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gucci</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hermes</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LVMH</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prada</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Kapner (2001) based on data from analysts Credit Suisse First Boston and J.P. Morgan.

\textsuperscript{28} Costs are associated with provisioning Paris fashion shows and maintaining ‘flagship’ stores. A fashion show by \textit{Thierry Mugler} cost $US 3 million (underwritten by Clarins, the producer of his perfume). The \textit{Armani Exchange} New York store opening party cost $US 2 million (Agins 1999:137).

\textsuperscript{29} Merrill Lynch projected that sales would be $US 38 billion in 1998 (an estimate made before the 1997 Asian crisis and Japan’s economic downturn).
Luxury firms follow a deterritorialising logic of homogenisation that targets high-income markets which are segmented by taste but global in scope (Winram 1984:19). Luxury firms operate in and simultaneously construct cosmopolitan ‘global’ fashion contexts. This detaches elite fashion products from the specificities of place and in the process rearticulates the spatial scale of consumer markets. It also places fashion at the core of cultural globalisation (Featherstone 1990, Robertson 1992, Tomlinson 1999).

4.3 Fashion’s Coordination of Space and Time

The luxury goods sector is concerned with the exploitation of people’s fascination with the ‘dream world’ of luxury and celebrity and with creating international markets among very high income consumers. The processes for generating elite design have created a distinctive geography, a unique timing and close relationships with associated industries.

4.3.1 The Place of Elite Fashion

Design activities are concentrated in advanced urban contexts, where elite ‘expert systems’ of cultural experiences are formed and reformed. The world’s fashion design elite gravitates principally to Paris and Milan, but also, to a lesser degree, to London, New York, Los Angeles and Tokyo. Other cities are peripheral and subordinate to the processes of elite fashion style formation.30

These central places of fashion are sites where related culturally advanced industries are found (Soja 1989, Sassen 1991, Scott and Soja 1996, Scott 2001), but they are not the same set of ‘world cities’ as dominate economic configurations of other sectors. The global finance sector, for example, has quite different geographies of power (see Pryke 1991). Nevertheless, Paris and Milan can be viewed as functioning as ‘switching centres’ for fashion information, knowledge, images and symbols (Lash and

30 For example, London Fashion Week was impoverished in 2002 because leading British designers had relocated to Paris to work for fashion multinationals (The Age, 2/3/2002). Policy-driven attempts to raise London and New York to parallel the status of Paris and Milan have not been successful.
Urry 1994:220, see also Sassen 1991), and as characterised by ‘complex interacting system(s) of technological and organisational processes that underlie economic growth and change’ (Castells 1989:19). Fashion’s geographies of intersecting knowledge and power create a symbolic ordering of the world’s cities (Gilbert 2000:9).

Fashion’s centralised geographies arise from intersecting and mutually reinforcing causes. Fashion’s urban and cosmopolitan nature is linked to its themes of beauty and success – thus to affluent contexts (Wilson 1987:9). Fashion is attracted to places where associated design and style disciplines can be found. Following a virtuous cycle of specialisation, these global focal points develop specialised social and technical divisions of labour which attracts firms engaged in the exploitation of style and meaning. In turn, firms attract more talented individuals from across the world (see Sayer and Walker 1992, Storper and Walker 1996, Florida 2001). The geographies of fashion and the character of the modern city interconnect as fashion specialisation increases the sophistication of local fashion markets and creates new consumption spaces, which in turn contribute to the increasing differentiation of urban space (Glennie and Thrift 1992, Mort 1996, Crewe and Beaverstock 1998, Gilbert 2000).

The geography of elite fashion is shaped by national differences in the geography of intellectual property regulation. Paris’ historical advantage as the world’s centre of high fashion styling reflects the protections enshrined through its Napoleonic legal system, which embraces a Kantian view of originality and bestows a high level of regulatory protection to artistic work (Hawkins 2001, Storper and Salais 1997). Intellectual property regulation in the United States, which discourages monopoly and promotes the transmission and commercialisation of ideas, offers less protection to designers. Design professionals gravitate to particular places, but which places depends on the extent to which their knowledge claims are protected by law.

Finally, the relation between fashion and place is spatially ‘fixed’ because the representational content of fashion contains and promotes mythologised connections with places. The notions of ‘Paris fashion’ and ‘Milan design’ articulate symbolic power (Gilbert 2000) through the ‘invocation of an exotic elsewhere’ (Hebdige 1988:9). Fashion’s role in place marketing is maintained by the media through its mythologising of cities as centres of creative artistry, style and romance (Ash 1989, Crane 1997). This place-based competitive advantage in fashion is sustained by the state through industry policy, especially in France and Italy (Storper and Salais 1997, Underhill 1999). The persistence of Paris as a style centre also highlights the continuing influence of
historically-grounded path dependent trajectories in the processes of accumulation and specialisation. In sum, wherever its ‘origin’, fashion knowledge emanates from an elite group of designers that are anchored spatially in particular global cities.

4.3.2 Fashion Events as Regulating the Rhythms of Fashion

Through fashion parades and fashion events, the elite fashion sector also regulates the pace of the world’s fashion seasons. The annual fashion calendar, which has developed over time from *Haute Couture*’s tradition of bi-annual shows, publicises fashion design, provides the subject matter for fashion media stories and at the same time presents new styles to retail store buyers. While fashion shows are crucial to legitimising and reproducing elite status, they also institutionalise and regulate the temporal aspects of fashion by establishing the starting date, number and duration of fashion ‘seasons’ in each year and in each place.

Although fashion events remain grounded in climatic seasons (Spring/Summer), they are increasingly disarticulated from nature, creating socially constructed quasi-seasons that satisfy the economic objectives of the fashion system. Fashion’s timing is shaped by inter-organisational relationships, the competitive strategies of elite transnational garment firms, the fashion media’s appetite for stories, and major retailers’ forward stock schedules. Within places, it is not uncommon for the dates of fashion events and the seasons they mark to be rescheduled to better integrate with other ‘lifestyle’ entertainments – for example, the Toronto Spring Fashion Festival in 2002 was moved to synchronise with the Toronto Film Festival.\(^{31}\)

Figure 4.3 reproduces the fashion calendar for the Spring/Summer 2002 fashion shows of leading United States’ firms. This schedule places fashion events at fortnightly intervals over September and October 2001, beginning in New York, followed by London, then Milan, and lastly Paris. These shows are staged in September (Autumn) for the upcoming European spring season – six months ahead. The schedule links the timing of the fashion season to the dominant places of fashion design. Fashion’s socially generated timings reflect the interests of the fashion system and its links to lifestyle, rather than the abstracted time imperatives of capitalist manufacturing production (see Postone 1996).

\(^{31}\) Note also that this event, like many other fashion events around the world, is sponsored by the cosmetics industry transnational L’Oreal.
Figure 4.3 The Spring/Summer 2002 Fashion Calendar of New York Designers
Source: www.style.com, accessed 20/11/01.

The fashion show schedule also illuminates the nature of competition in the elite sector. To meet the time imperative imposed by the fashion calendar, fashion houses must have their seasonal ranges complete and ready to show by a set date. The regularity of the calendar confines the release of new styles to intermittent 'bursts' of activity where multiple new designs from many different designers are revealed simultaneously. This focuses competition on the comparison between different styles, and involves a tacit agreement among fashion designers not to 'jump' the market with early releases. Thus, the institutional framework established by fashion’s seasonal calendar locks in two crucial aspects of business strategy: the rate of innovation and the rate of turnover of capital. It precludes strategic manoeuvring around the release of innovations and is incompatible with the notion that competition is based increasingly on time, or the quickest response to market signals (contra Blackburn 1991). Fashion events render elite fashion time-inflexible.

Importantly, because formative fashion events are held in the world centres of fashion, the temporal rhythms of fashion seasons everywhere in the world are positioned as subsequent to the Paris/Milan/New York (Northern Hemisphere) season. Therefore, the world’s fashion cities not only lead fashion in stylistic terms, but also lead its rhythmic aspect. In fashion’s intertwining of styles and rhythms, the rhythms of all of the various overlapping international and national fashion systems are situated in both space and time in a specific relation to the rhythms of the elite fashion system.
Thus, the world’s fashions follow the European winter (summer), which is the first of all the fashion winters (summers) in different places across the world.

Moreover, because the seasons arrive at different times in different parts of world (and because some places have no true summer or winter), the global penetration of fashions’ rhythmic aspect is uneven and differentiated. In Australia, for example, Spring 2002 does not arrive until September, six months behind the world’s leading Northern Hemisphere fashion cities’ ‘real’ Spring season and a full year after the media release of European spring styles for the following fashion year. Australian designers have a full half-year in which to evaluate and ‘interpret’ the international trends before they present their own designs to the local media.

You have reverse seasons in Australia – it’s always either early or late.

Interview HK13

To summarise: fashion seasons have specific start and end dates. Fashion creates a time-segmented structure in which elite firms cooperate over timing and compete over styling. The rhythms of fashion time are calibrated by the socially constructed schedules of fashion media events, fashion magazine publication dates and advertising deadlines. These create a hierarchical time-space relation in which everywhere else in the world is subordinate—in both stylistic and temporal terms—to the Paris-Milan-New York fashion axis.

4.3.3 Clothing’s Place in the Fashion System

Fashion designers must attract media interest in order to reproduce their elite status. Public recognition reinforces design authority while celebrity lifestyles maintain the ‘dream’ illusion of fashion. Through their association with designers, the media and advertising sectors to create a fashion system that combines luxury clothing, footwear and accessories with beauty industries and the various events that manufacture fashion as entertainment.

The production of elite fashion involves a complex set of interactions between three globalising industries: trans-national firms in the luxury good sector, the fashion media and the advertising sector. As they have combined to produce multi-sectoral circuits of capital based on culturally oriented ‘fashion’ consumption, they have each become more concentrated in ownership and more extensive in geographical reach. The
intersection between elite fashion, the media and advertising creates a unity built on complementary objectives and activities (Figure 4.4). In this system, elite fashion designers could not survive without the fashion media, the fashion media could not survive without its subject, fashion, and advertising firms could not operate in the fashion sector without capital-rich transnational fashion and beauty conglomerates. Very little of the activity in the fashion system is concerned with the production of garments as material commodities.

Figure 4.4 The Fashion Image-Production System

The fashion system is grounded in a mesh of interconnected and interdependent interactions that are not based in the value-adding chains familiar to commodity production. These connections blur the distinction between business and social worlds. Hirsch (1972) first identified the crucial importance of what he called ‘contact men’, who identified trends (fads) in the uncertain contexts that are characteristic of cultural industries. McRobbie (1998) similarly describes a shifting, predominantly freelance, labour force that moves between ill-defined retail, promotions, publicity and journalistic occupations at the intersection between fashion design and fashion journalism. These intermediaries create bridges between fashion’s different sectoral specialisations and bind the industries together through complex webs of interpersonal, social and business
relationships. Multi-sectoral project-driven organisational arrangements and tacit forms of coordination emerge from their shared vocabularies and outlooks (Grabher 2002). These interactions create what Storper and Salais (1997) describe as ‘untraded dependencies’ across the design-marketing-advertising-media specialisations.

The components of the fashion system are united not by flows of commodities or by sequences of value adding, but by their relationships to fashion knowledge. The fashion system is characterised by complex interdependencies and networks that extend beyond the realm of firms and include a range of other actors. The personal connections are nevertheless underpinned by multiple dependencies.

### 4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has commenced the process of incorporating clothing’s social meaning with its objects by explicating the power relations, institutional frameworks and economic structures that create and promote elite globalised fashions. It has described the creation of landscapes of fashion that hinge on the ideas, knowledge and expertise of the elite designers who embed in clothing those qualities that generate consumer desire. Fashion designers define individual ‘spaces’ that are connected to others in a relational sense. Their incorporation into luxury goods firms is achieved through structures that maintain the autonomy of designer identities, but transform them into property as brands. The resulting landscape of fashion is constructed (and reconstructed seasonally) through structured fashion events.

The business of fashion involves a complex intertwining of symbolic and economic powers. Elite firms have adopted a global market perspective, but each remains strongly linked to a mythologised cultural home. The restructuring of fashion businesses has preserved the authority of elite styling but has shifted its organisational structure to focus on the exploitation of style knowledge assets. These changes have involved reorganisation and restructuring of capital to focus on creating value from the conversion of designs into intellectual property, and from the connection between fashion and beauty. Fashion produces a highly specialised organisational configuration. Within its structures, the world of fashion creates a global landscape that is highly differentiated, but which at the same time creates spatial hierarchies that position places in relation to the global centres of fashion.